Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture

Bengal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Samarpita Mitra

BRILL

Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture

Brill's Indological Library

Edited by

Johannes Bronkhorst

In co-operation with

Richard Gombrich, Oskar von Hinüber,
Katsumi Mimaki, Arvind Sharma

VOLUME 52

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/bil*

Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture

Bengal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

By

Samarpita Mitra

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: Title pages and covers of early twentieth century periodicals: *Baṅganūr, Bhāratbarṣa, Bicitrā, Māsik Basumatī, Māsik Mohāmmadī* and *Prabāsī.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Mitra, Samarpita, author.
Title: Periodicals, readers and the making of a modern literary culture : Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century / Samarpita Mitra.
Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2020. | Series: Brill's Indological library, 0925-2916 ; volume 52 | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Summary: "In Periodicals, Readers and the Making of a Modern Literary Culture: Bengal at the Turn of the Twentieth Century Samarpita Mitra studies literary periodicals as a particular print form, and reveals how their production and circulation were critical to the formation of a Bengali public sphere during the turn of the twentieth century. Given its polyphonic nature, capacity for sustaining debates and adaptability by readers with diverse reading competencies, periodicals became the preferred means for dispensing modern education and entertainment through the vernacular. The book interrogates some of the defining debates that shaped readers' perspectives on critical social issues and explains how literary culture was envisioned as an indicator of the emergent nation. Finally it looks at the Bengali-Muslim and women's periodicals and their readerships and argues that the presence of multiple literary voices make it impossible to speak of Bengali literary culture in any singular terms"-- Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020002527 (print) | LCCN 2020002528 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004425644 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004427082 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Bengali periodicals--History--20th century. | Bengali literature--20th century--History and criticism. | Bengal (India)--Intellectual life--20th century.
Classification: LCC PN5449.B45 M58 2020 (print) | LCC PN5449.B45 (ebook) | DDC 059/.911--dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020002527
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2020002528

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0925-2916
ISBN 978-90-04-42564-4 (hardback)
ISBN 978-90-04-42708-2 (e-book)

Copyright 2020 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi, Brill Sense, Hotei Publishing, mentis Verlag, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh and Wilhelm Fink Verlag.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.
Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgements VII
List of Figures and Tables IX
Note on Transliteration of Bengali Terms XI

Introduction 1

1 ***Māsik patrikā*: a New Cultural Artefact?** 28
  1 Colonial Archives and the Making of Literary Periodicals: The *Bengal Library Catalogues* 29
  2 An Emergent Bengali Literary Sphere: the *Baṅgadarśan* Divide 38
  3 Professionalizing Literary Journalism: Aspects of Periodical Publishing 57

2 **The Social Space of *māsik patrikā*: Periodicals Market and Readership** 72
  1 Making of the *sacitra māsik patrikā*: Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* 74
  2 Becoming a Family Magazine: The War and the Exigencies of Commercial Publishing 96
  3 Envisioning the Aesthete Reader: Literacy, Education and Reading 105
  4 Leisure, Periodicals and Suitable Reading 118

3 **Determining the Frontiers of Obscenity, Aesthetics and Realism: Debates over *aślīlatā* in Literary Periodicals** 127
  1 Cleansing Literature: The Colonialist and Reformist Efforts 133
  2 The Periodical Media, Serial Fiction and the Formation of a New Aesthetic: *Baṅgadarśan* 139
  3 An Emergent Counter-Fiction Discourse 143
  4 Sāhitya Samālocanā: Regulating the Public Sphere 147
  5 Debating Love, Desire and Social Ethics 155
  6 Tagore's *Citrāṅgadā*: A Warped Mythology or Foregrounding a New Aesthetic? 169
  7 Realism, Psychoanalysis and the Question of Obscenity 174

4 **The Way to Traverse: Literary Separatism or Towards a Shared Literary Space** 191
1 Bengali-Muslim Periodicals Publishing 196
2 The Language Debates and Bengali Muslims' Quest for a Literary Language 214
3 The Debates on Genres: Fiction or History? 226
4 The Call for Emancipation of the Mind: *Saogāt* and *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan* 255

5 **The Limits of Literary License: What Could Women Read and Write on?** 266
1 Home, Reform and Nationalism 268
2 Content of Women's Journals 278
3 Delineating a Female Readership: Domesticity, Leisure and Journal Reading 280
4 Only Good Wives (*sugṝhiṇī*) Can Bring up Good Wives: Journal Writing as a Vocation 295
5 Education, Income and Changing Lives for Women 301
6 Women Writing Protest: Muslim Women, *Abarodh* and Publicity 310

6 **Political Discourse in the Bengali Literary Sphere: The Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Years** 329
1 Editorials, Readers and the Making of a Literary Political Culture 332
2 The Call of *mahāsṝṣṭi* (the Grand Creation): The Gandhian Spinner or the Tagorean *Byakti-mānab* 341
3 Summoning *Mahāpralaẏ* (the Grand Catastrophe): Nazrul Islam, *Dhūmketu* and the Contemplation of Cosmic Dissolution 350

Conclusion 362

Bibliography 369
Index 387

Acknowledgements

This book is the outcome of a long journey and I take this opportunity to thank all who have helped and supported me during various phases of research and writing.

I take this opportunity to thank the Librarians and Staff of the following libraries and archives:

Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta; Bagbazar Public Library, Calcutta; Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta; Dhaka University Library; Bangla Academy, Dhaka; Jadavpur University, Calcutta; The National Library, Calcutta; Ramakrishna Mission Public Library, Calcutta; West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta; Rabindra Bhavana Archives, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal; Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, New York and the India Office Library Records, British Library, London. Special thanks are also due to the Ramakrishna Mission Library and the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Library for permission to photograph periodicals in their holdings for reproducing in the book.

Fellowships and assistantships from the Department of History and the South Asia Center, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York; The NRTT-CSSSC post-doctoral residential fellowship from the Navajbhai Ratan Tata Trust and Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta; a three month fellowship at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Kolkata; and a year's study leave from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, made it possible to research and write at various stages during PhD and the completion of this book.

Thanks are due to my editors Patricia Radder (Assistant Editor for Asian Studies) and Dirk Bakker of Brill for their cooperation and guidance in every step of the publication process, the anonymous reviewers for their comments that helped improve the draft and the entire editorial and production teams at Brill. I also thank Ms. Anindita Bhaduri for her meticulous proof reading and indexing of the draft.

I am grateful to Prof. Rajat Kanta Ray, Head, Department of History, Presidency College, Calcutta who a long time ago had drawn my attention to the animated debates in literary periodicals during the early decades of the twentieth century. My indebtedness to Prof. Gautam Bhadra for his sustained guidance in formulating my research questions during the initial years as a doctoral student and also for painstakingly reading drafts of the book chapters. The historical consciousness that these two teachers have imbibed in generations of students has continued to be the sustenance of much of my own social and historical sensibility. I take this opportunity to thank all my teachers at Presidency College and the University of Calcutta: Professors Amit Mukherjee, Arun

Bandyopadhyay, Bhaskar Chakrabarty, Hari S. Vasudevan, Lakshmi Subramanian, Nirban Basu, Samita Sen, Shireen Maswood, Subhas Ranjan Chakrabarty and Tapati Guha Thakurta.

My thanks also to Professors Norman Kutcher, Frederick Marquardt, Crystal Bartolovich, Linda Alcoff, Subho Basu and the late Daniel Field of Syracuse University and Professor Clinton Seely of the University of Chicago. My greatest academic indebtedness is to my supervisor, Professor Sudipta Sen of University of California, Davis who with his patience and jovial disposition has guided me throughout during the PhD years as well as during preparation of the book manuscript. He had gone out of the way to help me tide over the initial difficulties in the USA and also steadfastly supported me during times of crises. I also thank Lyn Bigelow for all her help.

I thank all my colleagues at the Department of History, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. A special word of thanks to Professor Anuradha Roy for her valuable comments on my chapters; Professors Nupur Dasgupta and Sudeshna Banerjee for their compassion; Dr. Chandrani Banerjee Mukherjee for her evergreen presence; and Dr. Utsa Ray, Dr. Tilottama Mukherjee and Dr. Maroona Murmu for their unwavering support when I needed it the most. Thanks are due to Tilottama also for her numerous reminders to finish the book; Utsa for being a very genuine friend and Dr. Rajarshi Ghose of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta for his sound advice and help.

The students of the Department of History, Jadavpur University have been a source of constant encouragement and academic sustenance. I feel fortunate to be in the company of some of the brightest brains and future historians of South Asian History.

I take this opportunity to thank my uncles – Asim Kumar Mitra, Anup Kumar Ghosh and Partha Pratim Ghosh; my aunts – Shikha Mitra, Reba Chatterjee, Anjana Dutta; all my cousins, nephews and nieces. I fondly remember my uncles – late Rabindra Chandra Bhadra and late R.C. Sen; and my grand aunt the late Dipti Mukherjee who initiated my journey in to the world of education.

Trailing last but certainly not the least, my family: my parents-in-law, the late Prof. Dr. Sudhansu Ranjan Mitra and late Sujala Mitra for their unconditional love; bother-in-law Sudheer; sister Sandeepa, a neuroscientist and dancer, for being my severest critic and for her unparalleled sense of humor; the little ones Renee Maya, my adorable niece and Reyan Vijay, a bubbly toddler and my nephew; my husband Supriyo for just being there and occasionally reminding me of my 'priority', our daughters Sattwiki and Rajashi who have been sources of immense joy and trouble at the same time, and our Basset hound baby Ollie for bringing so much love and happiness in to our family. My grandparents late Sukumar and Maya Dey and late Nirad Ranjan and Bela Ghosh would no doubt, have been the happiest to see this book. As for my parents Kollol Dey and Sukla Dey, this book is for them.

Figures and Tables

Figures

1.1 First page of *Baṅgadarśan*, edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 1872 48
1.2 Title page of *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), edited by Rabindranath Tagore, showing the names of contributing writers 58
2.1 Line drawings of leaves accompanying an essay on indigenous foliage 81
2.2 A page from "Betāler Baiṭhak", a question-answer section of *Prabāsī* 82
2.3 A page from "Bibidha Prasaṅga", *Prabāsī*, the editorial column of Ramananda Chattopadhyay 84
2.4 A page from "Pārāpārer ḍheu", the women's section of *Prabāsī*, with an essay on the 'foundations of Russian Communism' 85
2.5 "Shah Jahan" by Abanindranath Tagore. *Prabāsī*, v. 25, pt. 1, #3, Āṣāṛh 1332 / June-July 1925 86
2.6 "Last days of Shah Jahan" by Abanindranath Tagore. *Prabāsī*, v. 15, pt. 2, # 1, Kārtik 1322 / October-November 1915 87
2.7 "Buddha, Jasodhara and Rahul" by Nandalal Bose. *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 1, # 1, Baiśākh 1329 / April-May 1922 88
2.8 "From the Dargah" by Mohammad Abdar Rahman Chughtai. *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 1, # 3, Āṣāṛh 1329 / June-July 1922 89
2.9 A page from "Mahilā Majlis", the women's section of *Prabāsī* 101
2.10 Simple lessons in drawing animals, "Cheleder Pāttāṛi", the children's section of *Prabāsī* 102
4.1 Title page of the inaugural issue of *Āl-Eslām*, Baiśākh 1322 / April-May 1915 193
4.2 First page of the inaugural issue of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Kārtik 1334 / October-November 1927 198
4.3 Cover page of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Year 1, Phālgun 1334 / February-March 1928 199
4.4 Title page of first volume, first part of *Moslem Bhārat*, Baiśākh – Āświn 1327 / April-October 1920 202
4.5 Title page of Eid Special Issue of *Nabanūr*, 1907 203
5.1 Aparna Devi, daughter of Congress leader Chittaranjan Das, shown reading *Māsik Basumatī* 289
5.2 First page of the inaugural issue of *Antaḥpur*, an early women's periodical 292
5.3 A page from *Ānnesā* (1328 / 1922), the first periodical for Muslim women 316
5.4 A page from "Mahilā Mehfil" (the women's section of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*) showing a chapter from Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's serialized essay "Abarodhbāsinī" 322
6.1 First page of *Bhāratbarṣa* Śrābaṇ, 1327 / July-August 1920. The Bengali

characters of the word *Bhāratbarṣa* have been designed following Persian calligraphic style. 333
6.2 A page from *Bhāratbarṣa* showing Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Rabindranath Tagore's niece and daughter of *Bhāratī* editor Swarnakumari Devi, spinning the *carkā* 334

Tables

1.1 Total book and periodicals registered in Bengal 38
1.2 Uni-lingual periodicals production in Bengal 38
2.1 Circulation figures of miscellaneous periodicals (figures mostly from the Final Quarter Reports of years shown) 119
2.2 Statistics for requisition of books not in the open shelf collection of the reading room (of the Imperial Library) 119

Note on Transliteration of Bengali Terms

I have, on the whole, used the 'Bengali Romanization Table' provided by the Library of Congress. However, I have made a few improvisations to suit to conventions of pronunciation.

According to the Library of Congress:

The vowel *a* is implicit after all consonants and consonant clusters and is supplied in transliteration, with the following exceptions:

(a) when another vowel is indicated by its appropriate sign; and

(b) when the absence of any vowel is indicated by the subscript symbol (্) called *hasanta* or *birāma*.

By omitting the implicit *a* in positions not specified under (a) and (b), I have tried to follow the patterns of pronunciation of words that have been transcribed. In everyday usage that includes conversation and reading, the implicit *a* is usually not pronounced. The pronunciations of such consonants then do not differ from specification (b), i.e. when the absence of the vowel *a* is indicated by *hasanta*.

Again, for the vowel ঔ and its bunching with consonants, I have used *ou* instead of *au*.

By inserting these improvisations, I hope to have made the pronunciations of Bengali words less cumbersome and more accurate for readers.

The Romanization forms of all other alphabets, vowel signs and consonant clusters remain as per the Library of Congress table.

Introduction

The term 'public', Rabindranath Tagore had argued in 1894, was new and impossible to render into Bengali.[1] In a span of about three decades, the poet had a Bengali name for 'public', – *lokalakṣmī*, implying the human collective as social resource.[2] Though the term hardly gained currency in contemporary or later social and political discourses, it is significant that by the nineteen twenties, a Bengali literary 'public' was seen as a palpable presence and conspicuous enough to acquire for itself a name in Bengali. *Lokalakṣmī* implied a society constituted by productive, more precisely, in the Tagorean sense, creative individuals bound by modern forms of communications, the most significant of which was the production and transmission of literature (*sāhitya*). Literature, understood in a broad sense had come to be foregrounded as a primary vehicle of nationalism's pedagogic mission and the key associative form. In other words, *sāhitya* was that which could potentially create a cohesive realm of interactions and interdependencies among individuals. A term more widely in use than *lokalakṣmī* appears to have been *jātīẏa jīban* (literally, the nation's life), understood generally as a collective of *byakti-mānab* (the individual-human). Through a process of continuous self-refinement, every person was to be metamorphosed into an ethically matured self – the *byakti-mānab* – endowed with a liberal consciousness (*udār citta*), an open heart (*praśasta prāṇ*) and a commitment to truth (*satya*).[3] The need for *byakti-mānab* like that of various collectivities, institutions and practices, emerged from within the social order. Monks (*sādhak-manḍalī*), religious communities (*upāsak sampradāẏ*), regulatory norms of behavior (*karmer niẏamtantra bidhibidhān*), institutions (*pratishṭhān*), customs and rituals (*anuṣṭhān*) constituted some of the organizing principles of social order.[4] This was then a vision of a moral social order based partly upon traditional habits, practices and institutions in which intellectual and spiritual capacities of individuals rather than wealth and power were the

1 Partha Chatterjee, "On civil and political society in post-colonial democracies" in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani ed. *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2003, p. 167.

2 Achintyakumar Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, M. C. Sarkar & Sons Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 1950, pp. 170–171. Sengupta does not provide a precise date for the conversation that the *Kallol* group including Dineshranjan Das, Nripendranath Chattopadhyay, Buddhadev Bose and Sengupta himself had with Tagore at the latter's Jorasanko residence. But it appears to have been around the mid-1920s when *Kallol* was still in circulation.

3 Sukumar Ray, 'Jībaner Hisāb' (Life's accounts), *Prabāsī* v. 17 pt. 2 # 6, Caitra 1324 / March-April 1918.

4 Ibid.

© koninklijke brill nv, leiden, 2020 | doi:10.1163/9789004427082_002

markers of social distinction. The relation of this idea of 'social constitution', to the domain of the modern state and the constitutional politics and political mobilizations it fostered was at best tangential.[5]

Similarly, the *byakti-mānab* too was an important constituent of the aspired social life of the nation (*jātīẏa jīban*). Drawn from a broadly liberal tradition of modern European thought, as individual (*byakti*), the self's orientation was towards the private and intimate and as human (*mānab*) the desirable propensity of the person was towards the public and the society at large. This *byakti-mānab* came to be imagined as the constitutive unit of *jātīẏa jīban* and a concept larger than if not incompatible with that of modern citizenship. The latter was a more impersonal notion premised upon the creation of a modern nation-state and its support systems like the market and bureaucracy.[6] Actualizing a *jātīẏa jīban* on the other hand involved creation of cultural affiliations in an otherwise heterogeneous society where traditional social and ritual binds predominated. Education and self-refinement constituted the formative core of the *byakti-mānab* and so for it to become a reality, the social function of education could not be limited by the agenda of citizenship.[7] In fact education meant exclusively for preparation of future citizenship (*nāgarik sṛṣṭi*), it was considered, could only be self-defeating and prolong suffering in society.[8] A hierarchical and institutionalized education system geared towards the interests and stability of the modern state and its apparatuses could prove inadequate in the making of the *byakti-mānab*. Clearly what was being longed for here was a modern public life for the Bengali speaking people, based upon modern principles of association and constituted by private individuals coming together as liberal, aesthetically endowed and socially responsible persons. This was then a public with semblances of maturity that corresponded to an advanced phase of print culture and made possible by books, journals, newspapers, literary societies, clubs and libraries. Each of these modern forms of sociability had their part in the making of the public. A reading culture sustained by the production and circulation of modern literature was now the index of a *jātīẏa jīban* being brought to fruition.

5 I have borrowed the term 'social constitution' from Sudipta Kaviraj, *On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity*, a lecture delivered at Columbia University, New York, 2005, reprinted in *The Trajectories of the Indian State: Politics and Ideas*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2010, pp. 40–77.

6 Sunil Khilnani, "The Development of Civil Society", Kaviraj and Khilnani, op. cit. pp. 28–29.

7 Anathnath Bose, "Śikṣā O Samāj" (Education and society), *Paricaẏ*, Māgh 1340 / January-February 1934.

8 Ibid. Bose explicitly says, "nāgarik sṛṣṭi śikṣār uddeśya haile jagater duḥkha sthāẏī karāi haibe." [If the purpose of education is to produce citizens, then that would only make the world's miseries everlasting.]

A mature literary public sphere vibrant in creativity and debates steadily emerged as an alternative as a section of the Bengali intelligentsia, howsoever numerically insignificant, began to redefine conflict-ridden notions of society based on caste and religious communities, and turned to the possibilities of a literary public sphere as the basis of a new social order (*nutan samāj*). In this search for a different society, literature came to be foregrounded as a possible alternative to the modern educational setup of the colonial state – for nurturing the *byakti-mānab* and towards the fulfillment of *jātīya jīban*. It was a new form grounded in the everyday life worlds and collective social practices of ordinary individuals, a modality that encouraged self-understanding and facilitated their dealing with the dilemmas of modernity. The constituent of the new society, the ordinary people (*sādhāran*) was idealized as a nascent but imminent possibility (*aprasuta sambhābanā*), in contrast to the realities of contemporary society.[9] Reworking society and social relationships along the contours and interactions of the literary sphere implied that writers and publicists rather than *netā* (caste and community leaders and also the modern political leadership) would be the *samāj kartā* (overseers of society), socially and morally more influential than political leaders.[10] Contemporary critics argued that it was the writers' inadequate sense of public responsibilities that had enabled the undue influence of political leaders (*netṛbṛnda*) in social life.[11] Reworking the basis of society from inherently divisive social categories like caste or community towards a new solidarity based on a shared literary culture (*sāhitya samāj*) was contemplated as a possible way out of the impasse of modern politics, especially the innate and often eruptive violence of caste-based and communalist politics. Coming from a sociologist, the contemplation of literary culture as a preparatory stage for the future society was neither naïve, nor a simple disavowal of social difference. Bengal had been, by the mid-thirties, plagued by chronic flare-up of violence that compelled publicists to rethink the bases of nationhood. Sashibhusan Basu presiding over the 1910 literary conference in Rajshahi, an eastern district of Bengal, cautioned his audience that literary culture by itself could never be an adequate predicate for nationhood. He argued that as long as caste and religious distinctions and discriminatory practices associated with such differences continued and were not delegitimized, *jātīya jīban* would continue to be elusive and an impossible

9 Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay, "Atha Kāvya Jijñāsā" in *Paricaẏ*, Baiśākh 1341 / April-May 1935. Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay was a leading sociologist and held distinguished academic positions.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

project to fulfill.[12] The understanding of the historical origins of caste and its subsequent mutations, Basu argued was a complex (*jaṭil*) matter that called for sustained discussions in the public domain, and research (*gabeṣaṇā*) and hard work (*pariśram*) of many.[13] Basu regretted that neither society nor history offered any hope for sustaining a national community. Society remained fissured by caste prejudices and interpretations of the past had little to say beyond conflicts between Hindus and Muslims.[14] In the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement, the Bengali literary sphere already manifested signs of aspiring beyond caste and religious centricities. The nation's life (*jātīẏa jīban*) was thus conceived as autonomous and fundamentally distinct from the premodern community identities (*Gemeinschaft*), their enumerated forms under colonial rule and formal political organizations. In this reading, the idea of society became identical with a community of readers (*pāṭhak samāj*) and literary publicists the pedagogues and guardians of the new social and moral order. Right since its inception, therefore, *jātīẏa jīban* came to be foregrounded as a self-regulatory domain, critical of modern political forms as inherently aggressive.

Under colonialism, the "fuzzy" idea of community in the precolonial times, gave way to the concept of bounded "enumerable" community.[15] Apparatuses of colonial governance like the Census were, the "sociological keys" that numerically defined indigenous categories of caste and religion that had previously been largely undetermined. By the early twentieth century, such classificatory schemes had become the bases of extensive documentation projects and began to be appropriated by various social groups in the process of political mobilization.[16] In colonial imagination the identity of a social collective was objectively ascertained and presumed to be unchanging. In reality however the Indian subject's inherited notion of his society conflicted with the inflexibility of the identity that the colonial state imposed on him. Thus in the late nineteenth century, the term *jāti*, implying a community or social collective, came to denote a range of social classifications, conveying multiple and ambiguous

---

12 Sashibhusan Basu, "Bāṅglā Nationality", *Prabāsī*, v. 10, pt 2, # 2, 3 and 4, Agrahāẏaṇ (November-December 1910), Pouṣ (December 1910-January 1911) and Māgh (January-February 1911).

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India" in Partha Chatterjee and Gyan Pandey ed. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, v. 7, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 20–33.

16 Bernard Cohn, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia", *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987, pp. 224–254.

meanings.[17] Even as the sense of *jāti* proved elusive and confounded, by the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of *jātīya jīban* emerged as a key conceptual construct, an object of fulfillment that sustained an impressive array of claims and counter claims on the nation and society. Here *jāti*, at least notionally, came to include all native speakers of Bengali who identified with either non-modern literary traditions or the modern literary genres. The *jāti* also transcended the 'region' to appeal to the expatriate communities of Bengalis. The idea of *jāti* and its realm (*svadeś*) were constituted by bonds of linguistic and literary kinship – ties based upon use of a common language and access to a defined aesthetic repertoire rather than identification with particular religion, ethnic group or customary relationships. Language, as much as religion and caste was then a primordial collective, an identity that one was born into. A modern literary culture in Bengali came to be perceived as a natural bond, one that united all who shared the same linguistic origin.

This book seeks to address one of the major print forms that facilitated the formation of *jātīya jīban* – the literary periodical (*sāhitya patrikā*), its role in the making of a modern, participatory reading culture and the social spaces of their readerships. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the maturing of print cultures in Bengal, at both the elite and popular levels. From around the 1860s, periodicals, even more than books, came to be perceived as a particularly appropriate print medium in the creation of a public sphere, given the form's interactive nature, capacity for sustaining protracted debates and its adaptability by readers with diverse reading abilities. The literary public sphere thus forged was at least notionally, a space of uninhibited exchange of ideas where parochialisms of the inherited social systems could be interrogated and imaginative possibilities about a regenerated new society reflected upon. Following Sudipta Kaviraj's reflections on the 'sociology of literature', it could be argued that literature and its primary vehicle, the periodical, insinuated a transformation in the 'moral imagination' of society, introducing changes that altered notions of domesticity, private space and relationships within middle-class households.[18] They reflected the deep and multifaceted historical transformations of the times, helped readers to make

---

17 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 220–223. Here Chatterjee shows how Kamalakanta, the opium eater in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Kamalākānter Daptar*, plays around with the almost endless meanings of the term *jāti* in the British magistrate's court in order to mock at the supposed rationality and impartiality of the colonial judicial system.

18 Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014, p. 25.

sense of the often paradoxical changes that modernity entailed and opened up imaginative possibilities of alternate orderings of society.

1 The Literary Periodical and the Making of a Public Sphere

In Europe, a mature public sphere as a characteristic feature of the modern times, had, according to Jurgen Habermas, developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in tandem with the transition towards bourgeois capitalist economy, the emergence of modern state apparatus and the sedimentation of a private-public binary defining middle-class lives. The formation of the 'public sphere' in Europe, according to Habermas, was facilitated by the spread of literacy, the printing press and the growth of urban culture. In its normative definition, the public sphere was constituted by free, rational-critical debates among private citizens and its domain demarcated clearly from that of the state. Public discussions in the form of rational arguments constituted the basis of public opinion on common concerns that in turn fostered ideals of citizenship, liberal values and criticisms of the functions of the state. Social institutions like coffee houses, clubs, newspapers and periodicals emerged as the spaces where the 'public' was generated.[19] Theoretically, the public sphere was premised on an ethic of inclusion, a domain of activity where everyone could be accommodated. This was evidently an idealized construct in which possibilities of exclusion of women and non-bourgeois social groups could severely delimit the widening of the public sphere.[20]

Under colonial conditions, as in India, the project of nationalist modernity entailed the creation of a public sphere constituted by modern 'civil social institutions', the aesthetic forms and the print media of which were derived from the nineteenth-century European world of letters.[21] Numerous reviews of European works, biographical essays of various authors, poets and social thinkers, plentiful translations of European fiction and verse testify to the continuous and robust connections that the Bengali literary sphere nurtured with the

19 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001 (Twelfth Edition).

20 Nancy Frazer, "Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution actually existing democracy" in Craig Calhoun ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 109–142.

21 Partha Chatterjee, 'On civil and political society in postcolonial democracies' in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani ed. *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, 2001 (Foundation Books edition, 2003), pp. 168–169.

world beyond the territorial frontiers of India. Yet the literary world of Bengal cannot be understood as having wholly assimilated the norms of Western public spheres. It developed its own conceptual categories, repertoires of aesthetic practices and responded to the concerns and predicaments of the society. For the colonial intelligentsia, engagements with literary and cultural concerns through print media like books and periodicals, literary societies and gatherings could generate a public presence on lines of Victorian England. In this project, the social leader's role was conceived as a pedagogic one of guiding the public towards maturity.[22] The Bengali intelligentsia envisioned the formation of the public sphere primarily in terms of a literary sphere and public activism as modern literariness. In their imagination, this public sphere was to embody the nation's life (*jātīẏa jīban*). The pedagogic intent behind the crafting of a public sphere becomes evident in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's advocacy of the need for a modern indigenous culture as a sphere of *lokaśikṣā* or mass education that would bridge the hiatus between the upcoming bilingually educated elite and the masses of non-literate and functionally literate populations. In his vision, the literary periodical was the primary communicative mode of modernity, replacing the premodern channels of communication represented by oral folkloric traditions that, he felt, were drying up with the onslaught of colonial education system. Bankim's *Baṅgadarśan* in a way marks the very first moment in the crafting of the Bengali public sphere. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the *sāhitya patrikā*, more than any other print form or associational modes, came to be looked upon as the most efficient instrument for fostering a social space for circulation of ideas. In its normative exposition, the public sphere crafted by periodicals was a participatory realm within civil society. It brought individual readers, otherwise unknown to each other, in proximity to other readers and with the society as a whole. Enhancing the accessibility of periodicals became a preferred way to maximize the reach of the public sphere. One thus notices an abiding interest in the spread of literacy, increase in subscriptions and the management of periodical publishing within the unfavorable conditions of colonial capital. Periodical subscription was perceived not only as an index of the relative popularity of each journal, but as a measure indicating the threshold of the public sphere. Eminent litterateurs, editors and writers therefore frequently voiced their disappointments with standards of literacy and the logistical irregularities that encumbered prospects of a thriving public sphere. Envisioned as a space for integration, the literary sphere was a domain predicated on the liberal principle of universal accessibility of education and one that could potentially

22 Ibid., p. 168.

accommodate social differentiations. Articulating a specific social pedagogy of their own, periodicals sought to take the notion of education beyond the institutional limits of colonial schooling – towards nurturing of aesthetic sensibilities and honing critical abilities of readers. The focus of this pedagogic practice was not simply on fostering a rational self. Rather enlarging the scope of education beyond literacy and skill development, it was hoped, would create an engaged conversational life that in future would become the basis for a committed political life.

The Bengali public sphere was at once democratic and exclusionary. The project to widen the public sphere was a deeply fissured one with profound anxieties endemic among publicists towards market relations and apprehensions over what seemed to be readers' appetite for low brow print swamping aesthetic refinement. For the bilingual nationalist elite, the mother language (*mātṝbhāṣā*) and the literary field (*sāhitya kṣetra*) it defined was a sanctified space that had to be protected from degeneration and anarchy. Literary debates constantly sought to strike a balance to resolve the seemingly perennial conflicts between the felt need to democratize readership and trepidations about the anarchic effects of a large and disorganized public sphere and between cultural refinement and increasing commercialization of literary practices. Democratization carried with it apprehensions of losing indices that were seen to structure the public sphere, especially codes of propriety and civility. One publicist expressed her concern over safeguarding the quality of public discourse even as she accepted the accessibility of middlebrow literature,

> The monthlies that cater to the leisure of ordinary householders cannot be expected to maintain very high standards. But it is essential to preserve politeness and respectability especially in the use of language.[23]

Evidently, such alarm at the possibility of civility being threatened by the inclusion of readers with different reading abilities owed its genesis to the inherent paradoxes of liberal political and cultural institutions. Critical here is the entry of the 'masses' in political activism and the growing consensus about democracy as the principle constitutional and political framework for the future nation-state. At the same time, the nationalist movements of 1905 and 1921 had plunged into religious and caste violence that had, especially in the case of the latter, forced suspension during full momentum, convincing the nationalist leadership about the political unpreparedness of the masses. An analogous tension permeated public discourses on culture – visions of a

23 Shanta Devi, "Bhāṣā o Sāhitya", *Prabāsī*, v. 33 pt. 2 # 6, Caitra 1340, March-April 1934.

democratized public sphere coexisting with the intelligentsia's frustrations that readers like the masses in nationalist movements were not always prepared to faithfully follow their leaders.

The duress of nation formation prevented any straightforward acceptance of an Arnoldian quest for perfection and his sense of high art and culture as disseminating "sweetness and light".[24] For most writers and editors of respectable periodicals, acutely aware of the realities of social stratification and differentiations in matters of taste, aesthetic perfection was an elusive pursuit. At the same time their disdain for 'low brow' literary choices was also evident. Contestations over definitions of aesthetic distinction and how to reach out to ordinary readers resulted in the search for a middle ground with its own 'high' and 'low' extremities – a space for 'middlebrow literature' that would nurture aesthetic refinement and yet be amenable to mass production. The periodical medium itself came to be foregrounded as an intermediate, relatively inexpensive form, readily accessible and containing a varied range of editorial innovations including illustrations. While a periodical like *Prabāsī* chose to be consciously highbrow, its successors, notably *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* strove to balance the erudite and popular in order to carve out the middle space. As periodicals endeavored to expand their readership base, the meanings of artistic imagination and creative competence became more inflected so as to accommodate differentiated literary tastes and reading abilities. Yet the Bengali literary public sphere continued to be sufficiently assertive and experimental, challenging deep rooted social norms and retaining its essentially antinomian core.

An 'apolitical' literary public sphere in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Western Europe was, according to Habermas, the 'precursor' of the "public sphere operative in the political domain".[25] In Bengal, the conscious creation of the literary public sphere by the bilingual intelligentsia was very much part of nationalism's cultural politics. It was one of several other 'modern civil social institutions' that were created by selectively appropriating cultural and literary forms of Western modernity and with an express purpose of crafting nationhood through a modern, yet indigenous literary culture.[26] Under

24 Amanda Adams, "The Uses of Distinction: Matthew Arnold and American Literary Realism", *American Literary Realism*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Fall, 2004), pp. 37–49.

25 Jurgen Habermas, op. cit. p. 29.

26 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Oxford University Press, 1994. According to Chatterjee, modern civil social institutions were put in place by through a process of selective cultural appropriations from Western modernity and then blended with the "reconstituted elements of what was claimed to be indigenous tradition".

conditions of colonial modernity therefore the literary sphere even at its inception could never have been ‘apolitical’. Neither did the literary public sphere give way to a chronologically subsequent political public sphere. Rather post-1905, the many interactions of the literary sphere and the political domain renders it impossible to speak of any causal relationship between the two. The Swadeshi days witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of literary creativity, especially in the form of verse and plays.[27] Yet the literary sphere cannot be said to have simply mirrored or contextualized political developments.[28] The ‘literary’ and the ‘political’ shared in a symbiotic relationship creating a space that engendered multiple, frequently contested imaginings of nationhood.[29] In a departure from the orthodoxies of literary theory, Rosinka Chaudhuri makes a plea for both the ‘materiality’ and ‘immanent immateriality’ of aesthetics to understand the formative moments of literary culture in Renaissance Bengal.[30] The relationship between the literary public sphere and the political, I argue, needs to be understood in terms of disjuncture but also as integrally constitutive of each other. Voices entreating for the aesthetic value of literature, especially the autonomy of poetry and its key role in providing happiness *ānanda*, frequently recur in the pages of periodicals. Barring the fervor of the Swadeshi years, Rabindranath himself remained a passionate spokesperson of the autonomy of aesthetics as that which was eternally true and beautiful. Yet in the two immensely creative and vibrant decades after Swadeshi, *sāhitya* or literature continued to be understood in terms of a

---

27 Anuradha Roy ed., “Introduction”, *Svādhīnatā Saṃgrāmer Gān O Kabitā: Biṃśa Śatābdī*, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2011, p. iii. Roy argues that cultural anti-colonialism was essentially a recuperative project that sought to reclaim the geographical space of the ‘locality’ that had been lost to the imperialist outsider. The lyrical tradition of rural romances in Bengali (like those of Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das and Jasimuddin to name a few) never stridently articulated territorial decolonization but through their celebration of nature and natural beauty of the land, formed a significant part of the restorative attempt.

28 Explaining the emergence of the radical right in Europe during the turn of the twentieth century, Carl Schorske has argued that it was the Viennese intellectuals’ disillusionment with liberal political institutions that made them withdraw into the world of culture, thereby leaving the domain of politics vulnerable to irrational forces. Schorske’s study of the Viennese intellectuals thus contextualizes political phenomenon (the ultraright) in a preoccupation with culture. Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna.*

29 Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905–1947,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017 has drawn attention to the multiple imaginings of nationhood and their contestations among Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim political leaders as well as men of letters. Using evidences from print media she argues that political and constitutional ideologies were embedded in the social and cultural world of Bengal.

30 Rosinka Chaudhuri, *The Literary Thing: History, Poetry and the Making of a Modern Cultural Sphere*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, p. 35.

constructive relationship with nationhood or *jātīyatā*. This book argues that in the Bengali cultural imagination the fulfillment of political modernity in the form of a nation was essentially a literary project that entailed the making of a vernacular reading public and assimilated multifarious controversies around authors and the aesthetical and social worth of their works.

A 'new political society' took shape during the period of nationalist political mobilizations, providing the site of mediation between the population and the state.[31] This arena was formally constituted by Indian National Congress where the elite and national-popular domains, otherwise distinct, came together during moments of mass mobilizations. Represented most remarkably by what Partha Chatterjee calls the 'Gandhian moment of maneuver'[32] this was a "site of strategic maneuvers, resistance and appropriation by different groups and classes…"[33] *Subaltern Studies* histories have shown how during moments of mass mobilization, the nationalist leadership's attempts to appropriate subaltern initiatives were countered with resistance to the political and ideological modalities of elite leadership. It is the question of the interface between this political society and the literary sphere that seem to have concerned publicists like Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay and the *Kallol* poets. By the mid-twenties when the younger group of poets met Tagore and asked for a Bengali name for 'public', the real public, what Partha Chatterjee has called the domain of the national-popular had already come into existence. Did Mukhopadhyay deem the new political society to be the *aprasuta sambhābanā*?

2 The Periodical Form, Reading and Middle-class Lives

> Thanks to the great intellectuals of the world, there are plenty of large water bodies (*sarobar*). One can quench the thirst for ideas by drinking or bathing in those waters. But for everyday use, the tap water is very convenient…. The newspaper, brief criticisms and other kinds of *kṣaṇik sāhitya* (momentary literature) fulfill the functions of tap water. They derive their supply from the big reservoirs of thought and distribute those to every household at nominal price – I guess that is the reason why many modern readers (*ādhunik pāṭhak*) have forgotten the skills of swimming

31 Partha Chatterjee, 'On civil and political society in postcolonial democracies', p. 176.

32 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, London, Zed Books, 1986.

33 Partha Chatterjee, 'On civil and political society in postcolonial democracies', p. 176.

> and the pleasure of submerging – because the depth and expanse of the lakes are absent in tap water.[34]

The young Rabindranath's observation, made at a moment when a periodical reading culture had only begun to germinate, succinctly brings forth both the rewards and deficiencies of the periodical form. The ubiquity and convenience of the journalistic medium held out promises of an expanding literary culture. Yet there is a pervasive sense of lament – the modern readers' inability, or amnesia as Tagore puts it, to plunge into avid book reading. Nevertheless, the poet's reflection indicated that Bengal was on the brink of a major social transformation embracing middle-class lives. At the heart of this transition was a diversifying reading culture constituted by an impressive range of prints, visual and textual.

Periodicals are presumably taken as those print forms that appear at intervals, for instance, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, monthlies, weeklies, bulletins etc. Poised at the interface of the newspaper media and printed books, between commercial publishing and the high arts, literary miscellanies or what in Bengali were the *sāmaẏik* (periodical) or *sāhitya* (literary) *patrikā* (journal), constituted a paradoxical middling format. While the name of a periodical, its editorial proficiency and its principal group of writers might suggest a stable entity, it was in practice a constantly evolving format. Multiple contributors, reviews and debates made it an interactive medium of literary practice than probably any other printed form.[35] Most of these periodicals appeared in attractive forms, the cover usually carrying a picture conveying the mission of the *patrikā* and its name ornately printed along those of the editor, assistant editor and patrons or publishers.[36] Periodicals constituted the lifeline

---

34 Rabindranath Tagore to Pramatha Chaudhuri, Letter from Bolpur dated May 21, 1890.

35 W.E. Houghton, 'Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes' in Joan Shattock & Michael Wolff ed., *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, Leicester University Press and University of Toronto Press, 1982, pp. 3–27. Houghton exemplifies the periodical nature of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* that assumed the book form only after a series of essays had been published in the *Cornhill* and other major reviews and the author had negotiated the criticisms that came up in other monthlies or weeklies.

36 Antonio Gramsci, 'Journalism: Types of Periodical: [External Appearance]' in Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, Harvard University Press, 1991, pp. 406–407. Gramsci argues that "The surface appearance of a review is of great importance both commercially and 'ideologically' (to secure fidelity and affection). In this case it is in fact hard to distinguish the commercial from the ideological aspect." He goes on to elaborate the importance of typescript, ink, attractiveness of headlines, margins and line spacing, quality of paper etc. and states that "Only in exceptional conditions, in specific periods of boom in public opinion, does it occur that an opinion is successful whatever the outward form in which it is presented."

of modern literature in the Bengali language – often the first public exposure for works that would attain canonical status alongside those that would over time become relatively obscure. They were the major vehicle for transmission of literary works and often the first forum for publication for amateur writers. Most works by leading writers and publicists, especially fiction made their appearance in periodicals in serialized format and would be compiled as books only after the appearance of the final episode. Literary periodicals comprised primarily indigenous adaptations of modern western literary genres like the novel, short stories, lyrical poetry and perhaps most importantly the essay form deployed for literary criticism, translations and discussions on a remarkable variety of subjects. The assorted range of a periodical's contents was not only meant to provide variety to the individual reader, it could potentially attract readers with different aesthetic preferences as well. A typical *māsik patrikā* would predictably contain serial fictions, verses, essays on an impressive variety of subjects and illustrations. A startling variety of contents and the fact that readers could fit in portions of reading between their work schedules, made literary periodicals one of the prominent forms of entertainment intended to suit the specific needs and tastes of a middle-class readership. A certain liberty was built into periodical reading, in terms of both the variety of its contents and the coexistence of different modes of readings that a periodical could be amenable to. The inherent "openness" of the periodical allowed readers their own pace – the choice to read what they wanted, browse or pass over those that seemed unappealing.[37]

A key template organizing the present work, concerns aspects of material culture of the Bengali middle classes – that class could be understood not merely in terms of its relations to processes of production, but more importantly, in terms of circulation of cultural artefacts like literary periodicals, consumption habits within households and the dominant 'taste' endorsed. A distinctive feature of modernity was that literary production entailed the creation of a reading public, implying a measure of 'integration' within a particular class in terms of 'taste'.[38] The reception of modern literature by the nineteenth-century bilingual intelligentsia marked the 'invention of private life' – shaping and justifying an idea of the self and structuring its emotions and aesthetic sensibilities.[39] Modern literary genres, particularly the novel and lyrical poetry, conceived of the individual as 'ordinary' as opposed to the

37 Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914*, Routledge, 1992.

38 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1977, p. 49.

39 Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Idea*, pp. 26–27.

extraordinary hero of the epics, celebrated the ordinariness of modern everyday lives and were imbued with a strong moral pedagogy. To the modern novelist, the ordinariness of the individual revealed itself through the imperfections and vulnerabilities of human life.[40] It was this space of the ordinary and daily life into which the *sāhitya patrikā* made its way in, creating a niche of private space within the structures of middle-class household. The periodical with its serial novels, poetry and snippets of entertainment reading normalized the colonized middle classes' encounter with modernity. Again the *ordinariness* in modern literary aesthetics embraced the life of *sādhāran pāṭhak* or the ordinary reader as well. The *sāhitya patrikā* fitted into the rhythm of daily lives of the middle classes and addressed the reader as an ordinary human with emotional susceptibilities and helplessness in face of the day to day realities of colonial subjugation. By the opening of the twentieth century, periodicals had become a popular commodity for consumption in middle-class Bengali homes – a standard medium of leisure entertainment and a major vehicle for circulation of ideas in the public domain. Not only the material presence of periodicals but the issues and concerns that they chose to engage with facilitated the configuration of modern middle-class private lives. Like the newspaper and the book, the periodical became a familiar household commodity in most educated middle-class homes, organizing quotidian domesticity in terms of household management and creating a modern sense of ethical social life.

The new genre of *sāhitya patrikā* was inscribed firmly in the space of a predominantly urban, middle classness – as one of the material objects that provides a glimpse into the world of the middle classes and defined bhadralok domesticity. Periodical reading signalled an altered approach to aesthetic preferences – determining patterns of consumption and entertainment in middle-class households and underscored needs for reformed reading. Periodicals meant quality entertainment at affordable cost and unlike amusements that required stepping out of the house it was more accessible to the womenfolk of the household. Carefully cultivated habitual reading was considered to be one of the defining features of modernity, a key indicator of middle-class lives. As perhaps the only print form that engaged with a startling variety of interests and concerns, literary periodicals sought to reach across multiple levels of literacy and educational competencies. Periodicals therefore came to constitute a domain of print production where the erudite elite and the high profile nationalist leader cohabited with the non-elite middle-class reader as writer, reader and respondent making the literary sphere a plural and diverse space. The proliferation of periodicals came to be perceived as a mark of a new social

40 Ibid., p. 31.

life coming into existence. The presence of a market for used periodicals indicate their popularity and readers' sustained interest in their contents even long after issues ceased to be current.[41] This new social life was based, at least notionally, on the acquisition and cultivation of aesthetic qualities. The organization and formatting of the literary periodical engendered a dialogic reading culture – a domain peopled by ordinary men and women, where questions impacting their lives were debated and which provided them a space for self-expression. The periodical press continued to engage with some of the defining concerns of Bengali social life – those that would likely have interested the non-elite middle-class reader more than or at least alongside the dominant narratives of nationalism. Engagement with expressly 'political' and 'economic' concerns, for instance, the possibilities of decolonization, the choices between the various forms of self-governance, debates over separate electorates, riots, inflations, food shortages, war time crises etc., constitute only a part of the several other intellectual engagements that turn the gaze away from the nationalist agitation as the dominant discourse determining social life of ordinary middle-class people.

At a more discursive level, the book will try to unearth some of the defining debates that occupied publicists of diverse social belongings and intellectual predilections. Authors, editors, literary critics and even ordinary readers were engaged in debates that often spread over several periodicals. These dialogues and frequent controversies, the book argues, forged the networks of interactions delineating the literary public sphere: shaping readers' perspectives on critical social issues, refining their aesthetic dispositions and underscoring the qualitative benefits that good reading habits could bring into their lives. Even though many of these encounters took the form of literary debates, they reveal deeply embedded societal concerns. The limited reach of the nineteenth-century social reforms through legislative interventions by the colonial state had perhaps insinuated a gradual conviction in the transformative capacity of literature, howsoever protracted that change might be. Literary engagements were seen as gradual builders of public consensus over the need for reforming various social norms and practices. Contemporary periodicals were rife with debates between traditionalists endorsing the sanctity of ritual strictures and customary practices and reformists (and even radical modernists) who

41 For instance, *Prabāsī* v. 22 pt. 1, Baiśākh 1329 / April-May 1921 carries advertisement by two used booksellers Khalil Ahmed & Sons and B.N. Seth & Co. located on Shyamacharan De Street and Beadon Street in north Calcutta. The periodicals advertised as available in these book stores were leather bound volumes of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Baṅgadarśan* and *Pracār*, *Prabāsī*, *Sāhitya*, *Nārāẏaṇ*, *Bhāratbarṣa*, *Sabuj Patra* and *Nabyabhārat* among others.

questioned the legitimacy of such prescriptions. The literary sphere therefore emerged as a space holding out promises of emancipation from social afflictions and exploitations, where conformism and certainties of all sorts could be questioned, and inhibitions shed. New literary innovations and aesthetic experiments nurtured in a range of distinctive periodicals called for the celebration of the young, unsullied and fearless mind (Pramatha Chaudhuri ed. *Sabuj Patra*; 1914), voiced the antinomianism of the energetic, rebellious youth against all forms of social entrapments (Dinesh Ranjan Das ed. *Kallol*; 1923) and not least, the call to emancipate the intellect from social parochialisms and bondage of doctrinaire principles (Mohammad Nasiruddin ed. *Saogāt*; 1917).

Reading, it has been usually believed, is elusive and seldom 'leaves traces'.[42] Individual reading within the private retreat of the home has been particularly difficult to trace. In a colonial society, where periodicals often reached individuals with less than effective skills of reading, 'evidences' of textual preferences are hard to come by. Nevertheless, as this book suggests, it is possible to reconstruct the normative ideals and social anxieties that informed practices of reading. Periodicals are thus aplenty with advices from publicists about how best to hone reading abilities and repeated warnings that readers may get addicted by morally reprehensible readings alongside carefully cultivated sense of aesthetics. The integration of individual readers, authors and editors into a literary community or *sāhitya samāj* created a shared space of cultural experience that was as much about collective social interactions as it was about cultivation of individual intellect. If as Michel de Certeau argues a 'text has meaning only through its readers',[43] then the organization of periodical publishing and the arrangement of contents show how periodical texts responded to both the pace and concerns of their middle-class readers. In fact the very existence of periodical texts revolved around the figure of the reader. In a way, while periodicals depended upon their readers for sales and by implication their survival, this study focuses more on how the normative 'reader' came to be envisioned by the periodical press, the ways in which they defined reading practices and the benefits of and the political and cultural investments in reading. In this sense, this investigation is not so much about the aggregate of periodicals readers comprising of sub-groups of readers with specific genre preferences. Rather it looks at how the prefiguration of the ordinary reader

42 Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1992, p. 1.

43 Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Lives*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984, pp. 170–171.

underpinned literary discourses on reading, the near ubiquitous presence of periodicals in middle-class homes and the consensus about a maturing public sphere as fulfilling the conversational needs of the nation. The book considers a variety of periodicals series, archived mostly in the form of hard bound volumes and focuses on both their material and discursive forms. Periodicals, it argues, effectively straddled the realms of middle-class domesticity and sociability, thereby not only blurring any obvious distinctions between the two domains, but in fact constituting a defining paradigm for understanding the private and the public. The interface between the two makes it possible to historicize reading as a common domestic practice shaping modern middle classes' private lives and also as an instrument stimulating the individual reader's identification with the public. Periodicals focussed on the ordinary reader (*sādhāran pāṭhak*) with the purpose of catering simple pleasure and knowledge. But in the context of a colonized society, it also became imperative for periodicals to deal with the duress of colonialism. It is rewarding to see the interface as not always constituted in a symbiotic relationship of the two. Rather the private and public aspects of reading seem frequently locked in contestations as concerns and anxieties over *jātīẏa jīban* took precedence. Even though, for the individual reader, the periodical was meant primarily for entertainment and instruction, the notion of the normative public sphere generated a tremendous faith in the antinomian potential and transformative capacity of reading itself. A quintessentially solitary practice such as leisure reading thus came to be invested with the task of a fundamental social transformation. With an apparently innocuous purpose of entertainment, literary periodicals penetrated the modest middle-class household and created a space where modern forms of social life and its possibilities could be contemplated.

3 The Periodicals Archive

The two foundational studies of Bengali journals (including but not limited to literary periodicals) have been Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay's two volume compendium of periodicals *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik-patra* (Bengali Periodicals) and Binoy Ghosh's six volume anthology *Sāmaẏikpatre Bāṅglār Samājcitra* (Reflections of Bengal's Society in Periodicals).[44] Both these compilations primarily contain brief bibliographic and publishing information on nineteenth-century

44 Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik-patra* in two volumes (1936 and 1952), Calcutta, 1947. Benoy Ghosh, *Sāmaẏikpatre Bāṅglār Samājcitra* in six volumes, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1963–1978.

periodicals and extracts from various critical essays published on significant social and political developments. Both Bandyopadhyay and Ghosh considered periodicals as invaluable evidence of Bengal's early colonial encounters. Bandyopadhyay, trained in the historians' craft by none other than Sir Jadunath Sarkar, saw periodicals as instruments that ushered in the Bengal Renaissance. His compilation as he himself stated was meant to provide a reliable historical evidence of the people and institutions involved in the making of the Renaissance. Benoy Ghosh's interest in nineteenth-century periodicals as exemplification of early vernacular journalism was evidently linked to his profession as a journalist. His academic training as a sociologist motivated him to anthologize periodicals as "reflections of society" (*samājcitra*). For both these stalwart thinkers, periodicals were a homogenous mass of printed matter that was in need of archiving through selective anthologizing. Anisuzzaman's *Muslim Bāṅglār Sāmaẏik Patra, 1831–1930* and Mustafa Nurul Islam's *Sāmaẏikpatre Jīban o Janamat, 1901–1930* closely follow Bandyopadhyay and Ghosh's archiving methods in anthologizing Bengali Muslim periodicals.[45]

This book however, sidesteps more familiar, chronologically ordered narratives of Bengali literature and surveys of 'landmark' periodicals. Instead, one of the critical questions that it engages with relates to the kind of archive that literature and the periodical medium in particular define. In the disciplinary sense of the archive as a collection of primary sources, periodicals mirrored the remarkable plurality of the literary and political interests of the educated Bengali mind and the sincerity with which publicists and readers engaged with cultural knowledge. Yet, beyond its obvious usefulness as a passive evidentiary reserve unproblematically reflecting historical narratives, this work has attempted to see the periodicals archive as an active force constituting a wider discursive field of production and exchange of social thought (*samāj cintā*). In the latter sense, the periodicals archive (and more generally literature) not only destabilizes the usual understanding of archives as a repository of bureaucratic documentation. Corresponding to a space outside of state control the periodicals archives resists being reduced to mere substantiation of historical narratives of chiefly political events in colonial Bengal. Instead, the periodicals archive reveals a different narrative of indigenous life under colonial modernity – how literature shaped the common readers' insights, transformed their perception and made them capable of contemplating beyond mundane everyday living. This explains why periodicals' engagements with 'political'

45 Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Bāṅglār Sāmaẏik Patra, 1831–1930*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1969. Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Sāmaẏikpatre Jīban o Janamat, 1901–1930*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977.

matters like the War, anti-colonial protests and the various constitutional developments never assumed forms similar to newspaper reportage. Rather they were meant to illuminate the contemporary so that readers could see the far flung implications of various happenings. Beyond its interpretive presence in the lives of common Bengali readers, the periodical archive exemplifies how a non-Western modern intellectual tradition was being shaped. This intellectual tradition, one that continued to draw upon European traditions of literary and social thought, was also self-consciously cosmopolitan, engaging with knowledge of history, society and cultural expressions of other non-Western nations, particularly those of the Islamicate societies of West Asia.

Yet as the book unfolds, the Bengali literary sphere developed its own ways to deal with and reflect upon its historical experiences and predicaments. Its own aesthetic expressions created a niche of intimacy for readers within the privacy of middle-class homes. The literary sphere therefore emerges as an archive inhabiting the interstitial space between the private and public domains. The private and public and the material and discursive aspects of periodicals can then be understood not as distinct binaries but rather as co-dependent and mutually constitutive. It was in this interactive space that an impressive range of knowledge was produced and various desires, including political aspirations came to be expressed. The literary and historical then, were mutually constitutive domains – a space where literary contests uncovered and historicized various social dominations and the challenges they faced. It was in this liminal domain of the literary that the Bengali middle-class readers inhabited – crafting archives of their own cultural and political engagements. The historical significance of the imaginative possibilities produced and debated in this space cannot be dismissed simply for its minority participation or elite hegemonic agenda. Its importance, this book suggests, lay elsewhere – in engendering counter hegemonic literary initiatives and opening up the Bengali literary space to democratic possibilities. The democratic potentials of the literary sphere were sought to be realized not only through integration of literate groups beyond the pale of the professionally successful bilingual elite but also by accommodating eclectic, often unconventional literary experiments and non-mainstream language. In a way this interactive space was one where possibilities and constraints of broad democratic principles could be tested, and public communication regulated. Women's journals, the Bengali Muslim literary periodicals, journals of various caste groups and district journals, besides the mainstream ones, contributed to the making of multiple, intersecting literary spheres. Journals devoted wholly to scientific enquiries, medical knowledge or theological and philosophical matters too drew their own small specialized

clusters of readers.[46] This work however takes up periodicals that identified themselves as *sāhitya patrikā* or literary journals, including the illustrated miscellaneous ones, women's journals and the Bengali-Muslim periodicals. These were distinct from other types of journals like those exclusively focussed on science, medicine, agriculture and industry as also from those journals that were organs of specific caste based associations or even district bulletins.

The concept of 'encounters' among readers, writers and editors within the textual space of the literary journals provides a useful category to understand the formations of the literary public sphere.[47] The dialogic structure of the magazine form opened it up to multiple and even contradictory voices in its pages, often within the covers of the same issue. The lack of ideological uniformity and the numerous inflections and ambivalences that common readers and amateur writers brought in dissuades me from treating these periodicals only as 'evidences' of specific 'historical' developments. In other words, the more common understanding of the literary as mirroring 'politics' and 'history'. Therefore, I have not attempted to search for the most representative text for any detailed scrutiny. Rather I have tried to capture the polyphonic nature of the periodical form and the literary sphere more generally, as a web of often competing ideas and the diverse experiences they engendered among readers and writers. Contemporary perceptions and social values frequently informed public dialogues on literary texts and writing. Argumentations and the tropes deployed in formulating them, determined the ways in which the text in question was received by the ordinary reader. This approach is particularly helpful because in most cases the dialogues and debates were trans-periodical, i.e. taking place across several literary journals of varying socio-cultural dispositions and since these contributions, articles or letters came from multiple authors, and some readers as well, they testify to the range and multi-vocal nature of the public sphere instead of exclusively focusing on leading writers and think-

---

46 Major science and medical journals included *Bijñān* (1894 and 1912), *Bijñān Darpaṇ* (1882 and 1909), *Cikiṯsā Darpaṇ* (1871 and 1920), *Cikiṯsak* (1889), *Cikiṯsā Prakāś* (1908). Major caste-based periodicals included *Tili Samācār* (1919), *Kāẏastha Patrikā* (1902), *Baiśya Patrikā* (1910) and *Baidya Hitaiṣiṇī* (1925). Organs of spiritual communities included *Baiṣñab* (1886) and *Baiṣñab Sandarbha* (1903).

47 By 'encounters' is meant "any set of articles or letters to the editor in which the writer, whether journalist or reader, responds to a published article in a periodical, often as a reply to special topics or issues of the day, or to other articles with which the respondent agrees or disagrees. These encounters may be in the form of debates or dialogues, and they function in several ways, notably as mediations of the topic under discussion in the press or as the content itself." Laurel Brake and Julie Codell, 'Introduction: Encountering the Press' in Laurel Brake and Julie Codell ed., *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

ers. Thus Rabindranath Tagore, inarguably the most important formative influence on the Bengali literary sphere during these decades, figures as one of the numerous voices.

A lyrical ballad like Rabindranath Tagore's *Citrāṅgadā* is therefore treated not in terms of its textuality or Tagorean aesthetics. An artefact of late nineteenth-century *Citrāṅgadā* came in the wake of the furious controversies around the Age of Consent Bill – a revivalist Hindu orthodoxy defending the custom of consummation of marriage at puberty and reformists seeking to increase the age of consent on grounds of creating healthy children for the nation. For a resilient indigenist nationalism, *Citrāṅgadā* with its celebration of premarital romance and courtship posed a very serious challenge to a patriarchy structured on redefined Hinduism. This explains *Citrāṅgadā*'s continued relevance throughout the early twentieth-century decades as controversies around gender, sexuality and tradition erupted every time legislations for marriage reforms were initiated. Time and again, the defenders of a reenergized tradition condemned the ballad as 'unnatural' and 'obscene' spurring some considerable response from Tagore's supporters. The protracted debates that were woven around the text testified to the continuing public interest in the lyrical ballad. The recurrent interjections and the responses they engendered across a large number of periodicals were laid out in terms of reformism and its challenges to a formidable orthodoxy and tied up with questions of conjugality, beliefs in the sanctity of Hindu marriage and norms of wifely chastity. Through these debates, it is possible to see how elective marriage and its expressions through romantic love and premarital courtship were gradually gaining social acceptability and becoming a normalized part of ordinary middle-class lives in Bengal.

4 The Plan of the Book

The first two chapters of this book form a continuum, dealing with the material culture of periodicals – the organization of their production and their circulation within Bengali middle-class homes. Through the course of the two chapters, the *māsik patrikā* evolve from a virtual non-entity in the colonial archives of the mid-nineteenth century to become, in the early decades of the twentieth century, an indispensable medium of entertainment and edification for Bengali readers. Focusing on the operational dimensions of periodicals publishing and the professionalization of editorial and authorial work, the chapters show how the Bengali literary sphere was strained by the counter pulls of a commercializing market and quests for aesthetic sophistication. The

literary publicists' dilemma turned on the need for a widening, democratizing public sphere vis-à-vis the acquirable threshold of readership within the limited access to primary education. However, even amidst these ambivalences and incompatibilities, the *māsik patrikā* clearly attained popularity in middle-class homes: redefining interactions between domesticity and the public sphere and foregrounding reading as one of the most productive ways to make use of leisure and also contribute towards the growth of a common space of participation.

Chapter one traces the emergence of the *sāhitya patrikā* from within a maze of disparate prints to be employed by the first generation of the English educated Bengalis as a means to fashion a literary public sphere in Bengal. It looks closely at an early instance of the literary periodical, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Baṅgadarśan* that was perhaps the first to generate tremendous excitement among its readers. Not only did Bankim's serial novels make it a popular choice but also the selection and organization of its contents laid out the template for subsequent experimentations. Initiated in 1872 *Baṅgadarśan*'s stated agenda was to deanglicise the English educated bilingual Bengali intelligentsia by offering them suitable reading material in the vernacular and engender interactions between them and those competent only in Bengali. For Bankim, the literary periodical held out the promise of a modern mode of mass education with potentials to replace the premodern networks of communication that had shrunk with the onslaught of colonialism and also to supplement the educational system put in place by the colonial state. A widening market in periodicals also came to be laden with a reformist drive as Bankim hoped to dent the *Baṭtalā* market of cheap prints and refine entertainment preferences of the petty bhadraloks. For Bankim's admirers, *Baṅgadarśan* embodied the transformative moment in the maturing of Bengali literature (*Baṅgasāhitya*) – mooting, for the first time the idea of *sāhitya* or literature as a modernizing agent. By the turn of the twentieth century, the literary sphere had widened noticeably to induce trends towards professionalization of authorial and editorial ventures. *Sāhitya sebā* became a commendable public initiative, an expression of commitment towards the nurturing of *jātīya jīban*. As periodical publishing became steadily well-run within a larger thriving commercial print market, several *sāhitya patrikā* modelled on the first series of *Baṅgadarśan* like *Bhāratī*, *Sāhitya*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Sādhanā* and *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan* among others were launched to forge links between the bilingually proficient and Bengali educated reading communities. Yet even as the first quarter of the twentieth century came to represent for posterity, the prime formative phase of modern Bengali literariness, the chasm between the lettered and the non-literate

masses remained mostly unmediated so that a 'public' coextensive with the populace continued to be perpetually elusive.

Robert Darnton's concept of a "communications circuit", an enclosed process involving authors, publishers, printers, shippers, booksellers and readers has been used by historians of print to understand the circulation of books in early print cultures.[48] This model explaining processes of communication in early modern France, Darnton has argued "applies to all histories of printed book" with "minor adjustments".[49] For an under-capitalized society like colonial Bengal where the majority of people remained trapped in vicious cycles of impoverishment and non-literacy, such seamless circuits become suspect. The production and consumption processes of literary periodicals were caught up amidst the tensions between infringing market relations and aesthetic persuasions.[50] In this context, Chapter Two traces the widening contours of literary communications through rising subscriptions of periodicals, their increased longevity and the diversity of their literary experimentations. More specifically, it studies the organization and functional logistics of Ramananda Chattopadhyay's illustrated miscellany *Prabāsī*, the first of its kind in the Bengali literary market. The illustrated miscellany or the *sacitra māsik patrikā* with its new features, especially plenty of illustrations and sections meant for readers to communicate among themselves made it a near instant hit. *Prabāsī*, and following it the other major ones, *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* enjoyed far greater circulations and longer print runs than any of their contemporaries. Yet, as the discussions on *Prabāsī* show, the literary media labored under the conflicting forces of a commercializing market and nurturing what several publicists interpreted as refined aesthetics: resulting in a chasm between the readerships it sought to create and that which was actually produced. Even the survival strategies adopted by the periodicals market in response to the economic dislocations wrought in by the First World War, were focused on increasing their marketability. Enhanced accessibility of periodicals was equated with a larger reader society (*pāṭhak samāj*) consisting of individual buyer-reader (*kretā-pāṭhak*) that implied a growing literate population willing and able to spend a minor amount on quality entertainment. Of course, the

48 Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1991, pp. 110–113.

49 Ibid.

50 For instance the introduction of electricity connections in Calcutta, the increase in the cost of upgrading printing presses and the subsequent leveling of such costs might have had an impact on the unevenness of print production. Abhijit Bhattacharya, *A Guide to the Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Collection*, Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, p. 50, note 5.

kretā-pāṭhak and *pāṭhak samāj* were figurative rather than literal, indicating the aspirations for an inclusive public sphere and also serving as points of reference in literary discourses.

Evidently, the task of grooming aesthetically sensitive and socially sensible readers assumed unprecedented urgency and became a precondition for the success of social reform. Chapter Three focuses on how the Bengali literary sphere emerged as a broadly self-regulatory domain, generating and normalizing its own aesthetic standards for appraising any new literary experimentation. The cultivation of literary taste and use of discretion in reading were looked upon as key indicators of a mature and articulate public culture. *Aślīlatā*, literally meaning obscenity, but also used more generally to denote 'lack' of aesthetic sensibility became the axial concept structuring debates on what constituted readable literature. This regulative aesthetic of *aślīlatā* was firmly embedded in a reinvented and "nationalized" Hindu tradition and the social ethic that upheld it. A modern and relatively unfamiliar cultural commodity, the novel and its explorations of the modern emotion of romantic love, roused apprehensions among orthodox publicists. For conservative literary critics, romantic love was posited in contrast to conventional ideas of chastity and wifely devotion – a threat that could potentially destabilize the reconstituted Hindu tradition and lead society towards anarchy. The chapter proceeds to show how alongside an abundance of fiction in periodicals, literary criticism emerged as an indispensable genre for shaping an integrated reading public. The task of literary criticism (*sāhitya samālocanā*) extended beyond arbitration of aesthetic disputes becoming equipped to lead readers in deciding on suitable reading and ostensibly the most effective way to filter out undesirable print.

The following two chapters deal with the formation of alternative readerships: Bengali Muslims and women respectively and the contours of these distinct, if not autonomous literary spheres. The mainstream literary sphere, despite its claims of and attempts at inclusiveness, clearly fell short of addressing the specific needs and aspirations of diverse reader groups. The sustained publications of Bengali Muslim periodicals and periodicals meant exclusively for women readers makes it possible to speak of multiple, coexisting and competing literary spheres. Here, the coexistence of multiple readerships does not necessarily indicate hierarchies of literacy or reading ability. Rather they make it possible to speak of diverse concerns that interested different groups of readers, pointing to the impossibility of a single, homogenous literary culture.

Chapter four deals with the Bengali Muslim literary sphere – the production logistics of periodicals meant specifically for the newly educated, upcoming middle-class sections among Bengal's Muslims and the challenges of

pushing the threshold of primary education in order to extend readerships. The chapter argues that this alternative literary sphere emerged as a critique of the mainstream, predominantly Hindu literary sphere and what came to be seen as the latter's exclusionist tendencies. It then traces the defining coordinates of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere through three major debates. The first debate centered on the search for a modern Bengali appropriate for Bengal's Muslims, a prose form that was to be distinct from the linguistic formations of premodern Bengali and the mainstream literary sphere, yet flexible enough for engagements with both. The language debates extended beyond the familiar Bengali-Urdu divide to include experimentations in vocabulary, transliteration, introducing new letters in Bengali to accommodate Arabic words as well as the concurrent contentions between proponents of chaste (*sādhu*) Bengali and spoken (*calit*) Bengali. The second set of controversies concerned literary genres appropriate for an emergent literary culture – while one group of publicists advocated genres like epics, biography, history, and essays on science, philosophy and theology, the more liberal ones encouraged lyrical poetry and fiction. Focusing on the furious controversies surrounding Kaekobad's epic verse *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* centered on the devastations of the third battle of Panipat between the Marathas and Afghan forces, the section interrogates the question of collective historical memories and how Bengali Muslim publicists debated which 'Islamic past' could be drawn upon as inspiration for Bengali Muslims. The epic came under attack for its supposed un-Islamicism (*anaislāmikatā*) with critics drawing analogies between un-Islamic aesthetics, obscenity (*aślīlatā*) and ahistoricism (*anaitihāsikatā*). The question of an authentic 'Islamic past' for Bengal's Muslims, especially students, spurred debates on Islamic and Islamicate pasts of West Asia, India and Bengal, with Muslim publicists strongly disapproving and registering their critique of the dominant versions of nationalist histories. Finally, I look at the *Buddhir Mukti* initiative that questioned conventional norms of Islamic piety and sought to recuperate and reinstate the rationalist strands within the philosophical traditions of early Islam as the defining principle of devotion for Bengali Muslims.

The penultimate chapter focuses on women's periodicals and their readers. For most women still captive in the interiors of the home, periodicals offered an opening to the world outside and its myriad happenings. Periodical reading was therefore a sort of crossover, unsettling the segregation of private and public spaces, a recognition of women's need for pleasure and of course serving a pedagogic purpose as well: to educate their readers in the craft of homemaking (*gharkarṇā*). Despite the centrality of women's questions within nationalist discourses and the visibility of women writers in the literary field, most women's periodicals were short-lived and the readership they could claim was

numerically thin. As the periodical press expanded and provided an enhanced opportunity to publish, women writers were emboldened from being simple anonymous contributors, coming up forthright with their names in print. For women, writing came to be foregrounded as an affirmative kind of social service. Contemporary literary discourses laid out principles as to who was morally qualified for being a writer in women's periodicals – typically the good homemaker or *sugṛhiṇī* came to be regarded as the suitable advisor for young readers. The limited reach of female education and concerns over suitable curricula informed much of the contents of these periodicals and the ways in which they related to their readers. Nevertheless, periodical reading afforded the woman reader a space of intimacy and a way to connect and socialize with others like her. Gradually, but certainly, periodicals insinuated a change in women's lifestyles, endorsing women's work beyond the confines of domesticity. Finally, the chapter moves on to see how beyond the predictable mainstream comprising educated Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia that included a few of their women, the literary sphere attracted even those who in much of conventional history writing would not qualify as subjects with substantial intellectual capital. Perhaps the most articulate among such marginalized, invisible sections of the society were several Bengali Muslim women for whom participation in the literary sphere was a conscious choice that enabled them to script their own lives, represented a break away from seclusion (*abarodh*) and a reinterpretation of devotion to the Prophet and Koranic principles. The emancipatory potentials of the literary sphere thus came to be determined by the defences built by various social orthodoxies and the challenges they encountered from more liberal publicists.

The closing chapter probes the interface between the literary sphere and what could be called the political life of the nation and how periodicals aimed to groom political literariness among readers. The vernacular newspaper press has more often than not been seen as a facilitator of nationalism – a vehicle of political indoctrination and expression of patriotic sentiments. Swadeshi day newspapers like *Amṛta Bājār Patrikā*, *Bande Mātaram*, *Basumatī*, *Bengalee, Hitabādī*, *Nabaśakti*, and *Sandhyā* were celebrated for their patriotism and criticisms of the British government's divide and rule policy.[51] Given the passionate fervour of patriotism that such print aroused, it is easy to see these as the primary producers of nationalist public opinion. With the acceleration

51 Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal,* Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2011, pp. 217–240. Sarkar describes the print media consisting of newspapers, weeklies, evening dailies and pamphlets as one of the most effective 'techniques of mass contact' that reached out to the educated and generally literate classes.

of the nationalist movement most periodicals too found it difficult to remain indifferent to the reality of strictly 'political' events. In fact one of the chief reasons why illustrated miscellanies like *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* fared better than the rest was their regular and substantive editorial commentaries on constitutional politics, the nationalist movement and the various peasant and labor unrests. The cohabitation of political analyses, news clips and general information from across the world and more general social and literary contents reflect the pluralities inherent in the imaginative appeal of the periodical form. With the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921, the subcontinent entered an unprecedented phase of mass political activism. Most mainstream periodicals expressed a robust Gandhian position during the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement, carrying extensive discussions on the philosophy and political legitimacy of *ahiṃsā*, *satyāgraha* and non-cooperation and allowing very little text space for dissenting views. Periodicals therefore sought to bring critical distance and analytical skill to politics, making the latter amenable to questions and criticisms.

At the same time, it was from within the literary sphere that a range of responses emerged that challenged the certainties of mainstream anticolonial nationalism. The chapter deals with two such significant responses, first, Rabindranath Tagore's critique of Gandhian program of *carkā* and Nazrul Islam's poetic rebellion against a world full of social exploitation, injustices and archaic practices. Rabindranath's trenchant critique of spinning as a means towards national self-sufficiency was dismissed by several nationalists including Gandhi as a poet's idealism that had little to do with political strategies. Such criticisms were premised on an assumption of the literary sphere as an idyllic space distanced from political activism. The two domains of the literary and the political thus not only acquired separate definitions and limits, but also the relationship between intellection and political struggle came to be mapped hierarchically. The literary and the political, the chapter argues, remained distinct and precisely for that reason deeply connected. The Bengali literary sphere sustained itself as a domain of freedom where inhibitions could be cast off. It offered its readers the resources to deal with the fast changing times.

CHAPTER 1

Māsik patrikā: A New Cultural Artefact?

The Colonial Archives, Early Indigenous Efforts and the Professionalization of Literary Journalism

> Today not only does *Bāṅglā bhāṣā* provide us with a secure habitat but is indeed abundantly fertile. Our habitat has truly become our motherland … Before this [i.e. before the *Baṅgadarśan* years] nobody was quite respectful of *Bāṅglā*. The Sanskrit pandits thought of *Bāṅglā* as rustic and the English pandits considered the language barbaric. That *Bāṅglā* was capable of articulating creative imagination was unthinkable to them. That is why out of mere empathy they composed simple textbooks for women and children in the vernacular.… The qualitative difference between the pre and post *Baṅgadarśan* Baṅgasāhitya is immeasurable."[1]

Rabindranath Tagore's speech, of which this extract forms a part, was delivered at a literary meet organized at the Chaitanya Library, a reading facility in north Calcutta inaugurated in 1893 and then printed in *Sādhanā*, a monthly journal run by the Tagores. In fin-de-siècle Bengal, the library and the literary monthly signaled the confluence of new social spaces that would constitute *jātīya jīban* (life of the nation). Rabindranath attributed the emergence of a confident *Baṅgasāhitya* and the modern Bengali public sphere it defined, to *Baṅgadarśan* (the vision of Bengal), a literary monthly edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. *Baṅgadarśan*, he felt, had singularly transfigured an ill-defined, scattered presence into an identifiable and mature literary sphere. The new literary sphere came to be seen an embodiment of the modern nation that an increasingly assertive colonial intelligentsia could claim and guard as its own. *Baṅgadarśan* for Tagore represented the moment of this literary sphere coming on to its own. Within a span of two decades, the noted literary critic and editor of the monthly *Sabuj Patra* Pramatha Chaudhuri described the qualitative transformation in the character of the Bengali public sphere as

1 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bankimchandra" in *Sādhanā*, Year III, Part I, 1300–1301 / 1893–94. The essay was a lecture delivered at a special session held at the Chaitanya Library, Calcutta. *Sādhanā* was started in 1891 and edited by Sudhindranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_003

a shift towards democratization, from the age of a "few forceful writers" (*bahu-śaktiśālī svalpasaṃkhyak lekhak*) to the age of "numerous, less-able writers" (*svalpaśaktiśālī bahu-saṃkhyak lekhak*), a process that was accompanied by a corresponding widening of readerships.[2]

The observations of Rabindranath Tagore and Pramatha Chaudhuri pertain to two distinct moments in the formative stages of the Bengali literary sphere. For Tagore, *Baṅgadarśan* represented a historic moment that revolutionized a nebulous and unorganized domain of literary production and instituted *Baṅgasāhitya* as a "secure habitat" for the colonized to assert their collective identity. The moment that Chaudhuri talks of represents a more democratized phase with a growing number of writers and an expanding readership. This transformation was the result of professionalization of literary journalism with its attendant shares of optimism and anxieties. The present chapter investigates these two moments of transfiguration by examining the social and institutional contexts of production, circulation and consumption of literary periodicals. From a near non-entity in the early colonial archives, the *māsik patrikā* would progressively acquire an identity of its own, becoming an almost indispensable medium of pedagogy and entertainment for Bengali readers. The following sections sketch the crystallizing of this phenomenal print genre through the colonial archives and the initial indigenous efforts – how it was deployed by the colonial intelligentsia as a modern communicative mode, the steady professionalization of authorial and editorial work and finally the operational dimensions of an expanding periodicals market.

1 Colonial Archives and the Making of Literary Periodicals: The *Bengal Library Catalogues*

Act XXV of 1867, more commonly known as the Registration of Books Act was devised in the aftermath of the Mutiny to inventory an ever growing corpus of printed material in the Indian subcontinent.[3] The Act required printers and

2 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Baṅga Sāhityer Nabayug" (New era in Bengali literature), "Kaṣṭipāthar", section *Prabāsī*, v. 20, pt. 2 # 1, Kārtik 1320 / October-November 1913.

3 Act XXV of 1867 or An Act for the Regulation of Printing-presses and Newspapers, for the preservation of copies of Books printed in British India, and for the Registration of such Books. C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780–1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1997 (Reprint 2007), pp. 340–343 has argued that in the post-Mutiny years, the colonial government (Department of Public Instructions) came down heavily on the native press. Bureaucrats believed that 'sedition' and 'immorality' were often interconnected and therefore needed to be clamped down. However, as Bayly shows,

publishers to register every book, pamphlet and periodical and submit three copies of each publication to the Government to be preserved at the Imperial Library, the India Office Library and the British Museum Library.[4] From the record of registrations were compiled quarterly catalogues of books and periodicals and finally an annual review and summary statistics that became part of a larger annual proceeding, i.e. *Reports on Publications Issued and Registered in the Several Provinces of British India*. The *Bengal Library Quarterly Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* classified publications under heads such as 'art', 'biography', 'history', 'law', 'literature', 'mathematics', 'medicine', 'religion', 'science' and 'travel'. Linguistically, classifications were made in terms of 'uni-lingual', 'bi-lingual', 'tri-lingual' and even 'poly-lingual' publications. A further division was made in terms of whether a publication was educational in content or not. Books and Periodicals were classified and assessed separately but the logic of classification in terms of subject and language were similar. Typically information about periodicals were classified under sixteen heads, including the type of periodical (whether on science, art, history, medicine or miscellaneous), serial number of registration, details about publishers and printers, date and place of publication, number of pages, size and description of paper used, number of copies printed, editions, price per issue or annual subscription (whichever was provided by the publisher), interval of publication (whether monthly or bi-monthly or weekly or fortnightly) etc. The final column on the extreme right titled 'remarks' would normally contain a short and critical synopsis of notable contents of an issue and an overall description of the journal. Normally, every issue of a periodical would be critically remarked upon by the Keeper of Catalogues. At the end of every year, the Librarian of the Bengal Library would condense the vast mass of quarterly data in the form of statistical tables and a summary review of publication "activities" during the assessment year.[5] The Annual Reviews of every province were then inserted into an overall 'Statement exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India'.[6] By the War years, the entire exercise of catalogue compilation had turned out to be copious and clumsy and in 1924 the Government of India terminated the publication of *Quarterly Catalogues* in the gazettes citing "unnecessary expenditure" and lack of "useful purpose".[7] Moreover the Indian Press Act of 1910 had

"the Indian press and other internal lines of communication were increasingly running out of the government's control." p. 343.

4 Akshaykumar Datta Gupta, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya Pañjikā (1923)" (Compendium of Bengali literary publications for the year 1923), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3, pt.1, Āṣāṛh 1331 / June-July 1924.

5 The term "activities" repeatedly occurs in the evaluations of the Bengal Librarians over successive years to indicate literary production of a particular year.

6 See also A.R. Venkatachalapathy, *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012, p. 177.

7 Venkatachalapathy, op. cit. p. 176.

defined "newspaper" as "any periodical work containing public news or comments on public news".[8] Since most "miscellaneous" periodicals contained reviews of political developments or reported events of general public interest, many periodicals ceased to be "submitted for registration having been declared as newspapers.... Exemption from the law of registration in such cases is claimed under section 5 of the Act (Act XXV of 1867)."[9] As a result, the figures for periodicals turned out to be incomplete, making continuous registration and cataloguing superfluous. From the mid-1920s, most periodicals other than the illustrated literary miscellanies with stable and reasonably substantial domestic market, did not even find a mention in the Catalogues or Annual Reviews. The rather fleeting nature of a majority of periodicals – the irregularity of their appearance and gradual phasing out must have made it ungainly for the Bengal Library to maintain regular entries and could well have contributed towards such administrative decisions. Henceforth, the format of the Catalogues now meant only for official use, too become more condensed and fragmentary.

Historians of print culture in India have questioned the comprehensiveness of the Library Catalogues as any reliable indicator of actual print production in the subcontinent.[10] One of the reasons for the incompleteness of the returns has been attributed to the fact that publishers had to voluntarily submit copies to the government and often received no payment in lieu of such submissions. Though non-registration implied that a particular publication could be deemed illegal and the publisher could be prosecuted, most of them did not file complete returns as they chose not to compromise on their meagre profit margins.[11] Officials noted that actual publications far exceeded the numbers reflected in the annual reports.[12] A Librarian of the Bengal Library however observed that the number of unregistered books were very few.[13] Historians of

---

8 East India (Press Act, 1910): Copy of the Indian Press Act, 1910 and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of the Governor General of India Relating Thereto. IOR/V4/68/Cd 5269.

9 'Annual Report', *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books and Periodicals* for the Year 1920. Akshaykumar Datta Gupta, the Bengal Librarian during the early 1920s stated that in case of periodicals the errors in figures were more than in case of books because many periodicals had declared themselves as newspapers. Akshaykumar Datta Gupta, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya Pañjikā (1923)", *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3, pt.1 Āṣāṛh 1331 / June-July 1924.

10 Robert Darnton, "Book Production in British India, 1850–1900", *Book History*, v. 5, 2002, pp. 239–262. Farina Mir, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2010, pp. 64–66. A.R. Venkatachalapathy, op. cit. pp. 169–177.

11 Mir, op. cit. p. 66.

12 Mir, op. cit. p. 66.

13 Akshaykumar Datta Gupta, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya Pañjikā (1923)".

the book in India have also questioned the appropriateness of the Catalogues in classifying Indian literary traditions according to Western classificatory schemes, such as art, biography, travel, fiction, history, law, medicine, miscellaneous, poetry, religion, science etc.[14] In their assessments of literary "activities" of a province the Library Catalogues thus reflected colonial epistemology and classificatory methods.[15] More often than not, colonial officials' sense of vernacular literary production proved to be entirely off course, becoming glaring evidences of "bureaucratic stupidity".[16] The other such instance of slippage was a common misperception about the relationships between language, script and literary traditions.[17] Driven primarily by the exigencies of governance, colonial knowledge had comprehended the subcontinent's fluid linguistic formations in terms of a simple equation between particular vernaculars and scripts, resulting in definite associations between scripts and languages, for instance, Devanagari with Hindi and Sanskrit, Indo-Persian with Urdu, Persian and Arabic and Gurumukhi with the Punjabi language.[18] Such conflations between scripts and languages solidified the linguistic and literary fluidities of the precolonial times, so much so that "Panjabi in Persian character" for instance, became an anomalous, rather than a commonplace occurrence.[19] In course of time, such ambiguities, it has been argued, were gradually erased as vernaculars became standardized 'official' languages.[20] Among other limitations of the Catalogues noted by scholars has been the Indian publishers'

14 Darnton, op. cit. p. 240.

15 The classificatory scheme of the *Bengal Library Catalogues* drew closely on Reverend James Long's 1859 report on the native presses. Two other catalogues of vernacular publications, J.F. Blumhardt, *Catalogue of Bengali Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum*, London 1886, the subsequent Supplementary to his main *Catalogue* and J. Wenger (the officiating Bengali Translator to the Govt. of Bengal), 'Catalogue of Sanscrit and Bengalee Publications printed in Bengal', January 30, 1865 also followed Long's basic scheme. James Long had been an influential advocate of free press, arguing that understanding of the 'native' mind was crucial as it could act like a "safety valve which gives warnings of danger…" Advising the British India government against Press regulations Long argued that "any measure of the kind would be" "suicidal". James Long, "Report on the Native Press in Bengal" (appendage to 1859 "Selections").

16 Venkatachalapathy, op. cit. p. 175.

17 Mir, op. cit. p. 69.

18 Bernard Cohn, 'The Command of Language and the Language of Command', in Ranajit Guha ed. *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, v. 4, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985, p. 285. Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 67–79. Orsini, op. cit. pp. 22–25. Mir, op. cit. pp. 40–49.

19 Mir, op. cit. p. 67.

20 Mir, op. cit. p. 68.

failure to respond to Western notions of copyright laws[21] and also the Catalogue's compilation by "overworked superannuated registrars and inadequate staff" that accounted for the uncertain nature of the reports adding to the limited scope of state surveillance.[22]

The *Bengal Library Catalogues* reflect the entire baggage of contradictions and uncertainties inherent in much of the bureaucratic structures of the colonial state. Unlike Punjab or the Hindustani heartland of India however, the Bengali language-script bind was more stable, the basic principles of language standardization having already been put in place before the institution of Act XXV. The linguistic categorizations of books and periodicals in the Catalogue indicate the languages used within the administrative borders of the province including the hills and some adjoining areas of the province. The annual statistical summaries of the Catalogues point to a more or less steady growth trend in production of both books and periodicals (Table 1.1). Sometimes the Catalogues would provide detailed statistics for different divisions of the Bengal province. For instance, according to the Annual Review for the year 1910 the "town of Calcutta" recorded the maximum number of publications that far outstripped all other divisions combined with 707 titles (818,817 copies) of English books and 2417 titles (4,045,871 copies) in all vernaculars registered during the year.[23] A major proportion of all publications comprised of Bengali and English uni-lingual books and periodicals. Books and periodicals in other vernaculars (often appearing in bi-lingual, tri-lingual, quadric-lingual and even poly-lingual combinations with Bengali or English) formed a much smaller proportion of the total production. Towards the end of the century books printed in the province of Bengal appeared in as many as twenty to twenty-two languages. Uni-lingual periodicals appeared in seven languages most of them being Bengali, closely followed by English periodicals (Table 1.2). As for Bengali books, the Catalogues only made a rather loose distinction between 'Bengali' and 'Musalmani Bengali' books. The former referred mostly to modern standardized and refined vernacular or *sādhu bhāṣā* (literally genteel language) that resulted from the efforts of bureaucrats, missionaries and the indigenous bilingual intelligentsia and was used in works ranging from erudite scholarship to fiction. The latter referred to a large and heterogeneous body of texts including works written in a mixed colloquial form, popular renditions of

21 Ulrike Stark, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, 2008, Second Edition 2012, pp. 86–90.

22 Venkatachalapathy, op. cit. p. 177.

23 'Annual Reviews', *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the year 1910.

Perso-Arabic tales and romances, as well as translations of the Koran.[24] Bengali periodicals however showed no such categorical distinction between 'Bengali' and 'Musalmani Bengali'. The domain of Muslim-Bengali periodicals was unambiguously identified as modern 'Bengali' and classified under uni-lingual Bengali miscellaneous periodicals, reinforcing its distance from the more plebeian domain of Musalmāni Bāṅglā print. The question of categorization of Muslim Bengali journals and their receptions will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter. But such inference also relates to a broader trend that identified all periodicals as a decidedly modern form.

Over the course of the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Library Catalogues came to exercise a formative influence on the formatting and organization of literary periodicals, making the inventory more intelligible. A look at the section on "Bengali Periodicals" for any given year in the early Catalogues reveal an mixed bag of printed materials ranging from pedagogical magazines like *Jyotiriṅgan*,[25] *Rahasya Sandarbha*[26] and *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*,[27] science journals like *Bijñān Rahasya*, medical bulletins like *Cikiṯsā Darpan*,[28] mouthpieces of religious societies for instance *Sanātan Dharmopadeśinī* belonging to the *Sanātan Dharmasabhā*, Bengali translations of monthly precedents of the Appellate High Court at Calcutta and even the *Indian Bradshaw*, the monthly railways manual consisting of time and fare tables of the Indian Railways, Steam Navigation and Transit Companies.[29] It were thus from within this ill-defined and largely haphazard space of production and circulation that the category of "miscellaneous" literary journals would emerge as a distinct form, claiming a social space of their own. From the mid-1870s, the organization of the *Bengal Library Catalogues* become more authoritative, classifying periodicals under several heads such as 'Art', 'Fiction', 'Medicine', 'Miscellaneous',

24 The Lucknow based, Hindu owned Naval Kishore Press's innovative publication of cheap-edition *Koran* made the holy book accessible to numerous ordinary Muslims. Stark argues that this was perhaps the first time that the holy book was being printed at a price that was generally affordable. Stark, op. cit. p. 19.

25 *Jyotiriṅgan* (1869), an illustrated magazine for women and children, was brought out by the Calcutta Tract Society. It contained articles on moral instructions by Christian authors.

26 *Rahasya Sandarbha* (1862–72), edited by Rajendralal Mitra and published by the Calcutta School Book Society contained quality writings on scientific problems and investigations.

27 *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* (1863–1923), one of the earliest and major journals for women, contained articles on women's education, family and health concerns and socio-economic issues. Its first editor was Umeshchandra Dutta and the journal was affiliated to the Bamabodhinī Sabhā and the Atmiya Sabhā.

28 *Cikiṯsā Darpan* (1871), a journal of medicine and health care edited by Jadunath Mukhopadhyay.

29 The *Bengal Library Catalogues*, Years 1871 and 1872.

'Religion', 'Science' etc. Over time, with an increase in the overall periodical production, those classified as 'Miscellaneous' outgrew corresponding numbers under other subject heads. In case of Tamil print production for instance, the category of 'Miscellaneous' print took up as much as 30% of the total while "heads such as travel, biography, and history often show next to nothing".[30] The Bengal Catalogues of the year 1920 for instance recorded 768 titles of vernacular books and periodicals under the 'Miscellaneous' head, whereas heads such as 'Fiction' (251 titles), 'Religion' (309 titles), 'History' (81 titles), 'Medicine' (70 titles) and 'Science' (54 titles) trailed behind.[31] The genre of *sāmaẏik* or *māsik sāhitya patrikā* (literary monthlies) emerged from this broader category of 'Miscellaneous' books and periodicals and would eventually become the most in-demand category of periodicals: out of 48 new periodicals started in 1901, 38 were recorded as miscellaneous, in 1910, out of 45 new periodicals, 33 were miscellaneous and in 1920, 30 out of 40 new periodicals belonged to the miscellaneous group.[32] According to the Librarian of the Bengal Library out of 197 unilingual and bilingual periodicals registered during the year 1923, 155 periodicals were "bibidha biṣaẏak" or "miscellaneous".[33]

By the turn of the twentieth century, 'Miscellaneous' periodicals included "important" journals dealing with "miscellaneous topics" like the *Calcutta Review*, *Modern Review*, *National Magazine* and *Indian World* in English and *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratī*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Baṅgadarśan*, *Sāhitya* and *Suprabhāt* in Bengali.[34] The Bengali miscellaneous periodicals typically contained an assortment of readings including fiction, poems, essays on a wide range of subjects, reviews of books and other periodicals, news clips, obituaries and biographic essays, and steadily an extensive content of illustrations and advertisements. The Librarian's task was to present an annual 'Report' on the publications received in the Bengal province. The office of the Librarian of the Bengal Library was usually held by bilingually educated Bengalis often erudite in Sanskrit, Bengali and English literatures like Chandranath Basu, Haraprasad Shastri, Rajendra Chandra Shastri and Manmatha Nath Rudra. A later Librarian, Akshaykumar Datta Gupta quipped that in Bengal, the Librarian of the Bengal Library was the worst casualty of the torment produced by the overabundance of

30 Venkatachalapathy, op. cit. p. 175.

31 *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* for the Year 1920. The Catalogues for the year 1925 reported 853 titles under Miscellaneous Books and Periodicals in vernacular.

32 *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books and Periodicals* for the years 1901, 1910 and 1920.

33 Akshaykumar Datta Gupta, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya Pañjikā (1923)". For the year under review, Datta Gupta mentions 88 Bengali periodicals with 639 issues.

34 Ibid.

print.[35] The annual reviews compiled by them, admittedly often stereotypical, provide insights that cannot always be dismissed as western perceptions of indigenous literary traditions and colonial knowledge imposing restrictive paradigms on what were fluid literary formations. As will be seen in subsequent sections, this very class of educated Bengalis would be the makers and participants of this literary culture of vernacular periodicals. The Librarians' observations seem to considerably qualify the colonial state's perception and surveillance of the vernacular literary field, frequently compromising on the political and administrative purpose of these interpretive procedures devised by colonial rule to scrutinize indigenous print. One might ask whether the Librarian Akshay Kumar Datta Gupta failed to grasp the incendiary contents of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Pather Dābī* while it was being intermittently serialized in the monthly *Baṅgabāṇī* or chose to overlook and not report it altogether.[36] Once published in book form, the novel was immediately proscribed by the British Indian government.[37] Most Librarians related a burgeoning vernacular periodical production to a "rapid growth of journalistic literature" prefiguring a "rise in the standard of intelligence in the country"[38] and an enhancement of the "new spirit".[39] Almost every Annual Report connected the expanding domain of vernacular literary journalism to nationalist concerns. Moreover the Librarians' perceptiveness is evident in his assessment of yearly "literary output" in terms of genres like Fiction or Poetry or History and so on, seldom making any distinction between book and periodical publication. Periodical production was mostly commented upon in very holistic terms, as "increasing in bulk" and "gaining more and more in importance".[40] Such prioritization of genre over either the periodical or book form attests the perceptivity of the Librarians to the evanescent nature of the periodical form. The Catalogues consistently reported any new periodical in the market or those that terminated during the year under review. For instance, the Annual

35 Akshay Kumar Datta Gupta, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya Pañjikā (1923)".

36 *Pather Dābī* was serialized in the monthly *Baṅgabāṇī* intermittently between Phālgun 1329 / February-March 1923 and Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.

37 *Pather Dābī* was published as a book in August 1926 by Umaprasad Mukhopadhyay and printed at the Cotton Press. 'Grantha-Pariciti', *Sarat Racanābalī* (Centenary Edition), v. 5, Sarat Samiti, Calcutta, 1980, p. 629.

38 Librarian of the Bengal Library, 'General Remarks', *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* for the Year 1901.

39 The Statement Exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India during the year 1908–09 (# 45).

40 Librarian of the Bengal Library, 'General Remarks', *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* for the Year 1910.

Reviews for the years 1910 and 1925 reported 37 and 79 defunct periodicals respectively.[41]

Following through the Library Catalogues it is possible to discern an emergent and largely self-regulatory sphere of circulation of a variety of periodicals, with the miscellaneous ones outnumbering other specialized journals and dominating the market for periodicals. Yet, periodicals themselves, more than the colonial records, speak of the material life and the mind space they came to shape and inhabit. The circulation of these miscellaneous periodicals was a palpable and vibrant reality that had started to transform the reception of print even before periodical production acquired a semblance of commercialization. Structured around literacy and appreciation for new literary genres, periodicals sold at prices affordable for the large majority of middle-class literate audience. In doing so it immediately targeted the market for 'small books'. The periodicals market sought to organize its domain differently from the pre-existing markets in print in terms of functioning, distribution and readership. Co-temporal with nationalist discourse's assertion of the incipient nation's own domain, periodicals claimed to embody a mature and autonomous public sphere, one that at least notionally reflected the life of the nation (*jātīya jīban*). Early print culture revolved primarily around a rapid diffusion of traditional genres through the printed word. By contrast, the concerns of the new field of circulation went beyond the question of access to an object (i.e. the periodicals). As the principal carrier of a modern literature, periodicals insinuated a "transformation of the moral universe" and enabled the process of its normalization too.[42] As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, "philosophical and theoretical debates of great intensity – which also happen in modern India – are normally restricted to circles of intellectuals, and cannot spread very far to reconstitute the moral 'common sense' of society."[43] Literature however "plays a fundamental role as the primary vehicle for the dissemination, popularization, and eventually normalization of these ideas about moral conduct."[44] The "conversion of ordinary people to modernity's moral imagination"[45] therefore became contingent upon the widening of the literary sphere – enhanced primary education to guarantee secured readership and commercialized publishing to cater to existing tastes and simultaneously shape new sensibilities. The miscellaneous literary periodical thus emerged as a new communicative mode that promised a new life for the society. Yet the periodicals market remained en-

41 *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* for the Years 1910 and 1925.

42 Sudipta Kaviraj, "Literature and the Moral Imagination of Modernity" in *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, Permanent Black, 2014, p. 25.

43 Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 25.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

TABLE 1.1 Total book and periodicals registered in Bengal

Registered books and periodicals in Bengal / Year	Total number of books registered (titles)	Total number of periodicals registered (issues)	Total (books and periodicals issues)
1901	2228	841	3069
1910	2948	1410	4353
1915	2562	1348	3910
1921	2924	1305	4229
1925	**3258**	**1365**	**4623**

TABLE 1.2 Uni-lingual periodicals production in Bengal

Languages / Years	Assamese	Bengali	English	Garo	Hindi	Sanskrit	Urdu
1901	–	85	35	1	3	1	1
1910	1	92	51	1	4	1	1
1915	2	91	54	1	4	1	1
1920	3	82	50	1	2	3	–
1925	2	95	56	1	–	2	1

cumbered by perennial problems like shortage of funds, limited literacy, unrefined tastes and unsatisfactory reader responses.

2 An Emergent Bengali Literary Sphere: The *Baṅgadarśan* Divide

2.1 *Reading in the Pre-Baṅgadarśan Years*

In the first half of the nineteenth century literary education constituted the major focus of what had come to be recognized as English or Western education. Devised as a facilitator of the East India Company's political agenda in the subcontinent, literary studies became one of the fundamental institutional support systems of the colonial administration.[46] The intended receiver of the

46 Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, p. 4.

proposed education, the native colonized subject, was consistently represented as intellectually and morally decrepit. While such imaginings posed threats of imminent rebellion for the British rulers, they also provided moral validations for the white man's intervention in the subcontinent. Literary education was intended to cultivate reason, critical judgment and moral faculties. In fact through close interaction with English literary texts, the native mind was supposed to get a feel of the *real* English identity – the cultivated moral and reasonable self.[47] English literary studies therefore emerged as "a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most perfect state" behind which remained veiled the more disreputable colonizer and the histories of his economic exploitation and racial oppression.[48] The reception of Western learning amongst the indigenous elite was equally fraught and contentious. The proposal for the Hindu College (established 1817) as a higher institution offering an English education had come from Calcutta's pre-eminent elites including amongst others, Rammohan Roy, Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen, who desired to "be informed of everything that the English gentlemen learnt, and they would take that which they found good and liked best."[49] For the indigenous elite the significance of western education, particularly literary studies lay in their acceptance of literature as a practice that could embody the dilemmas of the colonized and help negotiate their new position as a subject race.[50] But their engagement with English literature cannot be reduced to simple replication of contemporary literary practices in the metropolis. The poetic endeavors of the early generation of indigenous poets writing in English, like Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Kashiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and the Dutt family drew their idioms considerably from the English Romantic poets like Southey, Campbell, Byron and Wordsworth and from Orientalist scholarship on the East. They deployed concepts and languages derived from Western learning to articulate their new subject position, make sense of the oppression and inequality around them and enunciate in verse the splendors of an ancient Hindu civilization that the Orientalist scholars had just proclaimed.[51] Simultaneously, the demand for English fictions, dominated the literary market in mid and late nineteenth-century Bengal. The popularity amongst Indian readers of English fictions like those of Charles Dickens, George Elliot, Walter Scott, G.W.M. Reynolds, Alexander Dumas, Marion Crawford and Marie

47 Viswanathan, op. cit. pp. 19–20.
48 Viswanathan, op. cit. p. 20.
49 Viswanathan, op. cit. p. 43. Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project*, Seagull, 2002, pp. 11–12.
50 Chaudhuri, op. cit. pp. 15–17.
51 Chaudhuri, op. cit. pp. 28–29.

Corelli had inspired major metropolitan publishers to initiate colonial library series of best-selling fictions for the subcontinental market.[52] Several fictions that were seen to possess pedagogical necessity circulated in translations and adaptations, like Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*, Francis Bacon's *Essays* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrims' Progress.*[53] Literary preferences in colonial Bengal, particularly the popularity of romances and the melodramatic form, indicated certain convergences with metropolitan choices. At the same time these fictions resonated differently with Indian readers, most of who were newly urban and first or second generation English educated, helping them to make sense of their subalternized existence and providing the symbolic resource to resist colonial domination.[54] Reading of serious English fiction coexisted with the popularity of sensation fictions reflecting general reading trends and readers' choices. Attempts to curtail such readings by the management committee of the Calcutta Public Library for instance resulted in drastic decline in membership subscriptions, reiterating the ineffectuality of reform from above.[55]

At the other end of the print spectrum was the vernacular print-market, the largely ephemeral commercial publications comprising a wide range of genres and books.[56] The commercial presses situated in the northern and primarily indigenously populated localities of the city known as the *Baṭṭalā* churned out books and pamphlets on religious and mythological subjects, legends, romances, popular dramas, almanacs and some educational literature. These texts were diverse and included various *Purāṇa*, the epics *Rāmāẏaṇ* and *Mahābhārat*, and medieval texts like *Annadā Maṅgal*, *Hātem Tāi*, *Golebkāwālī* and *Lailā-Majnun*, Bengali renderings of Arabian and Persian tales, collections of wedding songs and even lithographic prints based on mythological themes.[57] *Baṭṭalā* was therefore an assortment, a collage of vastly different genres, literary tastes and

52 Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel In India*, Columbia University Press, 2002, p. 95.

53 Joshi, op. cit. p. 73.

54 Joshi, op. cit., pp. 35–92.

55 Joshi, op. cit. pp. 58–59.

56 For the most comprehensive account of the *Baṭṭalā* market – the production, consumption and clientele of cheap prints, the reading habits such publications generated and their interfaces with a precolonial oral tradition, see Gautam Bhadra, 'Nyāṛā Baṭṭalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?' in *Nyāṛā Baṭṭalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?* Chatim, Calcutta, 2010. Adris Biswas & Anil Acharya, ed., *Bāṅgālīr Baṭṭalā,* Anushtup, Calcutta, 2013. Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.

57 Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006, Chapters 4 and 6.

print-qualities where social aspirations of marginal groups like women and lower class Muslims found as much expression as their more affluent superiors, the bhadralok.[58] Participation within this vibrant print establishment ranged from the petty printer-trader to wealthy landed and commercial magnates like the Shobhabazar zamindars.[59] Amritalal Basu, a leading playwright and theatre actor respected for his sense of humor recollected much later in his life that in the nineteenth century, many well educated bhadralok too would get farces written by them published anonymously by *Baṭtalā* printers.[60] Referring to the appearance of light entertainment genres, he observed that in addition to the almanacs, epics, various *purāṇa*, *Vaiṣñava* and other religious texts and law books that were already being churned out of *Baṭtalā*, these farces comprised a "new *Baṭtalā-sāhitya*" mostly priced at a pice.[61] The readership that *Baṭtalā* catered to, included but also extended well beyond the metropolis and its western educated circle, drawn mostly from the urban and rural lower middle classes and other lesser, frequently non-literate social groups.[62] By the middle decades of the nineteenth century emerging normative codes of bhadralok respectability became tied up with notions of their social status and power. *Baṭtalā* popular prints like much of other popular cultural forms were increasingly subject to the civilizing and reformist discourses of the colonial and bhadralok elite.[63] With Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Durgeśnandinī*, emerged a literary aesthetic severely critical of *Baṭtalā*.[64] Henceforth the educated, Basu observed, started sneering at *Baṭtalā-sāhitya.*[65] However much of this low world of prurient print escaped institutionalized disciplining by both the colonial state and the indigenous elite and actually helped constitute and

58 Gautam Bhadra, 'Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?' in *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?* Chatim, Calcutta, p. 233.

59 Ibid. Bhadra speaks of an entire literary genre, the *guptakathā* or secret tales the publications of which were sponsored by the Shobhabazar Raj.

60 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā" (Almanac of the olden days), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3 pt.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1331 / April-May 1924.

61 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā".

62 Anindita Ghosh, "Cheap Books, Bad Books: Contesting Print Cultures in Colonial Bengal" in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorty ed., *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Permanent Black, 2004, pp. 183–190.

63 Tapti Roy, "Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature" in Partha Chatterjee ed., *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, University of Minnesota Press, 1995. Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlor and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1989 and "The Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of "Obscenity" in Nineteenth Century Bengali Culture", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 18, 1987.

64 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā".

65 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā".

disseminate alternate reading habits. From the 1860s the readership of *Baṭtalā* print comprised predominantly a growing number of the vernacular and partially literate lower middle-class groups but also young educated bhadralok men as well as women of the *antaḥpur*.[66] *Baṭtalā* thus came to demarcate popular tastes in vernacular reading, whose earthy and often syncretistic linguistic styles, plebian sensibilities, particularly their uninhibited sexualities, necessarily represented the non-standard and the deviant vis-à-vis the literary pursuits of the educated bhadralok. The deviant quality of some of these low-priced texts made them pervasive – so much so that even Rabindranath Tagore and Bipinchandra Pal admitted to have been attracted in their younger days to cheap farces.[67] Haraprasad Shastri recollected that prior to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's literary monthly *Baṅgadarśan*, the English educated Bengalis the *Iṃrejiwālā* as he described them, read Shakespeare, Milton, Byron and Shelley.[68] One gets a succinct idea of reading practices prevalent amongst the educated upper classes in Calcutta during the middle decades of the nineteenth century: the epics Krttivas's *Rāmāẏaṇa* and Kasiramdas's *Mahābhārata*; Bengali renderings of works as varied as the *Arabian Nights*, *Aesop's Fables* and *Robinson Crusoe*, tales like *Golebkāwālī*, *Lailā-Majnun*, *Annadā-Maṅgal*, the *Tales of Sushila* (*Suśīlār Upakhyan*) and *Betāl Pañcaviṃśati*.[69] Compulsory readings included Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's *Sītār Banabās* and Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Meghanādavadh Kāvya*.[70] Beyond mandatory lessons, readings included Rajendralal Mitra's *Bibidhārtha Saṃgraha*, Biharilal Chakrabarty's literary monthly *Abodhbandhu*, fiction like *Suśīlār Upakhyan* and farces like Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jāmāi Bārik*.[71]

---

66 Ghosh, *Power in Print*, pp. 161–163.

67 Anindita Ghosh, "Cheap Books, Bad Books".

68 Haraprasad Shastri, 'Bankimchandra' in Chittaranjan Das edited literary monthly *Nārāẏaṇ*, v. 5, 1325 / 1918.

69 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti* (My Reminiscences), Visva-Bharati, Bhādra 1411 / August 2004 edition, p. 13, 23, 67–68, 70–73. *Jībansmṛti* first appeared serially in *Prabāsī*, a miscellaneous monthly edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyay from Bhādra 1318 / August 1911 to Śrāvaṇ 1319 / July 1912. Swarnakumari Devi, "Sekele Kathā" in *Bhāratī*, Caitra, 1332 reprinted in Abhijit Bhattacharya and Abhijit Sen ed., *Sekele Kathā: Śatak Sūcanāẏe Meẏeder Smṛtikathā*, Calcutta, 1997, pp. 63–64. Bipinchandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, 1857–1884, Calcutta, First Published 1932, pp. 35–36.

70 Tagore, *Chelebelā* (My Boyhood Days), Visva-Bharati University Press, First Published, 1347 / 1940, p. 42 (1964 edition).

71 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, p. 71.

2.1.1 The Emergent Space for Literary Periodicals

Between 1818 when *Digdarśan* putatively the 'first' Bengali periodical was brought out by the Serampore Baptist Mission with the express aim of educating the native youth and 1872 when *Baṅgadarśan* edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay appeared, nearly a hundred periodicals had been reported.[72] Literary periodicals circulated in considerable numbers but their publications were often intermittent and most phased out after a few issues. Till about the mid-nineteenth century periodicals and newspapers were hardly distinguishable in form and content. From the 1850s a public sphere constituted by an increasing number of literary and miscellaneous journals in Bengali became discernable. In his memoirs *Jībansmṛti* Rabindranath recollected a couple of remarkable monthlies: Rajendralal Mitra's *Bibidhārtha Saṃgraha* containing mostly general knowledge essays on history, nature and science started in 1851 and later edited by Kaliprasanna Sinha being the outstanding amongst them.[73] The first part of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Tilottamā Sambhava Kāvya* appeared in *Bibidhārtha* in 1860. He remembered *Bibidhārtha*'s big square get up with lots of enjoyable illustrations (printed with woodcuts imported from England), general knowledge essays and humorous stories. The other prominent literary monthly Rabindranath remembered was *Abodhbandhu* a small sized magazine edited by Yogendranath Ghosh and the poet Biharilal Chakrabarty. It was started in 1864 with Krishnakamal Mukhopadhyay, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and Biharilal Chakrabarty as the regular and most well-known contributors. Rabindranath described *Abodhbandhu* as the 'Morning Star' in Bengali literary world through which he became acquainted with Biharilal's lyric poetry.[74] Other noteworthy early efforts towards creating a domain of literary miscellanies were – Pyarichand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar's *Māsik Patrikā* (The

---

72 The First Volume of Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay's's *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏikpatra*, Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 1358 / 1951, a seminal compilation of journals that appeared in Bengal through the nineteenth and early twentieth century is devoted entirely to periodicals that appeared before *Baṅgadarśan*, more precisely till 1867. *Digdarśan* was edited by the Serampore missionaries Marshman and John Clark. It contained primarily informative articles for young people. Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials, 1818–1950*, K.P. Bagchi, 2004, p. 127. Mukhopadhyay lists around 85 periodicals from 1818 till 1867.

73 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, pp. 72–73. The *Bibidhārtha* was brought out by the Vernacular Literary Society and was almost a vernacular version of the *Penny Magazine*, a widely circulating journal in contemporary England. Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, p. 80. Mukhopadhyay mentions that the *Bibidhārtha* terminated after publishing Dinabandhu Mitra's controversial play *Nīl Darpaṇ*. Ghosh, pp. 93–94.

74 Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, The Macmillan Company, 1917, p. 114. In the English edition *My Reminiscences* there is no reference of *Abodhbandhu* as the 'morning star'. This reference exists in the original Bengali version *Jībansmṛti*.

Monthly Journal, 1854), Biharilal Chakrabarty's *Pūrṇima* (Full Moon, 1859) and Rajendralal Mitra's *Rahasya Sandarbha* (1863), *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* (1843) of Debendranath Tagore and women's journals like the *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* (1863). The last two were the only periodicals from the pre-*Baṅgadarśan* years that survived into the twentieth century. The *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* (1863–1923) was brought out by the Bamabodhinī Sabhā and Ātmīẏa Sabhā. One of the earliest magazines meant primarily for women readers the *Patrikā* contained educative articles on childcare, household issues including cookery and home economics and women's educational endeavors.[75] The *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* (1843 – early 1930s) was brought out by the educational branch of the Adi Brahmo Samaj of Debendranath Tagore and edited by leading nineteenth-century intellectuals like Akshay Kumar Dutta, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Dwijendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore.[76] *Tattvabodhinī* engaged mainly with the philosophical concerns of Brahmoism and questions of social reform, rational sciences and theories of religion.

Notwithstanding the popularity of English fiction and the expansive field of vernacular print, what is significant about the mid-nineteenth-century decades is an overwhelming sense of a 'lack' amongst the educated bilingual elite. A quest for readable literature (*pāṭhopayogī sāhitya*) beyond the few that were available informs much of the perspective on mid-nineteenth-century reading habits. To younger contemporaries who were among the first readers of *Baṅgadarśan* (1872), a new literary periodical initiated and edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and were later able to appreciate their experiences with the benefit of hindsight it was the first 'deluge' that transmuted the Bengali language and its literature into maturity.[77] It was able to captivate the learned reader of the day because it offered a platform for the sudden spurt in the production of print – poetry, plays, novels, essays and criticisms.[78] In *Jībansmṛti* Rabindranath speaks of a virtual void in the availability of reading during his adolescent years.[79] He recollected, "… in my childhood days Bengali books were few but books unsuitable for young minds appeared in large numbers. We indiscriminately read all books, good and bad with insatiate

75 Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. pp. 41–42.

76 Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p. 373.

77 Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences*, p. 115. In the condolence meeting organized after Bankim's death Rabindranath compared the initiation of *Baṅgadarśan* with monsoon's first thundershowers (*samāgata rājabadunnatadhvaniḥ*). Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bankimchandra' in *Sādhanā*, Year III, Part I, 1300–1301 / 1893–1894.

78 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Bankimchandra'.

79 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, pp. 70–71.

eagerness".[80] The poet Nabinchandra Sen in his memoir *Āmār Jīban* also wrote that during the 1850s and 1860s, there were very few texts worth attentive reading. *Baṅgadarśan* for them embodied the moment of modernity's advent:

> Those were days when we were accustomed to unfair criticism of our *mātṝ bhāṣā* (mother language) ... *Baṅgadarśan* signaled that talent (*pratibhā*) has finally graced *Bāṅglā sāhitya*.[81]

Commenting on the difference in appeal between *Baṅgadarśan* and its older contemporary the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* the extremist Congress leader Bipinchandra Pal recollected:

> The generation of Bengalee youths to which I belonged came however in more direct contact with the "Bangadarshan" than with the "Tattvabodhini" school. The "Tattvabodhini" was a bit too serious and learned for our youthful minds; while the "Bangadarshan" with its fictions and poetry and satire as well as historical and social essays, appealed more powerfully to us.[82]

The difference in reading experiences across the *Baṅgadarśan* divide as Rabindranath explained was that previously "…there was no ideology (*ādarśa*) in literature, readers did not expect excellence, writers wrote nonchalantly, and reading was merely an act of conformity; mediocrity was applauded, and poor writing never criticized ... there is nothing as burdensome as an all-encompassing non-enthusiasm and unresponsiveness…the difference between the pre and post *Baṅgadarśan* years is immeasurable. Bengali literature after *Baṅgadarśan* acquired a sudden enhancement".[83] *Baṅgadarśan* represented the single most important moment in shaping the consumption patterns of Bengali readers, making writing and reading in the vernacular respectable, working on new literary experimentations and inspiring writers to identify with the psychological needs of the emerging middle classes. While sanitizing the language and its cultural articulations could possibly have comprised one of the aims of *Baṅgadarśan*, the journal's agenda actually came to represent

80 Ibid.

81 Nabinchandra Sen, *Āmār Jīban* (My life), Calcutta, 1974, pp. 460–461.

82 Bipinchandra Pal, *Memories of My Life and Times*, Calcutta, first published, 1932; second edition, 1973, p. 184.

83 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bankimchandra" in *Sādhanā*. The difference between the mid-nineteenth century and the immediate pre-*Baṅgadarśan* years was noted by contemporary journals as well, for instance *Somprakāś*, Baiśākh 11, 1279.

larger and in some ways, newer concerns.[84] *Baṅgadarśan* represented much more a conscious effort towards creating social solidarity and an experimentation with a new print medium, the literary periodical for opening up communication between potential reader groups. Rather than simply campaigning for reform and marginalizing contesting literary tastes, *Baṅgadarśan* was an early attempt to delineate a new literary modern, an effort towards social inclusion, rather than merely sanitization.[85] This new literary modern that Bankim came to formulate would be as disparaging of Reynolds's works as of some of the *Baṭtalā* texts.[86]

In the new literary sensibility that *Baṅgadarśan* represented, popular reading practices and the institutions of commercial publishing in which they were implicated were demarcated as the non-modern, the juvenile. *Baṭtalā* was therefore the constructed 'other' of *Baṅgadarśan.* It represented not so much a distinct social sphere comprising of only the social margins but more generally an aesthetic world sharply demarcated from and subversive of all that was respectable, and puritanical in educated, upper class bhadralok life. In this sense *Baṭtalā* now embodied an aesthetic idea, perhaps more readily identifiable in antithetical terms, by what it did not represent, namely the higher modern that the literary agenda that *Baṅgadarśan* sought to formulate. Recollecting the olden days of his adolescence, Amritalal Basu was full of nostalgia for the *Baṭtalā* that had vanished, the *Baṭtalā* where delightful farces like *ki majār śanibār* (what an enjoyable Saturday) priced at a price or two would dominate. These, Basu remembered were "different from Byron, Browning, Shelley and Swift"; they were distinct also from the works of modern Bengali poets like Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's, Nabinchandra Sen, Rabindranath Tagore and Satyendranath Dutta. Yet as he recalled, they had a plebian, everyday flavor, something that made them amusing for the ordinary householder.[87] It seems somewhat of a paradox that such longing for *Baṭtalā* literature would be echoed in the pages of *Māsik Basumatī*, an illustrated monthly miscellany that

---

84 Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print*, pp. 88–92. Gautam Bhadra has argued that *Baṅgadarśan*'s purpose cannot be reduced to sanitization efforts only. Bhadra, op. cit. p. 87.

85 Indeed as Gautam Bhadra has pointed out Bankim's early novels namely *Durgeśnandinī*, *Mṛṇālinī* and *Kapālkuṇḍalā* were more popular amongst women, most of who did not have any exposure to English education and consumed mostly tales published from Baṭtalā. Bhadra, p. 231.

86 "*Prāpta granther saṃkṣipta samālocanā*" (a short review of books received), *Baṅgadarśan* Kārtik 1280 / November-December 1873. *London Ruhusyu* (*London Rahasya*), a Bengali adaptation of Reynolds, *The Mysteries of the Court of London* was more or less constantly in print during the mid-nineteenth-century decades. *Bengal Library Catalogues*, for quarter ending June 30, 1871.

87 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā".

exemplified a fully formed, commercially successful periodical, containing visual and reading matter that had by the 1920s become quite stereotypical.

2.2 *The Baṅgadarśan Experiment*

So where did *Baṅgadarśan* fit in, in the very heterogeneous reading culture in nineteenth-century Bengal and how did it compensate for the 'lack'? In Rabindranath's words, without Bankim's initiatives Bengalis would never have made their way up beyond vernacular school textbooks and *Baṅgasāhitya* would certainly not have attained adulthood.[88] This moment of attaining adulthood (*baẏaḥprāpta*) was precisely the transition in the reader's taste, from tales and romances to the modern social and domestic fiction.[89] With *Baṅgadarśan*, a readily identifiable modern literary sphere constituted by a culture of periodicals became a distinct possibility. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay started *Baṅgadarśan: māsikpatra o samālocan* in 1872 (1279 Baṅgābda).[90] The *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books and Periodicals* translated the vernacular name as "the Mirror of Bengal, a monthly Magazine and Review" and categorized it as "miscellaneous".[91] Its first issues appeared with forty-eight pages, priced at eight annas each and a thousand copies of every issue were printed.[92] In the "Remark" column the Librarian and Keeper of the Catalogues of the Bengal Library, J. Robinson described *Baṅgadarśan* as "A very superior literary magazine and Review. Both the Editor and the contributors are among the ablest of Bengali writers."[93] At its peak the magazine's official circulation figures stood at 2000 copies per issue, at the time when Bankim's novels *Kamalākānter*

88 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bankimchandra".

89 Ibid. Rabindranath very ecstatically remarked that with Bankim's *Biṣabṛkṣa* the "children's tales" like *Bijaẏa-Basanta* and *Golebkāwālī* vanished.

90 *Baṅgadarśan* was initially published by Brajamadhab Basu and printed at the Saptahik Sambad Press, Pipulpati Lane, Bhowanipore in south Calcutta. See *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the quarter ending June 30, 1872. Jogeshchandra Bagal however writes that the journal initially came out from Baharampore in Murshidabad district of western Bengal where Bankim was residing at the time. See Jogeshchandra Bagal, *Bankim Racanābalī*, Volume 1, Sahitya Samsad, 1360 / 1953, 1397 / 1990 edition. From 1873 it came to be published from Bankim's own press, the Baṅgadarśan Kāryālaẏ located in his ancestral house in Kānṭhālpārā, Hooghly district.

91 *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the quarter ending June 30, 1872. Periodical names containing the *darśan* (literally implying beholding) suffix were common in the nineteenth century: for instance, *Digdarśan* (1818), *Bidyādarśan* (1842), *Jñāndarśan* (1851) and *Paridarśan* (1864).

92 *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the quarter ending June 30, 1872.

93 Ibid.

১৫৮।১(ক)

বঙ্গদর্শন।

(মাসিক পত্র ও সমালোচন)

১ম খণ্ড। ১লা বৈশাখ ১২৭৯। ১ম সংখ্যা।

পত্রসূচনা।

যাঁহারা বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় গ্রন্থ বা সাময়িক পত্র প্রচারে প্রবৃত্ত হয়েন. তাঁহাদিগের বিশেষ দুরদৃষ্ট। তাঁহারা যত যত্ন করুন না কেন, দেশীয় কৃতবিদ্য সম্প্রদায় প্রায়ই তাঁহাদিগের রচনা পাঠে বিমুখ। ইংরাজিপ্রিয় কৃতবিদ্যগণের প্রায় স্থির জ্ঞান আছে যে, তাঁহাদের পাঠের যোগ্য কিছুই বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় লিখিত হইতে পারে না। তাঁহাদের বিবেচনায় বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় লেখক মাত্রেই হয় ত বিদ্যাবুদ্ধিহীন, লিপি-কৌশল-শূন্য; নয় ত ইংরাজি গ্রন্থের অনুবাদক। তাঁহাদের বিশ্বাস যে, যাহা কিছু বাঙ্গালা ভাষায় লিপিবদ্ধ হয়, তাহা হয় ত অপাঠ্য, নয় ত কোন ইংরাজি গ্রন্থের ছায়া মাত্র; ইংরাজিতে যাহা আছে, তাহা আর বাঙ্গালায় পড়িয়া আত্মাবমাননার প্রয়োজন কি? সহজে কালো চামড়ার অপরাধে ধরা পড়িয়া আমরা নানারূপ সাফাইয়ের চেষ্টায় বেড়াইতেছি, বাঙ্গালা পড়িয়া কবুলজবাব কেন দিব?

ইংরাজি ভক্তদিগের এই রূপ। সংস্কৃতজ্ঞ পাণ্ডিত্যাভিমানীদিগের "ভাষায়" যেরূপ শ্রদ্ধা, তদ্বিষয়ে লিপিবাহুল্যের আবশ্যকতা নাই। যাঁহারা "বিষয়ী লোক" তাঁহাদিগের পক্ষে সকল ভাষাই সমান। কোন ভাষার বৃদ্ধি

FIGURE 1.1 First page of *Baṅgadarśan*, edited by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 1872

Daptar, *Rajanī* and *Rādhārāṇī* were being serialized.[94] Most of Bankim's popular novels *Biṣabṛkṣa* (1279 / 1872), *Indirā* (1279 / 1872), *Candraśekhar* (1280 / 1873), *Kṛṣṇakānter Uil* (1282 / 1875), *Ānandamaṭh* (1287–1289 / 1880–1882) and several others appeared serially in the pages of *Baṅgadarśan*. Besides fiction *Baṅgadarśan* carried essays (*prabandha*) on specialized subjects like philosophy, history, science and literature so as to bring within the folds of modern education, the general population in Bengal, the majority of whom dwelt outside the scope offered by western education.[95] *Baṅgadarśan* was perhaps the earliest instance of prominent intellectuals gathering around a particular literary periodical.[96] Bankim had drawn around him a group of highly educated and erudite intellectuals, most of who were well placed in colonial bureaucratic, judicial or education systems like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Ramdas Sen, Lalbehari Dey, Ramgati Nyayratna, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, Dinabandhu Mitra, Akshaychandra Sarkar, Gurudas Bandyopadhyay's and several others.[97] Major twentieth-century literary magazines like *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratbarṣa*, *Sāhitya*, *Nārāẏaṇ*, *Kallol*, *Paricaẏ* and *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* would all have a few core writers who lent the individual magazine its particular character and agenda.[98] *Baṅgadarśan* was modeled very consciously on the leading Victorian magazines like *The Cornhill Magazine* and *All the Year Round* that serialized some of the popular novels by exceptionally successful novelists.[99]

Laying out his principal purpose in initiating *Baṅgadarśan*, Bankim wrote:

> I have myself projected a Bengali Magazine with the object of making it the medium of communication and sympathy between the educated and the uneducated classes. You rightly say that English for good or for evil has become our vernacular; and this tends daily to widen the

94 *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the year 1875. Closely flowing were magazines like *Āryadarśan* at 1000 copies per issue and *Bhramar* at 1500 copies per issue.

95 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Patrasucanā' in *Baṅgadarśan*, Baiśākh, 1279 / April-May, 1872.

96 Sumit Sarkar, "The City Imagined" in *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 175.

97 Jogeshchandra Bagal, "Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay" in *Bankim Racanābalī*, Volume 1, p. sixteen.

98 For instance Rabindranath was the primary attraction of *Prabāsī* and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay that of *Bhāratbarṣa*. *Kallol*, *Bhāratī* and *Paricaẏ* for instance were all identified by their select group of writers or *lekhakgoṣṭhī*.

99 For instance Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, a hugely popular novel in its times was serialized in *All the Year Round* from December 1860 to August 1861 and Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Wives and Daughters* in *The Cornhill Magazine* between August 1864 and January 1866. See Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1988.

> gulf between the higher and the lower ranks of Bengali society. This, I think, is not exactly what it ought to be; I think that we ought to *disanglicise* ourselves … and speak to the masses in the language which they understand.[100]

Bankim's inaugural note (*patrasucanā*) to *Baṅgadarśan* reiterated this agenda as he described his twofold aim in starting the journal: to offer the English educated Bengali intelligentsia suitable reading material (*pāṭhayogya*) in the vernacular thereby inducing them into a practice of Bengali, and following from this, to forge a common ground of interaction between the English educated upper classes (*uccaśreṇī*) and lower classes (*nimnaśreṇī*) in Bengal.[101] Deanglicising the bilingually educated group meant, as Bankim himself explained, providing them with suitable and tasteful reading in the vernacular.[102] Bankim argued that over the course of colonial rule there had developed a chasm between the English educated upper-caste Hindu Bengali elite whom he described as the *suśikṣita* and the large numbers who were educated primarily in the vernacular with or without any functional knowledge of English. This rather large and amorphous group, he referred to as the *aśikṣita*. Through his journal Bankim intended to connect these two groups. Partha Chatterjee has argued that conceptualization of a modern culture was central to Bankim's formulation of a nationalist discourse. According to Bankim, a homogenous national culture could provide the bases for social solidarity and unify the majority of the indigenous population.[103] In articulating this discourse of a modern indigenous culture, he was primarily concerned with what he saw as the limited dissemination of rational thought among the people. This inadequacy drew him to a critique of the colonial education system, particularly the limitations of Western learning among the upper caste Hindus:

> It is said these days that "education" will "filter down". The implication of this opinion is that it is enough if the *uccaśreṇī* are well-educated only. The lower classes need no separate system of education.… The absorbency of the Bengali society will ensure that it suffices to educate the upper classes only and the lower classes will soon become saturated as well.[104]

100 Letter to Sambhuchandra Mukhopadhyay dated March 14, 1872, Berhampore compiled in Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay's and Sajanikanta Das, *Essays and Letters*.

101 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Patrasūcanā" in *Baṅgadarśan*, Baiśākh, 1279 / April-May, 1872.

102 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Patrasūcanā".

103 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 77.

104 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Patrasūcanā".

Evidently Bankim was not too convinced by the prospect of Macaulayan education filtrating down to the lower levels of the society.[105] His alternative was a more mindful project for popular education – to make available modern rational learning through the vernacular for people who virtually had no engagement with Western thought. Haraprasad Shastri later observed, "In the years prior to *Baṅgadarśan* there were several journals for the dissemination of knowledge (*jñān*). But none could actually 'filter down' knowledge in ways that *Baṅgadarśan* eventually would".[106] *Baṅgadarśan* was very much a part of Bankim's conceptualization of an alternative form of national education. As Partha Chatterjee has argued Bankim was quite unambiguous about who needed this vernacular education. It were the people, the *nimnaśreṇī* or the *aśikṣita* "between the ignorant peasant and the really well educated classes" – the artisans, shopkeepers, small zamindars, mofussil lawyers, humbler office employee and the small proprietors.[107] These were the peripheral, lower middle-class groups, often only partly adept in the vernacular and who were far removed from the world of their university educated and professionally more successful social superiors. For most of these social groups, education meant only a working knowledge of language and accounting – barely sufficient to assist them in family professions like priesthood, accountancy and shop-keeping.[108] The spread of vernacular education under the new initiatives of the colonial state, the more informally structured female education of the *antaḥpur* or *zenānā* and the increase in numbers of public libraries had created a wider reach for print, especially amongst these groups.[109] It was these people who read mostly Bengali, whose reading preferences and aesthetic sensibilities needed to be conditioned towards modern learning. Identifying its targeted readership in explicitly sociological terms *Baṅgadarśan*'s agenda was to disentangle these petty bhadralok classes from consumption of cheaper and ephemeral *Baṭtalā* texts that were seen as obscene and violating protocols of modern literary sensibilities. As it becomes evident from one of his articles published later in *Baṅgadarśan* it were the migrant population in the city who had left their villages in search for lesser office jobs in Calcutta that Bankim was particularly concerned about. Denied the entertainment to which they were accustomed

105 Partha Chatterjee has shown how Bankim formulated an indigenous alternative to colonial idea of education, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, pp. 77–79.

106 Shastri, "Bankimchandra".

107 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "A Popular Literature for Bengal" *Bankim Racanābalī* (English Works), p. 97, cited in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, p. 79.

108 Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print*, p. 157.

109 Ibid., pp. 154–170.

in their country homes, these groups easily took to urban vices, especially drinking. For Bankim such corrupted ways of living were almost invariably associated with obscene reading preferences.[110]

Bankim envisioned *Baṅgadarśan* as a modern yet indigenous experiment in *lokaśikṣā* or mass education and as a possible alternative to the inherent asymmetries of the colonial education system. Veena Naregal has shown that the education system put in place by the necessities of colonial administration was vastly unbalanced not only in terms of financial provisions for English and regional vernaculars but also the cognitive functions that the two linguistic fields were expected to perform.[111] The introduction of English in the curricula and the consequent restructuring of the vernaculars during the mid-nineteenth-century decades profoundly determined the social positions and intellectual orientations of the English educated intelligentsia and their 'vernacular' counterparts, as also their respective access to the colonial state's resources and their approach towards the less privileged and marginal social groups.[112] Bankim argued that it was precisely the marginalization of the indigenous languages and the hierarchical restructuring of social identities by colonial education policies that had subverted precolonial channels of social communication.[113] Effective dissemination of the teachings of Buddha and Shankaracharya in the ancient times was possible because modalities of communications between the learned and the unlearned operated smoothly. In the more recent precolonial past, *kathakatā* (i.e. the practice of itinerant bards or the *kathak ṭhākur* narrating stories from Hindu mythologies), Bankim argued was the predominant means of educating the masses. Even those tilling the land or spinning the yarn could all 'learn'.[114] English education Bankim explained had shrunk these indigenous modes (*upāẏ*) of interactions and the obvious reason (*sthūl kāraṇ*) was the absence of empathy (*samabedanā*) between the educated and the uneducated.[115] Thus the need of the hour was for the well-educated the *suśikṣita* to gradually connect with the less educated and "this message need to

110 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Aślīlatā' in *Baṅgadarśan*, Pouṣ 1280 / December-January 1873–74.

111 Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, 2001 and Veena Naregal, "Vernacular Culture and Political Formation in Western India" in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorti ed., *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Permanent Black, 2004, pp. 139–168.

112 Naregal, op. cit. pp. 139–141.

113 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Lokaśikṣā' in *Baṅgadarśan*, Agrahāẏaṇ, 1285 / November-December 1878.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

be spread throughout Bengal".[116] For Bankim therefore an emergent modern literary sphere in Bengal would not simply draw on the modular form of the Victorian literary public sphere. Rather it was also necessitated by a certain sense of urgency, that of creating an indigenous educational alternative, modern and yet outside the apparatus of the colonial education system. Delineating the nation's space of its own modern education constituted in Bankim's vision a significant way of establishing the nation's inner sovereignty. The vernacular magazine form with its miscellaneous contents, the delight of its fiction and educative essays provided a partial and informal alternative to the rigors of modern schooling and the disparate access to social and state resources that the asymmetry of linguistic hierarchies had resulted in. Rabindranath was ecstatic with *Baṅgadarśan* and the new form of education it had to offer, "… That day we fled from the control of schools and foreign teachers and turned to our homes…"[117] But even as Bankim believed that the magazine form was potentially an effective way to widely circulate literature he was also keenly aware that the time for inexpensive literature accessible to the masses, including the laboring poor, was still a distant possibility.[118]

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century social and economic stratification of the middle classes accompanied by differentiations in education reflected in the reading preferences of the various categories within the middle classes and rendered heterogeneity to the print establishment in terms of production, tastes and reception. Bankim was perceptively aware of this differentiated penetration of print in indigenous society and how consumption patterns of the *Baṭtalā* market embodied resistances of marginalized social groups towards attempts at standardizing their linguistic practices and aesthetic sensibilities.[119] For him new and indigenous modes of communication or *lokaśikṣā* could be opened up only by a new language form. Accordingly *Baṅgadarśan*'s agenda of reaching out to the lesser educated necessitated a flexible prose form that would be easily comprehensible and yet capable of

---

116 Ibid.

117 Rabindranath referring to *Baṅgadarśan* in context of the newly initiated journal *Aitihāsik Citra* in "Prasaṅga Kathā," *Bhāratī*, Bhādra 1305 / August-September 1898.

118 Evidently the notion of 'literature' that Bankim had in mind was that of a high modern aesthetic rather than the already circulating inexpensive prints from Baṭtalā. When Bankim spoke of his desire to bring out new editions of his novels with better print and paper quality, Sureshchandra Samajpati replied, "if only they (i.e. Bankim's novels) were cheaper, many more people could access them." Bankim reportedly replied, "Yes I have thought of that. But I think that time is not yet appropriate for 'cheap literature' in this country. It will not make a difference if novels are not inexpensive". Samajpati, "Bankimchandra", *Nārāẏaṇ*, 1321–22 / 1914–15, Samajpati, *Bankim-Prasaṅga*, pp. 183–209.

119 Anindita Ghosh, pp. 79–87.

articulating complex thoughts. In this the *Baṅgadarśan* writers resisted importation of unfamiliar syntax from alien linguistic-literary traditions, particularly Sanskrit, Persian or English.[120] The linguistic styles such as that of Vidyasagar had come to be perceived as not properly organic (*deśīya* – literally meaning belonging to the land) and therefore artificial.[121] In a reading session of Bankim's first novel *Durgeśnandinī* where the orthodox Bhatpara grammarians had assembled along with ordinary people, the grammarian Chandranath Bidyaratna admitted that the prose seemed more lucid and charming wherever Bankim had diverged from strict structural rules.[122] Bhadra argues that Bankim drew on diverse syntactic elements of the medieval grammarians, Vaishnava and Shakta poets and the mid-nineteenth-century poets like Iswar Gupta to craft a vernacular prose where parts of speech and syntax gelled into new phrase and sentence formations.[123] In an essay "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā" Bankim elaborated on the linguistic style most appropriate for a modern literary culture. For him neither the colloquial, iconoclastic forms of *Ālālī* and *Hūtamī* as embodied in Pyarichand Mitra's *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* and Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Pyām̐cār Nakṣā* respectively nor the chaste Sanskritized *sādhu* style developed by Vidyasagar and the *Tattvabodhinī* writers were entirely suitable for a modern literary culture. The purpose of the written form he explained was education (*śikṣādān*) while that of the spoken word was merely to convey a message (*jñāpan*).[124] The former therefore had to be capable of articulating complex ideas and also be intelligible. For this Bankim suggested use of a hybrid form of Bengali, one that would draw on all existing repertoires, the colloquial forms as well as the more pure canonical traditions of Persian or Sanskrit, depending on contextual need and availability or otherwise of

120 Haraprasad Shastri, 'Bāṅglā Bhāṣā' in Satyajit Chaudhuri *et al* ed., *Haraprasad Shastri Racanā Saṃgraha*, vol. 2, Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parshad, Calcutta, 1981 and Chandranath Basu, 'Nobel bā Kathāgranther Uddeśya' in *Baṅgadarśan*, April 1881. Shastri even went to the extent of arguing that vernacular reading for the English educated Bengali writers were limited to Vidyasagar's *Sītār Banabās* and 'Bankimbabu's novels'. Both works have been referred to in Swapan Chakravorti, 'Purity and Print: A Note on Nineteenth Century Bengali Prose' in Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravorti ed., *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Permanent Black, 2004, p. 200.

121 Haraprasad Shastri, "Baṅga Bhāṣā".

122 Gautam Bhadra, "Nyāṛā Baṭṭalāẏ Yāẏ Ka'bār?" in op. cit. p. 242.

123 Bhadra, op. cit. p. 242.

124 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Bāṅglā Bhāṣā in *Baṅgadarśan*, Jyaiṣṭha 1285 / May-June 1878. This was largely a response to Ramgati Nyayratna's dissertation *Bāṅglā bhāṣā o Bāṅglā sāhitya biṣaẏak prastāb* (1873) which considered the Tekchandi and Hutomi styles of intelligible and often colloquial Bengali as morally outrageous.

suitable synonyms.[125] Thus while he found no reason to entirely do away with Sanskrit words he insisted on the use of Bengali synonyms wherever they existed.[126] Again, while he strongly disapproved the standardization of colloquial prose as the written form, he endorsed the *Tekcā̃ṅdī* or *Hūtamī* styles for specific literary genres like humor or satire. Contentions over the literary form of the vernacular in the pages of *Baṅgadarśan* therefore amounted to more than an erudite debate among grammarians and literary intellectuals. They were part of a larger socio-political concern: the search for a linguistic apparatus that would enable democratization of the literary high modern without necessarily compromising the sanctity that the modernizing Bengali language had come to acquire. Bankim's defense of a flexible linguistic form therefore need to be seen in context of an emerging mode of literary communication, that of periodical publication, the new concepts of reading that this particular format entailed, the specific organization of its production and circulation and a literary agenda that simultaneously sought to embody a notion of the high modern as well as reach out beyond the normative boundaries of an erudite reading public.

Baṅgadarśan was evidently the new inspiration for subsequent literary monthlies in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Bengal. When Rabindranath's elder siblings debated whether to initiate a new literary venture or overhaul *Tattvabodhinī* the first idea got the majority support from within the family.[127] Dwijendranath Tagore wished to redefine *Tattvabodhinī* as a literary journal while retaining its original emphases on philosophical concerns but Jyotirindranath wanted a journal like Bankim's *Baṅgadarśan*.[128] The result was *Bhāratī* initially edited by Dwijendranath, and later by Swarnakumari Devi. *Bhāratī* (1877–1926), Debiprasanna Raychaudhury's *Navyabhārat* (1883–1925) and Sureshchandra Samajpati's *Sāhitya* (1890–1923) were consciously styled on *Baṅgadarśan* and were amongst the very few nineteenth-century literary miscellanies that survived into the first decades of the twentieth century. These literary miscellanies formed a new breed of periodicals distinct from medical

125 Ibid.

126 In the same essay, Bankim argued that use of Sanskritized words like *tāmra* (copper), *gṛha* (home) or *mastak* (head), instead of their respective Bengali synonyms, *tāmā*, *ghar* and *māthā* would unnecessarily complicate the articulation of specific ideas.

127 Dwijendranath Tagore, 'Purātan Prasaṅga' in *Bhāratbarṣa*, Āṣāṛh 1328 / June-July 1921. Chitra Deb, *Thākur Bārīr Andarmahal*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1990, p. 27.

128 Dwijendranath Tagore, 'Purātan Prasaṅga'. *Bhāratī* was primarily an initiative by Jyotirindranath. Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, p. 148.

and science journals,[129] caste journals,[130] district journals,[131] journals pertaining to agricultural matters[132] and journals of particular religious sects.[133] Spatially too the print industry of the early twentieth century expanded and moved southwards "away from *Baṭtalā*" to include central and much of proper north Calcutta, "from Bagbazar to Boubazar".[134] Most of the periodical offices in the early twentieth century were located in the Harrison Road, Cornwallis Street and Boubazar Street areas propped up by a vibrant book market operating in the nearby College Street neighborhood.[135] The monthly literary miscellanies (*māsik sāhitya patrikā*) became increasingly well-defined in form and content, discernible almost entirely by the modern literary genres that had already been defined and indigenously adapted by the late nineteenth century.[136] Also in contrast to most *Baṭtalā* prints, literary periodicals were usually printed on better quality papers and with fewer typographical errors. While peddling formed the primary distributive channel of *Baṭtalā* books and prints, periodicals were distributed mostly by postal mail to individual subscribers, institutions and libraries. By the opening of twentieth century the worlds of *Baṭtalā* and the *māsik sāhitya patrikā* had become sharply demarcated, both materially and discursively.[137] As the periodical media gained in importance, most of

129 Medical journals like *Cikiṯsādarśan* 1294 / 1887, *Cikiṯsak* 1296 / 1889, and Cikiṯsādarpan 1278 / 1871.

130 Journals that were mouthpieces of various caste groups like *Kāẏastha Patrikā* 1317 / 1910, *Tili Samācār* 1326 / 1919 and *Subarnabanik Samācār* 1323 / 1916.

131 District journals like *Bikrampur* 1320 / 1913, *Bīrbhūmi* 1306 / 1899 and *Bīrbhūmi* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) 1317 / 1910.

132 Agricultural journals like *Cāṣbās* 1334 / 1927.

133 Journals that were intended as organs of particular sects like *Baiṣñab* 1292 / 1886, *Baiṣñab Sebikā* 1318 / 1911 and *Āhmadī* 1332 / 1925.

134 Amritalal Basu, "Purātan Pañjikā".

135 For instance, *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* were brought out from Cornwallis Street and *Māsik Basumatī* from Boubazar Street.

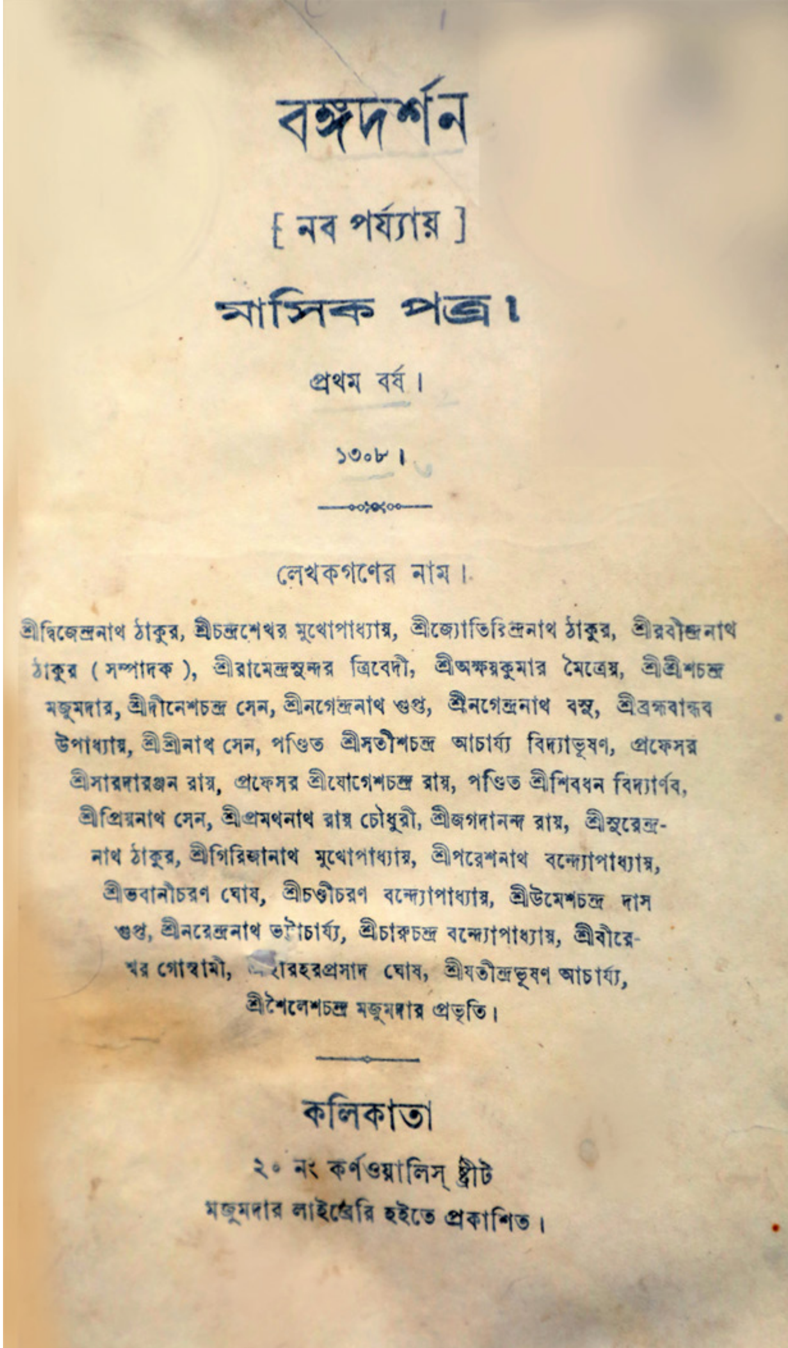
136 Rosinka Chaudhuri, 'A New Race of Men in the East' in *Gentlemen Poets* and Priya Joshi, 'By Way of Transition: Bankim's Will, or Indigenizing the Novel in India' in *In Another Country* have shown how Western literary genres, especially modern verse forms and fiction were indigenously adapted and how these processes of adaptation variously embodied the cultural politics of the educated colonial elite.

137 Most researches on Baṭtalā genres, publications, their markets and clientele deal with what could be the flourishing point of this publishing industry, the mid to late nineteenth century. Almost all scholars like Sripantha, Sukumar Sen, Gautam Bhadra and Anindita Ghosh deal with reading practices, audiences and dissemination but confine their studies to the nineteenth century. From this it could perhaps be reasonably concluded that with a widening periodicals market, a good section of Baṭtalā readers, at least the print literate ones, were gradually being sucked into this emergent literary sphere.

Bengali literature appeared first in journal pages, and only then in book form. It became the preferred medium for disseminating a modern literariness, circulating political criticisms of colonial rule and creating a space for debates on social issues. Such social and political concerns unambiguously segregated this new public media from earlier traditional and semi-oral literary genres. In seeking to stretch beyond a limited circle of well-educated and embrace the vernacular literate and the lesser educated, both urban and rural, literary periodicals marginalized these popular genres, casting them as obscene and unreformed. This marginalization however was not sought at the cost of exclusion. Rather by creating a discursive public sphere, periodicals sought to wean away the vernacular literate and lesser educated and provide them with the option of wide-ranging reading that would also double up as an alternative to Western education. Unlike *Baṭtalā* however the periodical form made a strong exception as far as non-literacy was concerned. Its form and contents being non-conducive to oral-aural reception, the mass of rural and urban poor remained entirely outside the purview of this literary sphere. This was a medium suitable mostly for solitary reading and even when read aloud, as was often the case among women of bhadralok households, its contents were meant for those who could appreciate modern genres like lyrical poetry or the novel. Publicists were sensitive to the limitations of the modern literary field – debating the possibilities of mass literary publications in the vernacular. One repeatedly finds editors like Bankim and Ramananda Chattopadhyay voicing their dissatisfaction that the non-literate and marginal social groups were beyond the reach of this literary sphere. But even as Bankim admitted the efficacy of premodern modalities in general education of the masses, in his vision, there was no scope for turning back to precolonial oral-aural traditions. The readership that these periodicals would in principle try to create would be contingent upon universal literacy. The twentieth-century literary sphere would continuously have to deal with the tension between the need to widen participation, differentiated literacy that stood in the way of shaping uniform cultural sensibilities and mass non-literacy in both rural and urban habitations that became almost impossible to negotiate.

3 Professionalizing Literary Journalism: Aspects of Periodical Publishing

Editorial Approach: In his editorial introduction to *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan* (*Renewed Baṅgadarśan*, 1901) Rabindranath broached the need for a new



বঙ্গদর্শন

[নব পর্য্যায়]

মাসিক পত্র।

প্রথম বর্ষ।

১৩০৮।

লেখকগণের নাম।

শ্রীদ্বিজেন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, শ্রীচন্দ্রশেখর মুখোপাধ্যায়, শ্রীজ্যোতিরিন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর, শ্রীরবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর (সম্পাদক), শ্রীরামেন্দ্রসুন্দর ত্রিবেদী, শ্রীঅক্ষয়কুমার মৈত্রেয়, শ্রীশ্রীশচন্দ্র মজুমদার, শ্রীদীনেশচন্দ্র সেন, শ্রীনগেন্দ্রনাথ গুপ্ত, শ্রীনগেন্দ্রনাথ বসু, শ্রীব্রহ্মবান্ধব উপাধ্যায়, শ্রীশ্রীনাথ সেন, পণ্ডিত শ্রীসতীশচন্দ্র আচার্য্য বিদ্যাভূষণ, প্রফেসর শ্রীসারদারঞ্জন রায়, প্রফেসর শ্রীযোগেশচন্দ্র রায়, পণ্ডিত শ্রীশিবধন বিদ্যার্ণব, শ্রীপ্রিয়নাথ সেন, শ্রীপ্রমথনাথ রায় চৌধুরী, শ্রীজগদানন্দ রায়, শ্রীসুরেন্দ্র-নাথ ঠাকুর, শ্রীগিরিজানাথ মুখোপাধ্যায়, শ্রীপরেশনাথ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, শ্রীভবানীচরণ ঘোষ, শ্রীচণ্ডীচরণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, শ্রীউমেশচন্দ্র দাস গুপ্ত, শ্রীনরেন্দ্রনাথ ভট্টাচার্য্য, শ্রীচারুচন্দ্র বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়, শ্রীবীরে-শ্বর গোস্বামী, [illegible]রহরপ্রসাদ ঘোষ, শ্রীযতীন্দ্রভূষণ আচার্য্য, শ্রীশৈলেশচন্দ্র মজুমদার প্রভৃতি।

কলিকাতা

২০ নং কর্ণওয়ালিস্ ষ্ট্রীট

মজুমদার লাইব্রেরি হইতে প্রকাশিত।

FIGURE 1.2 Title page of Rabindranath Tagore edited *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), edited by Rabindranath Tagore, showing the names of contributing writers

editorial line.[138] During the previous *Baṅgadarśan* he argued there were fewer writers and readers of Bengali literature and it were the narrow confines of that literary circle that Bankim's forceful creativity sought to break through and broaden. Commending Bankim's intervention as an editor, Rabindranath described him as *Sabyasācī*, following the legendary ambidextrous shooter Arjun,[139] as one who could simultaneously proceed with the editorial job of reworking other people's writings as well as make up for the unsolicited pages with his own compositions.[140] At the start of the twentieth century, the writer-reader society Rabindranath argued had become wider and more complex than it was during Bankim's times, as a result of the cheap and almost ubiquitous newspapers and the theater stage that had taken literature to the multitudes.[141] The literary sphere had broadened to accommodate diverse literary tastes. It was therefore necessary to move beyond Bankim's editorial method of writing almost singlehandedly and instead to create an amorphous pool of writers which the editor could draw on, so the latter could write less.[142] Rabindranath felt that in the altered conditions of the new century it was impossible for a single writer-editor or even a small group of writers to satisfy the needs of a widening though still largely an amorphous readership.[143]

Describing *Baṅgadarśan* as the 'rising sun' that instilled a sense of responsibility in literary pursuits,[144] Rabindranath noted that writing had emerged as a calling that could not be undertaken nonchalantly. Bankim himself set out instructions for aspiring writers and urging upon new editors to thoroughly rework every composition wherever needed.[145] He had gathered around his *Baṅgadarśan* a small unit of extremely erudite scholars like Ramdas Sen, Akshaychandra Sarkar, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay, Haraprasad Shastri, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay and poets like Nabinchandra Sen and Hemchandra

138 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sūcanā' (Foreword) in *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan*, Baiśākh 1308 / April-May 1901.

139 Jogeshchandra Bagal, *Bankim Racanābalī*, p. eighteen. A legendary hero from the epic *Mahābhārata* and the third of the Pandav brothers, Arjun was also popularly hailed as Sabyasācī, the ambidextrous archer.

140 For instance, the hymn *Bande Mātaram* that was later incorporated into his novel *Ānandamaṭh* originally appeared in *Baṅgadarśan* as space filler. Partho Chattopadhyay, *Bāṅglā Saṃbādpatra O Bāṅgālīr Nabajāgaraṇ: 1818–1878*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta 1977, p. 298.

141 Ibid.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bankimchandra".

145 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Bāṅglār Nabya Lekhakdiger Prati Nibedan" (An appeal to the new writers of Bengal), *Pracār*, Māgh 1291 / January-February 1885, a periodical he started after *Baṅgadarśan* had been wrapped up.

Bandyopadhyay's who regularly contributed to the journal. They were brought together by Bankim to form an identifiable group of writers (*lekhakgoṣṭhī*) for *Baṅgadarśan.* Bankim himself was a prolific writer and when contributions fell short he filled up the requisite spaces with his own writings.[146] The primary role of the editor that Bankim perceived for himself was to create and train this *lekhakgoṣṭhī* in the task of vernacular writing. Bankim himself admitted that his pen ran through the texts of most contributors and that they would be sent to the press only after several meticulous revisions.[147] The task was to tutor the English educated Bengali elite who were hitherto unaccustomed to writing in modern Bengali. Regularizing the use of the vernacular among this group was central to Bankim's nationalist agenda, constituting a major editorial approach. Creating a *lekhakgoṣṭhī* meant putting together a small group of social-intellectual leaders from amongst the well-educated (who he described as the *suśikṣita*) whose role was conceived as guiding the formation of a mature and discerning readership. Subsequently, several journals like *Sāhitya*, *Bhāratī* and later, *Kallol* and *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* would have their own group of core contributors. Speaking of his own objective in directing *Baṅgadarśan*, Bankim clarified that by writing on almost every subject, he intended to initiate specialized writing projects by respective authorities. This practice which he frequently adopted in *Baṅgadarśan*, he hoped would enable literature to become autonomous, self-reliant and all-inclusive (*sarbāṅga-sampanna*).[148] Therefore as a pioneering editor Bankim identified intellectuals who could write in Bengali on subjects that were their forte. Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay for instance was an acclaimed poet even before he started writing for *Baṅgadarśan.* Bankim however conceived of Rajkrishna's role primarily as an essayist on historical subjects. Though a few of his poems appeared in the journal, the former excelled as a non-fiction prose-writer.[149] Moreover, most writings that were

146 This was one of the major reasons why Bankim decided to discontinue *Baṅgadarśan* in 1876. Nabinchandra Sen, *Āmār Jīban*, Calcutta, 1974, pp. 460–461.

147 Sureshchandra Samajpati recollected this conversation with Bankim in his essay "Bankimchandra" that appeared in *Nārāẏaṇ*, 1321–1322 / 1915 and reprinted in Samajpati, *Bankim-Prasaṅga*, pp. 183–209.

148 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Introduction to *Bibidha Prabandha* (a collection of his historical essays that appeared in *Baṅgadarśan* and *Pracār*); quoted in "Bankimchandra O Bāṅglār Itihās" by an anonymous writer in *Sāhitya*, Bhādra 1315 / August-September 1908.

149 At the time he wrote for *Baṅgadarśan* Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay of the Uttarpara Raj was a teacher at Presidency College, Calcutta. It was during the *Baṅgadarśan* years that his much-admired book *Pratham Śikṣā Bāṅglār Itihās* (1874) was published. Bankimchandra was highly appreciative of Rajkrishna's ability as a historian (*Baṅgadarśan*, Māgh, 1281 / January-February, 1875).

brought out in *Baṅgadarśan* did not carry the names of their writers. Even when they did, they usually appeared in acronyms. The anonymity of writers indicated that literary practice or *sāhitya sebā* (literally, service to literature) as a vocation yielding monetary remuneration was yet to develop.[150] Anonymity also gave *Baṅgadarśan* a particular identity as a collaborative literary project, even as it made it difficult later on for the writers to claim authorship of their own works.[151]

Post-*Baṅgadarśan*, editors of literary periodicals would emulate and build up on Bankim's editorial strategies: solicit writers with expertise on specific subjects, revise scripts of amateur writers, arrange order of contents and ensure regularity in publication and flow of subscriptions.[152] *Bhāratī*, *Sāhitya*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Sādhanā*, *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) featured serial novels, short stories, poetry and quality essays on miscellaneous subjects, written usually by well-known authorities. Most journals of the turn-of-the-century years were quite eclectic in so far as they shared in a broadening pool of writers. Ramendrasundar Trivedi and Jagadananda Ray wrote on scientific subjects, effortlessly explaining various scientific and astronomical phenomena for a general readership.[153] Similarly, Rameshchandra Dutta and Dwijendranath Tagore were creative contributors to various periodicals, elucidating in uncomplicated terms themes on religious and philosophical subjects.[154] Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, Akshay Kumar Maitreya, Haraprasad Shastri and later Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay's would regularly write on historical events, archaeological findings and manuscript sources.[155] Translations from European fiction would

150 Haraprasad Shastri humbly admitted: "… it was never my desire to become famous by writing essays…" "Bankimchandra", *Nārāẏaṇ*, 1325 / 1918.

151 Haraprasad Shastri wrote: "… I never signed off. That is why it has become very difficult now to prove that those writings are indeed mine…" Shastri, "Bankimchandra Kāṅṭhālpāṛāẏe" in *Nārāẏaṇ*, 1322 / 1915. Restarting *Baṅgadarśan* under the editorship of Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay Bankim would elucidate on the need for literary practice to be a collaborative effort.

152 A few of the late nineteenth-century periodicals were run quite professionally, ensuring timely release of issues. In the 1891 report on publications issued and registered during the year 1890 in several provinces of British India, Haraprasad Shastri, Librarian at the Bengal Library observed that *Nabyabhārat* and *Bhāratī-O-Bālak* were the only periodicals that were "written with ability and issued with punctuality. The rest of the papers are short-lived and do not show much vigor."

153 Jagadananda Ray, "Jyotiṣik Samasyā" (Astronomical problems), *Bhāratī*, v.25, Jyaiṣṭha 1308 / May-June 1901.

154 For example: Rameshchandra Dutta, "Hindu Darśan" (Hindu Philosophy), *Bhāratī*, v. 25, Baiśākh, 1308 / April-May 1901.

155 Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, "Aitihāsik Patrābalī" (Historical Correspondences), *Bhāratī*, v.25, Baiśākh, 1308 / April-May 1901. Charuchandra Basu, "Aśoker Dharmalipi" (The edicts

become a visible feature of many of these journals. Jyotirindranath Tagore for instance would become known as a prolific translator from French sources.[156] Observations on contemporary administrative developments and events like recurrent famines would increasingly take up more space in these periodicals, making way for trenchant nationalist criticisms of colonial policies.[157] Indeed, commentaries on political developments, legal and administrative decisions of the colonial government, general apathy of the rulers towards masses of Indians and modalities of nationalist resistance would become the staple of these miscellaneous periodicals. As nationalist political activism intensified, shaping informed, reflective opinion became one of the defining jobs of editors of literary periodicals.

However even as Rabindranath realized the need to push beyond Bankim's editorial line, his own editorial experiments did not achieve much success with either *Sādhanā*, *Bhāndār* or *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan*, the circulation of these remaining pretty much the same or even lower than *Nabyabhārat*, *Sāhitya* and *Bhāratī*.[158] With Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* (1901) came a new breed of literary periodicals, the *sacitra māsik patrikā*, i.e. the illustrated miscellanies. *Prabāsī* came to be regarded as the pioneer for its constellation of eminent writers, well-chosen compositions, plenty of photograph representations and colorful illustrations and above all its regularity and punctuality. Its form and content were intended in ways that could at least potentially penetrate the market for cheap books and yet retain a high-brow aesthetic. From its commencement its circulation figures exceeded that of its older contemporaries like *Bhāratī* and *Sāhitya*.[159] Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* (1901), Jaladhar Sen's *Bhāratbarṣa* (1913), Satishchandra Mukhopadhyay's *Māsik Basumatī* (1922), and Upendranath Gangopadhyay's *Bicitrā* (1927) were among the

of Emperor Asoka), *Nārāẏaṇ*, v. 3 pt. 1 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1323 / November-December 1916.

156 Jyotirindranath Tagore, "Anunoẏ" (from Sully Prudhomme), *Bhāratī*, v. 25 Jyaiṣṭha 1308 / May-June 1901. Jyotirindranath Tagore, "Sandhyā-Gān" (Victor Hugo, *Serenade*), *Bhāratī*, v. 25 Śrāvaṇ 1308 / July-August 1901. Jyotirindranath Tagore, "Mānī Prajā" (from François Coppée), *Bhāratī*, v.26 Phālgun 1309 / February-March 1903. Jatindramohan Bagchi, "Premer Prabesh" (from Tennyson), *Bhāratī*, v. 27, Śrāvaṇ 1310 / July-August 1903.

157 Rameshchandra Dutta, "Bhāratīẏa Durbhikṣa" (India's famines), *Bhāratī*, v.25, Āṣāṛh 1308 / June-July 1901.

158 According to the *Bengal Library Catalogues*, estimates of "copies printed"

159 Circulation figures can be gathered from the *Catalogue of Books and Periodicals* published in the Bengal Presidency compiled by the Librarian of the Bengal Library and keeper of the *Catalogue of Books* under Section XVIII of Act XXV of 1867. According to these Catalogues, in 1903 for instance, *Prabāsī's* circulation was 2000 while that of *Bhāratī* was 1250, *Sāhitya's* 1600 and that of *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) was 500. By 1910 *Prabāsī*'s circulation had touched 4000 while *Bhāratī* and *Baṅgadarśan* trailed with 1750 and 1000 respectively.

more popular *sacitra māsik patrikā* that secured significantly long print runs,[160] attracted an array of writers and typically projected themselves as family magazines, usually with separate features for women and children. These *patrikā* were different from their immediate predecessors and older contemporaries like *Baṅgadarśan*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Sādhanā, Sāhitya* and *Bhāratī.* None of these previous journals commanded sustained reader responses, even though many writers were common to both varieties of journals. As will be evident from the organization and functioning of *Prabāsī* discussed in the following chapter, the illustrated miscellanies with the variety and quantity of their contents signalled a shift towards commercialization of high-brow literature and professionalization of literary practice.

Authors, authorial vocation and the literary sphere: Evidently, much in literary journalism had changed since the times of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Baṅgadarśan.* An increase in periodicals production involved not only newer journals but also a diverse pool of professional writers. In *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan*, Rabindranath spoke of the new century as an age marked by a noticeable expansion in the number of readers and writers. Periodicals, he urged now needed to accommodate readers with varying degrees of literacy and cultural appreciation: "Nowadays it is difficult to enumerate numbers of writers and readers. Composition and taste are very diverse. A range of class differentiations (*nānāprakār śreṇīr bibhāg*) have taken place among writers and readers."[161] By the second decade of the century, this internal differentiation within the Bengali literary sphere had resulted in a widening sphere, with obvious indications of commercialization. Pramatha Chaudhuri a leading literary and social critic and the editor of *Sabuj Patra* (1914) observed that literary practice had decidedly moved out of the domain of *rajdharma* (implying, its elite circles) and was assuming the attributes of *gaṇadharma* (i.e. moving towards the public or *gaṇa*).[162] Most writers, as evident from their family names, in journals like *Prabāsī* were drawn from the traditional upper scribal castes and their use of refined Bengali (even if not always *sādhu* or chaste Bengali) indicate a certain educational distinction, even if all were not financially

160 *Prabāsī* continued for nearly seven decades, *Bhāratbarṣa* continued for over half a century and *Māsik Basumatī* for over fifty years. Jagadindranath Ray's *Mānasī O Marmabāṇī* (1916), Atulprasad Sen's *Uttarā* (1925) and Upendranath Gangopadhyay's *Bicitrā* (1927) were among other important illustrated miscellanies but these were not as popular as the first three and neither did they continue for very long.

161 Rabindranath Tagore, "Sūcanā".

162 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Baṅga Sāhityer Nabayug" (New era in Bengali literature) in feature titled "Kaṣṭipāthar" in *Prabāsī*, v. 20, pt. 2 # 1, Kārtik 1320 / October-November 1913.

equally solvent.[163] Neither the term middle class nor bhadralok sufficiently convey the complexities of the social groups in question. Majority of writers in a high-brow periodical like *Prabāsī* were drawn from respectable professional groups with varying degrees of proficiency in English and included lawyers, doctors, college and school teachers and college-going students. Noting with some exasperation, the overload of fiction in the periodicals market, a publicist in *Māsik Basumatī* would mockingly remark that it was difficult to ascertain whether readers or writers exceeded in numbers.[164] From submission of a composition by an author to its publication and eventual distribution, the processes involved in the production and circulation of periodicals brought together writers, readers, editors, patrons, publishers and printers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. All these people could be bound by a sense of belonging to a common literary public and their interactions mediated by codes of civility. The noticeable swell in the number of writers contributing to periodicals thus called for a certain professionalization of authorial conduct. In an editorial note addressed to writers looking forward to contribute to *Prabāsī*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay explained the basic codes governing contributions to periodicals: enclosing a stamped reply card for correspondence and return of unaccepted compositions, the editor's inability to provide explanations for non-acceptance and delay in publication, the undesirability of sending a particular piece simultaneously to more than one periodical office for consideration and the rules for withdrawing one's own composition. The *Prabāsī* editor categorically stated that non-compliance with these generally practised authorship norms amounted to a violation of civility on part of the prospective author.[165]

Literary critics often interpreted with optimism, the presence of amateur authors as indication of an expanding and participatory public sphere. But the enlargement of the public domain also raised a vexed question: how to strike a balance between upliftment of readers' tastes and what was seen as the still unreformed choices of the majority of readers. The dilemma was how to break out of limited production and reach out to a socially heterogeneous public – whether it was possible to chart out a middle-brow literary space where the

163 By the War years regular and quality writers were not necessarily all financially solvent. As Achintyakumar Sengupta recollects in his reminiscences of the *Kallol Yug* most of the young writers, including eminent poets and novelists like Kazi Nazrul Islam and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay had difficult times making both ends meet.

164 Sarojnath Ghosh, "Bāṅglā Sāhityer Ekti Dhārā" (A trend within Bengali literature), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 4 pt. 2 # 2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1332 / November-December 1925.

165 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Lekhakgaṇer Prati Nibedan" (An appeal to writers), *Prabāsī*, v. 10 pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1317 / December 1910-January 1911.

refined and average tastes could converge. The logistics of periodical production, the readership they defined and the debates that animated their pages reveal the Bengali intelligentsia's sense of both optimism and unease with the potentialities and limitations of large-scale publications. In Pierre Bourdieu's definition,

> Middle-brow art is the product of a productive system dominated by the quest for investment profitability; this creates the need for the widest possible public. It cannot, moreover, content itself with seeking to intensify consumption within a determinate social class; it is obliged to orient itself towards a generalization of the social and cultural composition of this public.… middle-brow art is most often the culmination of transactions and compromises among the various categories of agents engaged in a technically and socially differentiated field of production.[166]

Given the felt need for commercialization of literary production in early twentieth-century Bengal, illustrated miscellanies emerged as the most successful modality of forging this space for the average reader. The major illustrated periodicals had stable and long print runs, generated enough profits to maintain their own office staff and printing presses and also sufficed as the editor's income. Profitability was crucial to the organization and functioning of the illustrated periodicals. But profit alone could not have been the single rationale for realizing a "widest possible public". The imperative for an expansive sphere came from the nationalist conviction that a mature public anticipated the national collective and the literary medium was potentially the most effectual communicative mode for generating critical opinion and aesthetic tastes. In its attempt to work out a middle ground, *Prabāsī* for instance, had to continuously negotiate the demands of popular accessibility and its self-projection as an upper-crust journal.

A second experiment towards making the literary sphere more inclusive came from Pramatha Chaudhuri, a barrister by profession and close kin of the Tagores by marriage. From the turn-of-the-century years, Chaudhuri had made a mark as an erudite commentator on social and political issues and as a connoisseur of French literature. His journal *Sabuj Patra* (1914) in a way marked an aversion to the palpable commercial trends of the day. By 1914, another popular illustrated monthly, *Bhāratbarṣa* patronized by Dwijendralal Roy and edited by Jaladhar Sen had been launched, further expanding the market for the

166 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p. 126.

miscellanies. By contrast, *Sabuj Patra* was conceived as a small-sized journal with limited fiction content and devoid of illustrations and advertisements. Rabindranath later explained that the journal was consciously intended as a turn away from the lure of profitability (*munāfā*).[167] *Sabuj Patra* though short lived made a huge impact in terms of reshaping literary language. Chaudhuri pioneered the use of *calit bhāṣā* (the spoken form) in literature and encouraged Rabindranath to use it in his novel *Ghare Bāire* that appeared in *Sabuj Patra*.[168] Traditionally *sādhu bhāṣā* was accepted as the medium for formal and literary writing. As a corollary *calit bhāṣā* became identified with women and marginal groups in society – the less educated and the functionally literate who were seen as incapable of using the genteel or *sādhu* form. Chaudhuri was not the first to make a case for the spoken form but he did so more systematically than his predecessors by standardizing the spoken dialect of Calcutta. *Sabuj Patra* became the medium through which he formulated a calibrated (and genteel) form of *calit bhāṣā* – readable and easily accessible by average reader groups.[169] The practice of *calit bhāṣā* was therefore a conscious strategy to make the Bengali literary sphere more inclusive, an alternative experiment to commercialization. Referring to Chaudhuri's writings Tagore anticipated that they would come in for a lot of criticism which he believed was a crucial sign of readers internalizing the new style of writings.[170] Readers' existing aesthetic sensibilities Tagore argued would initially resist innovations in writings but as they adapted new literary tastes their response matured much like a fruit from being raw and sour when green to being full-grown and sweet on ripening.[171] *Sabuj Patra* indicated a major shift towards democratic possibilities within the public sphere while also underscoring the problems of running a literary journal financially unsupported by advertisements.

167 Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Sudhindranath Dutta, *Paricaẏ*, Yr. 1 # 2, Kārtik 1338 / October-November 1931.

168 The better known of Tagore's works that appeared in *Sabuj Patra* before *Ghare Bāire* were *Galpasaptak* and *Caturaṅga*. Pramatha Chaudhuri's four-part story *Cār Iẏārī Kathā* appeared in *Sabuj Patra*.

169 The debate on *calit bhāṣā* was not unique to *Sabuj Patra*. It was tied to the agendas of formation, modernization and standardization of Bengali prose since the early decades of the nineteenth century. *Sabuj Patra*'s significance lay in that it directly linked *calit bhāṣā* to the process of literary socialization. Subsequent journals like the immensely popular *Dhūmketu* and the modernist writers adopted *calit bhāṣā*. Its implementation in high-brow literature proved to be a significant means towards democratization of the public sphere. For its opponents, *calit bhāṣā* symbolized the potential vulnerability of the public sphere and the danger of descent into vulgarity.

170 Rabindranath Tagore to Pramatha Chaudhuri, Letter from Ramgarh dated Jyaiṣṭha 22, 1321.

171 Rabindranath Tagore to Pramatha Chaudhuri, Letter from Bolpur dated Śrāvaṇ 15, 1321.

The anxiety about an expanding literary sphere giving way to degeneration became particularly acute in the post-War years. Akshay Kumar Sarkar noted with displeasure that the upshot of the prevalent socio-economic calamity was a moral degeneration of the middle classes or *madhyabitta* that expressed itself through poor reading habits, particularly the pursuit of cheap sensation fiction.[172] The stiff conditions generated by the War led many unemployed educated young men to take to the writing vocation, producing titillating fiction on orders from publishers.[173] For publicists like Sarkar, the enticement of money in lieu of writing and the production of literature on demand (*farmāẏesī sāhitya sṛjan*)[174] were tantamount to a subversion of creativity to market demands and an infiltration of the money market into what had traditionally constituted a sanctified and inviolable domain of letters. To many twentieth-century intellectuals who were unable to accept or cope with the increased commercialization of the publishing world and bemoaned the passing of a productive era in literary creation, the nineteenth century appeared as a time when publishers, printers and book-sellers were in service of authors.[175] The monopoly of the publisher in terms of controlling finances and dictating what writers ought to write in order to get their works published marked a crucial transformation in the ways in which literary production in the twentieth century had come to be perceived. For the unemployed young men cornered (*konṭhāsā*) into the literary field (*sāhitya kṣetra*) literary capital (*sāhityik muldhan*) did not comprise of education (*bidyā*), talent (*pratibhā*) or an aesthetic spirit (*sāhityik hṛdaẏ*).[176] Rather the only factor making them writers (*sāhityik*) was the compulsion of 'hunger'.[177] The only means it was argued by which these young writers could lay claim to some literary fame was the popularity of their uncritical vernacular adaptation of sensational themes from Western literature and an equally naïve imitation of linguistic techniques of established Bengali writers.[178] The outcome according to Sarkar was the replication in the

172 Akshay Kumar Sarkar, 'Madhyabitter Bṛtti Samasyā' (Job crises of the middle class), *Baṅgavāṇī*, Āṣāṛh 1330 / June-July 1923. Akshay Kumar Sarkar, 'Samālocanā' (critique), *Baṅgavāṇī*, Śrāvaṇ 1330 / July-August 1923.

173 Akshay Kumar Sarkar, 'Madhyabitter Bṛtti Samasyā'.

174 Akshay Kumar Sarkar, 'Samālocanā'.

175 Sarkar, 'Samālocanā'.

176 Raymond Williams argues that literary consciousness is constituted by knowledge, imagination and a sense of social responsibility. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 1977, pp. 132–133.

177 'Samālocanā'.

178 Interestingly enough sensation fictions and detective stories were popular reading choices. The Report on 1911 observed, "...The greater portion of the literature consisted of sensational and detective stories translated or adapted from English novelists."

field of literary production of the industrial model of relationship between the capitalist-businessman (*dhanī*) and his subordinate labor-employees (*karmī*).[179] Majority of writers therefore changed from being *sāhitya-sevī* (in the service of literature) to *sāhitya-karmī* (in the employment of literature) – being forced to produce mainly for entertainment on orders from their trader employer, the publisher.[180]

This shift from service to employment, from "few powerful writers" to "numerous less-able writers" was a necessary precondition for the commercialization of literary production. Commercialization thus carried both promises and perils. The expansion of literacy, refinement of taste and nurturing critical opinion were desirable if a democratizing nationalist public space had to become a reality. Yet, with increasing differentiation of participatory groups, the threat of anarchy in the literary public sphere loomed large.

From patronage to subscription: Historical researches have documented the colonial state's role in fashioning a language policy, producing and disseminating 'knowledge' about Indian languages, and mediating in crucial ways to modernize and standardize the administrative vernaculars like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and Tamil. In north India for instance, government and court patronage coexisted, the royal courts in Banaras, Rewa and Chattarpur being the main source of patronage for Braj Bhāṣā poets.[181] In mid and late nineteenth-century Bengal the literary system, including periodical production depended to a large extent on government patronage and that of the rich landed elites. Kaliprasanna Sinha, the education enthusiast, bought and donated a printing machine to the Tattvabodhinī Sabha and was used for printing the *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*.[182] Similarly, the Sobhabazar zamindar Kamalkrishna Deb Bahadur had endowed Monomohan Basu's *Madhyastha* journal with two printing press and several typesets.[183] The Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ (The Bengal Academy of Literature), a bureaucratic initiative at start, was largely a nationalist effort on part of the indigenous literati and patronized by wealthy landlords like the Sobhabazar and Kasimbazar zamindars. Besides, in the nineteenth-century print market, the elite had been the main benefactors of book production and had as much of a participatory function in the literary system as ordinary folks.

179 Ibid.

180 Ibid.

181 Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 158.

182 Gautam Bhadra, "Kathā 4: Bijñāpaner Tukitaki", *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?*, p. 301.

183 Ibid.

The Sobhabazar family owned publishing house *Śabdakalpadrum* had been the early sponsors of the *Guptakathā* (i.e. the secret tales) series.[184]

Periodicals publication was however different from book production in that it required sustained flow of funds if it had to appear with regularity. Funds for periodicals were not readily forthcoming even from elites, barring a few exceptions. Most literary periodicals since *Baṅgadarśan* were funded by the editors or their patrons, with very little coming in by way of subscriptions. *Baṅgadarśan* was nearly fully funded by Bankim, *Bhāratī* for the most part was a Tagore family enterprise and Ramananda Chattopadhyay's first editorial venture *Pradīp* was funded by a co-editor Baikunthanath Das.[185] The column head "Number of Copies printed" in the quarterly returns of the Bengal Library indicate that the market for periodicals had been a very limited one, being confined to mostly the better educated upper and middle classes. Almost none of these periodicals of the late nineteenth century recorded more than 2000 print copies per issue. Again, given that each issue sold for barely a few annas even in the 1920s, subscription income would probably have generated a very small proportion of the working finances. Funds from advertisements too were not readily available and one sees few advertisements in these early periodicals. Even into the opening years of the twentieth century the better known standard periodicals like *Sāhitya* or *Bhāratī* carried few advertisements. Even *Antaḥpur* and *Mahilā* could barely secure a couple of advertisements for each issue, although manufacturers of products like toiletries and jewelry could easily have reached out to a ready female clientele through advertising their products in these women's periodicals. Editors therefore increasingly sought to regularize subscriptions but subscription dues were not yet seen as equivalent to prices of marketable commodities. At the time Rabindranath edited *Sādhanā* in the 1890s, subscription to periodicals was called *dān* literally meaning donation.[186] In less than a decade's time the editorial office of *Antaḥpur* is seen notifying its readers that the defaulter among them should clear their annual dues to ensure the journal's regularity.[187] *Mahilā* frequently brought out list of subscribers (*Mūlyaprāpti*, Receipt of Dues) who had their dues up-to-date.[188] These references

184 Gautam Bhadra, "Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?" in *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?*, p. 210.

185 Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p. 263.

186 Letter from Dwijendralal Roy to Rabindranath Tagore dated September 06, 1895, Rabindra-Bhavan Archives, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan. In this letter Roy urges Tagore not to be shy about reminding subscribers to pay their dues. He also introduces two of his friends who were interested in subscribing *Sādhanā*.

187 "Biśeṣ Draṣṭbya" (Special attention – a notification given by the Manager of the *Antaḥpur* office), *Antaḥpur*, Year 5, # 3, Āṣāṛh 1309 / June-July 1902.

188 *Mahilā*, Year 10, # 8, Phālgun 1311 / February-March 1905.

indicate that the periodical market was still very unsteady, production being almost entirely contingent upon continuous flow of subscription dues (which again was minimal) and a readership still not quite accustomed to the new distributive mode of sending in subscription through postal money orders and receiving monthly issues by mail.[189] By the early 1920s, editors like Ramananda Chattopadhyay emphatically referred to subscription dues as *dām* or *dar* (both words meaning price), indicating a steady commercialization of the market for illustrated miscellanies and putting a price tag on the content that *Prabāsī* offered. Illustrated miscellanies like *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* would develop self-sustaining production – generating funds by securing large domestic markets and procuring reasonably steady advertisements. Most literary periodicals that followed the older pattern of smaller size, few illustrations and lesser content would however continue to face fund crunches – subscriptions that never took off and very few advertisements. Dwindling subscriptions was the singular reason why many excellent periodicals wrapped up. These included, among others, Pramatha Chaudhuri's *Sabuj Patra* (1914), Chittaranjan Das's *Nārāẏaṇ*, Gokulchandra Nag and Dineshranjan Das's *Kallol* (1923), several women's and Bengali Muslim periodicals.

Towards the close of the Swadeshi phase, Rabindranath spoke of an intensifying urge amongst Bengalis to associate: "…commitment to Bengali literature has not intensified suddenly. The reason behind this is the awareness to bond … today we feel the need to come together in as many ways as we possibly can…"[190] The public life of the nation rather than any artificial cartographic boundary Tagore argued, had made it possible to identify Bengalis as Bengalis. And this ingenuity was a strength that had not been acquired through prayers and petitions (*bhikṣā-labdha nahe*)".[191] Given the intelligentsia's faith in publicity, the *pāṭhak samāj* or the community of readers was postulated as a very real form of social solidarity. Most importantly though, the circulation of an impressive array of literary periodicals, the general proficiency that literary journalism was acquiring and periodicals' closeness to the everyday lives of middle-class readers, made it possible to conceive of the nation through the imagined community of the *pāṭhak samāj* and *sāhitya sebā* as exemplifying dedication to the nation.

---

189 Francesca Orsini argues that during the 1920s, Hindi magazines continuously insisted that readers ought to become *sthāẏī grāhak* or permanent subscribers so that the publishers could be have financial security. Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, p. 60.

190 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sāhitya-Sammelan' in *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Year VI, Number 11, Phālgun 1314 / February-March 1908. This was Tagore's presidential address at the sāhitya-sammelan held at Kasimbazar.

191 Ibid.

The possibilities that an emergent literary sphere held out however were seriously strained by anxieties that accompanied commercialization of print. The following chapter looks closely at the production of large circulation illustrated monthlies. Through a detailed study of Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī*, it tries to tease out the contest between a commercializing market for periodicals and the quest for high art. Its innovative features and professionalized production and distribution systems secured a large market, probably for the first time for any periodical in the history of print in colonial India. Yet, firmly implicated as it was in a Rabindric aesthetic, *Prabāsī* found it difficult to expand its market beyond a certain threshold.

CHAPTER 2

The Social Space of *māsik patrikā*: Periodicals Market and Readership

In her reminiscences, the writer Jyotirmoyee Devi (1896–1988) recollected how as a young girl during the opening decade of the twentieth century, she helped her uncle organize the family library. While books were simply numbered and shelved without classification of any kind, periodicals were sorted and set aside to be sent off for leather binding. She mentions that her job at the end of every Bengali year was to tear off the advertisement pages from *Bhāratī*, *Prabāsī* and *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) – periodicals the family subscribed and organize them consecutively in order of issues before they were sent to the book binder.[1] Decades later, an art-critic Manindrabhusan Gupta writing for the renowned women's journal *Baṅgalakṣmī*, would describe the most common art preferences among middle classes,

> As art, most people value faces of cuddly babies appearing in advertisement of baby food producers such as Glaxo and pretty women in advertisements found in two-penny magazines that are sold at railway stalls … And what kind of art do they [a section of the middle classes] collect? On visiting their homes, one is likely to find illustration of *siktabasanā*[2] cut out from the pages of a widely circulated Calcutta-based monthly, framed and put up on the wall.[3]

From Jyotirmoyee Devi's testimony it is evident that by the opening years of the twentieth century, periodicals had become cherished possessions in educated Bengali homes, worthy of preservation for posterity. In deed private collections of periodicals either handed down through generations within the family or donated to various public libraries across the city of Calcutta,

1 Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Smṛti Bismṛtir Taraṅge* (Amidst the waves of remembrances and forgetting), Calcutta, pp. 29–30.

2 The *siktabasanā* (literally woman in drenched drape) is a reference to a series of illustrations by the artist Hemendranath Majumdar, of just-bathed and bathing women in rural settings. The illustrations were usually accompanied by a verse couplet from the medieval Vaishnava *padābalī* and appeared in *Māsik Basumatī* during the 1920s and 30s.

3 Manindrabhusan Gupta, "Bāṅglār Citrakalā" (Arts of Bengal), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1337 / November-December 1930. The popular Calcutta based monthly that Gupta makes an allusion to here is probably *Māsik Basumatī*.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_004

constitute a significant proportion of the accessible archive of early twentieth-century periodicals. By the early thirties, as Gupta's observations about prevalent artistic tastes among the middle classes indicate, monthlies had become an almost ubiquitous presence in middle-class homes, a chief purveyor of artworks and a cultural agent mediating their readers' aesthetic sensibilities. One of the few extant artefacts that entered and circulated within a large number of Bengali middle-class homes, monthly periodicals or *māsik patrikā* became a significant, if not indispensable commodity of quotidian use.

The early twentieth-century decades correspond to a relatively mature phase of print when reading practices had moved beyond printed versions of pre-print genres and the performance of reading itself was shifting from being a communal and shared act to a more solitary one. In dealing with the question of Bengali readership beyond the phase of early print culture, this chapter probes how periodical publishing aimed for the domestic market and how periodical reading emerged as a form of entertainment specific to modern urban living. Literary periodicals unlike several other print genres, straddled both the private and public worlds of the colonial middle classes. Whether the home or the reading room of a library, the spaces of periodical reading were comparatively silent corners tucked away from public glare. Temporally too, periodical reading interfered with neither office work in case of men nor household chores of women. Nor did it ever claim to be a surrogate of formal education. Yet, the implications of periodical reading for crafting and democratizing a modern public sphere were profound. Though actively aiding the processes of diffusion of print, periodicals were not simply instruments for shaping and managing public opinion. They had a more intangible role to play – to create aesthetically minded and socially sensible readers. Yet such efforts towards making of ideal readers and a modern public life for the nation would not be a seamless one. The periodicals market would be weighed down by conflicting pulls of commercialization and democratization of print, the emergence of alternative audiences, the ambiguous reach of vernacular education among the masses and the perpetual quest for high-brow literature that would define a sub-national Bengali identity.

This chapter looks at the commercial dimensions of periodical publishing by focussing on the making of a new class of periodical, the *sacitra māsik patrikā* or the illustrated monthly miscellany. Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī*, was a skilfully crafted illustrated miscellany that for the first time, acquired any semblance of a mass circulating periodical. Yet its circulation remained restricted by constrains of capital and the limited scope of Bengali education among masses. But even as the marketability of the artefact remained ambiguous, periodicals did manage to create a niche in Bengali middle class lives.

1 Making of the *sacitra māsik patrikā*: Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī*

1.1 *Beginnings and Organization*

Looking back on the early years of the twentieth century Rabindranath Tagore recollected in the avant-garde literary journal *Paricaẏ*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay had "proved that the variety and punctuality with which he offered *Prabāsī* would be extremely popular … Large in size, adorned with plenty of illustrations and an incredulous range of compositions … It was hard to believe that such a priceless commodity would be successful in Bengal … Since then all other monthlies that appeared emulated *Prabāsī.* Whatever newness that was noticeable was only in appearance lay out and quantity of feature materials – more pictures, more stories, etc."[4] Rabindranath credited Ramananda Chattopadhyay for having imbibed professionalism in contemporary literary journalism and making the periodical format more generally accessible. *Prabāsī* was initiated in Prayag (Allahabad) in the United Province from Baiśākh 1308 / April-May 1901 and moved to Calcutta in 1908. The *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books and Periodicals* (1901) rendered the term in English as 'Sojourner'. In the inaugural editorial Ramananda Chattopadhyay drew readers' attention to the fact that *Prabāsī* was the first Bengali literary endeavor of its kind outside Bengal. *Prabāsī* was brought out by the Indian Press of Chintamani Ghosh – an established printing house that also brought out the important Hindi literary journal *Sarasvātī* and was initially the publisher of Rabindranath's books until the latter withdrew copyrights in favor of the Visva-Bharati Press at Santiniketan.[5] *Prabāsī* was printed on demy sheets with clear fonts and very minor typographical errors. By the early 1920s a month's *Prabāsī* typically consisted on an average one hundred and forty five pages. The journal stood out for its regular fees to writers and artists, consistent publication at thirty-one day interval, introduction of colored plates, flawless print and attractive frontage. The materiality of the periodical – its appearance and presentation was a clear indication of a commercializing literary market where the form of the print media was being foregrounded to achieve an immediate impact upon readers, persuade renewal of subscriptions and lure new subscribers. Within a few years of its

4 Rabindranath Tagore, Letter to Sudhindranath Dutta, printed in *Paricaẏ* Kārtik, 1338 / October-November 1931.

5 Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, p. 58. According to Shanta Devi, the Indian Press opened a separate Bengali print department for *Prabāsī* and *Sarasvatī* probably was the product of Ghosh's discussions with Chattopadhyay. Once *Prabāsī* moved to Calcutta, it was printed at the Kuntalin Press.

initiation, *Prabāsī* came to dominate the periodicals market in Bengal with large circulation and a long print run (1901–1974; Ramananda Chattopadhyay having been the editor from 1901–1943). Chattopadhyay's daughter Shanta Devi later recollected *Prabāsī*'s modest beginnings, being entirely a family enterprise, almost like a 'cottage-industry'. His wife Manorama Devi helped in packaging and maintaining accounts while the children chipped into stick stamps, arrange papers, etc. During the periodical's early years, Manorama Devi had decided to limit household expenditures to a bare minimum of Rs 150 per month. Of this meager amount Rs 60–65 was spent on the children's education, an expense which the Chattopadhyays were not willing to compromise on.[6] In its Allahabad days, a handful of émigré Bengalis notably Debendranath Sen, Bamandas Basu, Jogeshchandra Roy and Bijoychandra Majumdar actively contributed to the journal. Once *Prabāsī* moved to Calcutta it began to be published from the Kuntalin Press and its office was moved to Cornwallis Street in north Calcutta.

The name *Prabāsī* (literally meaning émigré) aroused many meanings. Some interpreted it to refer to its origin outside Bengal. The renowned physicist, Jagadish Chandra Bose, observed that the couplet on the covers of early *Prabāsī* – "[You] have become outsiders in your own land / surrendering everything in servility" – implied the nation's subjection: the national community which was an expatriate in its own land.[7] For the noted historian Nikhilnath Ray *Prabāsī* transported the ideological inheritance of *Baṅgadarśan* beyond the provincial limits of Bengal into the unfamiliar domains of *prabās* (foreign land).[8] The frontage (*pracchad*) of the very first issue of *Prabāsī* sought to represent a notional transformation from *prabās* to *svadeś* of areas within Indian territoriality. *Prabāsī* appeared in a bright and attractive cover studded with pictures of several heritage monuments each representing formative epochs in the history of the South Asian subcontinent: the Amaravati temple of the Gupta period, Taj Mahal in Agra, Burmese Pagoda, Qutb Minar at Delhi, Buddhist monastery of Bodhgaya, Golden Temple of the Sikhs at Amritsar, the

---

6 Shanta Devi, *Bhārat-Mukti Sādhak*: *Ramananda Chattopadhyay o Ardhasatābdīr Bāṅglā*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, p. 137 and p. 186.

7 Correspondence from Jagadish Chandra Bose to Ramananda Chattopadhyay on the occasion of *Prabāsī*'s twenty-fifth anniversary. Compiled along with other complements in "Āśīrbād o Svastibācan" (Blessings and well wishes), *Prabāsī*, v. 26, pt. 1# 1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926, the couplet read:

Nij bāsbhūme parabāsī hole
paradās-kṣhate samuday̌ dile
[We are outsiders in our own country / you've renounced everything to erase the wound of servitude]

8 Shanta Devi, op. cit. p. 140.

Lingaraja temple at Bhubaneswar and Gateway to the Sanchi Stupa.[9] This *prac-chad* would become the regular frontage of the magazine, identifying the nation through the magnificence of its artistic traditions.[10] The illustrations not only reminded readers about the architectural splendors of ancient India, but also generated association with an idealized national space that transcended their mundane everyday lives as ordinary people. The visual arrangement of historical sites, some of them thriving as pilgrimage shrines, produced an integrative sense of the nation beyond linguistic frontiers to include other regions and communities. *Prabāsī* would regularly feature articles on various sites of historic and religious interests in the subcontinent, accompanied by pictures of the monuments. The visual impact of these in reinforcing the meanings of 'Bengal', 'India' and the outside world led to clearer distinction in terms of *svadeś / prabās*. The prominence accorded to historic creations outside Bengal endorsed an emerging idea of territoriality where Bengal and India both represented *svadeś* or the nation.[11] The first issue carried a series of pictures of the fifth-century Gupta period cave paintings at Ajanta in western India accompanied by a historical and descriptive write-up by the editor himself – probably the first of its kind in Bengali miscellanies.[12] Ramendrasundar Trivedi, a distinguished philosopher and professor of Chemistry and Nikhilnath Ray commended the editor's compiling acumen.[13] Such essays on architectural sites complemented by photographic representations became a common feature of *Prabāsī* and all subsequent illustrated monthlies.

It retained the reputation of being an upper crust journal and attracted the finest writers in Bengali literature, many of whose literary careers took off once they managed to get their first efforts published in *Prabāsī*.[14] Older contemporaries of *Prabāsī* like *Sāhitya*, *Bhāratī*, *Nabyabhārat*, and *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan* carried similar fiction, essays and verse, in terms of content and

9 Ibid., p. 138. Eminent scholars like Priyanath Sen and Abinashchandra Das praised the innovativeness of *Prabāsī*'s cover.

10 Tapati Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c. 1850–1920* (Cambridge South Asian Studies, 52), Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1992, p. 138.

11 Shanta Devi, op. cit. p. 138.

12 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Ajantā Guhā Citrābalī" (The artwork of the Ajanta caves), *Prabāsī*, v.1, # 1, Baiśākh 1308 / April-May 1901. Later issues of the first volume would carry similar essays on historical sites accompanied by photographic illustrations: Nagendrachandra Nag, "Fatehpur Sikri", *Prabāsī* v.1 # 11 & 12, Phālgun o Caitra, 1308 / February-March and March-April 1902.

13 Shanta Devi, op. cit., pp. 139–140.

14 Achintyakumar Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, Calcutta, 1950, p. 140.

quality. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore,[15] his siblings Dwijendranath Tagore, Satyendranath Tagore, Jyotirindranath Tagore and Swarnakumari Devi, Abanindranath Tagore, Pramatha Chaudhuri, Satyendranath Dutta, Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay, Chattopadhyay's daughters Sita Devi and Shanta Devi were regular writers. Bipinchandra Pal, Haraprasad Shastri, Srishchandra Majumdar, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Akshay Kumar Maitreya, Dineshchandra Sen, Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay, Manilal Gangopadhyay, Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay, Jatindramohan Bagchi, Bijoychandra Majumdar, Nirupama Devi, Saratkumari Chaudhurani, Girindramohini Dasi, Nagendrabala Sarasvatī, Prabhabati Devi Saraswati and a host of other established and amateur writers contributed concurrently to several of these journals. It would perhaps not be an exaggeration to suggest that the range of prevailing literary tastes that *Prabāsī* espoused were shaped substantially by Rabindranath Tagore and Ramananda Chattopadhyay – the two being not just good friends but sharing in a common cultural ethos as well.[16] Every issue of *Prabāsī* aimed at variety and featured multiple serial novels,[17] short stories, essays spanning a wide range of subjects, poems, news clips, general knowledge and discussion sections, features for women and children and above all an extremely forthright and persuasive editorial from Chattopadhyay himself. Some of the best pieces in Bengali literature appeared in the pages of the *Prabāsī*. It would not be an exaggeration to say that writings of almost all major Bengali intellectuals are to be found in the magazine. For aspiring poets and fiction-writers *Prabāsī* was the platform for making a serious debut in Bengali literary venture. Many of Rabindranath's major works notably his novel *Gorā* (Rabindranath cred-

15 Rabindranath Tagore started writing for *Prabāsī* from around 1314 Baṅgābda i.e. 1907 after he quit as the editor of *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*).

16 Both Ramananda and Rabindranath were Brahmo affiliated to the Adi Brahmo Samaj, presided by Debendranath Tagore and subsequently Rabindranath himself. Rabindranath's Brahmacarya *āśram* that later became the Visva-Bharati University was located in Bolpur in Birbhum district. Ramananda Chattopadhyay's ancestral family residence was also in Birbhum district. One comes across innumerable essays in *Prabāsī* on Birbhum's local history and archaeology, one of the most regular writers being Sibratan Mitra, one of the founder-editors of the monthly *Mānasī* (1909–1915).

17 In the course of any given year, three to five novels ran serially. For instance the 1320 / 1913 *Prabāsī* (randomly chosen year) had four novels running concurrently: Abinashchandra Das's *Araṇyabās* (Dwelling in the forests), Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay's *Āguner Fulkī* (Sparks of fire), Nirupama Devi's *Didi* (Elder sister) and Sourindramohan Mukhopadhyay's *Mṝtyumocan* (Erasing death). Similarly the 1318 / 1911 volume serialized three novels: Satyendranath Dutta's *Janmadukhī* (Ill-fortuned since birth), Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay's *Nabīn Sannyāsī* (The young ascetic) and Manilal Gangopadhyay's *Bhāgyacakra* (The wheel of fortune). This trend would be further heightened by periodicals like *Bhāratbarṣa* (1913) and particularly *Māsik Basumatī* (1922).

ited the *Prabāsī* editor for prodding him to write *Gorā* and most of the novels and short stories that appeared in the journal),[18] his memoir *Jībansmṛti*,[19] lyrical drama *Acalāẏatan*,[20] numerous essays, poems and songs appeared in the journal.[21] So did the scientist Prafullachandra Ray's famous essays including *Bāṅgālīr Anna-Samasyā* and several others on plant life by the renowned physicist Jagadish Chandra Bose.[22] Jagadananda Ray, a scientist, who later on taught at Rabindranath's Visva-Bharati University, wrote numerous essays on popular science.[23] Historians Jadunath Sarkar and Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay wrote regularly on history and archaeological findings.[24] Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, an economist and social scientist contributed on questions of social thought.[25] Jyotirindranath Tagore was a prolific translator of European, espe-

---

18 Rabindranath Tagore to Ramananda Chattopadhyay, *Ciṭhi Patra* v.12, correspondence # 52. Shanta Devi mentions that Chattopadhyay had given Rabindranath an advance of Rs. 300/ for a serial novel for *Prabāsī*. Chattopadhyay, according to Shanta Devi had also mentioned that there was no compulsion on Tagore to write anything for that matter. *Gorā* was serialized for about two and a half years from Bhādra 1314 (August-September 1907) to Phālgun 1316 (February-March 1910). Shanta Devi also mentions that Rabindranath was very punctual in sending the *Gorā* episodes. Apparently he did not fail even when his minor son Samindranath passed away. Shanta Devi, op. cit., p. 190.

19 *Jībansmṛti* was serialized in *Prabāsī* from Bhādra 1318 / August-September 1911.

20 *Acalāẏatan* (The abode of immobility) was serialized in *Prabāsī* from Āśvin 1318 / September-October 1911.

21 Some of Rabindranath's major essays appeared in *Prabāsī* immediately after *Gorā*: "Byādhi o Pratikār" (Afflictions and their resolutions; Śrāvaṇ 1314), "Nabayuger Uṯsab" (The celebrations of the new era; 1315), "Pūrba O Paścim" (The east and west; 1315), "Sadupaẏ" (A meaningful way; 1315), and "Samasyā" (Dilemma; 1315). "Paścimjātrīr Dāẏārī" (Diary of the westward voyager in 1332 / 1925). *Raktakarabī* appeared in *Prabāsī* v.25 pt.1#1, Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925.

22 Jagadish Chandra Bose, "Udbhider Hṛṯspandan" (Life of plants), *Prabāsī*, v.25 pt.2 #3, Pouṣ 1332 / December 1925-January 1926.

23 Jagadananda Ray's science essays were written in very simple and unassuming languages that was at least potentially, easily accessible to all readers. The subjects of his essays ranged from the mysteries of the universe, 'Jyotiṣka Yaṯkiñciṯ', Kārtik, 1318 / Nov-Dec 1911 to the science behind simple household things like, 'Dadhī' (Yogurt), Bhādra, 1318 / Aug-Sept 1911.

24 For instance: Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay, 'Bhojbarmār Tāmraśāsan' (Copperplates from the reign of Bhojbarma), Śrāvaṇ 1318 / July-Aug 1911 and 'Mahānābik Buddhagupta' (Buddhagupta was one of the later Gupta dynasty rulers of the fifth century CE), Āśvin 1318 / Sept-Oct 1911. Jadunath Sarkar, 'Pūrvvabaṅga' (eastern Bengal), a review of Jatindramohan Roy's *Dhākār Itihās* (A history of Dhaka), Śrāvaṇ, 1320 / July-Aug 1913. Amritalal Shil, "Bardāi Kabi Cā̃der Mahākābya Pṛthvīrāj Rāsor Aitihāsikatā" (The historicity of Chand Bardai's epic Prithviraj Raso), *Prabāsī*, v.25 pt.2 #3, Pouṣ 1332 / December -January 1925–26.

25 Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay was particularly concerned with questions of rural reforms ('Pallī Saṃskār', Bhādra 1320 / Aug-Sept 1913) and *lokaśikṣā* or public education ('Lokaśikṣār

cially French works while his elder sibling Dwijendranath Tagore contributed mainly on philosophy and theology.[26]

From the late nineteenth-century Bengali professionals – civil servants, magistrates, doctors and teachers had started moving to other parts of the subcontinent. The colonial administration's vast civil, medical, educational and military networks required posting these Bengali professionals elsewhere in India. Most of these people were bilingually educated and served in lucrative assignments. *Prabāsī* carried biographies and photographs of these accomplished Bengalis outside the territorial frontiers of the Bengal province, including those who travelled outside the subcontinent. Gyanendramohan Das wrote a series of essays on the accomplishments and lives of *prabāsī Bāṅgālī* (expatriate Bengalis).[27] Besides Ramananda Chattopadhyay too wrote substantially on Bengal's émigrés including laboring communities from Bengal who had migrated to various parts of the world.[28] Gyanendramohan Das's essays were a feature unique to *Prabāsī*. No other literary journal of the period devoted so much space to the achievements of expatriate Bengalis, their life experiences, difficulties and challenges. It was not simply a reminder about the origin of the periodical. Rather through such features, the periodical sought to create an affinity between Bengalis resident in the home province and those outside of it. Besides, discussions about Bengali communities resident in far off places like the Punjab or the North-West reinforced the cartographic sense of the nation in the imagination of its readers. *Prabāsī* continued to be the only literary mis-

Praṇālī', Kārtik 1318 / November-December, 1911). This would start a prolonged debate between him and intellectuals like Lalitkumar Chattopadhyay on public education and the role of the literati as *lokaśikṣak*.

26 Dwijendranath Tagore's serialized commentary on the *Gītā* started in Baiśākh 1318 / April-May 1911. Though primarily a writer on philosophy and theology, he also wrote on colonial rule and modes of indigenous resistance.

27 Gyanendramohan Das, "Uttar-Paścim Pradeś, Ayodhyā o Punjābe Bāṅgālī" (Bengali settlers in the north-western provinces, Ayodhya and Punjab) and "Baṅger Bāhire Baṅgasāhitya" (Bengali literature outside Bengal), *Prabāsī* v. 1 # 11 & 12, Phālgun and Caitra 1308 / February-March and March-April 1902. "Uttar Paścime Baṅgasāhitya" (Bengali literature in the north western provinces), *Prabāsī*, v.1 # 3 Āṣāṛh and # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1308 /June-July and July-August 1901. "Pātiẏālāẏe Bāṅgālī" (Bengalis in Patiyala), *Prabāsī*, v.22 pt.2 #2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1329 / November-December 1922.

28 Chattopadhyay wrote on Manmathanath Bhattacharya (Accountant General of the Punjab Province, 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', Māgh 1315 / Jan-Feb 1909), Satishchandra Bandyopadhyay (Advocate at the Allahabad HC, 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', Jyaiṣṭha 1322 / May-June 1915), Sir Pratulchandra Chattopadhyay (Judge at the Lahore Chief Court, 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', Bhādra 1324 / Aug-Sept 1917), Nirmalchandra Mallick ('Bibidha Prasaṅga', Pouṣ 1324 / Dec-Jan 1917–18), Bamandas Basu (Civil Surgeon, retired as Major and an occasional writer in *Prabāsī* on places he was posted in the course of his medical career 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', Pouṣ 1337 / December-January 1930–31).

cellany in Bengali that appealed to large sections of the Bengali émigré community living in the Hindi speaking heartlands until *Uttarā* started in 1925.[29]

1.2 Prabāsī*'s Innovations and Popularity*

1.2.1 New Features

Prabāsī's innovativeness lay in its feature sections that constituted public forums for communication amongst a virtual community of readers. These were major initiatives in attempting to widen the literary public space by making the periodical form beneficial for everyday lives of ordinary people and involving readers outside educated circles of elites. These significantly altered the meaning of and need for literature as a mode of public engagement in so far as those contributing to these sections were usually well-informed ordinary readers, rather than the familiar, regular writers. These new features enhanced the periodical's capacity as a communicative mode, creating space for readers individually unknown to each other to come together and exchange knowledge of general and utilitarian interests. The *Ālocanā* (discussion) section of *Prabāsī* was the first of its kind in Bengali periodicals.[30] It comprised of criticism and discussion of essays that appeared in *Prabāsī* and also offered authors a chance to respond to readers and critics. The *Pustak Paricaẏ* (presenting books) section consisted of reviews of recently published Bengali books while *Kaṣṭipāthar* (touch stone) consisted of selections from various contemporary Bengali periodicals.[31] The *Pañcaśasya* (assorted grains) section was conceived as a counterpart of *Kaṣṭipāthar*, consisting of selections from international magazines from Europe, North America and East Asia.[32] The introductory note to the new feature *Betāler Baiṭhak* (the phantom's assembly) described it as a section

29 *Uttarā* edited by Atulprasad Sen and Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay was published by the Prabāsī Baṅga Sāhitya Sammilanī based at Lucknow and printed at the Indian Press at Banaras, the same press from where the early *Prabāsī* was printed. It continued until the late 1950s and was contributed to mostly by expatriate Bengalis in north India.

30 Ramananda Chattopadhyay to Nalinikumar Bhadra quoted in Shanta Devi, op. cit., p. 115. As many as three consecutive issues could be devoted to discussions on a particular theme. This process of exchange between authors and their readers and amongst readers took place within an expanding and commercializing market for periodical literature. As a result these essays and their discussions brought to the fore the crucial issues at stake for Bengali cultural and national sensibility.

31 For instance the Jyaiṣṭha 1320 / May-June 1913 *Prabāsī* Kaṣṭipāthar section contained selections from the Baiśākh 1320 *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā* (Kshitimohan Sen's essay "*Tīrthayātrā*" or pilgrimage) and Baiśākh 1320 / April-May 1913 *Bhāratī* (Abanindranath Tagore's short story "*Yugmatārā*" or the twin stars).

32 46 Selections were taken from *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Literary Digest*, *East and West*, *The Survey*, *Current Opinion*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Sun*, *Outlook*, *Hibbert Journal*, *La Croix*, *Les Documents du Progress*, *Japan Magazine* etc. *Pañcaśasya* also contained reviews and

২য় সংখ্যা] ছেলেদের পাত্তাড়ি—প্রকৃতির পাঠশালা ২৩৯

গর দিকে, কোনোটার নীচের দিকে ; পেঁপে ভেরেণ্ডা
টকারী প্রভৃতির পাতা আবার অনেক খণ্ডে চেরা অথচ
তিকাটা ; বনচাঁড়ালের পাতা বল্লমের ফলার মতন,
দামের পাতা ডিমের মতন, জলকচু আর কল্‌মী শাকের
তা বাণের ফলার মতন, থান্‌কুনির পাতা বর্‌বটীর
কার, টেপারীর পাতা হৃৎপিণ্ডের ন্যায়, আঁক্‌ড়ার পাতা
য়াড়ির প্রায়, ঘাসের খেজুরের নারিকেলের পাতা সরু
া, তালের পাতা ধার-চেরা ঢালের মতন ; বক-ফুল
ন্তীফুল তেঁতুল বাব্‌লা শাঁই প্রভৃতির পাতা জিরে
রে সরু সরু অনেক পাতার সমষ্টি ; কলার পাতা লম্বা
, মানপাতা প্রকাণ্ড ; কচুর পাতা ফুস্‌ফুসের আকার ;
ঞ্চন-ফুলের পাতা তালব্য-শয়ের পুঁটুলির মতন ; পদ্মপাতা
ল ছাতার মতন, তার বোঁটা থাকে ছাতার বাঁটের মতন
ায় মাঝখানে ; মটরের পাতা দাঁটার দুপাশ থেকে দাঁটা
রে জন্মে। দেবদারুর পাতার পাশ কোঁচানো।

পাতার নানান আকার।
(১) বনচাঁড়ালের পাতা—বল্লমের ফলার মত।
(২) বাদামের পাতা—বেগুনের মত।
(৩) কচুর পাতা—বাণের ফলার মত।

পাতার নানান আকার।
(১) থান্‌কুনির পাতা—বর্‌বটীর আকার।
(২) টেঁপারির পাতা—হৃৎপিণ্ডের আকার।
(৩) আঁক্‌ড়ার পাতা—চেয়াড়ির আকার।

কণ্টকারী ও শেয়ালকাঁটার পাতা। দাঁতিকাটা পাতার ক্রম-পরিণতি।

পাতার নানান আকার।
(১) জবার পাতা—বাঁকা হৃৎপিণ্ডের আকার।

পাথরকুচির পাতার পাশের কাটা-কাটা খাঁজ থেকে
আবার পাতা আর শিকড় বেরোয়।
এক রকমের গাছ আছে তার পাতার ডগায় একটা

FIGURE 2.1 Line drawings of leaves accompanying an essay on indigenous foliage

FIGURE 2.2 A page from "Betāler Baiṭhak", a question-answer section of *Prabāsī*

where readers could send in queries and others readers or the editor himself could reply. The editor explained: "It must be remembered that *Betāler Baiṭhak* is not intended to substitute for the encyclopaedia or the *Viśvakoṣ* – that is beyond the scope of monthlies. Rather the idea is that queries should be of the nature that common people could benefit from."[33] The idea was to solicit expert opinion from amongst the readers on issues of general interest.[34] These sections were the outcome of very conscious efforts by the *Prabāsī* editor to engage his readers in public encounters, making the journal a space for public participation. Such participation did not require substantial formal education on part of the readers. As the editor explained, these sections were meant to "encourage thinking among readers and enhance their ability to interrogate".[35] For instance, a *Betāler Baiṭhak* presented the following question to its readers: "List the ten best short stories by Rabindranath." An add-on note to the question stated the following criterion: "In answering this question one would need to consider the few stories appearing in *Sabuj Patra*, the five parts of *Galpaguccha* (A Bunch of Stories) and the selection entitled *Galpa Cāriti* (The Four Stories)."[36] Significant here is the effort by an established miscellany like *Prabāsī* in drawing readers' attention to the newly launched *Sabuj Patra* (1914), thereby subtly prodding the reader towards literature deemed to be aesthetically enriching.

translated excerpts from foreign books. The Āṣāṛh 1320 issue for instance contained reviews of books like W.E. Hardenberg's *The Putumayo: the Devil's Paradise* published by T. Fisher Unwin in 1912 and Woodrow Wilson's *The New Freedom* published by Chapman Hall in 1913.

33 'Betāler Baiṭhak' in *Prabāsī* v. 21 pt.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

34 Instances of a few questions posted in *Betāler Baiṭhak*: 1. What are the differences between a novel and a play? 2. On remedies for controlling water bred plant Gedua that spoilt paddy crops. [*Betāler Baiṭhak* was started in the Pouṣ 1321 / December 1914 – January 1915 number of *Prabāsī*.]

35 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Betāler Baiṭhak", *Prabāsī* v.14 pt.2 # 3, Pouṣ 1321 / December 1914 – January 1915.

36 "Betāler Baiṭhak", *Prabāsī* v.14 pt.2 # 4, Māgh 1321 / January-February 1915.

1.2.2 Editorial Approach

Within a few years, *Prabāsī* had surpassed all its contemporaries in popularity.[37] One novelty of *Prabāsī* was its editorial approach that distinguished it from its predecessors and contemporaries. Significant literary journals like its older contemporary *Sādhanā* edited by Rabindranath Tagore were filled up primarily by their own editors when contributions from other authors fell short. Even more than half the pages of *Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan* that started in the same year as *Prabāsī* were filled by the writings of its editor, Rabindranath Tagore.[38] By contrast, the *Prabāsī* editor wrote next to nothing. Rather his strategy was to expand the scope of "miscellaneous" subjects to include newer subjects of general interest, in a way making the periodical almost encyclopaedic in scope and content. This and the fact that by and large, he steered clear of partisanship towards any writer, made it possible for Chattopadhyay to draw on a wider reserve of writers than previous editors. By 1925, a year's *Prabāsī* contained over four hundred prose and verse from more than one hundred and sixty authors, many of whom had more than single contributions.

The only contribution that came from the *Prabāsī* editor was his eloquent editorials *Bibidha Prasaṅga* (Diverse Issues).

He took upon himself the task of elucidating on every issue of public interest – on various social issues, problems affecting institutionalization and commercialization of Bengali literature, drama and arts; female education; obituaries of prominent personalities; civic and municipal concerns; condition of the peasantry and tenancy laws; censorship laws; the War – its causes, course and impact; Gandhian political philosophy and Congress politics; the various constitutional procedures of 1909, 1919, 1927 and issues of Home Rule, diarchy and separate electorates that these were concerned with; the Government of India Act, 1935 and the question of federation; the 1937 provincial elections and worsening Hindu-Muslim relations.[39] An ardent advocate of the 'free press', Chattopadhyay was particularly vocal about the abuse of Press Acts by the bureaucracy to take vindictive measures against writers and editors. The

37 Circulation figures from the *Bengal Library Catalogue* indicate *Prabāsī*'s popularity surpassed those of other journals. In 1903 and 1904 for instance, *Bhāratī*'s circulation was 1250 while *Prabāsī*'s (then in its third / fourth year) stood at 2000. In 1911 the respective figures stood at 2000 and 5000.

38 Observed in the "Māsik Sāhitya Samālocanā" (Review of Periodical Literature) section in the monthly *Sāhitya*, Āṣāṛh 1312 / June-July 1905.

39 Obituary of important public figures: "Dwijendranath Tagore", 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', v.25, pt.2 #5, Phālgun 1332 / February-March 1926.

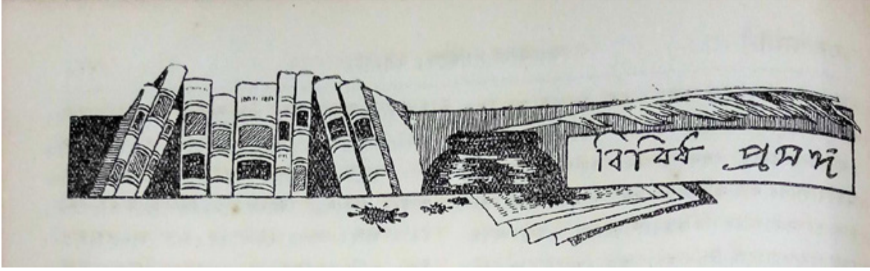


FIGURE 2.3 A page from "Bibidha Prasaṅga", *Prabāsī*, the editorial column of Ramananda Chattopadhyay

principal condition for a liberal literary sphere he claimed was a moderation of press censorship.[40]

The need for such all-encompassing argumentative editorials arose from an escalating interest in events that affected the lives of millions of Indians at home, abroad or at the warfront. The Swadeshi Movement, a decade later the First World War[41] and finally the Non-Cooperation Movement intensified an interest in news. This expanded the readership of literary periodicals beyond the previous circle of a highly literate audience. As Francesca Orsini has also pointed out in the case of the Hindi public sphere, this diverse reading public received a "common cultural and political education" through the periodical press.[42] That both literature and analyses of political news coexisted within the covers of the same miscellany indicate how during the first decades of the twentieth century aesthetic persuasions and political involvement were no longer perceived as disparate engagements of a serious and informed reader.

But what is also important to consider here is the role of an editor of Chattopadhyay's stature in raising the level of political awareness among his readers – a pedagogic task which would normally be associated with the newspaper and pamphlet press. In a letter to Chattopadhyay the historian Jadunath Sarkar described the first quarter of twentieth century in India as a conflict between *Modern Review* (the English monthly miscellany that Chattopadhyay edited) and the colonial bureaucracy, not unlike that of early nineteenth-century England which according to Sarkar was a history of conflict between the *Edinburgh*

40 Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Mudrā-yantra Āin" (Miscellaneous Matters – Press Acts), *Prabāsī*, v. 16 pt. 1 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1323 / July-August, 1916.

41 Francesca Orsini has also argued that the War was the major turning point so far as an increasing interest in news was concerned. Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, pp. 63–66.

42 Ibid., p. 66.

FIGURE 2.4 A page from "Pārāpārer ḍheu", *Prabāsī*, with an essay on the 'foundations of Russian Communism'

Review and the Tory bureaucracy.[43] The editor's function was clearly perceived as that of a pedagogue of public judgment. As a spokesperson of a nationalist mind, his role was now defined in terms of an implicit assumption that the literary public sphere was distinct from and in certain ways posited in opposition to the state apparatus.[44] In a tribute marking the fortieth anniversary of *Prabāsī* (1941) the *Simlā Baṅgīya Sammelan* wrote, "… For a good forty years in the realms of literature (*sāhitya*) and thought (*cintā*) *Prabāsī* has kept the mind of Bengal enlightened. We gratefully acknowledge our debt to the person whose broadmindedness has enabled this … regardless of limitations imposed by community, province and religion."[45]

1.2.3 *Prabāsī*'s Illustrations

In the commemorative issue of *Prabāsī*'s twenty-fifth anniversary, the pioneer artist of the nationalist school Abanindranath Tagore commended the editor for making the genre of *sacitra māsik patrikā* a success: "… and where then were *Baṅgabāṇī*, *Bhāratbarṣa* or *Basumatī*?"[46] These later miscellanies, especially *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* were loaded with illustrations that made them immediate commercial hits. But *Prabāsī* had been the trend-setter from early on in the century. Illustrations were among the key innovations with which *Prabāsī* identified itself proving to be the singular feature that gave

43 Letter to Ramananda Chattopadhyay from Jadunath Sarkar (Dated May 29, 1925, Darjeeling), Correspondence with Jadunath Sarkar, Ramananda Chattopadhyay Correspondence RC 54/5.

44 Ramananda Chattopadhyay in fact came to be considered as an authority even in international journal circles. One of his articles was listed amongst the best in all American magazines. Letter from Richard J. Walsh, editor, *Asia* to Ramananda Chattopadhyay (dated August 3, 1939). Ramananda Chattopadhyay Correspondence RC 54/7.

45 Letter from the Simla Bangiya Sammelan to Ramananda Chattopadhyay (Dated April 07, 1941), Ramananda Chattopadhyay Correspondence RC 46.

46 Abanindranath Tagore in *Prabāsī*, v.26, pt. 1 #1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.

FIGURE 2.5 “Shah Jahan” by Abanindranath Tagore. *Prabāsī*, v. 25, pt. 1, #3, Āṣāṛh 1332 / June-July 1925

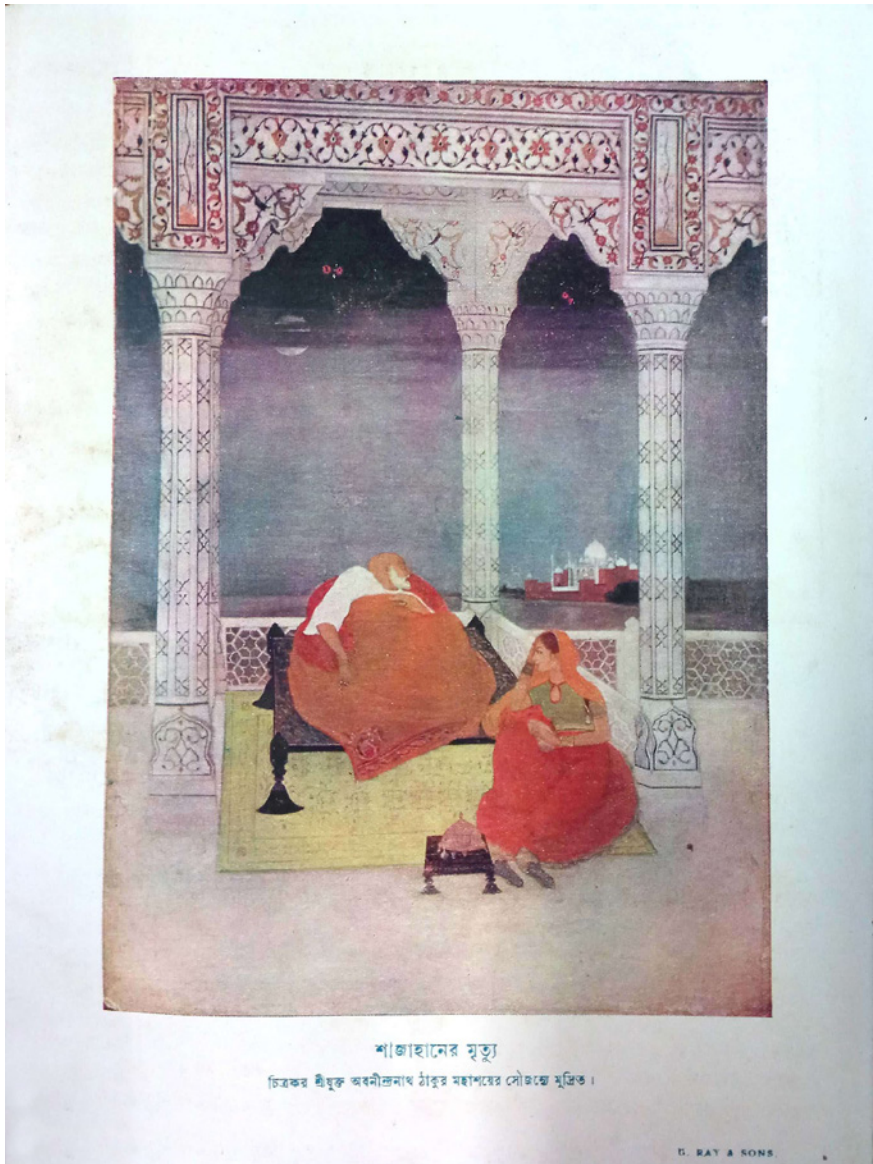


FIGURE 2.6 "Last days of Shah Jahan" by Abanindranath Tagore. *Prabāsī*, v. 15, pt. 2, # 1, Kārtik 1322 / October-November 1915

FIGURE 2.7 "Buddha, Jasodhara and Rahul" by Nandalal Bose. *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 1, # 1, Baiśākh 1329 / April-May 1922

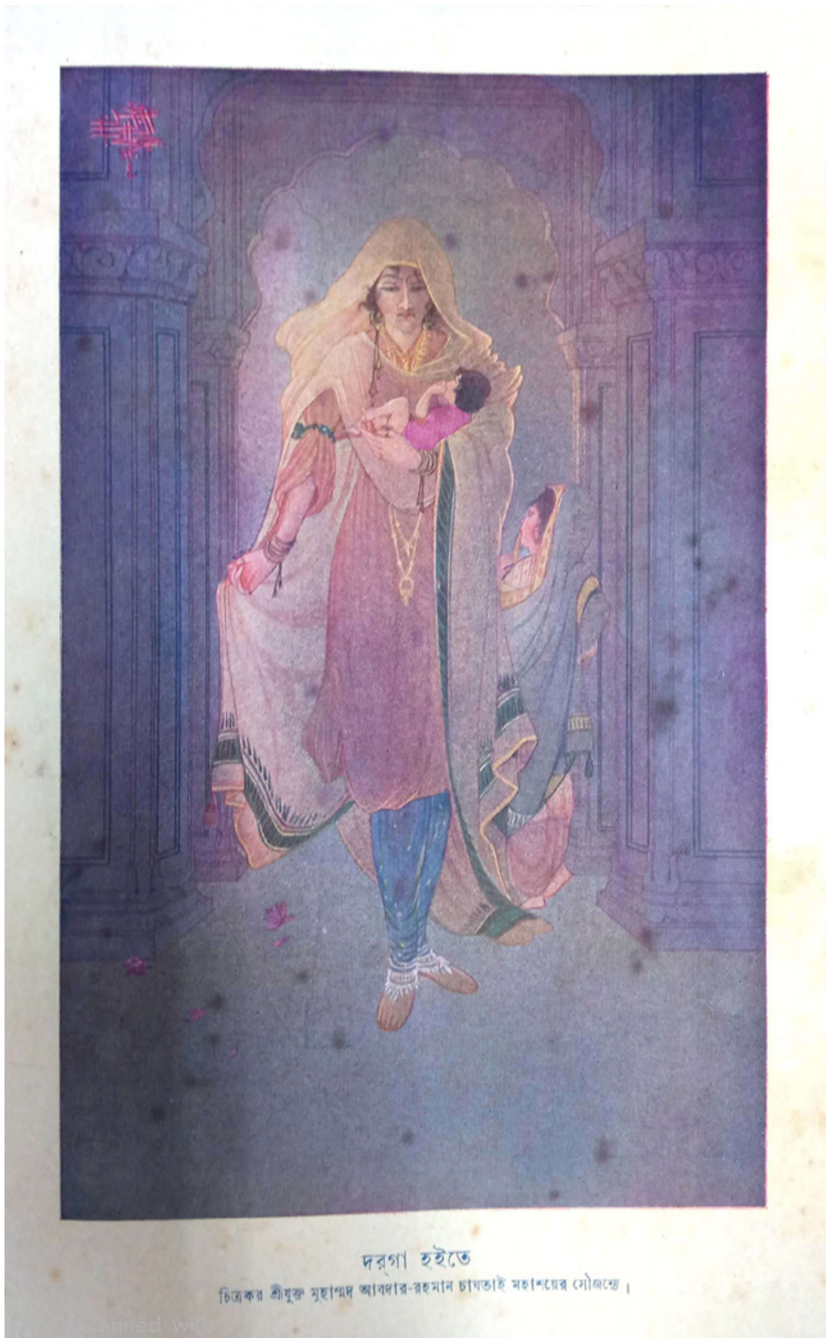


FIGURE 2.8 "From the Dargah" by Mohammad Abdar Rahman Chughtai. *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 1, # 3, Āṣāṛh 1329 / June-July 1922

the periodical an unprecedented popularity. The *Bengal Library Catalogue* expressly described *Prabāsī* as 'illustrated'. The word 'illustrated' was printed in italics to emphasize the distinct nature of an illustrated periodical like *Prabāsī*. Though others like *Sāhitya* and *Bhāratī* too carried illustrations occasionally, they were not categorized as 'illustrated', implying that unlike a *sacitra māsik patrikā* like *Prabāsī* illustrations were not on their routine platter.[47] Over the years *Prabāsī* increased its illustration contents – colored plates and black and white and tricolor representations. By 1925, a year's *Prabāsī* carried more than six hundred illustrations. Every issue carried colored plates of paintings by distinguished artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Ravi Varma, Ram Varma, Nandalal Bose, Upendrakishore Raychaudhury, Sukhalata Rao, Ramkinkar Beij, Ardhenduprasad Bandyopadhyay, Bamapada Bandyopadhyay and Satyendranath Bishi as well as reproductions of Ajanta cave frescoes and the Rajput, Mughal and Pahari miniature paintings. By the turn of the century advances in printing technology had made it possible for pioneers like Upendrakishore Raychaudhury, the proprietor of U. Ray & Sons, to improve on graphic representations, moving from sepia monotones and monochrome half-tone blocks to three-tone color (*tribarṇa*) blocks[48] and by the end of its first decade, *Prabāsī* printed over two hundred pictures and plates in a single year.[49] In later years, *Prabāsī*'s illustrations were printed at the Kuntalin Press and finally at the *Prabāsī* Press. All subsequent illustrated miscellanies depended substantially on the half-tone art plates pioneered by Upendrakishore Raychaudhury, until rivalled out by the offset litho process in the 1930s.[50]

Ramananda appreciated the potential attractiveness of illustrated magazines in enhancing readers' exposure to 'high' art and conditioning their aesthetic sensibilities, even as the cost of producing *Prabāsī* was much higher than costs involved in printing other contemporary journals. He asserted that *Prabāsī* voluntarily took up the additional costs to reproduce quality photographs and paintings for its readers.[51] Chattopadhyay was clearly inspired by the innovations made possible by photography in the West, especially its

47 *The Bengal Library Catalogues for Books and Periodicals* (1902).

48 Guha Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art*, p. 138.

49 The 1317 / 1910 volume of *Prabāsī* carried 213 pictures and plates. 'Prabāsīr Nijer Kathā', v. 11 pt. 1 # 5, Bhādra 1318 / August-September 1911. From 1315 / 1908 three tone pictures were published regularly. At the end of every Bengali year, picture plates that appeared in that particular year's *Prabāsī* were compiled in a single volume called *Chatterjee's Picture Album* and put up for sale in the market. Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p. 280.

50 Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1994, p. 124.

51 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Citra: Prabāsīte Mudrita Citra-Nirbācaner Youktikatā" (Rationale behind choice of illustrations for *Prabāsī*), *Prabāsī* v. 3, # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1310 / May-June 1903.

replication of naturalism. He immediately replaced the previous lithographic illustrations with the new half-tones.[52] This technique was already in wide use in the West. Victorian miscellanies like *Penny Magazine* and *Saturday Magazine* were known for their high quality illustrations that were an important part of the attraction of these periodicals. The remarkable success of these magazines had opened up an entire industry of illustrated periodicals in Victorian England.[53] At the time Chattopadhyay edited *Pradīp* the graphic press was still rather nebulous and the only other illustrated magazine was Shibnath Shastri's *Mukul*, a children's entertainment journal.[54] *Pradīp* used both half tone blocks and wooden blocks for its regular illustrations. The journal stood out for its illustrations that ensured regular subscriptions, even as the high expenses involved in reproducing pictures made the cost of printing *Pradīp* very high. Chattopadhyay wrote, "Had *Pradīp* not been illustrated and printed on good quality paper, we would have managed to survive barely a year with the same number of subscribers that we procured."[55] *Pradīp* had proved that illustrations could sell journals. So when *Prabāsī* started, he ensured that it carried enough illustrations to set it apart from its contemporaries. *Prabāsī* became known for its colorful vigor and it was the visual attractiveness lent by its pictures that made the magazine an easy conduit for reaching out to the literate readers. The first colored picture to be printed in *Prabāsī* was a photograph of Edward VII and his Queen Alexandria. Abanindranath's early paintings 'Sujātā O Buddha' and 'Bajramukut O Padmābatī' were reproduced in monotone because multicolored blocks of paintings were still difficult to produce in India. When *Bhāratbarṣa* was launched in 1913 the editor Jaladhar Sen took enough care to emulate specific features of *Prabāsī* – amongst them full-color plates of paintings by artists such as Bhabanicharan Laha appeared regularly in the pages of *Bhāratbarṣa*. Similarly *Māsik Basumatī* found in Hemen Majumdar its counterpart to Abanindranath Tagore and Bhabanicharan Laha.

In its early phase, *Prabāsī* primarily brought out reproductions of Ravi Varma's mythology-themed paintings. The 1902 *Prabāsī* for instance reproduced about twenty-one paintings by the artist along with his biography. The

52 Partha Mitter, op. cit. p. 122.

53 Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (ed.), *The Lure of Illustrations in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

54 There existed a vibrant market for cheap pictures, printed and painted in mid and late nineteenth-century Calcutta. Crude and often unclear, these pictures were produced by simple woodcuts and metal engravings and were used mainly for decorative purposes. Pictorial representations of religious and secular themes enabled complex engagement between the world of print and those on the peripheries of the print-literate societies. Ghosh, *Power in Print*, pp. 139–151.

55 Shanta Devi, op. cit., p. 115.

journal also provided ordinary Bengali readers a peek into the world of European paintings by reproducing works of Rafael, G.F. Watts, Guido Reni, Bartolomé Murillo and other well-known artists.[56] From around the Swadeshi years, *Prabāsī* became a distinct patron of the nationalist school of art with Abanindranath Tagore as the most extensively contributing artist. Several of his well-known paintings including 'Shājāhāner Mṛtyu', 'Birahī Yakṣa' and 'Bhāratmātā' were all first printed in the pages of *Prabāsī* – offering middle class readers a new visual vocabulary in the form of a more exclusive 'high art'.[57] Along with the new visual feast for its readers, *Prabāsī* also brought out several major essays on art and aesthetics by Abanindranath that sought to instruct a new middle class readership to value and judge modern art forms.[58] As a pioneering *sacitra patrikā Prabāsī*'s intervention in the visual edification of Bengali readers, tutoring them as to how to enjoy and appraise the visual media was profound. It endeavored to introduce a new aesthetic among the ordinary middle classes, the common purveyors and consumers of Kalighat *paṭ* and mythological paintings, making them mature enough to appreciate 'high arts'. *Prabāsī* and Chattopadhyay's English editorial venture, *The Modern Review* (1907) marked a decisive juncture in the circulation and consumption of modern Indian art, creating a new middle-class art-public and investing in the cultivation of artistic taste and viewership.[59] For the first time literary journalism in colonial India became intimately concerned with reproduction and criticisms of art. Influential art critics of the *Prabāsī-Modern Review* collective included Chattopadhyay himself, Nivedita, Coomaraswamy, O.C. Gangoly and Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay.[60] From the beginning therefore, *Prabāsī* con-

---

56 In time however, as Partha Mitter has shown, several journal brought out pirated illustrations from foreign publications, thus drastically reducing costs. Partha Mitter, op. cit. p. 124.

57 Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p. 318.

58 A few of Abanindranath's writings on arts and aesthetics include: 'Mūrtti' (Sculpted figures), *Prabāsī*, Pouṣ-Māgh, 1320 / December-February 1913–14. 'Citra-Paricaẏ: Śeṣ Bojhā' (Understanding Art), *Prabāsī*, Phālgun 1320 / February-March 1914. 'Rup-Rekhār Rupkathā' (Imagination and drawings), *Prabāsī* v. 25 pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925.

59 Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p. 139.

60 Ibid., p. 191. Some of the writings on art and aesthetics included: Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay, "Citra-Paricaẏ", v. 13 pt. 2 # 5, *Prabāsī*, Phālgun, 1319 / February-March 1913; Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Jātīẏa Jībane Kalāśilper Gurutva" (the significance of art in the making of a life for the nation), *Prabāsī* v. 13 pt. 2 # 6, Caitra 1319 / March-April 1913; Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Nabyatantrer Baṅgīẏa Citrakarsampradāẏ" (the new artists of Bengal), *Prabāsī* v. 28 pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1335 / December-January 1928–29; Sister Nivedita, "Bhārat-Mātā" (in English with a translation note by the editor) *Prabāsī* v. 6, # 5, Bhādra 1313 / August-September 1906; Sister Nivedita, "Notes on Pictures" (in English with a translation note by the editor) *Prabāsī* v. 7 # 12, Caitra 1313 / March-April 1907; Sister

sciously engaged itself in cultivating the aesthetic taste of its readers and its innovativeness lay in enforcing the instrumentality of the visual medium. The journal's idealization of beauty (*soundarya*) was shaped directly by its conscious appeal to the Renaissance and post-Renaissance artistic traditions of Western Europe.[61] In this *Prabāsī* represented a deliberate move towards endorsing an aesthetic sensibility distinct from what were seemingly lewd visual prints reproduced from the *Baṭtalā* presses. Though the *Prabāsī* editor reinforced his conviction that aesthetic sensibility could not be forcefully imposed, the journal did actually endorse the authenticity of certain types of art over others like the Kalighat *paṭ* paintings and woodcut engravings depicting religious and urban life in Calcutta.[62] Such preference was most clearly reflected in a rejection of the paintings of Ravi Varma for an appreciation of the works of Abanindranath Tagore and his new Bengal school of painting.[63] The *Sāhitya* however accused *Prabāsī* of simply drumming up support for the new school of painters.[64] The aesthetic shift had emerged out of a desire to carve out an autonomous niche for the nation. Nationalist ideology therefore identified and popularized the new school of art as distinctly modern, Indian and simultaneously discernible from the Western or European.[65]

By the first decades of the century, reproductions in books, journals and art albums, more than exhibitions and purchases had become the primary public spaces for the dissemination of paintings by artists like Abanindranath.[66] It was the new form of *sacitra māsik patrikā* that made the paintings by the Bengal School artists available to an expanding middle-class readership. The effective reach of *Prabāsī* would have been far more extensive than the exclusive art

---

Nivedita, "Nandalal Basur Satī-Citra", *Modern Review*, April 1908 / Translated by the Editor, *Prabāsī* v. 8 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1315 / May-June 1908.

61 Guha Thakurta, op. cit. p. 139.

62 Publisher's foreword – *Chatterjee's Picture Album*, no. 1 cited in Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p. 280.

63 Ibid., pp. 138–139. In an editorial observation, "Citra: Prabāsī-te Mudrita Citra-Nirvacaner Youktikatā" (criteria for selection of illustrations) in the *Prabāsī* issue of Jyaiṣṭha 1310 / May-June 1903, Ramananda Chattopadhyay replying to objections raised about reproducing European paintings emphasized the need for enhanced exposure to various kinds of high art.

64 Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p. 213. *Sāhitya* remained a staunch advocate of "Academic Realism", reproducing a Mughal miniature style painting by the painter Bhabanicharan Laha (B.C. Law, as he was known in art circles). Kamalika Mukherjee, *Parallel Lives: Charting the History of Popular Prints of the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies*, Archive Series 03, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 2011, pp. 16–17.

65 Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments,* p. 8.

66 Tapati Guha Thakurta, *Abanindranath, Known and Unknown: The Artist versus the Art of His Times*, Archive Series 01, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, p. 15.

books, art albums and exhibitions. The full-page color plates circulated by *Prabāsī* familiarized the new viewers with 'Indian-style' paintings. With *Bhāratbarṣa* and eventually *Māsik Basumatī* the *sacitra māsik patrikā* had become the primary purveyor of not just the 'high arts', but catered to a wider and often less exclusive, ordinary middle-class readerships with pictures by many amateur and lesser known painters. As Partha Mitter has argued, these *sacitra māsik patrikā* opened up the world of cosmopolitan art to women of middle-class households, most of who had access to neither English education nor public exhibitions.[67] The unmatched popularity of *Māsik Basumatī* owed much to the sensuous images of female figures that almost bordered on the erotic.[68] From mythological paintings and images of divinities, to the modern nationalist art and finally the sensuous feminine images, the *sacitra patrikā* had become a conduit with the most extensive and easy reach into middle-class homes, changing and reflecting the circulation of popular visual productions in early twentieth-century Bengal. The visual appeal of these *sacitra patrikā* was also enhanced by the use of ornate caption art, designed specifically for page headings, margins and feature segments. Inspired by Victorian illustrators Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac, artists like Satish Sinha decorated the title pages of *Māsik Basumatī* "blending volutes with voluptuous females" and using devices like "arabesques and meandering curves".[69]

Historical scholarships on the production and consumption of popular visual cultures have identified the periodical press as the shared space where diverse art-publics were brought into being and coexisted in the pages of competing illustrated periodicals. But in 1901, when *Prabāsī* was launched, the decision to incorporate illustrations and photographic representations had indeed been a bold one, testifying Ramananda Chattopadhyay's remarkable editorial insight. As Abanindranath later recollected, for the editor who had a family with several young children, a considerable business risk was involved given that there were few competent Indian artisans who could produce blocs, the cost of color reproduction being quite high and finally, there was no precedence to assure one that a Bengali periodical could indeed be long-lasting.[70] It was amidst such an uncertain beginning of the *sacitra patrikā* that Ramananda

67 Partha Mitter, op. cit. p. 124.

68 Kamalika Mukherjee, op. cit. p. 17. While Kamalika Mukherjee does not categorically discuss the sexualized images that appeared in *Māsik Basumatī*, many of them by the painter Hemen Majumdar, her thorough analysis of B.C. Law's (Bhabanicharan Laha) series of sensual studies of women fits in with the *Basumatī* images. In fact as she has noted, the *Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir* was the main purveyor of such sensuous images.

69 Partha Mitter, op. cit. p. 126.

70 Abanindranath Tagore in *Prabāsī*, v.26, pt. 1 #1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.

Chattopadhyay introduced the practice of remuneration for writers and artists who contributed to the journal. Indicating that the success of generations of Indian painters would have been virtually impossible without *Prabāsī*, Abanindranath wrote, "New artists came forward to contribute in *Prabāsī.* The one responsible for this is not me but Ramananda-Babu.… We amateur artists not only got publicity free of cost but we still receive regular imbursements for those paintings we give to *Prabāsī*. Who else would have invested his own money on apprentices like us had Ramananda-Babu not brought out *Prabāsī*?[71] It was this investment the editor made with quite a far-sight that made a difference in the nature and reception of the illustrated periodicals. Illustrations (and photographs) endowed the *sacitra patrikā* with immediate commercial success, providing readers with visual treats, breaking the monotony of continuous reading and often facilitating better understanding of the text through the pictures provided. The appeal of illustrations assured a steady run for the periodical, ensuring sizeable readership and monetary profit. The public space of reception of art and the visual media thus emerged in tandem with the commercialization of the periodical press, facilitating a wider reach for periodicals and incorporating readers from the non-elite, ordinary middle classes. By the time *Bhāratbarṣa* appeared in the market, technology was not a problem anymore and cost too was no longer exorbitant.[72] Inspired by *Prabāsī*'s success, Pandit Balkrishna Bhatta brought out an illustrated quality journal *Bālprabhākar* in Hindi from Varanasi.[73]

Prabāsī identified a high-brow aesthetics sensibility that was defined simultaneously as modern and indigenous. Before the outbreak of the First World War *Prabāsī* had come to embody a cosmopolitan Bengali aesthetic that was distinguishable from the more middlebrow platter of *Bhāratbarṣa*, the orthodox journals like Sureshchandra Samajpati's *Sāhitya* and the more mainstream nationalism-oriented *Nārāẏaṇ* (1914) edited by Chittaranjan Das. The Bengali middle classes experienced the War primarily through newspaper and journal reports. Newspapers conveyed widespread anxieties of a looming economic crisis, combined with resultant social disruption and psychological effects of the hostilities. On the home front the unprecedented force of the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919) and Gandhi's call for nonviolent non-cooperation with the Raj (1921) intensified anti-colonial emotions of the masses while simultaneously reiterating regional-linguistic sensibilities. The interplay of these historical processes created altered circumstances that necessitated a broadening of

71 Abanindranath Tagore in *Prabāsī*, v.26, pt. 1 #1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.

72 Partha Mitter, op. cit. p. 124.

73 Ibid.

literary imagination so as to accommodate new desires and emotions. Chattopadhyay's editorial acumen lay in shaping the journal as a broad spectrum assortment so that it could command ample contributions. The aesthetic world created in the pages of *Prabāsī* was assertive in its claims of being socially inclusive – Chattopadhyay reiterated the need to encourage literary endeavors of hitherto marginalized voices – women, the peasantry and other subaltern groups and of course the Bengali-Muslim community. It was not until about the War years and certainly the early 1920s that the dominant literary sensibilities articulated by *Prabāsī* came to be seriously questioned by more accessible and less exclusivist *sacitra patrikā* like *Māsik Basumatī* (1922), modernist journals like *Kallol* (1923) and some leading Bengali-Muslim monthlies like *Moslem Bhārat* (1920), *Saogāt* (1918, more regularly from 1926) and *Māsik Mohāmmadī* (1927).

2 Becoming a Family Magazine: The War and the Exigencies of Commercial Publishing

During the Swadeshi days, the vernacular elite had envisioned literary practice or *sāhitya sebā* (literally, service to literature) as a performative aspect of devotion to the nation, attempting to configure a modern literary public (*sāhitya samāj*) through representations of dedication. An idealized literary community or *sāhitya samāj* provided alternative ways for thinking about an autonomous national space. But the materiality of literary practices – the modalities and apparatuses of publishing, distribution, advertisements, subscriptions and sales, remunerations for writers and editors were limited by the functioning of the colonial economy. Periodical publishing found itself trapped between the contrary pulls of commercialization and service to the nation. Alluding to the turn of the twentieth century years, Jaladhar Sen, the editor of *Bhāratbarṣa*, a popular illustrated miscellany like *Prabāsī*, recollected *Bhāratī*'s struggle for survival amidst intense competition.[74] He credited *Bhāratī*'s editors for not compromising with the trends in commercial publishing, even at the risk of termination.[75] Pramatha Chaudhuri, the editor of the monthly *Sabuj Patra* consciously distanced his journal from the contagion of commerce, categorically stating that there would be neither illustrations nor advertisements.[76] *Prabāsī* was the first periodical that attempted to commercialize its

74 Jaladhar Sen, "Bhāratī", *Bhāratī*, Yr. 50 # 1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.
75 Ibid.
76 Pramatha Chaudhuri, 'Mukhapatra', *Sabuj Patra*, Yr. 1, # 1, Baiśākh 1321 / April-May 1914.

production, widen its subscription base and yet retain its objective of *sāhitya sebā.* But the problems it encountered in the course of its functioning exposed the tension between the readership it sought to create by making the periodical a retail commodity and the limited readership it actually enjoyed because of its identification with a high-brow aesthetic. The literary market was still a space where most readers, writer and editors were still not at ease with a potential consumer culture. The relationship between the vernacular print media and the colonial marketplace was an ambivalent one. Profitable periodical publishing in colonial Bengal remained mired in the limitations of colonial capital and the fact that large sections of the indigenous population lay beyond the pale of print literacy and the ability to purchase printed material. Drawing upon the widely accepted nationalist critique of colonial economy, Ramananda Chattopadhyay's editorials frequently invoked underdevelopment of indigenous capital as the principal impediment to print-capitalism. Procuring finances, especially through advertisements proved very difficult. The advertisements that *Prabāsī* received were mainly from few medium-sized businesses and mostly from small trading concerns like book stores, jewellers, toiletries makers advertising hair oils and essences, stores selling gramophone, musical instruments and bicycles, homeopathic pharmacies, nurseries selling seeds and saplings, stationery stores, etc.[77] Chattopadhyay linked the success of the print media, especially magazines, directly to advanced industrial capitalism. He drew on what he perceived as the happy experience of print-capital in Western Europe and especially in North America where the boom in national retailing that accompanied progressive urbanization and a general movement of the economy towards mature industrialism.[78] Magazines had become the most preferred medium for American business and the liaison between magazines and advertising made possible enormous growth in the periodical industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[79] In Bengal

---

77 Browsing through any volume of *Prabāsī* or other miscellaneous periodicals like *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī*, one comes across mostly these advertisements from petty trading concerns. From the 1920s onwards, it is also difficult to ignore the profusion of advertisements, most of them short and occupying quarter page spaces. Gautam Bhadra has researched in detail advertisements of books in the nineteenth century, looking at how advertisements targeted specific reader groups, the syntax of the ad captions and how these advertisements enable one to narrate a history of reception of print in colonial Bengal. Bhadra, "Uniś Śatake Bāṅglā Boiẏer Bijñāpan" in *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?* pp. 108–173.

78 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Nūtan Prabāsī" in *Prabāsī*, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

79 James West III, "The Magazine Market" in D. Finkelstein & A. McCleery, *The Book History Reader*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002, pp. 269–276.

by contrast most large-scale industries were monopolized by Europeans who chose to advertise in English language journals some of which had circulation far less than *Prabāsī*'s.[80]

It was World War I which brought in the critical times. The end of the War in 1918 had almost immediately set off major economic dislocations in terms of poor harvests resulting in droughts and immense retrenchment in international trade. These resulted in escalating prices that hit the highest point in 1920.[81] Prices of essentials such as salt, kerosene and cloth registered a disturbing increase in Bengal that was not accompanied by any corresponding increase in wages and salaries.[82] Prices of necessities such as sugar had risen from Rs 8–9 per maund to Rs 30–35 per maund.[83] News of price rises and their effects on the middle and working classes' paltry budgets were widely reported and discussed in the pages of *Prabāsī*.[84] The editor argued that that zamindars and businessmen did not have much to worry about. But the bhadralok and the *śramajībī* (the working classes) had to bear the brunt of the burden as their income stagnated while expenses soared.[85] The post-War years were thus marked by inflation, shrinking real incomes from rent, acute shortage of essential commodities and lack of employment opportunities that pressed hard on the predominantly Hindu middle classes of Bengal.[86] The *Prabāsī* editor reported that the condition of the middle classes who were engaged primarily as white collar employees (*masī-jībī*) in government jobs and school teachers, had deteriorated so much that the Ramakrishna Mission in Barisal, East Bengal

80 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Nūtan Prabāsī" in *Prabāsī*, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

81 Sugata Bose, *Agrarian Bengal: Economy, Social Structure and Politics, 1919–1947*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1987, pp. 63–64. Bose shows that the government's inflationary policies hit the eastern Bengal districts very hard. In the eastern countryside, prices of grain rocketed and articles of daily use like cloth, salt, kerosene and medicines were scarce and dear at a time when raw jute prices remained low. The result was a spate of agrarian violence. Subho Basu, *Does Class Matter? Colonial Capital and Workers' Resistance in Bengal, 1890–1937*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive account of the economic hardships of the post war years and how they helped create an ambience where protest mentality could thrive.

82 Ibid., p. 150. Basu shows that during the War years, i.e. 1914–1918, prices had increased by about 70% but wages had risen by a meager 15%. The immediate post war years were hit hard by what came to be known as the 'cloth famine' throughout the province and the outbreak of an influenza epidemic in Calcutta. Basu, pp. 151–152.

83 'Deśer Kathā', *Prabāsī*, v. 20, pt. 1 #2, Jyaiṣṭha 1327 / May-June 1927.

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid.

86 Partha Chatterjee, *Bengal 1920–1947*, v.1 *The Land Question*, Published for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta by K.P. Bagchi & Company, 1984, p. 63.

embarked upon a fundraising drive to alleviate the hardships of the *madhyabitta daridra* (poverty-stricken middle classes).[87]

This all-pervasive economic displacement did not spare the publishing industry either. The difficulties encountered by *Prabāsī* in the course of its circulation during and immediately after the War years and the means adopted to overcome those crises indicate new strategies of survival and expansion in a rapidly changing market. Paper and printing costs soared. While in 1904 a year's *Prabāsī* cost Rs 3/,[88] after the War price rise forced annual subscription to Rs 4/ in 1920 and to Rs 6/ in the very next year.[89]

Increased prices forced *Prabāsī* to reciprocate to its readers in terms of larger quantity and an enhanced variety. While it had hit the stands in 1901 with a mere forty-page first issue, the 1921 price rise came with the promise of one hundred and forty four plus pages per month.[90] By the close of our period, a month's *Prabāsī* contained 175+ pages. Some readers protested the 1921 price hike suggesting that advertisement rates instead of prices ought to have been increased. The *Prabāsī* editor responded by drawing readers' attention to the financial travails of running a Bengali monthly and though the price hike included an increase in advertisement rates as well the Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921 issue (the first month of the Bengali year) already carried fewer advertisements than before.[91] Chattopadhyay noted in a later editorial that in contrast to the situation in colonial Bengal, American businessmen had invested about

87 'Deśer Kathā' in *Prabāsī*, Jyaiṣṭha 1327 / May-June 1920.

88 Price of *Prabāsī* as provided by the *Bengal Library Catalogue of Books and Periodicals*, First Quarter ending March 31, 1904. Even during this time the going was not quite smooth. In 1905 the price of one *maund* of ordinary rice was more than Rs 3. From "Annual Average Retail Prices in Bengal for North and East Bengal" (Statistical Committee's Report) quoted in Kaliprasanna Bandyopadhyay, "Sekāler Bājār Dar" (Market Rates in those days) in *Prabāsī* Śrāvaṇ 1328 / July-August 1921.

89 *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books* for the First Quarter ending March 31, 1904 & *Bibidha Prasaṅga* – "Nutan *Prabāsī*", *Prabāsī* v. 21, pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

90 *Bibidha Prasaṅga* – "Nutan *Prabāsī*". *Prabāsī*'s volume had been expanding steadily with more regular features, fictions and poems. By 1910 a year's *Prabāsī* contained over 1230 pages. 'Prabāsīr Nijer Kathā' Bhādra, 1318 / August-September 1911. In fact the large size of these miscellanies earned them the epithet of "ḍhāus" (literally meaning big and clumsy).

91 *Bibidha Prasaṅga* – "Nutan *Prabāsī*" (Miscellaneous Matters – the new *Prabāsī*). The 1922 *Prabāsī* laid out rules for advertising in its pages. It also provided in detail the advertisement rates for different spaces: A full page advertisement for a single month was slated at Rs. 24/; half a page or one column at Rs. 12/; half a column at Rs. 6/ and quarter of a column at Rs. 3/. These were the rates provided for advertising in the main text of the periodical. The rates for advertisement spaces in supplements (*krorpatra*) were different from the above. The usual norm for subscribers would be to send in a year's periodicals (i.e. twelve issues) for binding. To make binding cost-effective and the year's volume easier to handle, the *krorpatra* would usually be torn off.

rupees three hundred and eighty million in advertisements in only seventy two weekly and monthly journals during 1921, notwithstanding the advertisements in daily newspapers. The *Saturday Evening Post* a weekly journal had registered an income of rupees one hundred million in 1920 alone and a major portion of this income had been drawn from advertisements.[92] He also added that in Bengal the costs in running a periodical were incurred mainly from printing expenditures. Most writers for literary miscellanies either contributed voluntarily or with minimal remuneration. Ramananda Chattopadhyay was full of praise for writers and artists who were regular contributors to *Prabāsī* and attributed its success to these 'selfless' people.[93] Consequently Chattopadhyay urged his reader-subscribers to treat and accept *Prabāsī* as a commodity (*paṇyadrabya*) and to weigh its price vis-à-vis what the miscellany had to offer every month. In response to a reader who had demanded *Prabāsī* be distributed free of cost, Chattopadhyay explained that periodicals were not meant to be complementary and therefore could not go unrecompensed.[94] Most editors including Chattopadhyay would insist on advance payment of annual subscription dues, either through money order or in person at the *Prabāsī* office.[95] Comparing a single issue of *Prabāsī* to a book of similar volume he drew readers' attention to the fact that the former cost a fraction of the latter, indicating the relatively cheaper access to entertainment through illustrated miscellanies like *Prabāsī*.[96] It is interesting that Chattopadhyay had to rationalize in terms of quantity while comparing an issue of *Prabāsī* with a book. Evidently, for the ordinary middle-class reader, perpetually hard-pressed to make ends meet, the monetary value of a book or a periodical had been reduced to the quantity and visual entertainment on offer. Chattopadhyay argued that while weighing the worth of *Prabāsī*, readers ought to deliberate on the quality of

---

92 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, 'Byabsā o Bijñāpan' (Business and advertisements), "Bibidha Prasaṅga", *Prabāsī*, v.22, pt.2, #2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1329 / November-December 1922.

93 Chattopadhyay, "Nutan *Prabāsī*". Chattopadhyay stated that the literary scene in Bengal was very different from that in the West where the major expenditure of the magazines went in paying for the fees of the writers. In the United States, for instance, a high-brow magazine like the *Smart Set* that addressed a limited and sophisticated readership was amongst the lowest paying ones as far as authors were concerned. Typically a short story there would fetch a writer somewhere between $100–400. Magazines like the *Saturday Evening Post* were more remunerative. By 1939, writers like Booth Tarkington earned $4000 per story. James L.W. West III, "The Magazine Market".

94 'Prabāsīr Nijer Kathā', v. 18, pt. 1 # 5, Bhādra 1318 / July-August 1911.

95 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, 'Āgāmī Baṯsarer Prabāsī' (the forthcoming year's *Prabāsī*), "Bibidha Prasaṅga", *Prabāsī* v.21, pt.2 # 6, Caitra 1328 / March-April 1922.

96 Ibid.

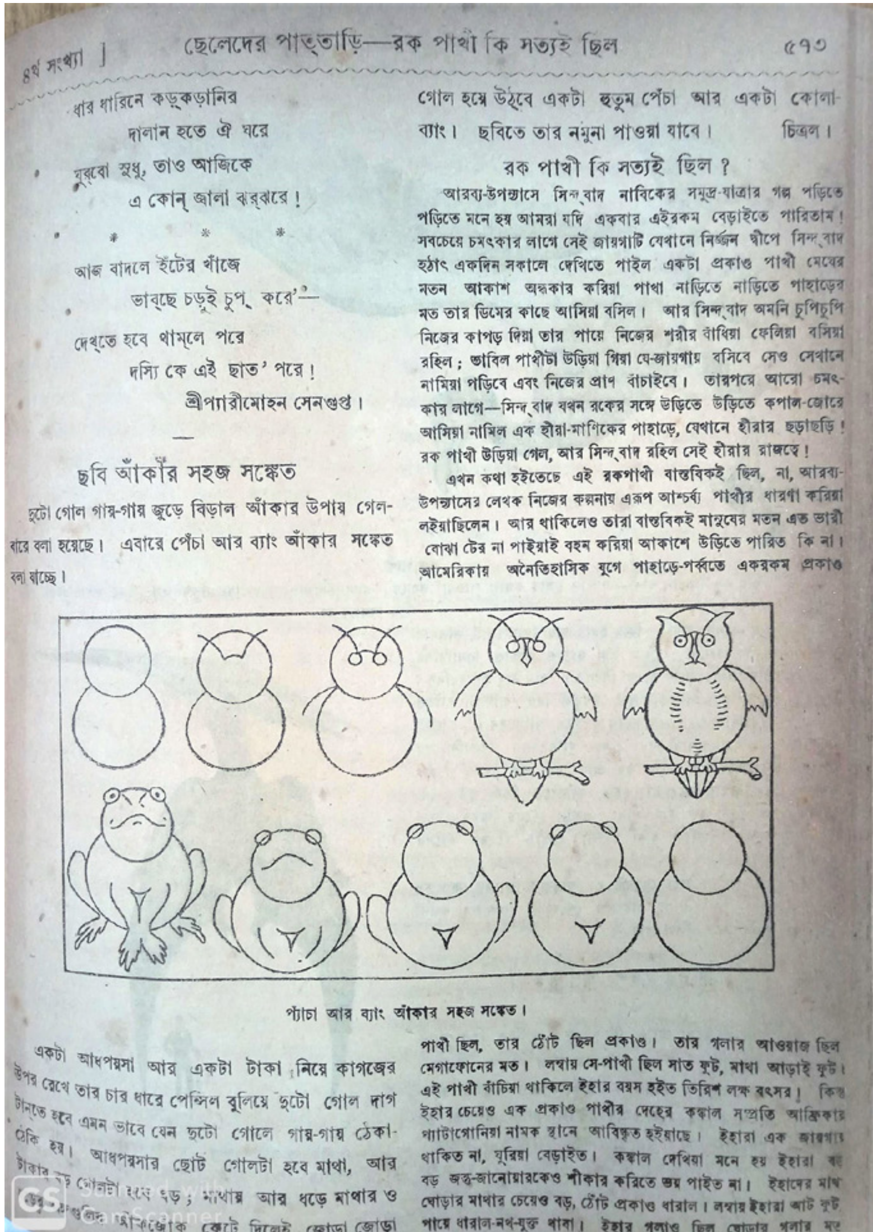
FIGURE 2.9 A page from "Mahilā Majlis", the women's section of *Prabāsī*

writings, pictures, quality of paper provided and the print.[97] Thus, in subsequent editorials one finds Chattopadhyay promising "thicker and glossier paper" to woo readers.[98] While the post-War price rise was necessary to meet the mounting expenses in printing the *Prabāsī* editor also justified it on grounds of an enhancement of quantity by including more features. Explaining the insufficiency of the *Deśer Kathā* (i.e. News of the Nation) section and its extension to *Deśbideśer Kathā* in order to include observations on international news, Ramananda Chattopadhyay wrote:

> The consequences of the War are not yet over … it is clear that the fate of every country and continent are bound to each other … Even countries like India where there has been no enemy intrusions, are besieged by inflation, food shortage and hunger, epidemics etc. we need to know in what we can learn from others' experiences and why in today's world there is no peace. On the whole it is no longer enough to simply know about Bengal….[99]

With the same issue, *Prabāsī* began a new feature on women: *Mahilā Majlis* (The Women's Get-together) and one for children's entertainment and lessons: *Cheleder Pāttāṛi* (Children's Lessons).[100]
These were not meant to stand in for separate women's or children's magazines but to provide every member of a subscriber household with something appropriate to read, a distinct shift towards making of a more comprehensive family magazine.[101] Enhancement of *Prabāsī*'s volume was meant ostensibly to minimize criticism of price hike. But the addition of women's section also

97 'Nutan *Prabāsī*'.
98 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Āgāmī Baṯsarer Prabāsī", *Prabāsī* v.21, pt.2 # 6, Caitra 1328 / March-April 1922.
99 "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Prabāsīr Kalebar Bṝddhi", (Increase in *Prabāsī*'s volume) *Prabāsī* v. 28, pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.
100 *Pāttāṛi* literally meaning palm leaves used instead of paper for writing in village schools.
101 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, 'Bibidha Prasaṅga – Nūtan Prabāsī' in *Prabāsī*, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.



৪র্থ সংখ্যা] ছেলেদের পাত্‌তাড়ি—রক পাখী কি সত্যই ছিল ৫৭৩

ধার ধারিনে কড়্‌কড়ানির
দালান হতে ঐ ঘরে
ঘুর্‌বো শুধু, তাও আজিকে
এ কোন্ জ্বালা ঝর্‌ঝরে !

* * *

আজ বাদলে ইঁটের খাঁজে
ভাব্‌ছে চড়ুই চুপ্ করে’—
দেখ্‌তে হবে থাম্‌লে পরে
দস্যি কে এই ছাত’ পরে !

শ্রীপ্যারীমোহন সেনগুপ্ত ।

—

ছবি আঁকার সহজ সঙ্কেত

দুটো গোল গায়-গায় জুড়ে বিড়াল আঁকার উপায় গেল-বারে বলা হয়েছে। এবারে পেঁচা আর ব্যাং আঁকার সঙ্কেত বলা যাচ্ছে।

পঁ্যাচা আর ব্যাং আঁকার সহজ সঙ্কেত।

একটা আধপয়সা আর একটা টাকা নিয়ে কাগজের উপর রেখে তার চার ধারে পেন্সিল বুলিয়ে দুটো গোল দাগ টান্‌তে হবে এমন ভাবে যেন দুটো গোলে গায়-গায় ঠেকা-ঠেকি হয়। আধপয়সার ছোট গোলটা হবে মাথা, আর টাকার বড় গোলটা হবে ধড়; মাথায় আর ধড়ে মাথার ও ... আঁকিজোক কেটে দিলেই জোড়া জোড়া

গোল হয়ে উঠ্‌বে একটা হুতুম পেঁচা আর একটা কোলা-ব্যাং। ছবিতে তার নমুনা পাওয়া যাবে। চিত্রল।

রক পাখী কি সত্যই ছিল ?

আরব্য-উপন্যাসে সিন্দ্‌বাদ নাবিকের সমুদ্র-যাত্রার গল্প পড়িতে পড়িতে মনে হয় আমরা যদি একবার এইরকম বেড়াইতে পারিতাম ! সবচেয়ে চমৎকার লাগে সেই জায়গাটি যেখানে নির্জ্জন দ্বীপে সিন্দ্‌বাদ হঠাৎ একদিন সকালে দেখিতে পাইল একটা প্রকাণ্ড পাখী মেঘের মতন আকাশ অন্ধকার করিয়া পাখা নাড়িতে নাড়িতে পাহাড়ের মত তার ডিমের কাছে আসিয়া বসিল। আর সিন্দ্‌বাদ অমনি চুপিচুপি নিজের কাপড় দিয়া তার পায়ে নিজের শরীর বাঁধিয়া ফেলিয়া বসিয়া রহিল ; ভাবিল পাখীটা উড়িয়া গিয়া যে-জায়গায় বসিবে সেও সেখানে নামিয়া পড়িবে এবং নিজের প্রাণ বাঁচাইবে। তারপরে আরো চমৎকার লাগে—সিন্দ্‌বাদ যখন রকের সঙ্গে উড়িতে উড়িতে কপাল-জোরে আসিয়া নামিল এক হীরা-মাণিকের পাহাড়ে, যেখানে হীরার ছড়াছড়ি ! রক পাখী উড়িয়া গেল, আর সিন্দ্‌বাদ রহিল সেই হীরার রাজত্বে !

এখন কথা হইতেছে এই রকপাখী বাস্তবিকই ছিল, না, আরব্য-উপন্যাসের লেখক নিজের কল্পনায় এরূপ আশ্চর্য্য পাখীর ধারণা করিয়া লইয়াছিলেন। আর থাকিলেও তারা বাস্তবিকই মানুষের মতন এত ভারী বোঝা টের না পাইয়াই বহন করিয়া আকাশে উড়িতে পারিত কি না। আমেরিকায় অনৈতিহাসিক যুগে পাহাড়ে-পর্ব্বতে একরকম প্রকাণ্ড পাখী ছিল, তার ঠোঁট ছিল প্রকাণ্ড। তার গলার আওয়াজ ছিল মেগাফোনের মত। লম্বায় সে-পাখী ছিল সাত ফুট, মাথা আড়াই ফুট। এই পাখী বাঁচিয়া থাকিলে ইহার বয়স হইত তিরিশ লক্ষ বৎসর ! কিন্তু ইহার চেয়েও এক প্রকাণ্ড পাখীর দেহের কঙ্কাল সম্প্রতি আফ্রিকার প্যাটাগোনিয়া নামক স্থানে আবিষ্কৃত হইয়াছে। ইহারা এক জায়গায় থাকিত না, ঘুরিয়া বেড়াইত। কঙ্কাল দেখিয়া মনে হয় ইহারা বড় বড় জন্তু-জানোয়ারকেও শীকার করিতে ভয় পাইত না। ইহাদের মাথা ঘোড়ার মাথার চেয়েও বড়, ঠোঁট প্রকাণ্ড ধারাল। লম্বায় ইহারা আট ফুট, পায়ে ধারাল-নখ-যুক্ত থাবা। ইহার গলাও ছিল ঘোড়ার গলার মত

Scanned with CamScanner

FIGURE 2.10 Simple lessons in drawing animals, “Cheleder Pāttāṛi’”, the children’s section of *Prabāsī*

point to the indisputable importance of women as a distinct constituency of readers with their own emotional and educational needs. *Mahilā Majlis* carried essays on women's history, current problems of women, their rights in India and other parts of the world, on women scientists and poets, female labor and education, on child rearing besides verse and prose compositions by women.[102] Therefore the editor's compensation for the price rise in terms of more content and illustrations enhanced the periodical's appeal as a family magazine, thereby making its target readerships more inclusive. The turn towards the family magazine not just made possible a further democratization of print but more importantly, marked a shift in the patterns of cultural consumption within the bhadralok domestic space. Faced with the competitiveness of a commercializing literary market, periodicals of both varieties – serious non-commercial literary periodicals like *Sabuj Patra* as well as fiction based magazines like *Jhaṅkār* and *Galpalaharī* – would languish.[103] If subscription figures and print runs are any indices of an expanding market for periodicals, then readers demonstrated a steadfast preference for the illustrated miscellanies with their blend of textual and visual enjoyment and their extensive engagement with current political affairs.

By the War years, *Prabāsī* commanded a substantial proportion of the periodical market. With the appearance of another popular illustrated miscellany *Bhāratbarṣa* in 1913, non-illustrated, non-commercial literary journals found it increasingly difficult to survive, facing languishing subscriptions and eventually having to wrap up. It was perhaps not a pure coincidence that nineteenth-century periodicals like *Bhāratī*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Bāmābodhinī* and *Tattvabodhinī* and the pre-War ones like *Sabuj Patra* and *Nārāẏaṇ* lapsed during the early and mid-1920s, a period converging with the appearance of *Māsik Basumatī*. With *Māsik Basumatī*, Bankim's vision of making literary periodicals all-inclusive (*sarbāṅga-sampanna*) seems to have attained a paradox. This was an illustrated family magazine brought out by the reputed publishing house *Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir*.[104] It hit the stands with 136+ pages in its very first issue,

102 Chapter 5 of the book investigates the domestic market of periodicals and how they created a distinct female readership.

103 The *Bengal Library Catalogues* 1915 show *Jhaṅkār* started in 1915 with 1200 printed copies of each issue. The journal which brought out mostly short stories probably did not live beyond a year. See, Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p. 169. Similarly, *Galpalaharī* a fiction magazine lasted for about six years (1912–18). See Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p. 134. The 1915 Library Catalogue shows 1000 copies of each issue printed.

104 The publishing house *Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir* was started in 1880 by Upendranath Mukhopadhyay. Initially it published various print genres ranging from annotated Bengali translations of the epics to Rabindranath's early novel *Naukādubi*. The House ran a weekly (*Sāptāhik Basumatī*) from 1896 and subsequently a daily (*Dainik Basumatī*) from 1918.

contained plenty of illustrations, plates and even cartoons that became an immediate entertainment success. In its initial years the magazine pulled in the best authors and poets. It contained essays on social issues and matters of general interest. Besides, like *Prabāsī* political discussions were a central feature of *Basumatī*, the editor categorically stating that unlike several other literary periodicals *Basumatī* would not reject political matters. In his introduction, the *Māsik Basumatī* editor Hemendraprasad Ghosh hinted at a demand-supply chain in the literary field. He noted that unlike nineteenth-century periodicals, contemporary ones such as *Bhāratī*, *Prabāsī*, *Mānasī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* had regular circulations and wide readerships. A maturing and burgeoning readership (*pāṭhak samāj*) in the vernacular was conducive to the launch of newer magazines, an implication that new periodicals, if run with editorial expertise could be assured of a substantial run.[105]

Māsik Basumatī immediately secured a sizeable readership, cutting into *Prabāsī*'s circulation and dampening *Bhāratbarṣa*'s expansion. It hit the stands with a full-page color illustration of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the nineteenth-century priest at the Kali temple in Dakshineshwar, whose doctrine of simple devotion and correlation between *chākri* (clerical job), subjugation and the evil charms of the dark age (Kaliyug) resonated with the average Hindu household of humble means, the "unsuccessful bhadralok".[106] *Māsik Basumatī* brought to Bengali middle class homes a serialized *Kathāmṛta*, the "obiter dicta" penned down by the devotee Mahendranath Gupta. This could well be an indicator as to who *Māsik Basumatī* was meant for – the modest middle class *kerāni* or clerical groups, reticent and unadventurous, yet the ones who according to Bankim were most vulnerable to visceral forms of entertainment. For a large market-sensitive publishing house like *Basumatī Sāhitya Mandir* the idea of an undifferentiated high aesthetic was not a commercially feasible one. Its contents were a mixed bag – perhaps a response to an increasingly differentiated readership of diverse tastes and reading abilities. Its illustrations of slender female figures in state of undress cohabited with serious essays on social issues, some of which were quite conservative. Such visual indulgence shared the same textual space with the juvenile sections too. Some of its serial fiction, quite predictable and following the standard trope of modesty vis-à-vis sexual misconduct, coexisted with an impressive range of general knowledge essays ranging from birth control to invention of various gadgets and even

105 Hemendraprasad Ghosh, "Patrasūcanā", *Māsik Basumatī*, Year 1 #1, Baiśākh 1329 / April-May 1922.

106 Sumit Sarkar, "Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times", *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, p. 285.

criticisms of superfluous public spending in a poverty ridden society along with abundant photographs and line sketches to aid reading. *Māsik Basumatī* therefore embodied a reading that simultaneously thwarted and endorsed a 'high' and more reformed literary sensibility. In a way it underscored the futility of bhadralok reformist drive to stamp out *Baṭtalā*, yet perhaps also confessing the need for a 'high' aesthetic if a modern national literary public sphere had to be realized.

3 Envisioning the Aesthete Reader: Literacy, Education and Reading

Gautam Bhadra has shown how reading in nineteenth-century Bengal was as much an intensely individuated practice as it was laden with wider social aspirations.[107] Drawing on the very different reminiscences of Akshaychandra Sarkar and Rasasundari Devi and also the fictive conversations between an ordinary housewife and her English-educated husband on the subject of suitable reading Bhadra shows how expectations, experiences and purposes of reading varied from one individual to another. While for Sarkar *pāṭhābhyās* or the habit of reading was a precondition for nurturing aesthetic sensibility, reading for Rasasundari was a divine endowment and its performance necessarily suffused with devotion. Such narratives of reading indicate how differentiations in experiences of reading represent very different contemporary social locales, even as the individuals were ostensibly part of the "same" class.[108] Reading, Bhadra suggests, is a process of constant engagement, complexly textured and variegated with social and linguistic hierarchies woven into various practices of reading. In his memoir, Akshaychandra Sarkar delineated different modes of reading: reading for acquiring knowledge and reading as a practice for nurturing a taste for literature. For him, reading was all about experiencing happiness. Whether a text was enjoyable or not had to be the sole index for judging its merit. He recollected Rajendralal Mitra's *Bibidhārtha Saṃgraha* more as an encyclopaedia, for gaining knowledge. From Mitra's writings, he argued, one could neither learn the use of language nor develop an aesthetic sensibility.[109] Sarkar further asserted that cultivation of taste or *ruci* was contingent upon nurturing habits of collegiality. Literary fellowship alone could create the ideal reader.[110]

107 Gautam Bhadra, 'Bāṅgālīr Bāṅglā Boi Paṛā' in *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?*, pp. 59–73.
108 Bhadra, op. cit., pp. 76–88.
109 Gautam Bhadra, "Bāṅgālīr Boi Paṛā", p. 77.
110 Ibid., pp. 77–78.

Two significant inferences can be drawn from Bhadra's reading of Akshaychandra that relate in important ways to the emergence of periodical reading culture among middle-class Bengalis. First, the disentangling of 'reading habit' from the 'acquisition of knowledge', that is reading oriented towards creating an aesthete and not simply a knowledgeable person and second, *sāhacaryer śāsan* or the obligation enforced by communication could alone foster literary taste. Reading literature (and literary periodicals) was, despite its pedagogic intent, not strictly meant to stand in for educational books and therefore as a habit conducive to leisure hours. But reading also had to be a crucial form of public engagement, a key mode of social communication and an index of public awareness and involvement. Addressing a literary conference held at Kasimbazar, Rabindranath spoke of *mānasik sāmājikatā* or mental sociability that could be shaped by *sāhitya* or literature alone, a concept similar to what Akshaychandra Sarkar had earlier described as *sāhacaryer śāsan*. Emphasizing the social functions of literature, Rabindranath argued that the term *sāhitya* was particularly germane because it embraced the word *sahit,* literally meaning togetherness.[111] This idealized conviction in the social potential of literature was nurtured by the intelligentsia and publicists well into the later decades. Debates in the pages of literary periodicals reveal a sustained concern with the making of an aesthete person out of the common reader (*sādhāran pāṭhak*) by nurturing good reading habits. Concepts of the ideal reader and an expansive literary sphere existed not simply as commercial targets for publishers and editors. Rather in the imagination of the nationalist publicists, these were very real categories that foreboded the future nation as a collective based upon universal literacy and where every individual was endowed with rational and aesthetic sense. But as the hiatus between the ideal and reality became seemingly non-negotiable, publicists' frustrations with their readers too escalated. Condemning commercial trends towards enlarging readerships by fulfilling existing tastes, publicists across a broad spectrum of periodicals decried what came to be seen as a symbiotic existence of "half-educated, disrespectful and unsophisticated" readers and equally ill-equipped writers.[112]

For a nationalism seeking to create its own cultural and aesthetic space, modern, yet distinct from the West, the literary sphere or *sāhitya kṣetra* had become a sanctified domain. This *sāhitya kṣetra* was conceived of as a modern public sphere constituted by an impersonal reading audience or *pāṭhak samāj*,

111 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sāhitya Sammelan' (Literary meet) in *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Phālgun 1314 / January-February 1908.

112 Gopal Haldar, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣār Bhabiṣyaṯ" (Future of the Bengali language), *Prabāsī*, v. 30 pt.2 #1, Kārtik 1337 / October-November 1930.

very different from premodern communal practices and performative modes. At the heart of this was the figure of the *kretā-pāṭhak* or the consumer-reader. This notion of the *kretā-pāṭhak* subsumed the idea of an individual buyer-reader, i.e. single issue of a periodical to one individual or one household. Such notions seem to have foreclosed the possibility of reaching out to readers who shared texts by reading aloud – whether it was Rasasundari's practice of reading out devotional texts to the neighborhood womenfolk or peasants listening to folk ballads and Persian tales written in Musalmānī Bāṅglā being read aloud from printed *puthi* texts. The modern literary sphere is seen to have functioned on the assumption that traditional reading practices had become outdated, to be effaced by the solitary readings of the lonely private individual.[113] In reality such notional foreclosures might have proved ineffectual. Periodicals could have lent themselves as much to practices of shared readings as they did to individual reading within the privacy of domestic leisure. However, even in instance of shared reading, the periodicals' reach would most likely have been confined to those with some ability to read and appreciate modern genres of poetry, fiction and essays. Collective reading would probably not have enabled a non-literate person to appreciate the contents of any *māsik patrikā*. So while the coming of print and the reach of books peddlers in the countryside had widened the accessibility of pre-print genres like the epics, the Vaishnava and Musalmānī Bāṅglā *puthi* texts in Bengal and the *qisse* in rural Punjab, the circulation of periodicals seem to have been firmly circumscribed by the reach of primary and secondary level education. This explains periodicals' unrelenting anxieties about the inadequacies of the colonial education system and the need to upgrade vernacular schooling.

Nationalist publicists found in *sāhitya patrikā* a potential instrument for fashioning social solidarity. The *sāhitya kṣetra* was conceived of as a participatory field where publishers, editors, writers and readers could interact and the *pāṭhak samāj* as essentially an inclusionary space in which any individual with a certain amount of education could participate. At the same time, the organization and functioning of the periodicals market indicate the educated and nationalist publicists' eagerness to distance the sphere of *sāmaẏik sāhitya* from what were seen as print production of a more plebeian sort, especially genres deemed scurrilous and popular amongst a wider heterogeneous rural and semi-urban motley population. Throughout the early twentieth-century decades, literary periodicals that aimed to uphold high-brow aesthetic had to contend with the contradiction between the realities of differentiated literacy

113 Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal" in *The Invention of Private Life*, pp. 80–81.

and an emergent nationalist utopia of a society where every individual was fully literate.

Who then were the primary readers of *sāmaẏik sāhitya*? The *Bhāratbarṣa* editor Jaladhar Sen observed that many affluent zamindars had started taking keen interest in periodical literature. But the youth and middle class groups constituted the overwhelming majority of periodical readers.[114] These were mostly people who had moderate to substantial formal education, engaged in either the professions or in trade, with or without a parallel rent income from land. Its women readers, even if not always formally educated would perhaps have been familiar with a lifestyle imbued with a modern sensibility. Turning over pages of literary periodicals through the decades, yields significant insights into the social world of its primarily urban middle class readers. Descriptions of domestic space and its aestheticization, women's fashions, their codes of behavior, jewelry designs and hair styles in serial novels written by women authors like Shanta Devi, Sita Devi, Anurupa Devi, Nirupama Devi, Swarnakumari Devi and others, provide a peek into the kinds of lifestyles likely to be familiar with both the periodical's readers and the authors themselves.

Notwithstanding the numerical size of the literate population, it may well be contended that the popularity of periodicals lay in their accessibility to the vernacular literate.[115] It became a major avenue for familiarizing the vernacular educated with cosmopolitan literature and ideas. Jyotirindranath Tagore, a prolific translator, rendered several short stories of Maupassant in Bengali. These translations appeared in various journals including *Prabāsī*.[116] Periodi-

---

114 Jaladhar Sen, 'Sūcanā' (Introduction), *Bhāratbarṣa*, Year 1, no. 1, Āṣāṛh 1320 / June-July 1913.

115 Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2001 has shown how colonial education system created linguistic hierarchies and how the trajectories of vernacular education and its accessibility to various indigenous social groups emerged as intensely politicized processes.

116 Jyotirindranath Tagore started a serialized translation of Antoine Rous marquis de La Mazeliére's *Essai sur l'évolution de la civilization indienne* published in Paris in 1903. His Bengali translation started in *Prabāsī* in Baiśākh 1318 / April-May 1911 and appeared in two sequences, 'Prācīn Bhārater Sabhyatā' and 'Madhyayuge Bhāratīẏa Sabhyatā'. Jyotirindranath Tagore, "Niśān" (from Russian writer V.M. Garshin), *Prabāsī*, v. 25 pt.1 # 1 Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925. Jyotirindranath Tagore, Clothe-Giyu – translation of Hugo: *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3 pt. 1 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1331 / July-August 1924. Following Jyotirindranath Tagore, other writers too frequently translated European texts. For instance: Jatindramohan Bagchi, "Premer Prabeś" (from Tennyson), *Bhāratī*, v. 27, Śrāvaṇ 1310 / July-August 1903. Dinendranath Tagore, "Premer Jaẏjaẏantī" [translation of Ivan Turgenieuff's *The Song of Triumphant Love* (English rendering of the original Russian)], *Prabāsī*, v.18, pt. 1 # 5, Bhādra 1318 / July-August 1911. Kartikchandra Dasgupta, "Kerānīr Strī" (from Guy de Maupassant), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.3 pt.1 # 5, Bhadra 1332 / August-September 1925. Monomohan

cals like *Prabāsī* carried reviews of translated fiction that included renderings of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Chandicharan Sen, *Tom Kākār Kutir*), John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (Satyendranath Dutta, *Tīrtha Salīl*), *Aesop's Fables* (Manilal Gangopadhyay, *Kalpakathā*) and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Girishchandra Ghose, *Macbeth*).[117] Literary miscellanies like *Prabāsī* therefore constituted significant avenues for reception of European aesthetic conventions as editors sought to generate reading material suitable for the vast majority of the vernacular-literate, including women and children. Once *Prabāsī* even brought out a long list of mostly foreign literature which its readers felt worthy of translation.[118] Such lists indicate Bengali readers' familiarity with various European and North American works and also a consensus about what were generally regarded as suitable readings. Vernacular renditions of European texts constituted a significant approach by which periodicals sought to reach out to the vernacular literate, thereby pushing the frontiers of the literary sphere beyond a confined readership of the bilingually erudite and making the divides between the two groups more indeterminate.

3.1 *Charting Periodical Readership*

R.D. Altick in his influential work *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* had spoken of literature produced for the "common reader" and the emergence of a mass reading public in Victorian England as the basis of future English democracy.[119] Charles Dickens and G.W.M. Reynolds were widely read novelists in nineteenth-century England. Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* had recorded a sensational sales figure of 40,000 within the first few months in 1836.[120] In early twentieth-century colonial Bengal, circulation figures for the popular illustrated periodicals still fell far short of metropolitan 'mass circulation' standards. While this might seem explicable in terms of contrasts between societies with varying degrees of print literacy

Roy, "Ādarśa Dhanī" (Oscar Wilde, Model Millionaire), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.1 # 3 Āṣāṛh 1329 / June-July 1922.

117 "Baṅgasāhityer Śreṣṭha Anubād bā Anusaraṇ Grantha" (The Best Translated or Rendered Books in Bengali Literature) in "Betāler Baiṭhak", *Prabāsī*, v. 15, pt.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1322 / April-May 1915.

118 "Betāler Baiṭhak" section, *Prabāsī*, v. 14, pt.2 # 5, Phālgun 1321 / February-March 1915.

119 R.D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1957, p. 3.

120 Linda Hughes & Michael Lund, 'Textual / Sexual Pleasure and Serial Publication' in J. Jordan and R. Patten, *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 151. Works of these authors attracted sizeable reading audience in colonial markets as well. Priya Joshi, 'The Circulation of Fiction in Indian Libraries, ca. 1835–1901' in *In Another Country*, pp. 35–92.

and capitalist development, one needs to be aware of multiple factors that mediated the production and consumption of print in colonial India.[121] In the South Asian context, the idea of the 'common' or 'average' reader must necessarily remain a "heuristic device", indicative of an expanding literate audience that was a result of increasing literacy and commercialization of print, rather than as an absolute numerical measured as a ratio against the entire population.[122] In British Bengal a mass readership in terms of enumerable vernacular literate readers was limited even though an extensive market for a large variety of prints, textual and graphic, thrived and coexisted alongside pre-print practices of collective reading.[123] The sheer heterogeneity of the readership of various print forms and the uncertain reach of printed texts renders the question of readerships quite complex. Historical researches on the production and spread of the printed book have seriously challenged the assumption of literacy as a necessary precondition for consumption of print.[124] Practices of shared reading and listening to a particular text being read aloud constituted important ways in which non-literate groups accessed and participated in print culture.[125] The actual numerical size of the reading public, that is, the exact

121 Robin Jeffrey's identification of three stages of print consumption in Kerala is a useful means to understand periodical readership in colonial Bengal. The mid-nineteenth-century decades broadly conforms to what Jeffrey in his study of the newspaper press in Kerala has called the "scarce" stage when periodicals and newspapers are published regularly and from a number of outlets. In this stage, Jeffrey argues, newspapers production assumes what Habermas has called the "small handicraft business". In fact this is exactly how Shanta Devi described the early phase of *Prabāsī*'s publications – as a small cottage industry. Robin Jeffrey, "Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 68: 2, 2009, pp. 465–489.

122 Ulrike Stark, op. cit. pp. 16–17.

123 In his 1859 survey of book trade in the Bengal Presidency Reverend James Long estimated that approximately 600,000 copies of various Bengali books reached almost six million people, the majority of whom were listeners rather than readers. During the first decade of the twentieth century Novel and Religion commanded the highest number of book publication titles compared to other more specialized categories like History or Science. Even as late as 1922 for instance Fiction as a category commanded the largest publication – 237 fiction books were printed in this year out of a total number of 1564 book titles. *Bengal Library Catalogue* for the year 1922.

124 Ghosh, 'Revisiting the Bengal Renaissance' argues that the practice of reading texts aloud and staging of plays considerably stretched the boundaries of consumption beyond the literate audiences.

125 Tapti Roy, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal: The Journey of Bidyasundar*, Routledge, London, 2019. Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, 2001. Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.

number of readers and listeners whom a given book, periodical or newspaper reached therefore remains elusive.[126]

Even amidst the indeterminate nature of print literacy, what is intriguing is the emergence in fin-de-siècle Bengal of a highly developed periodical culture. The periodical market developed in tandem with the nationalism's assertion of sovereignty. But even as this phase was, in comparison to the early and mid-nineteenth century, a more mature phase of print, the question of ascertaining reading trends does not necessarily become any easier. In the decade between 1900 and 1910, there were as many as 140 Bengali *māsik patrikā* of varying form, content, target readership and longevity that circulated.[127] The "Number of Copies Printed" data provided by the *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals* remain at best only partial indicator of the reach of print. Rather than any comprehensive information about a quantifiable readership, they are more useful as indices of the relative popularity of various periodicals. Moreover it can be fairly assumed that some people must have read more than one magazine. This pattern of overlap too is difficult to trace. The question of periodical consumption and its relation to print-literacy is an uncertain one and therefore demands much more attention than it has so far.[128]

3.2 *Vernacular Education, Periodical Readership and the Public Sphere*

The problem of charting periodical readerships calls for an investigation into the spread, scope and the meanings of print-literacy, especially that of vernacular education and how it became a central concern for making consumption of periodicals *sarbajanīn*, i.e. accessible to all. In an editorial in which he

126 According to the literacy statistics provided by the 1931 Census, only a meager 79 out of every 1000 Hindu adults aged 24 years and above had some form of primary education. The corresponding figure for Muslims in Bengal was 40 out of every 1000. Similarly, ratios of vernacular literates and literates in English showed a considerable hiatus for both Hindu and Muslim males and females. Bengali-Hindu male literacy (for ages above five years) stood at 217 / 1000 (1901), 238 / 1000 (1911), 268 / 1000 (1921) and 259 / 1000 (1931). Corresponding English literacy for the same social group was 50 and 68 per 1000 for 1921 and 1931 respectively. The 1931 Census for the first time categorized 'Authors, Editors, Journalists and Photographers' as a distinct sub-category occupation under the broader category of 'Letters, Arts and Sciences'. The statistics for sub-category of Authors etc. was put at a mere 274 males and 6 females for the year 1931.

127 Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials, 1818–1950: A Shared Database of Library Holdings Worldwide*, Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 2004, pp. 397–399.

128 The relationship between print-literacy, forms of oral transmission of literary texts and periodical consumption is an uncertain and ambiguous one. For instance while fiction and poems could be read most appropriately in the solitude of private reading a section like *Pañcaśasya* that appeared regularly in *Prabāsī* was perhaps more amenable to collective reading.

examined the reasons behind the ephemeral nature of Bengali periodicals, Ramananda Chattopadhyay pointed out the limited reach and doubtful quality of the colonial state's primary and higher education schemes.[129] Widespread non-literacy he concluded was directly responsible for the inadequate subscriptions of vernacular periodicals. The need of the hour for him was to widen accessibility of primary education "whose minimum prerequisite were a few pice for books and a few minutes of practice each day".[130] The *Prabāsī* editor observed,

> The life-experiences of woodcutters in our forests, the peasants of the Sundarbans, the boatmen plying the Padma and Meghna and the sea bound fishermen are yet to find a place in our literature. Apart from a few classes (*sreṇī*) of people identified as bhadralok the rest of the populations have till now, refrained from *sāhitya sebā*. Women have expressed themselves only partly in literature. The Bengali-Muslim's enthusiasm and commitment are yet to enrich and vitalize Bengali literature.[131]

Literacy and a modern literary sensibility were considered to be the necessary preconditions of periodical readership. The reach of primary education being only partial, over the years, the hope of sustaining periodical publishing by incorporating new readers, diminished. Readership and longevity of periodicals became proportional to the expansion in vernacular literacy. The 1921 Census for instance, estimated the average literacy in Bengal to be 104 out of every 1000 people and this included all who were only functionally literate with a minimum ability to correspond via letters.[132] Even into the 1920s, a time when most publicists nurtured an optimistic view of periodical production, the

129 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga: Bāṅglā Māsik Dīrghajībī Hoẏnā keno?" (Why are Bengali monthlies short-lived?), *Prabāsī*, Kārtik 1324 / October-November 1917.

130 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga: Bāṅglā Sāhitya O Sarbasādhāraner Śikṣā" (Bengali literature and mass education) in *Prabāsī* v.15 pt. 2, # 5, Phālgun 1321 / February-March 1915. Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898–1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1970, has shown how the commercialization of cash crops like jute made certain groups within the cultivating communities affluent enough to send their sons to schools. Basu, pp. 114–115.

131 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga" in *Prabāsī*, Pouṣ 1321 / December-January 1914–15.

132 Nagendrachandra Dasgupta, 'Bāṅglār Janatattva' (Bengal's demography), *Prabāsī*, v. 23, pt. 2 # 1, Kārtik 1330 / November-December 1923. According to an extract from the 1921 Census published in *Prabāsī*, v.25, pt.1 #2, Jyaiṣṭha 1332 / May-June 1925, the rate of literacy among the three upper castes in Bengal were estimated at: 486 / 1000 for Brahmins, 662 / 1000 for Baidyas and 413 / 1000 for Kayasthas.

threshold that the periodical market could practically attain was only about ten percent of the overall population. Given the form and content of most literary periodicals, the periodicals market could not have widened beyond the educated minority. Periodical reading remained firmly embedded in notions of print literacy and solitary readings in private spaces. The only way to create new readers and sustain the inclusionary claims of the literary community was to enhance the scope of vernacular primary education. This becomes evident in Chattopadhyay's recurrent insistence on subsuming within the literary sphere marginalized social groups through improved schooling. Women's journals too frequently spoke of the appalling conditions of primary education for women, especially in the rural areas.[133] According to one estimate, during the years 1916–1917, only 1.3% of Bengal's entire female population was being tutored.[134] At the heart of such disappointments was the constant tension between an envisioned literary public and the reality of a hierarchical colonial education system in which the vernacular had been relegated to a secondary position and from which a majority of the indigenous population had been kept out. The education system put in place by the necessities of colonial administration was vastly unbalanced not only in terms of financial provisions for English and regional vernaculars but also the cognitive functions that the two linguistic fields were expected to perform. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia had fully internalized the linguistic and cognitive hierarchy formulated in the colonial classrooms and used the print media to secure their hegemony over subordinate groups.[135] Financial and social qualifications governed access to institutions of higher education that remained by and large confined to the well-to-do.[136] As the primary beneficiaries of English education at the high school and college levels, they opposed the extension of compulsory primary education since that would have meant a corresponding reduction in government support for higher education. Such oppositions continued well into the 1920s when the rural wealthy opposed proposals for a tax on them to fund primary education facilities in villages.[137]

133 Nirajbashini Shome, "Bāṅglādeśe Strī Śikṣār Bartamān Abasthār Saṃkṣipta Bibaraṇ" (A brief report on the condition of female education in Bengal), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6, # 9, Śrāvaṇ 1338 / July-August 1931.

134 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga" in *Prabāsī*, v. 19 pt. 1 #1, Baiśākh 1326 / April-May 1919.

135 Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, 2001.

136 Tithi Bhattacharya, *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education, and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal (1848–85)*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005.

137 Poromesh Acharya, "Law and Politics of Primary Education in Bengal" in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ed. *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1998, pp. 229–251.

The contestations around education were played out on two distinct but overlapping terrains – the first related to the question of hegemony within indigenous society and the second between the national collective and colonial power. The hierarchical organization of colonial education system ensured and preserved the domination of traditional upper and middle caste landed elements, legitimizing their claims for political, ideological and cultural hegemony. The Census of 1921 estimated that literacy rates were highest amongst the three upper castes in Bengal – the Brahmins (486 per one thousand), Kayasthas (413 per one thousand) and Baidyas (662 per one thousand).[138] It reinforced their detachment from the vast majority of the population who lay beyond the pale of education initiatives, inhibited by limited access to socio-economic resources and drifting further away from avenues of social mobility and material wealth opened up by colonial rule. Again as a modern, civic form of bonding the community of ordinary readers (*pāṭhak samāj*) could be a potent instrument in bringing an imagined national collective into material existence. Nationalism's confrontation with colonialism dictated the need for a democratizing literary sphere based upon widespread literacy and more equitable access to social resources. Literary periodicals reveal this tension between the hegemonic aspirations of the dominant class and the inclusionary claims of a modern public sphere. The ideal literary sphere that Chattopadhyay speaks of was discernibly constituted by liberal principles of literary practice adapted by the modern intelligentsia – literacy, acquisition of some formal education at least in the vernacular and an aesthetic sensibility to appreciate modern genres.[139]

Even then the connotations of the *śikṣita pāṭhak*, that is the educated reader, remained ambiguous. The official criterion laid out by the Census for registering oneself as educated – the bare minimum ability to compose a full letter – remained dubious and untenable as far as the intelligentsia was concerned. Exclaiming that the literary sphere had become a veritable marketplace populated by non-literates, a publicist in the journal *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* observed that a majority of vernacular readers were near non-literates (*mūrkha*). Such readers, the writer proceeded, were almost entirely unprepared to read essays and merely capable of following simple narrative plots.[140] A corresponding catego-

138 1921 Census extracts in *Prabāsī*, v. 25, pt. 1 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1332 / May-June 1925.

139 As a social group, the educated middle class in colonial Bengal howsoever diverse and stratified was only a miniscule of the entire indigenous population. Even as late as 1931, the proportion of the population engaged in the 'Professions and Liberal Arts' was 55 per one thousand. 1931 Census: Volume v Bengal and Sikkim.

140 Anonymous, "Prasaṅga Kathā", *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*, Year 7, # 11, Bhādra 1342 / August-September 1935.

ry of writers akin (*sahadharmī*) to these readers in learning and refinement, the publicist claimed, had emerged who crowded publishers' offices in search of writing assignments that would sell readily.[141] Publicists noted with concern the overwhelming preference for lightweight sensation fiction among common readers.[142] Rabindranath regretted what he believed was the common readers' preference for excitement (*uttejanā*) over enlightenment (*udbodhan*) – a choice, he asserted, compromised on the social function of literature.[143] The central concern was not merely to draw a distinction between literacy and reading as habit. Just as literacy was not a homogenous category, with a range of 'reading abilities' active between literacy and non-literacy,[144] so too was the practice of reading. The Bengali literati sought to differentiate between habitual readings of diverse kinds – especially between reading thriller and sensation fictions and engagement with fiction, poetry and essays of more serious varieties. For them, it was not enough to just cater to existing literary tastes, create new, extended readerships and encourage people to buy and subscribe books and periodicals. The idea of the common reader needs to be situated in this context. The ordinary reader was not simply one who was vernacular educated, a habitual reader and the one whom periodicals considered their target audience. The 'common reader' embodied the vulnerability of a particular social position and the aesthetic threat that such position constituted to an idealized literary sphere. The anxieties of the literati indicate that the 'common reader' inhabited the fuzzy zone demarcating the sanctified domain of the canonical from the wider domain of popular prints. Notionally, the 'common reader' could be absorbed in and transformed into an aesthete reader, a responsible participant within the literary system. Yet the threat of slippage was too real to ignore, a slippage that expressed itself in the production and consumption of frivolous "obscene" fiction and forewarned the peril of anarchy.

---

141 Ibid.

142 The *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*, Year 8, # 6, Caitra 1342 / March-April 1936 disparagingly noted that most readers were "mentally lethargic" that explained much of their refusal to read anything thought-provoking. During the first decade of the twentieth century Novel and Religion commanded the highest number of book publication titles compared to other more specialized categories like History or Science. Even as late as 1922 for instance Fiction as a category commanded the largest publication – 237 fiction books were printed in this year out of a total number of 1564 book titles. Report of the *Bengal Library Catalogue*, 1922.

143 Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Sudhindranath Dutta, *Paricaẏ*, Kārtik 1338 / October-November 1931.

144 Roger Chartier, 'Culture as Appropriation: Popular Cultural Uses in Early Modern France' in Steven L. Kaplan ed. *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Mouton, New York, p. 229–53; cited in Ulrike Stark, op. cit. p. 13.

3.3 *Libraries and Periodical Holdings*

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the limited purchasing abilities of a large section of print literate population seem to have enhanced the importance of public libraries in urban Calcutta and its immediate semi-urban surroundings.[145] Public libraries, along with other spaces like museums, teashops, bookstores, theatre, trams and middle-class drawing rooms emerged as an important space of modernity in nineteenth and early twentieth-century urban Calcutta.[146] The number of libraries and reading rooms in Calcutta increased from 49 in 1886 to 137 in 1901.[147] Most localities in the indigenously populated parts of urban Calcutta and its suburbs had their own public library, howsoever humble. Several British publishing houses like Macmillan started their own Colonial Library Series as part of their agenda to cultivate a market for their publications in overseas colonies.[148] Indigenous public libraries, reading rooms of various locally established societies and clubs became major institutional sites for nurturing vernacular reading. Leading libraries in the city included the Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ Library, Caitanya Library, the Uttarpara Public Library, Bagbazar Reading Library, Saraswati Library, Sabitri Library and the Paikpara Zamindars' Association Library besides several others.[149] Gyanendramohan Das who regularly contributed to *Prabāsī* on various aspects of lives of expatriate Bengalis came up with a series of reports on libraries and reading facilities available to the Bengali communities in the urban centres in north and north-west provinces like Agra, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi, Rawalpindi, Dehradun, Nainital and Simla. Most of these public libraries were set up and maintained by a small number of Bengalis resident in each town,

---

145 Priya Joshi, 'Reading in the Public Eye: The Circulation of British Fiction in Indian Libraries' in Stuart Blackburn & Vasudha Dalmia ed., *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, Permanent Black, 2008, pp. 280–326. During the late nineteenth-century decades the general pattern of public reading remained overwhelmingly gendered with very few women securing the education or the freedom to access public libraries. Ghosh, *Power in Print*, pp. 154–161.

146 Rosinka Chaudhuri, 'Modernity at Home: A Possible Genealogy of the Indian Drawing Room' in *Freedom and Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2012, pp. 120–121.

147 Joshi, op. cit. p. 293.

148 Ibid.

149 "List of the more important Libraries in India (1905)" enumerates 96 libraries in Bengal (of which 22 were located in and around Calcutta), 10 in Bombay and 44 in Madras. A more exhaustive list compiled in 1907 listed 139 public libraries in Bengal (including Orissa, Chota Nagpur, Bhagalpur and Patna Divisions). Private Libraries including collections of individuals or families like those of the Pathuriaghata Tagores, Asutosh Mukherjee, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, Radhakanta Deb and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar were listed separately. IOR: V/27/10/1.

with paltry annual budgets.[150] Most of these libraries had less than a thousand book holdings and annual subscriptions for periodicals like *Prabāsī*, *Nabyabhārat*, *Bhāratī*, *Sāhitya*, *Mukul*, *Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ Patrikā* and *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* and also a few terminated ones like *Baṅgadarśan*, *Āryadarśan*, *Bāndhab*, *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā*.[151]

These public libraries, most of them set up through indigenous initiatives, became important facilities for readers of Bengali. A large variety of these periodicals found their place in the stacks of public libraries and was made available for borrowing. Often subscribing to several periodicals, public library reading rooms emerged as important spaces for circulation of periodicals as much as they did for books. Catering mostly to occasional readers of periodicals rather than regular subscribers, the public library network became a significant multiplier of periodical readership and more generally of print.[152] The public library system received an immediate support from the educated Indians who endorsed its expansion and many of who were willing to contribute towards the establishment and upkeep of local public libraries. In fact public libraries came to be broached as an important marker of the nation's "self-culture".[153] Literary periodicals, as much as books, came to be seen as important constituents of public library holdings. Underscoring the importance of and the need to create an extensive archive of vernacular periodicals, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, the Secretary of the Pariṣaṯ argued that "Literary periodicals are the live history (*pratyakṣa itihās*) of a vernacular's consistent improvement (*kramonnati*). The Pariṣaṯ library must house all kinds of vernacular periodicals, current (*bartamān*) and extinct (*lupta*)."[154] The *Prabāsī* editor too urged expatriate Bengalis to send in reports on their local libraries and their collections, including the periodicals and newspapers they subscribed to.[155] Literary periodicals were simultaneously subscribed to by large number of households

150 Gyanendramohan Das, "Uttar Paścime Baṅgasāhitya", *Prabāsī*, v.1 # 3, Āṣāṛh (June-July), # 4, Śrāvaṇ (July-August), # 5, Bhādra (August-September), # 6 & 7, Āśvin and Kārtik (September-October and October-November) 1308 / 1901. In these reports Das explained, that most of these towns had a few hundred Bengali residents. The annual maintenance budgets for libraries would typically be around rupees thirty.

151 Ibid.

152 Both Priya Joshi and Ulrike Stark have discussed the institutional space of public libraries as 'multiplicators' of print. See Joshi, op. cit. pp. 50–68 and Stark, op. cit. pp. 17–18.

153 Pramatha Chaudhuri, 'Granthāgār' (library), *Bicitrā*, v.1 pt.2, Phālgun 1334 / February-March 1927.

154 *Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ Kāryyabibaranī* or the Proceedings of the Baṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ (Year 8, 1900, p. 19).

155 *Prabāsī*, v.1 # 6 & 7, Āśvin and Kārtik 1308 / (September-October and October-November) 1901.

and several reading libraries. By the early 1920s however, the *Prabāsī* editor decided to increase annual subscription fees for clubs and libraries, differentiating subscription for collective use from domestic subscription. The explanation he offered was that availability of periodicals in public libraries impeded domestic subscription and the loss thus incurred could be reduced by differentiating the public market from the domestic one.[156] In this commercializing phase of periodical production, the quantifiable market rather than the effective reach of periodicals seem to have taken a priority, qualifying the role of libraries as unmediated multipliers of print and further complicating the question of circulation and readership.

Periodicals constitute an important archive not only as representing a rapid process of commercialization and diffusion of print in an undercapitalized colonial society but also for its materiality – as an archive that clearly demonstrates the unevenness of the evolving class ideologies and identities of the indigenous middle classes. Given the unevenness and stratification of the colonial *madhyabitta* in terms of economic and socio-cultural markers it becomes quite problematic to speak of the literary marketplace and cultural consumption simply in terms of class-based ideology. The complex patterns of production, transmission and consumption of *sacitra māsik patrikā* like *Prabāsī* need to be investigated in terms of the aesthetic principles that they articulated and how those principles came to be understood and contested by various reader groups. By the beginning of the War years, these periodicals had come to embody a kind of mainstream literary sensibility – an aesthetic, the acquiring of which represented claims to a certain cultural and sub-national position. Thus the journals' popularity becomes significant even more in context of the internal fissures of its readership – that notwithstanding socio-economic differentiations and uneven literacy patterns, at least a section of the Bengali intelligentsia felt that it was desirable and perhaps possible to shape an aesthetically uniform readership.

4 Leisure, Periodicals and Suitable Reading

Looking back at his childhood days in the 1860s and early 1870s Rabindranath described the everyday life of the urban middle classes in the following terms:

156 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, 'Nutan *Prabāsī*', *Prabāsī* v. 21 pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

TABLE 2.1 Circulation figures of miscellaneous periodicals (figures mostly from the Final Quarter Reports of years shown)

Periodicals / Year	1901	1905	1910	1915	1922	1925
Prabāsī	Published from Allahabad	2000	4000	6000	7000	7500
Bhāratbarṣa	×	×	×	5000	8500	10000
Māsik Basumatī	×	×	×	×	×	12000
Bhāratī	1250	1250	–	2250	2500	1500
Sabuj Patra	×	×	×	1000	500	×
Bāmābodhinī Patrikā	–	900	750	650	–	×
Saogāt	×	×	×	×	1000	–

– Implies non-availability of statistics
× Implies the periodical did not exist during that period

TABLE 2.2 Statistics for requisition of books not in the open shelf collection of the reading room (of the Imperial Library):[a]

Print Media / Year	1920–21	1922–23	1925–26	1929–30
Newspapers	517	1017	805	1153
Periodicals	399	848	723	613

a Report on the working of the Imperial Library from April 1920 to March 1926 and April 1926 to March 1931. IOR: V/24/2634 & V/24/2635.

> People did not have too many components with which to fill up their time. Day schedules were not tautly knit. Rather they were like nets with big holes in them.... Whether the men's gatherings (*majlis*) or the womenfolk's gossips (*āsar*) the chitchats were mostly of a rather casual kind.[157]

These days of ample free time Rabindranath argued belonged to the pre-modern and rural peasant society when every household had a *ḍhẽkiśāl* (room with a grain husking pedal), women made sugared coconut balls (*nāṛu*) and when children listened to fairytales (*rupkathā*) from the womenfolk in the family

157 Rabindranath Tagore, *Chelebelā*, p. 45.

rather than reading them from printed books.[158] Long spare afternoons, especially for women in city households were spaces where rural time lingered on, co-existing paradoxically with the new disciplinary clock-time enforced in British-controlled government or mercantile offices and the new educational institutions. As Sumit Sarkar has argued, colonial India underwent a drastic transition from pre-modern time measured in hours alone to the rigors of modern clock- and calendar-time under subjugated conditions within only a couple of generations. The process was, therefore, far more complex and tenuous than in Europe where similar transition took place over a span of over five centuries.[159] By the middle decades of the nineteenth-century *chākri* or office-jobs had come to embody the oppressiveness of the colonial regime in the everyday lives of the subjugated middle classes. For the majority of the colonial middle classes, especially the less successful 'bhadralok', often office clerks, modest schoolteachers and unemployed graduates, experiences of the new rigors of clock-time went beyond the spatial confines of the colonial office spaces, embodying their demeaning existence and reinforcing the myth of the dark and grinding times, the *kaliyug*.[160] Accounts of nineteenth-century Calcutta such as those of Durgacharan Roy were dominated neither by images of palaces and elites nor the squalor of the city's poorest, but by images of its middle classes, especially the clerical groups crowding to the city from the suburbs and returning home in the evening after the day's exhaustion and humiliation.[161] The middle classes' encounter with clock- and calendar- time thus constituted a crucial aspect of colonial modernity and a gendering of time itself – the afternoon leisure for the household's womenfolk and office discipline for its men.

It was into these spaces of long spare afternoons usually spent in siesta and the rigors of colonial office that periodicals intervened. When a new issue of *Baṅgadarśan* appeared no one in the neighborhood (*pāṛā*) seemed to have time for their habitual afternoon naps.[162] Rabindranath recollected how during his boyhood days he waited restlessly for *Baṅgadarśan* to appear at the end of the month. His impatience, he writes in *Jībansmṛti* would be prolonged because family elders got the privilege to read first while youngsters were kept waiting. He wrote,

158 Rabindranath Tagore, *Chelebelā*, pp. 47–48.

159 Sarkar, 'Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth and History in Colonial Bengal,' in *Writing Social History*, p. 190.

160 Sarkar, 'The City Imagined: Calcutta of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries' in *Writing Social History*, p. 176.

161 Ibid., p. 177.

162 Rabindranath Tagore, *Chelebelā*, p. 68.

> Now anyone can easily read Bankim's *Biṣabṛkṣa*, *Candraśekhar*, in one sitting. But in our days we read these very classics over months. The way we desired them intensely, waited for them, episodic readings followed by long periods of reflections, contentment mixed with dissatisfaction and curiosity arising out of reading these novels building up through successive installments – no one else will be able to read these novels in the same way anymore.[163]

Rabindranath's reminiscences convey the excitement of *Baṅgadarśan's* first readers. Literary periodicals were evidently the new form for the modern times. Scheduled to appear at regular thirty-one days interval and aiming to provide reading matter sufficient for a month, magazine reading was well on its way to becoming an integral aspect of middle class lives. Reading magazines would now constitute not a lazy habit to fill up one's spare time, but rather a specifically modern form of leisure, problematizing the emergent middle-class readers' experiences of temporality. The enforced interruptions between readings that Rabindranath refers to provided readers with opportunities for reflections and speculations. Stuck for a month, readers found the time to procrastinate and the yearning to know 'what might happen next' could be satisfied only by procuring and reading the following issue. Rabindranath described the intense excitement that Bankim's serial novels triggered among its new readers, '… those were the times when everyone was overwhelmed by *Baṅgadarśan*. Like family members, Suryamukhi and Kundanandini[164] walked into our homes. What's going on, what's about to happen … everyone was equally anxious (*deśsuddha sabār ei bhābanā*).'[165] The specific formatting of periodicals and of serial fiction in particular therefore directly paced the reading experiences of readers, constituting an important aspect of their interpretative efforts.[166]

Sudipta Kaviraj argues that with the coming of modernity, literary practice had turned into a "primarily lonely pleasure", involving in its wake, a series of institutional changes that altered vernacular literary culture.[167] Expansion in periodical reading has been linked to economic growth and substantial section

163 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, Visva-Bharati Granthana Vibhaga, Calcutta, Reprint 1411 / 2004, p. 64.

164 Kundanandini and Suryamukhi were the major female protagonists in Bankimchandra's first serial novel in *Baṅgadarśan*, *Biṣabṛkṣa* serialized in 1279 / 1872.

165 Rabindranath Tagore, *Chelebelā*, Bhādra 1347 / August-September 1940, Parts 12 and 13, p. 68.

166 Tom Keymer, 'Reading Time in Serial Fiction before Dickens', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, v. 30 (2000), pp. 34–45.

167 Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal", p. 80.

of the literate population becoming more leisured.[168] The historical trajectories of urbanization and professionalization of the Bengali *madhyabitta* during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century created a space of leisure for this emergent class. Leisure or *abasar* is generally conceived as belonging to the realm of the domestic and constituting the less busy and less important times of the day, for instance, the afternoons in case of the household's women and evenings and weekend holidays for men.[169] In *Jībansmṛti*, Rabindranath spoke of a virtual void in the availability of reading.[170] Similarly, the nineteenth-century poet Nabinchandra Sen in his memoir *Āmār Jīban* recollected that during his childhood, i.e. 1850s and 1860s, there were very few texts worth attentive reading. Leisure or *abasar* thus implied not voracious reading habits but either afternoon repose or other forms of performative and audio-visual entertainments, like the *jātrā* (mobile theatres) or musical presentations by itinerant performers. Reading problematized the existing ideas of *abasar*, crucially altering the textures of the everyday *madhyabitta* life. The practice sneaked into and reordered the domestic space of the ordinary *madhyabitta* household. Gautam Bhadra has talked about Rasasundari Devi's small women's reading circle consisting of her sisters-in-law and neighbors where she was at once the sole reader and performer.[171] For womenfolk toiling with household chores, their coming together could not have been possible at the cost of domestic obligations. Completion of family duties must have been a precondition for such reading circles. This necessarily infused a sense of wrapping up chores on times, making time for *abasar* and then participating in such collective performances. It was precisely in this space of leisure that Bankim's *Baṅgadarśan* and subsequently other literary periodicals intervened. They constituted an intervention that transformed conventional notions of leisure, thereby significantly reshaping the colonial domestic space.

By the early twentieth century, periodical reading had emerged as the most common and perhaps fashionable leisure activity among middle-class men

168 Price, K. & Smith, S., *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America*, University of Virginia Press, 1995, pp. 1–16.

169 From about the last decades of the nineteenth century, women from middle-class and richer families were increasingly encouraged by their families to spend their free time in constructive ways that included reading, embroidery, knitting and music. These new trainings constituted important ways towards creating the new gentlewoman, the bhadramahila.

170 Rabindranath Tagore, *Jībansmṛti*, Visva-Bharati Granthana Vibhaga, Reprint 1411 / 2004, p. 71. Even the nineteenth-century poet Nabinchandra Sen in his memoir *Āmār Jīban* wrote that during his childhood days, i.e. 1850s and 1860s, there were very few texts worth attentive reading.

171 Gautam Bhadra, op. cit. p. 79.

and women. Several twentieth-century literary periodicals derided *abasar samaẏ* or leisure time that was spent in doing nothing, typically disparaging time wiled away in afternoon nap, playing cards or gossiping. Reconceptualised as caring for the self through constructive and helpful reading that was to play a central role in the formation of the modern self, *abasar* became a key indicator of middle-class identity. It emerged as a concept of time that was to be spent in *sadgranthapāṭh* (literally implying reading good books). Alternately it meant refrain from engaging with *hāsyarasotpādak-pustak* or books of light entertainment and comedies.[172] When Bankimchandra started *Baṅgadarśan*, he did so with the specific aim of connecting the highly erudite amongst the indigenous elite who mostly wrote in English with the lower stratum vernacular literate who drew his entertainment from fictional sub-genres, farces and secret romantic tales.[173] Periodicals were foregrounded as effective antidote to these sub-genres. Readers were repeatedly urged to abandon habits of reading undesirable texts, a practice that amounted to indolence and squandering of precious leisure time. In contrast, high-brow literary periodicals like *Prabāsī* came to be regarded as constituting good and essential reading that did not necessitate family vigilance even if read by young maidens. Neither Purnasashi Devi nor Jyotirmoyee Devi mentions any vigilance vis-à-vis reading periodicals that their respective families subscribed to.[174] Curiously, it was the invention of *abasar* as a reading interval that made possible the pedagogic discourses on good reading habits and how well-read home-makers could transform the household into an ideal domestic space. In the way of becoming a quotidian presence, periodical reading unsettled the lingering rural time that Rabindranath speaks of and signaled modernity's entry into middle-class homes. This temporal reordering of domesticity altered the ways in which the private and the public related to each other. Ranajit Guha has argued that the

172 Mudrā-rākṣas (the Print Monster), a short description of a novel 'Satīlakṣmī' by Bidhubhusan Basu in 'Prāpta Pustaker Saṃkṣipta Paricaẏ' (Brief Review of Books Received) Section, *Prabāsī*, Baiśākh 1316 / April-May 1909.

173 The disparity and the distance between these two literary worlds can be sensed from the works of Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project*, Seagull Books, 2002, which deals with English writings of mid-nineteenth-century bilingual Bengali elite and Ghosh, *Power in Print* that studies the other end of the spectrum, the lower stratum literates whose literacy diverged widely from vernacular literacy to total non-literacy. Rabindranath Tagore's letter to Dineshchandra Sen dated Agrahāẏaṇ 1312 / November-December 1905, *Ciṭhipatra*, volume 10, no. 32, p. 31. Tagore wrote, "… Bankim's *Baṅgadarśan* nourished Bengali literature in modern ways and inspired the educated to use our mother-language (*mātṝ-bhāṣā*)…."

174 Purnasashi Devi, "Smṝtikathā" in Bandyopadhyay, A. & Sen, A. *Pūrṇaśaśī Devīr Nirbācita Racanā*, pp. 230–31. Jyotirmoyee Devi, *Smṝti Bismṝtir Taraṅge*, pp. 29–30.

the colonial everyday was 'irreparably split in the middle, with one part assimilated to official time' and the other 'alienated from civil society'.[175] The sense of a shared present and social space that the literary periodicals helped incorporate among readers was one of the important ways in which the private came to be assimilated into the emergent public sphere, helping in the creation of what in Guha's terms could be described as the 'worldhood of a colonial public'.[176]

The history of a quotidian practice like reading therefore reveals crucial aspects of the changing cultural politics of the Bengali middle class, and provides significant clues to the transformation of middle class values, beliefs and priorities. The production and circulation of periodicals straddled the private-public divide that is generally assumed to have been a central feature of middle-class bhadralok life in colonial Bengal.[177] Questions of social reform that animated the colonial public sphere during the second half of the nineteenth century were no longer restricted to the older public domain of engagement with the colonial state. Rather the same questions, now couched in a new discourse of taste and morality, reappear in the pages of literary journals. Literary periodicals, as will be seen, tried to redirect questions of social and family reform away from the legislative sphere – but not merely into a retreat called the domestic sphere.[178] From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, especially after the advent of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Baṅgadarśan*, there prevailed a sense of confidence in the transformative capacity of literature.[179] The raging debates on the Age of Consent (1891) of minor wives threw up questions about limits of the colonial state's legislative intervention into the domain of the nation.[180] The concomitant surge in print reflected the centrality in the

175 Ranajit Guha, 'A Colonial City and its Time(s)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, v. 45 (2008), pp. 341–344.

176 Ibid., pp. 340–342.

177 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, p. 10.

178 Ibid., pp. 147–149.

179 Rabindranath wrote on the impact of *Baṅgadarśan*, "… That day we fled from the control of schools and foreign teachers and turned to our homes…" Rabindranath Tagore on the newly initiated journal *Aitihāsik Citra* in 'Prasaṅga Kathā', *Bhāratī*, Bhādra 1305 / August-September 1898.

180 Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and Its Women' in *Nation and Its Fragments*, pp. 116–134. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001 and Tanika Sarkar, Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child Wife, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28:36, 1993, pp. 1869–78. Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995. Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001. Sumit Sarkar &

public sphere, of the questions thrown up by nineteenth-century social reform debates – concerns over issues such as ideas of love and conjugality, femininity, masculinity and motherhood and most importantly how notions of the *samāj* or social collective were redrawn in the light of the new debates. The domain of print emerged as a quasi-autonomous domain where *jātīẏa jīban* or national life could be interrogated and alternative possibilities about society and politics explored. Literary periodicals because of their remarkable inherent diversity came to be considered as particularly apposite as an apparatus for self-improvement. Periodical reading was intended to induce emotional experiences that would in turn make possible new conceptualizations of the individual's social roles. Periodicals like *Prabāsī* reveal how the social function of literature was conceptualized differently and in intensely contested ways. The bond between literary periodicals and their readers – itself an ongoing and creative process – therefore provides a different narrative of the constitutive relationships between print-culture and social and political change. It is here that periodical reading emerged as a useful choice for spending leisure. Leisure reading offered the space for individual readers to contemplate and think through questions raised. While allowing its readers privacy of domestic leisure and choice in reading, periodicals also provided for a certain degree of engagement amongst readers, writers and editors in a public forum, something that the domain of colonial law did not. For the indigenous middle classes therefore this literary sphere emerged as one that they could claim and guard as their own, a sanctuary for the sub-dominant colonial elite.

By the 1930s, the earlier generation of literary periodicals had phased out and the more popular illustrated miscellanies were turning out to be somewhat staid and stereotypical. With no radical innovation making a mark, the world of periodicals was seen as tending towards stagnation, having almost touched the liminal in terms of readership and creativity. The reason as Gopal Haldar would explain in a rather pessimistic tone, was that, in contrast to European language periodicals, the approach of most Bengali periodicals was quite generalized, preferring non-specialized content and catering to a readership undifferentiated in terms of class.[181] With other social media like radio and cinema emerging and gaining popularity, were literary periodicals outlasting their social necessity? New periodicals like *Paricaẏ* (1931), *Kabitā* (1935) and a range of socialist journals would remain confined to a very small literary and

---

Tanika Sarkar, *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, Indiana University Press, 2008.

181 Gopal Haldar, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣār Bhabiṣyaṯ", *Prabāsī*, v. 30 pt.2 #1, Kārtik 1337 / October-November 1930.

scholarly circle, cherished either for their academic contents or for their enunciation of defined, primarily leftist political ideology. Among the later periodicals perhaps only *Deś* (1933), a weekly magazine, would become a household name.

As the mainstream, nationalist *māsik patrikā* like *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* became progressively sedate and unadventurous, growing merely in bulk, several new periodicals came up that nurtured different aesthetic and social sensibilities and aimed for other readerships especially women, children and perhaps most importantly, the upcoming professional middle-class segment among Bengal's Muslims. As will be evident from the functioning of women's journals and Bengali-Muslim periodicals, operational encumbrances crippled the periodicals industry throughout. The periodicals market continued to labor under the contradictory pulls of commercialization and quest for high-brow literature, a homogenizing incorporative readership and the schisms produced by alternative audiences, and finally the need to expand and democratize reading and the virtually insurmountable encumbrance produced by mass non-literacy. These unremitting tensions prevented the coalescing of *jātīya jīban* or public life into a single positioning, indicating the existence of multiple, contesting Bengali literary spheres. With a maturing mainstream literary sphere, came an intense anxiety over its preservation. The threat of disorder seemed to loom large. The following chapter shows how the literary sphere fashioned itself into a self-regulatory domain organized on principles of aesthetics and obscenity and how the genre of literary criticism emerged as a monitor of readers' tastes endowed with the task of uplifting reading choices.

CHAPTER 3

Determining the Frontiers of Obscenity, Aesthetics and Realism: Debates over *aślīlatā* in Literary Periodicals

In his response to Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's manuscript of the novel *Caritrahīn*, the editor of the monthly literary periodical *Sāhitya* Sureshchandra Samajpati expressed his inability to serialize it in his periodical even as he admitted that it was an undeniably powerful work. He feared that *Sāhitya* would have to wrap up because readers and annual subscribers would not, in lieu of their hard-earned money, accept a romantic relationship between an educated young man and the widowed female help of a men's mess.[1] Instead, realizing the potential of the young Saratchandra as a novelist, he urged him to serve up fiction that would be more palatable for readers of *Sāhitya*.[2] *Caritrahīn* was subsequently serialized in *Yamunā*[3] after a brief tussle with *Bhāratbarṣa*, one of the leading illustrated miscellanies, which after a short-lived enthusiasm returned the manuscript to its author, on the same pretext as *Sāhitya.* Both *Sāhitya*'s and *Bhāratbarṣa*'s refusal to serialize *Caritrahīn* had to do with the perceived threat posed by the alleged unregulated sexuality of women, especially women of the lower orders to the normative ideal of middle-class male chastity. This chapter looks at the debates over obscenity (*aślīlatā*) and propriety that animated the pages of literary periodicals during the early twentieth-century decades. Indeed every periodical found occasion to chip in to the flurry of frequent heated exchanges. Expanding readerships and increase in the numerical count of periodicals and publishers led to a steady democratization of the public sphere that made the relationship between print-culture and public morality contentious. The perceived threat from foreign cultural forms, particularly the novel, converged with the challenge of watching over an ever

1 Upendranath Gangopadhyay, *Smṛtikathā* (Reminiscences), v.1, Calcutta, 1951, p. 174.

2 Ibid., p. 176.

3 *Yamunā*, edited by Phanindranath Pal and Dhirendranath Pal was published from Calcutta from 1316 / 1909 and continued up to roughly 1916. It was revived in 1325 / 1918 and continued up to 1923, now published by a regular publishing house Sisir Publishing House. Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials*, pp. 387–388. Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Caritrahīn* was serialized in *Yamunā* from Kārtik 1320 / October-November 1913 onwards. Vide 'Grantha-Pariciti', Subodhchandra Sengupta et al., *Sarat Racanābalī*, Centenary edition, Published by Sarat Samiti, Calcutta, 1386 / 1980, p. 601.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_005

growing readership and made conservative publicists alarmed at the possibility of society lapsing into anarchy. *Aślīlatā* thus became the axial concept structuring what could be seen as a broadly self-regulatory literary sphere. It was not so much the specter of the censorial apparatus of the colonial state but the aesthetic and social principles emerging from within the literary sphere itself that sought to order and regulate it. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the Bengali literary sphere gradually moved out of colonial policing. It generated and normalized its own aesthetic standards that rigorously measured any new literary experimentation. The regulative aesthetic was firmly embedded in a reinvented and "nationalized" Hindu tradition and the social ethic that upheld it. An assertive Brahmanical orthodoxy found its literary counterpart in conservative publicists like Samajpati for whom romantic love and transgressive conduct, the seemingly indispensable contents of fiction, constituted an unmitigated threat to the social order and the reformulated Hinduism underpinning it.

The broader concern at stake was what could legitimately qualify as content of modern literature and the indices to be put in place to filter out unacceptable print. Nineteenth-century Bengali society had not been entirely unfamiliar with defiance of Hindu marriage conventions, consensual wedlock and finally romantic love and courtship in both literary and real life instances.[4] Into the twentieth century, romance was very much a part of the actual experience of the Bengali middle classes – an ideological mediation that enabled them to prevail over the humiliations of political subjection.[5] Embedded in premodern Vaishnava religious poetry and maturing into a specifically modern form of emotion, romantic love and courtship had become an integral component of Bengali middle-class sentiments. The modern novel form enjoying immense popularity, it has been argued, insinuated such emotional changes in Bengali society.[6] But the process of normalization of the romantic aesthetic was far from unproblematic. From the late nineteenth century onwards, an increasingly strident revivalist nationalism sought to regenerate indigenous custom as the foundation for social organism, rejecting in the process liberal

4 Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Love in a Colonial Climate: Marriage, Sex and Romance in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 65–95.

5 Ibid., p. 89.

6 Rajat Kanta Ray, "Man, Woman and the Novel: The Rise of a New Consciousness in Bengal" in *Exploring Emotional History: Gender, Mentality and Literature in the Indian Awakening*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 67–117.

principles of self, polity and society.[7] This indigenist turn it has been argued, had sought to limit "free exchange in the sphere of circulation".[8] In the literary sphere the orthodoxy's attempts to salvage *dharma* from the onslaughts of the modern West and reinstate an uninfringeable Hindu tradition, meant rejecting aesthetic forms identified as foreign. Rendering futile the vernacular literary sphere's claims to be a domain of uninhibited exchange and experimentations, conservative publicists militated against any aesthetic innovations, notably those of romantic love and modernism. Literary debates, organized around the embattled categories of *ślīlatā* (i.e. decency) and its reverse *aślīlatā* (or obscenity), would come to represent an ascendant orthodoxy challenged by diverse forms of aesthetic eclecticisms. While orthodox polemicists grounded their position in ethical critique of society, their adversaries sought to shatter the myth of robust tradition by foregrounding aesthetic principles.

From the late nineteenth century onwards, the Bengali literary sphere came to constitute a dominant area where shifts in social concerns and principles were interrogated, reinforced and critiqued, producing complex and imaginative resolutions. As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, the passage to modernity implied a fundamental transformation of a society's 'moral imagination' involving new precepts on moral conduct.[9] Theoretical debates and readings of western political philosophy of Rousseau and Kant would have remained confined to a small erudite circle only. Literature, on the other hand emerged as a crucial medium for the "dissemination, popularization and eventually the normalization of these ideas about moral conduct".[10] Literary discourse, Kaviraj proceeds, "forms the directions and contours of our emotions, structures moral intentionality, and shapes the moral personality of ordinary individuals by celebrating the modern way of being in the world as both intellectually admirable and socially possible".[11] This transformation in the moral universe of society however was not an uncontested process. Serial fictions and the criticisms and counter-criticisms that they engendered testify to competing moralities, one grounded in a reconstituted *dharma* and the other in modern notion of individuality and romantic love. The process of normalization of the 'moral

---

7 Andrew Sartori, "The Conceptual Structure of an Indigenist Nationalism", *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2008, pp. 136–175.

8 Ibid., p. 135.

9 Sudipta Kaviraj, "Literature and the Moral Imagination of Modernity" in Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, Permanent Black, 2014, pp. 25–26.

10 Ibid., p. 25.

11 Ibid., p. 26.

imagination' of modernity therefore happened through intense debates in the public sphere.

The perceived threat of literature degenerating into forms of public vulgarity gave rise to an overtly censorial form of literary criticism that sought to purge prurience and sexuality in print. This chapter looks at the formulation of literary discourses on questions of moral purity and the pedagogic purpose that literature was believed to accomplish. It shows how polemicists made use of the genre of literary criticism to arbitrate aesthetic disputes. Drives against *aślīlatā* almost without exception assumed the vocabulary of reforming public reading practices and creating refined literary tastes. As a result, literary taste, referred to variously as *soundarya bodh* (sense of beauty), *sāhitya bodh* (sense of the literary) and *sāhityik nīti* or *sāhityik dharma* (literary morality), it was unanimously believed, was of key importance if a mature reader community was to emerge. Literary sense and cultivation of it thereof was commonly held to be a key indication of a mature and articulate public culture. The urgency about securing a moral threshold was linked directly to anxieties about literary improprieties and possibilities of an anarchic social sphere. From the late nineteenth century decades, 'obscenity' had been a defining trope for modern vernacular literary canons, becoming almost axial in the indigenous elite's conceptual repertoire of cultural nationalism. Obscenity came to be seen as more of a threat from below – the supposedly immodest tastes and licentiousness of lower orders impinging on refined cultural values and practices of the elite. Such 'othering' of popular culture characterized unseemliness and indecency as behavioral preserves of lesser social groups and sharply demarcated the contours of elite social and cultural habitat.[12] But in everyday lives, the segregation between the canonical and the popular was less than complete as surreptitious reading of Baṭtalā works were not uncommon among the indigenous elite and women's cultural practices too tended to subvert modern literary sensibilities.[13] The domain of popular print, it has been argued, belonged to an 'intermediate orality' where social aspirations, shared imaginations and diverse reading practices converged.[14] By contrast, in its own self-identification the periodical media projected itself as participating in and shaping a liberal public sphere coextending with a moderate to high literacy while aspiring to reach out to various lesser print audiences as well. The frequently acrimonious debates over *aślīlatā* in Bengali periodicals during the early twentieth

12 Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print*, p. 66. Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2001, pp. 39–40.

13 Ghosh, op. cit. chapters 4 and 6.

14 Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 153–154.

century were not so much an opposition between dominant literary canons and an insubordinate domain of popular print – thus questioning the assumption of these as two homogenous domains confronting one another. Periodicals in fact bear out the fact that the literary modern itself had been fractured and multiple. In the parlance of orthodoxy works condemned as *aślīl* were quickly labeled as junk from Baṭṭalā that threatened to clutter a respectable cultural space. Nevertheless, the threat of obscenity here was somewhat different. The source of danger was seen to lay in the new aesthetics of romantic love and in the post-War period in modernism and psychoanalysis. Targeted as foreign commodities, both romantic love and modernism were perceived by conservative publicists as intimidating the last bastion of the nationalist elite, namely the household and conjugality. By the turn of the twentieth century, as a result of the burden that nationalism placed on it, the Bengali literary sphere had normalized into a self-regulatory domain that resisted any external influence, most expressly in the form of censorship laws, but also from the Swadeshi years onwards included any literary experimentation that were identified as non-indigenist or 'foreign'. Connections between literary sensibility and social principles, proved controversial, related as they were to ruminations about a new society. Ideas of a moral private, individual self and a collective public sphere were seen at risk without a strictly regulated and disciplined print culture. By defining the frontiers of literary permissibility, of what was acceptable in a print, the public sphere put in place its own censorial apparatus.

Though largely outside the chronological scope of this work, this chapter deals with the mid and late nineteenth-century colonial rhetoric around obscenity and how the indigenous elite both internalized and mediated that rhetoric. Certain fundamentals of the vocabularies on literary vulgarity, particularly the anxiety about impending damage to the indigenous social fabric, were formulated during the late nineteenth-century decades and continued into the twentieth century. The disparagement leveled by colonial officials at a cheap fiction from Baṭṭalā bears striking resemblances to the vilification of works by leading twentieth-century authors like Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay. The difference in the two derisions is perhaps brought in by the development of criticism as a literary genre. Focusing on two specimens of literary criticism, one from the late nineteenth century by Chandranath Basu and the other an early twentieth-century piece by Jatindramohan Sinha, the chapter shows how from its early days, literary criticism was organized in tandem with concerns about domesticity and how it became the public sphere's own devise for surveillance of literary output as well as a medium for shaping an informed reading public. By laying out the standards of literary acceptability these two essay critiques reinforced the orthodoxy's

stand on domesticity and strengthened the claims of revivalist nationalism. Basu's anxieties about the chaotic potentialities of fiction and his argumentative style anticipated much of the twentieth-century assumptions and terms of argument about morality and the literary public sphere. At every moment of literary experimentation, the conservative backlash invariably spoke of violation of society (*samāj*) and scriptural sanctions (*dharma*). The unrelenting controversies surrounding Rabindranath Tagore's *Citrāṅgadā* provides an interesting example of how the genre of literary criticism was deployed to debate the ethical merit of the lyrical ballad and the encounters they produced across a range of periodicals. By prioritizing romantic love over both puritanical restraint and sexual lust *Citrāṅgadā* intervened right in the heart of the social reform debates on child brides, sexual consent and the position of women within marriage. Not surprising, the poet became the target of a furious campaign against literary obscenity (*sāhityik aślīlatā*), led by conservative critics like Sureshchandra Samajpati and Dwijendralal Roy who took serious exception to Tagore's portrayal of courtship, interpreting it as a violation of practice sanctified by scriptural authority, an obstacle to the development of pure literary taste amongst readers of periodical literature (*sāmaẏik sāhitya*)and therefore hostile to the emerging nation, nourished as it was by a reinvented Hindu tradition.[15] Though the debate on *Citrāṅgadā* proved to be a prolonged one, by the 1920s reception of Tagore's works had generally become less critical. *Aślīlatā* however continued to be a deeply contested aesthetic index. A persistent fear that society was in danger of being engulfed by widespread sexual depravity lurked amongst conservative critics. For Tagore and subsequently the modernist poets, the roots of the tension lay in the contradiction between their aesthetic imaginations and the conventional norms of society.[16] From

15 For the history of the middle-class reformist-nationalist agenda and the centrality of a reinvented Hindu tradition, see for instance: Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2001. Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

16 For Tagore certainly an indigenous Unitarian Brahmo sense of personal moral censure was at work. One of the conditions of membership of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj (1878) was that the "private character" of the initiate "must be pure and moral" and that the "breach of morality in private life" made him liable to "forfeiture of membership". Pramatha Nath Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilization During British Rule*, vol. 1, W. Newman, Calcutta, 1894, p. 166.

the early 1920s, with *bāstabatā*[17] or realism becoming a new aesthetic in literary experimentations, the debates over *aśīlatā* moved on to a different register. Criticisms of modernist aesthetics however continued to deploy identical indices of judgment and the same metaphor of society's health and the perils involved. *Kallol*, a non-commercial monthly run on a meager budget signaled the coming of literary modernism. As predicaments of modern urban living, its displacements and alienation found a place in literary representations, so did assimilation into the literary public sphere become more challenging for the avant-garde. But even the startling radicalism of the *Kallol* group, despite their strident critique of the elitist limitations of mainstream Bengali literature and the thematic centrality in their oeuvres, of repressed populations and marginalized urban habitats, remained fundamentally constricted in terms of readership. Its literary impact aside, *Kallol* was a very short-lived irregular journal and its circulation never exceeded a few hundred. Nevertheless, for all their positional differences and confrontations that enlivened the pages of the periodicals, literary publicists across the spectrum underscored the primacy of the middle-class reader audience as they attempted to harness the literary market and create an ideologically homogenous and primed readership.

1 Cleansing Literature: The Colonialist and Reformist Efforts

Notionally the world of twentieth-century Bengali periodicals was very different from that of the mid and late nineteenth-century print productions. Nevertheless, there seem to have been certain continuities in terms of governing concerns, tropes and anxieties, even as their formulation differed over the course of the entire period. Since its inception in Bengal and more surely by the mid-nineteenth century the colonial administration sought to get acquainted with and monitor indigenous literature. Surveillance of literary productions and book trade had already emerged as an important function of monarchical regimes in Europe since early modernity. As Robert Darnton has shown in the case of pre-revolutionary France, even an absolutist regime had to take account of public opinion. Lower rank officials like police inspectors entrusted with the task of surveillance, devised ingenious ways to make sense of the Parisian literary world from the writings of philosophes to those of the

17 Debates on *bastutantratā* did not start with the coming of the modernist poets. Before the War years Rabindranath Tagore's writings had been criticized by Bipinchandra Pal and Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay of being too romantic and not materialistic enough.

obscure authors of scandals and thrillers.[18] With colonial rule seeking to replicate the major administrative organs of the modern state in the subcontinent, surveillance of print emerged as one of the principal tasks of governance. The expansion of print invited relentless scrutiny and control on part of colonial officials. An Act passed by the Legislative Council of India in 1856 explicitly sought to prevent the sale of obscene books and pictures.[19] Not only were Baṭtalā productions the specific target of such a censorial Act, the prime initiative came from a missionary of no less a stature than Reverend James Long.[20] Since the early nineteenth century, evangelical missionaries had been vociferous in their critiques of indigenous cultural forms, both literary and performative, deprecating them for their supposed coarseness and vulgarity. Nurturing aspirations for taking up the burden of civilizing the heathen cultures and propagating Christianity, missionaries targeted the use of colloquial language and the presence of what they perceived as overt sensuality in these folk traditions. For the colonial administration such efforts seemed conducive for ensuring the longevity of the Indian Empire.[21] In the post Mutiny decades, the campaign against the commercial vernacular print was undertaken jointly by administrators, missionaries, and increasingly the indigenous literati and reformers. Surveillance became a more formalized practice with the institution of the Book and Periodicals Registration Act of 1867 and the Vernacular Press Act of 1877. For the colonial administrators, the experiences of 1857 made surveillance of print and policing of native opinion urgent for purging anti-British sentiments.

For the indigenous bilingual intelligentsia cleansing the vernacular and its literature of undesired elements became a principal component of their reformist drive. The colonial and missionary charge of cultural obscenity had to

18 Robert Darnton, "A Police Inspector Sorts His Files: The Anatomy of the Republic of Letters" (Chapter 4) in Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Basic Books, 1999, pp. 145–189.

19 Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 83–84.

20 Ibid., p. 83.

21 In much of early nineteenth-century imaginations of the English Britain's colonial subjects not unlike the working classes at home, were seen as closely equating the image of the 'savage'. The riotous mobs of London and the colonial subjects were therefore deemed in need of deliverance by Victorian bourgeois moral codes that then came to represent the West. To see how nineteenth-century moral ideologies molded British appraisal of colonial cultures see for example: Eric Stokes, *English Utilitarians and India*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 1959; Kenneth W. Jones (ed.), *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, The New Cambridge History of India, vol. III.1, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1989; Rosalind O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1985.

be contested if their respectability and cultural identity had to be affirmed. They responded through their disapproval of popular entertainment forms, Baṭtalā print and their clientele while asserting their own respectability. By the middle of the nineteenth century Victorian Protestant moral codes had so permeated the English educated indigenous elite that imbibing such principles came to be thought of as an education as fundamental to learning as the numerical and alphabets.[22] Lessons on virtues such as honesty, obedience, fidelity and sacrifice therefore went hand in hand with elementary training like the introduction of alphabets.[23] These newly defined virtues therefore shaped much of what was to constitute the Bengali middle-class morality and their everyday ethical codes. Any presumed aberrations of the prescribed code were promptly censured by them as 'obscene'. Pre-colonial entertainment forms like the *jhumur* and *khemṭā* dances and *kabiẏāl* duels were gradually marginalized as obscene and their patrons and performers accused of bawdy tastes.[24] *Baṭtalā* print productions, especially farces and romances constituted the major target of such cleansing operations.[25]

22 Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849–1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984, pp. 108–50. Dagmar Engels, *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal, 1890–1939*, SOAS Studies in South Asia, Oxford University Press, New York, 1996, pp. 100–108. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India" in *Subaltern Studies*, Volume VIII, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

23 Such lessons were incorporated in school text books not only by the missionaries and English educationists but also by the Indians themselves like the noted educationist Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. His *Varṇaparicaẏ* (Introducing the Bengali Alphabets) incorporated moral instruction alongside grammar lessons and is used even now in schools. Moral instructions therefore came to occupy a central position in the curriculum as school-going students became the prime subjects for the dissemination of a largely imported code of morality. See Brian A. Hatcher, *Idioms of Improvement: Vidyasagar and the Cultural Encounter in Bengal*, Calcutta, 1996.

24 Sumanta Banerjee, "The Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of "Obscenity" in Nineteenth Century Bengali Culture", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 18, 1987. Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlor and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, 1989. Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 59–65. This shift was crucially related to the change in the nature of the literary itself. See Kaviraj, "The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal" in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003, pp. 503–566.

25 By the later decades of the nineteenth-century *Baṭtalā*, situated in the northern fringes of Calcutta had emerged as a thriving publishing center. Typical publications included almanacs, plays, farces, romances and religious and mythological tales that collectively came to be known as the *Baṭtalā* productions. These were generally cheap prints widely circulated amongst a large and amorphous group of urban and rural literates. The primary clientele included not only well-educated and socially established people but also simply functionally literate clerical service holders as well. These inexpensive prints became a

The formulation of 'obscenity' in nineteenth-century Bengal was the consequence of dialogue and contest between colonial rulers and missionaries on the one hand and an emerging reformist intelligentsia, a 'subaltern power elite' seeking to respond to the formers' criticisms of indigenous culture on the other.[26] As questions of morality and the need for regulating literary preferences opened up, both colonial bureaucrats and the bilingual literati saw vulgarity as endemic to the indigenous society rather than deliberate perversion among the lower orders of society. This becomes evident in the issue of prosecution of the owner of Victoria Press and the publisher of *Ramaṇī Rahasya* in December 1872. The prosecuted were simply warned and discharged. The Magistrate thought that the publications were undoubtedly obscene; yet he did not believe that "the defendants intended to print or sell copies of the work for the purpose of disseminating obscenity", that "the printing and selling were both done in the ordinary course of trade" and that the conduct of the defendants "differed" from "similar offenders at home, who traded in obscene books *intending* to circulate them for immoral purposes".[27] Nevertheless, obscenity was seen as so pervasive in print that in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, the Bengali Translator requested he be excused from what he described as "no enviable task". The Commissioner of Police had submitted to him for examination books that had been seized on grounds of their purported obscenity. The Translator agreed that though "in the interest of humanity", determining whether the contents of such books were "calculated to pollute or excite the corrupt passions of the reader" may be "regarded as a duty", some of the books were indeed "very filthy and all of a low vulgar type".[28] The Translator suggested that the task of purging *aślīl* works be entrusted to the newly formed *Aślīlatā Nibāranī Samiti* (Society for the Eradication of Obscenity). Several "native gentlemen" headed by Raja Kali Krishna Bahadur of Sobhabazar Raj and the Brahmo reformer Keshab Chandra Sen had formed the Society with the aim of purging vulgar print.[29] He argued that as native speakers of the Bengali language the members of the society were better equipped to

major avenue for entertainment for daily commuting office-goers. Anindita Ghosh, pp. 171–182.

26 Sumanta Banerjee, "The Bogey of the Bawdy".

27 Correspondence from the Bengali Translator A. Mackenzie to the Secretary to the Government of India, Calcutta July 11, 1873 [Government of Bengal – Judicial Dept, Judicial Branch, Proceedings B 177–180].

28 Correspondence between the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal and the Govt. Bengali Translator; Calcutta, March 7, 1874 [Government of Bengal – Judicial Dept: Judicial Branch, Proceedings for February-March 1874].

29 Ibid.

locate and tackle vulgarity in print.[30] Not surprisingly it was the English educated *bhadralok* who were deemed most suitable for the task of civilizing the literary tastes of their countrymen.

Welcoming the initiatives taken by newly formed *Aślīlatā Nibāranī Samiti* Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay described *aślīlatā* as a national malaise (*jātīẏa doṣ*) of the Bengalis.[31] In defining the scope of obscenity Chattopadhyay located it in almost every aspect of the Bengali's life and activities: their jokes, name-calling, the language used by squabbling lower caste women and even folk performances such as the *jātrā*, *kobi* performances and collective readings of *pām̐cāli*.[32] For him, obscenity was more about an unreformed, non-modern way of life rather than simply pornographic and salacious content of cheap, clandestine readings. By this time the poetry of Iswar Gupta, his mentor and the editor of *Saṃbād Prabhākar* too seemed to Bankim as organic but rather lurid and so unacceptable for an emergent modern Bengali sensibility. Bankim denounced excessive sensuality in artistic performances and literary works. An archetypal Bengali intellectual of the mid-nineteenth century – one of the first graduates of the University of Calcutta, imbibing the positivist and utilitarian doctrines of contemporary Europe, Bankim found the aesthetics of middle Bengali texts like *Vidyāsundar* and *Gītagovinda* offensive, even as he appreciated their lyrical forms.[33] As Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out, Bankim was extremely conscious of purging the mythological constructions of Radha and Krishna in the predominant Vaiṣñava tradition of Bengal.[34] Thus in his discourse on Krishna, *Kr̥ṣṇacaritra* Bankim carefully cut back the erotic narrations of Krishna's courtship with Radha in the *Bhāgavat*, describing them as obscene and emasculated.[35] One of the primary motives of *Baṅgadarśan*, the literary monthly initiated and edited by Bankim was to foreground a refined vernacular literature as an alternative to the popular genres condemned by the reforming elite as readings of questionable tastes.[36] But *aślīlatā* was not the

30 Ibid.

31 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "Aślīlatā" in *Baṅgadarśan*, Pouṣ 1280 / December-January 1873.

32 Ibid.

33 Sudipta Kaviraj, "Tagore and the Transformations in the Ideals of Love" in Francesca Orsini ed., *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2006, p. 167.

34 Kaviraj, op. cit., p. 168.

35 Ibid. Also, Kaviraj, "The Myth of Praxis: Construction of the Figure of Kṛṣṇa in *Kr̥ṣṇacaritra*" in *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 100–102.

36 Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. pp 88–89.

singular concern for Bankim.[37] In the new literary sensibility that he articulated through *Baṅgadarśan*, popular reading practices and the institutions of commercial publishing in which they were implicated were demarcated as the non-modern, the juvenile. Baṭṭalā was therefore the constructed 'other' of *Baṅgadarśan.* In terms of form and content, the literary periodical was consciously set apart from the amorphous domain of Baṭṭalā perceived mostly as consisting of vulgar, titillating productions. With its miscellaneous contents, the delight of its fiction, poetry and educative essays, the vernacular periodical it was envisioned, could provide an attractive alternative to thrillers, romances and farces churned out of Baṭṭalā. Literary monthlies were to constitute a modern communicative mode with the specific agenda of weaning away as much of the Baṭṭalā clientele as possible and providing them with quality entertainment and educative reading. In Bankim's parlance, it were thus the *nimnaśreṇī* or the *aśikṣita* "between the ignorant peasant and the really well educated classes" – the artisans, shopkeepers, small zamindars, mofussil lawyers, humbler office employee and the small proprietors[38] – ones who mostly possessed a working knowledge of accounting and the vernacular, whose reading preferences and aesthetic sensibilities needed to be conditioned.[39] Identifying its targeted readership in explicitly sociological terms *Baṅgadarśan*'s agenda was to disentangle these petty bhadralok classes from consumption of cheaper and ephemeral *Baṭṭalā* texts. It is evident from one of his later articles published in *Baṅgadarśan* that it was the migrant population in the city who had left their villages in search for lesser office jobs in Calcutta that Bankim was particularly concerned about. Denied the entertainment to which they were accustomed in their country homes, these groups easily took to urban vices, especially drinking. For Bankim such corrupted ways of living were almost invariably associated with vulgar reading preferences.[40] So too were women deemed susceptible to licentious readings and erotic fantasies.[41]

---

37 Bhadra, *Nyāḍā Baṭṭalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār*, p. 87.

38 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, "A Popular Literature for Bengal", *Bankim Racanābalī* (English Works), p. 97. Cited in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, p. 79.

39 Anindita Ghosh, op. cit., p. 157.

40 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Aślīlatā', *Baṅgadarśan*, Pouṣ 1280 / December-January 1873–74.

41 Romances like *Ratiśāstra* and *Rasik Taraṅginī*, popular with the little learned or illiterate (*alpa śikṣita* or *nirakṣar*) womenfolk were found distasteful and responsible for the women's low and bawdy behaviors. Anindita Ghosh, pp. 225–258. Sumanta Banerjee, "Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Bengal", in Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, 1989.

Charu Gupta has argued that formulation and assertion of "a moral code in a canon of literature became a national virtue".[42] Suppression of eroticism and sensuality in print was a prerequisite for defining codes of morality and respectability. Sexual and bodily pleasures were condemned as transgressions of ideals of the nation.[43] For a still politically inarticulate nationalist project, defining the moment of the arrival of literary modernity had become imperative.[44] The urgency of creating a literary high modern as a mark of the nation's sovereignty, it was held, would transform literature, at least notionally, into an exclusive domain of refinement and creativity, distanced from the infectivity of commerce and ostensibly transcending divisive social barrier.[45] In retrospect, Rabindranath identified *Baṅgadarśan* as the moment when *Baṅgasāhitya* or Bengali literature attained adulthood (*baẏaḥprāpta*) that marked a transition in the reader's taste, from tales and romances like *Bijaẏa Basanta* and *Golebkāwālī* to the modern social fiction like Bankim's *Biṣabṛkṣa*.[46]

2 The Periodical Media, Serial Fiction and the Formation of a New Aesthetic: *Baṅgadarśan*

The attainment of literary adulthood involved a conscious distancing from certain medieval textual traditions and popular genres considered unfit for reading. At the heart of this shift from the 'popular' to the 'canonical' was a cleansing effort involving a change in gender norms from the "erotic and sexually active" woman to the chaste and demure wife.[47] Modern ideals of companionate marriage demanded that women be virtuous, thereby necessitating dissociation from the 'vulgarity' and 'coarseness' of erotic tales and folk performances.[48] Ushering in the modern 'canon' however, was fraught with ambiguities. As a

42 Charu Gupta, op. cit., p. 41.

43 Gupta, op. cit. p. 40.

44 The need to celebrate the advent of the literary modern is crucial to the nationalist project. See Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction" in Sheldon Pollock ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions form South Asia*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2003.

45 Ann Bermingham and John Brewer ed., *The Consumption of Culture 1600–1800: Image, Object, Text*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995 addresses how in industrializing Europe, culture, which by the mid-nineteenth century had become largely synonymous with the 'high' arts, was conceived of as intrinsically free from the infectivity of trade and therefore increasingly sought to be segregated from the domains of commerce and mass culture.

46 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bankimchandra".

47 Gupta, op. cit. p. 40.

48 Ibid.

modern form of print, literary periodicals and the social space of their circulation defy a sharp segregation between 'canonical' and 'popular' domains of literature. The commercial imperative of periodical publishing demanded that they have a substantial buyer and subscriber market. At the same time a periodical like *Baṅgadarśan* consciously distanced itself from popular print censured for their salacity and titillation. Modeled on the mid-century Victorian literary periodicals, *Baṅgadarśan* contained a mix of fictional and non-fictional works. Serial novels by Bankim were the central feature of *Baṅgadarśan.* For contemporaries Bankim's social novels were a welcome break from the romantic tales and mysteries that inundated the literary marketplace and were abhorred for their supposed licentiousness. Tales like *Rujuneekantu* (*Rajanikānta*), by one Bishwambhar Das De, described as a' "Hindoo Mythological Tale", were as much a source of disgust for the Librarian and Keeper of Records at the Bengal Library as for the indigenous educated elite, their language being "the filthiest poetical effusion imaginable".[49]

Drawn from the modern European novelistic tradition the new vernacular fiction reflected a nuanced sense of the past, an awareness of the complexities of social relationships and the emergence of the ego as an individuated bourgeois subject.[50] The protagonist in such fiction was not only this bourgeois subject but also its urban middle-class reader whose sense of change and negotiation as a colonized subject, was addressed by this particular modern form of reading.[51] Fiction reading thus emerged as an integral aspect of the colonial middle class's experiences of modernity and not just a mode of entertainment.[52] Premodern narratives revolved around the adventures of exceptional characters, their plots often verging on the fantastic. Modern novels by contrast, dealt with lives of ordinary individuals, related to readers who again were ordinary people and presented a social world that was credible in a modern world.[53] The narrative lessons about the vulnerabilities and incompleteness of human lives that readers drew upon constituted the "moral pedagogy" of the modern novel form.[54] The novel, along with two other modern literary genres, lyric poetry and autobiography constituted an "aestheticized representation" of modern life. They also produced a "moral ideal" and helped in "people's

49 *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the Second Quarter ending June 30, 1871.

50 Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp. 291–293.

51 Ibid., p. 293.

52 Ibid., pp. 292–293.

53 Kaviraj, "Literature and the Moral Imagination of Modernity", p. 31.

54 Ibid., p. 31.

conversion to that ideal" through the silent and enjoyable practice of reading.[55] Thus by deploying an innovative narrative style, drawing partly on premodern *śṛṅgār* aesthetics, Bankim was able to unravel for his readers the fraught ideological terrain that was the product of the colonial encounter. Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that Bankim wove in various narrative strategies and multiple life-experiences that addressed differentiated reader expectations and narrative functions. In exploring the createdness of Bankim's novelistic world, Kaviraj has spoken of Bankim's engagement with the ontological question of liminality of the moral codes of society, the force of instincts and the inevitability of human transgressions.[56] Contradictions between social constructs, particularly the sanctity of marriage, and the instinctual drives of human nature were fundamental to Bankim's worldview and his historical sensibility and gave it a sense of being dark, tense and essentially tragic.[57] Bankim's explorations into the nature of the liminal – the indecisive conflict between the assumed symmetry of the social world and the inevitability of violations – were central to his literary imagination. Modern literary ideals adapted from the West and an indigenous society caught up in the conflicts of transition led Bankim to abandon the traditional *śṛṅgār* concept of love in his novels. The *śṛṅgār* or *ādiras* ideal (i.e. the 'primary' *rasa* or aesthetics) was firmly ensconced in the concept of *rūp* or beauty, more specifically feminine beauty. Bankim's major works though drawing qualitatively on classical rhetoric reveal an immense effort to reorient shringaric depictions of love towards more modern forms.[58] He pos-

55 Ibid., p. 36.

56 Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, Chapters 1 and 2. In his discussions of *Indirā* and *Kamalākānter Daptar* Kaviraj has shown how the structure of these two works related directly to the world of the subalternized bhadralok, their aspirations, convictions and frustrations. In *Indirā* the very versatility of Bankim's language-use brilliantly brings out the pretensions and delusions of the colonized babu, the woman of the Hindu middle-class household who comes to represent the culturally unconquered and autonomous space of indigenous domesticity. *Kamalākānter Daptar* Kaviraj argues, is a brilliant piece in the subversive play of laughter – self-humor as well as laughter of contempt and reproach that exposes the essentially ironic position of the subaltern – the babu, his helplessness in face of colonial power and his historical and social others, particularly the world of the feminine. The first edition of *Kamalākānter Daptar* reprinted from the *Baṅgadarśan* in 1878 was priced at 8 annas and two thousand copies were printed.

57 Ibid., p. 3.

58 Sudipta Kaviraj, "Tagore and Transformation in the Ideals of Love". All of Bankim's women – from Ayesha (*Dūrgeśnandīni* – his first Bengali novel) to Śrī (*Sītārām* – his final novel) were beautiful women whose physical beauty proved fatal for social relations around them. For Kaviraj, the paradox in Bankim lay in the latter's deprecation of the gopis' love for Krishna as erotic even though in his novels he repeatedly explores the consequence of love and beauty on ordinary human lives, p. 168.

ited the aesthetic of *śṛṅgār* against the intimacy and emotion of new conjugal love. The exceptional beauty of the women proves fatal for new ideas of conjugality, thereby validating this new form of love by "negative example".[59] This made Bankim's aesthetic world essentially dark and tragic. The invincibility of social boundaries and the prospects of tragedy befalling transgressors resonated with the desires and frustrations of the subalternized bhadralok. In certain ways these novels enabled them to make sense of their worlds and rescript their expectations accordingly. The notions of 'vulgarity' and 'decency' that came to dominate much of the cultural discourse of the nineteenth-century *bhadralok* society were indicative of a transitional phase of a conflict-fraught society grappling towards the articulation of a modern literary discourse.[60] The new genre of *gārhasthya upanyās* or domestic novels that steadily dominated the literary market was not intended to provide cures for social ills. But neither were they ephemeral. They emerged as a significant way in which readers' perceptions could be altered, their moral horizons widened and their frequently agonizing experiences under conditions of colonial rule affirmed and articulated.

Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the monthly periodical or the *māsik patrikā* emerged as the most effective means for securing and retaining a reading audience. Serial fictions (*dhārābāhik kathāsāhitya*) dominated the vernacular literary market in the post-*Baṅgadarśan* years.[61] They were the key attraction of these miscellanies that also supplemented fiction-reading with poetry, non-fictional prose and illustrations. Arguably the most ubiquitous of all literary genres, periodicals of general interest would find it very difficult to survive without one or more novels unfolding concurrently in their pages.[62] Commenting on the lapse of *Aitihāsik Citra* (Illustrations from History) a quarterly periodical that contained essays on history and archaeological findings, its editor Nikhilnath Ray blamed the Bengali readers' overwhelming preference for fiction as the reason why specialized

---

59 Kaviraj, "Tagore and Transformations in the Ideals of Love", pp. 168–169.

60 Francesca Orsini had captured this transition in her treatment of the multi-layered ideas of the term *saṃskāra* in context of the Hindi public sphere. See Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940*, pp. 43–48.

61 Report on publications in the Bengal province for the year 1877 noted as many as seventy new works of fiction, the majority being "love-tales and the remainder dwell on topics of historical or social importance", Report of Bengal Library, 1877.

62 Rabindranath's novels *Naukādubi* and *Cokher Bāli* were serialized in *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*). *Gorā* would appear in *Prabāsī* between 1908 and 1910. By the First World War years serial fictions were the staple of the most popular magazines, particularly *Bhāratbarṣa* where Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's major novels were serialized.

scholarly journals could not thrive: "in spite of our best efforts to entertain, we were unable to turn readers' attention from the flood of plays and novels."[63]

3 An Emergent Counter-Fiction Discourse

Even as Bankim's novel's came to represent respectable reading and gained a kind of cultural acceptance among educated Bengalis, a parallel critique of fiction emerged within the pages of *Baṅgadarśan* itself. These critiques were not simple oppositions to novel reading that characterized it as a frivolous waste of time. Evidently in colonial Bengal, contemporary criticism of novel-reading did emerge from moral and social concerns that were tied up with larger nationalist investments in the sanctity of the home and hearth. But what is also significant is a lingering apprehension about a modern and relatively unfamiliar cultural commodity, the spread of which seemed to foreshadow threats of degeneration into anarchic forms of popular culture. Early criticisms of the novel that emerged as responses to Bankim's works acknowledged the utilitarian functions of the genre as an effective didactic form. But even as they did so, doubts were raised about fictional representations of love that could delude immature readers and undermine social order. In what could be considered as an early instance of informed literary criticism Chandranath Basu[64] identified fiction (*kathāgrantha*) as one of the three major narrative forms (*upākhyān*), the others being the drama (*nāṭak*) and the tale (*ākhyāẏikā*).[65] Fiction in its modern form, Basu argued, had begun only with Daniel Defoe. He identified Bankim as the pioneer of fiction in India, though qualifying that his novels were entirely replications (*sampūrna anukaraṇ*) of English fiction in terms of emotions, characters and even their language use. Again fiction was of two types: the first was the historical romance and Bengali works like Bankim's *Durgeśnandinī* and Pratap Chandra Ghosh's *Baṅgādhipaparājaẏ* (1869) belonged to this category. Reading them, Basu argued, yielded only momentary pleasure (*kṣaṇik ānanda*) and the thrill they generated was likely to impede rational thinking (*bibecanāśakti*). The second category of fiction was that

63 Nikhilnath Ray quoted in Gita Chattopadhyay, *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik Patrikā Pañji, 1915–1930*, Volume 1, Calcutta, 1990, pp. 44–45.

64 Chandranath Basu was a leading orthodox publicist of the later decades of the nineteenth century. For a brief biography of Basu, see, Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Sāhitya Sādhak Caritmālā* (a multivolume compendium of biographies of Bengali writers and litterateurs), v. 6 (83), Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Calcutta, 1951, pp. 8–30.

65 Chandranath Basu, "Nobel bā kathāgranther uddeśya" (The purpose of novels or fiction), *Baṅgadarśan*, Baiśākh 1287 / April-May 1880.

which related to everyday reality. To this category which Basu named *gārhasthya kathāgrantha* (domestic fiction) belonged Bankim's *Biṣabṝkṣa* and *Kṝṣṇakānter Uil*. Here Basu foregrounds his discussions in terms of the relationships between the novel and its utility (*lābhālābh*) for society. Problematizing this issue in context of the larger contemporary debates on utilitarianism (*byabahāropayogitā*), he argued that entertainment (*āmod*) alone could never be the purpose of the novel. The primary utility of a novel, he held, lay in the education it could offer by addressing social realities and complexities of human behavior. Romances, he observed were becoming less popular in comparison to novels because they yielded little utility in terms of their educative value. For Basu, the core of the problem was the mutual irreconcilability between indigenous social relations and the new notion of emotional love, the latter being a foreign import. It was the uncritical borrowing of narrative plots and emotions from English fiction, especially the ways in which Bengali novelists addressed the question of love (*praṇaẏ*) that produced unnatural relations in fictional representations.[66] For the English, Basu explained, love was entirely a function of the heart (*hṝdaẏ*) and was relatively independent of nuptial bonds. In a trenchant critique he pointed to the apparent contradictions of Victorian morality. The heart he argued could direct one to disobey laws or snatch other people's money. In such cases, most people would follow the injunctions of society rather than of the heart. But in matters of love, the command of the heart had to reign (*śirodhārya*). But the instinct of love could be no different from other instincts. It too had to be subjected to social injunctions (*samājer upadeś*). Thus in Bankim's novel *Candraśekhar*, in spite of having a very gifted and broad-minded husband like Candrasekhar, Saibalini followed her instinct in continuing to love Pratap. Similarly Kundanandini, a widow, followed her heart when she fell in love with Nagendra, a married man. These emotions, Basu held, were derived from England where unmarried women were free to choose their love. But within indigenous social norms, love could germinate only after marriage. However much Western scientists and philosophers thought of the Hindu wife's *satītva* (wifely devotion) as superstition, Basu asserted, it was nonetheless the only shining gemstone of the subjugated Indian race and so uncritical acceptance of Western aesthetic standards could endanger the value of *satītva*. Quoting Dryden – "One to one was cursedly confined" – Basu inverted it to sum up the indigenous value system thus: "One to one was blessedly confirmed". He concluded that novelists ought to embark beyond mere translation (*tarjamā*) of English emotions and ideas and

66 Basu, an admirer of Bankim and a regular contributor to *Baṅgadarśan* was careful to distinguish between Bankim's novels and those of lesser, mostly aspiring fiction writers.

extend their agenda towards creating social awareness and eradicating social wrongs.

Basu's anxieties about the chaotic potentialities of fiction and his argumentative style anticipated much of the twentieth century assumptions and terms of argument about morality and the literary public sphere. It demonstrates how literary criticism from its early days was organized in tandem with concerns about domesticity. In his critique, two sets of binaries have been counterpoised – the first one between social sanctions and instinct, and the second between a constructed notion of indigenous conjugality and a foreign import, namely romantic love. As later sections of this chapter will show, these binaries proved enduring and pervasive, informing much of the debates on the limits of literary permissibility. Most early twentieth-century literary critics used them as criteria to determine respectability and value of a literary work, especially fiction. As a modern aesthetic, emotional love and its deployment in fiction was severely censured by influential literary critics as a means of reining the public sphere and erasing immorality. In the process, the genre of literary criticism did much to idealize and sustain a conviction of Hindu conjugality as everlasting, non-consensual and rooted in child marriage. Inverting the colonial critique of India's inferior civilizational status, Basu had argued that the true signifier of civilization was the supremacy of socially sanctified norms over unbridled instincts. Elsewhere too he celebrated the coercive power of Hindu marriage system and had argued that the superiority of Hinduism lay in its discipline.[67] The debates surrounding Hindu marriage systems, especially those concerning polygamy, widowhood and child marriage reveal how concepts of conjugality and domesticity were becoming firmly ensconced in discourses of nationhood.[68] The intensifying contentions on representations of the woman and womanly conduct sought to enshrine the woman and her place within the household. Images of the woman – as a spiritually oriented, calm and compassionate denizen of the household who brought strength, good-luck and prosperity to the family she nurtured were becoming increasingly entrenched. Literature was expected to uphold this image and deviations from supposedly true feminine attributes came to be conceived as a violation of *ślīlatā* or norms of decency. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth

67 Chandranath Basu's rejoinder to Rabindranath Tagore on the issue of *Hindubibāha* in *Hindutva* (*Hindur Prakṛta Itihās*), Calcutta, 1892, cited in Tanika Sarkar, "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001, p. 50.

68 Tanika Sarkar, "Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism: Resisting Colonial Reason and the Death of a Child-Wife" in Tanika Sarkar, op. cit., pp. 191–225.

century the task of cleansing literature and keeping literary practice free of corruptible elements had considerably moved away from the domain of the state into the hands of the nationalist literati. The threat to the cultural respectability of the bhadralok was posed not so much by the erotic contents of medieval Bengali texts or the popular genres of Baṭtalā. The source of danger to the public sphere and the nation at large was now a foreign thing, emotional love. It was threatening because while this love could happen between a husband and wife, its potentialities lay outside the bounds of wedlock. The perils produced by the deployment of this new aesthetic in the creative space of fictions could be eradicated neither by legislative acts nor reformist diatribes. It required a new discursive form, one that could argumentatively legitimize principles of literary morality and convince readers thereof. Basu's text belonged to this new genre, that of literary criticism (*samālocanā sāhitya*) – a genre that in the early twentieth century assume a very specialized function, that of moral arbiter in the public domain. As a literary form it would become a key determinant of taste which in turn was regarded as a cultural attribute that produced social sense and brought people together. The role of criticism was therefore conceived in terms of its potential to reform. With serial and short fictions becoming the staple of most literary periodicals, literary criticism acquired an almost antidotal urgency, so much so that quality reviews became one of the benchmark components of good periodicals. Critical reviews of novels in particular, became a cause of concern as they were seen as contributing directly towards the shaping of the ideal, informed 'reader'. Following Mathew Arnold, one of the widely read Victorian literary publicists in late nineteenth-century Bengal,[69] the maturing of the genre itself was seen as an indication of the literary high modern and a means to thwart possibilities of disorder.[70]

69 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Sāhitye Soujanya" (Courtesy in the literary sphere), *Swadeśī Bājār*, v.1 # 9, Māgh 1335 / January-February 1929. Chaudhuri (1868–1946) remarked that Mathew Arnold the literary critic, more than Arnold the poet was familiar to students of his generation. Chaudhuri's student years would have roughly corresponded to the 1880s, the time when Basu's piece appeared in *Baṅgadarśan*.

70 For Mathew Arnold "culture", denoting both a state and a pursuit of perfection was the product of "inward operation" comprising of poetry, education and criticism. All of these three enabled the cultivation of the "best self" that is inherent in all humans but concealed by the limitations of class ideology and habits. Culture for Arnold was an active, continuous process of 'becoming' that precluded the vulgar and thwarted anarchy. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1958, 1983, pp. 110–129.

4 Sāhitya Samālocanā: Regulating the Public Sphere

By the second decade of the twentieth century, contemporaries noted with much optimism, the abundant production of vernacular print. The presence of a large number of monthly periodicals, in particular provided more space for literary output. The "Sāmaẏikī" (meaning contemporaneous), a regular section in the popular illustrated periodical *Bhāratbarṣa* spoke of poetry and fiction, including novels and short stories of diverse qualities having inundated the literary marketplace.[71] Neither was there any dearth of articulate essays and several literary monthlies were indeed managed by competent editors.[72] Nonetheless, "Sāmaẏikī" regretted the one thing that the Bengali literary field "lacked" was fair and objective criticism (*samālocanā*). What was unwelcome was the lack of grace and restrained language in criticism that frequently reduced a literary genre to personal invectives. The result, "Sāmaẏikī" explained, was abuse of the critic's position.[73] Likened to a teacher, the critic's role was seen to be that of a guardian of the public mind whose reprimands had to be accepted with humility by writers and editors.[74] The core emphasis of "Sāmaẏikī" was on the need for good manners and mutual respect in literary debates so as to ensure civility in the public domain. An increasing number of periodical-readers, new writers and novel aesthetic experiments contributed to a pluralization of the Bengali public sphere, raising alarm over several issues like readers' tastes, discrimination in choices of reading and the urgency of monitoring the reception of print.[75] In two successive essays in the monthly *Baṅgabāṇī*, Akshay Kumar Sarkar for instance argued that the upshot of the post-War socio-economic instability was a moral degeneration among the middle classes or *madhyabitta* that expressed itself through poor reading habits, particularly leisurely pursuit of rapidly proliferating cheap sensational fiction.[76] Central to Sarkar's essays is the alarm over any possibility of a gnawing away of the literary public sphere that represented a sanctified space of the nation. In

71 "Sāmaẏikī", *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.5 pt.2, #5, Baiśākh 1325 / April-May 1918.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Sarojnath Ghosh, "Daptar: 'Bāṅglā Sāhityer Ekti Dhārā'" (A trend in Bengali literature), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.4 pt.2 # 2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1332 / November-December 1925. Ghosh's essay is representative of a sense of panic shared by many publicists at what was seen as an inundation of "hideous aesthetic" (*bībhaṯsa rasa*) that "threatened to wash away values such as patriotism and motherhood".

76 Akshay Kumar Sarkar, 'Madhyabitter Bṝtti Samasyā' (Job crises facing the middle class), *Baṅgabāṇī*, Āṣāṛh 1330 / June-July 1923 and 'Samālocanā' in *Baṅgabāṇī*, Śrāvaṇ 1330 / July-August 1923.

this context, critical reviews assumed an integral function in the public domain, a medium that could help readers navigate the inundation of print, differentiate between suitable (*supāṭhya*) and prurient (*apāṭhya*) readings and make judicious choices. Criticism (*samālocanā*) became the means for debating what constituted readable literature and the most appropriate means for filtering out printed garbage.[77]

Written in the form of argumentative essays, criticism was expected to evaluate a particular piece of work, more commonly fiction and poetry, by conforming to certain prescribed parameters and aesthetic concepts. The core sense of criticism is fault-finding. But as a literary genre it has to be understood not as mere negation of a piece of work but rather as a "definite practice" involving both positive and negative responses and operating in "active and complex relations" with the whole context of the production and circulation of a text.[78] For instance, the serialization of a fiction in a particular periodical would generate reviews of it in the pages of that periodical and in others as well. These critical reviews often evoked counter responses, thus creating multiple judgments and interjections that spread over several issues across a diverse range of periodicals. With the commercialization of print in the modern industrial age, literary criticism, it has been argued, assumed a "new and effectively primary importance" in the literary sphere, emerging as the key modality for distinguishing between high and low literatures.[79] Its core function was to groom readers to "discriminate" and "grade" works of art in terms of major, minor and those that deserved to be purged.[80] Through its didactic function as an arbiter of literary morality, criticism thus became a device for integrating the reading audience.[81] A reader community constituted by universal literacy and uniform reading habits could potentially be the basis of an integrated na-

77 Sarkar, "Samālocanā". As late as 1934, the editor of the avant-garde journal *Paricaẏ* Sudhindranath Dutta spoke scornfully of Dineshchandra Sen for writing a foreword for an undeserving volume of translations by one Kamalkrishna Ghosh. Dutta wrote, such irresponsible evaluation certainly makes a mockery of Bengali *samālocanā*. Sudhindranath Dutta, in "Pustak-Paricaẏa" section, a review of Kamalkrishna Ghosh's "Opārer Dheu", Baiśākh 1341 / April-May 1934. Tagore's reply to a question at the Literary Conference held at the Tagore family mansion at Jorasanko in north Calcutta (Caitra 1334 / March-April 1928); proceedings printed in *Prabāsī*, Jyaiṣṭha 1335 / May-June 1928.

78 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1975, 1983, pp. 85–86.

79 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 1977, pp. 50–51.

80 Williams, op. cit. p. 51.

81 Williams argues that from the perspective of a society's historical development, 'criticism' and the associated concepts of 'taste', 'sensibility' and 'aesthetics' that together constitute the form of literature are "forms of a class specialization and control of a general social

tional community. Time and again therefore publicists in early twentieth-century Bengal, underscored the centrality of aesthetic values in the formation of a public life (*jātīya jīban*).[82] Such notions led to anxious monitoring of literary frontiers – authenticating literary production and laying out the permissible limits of printed matter. Criticism could therefore claim to create an informed readership by supervising reading habits, especially reading of fiction. The genre of literary criticism, it has been argued, developed in tandem with the emergence and popularization of modern fiction.[83] The stake of *jātīya jīban* was high and so criticism could not be estranged from the general reading public and remain confined to rarefied circle of literary connoisseurs. So even as the literary periodical was being read in the privacy of the home, in actually trying to connect with its readers, criticism shook off its private character and converged with common ways of judgment and experience. This definitive role assigned to criticism was connected to anxieties about popular literacy. Francesca Orsini in her study of the Hindi public sphere has noted that criticism as evaluation of rhetoric and prosody was insignificant in this agenda.[84] With an ever-growing commercial market for print driven largely by demands for sensual themes, the immediate concern of criticism had to do with *lokhit* or good of the people that had been defined firmly by the nationalist agenda.[85] In Bengal, the literary forms structured by *Baṅgadarśan* were already widening the literary field, creating hierarchies of readerships with differentiated reading abilities. If these heterogeneous reading publics were to be brought together as part of a single intellectualized culture then that would necessitate a refined aesthetics and a broadly uniform sense of what literature ought to be. By the turn of the twentieth century, literature therefore emerged as the domain of aesthetic self-identification of the Bengali bhadralok, becoming laden with a kind of social responsibility. The perceived threat of vulgar literary senses impinging on the social order gave rise to a literary criticism that sought to purge prurience and sexuality in print. Foregrounding a direct connection between literary practice and social condition, criticism became inextricable from the agenda of integrating socially differentiated readers. *Aślīlatā* or obscenity became a key determinant for evaluating literature. Debates over

practice" as well as forms of "a class limitation of the questions which it might raise". Williams, op. cit. p. 49.

82 Bireshwar Majumdar, "Jātīyajībane Sāhityer Upayogitā" (The need for literature in the nation's life), *Sabuj Patra*, Yr. 4, # 11, Phālgun 1324 / February-March 1918.

83 Rajat Kanta Ray, op. cit., p. 77.

84 Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, p. 167.

85 Ibid., p. 173.

whether a particular fiction or poetry was *aślīl* showed that questions of permissibility and aesthetic tastes were intensely contentious.

The purported abundance of fiction – in terms of both separate book volumes and serialization in periodicals – was a cause of continuing alarm for the both the colonial bureaucracy and the nationalist intelligentsia.[86] The *Bengal Library Catalogues* continued to express unease with what was seen as an outpouring of mediocre domestic novels and detective thrillers.[87] Rabindranath regretted the common readers' preference for excitement (*uttejanā*) over enlightenment (*udbodhan*) – a choice that he believed compromised on the social function of literature.[88] It was amidst a growing concern for disorder that the genre of literary criticism (*samālocanā sāhitya*) emerged as a disciplining mediator in literary communication, endowed with the task of cultivating taste (*sāhitya āsvādan*) among readers of modern literature. The purpose of criticism it was argued, was to "hurt" rather than "entertain" the reader.[89] As a genre therefore criticism set itself apart from genres meant to provide entertainment. Analogies of the social function of critics were typically drawn from imageries of "scavengers"[90] and the state's "Sanitation department".[91] The professed task of critics was cleansing the public sphere by disposing off offensive print that threatened to contaminate the nation's life (*jātīya jīban*) – a ruthless but indispensable job nonetheless.[92] Critics were to ensure that the nation's life was "well ventilated, thus preventing the accumulation of toxic elements". Like true physicians it was the critics' duty to cure the nation's malaise, rid the public mind of undesirable thoughts and create new imaginative possibilities.[93]

Affinity between critics and reader in terms of shared social location and literary tastes could well have accounted for reader-loyalty to specific

86 The *Bengal Library Catalogue* for instance records 68 fiction titles for the first three quarters of 1904, 84 for the same period of 1906 and 138 for the same period of 1921.

87 See for instance the General Observations (about fiction) of the Bengal Librarian, compiler of the *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the year 1929: "The crop of the year was both varied and abundant but without much outstanding worth. Detective stories were in favor with the reading public…."

88 Letter from Rabindranath Tagore to Sudhindranath Dutta, *Paricaẏ*, Kārtik 1338 / October-November 1931.

89 Bireshwar Majumdar, "Jātīẏajībane Sāhityer Upayogitā" (Relevance of literature in the nation's life), *Sabuj Patra*, Yr. 4, # 11, Phālgun 1324 / February-March 1918.

90 Prof. Mohinimohan Mukhopadhyay, "Purātan O Nūtan Bāṅglā Sāhitya" (Old and modern Bengali literature), *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.6, pt.2, # 5, Baiśākh 1326 / April-May 1919.

91 Bireshwar Majumdar, "Jātīẏajībane Sāhityer Upayogitā".

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

periodicals.[94] Through pedagogy of moral-aesthetic values, the critic was to set himself apart and above the general body of readers who in his perception were naïve and in need of advice and monitoring.[95] The critic was therefore a discerning reader too, embodying the aesthetic attributes expected of informed readers. The quality that made him a distinguished reader was judgement and discrimination. The function of the literary critic was thus conceived beyond heated exchanges among authors and critics as well. Defining the attributes of the informed critic, a commentator drew on the principles of criticism enunciated by Mathew Arnold, urged periodical editors to follow Arnold's line of appreciation and hoped that the fate of Bengali verse would improve. Appreciation of good verse, he argued on Arnoldian lines, accompanied education and aesthetic sensibility and did not require preset parameters.[96] Taking note of the trends in Bengali criticism, Binoy Ghosh argued that the dominant style represented by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Chandranath Basu, Dwijendralal Roy and Rabindranath Tagore closely followed those of Walter Bagehot, Leslie Stephens and Mathew Arnold. These European critics, Ghosh held were truly philosophers and therefore the aesthetic and cognitive regulators of public life (*jātīẏa jībaner niẏāmak*).[97] By the late 1920s, the purpose of literary criticism seemed to shift, in a way recording the pluralizing of the public sphere. *Samālocanā* was now proposed as articulations of individuated readings of literary oeuvres. Commenting on the relevance of literary criticism in public life, Pramatha Chaudhuri contended that twentieth-century literary sphere was different from the era of *Baṅgadarśan* (i.e. the late nineteenth century) when Bankimchandra was uncritically revered as a literary critic and his verdict about various writers acquired consensus within the *pāṭhak samāj*

94 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Routledge and Keegan Paul, London and New York, 1984, pp. 234–235 and pp. 239–240. Bourdieu contends that the critic and his readers share in a relationship of "elective affinities". Bourdieu elaborates, "a critic can only 'influence' his readers insofar as they grant him this power because they are structurally attuned to him in their view of the social world, their tastes and their whole habitus.", p. 240.

95 Theodore Adorno, "Culture, Criticism and Society" in Brian O' Connor ed., *The Adorno Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2000, Chapter 11, p. 196. About the social function of the literary critic Adorno says: "The cultural critic can hardly avoid the imputation that he has the culture that culture lacks. His vanity aids that of culture: even in the accusing gesture, the critic clings to the notion of culture, isolated, unquestioned, dogmatic."

96 Satya Sundar Das (Mohitlal Majumdar), "Bāṅglā Kavitā O Samālocanā" (Bengali poetry and criticism), *Bhāratī*, Year 40, # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1326 / May-June 1919.

97 Binoy Ghosh, "Biśvasāhitya" (world literature), *Prabāsī*, v.15, pt. 1, # 5, Bhādra 1322 / August-September 1915.

(reader society).[98] The present he observed was a democratic age for literature. Appraisals of literary works had moved beyond predetermined "cannons of criticism" and criticism had been reduced to mere personal views. The critic's individual taste (*ruci*) alone was the standard governing his reviews. This Chaudhuri argued thwarted the possibility of any emergent social sensibility (*sāmājik ruci*) and so presaged "critical anarchism".[99] Nevertheless, he asserted, it was imperative for critics to accept that the true spirit of *samālocanā* was self-expression (*ātmaprakāś*) rather than the responsibility of patronizing or disciplining.[100] Conservative critics however bemoaned the passing away of old-style criticism à la Samajpati's – criticism that would fulfill the function of moral arbitration.[101]

In case of fiction, the question of *nīti* or morality proved particularly contentious, especially so as orthodox critics used it as a somewhat universal standard for evaluating domestic fiction. The discourse about the social function of fiction and its desirable forms attracted wider questions about instructing and shaping a discerning readership and the role of the critic in molding the ordinary reader's mind. The prospects of creating a sufficiently large readership were linked to concerns over moral instruction of readers and a fear that reading unsuitable fiction would exert a corrupting influence. The anxiety here was not so much about novel-reading being a disreputable habit. Rather the concern was more about the perceived gullibility of readers and the morality espoused through the fiction form. Counseling readers on choosing the 'right' reading therefore assumed a kind of urgency as encounters in the pages of literary periodicals reveal how politics of the home, household relationships, indissoluble companionate marriages and women's monogamy were being woven into a quotidian practice like reading, thereby upsetting assumptions of reading literature (and more generally periodicals) as an unstructured and playful activity. Such anti-fictional vocabulary inscribed within the pages of the very journals that brought out the novels would continue to endure well into the twentieth century and gain credibility in the name of the nation and its health. In the pages of journals like *Sāhitya* and thereafter *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* this very anxiety over possibilities of social corruption would reappear and develop into rhetoric of the organic social body and the contaminating effects of 'immoral' readings.

98 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Samālocanā" (criticism), *Kallol*, v. 4 # 6, Āśvin 1333 / September-October 1926.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Sarojnath Ghosh, Daptar, 'Bāṅglā Sāhityer Ekti Dhārā' *Māsik Basumatī*, v.4 pt.2 # 2 Agrahāẏaṇ 1332 / November-December 1925.

Publicists argued against imposition of any moral burden (*nīti*) on modern literature reiterating that literature was a domain where social values especially gender norms and relations had to be interrogated, reinforced and critiqued.[102] As Sarkar observed,

> The Bengali literary field is swamped with novels of all quality..... Most major writers like Saratchandra Chattopadhyay have acquired fame through the novelistic genre. Novels have addressed the social context – in trying to establish the woman's rights, analyzing the complexities of her mentality, probing in to her strengths and weaknesses according to natural human moralities – all these have raised a storm in literary circles.[103]

It was in representations of women that Bengali novelistic imagination proved to be most creative yet intensely conflictual and ambiguous. As "object of interrogation", Tanika Sarkar argues, the woman was "enclosed within the Self, was immediately outside it, and was possibly opposed to it."[104] The queries about man-woman relations and their aesthetic resolutions were thus infinite. Frequently acrimonious debates over some of Tagore's works reveal that the notions of womanhood, romantic love and monogamous, companionate marriage informed much of the literary concerns of the day. Any deviation from the normative was immediately read as valorization of sexual promiscuity and therefore labeled as *aślīl.* Thus literary debates on obscenity became in some ways a defense or attack on Hindu domesticity and a conflict over the reified ideals of womanhood, questions of chastity and morality within the domestic space (*gr̄ha*). Most of the literary monthlies had a substantial female readership as did the solely women's journals. Women believed to be mentally weaker and particularly addicted to novels that provided less strenuous and intellectually hollow reading, were considered to be in need for guidance as to what they ought not to read.[105] Middle-class men too could not be outside the scope of such rhetoric, though for them it was more a question of securing respectability by distancing themselves from sexual and titillating elements of

---

102 Sukharanjan Roy, "Choto-Galpa" (short story), *Nārāyaṇ*, Year 11, v.1, # 4, Phālgun 1322 / February-March 1916.

103 Akshaykumar Sarkar, "Samālocanā" in *Baṅgavāṇī*, Śrāvaṇ 1330 / July-August 1923.

104 Tanika Sarkar, "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation", p. 37.

105 The domestic markets of periodicals have been studied in detail in Chapter 2. Also see Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914*, Oxford University Press, 1993. Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914*, Routledge, United Kingdom, 1996.

popular culture. Conservative intellectuals like Sureshchandra Samajpati (editor of the monthly *Sāhitya*), Bipinchandra Pal[106] and the poet Dwijendralal Roy highlighted the censorial task of criticism. For them moral policing of literary boundaries was an important way of ensuring the durability of orthodox principles of Hindu marriage and affirming the hegemonic claims of a Hindu nationalism. Journals like *Sāhitya* and *Nārāẏaṇ* showed a visible apprehension about modern notions of love, emotions and physical pleasure. Tagore's oeuvres like *Strīr Patra,*[107] *Naṣṭa-Nīṛ* (both short stories), *Ghare Bāire*[108] and *Citrāṅgadā* came to be viewed as transgression of virtues and moral tenets that encapsulated ideals of a Hindu domesticity. Referring to the orthodoxy's furor over *Ghare Bāire* and *Strīr Patra* a pro-Tagore critic observed that they had probably stunned the Bengali public even more than Ibsen's *Doll's House* had moved the English and French publics.[109] The orthodoxy's mobilization was built around an indomitable defense of traditional patriarchy. Since the later nineteenth century the many debates surrounding Hindu marriage systems and the need or otherwise to reform those revealed how concepts of a binding and non-consensual Hindu conjugality had become firmly ensconced in discourses about a Hindu nationhood.[110] Representations of the woman and of womanly conduct became contentious as discourses across the board from liberal-reformists to conservative-revivalists sought to enshrine the woman

106 Bipinchandra Pal initially shared a good relation with Tagore and wrote for the latter's journals like *Bhāndār* and *Navaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan.* However the two soon fell out because of Pal's incessant stance on revivalist Hindu nationalism. He used the literary medium profusely to strengthen an anti-Tagore alliance of intellectuals. When Tagore renounced his job as the editor of *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) Pal immediately took up the vacated position to use the journal for his ideological enunciation. Pal was also the one who convinced Chittaranjan Das to initiate the literary journal *Nārāẏaṇ* (Agrahāẏaṇ 1321 / September-October 1914) – once again a forum for his anti-Tagorean pronunciations.

107 Tagore's short story "Strīr Patra" (wife's letter) appeared in *Sabuj Patra*, Śrāvaṇ 1321 issue and in Agrahāẏaṇ 1321 a parody of the story appeared in *Nārāẏaṇ.* The parody was titled "Mṛṇāler Kathā" and written anonymously. Sukumar Sen, *BSI* volume 5, p. 258.

108 The renowned scientist Prafullachandra Ray resentfully remarked that at a mature age (approximately 67 years) Tagore had indecently (*aślīl bhābe*) pulled the scandals of the Hindu home out into the public space. He felt that it was even more unexpected of Tagore because he was commonly addressed as the *Ṛṣi* (Saint). P.C. Ray in *Nabyabhārat* Baiśākh 1324 / April-May 1917. Amarendranath Roy, "Sāhitye Śālīnatā" (Decency in literature) in section "Sāhitya Prasaṅga", *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.5, pt. 2, #1, Pouṣ 1324 / December-January 1917–18. Roy argued that *Ghare Bāire* was unacceptable primarily because of the "imported concept of love".

109 Ajitkumar Chakrabarty in his essay "Ādhunik Bāṅglā Sāhityer Saṅge Pāścātya Sāhityer Sambandha" (relationship between modern Bengali literature and western literature), *Prabāsī* v. 18, pt. 2 # 7, Kārtik 1325 / October-November 1918.

110 Tanika Sarkar, "Conjugality and Hindu Nationalism".

and her place within the household. Imageries of the woman – as the wife, mother and daughter assumed multivalent connotations, most popularly as the reasonably educated, spiritually oriented, quiet, decent and proficient denizen of the household, the *satīlakṣmī* and *sugṛhiṇī* who brought strength, goodluck and prosperity to the family she nurtured. Literature was expected to uphold this imagery and deviations from supposedly true feminine attributes came to be conceived as a violation of *ślīlatā* or norms of decency. So profound was the imagery of the *satīlakṣmī* and the *sugṛhiṇī* that submission to the uninfringeable ideal became the yardstick with which most literary critics chose to analyze female characters in novels and stories. Literary miscellanies are aplenty with reviews that scrutinize female characters in terms of transgression and compliance. Tagore was particularly displeased with such growing analytical orthodoxies. He insisted that Kumu, the female protagonist of *Yogāyog*[111] be judged as a human being responding to her circumstantial compulsions rather than a woman of misdemeanor incapable of being an archetype for emulation.[112] The debates surrounding some of his works perhaps best reveal the interplay between idealizations of Hindu marriage, nationalist discourse and questions of literary propriety.

5 Debating Love, Desire and Social Ethics

5.1 *The Body, Its Diseases and the Threat of Epidemic*

In a serialized essay '*Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā*' (Sustaining a Healthy Literature)[113] the author Jatindramohan Sinha[114] identified three categories of forbidden love – the widow's love (*bidhabār prem*), the married woman's love outside wedlock (*sadhabār prem*) and the affairs of the public woman (*bār-banitār*

---

111 Rabindranath's *Yogāyog* appeared serially in 1334 / 1927 in the monthly *Bicitrā* edited by Upendranath Gangopadhyay. The novel interrogated the presumed inviolability of marriage sacrament and the orthodox insistence that the wife should love her husband irrespective of circumstances.

112 Rabindranath Tagore, 'Sāhityavicār' (Judging Literature) in *Prabāsī*, v. 29 pt. 2 # 7, Kārtik 1336 / October-November 1929. It was possible that Rabindranath was responding to the spurt of reviews following the completion of serialization, for instance the one in *Bicitrā* v. 3 pt. 1 # 4, Āśvin 1336 / September-October 1929.

113 Jatindramohan Sinha, 'Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā' appeared in Sureshchandra Samajpati edited *Sāhitya* during the year 1327 / 1920. It appeared as a book in 1922.

114 Jatindramohan Sinha's first noticeable appearance was as an anti-Tagore critic in Chittaranjan Das's journal *Nārāẏaṇ*. His essay titled "Bhāṣār Kathā (On language) appeared in *Nārāẏaṇ* v. 2, # 8, Āṣāṛh 1322 / June-July 1915.

prem). Before embarking on a detailed critique of several major novels by Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Sinha provided an elaborate perspective on society itself.

The idea of disease had been a common metaphor used to describe *aślīlatā.* Late nineteenth-century theories of social evolutionism had metamorphosed into functionalist perspectives of the society. The study of society came to be regarded as analogous to the biological sciences. Works of influential social scientists like Durkheim treated society as an organism and various social institutions were likened to parts of the body functioning together. Such organic analogies of society were decidedly evolutionist with thinkers like Spencer and Durkheim arguing that society passed through stages similar to human biological developments like infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, midlife and old-age.[115] Fin-de-siècle Bengal was evidently quite receptive to the social-anthropological debates in contemporary Europe, conceiving of society as a living organism with specific health needs:

> It is well known that the human society is like the human body. The society like our body too possesses brain and limbs.… Both form and movement define humans as well as societies.… This is the way a fully evolved society is composed.[116]

Jatindramohan Sinha started his essay by elucidating on an organic analogy of society. The logic was simple. If society was like the human body, then an analogous concept of health and hygiene was essential for preventing malady and a sufficient dose of medication was necessary to preclude possible epidemic in the body social. A clean environment he argued necessitated *saṯ-saṅga* (good company) which could be ensured by *saṯ-sāhitya* (good literature). *Asaṯ-sāhitya* (dishonest / indecent literature) on the contrary contaminated the surroundings. A standard education (*śikṣā-praṇālī*) fulfilled the task of digestive enzymes that aided in assimilating *saṯ-sāhitya.*[117] Fiction according to Sinha posed the greatest threat to social health. Not bound by rules of prosody most

---

115 Alan Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2000, pp. 62–63. Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown formulated a functionalist perspective of society in which society was imagined as functioning smoothly like a healthy biological organism.

116 Jogeshchandra Ray, "Kalā-śikṣā" (Learning the Arts) in *Bhāratī*, Kārtik 1309 / October-November 1902. Prof. Mohinimohan Mukhopadhyay, "Purātan O Nūtan Bāṅglā Sāhitya" in *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.6, pt.2, Baiśākh 1326 / April-May 1919.

117 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā".

ordinary writers feel writing fiction is easy. Most readers too preferred novels because it afforded light reading for leisurely afternoons after the day's routine chores. Sinha then went on to argue:

> Most novels and short stories enter our *antaḥpur* and create an "unhealthy atmosphere" there, polluting our social ambiance. This is the main reason for our objection. The works of ordinary writers who do not quite possess any "art" are not dangerous. All that they do is create some temporary sensation. But the works of those who are true poets and artists are much more damaging – because they can permanently imprint in the minds of the readers a corrupted emotion. It is really sad that some of the great talents are being particularly detrimental to the society by simply invoking the pretext of "art for art's sake".[118]

The germ (*vīj* – literally meaning seed) of *prem-rog* (malady of love) Sinha claimed was more hazardous than those of cholera, plague and small-pox which brought death quickly. He likened the *vīj* of *prem-rog* with hook-worm – both destroyed the organic body slowly. As he pointed out in case of Tagore's early novel *Cokher Bāli* that though Binodini, one of the two main female characters, was steadfastly dedicated to Bihari, yet there was no denying that to her (a widow), he was a *parpuruṣ* (the 'other' man whom she could not marry). The depiction of love between a young widow (Binodini) and an eligible bachelor (Bihari) was sinful. The readers' intimacy with such aberrant sketches of love he feared would diminish their fear of acts of social transgression. *Cokher Bāli* was therefore like a toxin (*viṣ-svarūp*) in the social-body (*samāj-śarīr*).[119] Such novels as *Cokher Bāli* were potentially detrimental for widows whose place was "atop the temple shire".[120] The trend Sinha asserted had started with Bankimchandra's fictional heroines – Ayesha, Kundanandini, Shaibalini, Rohini – all extraordinarily beautiful women whose relationships brought destruction around them. Tagore and Saratchandra he argued went farther than Bankim.[121] The love enunciated in these fictions was born of physical desire (*kāmaja*).[122] Most of these novels were "romantic" novels rather than "realistic" because their narratives revolved around pre-marital love (*pūrbarāg*) or extramarital

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid.

122 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Upanyāse Premcitra" (love scenes in novels), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.1 pt.2 #6, Caitra 1329 / March-April 1923.

relationships, neither of which were the norm in indigenous society.[123] Responding to an essay in the monthly *Upāsanā*, Sinha dismissed the idea of art's autonomous existence, instead arguing that literature was ensconced in social condition.[124] Modern Bengali fiction, he argued were poor replications of European novels, uninvolved with the conventions and relationships that constituted indigenous society.[125]

The predicament for conservative ideologues like Sinha was to address the modern concept of love and conjugality and the representations thereof in literature. Indigenous society was pitted against certain stereotypical ideas of the West where child-marriage was not a norm, marriage followed courtship and women were allowed to socialize freely. Bengali society being wholly different from society in Europe, Sinha claimed fictional plots revolving around 'love' were an anomaly and so potentially corruptible.[126] With novelistic themes hardly concentrating on other aspects of life, writers were left with no choice but to deal with the three forms of illegitimate love: *bidhabār prem*, *sadhabār prem* and *bār-banitār prem.* Sinha argued that it was the very unnaturalness of these relationships that gave them a deviant quality. Modern Bengali fiction therefore posed a threat of contamination to the society and the only way to resist *prem-rog* was to fortify tradition itself. Preservation of child-marriage (*bālya-vivāha*) and ascetic widowhood were adjudged the most effective vaccine (*pratiṣedhak*)[127] to buttress society. As later sections will elaborate, the key to the obscenity debate lay in this perceived anomaly between modern forms of love and indigenous social norms. The abundance of fiction in Bengali literary miscellanies indicated how contentious questions of love and conjugality had become. Nationalism demanded an autonomous cultural space where the sovereignty of the nation could be proclaimed. Aesthetic and literary categories emerged as the surrogate arenas for an alternate articulation of the nation's autonomy. Admittedly literature did not quite seek to replace political discourses of the nation but it did succeed in making a powerful intervention in national life.[128] The literary effort consisted in selectively distancing modern Bengali culture from both its pre-colonial past and from the modern West. In this entire exercise towards a re-orientation of self and society, love

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid. The essay in question was Nareshchandra Sengupta, "Sāhitye Svādhīnatā" (license in literature), *Upāsanā*, Kārtik 1329 / October-November 1922.

125 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Upanyāse Premcitra".

126 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Ārt o Morāliti" (art and morality), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.2 pt.2 #1, Kārtik 1330 / October-November 1923.

127 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā".

128 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā".

and conjugality as the most indispensable impulse of human existence assumed strategic importance in literary debates.

In a review of '*Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā*'[129] Sarala Devi differed radically. She argued that not only is *prem* not alien to indigenous society but is in fact situated right at the heart of Bengali literary imagination. Sinha she argued had incorrectly assumed that the 'Hindu' society was a homogenous, impervious and a flawless system that was threatened by modern literature. For Sinha, she continued, *prem* was an importation of the western concept of 'love' and was non-existent in pre-colonial indigenous society. Sarala Devi started by addressing the meaning of *prem* – that it contained a nuanced implication of adulation and sexual desire. The difference between a *premik* (lover) and *kāmuk* (one with only a desire for bodily pleasure) was that the former sought the *ātmā* (mind / soul) and the latter chose physical gratification. Drawing on medieval Bengali texts, particularly Vaiṣṇava literature (*Vaiṣṇava Padāvalī*) Sarala Devi argued that *parakīẏā prem* (love outside wedlock) had been celebrated in these verses. Criticisms of the liberal variety underscored the sensuality in the incestuous relationship between Radha and Krishna that apparently did not violate orthodox sensibilities or seem *aślīl* because here the physical union of the lovers was believed to sublimate into a spiritual union of the devotee and divinity. The word used in these texts and in pre-modern colloquial dialect in general was *pirīti* (derived from the Sanskrit *prīti*, also meaning affection). Sarala Devi asks a pointed question, "… so does the problem lay in the word *prem*? Is *prem* indecent and *pirīti* socially acceptable?" Her argument was very different from Sinha's. While the latter had argued that socially unacceptable relationships celebrated in modern Bengali novels were drawn from western notions of love, Sarala Devi claimed that *parakīẏā prem* had existed in Hindu society for times immemorial. All that Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (the main offenders according to Sinha) did was to expose the tribulations of the Hindu society, not unlike what Tolstoy had done in nineteenth-century Russia.

Jatindramohan Sinha's serialized essay '*Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā*' was not the only piece in the monthly *Sāhitya.* When Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novels *Svāmī* and *Bilāsī* appeared in *Bhāratī* and *Nārāẏaṇ*,[130] Sureshchandra Samajpati severely criticized *Nārāẏaṇ* for patronizing *dehabād* (physicality) and

129 Sarala Devi, 'Siṃher Bibare', *Baṅgavāṇī*, Year 3, pt.1, # 1; Phālgun 1330 / February-March 1924. Jatindramohan Sinha had requested Sarala Devi to write a review of '*Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā*'. Her essay 'Siṃher Bibare' (literally meaning "In the Lion's Cave"), is a pun on the author's last name 'Siṃha' (Lion).

130 *Nārāẏaṇ* was an important nationalist periodical started by Chittaranjan Das in 1914. It published letters of Aurobindo and Barin Ghosh, portraits and cartoons by Gaganen-

kāmabāsanā (sexual desire).[131] It is interesting that *Sāhitya* itself had brought out Chattopadhyay's *Bālya-smṛti*, *Kāśīnāth* and *Haricaraṇ* (all published between 1912 and 1914) – apparently without the author's knowledge while he was in Rangoon. These stories putatively contained nothing *aślīl.* But for literary critics, novels like *Svāmī* (*Nārāẏaṇ*, 1918) could be detrimental.[132] The plot centered on a young girl Saudamini, married off to a widower Ghanasyam who was only functionally educated, earned enough to support his family consisting of his step-mother, half-brothers and their families. Chattopadhyay narrated in some details Saudamini's pre-marital affair with the zamindar's son Naren, his reappearance as her husband's guest, their eloping to Calcutta and her subsequent repentance and reunion with her forgiving Vaishnava husband. Both Samajpati and Sinha objected to Chattopadhyay's depiction of Saudamini's shameless rendezvous with Naren one monsoon afternoon, her promiscuous behavior after marriage with Ghanasyam and the latter's ineffectuality in refusing to take Saudamini back. Several other novels by Chattopadhyay also came under severe scrutiny – the foremost amongst them being *Caritrahīn*, *Devadās*, *Baṛdidi* and *Pallīsamāj.*[133] It was also from the *Sāhitya* platform that the nationalist poet Dwijendralal Roy initiated a prolonged debate over Tagore's lyrical ballad *Citrāṅgadā.*

While orthodox publicists were reviling the new literary candidness on matters relating to man-woman relationships beyond normative sacramental marriage, romantic love, often elusive and unrequited, became the measure for the development of the full human character in novelistic prose. As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, fictional characters, despite their unreality perform the "immensely powerful function of setting examples, giving arguments and providing advice for real individuals on the point of falling in love. They contribute to a fictional normalization of such conduct."[134] Writers such as Saratchandra Chattopadhyay experimented with narrative plots exposing the hypocrisies of patriarchy and emphasizing durable union of a man and a woman rather than the preservation of extended family and social ties. The often acrimonious debates around romantic love (*prem* or *bhālobāsā*), marriage and the woman's place in society became the indicators of changes considered desirable for society. Romantic love did not preclude male sexuality either. Nov-

---

dranath Tagore, essays on ancient Indian history, philosophy, religion by Haraprasad Shastri, essays on nationalism and politics by Bipinchandra Pal and Chittaranjan Das.

131 Nirmalendu Bhowmik, *Sāhitya Patrikār Paricaẏ O Racanāsūci*, Sahityasri, Calcutta, Āśvin 1383 / September-October 1976.

132 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā".

133 Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel "Śrīkānta" serialized in *Bhāratbarṣa* in 1327 / 1920.

134 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 181.

els were replete with illustrations of patriarchy's thoughtlessness towards women and frequent insincerity on part of educated young men. While revivalist-nationalist publicists like Samajpati and Sinha reiterated their defense of patriarchal institutions like child-marriage, celibate widowhood and general chastity norms for women, Tagore and Chattopadhyay's oeuvres came to question the presumed distinctions between chastity and promiscuity. Liberal-minded reviewers like Sarala Devi and Lalitkumar Chattopadhyay inverted the conservative arguments to establish that Tagore and Chattopadhyay were in fact 'reformers' (*saṃskārak*) who sought to expose the ills of society through their deft use of the novelistic genre. It is significant to note that reviewers in favor of Rabindranath and Saratchandra employed a vocabulary similar to their critics' – i.e. in terms of *sāhityik aślīlatā* and its adverse effects on public morality. Pro-Tagore critics sought to convince skeptics that *Cokher Bāli*'s Binodini did indeed represent the 'immoral', as an archetype that needed to be expunged from society.[135] It is unlikely that orthodox critics would have found such defense of Tagore and Chattopadhyay convincing. What is important is that publicists on either side of the divide wished to see fiction-writers in the role of social reformers and public educators. Some of Saratchandra's short stories found their way into the syllabi of primary and middle schools because they carried a 'social message' of compassion that growing children, it was felt, needed to imbibe.[136] But neither of the two novelists, with their deep distrust of Hindu patriarchal norms admitted to being inspired by any mission of social reform – for them it was more about the liberty of 'art' and the authors' imaginative dispensation.[137]

These debates point to the shaping of new aesthetic and ethical codes because fiction did slip in certain changes in the readers' individual and conjugal lives – however small, indirect and slightly visible those might be. Literary principles were linked to notions of respectability within the home and from thence to morality of the nation itself. *Prem* was indeed the axial concept around which the debates on obscenity were woven. To orthodox publicists, *bilātī prem* (foreign / imported love) was incongruous with indigenous customary practices and rituals, constituted a threat to the cohesiveness of the joint family system (*jautha-paribār*) and was injurious to the sacramental character

135 Lalitkumar Chattopadhyay, 'Sāhitya O Samāj' (literature and society), *Baṅgabāṇī*, Caitra 1330 / March-April 1924.

136 Sarala Devi, 'Siṃher Bibare'.

137 Tagore and Chattopadhyay argue on such lines on numerous occasions. See for example Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's 'Sāhitya O Nīti' (literature and ethics), *Baṅgabāṇī*, Year 3, pt. 2 # 5, Pouṣ 1330 / December-January 1923–24.

of the Hindu religion.[138] Modern literature, they argued, had ruptured the familiar convergence between 'morality' and 'art', rationalizing experimentations with *prem* on grounds of "art for art's sake".[139] The solution as Sinha reiterated time and again, lay in preserving customary practices of child marriage, celibate widowhood and purdah alongside preventing women from being educated.[140] The fictional experiments of Tagore and Chattopadhyay had produced a redefinition of the concepts and semantics and of love, often questioning the enforced durability of marital relationships. Several of Chattopadhyay's novels in particular had anchored romantic love in unusual relationships that transgressed societal boundaries.[141] *Prem* denoting modern romantic love now meant an emotional bonding between man and woman wherein sexual desire was only secondary.[142] As an aesthetic and moral code, romantic love emerged in tandem with the new social ethic of individuality that now defined much of the life world of the novelistic characters and readers too were expected to be molded by such narratives of cultural refinement.[143] Its deployment in literary experimentations signified changing times and shifting social relations. Changes in the nature of love and marriage could be effected when surrounding social relations underwent changes as well.[144] Also, while *prem* could possibly lead to fulfillment within marriage, it carried an undertone of forbidden romance.[145] It was precisely the threat of possible disintegration of the familiar patriarchal social order that made orthodox publicists vehemently oppose the modern aesthetics of romantic love and censure it on grounds its

138 Jatindramohan Sinha, "Baṅgasāhitye Nūtan Pañjikā-falaśruti" in *Māsik Basumatī*, v.1 #5, Year 4, Bhādra 1332 / August-September 1925.

139 Ibid.

140 Sinha, 'Upanyāse Premcitra'.

141 Several of Saratchandra's novels proved to be exceptionally popular, yet the focus of very bitter debates: "Śrīkāntar Bhramaṇ-Kāhinī" (appeared in book form as *Śrīkānta*) serialized intermittently in *Bhāratbarṣa* from Year 9, vol. 1 # 3, Bhādra 1328 / August-September 1921. Caritrahīn was serialized in *Yamunā.*

142 Sudipta Kaviraj argues that modern ideas of 'love', during this period of transformation, were more an expansion of the interiority of the mind rather than a preoccupation with sexual craving. See, Kaviraj, "Tagore and transformations in the ideals of love" in Francesca Orsini edited, *Love in South Asia*, p. 179.

143 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 173, pp. 179–180.

144 Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 179.

145 Vasudha Dalmia shows how concepts of muhabbat and 'ishq' that in premodern times were used to denote extramarital relations especially with the courtesan, were deployed in modern fiction of the early twentieth century as domesticated love operating within marriage or leading to marriage. But even as the concepts were being located within marital unions, they continued to connote illicit love. Vasudha Dalmia, "The spaces of love and the passing of the seasons: Delhi in the early twentieth century" in Francesca Orsini ed. *Love in South Asia*, pp. 183–184.

purported outlandishness. For a defensive patriarchy, social status quo could possibly be maintained by buttressing indigenous social structures that provided little space for individuality and by reinforcing various restrictive injunctions, especially those that strengthened female subordination and curbed their discretionary conduct.

5.2 *Marriage, Hindu Patriarchy and Post-war Economic Crises*

As periodical-reading gained popularity among middle-class households, it became imperative for periodicals to address the feelings of despair of the hard-pressed middle classes. The post-War economic instabilities, especially uncontrolled price-rises, food shortages and steadily dwindling landed incomes seemed to intensify the ever-present miseries of the urban petty bourgeoisie. Periodicals recorded the deep anguish of this subalternized class as they debated on whether to discard customary norms to keep pace with changing social equations or if conventional norms could indeed withstand the test of the stressful modern times. Contestations around core concerns of life like marriage and love came, were hinged on the everyday material aspects of middle-class lives, particularly the shrinking social resources of the middle classes. The trope of an irreversible economic hardship was deployed by both sides in the debate to argue for or against changes in marriage principles. The new aesthetic position, perhaps best exemplified in Tagore's writings, situated desired changes in marriage practices within shifting social relations, arguing that the modern times called for new ideals of individuality and conjugal intimacy. For his orthodox adversaries, such changes implied surrendering the last unconquered space of the Hindu nation. In their defense of traditional patriarchy with its entire baggage of customary rituals, they claimed the resilience of older norms against the onslaught of modernity.

In what proved to be a controversial essay on Hindu marriage, Rabindranath argued that the traditional anchors of Hindu society had started destabilizing as the social space (*sāmājik paridhi*) of individual families shrunk in face of acute shortages after the War.[146] But even in face of such "degeneracy" (*apajanan*) he explained, there had been no corresponding changes in society's conceptual repertoire. The erosion of traditional familial configurations did not create any new possibility for individual autonomy. As a result, family ties (*paribārbandhan*) had become the most oppressive of all relationships. He reiterated that older Hindu customary norms had rendered husband-wife relations flaccid and had therefore increasingly become aggressive. Celebrating

146 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bhāratvarṣīẏa Bibāha" (Indian Marriage), *Prabāsī*, Year 25, v. 1, # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1332 / July-August 1925.

the emancipatory potential of individualism and romantic love, Tagore sought to foreground these as the moral-aesthetic principles of the modern times. Modern conjugal relations could not endure within the conventional Hindu patriarchal structure and so the deep-rooted idea of the husband too needed to change. This entailed moving beyond the familiar conventions of female subordination: restraining child marriage, raising the age of consent[147] and emotional companionship between the husband and wife. Accordingly, the woman needed to be freed from the bonds of ritual performances carried out to acquire the 'ideal' husband.[148] For the girl child weighed down by numerous pre-marriage ritual performances (*brata-pūjā*), Tagore argued, the husband was merely an "idea" to be sought for rather than an 'individual' (*vyakti*) to be loved. The idea of the husband was only reinforced with every ritual performed.[149] Tagore's writings clearly articulated a preference for wedlock where sexual attraction was inferior to emotional companionship.[150] This he argued could be realized only by transcending the *kāminī-kāñcan* (lit. women and gold) dyad and internalizing the spiritual and emotive need of wedlock:

> … Those who believe in the spirituality of wedlock seek to liberate the marriage from the appalling torture of the society.… Marriage in our society is still sheathed in primitive practices that inhibit fulfillment of the unison between man and woman.… Men still think that only they are humans and their freedom is the only goal. Women are equated with money (*kāñcan* – literally gold) – to be used or left over as men please. Men seldom realize that by leaving women behind they merely move towards self-destruction.[151]

The lure of *kāminī-kāñcan* had been an old theme but as Sumit Sarkar has argued its connection with the bondage of the colonial office job was a novelty deployed by the nineteenth-century saint Ramakrishna Paramahansa while addressing his primarily urban middle and lower middle-class audience.[152] By

147 The Age of Consent for girl wives continued to be debated during the first decades of the twentieth century and liberal minded periodical editors like Ramananda Chattopadhyay repeatedly stressed the need to increase the legal age of consent. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Bālikāder Sammatir Baẏas" (Miscellaneous Matters – age of consent for girl brides), *Prabāsī*, v. 25 pt. 1# 1, Baiśākh 1332 / April-March 1925.

148 Rabindranath Tagore, "Bhāratvarṣīẏa Bibāha".

149 Ibid.

150 Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 179.

151 Tagore, "Bhāratvarṣīẏa Bibāha".

152 Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramakrishna and His Times' in *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p. 289.

the mid-1920s, through the efforts of Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission, the Ramakrishna cult had attained considerable popularity amongst the middle and lower middle-class households in Bengal, even as it continued to remain confined to the bhadralok group.[153] Foregrounding *kāminī-kāñcan-cākri* as the equation that tied the ordinary middle-class man in subjugation from which he sought spiritual relief, Ramakrishna had reiterated that his devotees eschew such enticements so characteristic of the dark, modern times, the Kaliyuga.[154] Tagore's critique of the equivalence between women and wealth was quickly interpreted as a jibe at Ramakrishna, by the *Māsik Basumatī.* The latter was a hugely popular journal whose print-run had by 1925, surpassed that of the more highbrow *Prabāsī* where Tagore was a regular contributor.[155] *Māsik Basumatī* was launched with a tri-color photographic print of Ramakrishna in its inaugural issue of April 1922. In successive issues the journal reprinted photographs of various places and persons associated with the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The, *Kathāmṛta*, a "diary-based record of conversation"[156] between Ramakrishna, his devotees and visitors, and recorded by his disciple Mahendranath Gupta, headmaster of a city-based school, appeared serially in the journal as did essays on various aspects of his life and thought.[157] Through such display of devotion to the Ramakrishna cult, *Māsik Basumatī* made its way into the interior space of urban middle-class religiosity and acquired instant popularity. Over the years, its social essays stridently defended Hindu marriage principles and justified patriarchy's disapproval of alternative conjugal order. From its inception therefore, *Māsik Basumatī* distinguished its social ethics and aesthetic ideals from the Brahmo oriented erudite *Prabāsī*,

153 Ibid., p. 283.

154 Sumit Sarkar has argued that a 'gender-paradox' underlay Ramakrishna's preaching: on the one hand, the unchaste, frivolous woman was posited as the source of evil and on the other, bhakti or devotion too had a feminine dimension, deified in the Mother Goddess and personified in the pure and dutiful mother and wife. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit. p. 312.

155 According to the circulation figures recorded in the *Bengal Library Catalogues* for the First Quarter (ending March 31) of 1925, *Māsik Basumatī* recorded a circulation of 12, 000 per issue, in contrast to *Prabāsī* which had a circulation of 7,500 copies and *Bhāratbarṣa* which had 10,000.

156 Sumit Sarkar, op. cit. p. 284. It could well be argued that the serialization of the *Kathāmṛta* in a popular periodical like *Māsik Basumatī* had contributed significantly towards making the Ramakrishna cult "a religion of urban domesticity".

157 Sri M, "Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa-Kathāmṛta", *Māsik Basumatī*, v.3 pt.1 #4, Śrāvaṇ, 1331 / July-August 1924. The serialization had begun earlier but this particular issue contained Ramakrishna's exposition on *kāminīkāñcan* that would become contentious and unacceptable for intellectuals like Tagore. Other regular writings on the life and thought of Ramakrishna contributed by Debendranath Basu appeared in almost every issue of the journal, often alongside episodes of the *Kathāmṛta*.

possibly weaning away a considerable segment of the latter's readers. The orthodox backlash to Tagore came from *Basumatī* several months later and from a lesser known publicist Basantakumar Chattopadhyay, a regular contributor to *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī*.[158] The *Basumatī* publicist asserted that given the financial constraints produced by the post-war economic crises, consensual marriage based upon romantic love and a higher age of consent was an unfeasible proposition. Older unmarried daughters would either be a burden on their aged parents or would be left to fend for themselves in the event of the latter's demise.[159] Again, if marriage depended upon individual choice, then in face of price-rise and financial insecurities, young men would choose to distance themselves from responsibilities of marriage and family, increasing manifold the peril of moral lapses.[160] Citing undated an issue of the *Tribune* he argued that one out of every seven marriages in the United States of America terminated in divorce – a symptom that he ascribed to the proliferation of individualism and free love (*svādhīn praṇaẏ*) in Western societies.[161] In "Bhāratvarṣīẏa Bibāha" Tagore had espoused that modern society needed to move beyond the *kāminī-kāñcan* dyad and redefine women not as objects of lust and source of threat but as companions in the making of civilization. The *Basumatī* publicist in his rejoinder to Tagore denied that Ramakrishna's equation of *kāminī-kāñcan* had undermined women's position, reiterating that the saint had looked upon women as manifestation of the mother goddess.[162] Appropriating the saint and his devotion to Kali squarely within the nationalist project that had created a new axis around the iconography of the Motherland

158 Basantakumar Chattopadhyay, "Hindur Bibāha" (Hindu marriage), 'Daptar' section, *Māsik Basumatī*, v.2 # 5, Year 4, Phālgun 1332 / February-March 1926. The arrangement of the article in the periodical was also crucial placed as it was just before an essay that discussed the economic predicaments of the middle classes, especially their land problems and reduced rent incomes. Gyanendranath Chakrabarty, "Bargā-Jami Samasyā" (land crises), 'Daptar' section, *Māsik Basumatī*, v.2 # 5, Year 4, Phālgun 1332 / February-March 1926.

159 Chattopadhyay, "Hindur Bibāha".

160 Chattopadhyay, "Hindur Bibāha".

161 Chattopadhyay, "Hindur Bibāha".

162 Sumit Sarkar has shown that the Ramakrishna cult and the saint's doctrines were deeply paradoxical and often conflicting. Ramakrishna's abhorrence of sex and fear of female body, his revulsion towards Tantric esoteric practices and choice of mother-worship from within the larger Shakta tradition of which Tantrism was a part, were all relate to broader moves within bhadralok constructions of womanhood. His messages as Sarkar shows were full of hatred for the temptress and the luxurious women. Yet he won the devotion of many women including wives and widows of bhadralok families and even theatre actresses and prostitutes. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit. pp. 338–340.

and the affective relationship between mother and son,[163] Hindu orthodoxy in a way chose to circumvent liberal critique. Basantakumar Chattopadhyay's defense of orthodox principles revealed the sustained challenge that the Tagorean aesthetics of love posed to dominant Hindu revivalist-nationalism. It also tested the resilience and proliferation of orthodoxy in face of the global recognition of Tagorean aesthetic and social ideals.

5.3 *A Different Take on Aślīlatā*

While orthodox publicists anxiously guarded literary frontiers against possible transgressions of codes of Hindu respectability, there was also a felt need to discuss sexual matters explicitly in the public domain as means to restrain moral panic. Even if rarely, the Bengali public sphere did prove to be accommodative and open enough to dare discussions on Vāṯsyāẏan's *Kāmasūtra*,[164] an ancient Sanskrit text on sexual behavior, intended primarily as a prescription for the *nāgaraka* or the citizen of ancient Indian polity.[165] Through a review of the annotated edition, the *Bhāratbarṣa* publicist sought to address widespread concerns over sexual anarchy perceived by many as a cause of emasculation of Indian men. Vulgar reading habits, especially of licentious literature churned out from Baṭtalā were commonly considered as a source of moral perversion. Paradoxically, while the text, at least in this one instance was being discussed in an open respectable forum, in the United Province, authorities categorically ordered booksellers not to keep copies of the *Kāmasūtra*.[166] The author drew on Manu the ancient law-giver to argue that ordered carnality (*dharmārtha kām*) formed the core of procreation, the absence of which endangered the three fundamental principles of life – moral order (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*) and spiritual emancipation (*mokṣa*).[167] Legitimizing the need for sex education especially among the youth, he explained that *Kāmasūtra* was not an obscene text because its author Vāṯsyāẏan, being a scholar-saint

163 See Tanika Sarkar, "Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation", op. cit. pp. 51–52. Also, as Sumit Sarkar has argued, with Vivekananda Ramakrishna's cult of childlike devotion to the mother was subsumed within a discourse of activist social duty in the immediate pre-Swadeshi years. Sarkar, op. cit. pp. 336.

164 Vāṯsyāẏan's *Kāmasūtra* published with annotations and notes by Chowkhamba Sanskrit Pustakalay, Varanasi – review Jadunath Chakrabarty, "Vāṯsyāẏaner Kāmasūtra", 'Bibidha Prasaṅga', *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.6 pt.2, Baiśākh 1326 / April-May 1919. Paradoxically, while the text, at least in this one instance was being discussed in an open respectable forum, in the United Province, booksellers were categorically ordered not to keep copies of *Kāmasūtra*. Charu Gupta, op. cit. p. 57.

165 Orsini, 'Introduction' in Orsini, op. cit. p. 8.

166 Charu Gupta, op. cit. p. 57.

167 Orsini, 'Introduction' in Orsini op. cit. p. 7.

had himself been indifferent to carnal desire. His text was therefore objective, its only goal being sustenance of the moral social order by regulating sexuality.[168] The author argued that since sensibilities of the ancient times were vastly different from contemporary ones, every aspect of the text could not be discussed in detail in the public sphere.[169] But the threat posed by unregulated carnality too could not be ignored. In modern Bengal, he argued, one only needed to have a look at the advertisement columns of periodicals and almanacs to note the extent to which aphrodisiacs and cures for sexually transmitted diseases were being propagated.[170] Claiming original research on the clientele of such products, he asserted that buyers were mainly young men and their unregulated sexuality constituted a threat to the moral order of society.[171] The author claimed that the women were less susceptible to such flaws (*doṣ*) because of the age-old custom of child marriage. Timely sexual education (*guhya śikṣā*, lit. lessons on secret matters), he held, could prevent perversity in young minds and so preclude possibilities of social anarchy. Abstinence was not the alternative. Rather an ideal way of imparting *guhya śikṣā* had to be worked out if the youth were to be prevented from distraction.[172] Discussions on sexual desire (*kām*) in the public domain were therefore rationalized on grounds of sustaining a moral social order: the wellness (*maṅgal*) of the nation and its people. This might explain why a respectable, nationalist periodical like *Bhāratbarṣa* chose to provide space to the review of *Kāmasūtra* instead of eschewing such discussions on grounds of *aślīlatā*. Curiously, in what otherwise seems to be an audacious move to discuss *kāmaśāstra* (sexual science) in a respectable print media, the author was actually reinforcing orthodoxy's position on Hindu marriage practices, reminding readers that *dharma* was the defining principle of conjugality and physical pleasure had to be reined in for procreation in the service of the nation.

---

168 Chakrabarty rationalizes his discussion of *Kāmasūtra* on grounds that the text could neither be ignored nor was a part discussion of it in public indecent. It was a text that spoke of desire as having multiple expressions relating to various social classes.

169 Chakrabarty, "Vāṯsyāẏaner Kāmasūtra".

170 Charu Gupta, op. cit. pp. 66–83 shows how hegemonic ideas of celibacy and chastity were being constantly subverted by advertisements of sex manuals and aphrodisiacs that appeared in large numbers in popular print, especially in respectable magazines.

171 Orsini argues that the ancients were ambivalent towards the ideal of *kāma* or desire. But Manu strongly emphasized that it was particularly damaging for the student. Orsini, op. cit. p. 7.

172 Chakrabarty, "Vāṯsyāẏaner Kāmasūtra".

6 Tagore's *Citrāṅgadā*: A Warped Mythology or Foregrounding a New Aesthetic?

Tagore's lyrical ballad *Citrāṅgadā* centering on an episode from the epic *Mahābhārat* was published as a book in 1892 in the wake of furious controversies over the death of a child-wife and more generally on the age of consent for girls.[173] It continued to be bitterly controversial throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century with the terms of the debates converging with the ongoing contestations about child marriage, age of consent and more generally around the institution of Hindu domesticity. Till about 1915 the major arguments on the lyrical ballad were broached from the *Sāhitya* platform as the otherwise conservative periodical offered space for publicists across the spectrum. The acrimonious debates over the lyrical drama embodied the terms of contentions on *aślīlatā* in the literary domain and most serious critics dealing with questions about the limits of aesthetic license felt compelled to address problems thrown up by the lyrical play. At a time when excellence in poetry came to be regarded as an indicator of cultural distinction, *Citrāṅgadā* with its style achieving an unmatched finesse and brilliance appeared threatening espousing seemingly unsavory social principles. While still incomplete, Rabindranath himself was aware that *Citrāṅgadā* could be potentially objectionable. In a letter to Pramatha Chaudhuri he expressed his apprehension thus:

> I had named the piece that I am presently working on, *Anaṅga-āśram*.[174] The name will most probably rouse curiosity in many. Thanks to the innumerable philosophies holding sway during the turn-of-the-century all other *devatā* (gods) save Anaṅga have fled the minds of our educated community.… These days naming Anaṅga directly invites chastisement for distorted taste (*ruci-vyābhicār*). We have become so educated and cultured that with the progress of civilization perhaps the word 'love'

173 Arjun was the third of the Pandav brothers of Indraprastha who had been banished from their kingdom after losing a game of dice to their cousins the Kaurav rulers of Hastinapur. The ambidextrous archer Arjun spent his exile years in adventures across various parts of the subcontinent. His journey took him to the small kingdom of Manipur. Citrangada the heiress had been groomed as a warrior by her father, the king of Manipur. She fell in love with the handsome Arjun. Embarrassed to come forward to him because of her rather un-feminine looks she let her true feelings known to him only after her wish of becoming an attractive woman was granted by Madan, the God of Love. In the end she conceded her true self to Arjun who greeted her passionately.

174 Variously known as *Kama, Madan, Kandarpa, Manasij* and *Ritupati, Ananga* according to Hindu mythology was the God of Love and Desire. Ashram implied hermitage.

> (*prem*) will also become obscene. Our writings will probably then become forbidden reading and so the youth will enjoy them more. And if the Sadharan Brahmo exists even then who knows what tremendous decorum (*pabitratā*) they might preach![175]

The poet Dwijendralal Roy castigated Tagore for distorting the original tale of Arjun-Citrangada and perpetuating immorality. Roy insisted that his was not a blind criticism of *Citrāṅgadā* which he acknowledged was an exceptional piece of blank verse but one that violated conventional principles of social propriety and deserved to be burnt publicly.[176] The objection to *Citrāṅgadā* lay in what Roy considered "induction of courtship". Roy argued that the notion of 'courtship' was foreign and therefore an anomaly in the indigenous social context. For him love and courtship between unmarried man and woman was illegitimate because girls were not supposed to remain unmarried after the age of twelve and courtship in pre-puberty age was impossible.[177]

It is interesting to see how the criticism of *Citrāṅgadā* became entangled with the furors over the age of consent and child marriage questions. Notions of literary permissibility, of what was acceptable in literature came to be significantly defined by arguments broached by the debating parties on the Hindu marriage question. Roy further argued that though the epic *Vidyāsundar* by the late medieval poet Bharatchandra was indecent it was nonetheless not immoral in the sense that *Citrāṅgadā* was. *Vidyāsundar* after all was about the love between Vidya and Sundar who were a married couple. The objectionable in *Vidyāsundar* was Bharatchandra's sensuous portrayal of the couple's love.[178] Roy claimed that *Vidyāsundar* was *aślīl* or *ādirasātmak*, it was not against *dharma* (morality) and therefore did not constitute a threat to the society in the way that *Citrāṅgadā* did. The emphasis as Roy put it was on *dharma* and *nīti* rather than *ruci* and he called on to his support all those were uncompromising on these grounds. D.L. Roy argued that the brunt of responsibility lay with Tagore because a writer's job was not to cater to readers' demands but in fact to create morally sensible readers. This was commensurate with the nineteenth-

175 Rabindranath Tagore to Pramatha Chaudhuri – Letter dated June 21, 1890, Bolpur; Rabindra Bhavan Archives, Visva-Bharati – Pramatha Chaudhuri File # 1.

176 Dwijendralal Roy, "Kāvye Nīti" (Ethics in Poetry) in *Sāhitya*, Jyaiṣṭha 1316 / May-June 1909.

177 Ibid.

178 In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary discourse there seem to have been a consensus within the Hindu orthodoxy that Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar* was obscene. See for instance: Nalininath Chattopadhyay, "Bhāratcandra" in v. 3, *Sāhitya* 1299 / 1892. Hemendraprasad Ghosh, "Bhāratcandrer Aślīlatā" in *Sāhitya* v. 16 # 1, Baiśākh 1312 / April-May 1905.

century idea of criticism's functional role as a moral patrol. Critics like Roy and Samajpati therefore remained ensnared by *samāj nīti* or social ethics as the analytical index for *sāhitya samālocanā.*[179] Interestingly, Roy was convinced that his perspective was objective enough and that he had been successful in taming Tagore:

> … I am not sure why moral flogging (*naitik cābuk*) is unnecessary in literature – I believe Rabindra-babu has benefited considerably from my moral-whipping. His recent writings do not reek of the modern age.… I have honestly praised his *Gorā* and *Jete Nāhi Dibo.*[180]

A lot of pro-Tagore responses to Roy and Samajpati appeared in the pages of *Sāhitya*. Samajpati's decision not to serialize Saratchandra's *Caritrahīn* but allow pro-Tagore reviews might indicate a contradiction. But it is indeed a statement of his editorial judgment. Permitting *Caritrahīn* would have meant editorial approval of content deemed *aślīl.* By allowing for open debates on *Citrāṅgadā* Samajpati acquiesced to the professional principle of editorial impartiality. In their responses to Dwijendralal Roy, pro-Tagore critics sidestepped allegations about *Citrāṅgadā*'s immoral content.[181] Tagore's close associate Priyanath Sen set out to argue that there was nothing to prove that Arjun and Citrangada were not married, that implicit in their relationship were indications of a *gāndharva bibāha* (celestial wedding)[182] and Roy's objection with 'courtship' was unfounded since *pūrbarāg*[183] involving reciprocity and emotions was very much a part of the Indian tradition of love.[184] In another response to Roy, the well-known literary critic Lalitkumar Bandyopadhyay described *Citrāṅgadā* as an allegory (*rūpak*) that sought to expose the

179 Arunkumar Mukhopadhyay, *Bāṅglā Samālocanār Itihās: 1851–2000*; Dey's Publishing 1965, pp. 185–192.

180 D.L. Roy to Pramatha Chaudhuri; date and place not mentioned. Rabindra Bhavan Archives, "Correspondence to Others", serial # 1.

181 Several critics argued in favor of Tagore: Surendranath Majumdar, "Kāvye Samālocanā" (critique of poetry), *Sāhitya*, Śrāvaṇ 1316 / July-August 1909; Priyanath Sen, "Citrāṅgadā", *Sāhitya*, Śrāvaṇ 1316 / July-August 1909; Lalitkumar Bandyopadhyay, "Citrāṅgadār Ādhyātmik Vyākhyā" (A spiritual interpretation of *Citrāṅgadā*), *Sāhitya*, Agrahāẏaṇ 1316 / November-December 1909; Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Sāhitye Cābuk" (whip to discipline literature), *Sāhitya*, Māgh 1319 / January-February 1913.

182 *Gāndharva bibāha* (wedding) implied marriage by mutual consensus of the man and woman without performance of any social or religious rituals.

183 *Pūrbarāg* or courtship, Sen argued was a celebration in all Indian classics from Kalidasa's *Abhigñānam Śakuntalam* to Bharatchandra's *Vidyāsundar.*

184 Priyanath Sen, "Citrāṅgadā", *Sāhitya*, Kārtik 1316 / October-November 1909.

limitations of nineteenth-century Bengali wedlock and courtship.[185] Even during the nineteen twenties criticisms of *Citrāṅgadā* showed no sign of abating. Moral disapproval of the lyrical drama by an English missionary Thomson and a professor Rollo made Pramatha Chaudhuri embark on yet another defense of *Citrāṅgadā.*[186] Drawing on Sanskrit *alaṃkāraśāstra* and Buddhist literary theories Chaudhuri argued that poetics was about *soundarya* (i.e. beauty) rather than social-moral realities.[187] In this sense *Citrāṅgadā* belonged to the same category of artwork as Kalidasa's *Meghadūtam* and *Kumārasambhava. Anaṅga-āśram* described by Tagore was like *alakā* (of *Meghadūtam*) and *śaila-āśram* (of *Kumārasambhava*) an imaginatively constructed world (*kalpa-lok* or *rūp-lok*) that transcended the material world *kām-lok* (lit. the world of desire and eroticism).[188] While Hindu orthodox and missionary critics seemed to irrevocably connect social morality with notions of aesthetics, the new literary trend elucidated by Tagore and his associates sought to disengage the categories of morality (*dharma / nīti*) and beauty (*soundarya*).[189] The latter drew on the reservoir of ancient Sanskrit literature precisely to exemplify the implications of such disengagement. In doing so, Tagore's associates, particularly Pramatha Chaudhuri sought recourse in the Sanskritic aesthetic tradition to respond to the missionary critique on the inextricability of morality and aesthetics.[190] He insisted on re-reading of the *alaṃkāraśāstra* and a historical understanding of the Sanskritic tradition in order to appreciate the concept of *ādiras* and *śṝṅgār.* Chaudhuri argued that most Sanskrit poets and Kalidasa in particular go to great lengths to describe the beauty of both nature and women. Tagore's descriptions of Citrangada's physical beauty and her rendezvous with Arjun, Chaudhuri argued, were therefore not discontinuous with the Sanskritic poetic tradition. Drawing on the Sanskrit *alaṃkār* theorist Vamanacarya,

185 Lalitkumar Bandyopadhyay, "Citrāṅgadār Ādhyātmik Vyākhyā" (Spiritual Exposition of *Citrangada*) in *Sāhitya*, Agrahāẏaṇ 1316 / November-December 1909.

186 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Citrāṅgadā", *Bicitrā*, v.1 pt.2 #4, Caitra 1334 / 1927. It was originally a paper read at a seminar organized by the Rabindra-Pariṣaṯ at Presidency College, Calcutta.

187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Chaudhuri made it clear that detaching morality and beauty did not imply that literature had no responsibility whatsoever towards preservation of the moral order. He argued that there could be place even for immorality in literature but only as negation of such practice. As example he argued that the Sanskrit play Sudraka's *Mṝcchakaṭikam* did not inspire anyone towards theft.

190 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Kāvyer Aślīlatā" in 'Saṃkalan', *Bicitrā*, v.3, pt.1, Āṣāṝh 1336 / June-July 1929. This essay written probably as a response to Jatindramohan Sinha's 'Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā' and generally against the orthodox obsession with obscenity was a summary of an article "Kāvye Aślīlatā: Ālaṃkārik Mat" (Obscenity in verse: perspective from classical aesthetics) that appeared originally in *Māsik Basumatī*, Baiśākh 1336 / April-May 1929.

Chaudhuri argued, *aślīl* was that word or sentence which on hearing aroused negative emotions such as shame, hatred and any apprehension of misfortune.[191] *Aślīlatā* therefore constituted a major *kāvya-doṣ* or poetic imperfection. Through his participation in the *Citrāṅgadā* debate, Chaudhuri sought to redefine the meaning of *aślīlatā* beyond its implication as simply a category embedded in the cultural moral codes of contemporary Bengali society. He argued that according to the leading critic Mathew Arnold, 'urbanity' or politeness was the key feature of modern French literature, a trait that most other national literatures including English, putatively lacked.[192] Rendering Arnold's sense of 'urbanity' as *soujanya* (lit. courtesy) in Bengali, Chaudhuri argued that "urbanity" was both a social and literary attribute and politeness in literary exchanges was indicative of a civil society (*sabhya samāj*).[193] *Aślīlatā* then was a blemish not so much as content of literature, but more importantly, as "style" or a manner of literary dialogue. If *suruci* (good taste) was indeed the desirable literary principle, then it could be acquired only if *soujanya* governed literary exchanges within the public sphere. Chaudhuri further clarified that he favored "urbanity of style" because "urbanity" was the essence not only of modern French literature but had been the spirit of ancient Sanskrit literature as well. *Soujanya* was therefore an indigenous literary attribute.[194] A new aesthetic emerged from the *Citrāṅgadā* debate and set the tone for Bengali mainstream poetics certainly for a good part of the first few decades of the twentieth century. By positing Sanskritic *alaṃkāraśāstra* against the nineteenth-century Victorian and Orientalist perceptions the new aesthetic sought to legitimize itself against the moral codes asserted simultaneously by Hindu revivalists and the colonial missionary-bureaucracy. While the new aesthetic can largely be described as *Rābīndrik* critics like Priyanath Sen, Lalitkumar Bandyopadhyay, Ajitkumar Chakrabarty and above all Pramatha Chaudhuri had significantly participated in its articulation. By the end of the 1920s, the new aesthetic of romantic love became normalized amidst the hue and cry that *Citrāṅgadā* constituted a potential menace to the moral order cherished by the late nineteenth-century Hindu domesticity.[195]

191 Vaman used the term: *Vṝḍajugūpsāmaṅgalātaṅkadāyī*; i.e. that word or sentence that is capable of arousing *vṝḍa* (shame), *jugūpsā* (nauseous), or *amaṅgalātaṅka* (fear of mishap: *amaṅgal* = mishap and *ātaṅka* = fear); quoted in Chaudhuri, "Kāvye Aślīlatā – Ālaṃkārik Mat".

192 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Sāhitye Soujanya", *Swadeśī Bājār*, v.1 #9, Māgh 1335 / January-February 1929.

193 Ibid.

194 Ibid.

195 Tagore's works were never free of the *aślīlatā* charge. For the scientist and nationalist Prafullachandra Ray (later a staunch Gandhian and an ardent champion of the *carkā*)

7 Realism, Psychoanalysis and the Question of Obscenity

From the early 1920s focus shifted to a group of radical young writers who teamed up to form the *Kallol* group. Post-war conditions of economic desperation and inspiration from European modernist literature created the intellectual-moral world for experimenting with realist literature. Conservative and liberal opposition to the modernists reflected a general aversion to graphic realism on part of the Bengali middle classes – their anxieties over literary representations of human sexuality and carnal desire, urban lower classes as literary subjects and their supposedly immodest dialects raised immense disapproval over *aślīl sāhitya* inundating periodicals and leading puerile readers astray. Realism or *bāstabatā* proved to be an extremely contentious aesthetic category that drew its artistic content from urban despondency. The issue was not so much about the literary form of realism but the content of what could be depicted as real, i.e. the possibilities and limits of realist literature. By the early 1920s perceptions of obscenity had become entwined with those of realism. Access to the new science of Freudian psychoanalysis primarily through essays by Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose in miscellanies like *Prabāsī*, defined sexuality in psychological terms and provided new insights into ideas of selfhood. The concept of the unconscious, the 'other' of the conscious rational self was used by several *Kallol* writers to explore notions of *prem*, physical desire and love outside wedlock. These writers thus questioned socially ratified notions of conjugality and sought to provide radically imaginative answers to problems of gender inequality. In doing so the modernists – at least some of them, if not all, could have had in mind a programmatic role for literature, their targeted audience being evidently the middle-class *bhadralok* readership.

7.1 *The Kallol Group and Their New Literary Aesthetic* (*bāstabatā*)

The coming of modernist literature (*ādhunik sāhitya* and sometimes sneeringly called *ati-ādhunik sāhitya*) in the immediate post-war years added a more complex dimension to the already heated debates on *sāhityik aślīlatā* and the limits of literary permissibility. Interlaced with speculations about what constituted the 'real' or *bāstab*, the question of obscenity became multifaceted. *Kallol* started in Baiśākh 1330 / April 1923, was edited by Dineshranjan Das and Gokulchandra Nag and priced at 4 annas per issue. It was the first avant-garde Bengali periodical and the acclaimed pioneer in the literary endeavor that

---

Tagore's *Ghare Bāire* (The Home and the World) was deplorable because it pulled the 'private' scandals of the Hindu household into the 'public' gaze.

sought to redefine the meaning and purpose of literature.[196] It was perhaps the only periodical that lent its name to a range of new literary experimentations and came to singularly define the period associated with such innovations as *Kallol yug* or the Kallol era. *Kallol* became a legacy for subsequent periodicals like *Kāli-kalam*, *Kavitā*, *Paricaẏ*, *Caturaṅga* and several others during the 1920s and 1930s. Achintyakumar Sengupta, a *Kallol* insider in his reminiscences of the *Kallol* era spoke of how young writers like himself, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Premendra Mitra, Nripendrakrishna Chattopadhyay – all gathered to comprise *Kallol*.[197] He remembers how a very modern form of literary sociability and associational culture developed around the periodical.[198] *Kallol* provided a forum for encouraging young upcoming writers who were mostly rejected straightaway by the mainstream miscellanies.[199] For this young group sociability was integral to the process of formation and redemption of the self.[200] The self it was argued would remain fragmented (*khaṇḍita*) unless it was part of an associational life that only a periodical could provide. Public life and camaraderie were therefore at the very heart of modernist literary practice. The *Kallol* poets' deep disillusionment with urban modernity and their sense of despair comes through in several of their works. Yet at the core of such despair was no fleeing away from modern urban living, rather urban squalor and the suffocation it bred were situated indispensably in their poetry. For the modernists, realism implied connecting with the marginalized urban habitats and the clerical lives of the majority of the lower middle classes.[201] For a large majority of the toiling and hard-pressed middle classes, Tagorean aesthetics, it has been argued, proved elusive. The moral and ideological desolation of Calcutta's petty bourgeoisie needed a new literary language, beyond the purely Tagorean.[202] The new literary trend drew on concepts of Freudian psychoanalysis, gave precedence to marginal social groups and life in forbidden urban habitats, and

---

196 Achintyakumar Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, Calcutta, p. 4. Dineshranjan Das and Gokulchandra Nag ed. *Kallol* was affiliated to the Four Arts Club and was initiated in 1330 / 1923. Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials*, p. 177.

197 *Kallol Yug*, pp. 17–18. Sengupta however makes it clear that the first journal to have made the difference was not *Kallol* but the little known, short-lived *Saṃhati* (Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923; meaning Unity) edited by Muralidhar Basu. *Saṃhati* claimed to speak for the multitudes of society before *Lāṅgal*, *Gaṇavāṇī* or *Gaṇaśakti* made the mark.

198 *Kallol Yug*, p. 34. Sengupta described those years as an era of *samakarmitā* or comradeship.

199 Ibid., p. 20.

200 Ibid., pp. 39–40. Premendra Mitra's letter from Dacca to Achintyakumar Sengupta. Mitra's ideas he himself acknowledged were derived from Walt Whitman.

201 Ibid., p. 47.

202 Kaviraj, "The Art of Despair: The Sense of the City in Modern Bengali Poetry" in *The Invention of Private Life*, pp. 294–295.

was emphatic about the predominance of sexual desires in romance and the ineffectuality of socio-ritual proscriptions in the way of desire. Certainly the rebellious young writers of *Kallol* were not the first to address these problems. What was new was their use of analytical categories from Western psychoanalysis to induce pluralistic perspectives in social relationships. By foregrounding the conventionally objectionable, modernist literature problematized the very concept of the *bāstab* and its hitherto almost uncomplicated positioning vis-à-vis the 'romantic'.

By the early 1920s, works of writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay and the four distinguished women writers, Sita Devi, Shanta Devi, Anurupa Devi and Nirupama Devi came to be by and large considered as the mainstream Bengali literature.[203] The modernists were not necessarily rebelling outright against these 'mainstream' writers; in fact the younger generation drew substantially from them, particularly, Tagore and Chattopadhyay.[204] Both Tagore and Chattopadhyay had been subject to severe disapproval for what their critics perceived as obscenity and violation of codes of socio-ritual conduct. By the end of the First World War however, the reception of writers like Tagore and Chattopadhyay had become by and large normalized. Love had become an accepted social value, though still bound by caste rules and familial commands.[205] Now it was *ati-ādhunik sāhitya* or ultra-modern literature that appeared defiant and radical. *Kallol*'s iconoclasm came to be perceived as cut off from indigenous tradition, limited in appeal and constituting a threat to social equilibrium. Modernist literature appeared particularly threatening because they sought aesthetics in the squalor of slums and urban environs, love and wedlock across caste and religious divides and inclusion of marginal, supposedly immoral social groups like prostitutes. Their works therefore questioned the presumed ritual sanctity

203 Sita Devi and Shanta Devi were daughters of the *Prabāsī* editor Ramananda Chattopadhyay and their fiction and non-fiction prose writings regularly appeared in that magazine. Anurupa Devi and Nirupama Devi were regular contributors for *Bhāratbarṣa* edited by Jaladhar Sen. Some of their well-known novels serialized in various periodicals include: Sita Devi, "Sonār Khā̃cā" (The golden cage), *Prabāsī*, 1920. "Rajanīgandhā" (tuberose), *Prabāsī* 1921. Shanta Devi, "Cirantanī" (eternal), *Prabāsī*, 1921. "Jībandolā" (The swing named life), *Prabāsī*, 1930. Anurupa Devi, "Mantraśakti" (the power of chants), *Bhāratbarṣa*, 1915; "Mā" (mother), *Bhāratbarṣa*, 1920; "Garīber Meẏe" (daughter of a poverty stricken family), *Māsik Basumatī*, 1923–24. Nirupama Devi, "Annapūrnār Mandir" (the abode of Annapūrnā, the goddess of provisions), *Bhāratbarṣa*, 1913. "Bidhilipi" (destiny), *Bhāratbarṣa*, 1919. Shailabala Ghoshjaya, "Śekh Āndu" (a name), 1917.

204 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Nation and Imagination" in *Provincializing Europe*: *Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

205 Rajat Kanta Ray, op. cit., pp. 111–112.

of marriage social conventions. The *Kallol* group's efforts resulted in a certain democratization in so far as marginal and lower orders entered the literary sphere not so much as participant readers but as rightful literary subjects. With literacy continuing to be a major constraint in the expansion of the literary sphere pluralization happened more in terms of literary representation and the educated middle class's encounter with the "undesirable". Reading therefore was a practice that could force the middle-class reader to emerge from his familiar comfort zone and come face to face with the "other", including the irrational. For critics, *Kallol* appeared to contain anarchic potential and therefore threatening in its possibilities especially when considered in context of widening readerships of vernacular periodicals.

The post-war years brought the problem of *ādhunikatā* or modernity right into the heart of literary debates. Till the early years of the twentieth century the problem of modernity largely had to do with the process of reception and internalization of European thought – its science, philosophy and literature. For the first time, *Kallol*'s iconoclasm forced attention on the complex components of the modern human condition – the eternal contradiction between a yearning for harmony and the disappointing reality of a fragmented social milieu that urban Calcutta represented. Slums and tenement dwellings, offices and dreary clerical routines, electric lights, squalid conditions of industrial belts along Calcutta's riverfront – all these became indicative of urban dereliction, the portrayal of which, particularly in poetry came to be regarded as 'realistic' or *bāstab*. The reality or *bāstabatā* of human condition – man's increasing alienation from his social roots – came to be almost unequivocally associated with the decaying industrial city of European modernism. For the *Kallol* writers and their literary inheritors, colonial modernism assumed a sense of exigency. They attempted to address this by coming to terms with the idea of the *bāstab*, something that involved a fundamental reworking of the dominant Tagorean aesthetics. Of course 'realism' proved to be an extraordinarily elastic concept – the ambivalent and evasive nature of its implications leading to passionate disputes over the form, content and future course of Bengali literature. The concept of *bāstabatā* evoked a wide range of responses from poets and critics, the result being a range of radical literary experiments that drew theoretical sustenance, at least partly from Buddhadev Bose's translation of T.S. Eliot's essay on Baudelaire.[206] The figure of the clerk or kerāni became a common

206 T.S. Eliot, 'The Lesson of Baudelaire' appeared as the first part of the two-part "Notes on Current Letters" published in the magazine *The Tyro: A Review of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture and Design* edited by Wyndham Lewis, Spring 1921.

literary devise to depict the dull repetitiveness and anomie of city life.[207] *Bāstabatā* implied admitting the fundamental instincts of human existence, especially the centrality of romance and sexual desire as a formative impression on subjectivity. Realism meant conceding the true nature of the individual and collective selves and expressing them vis-à-vis the contemporary society. This was seen to possess a redemptive potential, working towards a different, autonomous space where literary culture could become the language of asserting the nation's self-identity. Evidently, such an implication and treatment of *bāstabatā* could not be detached from the representations of the wretchedness and afflictions of an excruciating urban life. Investigating human subjectivity in the context of the prosaic quality of city life under colonialism induced modernist writers to emphasize the aesthetic necessity of psychoanalysis (*manabikalan*). The result was not just an obsession with morbidity as many critics supposed. *Ādhunik sāhitya* with its emphases on the authenticity of emotional and physical yearnings, in a way sought to liberate desire from the bondage of social conventions. Portrayal of gender relationships across caste and class boundaries considered socially transgressive, became an inseparable part of the depiction of reality. As the socially underprivileged groups like coolies and factory workers secured a place as literary subjects, the concern over *sāhityik aślīlatā* became more sensitive and controversial. *Kallol* writers sought to address through their fiction the emotional and sexual behaviors of marginal and subordinate sections of society – industrial labouring groups, slum dwellers, widows and prostitutes.

The First World War had drastically altered the socio-economic circumstances in South Asia.[208] The war-time demands for raw materials like coal and jute had spurred growth in the coal mines and jute mills. The increased need for labour in these industries attracted landless labouring groups from the rural and tribal hinterland.[209] The end of the war and the sudden fall in demand

207 The life of the clerk became an atypical ideal embodying lesser middle-class existence in the city. The clerk's meager income, inflation and corresponding expenditure, dilapidated condition of rented houses, derelict transport system, the heat and grime of the city, regular slur from the office superiors and elements of day-to-day living – all combined to make the clerical existence representative of city life. The clerk seemed to straddle the border region between the upper middle classes and elites on the one hand and the city's labouring poor on the other. Moreover, being mostly educated in the vernacular the lower middle classes formed the main target groups of periodicals.

208 See Chapter 1.

209 Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, *The Origins of Industrial Capitalism in India: Business Strategies and Working Class in Bombay, 1900–1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-class History: Bengal 1890–1940*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989.

for raw materials created a slump in the coal and jute industries. Tribal communities like the Santhal and low castes like the Bauris worked in the Raniganj and Jharia coalfield areas of western and central Bengal and Bihar. These industries also employed women laborers in substantial numbers.[210] Exploitation by mostly European mine and mill owners in the form of low wages, long work shifts and employment of child labor combined to produce a poverty-stricken and underprivileged livelihood for the laboring poor. The shoddy living conditions in the coalfields and mill lines and the supposed promiscuity in sexual behavior of the labor inhabitants created a perception of these habitats as debauched places. Women laborers particularly were at the receiving end of sexual prejudice. They were seen almost without exception as impious, wretched women involved in multiple licentious relationships. It is this laboring group that becomes the subject of much of early avant-garde literature in Bengal. One of the foremost and popular writers of the *Kallol* group, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay grew up in the central Bengal district of Burdwan, near the coalfield areas of Raniganj.[211] His short stories like *Mā* (Mother, Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923), *Maraṇ Baraṇ* (Welcoming Death, Māgh 1330 / January-February 1924) and *Jhamrū* (name of the protagonist, a Santhal coolie) addressed the dismal conditions of labor life in the coalfields and the helplessness of the womenfolk in the face of sexual exploitation by European mine-owners.[212]

Kallol therefore marked a radical departure from the Tagorean inheritance – a trend that was carried forward by other avant-garde periodicals like *Kālikalam*, *Pragati*, *Paricaẏ* and *Kavitā*.[213] Tagore's negative response towards poets like Eliot led younger poets like Buddhadev Bose to identify him as a romantic.[214] Tagore's rejection of urban squalor as a subject matter of poetry was interpreted as indicative of his *bastutantrahīn* (non-realist) oeuvres and his consequent disconnectedness from modernism.[215] The thematic predomi-

210 See Samita Sen, *Women and Labor in Late Colonial India: The Bengal Jute Industry*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1999.

211 *Kallol Yug*, p. 16.

212 Similar fiction relating to life in the mill lines appeared in the works of writers like Subodh Roy and Prafullakumar Dasgupta. Fictional depiction of evening gatherings of coolies in local liquor stalls and their spare time bawdy amusements were somewhat intended to provide complete insight into the life of the toiling masses. See particularly short stories by Panchugopal Mukhopadhyay in *Kallol*.

213 Clinton B. Seely, *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das (1899–1954)*, Newark: University of Delaware Press, Delaware, 1990; Chapter 2 discusses *Kallol's* aesthetic perspectives and avant-garde literary practices and the *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*'s criticisms of the former's literary approach.

214 Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Nation and Imagination' in *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 155–163.

215 In his critiques of modernist aesthetics, Tagore at this point, seemed more favorably disposed towards the *Ciṭhi*. However he did not condone the periodical's style of criticism.

nance of nature in Tagore's non-prose works situated him quite unproblematically within the Romantic tradition. Yet the poet's younger contemporaries found it hard to dismiss him altogether. This is amply evident in their use of lines and phrases from Tagore's works in their own poetry.[216] Tagore too on his part refused to be identified unproblematically with a romantic literary past during his own lifetime.[217] His various attempts to address the problems of literary modernity – the experiments with free verse or prose-poetry (*gadya-kavitā*) in his depiction of lower-middle-class clerical life of the city in *Bāṅśī* (Flute), his paintings and the novel *Śeṣer Kavitā* where he used colloquial prose with a brilliant poetic eloquence– all reveal Tagore's tenuous relationship with modernism. While modernist poets' depiction of an angst-ridden world was meant largely as a vehicle for social critique, Tagore felt that such a response to life was indeed parochial and limited – a temporary aberration in the course of human history:

> If modernism has any theory (*tattva*) at all, and if that theory can be considered impersonal / objective (*nairvyaktik*), then it must be said that such audacious mistrust for the world and reprehensible visualization, are all a perversion of the mind (*citta bikār*) resulting from the suddenness of anarchical changes. The mind is obsessed and lacks the profundity for an impersonal and uncomplicated reception of the real (*bāstab*).[218]

In the same essay Tagore compared the eighth-century Chinese poet Li-Po whose vision of the natural world was uncomplicated with that of the modernists for whom the world was "decaying, full of rubbish and grimy". The minds of the young modernists were he wrote sympathetically, "sick (*asustha*), unhappy (*asukhi*) and deranged (*abybasthita*)".[219] Much of *ādhunik sāhitya* was a *bikār* or perversion that involved itself excessively with things hideous (*kadaryya*). The subject-matter of modern realist literature, Tagore claimed, was strictly confined within the limits of personal experience of the authors and devoid of any expressive contact with the world.[220] The archetype for Tagore was nineteenth-century European literature. Literary realism he argued in several contexts had to do with representing human condition in unison with its habitus, nature. He categorically rejected the growing tendency to equate realism with

Seely, pp. 60–62.

216 Ibid., p. 62.

217 Sudipta Kaviraj, in Pollock, *Literary Cultures*, p. 557.

218 Rabindranath Tagore, "Ādhunik Kāvya" (modern poetry), *Paricaẏ*, Baiśākh 1339 / April-May 1932.

219 Ibid.

220 Ibid.

a fascination for morbidity and eccentricity. Modernity (*ādhunikatā*) for him represented a particular mood rather than a moment in historical time – the cultural sensibility implicit in *ādhunikatā* being rooted in a blend of an understanding of the world held out by modern science and an aesthetic that upheld beauty and hopefulness.[221] Tagore proved to be surprisingly receptive to the younger modernists' criticisms of not being sufficiently realistic. To his younger contemporaries (who were perhaps some of his greatest admirers) Tagore appeared to be somewhat irrelevantly romantic for the times – his aesthetic world appearing constricted for depicting the paralysis of human substance by the banalities of urban living.[222]

However, it is an oversimplification to interpret the differences between Tagore and the modernists in dichotomous terms – romantic / realist or ahistorical / political.[223] Tagore's aesthetics and its connectedness with politics seem far more complicated. This was evident in Tagore's exchanges with the modernists and the famous literary conference held at the Tagore family residence at Jorasanko in north Calcutta. Throughout Tagore relentlessly refused to make the morbid (*kadaryya*) the subject of poetic enunciation. In an essay that appeared in Buddhadev Bose's journal *Kavitā*, Tagore made a crucial point that the 'familiar' was transient / fleeting and therefore not necessarily the 'real'. Therefore the everyday familiarity with the monotony of city life did not imply that that was more real (*bāstab*) than other aspects of life. The experience of s*oundarya* and *satya* (truth) he argued even in his contributions to avant-garde journals, involved an intimacy with the less-known, yet indispensable organic (*jaiba*). The task of poetry was precisely to render this *jaiba* comprehensible.[224] Nature or *prakṝti* – representing the common yet arcane – occupied a centrality in Tagore's poetry and much of his political thought lay embedded in his conceptualization and poetic rendering of *prakṝti.*[225]

221 See Rabindranath Tagore, "Ādhunik Kāvya" and Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Two Histories" p. 555.

222 Dipesh Chakrabarty, op. cit., pp. 156–157.

223 Most contemporaries tended to view poetry with romanticism and the ahistorical while prose was aligned to realism and the political. Ibid., pp. 154–155. In fact *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*'s criticism of Tagore was based precisely on this distinction.

224 Rabindranath Tagore, "Sāhityer Svarūp" (the nature of literature), Buddhadev Bose ed., *Kavitā*, Baiśākh 1345 / April-May 1938.

225 Literary debates concerning 'realism' were not entirely new in the post-war years. The next chapter will deal with the 'realism' debates of the pre-*Kallol* era when Bipinchandra Pal and Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay criticized Tagore for not being 'realist' enough. Realism in these debates was closely tied to the issue of the social function of literature as pedagogy. The critique against Tagore sought to underscore that the poet by not being realist was evading his social responsibility as a *lokaśikṣak* or pedagogue.

7.2 *Manabikalan: A New Literary Apparatus?*

The *Kallol* writers were surely not the first to address the crises within modern emotion of *prem* and question socially approved conventions of conjugality, sexual behavior and constructions of obscenity. What was new in their approach was the use of psychoanalysis (*manabikalan*) – a relatively new discipline in India – that they drew from the works of Freud, Jung and Ernest Jones.[226] Miscellanies like *Prabāsī*, *Bhāratbarṣa* and *Māsik Basumatī* frequently brought out essays on psychology and psychoanalysis that not only testify to the range of subjects these journals dealt with but also that by the 1920s journal readership was considered adequately matured and receptive to essays on such specialized subjects.[227] Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose was the first non-Western psychoanalyst who pioneered the career of psychoanalysis and psychiatry in colonial South Asia.[228] Bose wrote extensively for Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* and it was mostly through his writings that the Bengali readership became familiar with psychology (*manobiśleṣaṇ*) and psychoanalysis (*manobyākaraṇ*).[229] Bose, as Ashis Nandy has shown, used cultural categories from the Indian philosophical tradition to normalize psychoanalysis as

226 The term *manabikalan* was used by Achintyakumar Sengupta in his *Kallol Yug*. Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, the first non-Western psychoanalyst however coined the term *manobyākaraṇ*, literally, the structure of the mind.

227 A random look at the leading literary monthlies reveals the new enthusiasm about the subject: Prof. Charuchandra Sinha, "Manobijñān" (the science of mind, an essay in three parts), *Bhāratbarṣa* v. 5 pt. 2 # 1 (Pouṣ 1324 / December-January 1917–1918), # 3 (Phālgun 1324 / February-March 1918) and # 4 (Caitra, 1324 / March-April 1918). Bireshwar Chattopadhyay, "Svapna" (dream), *Bhāratbarṣa*, Yr. 6 pt.2, # 6, Jyaiṣṭha 1326 / May-June 1919. Anonymous, "Sāhitye Sunīti" (moral principles in literature), Prasaṅga-kathā, *Bicitrā*, v.1 pt. 2 Baiśākh 1335 / April-May 1928.

228 Ashis Nandy, "The Savage Freud: The First Non-Western Psychoanalyst and the Politics of Secret Selves in Colonial India" in Ashis Nandy, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, 2006, Paperback edition, pp. 83–144.

229 Some of Bose's contribution in Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* include: Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose: "Svapna" (dreams), *Prabāsī*, v.22 pt.2 # 4, Māgh 1329 / January-February 1922 (reprinted from *Bhāratbarṣa*, Pouṣ 1329 / December 1921-January 1922). Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, "Manobyākaraṇ" (the structure of the mind), *Prabāsī*, v. 25, pt. 1, # 6 Āśvin 1332 / September-October 1925 (Lecture delivered at the Jadavpur Bengal Technical Institute). Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, "Moner Rog" (disorders of the mind), *Prabāsī*, v.25 pt.1 # 1 Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925. Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, "Sattva, Raja, Tama" (pertaining to the three primal attributes of human beings – sattva indicating spirituality and principled conduct; raja implying the desire for material splendor; and tama referring to the darker qualities of the human mind), *Prabāsī* v. 30 pt. 2 # 1 Kārtik 1337 / October-November 1930. Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, "Mānusher Man" (the human mind), *Prabāsī* v. 30 pt. 1 # 3 Āṣāṛh 1337 / June-July 1930.

a modern inheritance / sequence of traditional knowledge in an attempt to familiarize the new science amongst Indians.[230] He was interested primarily in elucidating on the socio-cultural implications of the new discipline in the Indian context. For Bose therefore the question of relationship between the self (*ātman* that is all-pervasive) and nature (*prakṝti*) was absolutely central. Knowledge of this relationship was the ultimate knowledge and was possible only through the highest of the *tri-guṇa* (the three attributes of nature and the human being) – the *sattva* or the introspective knowledge.[231] Though Bose pioneered psychiatry and psychotherapy in India, for him the possibility of a social-cultural critique was more serious than the therapeutic role of psychoanalysis.[232] The appeal of psychoanalysis probably lay in the fact that it possessed the potential for a radical critique of extant social conventions and the limiting effects of religious and social allegiances. While Bose sought to break free of the supremacy of positivist sciences by identifying psychoanalysis with the Vedantic tradition of thought, he also emphasized the individual as the subject of social investigations. This second aspect was necessary not only as part of the psychologists' professional requirements but also for a resident of a colonial urban habitat relentlessly encountering changes ideologically constituted by elements of individualism.[233]

Girindrasekhar's works aroused tremendous enthusiasm in psychoanalysis and its thinkers – Freud, Jones and Jung. As will be evident in the course of this section, several critics of modernist literature were well read in theories of psychoanalysis and its deployment in European literatures. Of course the works of Girindrasekhar Bose had made it easier for these critics to relate psychoanalysis with the post-war transformations within the Bengali society. Bose had emphasized that the knowledge of the relationship between self and nature was essentially emancipatory and the ultimate form of experience that could be achieved only through introspection. Introspection therefore revealed the 're-ality' – i.e. the true nature of selfhood and its connection vis-à-vis life. This converged with contemporary principles of literary realism in so far as the latter aspired to be "a conscious commitment to understanding and describing [the] movement of psychological or social or physical forces" within a

230 Nandy, p. 122.

231 Ibid., pp. 123–124; p. 126. The *sāttvik* knowledge was essentially the opposite of the *tāmasik* (literally, of darkness) that represented ignorance, depravity and instinctual urges. Bose implied that psychoanalysis belonged to this domain of the *sattva* and therefore psychology was the ultimate science.

232 Ibid., p. 114, 117.

233 Ibid., p. 127.

particular society.[234] For the *Kallol* writers precepts of *manabikalan* could be fruitfully deployed for comprehending and representing the reality (*bāstab*). Psychoanalyses emphasized the individual as the unit of intellectual analyses – "reality" of the darker, unconscious and unacknowledged dimensions of the self in contrast to the conscious, rational part that Enlightenment knowledge valorized. Bose had himself been critical of the turn-of-the-century fascination with the "scientific".[235] The *Kallol* writers in addressing the play of potentially transgressive repressed human emotions vis-à-vis socially endorsed conjugality drew from Freudian concepts of the self. *Manabikalan* offered an innovative understanding of the self-nature relationship and therefore of the elements of realism. For the modernists *manabikalan* at least partly provided a new device for making a moral-critical statement on contemporary society. It made possible to explore the crises within modern emotions.[236] Achintyakumar Sengupta, one of the regular writers for *Kallol* records a short conversation at the journal's office, between him and Buddhadev Bose, then a relatively new writer in Calcutta:

> AKSG: Do you have a short story ready for publication?
> BB (hesitantly): Yes I do.
> AKSG: Give it to *Kallol.*

But Buddhadev was not enthused. A new word was becoming current at the time. He mentioned that word:

> BB: The story might be 'morbid'.
> AKSG: Let it be morbid! Which scholar will decide whether a story is sick or healthy? You submit your story. Don't worry about the moral police.

Buddhadev now looked encouraged.

> AKSG: What is the name of the story? …
> BB: *Rajanī hala Utalā* (The Restless Night).[237]

The dialogue reveals the amateur author's apprehensions about how his work might be received. Bose seemed decidedly confident when Sengupta assured

234 Williams, *Keywords*, p. 261.
235 Bose, "Manobyākaraṇ".
236 An example is the letter from Buddhadev Bose to Achintyakumar Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, p. 128.
237 *Kallol Yug*, p. 119.

him not to be troubled by the clamor of the moral purists. The adjective 'morbid' had become fashionable, used generally to describe those fiction and poetry that created a feeling of melancholy and gloom. For non-modernists it indicated a perverse aesthetic sensibility and could be condemned as *aślīl*.

Rajanī hala Utalā dealt with the dream of a youth where he fancied a beautiful but mysterious woman appearing at his bedside, his futile attempt during the day to identify his coveted dream lady amidst a group of joyous women and the same dream again the following night. The story made a conscious effort towards exploring the subconscious (*abacetan*) and locating emotional and sexual desires within that mystifying realm. The conversation exposes the new writer's reluctance about the possible conservative backlash towards supposedly 'morbid' literature. As anticipated *Rajanī hala Utalā*, published in *Kallol*, provoked strong reactions from readers, and curiously enough, women readers. One of them, apparently from respectable background, advised the writer to "marry soon, and if his wife was away visiting her parents, to get her back immediately".[238] Another woman reader from a well-known background publicly reprimanded the young modernist writers and forcefully argued for their total extermination (*nirmulikaran*).[239] Successive poems and fiction appearing in *Kallol* and its off-shoot *Kāli-kalam* further provoked conservative backlash. A series of short stories entitled *Paṭaldāṅgār Pāṅ̐cāli* (The Tales of Pataldanga) by the writer Manish Ghatak appeared during the early phase of *Kallol*'s career. The stories dealt with an infamous locality in central-northern Calcutta (Pataldanga) and its shadowy inhabitants – handicapped beggars, pickpockets, thieves and smugglers. The nether-world came alive in these short tales through conversations in the inhabitants' particular slang and portrayal of their supposedly fluid sexual behaviors. The *Paṭaldāṅgā* tales were considered offensive to the cultural sensibilities of the educated *bhadralok* – perhaps more so as Pataldanga ironically reminded one of its adjacent localities that comprised of the Calcutta Medical College, The University of Calcutta and Presidency College – all prestigious institutions of higher education that had a formative influence on the making of the colonial *bhadralok*. The *Paṭaldāṅgā* tales therefore represented the very antithesis of *bhadralok* respectability and were quickly condemned as *aślīl* and detrimental to the emerging aesthetic sensibilities of Bengali cultural life. Sengupta's poem *Gābo āj ānander gān* (We shall sing the song of Happiness today), Nazrul Islam's *Mādhabī Pralāp* (The

238 Ibid., p. 122.

239 Ibid., p. 122. This lady whom Sengupta does not identify argued that the upcoming modernist writers "ought to be killed in the delivery room (*āṅ̐tur-ghar*) itself by forcing a fistful of common salt down their throat". Salt was known for its use in female infanticide.

delirium of Mādhabī), *Anāmikā* (The nameless / unidentified woman) and Buddhadev's *Bandir Bandanā* (The Captive's Hymn)[240] – all celebrated *prem* personified as a sensuous nameless woman and carried explicit references to undying instinctual desires, the agonizing experience of physical and emotional separation and craving for union with the loved woman. Bose's verse *Bandir Bandanā* according to Sengupta was the last straw, infused as it was with concepts derived from *manabikalan*.[241] It was a hymn to the immortality of instinctual urges (*bāsanā*) and the captivity of the desires of a famished youth (*kṣudhita jauban*). The concept of the *tāmasik guṇ* was once again evoked in the metaphorical portrayal of *Kāmanā* or desire as *andhakār amārātri* (the dark new moon night) – a poignant allusion to *acetan* or the Freudian unconscious. The poem spoke of the *acetan* at once as the limitless eternity out of which *prem* arose and as the artist who crafted *svapna* or dream that sustained human existence. The self (quite evidently the male self) was consciously created by the enduring conflicts between thirst for *amṛta* (literally, heavenly nectar; here denoting emotional satisfaction rather than the mythological heavenly nectar that guaranteed immortality), the excruciating experience of abjuring from sexual relationship with the coveted woman and the fulfillment derived from renewed emotional bonding with her. In conclusion the poem asked of the Unconscious, "… only you know what your role had been at that solemn moment of grand creativity."[242]

It were these modernist works especially, *Rajanī hala Utalā*, *Paṭaldāṅgār Pāñcāli* and *Bandir Bandanā* that sparked off an incensed debate on the limits of literary permissibility. The conservative influence within Bengali literary sphere represented now most vociferously by *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* took upon itself to oppose *ati-ādhunik* literature by its sustained ridiculing of works published in *Kallol*.[243] The *Ciṭhi*'s editor Sajanikanta Das routinely disparaged the *Kallol* writers for what conservatives saw as *aślīlatā* (obscenity) and *nirlajjatā* (shamelessness) in the name of realism and progressive gender outlook. The terms of the *Ciṭhi*'s critical discourse closely resembled those of *Sāhitya*'s campaign against Tagore and Saratchandra – so much so that Das was perceived as the

240 Ibid., pp. 123–126. Sengupta's poem appeared in *Kallol* the month after Bose's *Rajanī hala Utalā* (both in 1333 / 1926). Nazrul's poems appeared in *Kāli-Kalam* in 1333 / 1926. Bose's poem appeared in *Kallol* Phālgun 1333 / February-March 1927. Madhabi had a dual meaning both of which carried possible sensuous implications. As a female variant of the adjective madhab it meant 'honeyed'; as a noun, the word meant an evergreen creeper.

241 Ibid., p. 125.

242 Ibid., p. 125.

243 *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* was started in 1334 BS / 1927. Its editorial board included Sajanikanta Das, Parimal Goswami and Niradchandra Chaudhuri.

new Samajpati, society's new guardian.[244] Concern for a robust society was evoked on both occasions to generate reader consensus on the campaign against the new literary trends. Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay had during their initial careers come to represent new literary aesthetics. Sureshchandra Samajpati and the *Sāhitya* circle constituted by Panchkari Bandyopadhyay, Dwijendralal Roy and Jatindramohan Sinha among others had during the pre-War period furiously opposed the Tagorean aesthetic of romantic love. Critics raucously voiced their opposition, claiming that Tagore had undermined sanctified familial and social relationships.[245] Emphasizing the *Ciṭhi*'s commitment to discipline in the public sphere, the periodical's "Saṃbād Sāhitya" (Literary News) section reiterated that literary criticism was not its primary task. Rather, its principal mission was to offset the anarchy that had become rampant in the literary sphere.[246] Paradoxically, at the time when Sajanikanta chose to plead his case before Tagore, the latter had acquired an iconic stature. Thus what appeared to Samajpati and associates as violent transgressions of prescriptive boundaries had become normalized by the time Sajanikanta tried to win over Tagore to the *Ciṭhi*'s cause. Das wrote to Tagore:

> You had gone only to the extent to which it was necessary. I shudder to think what will transpire if the themes that you had brought up, are now dealt with by the modernist writers. What would happen if these writers choose to write *Ekrātri*, *Nashṭa-Nīṛ* and *Ghare-Bāire*?[247]

Citing inability to write due to an injured finger and mental fatigue, Tagore chose to stay away from the controversy for the time being. He was probably reminded of his own experience when his critics had condemned his works in the name of protecting society from the polluting effects of romantic depicted in his fiction. Tagore in his brief reply to Sajanikanta however did hint at his reservations regarding modernist literature:

> I do not usually read *ādhunik sāhitya.* If by chance I happen to come across some I feel as though the pen has suddenly become too unabashed. Do not think that I feel it (*ādhunik sāhitya*) is necessarily delightful (*susrī*). There are literary grounds (*sāhityik kāraṇ*) why I do not; though in this context moral rationales (*naitik kāraṇ*) might not be sustainable.

244 Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, p. 127.
245 Ibid., p. 127.
246 "Saṃbād Sāhitya", *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*, vol. 4, # 4, Pouṣ 1338 / December 1931-January 1932.
247 Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, p. 128.

> Discussing this issue would require deliberating on theories of art and literature.[248]

Achintyakumar Sengupta later claimed that Rabindranath could see through Sajanikanta's ploy of placating him and therefore rejected the latter's appeal.[249] However Tagore made it clear that his reservations had more to do with aesthetics rather than the possibilities of literature degrading society. Tagore remained a strong opponent of literature's pedagogic role. For him it was more important that the aesthetic bounds of literature be ascertained, i.e. to restrain the entry into the literary field of what he perceived to be unsightly / repulsive. In a letter published in *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*, Tagore expressed his conviction that it was the *Ciṭhi*'s disciplining that had heightened "literary perversion" (*sāhityer bikṛti*).[250] Chastisement, he emphasized, was unnecessary since such writings were in any case transient.[251] Lauding the *Ciṭhi*'s writers for their "exceptionally sharp" burlesque skills Tagore called attention to the literary claims of parody and reminded them that such talent ought not to be wasted on silencing specific individuals.[252] Later in a literary meet held at his Jorasanko residence in northern Calcutta Tagore tried to resolve the aesthetic differences of the modernists and the more conservative groups represented by *Śanibārer Ciṭhi.* Tagore's indifference to the clarion call for saving the society and his not too secret affection for some of the modernist poets, particularly Buddhadev Bose, however, drove the *Ciṭhi*'s editor to rather unpleasant limits – making gross mockery of Tagore and his followers at Santiniketan. It constituted perhaps the most disgraceful episode in Bengal's literary history. Sajanikanta later repented and was chosen by Tagore as one of the editors of his collected works (*Rabīndra Racanāvalī*).[253]

Significantly, Freudian psychoanalysis was drawn upon by other critics of *ati-ādhunik sāhitya* as much as the modernists themselves. Some found *ādhunik sāhitya's* dependence on western psychological theories unsettling and far-removed from indigenous inspirations. Anti-modernists rejected the *Kallol* group's unconcealed assertion of carnal desire as the reality, arguing that social

248 Tagore to Sajanikanta Das dated Phālgun 1333 / February-March 1927, cited in *Kallol Yug*, p. 127.

249 *Kallol Yug*, p. 127.

250 "Rabindranāther Ekkhāni Patra", letter from Tagore to Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, *Śanibārer Ciṭhi*, v.4 # 6, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928.

251 Ibid.

252 Ibid.

253 For a narrative of the debates between *Kallol* and *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* see Seely, Chapter 2, "The Kallol Era".

reality was necessarily multiple, thus rejecting *kṣudhā* or hunger as the singular reality of human life.[254] Drawing on the same repertoire of psychoanalysis to argue that *ādhunik sāhitya* was indeed an agonizing product of urban life, its unwarranted orientation towards *kāmaśakti* (literally, the force of desire) or libido being an offshoot of excessive security of modern city life. For the modern writer therefore the meaning of life was reduced to *kāmatṝṣṇā* or a sheer primitive lust for bodily pleasure.[255] For this second group of critics not entirely apathetic to modern scientific research (in this case psychoanalysis), *ādhunik sāhitya* nonetheless came to imply a transgression of essentially modern Bengali aesthetic values. *Ādhunik sāhitya* manifestly drew its inspiration from the post-war literature of Europe. These critics sought to resist what had readily become perceived as an agenda to transform colonized Indian subjects into another version of the twentieth-century European. It would be simplistic to explain this as a kind of nationalistic project of indigenous resistance to an aesthetic category derived from Europe. Modernist literature and its critique had more to do with Bengali cultural consciousness. The young modernists sought to demystify social institutions and practices considered decadent. Theirs was a radical critique and an attempt to formulate the cultural-aesthetic parameters for a more pluralized public sphere. As young urban Indians trying to make sense of the rapid post-war changes – collapse of social bonds and accompanying cultural displacements, *manabikalan* seemed to offer the modernists an alternate radical theory for social criticism. Psychoanalysis was a theory that sought to foreground a new idea of the self – the hitherto disavowed underside of the 'apparent self' that the latter either knew nothing about or rejected as immoral.[256] For the critics of *ādhunik sāhitya* any work that drew on *manabikalan* appeared *aślīl* and subversive. It was the fundamentally radical nature of literary modernism that made it seem inappropriate for incorporation into the public sphere. Drawing on the same corpus of Western psychoanalyses and sociology they perceived modernist literature as an inevitable but a perverted stage in the forward march of civilization.[257] Rabindranath Tagore who himself had been the target of a furious campaign on grounds

254 Anonymous, "Sāhitye Sunīti", Prasaṅga kathā (moral principles in literature), *Bicitrā*, v.1 pt. 2 Baiśākh 1335 / April-May 1928.

255 Mahendrachandra Roy, "Jīban O Ādhunik Sāhitya" (life and modern Literature), *Kāli-kalam*, Year III, 1335 / 1927. Roy cites from Ernst Jung, *Analytical Psychology*, Chapter XIV, pp. 369–70.

256 Nandy, op. cit., p. 111.

257 Mahendrachandra Ray, "Jīban O Ādhunik Sāhitya" (Life and modern literature), in *Kāli-kalam*, Year 3, 1335 / 1928. Soumendranath Tagore, 'Sāhitya' in *Kāli-kalam*, Year I, 1333 / 1926, read initially at the Shibpur Sahitya Samsad.

of *aślīlatā*, came to represent for critics of radical realism, the perfect balance between the 'modern' and the 'beautiful'. By the mid-1920s Tagorean aesthetics had become somewhat iconic and the poet's works now stood for atypical Bengali literature.[258]

The Bengali literary sphere emerged as a self-regulatory domain where the question of what was aesthetically permissible, was passionately fought out. *Aślīlatā* was the primary organizing concept in these debates but it was laden with multiple shifting meanings. The terms of the debates however remained continuous with most conservative publicists raising alarm at the imagined possibility that *jātīẏa jīban* might get contaminated. Literary reviews or *sāhitya samālocanā* came to be fashioned as a disciplining mediator in literary exchanges, endowed with the task of cultivating taste among readers and the prime safeguard against social disorder. In this sense the function of criticism, for the majority of publicists had less to do with an Arnoldian quest for the "best self" and was far more concerned with the preservation of social orthodoxy.

258 For critics like Mahendrachandra Roy and Soumendranath Tagore, the ways in which Rabindranath dealt with female beauty and love could be the sole exemplar. *Saṃyam* or self-restraint therefore was a crucial determinant of aesthetics. What was different from earlier conservative critics like Samajpati and Sinha was that these new critics acknowledged the centrality of physical desires in the process of redeeming the individual and collective selves. Soumendranath Tagore argued that it was not part of the poet's job to elucidate on the anatomical details (*deher ākār-tatva*) of a female body, instead, deification of beauty required *saṃyam* – the restraint pursued not by moral purists but that practiced through the devotee's adulation, i.e. the true aesthete. Rabindranath, he pointed out, too had used words like *tanu* (body), *cumban* (kiss), *bibasanā*(the undressed woman), *deher milan* (union of the body) and *stan* (breast) as title names of his poems, but reading these poems make clear the difference between the 'worshipper of *soundarya* (beauty)' and 'the lustful glutton'.

CHAPTER 4

The Way to Traverse: Literary Separatism or Towards a Shared Literary Space

In an editorial in *Prabāsī*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay insisted that Muslim membership at the Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Parishaṯ needed to improve but placed the onus for such participation squarely on Muslim intellectuals.[1] Bengali Muslims, Mohammad Wajed Ali contended, found themselves alienated and difficult to connect with the lectures at the Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ because of their essential 'Hinduness'.[2] Expressing strong reservations about the nature of the proceedings at literary conferences organized under the auspices of the Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ, Wajed Ali mentioned that it was almost impossible for a Bengali Muslim to relate to the innate dispositions of the Hindu religion (*bhāb*) and idolatry (*pouttalikatā*) and to participate "without losing sense of his self".[3] A parallel literary academy, the Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti was established in 1918 to initiate an autonomous (*svatantra*) literary agenda for Bengali Muslims as a necessary precondition for literary exchanges. For sure, such efforts were not accepted uncritically. A 'nationalist Hindu' friend of Mohammad Wajed Ali had rather acerbically remarked whether Bengali Muslims wished to carve out a separate electorate within the Bengali literary sphere – an evident allusion to the 1916 Lucknow Pact and the possibility of separatist tendencies of the political world being reproduced in the literary domain.[4] For the 'nationalist Hindu' the threat of dividing up (*dvikhaṇḍita*) the language-Mother (i.e. *Baṅgabhāṣā*) was indeed a very real one. *Baṅgabhāṣā* and *Baṅgasāhitya* had to be at all costs, protected from the fate of bifurcation, on lines of the Hindi-Urdu divide.[5] The formation of a Bengali Muslim literary sphere came to be weighed down by the pressures of being 'Bengali' and 'Muslim' at the same time, as if the two had been historically at odds with one another. The history of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere is one of incessant dialogues and contestations with its mainstream 'Hindu' counterpart. Under

1 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Sāhitya-Pariṣader Musalmān Sadasya" (Muslim members of the Sahitya Parishad), *Prabāsī*, v. 15 pt. 1 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1322 / May-June, 1915.

2 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Baṅgabhāṣā O Musalmān Sāhitya" (Bengali language and Muslim literature), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, Māgh 1325 / January-February 1918.

3 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Baṅgabhāṣā O Musalmān Sāhitya".

4 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Baṅgabhāṣā O Musalmān Sāhitya".

5 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bāṅglār Bhāṣā Bhed" (language differences in Bengal), *Prabāsī*, v. 5 # 1, Baiśākh 1312 / April-May 1905.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_006

duress of having to fashion a literary culture distinct, yet not alienated from the Bengali Hindu and a north Indian, predominantly Urdu cultural traditions, Bengali Muslim publicists traversed a course that was remarkably open-ended, self-critical and invested with a rare form of versatility. While existing historiography emphasizes the increasing polarization of Bengal politics along communal lines, a history of the literary sphere yields a narrative that labors under the entrapment of political intemperance and yet asserts its autonomy.

This chapter begins by looking at the production and circulation of Bengali Muslim periodicals in the early twentieth century, arguing how the emergent market for these prints was severely impacted by the limited access to higher education and the constraints of social mobilization within Bengal's Muslim community. The agrarian base of a majority of Muslims and the preeminence of maktab-madrasa learning were seen to inhibit the formation of a readership appropriate for a modern literary culture. The profusion and popularity of premodern textual traditions, the Islamic-Bengali *puthi* ballads, romances and religious tracts, among rural Muslims testify to the presence of an energetic literary culture that modern print media like periodicals found difficult to dent. Bengali Muslim periodicals were patronized and produced by a section of theologians, for instance the Anjuman Ulema-e Bangla that brought out the monthly *Āl-Eslām*.

A small, albeit increasingly articulate urbanized and professional middle class too were enterprising in periodical publishing. With a majority of Bengal's Muslims engaged in agriculture, periodicals would very likely have found most of their readers within middle-class homes. The section also highlights the logistical issues impeding the growth of periodical readership among Bengali Muslims. The chapter then moves on to address some of the concerns that formed the primary coordinates of a modern Bengali Muslim literary sphere – the language question, the prioritization of literary genres and the contestations over the nature of Islamic piety. Each of these themes critically informed Bengali Muslim notions of the self and community. These social-aesthetic tropes opened up vigorous exchanges on the nature of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere – its autonomous dispensation vis-à-vis possibilities of a shared cultural space. Far less populated than its mainstream counterpart in terms of numerical strength of periodicals and their readers, the Bengali Muslim literary sphere offers a narrative of an alternative readership – its formation, the social aspirations articulated and its engagements with Hindu-Brahmo literary sphere. Its relationship with the latter oscillated between admirations and skepticism about its exclusionist propensities. Time and again, Bengali Muslim publicists reiterated the need to emulate the 'Hindu awakening'. As Abdul Karim put it, "… The Hindus with their untiring perseverance and commitment

FIGURE 4.1 Title page of the inaugural issue of *Āl-Eslām*, Baiśākh 1322 / April-May 1915

to literary practice (*sāhitya-carcā*) have succeeded in ensuring a tremendous improvement of the Bengali language and literature, alongside that of their own society (*samāj*). Sadly enough the Bengali Muslims have remained largely indifferent to their mother tongue and its literature."[6] Muslim involvement with the new literary culture was disproportionate compared to their Hindu counterparts, at least during the nineteenth century. The task faced by the Bengali Muslim community was thus seen as a particularly uphill one, given that they had far less time to attain what the Hindus were seen to have accomplished over a century's time.[7] Bengali Muslim voices did occasionally find space within mainstream periodicals. But even as the literary sphere was envisioned as fundamentally non-communal, mainstream literature on the whole remained uninflected by the concerns and life experiences of Bengal's Muslims. A disillusioned Humayun Kabir regretted, "Only a handful [of writers] have occasionally mentioned Muslims and even then are there no Bengali Muslims other than *mājhi* (boatmen) and *khānsāmā* (peon)?"[8] Kabir's sense of injustice bears an uncanny resemblance to a marginal character in Tagore's autobiography *Chelebelā* (*My Boyhood Days*) – Abdul *mājhi* (the boatman).[9]

What binds the seemingly disconnected debates that this chapter explores is the fundamental question of Hindu-Muslim relationship. In the political sphere, the increasing contestations between the Indian National Congress, the All India Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha and the legislative interventions on part of the colonial state escalated communal animosities. It was however in the day to day social interactions that estrangement between the two communities was deep-seated. Discrimination permeated quotidian habits and practices like modes of address, intolerance regarding forbidden food, prejudicial but unintentional use of certain referents and caste and community based clustering of rural settlements and even of student hostels in

---

6 Abdul Karim, "Baṅgīẏa Musalmāner Baṅga Sāhitya-carcā" (the Bengali Muslims' practice of Bengali literature), *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Year 11, Agrahāẏaṇ 1322 / November-December 1915.

7 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī" (Muslim periodicals), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 6 # 1, Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923.

8 Humayun Kabir, 'Sāhitye Bāstabatā' (realism in literature), *Paricaẏ*, Kārtik 1339 / October-November 1932. Such allegations against Tagore were not uncommon amongst the Muslim literati. Tagore and Bankim were described as equally antagonistic to Muslims – the only difference being that while Bankim was seen as directly abusive, Tagore was seen as 'passive' and therefore more cunning (*catur*). Golam Mostafa, "Muslim Sāhityer Gati O Lakshya" (the progress and agenda of Muslim literature), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928.

9 *Chelebelā* contained a curious description of Abdul mājhi – a man with a pointed beard, shaven moustache and a bald head.

cities.[10] The Bengali Muslim literary sphere came to be organized in terms of a mainstream 'Hindu' literary sphere and its contestations with 'other', alternative literary spheres, its historical formation having to bear all the entanglements of political acrimonies and social detachments. But the literary sphere also seemed to hold out possibilities of resisting political divisiveness and creating an analogous space of beliefs and ideas. The formative spirit of a new literary culture thus in many ways turned to past intellectual and literary traditions – whether of medieval Bengal or of early Islam – to open and sustain a dialogic interaction with the mainstream literary sphere. Philosophical debates within early Islam were drawn upon to secure 'rationalism' as an inviolable constituent of Islamic piety. A devout, reasonable Muslim endowed with an emancipated intellect could then stand up to the excesses of political violence.

Drawing on histories of medieval Bengal, *Baṅgasāhitya* of the Pathan and Mughal eras was foregrounded as a syncretistic space shared in by both Hindus and Muslims. Medieval Bengal society, despite incidents of conflicts and perpetration of military violence, was projected as one where Hindus and Muslims were part of the same structure of beliefs and practices – a non-politicized society in which "cow killing" was never an issue despite no dearth of unrest.[11] By implication, precolonial Bengal was interpreted as a non-polarized society bereft of hostilities between Hindus and Muslims. The domain of the state with its frequent dynastic changes remained a non-invasive outsider to social life.[12] In contrast, colonial modernity, Pramatha Chaudhuri argued, had brought with it an insidious 'politics' that threatened to alter the basic equivalence (*samābastha*) of all Indians and homogenize Indian society by promoting community and sectarian 'privilege' in the domain of the state.[13] The state, Chaudhuri elaborated, was only a part (*aṅga*) of the social world in which politics made up a significant aspect of individual lives and yet, "fortunately, politics had not been able to consume the whole of social life (*samāj jīban*)."[14] One could read Chaudhuri's essay as an indictment of all formal

10 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal 1920–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014. Chapter 4, "The Logic of Fission: Muslim Identity and Its Contestations", pp. 108–145.

11 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Baṅgasāhitye Hindu-Musalmān" (Hindu and Muslim in Bengali literature), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3 pt. 1 # 1 (Baiśākh / April-May) and 2 (Jyaiṣṭha / May-June) 1331 / 1924.

12 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Baṅgasāhitye Hindu-Musalmān", *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3 pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1331 / April-May 1924.

13 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Hindu-Musalmān Samasyā" (the Hindu-Muslim dilemma), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 3 pt. 1 # 6, Āśvin 1331 / September-October 1924.

14 Ibid.

political principles as uniformly divisive and disruptive of pre-existing social arrangements. But what also comes through is an effort to distance 'politics' and the conflict-ridden categories it produced, from the social world in which the literary sphere was embedded. As a bequest of early Islam and medieval Bengali syncretism, the domain of modern literariness would time and again be broached as an imaginative way out of the impasse of national and communal politics. The literary sphere seemed to offer prospective for alternative solidarities – a social collective that was relatively free from conflicts than communities based on caste and religion. Of course, such optimism would prove to be rather fragile. With frequent riots, faith in versatility of the literary sphere would rupture quickly and a sense of futility and despair creep in.

1 Bengali-Muslim Periodicals Publishing

The domain of Bengali Muslim print was one where printed editions of premodern *puthi* texts were produced and circulated in much larger numbers than literary periodicals. Well into the twentieth century the market for Bengali Muslim literary periodicals trailed far behind both *puthi* prints as well as the established non-Muslim periodicals. For instance, at the opening of the century the *Bengal Library Catalogues* recorded one thousand printed copies of the monthly *Islām Pracārak* whereas a booklet for religious instruction *Hazrat Muhammader begonā thākār visaye Musalmán Maulaviganer Sikṣā* (The Teachings of the Maulavis regarding the innocence of Muhammad) published by the Christian Tract and Book Society showed five thousand printed copies. Similarly, for the year 1919 for instance, while circulation of a single issue of *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* stood at 1500, *Sonābhāner Kecchā* (The Tale of *Sonābhān*) had a circulation of 2000 while *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* were running at 6000. *Puthi* texts commonly categorized under the head "Musalmani Bengali – Miscellaneous" like *Gadā Mālekār Puthi* or *Ufāter Kabitā* sold for a few pice with usually one or two thousand printed copies of each.[15] So were the *kecchā* (farces) like *Kecchā Bhagabān Bhut* (The Tale of the Ghost Lord) or *Kabir Fẽ̊seṛār Kecchā* (Tale of *Kabir Fẽ̊seṛā*) that continued to be in print. Religious booklets grouped either under "Arabic and Bengali Books" or "Musalmani Bengali – Religious" like *Nāmāj Śikṣā* were also priced at a few annas had several thousand copies in print.[16] However unlike *puthi* texts and chapbooks for

15 "Musalmani Bengali – Miscellaneous", *Bengal Library Catalogue Annual Report* for the year 1910.
16 "Arabic and Bengali Books", *Bengal Library Catalogue Annual Report* for the year 1920.

religious instructions, Bengali Muslim periodicals were never classified under "Musalmani Bengali" heads. Rather the Library Catalogues always categorized them under the head "Bengali periodicals – miscellaneous". These periodicals were thus seen as a generically modern literary form, sharing at least notionally, the same social space of interaction as mainstream periodicals. The literary sphere of these periodicals was constituted as much by the internal logic of Bengali Muslim society as also through a constant interface with the mainstream literary sphere that was overwhelmingly Hindu in intonation and participation. The narrative that unfolds on flipping through the Bengali Muslim periodicals is not simply, as one would expect, one of confrontation and contestations, but also one informed by a sense of having historically traversed a shared course and aspirations for a collective literary sphere.

The publications of Bengali Muslim literary periodicals were at best intermittent, uncertain and far fewer in numbers than their Hindu and Brahmo counterparts.[17] Occasional experiments with literary periodicals were visible from the late nineteenth century onwards, the notable ones being Mir Mosharaf Hossain's short-lived journal *Ajijannehar* (1874), the first Muslim Bengali periodical to have used a *sādhu* or chaste form of literary Bengali, and Maulavi Mohammad Naimuddin's monthly journal *Akhbar-e-Islāmīẏā* (1883).[18] By the closing decade of the nineteenth century, a handful of Muslim journals like *Mihir* (1892), *Hāfej* (1897), *Kohinūr* (1898) and *Pracārak* (1898) had started publications, mostly from Calcutta. *Mihir* and *Hāfej* for instance were explicitly

17 The earliest instance of a Bengali periodical patronized and edited by a Muslim was *Samācār Sabhārājendra* (1831), a bilingual weekly in Bengali and Persian edited by Shekh Alimullah and including among its readers both Hindus and Muslims. *Sabhārājendra* was followed by *Jagaduddīpak Bhāskar* edited by Maulavi Rajab Ali. Following Reverend James Long's *A Catalogue of Bengali Newspapers and Periodicals, 1818–1855, Selections from the Record of the Bengal Government* where both these journals find mention, Anisuzzaman speculates that their language was *taṯsama* or Sanskrit-based Bengali in use by the pundits at Fort William. The early and mid-nineteenth century also saw several multilingual periodicals in English, Urdu, Persian, Hindi and Bengali. The contents of these early periodicals remain elusive. Anisuzzaman's conjecture is that rather than being literary in content, they dealt primarily with political and commercial happenings of the Company administration. The latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, most Muslim periodicals like *Mohāmmadī Ākhbar* (1877) used a form of Bengali that was close to the *do-bhāṣī puthi* language. Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Bānglār Sāmaẏik Patra, 1831–1930*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1969, pp. 1–3 and "Introduction", pp. 25–26.

18 The latter patronized by the Khan Panni zamindar family of Karatiya, Mymensingh continued for almost a decade. Amalendu De, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972, pp. 42–45. Neither of these two journals finds mention in Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials 1818–1950*, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 2004.

মাসিক মোহাম্মদী

প্রথম বর্ষ। | কার্ত্তিক ১৩৩৪ সাল। | প্রথম সংখ্যা

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

করুণাময় কৃপানিধান আল্লার নামে।

الحمد لله نحمده و نستعينه و نستغفره و نؤمن به و نتوكل عليه - و نعوذ بالله من
شرور انفسنا و من سيئات اعمالنا ——

সমস্ত মহিমা আল্লার। আমরা তাঁহার মহিমা কীর্ত্তন করিতেছি, তাঁহার সমীপে শক্তি ভিক্ষা করিতেছি, তাঁহার দরগাহে ক্ষমা প্রার্থনা করিতেছি, তাঁহাতে বিশ্বাস স্থাপন করিতেছি, তাঁহার উপর নির্ভর করিতেছি—এবং নিজেদের মনের বিকার ও কর্ম্মের বিপর্য্যয় হইতে রক্ষা পাইবার নিমিত্ত তাঁহার শরণ প্রার্থনা করিতেছি।

و نشهد ان لا اله الا الله وحده لا شريك له و نشهد ان محمدا عبده و رسوله
الذى بعثه بالحق بشيرا و نذيرا و داعيا الى الله باذنه و سراجا منيرا - و ارسله
كافة للناس و جعله أسوة حسنة للسالكين و رحمة للعالمين صلى الله عليه
و على جميع الانبياء و المرسلين و عباده الصالحين -

আমরা স্বীকার করিতেছি যে, আল্লাহ ব্যতীত অন্য কোনও উপাস্য নাই—তিনি একক ও অদ্বিতীয় এবং মোহাম্মদ তাঁহার প্রেরণাপ্রাপ্ত রছুল। পুণ্যের সুফল সম্বন্ধে শুভসংবাদ প্রদানের এবং পাপের কুফল সম্বন্ধে সতর্ক করার নিমিত্ত, তিনি আল্লার আদেশে তাঁহার প্রতি আহ্বানকারী ও দীপ্তিকর-প্রদীপরূপে প্রেরিত হইয়াছেন। বিশ্ব-মানবের মঙ্গলের নিমিত্ত আল্লাহ তাঁহাকে পুণ্যতম পূর্ণতম আদর্শ এবং সমস্ত জগতের প্রতি নিজের অনন্ত প্রেমের সাক্ষাৎ নিদর্শন স্বরূপে প্রেরণ করিয়াছেন। তাঁহার প্রতি, এবং দুনয়ার যাবতীয় প্রেরণাপ্রাপ্ত মহাপুরুষ ও সাধু-সজ্জনগণের প্রতি আল্লার অনন্ত আশীর্ব্বাদ!

FIGURE 4.2 First page of the inaugural issue of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Kārtik 1334 / October-November 1927

FIGURE 4.3 Cover page of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Year 1, Phālgun 1334 / February-March 1928

theology oriented supporting the Hanafi School of Islamic jurisprudence.[19] These journals did not carry any illustrations in deference to Islamic beliefs.[20] Publications however remained irregular with none of the periodicals commanding any sizeable readership and having to wrap up fairly soon after launch. *Kohinūr* for instance had been inconsistent and ceased publication after about eight years. Its editor Raoshan Ali Chaudhuri revived the journal in 1911. At the turn of the century however, the annual report of the *Bengal Library Catalogue* observed, "Literary activity among Muhammadans is on the increase, and the three Muhammadan journals, viz., the *Laharī*, the *Pracārak*, and the *Islām Pracārak*, continued to be fairly well written. They were all given to extolling the Sultan of Turkey and reminding Musalmans of their past glory. The *Sultan* was an exception to them, having been started during the year under notice with the distinct object of establishing a good understanding between Hindus and Muhammadans."[21] Recollecting the early phase of Bengali Muslim periodical publication, Mohammad Nasiruddin would draw attention to two features: first, these periodicals were patronized and edited mostly by theologians, the maulavis and maulanas and second, bereft of creative genres and compositions on science and rational thought, many of the journals were deployed as mouthpieces of different Islamic religious sects.[22] Nasiruddin described the frequent rivalries among the sects and their journals as virulent, often overpowering any attempt at rational thought.[23] Given the prevalent mood of the "Muslim society in that age of illiteracy, ignorance and superstitions", Nasiruddin explained, it was potentially hazardous to even contemplate a journal of a modern type (*ādhunik dharaṇer*) with short stories, serial novels and illustrations.[24] It seems paradoxical that the maulavi-maulana-munshi groups traditionally nurtured in a Perso-Arabic ambience were the first initia-

19 Mohammad Nasiruddin, *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug* (the *Saogāt* era in Bengali literature), Dacca, 1985, p. 26.

20 Nasiruddin spoke of his difficulties in getting *Saogāt* started. He found no Bengali Muslim artist who could design a cover for his journal in colored halftone. Ibid., p. 26.

21 Report of the *Bengal Library Catalogue*, 1901. *Islām Pracārak* (1891) was edited by Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad and printed at 4, Kareya Gorasthan Road. It was priced at 3 annas per issue and contained on an average thirty pages. The new phase (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) of the periodical was started in 1899. *Laharī* (1900) was a monthly periodical edited by Mozammel Haq, published from Nadia district in central Bengal and priced at 3 annas per issue. The editorial described the periodical as a "miscellaneous, poetic and critical journal". Anisuzzaman, op. cit. p. 62.

22 *Mihir* and *Hāfej* for instance staunchly advocated Hanafi principles. Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, op. cit. p. 146 and 216.

23 Mohammad Nasiruddin, *Saogāt Yug*, published by Nurjahan Begum, Dhaka, 1985, pp. 26–27.

24 Ibid.

tors of Bengali periodicals. As religious preachers they were the ones, who routinely came in contact with the Muslim masses, realizing that it was virtually impossible to reach out to the rural poor without using Bengali as the medium of instruction.[25] In this early, pre-*Saogāt* phase that Nasiruddin identified, the only exceptions in the group of theologian editors were Syed Emdad Ali of *Nabanūr* and Mohammad Shahidullah of the *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*.[26] The theologians engaged in the periodical projects were mostly of middle and lower-middle ranks with limited resources. A few rural landlords in the eastern districts, like the Khan Panni zamindars of Karatiya, Karimunnesa Chaudhurani and Abdul Halim Gaznavi of Delduar, Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri of Dhanbari, Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani of Paschimgaon and the Dhaka Nawab Sir Khwaja Salimullah Bahadur were active patrons of Bengali Muslim periodical publishing.[27]

Contemporary publicists noted with much despair the irregularity in publications, short print runs and limited subscriptions – widely believed to be the primary obstacles in the maturing of a Bengali Muslim literary sphere.[28] *Kohinūr*, *Nabanūr*, *Āl-Eslām*, *Moslem Bhārat* and *Saogāt* were identified as the few literary periodicals that carried quality essays on Islamic histories, social issues and Koranic principles.[29]

Besides these more important periodicals, other initiatives, most of which were short-lived included *Baṅganūr*, *Islām Darśan*, *Āṅgur*, *Ānnesā*, *Uddīpanā*, *Bakul*, *Pracārak*, *Nūr* and *Sahacar*.[30] For others, neither *Kohinūr* nor *Āl-Eslām* was of any significance. *Kohinūr*'s irregularity and frequent lapses made it less respectable to its readers while *Āl-Eslām* did not qualify as a truly literary periodical, being managed and contributed to by mostly maulanas and Muslim missionaries.[31] In the absence of *sāhitya patrikā* presumably along lines of

25 Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Sāmaẏikpatre Jīban o Janamat, 1901–1930* (life and public opinion in periodicals), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977, pp. 11–12.

26 Ibid., p. 12.

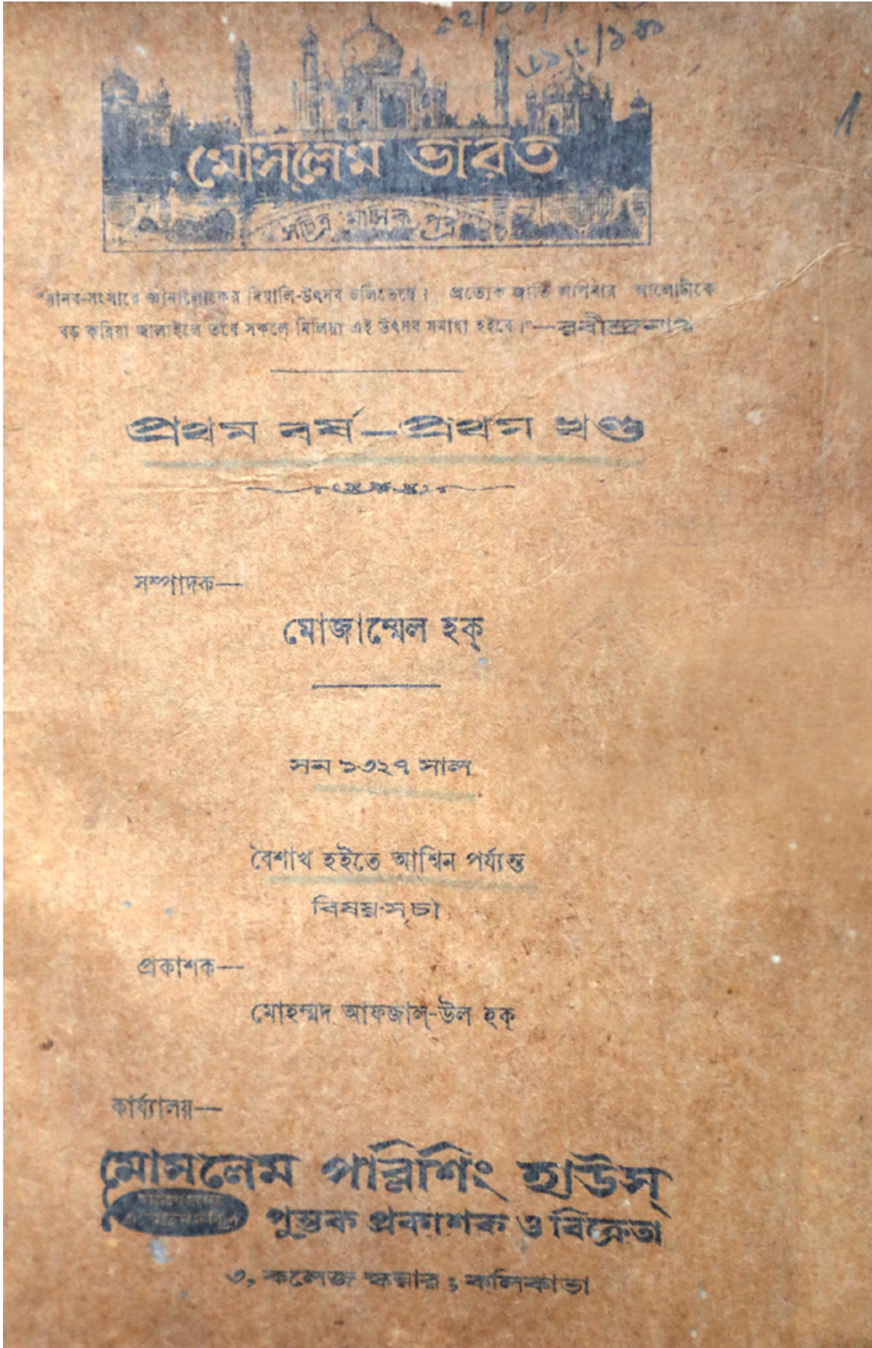
27 Ibid., p. 12.

28 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī", *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 6 #1, Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923.

29 *Kohinūr* edited by S.K.M. Mohammad Raoshan Ali, published from Kustiya in eastern Bengal and priced at 4 annas an issue. Number of copies printed per issue varied from 1000 in its first issue to 3000 in the following month and finally down to 500 copies. Anisuzzaman, op. cit. p. 20. *Nabanūr* edited by Syed Emdad Ali, published from Calcutta and priced at 4 annas per issue (yearly Rs.2/). Number of copies printed per issue usually varied from 500 to 1000. The periodical survived for about four years. Anisuzzaman, op. cit. pp. 66–67.

30 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī".

31 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Āmāder Sāhityik Abasād" (Our literary disenchantments), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 #4, Śrāvaṇ 1323 / July-August 1916. *Āl-Eslām* was a journal that addressed


মোসলেম ভারত
সচিত্র মাসিক পত্র

"মানব-সংসারে জ্ঞানালোকের দিয়ালি-উৎসব চলিতেছে। প্রত্যেক জাতি আপনার আলোটিকে বড় করিয়া জ্বালাইলে তবে সকলে মিলিয়া এই উৎসব সমাধা হইবে।"—রবীন্দ্রনাথ

প্রথম বর্ষ—প্রথম খণ্ড

সম্পাদক—
মোজাম্মেল হক্

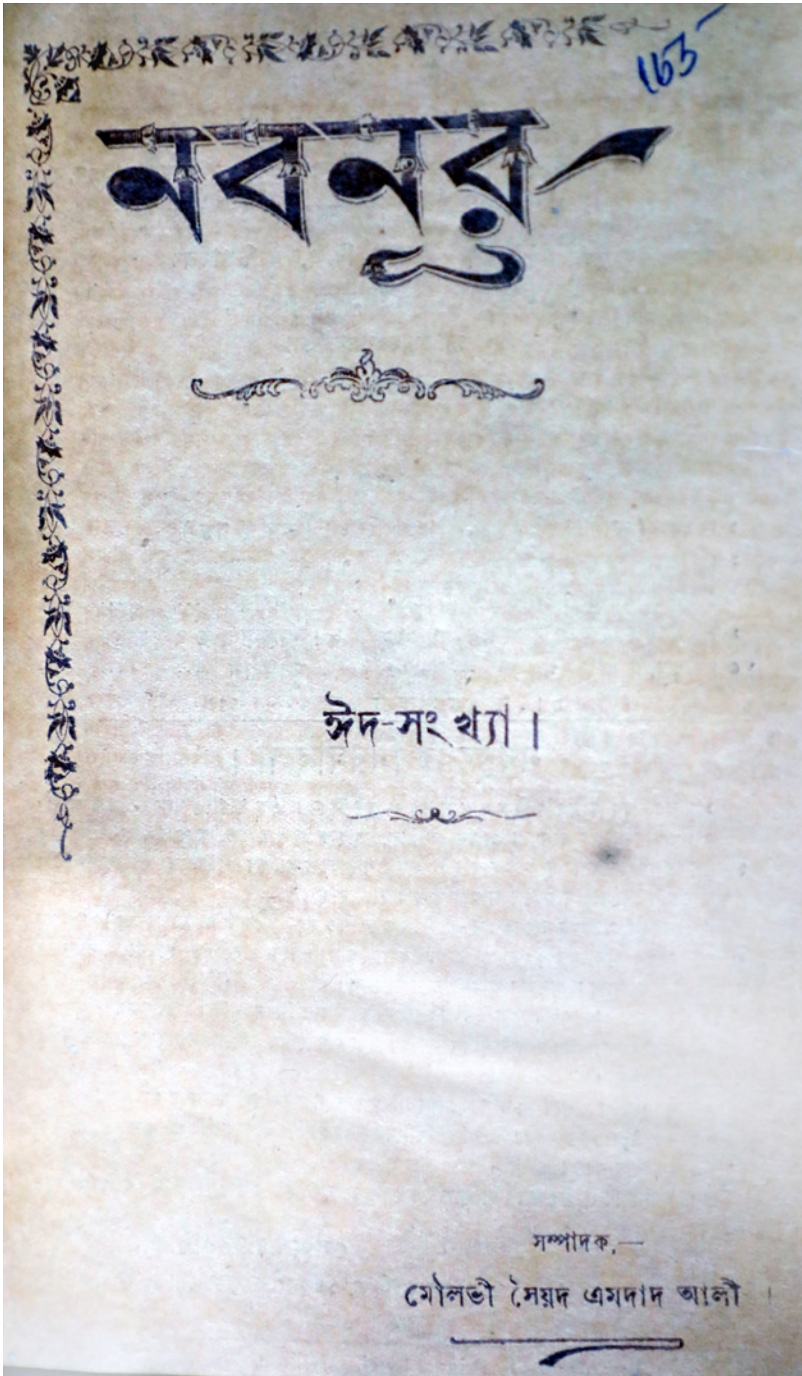
সন ১৩২৭ সাল

বৈশাখ হইতে আশ্বিন পর্য্যন্ত
বিষয়-সূচী

প্রকাশক—
মোহম্মদ আফজাল-উল হক্

কার্য্যালয়—
মোসলেম পাব্লিশিং হাউস্
পুস্তক প্রকাশক ও বিক্রেতা
৩, কলেজ স্কয়ার; কলিকাতা

FIGURE 4.4 Title page of first volume, first part of *Moslem Bhārat*, Baiśākh – Āświn 1327 / April-October 1920



নবনূর

ঈদ-সংখ্যা।

সম্পাদক,—

মৌলভী সৈয়দ এমদাদ আলী।

FIGURE 4.5 Title page of Eid Special Issue of *Nabanūr*, 1907

popular miscellanies like *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa*, aspiring Muslim writers hardly found a space wherein to nurture their literary commitments.

1.1 *The Saogāt Divide: A Breakthrough in Periodical Publishing*

In 1918 Mohammad Nasiruddin initiated a new literary monthly *Saogāt*, literally meaning a cherished gift.[32] The term *saogāt* had been one of the few words of Perso-Arabic origin that were freely in use by several Hindu writers.[33] Mohammad Nasiruddin justified his choice of the word in terms of its potential appeal to non-Muslim communities. At the same time, he explained as a periodical meant chiefly for the Muslim community, the name satisfied the need for "some distinguishing trait".[34] Its mention in the Bengali dictionary was a further endorsement of the word's inclusion in the Bengali vocabulary. *Saogāt* was therefore meant to be an "earnest gift" to the reader society (*pāṭhak samāj*), that is the nation (*jāti*).[35] Nasiruddin's compendium *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug* (The *Saogāt* Era in Bengali Literature), a compilation of selected verse and prose pieces from the magazine that also includes a recollection of his experiences as an entrepreneur-editor is perhaps the only of its kind from early twentieth-century Bengal where the editor himself recounted decades later, the experiences and challenges of running a literary periodical. In this sense the publication and intervention that *Saogāt* sought to make is perhaps one of the best documented in the history of Bengali print. *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug* brings to mind a similar recollection – that of Achintyakumar Sengupta's *Kallol Yug*, a reminiscence of the literary life of the 1920s and the modernist interventions of the period. The parallels between the two memoirs are too evident to miss out. Both look back to temporal interludes in the literary life of Bengal as coterminous with particular literary periodicals: for Sengupta, the early-1920s constituting the *Kallol yug* and for Nasiruddin, the late-1920s and 1930s forming the *Saogāt yug*. Written in retrospect, both have sought to understand contemporary social and literary life and the journalistic innovations that *Kallol* and *Saogāt* constituted therein, as symptomatic of intellectual insurgences against all forms of social, religious and cultural orthodoxies. Both foregrounded their respective periodicals as forming and bequeathing legacies – *Kallol* in

---

primarily religious, historical and social reform issues. It was affiliated to the *Anjuman-e-Ulemae Bangla*.

32 Mohammad Nasiruddin, *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug*, Published by Nurjahan Begum, Saogāt Press, Dhaka, 1985.

33 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Jātīya Sāhitye Hindu Musalmān" (Hindu and Muslim in national literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 #1, Baiśākh 1323 / April-May 1916.

34 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 32–33.

35 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 32–33.

the form of subsequent avant garde journals like *Kali-kalam*, *Kabitā*, *Caturaṅga* and *Paricaẏ* and *Saogāt* in the form of periodicals like *Śikhā*, *Gulistm̐ā* (1932, editor: Samser Ali), *Tablīg* (1927, Muhammad Delawar Hossain).

The logistical difficulties that Nasiruddin spoke of in his reminiscences were in many ways similar to those that Ramananda Chattopadhyay encountered while running *Prabāsī*, particularly the problems of making periodical publishing self-sustaining if not always profit generating. The initial years were difficult, Nasiruddin incurring a deficit worth thousands of rupees. Having to expend his personal savings, he was forced to suspend publication until he recovered his losses. He worked tirelessly as an insurance agent and resumed publication of *Saogāt* only after he had accumulated sufficient capital to re-invest.[36] He attributed his losses to the high costs of paper and printing in the immediate post-war years (for the first three years, *Saogāt* was printed on newsprint sheets) and to the fact that the price of *Saogāt* had been deliberately kept low to maximize circulation among a predominantly underprivileged and poor Muslim community of Bengal.[37] Around the same time other periodicals, particularly *Moslem Bhārat* too had met a similar fate, becoming bankrupt as a result of publishing expenditure overshooting income from sales, subscription and advertisements.[38] Capital apart, the *Saogāt* editor identified several other obstacles that made periodical publishing much more a labor of love than a profit generating commercial enterprise. Finding artists to design the cover and make a few illustrations and cartoons, and skilled craftsmen who would prepare blocks for half-tone and colored prints were a major hurdle. No Muslim youth were to be found in these professions, for fear of committing *gunah*, i.e. sin, and inviting the wrath of the ulema.[39] Neither did Nasiruddin readily find a press suitable for quality print. Most Muslim-owned presses like the Islamiya Art Press on Kareya Road churned out inexpensive *puthi* literature using paper and printing of inferior quality. The bigger Hindu-owned presses proved costly and many did not possess Arabic types that were needed alongside Bengali ones. The manager of the Fine Art Printing Syndicate located in the Jorasanko area finally agreed to print *Saogāt* only after Nasiruddin had convinced him that *Saogāt* would be a modern and progressive journal (*unnata*

36 Nasiruddin, op. cit., pp. 185–186.

37 Ibid., p. 36, 184.

38 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī".

39 Nasiruddin, op. cit., "*Saogāter Pratiṣṭhā*", p. 33. Nasiruddin explained that the pre-*Saogāt* periodicals were in-ornate with no illustrations inside or on the front cover. Most had their names printed in bold fonts and thick black border on the margin of the cover. He finally got hold of a Hindu artist Ganesh Banerjee and commissioned him to design the cover and make a few illustrations for the first issue.

pragatiśīl patrikā) with several Hindu writers contributing to it.[40] The logistical problems were resolved only during the *Nabaparyyāẏ* phase when Nasiruddin had been able to expand his office space and purchase an independent printing press for *Saogāt*.[41] By the late-1920s and early-1930s, *Saogāt* seems to have secured a fairly sizeable readership with 16,000 printed copies of each issue of *Saogāt*.[42]

A severe obstacle for Nasiruddin however, was the hostility of the orthodox ulema (*gōṛā mollā śreṇī*) that denounced *Saogāt* as anti-Islam (*Islām birodhī*) and were alarmed at the photographs of men and particularly of women that appeared on its pages.[43] Pir Badshah Miya of Faridpur congratulated Nasiruddin on bringing out a quality periodical but complained that because of its visual contents, it had to be removed from the room prior to performing *namaz*.[44] Nasiruddin responded that similar injunctions were not applicable for currency notes and silver coins that were imprinted with the images of the non-believer (*bidharmī*) king. Pir endorsed Nasiruddin's arguments as reasonable, withdrew his earlier statement and sent in his annual subscription via money order. Pir Badshah Miya remained a *Saogāt* subscriber for many years.[45] Most common theologians however virulently opposed *Saogāt* for its fictions and pictures. The local correspondent from Nagarbari, Pabna district reported in the daily *Bāṅglār Kathā* (Agrahāẏaṇ 1335 / November-December 1928) that the Maulana Saheb of Furfura Sharif had addressed a gathering of villagers at Taranagar, instigating them against the *Saogāt* group. The latter were branded as *kafer*, i.e. non-believer and accused of indulging in anti-Islamic activities like criticizing the ulema, violating the Sharia and not the least, publishing photographs of Muslim women.[46]

1.2 *Mentoring Writers*

The chief hurdle for Nasiruddin was the absence of "progressive" writers, making him turn to mainstream Hindu and Brahmo writers like Jaladhar Sen, Satyendranath Datta, Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, Kumudranjan Mullick and Mankumari Basu.[47] This was not new. Several important periodicals like *Āl-Eslām*, *Kohinūr* and *Nabanūr* had ceaselessly voiced their disquiet over the lack

40 Ibid., p. 35.
41 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 193–195.
42 Ibid., p. 25.
43 Ibid., p. 39.
44 Ibid., p. 39.
45 Ibid., p. 40.
46 Ibid., p. 41.
47 Ibid., p. 34.

of competent writers among Bengali Muslims. In most Bengali Muslim *sāhitya patrikā* non-Muslim writers comprised a noticeable presence. Among the contributing writers of *Nabanūr* for instance, at least half were non-Muslim Bengalis including Jadunath Sarkar, Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, Kumudranjan Mullick, Bijoychandra Majumdar, Keshabchandra Gupta, Charuchandra Mitra, Sarasibala Devi, Charubala Devi and Anupama Devi.[48] The presence of non-Muslim writers was applauded by contemporary periodicals like *Sāhitya* and *Raṅgālaẏ* as fostering cordiality between the Hindu and Muslim communities.[49] However, despite the thrust towards creating a shared literary space, there also seem to have been a tacit acceptance of lack of proficient writers. In an attempt to create a team of writers for itself *Nabanūr* announced an essay competition.[50] Essays were invited on a range of themes considered to be of immediate pertinence such as Koranic precepts and the influence of Islam, reasons for the crises of Bengal's Muslim society and ways to alleviate those and causes of conflict between Hindus and Muslims.[51] Compositions on the third subject, it was announced, were to be judged and awarded separately for Muslims and non-Muslims. The announcement included a list of sponsors who funded the award, comprising both Muslims (chiefly theologians) and non-Muslims, and including: Maulavi Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri, Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, Maulavi Khondkar Anwar Ali, Maulavi Emdad-ul Haq and Maulavi Syed Emdad Ali besides others.[52] It was publicized that essays of awardees and other satisfactory ones, were to be published in subsequent issues of *Nabanūr*. *Nabanūr*'s effort to create a pool of writers and its consistent appearance were unique among Bengali Muslim periodicals. Lamenting the periodical's demise, publicists would recall its group of formidable writers (*śaktiśālī lekhak sampradāẏ*) as an achievement that subsequent periodicals had been unable to reproduce.[53] Even several years after its termination, it continued to evoke memories of an ideal, all-embracing literary periodical.[54]

---

48 Out of eight authors in *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 2, four were non-Muslim Bengalis while out of eleven authors listed in *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 3, seven were non-Muslims.

49 Excerpts from reviews by *Sāhitya* and *Raṅgālaẏ* appeared on the back cover of every issue of *Nabanūr*.

50 "*Nabanūr*-er puraṣkār-racanā", *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1312 / June-July 1905.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Abdul Karim, "Baṅgasāhitye Musalmān Lekhak" (Muslim writers in Bengali literature), *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), v. 1 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1318 / June-July 1911. Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, "Sāhitya Prasaṅga" (about literature), *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), v.2 # 11, Phālgun 1322 / February-March 1916.

54 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Āmāder Sāhityik Abasād" (our literary despair), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1323 / July-August 1916.

Deficiency of writers, its causes and ways to resolve the difficulty was a predominant concern among publicists – some even drawing upon Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's famous *Baṅgadarśan* essay "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā" where the latter had espoused key principles for would-be writers.[55] Probing into the factors that made for an ill-defined literary sphere, some pointed to the lack of competent editors (*sampādak*) and secretaries (*kāryādhyakṣa*).[56] Other publicists were unanimous in what they perceived to be a pervasive disinterestedness on part of the educated Muslim youth. The Muslim students resident in Eliot and Baker hostels, it was believed, were indifferent towards their own society – their leisure priorities being largely confined to indolent pastimes, evening parties and theatre visits and in contrast to the literary meets hosted by the Hindu and Brahmo students of the Eden Hostel.[57] Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri observed that it was "not uncommon to come across young Muslim men in positions of deputy and sub-deputy *munsef* (magistrate). The youth hostels in Calcutta and Dhaka too beamed with well-groomed young graduates. Yet they were apathetic to literary practice (*sāhitya carcā*) … the result being that literary practice was left to the maulavis who made up for a majority of writers and yet the ones frowned upon by the English educated young men."[58] For Chaudhuri, the task of mentoring new writers out of the mass of unresponsive but educated young men, thoroughly unmoved by religion, politics and literature, was practically unachievable.[59] Hence a scathing sarcasm from a publicist in *Saogāt*, "… Omar Khayyam [Khayyam's works] is translated by Kantibabu [Kantichandra Ghosh] and Narendrababu [Narendra Deb] … and *Koran* and *Hadith* are translated by Girishbabu [Girishchandra Sen]".[60]

Referring to Muslim-Bengali periodicals of the pre-*Saogāt* period, Nasiruddin described their agenda (*uddeśya*) as propagation of Islam and bereft of what he identified as literary works enriched by a free intellect (*mukta buddhi*) and independent thought (*svādhīn cintā*).[61] This earlier phase of Bengali Muslim periodical production had been marked by a prohibition on fiction, pictures and illustrated front covers. They abounded with anti-fiction rhetoric

55 Shamsuddin Ahmad, "Āmāder Sāhitya" (our literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 10, Māgh 1322 / January-February 1916.

56 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī", *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 6 # 1, Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923.

57 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Āmāder Sāhityik Abasād".

58 Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, "Sāhitya Prasaṅga".

59 Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, "Sāhitya Prasaṅga".

60 Tasadduk Ahmad, "Āmāder Bhāṣā o Sāhitya" (our language and literature), *Saogāt*, Jyaiṣṭha 1333 / May-June 1926.

61 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 24–25.

that branded creative writing especially novels, as un-Islamic.[62] Novels, it was argued, perverted readers' taste and turned them into feeble, irresponsible and lethargic human beings that consequently proved disastrous for the society.[63] The main impediment for Nasiruddin was the various religious prohibitions (*bidhiniṣedh*) that bound Muslim writers. Under such circumstances, expressing "independent opinion" (*svādhīn matāmat*) with a "free mind" (*svādhīn cintā*) was virtually impossible. Even thoughtful writers, according to him, could not muster up the courage to break free of these precincts, fearing retaliation by the orthodoxy.[64] *Saogāt*, he hoped would remedy the dearth of literary authors.[65]

1.3 *Awaiting a Readership?*

The dominant mood prevalent among a significant section of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia was one of an all-pervasive disenchantment and backwardness crippling the Muslim society.[66] At the turn of the twentieth century, the number of Bengali Muslim writers was estimated at less than one hundred and that of readers at less than two thousand.[67] Describing the social profile of Bengali-Muslim readership at the turn of the twentieth century, Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, the editor of *Islām Pracārak* identified two groups of readers, the first, those who knew Bengali well and those who had a very ordinary or functional knowledge of the language.[68] The latter, he asserted, were more numerous. Readers from this group were mostly hesitant to subscribe to literary periodicals since they had very little understanding of formal Bengali prose, the medium that periodicals mostly used. However, Ahmad noted that the more "enthusiastic men" among this group could comprehend Islamic Bengali (*Islāmī Bāṅglā*), i.e. the language of Musalmani *puthi* very well.[69] Given the extent of non-literacy among the province's Muslims and the ubiquity and popularity of *puthi* texts among a predominantly small holding peasant

62 Ibid., 27, 33.

63 Mohammad Akram Khan and Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad respectively in Jyaiṣṭha / May-June and Āśvin / September-October 1327 / 1920 issues of *Āl-Eslām*. Quoted in Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 29–30.

64 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Se Kāle Musalmān Samāje Patra-patrikār Abasthā" in *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug*, p. 26.

65 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 24–25.

66 Syed Emdad Ali, "Sūcanā" (Introduction) in *Nabanūr*, v.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1310 / April-May 1903.

67 Anisuzzaman, op. cit., "Introduction", p. 45; citation from *Islām Pracārak*, 1903 [other bibliographic details not provided].

68 Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, "Ātmanibedan" in *Islām Pracārak*, v.3 #1, Śrāvaṇ 1306 / July-August 1899.

69 Ibid.

population, most Bengali Muslim periodicals continued to be low circulation journals, severely limited in terms of readership. The *Bengal Library Catalogues* recorded 1000 printed copies of each issue for both *Nabanūr* and *Kohinūr.*[70] If figures provided under the head "Number of Copies Printed" are any indication of popularity among readers, then Muslim periodicals like *Nabanūr* and mainstream journals like *Bhāratī*, *Bhāndār* and *Sāhitya* were comparable while corresponding figures for women's journals like *Mahilā* and *Jāhnavī* suggest these trailed far behind.[71]

In the absence of literate, habituated readerships, periodicals like *Āl-Eslām* and *Islām Pracārak* were disseminated in the countryside mainly through the efforts of itinerant religious preachers and volunteers associated with theologian-intellectuals like Munshi Meherulla, Ismail Hossain Siraji, Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi and Maulana Akram Khan.[72] The monthly *Kohinūr* ordinarily priced at Rs.2/ for a year's subscription, announced a discounted subscription of Re. 1/ for the "asamartha" (i.e. the underprivileged) as part of its effort to reach out and widen circulation.[73] The *Saogāt* editor testified that the majority of Bengal's Muslims, being underprivileged, did not have access to the literary culture of periodicals. Ordinary Hindu readers did not usually purchase these periodicals because they were run by Muslims and their content was primarily Islamic.[74] Muslim reader subscription for the mainstream Bengali journals edited and run by Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia was quite negligible too.[75] Most Muslim readers who chose to subscribe to periodicals, it was observed, preferred the established mainstream Hindu journals over the Muslim ones.[76]

The problem, several Muslim intellectuals concurred, was the relative 'backwardness' of the majority of Muslims in terms of access to social resources particularly education, lack of entrepreneur editors and gifted writers.[77] With perhaps the single exception of *Saogāt*, almost all other Bengali Muslim periodicals proved to be short lived, even as it was widely accepted that periodicals

70 *Bengal Library Catalogue* for the Fourth Quarter, 1905.

71 As per the *Bengal Library Catalogue* the "Number of Copies Printed" head showed *Bhāratī* with 1250 copies, *Bhāndār* with 1000, *Sāhitya* with 1600 and *Mahilā* and *Jāhnavī* at 325 and 300 respectively.

72 Mustafa Nurul Islam, op. cit. p. 13.

73 Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", p. 115.

74 Mohammed Nasiruddin, "Saogāter Nabaparyyāẏ" (Renewal of *Saogāt*) Nasiruddin, op. cit. p. 187.

75 Ibid., p. 18.

76 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī".

77 Ibid.

could be a profitable enterprise if competently organized.[78] Explaining the benefits of reading (that is, reading modern literature), Mohammad Lutfar Rahman described it as a way towards enhancement of life. Faith and prayer alone, he contended, could not cause uplift of life. Rather periodicals could be a medium of instruction in science and knowledge, interpretation of *Koran-Hadith*, entertainment and interaction, and was therefore potentially empowering.[79] Publicists were full of contempt about what they saw as an appalling unconcern among young Muslim students towards reading. In comparison, Hindu students were believed to be more enthusiastic about literary periodicals like *Prabāsī*, *Sabuj Patra*, *Sāhitya*, *Bhāratbarṣa*, *Mānasī* and *Marmabāṇī*, organizing literary meets and borrowing periodicals from literary clubs set up in hostels.[80] By the second decade of the century, several observers however did record marginal increase in the readership of fiction among Muslims, but lamented that preference for the modern literary genres was limited to fiction only.[81]

The making of a modern literary sphere sustained by a vibrant reader community was contingent upon the extension of education beyond primary schooling. Muslims constituted a definitive demographic majority in the province – estimates ranging from 52.3% of the overall population of the province in 1915 to about 55% in the mid-1920s.[82] The Census of 1921 reported an increase of approximately 1.25 million among the province's Muslim population, especially in the eastern districts like Dhaka where 92% of available cultivable

78 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Āmāder Sāhityik Abasād" (Our Literary Despair), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1323 / July-August 1916.

79 Mohammad Lutfar Rahman, "Sāhitya" (literature), *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 3 # 4, Māgh 1327 / January-February 1921.

80 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Sāhitya Prasaṅga", *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 10, Māgh 1323 / January-February 1917.

81 M. Ansari, "Musalmān Sāmaẏikī". Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Sāhitya Prasaṅga". Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Musalmān Sāhityik" (the Muslim litterateur), *Prabāsī*, v. 18 pt. 2 # 3 Pouṣ 1325 / December 1918-January 1919.

82 "Bāṅglāẏ Musalmān Jātir Janabahulatā" (demographic surge of the Muslim community in Bengal), *Āl-Eslām*, v.1 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1322 / May-June 1915. Report of the Committee appointed by the Bengal Govt. to consider questions connected with Muhammadan Education, 1915 (hence forth Report of 1915) reported population of Muslims in the province was 52.3% of the total population. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Hindu Musalmāner Hrāsbṝddhi" (Miscellaneous matters – comparative demography of Hindus and Muslims), *Prabāsī*, v. 22 pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1329 / December 1922 – January 1923. Anwar Hossain, "Bāṅglār Mosalmān O Prāthamik Śikṣā" (Bengal's Muslims and primary education), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v. 1 # 2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1334 / November-December 1927.

land was ploughed.[83] The province's Muslim population was concentrated predominantly in the eastern Bengal districts where Muslim cultivators exceeded Hindu peasants by more than 8 million.[84] In context of an intensifying commercialization of agrarian relations, a large mass of mostly Muslim smallholding peasantry became increasingly exposed to the uncertainties of global market fluctuations, their diverse rights over labor, land and rent endorsed by custom dissipated, flinging them into an ever deepening vortex of impoverishment.[85] For this vast mass of peasantry, access to a modern literary sphere, howsoever open and liberal, remained perpetually elusive.

As for the small segment of Muslim middle classes, progress in terms of education and professional opportunities continued to be limited till after the end of the War. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, very few Muslims with some working knowledge of English made it to the middle rungs of the colonial administration. Neither did they enjoy adequate representation in self-governing bodies like municipalities and district boards. An almost complete Hindu monopoly over education and the professions ensured unequal access to social resources and opportunities opened up by colonial rule. A sense of being unfairly disadvantaged was thus pervasive among a significant section of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia. To Bengali Muslim intellectuals it was indeed a strange paradox that a demographically robust community remained so backward, especially in terms of literacy. In 1906–07 for instance, only twelve Muslims in the eastern districts and Assam passed the First Arts exam and only one became a graduate.[86] The condition of education for the vast majority of Muslims in Bengal remained dismal even after public expenditure more than doubled during the five years between 1906–07 and 1911–12.[87] The Sadler Commission report (1919) recommended increase in the representation of Muslims in both Calcutta University and the proposed university at Dhaka, even as it expressed its dislike for communal representation in University governing bodies.[88] The period from the 1920s onwards was marked by an expansion in colonial educational and professional infrastructure for the province's Muslims – greater aid by way of scholarships,

83 Anonymous, "Bāṅglār Janasaṃkhyā" (Bengal's population), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.1 pt.1# 5, Bhādra 1329 / August-September 1922.

84 Report of 1915.

85 Sugata Bose, *Peasant Labor and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, Cambridge University Press, 1993. Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2014.

86 Zaheda Ahmad, "State and Education" in Sirajul Islam, *History of Bangladesh 1704–1971*, v.3 (Society and Culture), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1997, pp. 108–153.

87 Ahmad, p. 118.

88 Ibid., pp. 121–124.

availability of student hostels, recruitment as teachers and inspectors in the Department of Education, new private and government colleges especially in the east Bengal districts and finally the establishment of the Dhaka University. In response, overall enrolment of Muslim students in primary, secondary and college levels increased by 46% during 1906–11 while the corresponding figure for Hindus was 30%. Despite the advancement in opportunities, however, the Bengali Muslim community was unable to breach the Hindu domination over education and the professions. In a retrospect evaluation of the expansion in the primary and secondary education among Muslims, a publicist noted that statistics for the Dhaka district during the five year term between 1917–18 and 1921–22 showed an increase in primary education among Muslim boys and girls but the proportion dramatically declined when it came to higher education.[89] The reviewer noted with concern that while facilities and government expenditures with regard to primary, secondary and higher education were on the rise, Muslim presence beyond the primary level was insignificant. According to the 1911 census cited by Hossain, in the Dacca division, the proportion of literate adult Hindu males to literate adult Muslim males was 238.8 to 60.1 per 1000 and in the Presidency division the ratio was 249.8 to 96.1 per 1000.[90] The 1915 Report on Muslim education and its reforms too provided a similar estimate, the ratio of literate Muslim males to literate Hindu males approximating to 9:22.[91] One factor seen as responsible for the dropout of Muslim boys in the transition from primary to secondary levels was that schooling would have left the peasant household without any help, forcing boys from peasant families to give up education and help in farm work.[92] Even after more than a decade since the reformed madrasa scheme, only a small proportion of Muslim students made it to one of the three Islamic Intermediate Colleges.[93]

With an overwhelming majority of the non-literate Muslim population caught up in agrarian production and the ensuing circumstances of rent burden, landlessness and destitution, the prospect of a modern literary sphere as a space of social exchange never seemed bright. Confronted with what

---

89 Anwar Hossain, “Bāṅglār Mosalmān O Prāthamik Śikṣā” (Bengal’s Muslims and Elementary Education), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v. 1 # 2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1334 / November-December 1927. Tazeen M. Murshid also notes a drop in the number of Muslim pupils in middle and higher stages of school in the decade between 1916–17 and 1926–27. Tazeen M. Murshid, op. cit. p. 74.

90 Anwar Hossain, “Bāṅglār Mosalmān O Prāthamik Śikṣā”.

91 Report of 1915.

92 Anwar Hossain, “Bāṅglār Mosalmān O Prāthamik Śikṣā”.

93 Tazeen M. Murshid, op. cit. p. 77. According to Murshid in 1927, out of a total population of 11,09,237 Muslim students in the province, only 881 were reading in the first year Islamic Intermediate class, whereas as many as 50,999 boys were in recognized madrasas.

Nasiruddin described as an all-consuming darkness of non-literacy, Bengali Muslim periodicals production found it a virtually impossible to push the frontiers of their readerships. One therefore finds Bengali Muslim publicists constantly speculating on how best to maximize the advantages of demographic strength and adjust to the ubiquitous non-literacy within the community. The challenge they faced of fashioning a space for socialization and articulation of Bengali Muslim identity seemed insurmountable. The resolution, it came to be believed, lay in an unambiguous acceptance about the Bengaliness of the province's Muslim population. The way forward could be worked out only by instating Bengali as the mother language (*mātṝ bhāṣā*) of the province's Muslims.[94] Maulana Akram Khan suggested that the *jumā khutbā* (the Friday sermon) be delivered in Bengali in order to maximize access to religious and moral education.[95] As the following sections will endorse, this was a tenuous, yet richly textured endeavor, for it meant challenging the hegemonies of languages long identified as Islamic as well as that of the modern standardized Bengali prose crafted by the nineteenth-century Hindu intelligentsia. Working out the contours of a modern Musalmani Bengali also meant an irreversible turn away from the premodern textual culture of *puthi* literature.

2 The Language Debates and Bengali Muslims' Quest for a Literary Language

According to the noted linguist Sukumar Sen, prior to the nineteenth-century *Islāmi Bāṅglā* minus its "Hindi words and idioms" was hardly distinguishable from colloquial Bengali.[96] This quotidian language contained Arabic and Persian words in substantial measure since the sixteenth century, a period to which the first instances of Bengali prose have been dated.[97] After 1839, when Bengali replaced Persian as the administrative and legal language, Persian and Arabic words were systematically purged from a newly formed standardized prose that drew from a cache of Sanskrit grammar and vocabulary. The consequence of this modern, Bengali, canonized on Sanskritic lines by an English educated Bengali Hindu intelligentsia, was the perpetration of great

94 Golam Mostafa, "Muslim Sāhityer Gati O Lakṣya", *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v.1 # 4, Māgh 1334 / January-February, 1928.

95 Tazeen M. Murshid, op. cit. p. 140. Murshid opines that for Akram Khan, only the *khutbā*, and not the *namāj* (prayer) and *ājān* (call to prayer) could be delivered in Bengali.

96 Sukumar Sen, "Islāmi Bāṅglā", *Islāmi Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, Eastern Publishers, Calcutta, 2nd Edition 1973, pp. 183–187.

97 Ibid., p. 183.

divergence between the new literary language and an older shared literary tradition, including *Islāmi bhāṣā*.[98] Community boundaries further hardened when late nineteenth-century Islamic revivalist movements fervently condemned 'un-Islamic' syncretistic practices. The *nasihat-nāmāh* (manuals of religious instruction) authors, in a bid towards Islamicization, altered their previous eclectic linguistic styles and increasingly used a Bengali with copious infusions of Persian, Arabic and Urdu words. The Bengali script itself came to be structured from right to left following Arabic and Persian scripts and even the binds of such books were reversed.[99] The Islamicized Bengali of the *nasihat-nāmāh*s was an attempt on part of the mullahs to reject all that was 'un-Islamic' and emphasize a Muslim identity that was inconsistent with Bengali identity.[100] Secular romances and tales, notably the *kecchā*, continued to be written in an earlier shared *dobhāṣī* (literally, mixed lingo) or Islami Bengali and comprised a profitable bulk of Baṭtalā prints. Sukumar Sen has traced this vast heterogeneous corpus of romances, tales and epics – a literary culture that he identifies as drawn from a Hindi-Persian verse tradition – to the medieval courts of Roshang and Gour in eastern India.[101] Sufi poets like Alaoal, Malik Muhammad Jaysi and Daulat Kazi drew on a pre-existing reserve of locally circulating tales to compose romantic ballads like *Padmāvat* and *Lor Chandrānī*. Some of the folk tales, even as they were based upon Islamic themes and couched in Sufi devotion, were suffused with iconographies and practices surrounding local deities like Banbibi and Mangalcandi. Into the nineteenth century it was this cache of ballads and romances that constituted the major chunk of Baṭtalā prints. The printing of these Islami Bengali verse was not a monopoly of Muslim publishers alone. Hindu authors and publishers too partook in the printing and transmission of these popular genres.[102] *Bikramāditya Upākhyān*, *Tutināmā*, *Hātemtāi*, *Yusuf-Julekhā*, *Lailā-Majnu*, *Golebākaoeli*, *Gole-Hormuj*, *Ārabya Upanyās*, *Pārasya Upanyās* were equally popular among Hindu and Muslim rural poor, petty traders, shopkeepers, agents and small servicemen.[103] At the turn of the twentieth century, the collective audience for these folk genres indicates an eclectic literary culture yet to be fissured by hardened religious identities. The elite among Bengal's Muslims however, unambiguously identified with Arabic, Persian and Urdu, rather than Bengali. Most treated *Baṭtalā puthi*, including the more 'Islamicized' *nasihat-nāmāh*s,

98 Ibid., p. 186.
99 Rafiuddin Ahmad, op. cit. pp. 82–92. Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 264–265.
100 Rafiuddin Ahmad, op. cit. p. 91.
101 Sukumar Sen, op. cit. pp. 30–33.
102 Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. p. 270.
103 Sukumar Sen, pp. 118–119 and pp. 130–131. Anindita Ghosh, op. cit. pp. 274–275.

with disdain, condemning them as un-Islamic and inappropriate for polite use. Linguistic differentiations within the literary culture of pre-modern Bengali therefore reflected class divides rather than splits along communitarian lines.

In colonial bureaucratic perception, the syncretic *dobhāṣī* Bengali increasingly crystallized into 'Musalmani Bengali' distinct from the Sanskritized, reformed Bengali prose that was fast acquiring a 'Hindu' character. The various ethnographic surveys of the Bengal province, including the Censuses grafted a religious divide on to what had until then been a largely shared vernacular. The introduction of a 'Musalmāni' variety of Bengali in colonial records only helped perpetrate a further compartmentalization of the Bengali language along community divide. In colonial records 'Musalmani Bengali' was now understood as a 'dialect' of literary importance in which "colloquial vocabulary is supplemented by words derived from Persian and Arabic sources and not from Sanskrit".[104] It had been introduced as a distinct language category with enumerated publications in the *Bengal Library Catalogues* in 1891 alongside Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Assamese and other vernaculars that were published in the province as well. The *Linguistic Survey of India* coordinated and compiled by Grierson equated the dialect of the eastern districts with Musalmani Bengali,[105] a move that was viewed with suspicion by sections of the Hindu elite. For the latter it held out a threat of bifurcating Bengali language and literature.[106] On the eve of the partition of Bengal, with the eastern districts set to become a separate administrative unit, the divisive potentials of Grierson's project seemed real to the nationalist elite.[107]

For an upcoming Bengali Muslim middle class, the literary culture of *puthi* and the shared idiom of *dobhāṣī* or Islāmī Bengali in which the manuscript tradition was embedded belonged irretrievably to a bygone era. The changes in literary sensibilities produced by colonial modernity sought a new language for expression. For intellectuals like Munshi Abdul Karim the Bengali Muslims'

104 *Bengal Census Report* for 1901, p. 318 cited in Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bāṅglār Bhāṣā bhed", *Prabāsī*, v. 5 # 1, Baiśākh 1312 / April-May 1905.

105 *Linguistic Survey of India*, v. 5, Part 1 [Indo-Aryan Family: Eastern Group: Specimens of the Bengali and Assamese Languages]; published by the Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1903. The *Survey* identified Eastern Bengali as the most important dialect, given that it had the maximum number of enumerated speakers. Since a majority of the population of the eastern districts (including Dacca, Faridpur, Jessore and Khulna Mymensingh, Tippera and Backergunge in Bengal and Sylhet and Cachar in Assam) were Muslims, the *Survey* equated the dialect and its variations as Musalmāni Bengali. p. 201–202.

106 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Sāmaẏik Prasaṅga", *Prabāsī*, v. 3 # 11, Phālgun 1310 / February-March 1903.

107 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bāṅglār Bhāṣā bhed".

identity was rooted in the premodern textual culture of the *puthi*. His tours of the Bengal countryside in search for *puthi* texts and his prolific researches represented a specific quest for selfhood that would etch out a distinct identity for Bengal's Muslims.[108] Again, for the radical liberals like Kazi Abdul Wadud, *puthi* represented the entertainment needs of a juvenile community and idealizing *puthi* as *sāhitya* constituted an undermining of the term *sāhitya* itself.[109] Wadud identified the "new literature" as elemental to contemporary Bengali Muslim awakening (*jāgaraṇ*). This new literature was primarily an urban effort confined in its production and reception to the educated Bengali Muslim middle classes. For the new intelligentsia a modern literary sphere analogous to the Hindu-Brahmo mainstream one had to be replicated if a vibrant *jātīya jīban* was to be attained. Evidently, this new sphere of literariness and public exchanges could not be sustained by the premodern *dobhāṣī* lingo. In this vision of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere, *puthi* texts embodied a sort of pre-'literary' past of this literary sphere worthy of edification and preservation in print. Yet the *puthi* survived not simply as a passive archive of a literary tradition that had been erased, but rather as a living form that made up the social universe of a majority of Bengal's Muslims.[110] The advent and popularity of fiction (*kathā-sāhitya*) in particular had rendered the *dobhāṣī* somewhat outmoded. Debates thus surfaced over the significance of the Bengali language for Muslims and the making of a distinctly modern Musalmāni Bengali. For a new Muslim intelligentsia, the modern Musalmāni Bengali was to be distinct from both the Sanskritized Bengali of the Hindus as well as the *dobhāṣī* or Islāmī Bāṅglā of the *puthi* tradition.

The language debates constituted a primary axis around which the Bengali Muslims' search for their own identity took shape. The Bengali Muslim periodicals as well as the mainstream Hindu-Brahmo journals abound with vibrant contestations around the language question, with leading and lesser known publicists stepping in and lending nuances to the debates. Contrary to common presumption, the language debates of the Bengali Muslims, richly textured as they were, extended beyond the simple opposition between Bengali

---

108 Gautam Bhadra, *Munshi Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad O Atmasattvar Rajniti*, Sanhati Prakashan, Dhaka, 1414 / 2007.

109 Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Musalman Sāhityik", *Prabāsī*, v. 18, pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1325 / December 1918-January 1919.

110 Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Two Histories of Literary Culture in Bengal" in Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, Permanent Black, 2014, p. 69. Kaviraj's observations relate to the Vaiṣṇava padābalī tradition, where he argues that a literary tradition survives not simply as a "living literature but within the living anthology of the tradition, available to be played upon by a new literary sensibility or a historically recreated consciousness."

on the one hand and Arabic-Persian-Urdu on the other. Neither was the language debates confined to the Muslim periodicals only. Several mainstream periodicals like *Prabāsī* and *Māsik Basumatī* were drawn into the debates as well, energetically welcoming the claims of Bengali as the mother language of the province's Muslims and persuading non-Muslim readers to be receptive towards Muslim writers and their works.[111] This section will explore dimensions of the debate beyond the simplistic opposition between Bengali and Urdu, facets that reflected Bengali Muslim publicists' serious engagements with the question of formulating a language useable for an emergent public sphere. A formidable section of the Bengali Muslim publicists vociferously denied any claims of Urdu as the language of the province's Muslims, thus reinforcing their differences with Muslim populations of north and northwestern India. At the same time, the crafting of a distinct literary language for Bengali Muslims challenged the Hindu-Brahmo domination of the Bengali literary sphere. By the opening of the twentieth century, it is no longer possible to speak of a single modern literary sphere. Much of the language debates turned on two major considerations – first, the felt need for a language form distinct from that used by the Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia and middle classes; and second, a language form capable of reaching out to the masses of rural, poor Muslims.

The bureaucracy and the Muslim intelligentsia became engaged in protracted debates on whether Bengali ought to be the medium of instruction in *maktabs* (primary schools for Muslim students). The 1915 Report on Muslim Education noted that weighed down by the task of having to learn multiple languages, Muslim boys faced serious encumbrances in their overall education:

> While a Bengali Hindu is required to read only three languages, viz, English, Bengali and Sanskrit, a Bengali Moslem boy has to read as many as five: Arabic, Persian, Urdu, English and Bengali. This burden of languages has very seriously told upon the general educational progress of Mussalmans in Bengal. But while its injurious effect has been thoroughly realized by the leaders of the community, they have not been able to shake off the idea that the study of three languages, viz, Arabic, Persian and Urdu is indispensable for Moslems. Two other languages are necessary: English and Bengali. Without the former, neither a secondary nor a University education is possible; the latter is the vernacular of the great

111 Anonymous, "Ghare Bāhire" section in *Māsik Basumatī*, v.1 pt. 1 #4, Śrāvaṇ 1329 / July-August 1922.

> majority of Moslems in Bengal and some knowledge of it is a necessity of everyday life. We have carefully examined these questions of languages to see whether the number of languages can be curtailed.[112]

The Report proceeded to suggest that out of the three languages in question, i.e. Arabic, Persian and Urdu, only the third was "the most important language for Moslems to learn at school" besides the necessary instructions in English and Bengali.[113] Bureaucratic assessments partly concurred with deepening conviction amongst an influential section of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia on what they perceived as unnecessary training in all the languages, with an important difference that unlike the colonial state, the latter preferred Arabic to Urdu. These intellectuals underscored the need for Muslim students to train in English and Bengali.[114] A persistent concern amongst the more liberal Muslim intellectuals was that compared to Bengali Muslims, Bengali Hindus were better off as a result of their access to English education that gave them admittance to the modern professions and ways of life.[115] The quest for an analogous cultural awakening amongst Bengal's Muslims therefore had much of a socio-economic impetus as well.[116] In his presidential address at the *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ*, Mohammad Shahidullah sorted out the languages according to their respective roles in the lives of Bengal's Muslims. In his

---

112 *Report of the Committee Appointed by the Bengal Govt. to Consider Questions Connected with Muhammadan Education* (1915).

113 Ibid.

114 Bengali Muslim literary periodicals were inundated with essays emphasizing the need to replace Persian and Arabic with Bengali in schools: Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Ārabi Viśva Vidyālaẏ" (Arabic University), *Āl-Eslām*, Āṣāṛh 1327 / June-July, 1920. Tariqul Alam, "Āmāder Śikṣā-Samasyā" (dilemmas in our education), *Moslem Bhārat*, Phālgun 1327 / February-March 1921. Sofia Khatun, "Ādhunik Śikṣā" (modern education), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 6 # 1, Baiśākh 1330 / April-May 1923. Anwarul Qader, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāmājik Galad" (social flaws of the Bengali Muslims), *Śikṣā*, Caitra 1333 / March-April, 1926. Abul Hossain, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Śikṣā-Samasyā" (the Bengali Muslims' dilemmas concerning education), 1333 / 1926) quoted in Maneer, p. 348.

115 Abul Hossain lamented that while Bengali 'Hindus' had access to "world knowledge" (*viśwa-jñān*) Muslims of Bengal were rapidly falling off. Ibid.

116 The 1915 Report highlighted the 'lack' of English education amongst the province's Muslims and provided the following ratio between English educated Hindu and Muslim men: Total Hindu Males: 10848217; Literates: 2278004; English educated: 375111. Total Muslim Males: 12377215; Literates: 976190; English educated: 61924. The majority of the Muslims in Bengal were drawn from the poorer sections of the rural population. By contrast the Hindu middle classes who migrated to Calcutta for education or in search of jobs possessed some landed interests, either as large or medium-range landlords, tenure holders or just ties with the ancestral home. The latter therefore controlled some degree of land, labor or capital.

scheme, Arabic was the language of the scriptures (*dharma bhāṣā*), Persian, the language of Islamic civilization (*sabhya bhāṣā*), Urdu was the language of communication for Indian Muslims (*āntarjanīn bhāṣā*), English, the official language (*rāj bhāṣā*) and finally, Bengali which was the mother language (*mātṛ bhāṣā*) of a majority of Bengal's Muslims.[117] Concurring with the official stance on Muslim students having to bear the burden of learning five languages, Shahidullah argued for Bengali as the medium of education in maktabs, madrasas and schools along with compulsory training in Arabic and English. Offering Persian and Urdu as optional in schools and colleges, he felt, would suffice.[118] Shahidullah would continue to emphasize the futility of trying to adopt any of the 'foreign' languages as the literary language of the province's Muslims.[119] Kazi Abdul Wadud, a liberal intellectual asserted that it would not be easy for Bengali Muslims to renounce the language (i.e. Bengali) that had due to geographical and temporal factors, been their vernacular for centuries.[120] Muzaffar Ahmad was even more forthright, disapproving of Urdu as a language suitable for Bengali Muslims. Originally a language of north Indian bazaars and cantonments, Ahmad argued Urdu literary tradition carried much that was inauthentic – either mere translations from Persian and Arabic literatures or un-Islamic contaminations (*halāhal*). The historicity of Musalmani Bengali literary tradition constituted by epic works like *Padmābatī Kābya* predated the times when Urdu was still an undefined vernacular in any north Indian bazaar. In terms of sheer figures too, Ahmad continued, Bengali speaking Muslims outnumbered the Urdu speaking population.[121] In an editorial note to Ahmad's essay, the editor of *Āl-Eslām*, Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi disagreed with the author, stating that Urdu was indispensable in so far as it was potentially the only language of communication among Muslims from different parts of the subcontinent.[122] Even at the height of pan-Islamic emotions during the Khilafat agitations, several Bengali Muslim publicists displayed a

117 Mohammad Shahidullah, "Dvitīẏa Baṅgīẏa Musalmān-Sāhitya Sammelaner Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣan" (presidential address at the second Bengali-Muslim literary convention), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1325 / April-May 1918.

118 Ibid.

119 Mohammad Shahidullah's lecture at Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣad, "Bāṅglā Sāhitya O Chātra Samāj" (Bengali literature and the student community), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 3 # 3, Kārtik 1327 / October-November 1920.

120 Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Musalmān Sāhityik", *Prabāsī*, v. 18 pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1325 / December 1918-January 1919.

121 Muzaffar Ahmad, "Urdu bhāṣā o Baṅgīẏa Musalmān" (Urdu and the Bengali Muslim), *Āl-Eslām*, v.3 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1324 / July-August 1917. Ahmad claimed that even towering Urdu intellectuals like Maulana Shibli Numani were not entirely free of such accretions.

122 Editorial note to Muzaffar Ahmad, "Urdu bhāṣā o Baṅgīẏa Musalmān".

deep distrust for Urdu. Another publicist Mohammad Lutfar Rahman argued that Bengali was the domestic language, the *gṝher bhāṣā* of Bengal's Muslims and therefore their *mātṛ bhāṣā.* If Bengali indeed had to be done away with, then the ideal language for Muslims worldwide, including those of Bengal would be Arabic rather than Urdu. Both Muzaffar Ahmad and Mohammad Lutfar Rahman dismissed Calcutta's Urdu speaking populations, both the urban poor and the upper classes as mostly unreformed. Describing the Calcutta Muslims as a motley group (*khicuṛī Mosalmān*), Ahmad argued that on seeing them, it was difficult to figure out what their *mātṝ bhāṣā* was, hence the robust claims made in favor of Urdu. But the rural reality was different. Like most other publicists, Ahmad emphasized that an overwhelming majority of Bengal's Muslims spoke Bengali.[123] Lutfar Rahman argued that for the Calcutta groups, the idea of *yukta Islām* or united Islam meant nothing more than the subjugation of non-Islamic societies. These Urdu speaking residents of Bengal could be reformed only by incorporating them within the socio-literary space of Bengali Hindus and Muslims.[124]

The reluctance to acknowledge Bengali as the mother-tongue and literary vehicle of the province's Muslims and a prejudice for the 'Islamic' languages, especially Urdu, lingered on well into the second decade of the twentieth century. The pages of several distinguished literary journals reveal not simply the prevailing uncertainty over Bengali within elite circles but also the passion and steadfastness with which several writers insisted on Bengali as the vernacular of the province's Muslims.[125] The debate, Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad argued, was meaningless since the choice posited was between a living language like Bengali and Arabic and Persian that were lifeless languages (*mṝta bhāṣā*) and Urdu a language of India's northwest.[126] By the late-1920s, the Bengali-Urdu debate was seen on the whole as settled. As S. Wajed Ali argued, given that a majority of the province's Muslims spoke Bengali, it would indeed have been anti-democratic had the verdict of the debate been in favor of Urdu.[127] Even as late as 1928, periodicals like *Mohāmmadī* resisted attempts to make Urdu

---

123 Muzaffar Ahmad, "Urdu bhāṣā o Baṅgīẏa Musalmān".

124 Mohammad Lutfar Rahman, "Urdu O Bāṅglā Sāhitya" (Urdu and Bengali literature), *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 4 # 1, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921.

125 Periodicals like the *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* provided space for dissenting opinion that expressed displeasure at the choice of Bengali but the editorial policy of the *Patrikā* remained unchanged and firmly in favor of Bengali. Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", p. 49.

126 Abdul Karim, "Baṅgīẏa Musalmāner Baṅga Sāhitya Carcā", *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), v. 2 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1322 / November-December 1915.

127 S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā", *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v. 1 # 7, Baiśākh 1335 / April-May 1928.

compulsory for Muslim students of Calcutta University.[128] Nevertheless, this drawn out debate over Bengali and Urdu was more easily resolved than the related debate over the ideal literary language of Bengali Muslims. Most periodicals carried extensive essays on the suitable uses of Bengali for Muslim writers and readers – testifying to the abiding concern that language had become.[129] Evidently the debate was no longer only about whether Bengali was the first language of the province's Muslims, rather the terms of the debate had shifted towards reshaping Bengali in a way that would resonate the imaginations and aspirations of Bengal's Muslim community. Alongside the strident claims of Bengali as the vernacular of the province's Muslims, the language debate turned on a key concern: the need to formulate a modern literary language distinctly identifiable as Muslim Bengali and the modalities for working it out. It was this question that produced some sparkling debates on the language question with publicists broaching diverse possibilities for resolution. Suggestions included imaginative resolutions like scripting Bengali in Arabic characters and formalizing the precolonial *do-bhāṣī*[130] to inventing new Bengali alphabets so that modern Bengali prose could be made more accommodative to Arabic vocabulary.[131] Post-Bengali-Urdu divide, the language question and the creative responses it engendered indicate how a carefully crafted literary language was central to the fashioning of a community identity. Musalmāni Bāṅglā as the expressive medium of Bengali Muslims had to be differentiated from Bengali loaded with Hindu-imageries and words describing Hindu concepts and practices. For an influential section of pedagogues, the textual tradition of *puthi sāhitya* belonged unambiguously to the past, with little consequence for the modern literary sphere.[132] Such distancing from precolonial *do-bhāṣī* (mixed lingos of the masses) and configuring a modern Musalmāni Bāṅglā were looked upon as preconditions for a public life to emerge.

The resolution that acquired optimal consensus was the use of *sādhu bhāṣā* or formal Bengali with Perso-Arabic vocabulary wherever needed and minimum employment of overtly Sanskritized words. From the middle of the

128 Anisuzzaman, op. cit., "Introduction", p. 48.

129 Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Musalmān Sāhityik" in *Prabāsī*, v. 18 pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1325 / December 1918-January 1919. Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Sāhityiker Sādhanā" (literary commitment and practice), *Moslem Bhārat*, Baiśākh 1327 / April-May 1920. Golam Mostafa, "Muslim Sāhityer Gati O Lakṣya" in *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928. Syed Emdad Ali, "Bāṅglā Bhāshā O Musalmān" (the Bengali language and Muslims), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Caitra 1334 / March-April 1928.

130 Khademul Eslam Bangabasi, "Bāṅgālīr Mātṛbhāṣā" (the Bengalis' mother-language), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 7, Kārtik 1322 / October-November 1915.

131 S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā".

132 Ibid.

nineteenth century, an increasingly standardized and structured form of the vernacular the *sādhu bhāṣā* (literally, genteel language) had come to be fashioned by the bilingual Hindu intelligentsia through their literary endeavors. The noted linguist and historian of the Bengali language Sukumar Sen has traced the formation of a distinctly styled Islamic Bāṅglā or Muslim Bengali from the late nineteenth-century as a reaction to the standardized and visibly Sanskritized Bengali of the Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia – a division along ostensibly religious lines that shaped the discrete histories of the two communities in the province.[133] Contrary to common assumptions however, it is hard to come across a prose piece in any of the Bengali Muslim periodicals that was not written in *sādhu bhāṣā* – underscoring the formal style's indispensability as a literary medium for a modern public sphere.[134] Its acceptance among a majority of Muslim publicists was factored by the feasibility of its standardized form vis-à-vis the numerous spoken forms across the province.[135] A standardized form alone, it was argued, could make literary language universal (*sārbabhoumik*).[136] The approval for the formal literary style pertained to the structural forms of the *sādhu bhāṣā*, especially with regard to verb and tense use. Interestingly, here the paradigm for a modern literary language delineated by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in his *Baṅgadarśan* essay "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā" was upheld as the normative.[137] This was indeed paradoxical given that most Muslim publicists denounced Bankim for what was perceived as his prejudice towards Muslims. Following Bankim, Shamsuddin Ahmad argued that the most viable option was an easily comprehensible refined language (*sahajbodhya biśuddha bhāṣā*) close to the spoken form. As instances of this ideal language, Ahmad pointed to the mature Bankim of the *Baṅgadarśan* and *Pracār* phase, a period when Bankim produced his three final novels, *Ānandamaṭh*, *Sītārām* and especially *Debī Coudhurāṇī*.[138]

133 Sukumar Sen, *Baṭtalār Chāpā O Chabi*, Ananda Publishers, 1984.

134 Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, 'Sāhitya Prasaṅga: Sāhitya carcār abasthā' (literature in context; condition of literary practice), *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Phālgun 1322 / February-March 1915. Syed Emdad Ali, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā O Musalmān", *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v.1 # 6, Caitra 1334 / March-April 1928. Both Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri and Syed Emdad Ali testified that apart from a few prose pieces in *Prabāsī* a majority of writings in Bengali periodicals, dailies, weeklies and monthlies, followed the *sādhu bhāṣā*.

135 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Jātīẏa Sāhitye Hindu Musalmān" (the Hindu and Muslim in national literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 # 1, Baiśākh 1323 / April-May 1916.

136 Shamsuddin Ahmad, "Āmāder Sāhitya" (our literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 10, Māgh 1322 / January-February 1916.

137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.

Evidently a response to Pramatha Chaudhuri's advocacy of the *calit bhāṣā* (literally the current or spoken form) through his journal *Sabuj Patra*, Ahmad resisted the standardization of the spoken form of Calcutta. There could be no rationale, he asserted, for privileging the Calcutta dialect which was only one among the numerous district dialects of Bengal.[139] Besides, he explained, in line with Bankim that the written form (*likhaner bhāṣā*) was best suited to purposes of pedagogy and intellectual praxis, a task that the spoken form (*kathaner bhāṣā*) was unequipped to perform.[140] The *calit* form of Bengali varied considerably across sub-regions of undivided Bengal. Moreover the overall structure of the spoken form and their respective verb usages were vastly different in the eastern and western parts of Bengal. Pramatha Chaudhuri's standardization of the *calit* form had prioritized the spoken form current in the Hooghly, Howrah, 24-Parganas, Calcutta, Nadia, Murshidabad, Burdwan and Midnapore regions that Grierson's 1903 *Linguistic Survey* had identified as 'Central or Standard Bengali'. Syed Emdad Ali too for instance favored the structural format of the *sādhu bhāṣā* while making the language more agile by incorporating vocabulary from daily use, including Perso-Arabic words.[141] Even *Saogāt*, the liberal-minded journal that dared to broach alternative interpretations of Islamic piety, continued with the formal language. A few publicists like S. Wajed Ali for instance emphatically drew from the linguistic innovations of *Sabuj Patra*, not plainly replicating the spoken form but using a formalized language with the verb variant of *calit bhāṣā*.[142] These exchanges concerning an appropriate literary language for Bengali Muslims mirror the emotional, cultural and political investment that the making of a literary sphere had become. The search for a normative language form had much to do with the urge connect with the voices of the non-literate, cultivating masses of poor Muslims.

While *sādhu bhāṣā* became the preferred language form for most Bengali Muslim periodicals, publicists categorically rejected use of Bengali *taṯsama* words, i.e. vocabulary derived directly from Sanskrit.[143] The abundance of *taṯsama* words, many of which were seen as unnecessary and synthetic, was believed to be the fallout of an attitude of "untouchability" (*sparśadoṣ*)

---

139 Ibid.

140 Ibid.

141 Syed Emdad Ali, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā O Musalmān".

142 S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā" (literary dilemmas of Bengal's Muslims).

143 Anisuzzaman also argues that the consensus was overwhelmingly in favor of a pure form of Bengali (*biśuddha bhāṣā*) containing prevalent Perso-Arabic words. Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", p. 49.

towards Arabic, Persian and Urdu words.[144] In actual usage however, the dismissal amounted to a rejection of those words that conveyed specifically Hindu religious ideas. Prevailing Bengali words the meaning of which contradicted or subverted Islamic beliefs and values like *ejanme* (in this life), *Bāgdevī* (*Sarasvatī*, the Goddess of learning) and *yamadut* (the messenger of the God of death, Yama) – were to be avoided in literary use.[145] Rejecting the claims of formalized Bengali of the mid-nineteenth century as artificial and Hinduized, several Muslim publicists asserted the appropriateness of Perso-Arabic words that were popularly in use for centuries before colonial rule. Khademul Eslam listed fifty seven such words alongside their formal Bengali synonyms and advised readers to refrain from using the latter as far as possible.[146] Words the list endorsed included mostly non-religious terms such as *ketāb* (book), *jewar* (jewelry), *śaram* (shame) etc. These Eslam affirmed were *sābek* or old words that were used and understood by a majority of Bengal's Muslims. Replacing these with new words like *pustak* (book), *alaṃkār* (jewelry) and *lajjā* (shame) could be self-defeating for the formation of a Bengali Muslim literary sphere, given that non-literate and semi-literate Muslims would take up years to acquire fluency in the new vocabulary.[147] Eslam's position differed significantly from that of others who argued that Perso-Arabic and Urdu terms were to be used only where appropriate Bengali synonyms did not exist, particularly when conveying Islamic concepts. A growing number of writers came to be convinced that though the Bengali language did contain a significant number of words of Perso-Arabic origin, loading the language with Persian and Arabic words would unnecessarily complicate and make incomprehensible to both Hindu and Muslim readers their own use of Bengali.[148] It was preferable to use ordinary Bengali words like *svarga* (heaven) and *narak* (hell) instead of *behest* and *dojakh* or even *snān* (bath) and *āhār* (meal) instead of *gochal* and *khānā* respectively, but words like *upāsanā* (prayers) and *upabās* (fasting) that did not adequately convey the meanings of the concepts of *nāmāj* (daily prayers) and *rojā* (ritual fasting during the month of Ramzan) were not be used as stand-ins for the Islamic terms.[149] Still others like Sheikh Habibur Rahman pointed out that words like *pāni* (water), *kagaj* (paper), *doẏāt* (inkpot) and *kalam* (pen) were so intrinsic to the Bengali language that the latter would be

144 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Jātīẏa Sāhitye Hindu Musalmān".
145 Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, 'Sāhitya Prasaṅga: Sāhitya carcār abasthā'.
146 Khademul Eslam Bangabasi (probably pen name), "Bāṅgālīr Mātṛbhāṣā".
147 Ibid.
148 Syed Emdad Ali, "Bāṅglā Bhāṣā O Musalmān".
149 Mohammad Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, 'Sāhitya Prasaṅga: Sāhitya carcār abasthā'.

left crippled if such words were removed.[150] A furor broke out when a book reviewer for *Prabāsī* objected to the use of the word *pāni* (water, used more commonly by Muslims) labeling it as *acal* (motionless, not in vogue). Citing demographic figures of the province's Muslims, publicists like Sheikh Habibur Rahman and Mohammad K. Chand asked how could a word used by more than half the province's total population be considered non-prevalent.[151] Besides, as Mohammad K. Chand argued, it would be impossible to eliminate a whole range of legal-administrative terms that were derived from Arabic, Persian and Urdu. Chand listed almost thirty such terms of Persian origin which he argued had become indistinguishable from any other Bengali words. These included terms such as: *ādālat* (court), *mokaddamā* (case), *nāliś* (complaint), *ārji* (petition), *hākim*(magistrate), *meẏād* (tenure), *āin* (law) and *pattākabuliẏāṯ* (deed confirming tenancy entitlements).[152] Prominent Hindu intellectuals like Haraprasad Shastri too resisted homogenizing the Bengali language, drawing attention to the absurdity of Sanskritizing the entire corpus of Bengali vocabulary, for instance, the attempts by several Hindu writers to substitute commonly used words like *kalam* (pen) with *lekhanī* – a term he himself considered to be hybrid.[153] As for the perceived need to create an adequate scientific vocabulary in the vernacular S. Wajed Ali for instance argued for an eclectic approach wherein suitable Bengali synonyms could be framed by drawing upon Arabic, Sanskrit and English repertoires.[154]

3 The Debates on Genres: Fiction or History?

> … The printing presses churn out numerous newspapers, periodicals and books daily. But how many one may ask concern science, philosophy, history and biography? Most periodicals are full of senseless love stories and

150 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Jātīẏa Sāhitye Hindu-Musalmān" (Hindu-Muslim in National Literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 1, Baiśākh 1323 / April-May 1916.

151 Sheikh Habibur Rahman, "Jātīẏa Sāhitye Hindu-Musalmān". Mohammad K. Chand, "Baṅgabhāṣā O Musalmān" (the Bengali language and Muslims), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 # 11 & 12, Phālgun-Caitra 1323 / February-March and March-April 1917.

152 Mohammad K. Chand, "Baṅgabhāṣā O Musalmān".

153 Several Muslim publicists commended Shastri for voicing resentment at what seemed to them to be blatant attempts at Sanskritization: Shamsuddin Ahmad, "Āmader Sāhitya" (Our Literature), *Āl-Eslām*, v.1 # 10, Māgh 1322 / January-February 1916. Mohammad Ahbab Chaudhuri, "Iśvar Śabder Byābahār" (the use of the word Iśvar), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 4, Phālgun 1333 / February-March 1927.

154 S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Samasyā".

> contain very little by way of well researched, original essays… Most readers seem very eager to read novels and love stories.[155]

This anxiety voiced by the eminent poet Ismail Hossain Siraji echoes the anti-fiction rhetoric that dominated the mainstream Bengali literary sphere, an indication of how rising popularity of fiction opened up an analogous debate within the Bengali Muslim literary sphere. The debates over genres constituted the template for configuring an ideal literary sphere. As in the larger mainstream literary sphere, here too, an anti-fiction rhetoric was evidently a response to the perceived threat of vulgarity that was believed to corrupt reading choices and lead towards a degenerate public sphere. More directly however, the debates over genres had to do with the perceived maturity or otherwise of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere. Few publicists doubted that this was a still nebulous literary sphere that needed careful nurturing. Genres such as history, epics and biographies were looked upon as the ones that would enhance and energize this literary sphere. Drawing upon the antecedents of Renaissance Europe and nineteenth-century Bengal, prominent Muslim publicists were convinced that these genres were crucial in the formative stages of a literary sphere. Fiction, in this teleology, was the product of a more mature literary culture just as *do-bhāṣī* romances, fables and *puthi* texts embodied an irretrievable past of this literary sphere.

For most publicists both modern novels and the Baṭtalā tales (*upākhyān*) and *puthi* alike could potentially hinder the grooming of informed and aesthetically sensible readers.[156] In 1903, *Islām Pracārak* had objected to the reprints of puthi texts like *Lailā-Majnu*, expressing apprehension that such readings would corrupt young minds.[157] The periodical also objected to *Mihir o Sudhākar* carrying advertisements and critical reviews of theatre performances, fearing Muslim readers being drawn into a "terrifying hell".[158] Emulating mainstream (Hindu) literary production in terms of romantic verses and fiction, it was argued, could be futile and self-defeating, given that the Bengali Muslim *sāhitya kṣetra* needed to pass through a preparatory stage before its literature

155 Siraji, "Sāhityaśakti o Jātisaṃgaṭhan" (the power of literature and nation building), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1322 / November-December 1915.

156 Abdul Mannan, "Sāhitya o Itihās" (literature and history), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 9, Pouṣ 1322 / December 1915-January 1916.

157 Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", p. 50.

158 Ebne Ma'aj, "Mihir o Sudhākarer Ruci bikār" (Corrupted aesthetics of Mihir o Sudhākar), *Islām Pracārak*, v.3 # 9&10, Caitra 1306 and Baiśākh 1307 / March-April and April-May 1900.

could reach out and become inclusive.[159] The necessary requisite for the Bengali Muslim literary sphere was not a Rabindranath but epic poets like Hemchandra (Bandyopadhyay) and Michael (Madhusudan Dutta).[160] Siraji argued that compared to history, biography, philosophy, theology, politics and science, fiction reading seldom bestowed any benefit and was certainly not meant for all.[161] Reiterating its agenda in unambiguous terms, the monthly *Āl-Eslām*, coordinated by theologians of the Anjuman Ulema-e Bangla, proclaimed itself as a periodical devoted to "reform of aesthetic taste (*ruci saṃskār*), social reform (*samāj saṃskār*) and changing the people's mindset".[162] It was thus futile on part of its readers to expect light entertainment in the form of fiction and poetry. Instead, it asserted that as dispensers of moral education, the ulema associated with the periodical would continue to concentrate on essays on historical, social and religious themes, fully aware that these were far less popular than fiction.[163] The organic analogy deployed by self-proclaimed custodians of public taste like Jatindramohan Sinha found resonance in the Bengali Muslim literary sphere with the Anjuman deciding on the need for "bitter medicines" (*tikta ouṣadh*) to revive a "crippled society" (*pīṛita samāj*).[164]

In what was a sharply polarized debate, several other publicists argued differently, that Muslim Bengali literature needed to move beyond the restrictive and 'inward-looking' genres like history and biography – the need of the hour being creative literature like those of the 'Hindus'. They frequently regretted what they perceived to be a 'lack' of imaginative literature, uninhibited by religious distinctions and capable of interacting with other literatures.[165] A consensus emerged among pro-fiction publicists regarding the effectiveness of fiction in reforming the lives of ordinary readers. None of the non-fiction

159 Mohammad. Wajed Ali, 'Bāṅglā Bhāshā O Musalmān Sāhitya' (Bengali language and Muslim literature), *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā,* Māgh 1325 / January-February 1918.

160 Ibid.

161 Siraji, "Sāhityaśakti o Jātisaṃgaṭhan". Siraji's anti-fiction stand had been consistent since the opening years of the century when he had written about the prospective "harmful effects" of *prem rasa* on the "corpse" of Bengali Muslim community. Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", pp. 50–51.

162 Anonymous, "Ālocanā" section, *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1323 / November-December 1916.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid. *Āl-Eslām* was particularly puritanical in its stand on fiction. Nazir Ahmad, "Upanyās", *Āl-Eslām*, v.6 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1327 / May-June 1920 epitomized the periodical's anti-fiction rhetoric. Ahmad described both *puthi* and fiction reading as intoxicating addictions that infected the reader's aesthetic sense (*ruci bikār*).

165 Mohammad. Eyakub Ali Chaudhuri, 'Sāhitya Prasaṅga: Sāhitya Carcār Abasthā' (The condition of literary practice), *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Phālgun 1322 / February-March 1915.

prose genres like science, history or philosophy, it was asserted, were capable of affecting the minds of readers as much as *kathā-sāhitya*. Fiction was the common reader's preference and consequently the medium for reaching out and making the literary sphere inclusive.[166] It was therefore necessary, a publicist argued that the everyday lives and religious and cultural practices of Muslims be incorporated in the fiction narratives.[167] Anisuzzaman argues that a liberal trend in literary criticism initiated by the critical evaluations of Bankim's works by Dr. Mohammad Habibur Rahman in *Mihir* and subsequently in *Nabanūr* was strengthened through the editorial thrust of periodicals like *Nabanūr*, *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, *Moslem Bhārat* and eventually *Saogāt*. He identifies Golam Mostafa and Abul Kalam Shamsuddin as the leading pro-fiction publicists.[168] Abul Kalam Shamsuddin's serial essay on literary criticism "Kābyasāhitye Bāṅgālī Musalmān" during the first year of *Nabaparyyāẏ Saogāt*, Anisuzzaman argues, initiated an approach towards a more "objective" appraisal of literary works vis-à-vis measuring aesthetics in terms of Islamic principles.[169] Shamsuddin argued for an approach that could be broadly described as an Arnoldian form of critique that sought to assess literary works in terms of happiness, pleasure and making of a modern culturalism. In this trend, poets like Kaekobad, Nazrul Islam and Jasimuddin would emerge as respectable poets.

An early instance of serial fiction in a Bengali Muslim periodical was Kazi Imdad-ul Haq's novel *Abdullah*. A lengthy novel, it was serialized from the first issue of *Moslem Bhārat* in Baiśākh 1327 / April-May 1920 and continued up to Pouṣ 1328 / December 1921– January 1922 when the periodical ceased production. It remained unfinished and later appeared in book form in 1932.[170] The narrative plot turned on the familiar tensions between the old and new, between convention and modernity, with particular import for the Bengali Muslim society. Every episode of the novel carried the sub heading *samāj citra* (an illustration of society) in parenthesis. It was thus meant to document a society in transition; a society caught up between the contrary pulls of *maktab* based theological learning and modern university education, incidentally against the backdrop of the reformed *madrasa* education scheme – a tension that would

166 Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, "Kathā-sāhitya O Baṅgīẏa Musalmān" (prose literature and Bengal's Muslims), *Saogāt*, Baiśākh 1327 / April-May 1920.

167 Anonymous, "Kathā Sāhitya" (prose literature), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 3 # 3, Kārtik 1927 / October-November 1920.

168 Anisuzzaman, op. cit. "Introduction", p. 51.

169 Anisuzzaman, op. cit. pp. 53–54.

170 Habib Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj o Buddhir Mukti Andolan*, Mitram, Calcutta, 2009, p. 123.

continue to trouble the progressive intelligentsia among Bengali Muslims.[171] The conflicts played out in the name of progressive, liberal ideology and elements of what were seen as retrogressive aspects of conventional thinking, extended across several social issues like seclusion of women, the need for their education and marital relations. Abdullah, the protagonist and his brother-in-law Abdul Qadir had embraced modern education and refused to follow their ancestral professions of pirhood or become a maulavi. Abdullah's father Khondakar Waliullah, accepted his son's decision to go for modern education, a mark of his pragmatism, given that inherited earning from tributes paid by *murid* (disciples) were drying up and the family was heading rapidly towards penury. The reformism of the two young men and Waliullah's compromise with change stood in contradistinction to Abdul Qadir's father, Syed Abdul Kuddus who epitomized bigotry and reactionary thinking. The conflict between the 'old' and 'new' extended to affect even conjugal relationships as Abdullah sought a companionate, romantic marital relation while his wife and Kuddus's daughter Saleha's conduct remained strictly conventional, often to Abdullah's frustrations.

Going by the episodes that were serialized in *Moslem Bhārat*, the narrative plot of the novel remained by and large devoid of themes related to love, conjugality and transgressions. Instead the episodes of the novel meticulously portrayed the life experiences of Muslims in the Bengal countryside – their livelihood, social and family relations and everlasting poverty. But most importantly, the narrative sought to foreground the deep sense of Islamic piety that constituted the rural Muslims' perception of themselves and their surroundings, how that sense of piousness was mitigated by the changing times and the diverse responses they evoked among people as different as Waliullah, Abdul Kuddus and the compassionate village moneylender Mir Saheb. Kazi Imdad-ul Haq's affirmation of *Abdullah* as a social commentary was perhaps meant to offset suspicions about fiction reading and deploy the fiction form as an experiment in reformist discourse.

3.1 *'Muslim' History and Correcting Biases in Hindu Historiography*

Critical engagements with history had become a key constituent of self-assertion, a means for organizing the public sphere and making possible social cohesion. The periodical media provided an open discursive arena for the

171 Abul Hossain, *Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Śikṣā Samasyā*, 1928, cited in Tazeen M. Murshid, op. cit. p. 74. Hossain had blamed the special provision under the Reformed Madrasa Scheme that granted meager support of Rs.50–100/ to "semi-educated" mullahs to open madrasas for the decrease in number of Muslim pupils in schools and colleges.

production and circulation of modern historical ideas and practices and periodical readers, a ready audience for their reception. In attempting to generate critical interest in the past and trying to tutor readers to differentiate between 'right' and 'wrong' varieties of histories, the periodical press sustained a domain of popular, semi-academic historical practice outside the institutional space of universities and research centers like the Asiatic Society and Archaeological Survey of India. Historical scholarships have shown how in conditions of colonial modernity, history as an evidence-based practice emerged as a response to Orientalist and colonialist historiography and in tandem with a majoritarian nationalist discourse.[172] The twin axes of religion and nationhood were important constitutive elements in the formation of a broad template of 'national history' that extended across the different vernacular societies. Predictably, in the constructions of a continuous, largely Hindu history, the Islamicate interlude was a thorny question, with a majority of vernacular publicists facilitating the widespread understanding of the subcontinent's medieval past as 'dark' and 'decadent'.[173]

It was this popularized "Hindu" version of Muslim rule in the subcontinent that Muslim publicists sought to revise. Bengali Muslim periodicals made a conscious effort to alter the dominant perceptions of the past. The counter-narratives that they offered were both critical and conciliatory, attempting to rationalize and integrate the somewhat uncomfortable historical question of 'Muslim tyranny'. The revisionist project was made imperative by the sense that the dominant 'Hindu' interpretation of India's history was a cause of much embarrassment for the Muslim community and was seen to stand in the way of collective assertion. This section looks at this revisionist project that involved a rereading of India's past in the light of newly uncovered documents, a passion for critical historical methods and an attempt to move away from the overriding trope of the enslaved 'Hindu' inhabitant vis-à-vis the tyrannical foreign 'Muslim'. Most importantly, this recuperative project was informed by a historical vision shared by both Hindu and Muslim publicists, endorsing an allegiance towards liberal values and extended beyond the confines of Bengali Muslim journals, across several mainstream periodicals as well.

---

172 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993. Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997. Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2007.

173 Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 181–192.

3.2 *National History and Its 'Muslim' Critique: Methodological Questions*

Evidently, the revisionist project signaled a challenge to dominant historiographical practices and inaugurated a creative phase in Bengali literary life. Drawing on modern historiographical practices in the Urdu literary sphere, Bengali Muslims embarked on their own project of engaging with the past. Inspired by the rigorous evidence based history writings of Maulana Shibli Numani and using his works as a template, several Bengali publicists like Nazir Ahmad Chaudhuri attempted to address the Islamicate pasts through critical historical methods. The ensuing revisionist project became indicative of Bengali Muslim identity and their religious and political aspirations.[174] Two different sets of responses emerged from Bengali Muslim publicists – the first, a direct critique of what was largely understood as a 'Hindu' historiography and second, more nuanced and often unnoticed, an effort to understand the politics of such history-writing, at times including a liberal appreciation of history written by 'Hindus' as well.[175] Hindus' suspicion of Muslims was rationalized as revulsion against oppressive Nawabi regimes and attributed to the abuse of state power (*prabhu-śaktir apabyābahār*) by a few Afghan, Mughal and Nawabi rulers.[176] Other explanations attributed the 'distorted' history to colonial conspiracy and also to the fact that Persian, Arabic and Urdu records were inaccessible to Bengali Hindus, forcing the latter to rely on accounts by colonial administrators, ethnographers and Orientalist scholars.[177]

For the early generation of Orientalist scholars, ethnographers, missionaries and administrators the Company had shot to preponderance by defeating the 'Muslim' regime. Muslim sultans and nawabs were depicted as tyrannical, indolent and given to opulence.[178] 'Muslim' rule in the subcontinent was therefore interpreted as a period of obscurity when the supposedly 'golden' era of the civilized 'Hindus' plummeted into degeneration. Such vilification of 'Muslim rule' in the subcontinent as 'dark' and destructive of the glorious Hindu

174 Rajarshi Ghose, "Uses of History: Shibli Numani and the Muslim middle class in colonial Bengal" paper presented at *Archiving the Past: Rethinking Region, Religion and Language in Modern Indian History*, a one-day colloquium in memory of the historian Kumkum Chatterjee, July 17, 2015, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta.

175 Indira Chowdhury, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

176 Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar, 'Pratibāde Anurodh' (request and protest), *Nabanūr* Āṣāṛh 1310 / June-July 1903.

177 Abdul Karim, 'Baṅgīẏa Musalmāner Baṅga Sāhitya Carcā', *Kohinūr Nabaparyyāẏ*, 1322 / 1915.

178 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 102–106.

past had been too literally adopted by the Hindu historians.[179] For Abdul Karim at least, the onus of this 'distorted' history rested squarely on the Muslim intelligentsia. He lamented what he saw as a lack of interrogative spirit among Bengali Muslims: "Had Bengali Muslims been faithful to their own history, the course of historical writings by the Hindus would have no doubt been different."[180] It was therefore imperative that Muslim writers undertook to address their own history as a corrective measure – either through well-researched empirical essays or by translating Persian sources.[181] The genre of History therefore acquired an immediacy that called for recuperating the 'true' pasts and rectifying the biases in Hindu historiography.[182] The project however proved to be immensely challenging as publicists struggled to reframe analytical categories that were used to understand India's medieval past. Despite the critical mood and adherence to empirical practice, there can be no mistaking the efforts to rationally and seamlessly integrate the Islamicate pasts within the overall structure of national history. At the same time, Bengali Muslim publicists toiled to negotiate which of the three pasts to claim for forging a sense of community cohesion: the classical past of Islam and the wider Islamic world; the Islamicate histories of the Indian subcontinent; and the histories of Bengal under the Afghan and Mughal regimes.

A trend noticeable among history writers in both mainstream and Bengali Muslim periodicals was to introduce readers to various textual records from the medieval past, howsoever fragmentary. Typically, a note on chronology, authorship and content of the document would be accompanied by an assessment of its historical value and to what extent the document served to alter known facts.[183] One such effort in familiarizing readers with evidence based histories of Islamic regimes in South Asia was Keshabchandra Gupta's serial essays *Musalmānādhikr̥ta Bhāratbarṣer Itihās* (A history of India under the

179 Ibid., pp. 96–98.

180 Abdul Karim, "Baṅgīẏa Musalmāner Baṅga Sāhitya Carcā", *Kohinūr* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), v. 2 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1322 / November-December 1915.

181 Ibid. Most journals stressed the need for revisionist essays.

182 Kazi Mafizuddin Ahmad, "Āmāder Itihāspāṭher Ābaśyakatā" (the need for studying history), *Nabanūr*, v. 2 #11, Phālgun 1311 / February-March 1905.

183 For instance Mohammad Shamsozzoha, "Tuzuk-i-Babur", *Bicitrā*, Baiśākh, 1335 / April-May 1928. Jadunath Sarkar, "Ekjon Bāṅgālī Musalmān Bīr" (bravery of a Bengali Muslim), *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 10, Māgh 1312 / January-February 1906. Sarkar's account is a condensed translation of a Persian text written by Shihabuddin Bali Mohammad Talish. Sarkar dated the fragment of the text he found at the India Office Library in London to the Nawabi tenure of Mir Jumla (seventeenth century) and Shaista Khan's campaigns in Assam and the eastern fringes of Bengal.

Muslim), continuing through two periodicals *Nabanūr* and *Kohinūr*.[184] In this series Gupta listed nearly fifty *tarikh* chronicles starting with the twelfth-century *Kutchnama* or *Tawarikh-e Sindh*. Gleaned mostly from translated and annotated versions produced by British historians and Indologists, *Musalmānādhikṝta Bhāratbarṣer Itihās* foregrounded the *tarikhs* as products of a literate Indo-Persianate culture and a historical tradition (*itibṝtta*) of a kind that was nearly non-existent in Sanskrit literary culture.[185] In his analysis of individual tarikhs, Gupta deployed principles of objectivist history to assess their historical value, primarily on the basis of the information the *tarikh* provided on administrative and revenue systems, military campaigns, commerce etc. Gupta endorsed the *tarikhs* as reliable historical records that despite their occasional inconsistencies and fragmentariness represented a historiographical practice that could withstand the probing of positivist methodology.

The formation of this critical historical dispensation called for a reframing of analytical categories, especially a move to disengage 'faith' from 'power'. This meant moving beyond simplistic narrative templates of foreign Muslim rulers and timid Hindus who subsequently rose up to challenge injustices perpetrated by the tyrant. The methodological strategy adopted was to segregate political hostilities from a general hatred towards particular communities and / or religion. Thus Mahmud's destruction of temples at Somnath and Mathura were not to be read as 'Muslim' ravages of 'Hindu' temples.[186] The Umayyad-Abbasid conflicts during the reign of the Umayyad Caliphs and the tremendous bloodshed that they unleashed around Kaba were cited to endorse the argument that perpetration of vengeance was common in every political hostilities and military encounters and was distinct from retaliation against entire non-Islamic religious communities.[187] What is interesting to observe, is that history writers now marshaled an array of Persian texts to narrate the medieval past. In his three-part essay in *Āl-Eslām* where Eslamabadi discussed the various political, civic and legal rights of Hindu subjects and their general living facilities under Afghan and Mughal imperia, he cited not a single European historian. Instead, drawing on a range of Persian *tarikh* texts like *Tarikh-e*

184 Keshabchandra Gupta, "Musalmānādhikṝta Bhāratbarṣer Itihās" (History of India under Muslim rule), *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 7 Kārtik 1312 / October-November 1905 and serialized over several months.

185 Ibid.

186 Eslamabadi, "Musalmān Āmale Hindur Adhikār" (Hindus' rights under Muslim rule), *Āl-Eslām*, v. 1 # 7, Kārtik 1322 / October-November 1915. The essay was serialized over three successive months: Āśvin (September-October), Kārtik (October-November) and Agrahāẏaṇ (November-December) 1322 / 1915.

187 Ibid.

Hind and *Tarikh-e Firishta*, biographical accounts like *Badshah Nama* and *Shah Jahan Nama* and autobiographies like *Tuzuk-e Jahangiri*, he concluded that there were hardly any instances of injustice perpetrated towards Hindu during peace times and that the latter enjoyed full liberty and civic and legal rights under Afghan and Mughal regimes.[188] He argued that intolerance towards non-Islamic religious communities was contrary to Islamic principles and the few episodes of temple destructions in Mathura, Vrindavan, Banaras and Somnath over a course of over seven centuries of Muslim rule were acts of political retaliation rather than religious hatred.[189] Addressing the touchy question of the imposition of *jiziya* by Aurangzeb, Eslamabadi rationalized that the tax was levied on non-compliant, rebellious Hindus and contrary to general conviction, a majority of the Hindu population remained outside its purview. The essay portrayed the *Musalmān āmal* or the Muslim period as one of harmony and integration with the state being on the whole non-interventionist and playing only the role of protector of Hindu subjects in the event of any harassment or offense. It was the modern state with its complicated paraphernalia of multiple taxes and dues, Eslamabadi pointed out, that stood in contrast to the previous Islamicate states.[190] By positing the Islamicate pasts as idyllic, publicists like Eslamabadi could wrest the colonialist justification of British rule restoring order and rule of law in an anarchical land dominated by dissolute Muslim tyrants.

Eslamabadi's essay somewhat represents the prevalent mood shared by several Hindu and Muslim intellectuals that the subcontinent's medieval / Islamic past had been a period of overall peace, stability and creativity and resisting the projection of the two communities as polarized entities. Methodologically and structurally, this counter narrative did not question or deviate from the normative model of positivist historiography. Nevertheless, the *Musalmān āmal* was recuperated from its status as a narrative break and integrated into the overall template of national history by seriously re-examining analytical categories and through source criticism that rigorously engaged with questions of authorship, method, evidence and the socio-political milieu of documents.

A second narrative intervention proposed to thwart 'Hindu' prejudices in historical practice, was to urge Muslims to write their 'own' histories. This included the histories of the Islamicate pasts of both India and the wider world, especially that of classical Islam and the early Caliphal order. A publicist in

188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
190 Ibid.

Māsik Mohāmmadī for instance argued that Muslim history writers needed to distance themselves from Bengal's medieval past. Instead, reiterating pan-Islamicist imaginations of unified Islamic civilization, he made a case for the triumphalist moments of Islam's history.[191] Non-Muslim historians and scholars like Jadunath Sarkar, Akshay Kumar Maitreya, Girishchandra Sen and Rampran Gupta were acclaimed as leading facilitators of the revisionist project: "Babu Girishchandra Sen has been the first to render (into Bengali), the *Korān Śarif* and the *Hādith Śarif*. He has been the first biographer (in Bengali) of the Prophet and a preacher of the lives of Muslim saints. Respected Babu Akshaychandra Maitreya had been the first to correct the ill reputes of Siraj and Mir Kasim. Professor Jadunath Sarkar and Babu Rampran Gupta are writers of Islam's history".[192] Nevertheless, their accounts were seen as carrying imprints of their "individuality" and therefore not entirely objective. He justified the need for Muslim history writers to compile textbooks for Muslim students in terms of insiders' familiarity and understanding. Shahidullah's proposition for revised history seem to go beyond methodological concerns about sources and analytical categories, touching upon the comportments of historical narratives and the question of subjectivity of the historian. He does not question the scholarship of the aforementioned. Neither does he feel that their narratives are distorted. For him, their writings, despite their objectivity and empathy, simply did not convey the Muslims' "standpoint". History after all was an exercise in self-projection. It had become a very charged domain, a site where competing social and political identities could be articulated, even as these diverse visions of the past continued to be profoundly influenced by the dominant European disciplinary paradigms that they sought to challenge.

3.3 *Revisionist History in School Curriculum*

The revisionist discourse of history emerged in response to colonialist historiography and also as a critique of a Hindu dominated national history. This historical encounter came to be crucially linked to the organization of the Bengali Muslim public sphere in terms of circulation of the new historical ideas and the increasing need felt for revised textbooks, especially at school levels. One of the characteristics of the colonial education system was its linguistic structure: vernacular medium at the primary and secondary levels and English instruction for the higher levels. As Veena Naregal has shown, the Marathi public

191 Golam Mostafa, "Muslim Sāhityer Gati O Lakṣya" (The course and agenda of Muslim literature), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v.1 # 4, Māgh 1334 / January-February, 1928.

192 Mohammad Shahidullah, "Āmāder (Sāhityik) Daridratā" (our (literary) poverty), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1323 / May-June 1916. S.M. Akbaruddin, "Bartamān Bāṅglā Sāhitye Musalmāner Sthān", *Āl-Eslām*, v. 2 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1323 / November-December 1916.

sphere had come to be ordered hierarchically as a result of this linguistic split between English and the vernacular.[193] In Bengal too, the majority of readers / potential readers were vernacular literate and the primary participants in the public sphere. They became the target for new literary productions, including new forms of history writing. A general consensus was that if the Bengali Muslim public sphere had to be made more inclusive, then lower levels of literacy had to be addressed in order to reframe historical understanding.

In the wake of the Madrasa reforms, school curricula acquired urgency in the public sphere, becoming a frequently debated concern. The prevalent mood in the Bengali public sphere seemed to have been overwhelmingly in favor of revised textbooks for school students. The *Prabāsī* editor was forthright in placing the onus of distorted history on works of English scholars like James Tod that needed rectification through new ways of writing and reading history.[194] History syllabi in schools for Muslim students came under close scrutiny as several publicists called for rectifying what was seen as a pro-Hindu 'bias' in history teaching and textbooks. Most contended that the available textbooks were written by 'Hindu' writers and were lopsided in their assessments of the Islamicate pasts of India. It was ironic, a publicist argued, that Muslim students "passed out of each grade without any familiarity with prominent Muslim personalities" like Akbar, Aurangzeb, Mir Jumla, Shaista Khan, Alauddin, Abul Fazl, Chand Sultana, Firozshah Bahmani let alone Omar, Ali or Sultan Saladin. "But they would well be able to rattle off names like Napoleon, Garibaldi, Washington and even Arjun, Bhim and Shivaji."[195] Muslim students, Siraji felt were particularly unfortunate as they had to read textbooks by anti-Muslim Hindu writers who never discussed objectively the reigns of "magnanimous Muslim Badshahs".[196] Assessment of the 'Hindu period' of Indian history, Siraji contended, in works like the multivolume *Pṛthibīr Itihās* (A History of the World) by Durgadas Lahiri, were disproportionately weightier than their appraisals of medieval India. Even Akshay Kumar Maitreya's refutation of the inherited idea of Islam's advent in Bengal (*Baṅga bijaẏ*) as a blitzkrieg executed by seventeen Turkish warriors on horseback, drew indignation from Siraji as the 'fact' had been validated by none other than the *itihās bettā* (practitioner

---

193 Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, 2001.

194 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Musalmān Rājatya o Bhāratbarṣer Parādhīnatā" (Miscellaneous matters – Muslim rule and the colonization of India), *Prabāsī* v. 21 pt. 2 # 4, Māgh 1328 / January-February 1922.

195 Siraji, "Itihās Carcār Ābaśyakatā" (the importance of studying history), *Āl-Eslām*, v.2 # 5, Bhādra 1323 / August-September 1916.

196 Ibid.

of history) Kazi Minhaj-ud-din Siraj, the twelfth-century Persian chronicler of the Mamluk Sultans of Delhi and author of *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri.* Siraji contended that the abrupt end of 'Hindu' rule in Bengal has been an embarrassment for Hindus and Maitreya's repudiation of the 'event' was a way of ameliorating that frustration. Such 'distorted' histories, he argued, acquired a cruder popularized version at the level of school textbooks, impeding the confidence and assertiveness of Muslim boys.[197] For Mohammad Shahidullah, school history textbooks were an important influence on the formation of Hindu majoritarian discourse. 'Hinduized' histories, he argued, imbibed a sense of superior, dominant race among Hindu boys while a sense of inferiority gripped their Muslim counterparts.[198]

From the early days of colonial education, history had been a compulsory component of school curricula. Even though rational historical sensibility was foregrounded as a characteristic feature of modernity, the focus of school level history remained confined primarily to empirical knowledge of past episodes, especially major European ones and schools and colleges remained on the whole teaching institutions with very little engagements with philosophy of history.[199] In Bengal public debates on the need for revised textbooks do not propose any innovative teaching beyond the conventional methods of chronological narration of events, the political, administrative and military histories of various regimes and assessments of prominent historical personalities. Indeed history was projected as a broader lesson in moral and character values for adolescent students. Biographical assessments had come to form an important part of that history teaching, explaining publicists' repeated insistence on production of revised textbooks with more space for devout and benevolent monarchs of the Sultanate and Mughal periods.[200]

3.4 *Revisionism in the Popular Media*

Muslim writers are seen frenetically resisting majoritarian understandings of the past, especially the portrayal of Muslim rulers in fictions of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the plays of Dwijendralal Roy.[201] In particular, the Rajput and Maratha insurgencies against 'Muslim' regimes were favorite historical moments for several popular fiction, poetry and plays. The use of the past in literary genres bore a tenuous relationship to the practice of positivist history.

---

197 Ibid.
198 Mohammad Shahidullah, "Āmāder (Sāhityik) Daridratā".
199 Prachi Deshpande, op. cit. pp. 87–88.
200 Mohammad Shahidullah, "Āmāder (Sāhityik) Daridratā".
201 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Defining Moments in Bengal, 1920–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 128–130.

At one level, fictional and theatrical narratives claimed to have been inspired by 'real events' of the past. At another, novelists, poets and playwrights used their creative license to fashion, what Sudipta Kaviraj calls, "an invested history", the primary aim of which was to seek a genealogy for a modern collectivity.[202] While rational history provided an explanation for subjection, imaginary history created grounds for thinking about liberation.[203] Imaginary history was therefore potentially radical as it made possible articulations of a collective self that was nevertheless majoritarian and exclusionary in nature.

At stake were Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's fictions, especially his historical novels some of whose narrative plots were organized around the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century hostilities between the Mughals and the Bengal zamindars. Bankim's historical fiction inspired a whole range of romantic reconstructions of many medieval and late medieval Bengal zamindars like Sitaram, Pratapaditya and Basanta Roy. In most such fictional and theatrical reconstructions, the zamindars, particularly the *bāro bhů̃iẏā* came to be represented as regional patriots challenging Muslim might in the interest of their patrimony.[204] Popular Hindu-Brahmo Bengali opinion that fed on theatres and fiction had uncritically internalized this anti-Muslim rhetoric that derived from the colonial discourse on Islam's expansion in Bengal as a "Religion of the Sword".[205] So deep-rooted was this anti-Muslim rhetoric that one publicist admitted that most Hindus from childhood onwards, were inculcated with the idea of the Muslim conqueror as armed with sword and the Koran.[206] From early on in the twentieth century, Bengali Muslim publicists took serious exception to the fictional representations of Muslim rulers as *lampaṭ* (dissolute) and *nṝśṃsa* (pitiless).[207] The most common method adopted from principles of literary criticism was to assess fictional characters in terms of their moral strengths and weaknesses. Just as in the case of rational historical methods,

202 Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 108–109.

203 Ibid., p. 109.

204 Kumkum Chatterjee, op. cit. p. 254.

205 Richard M. Eaton, op. cit. pp. 122–123. Eaton shows how towards the late nineteenth century a consensus emerged in the official circles on the issue of Islamicization of Bengal, particularly its eastern districts. Bureaucrats like James Wise, E.A. Gait and Henry Beverly were important contributors to the discourse.

206 Debendranath Sinha, "Hindu-Musalmān o Baṅgasāhitya" (Hindu-Muslim and Bengali literature), *Bhāratī*, v. 27, Śrāvaṇ 1310 / July-August 1903.

207 Imdad-ul Haq, "Hindu-Musalmān o Baṅgasāhitya", *Bhāratī*, v. 27, Baiśākh 1310 / April-May 1903. Imdad-ul Haq, "Aislāmik Yaṯkiñciṯ" (a few notes on Islam), *Bhāratī*, v. 27, Āṣāṛh 1310 / June-July 1903.

biographical assessments and contributions of prominent figures had comprised one of the primary modalities of critical evaluation, so too in literary criticism, critical appraisal of fictional protagonists became the key strategy for literary reviews. Bankim's characters came to be evaluated in terms of their anti-Muslim hatred or whether superiority of the fictional protagonist was asserted in comparison to 'Muslim' inferiority. Several publicists like S.M. Akbaruddin objected to what they saw as misrepresentations of 'Muslim' characters, especially the pigeonholing of Muslim women as capricious and scheming.[208] Akbaruddin argued that Bankim was guilty of bias and that his (Hindu) protagonists were mostly "ethereal".[209]

A key thrust of Akbaruddin's critique was directed towards one of Bankim's later novels *Ānandamaṭh*, arguably his most controversial novel. The hymn *Bande Mātaram* drew aspersions for being vulgarly Hindu. Through the hymn Bankim had conjured up the iconography of the nation and its territorial space as feminine and maternal.[210] A closer reading of the hymn though reveals that Bankim's symbolisms were drawn from a fairly unorthodox repertoire and his literary devise too made very 'unprincipled' use of Hinduism.[211] Bankim had been amongst the first to articulate such imaginings and so the ruptures in his consciousness – both his inspirations and anxieties become particularly manifest in the hymn.[212] The lines in the hymn that invoke the anthropomorphic attributes of the nation-mother – the seven crore cheerful voices and the twice seven crore uplifted arms, as Kaviraj has argued, were "not statistically communal", organized as they are, on the basis of a demographic enumeration in which Muslims were a majority.[213] The hymn unambiguously foregrounded the certainty and immortality of the Mother, even as the demographic identity remained fairly vague.[214] At the turn of the twentieth century however, Akbaruddin was precisely expressing disenchantment with the demographic arithmetic of *Bande Mātaram*. His disillusionment with the attributes of Dūrgā that were alien to Muslim spiritual sensibility is clearly manifest:

208 S.M. Akbaruddin, "Bartamān Bāṅglā Sāhitye Musalmāner Sthān" (The Muslim's place in contemporary Bengali literature), serialized in *Āl-Eslām* from v.2 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1323 / November-December 1916.

209 Bankim chose less known characters like Bhabani Pathak and Sitaram, and factually underdetermined, vague episodes like the Sannyasi rebellion. This, Kaviraj argues, was a deliberate narrative strategy that gave him the flexibility of starting and ending points of the stories. Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 133.

210 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 137.

211 Ibid., p. 141.

212 Ibid., p. 145.

213 Ibid., p. 132.

214 Ibid., p. 132.

> The song is intended to be sung by the "seven crore cheerful voices". Where does this seven crore people belong to? Certainly Bengal. Then are they all Hindus? Surely not. Then understandably, the song has been composed for Muslims as well.… Here Bhāratmātā is at times Dūrgā and Kālī and at other times a contemporary, newly energized mother-figure. Bankimbabu certainly did not forget that Muslims do not relate to deities.… They [i.e. the Muslims] would not be able to embrace it as their own.… So the song cannot possible be the national song (*jātīẏa saṅgīt*) of the Bengali *jāti.*[215]

Akbaruddin's critique was directed at what he saw as a homogenizing appetite: "Muslims can accept this hymn as their own only at the moment when they shall be able to surrender their self-identity, their distinctiveness and completely merge with the Hindus."[216] It had perhaps been a deliberate move on part of Bankim to have left the Mother's "children" as an indistinguishable collective.[217] But at the opening of the twentieth century, this was clearly seen as an offensively majoritarian discourse that sought to erase Muslim distinctiveness. Such discursive subversion of the Muslim community who constituted a definitive demographic majority in the province threatened to undermine Muslim participation in the project of "building a new nation".[218]

3.5 *Histories of the Islamicate World Beyond India*

Periodicals abound in essays on histories of classical Islam and Islamicate cultures beyond South Asia in West and Central Asia, North Africa, the Mediterranean and Iberian regions and East Asia. Most of them frequently brought out illustrations of various Islamic historical and sacred sites and monuments and reproductions of artworks from the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ottoman periods. The visual feast not only served to erase notions of Islamic *tamaddun* as alien and repressive. Rather, it sought to project Islamic culture as constitutive of Bengali ways of living through centuries of interaction between global Islamicate cultures and various local traditions in Bengal. Essays, frequently by Hindu writers, sought to acquire a broader readership for "Islamic history" by familiarizing mainstream, mostly Hindu readership with Islam's pasts. Accounts of righteous rules of Caliphs and the early Muslim community as democratic and virtuous were meant to reframe popular historical assumptions of Muslim

215 Akbaruddin, "Bartamān Bāṅglā Sāhitye Musalmāner Sthān".
216 Ibid.
217 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 132.
218 Akbaruddin, "Bartamān Bāṅglā Sāhitye Musalmāner Sthān".

rulers as tyrannical and widespread beliefs about Islam as a proselytizing religion. An early instance of such effort was Rampran Gupta's serial narration in *Prabāsī* of the early history of Islam, the propagation of the faith in West Asia and the evolution of the Caliphal order.[219] In about the same time, Gupta narrated the history of the administrative organization of the Caliphal polity and the political and military achievements of individual Caliphs in *Nabanūr*.[220] A range of such historical narratives on the regimes of the early Caliphs and the Islamicate civilizations of the Mediterranean and West Asian regions appeared in periodicals across the board, representing attempts to exemplify the political ideals of the old Islamic order.[221] The early Caliphal order, in particular, came to embody ethical governance that was defined by a strong sense of Islamic pietism and a narrative history of it was evidently meant to refute ideas of 'Muslim' rulers as despotic and intolerant of non-Islamic communities. In projecting the Caliphal state as founded on liberal principles of democracy, equality and fraternity (and by implication, not on arbitrary rule) this historiographical practice was fundamentally anti-colonial in its politics.[222]

Interests in the pasts of classical Islam and the wider Islamic world represented concerns beyond pan-Islamicist sentiment. While that past could be seen as a cohesive force, one that the entire Muslim *umma* could lay claims on, it could also be interpreted as an alternative to a national history where 'Hindu' agency predominated and in which the Islamicate interlude could only be understood in terms of a fissure. Evidently, the narration of this past was not strictly limited to Muslims. Nor was its evocation confined to rational historical consciousness and its positivist methodology. Charuchandra Mitra and Kumudranjan Mullick were among several other non-Muslim Bengali poets

219 Rampran Gupta, "Kholfāẏe Rāśedin" (Khulafaye Rashidin, i.e. the rule of the first four righteous Caliphs), *Prabāsī* v.5 # 1, Baiśākh 1312 / April-May 1905. Gupta made use of "authoritative" histories like Syed Ameer Ali's *Life of Mahomed* and *History of the Saracens*; Jarret's *Translation of the History of the Califs*; Muir's *Caliphate*; Irving's *Successors of Mahomet*; Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam*; Ockley's *History of the Saracens.*

220 Rampran Gupta, "Khālifāgaṇer Śāsannīti" (principles of the rule of the Caliphs), *Nabanūr*, serialized intermittently during 1312 / 1905–06. Rampran Gupta, "Sultan Saladin", *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 11 Phālgun 1312 / February-March 1906 and # 12 Caitra 1312 / March-April 1906.

221 Histories of Caliphal dynasties, political order and military successes were very popular as themes of historical essays. An essay bearing the same title as Gupta's written by Dr. Fazlar Rahman Khan also appeared serially in *Nabanūr* during the same year. Hamed Ali, "Sultān Dvītiẏa Mohammad Kartṝk Constantinople Adhikār" (The capture of Constantinople by Sultan Mohammad II), *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 7, Kārtik 1312 / October-November 1905.

222 Rajarshi Ghose, op. cit. However the anticolonial intent of this history-writing was evident even before the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation years as borne out by the *Nabanūr* articles.

whose romanticized invocations of early Islam and the Islamic *tamaddun* animated the pages of Bengali periodicals.[223]

Histories of Islamicate cultures beyond South Asia and a conviction that Bengali Muslims too shared in that past could possibly facilitate a sense of belonging to the wider Islamic community and also make the comprehension of the non-territorial identity of the *umma* easier. However historical narratives on medieval and early modern Islamic worlds coexisted with histories of the Bengal region under Pathan and Mughal regimes within the same space of periodicals, often within the same monthly number. Such engagements testify to an eclectic and nuanced historical sensibility – the Bengali Muslim publicists' ability to conceive of and relate to the past at regional, national and extra-territorial levels. But such historiographical exercises also expose the deep ambivalences of such engagements – which past could Bengali Muslims possibly relate to? As a later section would demonstrate, several radical Bengali Muslim publicists would draw upon the histories of early Islam to trace rationalism within a specifically Islamic cultural tradition and enunciate their call for autonomy of thought.

3.6 *Epic and the Practice of Authentic History*

Mahāśmaśān Kābya or "the great sepulchre",[224] an epic composed by Mohammad Qazem Al Qureshi, better known as Kaekobad, was first published in 1311 B.S. / 1905.[225] It was priced at Rs.2/ and advertised in the pages of the periodical *Nabanūr* as the first epic work composed by a Bengali Muslim poet.[226] Judging by its multiple editions, *Mahāśmaśān* would probably have been popular among the educated in urban and semi-urban areas. A magisterial epic narrative completed in three volumes and spanning close to seven hundred pages, *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* was based on the historic third battle of Panipat (1761)

---

223 Charuchandra Mitra, "Āmenā-Kumār", *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1312 / July-August 1905. The poem invoked Lord Byron's quote: "Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea, / Jehova hath triumphed, his people are free." Kumudranjan Mullick, "Moslem Bhārat", *Moslem Bhārat*, v.1 pt.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1327 / April-May 1920. Jibendrakumar Dutta, "Mahājirīṇ" (Muhajirin), *Moslem Bhārat*, v.1, pt. 1 # 4, Āṣāṛh 1327 / June-July 1920. Chandicharan Mitra, "Biẏog-kātarer Gān" (from Amir Khusrau), *Moslem Bhārat*, v.1, pt. 2 # 5 Phālgun 1327 / February-March 1921.

224 English rendition of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* cited from Md. Abdul Khaleque, "A Short Biography of Kaikobad Al-Qoreshi" translated from his autobiography and inserted in the third edition of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* that appeared in 1332 / 1925, p. viii.

225 Kaekobad, *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, Dacca, First Edition, 1311 / 1905. The second and third editions appeared from Dacca in 1910 and 1925 respectively. The third edition, bounded and embossed with golden letters was priced at Rs. 3/.

226 *Nabanūr* (Content Page), v.3 #4, Śrāvaṇ 1312 / July-August 1905.

fought between the Maratha Confederacy and the coalition forces of the Rohilla chief Najib-ud-daula, Shuja-ud-daula, the Nawab of Awadh and the Afghan king Ahmad Shah Abdali, an encounter that had virtually ended Maratha aspirations for paramountcy in central and north India. The scenes in the epic shift back and forth between the durbars of various chiefs, palace gardens, temple complexes, hermitages that act as indoctrination centers and the Maratha and Durani military camps. Romantic love, fidelity to the patrimony and devotions to divinity in temples and mosques coexist with assessments of the might of adversaries and rebellions in military camps. Long, frequently sonorous speeches by characters bring out equations made between notions of political morality, diplomatic opportunism, practical appraisal of strategic conditions and impulsive displays of chivalry. Characters are depicted in various hues, with the vengeful Zohra Begum as the inspirational force for "Muslim" powers against the Marathas; the Rohilla chief portrayed as severely ruthless, obstructing any attempts at peace; Shuja-ud-daula as one with a compassionate heart making efforts to arrange for the funerary rites of the Maratha warriors at the end of the battle; Abdali, a daring but cool headed military commander unruffled by any unfavorable turn of events, and finally the Maratha warriors Sadashivrao Bhau, Jankoji Shinde, Ratnaji, Viswasrao, Jaswantrao Powar and the Bhau's loyal general Ibrahim Gardi appear as resolute warriors committed to the annihilation of evil (*pāpācār*) and instatement of righteous governance (*dharma rājya*).[227]

Prachi Deshpande has shown how important representations of Maratha pasts were to the nationalist agenda of the Marathi intelligentsia.[228] The practice of the modern discipline of history writing, she argues, not only facilitated the development of a distinct regional identity, but also shaped a popular memory that was majoritarian and divisive in intonation. Panipat, epitomizing the moment of "fall" of the Maratha race was a popular choice as theme for a large variety of literary works and theatrical performances – most such representations projecting an image of chivalrous Maratha warriors and identifying Muslims as foreigners on Indian soil. But what purpose would a re-creation of a historical moment such as Panipat, serve for Bengal's Muslims? What kind of a historical memory was Kaekobad seeking to create? The preface to the epic clearly struggles to make a connection, one that was understandably deeply ambivalent, between Panipat and the making of a Bengali Muslim consciousness. Nothing in Kaekobad suggests that the epic was intended as a kind of a

227 *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, p. 672.

228 Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960*, Permanent Black, 2007.

'Muslim' response to the conceptual frame of Hindu dharma (and Marathas as its protectors) pitted against the presumed depredations of 'foreign' Muslim power. Rather, Kaekobad foregrounds *Mahāśmaśān* as the 'memory' of erstwhile Hindu and Muslim empires that had been reduced to ashes. Panipat thus comes across as a tumultuous moment not only because the centralizing power of the imperial Mughals had waned, but more because it signified the passing of old regimes. A strange, melancholic sense of history unraveled by providence runs through the entire epic, perhaps not entirely unlike the Marathi *bakhar* histories that sought to explain and account for the Panipat debacle as predestined.[229]

Contenders at Panipat from times immemorial, Kaekobad believed were fated towards disaster – the Pandav and Kaurav clans who had fought at Kurukshetra and thereafter, the successive Muslim regimes of the Sultanate, the Afghan Lodhi routed by Babur and the Pathan Sur dynasty vanquished by Akbar. The final encounter turned out to be a debacle for the Marathas.[230] For Kaekobad, a believer in destiny, Panipat symbolized the waning of both Hindu and Muslim power in the subcontinent, the final battle terminating any hope of resurgence for Indian Muslims (even though Abdali had been triumphant) and paving the way for European ascendancy.[231] The battle, he was convinced, had been a providential blessing for India's Muslims in as much as the battle transformed the domination-subjection equation in the subcontinent once and for all, subjecting Muslims to European ascendancy rather than to the tyranny of Maratha rule. It had sapped the strength of India's Muslim rule and had the English not stepped in to establish their empire soon after, 'Hindu' ascendancy would have been inevitable.[232] Panipat, with its dense interweaves of rise and fall (*utthān-patan*), Kaekobad elaborated, exemplified the play of divine will, its impenetrability by the human mind and the utter helplessness of human agency.[233] It was this grand narrative of preordained human destiny overpowering human agency, including even the most chivalrous of war efforts, which according to Kaekobad constituted the ideal subject matter of epics. *Mahāśmaśān* was therefore a tribute to Panipat, a historical moment that he believed encapsulated the memory of the last spark (*śeṣ agni-sfuliṅga*) of prowess demonstrated by Indian Muslims as unparalleled valiant warriors

---

229 Prachi Deshpande, op. cit. p. 29.

230 Kaekobad, "Introduction to the first edition" (reprinted in the third edition), *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, p. 7. Kaekobad believed that Panipat was Kurukshetra of antiquity where the glory of ancient Hindu had once and for all ended.

231 Kaekobad, op. cit. pp. 7–8.

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid.

(*adwitīya mahābīr*).[234] Panipat represented a tragic moment in so far as it was a debacle for the Hindus and a non-sustainable military triumph for the Muslims. A profound sense of futility of the encounter comes through in Sadashivrao Bhau's final hour message to Shuja-ud Daula urging the latter to settle for a treaty (*sandhi*) or meet the Maratha forces in battle at daybreak. The Maratha commander-in-chief writes to the Awadh Nawab,

> Granted, for the sake of argument, in this great battle,
> It's our defeat, the Maharashtra Sun sets
> In darkness forever,
> What would Indian Muslims gain?
> At the feet of the outsider, Abdali Shah,
> Bharatvarsha shall be humbled forever.
> Will Indian Muslims ever acquire
> India's throne?…[235]

His objective, Kaekobad explained, was to "compose a *yuddha kābya*" (a war chronicle in verse) depicting the "chivalry and masculinity of Indian Muslims" that would boost the confidence and self-esteem of Bengali Muslims – an effort that he hoped would be duly appreciated only when Bengali became the literary language of the province's Muslims.[236] The appeal of Panipat lay in its imagination as the final collective action by a grand alliance of India's Muslims. Sudipta Kaviraj has argued in context of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's final historical novels that a society's history is profoundly shaped by what it 'remembers' rather than what actually happened in the past. In this Durkheimian sense, the rationale of historical imagination lay in facilitating social cohesion.[237] Kaekobad was unambiguous in stating the purpose of writing his *yuddha kābya* – to recuperate a glorious past that Bengali Muslims could identify with and partake in. Panipat was therefore conceived of as a theme that could potentially mobilize Bengal's Muslims – as mourning, Panipat could energize them to take pride in the valiance of their ancestors and as a commemoration, it could help them to overcome their pervasive sense of frustrations and encourage them to meaningfully engage in social and political life.

Not unexpectedly, *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* evoked considerable interest and criticism in the periodical press. So polarized were critical opinions that the

234 Kaekobad, "Introduction to the Second Edition", Dhaka, 1917.

235 *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, pp. 680–681.

236 Kaekobad, "Introduction to the Second Edition" (reprinted in the third edition), *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*, p. 16.

237 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. p. 132.

Saogāt editor announced that no further reviews of the epic would appear in his journal.[238] The debates turned on the core formulations of un-Islamicism (*anaislāmikatā*) and indecency (*aślīlatā*). For most critics the two tropes of 'un-Islamicism' and 'indecency' were nearly indistinguishable and a consensus emerged that *Mahāśmaśān* had failed to live up to the purported moral and didactic purposes of an epic. Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad denounced the epic as anti-Islamic (*Islām dharmer biruddha*) and as an evidence of deficiency in Kaekobad's *majhābī śikṣā* or religious education.[239] In a more argumentative essay, the former *Nabanūr* editor Syed Emdad Ali criticized the epic for its un-Islamicism and *aślīlatā*, his objections ranging from portrayal of premarital courtship and transgressive conduct to incorporation of hymns to deities venerated by Hindus (for instance, the invocations of *Kālī* and *Gaṅgā*) and the poet's unrelenting use of metaphors drawn from Hindu mythologies.[240] The terms of the debates were strikingly similar to those on *aślīlatā* that animated the mainstream literary sphere, especially the ones surrounding Rabindranath's lyrical ballad *Citrāṅgadā*.[241] Emdad Ali was particularly vituperative towards what he saw as excessive presence of "antinuptial" love that unlike "postnuptial" love had no religious sanction.[242] Kaekobad's un-Islamic aesthetic, Emdad Ali argued, could potentially thwart the Bengali Muslims' agenda of creating a "new literature".[243] Abul Kalam Shamsuddin responded to Emdad Ali's review, arguing that *Mahāśmaśān* was an original (*moulik*) epic that unlike Madhusudan Dutta's *Meghnādbadh Kābya* and Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay's *Bṛtrasaṃhār* was not built upon preexisting epic narratives.[244] Following Kaekobad, Shamsuddin therefore chose to make a deliberate distinction between myth and an

238 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Sampādakīẏa" (Editorial), *Saogāt*, Kārtik 1326 / October-November 1919, cited in Abdul Mannan Syed ed. *Kaekobad Racanabali*, v.2, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1994, pp. 447–448.

239 Munshi Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad, "Mahāśmaśān Kābyer Bhumikāẏe Islāmer Abamānanā" (Demeaning of Islam in the introduction of *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*), *Islām Darśan*, v. 1 # 5, Bhādra 1327 / August-September 1920.

240 Syed Emdad Ali, "Mahāśmaśān Kābye Anaislāmik o Aślīl Bhāb" (Un-Islamic and indecent traits in *Mahāśmaśān Kābya*), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 2 # 1, Baiśākh 1326 / April-May 1919. Emdad Ali's position seems all the more interesting because the *Nabanūr* office was advertised as the place from where buyers could procure a copy of the epic.

241 Syed Emdad Ali, "Mahāśmaśān Kābye Johrār Caritra" (the character of Johrā in Mahāśmaśān Kābya), *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, v. 2 # 2, Śrāvaṇ 1326 / July-August 1919.

242 Syed Emdad Ali, "Mahāśmaśān Kābye Anaislāmik o Aślīl Bhāb".

243 Ibid.

244 Abul Kalam Mohammad Shamsuddin, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya", *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 8, Āṣāṛh 1326 / June-July 1919. The author would reiterate his defense of the epic in a later essay: Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, "Kābyasāhitye Bāṅgālī Musalmān" (The Bengali Muslim in Verse Literature), *Saogāt Nabaparyyāẏ*, v. 4 # 4, Āśvin 1333 / September-October 1926.

epical performance of "imaginary history". The poet, he explained had shown mastery over the various literary *rasa*s or aesthetic forms through his portrayal of eroticism (*ādirasa*), chivalry (*bīr rasa*) and melancholy (*karuṇ rasa*). He argued that critics had found *Mahāśmaśān* unacceptable as Bengali Muslim readers were still groomed in ethical principles (*naitik upadeś*) rather than in the romantic literary traditions.[245] Shamsuddin's defense of Kaekobad converged with defenses of *Citrāṅgadā* – that "antinuptial" love was not unnatural or unrealistic. Previous literary works like *Lailā-Majnu* or the *Ārabya Upanyās* (*Arabian Nights*) had never been penalized by Islamic sanctions on grounds of portraying "antinuptial" love.[246] Protesting Shamsuddin's defense, Emdad Ali reiterated his earlier stand that as a 'modern' epic *Mahāśmaśān* failed to live up to truly Islamic principles and epitomize *yugadharma* (the call of the times), the aspirations and ideologies of Bengali Muslims.[247] The epic had freely borrowed poetic metaphors from Hindu mythologies and religious beliefs but had failed to create a shared space (*milan kṣetra*) where Bengal's Hindus and Muslims could come together in a meaningful relationship.[248] For Emdad Ali, *Mahāśmaśān* was more of a Sanskritized version of *Amir Hamja*, a Persian tale of love and chivalry that had seen popular renditions in Islamic Bengali *puthi* texts over successive centuries. It would have been unnatural, Ali explained had the couple Ibrahim Khan Gardi and Zohra Begum exchanged Islamic messages. His point was clear: there could be no question of stamping out "kisses" (*cumban*) and eradicating new sexual norms from literary works but an "excess" (*prābalya*) of it was objectionable.[249] Mohammad Wajed Ali too expressed his reservations at what seemed representations of un-Islamic practices, beliefs and metaphors.[250]

Kaekobad himself had anticipated some of the criticisms that circulated in the public domain, particularly the contestations over what could have been realistic dialogues. In his preface to the first edition, he explained that he had refrained from attacking any community. Arguing in a vein common among Muslim publicists, he pointed out that Hindu writers "expected applause by demeaning Muslims and portraying them in roles of peon, waiters, coolies and laborers" and used abusive expressions for Muslims like "bhurucācā and

245 Ibid.

246 Abul Kalam Mohammad Shamsuddin, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya".

247 Syed Emdad Ali, "Pratibād: Āmār Uttar" (Protest: My Response), *Saogāt*, v.1 # 12, Kārtik 1326 / October-November 1919.

248 Ibid.

249 Ibid.

250 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Mahāśmaśān Sambandhe Dui Ekti Kathā" (a few observations on *Mahāśmaśān*), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 9, Śrāvaṇ 1326 / July-August 1919.

neṛemāmā".[251] He decided that he would not reciprocate by disgracing Hindus. However, he rationalized the use of invectives like *kāfer* (non-believer), *pāṣaṇḍa* (ruthless), *barbar* (uncivilized) and *narādham* (subhuman) to recreate a war ambience, on grounds that adversaries in combat would most likely have indulged in mutual name-calling.[252] Kaekobad also anticipated he would be criticized for not portraying Hindus (i.e. the Marathas) in an "inferior light" (*hīn barṇa*) – a practice that he felt would have amounted to "partiality" and a "distortion of truth".[253] Projecting Hindus unfavorably as effeminate and cowardly, he felt, could not have been glorious for Muslims, for there was no gallantry involved in "killing a fox".[254] Muslim valiance could be asserted only by representing the Marathas as "lions".

It was in the pages of *Nabanūr* that more serious charges of ahistoricity (*anaitihāsikatā*) were directed towards the epic. In an essay "Mahāśmaśān Kābya", Fazlar Rahman Khan criticized Kaekobad for being unfamiliar with evidence based scientific methods of historical practice.[255] Rahman praised the thrilling descriptions of wars and warriors in the epic as testimony of the poet's creativity, even as he admitted the "monotony" of the descriptive parts. A far more serious charge according to Rahman was the factual errors that defiled Islam and Muslims. Could poets, he asked enjoy creative license to deviate from 'facts'?

The use of primary sources for reconstructing the Panipat narrative became a key issue of contention. No evidence from the epic text or the poet's introductions to successive editions suggest that he had any familiarity (in origin or through translation) with the genre of printed bakhars that had been in circulation in Bombay Presidency from the late nineteenth century onwards.[256] Nor does the epic demonstrate much familiarity with the works of English historians like James Grant Duff's *History of the Mahrattas*, Elphinstone's *History of India* and Alexander Dow's *History of the Decline of the Mughal Empire*. Rather, the source that Kaekobad seems to have used was a recollection by Casi Raj Pundit translated by James Browne.[257] Casi Raj Pandit was a "muttaseddy in

251 Kaekobad, "Introduction to the First Edition", Dhaka 1311 / 1904.
252 Kaekobad, "Introduction to the First Edition", pp. 10–11.
253 Ibid.
254 Ibid.
255 Fazlar Rahman Khan, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya", *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 10, Māgh 1312 / January-February 1906.
256 Prachi Deshpande, op. cit. pp. 89–93 shows how bakhars did not become extinct in the colonial period. Rather print infused them with a new life and career in the public sphere during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.
257 This translated and annotated version of Casi Raj Pundit's account appeared in *Asiatic Researches*, volume iii, p. 44.

the service of the late Vizier Shuja-ud-daula, and being by birth a native of the Deccan, acquainted with the Marhatta language and having some friends in the service of the Bhow, he became the channel of several overtures for peace".[258] He had also been present at Panipat during the fateful battle. Being an eyewitness's testimony, Kaekobad accepted Casi Raj's account as credible and made extensive use of it to recreate in detail the course of the battle.

The *Nabanūr* critic argued that since the account was written long after Panipat and being a Maratha himself, it was unlikely that Casi Raj's retrospective analysis would have been entirely unprejudiced.[259] He found unacceptable, what he described as Kaekobad's lack of historical sense and interrogative spirit that explained his uncritical and selective reliance on Casi Raj's account. He argued that while Kaekobad had portrayed in graphic detail, the extent of Maratha losses and the violence perpetrated by the Durani coalition, he had chosen to ignore the accounts of Maratha depredations in northern India prior to the ill-fated encounter. Drawing on Alexander Dow's description of the ravages caused by Maratha military expeditions to Delhi under Sadashivrao and Viswasrao, Fazlar Rahman Khan wondered how Kaekobad could overlook the violence perpetrated by the 'Hindus' and only portray 'Muslims' as possessing monstrous military prowess.[260] He pointed out that even Casi Raj, whose impartiality was not entirely convincing, had admitted that the Marathas themselves were to blame for the debacle and interpreted Abdali's role as providential in humbling "the unbecoming pride and presumption of the Marhattas; for in the eyes of God pride is criminal."[261] Citing Casi Raj's account and Elphinstone's *History of India*, Rahman argued that the Marathas had been completely routed at Panipat, but Kaekobad being unfaithful to evidence based history and being empathetic towards the Hindu warriors, had chosen not to portray a complete Maratha debacle.[262] The role of Shuja-ud-daula was taken up by Fazlar Rahman Khan as another instance of a methodological flaw on Kaekobad's part. Following Casi Raj, Kaekobad had depicted the Awadh Nawab as a non-combatant participant at Panipat.[263] Drawing on Alexander Dow, Elphinstone and James Browne, Rahman argued that it was indeed the intervention

258 Fazlar Rahman Khan, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya" cited from translation of Casi Raj's text by James Browne.

259 Fazlar Rahman Khan, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya".

260 Ibid.

261 Casi Raj's account in the Asiatic Society's Researches, v. iii, p. 134 cited in Fazlar Rahman Khan, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya".

262 Fazlar Rahman Khan, "Mahāśmaśān Kābya".

263 Ibid.

of Shuja-ud-daula and Ahmad Shah Bangash that had changed the course of the battle in favor of Abdali's coalition.[264]

The debate clearly turned on the question of what constituted authentic history and whether literary genres could deviate from the overarching framework of established "historical truth". At one level the contestations had to do with the historical veracity of sources to be used for composing an epic of such magnitude. For Fazlar Rahman Khan, histories of India and the Marathas written by English historians like Elphinstone, Duff and Dow clearly took precedence over narratives of local informants like Casi Raj Pundit. The perspectives of the former set of historians, trained in liberal education and practitioners of what was accepted as impartial and empirically grounded historiographical discourse, seemed more credible than that of a middle-rank indigenous bureaucrat. Reliance on Casi Raj and empathy for the 'Hindus', Rahman believed, had distanced Kaekobad from the 'truth'. The fact that *Mahāśmaśān* visibly owed little or nothing to evidence-based histories of the colonial bureaucrats seemed to corroborate the lack of interrogative rigor and a deficient sense of history on part of the poet. Kaekobad himself as well as publicists supporting him seem rather quiet on this matter. Except for brief statements reiterating his commitment to historical truth and impartial assessment that appeared in the introductions to the second and third editions of *Mahāśmaśān*, Kaekobad does not seem to have engaged with the question of evidence based history writing and its deployment in creative genres like epics.

The question that framed much of these debates was whether *Mahāśmaśān* possessed the potential to help Bengali Muslims cope with their social world and how it could serve to hone their collective identity. For Fazlar Rahman Khan, the stake was high – the way Indian Muslims had been portrayed in *Mahāśmaśān*, barring exceptions like Ibrahim Gardi, was shameful and undesirable at an hour of crises when Bengal's Muslim community was in need of principles (*ādarśa*) and inspiration (*preraṇā*).[265] Historical authenticity, it was believed, could be a valuable component of nationalist pride. *Mahāśmaśān* claimed to narrate an epochal moment in the past of Indian Muslims, but one that arguably depicted Muslims as barbaric and ruthless. Critics took strong exception to rhetoric like *durdharṣa Moslem* (terrifying Muslim) and *dorāṇī barbar* (barbaric Duranis) – such phrases being 'inauthentic' and unsubstantiated by empirically verifiable facts was potentially debilitating for Bengal's Muslims.[266] Kaekobad, it seemed stood in contrast to a "high-minded Hindu"

264 Ibid.
265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.

(*mahāmanā Hindu*), the historian Jadunath Sarkar, striving to recuperate the "true" history of Aurangzeb and seeking to free the 'Muslim' monarch from the indignity (*kalañkakālīmā*) of historical falsities.[267]

Recent scholarships have shown how modern historiographic practices introduced and sustained by colonial bureaucratic and educational institutions, had simplified 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as geographical and social realities inherited from the past and projected them as immutable. By the early twentieth century, the eighteenth-century Maratha past was being interpreted in ways that reconciled the Maratha project with ideas of an essentially Hindu nation, its Hindi core and Muslim adversaries.[268] Both Kaekobad and his critics appear to have quite uncritically absorbed and shared in such contemporary discourses that were in circulation. Through the epic, 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' appear as homogenous military and cultural categories, their mutual exclusivity symbolized by their respective war slogans "har har mahādeb" (victory to Mahadev) and "dīn dīn" (victory to faith).[269] Kaekobad's critics too spoke in a similar voice, uncritically assuming 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' as invariable historical subjects that had always been socially and politically distinct. Emdad Ali and other critics' silence on Kaekobad's identification of the eighteenth-century "Muslim" as predecessors of modern Bengali speaking Muslims need to be contextualized amidst this growing historical common sense. These critics never questioned Kaekobad's efforts to recuperate a collective identity through deployment of imaginary singularities. At the same time, there seems to have been an underlying unarticulated discomfiture with this equation of eighteenth-century Muslim with Bengal's Muslims of the twentieth century.

Tied to the debates over authentic histories was a deeper concern about the connections between historical and literary narratives: could the poet's imaginative and linguistic dexterity be allowed the liberty to recreate a particular past or was it imperative on his part to remain strictly faithful to historical reality? In his discussions of Bankim's historical novels, Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that for the colonized Bengali intelligentsia, historical fiction provided a space for free play of imagination, the novelist deftly using his aesthetic liberty to unfurl "a landscape of imaginary effort against constituted historical injustice" and to "explore the peculiar terrain of history's non-actualized possibilities".[270] But there were also limits to literary imaginations – fictional consciousness and positivist historical methods were in sync, recreating the past in ways de-

267 Ibid.

268 Prachi Deshpande, op. cit. p. 209.

269 *Mahāśmaśān Kāvya*, p. 692.

270 Sudipta Kaviraj, op. cit. pp. 132–133.

manded by a majoritarian collective identity.[271] Epics together with genres like biography and history was perceived as heralding the literary modern. The 'modern' epic was overtly polemical in nature – providing an index of early efforts towards edification of tradition and crafting of collective identities. One question in the debates of course was whether or not the historical time recreated in *Mahāśmaśān* and the natures of the characters portrayed were empirically credible. The other critical concern framing the debates was, to what extent the epic was faithful to Islamic principles. Both Kaekobad and his critics spoke from within the same moral universe defined in terms of Islamic piety and the collective identity of Indian / Bengali Muslims. Both sides defended their respective positions in terms of their beliefs in historical objectivity and compliance with Islamic codes. Critics were in agreement that *Mahāśmaśān* had failed to illuminate true Islamic principles and the glorious pasts of Indian Muslims. Even the very choice of the historic moment of the third battle of Panipat to represent Muslim prowess was considered problematic. *Mahāśmaśān* thus became an arena where divergent notions of literary merit, historiographical exercise, and representations of Islam and Muslims converged. Departures from Islamic principles and the truthfulness or otherwise of representations of Muslims were now tested polemically, in terms of positivist methods and the veracity of sources used. *Anaislāmikatā* was now an empirically verifiable category – "evidence" culled from historical accounts of Duff, Elphinstone and Dow had been marshaled to demonstrate that all that was "un-Islamic" in the epic were indeed "un-historical" (*anaitihāsik*). Kaekobad's epic and the breed of 'authentic' histories therefore coexisted, complemented and contested each other within the same public sphere producing animated debates over ostensible factual fallacies.

A significant response to *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* was Syed Ismail Hossain Siraji's *Mahāśikṣā Kābya* published in parts in the periodical *Āl-Eslām*.[272] This epic too dealt with a moment of profound tragedy – the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Hossain at the battle of Karbala in 680 AD. The choice of the Karbala tragedy as a theme in Bengali literary genres was not new. Michael Madhusudan Dutta had, in the mid-nineteenth century, identified the Muharram episode as deeply melancholic and therefore constituting an ideal

271 Prachi Deshpande, op. cit. pp. 162–163.

272 Ismail Hossain Siraji, "Mahāśikṣā Kābya" (The epic of seminal / true learning), *Āl-Eslām*, v.1 # 3 Āṣāṛh 1322 / June-July 1915. The term *Mahāśikṣā Kābya* literally implies a chronicle of true lesson. Only parts of the epic, constituting the first volume (*Maharram-parba*) appeared in *Āl-Eslām*. The second half, chronicling avenge on Ejid appeared several decades later. Abdul Qadir ed. Syed Ismail Hossain Siraji, *Mahāśikṣā Kābya*, v. 2 [*Ejid badh*], Kendriya Bangla Unnayan Board, Dhaka, 1971.

theme for epics.[273] In the previous centuries, it had inspired a long and continuous literary tradition of *jaṅgnāmā* and *jārigān* that primarily dealt with Karbala and the triumphant campaigns of the early Imams.[274] Several popular *jaṅgnāmā* on Karbala, like *Maharram-parba* (the Muharram Episode; 1723) by the poet Heyyat Mamud circulated particularly during the eighteenth century. Mir Mosharraf Hossain's *Biṣād Sindhu* (Sea of Sorrow), a nineteenth-century historical fiction was the first Karbala narrative in modern vernacular prose, a heart-rending tale of misfortune depicting the exemplary courage of Hossain and his followers.[275] Siraji's epic narration of Karbala celebrating the extraordinary valor of Imam Hossain seems to be in marked contrast to Kaekobad's Panipat. Both were posited by their respective authors as moments of profound mourning for Muslims. But *Mahāśikṣā Kābya* mourned a past that could arguably be more effective in molding a sense of community solidarity, involving not just Indian Muslims (as Kaekobad had done) but one that crossed over geographical and political boundaries to absorb Muslims across the globe. It began with an invocation of Islamic Unitarianism – the indivisibility of Āllāh, the Nabī and the Korāṇ. Siraji situated himself within a continuous inheritance of epic composers from antiquity to modernity, including Homer, Balmiki, Dante, Virgil, Hafez, Sadi, Nizami, Firdausi, Kalidasa, Krittibas, Milton, Faizi, Rumi, Omar Khayyam, Tennyson, Cowper, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Khusrau, Alaoal, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay and several others.[276] He also elucidated that the objectives of epics (*mahākābya*) was to make known the dualities that shaped human lives – the eternal dialectics between order and chaos, between courage and cowardice as well as the virtues of forgiveness, love and devotion.[277]

At the moment of initiation of a Bengali Muslim literary sphere, there appears to have been a general consensus about epics as a potent device for crafting historical memories considered appropriate for Bengali Muslims. Historical epics were thus a response to and were conditioned by the perceived needs of a particular reader group, in this case, the emergent middle classes among Bengal's Muslims. Karbala narratives had been in circulation in precolonial scribal as well as early print cultures in Bengal. A retelling of Karbala in

273 Abdul Qadir, op. cit. p. 2.

274 Sukumar Sen, *Islāmi Bāṇglā Sāhitya*, pp. 44–52.

275 *Biṣād Sindhu* appeared in three parts in 1885 (Maharram-parba), 1887 (*Uddhār-parba*) and 1891 (*Ejid badh-parba*). Selim Jahangir, *Mir Mosharraf Hossain: Jīban o Sāhitya*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993, p. 130.

276 Ismail Hossain Siraji, "Mahāśikṣā Kābya". Not all the poets Siraji lists were in the literal sense epic writers.

277 Ibid.

modern, predominantly blank verse form would have been dictated by the need to connect modern Muslim middle classes with Islamic legacies that were till then, available either in premodern vernacular *puthi* or in Perso-Arabic texts. The polemical and creative orientation of *Mahāśikṣā Kābya* was directed towards this modern readership still in its formative stages. Towards the end of the first half, the Prophet is seen comforting his grieving daughter Fatima at the funeral of Imam Hossain that her son had laid down his life for the defense of liberty (*svādhīnatā*) and the republic (*prajātantra prathā*).[278] The epic's evocation of the principles of liberty and republicanism in context of early Islamic commune seem to have particular resonance for the early twentieth century in as much as these concepts of political liberalism could be deployed to forge modern collectivities. The appearance of these compositions and their reviews in the pages of periodicals reveal how memories of pasts were generated and circulated in the wider public sphere beyond institutional and academic enclaves. The contrast between *Mahāśmaśān Kābya* and *Mahāśikṣā Kābya* clearly had much to do with which past to appropriate for purposes of edification and collective consciousness. To most critics, Kaekobad's choice of a moment representing the passing of India's Islamicate past seemed unfortunate, with some even stating that the epic should not have appeared at all. By contrast, Siraji's epic claimed to rejoice the grand teachings (*mahatī śikṣā*) of Islam through its commemoration of what was perhaps the most poignant moment in the history of early Islam. Not only was there no doubt about the historical veracity of Karbala and the characters associated with it, Siraji took enough care to make characters noble and dialogues credible, so as to avert any accusations of falsehood. His narrative technique too appears far less cumbersome than that of Kaekobad, especially in his use of metaphors and epithets. Finally, Siraji's epic appealed to a larger truth of Islamic wisdom that went beyond the particularities of historicity.

4 The Call for Emancipation of the Mind: *Saogāt* and *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan*

The *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan* (Movement for Emancipation of the Mind) was initiated by the Muslim Sahitya Samaj (The Muslim Literary Society) set up in January 1926 by a small group of radical Bengali Muslim youth based in Dacca

278 Abdul Qadir, "Preface" to Siraji, *Mahāśikṣā Kābya*, v. 2, p. 1.

in eastern Bengal.[279] The association set up under the auspices of Mohammad Shahidullah included several students and teachers from Dacca University and Dacca Intermediate College like Abul Hossain, Abul Fazal, Kazi Abdul Wadud, A.F.M. Abdul Haq, Anwar Hossain, Abdul Qadir, Kazi Anwarul Qadir and Kazi Motahar Hossain.[280] The Society started annual issues of its mouthpiece, *Śikhā*. Edited by Professor Abul Hossain, a professor of economics at Dacca University, the first issue was published in Caitra 1333 / March-April 1927. In all only five issues of *Śikhā* were published. But the journal left a tremendous impact on cultural discourses of the time.[281] Abdul Wadud elaborated on the scope and force of the movement's call for emancipated mind:

> Where knowledge is restricted (*sīmābaddha*) and the intellect impeded (*āṛaṣṭa*), emancipation (*mukti*) is impossible.... Where the mind is not fearful of false notions perpetrated by traditions and self-confidence (*ātmaśakti*) has not been enervated, there can be no problems with regard to literature.[282]

Every issue of *Śikhā* carried the slogan taken from the opening words of the essay: *Jñān jekhāne sīmābaddha, buddhi sekhāne āṛaṣṭa – mukti sekhāne asambhav* (Where knowledge is restricted and the intellect impeded – emancipation is impossible).[283] When *Nabaparyyāẏ Saogāt* appeared in Agrahāẏaṇ 1333 / November-December 1926, it aligned itself with the Buddhir Mukti Āndolan,

279 This section will be concerned only with the beginnings of the *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan*, itself a short-lived movement that had more or less phased out by the mid-1930s. For a brief description of the *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan* see Tazeen M. Murshid, *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses 1871–1977*, pp. 125–132. Habib Rahman, *Bangali Musalman Samaj O Buddhir Mukti Andolan*, Mitram, Calcutta, 2009.

280 Habib Rahman, op. cit., p. 87.

281 Several literary periodicals inspired by the call for independence of thought appeared during the mid and late 1920s: *Abhijān* (1333 / 1926), *Taruṇpatra* (1332 / 1925), *Jāgaraṇ* (1335 / 1928), *Sañcaẏ* (1335 / 1928), *Jaẏatī* (1337 / 1930). All these periodicals were edited by Bengali Muslims but none quite secured any substantial readership.

282 Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Sāhitye Samasyā" in his volume of collected essays *Naba Paryāẏ* (published in 1333 / 1926), quoted in Maneer, *Bāṅglā Sahitye Baṅgālī Musalmāner Chintādhārā*, p. 373. Khan Saheb Maulana Abdur Rahman Khan, 'Sabhāpatir Abhibhāṣaṇ' (Presidential Address) at the Second Annual Session of Muslim Sāhitya Samāj 1334 / 1928 argued that it was essential to turn Muslim readers' attention away from puthi literature towards *prakṝta sāhitya* (real literature) – implying a reorientation of the community's indices from pre-colonial literary tradition towards modern literary sociability.

283 This was evidently an invocation of Tagore's poem from *Gītāñjali*: "Where the mind is without fear and the head held high / Where knowledge is free / ... In to that heaven of freedom, My Father, let my country awake!" ...

working closely with the Muslim Sahitya Samaj and *Śikhā* and providing the new radicalism with a literary and publishing presence in Calcutta circles. *Saogāt* provided an unencumbered institutional base for the movement – an innovative periodical with a secure run, its own, independent press and commercially successful. Being ideologically eclectic, it was able to pull in several acclaimed and amateur writers – non-Muslims, progressives among the Muslim youth and perhaps most importantly, Muslim women. The periodical cultivated an enduring relationship with Nazrul Islam, providing the rebel poet with his most important literary base besides his own editorial ventures like *Laṅgal* and *Gaṇavāṇī*.

For the radical intellectuals associated with *Saogāt* and *Śikhā* the call for an emancipated mind was part of an extended lineage of intellectual dissent embodied in the scholarly and religious persuasions of Al Mamun, Ibn Rushd, Akbar and Dara Shikoh.[284] This rationalist quest within Islamic philosophical tradition was demarcated as an alternative piety distinct from the Islamic piety (*Musalmānatva*) of ordinary practicing Muslims.[285] The debates between these *buddhibādī* (rationalist) intellectuals and the more conservative faction represented by the *Mohāmmadī* group was foregrounded in terms of an encounter between reason and conformism, between liberal principles and orthodoxies. Since the late nineteenth century, the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia had been torn between Islamic universalism and Bengali regionalism. Their prolonged engagements with these apparent contradictions had shaped the template for a Bengali Muslim literary sphere, informing debates on questions of mother tongue, Islamicization of modern literary Bengali and their claims to multiple Islamicate pasts. The *mukta buddhi* intellectuals reiterated the Bengali Muslims' social cultural proximity with the Bengali Hindus and prioritized it over Islamic universalism. Kazi Abdul Wadud argued:

> The attitude of the Bengali Muslim to ascertain brotherhood by simply recognizing a Muslim by his fez (*tupi*) must be gotten rid of as soon as possible so as to reduce our shame.[286]

284 Abdul Qadir, "Śāstrabāhaker Humkī" (Blackmailing by the custodians of scriptures), Abul Hossain Racanābalī, v.1, Naoroz Kitabistan, 1968, p. 382, cited in Habib Rahman, op. cit. p. 92.

285 Kazi Abdul Wadud, "Sāhityiker Sādhanā" (The commitment of writers), *Moslem Bhārat*, Baiśākh 1327 / April-May 1920.

286 Abdul Wadud, "Sāhitya Samasyā" (The problem of literature), *Śikhā*, Caitra 1333 / March-April, 1927.

Similar sentiments echoed in Fazilatunnesa's thoughts as well when she called upon Muslim women to impart to their children the faith that their motherland (*mātṛbhūmi*) was not Arabia, Persia, Turkey or Egypt but Bharatbarsha and that they were all *Bhāratbāsī.*[287] The ideological parameters of *Buddhir Mukti* were drawn out by a strong sense of Bengali regionalism, the normative principles of bourgeois humanism, and a reinterpretation of Islamic culture as essentially democratic involving a total negation of the practice of seclusion for women.[288] The experiences of communal conflicts of the post-Non-Cooperation years also produced strong sentiments about the atrocities of riots as militating against human dignity.

4.1 *Recuperating a Rational Religion: Classical Islam and Bengal Islam*

Faced with vehement criticisms from the orthodoxy for what appeared to be an influence of the "Godless (*dharma-bhāb śunya*)" nature of European or 'Hellenic culture'[289] and their consequent irreverence towards Islam, the *Saogāt* progressives assiduously argued that rationality and logical reasoning had been an integrated aspect of Islamic religious and intellectual traditions since its "classical" age between the eighth and twelfth centuries. Negating the ulema's deprecations of *mukta buddhi* as revolutionary and anti-Islamic, Mo-

---

287 Fazilatunnesa, "Muslim Nārīr Śikṣār Praẏajanīẏatā" (The need for education for Muslim women) in *Saogāt*, Agrahāẏaṇ 1334 / November-December, 1927 quoted in Dattagupta, Sharmistha, *Saogāt Patrikāẏe Bāṅgālī Nārīr Ātmaprakāś, 1927–47* [The appearance of Bengali women in *Saogāt*, 1927–47], School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, 2007, p. 19. In an address to the youths of the Mamun Club established by the Muslim Sāhitya Samāj Fazilatunnesa had reiterated similar arguments. Interestingly, Fazilatunnesa would be stoned and assaulted in public when she walked to the Dacca University daily clad in a saree and refusing to wear the borka. Eventually she passed her MA examination in Mathematics from Dacca University where she ranked 'First Class First'; quoted in Dattagupta, p. 7. In his presidential address at the Fourth Annual Session of the Muslim Sāhitya Samāj (1337 / 1930) Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad argued that Indian Muslims ought to turn away from their fascination with the West Asian lands of Arabia and Persia and instead firmly convince themselves that their homeland was India [Quoted in Layla Zaman, *Saogāt Patrikār Sāhityik Abadān o Sāmājik Bhūmikā*, pp. 238–239].

288 These were reiterated in numerous essays in *Saogāt* – Abul Hossain, "Muktir Kathā" (About Freedom), (Agrahāẏaṇ 1336 / Nov-Dec 1929); Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Dharmiẏa Śāsan" (Religious strictures), (Bhādra, 1338 / August-September 1931), "Strī Śikṣā" (Women's education) (Jyaiṣṭha 1335 / May-June 1928) and "Ulemāder Bhūmikā" (The role of ulema) (Jyaiṣṭha 1352 / May-June 1945); Begum Suraiya, "Korān o Pardā" (Koran and Purdah) (Baiśākh 1340 / April-May 1933); Fazilatunnesa, "Muslim Nārīr Mukti" (Freedom for the Muslim woman) (Bhādra 1336 / August-September 1929); Anowar Hossain, "Saṃskār o Yukti" (Belief and logic) (Kārtik 1336 / October-November 1929).

289 Golam Mostafa, "Muslim Sāhityer Gati O Lakṣya" (the path and progress of Muslim literature), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928.

hammad Nasiruddin denied that there was any scope for revolution within Islam. Asserting his belief in the fullness and finality of Islam, Nasiruddin explained that Islam did not stand in need of reforms and so was unchangeable. What were variable were the Muslims' temporal and circumstantial conditions that called for new questions and renewed understandings of Islamic tenets in the light of altered surroundings.[290] Challenging the ulema's monopoly over interpretations of Islamic laws, the *Saogāt* writers in a way questioned convictions about the immutability of the Sharia.[291] Simultaneously, they sought to locate *mukta buddhi* (an unchained intellect) and its logical extension *svādhīn cintā* (autonomy of thought), within established Islamic intellectual traditions, claiming that these were in fact dictum of the *Korān*, especially of its *iqra* / first *surā*.[292] Indeed, neither *Saogāt* nor the *Buddhir Mukti* intellectuals were the first to argue on these lines. Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi had earlier argued in *Nabanūr* that there was nothing in either the *Korān* or the *Hādis* that was contrary to *yukti* (reason) and *bibek* (conscience). Islamabadi contended that the *Hādis* that failed to make sense in terms of rationality was in all probability a later accretion rather than the Prophet's own words.[293]

In a very well-informed essay, Mohammad Barkatullah, a regular contributor on Islamic philosophy and history in *Saogāt*, sought to historicize *mukta buddhi* as a formative component of Classical Islam.[294] In identifying *mukta*

290 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Cintār Svādhīnatā" (freedom of thought), *Saogāt*, v. 2 # 3, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928.

291 Several essays appeared in *Saogāt* that reinforced the need to understand Koranic principles in the light of *muktabuddhi* and *svādhīn cintā*: Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Dharmajībane Agñatā o Kusaṃskār" (ignorance and superstitions in religious life), *Bārṣik Saogāt*, 1334 / 1927. Rezaul Karim, "Islāmer Ādarśa" (the ideology of Islam), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 10, Bhādra 1334 / August-September 1927. S. Wajed Ali, "Islāmer Dān" (The gift of Islam), *Saogāt*, v. 3 # 7, Jyaiṣṭha 1336 / May-June 1929. Sahadat Hossain, "Islāme Paramatsahiṣṇutā" (tolerance in Islam), *Saogāt*, v. 3 # 7, Jyaiṣṭha 1336 / May-June 1929. Mohammad Barkatullah, "Islām o Sabhyatā" (Islam and civilization), *Saogāt*, v. 3 # 7, Jyaiṣṭha 1336 / May-June 1929.

292 Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad, 'Islām o Musalmān' (Islam and Muslims), *Saogāt*, v. 4 # 5, Caitra 1336 / March-April 1930.

293 Mohammad Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, "Dharma o Bijñān" (Religion and Science), *Nabanūr*, v.3 # 5, Bhādra 1312 / July-August 1905.

294 Mohammad Barkatullah, 'Islām o Mukta Buddhi' (Islam and Emancipated Intellect), *Saogāt*, v. 4 # 4, Phālgun 1336 / February-March 1930. Raziuddin Aquil, "Reason and Faith in Islam", *In the Name of Allah: Understanding Islam and Indian History*, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2009, p. 199. Aquil describes the first century after the rise of Islam when large territories in Arabia, Middle East, Iran, Central Asia, the Maghreb and Africa were brought under a single political authority of a resurging new faith of Islam, as the period of Classical Islam. Barkatullah too identified the intellectual disputes during the Abbasid Caliphate as forming the golden past of Islam between the ninth and eleventh centuries.

buddhi and *svādhīn cintā* as not only embedded in Koranic scriptures but also as integral constituents in the unfolding of Islamic history, Barkatullah sought to undercut orthodoxy's denigration of liberal progressive ideals as un-Islamic. The history of early Islam, he argued, had been one of continuous contestation between clerical orthodoxy and protestant principles, between faith and philosophical reasoning – what he described as a *dharma-darśan dvanda*.[295] The conflict between faith and reason was therefore not new to Islam, nor exclusive to Bengal of the 1920s. Rationalist scholars had time again questioned the scriptural enunciations of theologians. As proponents of *buddhir mukti*, the *Saogāt* intellectuals saw themselves as sharing in that counter-theological protestant discourse.

The intellectual contestations, Barkatullah's essay elaborated, had begun with the encounter between a primal Islam (*moulik Islām*) and neo-Platonism during the Crusades, a moment that began an intellectual exchange between Europe and the Islamic world.[296] The concept of Islamic universalism itself, Barkatullah argued, had been a product of philosophical speculations of Arab scholars who extended the foundational notion of God (*khuda*) to conceptualize a universal religion (*biswajanīn dharmabād*).[297] The reign of the Umayyad monarchs had encouraged the intellectual radicalism of Arab philosophers, exemplified by the conflict between the rationalist Mutazila followers of Hasan Basri of Damascus known as the *Kaderiya* (i.e. believers in human ability and agency) and the more orthodox segment of the clergy, the *Jabariya* (believers in the preordination of fate).[298] Evidently, these intellectual schisms were aligned with the political contests for legitimate claims over the Caliphate.[299] The trend towards protestant thought, Barkatullah elucidated, matured under the patronage of the Abbasid Caliphate when the followers of Basri declared themselves to be "Ahlel Tauhid" and "Al Adl" (i.e. the supporters of the unity and sovereignty of God). This period in the history of West Asia, between ninth and eleventh centuries, was for Barkatullah, the *muktiyug* or the era of emancipation, implying an intellectually fertile and productive period across Islamic lands, represented by philosophers like Ibn Sina, Al Kindi, Al Farabi, and

295 Mohammad Barkatullah, op. cit.

296 Important Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were well-known to philosophers of medieval Islam. The latter based in the Middle East, Iran, Egypt and Spain collected, translated, critiqued and selectively appropriated principles of Greek philosophical traditions in their quest to understand and / or challenge Islam. Aquil, op. cit. p. 201.

297 Mohammad Barkatullah, 'Islām o Mukta Buddhi'.

298 Ibid.

299 Aquil, op. cit. p. 200.

most articulately by Ibn Rushd who in his debates with the Sunni revivalist Imam Ghazali, criticized blind conformism (*taqlid*) and argued that institutionalized religion was inherently false.[300] This was a period in which Omar Khayyam lived, times that for Barkatullah, were the embodiment of *svādhīn-cintā*.[301] Ibn Rushd's philosophical intervention demarcated the domains of religious knowledge and science and philosophy. Clerics, Barkatullah argued, knew only one form of learning – commentaries on scriptures, notes and counter-notes.[302] Any other modes of intellectual engagement, especially interrogation and logical reasoning were unknown to them. Ibn Rushd, he argued, had delineated the domain of science and philosophy as autonomous and beyond the bounds of scriptures. Islam, Barkatullah asserted embodied the domain of the former.[303] The experience of the Crusades had made these rebel philosophers realize the superficiality of territorial and religious boundaries, thus making it possible for them to conceive a universal religion (*sarbajanīn dharma mat*). The Arab philosophers were mostly physicians and not clerics who were not dependent upon royal protection and hence had been ruthlessly prosecuted.[304] Barkatullah argued that Islamic institutional authority had at various moments in the past been challenged by rebel philosophers who disowned clerical authority over interpretations of scriptures and reinventing true Islamic principles through *svādhīn cintā*. The principle of universal brotherhood in Islam, that most Muslim clerics would express their solidarity with, he asserted, was very much a product of radical protestant thought rather than of conformism (*taqlid*).[305]

Barkatullah's piece is an exposition of how the history of early Islam – the histories of the Abbasid Caliphate based in Baghdad, Fatimid Egypt and Umayyad Spain – were invoked to articulate a specific liberal and progressive cultural dispensation for Bengal's Muslims. The narratives of intellectual schisms within early Islam – the confrontations between philosophers and theologians, especially Ibn Rushd's questioning of the theological foundations of religion, provided the template for a historically grounded and discursively laid out opposition between reason (*tauhid*) and conformism (*taqlid*). Situating *buddhir mukti* firmly in this historical tradition of ideological contestation implied not

300 Mohammad Barkatullah, op. cit. Aquil, op. cit. pp. 203–208.

301 Omar Khayyam, according to Barkatullah had died in Nishpur a couple of years before the birth of Ibn Rushd.

302 Mohammad Barkatullah, op. cit.

303 Ibid.

304 The philosophers in fact found support with neither the masses nor the rulers – Caliphs and Sultans. Aquil, p. 205.

305 Mohammad Barkatullah, op. cit.

simply an attempt to argumentatively undermine theologians' authority and their control over the masses but also to align with a prevalent sense of unified Islamism even as Indian Muslim societies and the Caliphal order had undergone a profound transformation since the early 1920s. Reiterating that the principle of Islamic brotherhood was no myth, rather a true form of democracy (*gaṇatantra*), Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad argued that the contemporary time was a period of awakening similar to the Protestant Reformation of early sixteenth-century Europe. Both Egypt (*Miśar*) and Turkey (*Turaska*) had responded to the contemporary "rationalistic world culture" and the "intense nationalism" of the European nations.[306] For modern Turkey, Ahmad continued, the decision to abolish the Khilafat had been in accordance with true Islamic principles because the pristine Caliphal order had terminated with *khulafa-i-rashidin*, i.e. the Prophet and his successors during the course of the first century of Islam.[307]

Having asserted a historically identifiable rationalist element within Islamic thought that operated independently of theologians' interventions, several *Saogāt* writers turned to the immediate social-historical context of Bengal's Muslims, a vast majority of who were hapless masses, living in poverty and exploited by the agrarian power nexus of zamindars, moneylenders, lawyers and mullahs. Rational piety, the *Saogāti dal* believed, was one plausible way to alleviate the social miseries of the Muslim agrarian masses. Mullahs, Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad argued, had been the worst exploiters, a growing disparagement for the ulema among the educated Muslims becoming evident in the very way in which the term *mullah* was being pronounced as *mollah*.[308] Identifying "mollahs" as the primary cause of misery for the masses of Bengal's Muslims, Syeduddin Khan concurred with the daily *The Mussalman* that mollahs "should be thrown overboard".[309] In an appeal to the "ālem samāj" the *Saogāt* editor urged the ulema to move beyond their simple functions like dispensing religious instructions and issuing *kafer fatwa*.[310] As natural leaders, the ulema were seen as most proximate to the rural Muslim masses and so it was imperative that the ulema be more sensitive to their needs and problems. The ulema, Nasiruddin advised, had to take initiatives to promote vocational training, counsel poor peasants on ways to overcome financial hardships and

306 Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad, 'Islām o Musalmān'.

307 Ibid.

308 Ibid.

309 Syeduddin Khan, "Mollā Samāj" (The community of mollahs), *Saogāt*, v.4 # 11, Āśvin 1336 / September-October 1929.

310 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Ālem Samājer Prati Nibedan" (an appeal to the Ulema), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 4, Phālgun 1333 / February-March 1927.

also to take initiatives to circulate newspapers and periodicals in the countryside.[311] These journalistic speculations over the relevance and reform of Muslim theologian classes constituted a significant aspect of the liberal publicists' concerns.[312] Given the escalation of organized peasant politics from the mid-1920s onwards around issues of proprietary rights and entitlements, the *buddhir mukti* discourses on alternative piety had important implications for the ways in which literary publicists related to agrarian questions. Several *Saogāt* writers addressed agrarian problems of peasant impoverishment especially in the eastern districts: the Hindu gentry's monopoly over rural credit, the exploitation of the *prajā* (literally, subjects; here implying the rent paying small holding peasantry) by landlords and how commercial agriculture adversely affected peasants' occupancy rights and eroded the protection of local custom that they had traditionally enjoyed.[313]

Andrew Sartori has argued that pamphlets circulating widely in the Bengal countryside, especially during the 1920s posited a definitive connection between Muslimness, cultivation and Bengaliness. In this discourse, the peasant, rather than the bhadralok was the quintessential Bengali and it was the peasant's sense of Islamic piety that bound him closely to cultivation.[314] The concept of Muslimness and reform of day to day living was invoked to reinforce interests of the cultivator-tenant, their demands for proprietary rights and finally their emancipation. "The ready availability of practices of Muslim piety in the agrarian setting", Sartori argues, "made their invocation as a basis of self-cultivation so compelling."[315] Despite obvious continuities with nineteenth-century Faraizi principles, piety came to be articulated in very material terms in the twentieth century as tangible agrarian political demands of Bengal's Muslims.[316] This sense of Bengali Muslim culture as constituted by the life

311 Ibid.

312 Syeduddin Khan, "Anyāẏ gõṛāmī" (unjust / unfair orthodoxy), *Saogāt*, v.3 # 11, Āśvin 1336 / September-October 1929.

313 Mohammad Samiruddin, "Sud Samasyā o Bāṅglār Kṛṣak" (the problem of loan interests and Bengal's peasantry), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 10, Bhādra 1334 / August-September 1927. Syeduddin Khan, "Mosalmān o Sud Samasyā" (Muslims and the problem of interest on loan), *Saogāt*, v. 2 # 3, Māgh 1334 / January-February 1928. Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Sud Sambandhe Kaẏekṭi Kathā" (a few words about interest on loan), *Saogāt*, v. 2 # 5, Caitra 1334 / March-April 1928. Abdur Rashid Jamali, "Pāṭ o Bāṅglār Kṛṣak" (jute and Bengal's peasantry), *Saogāt*, v. 1 # 9, Śrāvaṇ 1334 / July-August 1927. S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅglār Kṛṣak o Pāṭer Cāṣ" (Bengal's peasantry and jute cultivation), *Saogāt*, v. 2 # 2, Pouṣ 1334 / December 1927-January 1928.

314 Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2014, pp. 148–149.

315 Ibid., pp. 143–144.

316 Ibid., p. 145.

experiences of small holding peasantry of the eastern districts had been an important substance of the liberal discourses of Bengali Muslim intellectuals as much as the visions of rural pamphleteers that Sartori talks about. For at least a small section of the Muslim liberal intelligentsia, the *Saogāt* group, the prevalent concept of piety and its manifestations in everyday practices, were inadequate to assuage the impoverishment of the Muslim cultivator. For them, the onus of peasant misery lay not so much with the Hindu gentry but with what they perceived as "unjust conservatism" (*anyāẏ gõṛāmī*) on part of the ulema.[317] The mullahs' insistence on a fundamentally "un-Islamic" practice like *taqlid*, it was argued, had facilitated the subordination and destitution of masses of Muslim cultivators. The *Saogāt* editor had at the outset publicly affirmed the journal's mission as directed against the "pretentious pīrs, mollahs and maulavis"[318] who in their own interests stifled rational thinking and promoted uncritical conformism.[319] Thus *Saogāt* writers like Syeduddin Khan, Sadat Ali Akhand, Mohammad Wajed Ali and several others passionately argued for reform of the ulema. Their critique was directed more at the localized forms and practices of rural Islam that revolved around village mosques and dargahs. This sense of piety and Muslimness came to be seen as having entrenched an inherently unequal hierarchy in rural society. Placed in juxtaposition to the perception of the early Caliphal order, the golden age of Islam as founded on rational, tolerant and egalitarian principles, the Bengal countryside came to represent a social system where injustice and inequality seemed endemic and social relations mired in an exploitative network of indebtedness, an unpredictable market and unsustainable subsistence farming. For the *buddhir mukti* publicists, rational piety enabled by reformed education was a positive alternative in so far as it could hold out the hope for the majority of cultivators to step out of uncritical conformism, identify the factors determining their suffering and affirm their political action accordingly. What the liberal intelligentsia thus hoped to offer – and where their progressive discourse intersected with the agrarian political discourse – was a conception of non-compliance and emancipation born out of *sunnat jama'at*.[320]

317 Syeduddin Khan, "Anyāẏ gõṛāmī".

318 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Sampādaker Nibedan" (Submission from the editor), *Saogāt Nabaparyyāẏ*, v.1 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1333 / November-December 1926, quoted in Nasiruddin, *Saogāt Yug*, pp. 189–190.

319 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Dharma-Jībane Ajñatā o Kusaṃskār".

320 Mohammad Wajed Ali, "Dharma-Jībane Ajñatā o Kusaṃskār".

4.2 *The Saogāt-Mohāmmadī Rivalry*

The *buddhir mukti* attempt to prioritize the rational-philosophical strand of Islamic thought at the expense of the theological-scholastic drew virulent hostility from a section of the ulema. As Mohammad Nasiruddin recollected, the weeklies *Mohāmmadī* and *Hānāfī* raised the cry of "Islam in danger" (*Islām bipanna*) and issued a decree of heresy (*kāferī fatowā*) against the *Saogāti dal*.[321] Nasiruddin explained the *Mohāmmadī-Hānāfī* retaliation in terms of the threat *Saogāt* and its call for *mukta buddhi* posed to the ulema's "entrenched interests" (*kāẏemī svārtha*).[322] According to Nasiruddin, the assertion in the pages of *Nabaparyyāẏ Saogāt* of *mukta buddhi* and *svādhīn cintā* as the core of Islam and *Saogāt*'s alignment with Nazrul Islam precipitated the hostility between the two groups of periodicals. Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan, an acclaimed publicist and editor of the weekly *Mohāmmadī* and from 1927 onwards of *Māsik Mohāmmadī* led the campaign against the *Saogāti dal*, the terms of which, Nasiruddin complained, frequently crossed the limits of journalistic courtesy (*sāṃbādik nīti*).[323] For Nasiruddin the rampages at the *Saogāt*-organized condolence meeting for Justice Syed Amir Ali and the felicitation programs in honor of Fazilatunnesa and Nazrul Islam, were perpetrated by the orthodox mollahs who had gathered under the cover of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*.[324]

The freezing of religious boundaries and the ascendancy of communal politics during the early twentieth-century decades forms perhaps the most important narrative in histories of various South Asian regions. The formative history of the Bengali Muslim literary sphere and its contestations with the mainstream, predominantly Hindu public sphere seriously undermines a singular narrative of communal polarization steadily leading towards a catastrophic 1947. The literary sphere was not a naïve space calling for social harmony. Bengali Muslim publicists in their quest for self and community identities frontally addressed questions of political conflicts, the Hindu domination of *Baṅgasāhitya*, the liberal-democratic possibilities within Islamic piety and the feasible ways to bring in Bengal's majority population, the rural Muslims within the folds of a modern public sphere. The patterns of production, circulation and reception of Bengali Muslim periodicals show how this domain was shaping up as essentially a cross-community formation with a robust regional certitude. Most significantly perhaps, this literary sphere seemed to defy the appropriative powers of modern political practices.

---

321 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Maulana Mohammad Akram Khan, Mohāmmadī o Saogāt", *Saogāt Yug*, p. 831.

322 Ibid.

323 Mohammad Nasiruddin, *Saogāt Yug*, pp. 830–831.

324 Mohammad Nasiruddin, op. cit. pp. 844–849.

CHAPTER 5

The Limits of Literary License: What Could Women Read and Write on?

> We [i.e. the Bengali *bhadralok*] have permitted our womenfolk (*strī-jāti*) to be free not in society, but in the realm of literature. Surely the number of women writers in Bengali exceeds that of male writers.[1] Probably this is the reason why periodicals (*māsik patra*) have popularly acquired the feminine gender (i.e. *patrikā*)….
>
> This autonomy in the literary field, though *in itself pleasant as an outcome*, is nonetheless the *result of a wrongful reasoning*. Women hardly enjoy any respect in our society but in literature they do so probably in excess of what is really required. This is because if the superiority of the Hindu society over all other societies has to be established then the only way is to eulogize our womenfolk. It is not possible to applaud ourselves [i.e. the Bengali bhadralok] because our physical and mental wretchedness is known to all. Thus we are forced to argue that the very best in our society is locked up inside our *antaḥpur*.[2]… These arguments are actually meant to rave about ourselves in a camouflaged way. So if you [i.e. the womenfolk] think that you have acquired any claim (*svatta*) to those eulogized attributes, then you will remain in the same obscurity as ever.[3]

Evidently Pramatha Chaudhuri, a leading social and literary critic found no reason for complacence in the fact that women writers (*lekhikā*) were numerically visible in periodical publishing. In his usual incisive style he argued that women's participation in the literary sphere was primarily a result of male initiative, a response to colonial criticism about the depraved condition of Bengali women. For Chaudhuri, women's involvement in the literary world was

1 This observation, most probably, is not based on any quantitative information. Rather it metaphorically alludes to the visibility of women writers in literary periodicals.

2 The inner residential quarters of the house with strict privacy maintained were known as *antaḥpur*.

3 Pramatha Chaudhuri (Bīrbal), "Nārīr Patrer Uttar" (response to a lady's letter), *Sabuj Patra*, Year 1, # 7, Kārtik 1321 / October-November 1914 [emphases mine].

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_007

not an indicator of any real improvement in their social-familial position. Rather it was a product of "wrongful reasoning". The visibility of women in the literary public sphere had more to do with nationalist-reformist strategies of indigenous men.[4] Literary engagement, possible only for the 'educated' woman was thus a direct testimony of the reform initiatives of the Bengali bhadralok and their ability to manage their own households. Thus their preoccupation with elevating the *antaḥpur* to a reformed and progressive space ideologically presaged their competence for national self-rule. Chaudhuri's argument implied that the nationalist project of reconfiguring the domestic space was duplicitous because it bestowed no real freedom on women. He seemed unconvinced that the predominance of women writers in literary monthlies was an indicator of the progress of female education and bhadralok success in reforming domestic space. A few years later, a male publicist in the women's journal *Mātṝmandir* regretted that despite the presence of many well educated women in Bengal, none except a few like Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Basanti Devi were active in nationalist politics at an all-India level.[5] A majority of them including Swarnakumari Devi, Mankumari Basu, Jyotirmoyee Ganguly, Priyamvada Devi and Girindramohini Dasi had chosen to become poets and novelists. Bengali literary periodicals, he rued, were replete with hundreds of women writers but only a handful coming up with anything profound. There were none among Bengali women like Pandita Ramabai, Parvati Devi (daughter of the Congress extremist Lala Lajpat Rai) or Kasturbabai Gandhi.[6] Despite their different takes on the same issue, both men found the numerical visibility of women writers somewhat misleading. For a nationalist elite eager to present before the colonial rulers a reformed domestic space, an increase in the number of women writers most likely would have been a convenient evidence of the progress in female education. But ironically, this correlation proved to be a source of discomfiture for at least some amongst the nationalist elite. For Chaudhuri it was not an index reflecting any improved status for women. For the publicist of *Mātṝmandir*, it was awkward that a majority of educated Bengali women chose not to be involved in nationalist politics (*swādeśikatā*). The paradox was the presence of a large number of minimally educated women indicating neither any real improvement in women's social status, nor the possibility of women with leadership qualities. Thus even as women's public presence became a reality, making the

4 Ibid.
5 Shyamlal Goswami, "Swadeśī-sādhanāẏe Baṅgamahilā" (Bengali women in the Swadeshi struggle), *Mātṝmandir*, v. 1 # 6, Agrahāẏaṇ 1330 / November-December 1923.
6 Ibid.

literary sphere more democratic, in their private, domestic lives, most middle-class women continued to be subordinated to an oppressive patriarchy. It is this paradox that provides an entry point into women's literary engagements as readers and writers and what sort of public role literary journalism conferred on middle-class women. This chapter shows that the aesthetic and ideological tropes governing women's literary engagements continued to be dictated by nationalism's reformist program. The pedagogical thrust of women's periodicals is unmistakable and so are the nationalist anxieties surrounding middle-class domesticity. Into the early twentieth century, women's literary culture remained firmly hemmed in domesticity. Nevertheless, periodicals silently wove distinct, albeit submerged narratives of middle-class women's lives, their desires and the gradual changes in their lifestyles while also enabling at least some of them to register their dissent against the inequalities of patriarchy.

Focusing on the question of literary permissibility that bound women readers and writers, this chapter shows how women were seen to comprise a distinct constituency of readers with their own pedagogical and aesthetic needs and how women's writers engaged with an avid and growing female readership. By the early twentieth century the periodical medium had emerged as an extended form of sociability that acted both as entertainment and as supplement to formal education. Literary periodicals formed an important part in women's everyday lived experiences, bringing a woman reader in intimate relationships with a wider community of women readers who were individually unknown to her. This bond of intimacy was constituted by domesticity even as it extended beyond the physical space of the domestic realm. Literary periodicals provide testimonies to the material form and aesthetics of women's public engagements, reworking the boundaries between the domestic spaces that they inhabited and worlds into which desired to cross over.

1 Home, Reform and Nationalism

During the late nineteenth century, domesticity and conjugality had emerged as well-developed cultural codes for addressing questions related to women and the emergent modern nation. Within history writing on colonial South Asia and particularly Bengal, the domestic sphere of the upper-caste, upper and middle-class *bhadralok* households is perhaps one of the best documented.[7] Studies have focused on narratives of complicity between patriarchal

7 Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*; Brill Publishers, Leiden, 1996. Himani Banerjee, "Fashioning a Self: Educational Proposals for

and colonial politics and how the *antaḥpur* became a site for a predominantly bourgeois and male modernizing project in terms of medical and educational interventions. Partha Chatterjee's well-known formulation of the "nationalist resolution of the 'woman question'" showed how the upper-caste Bengali home was represented as the private, spiritual domain where the nation came into its own. For the reformist elites this interior space was a sanctified one that had to be made capable of enduring material and colonial interventions.[8] The *zenānā* or *antaḥpur* i.e. the private inner quarters of the residence was demarcated primarily as the woman's space that became the focus of intense scrutiny and reform debates. The *antaḥpur* as European missionaries, colonial bureaucrats and Victorian feminists perceived it was unhygienic, devoid of knowledge, wholly dominated by effeminate male members and therefore indicative of the Indians' fundamental incompetence to govern themselves. In response both Indian reformists and conservatives alike came to identify the indigenous domestic space as private and spiritual vis-à-vis the colonial public sphere that was now characterized as masculine and materialistic.[9] The articulation of a new patriarchy made it possible for the bilingual indigenous male elite to counter imperialist critiques of Indian civilization by legitimizing reform programs aimed to elevate the home. Under their reforming zeal, the early nationalist project of organizing the home involved most importantly enlightening women of the household. This was done primarily by articulating modern, yet indigenous principles of domesticity, feminine virtues and duties.[10] The woman in the nationalist discourse came to be represented as the

---

and by Women in Popular Periodicals in Colonial Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct 26, 1991. Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal: 1849–1905*, Princeton University Press, 1984. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, 2003. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India" in *Subaltern Studies*, Volume VIII, Oxford University Press, 1994. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, 1993. Dagmar Engels, *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal 1890–1930*, Oxford University Press, 1999. Geraldine Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, 1998. Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India: Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*, Oxford University Press, 2002. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001. Judith Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned when Men gave them Advice*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, Maryland, 2004.

8 Partha Chatterjee, "The Nation and Its Women" in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, pp. 126–132.

9 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p. 6.

10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal", *History Workshop Journal* 36 (Autumn), 1993, pp. 1–33.

prime dweller of the interior space and as the *Gṝhalakṣmī*, personified the essentially sanctified nature of the *antaḥpur.* The domestic realm therefore became endowed with the twofold burden of standing in for the embryonic modern nation as well as being emblematic of the real India embedded in an essentially Hindu past.[11] The present home was however seen as debilitated and in need of immediate amelioration. The *gṝha* or home thus became the site for modernizing interventions by the colonial state, white feminists and nationalist reformers.[12]

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century liberal reformers called for legal intervention on part of the colonial state and rationalized reforms in terms of authentic scriptural tradition. Revivalists proposed similar changes but without the involvement of the state and driven by male leaders of the community.[13] By the late nineteenth century however reform efforts had ended in stalemate because of the predominance of orthodoxy.[14] Women, supposedly the beneficiaries of social reform hardly had a voice in effecting the legislative changes or in the debates between the male reformists and revivalists. It was the latter who laid down the precincts of nationalist domesticity, femininity and conjugality.[15] Women's education and well-being were conceived not in terms of their rights or emotional needs but as an essential precondition to reinvigorate the community. While sharing certain global and metropolitan presumptions, discourses on women in colonial Bengal were very much responses to immediate localized circumstances.[16] The genre of domestic advice manuals for women, for instance show how middle-class Hindu women internalized the normative values of the new patriarchy dispensed by male nationalist reformers.[17] An expanding bilingual public sphere facilitated by a popular market in print provided the discursive space for polemicists on either side of the reform divide but more notably for women's voices to be heard.[18] Of course not everyone was willing to hear the latter out but accounts

11 Partha Chatterjee, op. cit. p. 117.

12 Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill Press 1994.

13 Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit. p. 7.

14 Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit. p. 7.

15 Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001.

16 Walsh, op. cit. pp. 25–26.

17 Walsh, pp. 38–40.

18 For an analysis of how print culture provided the discursive space for debates on social reforms, see for instance Tanika Sarkar, "Talking About Scandals: Religion, Law and Love in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal" in *Hindu Wife*, *Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001, pp. 53–94. Sarkar shows how the emerging

of women like Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai or even the secret autobiography of Rasasundari Devi did destabilize reformist polemics by foregrounding women's life experiences, the pain of dislocation that marriage involved and yearnings for learning.[19]

Through the prolonged debates that involved Indian and British reformists, feminists and conservatives, the *antaḥpur* became at once the repository of fast disappearing traditions as well as evidence of a potentially bright and hopeful future. Enhanced female education, erosion of purdah, and abolition of practices like child-marriage, polygamy and dowry were seen as conclusive markers of women's "progress".[20] From the Swadeshi years, women's political activism, either as "direct participation" in processions and collective boycotting of foreign goods or as "indirect participation" in silent camouflaged aid to secret armed societies increasingly gained social acceptance. Women's political activism prompted the colonial government to adopt measures to prevent spread of patriotism in the *andarmahal* – banning gramophone records with songs like *Bandemātaram* and *Āmār Deś* and permitting plays like *Jīban Sandhyā* running in Star Theatre to continue after removal of 'objectionable' passages.[21] Added to these, since the 1920s were women's new political demands especially demands for equal franchise that became increasingly eloquent as women breached centuries'-old seclusion norms to join anti-colonial agitation politics.[22] It was in this context that *strī-svādhīnatā* (or women's autonomy) emerged as a heavily freighted concept and came to be imagined in ways that foreboded the nation's political autonomy from colonial rule.

By the early twentieth century years, women's education, at least primary learning, had become a fairly acceptable practice amongst the urban middle

---

public sphere provided space for individuals to articulate their anxieties over issues generally regarded as intimate, the imperative for such enunciations coming from certain reported incident, in this case a scandal involving a temple priest and a young married woman. Tanika Sarkar, "A Pre-History of Rights? The Age of Consent Debates in Colonial Bengal" in Sarkar, op. cit. pp 226–249. In this essay Sarkar shows how the identity of a woman, though not yet thought in terms of her rights to her own life, was being seen as a precondition for free and uninhibited debates in the public sphere.

19 Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit. p. 4.

20 Engels, pp. 4–5; Borthwick, pp. 26–59 and Forbes, pp. 12–18 have discussed colonial and missionary impetus for reform of women's condition and the subsequent nationalist internalization of such discourses on women's emancipation.

21 Bharati Ray, "The Freedom Movement and Feminist Consciousness in Bengal, 1905–1929" in Bharati Ray (ed.), *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 182–189.

22 Ray, op. cit., pp. 189–201. Geraldine Forbes, op. cit. pp. 93–100.

classes. Child marriage, i.e. marriage of girls below the age of ten too was being increasingly abandoned in favor of their schooling. Though marriage itself remained almost universal for girls, raising the permissible age resulted in fewer child widows and more time spent at school.[23] Nevertheless, since girls were still married off at a fairly young age, their formal schooling period (mostly in the vernacular) added up to only a few years.[24] For a majority of young wives who had acquired only a partial education in primary school, periodicals were an important medium of informal education, supplementing formal schooling with their wide range of subjects and literary genres. Incorporating an impressive range of readings like poetry, fiction, travel narratives, domestic advices and essays on history, geography and science, journals emerged as an integral constituent of women's reading practices, combining pedagogy and intimacy. They inculcated in their readers certain public concerns, especially those pertaining to women's education, political activism and financial liberty. Even as women entered Gandhian politics in large numbers during this period, journals hardly ever questioned normative behavioral codes set out for women and their repeated insistence on propriety and demeanor seems to an extent, reticent. But while they were never quite feminist, they gradually did broaden their readers' concerns and steadily created consensus for social reform. At a time when the efficacy of legislative reforms had been largely undermined, periodicals, much like sartorial morality, became a mode of internal reform.[25] Though initially monopolized by the aesthetic visions and moral concerns of the male reforming elite, the discursive space of periodicals was soon wrested by women writers. Through their reading and writing, women became

23 Dagmar Engels, op. cit. pp. 43–44.

24 The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 raised the legal marriageable age to only 16 for brides and 18 or 20 for grooms. The Act, as Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar point out was passed without much difficulty in stark contrast to the debates surrounding the Age of Consent bill only three decades earlier. The reason as the Sarkars argue were the tangible presence of women's organizations, a more proactive Congress leadership and the anger caused by the very racist account of Indian gender norms by the American journalist Katherine Mayo. Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit., p. 8. Geraldine Forbes, "Women and Modernity: The Issues of Child-marriage in India", *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 2, 1979, p. 413. Dagmar Engels, op. cit., p. 45.

25 Himani Banerjee, "Attired in Virtue: The Discourse on Shame (lajja) and Clothing of the Bhadramahila in Colonial Bengal" in Bharati Ray ed., *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997, pp 67–106. Banerjee demonstrates how clothing of the female body became an important aesthetic project for male reformers, entailing certain basic shifts within the everyday lives of households. A reformed sartorial style was a moral indication of the bhadramahila's social role and the culture of her society.

energetic participants within the literary public sphere, fashioning their subjectivities and defining ideas of their public engagements.

As such this chapter does not unearth new historical facts about South Asian women. However, in attempting to write a history of how women related to an expanding public sphere through reading and writing, it seeks to uncover the intimate experiences that these practices formed in a woman's life. Reading experiences were both familiar and new and they entailed a reconfiguration of domesticity in both its material and conceptual aspects, and its boundaries with the public sphere. Women's journals were edited by well-educated women from upper class (mostly upper caste) Hindu and Brahmo families. Women writers and readers however comprised a mix of well-educated modernized women and a host of ordinary middle-class women. The subject of this study is therefore not so much the westernized mobile woman often inhabiting transnational spaces or institutional histories of women's movement and progress of female education. Rather I seek to search out the ordinary reader and writer (the woman who perhaps aspired to be a writer but never quite made the cut), many of who would perhaps have been reticent to break free of seclusion let alone come out on to the streets and participate in anti-British demonstrations. For many of these women readers, periodicals were possibly their only connection with the world outside. The ordinary middle-class women to whom these periodicals reached out appear perhaps only in colonial records as circulation figures for various women's journals. Identifiable only by their anonymity, then can these women justly be subjects of historical inquiry? Sifting through the pages of these journals one comes across a range of issues and concerns that were seen as 'fit' for women readers, those that related to the home and various aspects of domesticity. Very few of the writings in women's journals stand out as either innovative or radical – most are endless repetitions of advices on domesticity, behavioral codes for women and domestic fiction with narrative plots woven around the house and home. Then are they only worth being consigned to oblivion for 'lack' of any new supplemental facts? Literary periodicals are perhaps one of the very few extant artifacts that entered, circulated and were consumed in the interior space of early twentieth-century Bengali middle-class homes. They are therefore material testimonies of domestic experiences and family lives of these otherwise anonymous, faceless women.

Women's periodicals delineated a female readership by focusing primarily on issues pertaining to women. The process of creating a female readership entailed most importantly nurturing women writers. Amateur women writers

took to magazine writing seriously, though not yet as a profession. These writings were essentially different from the confessional writings of private diaries that were not initially meant for publishing.[26] Rather writing for periodicals meant writing for anonymous readers. For women writers therefore the task of writing was not a simple one of narrating their experiences and talking about desires. Conscious of the public circulation of their texts many of them had to constantly struggle against open rebuke of women's intellect and limited education. At the same time their task was to continuously inscribe domesticity in the public domain, project the imaginary best and cleanse the domestic space of all undesirability.

Women's writings of their own experiences and the memories that shape the narration of those experiences cannot be analyzed in terms of 'truth' content. Neither can they be treated as evidences corroborating larger political histories of the nation.[27] Rather, as Antoinette Burton has argued, women's writings such as those of Janaki Majumdar, Cornelia Sorabji and Atia Hossain constitute a history and its archive in their own rights and that they are not supplemental to or "afterimages" of any meta-narrative of history.[28] Thus her insistence that women's writings be read "*both* as archival sites *and* as history-in-the-making" as "legitimate" as official archives, artifacts and other narratives of the past. And if women's writings and memories are "unreliable" as archives, then so are official archives.[29] As Tanika Sarkar has admitted in her reading of Rasasundari Devi's autobiography, it is "not easy to convince oneself that the writing of an obscure village housewife has any significance as a subject of historical research, since it cannot uncover new or significant 'historical fact.'"[30]

26 Rasasundari Devi's autobiography *Āmār Jīban* provides instance of such early writings by women. See Tanika Sarkar, "A Book of Her Own, A Life of her Own: The Autobiography of a Nineteenth Century Woman" in her *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, 2001.

27 History writing critiquing the irrefutability of official archives have not only asserted the legitimacy and autonomy of *all* archives, especially writings and memories of subaltern and marginal social groups including women, but have also made the important argument that even official archives are inherently ephemeral: Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1994. Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998. Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003.

28 Antoinette Burton, op. cit., p. 26.

29 Ibid., p. 26.

30 Tanika Sarkar, *Words to Win: The Making of Amar Jiban: A Modern Autobiography*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1999, p. ix, quoted in Antoinette Burton, op. cit., p. 24.

Women's periodicals do not simply constitute an archive yielding information on women, their capitulations to or dissensions with patriarchy. They contained multiple authorial voices, assort of genres and readers' responses, which resist any simple idea of the magazine text as contraptions of invasive and dominant patriarchal ideology. Rather they reveal how an increasingly popular press destabilized accepted gender norms, reflected middle-class definitions of domesticity and lent new meanings and legitimacy to women's desires.

In the context of a rapidly capitalizing society such as early twentieth-century Japan, periodicals provided an exposure to commodities for household and personal use, an avenue for release of desires for material goods and an escape from the drudgeries of everyday household chores.[31] The emergence of consumerism indexed most significantly by a whole range of cultural commoditization including departmental stores, Hollywood movies, jazz, radio programs and popular music represented an overall shift in modern, urban lifestyles. Images of modern Japanese women as enlightened mother or as the modern professional widely circulated through these mass periodicals and these representations enabled readers to negotiate the fast pace of urban life.[32] By contrast in colonial Bengal women's periodicals were not the glossy ones speaking to the modern professional women. Confronted by uncertainties of inadequate finances and a constrained market the lives of women's periodicals in a way reflected the ambivalences of Bengali middle-class readership they targeted. They emerged less as purveyors of consumerism and urban mass culture. Rather they appear as artifacts of desire in themselves – a commodity that ordinary middle-class women craved and eagerly waited for every month. The look of these periodicals is simple and their content more in conformity with the dominative discourses on domesticity and nationalism. Since most women were still concerned chiefly with their private lives encumbered by domestic obligations, one of the priorities of these periodicals was probably to reach to as many ordinary middle-class homemakers as possible. Women's journals spoke not so much to the sexual desires of their readers but concentrated on elevation of their lifestyles, the latter being firmly ensconced in nationalist discourses on domestic duties. But at more mundane day to day level periodicals did create and embody material desires among readers, a desire to be a good wife and enlightened mother, a longing for socialization and a desire for release that reading and writing offered. Increased production of

31 Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*, Duke University Press, 2003.

32 Sato, op. cit. p. 16.

periodicals altered forms of women's sociability, made possible new ways of thinking and determined their relationship with the society at large. They were perceived as a reader group with different intellectual abilities and interests determining their reading choices. Women's magazine reading culture needs to be seen as involving practices embedded in the domestic realm valorized by the nationalist elite as the abode of the nation.[33] They are distinctive by their circulation in a particular social space, the middle-class household. An enlightened homemaker as envisioned in the reformist discourse was therefore not a simple product of female education and reading of advice manuals and religious texts. Rather her subjectivity was as much determined by her engaged reading of periodicals. Advice essays and writings on religious rituals might still have been important components of women's periodicals and male reformists their considerable producers.[34] Yet as literary forms, periodicals were different. Their very nature provided women with ample scope for articulating their thought and dealing with their own 'problems' (*samasyā*) themselves. They were no longer simply passive receptors of advices from male mentors. Debates raged over what kind of familial and social space women ought to dwell in, the limits of *strī-svādhīnatā* and their responsibility in fostering an educated and cultured generation of future citizens. Questions relating to domesticity, love and companionate marriage were the formulating tropes of social and domestic fiction that were the key attraction of periodicals. For many women writing and reading became at once a retreat from the insensitivities of the society as well as conscious acts signifying defiance of ruthless social regulations. By the early twentieth century, the ability of women to read and write was not quite considered a sacrilege, as it had been a century before.[35] Neither was their open participation on the streets of Calcutta during the Gandhian movements considered a violation of the basic principles of *purdah*. Women's writings in literary periodicals candidly acknowledged the seeming changes in their public lives. But what came across through most of their writings was a

33 Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Stanford University Press, 1992, pp. 3–5. Chartier argues that reading habits of every social group are perceived as an indicator of their intellectual ability. But reading practices are firmly imbricated in particular social spaces and habits.

34 Anonymous, "Mahilār Pratiṣṭhātā O Sampādak" (The founder and editor of *Mahilā*), *Mahilā*, v. 15 # 4, Kārtik 1316 / October-November 1909. Commenting on the endeavor and hard work of Girishchandra Sen, the founder and editor of the journal, the write-up lauded his reformist mission and his commitment to the cause of women's welfare and education.

35 Dagmar Engels, p. 160.

passionate aspiration for amelioration of women's and especially of widows' social and familial conditions.

The following sections of this chapter interrogate how women themselves participated in literary journalism as a mark of social transformation, emerging as a rightful public at a moment when the contours of a politically autonomous post-colonial nation-state were being debated in the public sphere. Periodicals made way into feminine reading spaces that had till the late nineteenth century, included mainly advice manuals, religious texts and mythologies. Reading matter for women continued to be gendered and license on women writers rather stringent. An exploration of the contents of women's periodicals, concerns over their literary tastes, the reading choices that they were allowed to make and the intellectual duress behind their writings reveal how magazine reading became a quotidian practice among middle-class homemakers, etching out space of intimacy and collective agency. In trying to shape a female readership, periodicals focused on issues tied up with 'the woman's question' – education, work and domesticity. As long as the woman's reading remained confined to various aspects of domesticity, society was by and large prepared to accommodate her desire for reading. Indeed the issue of literary license became particularly sensitive, as women writers were mostly expected to concentrate on 'feminine matters', i.e. the domestic space – its care and management, rather than on sexuality.[36] Even during the 1920s women writers exploring *prem* or love beyond conventional frames either in poetry or fiction were very few. The noted exceptions were Radharani Devi and Amodini Ghosh whose verses foregrounding sexuality were indeed very radical for the times. The issue of literary license vis-à-vis women writers were in effect a powerful social commentary on the limits and possibilities of *strī-svādhīnatā* – what women writers chose to or were permitted to pen down. Journals tried to create a responsive female readership by including 'feminine' features in their pages; thereby identifying women's reading practices as distinctly feminized.[37]

36 Samita Sen, "Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal" in *Gender and History*, Wiley-Blackwell, v.5 # 2, June 1993, pp. 231–243.

37 For historical accounts of women's periodicals and their roles in shaping a female readership see: Himani Bannerji, "Fashioning a Self: Educational Proposals for and by Women in Popular Periodicals in Colonial Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 26, 1991; Gail Minault, "Urdu Women's Periodicals in the Early Twentieth Century, *Manushi*, 48 (September-October, 1988); Francesca Orsini, "Domesticity and Beyond: Hindi Women's Journals in the Early Twentieth Century" in *South Asia Research*, Sage, 19, no. 2, 1999, pp 137–60; The *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* with its long print run became tied to the changes in the ways society perceived female education. It was a periodical that not only legitimated female education but represented a moment when social reform became the primary function of literary agenda. Sonal Shukla, "Cultivating Minds: Nineteenth

But as this chapter proceeds to show, women's journals did slowly induct their readers into hitherto socially unaccepted ideas (for example, the issue of women's work outside home), constantly reiterating those themes until there started to emerge a consensus for such thinking amongst readers themselves. Most women's journals aligned with nationalist concerns, underscoring the ideals of the 'new woman' of the nationalist-reformist program and underscoring women's natural role as virtuous mothers and dutiful home-makers. But one also finds a subtle social acceptance of women's work outside home, a measure involving crucial lifestyle changes. If women could participate in the anticolonial demonstrations, organize meetings and back revolutionary activism, they could opt to work for supplemental income as well. Indeed women's journals from the 1920s onwards were quite vocal about middle-class women's entry into the professional work force and how they could simultaneously remain dutiful wives and mothers. The final section of this chapter looks at the writings of a few Bengali Muslim women. Through their conscious choice of the journalistic form and of Bengali as the preferred language of articulation they registered their protest against an orthodox patriarchy whose injunctions they very ingeniously distinguished from Islamic instructions.

2 Content of Women's Journals

Women's journals are aplenty with essays that deal with the various aspects of grooming a good homemaker *gr̥halakṣmī* and an ideal mother. They routinely presented recipes,[38] home-care advices including essays on pre-natal and child

---

Century Gujarati Women's Journals" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct 26, 1991; Mytheli Sreenivas, "Emotion, Identity and the Female Subject: Tamil Women's Periodicals in Colonial India, 1890–1940" in *Journal of Women's History*, 14, no. 4 (2003).

38 For recipes, see especially sections "Randhan" (Cooking) in *Antaḥpur* and "Randhan-Praṇālī" (Cooking Method) in *Mahilā*. Recipes included traditional Bengali cooking as well as Anglo-Indian recipes and those from other provinces of the subcontinent. Kamalekamini Gupta, 'Māṃser Cop' (Meat Chop) in "Randhan", *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 10, Māgh 1310 / January-February 1904. Hemantakumari Sengupta, 'Sahaj Upāẏe Māṃsa Pāk' (An Easy Way to Cook Meat) in "Randhan", *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 6, Āśvin 1310 / September-October 1903. Anonymous, "Randhan-Praṇālī" (Recipe), *Mahilā* v. 12 # 1, Śrāvaṇ 1313 / July-August 1906 listed two Oriya recipes "collected from a young woman in Cuttack". Anonymous, "Randhan-Praṇālī" (Recipe), *Mahilā* v. 12 # 11, Jyaiṣṭha 1314 / May-June 1907 lists two recipes. Ushamoyee Choudhury, "Guava-Jelly", *Mātr̥-Mandir*, Phālgun 1330 / January-February 1924. Jibantara Nandi, "Mustard Sauce", *Mātr̥-Mandir*, Caitra 1330 / March-April 1924. Sarojini Devi, "Tamarind Pickle" *Mātr̥-Mandir*, Caitra 1330 / March-April 1924.

care,[39] feminine duties and rituals[40] and serialized fiction that almost invariably focused on romance, seduction, and infidelity and in the end endorsed the socio-moral lesson of sexual integrity and religiosity. Periodicals therefore addressed femininity through multiple ways, reiterating its meanings and constructing a gendered and embodied identity. Fashion did not explicitly constitute a subject considered worthy of literary or journalistic treatment. It was perceived as an indulgence for the leisurely woman, to be abhorred by the frugal *gṝhinī* conscious of her swadeshi responsibilities. In a sense it was an anomaly that most miscellanies carried advertisements of gold and silver jewelers and toiletries like hair oil, perfumes, talc and moisturizers – the targeted consumers being evidently women readers. By the 1920s like most miscellaneous periodicals, women's journals too were sustained considerably by advertisements. However these advertisements appeared mostly in the closing pages of an issue, in a way relegating fashion to the margins of the magazine text. They insisted upon the genuineness of the woman's gendered identity and promotion of feminine products reasserted the model of a prudent woman who spent wisely on herself. Advertisements of toiletries justified their use by women on grounds of being indigenous, Swadeshi enterprise in need of a clientele to sustain themselves and also explaining that to look good was part of wifely duties so that her fair look could please her tired husband after a day's work.[41]

39 Advice essays on women and child health issues were numerous. These would be written mostly by professional doctors or women authors. For example: Dr. Bibhutibhusan Bhattacharya "Strī Roger Sādhāran Cikiṯsā" (Simple treatments for gynecological disorders), *Mātṝ-Mandir* Caitra 1330 / March-April, 1923 emphasized the need for women to break free of social stigma and consult qualified doctors in cases of pregnancy, child-deliveries and post-partum complications. Dr. Kishorilal Pal, "Santan-Pālan" (Child rearing), *Mātṝ-Mandir* Āśvin 1330 / September-October, 1923 on child care. Dr. Sundari Mohan Das, "Govardhani Śiśuvardhan" (Child rearing), *Mātṝ-Mandir* Agrahāẏaṇ 1330 / November-December 1923on child health. Dr. Ramesh Chandra Das, "Mātṝ-Maṅgal" (Post-natal healthcare), *Mātṝ-Mandir* Āśvin 1334 / September-October 1927 on baseless post-partum superstitions prevalent amongst uneducated women. Manorama Ghosh, "E Deśer Prasūti" (Pregnant women), *Māsik Basumatī* v.1 pt.1 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1329 / June-July, 1922 on the neglect and lack of nutrition and cleanliness for pregnant women. Dr. Bamandas Mukhopadhyay, "Nārī Mandir 'Garbhābasthāẏe Niẏampālan'" (Discipline during pregnancy), *Māsik Basumatī* v.4 pt.1 # 1, Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925.

40 Nirupama Devi, "Ekānnabhukta Paribārer Aśānti Nibāraṇer Upāẏ Ki?" (Ways to minimize conflict in extended families), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 9, Pouṣ 1310 / December 1903-January 1904.

41 See for example the advertisements of a body oil 'Lakṣmībilās Taila' manufactured by Motilal Basu and Company in *Mahilā*, v. 12 # 11, Jyaiṣṭha 1314 / May-June 1907; face cream 'Himānī Sno' manufactured by Himani Works in *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v. 6 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1337 / November-December 1930; Labhchand Motichand Jewelers in *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v. 6 # 5, Caitra 1337 / March-April 1931 (most jewelers advertised their products using sketches of sample earrings, wristlets, bangles and necklaces).

3 Delineating a Female Readership: Domesticity, Leisure and Journal Reading

Probably the first known effort towards identifying a specifically female readership for a periodical was the *Māsik Patrikā* edited by Radhanath Sikdar and Pyarichand Mitra in 1854.[42] Small in size, the targeted readership of the *patrikā* was clearly defined:

> This journal is meant for ordinary readers and especially for women. All contributions to this periodical are composed in the parlance of our daily usage. If the scholarly wish to read, they are welcome to do so; but this journal is not intended for them.[43]

Notwithstanding the nineteenth-century similitude drawn between women and the non-literate masses in terms of uncouth characteristics supposedly possessed by both groups,[44] one can only speculate whether the 'silence' of women was audible enough for liberal contemporaries like Mitra and Sikdar to identify the periodical as the most suitable medium for initiating a long-lasting effective change.[45] As is evident from this preface notions of gender divides produced literary-cultural spheres with rigid boundaries – the refined and educated bhadralok on the one hand and the 'ordinary readers' and 'women' for whom the *Māsik Patrikā* was meant, on the other. The latter groups were seen to share a common linguistic and cultural space that was rooted in the undi-

42 Asoknath Mukhopadhyay, *Early Bengali Serials*, p. 213. *Māsik Patrikā* (1854–1857) was published by Rozario Company, Calcutta located on the eastern side of Laldighi (later Dalhousie Square). It was specifically intended as a women's magazine. Mitra's *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (under his pseudonym Tekchand Thakur) appeared serially in this journal. The BSP catalogue shows the existence of the following numbers: – 1854 (v.1, # 1 & 10); 1855 (v.2, # 7); and 1856 (v.3, # 11). The Library staff were however able to procure only 1854 (v.1, # 1) for me, the rest being categorized as "missing" / "not found". It was extremely distressing to find a rare journal in early colonial Bengal (certainly one of the first literary periodicals with a degree of aesthetic maturity) entirely tattered – only the title page and a few inside pages having survived the ravage of negligence. The indifference and apathy of the then BSP librarian was even more astonishing, given that the only step she took was to declare *Māsik Patrikā* "cannot be issued".

43 *Māsik Patrikā*, Jyaiṣṭha 1262 / May-June 1855.

44 Sumanta Banerjee, 'The Marginalization of Women's Popular Culture in Nineteenth-Century Bengal', in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, Kali for Women, 1989.

45 Usha Chakrabarty, *Condition of Bengali Women Around the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, 1963, pp. 147–193, lists twenty-one periodicals on women's issues and edited by women that were in circulation in Bengal.

vided domestic space of the pre-colonial Bengali household and which became increasingly bifurcated into the refined and bucolic zones as the urban middle classes took more and more to colonial education and services. The marginalization of *meẏeli bhāṣā*, or women's tongue was part of the nineteenth-century *bhadralok*'s project of refinement and modernization of linguistic practices that was tied up with notions of social respectability.[46]

Pūṇya (1897 / 1304–05 B.S) a late nineteenth-century magazine intended primarily for women was edited by Prajnasundari Devi, Hitendranath Tagore and Hritendranath Tagore.[47] Initially a hand-written magazine that circulated only within the Jorasanko Tagore family, *Pūṇya* appeared in print from 1897 onwards. In the introductory note Prajnasundari summed up the utility of journals in women's everyday lives: "*living amidst diversity brings happiness that enables us* [i.e. women] *to work hard*".[48] The choice of subjects for the magazine indicates targeting of a specifically female readership:

> … … This journal will give place to contributions on literature deemed worthy for the public (*janasamāj*), science, archaeology and history, music etc. Apart from these there will be articles on food which is perhaps the most fundamental prop for family people (*gṝhastha*) and human existence in general. The journal will also try to eliminate the present inadequacies (*abhāv*) in lessons on household (*gārhasthya dharma*) and art (*śilpa-vidyā*). [49]

For Prajnasundari Devi *Pūṇya* was to fulfill a dual purpose: as leisure and as lesson for its women readers. She was amongst the first women writers to pioneer cookery lessons in Bengali periodicals that involved not just recipes but managing the kitchen as well i.e. lessons on measurements and proportions of ingredients, dicing vegetables, cleaning and chopping fish and meat, procuring, storing and preserving groceries, laying the table and preparing menus fitting seasonal availabilities. Essays also reiterated the need for cleanliness in preparation of meals, sufficiently ventilated kitchen, avoiding spicy and oily food and ways to prevent possible contamination of foodstuff.[50] Modern dis-

---

46 See Anindita Ghosh, op. cit, Chapter 6 where she shows how typical feminine genres like *bāsar* songs were systematically marginalized because of their perceived subversive nature.

47 Sons and daughter of Hemendranath Tagore, the third son of Debendranath Tagore.

48 "Sūcanā" or the Introductory Note, *Pūṇya*, Year 1, 1304–05 / 1897. Emphases mine.

49 Ibid.

50 Such advice essays continued well into the twentieth century, for instance, Sarojini Devi, "Randhan-Kārya" (Culinary chores), *Mātṝmandir* Agrahāẏaṇ 1330 / November-December

courses on domesticity identified cooking as one of the primary fulfillments of womanhood and also as a disciplinary work that regimented their lives and prevented accumulation of undesirable habits in them.[51] As Judith Walsh has argued much of the late nineteenth-century reformist-nationalist vocabulary about women in colonial Bengal were produced through complex exchanges between the imperial metropole and colonial periphery.[52] The well-organized household and the disciplined home-maker who ran it emerged as imageries central to the formulation of tropes for a nation's progress and wellbeing. The new literate Bengali women who were both the subject and site of reform were exposed to the moralities of modern domesticity through the print media. The closing decades of the nineteenth century saw an explosion in advice manuals for women in several Indian languages. These manuals typically focused on women's household duties or *strī-dharma* – home management, household accounts, child care and hygiene.[53] Alongside practical advices on domestic chores, they also advised women on proper feminine dress habits, conduct and manners.[54] In the process of creating the new reformed woman, these advice literatures reiterated the woman's position in a redefined patriarchy, embedding her ever more firmly in a separate domestic sphere. The domestic space thus became "the context for interior explications of national identity".[55] By the early twentieth century, advice manuals had more or less ceased to exist though much of their teachings had become part of accepted practices in urban middle-class Bengali homes.[56] One could well contend that women's periodicals, now appearing in larger numbers, most of them with regularity every month, provided a more extensive field for circulation. Most importantly, unlike manuals that could be monotonous, these journals offered a mixed platter of advice and entertainment as well as a scope for dialogue and debate. This combination of advice and entertainment made journals more accessible in the inner quarters of bhadralok households, reforming not simply women's

---

1923. By 1923 cooking manuals like *Behesti Zewar* were available for women of Muslim families. See Sonia Nishat Amin, pp. 256–257.

51 "Mrs. Dumple's Cooking School" a serial fiction in the English journal *Eliza Cook's Journal* (1850 issues), written by Eliza Meteyard characterized cooking as a 'civilizing art' that was meant to be class-specific and disciplinary at the same time. See Johanna M. Smith, "Textual Encounters in *Eliza Cook's Journal*: Class, Gender and Sexuality" in Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell ed., *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 55–56.

52 Judith Walsh, op. cit. pp. 12–16.

53 Ibid., pp. 20–23.

54 Ibid., pp. 23–25.

55 Ibid., p. 28.

56 Ibid., op. cit. p. 32.

chores but also their leisure. The core messages of wifely devotion, domestic proficiency and responsible mothering were common to almost all essays across journals and very few advocated anything new. But anxieties over women's aesthetic sensibility and reading choices just like their educational needs and household responsibilities persisted in the public domain, an issue that had to be conditioned and adapted to suit the reformist and nationalist agenda of the male *bhadralok*. The educated bhadralok, at least in public refrained from associating with publications churned out of *Baṭtalā* and other suburban presses.[57] But despite arduous efforts towards reforming the *andarmahal*, women, many of whom were educated in the vernacular, gained access to prohibited printed matter and continued to hold on to their own reading preferences.[58] During the last few decades of the nineteenth-century demand among women for thrillers, farces and romances grew, much to the disquiet of the reformist program.[59] By making their own conscious choices on what to read they subverted contemporary reformist expectations of gentility. In fact the entire educationist efforts, missionary, feminist or indigenous, faced the threat of their hard work towards reforming women, going off course.[60] This directly contravened the image of educated and pliant wives authoring (and reading) didactic essays on ideal domesticity, thereby enhancing the cause of reformist-nationalist programs.

So what could women read? Representations of the woman reader in literary journals were inseparable from women's imagined roles as wives and mothers. Reading constituted both a threat to and a source of enhancement of family life depending on the woman's critical ability to make the choices considered morally acceptable. The trope around which concerns over women's readings were woven was discretion. This discretion operated at two levels. First, periodicals including women's journals continuously advised women against improper habits that included gossip and sensation readings. The objective of critics, both men and women was now to show the way for readers to select suitable books and journals as well as the proper ways of reading.[61] Journals carried messages warning women readers against the perils of indiscre-

57 Anindita Ghosh, "Women Refusing Conformity" in *Power in Print*, pp. 225–258.

58 Ibid., op. cit. p. 229.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ros Ballaster, Margaret Beetham, Elizabeth Frazer, Sandra Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine*, Macmillan, 1991. Jennifer Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader*, Ohio State University Press, 2004. Both these works detail how women's periodicals in nineteenth and early twentieth-century England painstakingly guided women readers on choices of good reading and how to subvert lust for scintillating literature.

tion. Good books (*supustak*) yielded the results of good companionship while indecent ones produced reverse effects.[62] Particularly objectionable for reasons of women's health, it was argued, were literary miscellanies, three quarters of which were full of fiction. Women were seen as addicted to these serials that caused health disorders like hysteria, neurological weaknesses, ill-temper and most dangerously, sexual desires. These in turn reduced women's interest in the household.[63]

Discretion also operated within family circles in the form of prohibitory orders on young maidens with regard to certain books. While transgressions of such rules often constituted the fun of exploring prohibited texts, most seem to have internalized the reformist rhetoric about 'good' and 'bad' readings. The post-Swadeshi literary market saw a surge in production of periodicals as of print in general. Inexpensive and fiction-dominated periodicals appeared in abundance as did romantic fiction, farces (*prahasan*) and sensation tales (*guptakathā*). The expansion in female literacy coincided with guarded approaches to particular literary genres. Social anxieties about what women ought to read made the question of women's reading practices a site for debates and differences. Reading was believed to enable intellectual competence. But unregulated, careless reading habits amongst women could be potentially dangerous. Could women make their own choices or would they have to depend on the dictates of their male guardians for advices on what to read? Reading practices of women, it was felt, needed to be monitored, particularly because the cultural image of the woman reader had become inseparable from her social roles as wife and mother. Women's reading therefore became the site for animated debates as literary journals assumed the role of surrogate sentinels responsible for cultivating good taste or *suruci* amongst their women readers. By far the best possible readings for Hindu Bengali women of any generation were the epics – Kṛttivās's *Rāmāẏaṇa* and Kāśirāmdās's *Mahābhārata*.[64] A typical review of a novel *Satīlakṣmī*[65] spoke of its author as having "acquired fame by writing novels suitable for women" (*strī-pāṭhya upanyās*) and described the book as "instructive" and constituting "happy reading for all good

62 Banalata Das, "Saṃsarga" (Companionship), *Mahilā*, v. 15 # 7 & 8, Māgh and Phālgun 1316 / January-March 1910.

63 Dr. Rameshchandra Roy, L.M.S., "Nārīr Svāsthya" (Women's health), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 11, Āśvin 1338 / September-October 1931.

64 Dwarikanath Mitra's lecture in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*.

65 *Satīlakṣmī* used interchangeably with *Gṛhalakṣmī* referred to the dutiful wife who was prepared to sacrifice even her life if required for the sake of her husband.

wives"(*śikṣāprada, satīlakṣmīdiger sukhapāṭhya*).[66] The reviewer of another novel *Puṣparāṇī* appreciated the good education (*suśikṣā*) dispensed through the book and recommended it as a suitable gift for wives, daughters and daughters-in-law.[67] Such readings were to be distinguished from *hāsya-rasoṯpādak-pustak* or books of light entertainment and comedies or discussing books of impure taste (*asaṯ pustakālocanā*) amidst unwanted company.[68] Purnasashi Devi, a well-known writer in her memoirs recalled how her mother prevented her from reading *Kānākaṛi Prahasan* probably a Baṭṭalā farce, described as a 'bad' (*bāje*) book and how her elder sister as a maiden secretly read Rabindranath's book of verse *Sonār Tarī* (The Golden Yacht).[69] Jyotirmoyee Devi refers to well-known sensation fictions (the *Guptakathā* or 'secret romance' series) in her family library that were strictly out of bounds for unmarried girls.[70] Interestingly neither of the two memoirs speaks of any transgression in terms of defying family and social ban on such books. What is remarkable is that while speaking of the censorious attitudes of family elders, these women subtly reveal the dark underside of the reformist thrust of bhadralok's cultural discourses. Both Purnasashi and Jyotirmoyee speak of having encountered "prohibited" books in their respective family libraries. Adult males of reasonably educated families were lured into reading *Baṭṭalā* books in private while women's readings of such lesser prints were condemned as deviant and adolescent girls were to be entirely kept away from these books.

---

66 Mudrā-rākṣas (the Print Monster), a short description of a novel 'Satīlakṣmī' by Bidhubhusan Basu in 'Prāpta Pustaker Saṃkṣipta Paricaẏ' (Brief Review of Books Received) Section, *Prabāsī*, Baiśākh 1316 / April-May 1909.

67 Review of the novel *Puṣparāṇī* by Phanindranath Pal in "Pustak-Paricaẏ" section, *Bhāratbarṣa* v.6 pt.2 #3, Phālgun 1325 / February-March 1919.

68 Ibid. Women's periodicals repeatedly reminded their readers to make cautious choices in reading, for instance, Anonymous, "Strīnītisār", *Mahilā*, v.9 # 8, Phālgun 1310 / February-March 1904.

69 Purnasashi Devi, "Smṛtikathā" in Arunkumar Bandyopadhyay and Abhijit Sen (ed.) *Pūrṇaśaśī Devīr Nirvācita Racanā*, School of Women's Studies (Jadavpur University) and Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1998, pp. 230–231.

70 Jyotirmoyee Devi, pp. 30. The secret romances included *Haridāser Guptakathā*, *Bilātī Guptakathā*, *Udāsinī Rājkanyār Guptakathā* and the like. Kate Flint speaks of adolescent girls in England purposefully defying parental bans on certain books. Forbidden books included works by George Eliot, Pierre de Ronsard, Guy de Maupassant, Daniel Defoe, Balzac and Stendhal, besides periodicals like *Home Chat.* Such transgressions were not only assertions of individuality by young women against family / social dictates but were also directly related to "the self-confidence necessary for the writing of published autobiography". See Kate Flint, "Reading Practices", in David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, *The Book History Reader*, Routledge, United Kingdom, 2002, p. 317.

However both Jyotirmoyee Devi and Purnasashi Devi in their memoirs speak of engrossed readings of literary periodicals – *Prabāsī*, *Baṅgadarśan* (*Navaparyyāẏa*), *Bhāratī*, *Baṅgavāṇī*, *Navyabhārat*, *Hitavādī*, *Anusandhān* and *Janmabhūmi* – in their childhood days and neither of them speaks of any vigilance with regard to reading these journals.[71] All these journals were frontline literary periodicals with substantial circulations and were deemed as suitable for reading. While novels were considered strictly out of their reach, unmarried girls were free to access periodicals.[72] Contemporary accounts are replete with references about the negative impact that novels supposedly had on young minds of unmarried girls. It is indeed a paradox that while novels were considered 'dangerous' for women, periodicals, where in fact most novels appeared first, were seen as relatively safe reading. Purnasashi speaks of 'listening' to the stories of Bankim's novels like *Ānandamaṭh*, *Candraśekhar*, *Devī Caudhurāṇī* and the rest from her married elder sister when the latter visited them.[73] Marriage at tender ages brought along for the young bride relatively slackened vigilance at her parental home. She could now access novels and read verses by her favorite women writers Girindramohini Dasi, Swarnakumari Devi and Mankumari Bose.[74] Companionate marriage and a romantic bond between the husband and wife was often perceived as the ideal site for enabling mature readings by the wife guided by her educated and compassionate spouse. Ideal readings within such marriages included Tagore's fiction and verse, especially *Citrāṅgadā*, Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Meghnādvadh Kāvya*, Kalidasa's *Kumārasambhava*, Bankimchandra's novels and the poems of Shelley and Tennyson.[75] In fact the Muslim bhadramahila's reading repertoire consisted of similar texts including Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's *Pāribārik Prabandha*, Vidyasagar's *Sītār Banabās*, *Meghnādvadh Kāvya*, and *Rahe Nazat*.[76] Women readers were therefore oriented towards subject matters that were believed to produce good wives and educated mothers in the interests of the

71 Purnasashi Devi, op. cit., pp. 230–232; Jyotirmoyee Devi, op. cit., pp. 30–32.

72 Ibid. Novels and "reading life according to the conventions of fiction" was diagnosed as a "particularly feminine affliction" in Victorian England. See Stuart Curran, "Women Readers, Women Writers" in Stuart Curran ed., *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 182.

73 Purnasashi Devi, op. cit., p. 246.

74 Ibid., p. 246.

75 Sri Ma, "Bhairavī" (a short story) in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* # 573, Baiśākh 1318 / April-May 1911. Interestingly while Tagore's *Citrāṅgadā* proved to be a subject of intense controversy, being targeted as a work that subverted reformist notions of gentility, it was regarded as an ideal reading for newlywed young couples.

76 Najibur Rahman's novels *Anowārā* and *Gariber Meẏe*. See Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women*, pp. 256–257.

family and the nation.[77] *Sadgranthapāṭh* (reading good books) came to be considered most effectual in promoting good taste amongst women.[78] Numerous essays in various journals are to be found that talk of the benefits derived from reading 'good books'. 'Good books' therefore invariably included books permeated by a deep sense of religiosity, filial morality and expositions of *strī-dharma* (feminine virtues and obligations).

The circulation and readership of women's journals were directly determined by the scope and spread of women's literacy. Circulation of these journals through individual and institutional subscriptions coincided with an expanding primary education for women during the early twentieth century. This involved many more women – as participants in and consumers of an emergent public culture. Discussions and debates over the nature, content and need for women's education constituted the most important organizing themes of women's magazine reading culture. The increase in literacy among middle-class women made these periodicals cater specifically to women of the bhadralok class. This is not to imply that concerns with women of lower orders were absent but the dominant representations of desires, anxieties and lifestyles were very specifically middle-class in tone and content. Since female literacy rates remained limited to a minor proportion of the overall population, women's periodicals never quite acquired the mass circulation that similar periodicals attained in European and North American societies or even in early twentieth-century Japan.[79] Women's periodicals reproduced statistics gleaned from census data and from the decennial reports of the Education Department of the Government of Bengal to reiterate the unsatisfactory progress of female education in the province. Even as late as 1931 a meager 2% of the overall female population of Bengal was considered literate.[80] Hence Nirajbashini

77 A few instances of such reading matter include: Mrs. D.N. Das, "Strīloker Kāj" (Women's duties), *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Baiśākh 1318 / April-May 1911; Hemnalini Basu, "Nārīr Kartavya" in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Śrāvaṇ 1321 / July-Aug 1914; Dr. Kishorilal Pal, "Santān Pālan" (Child rearing), *Mātṝmandir*, Āśvin 1330 / Sept-Oct, 1923; Birajasundari Devi, "Nārīr Svāvalamban O Svādhīnatā" (Self-dependence and liberation of women), *Mātṝmandir*, Agrahāẏaṇ 1330 / Nov-Dec, 1923.

78 'Bāmāgaṇer Mānasik Unnati' (Mental Improvement of women), *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Phālgun 1278 / Feb-Mar 1872.

79 Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman,* pp. 78 – 113.

80 Nirajbashini Shome, B.A., B.T., "Bāṅglādeśe Strī-śikṣār Bartamān Abasthār Saṃkṣipta Bibaraṇ" (A brief report on the present condition of female education in Bengal), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 9, Śrāvaṇ 1338 / July-August 1931. This was an address to a session of the All India Women's Conference on July 1, 1931 that was published in the immediate issue of *Baṅgalakṣmī*. Nirajbashini argued that while there had been a sizeable increase in the number of educational institutions for women including primary to college and various vocational training centers and a consequent increase in numbers of girls attending

Shome's proposals to the All India Women's Conference to arrange for more funds and increased numbers of trained women teachers to facilitate efficient organization of the schools.[81] Though a public forum, the AIWC was nonetheless limited in so far as only educated women from progressive elite households attended such meetings. The publication of the Nirajbashini's message in *Baṅgalakṣmī* would probably have reached many more numbers of women.

Periodicals located their female readers in the private domain of the family that middle-class nationalist discourse had identified since the late nineteenth century. Both miscellaneous family periodicals and women's periodicals of the early twentieth century defined women readers as *pāṭhikā*. While family journals addressed their readers as *pāṭhak-pāṭhikā* (men and women readers), women's journals addressed them as *pāṭhikā* (a woman reader), *bhaginī* (sister) and *pāṭhikā-bhaginī* (reader-sisters). It was paradoxical that although women's questions were central to the nationalist project, almost all family periodicals assumed male readership as the norm. Even when these periodicals accommodated separate needs that women readers were thought to have, such sections typically constituted a smaller proportion of the entire content. Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* was the first to introduce an independent section for women readers during the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation years.[82] By that time women had become politically 'visible' through their participation in anti-colonial demonstrations, accentuating a new dimension in women's public role. It might not have been a coincidence that *Prabāsī* introduced the new section *Mahilā Majlis* for its women readers during the same year. Subsequent family periodicals like *Māsik Basumatī* would incorporate women's sections right from the start of their runs.[83]

These women's sections displayed an impressive range of engagement relating mostly to women's issues like education, health, purdah and conditions of women in other societies. Assuming women readers' gender as axiomatic, journals sought to construct and constantly rework new meanings of femininity (*nārītva*) in the context of nationalism and renewed ideas of domesticity. The process of creating an informed and enfranchised female readership became enmeshed with women's question within nationalist discourse. Though

---

primary and middle schools, the proportion of literate women to the overall female population of the province remained abysmally low.

81 Ibid.

82 See Chapter 2 for a detailed section on *Prabāsī*. Introduction of the women's section was explained as part of a general reorientation of the magazine that involved cost-effective measures as well.

83 *Māsik Basumatī* contained a women's section "Nārī Mandir" from its first issue Baiśākh 1329 / April-May 1922.

FIGURE 5.1 Aparna Devi, daughter of Congress leader Chittaranjan Das, shown reading *Māsik Basumatī*

not free of ambiguities, literary periodicals continuously asserted and reworked the meanings of womanhood and the idealized spaces of femininity that nourished gender paradigms upheld by middle-class nationalist discourse. Shaping a female readership became entangled with the family and nation's need for educated wives and mothers and with the project of reasserting patterns for respectable (*bhadra*) middle-class behavior. The tone and vocabulary of women's periodicals generally represented and reiterated the dominant principles of reformist and nationalist domesticity. But women's journals cannot simply be seen as a repository of such discourses on women. Women readers proved to be far from passive consumers of the hegemonizing discourse. Articles appearing in women's journals reveal deep fissures – while internalizing a substantial part of the discourses on modern domesticity one also notices shifts as women increasingly voiced frustrations with their subordinated and mundane existence.

Early twentieth-century women's journals keenly demonstrated the good effects of journal reading. The *Mahilā* occasionally brought out features where the anonymous author(s) narrated first person experiences of how various households were run. These narratives do not clearly mention as to who visited these household, whether they were invited by journal-readers or how the connections were made. But they do provide an impression that probably the editor and those involved in the organization of the journal visited these households, sometimes travelling long distances. In some cases they were invited for a meal or urged to spend a couple of days with the family. In most narratives the guests appear to be disengaged observers of the household. Their judgments were based on the efficiency of the *gṝhinī* – her ability to manage the household with minimum or possibly no help, how well she took care of her guests, her manners with domestic helps, whether she could preclude unnecessary costs and of course if she was a good cook. This feature was an innovative one that had no parallel in any other women's journals of the time. First person experiences lent credibility to the constructs of the 'good' and 'bad' wives that appeared in the various advice essays in women's journals. Moreover it also demonstrated the "good effects" of *Mahilā*, especially in households where women became better cooks by following the recipes provided in the journal.[84]

84 Anonymous, "Bibhinna Paribārer Gṝhinī" (Mistresses of various households), *Mahilā* v.9 # 8, Phālgun 1310 / February-March 1904; Anonymous, "Hinduramaṇīr Atithi Saṯkār" (Playing the perfect hostess by Hindu women), *Mahilā* v. 10 # 5, Agrahāẏaṇ 1311 / November-December 1904. See Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle Class*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, Chapter 3 (Aestheticizing Labour? An Affective Discourse of Cooking in Colonial Bengal) for a detailed discussion on how cooking became an aestheticized work, a marker of education and cultural grooming for

A review of the format and content of women's periodicals reveal that women were pretty much crafting their own lives and shared an intimate relationship with journals. The presence of an increasing number of women writers most of whom were not acclaimed authors indicate that more and more women had taken to magazine reading and writing as a way to connect with the world beyond their households. Periodicals frequently asserted the need for women of the same neighborhood to get together and contribute towards building up a stock of books and periodicals suitable for their reading and discussion sessions.[85] The Sarojnalini Dutta Nārīmaṅgal Samiti library subscribed to various periodicals for its volunteer members to read.[86] One of the routine tasks of women's associations (*nārī samiti*) was to read out periodicals and dailies in their meeting sessions.[87] Speaking of the schooling opportunities for girls at Visva-Bharati, the educational institution founded by Rabindranath Tagore, Ramananda Chattopadhyay pointed out that the institution had a rich library that apart from a vast collection of books in several languages, also possessed an impressive assortment of newspapers and periodicals.[88] Evidently, periodical subscriptions were not confined to domestic consumption only. Institutions and libraries provided important sites for their inclusion – an indication that they were perceived as an important supplement to formal education and also as informing lifestyles and disciplines of Bengali domesticity. The monthly *Antaḥpur* for example, asserted the need for women to connect with each other through periodicals.

A woman could only open up to other women because there was none other who could understand her predicaments.[89] Shared experiences of suffering made it possible for women to empathize and bond with readers who were otherwise unknown to them.[90] Periodicals were thus women's friends in leisure (*abasar*). It urged women to share a periodical with a child widow who

middle class women in colonial Bengal. The gendered discourse of culinary culture, Ray argues, was constitutive of middle class domesticity and consumption practices.

85 Anonymous, "Strīnītisār" (Essence of women's ethics), *Mahilā*, v.9 # 7, Māgh 1310 / January-February 1904.

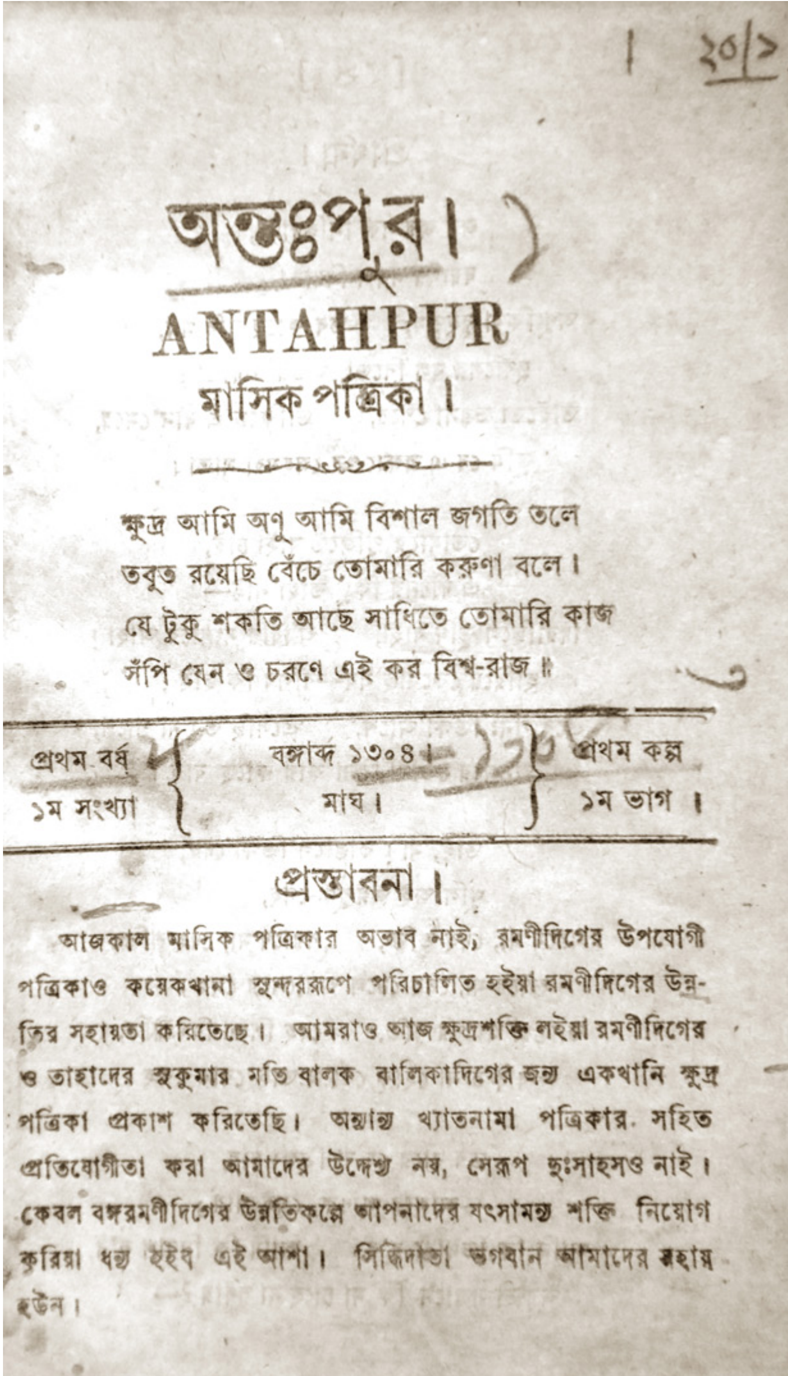
86 Nalinibala Sen, Secretary of the Simla branch of the Samiti reported the subscription of the magazine *Jaẏaśrī* after the closure of *Mātṛmandir* that was being subscribed to. "Samiti Kathā", *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 11, Āśvin 1338 / September-October 1931.

87 Saratkumari Devi, "Samitir Katha", *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 12, Kārtik 1338 / October-November 1931.

88 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Biśvabhāratīte Meẏeder Śikṣār Suyog" (Opportunities for women's education at Visva-Bharati), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 5, Caitra 1337 / March-April 1931.

89 Anonymous, "Ekkhāni Patra" (A letter), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 6, Āśvin 1310 / September-October 1903. Prafullakumari Chaudhuri, "Chattagrām Bhagnīsamājer Aṣṭam Bārṣik Report", *Mahilā*, v.15 # 2, Bhādra 1316 / August-September 1909.

90 Ibid.



অন্তঃপুর।

ANTAHPUR

মাসিক পত্রিকা।

ক্ষুদ্র আমি অণু আমি বিশাল জগতি তলে
তবুত রয়েছি বেঁচে তোমারি করুণা বলে।
যে টুকু শকতি আছে সাধিতে তোমারি কাজ
সঁপি যেন ও চরণে এই কর বিশ্ব-রাজ॥

প্রথম বর্ষ	বঙ্গাব্দ ১৩০৪।	প্রথম কল্প
১ম সংখ্যা	মাঘ।	১ম ভাগ।

প্রস্তাবনা।

আজকাল মাসিক পত্রিকার অভাব নাই, রমণীদিগের উপযোগী পত্রিকাও কয়েকখানা সুন্দররূপে পরিচালিত হইয়া রমণীদিগের উন্নতির সহায়তা করিতেছে। আমরাও আজ ক্ষুদ্রশক্তি লইয়া রমণীদিগের ও তাহাদের সুকুমার মতি বালক বালিকাদিগের জন্য একখানি ক্ষুদ্র পত্রিকা প্রকাশ করিতেছি। অন্যান্য খ্যাতনামা পত্রিকার সহিত প্রতিযোগীতা করা আমাদের উদ্দেশ্য নয়, সেরূপ দুঃসাহসও নাই। কেবল বঙ্গরমণীদিগের উন্নতিকল্পে আপনাদের যৎসামন্য শক্তি নিয়োগ করিয়া ধন্য হইব এই আশা। সিদ্ধিদাতা ভগবান আমাদের সহায় হউন।

FIGURE 5.2 First page of the inaugural issue of *Antaḥpur*, an early women's periodical

knew no luxury and had no household of her own.[91] It is this sense of a shared social space, the creation of fellowship amongst anonymous and physically disconnected readers that increasingly defined women's expectations of reading. Despite ideological and emotional alignments with mainstream concerns, especially those of the anticolonial nationalist struggle, women's journals and their readers unambiguously identify a space of their own. The urge to connect emerged partly out of nationalist concerns and perhaps more out of a shared sense of subordination and lack of autonomy. Far from learning uncritically what they were taught by their male guardians women readers emerge as a distinct social category with separate emotional and pedagogical needs that only women's journals were seen fit to dispense. Howsoever limited in their social expanse, women's periodicals were able to craft and sustain a sense of belonging that their readers saw as emotionally nourishing so much so that they felt comfortable to share individual predicaments in what was otherwise a public forum. Also since women's journals were identified with the domestic quarters, and men as writers or readers were few, women's readership became a space of confidentiality. This notional seclusion might have made women feel freer to share their private dilemmas. Socializing with non-kin women was nothing new. During the late nineteenth century several voluntary associations for women were organized in Calcutta and its suburbia, for instance, Sakhi Samiti (1886) organized by Swarnakumari Devi, the eldest daughter of Debendranath Tagore, the Arya Nari Samaj (1879) founded by Keshab Chandra Sen and the Banga Mahila Samaj (1879) founded by another group of Brahmos headed by Anandamohan Bose. These associations were engaged mainly in philanthropic and social welfare programs concerning female education and upliftment of destitute widows.[92] However as a means of socialization they remained limited to women from Brahmo and reformed Hindu families. Besides, injunctions of purdah would have been too stringent for women from ordinary middle-class families to go out and participate in these public forums. Journals by contrast did not require women to step out of their homes. Neither did reading weigh down on domestic duties because it could be done during leisure or in-between chores. By the beginning of the twentieth century, reading was considered very much a part of a woman's quotidian practices and in most advices of the period it was prescribed for afternoons.[93]

91 Ibid.

92 Borthwick, op. cit. pp. 278–287.

93 Anonymous, "Baṅgīẏa Gṛhiṇīdiger Nitya Kārya" (The routine duties of Bengali women), *Mahilā*, v.9 # 9, Caitra 1310 / March-April 1904.

Women's periodicals, it has been argued, not only defined the woman as their readers but assumed that the very acts of reading by all members of the family were implicated in her ability to manage the domestic sphere and thereby provide a congenial ambience for reading.[94] Deficient reading practices were thought to reflect women's inability or unwillingness to organize housework and utilize leisure in rewarding ways.[95] Their reading practices and their use of leisure time were therefore in need of monitoring so that she would not be distracted from her everyday domestic duties. Mid-nineteenth-century Victorian women's periodicals accepted the lack of privacy for the womenfolk within the home and therefore the ephemeral nature of women's reading practices.[96] Simultaneously women's readings came to be represented as useful for the entire family as they became interwoven with the ideals and aspirations of the good homemaker, loyal wife and educated mother.[97] An enduring image of women readers nevertheless emerges that is not particular to any society, class or racial group.[98] Reading as Kate Flint has argued had the dual effect of constraining and liberating. The imagined contours of domesticity, social morality and the nation's status limited the reading experiences of women. Her roles as mother and housewife continued to be the main principles governing feminine desire for self-fulfillment. But reading was also looked upon as an avenue for release, an act that enabled self-assertion, individuality and as a means of socialization. In colonial Bengal, women's periodical reading operated within the system of a new patriarchy that nationalism had delineated and therefore encoded a specific agenda based on gender-differentiation. But reading it was deemed, entailed a certain intellectual competence. Women's journals frequently voiced dissent at wrongs perpetrated on women by society and the ways in which women could prevent themselves from being overwhelmed by domestic drudgery. Beneath the façade celebrating domesticity thus emerge speculations over the meanings and implications of autonomy for women. Sharing as they did an intimate connection with their readers, women's journals held out various options before their readers and advised women on how to negotiate assertively the everyday domestic difficulties they faced. In this

---

94 Margaret Beetham, op. cit. p. 46.

95 Ibid. Stuart Curran, "Women Readers, Women Writers" in Stuart Curran ed., *Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* Cambridge University Press, 1993 also mentions reading as an alternative to leisure and courtesy visits.

96 Janet Badia and Jennifer Phegley, *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, University of Toronto Press, 2005; "Introduction".

97 Ibid., p. 20. *The Cornhill Magazine* stressed that women's readings would be beneficial for their families.

98 Kate Flint, "Afterword: Women Readers Revisited" in Badia and Phegley, pp. 281–285.

sense women's periodicals were one of the most fundamental producers of *strī-svādhīnatā* even while not forthrightly challenging domestic ideals of *gṛhalakṣmī* (goddess of the household).

4 Only Good Wives (*sugṛhiṇī*) Can Bring up Good Wives: Journal Writing as a Vocation

The woman's primary task (*pradhān kārya*), the leading magazine *Antaḥpur* asserted, was to conform to *gṛhadharma* (the philosophy of domesticity) and her domain (*kārya kṣetra*) was the home (*gṛha*).[99] Literary license for women writers came to be indexed in terms of the *gṛha* (home), *gṛhasthālī* (the household) or *saṃsār* (used interchangeably to denote both the household and the wider material world) and the role of the *strī-jāti* or *nārī-jāti* in relation to these. Women were perceived as directly related to social well-being (*maṅgal*) in so far as the family was construed as the unit of society. The obituary of Nagendrabala Saraswati that appeared in the journal *Jāhnavī* provides an insight into the ways in which writing was considered as a vocation for women at the opening of the twentieth century:

> The number of educated women in Bengal is dismally low and good women writers are hard to find. Nagendrabala Saraswati had won the hearts of her readers by both her prose and poetry.... She passionately advocated a code of feminine conduct endorsed by the Hindu scriptures (*hinduśāstrānumadita nārīnīti*). Her writings reflected her firm belief in the wifely virtue of devotion to the husband-god (*pati-devatā*).[100]

Evidently, the woman writer was expected to focus only on feminine issues – whether through didactic essays or poetry and fiction that almost invariably celebrated the woman's devotion and sacrifice. Thus composing poems or writing letters simply to obtain praise from friends could not be the purpose of education and such writing exercises were indeed undesirable.[101] For her, writing was in some ways an extension of *gṛhadharma* itself – applying her own

99 Banalata Devi (Bandyopadhyay), "Gṛhadharma" (Domesticity), *Antaḥpur* Jyaiṣṭha & Āṣāṛh 1306 / May-July 1899.

100 Obituary of Nagendrabala Sarasvatī in *Jāhnavī*, Jyaiṣṭha 1313 / May-June 1906. For an analysis on how Nagendrabala's writings were embedded in contemporary discourses on domesticity, see Judith Walsh, op. cit. pp. 144–153.

101 Anonymous author, 'Bāmāgaṇer Mānasik Unnati' (Mental Improvement of Women) in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Phālgun 1278 / Feb-Mar 1872.

education and experience to instruct her less-informed readers and enable them to be better wives and mothers.[102] While formulating a consensual definition of *gṝhadharma* was a matter of intense intellectual exercise and was frequently described as an immense task demanding vigor and commitment, most women writers seem to have been convinced about what *gṝhadharma* was not about. *Gṝhadharma* was not the way of life presumably led by non-literate, seemingly uneducated women who almost mechanically performed household chores and spent their leisure in gossip.[103] A majority of the advice-essays for women appearing in various journals demonstrate a strong dislike for the uneducated woman. Evidently the *sugṝhiṇī* was identifiable by her education and so strictly circumscribed by parameters of class. In a serialized essay Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain categorically asserted that lower class women cannot qualify as *sugṝhiṇī*.[104] The prerequisite for the making of an ideal domesticity, she argued, was mental culture. For her, the Bengali term "kājer chiri" (meaning work habits) did not adequately convey the sense of "mental culture". Rather the Urdu terms *salika* (meaning "taste") and "sahebe salika" (a person of taste) could be introduced to describe a good homemaker and her mental faculty.[105] Thus for every woman self-fulfillment was to be found in aestheticizing the mundane of their everyday lives. In a patriarchal society where the birth of a boy child was more welcome than that of a girl, and where most women desired to be mother of boys, the concept of *sugṝhiṇī* was rationalized in terms of a precondition for becoming an enlightened mother capable of nurturing an accomplished man. Thus only a "polished" and "cultured" mother could produce promising sons.[106] It was then such a woman

102 *Antaḥpur*, v. 6 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1310 / July-August 1903 announced an essay competition amongst its readers on the theme "Sugṝhiṇī o Ādarśamātā" (The Good Homemaker and the Ideal Mother). Instances to the contrary are also not wanting. The noted nineteenth-century woman reformer and writer Krishnabhamini Das had argued that a woman ought to live for herself as much as she had to live for her family. Krishnabhamini Das, "Strīlok o Puruṣ" (Womenfolk and men), *Bhāratī*, 1889, quoted in Sutapa Bhattacharya, *Strī-svādhīnatā theke Nārīmukti–Meyeder Cokhe*, Papyrus, 2005 and in Anuradha Roy, "Dukhinī Sati Carit: Uniś Śataker Nārīder Upanyas", Ababhash (Uniś Śataker Bāṇglā Upanyas), Year 6, # 3, October-December 2006, pp. 313–413. Reprinted by Ababhash, 2011.

103 Banalata Devi, 'Gṝhadharma'.

104 Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, "Sugṝhiṇī" (The ideal mistress), *Mahilā*, v.9 # 7& 8, Māgh and Phālgun 1310 / January-February and February-March 1904.

105 Ibid.

106 Anonymous, "Mahilār Pāṭhikāsamīpe Nibedan" (A submission to women readers), *Mahilā* v.10 # 10, Baiśākh 1312 /April-May 1905. This is an interview with an English civil servant who had spent more than three decades in India. The terms "polished" and "cultured" appear in English in the essay.

who was deemed most suited to educate her literate but younger and less informed peers. For women both reading and writing in journals were therefore meant to facilitate the performance of *gṝhadharma*. Didactic writings on various aspects of *strī-dharma* emerged as the most preferred subject for women's monthlies, at times even at the risk of tiresome repetitions. Elderly women, experienced *gṝhiṇī* themselves, spoke of effective management of the household including maintenance of accounts for domestic expenses, reasoned with motherly affection, the need to maintain cleanliness in the family's labor room (*ā̐tuṛ ghar*) and also discussed child-rearing extensively.

The expansion of the periodical press and a consequent increase in the volume of literary production during the opening decades of the century provided women with an enhanced opportunity to publish. Their visible presence in the literary domain did not go unnoticed.[107] For patriarchy women's public participation as writers and editors was a signifier of progress and as a mark of their maturity towards acquiring various social and property rights.[108] Most women writers in the late nineteenth century chose to publish in anonymity. Their writings even in women's journals appeared without their names. *Mahilā* for instance clustered women's anonymous writings under the section "mahilādiger racanā" (i.e. women's writings) probably to mark them out from the writings by its editor or other men. During the first decade of the twentieth century too, very few women chose to identify themselves in print or acknowledge their own publications. In an obituary to the writer and poet Indira Devi, the *Māsik Basumatī* lauded her thus: "… she had been such a homemaker that for quite a while even her family did not know that she was the writer Indira Devi…"[109] This initial reticence indicate a complex connection between publicity and seclusion. Writing was becoming an acceptable, perhaps even a dignified engagement for women – certainly as one of the affirmative forms of social service and possibly also as a rewarding alternative to gossip. But it could also be construed as a woman's neglect of her housewifely duties or as an outrage of her demure. Therefore choosing not to identify oneself in print or not publicly acknowledging her composition was surely one way of evading family disapproval. Furthermore, the choice of anonymity could also be attributed to a sense of inferiority prevalent among most late nineteenth-century women writers.[110] Early, women's writings, especially fiction were few, immature and

107 Amritalal Gupta, "Nārīr Kārya" (Women's duties), *Bhāratmahilā*, v.4 #9, Pouṣ 1315 / December-January 1908–09.

108 "Nārīr Adhikār" (Women's rights), *Bhāratī* v. 24.

109 "Sampādakīẏa: Indirā Devī" (Editorial – Obituary of Indira Devi), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 1 pt. 2 # 1, Kārtik 1329 / October-November 1922.

110 Anuradha Roy, op. cit., p. 43.

almost always narratives of victimhood, self-denial and sacrifice.[111] On the contrary non-fictional writings of nineteenth-century women revealed a more assertive self-amplifying its criticism of patriarchy.[112] It was this critical voice that would become more self-assured with the enhancement of women's literacy and political activism. Over the next decade the number of anonymous women writers decreased noticeably and during late 1920s most writers' names appeared along with their academic qualifications.[113]

Literary journalism was now a suitable avenue for public participation and a key modality for social reform. In a review of Prasannatara Gupta's advice-manual *Pāribārik Jiban* (Family Life) the commentator praised the author for her social work and commitment to the nation. By opting to write on issues of domesticity, female education, polygamy and the plight of widows instead of having frittered away her talent in writing poetry or fiction, the reviewer argued, Prasannatara had shown the true worth of a *gṝhakartrī*.[114] He urged educated women to follow in her footsteps in contributing to the welfare of the nation thereby reiterating the status of elderly educated homemakers as appropriate dispensers of lessons on domesticity and feminine virtues.[115] And not just male pedagogues but women editors too encouraged them to become more active in the literary sphere and narrate experiences of domesticity. For these editors too women's public participation meant a reinforcement of their domestic relationships and housekeeping duties. The popular novelist Anurupa Devi recounted her long involvement with *Bhāratī* and the encouragement provided early on in her career by its editor Swarnakumari Devi. She recalled the editor's explicit instruction on what to write: "… You will have to write another novel like *Poṣyaputra*… you can send it in parts every month. Narrate homemaking (*gharkarṇā*) as effortlessly you had done earlier."[116] She also recollected how Swarnakumari persuaded her to overcome her introversion,

111 Anuradha Roy, op. cit., pp. 91–92. Women's fictions of the early phase (1867–1889) were mostly linear narratives with characters portrayed in extreme contrasting shades and devoid of complexities, often deploying melodramatic sequences. Roy has argued that in an age when novel reading itself was a near-forbidden practice for women, women writers could hardly have shown the aesthetic courage à la Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay p. 92.

112 Anuradha Roy, op. cit., pp. 95–98.

113 The latter is especially true of a journal like *Baṅgalakṣmī* where educational qualifications appeared beside names of authors both men and women. The practice had been in vogue for men authors from the opening years of the twentieth century.

114 *Gṝhakartrī* literally means the female head of a household, implying in this case a senior educated lady who has been a good homemaker and mother.

115 Anonymous, "Samālocanā", *Antaḥpur*, v. 6 # 10, Māgh 1310 / January-February 1904.

116 Anurupa Devi, "Bhāratī-Smṝti" (Memories of *Bhāratī*), *Bhāratī* v.50 # 1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926.

abandon her nom de plume Anupama Devi and instead come out as her own self, Anurupa Devi.[117] Being a grand-daughter of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, her recognition as a novelist who abided by "the old Indian morality and domestic ideal" was attributed to the orthodox Hindu "tradition of her family".[118] She could therefore produce "an excellent domestic story" like the novel *Mā* (Mother) serialized in the illustrated family miscellany *Bhāratbarṣa*, a "story of a childless step-mother whose deep-rooted hatred against the co-wife and her son eventually gives way to the motherly instinct".[119] Anurupa Devi also revealed that the *Bhāratī* editor's encouragement got her into the habit of writing fiction in episodic format for journals, a practice that had by then (i.e. the mid-1920s) become fairly common among novelists writing serial fiction for periodicals.[120] Both Anurupa Devi and her peer Nirupama Devi graciously acknowledged their indebtedness to the journal and its editors for providing the public space from where their literary careers took off.[121] The latter recollected how the publication of Anurupa Devi's serial novels inspired her to muster up the courage to send in her writings to the journal.[122] For most women writers and editors literary journalism was still quite far from being a money-yielding occupation.[123] But by the early 1920s women novelists were a discernible presence in the public domain, the Director of Public Instructions observing that "lady novelists" had "invaded the field in some numbers". [124] The "better class" of women writers was seen as engaged in "making serial contributions to

117 Ibid.

118 Akshaykumar Datta-Gupta, Librarian, Bengal Library, "Report on Publications Registered Under Act XXV of 1867 in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1920", *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books* (Appended to the Calcutta Gazette), Quarter ending March 31, 1920.

119 Ibid.

120 Anurupa Devi, "Bhāratī-Smṛti", *Bhāratī*.

121 Ibid. Nirupama Devi, "Bhāratī Smṛti", *Bhāratī* v.50 # 1, Baiśākh 1333 / April-May 1926. Swarnakumari Devi's daughters Hiranmoyee Devi and Sarala Devi were in charge of editorship of the journal at different stages during its long print-run. Both Anurupa Devi and Nirupama Devi were referring to the decade between Swadeshi Movement and the beginnings of World War I as the early phase of their fiction-writing career.

122 Nirupama Devi, "Bhāratī Smṛti".

123 Though the only woman known to have made writing her profession was Purnasashi Devi. Vide, Chitra Deb, "Introduction" in *Purnasashi Devir Nirbachita Racanā.*

124 Correspondence No. 178-C/15-C dated 26th May 1921 from W.W. Hornell, Director of Public Instructions, Government of Bengal to The Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Education Department, forwarding Report on Publications Registered under Act XXV of 1867 in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1920.

periodicals"[125] but most were seen to "lack sufficient education" and "well-conceived attitude towards life".[126]

During the course of the early twentieth century, the domestic space was drawn into the nation's struggle for political autonomy. Mature women writers (*sulekhikā*) were called upon to undertake the task of social reform as an affirmative way to contribute to the public life of the nation. Women writers opened up *gr̥hadharma* to the public sphere and their moral influence over society came to be widely recognized. Their literary practices were considered enriching experiences as long as what they read and wrote remained compatible with the expected social behaviors of the *sugr̥hiṇī*.[127] Discourses on Bengali middle-class domesticity proved to be both limiting as well as enabling for the women writers. Ideas of motherhood and good wife were powerful and convincing tropes for precluding women from entering male preserves.[128]

Writing along with tutoring was amongst the few "intellectual jobs" (*mānasik kārya*) that gradually became acceptable as appropriate for women.[129] Preparing text books for children was considered a relatively easier and suitable exercise for women – the assumption being that most women naturally lacked the originality of thought and imagination required for being a successful litterateur.[130] Gender relations that were regulated along rigid lines of social norms confined women writers (and readers) to certain specificities in terms of content of these journals. The 'resolution' as it were, was to be found in limiting the aesthetic space shared by women. Violating those confines involved the risk of being condemned as *aślīl* or indecent. While most women writers conformed to the hegemonic prescriptions of the male literary community they nonetheless acquired the aesthetic means to subvert patriarchal domination. Morality and along with it the fear of transgression was a matter of perpetual concern.

125 Akshaykumar Datta-Gupta, Librarian, Bengal Library, "Report on Publications Registered Under Act XXV of 1867 in the Presidency of Bengal During the Year 1921", *Bengal Library Catalogues of Books* (Appended to the Calcutta Gazette), Report dated 6th March 1922.

126 Ibid.

127 Nupur Chaudhuri, "Nationalism and Feminism in the Writings of Santa Devi and Sita Devi" in Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose ed. *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, Francis and Taylor, 1997, pp. 31–44. Chaudhuri shows how these two women novelists despite their critique of certain traditional beliefs and support for women's education, nevertheless conformed to the ideas of middle-class nationalism.

128 Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal*, 1978, Volume 5, #1, pp. 9–66. Borthwick, p. 64.

129 Mrs. D.N. Das, 'Strīloker Kāj' (Women's Jobs) in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Year 48 # 582 Māgh 1318 / January-February 1912.

130 Ibid.

Yet, these very same limiting tropes enabled some women writers to voice their protests. But women did script protests by reworking the concepts of the private and the domestic, often in the name of social progress and national interest (*jātīẏa svārtha*).

5 Education, Income and Changing Lives for Women

The task of producing responsible women readers and writers was entwined with the question of women's education.[131] The publicly asserted raison d'être for women's education was to groom them to instruct their children well. Periodicals took on an increasingly didactic role of cultural instruction vis-à-vis the literate middle-class *bhadramahila*. The woman represented as the repository of culture was now seen as responsible for the dissemination of good taste in so far as she was responsible for tutoring her children and instilling in them proper reading habits.[132] Much of the rhetoric about the home and women remained unaltered over the decades. In the nineteenth century for instance, the *Bāmābodhinī* had enumerated the primary duties of the good wife in the following manner:

> She ought to be the principal supervisor of household chores, hard-working and a strict disciplinarian; she must wake up early in the morning and clean the house herself or get it done by domestic helps and finally she has to be prudent. A household where the wife is lazy and wakes up late in the morning is crippled by disease, poverty and misery.[133]

Almost half a century later the vocabulary remained almost identical. In an essay 'Nārīr Kartavya' in the same journal, Hemnalini Basu described the

131 Jennifer Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Periodicals and the Cultural Health of the Nation*, Ohio State University Press, 2004. Phegley shows how family literary periodicals taught women to become responsible readers and how to represent themselves as embodiments of middle-class cultural values. Reading and cultivation of literary tastes were considered as parts of nation-building. At stake Phegley argues was the middle-class anxiety about the nation's cultural superiority. Literary taste and cultural sensibility of the woman reader were means to justify an enhanced national culture.

132 Children's journals were being churned out in increasing numbers. Rabindranath Tagore initiated *Bālak* in the late 1880s. The most popular children's magazine was however *Sandeś* started by Upendrakishore Raychaudhury and later continued by Sukumar Ray.

133 Anonymous, 'Gṛhasthāśram' (Domesticity), *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* Part-6, # 84 Śrāvaṇ 1277 / July-August 1870.

woman as the empress of the home (*gṛher rāgñīsvarūpā*) and outlined her duties in terms of preservation of the *saṃsār* i.e. the household and providing meaningful education to her children. She argued in unambiguous terms that the purpose of women's education was not to enable them to earn money and become financially self-reliant.[134] Such notions about femininity and female education that one would generally associate with the "old patriarchy"[135] demonstrate strong continuities from the late nineteenth century and reveal how critically they determined representations of the woman. One such essay appearing in the otherwise reformist journal *Baṅgalakṣmī* steered clear of the notion of 'literacy' altogether and argued that 'historically' women's education was very much a part of the Bengali way of life. Evidence of such education was not to be found in historical texts but woven into the textures of the Bengalis' domestic lives, especially the feminine rituals (*brata*).[136] Women's learning, the writer argued ought to revolve around legendary women like Sita, Kunti and Draupadi.[137] Listening to religious and mythological texts was the primary mode of their education. Finally their training was to include step by step induction into household chores – preparations for the routine household *pūjā*, plucking flowers, bathing and feeding younger siblings, chopping vegetables and finally being given the chance to cook.[138] Such occasional essays though not quite in accord with the general mood of an otherwise progressive journal like *Baṅgalakṣmī* nevertheless posits this older ideal as a probable choice for its readers and perhaps also to enable them to weigh the worth of the new reformist alternatives.

Women in most of the liberal-reformist discourses of the nineteenth century were presented as unenlightened and therefore the primary encumbrance to the expansion of a literary public domain. In the process the *antaḥpur* culture or the women's domestic space came to be depicted as debauched, morally vulnerable and in urgent need for transformation. Women's language, cultural and literary preferences and their space, the domestic sphere had all been

134 Hemnalini Basu, 'Nārīr Kartavya' (Women's duties), *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* 1321 / 1914, Year 51, Kalpa 10, Part III, # 612. Hemnalini concludes the essay with the categorical comment: "The purpose of women's education is not to enable them to earn money …"

135 Walsh, op. cit. pp. 53–54.

136 Balai Debsharma, "Bāṅgālīr Kanyāśikṣā" (Girls' education among Bengalis), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 2, Pouṣ 1337 / December-January 1929–30.

137 Ibid. The legendary figures of Sita (exemplar of wifely devotion and hence the desire to be a sati like her "satī habo"), Kunti (example of the mother of several sons and hence the desire to be like her "bāḍunī habo") and Draupadi (the archetype of an excellent cook and hence the desire to be a cook like her "rā̃dhunī habo") were drawn from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata, both of which constituted mandatory reading for women.

138 Ibid.

singled out as inferior and therefore in need of amelioration. Female literacy therefore had been the most fundamental focus of the indigenous and bureaucratic reformist agenda.[139] By far the two most important rationales justifying women's education in the early and mid-nineteenth century were first, that literate women could manage property and check accounts in the event of her husband's demise and second educated, enlightened women were more likely to produce enlightened sons.[140] Much of these assumptions on the nature of women's education remained continuous from those of the nineteenth century, oriented towards making girl children deeply religious, devoted to their nuptial family and proficient in household chores including cookery and child-rearing.[141] To this end 'higher sciences' and 'philosophy' could be entirely left out.[142] Neither was it necessary for women to go further than the basic skills in mathematics – geometry, trigonometry and algebra most certainly had no use for housewives.[143] Finally everyone would be better off if women kept out of studying law![144] What was needed for women was a judicious sense of cookery, kitchen gardening, hygiene, nursing and basic skills in delivering babies.[145] Later, even as Montessori methods were being recommended in respect to primary education for girls aged between eight and twelve, the emphases continued to be on domestic skills, ethics and religious texts.[146] These specific objectives of female curriculum increasingly differentiated it from the mainstream curriculum that catered to primarily male students. There was indeed a consensus among missionaries, British feminists like Mary Carpenter and the reformist indigenous intelligentsia about the need for 'feminine' content in female education.[147] Proposals for a separate women's university or *mahilā biśvabidyālaẏ* suggested reduced course lengths, simpler contents and vernacular medium so that more young girls could avail opportunities of higher education before

---

139 Borthwick, op. cit., pp. 26–40. Forbes, op. cit., pp. 39–46.

140 From an imaginary dialogue between a husband and wife in which the former tries to persuade his spouse to learn. "Gṛhakathā", *Māsik Patrikā*, v.1 #1, cited in Borthwick p. 64.

141 Ibid., p. 229. Vernacular primary texts for women included – *Kathāmālā*, *Bodhadaẏa*, *Padyapāṭh*, *Cārupāṭh*, *Ākhyāṇa-Mañjarī*, *Caritāvali* and P.C. Sarkar's 'First Book'.

142 Dwarikanath Mitra's Lecture compiled by Sri Dharmananda Mahabharati in *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Year 47, Āśvin 1316 / October-November 1909.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 Ibid.

146 Manindranath Roy, "Bāṅglādeśer Bālikādiger Nimnaśikṣā" (Minimal education for girls in Bengal), 'Mahilā Majlis', *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 2, # 1, Kārtik 1329 / October-November 1922.

147 Borthwick, pp. 80–86.

they were married off in the mid-teens.[148] Education for women was therefore explained on grounds of achieving a happy family life steeped in religiosity and efficient functioning of the household and even women writers reasoned in this way.[149] There was little disagreement that women's education had to be such that a woman's feminine attributes were preserved and her domestic and spiritual life enhanced.[150] While the number of women successfully taking examinations at the middle and high school and university levels grew each year,[151] arguments about the essential 'masculine' nature of the education remained relentless in the public domain.[152] Women's educational accomplishments were frequently recognized and photographs of University graduates and debutants appeared in various miscellanies and women's journals.

Within this reformist-nationalist paradigm, *brata* occupied an important content of women's readings. *Brata* literally meaning a vow or resolution, were part of a quasi-autonomous domain of feminine rituals that involved women in their capacities as married (*sadhabā*), unmarried (*āibuṛo*) or widowed (*bidhabā*), as mother of several children or a childless woman aspiring for motherhood, or even as a faithful wife trying to divert her husband's attention away from his mistress. These *brata* or *strī-ācār* involved fasting or restricted

---

148 Jatindrakumar Basu, "Mahilā Biśvabidyālaẏ" (Women's University), *Bhāratmahilā*, v. 4 # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1315 / July-August 1908.

149 Hemangini Choudhury, "Strī-śikṣār Praẏojanīẏatā" (The need for women's education), in *Antaḥpur*, Māgh 1307 / January-February 1901. Hemantakumari Gupta, "Gṛhiṇī o gṛha śṛṅkhalā" (The mistress of the household and domestic discipline), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 5, Bhādra 1310 / August-September 1903. Subashini Sehanabish, "Āmāder Jātīẏa Jībane Pāścātya Śikṣār Prabhāb" (Western influences on our nation's life), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 10, Māgh 1310 / January-February 1904. Anonymous, "Bhārat-nārī o Hindu Nītibijñān" (Indian women and the science of ethics), *Bhāratmahilā*, v. 4 # 12, Caitra 1315 / March-April 1909. This is a Bengali transcription of the address delivered by Lakshmi Ammal at the Madras session of the Bharat Mahila Parishad.

150 Anonymous, "Bartamān Baṅgīẏa Mahilāsamājer Śikṣā – tāhār śreṣṭha ādarśa o bistārer prakṛṣṭa upāẏ" (Women's education in contemporary Bengal – its ideology and means of dissemination), *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Year 51, # 618, 1914.

151 Most women took their high school and graduation examinations through the following schools: Bethune School, St. John's Diocesan, Loreto Convent, Brahmo Balika Shikshalaya and Dacca Eden School, besides some non-collegiate private examinees. The *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā* regularly published names of women passing various levels of school and collegiate examinations. *Mahilā* brought out proceedings of the functioning and lectures organized at the Victoria Mahila Vidyalay.

152 Sharing educational space with men was anything but desirable. It was widely believed to generate *ku-śikṣā* amongst women (evil lessons). Only functional knowledge of language (both Bengali and English) and mathematics were regarded as essential for fulfillment of household duties. Manindrakumar Ghosh, "Bālikā-Bidyālaẏ" (Girls' school) in *Mātṛmandir*, Caitra 1330 / March-April 1923.

food intake alongside performance of rituals and in most cases did not require the mediation of Brahmin priests. The reading of *bratakathā* that narrated a mythological tale suffused with morality and the rationale for performing a specific *brata* was the usual way to conclude the ceremony. Both general periodicals and women's journals carried essays explaining the need to perform a particular *brata* and the right ways of doing so.[153] Elderly women well versed in the specificities of rituals were usually the ones who taught young girls the performances of the bratas at home. Periodicals saw an extension of their roles as repositories and dispensers of non-scriptural and quotidian religious knowledge.[154] The ostensible reason behind the visibility of essays on *brata* even in journals like *Bhāratī* and *Prabāsī* both of whose editors were Brahmo and who consciously maintained a distance from idolism and polytheistic aspects of Hinduism may have been to enable their women readers to perform the rituals more meaningfully. It was also part of an overall attempt to encapsulate in print these indigenous oral-aural ritual idioms.[155] These essays in certain ways constituted and renewed the readers' sense of their feminine duties or *nārī dharma*. *Brata*s were believed to be disciplinary in their effect on performers, infusing resoluteness into her character and making her a *brātya* or outcaste in the event of deviation from proper performance.[156] The woman who regularly and conscientiously performed her *brata*s was the ideal woman: devoted to

153 A periodical issue would mostly carry essays on the *brata*(s) that were performed during the particular month. For instance: Aghornath Chattopadhyay, "Meẏeli Sāhitya O Bārbrata" (Women's literature and rituals), *Prabāsī*, v.1 # 6 and 7, Āśvin o Kārtik 1308 / September-November 1901; v.1 # 8 and 9, Agrahāẏaṇ o Pouṣ, 1308–09 / November 1901-January 1902. *Prabāsī* (Phālgun, 1318 / February-March 1911) carried an article on the performance of *Aśokṣaṣṭhī* and *Nīlṣaṣṭhī* rituals. Rajanikanta Vidyāvinod, "Aitihāsik Ghiṭu Pūjā", *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Phālgun 1318 / February-March 1911. Sushilasundari Mitra, "Bāuni Pārbaṇ", *Bāmābodhinī Patrikā*, Baiśākh 1316 / April-May 1909. Anonymous, "Itu-Pūjār Kathā", *Mātṛmandir*, Agrahāẏaṇ 1330 / November-December 1923 discusses the meanings and rituals of Itu-Pūjā in honor of Itu-Thākur or Sun-god on every Sunday of the month of Agrahāẏaṇ (November-December). Bindubasini Dasi, "Pūrvabaṅger Bratakathā", *Jāhnavī*, Kārtik, 1315 / October-November 1908. Anonymous, "Sampad-Nārāẏaṇ Brata", *Jāhnavī*, Agrahāẏaṇ, 1315 / November-December 1908. Anonymous, "Barakumār Brata", *Jāhnavī*, Pouṣ, 1315 / December-January 1908–09. Bipadbhanjan Chakrabarty, "Bhādu-Pūjā", *Prabāsī*, v.25 pt.2 #4, Māgh 1332 / January-February 1926.

154 Charushila Mitra, for instance, a frequent writer and probably a widowed daughter of the Sobhabazar Raj family who lived in her natal-ancestral home, wrote extensively on various *brata* in *Prabāsī*.

155 Abanindranath Tagore who compiled *Bāṅglār Brata* (Rituals of Bengal; first published in 1919 / 1325 BS) and Gurusaday Dutta (inaugurated the Bratacarī Movement for revival of indigenous practices) were pioneers.

156 Banalata Devi, 'Brata' (Rituals), *Antaḥpur* v. 4 # 1, Baiśākh 1308 / April-May 1901. Jatindranath Basu, "Bratakathā", *Mahilā*, v. 15 # 3, Āśvin 1316 / September-October 1909.

her husband (*svāmīr anugāminī*), encouraging and supporting in his duties, always ready to sacrifice for his wellbeing and constantly attentive towards each of her children. The society it was firmly believed needed such women of pure conduct (*śuddhācāriṇī*).[157]

From the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation years, times started changing and discourses on femininity, education and publicity were gradually moving out of the familiar nineteenth-century reformist vocabulary. During the movement Gandhi appealed to women, including women of marginalized classes to join the picket lines and court arrest.[158] Several hundred women, including those from respectable families courted arrest. For nationalist leaders this was an appropriate ploy to shame men into joining politics. But women's participation and courting arrest had unintended and less predictable outcomes as well.[159] And these outcomes were not necessarily confined to direct political participation only. Direct political activism whether in anti-colonial mass movements or in demands for women's civil rights like franchise was limited in terms of temporal duration and participation.[160] Women's periodicals reveal how the question of women's public engagement was wrested from the constricted domain of politics and imbued with wider and more conflicting meanings. Within the earlier reformist discourse, women's public involvement either as readers or writers had been delimited by the indices of domesticity. Public engagement was an extension of domesticity itself in so far as women's literary choices were subjected to intense social and familial supervision. But from the 1920s the literary sphere opened up to questions of middle-class women's participation in professional work force. Contemporary personal testimonies might be too few to form an idea about what motivated women to join political movements,[161] but women's journals are aplenty with essays that sought to create social consensus for women's professions and their value in the public domain. Endorsing public roles such as the professions for women necessarily called for a redefinition of female curricula as well. *Baṅgalakṣmī* for example consistently asserted the importance of women joining various professions and suggested jobs that suited the 'feminine' disposition and did

157 Banalata Devi, 'Brata'.

158 Forbes, op. cit. pp. 126–127.

159 Ibid., op. cit. p. 127.

160 During the decade-long interludes between the various all-India mass movements, especially during the years after Non-Cooperation, Gandhi urged Indians to spin on the charka to make the nation self-reliant in textiles. During these phases direct political action was largely absent from public life, barring a few instances like the anti-Simon agitations of 1927–28.

161 Ibid., op. cit. p. 129.

not drastically upset the domestic poise. This shift was less radical and in consonance with the renewed emphasis on motherhood and traditionalist feminine qualities that emerged in the aftermath of the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal.[162]

On returning to India after several years, Sita Devi observed that by the 1920s, there had been a qualitative change in the public life of the nation.[163] This she described as an age of rising public opinion (*janamat jāgaraṇ*) and women's awakening (*nārī jāgaraṇ*).[164] She called for an increased participation for women in the public sphere as teachers, nurses, obstetricians and social workers. Women, she asserted, should move beyond their socially affixed roles as mothers and wives and contribute to the public life of the nation. Unmarried young girls, women with grown up children and those who were childless were relatively free of domestic encumbrances and could therefore engage themselves in social service.[165] Alongside a redefinition of their social roles, the content of women's curriculum too was rethought and reforms proposed to that effect. Critical of the earlier position that women ought to be trained only in domestic duties like cooking, sewing and child-rearing and a preliminary knowledge of history, geography, literature and science was quite sufficient, the new stand enunciated by progressive individuals advocated income-oriented (*arthakarī śikṣā*), vocational education for men and women alike.[166] In what were very much a response to the perpetually hard pressed

162 Radha Kumar, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1990*, Zubaan, 1993; Chapter Three, "Towards Becoming 'The Mothers of the Nation'". Sarala Debi Ghoshal and Kumudini Mitra had led the way in reclaiming the mythic prowess of traditional goddesses and deities such as Kali and Durga and this influenced profoundly the thinking of leaders such as Sarojini Naidu. Historians who have studied the affinity between ideologies of motherhood and a new emphasis on marriage, maternity, health and child rearing have suggested that this was an imperial as well as a colonial phenomenon. Anna Davin in "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal* 1978, Volume 5, #1, pp. 9–66. Samita Sen, "Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal", *Gender and History*, Volume 5, #2, pp. 231–243. Sen argues that the idea of motherhood provided a new gendered idiom for nationalism during the twentieth century.

163 This observation was shared by several nationalist periodicals. *Māsik Basumatī* for instance credited Gandhi for bringing about an "explosive" transformation among Indian women. "Sāmaẏik Prasaṅga" (Contemporary Contexts), *Māsik Basumatī*, v. 9 pt. 1 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1337 / June-July 1930.

164 Sita Devi, B.A., "Nārīr Kāj" (Women's work), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 4, Phālgun 1337 / February-March 1930.

165 Ibid.

166 Indira Devi Chaudhurani, B.A., "Strī-śikṣār Ādarśa Ki?" (What are the principles of women's education?), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 8, Āṣāṛh 1338 / June-July 1931. Parimal Goswami, M.A., "Strī-śikṣār Ādarśa" (The principles of women's education), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 10,

conditions of the middle classes, women's income, howsoever meager, they argued, could partly ameliorate monetary difficulties.[167] By the Non-Cooperation years this had become a common argument in the pages of women's journals and women's sections in miscellanies. The *Prabāsī* editor argued that it was condemnable if a father did not care for his daughter's education and instead agree to sponsor the son-in-law's education as part of dowry contract. Education he rationalized would make a girl self-dependent and competent enough to preserve her *strīdhan* (wedding gifts, usually gold jewelry and cash).[168] Women, several women's periodicals urged, needed to have some vocational training that would make it possible for them to earn either working at home or if required working outside.[169] Women's work, it was argued could potentially disrupt home discipline. But a *sugṛhiṇī* should be able to manage the household even if she is a working woman.[170] Besides, such proposals were also sensitive to the cause of widows, urging a utility oriented training that would enable a widow to earn decent living for herself and her children in the face of disintegration of extended familial networks.[171] Periodicals recorded with alarm the large number of young widows among Hindu and Muslim families in Bengal.[172] Social stigma against widow remarriage still remained

---

Bhādra, 1338 / August-September 1931. Radhacharan Chakrabarty, "Bāhirer Karmakṣetra" (Workplace outside home), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 9, Śrāvaṇ 1338 / July-August 1931 elaborated on the socio-familial roles of women in England, opportunities for their higher education and the range of professional choices open before them. He pointed out that most young girls in Britain were employed in office jobs. Others were employed as pharmacy attendant, librarianship, accountants, designers and other such jobs.

167 Indira Devi Chaudhurani, "Strī-śikṣār Ādarśa Ki?". Also, Kumudini Sinha, Etaddeśīẏa Mahilāder Śilpa Śikṣā" (Vocational training for indigenous women), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 12, Caitra 1310 / March-April 1904.

168 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, 'Bibidha Prasaṅga – Barpaṇ o Kanyār Strīdhan' (Miscellaneous Matters – Dowry and the Bride's possessions), *Prabāsī*, v. 22, pt. 2 # 3, Pouṣ 1329 / December 1922 – January 1323.

169 Sudhamoyee Devi, B.A., "Paribāre Nārīr Sthān" (Position of women within the family), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1337 / November-December 1930.

170 Ibid.

171 Indira Devi Chaudhurani, "Strī-śikṣār Ādarśa Ki?", *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 8, Āṣāṛh 1338 / June-July 1931 and Kumudini Sinha, "Etaddeśīẏa Mahilāder Śilpa Śikṣā" (Vocational training for indigenous women), *Antaḥpur*, v.6 # 12, Caitra 1310 / March-April 1904. Widows as Engels points out were at the lowest rung of the family hierarchy. A widow living in her in-laws' household was perhaps the most exploited being deprived of direct male protection and often driven to commit suicide. Engels, p. 63. "Nānākathā" (Miscellaneous Words), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 #3, Māgh 1337 / January-February 1930. The feature insisted that young widows be treated at par with maidens with regard to education so that they would not need to depend on natal or marital families for financial support. It argued that nursing and teaching were the most suitable professions for widows to adopt.

172 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Hindu-Musalmāner Hrasbṛddhi" (Miscellaneous Matters – Comparative Demography of Hindus and Muslims), *Prabāsī*, v. 22 pt.

strong even amongst educated middle-class Bengali families. Remarriage was deemed acceptable for child and virgin widows.[173] For other widows, especially older ones and those with children, gainful employment and voluntary service to the nation were recommended.[174] Women it was now proposed could opt for professions such as teaching, medical sciences, obstetrics, nursing, law, photography, painting, marketing, typewriting and insurance agency.[175] The Sarojnalini Dutta Nārīmaṅgal Samiti organized nursing training classes so that women and especially widows from less well-to-do households could support themselves and their dependent children.[176] In several of its Mahilā Majlis sections, *Prabāsī* reiterated the importance of earning for women from respectable households and drew attention to the medical profession as an honorable vocation for women.[177] Ramananda Chattopadhyay even proposed architectural engineering as a possible vocation for women, given that they could "easily understand" the requirements of a well-designed dwelling space.[178] But even as various "suitable professions" for women were being explored, their income-oriented work, it was argued, could only be a response to financial difficulties and never as a general rule. If a wife worked to meet family needs, then her relationship with her husband shall not sour. But if she stepped out to earn for reasons other than monetary difficulties then it was bound to make the man lazy.[179]

Interestingly, unlike China during the May Fourth era, women's periodicals in Bengal hardly showed any fascination with Nora slamming the door of a

---

2 # 3, Pouṣ 1329 / December 1922 – January 1923. Anonymous, 'Deś-bideśer Kathā' *Prabāsī*, v. 22 pt. 2 # 5, Phālgun 1329 / February-March 1923.

173 Ramananda Chattopadhyay repeatedly emphasized the need for remarriage of young, childless widows. He argued that widow remarriage would help arrest the declining population of Hindus in Bengal, apart from prevent various social ills like feticide. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Baṅge Bidhabābibāha" (Widow remarriage in Bengal), *Prabāsī*, v. 25, pt. 1 # 1, Baiśākh 1332 / April-May 1925.

174 Anurupa Devi, "Nārīr Sthān" in *Bhāratī*, v. 46 # 1, 1923.

175 Parimal Goswami, "Strī-śikṣār Ādarśa".

176 "Kendrasamitir Kathā" (Monthly Report on the workings of the central committee of the Sarojnalini Dutta Narīmaṅgal Samiti), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 6, Baiśākh 1338 / April-May 1931.

177 Anonymous, 'Nārī Pragatī' (Women's progress) in Mahilā Majlis, *Prabāsī*, v.22 pt. 2 # 2, Agrahāẏaṇ 1329 / November-December 1922.

178 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Sthāpatya Mahilāder Abalambanīẏa" (Women can become architects), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 3, Māgh 1337 / January-February 1931. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Biśvabhāratīte Meyeder Śikṣār Suyog" (Opportunities for girls' education at Visva-Bharati), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 5, Caitra 1337 / March-April 1930.

179 Sudhamoyee Devi, B.A., "Paribāre Nārīr Sthān" (The Position of women within the family), *Baṅgalakṣmī*, v.6 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1337 / November-December 1930.

'doll's house' and walking out.[180] Evidently the nationalist imperative prevented any such radical break with social authority. But while still being deferential to the sanctity of the *gr̥ha* and the authoritativeness of *gr̥hadharma*, they mark subtle attempts to create public consent on matter of women's work outside home. Such rationalizations insinuated changes in Bengali middle-class domesticity in modest ways. Of course periodicals reflected women's lives as centered on family and home, thereby confining them to the domestic space but by the 1920s they also reveal a new trajectory, that of showing women ways to work out of the constraints of domesticity. Attending educational institutions and then going out to work in professions of their own choice created a new paradigm of social behavior for women – breaching the confines of the domestic sphere and acquiring a public identity of their own. During these early decades of the twentieth century, the agenda of social reform dovetailed with women's political activism over issues such as suffrage, marriage and inheritance laws, maternal and child healthcare facilities.[181] Most of these demands were forwarded through petitions and meetings of various women's associations. Periodicals like *Baṅgalakṣmī* emerged as a vital means of public argument, creating consensus for proposed reforms and contemplating on possible resolution of dilemmas opened up by new choices.

6 Women Writing Protest: Muslim Women, *Abarodh* and Publicity

Historical literature has generally identified the shaping of a distinct self-identity amongst Bengal's Muslims with the social-linguistic process of formation of Islamic-Bangla.[182] The transition from the pre-colonial syncretistic tradition to community-based identities during the 1870s has been perceived as simultaneously linguistic and religious. Colonial classificatory schemes, their adoption by both Muslim and Hindu elites, and a purported 'Sanskritization' or 'Hinduization' of formal literary Bengali are seen to have contributed towards

180 The heroine of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Nora became very popular in China during the May Fourth era (roughly between 1918 and 1927) after Hu Shih's translation of the play in 1918, inspiring many young women to break away from conventional family bonds. See Leo Ou-Fan Lee, "Literary Trends: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927" in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee ed. *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2002, pp. 168–169.

181 Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, op. cit. pp. 4–5.

182 See Rafiuddin Ahmad, *The Bengal Muslims: 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981.

sedimentation of communal categories of the 'Hindu' and 'Musalmān'.[183] The *ashraf* or elite landholding Muslims community claimed descent from West Asian noble migrants and chose to identify themselves with Arabic-Persian-Urdu cultural and literary traditions rather than with Bengali. The latter was disregarded as the language of the 'Hindus' and Muslim *atraf* groups. The latter were believed to be descended from indigenous converts of questionable socio-cultural profile.[184] Such linguistic boundaries conceived during the last quarter of the nineteenth century therefore operated more along class rather than religious lines.

The traditional legal discourse (*Sharia*) of Islam enjoined authority in terms of social space.[185] The public-discursive (typically the court, market, school and mosque) was conceived as the realm of adult men and therefore the true space of Islam. The private-non-discursive (feminine and juvenile space) was the weak but sensual domain that posed a constant threat of *fitna* or social disruption.[186] The colonial encounter disrupted the neat separation of boundaries, crippling the arena of the public by appropriating the state and market and consigning the school and mosque to the private realm. The emergent middle class or *shurafa* of the nineteenth century imagined and represented themselves as a *sharif qawm* (group nation) through the associational culture of print and meetings. The domestic space, religion and educational practices now constituted the *sharif* space or the domain of true Islam.[187] An emergent intelligentsia amongst the Bengali Muslim middle class shared in much of this process of privatization, engaging through print in never-ending debates on their identity and imagined polity. Simultaneously, an articulate section within them sought to rescind from the Perso-Arabic cultural tradition and consciously chose to partake in the cultural precepts of the *nabajāgaraṇ* (i.e. the nineteenth-century Hindu-Brahmo cultural stirring) enhancing the Bengali literary field with infusions of Musalmāni Bengali articulations. In the process middle-class educated Bengali Muslims came to share in the ideas, assumptions and practices of colonial patriarchy formulated by the Bengali Hindu / Brahmo

183 Anindita Ghosh, 'Bengali and Its 'Muslim Other" in *Power in Print* provides an in-depth study of the social agenda and political implications of 'Musalmāni-Bāṅglā' and the reception of *půthi* literature.

184 Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, University of California Press, 1993.

185 Faisal Fatehali Devji, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform, 1857–1900" in Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit, pp. 378–388.

186 Devji, op. cit. pp. 380–381.

187 Devji, op. cit. pp. 383–384.

bhadralok.[188] Sonia Nishat Amin has argued that the emergence of an educated and professional middle class within the Bengali Muslim community became inextricably tied up with the project of modernization that in turn had become co-terminus with the process of 'Bengalicization'.[189] The question of formation of a parallel 'bhadralok' class within the Muslim community was indicative of the imperatives for modernization within the emergent middle classes.[190]

The search for a *bhadralok* class led almost reflexively to a quest for the Muslim *bhadramahila*.[191] Muslim women who lived through the early twentieth-century decades themselves were divided on whether the normative category of 'bhadramahila' was applied to them in public spaces.[192] The term 'Muslim bhadramahila' had been first used by Nawab Faizunnessa Chaudhurani (1834–1903) in 1876 in reference to herself in the preface to her book *Rupjālāl*.[193] By the 1920s as Nishat Amin has argued, Hindu and Muslim *bhadramahila* looked the same, spoke the same language, and wore the same dress – i.e. sari and chemise, inhabited the same geographical space and in fact shared many of the same domestic concerns like home management and child care.[194] Muslim women have been typically perceived as subjects of reform projects that sought to redefine their position through legislations, education, health improvement instructions and civic status.[195] The process of the 'emergence of feminism' amongst Muslim women, perceived as progressive-liberal, is none the less seen

188 See Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*; Brill Publishers, 1996 for an extensive study on the 'Bengalicization' of middle-class Muslim Bengali community, the controversial emergence of the 'Muslim Bhadramahila' and the latter's negotiations with the literary public sphere.

189 Ibid., see "Introduction".

190 Ibid., p. 6.

191 The term *bhadramahila* has been used as a category of historical investigation Hindu and Brahmo gentlewomen by Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905* and by Ghulam Murshed, *The Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849–1905*, Rajshahi Sahitya Samsad, 1983.

192 Murshed, op. cit. p. 12. Sonia Amin interviewed several women writers including the well-known poet Begum Sufia Kamal. There existed considerable divergences in opinion whether educated middle-class Muslim women were referred to as 'bhadramahila' in public. Sufia Kamal remarked that modern Muslim gentlewomen were mostly referred to as 'bibi saheba' or simply 'meye' or 'mahila'. Mehrunnessa Islam, Noorjahan Murshed and Rahima Khatun were of the opinion that Muslim gentlewomen were indeed referred to as 'bhadramahila' frequently.

193 Murshed, op. cit., p. 12.

194 Ibid., p. 12.

195 See Azra Asghar Ali, *The Emergence of Feminism Among Indian Muslim Women, 1920–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

in these accounts as deriving from middle-class Muslim male initiatives.[196] The historiography of Indian nationalism too has remained by and large silent on the question of Muslim women. Their 'invisibility' in colonial and post-independence India was produced by the majoritarianism-dominated nationalist discourse and its historiography.[197] Nationalist imaginings of the nation as the divine Mother was derived exclusively from the socio-cultural images of upper caste, upper and middle-class married Hindu women. Muslim women continued to be marginalized as they appeared 'misfit' in this imagination. The consequence as has been argued is that these women (including the educated and articulate ones) "disappear" from history writing.[198] It is therefore imperative that Muslim women's history be rescued from the foreclosing effects of the historiography of Hindu nationalism by retrieving their historical agency and situating them as legitimate actors in their own right.[199] The history of Bengali Muslim women therefore becomes a project of recuperating their suppressed voices and their lived experiences.

In colonial India the printed word, especially the journalistic media became the site where questions of reform and rights of Muslim women and their endorsement or otherwise in the Sharia were contested. The Urdu journal *Tahzib un-Niswan* (meaning The Woman's Reformer) for instance, edited and published from Lahore by the reformer Mumtaz 'Ali and his wife Muhammadi Begum during the late 1890s advocated equal status for women, called for women's rights to education and provided a means for its female readers to connect with the world outside the confines of the home.[200] This of course was part of a larger agenda of reforming the private world that rested in women's hands in order to reform traditional individual private lives.[201] The public domain, ideally the appropriate sphere of religion had passed on from the "Muslims" to the "British" with the coming of colonial rule and was outside the purview of Islamic reforms.[202] Faisal Fatehali Devji has argued that with the disintegration of the 'moral city' enjoined by the Sharia, the private do-

196 Ibid., see Introduction.

197 Mohua Sarkar, *Visible Histories, Disappearing Women: Producing Muslim Womanhood in Late Colonial Bengal*, Duke University Press, 2008, pp. 7–8.

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid., see Introduction. Through analyses of Muslim women's writings Sarkar seeks to show how these women formulated their own interventions in debates on reforming their lives and the *zenānā*.

200 Gail Minault, "Sayyid Mumtaz 'Ali and Tahzib un-Niswan: Women's Rights in Islam and Women's Journalism in Urdu" in Sarkar and Sarkar, op. cit. pp. 359–377.

201 Barbara D. Metcalf, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*, University of California Press, 1992; Introduction, pp. 1–38.

202 Metcalf, op. cit. p. 8.

main came to embody the essence of Islamic tradition. The threat of *fitna* that the *zuafa* (domestic realm of the weak, i.e. women, youths and slaves) posed could be neutralized by effectively incorporating them within the sharif polity through the processes of education and Islamization.[203] For the new orthodox patriarchy, reformed Muslim women were to be kept secluded and not freed. In a curious inversion of the earlier rationalization for seclusion (that women could potentially corrupt and un-man the Muslim man), reformist discourse now justified seclusion on grounds that the *zuafa* themselves could be corrupted by the outside world.[204] As a narrative of reformist experiments and identity formation, this history unfolds against the backdrop of the history of the making of a hegemonic sharif polity. Reforms based on the Sharia enjoined behavioral codes for both men and women. Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi's reform guide *Bihishti Zewar* (Requisites of Islam) delineated a reformist disposition based on belief in a cultivated personality without necessarily questioning the social role of men and women.[205] One of the more popular among numerous pamphlets brought out by the Deobandi school for the purpose of educating women, *Bihishti Zewar* claimed to offer a holistic knowledge for women readers: including alphabets, letter writing, stories of the Prophet and practical domestic advices like care of the sick, cookery and home management.[206] The new middle classes among Bengali Muslims drew from similar reformist enjoinments regarding domestic space and the behavioral conduct of women.

Bengali Muslim periodicals reflected how educated Muslim women in Bengal articulated reformist programs and chose to register their dissent against what they perceived as a debased patriarchy. It is important to investigate how they engaged with the agenda of writing (and reading) in terms of an interface between the domestic and public spheres. These women without exception opted for Bengali as the expressive medium for their intervention and consciously chose participation within literary culture as the most viable means to formulate their critique of patriarchy, their intolerance of gender repression and their visions of an alternate society. By prioritizing Bengali several of these women made a radical statement about their agency and the nature of intervention they sought to make. In this sense middle-class Muslim women constituted a seemingly indiscernible but in reality a remarkable group for whom the Bengali literary sphere held out the promise of emancipation and who were

203 Devji, op. cit. p. 385.
204 Devji, op. cit. p. 385.
205 Metcalf, op. cit. pp. 9–10.
206 Barbara Daly Metcalf, Islamic Revival in India: Deoband, 1860–1900, in *India's Muslims: An Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 211.

able to reinvent their selfhood through conscious literary participation. Like their Hindu and Brahmo counterparts they shared in the questions that pertained specifically to women – education, seclusion, child marriage, polygamy, widowhood, health and mortality, and child rearing. What is nonetheless exceptional in the writings of these Bengali Muslim women is the radical critique of gender oppression and their call for emancipation and empowerment. They questioned time-honored virtues like *satītva* and austere widowhood and called for the application of such concepts in the lives of men as well.[207] Through a study of their writings I try to show how they worked within the aesthetic limits imposed on them and articulated Bengali middle-class cultural codes of feminine respectability that cut across religious divides.[208] These women writers were in fact encountered with the dual burden of confronting orthodoxy on the one hand, the norms and practices of which were dictated by *maulvis* in the name of religiosity, and a renewed patriarchy claiming to be liberal and progressive.

The Bengali Muslim reformist intelligentsia increasingly despised women's reading preferences for *Baṭtalā* fiction.[209] Periodicals thus emerged as a viable reading choice for Muslim women and arguably the most effective medium through which the need for education among Muslim women could most stridently be called for. Essays and fictions appearing in periodicals edited by the Muslim intelligentsia frequently addressed questions pertaining to women – their education, marriage, and engagements in the public domain. One of the first journals meant for an exclusively Bengali Muslim women readership was *Ānnesā*, started in 1328 BS / 1921 and was edited by Begum Sofia Khatun.[210]

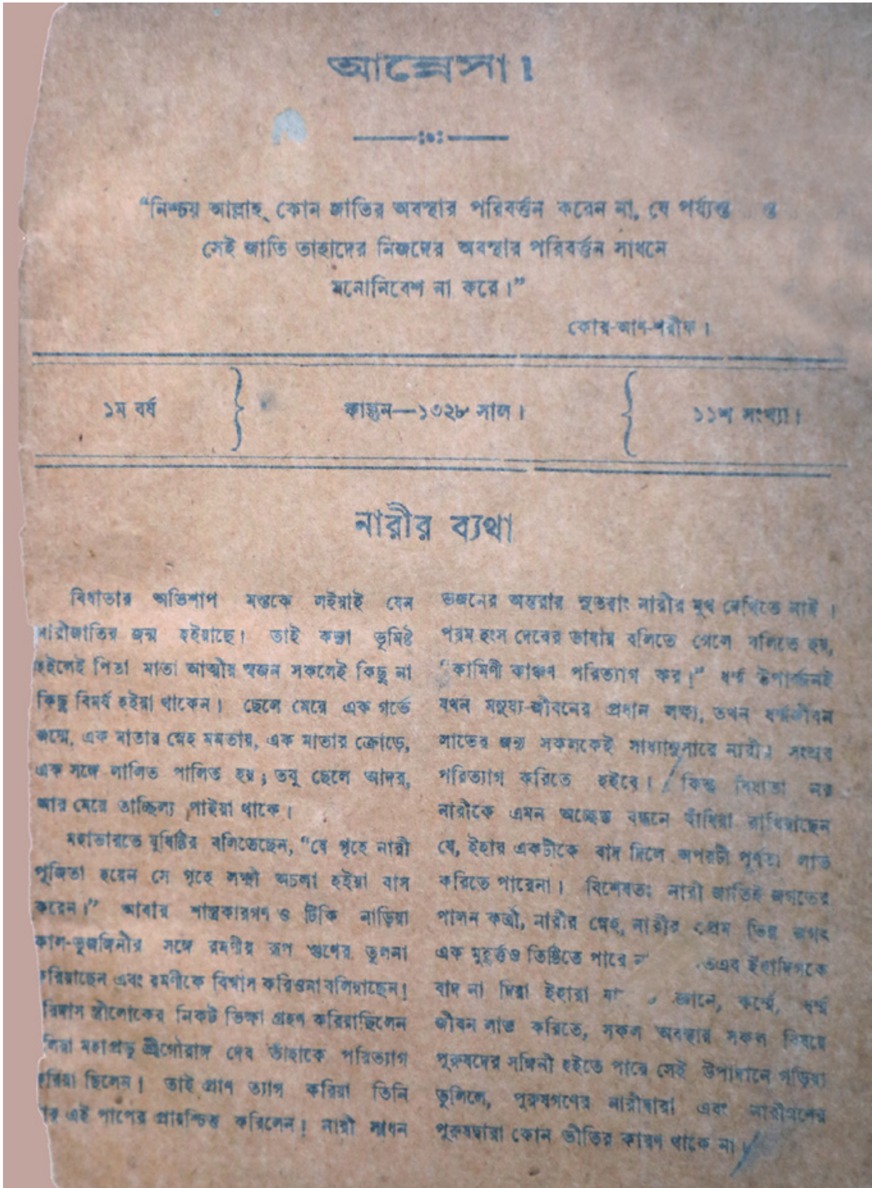
Given its very short print run and the fact that it was brought out from Chittagong, a mofussil region on the eastern fringes of Bengal, it is hard to estimate how many Muslim women would have read it. In the eleventh issue of its first volume the editor announced a reduction in annual subscription of the

207 Advocating equal status for women in his journal *Huquq un-Niswan*, Mumtaz 'Ali argued that the Muslim community needed to recognize a widow's rights to remarry. Widowhood or remarriage he argued had to be endorsed or permitted equally for both sexes. Gail Minault, op. cit., p. 368.

208 Jane Rendall has shown how the rhetoric of Empire was appropriated by women writers to critique patriarchal domination and articulate their own views in nineteenth century Britain. See Jane Rendall, "The Condition of Women, Women's Writings and the Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain" in Catherine hall and Sonya O. Rose (ed.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

209 Sheikh Abdur Rahman, 'Śikṣār Bhitti' (The foundations of education) in *Āl-Eslām*, Year 5 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1326 / November-December 1919.

210 Ashoknath Mukhopadhyay, op. cit., p. 16.



আন্নেসা।

—:০:—

"নিশ্চয় আল্লাহ্ কোন জাতির অবস্থার পরিবর্ত্তন করেন না, যে পর্য্যন্ত
সেই জাতি তাহাদের নিজদের অবস্থার পরিবর্ত্তন সাধনে
মনোনিবেশ না করে।"

কোর-আন-শরীফ।

১ম বর্ষ } ফাল্গুন—১৩২৮ সাল। { ১১শ সংখ্যা।

নারীর ব্যথা

বিধাতার অভিশাপ মস্তকে লইয়াই যেন নারীজাতির জন্ম হইয়াছে। তাই কন্যা ভূমিষ্ট হইলেই পিতা মাতা আত্মীয় স্বজন সকলেই কিছু না কিছু বিমর্ষ হইয়া থাকেন। ছেলে মেয়ে এক গর্ভে জন্মে, এক মাতার স্নেহ মমতায়, এক মাতার ক্রোড়ে, এক সঙ্গে লালিত পালিত হয়; তবু ছেলে আদর, আর মেয়ে তাচ্ছিল্য পাইয়া থাকে।

মহাভারতে যুধিষ্ঠির বলিতেছেন, "যে গৃহে নারী পূজিতা হয়েন সে গৃহে লক্ষ্মী অচলা হইয়া বাস করেন।" আবার শাস্ত্রকারগণও টিকি নাড়িয়া কাল-ভুজঙ্গিনীর সঙ্গে রমণীর রূপ গুণের তুলনা করিয়াছেন এবং রমণীকে বিশ্বাস করিওনা বলিয়াছেন। [illegible] স্ত্রীলোকের নিকট ভিক্ষা গ্রহণ করিয়াছিলেন [illegible] মহাপ্রভু শ্রীগৌরাঙ্গ দেব তাঁহাকে পরিত্যাগ করিয়া ছিলেন। তাই প্রাণ ত্যাগ করিয়া তিনি [illegible] এই পাপের প্রায়শ্চিত্ত করিলেন। নারী সাধন ভজনের অন্তরায় সুতরাং নারীর মুখ দেখিতে নাই। পরম হংস দেবের ভাষায় বলিতে গেলে বলিতে হয়, "কামিনী কাঞ্চন পরিত্যাগ কর।" ধর্ম্ম উপার্জ্জনই যখন মনুষ্য-জীবনের প্রধান লক্ষ্য, তখন ধর্ম্মজীবন লাভের জন্য সকলকেই সাধ্যানুসারে নারীর সংস্রব পরিত্যাগ করিতে হইবে। কিন্তু বিধাতা নর নারীকে এমন অচ্ছেদ্য বন্ধনে বাঁধিয়া রাখিয়াছেন যে, ইহার একটীকে বাদ দিলে অপরটী পূর্ণতা লাভ করিতে পারেনা। বিশেষতঃ নারী জাতিই জগতের পালন কর্ত্রী, নারীর স্নেহ, নারীর প্রেম ভিন্ন জগৎ এক মুহূর্ত্তও তিষ্ঠিতে পারে [illegible] অতএব ইহাদিগকে বাদ না দিয়া ইহারা [illegible] জ্ঞানে, কর্ম্মে, ধর্ম্ম জীবন লাভ করিতে, সকল অবস্থায় সকল বিষয়ে পুরুষদের সঙ্গিনী হইতে পারে সেই উপাদানে গড়িয়া তুলিলে, পুরুষগণের নারীদ্বারা এবং নারীগণের পুরুষদ্বারা কোন ভীতির কারণ থাকে না।

FIGURE 5.3 A page from *Ānnesā* (1328 / 1922), the first periodical for Muslim women

journal, probably in response to an unsatisfactory circulation.[211] Scarcity of periodicals for Muslim women made the miscellaneous periodicals and the mainstream women's journals a more preferred site for women's readings and issues pertaining to women. Prominent Bengali Muslim literary periodicals like *Nabanūr*, *Moslem Bhārat*, *Āl-Eslām*, *Baṅganūr*, *Mohāmmadī*, *Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* and *Saogāt* regularly brought out writings by Muslim women. So did the early women's periodicals like *Mahilā* and *Antaḥpur* organized and edited by the Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia. Both groups of journals catered to women from Muslim middle classes. Begum Rokeya for instance, was a regular contributor to several of these periodicals.[212]

Śikṣā (education) and *abarodh* (seclusion) were the two most debated concerns in Bengali Muslim periodicals. Debates on education addressed the need for an organized, well-disciplined domestic space capable of becoming the citadel of Islam. The pagan *zuafa* had to be transformed into an Islamicized domain through reform and education. The woman was thus no longer a potential source of *fitna*. Rather she was to emerge as a guardian of the Islamicized domestic space, a denizen capable of exerting a moral influence formidable enough to protect men in the immoral city governed by colonial rulers.[213] That women needed to be educated was less a matter of debate. Rather it was the modality of their learning that was at stake for formal institutional training required women to step outside the confines of the *andarmahal*. So even as a substantial section among the conservative ulema continued to oppose any form of education for women,[214] these periodicals carried very little of what could be identified as unqualified hostility towards any form of learning for women. In fact most early twentieth periodicals adopted a liberal stand towards women's education.[215] Reformists advocated effective dissemination of women's education through setting up of madrasa and primary schools in vil-

211 Begum Sofia Khatun, "Grāhak Grāhikābarger Prati" (A submission to the subscribers), *Ānnesā*, v. 1 # 11, Phālgun 1328 / February-March 1922.

212 The very first issue of *Saogāt* introduced Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain as one of the eminent writers among Bengali Muslims and the foremost among Bengali Muslim women writers. It was stated that she contributed prolifically to periodicals such as *Nabanūr*, *Nabaprabhā*, *Mahilā* and *Antaḥpur*. *Saogāt*, Year 1 # 1, Agrahāẏaṇ 1325 / November-December 1918.

213 Devji, op. cit. p. 385. Devji argues that the reformist program of incorporating the woman into sharif polity involved a systematic marginalization of women's tongue (*begamati zaban*) as well, op. cit. p. 386.

214 Feroza Begum, "Āmāder śikṣār praẏojanīẏatā" (The Need for Our Education), *Saogāt*, Year 7 # 1, Bhādra 1336 / August-September 1929 categorically stated that the ulema were the primary encumbrance to the spread of education amongst Muslim women.

215 Sonia Nishat Amin, op. cit. p. 112.

lages and use of Bengali in explaining the moral lessons of the Friday *khutba*.[216] The liberal curriculum was to comprise a mix of compulsory Koranic learning and modern education, the latter including feminine skills like cookery, child care, knitting and needlework.[217] Of course *sharif* women internalized quite a bit of this reformist discourse. Education was for women as much a *farz* (obligation / duty) as it was for men.[218] Women writers expressed their veneration for Koranic precepts through frequent insistence on religious learning. The Muslim woman's education they argued had to be in conformity with Koranic injunctions so that they were distinct from both the European lady and the Hindu bhadramahila.[219] Raziya Khatun, one of the pioneer woman social critics, even argued that an uneducated but believing woman was preferable to an educated irreverent woman. A truly educated woman was one who followed the principles of Islam.[220] What is interesting is that their stand on education belies any uncritical compliance of a hegemonizing male reformism. By reiterating their unquestioned loyalty to Islamic precepts, they subtly shifted their allegiance away from the orthodox patriarchy, wresting the reformist initiative away from the male intelligentsia to chart out their own agenda and register dissent.

Debates on education were inalienable from the question of *abarodh*. Meaningful education that held out the promise of social change could be achieved only by subverting *abarodh*. The latter therefore became the central trope stimulating a range of animated debates on women's engagements in

---

216 Sheikh Abdul Gafur Jalali, 'Śikṣā Bistārer Upāẏ' (Ways to spread education), *Āl-Eslām*, v.5 #4, Śrāvaṇ 1326 / July-August 1919.

217 Sheikh Abdur Rahman, "Śikṣār Bhitti" (The Foundation of Education), *Al-Eslām*, Year 5 # 8, Agrahāẏaṇ 1326 / November-December 1919 laid out prospective course for Muslim women's primary education that included six years of learning the Korān, Bengali, Urdu, some fundamental arithmetic, geography, history, healthcare, morals, handwriting, cookery, home management, child-rearing and needlework. It is significant that this proposal does not contain any reference to English education, either as a subject or a medium of instruction. Sonia Nishat Amin describes the late nineteenth century and early twentieth-century decades as a transition time for Muslim women. Women's education marked a gradual but steady progress from home tutoring by 'ustadnis' to public high schools. "The Early Muslim Bhadramahila: The Growth of Learning and Creativity, 1876 to 1939" in Bharati Ray ed. *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, p. 112.

218 Momena Khatun, 'Nārīr Kathā' (About women), *Śariẏate Eslām*, Year 4 # 11, Agrahāẏaṇ 1336 / November-December 1929.

219 Rahima Khatun, 'Strīśikṣā o Samāj' (Women's education and society), *Śariẏate Eslām*, Year 2 # 1, Māgh 1333 / January-February 1927.

220 Raziya Khatun, 'Baṅgīẏa Moslem Mahilāgaṇer Śikṣār Dhārā' (Trends in the education of Bengali Muslim women), *Saogāt*, Year 5 # 1, Āṣāṛh 1334 / June-July 1927.

the public sphere. For Bengali Muslim women the move towards emancipation was formulated in terms of *purdah-abarodh* complex, facilitated by their steady exposure to education and culminated in their visible presence in an expanding field of Bengali literary production.[221] This partly explains the subtle distinctions that these women writers made between maintaining the *borka* and rejecting seclusion. Reformist prescriptions selectively deployed by them provided a persuasive legitimization of their protest against *abarodh-prathā*. For several formidable Muslim women writers who followed Rokeya, the act of writing implied canvassing against the practice of seclusion (*abarodh-prathā*). Their engagements with the public sphere signified defiance of *abarodh* that amounted to insolence against the Perso-Arabic cultural tradition of the *ashraf* community. As Sonia Nishat Amin has argued, through successive generations the use of Bengali became normalized amongst elite and middle-class Bengali Muslim women.[222] For these women the transition from Urdu to Bengali marked "a conscious process of cultural change".[223] My contention is that for Muslim women writers, writing and writing in Bengali presaged an act of insubordination to the Perso-Arabic tradition and the conformist patriarchy of the *ashraf* that it represented. The concept of women's emancipation or *strī-svādhīnatā* therefore insinuated a particular dual valence in the context of the writings of Bengali Muslim women. Theirs were not straightforward mimicries of male reformist agendas that typically sought to reform 'women's conditions' in the name of regeneration of the Islamic community. Rather the writings by these women reflect a strong sense of assertiveness and a purposeful thrust towards women's wellbeing in general. Bengali Muslim women articulated a determined critique of seclusion (*abarodh-prathā*) as the indispensable step towards participating in a culture of literary publicity. Such participatory politics denied the middle-class male intelligentsia sole agency in women's issues, rendering much more complex the very ways in which a vernacular public sphere was organized.

Interestingly it was not so much the *borka* that aroused the disapproval of these women but the very practice of leading a life isolated from society:

221 Sonia Nishat Amin, op. cit. p. 139. Amin has argued that the *purdah-abarodh* formulation shaped the mental makeup of most Muslim bhadramahila.

222 Sonia Nishat Amin, "The Early Muslim Bhadramahila: The Growth of Learning and Creativity, 1876 to 1939" in Bharati Ray ed. *From the Seams of History: Essays on Indian Women*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995, pp. 120–121.

223 Ibid., p. 121.

> Nobody cares that we, the womenfolk are being slowly poisoned and pushed towards death by being deprived of light and breeze, imprisoned in the *antaḥpur* and engulfed by scarce happiness and enthusiasm.… We want to maintain as much *purdah* as prescribed by the *Sharia'* … But beyond that we want genuine freedom (*mukti*) that will enhance and nurture our minds.[224]

Drawing a distinction between *abarodh* and *purdah* Raziya Khatun argued that the former was nowhere endorsed in the Korān and Hādis.[225] The Prophet, she maintained, had indeed imposed no restrictions on women's sociability as long as she maintained *purdah* and that seclusion was an injunction imposed by an orthodox patriarchy.[226] Thus for women, taking off the *borka* as part of her defiance of *abarodh*, was un-Islamic and in contravention of the Prophet's injunctions.[227] *Abarodh*, argued another outspoken woman Fazilatunnesa, was unnatural and injurious to society because it made half the society (i.e. women) sluggish and moribund.[228] The *Saogāt* editor identified *abarodh* as one of the shameful practices amongst Indian Muslims and one which most obstructed education among women.[229] Breaking free of seclusion was therefore an unqualified prerequisite for women's socialization and journals made possible polemical assertions on the question of *abarodh*.[230] Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain[231] – arguably the one who opened up the

224 Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani, "Samāje O Gṛhe Nārīr Sthān" (Women's position in the society and household) in *Saogāt*, Bhādra 1334 / August-September, 1927.

225 Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani, "Zenānā Mahal: Nārīr Kathā" (The Feminine Quarters: About women), *Saogāt*, Jyaiṣṭha 1336 / May-June 1929.

226 Ibid.

227 Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani, "Pardā o Abarodh" (Purdah and Seclusion), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, v. 2 # 10, Śrāvaṇ 1336 / July-August 1929.

228 Fazilatunnesa, 'Muslim Nārīr Śikṣār Praẏojanīẏatā' (The need for education of Muslim women), *Saogāt*, Year 5, # 6, Agrahāẏaṇ 1334 / November-December 1927.

229 Mohammad Nasiruddin, "Sampādakīẏa: Abarodh Prathā" (Editorial: The Practice of Seclusion), *Saogāt*, Year 5, # 9, Phālgun 1334 / February-March 1928.

230 Periodicals with by and large a Hindu readership too commented on *abarodh*, mostly describing it as un-Islamic. The *Māsik Basumatī* publicist and writer of the "Nārī Mandir" section Satyendrakumar Basu cited Sura xxiv, 30, 31 from the *Korān* and quoted from Syed Amir Ali to argue that *abarodh* was not a uniform practice across Muslim societies in other parts of the world. Satyendrakumar Basu, "Nārī Mandir 'Pardār Antarāle'" (Behind the Purdah in the women's section Nārī Mandir), *Māsik Basumatī*, v.3 pt.1 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1331 / May-June 1924.

231 Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain was born into an elite landholding family in Rangpur district of northern Bengal. Married to Sakhawat Hossain she had learnt Bengali from her elder sister Karimunnessa (much to the anguish of her father) and English from her husband. She matured into a pioneering writer and an incessant campaigner for Muslim

Bengali literary sphere for her younger contemporaries, herself seemed uncertain on the question of *abarodh.* While her 1904 essay *Borka*[232] clearly defended the practice of seclusion on grounds that parallel systems existed in "civilized" European societies as well, more than two decades later her *Abarodhbāsinī*[233](lit. The residents of seclusion) appeared in *Māsik Mohāmmadī* as a collection of anecdotes that ruthlessly criticized *abarodh.* In her own life Rokeya never discarded the *borka.*

But for her it was imperative that women took to writing publicly. Like many of her Hindu contemporaries for Rokeya there was no incongruity between publicity and domesticity. Writing was indeed an extension of domesticity itself. A prolific writer, Rokeya's literary strategy was remarkably 'deviant' for her times. While many of her Hindu contemporaries still used various words and phrases of self-condemnation such as *asahāẏ* (helpless), *kshudra* (little), *dāsī* (servant) as a means of defense, Rokeya's style was forthright and buoyant. Articulate and confident, her approach was unambiguous in terms of a programmatic agenda that sought a total transformation of the dominant ideologies of patriarchal orthodoxy. Evidently, for Rokeya the most foundational concern was how to represent and connect with the disenfranchised, secluded womenfolk of the *zenānā.* The periodical medium precisely provided that space whereby women could operate in the public sphere as writers and readers.[234]

The monthly miscellany *Saogāt*[235] edited by Mohammed Nasiruddin marked a pioneering effort in providing a literary space for Muslim women. Ideologically the journal was meant to complement the new reform efforts towards encouraging and formalizing educational curricula for Muslim women.

---

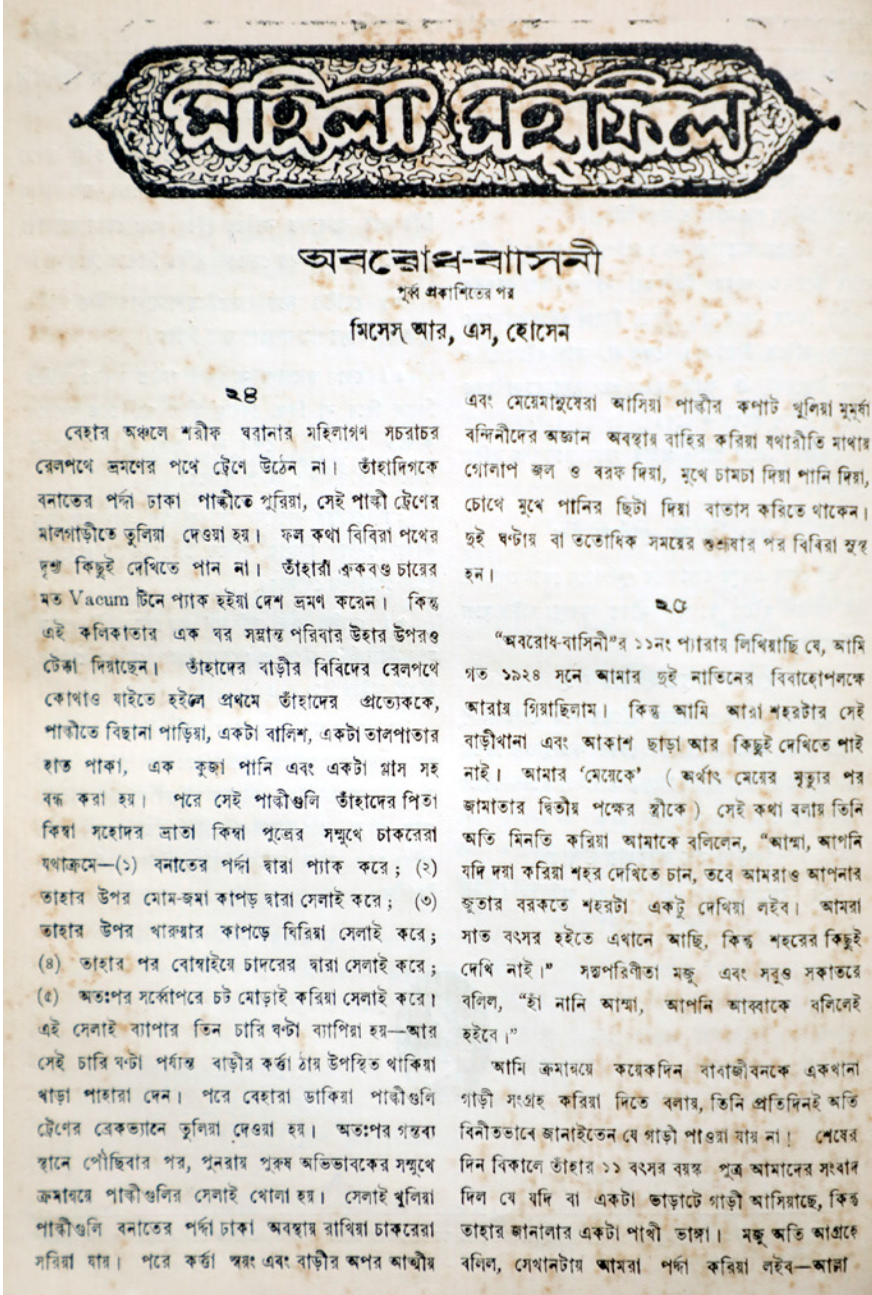
women's education and rights. For a biography of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and her writings and activism, see, Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists of Colonial India*, pp. 16–27, 69–75, 87–93.

232 Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, 'Borkā' (Borkha), *Nabanūr* Baiśākh 1311 / Apr-May 1904.

233 Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, 'Abarodh-bāsinī' (The residents of seclusion), *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Kārtik 1335 / November-December 1928, Bhādra 1336 / August-September 1929, Śrāvaṇ 1337 / July-August 1930 and Bhādra 1337 / August-September 1930. Anecdotes 1 to 30 appeared in *Māsik Mohāmmadī* while in its book form *Abarodh-bāsinī* contained 47 anecdotes.

234 Rokeya's writings appeared in several leading periodicals like *Nabanūr*, *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, *Saogāt*, *Bhārat Mahilā*, *Nabaprabhā*, *Mahilā*, *Āl-Eslām*, *Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, *Sādhanā*, *Dhūmketu*, *Naoroz*, *Sāhitẏikā*, *Sabuj Patra*, *Moajjin*, *Baṅgalakṣmī* and *Gulistå.*

235 *Saogāt* was first published in 1918 by Mohammed Nasiruddin and printed by Priyanath Das at Fine Arts Printing Syndicate, Calcutta. One of its primary motives was to provide an opportunity for women writers, especially Muslim women writers. Shaheen Akhtar and Mousumi Bhowmik eds., *Zenānā Mehfil: Bāñgāli Musalmān Lekhikāder Nirbāchita Racanā, 1908–1938*, Stri 1998, p. 259.



মহিলা মহ্ফিল

অবরোধ-বাসিনী

পূর্ব্ব প্রকাশিতের পর

মিসেস্ আর, এস, হোসেন

২৪

বেহার অঞ্চলে শরীফ ঘরানার মহিলাগণ সচরাচর রেলপথে ভ্রমণের পথে ট্রেণে উঠেন না। তাঁহাদিগকে বনাতের পর্দ্দা ঢাকা পাল্কীতে পুরিয়া, সেই পাল্কী ট্রেণের মালগাড়ীতে তুলিয়া দেওয়া হয়। ফল কথা বিবিরা পথের দৃশ্য কিছুই দেখিতে পান না। তাঁহারা ক্রকবণ্ড চায়ের মত Vacum টিনে প্যাক হইয়া দেশ ভ্রমণ করেন। কিন্তু এই কলিকাতার এক ঘর সম্ভ্রান্ত পরিবার উহার উপরও টেক্কা দিয়াছেন। তাঁহাদের বাড়ীর বিবিদের রেলপথে কোথাও যাইতে হইলে প্রথমে তাঁহাদের প্রত্যেককে, পাল্কীতে বিছানা পাড়িয়া, একটা বালিশ, একটা তালপাতার হাত পাকা, এক কুজা পানি এবং একটা গ্লাস সহ বন্ধ করা হয়। পরে সেই পাল্কীগুলি তাঁহাদের পিতা কিম্বা সহোদর ভ্রাতা কিম্বা পুত্রের সম্মুখে চাকরেরা যথাক্রমে—(১) বনাতের পর্দ্দা দ্বারা প্যাক করে; (২) তাহার উপর মোম-জমা কাপড় দ্বারা সেলাই করে; (৩) তাহার উপর খারুয়ার কাপড়ে ঘিরিয়া সেলাই করে; (৪) তাহার পর বোম্বাইয়ে চাদরের দ্বারা সেলাই করে; (৫) অতঃপর সর্ব্বোপরে চট মোড়াই করিয়া সেলাই করে। এই সেলাই ব্যাপার তিন চারি ঘণ্টা ব্যাপিয়া হয়—আর সেই চারি ঘণ্টা পর্য্যন্ত বাড়ীর কর্ত্তা ঠায় উপস্থিত থাকিয়া খাড়া পাহারা দেন। পরে বেহারা ডাকিয়া পাল্কীগুলি ট্রেণের ব্রেকভ্যানে তুলিয়া দেওয়া হয়। অতঃপর গন্তব্য স্থানে পৌছিবার পর, পুনরায় পুরুষ অভিভাবকের সম্মুখে ক্রমান্বয়ে পাল্কীগুলির সেলাই খোলা হয়। সেলাই খুলিয়া পাল্কীগুলি বনাতের পর্দ্দা ঢাকা অবস্থায় রাখিয়া চাকরেরা সরিয়া যায়। পরে কর্ত্তা স্বয়ং এবং বাড়ীর অপর আত্মীয় এবং মেয়েমানুষেরা আসিয়া পাল্কীর কপাট খুলিয়া মুমূর্ষা বন্দিনীদের অজ্ঞান অবস্থায় বাহির করিয়া যথারীতি মাথায় গোলাপ জল ও বরফ দিয়া, মুখে চামচা দিয়া পানি দিয়া, চোখে মুখে পানির ছিটা দিয়া বাতাস করিতে থাকেন। দুই ঘণ্টায় বা ততোধিক সময়ের শুশ্রূষার পর বিবিরা সুস্থ হন।

২৫

"অবরোধ-বাসিনী"র ১১নং প্যারায় লিখিয়াছি যে, আমি গত ১৯২৪ সনে আমার দুই নাতিনের বিবাহোপলক্ষে আরায় গিয়াছিলাম। কিন্তু আমি আরা শহরটার সেই বাড়ীখানা এবং আকাশ ছাড়া আর কিছুই দেখিতে পাই নাই। আমার 'মেয়েকে' (অর্থাৎ মেয়ের মৃত্যুর পর জামাতার দ্বিতীয় পক্ষের স্ত্রীকে) সেই কথা বলায় তিনি অতি মিনতি করিয়া আমাকে বলিলেন, "আম্মা, আপনি যদি দয়া করিয়া শহর দেখিতে চান, তবে আমরাও আপনার জুতার বরকতে শহরটা একটু দেখিয়া লইব। আমরা সাত বৎসর হইতে এখানে আছি, কিন্তু শহরের কিছুই দেখি নাই।" সদ্যপরিণীতা মঞ্জু এবং সবুও সকাতরে বলিল, "হাঁ নানি আম্মা, আপনি আব্বাকে বলিলেই হইবে।"

আমি ক্রমান্বয়ে কয়েকদিন বাবাজীবনকে একখানা গাড়ী সংগ্রহ করিয়া দিতে বলায়, তিনি প্রতিদিনই অতি বিনীতভাবে জানাইতেন যে গাড়ী পাওয়া যায় না! শেষের দিন বিকালে তাঁহার ১১ বৎসর বয়স্ক পুত্র আমাদের সংবাদ দিল যে যদি বা একটা ভাড়াটে গাড়ী আসিয়াছে, কিন্তু তাহার জানালার একটা পাখী ভাঙ্গা। মঞ্জু অতি আগ্রহে বলিল, সেখানটায় আমরা পর্দ্দা করিয়া লইব—আল্লা

FIGURE 5.4 A page from "Mahilā Mehfil" (the women's section of *Māsik Mohāmmadī*) showing a chapter from Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's serialized essay "Abarodhbāsinī"

Saogāt's editor publicly advocated its role as a facilitator of women's progressive movement (*nārī pragatī āndolan*).[236] The journal enabled Muslim women writers to articulate their own agendas and express their dissidence. It offered the literary apparatus that empowered women to make decisions to break free of *abarodh.* Nasiruddin spoke of Sufia Kamal and Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua who defied seclusion and came over to the *Saogāt* office located in the Wellesley area of Central Calcutta. Sufia Kamal did not abandon the *borka* until much later but chose to take it off once she was inside the *Saogāt* office. Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua was bolder. Mohammed Nasiruddin later recalled that in 1930 she entered the *patrikā* office like a *dhūmketu* or comet to meet him. Clad in 'modern' outfit (*ādhunik poshāke sajjitā*) and with her hair cut short (*culgulo 'bob' kāṭā*) she would run up to get a view of the city from the terrace of the building where the *Saogāt* office was located.[237] Nasiruddin described them as belonging to the team of defiance (*niẏom bhāṅgār dale*).[238] These women unambiguously articulated their political position vis-à-vis their community in appropriating the liberty to choose what to wear.[239] The writers Mrs. M Rahman and Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani chose to put on *khaddar* saris – even as their respective families were ensconced in religio-cultural practices that would have demanded austere maintenance of *purdah*.[240] It might be useful here to explore the concept of "unhomely lives".[241] The figure of the woman, particularly the non-conformist woman becomes the site where the borders between the 'public' and the 'domestic' become fuzzy and they become part of each other. Once the symmetry of the two spheres is disturbed, it becomes impossible to neatly map gender roles on to the private and public. The unhomely moment disturbs the patriarchal nature of civil society and renders the 'personal' as 'political'.[242] Performance of the forbidden act, the non-compliance of *abarodh-prathā* constituted the grounds on which these women imaginatively conceptualized and claimed their stakes to alternative sociocultural worlds.[243] The radical conducts of women like Sufia Kamal and

236 Ibid., p. 261.

237 Mohammed Nasiruddin interview to Shaheen Akhtar. *Zenānā Mehfil*, p. 263.

238 Ibid.

239 In the early 1920s Fazilatunnesa a graduate student in Mathematics at the Dacca University discarded the borka and walked to campus in a sari. Fanatics are said to have assaulted her physically and verbally on the streets. Eventually Fazilatunnesa ranked 'First Class First' in the MA examinations of the University.

240 *Zenānā Mehfil*, p. 50 and 187.

241 Homi K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, United Kingdom, 1994, pp. 9–18.

242 Ibid., p. 11.

243 See Bharati Ray, *Early Feminists*, pp. 19–20 for an insight into the burden that the practice of *abarodh* was.

Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua particularly lent them to criticisms of being rather 'unhomely' – women who were not only irrepressible but were also active producers of literary culture.

The leading Muslim women writers – Begum Rokeya, Nurunessa Khatun, Shamsunnahar Mahmud, Motahera Banu, Rabeya Khatun, Asadunnessa, Mahmuda Siddiqua, Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani, Mrs. M. Rahman, Sufia Kamal and several others – engaged intensely with notions of 'domesticity' that their own experiences as daughters, mothers and wives offered as also with questions of political consciousness and representations in the context of nation formation. Many of these women came from conservative *ashraf* backgrounds where even household use of Bengali was considered un-Islamic and a violation of *sharif* (i.e. gentle, analogous to the 'Hindu' usage of *bhadra*) behavioral norms derived from Perso-Arabic tradition. In their deliberate use of Bengali, these women stood out in the elite Muslims of Calcutta. For them the use of Urdu as a medium of expression was never a choice.[244] Rokeya herself recalled how her elder siblings Ibrahim Saber and Karimunnessa Khanum took the initiative to teach her. While other relatives disparaged Bengali lessons, Rokeya's elder sister Karimunnessa Khanum earnestly taught her to read and write in Bengali.[245] Sufia Kamal too testified to her experiences of intimidating behavior from her immediate family members. Her first published work, a short story *Sainik Badhu* appeared in *Tarūṇ*, a weekly journal edited by Saral Kumar Dutta.[246] But none of her family members were enthusiastic about it. As she later recounted:

> I had to endure a lot of inhibitions, rudeness and invectives at that time … No one in my family wanted me to write. Finally I had to break away from my family. Only my mother was with me. We finally moved out in 1933. Everyone else in my family detested speaking and writing in Bengali, mixing with Bengalis and my rejection of *borka* for going out for social work – all these were very offensive (*beijjati*) for my family.[247]

244 Sonia Nishat Amin, op. cit., p. 120. But as Amin has shown, these women were exceptions. Even as late as 1927 out of the 114 students attending Rokeya's girls' school only two attended the Bengali medium section.

245 Rokeya dedicated her book *Maticūr* to Karimunnessa Khanum Chaudhurani. See, Tahmina Alam, *Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Chintā-Chetanār Dharā O Samājkarma*, Bangla Academy Dhaka, 1992, p. 17.

246 Saral Kumar Dutta was the nephew of Ashwini Kumar Dutta of Barisal. Akhtar and Bhowmik, op. cit., p. 266.

247 Sufia Kamal in her interview with Shaheen Akhtar, September 6 & 20, 1996, Akhtar and Bhowmik, op. cit., pp. 266–269.

That Sufia had learnt Bengali and her name appeared in Bengali script was quite annoying for her family.[248] Women's entry into public spaces, it was feared, resulted in their sexual ruination and consequent dishonor for their families.[249] The same sense of apprehension operated amongst conservative theologians (*mollāh*) when Mohammed Nasiruddin initiated a separate section (*Mahilā Jagaṯ* – The World of Women) for women readers in the monthly *Saogāt* and later in 1929 brought out a women's issue of the *Saogāt* (*Mahilā Saogāt*).[250] Nasiruddin had drawn together several Muslim women writers including Mrs. M Rahman, Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani and Sayyida Motahera Banu and had published photographs of several women litterateurs. Nasiruddin later quipped that once the *Mahilā Saogāt* was out it were mostly the maulvis who crowded the magazine stalls.[251]

The implications of writing in Bengali were therefore remarkable. Participation within the Bengali literary sphere – as readers and more so as writers, at once meant defiance of tradition and breaking free of *abarodh*. Writing in Bengali itself constituted an act of insubordination to both a conformist *ashraf* patriarchy and the purported Islamic regulations it tried to sustain. Reading, writing and publishing in Bengali carried the allusion of transgressing Islamic and Islamicized domains. That Sufia's name appeared in print, i.e. in public was a contravention of seclusion or *abarodh* that was as grave as the rejection of *borka*. Therefore *strī-svādhīnatā* could be realized only by partaking in literary sociability that involved a constant and blatant violation of domestic conventions. For most of these women writers the decision to write in Bengali represented emancipation from a subordinated, colonized existence to a domain of uncolonized consciousness. Participation in the public sphere suggested wandering out of a strictly secluded and feminine space. While the Bengali literary sphere during the early decades of the twentieth century can hardly be conceived as a singularly male domain, conformist Muslim critics tended to perceive the *abarodh*-free woman as an unhomely vagrant. Most of these women saw social change as product of personal and literary encounters in the public domain. Not surprising that they valued their socializations with respectable literary figures of the day. Sufia Kamal recounted the encouragement she received from the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, the *Saogāt* editor Mohammed Nasiruddin and Rabindranath Tagore.[252] These women writers were

248 Ibid.

249 Maulavi Mahbub, "Nārī Svādhīnatā O Pardā" (Women's liberation and Purdah), *Tablīg*, Year 1 # 11, Caitra 1334 / March-April 1927.

250 *Zenānā Mehfil*, pp. 261–262.

251 Ibid., p. 261.

252 Ibid., pp. 266–267.

acutely aware of their socio-cultural constraints which they hinted at while expressing their 'gratitude' to men who encouraged them. Both Rokeya and Sufia acknowledged the roles of their respective husbands for encouraging them to move on.[253] Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua was perhaps the only Muslim woman writer who not only refused conformity but also repudiated her childhood marriage and lived single throughout her life. During her stays in Calcutta she interacted with leading litterateurs of the times – Tagore, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay and Nazrul Islam. In fact she enjoyed fullest liberty to meet Saratchandra.[254] Thus for these women refusal to conform to the internal regulations of the community was not incompatible with socializing in the literary sphere.

The periodical medium, especially *Saogāt* and *Dhūmketu* afforded these radical women writers the opportunity for mobilization of a collective identity in the literary public sphere. The literary sphere constituted the domain where the social and the political had come together and made possible the articulation of women's rights. A collective identity for women came to be distinguished from the private domain of the home and the community. These women writers consciously and unequivocally enunciated the terms of their *svādhikār* (literally own right), the means of acquiring it and the futility of expecting patriarchy to concede such rights:

> We are being steadily destroyed by the *samāj* (society) that they (i.e. men) have formed and by the religious scriptures that are entirely their constructs (*mangaṛā*). Until we rebel, men will never understand their own misdeeds. By depriving us of knowledge they are wrecking us …
>
> Those who have not conceded to their brethren a pinch of soil without bloodshed right from the days of the *Mahābhārat*, will they ever give us our due rights? …
>
> And even we are mistaken. Who do we ask rights from? From men who themselves have no rights … who have even enslaved their souls. Will they ever bequeath us rights? Are you mad? …[255]

Reform of family life and a reworking of the relationship between the Islamic community and its women therefore assumed a cultural and political

253 Sufia Kamal in her interview to Shaheen Akhtar, September 1996, *Zenānā Mehfil*, pp. 266–269.

254 *Zenānā Mehfil*, pp. 172–173.

255 Mrs. M Rahman, "Āmāder Dābi" (Our Demands), *Dhūmketu*, Āśvin 1329 / September-October, 1922. A lot of the writings of Muslim women are eclectic in their use of imageries and metaphors from Hindu mythologies and legends.

priority. The significance of the insistence on reform of the domestic sphere lay not so much in its modernizing agenda because the reformist discourses in themselves were quite passé by the 1920s and 1930s. Rather the implications of such call for reforms lay in the scope it provided for a possible mobilization of women's collective identity.[256] Much of the radical writings of Muslim women unambiguously argued against the relegation of femininity, marriage and domesticity to the realm of the personal and the religious. The writings of Muslim Bengali women, by and large non-conformist in nature, cannot be subsumed within any hegemonic colonialist, nationalist or separatist discourses. These women were not passive recipient of male rationalistic and reformist enterprise and their writings cannot be reduced to an unproblematic reproduction of hegemonic reformist discourses. By attempting to restructure the Muslim home from within, especially through discussions on women's legal rights within the Islamic tradition, they challenged certain inherited cultural assumptions that took communities (in this case the Perso-Arabic moorings of the Muslim community) to be elemental. Their claims therefore came to constitute a challenge to the patriarchal powers of the community that identified women as the quintessence of the family. The richly textured writings of these women can therefore be seen as constituting powerful disruptions in the dominant ideologies about the family, community and nation. A conviction in the resurgent ideas of modernity and progress emerge from the writings of these women as they constantly tried to negotiate the foundational concerns of domesticity, femininity and sexuality vis-à-vis patriarchy, religious community and political consciousness. Confronted with inhibitions and social stigma that was many times more than their Hindu counterparts, the radical voice of the Muslim women writers created an alternative vocabulary for women's rights in the public realm.

This chapter has sought to underscore the importance of the woman reader within the literary domain produced by monthly periodicals. Reading was essentially a practice carried on within the privacy of the home. Therefore the woman who was the denizen of the domestic world became central to the

256 Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire*, Duke University Press, Durham, South Carolina, 2006 shows how Catherine Mayo's work *Mother India* created intense debates on the need for reform, the limits of the colonial state and the appropriation of the debates by the nationalists. She shows how as a process of enactment of the Sarda Act (1929) women's activism and participation in the debates enabled the construction of women's collective agency. 'Reform' now extended beyond the nineteenth-century tropes of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and actually enabled the formation of alternate political subjectivities.

practice of reading as well.[257] Her leisure was indicative of her gender and periodicals sought precisely to target and maneuver that leisure. In the process both women's periodicals and family periodicals shaped much of the principles on what young girls and married women could read. The figure of the unmarried young girl emerged as one in need of particular vigilance vis-à-vis forbidden readings as the latter were seen to corrupt the susceptible minds of the young girls that would then damage their marital lives. Thus meanings of womanhood and femininity were subjects of intense debates that crucially molded the implications of such cultural categories. But the periodical medium also empowered women in certain ways. A study in this respect of Bengali Muslim women is particularly rewarding. For these women participating in the literary sphere – reading and writing in Bengali – held out the promise of emancipation. It is in this context that the accounts of resistance by these women need to be read.

257 Beetham, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

CHAPTER 6

Political Discourse in the Bengali Literary Sphere: The Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Years

By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, periodicals like *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* offered a stunning variety of readings. Bengali readers were deemed mature enough to move smoothly between subjects as divergent as the biographies and works of Anatole France (the recipient of the 1921 Nobel Prize for Literature) and Fyodor Dostoevsky (nineteenth-century Russian novelist) followed immediately by a review of Bengali literary traditions of the early nineteenth century.[1] Periodicals opened up an expansive horizon for their readers, making them acquainted with happenings across the globe. *Pārāpārer Dheu* (sea waves) was a regular feature section in *Prabāsī* that brought home to the Bengali readers news from across the world. African cultural renaissance movements led by the rights activist Marcus Garvey and based at Harlem, New York; the May Fourth movement in China and the victory of Sun-yat Sen's nationalist party; the Irish independence struggle and the Young Turks movement led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha – periodicals reported extensively on imperialism's retreat in the face of emergent forces of nationalism. All these liberation movements including India's own struggle for decolonization came to be seen as part of a worldwide resurgence of much of the subjugated peoples across the globe who aspired for self-determination. Literatures across the world too responded to the perceived crises of modern civilization. Dilemmas with modernity came to be expressed in literature through new experiments ranging from anarchist fiction to avant-garde poetry. Much of this new literature reached Bengali readers either through translations or reviews in periodicals.

This chapter is concerned with the literary sphere's engagements with matters 'political'. The 'literary' and the 'political' has often been seen as mutually inassimilable – indicating a supposed divergence between literature that was 'apolitical' and literature that worked closely with political mobilizations.

1 Prabhatchandra Gangopadhyay, "Pārāpārer Dheu" (The sea waves), *Prabāsī*, v. 21, pt. 2, # 4, Māgh 1328 / January-February 1922. This section discusses Anatole France and Dostoevsky and is followed immediately by a review of Sushil Kumar Dey, *History of Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century, 1800–1825* published by the University of Calcutta. Dey had received the prestigious Griffith Memorial and the Premchand Raichand Scholarship for his research and publication.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/9789004427082_008

Stepping aside the debates on the political function of literature, this chapter argues that the literary sphere was far from being an idyllic space not violated by political concerns. The state with its stringent press acts loomed on the horizon making it difficult for newspapers and journals to criticize the British India government. Literary periodicals however did bring critical distance and analytical expertise to political developments and the resources to deal with the fast changing times. The relationships between political activism and intellection or literariness were thus complex, each rendered dynamic, changeable and amenable to mutual questioning and criticisms. The 'political' and the 'literary' thus represented not domains of non-correspondence. Rather both in their own ways desired an autonomous nation and the renovation of society, so as to make possible ethical living. Their relationships therefore need to be understood in terms of quests for and constant tensions between imaginative possibilities and their actualizations. The literary sphere represented a world organized by print culture that aimed to create affective bonds and create vision of an idealized, just society. To this extent, engagements with the political field were inevitable.

This chapter considers three distinct responses to the mass movements of 1921–22. The first section examines the large circulation miscellaneous periodicals that were unequivocal in their support for the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation Movement. It shows how political matters became a key concern of these literary journals – an indication that nationalist politics aroused considerable interest and commitment among periodical readers. The sustained engagement with political matters therefore reflects widening of the periodicals' pedagogical mission, a convergence of politics and literature in the daily lives of ordinary middle-class readers. The other two responses come respectively from Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. Disillusioned by the excesses of agitation politics that he witnessed during the Swadeshi movement, Rabindranath, as is well known, had withdrawn from direct political activism. He had steadily become critical of the machinery of the modern state and nationalism as an aggrandizing force. His 1917 lectures on *Nationalism* that he delivered in the United States and Europe in the midst of the War, has been seen by many as marking a definitive disjuncture in his conception of the nation. From 1917 to 1941 when he delivered his last public lecture *Sabhyatār Saṃkaṭ* (Crisis in Civilization) a few months before his death in August 1941 Rabindranath, it has been argued had stridently denounced the dominant European sense of nationalism as an aggressive pursuit of self-interest through imperialistic expansionism. Throughout he remained consistent in his perception that violence born out of military aggrandizement constituted offence against humanity. The War, he argued, exposed the nature of European civilization:

'A political civilization has sprung up from the soil of Europe and is overrunning the whole world.... It is carnivorous and cannibalistic in its tendencies, it feeds upon the resources of other peoples and tries to swallow their whole future.'[2] He saw in the modern state and its mechanistic apparatuses the dangers of coercion and repressive violence that militated against the inherent creativity of every individual. In Gandhi's campaign for *carkā* Rabindranath identified similar tendencies of enforced conformity and intolerance for dissimilarities. He saw in obligatory spinning a parochial form of patriotism, one that violated the innate creativity of individuals, ironed out differences and reduced humans to a mechanized existence. Needless to add that amidst the patriotic frenzy of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation, Rabindranath's was a solitary voice. The final section of this chapter looks at the third response generated from within the literary sphere – that of Kazi Nazrul Islam, well known as the *Bidrohī kabi* or the rebel poet. It looks at how Nazrul's use of figurative expressions especially that of the comet's journey across the skies invoked images of a dismantled old order and the emergence of a new one free of prejudices, discriminations and violence. Several contemporaries saw in Nazrul's verse an obsession with mythological and cosmic imageries and an impatience bordering on anarchism and militancy. *Dhūmketu* is perhaps best understood not in terms of an anti-colonial patriotism, but rather in terms of an antinomianism – a rejection of all existing social structures, power relationships and the laws governing them and reconstructing the nation anew. A few years later, Nazrul would come in close contact with the communist Muzaffar Ahmad. Together they would start *Lāṅgal* (The Plough), a journal with a distinct socialist ideology that upheld peasants and workers struggle against exploitation. In the opening poem *Sāmya* (Equality), Nazrul celebrated the breakdown of the old order and welcomed the heralding of a renewed egalitarian society.

What brings these apparently disparate responses together is not only their co-temporality but that they constitute part of a shared political imagination, responding to the radicalized conditions of the times. The debates on the various aspects of the movement – either material or discursive – represent different understandings of the given circumstances of 1921–22. Rabindranath's stand on the *carkā* was chided by critics as implausible. Nazrul's verse would be criticized for their supposed defiance and inchoateness. Yet, both pointed towards unorthodox possibilities in the social life of the nation

---

2 Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (in English), in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* (ed.), Sisir Kumar Das (Sahitya Academy, Delhi, 1996; first published by Macmillan, New York, 1917), vol. II, p. 440 cited in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, "The Concept of Civilization: Rabindranath Tagore's Evolving Perspective" in TALKING BACK: *The Idea of Civilization in Indian Nationalist Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2012, p. 72.

in unconventional language. Both were politically marginal voices that in the pages of the major literary periodicals coexisted with much of the mainstream dialogues on the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation programs. The variegated responses to the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation could be read as testimonies of the pluralities and ambiguities within nationalist discourse and of its quasi-hegemonic nature. But they also point to the maturity and the assimilative capacity of readers and their readiness to accept alternative conceptualizations of the political sphere.

1 Editorials, Readers and the Making of a Literary Political Culture

In January 1921 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi called for a non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement against the British India Government. His political philosophy was formulated on two new concepts – *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and *satyāgraha* (literally meaning earnestness or *āgraha* for Truth or *satya*) – the two implying ethical mass political activity. Though some aspects of the Movement had been anticipated during the anti-Partition agitation of 1905, 1921 proved unprecedented in terms of sheer involvement of hitherto politically non-participant populations of the Indian subcontinent – especially peasants and factory laborers.[3] The Non-Cooperation program included: surrender of government titles, withdrawal from government schools, boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants, withdrawal from council elections, boycott of foreign goods, especially Manchester textiles and support for national schools and law courts. An integral part of the constructive dimensions of the Movement comprised of spinning *khādi* (homespun cloth) on the *carkā* (spinning wheel) as a normative act signifying non-reliance on Manchester textiles and

3 For historical narratives on Gandhian political philosophy and the mass movements I have found the following works useful: Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*, University of California Press, California, 1995. Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915–1922*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1972 and *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928–1934*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1977. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Mahatma Gandhi: A Historical Biography*, Lotus Collection, 2007. Bipan Chandra, *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, Orient Longman, 1979 and *Essays on Indian Nationalism*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 1993. Mahatma Gandhi, *The Oxford India Gandhi: the essential writings,* Oxford University Press, 2008. Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1916–1928*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1979. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982. Rudrangshu Mukherjee ed., *The Gandhi Reader*, Penguin Books, 1995. Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2007.

FIGURE 6.1 First page of *Bhāratbarṣa* Śrābaṇ, 1327 / July-August 1920. The Bengali characters of the word *Bhāratbarṣa* have been designed following Persian calligraphic style.

self-sufficient production of indigenous looms. Along with the proposed targets of enlisting ten million Congress volunteers and raising Rupees ten million for the Tilak Swarajya Fund, Gandhi also called for the use of *carkā* in two million households.

In Bengal, the non-cooperation program initially found its staunchest advocate in Chittaranjan Das but he soon developed significant points of divergences from the all-India program of the Congress. The primary disagreement between Gandhi and eminent Bengal Provincial Congress leaders like C.R. Das and Bipinchandra Pal was much more over strategic issues of non-cooperation rather than the concept itself.[4] Das in particular was in favor of a radical program that could inflict major economic losses on the British and extract constitutional concessions.[5] With the All India Congress Committee, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, the All India Muslim League, the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, the Central Khilafat Committee and the Bengal Khilafat

4 Rajat Kanta Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875–1927*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984, pp. 253–254.

5 Ibid., p. 258.

FIGURE 6.2 A page from *Bhāratbarṣa* showing Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Rabindranath Tagore's niece and daughter of *Bhāratī* editor Swarnakumari Devi, spinning the *carkā.*

Committee – each representing distinct social constituencies and political stratagem, the politics of the non-cooperation years revealed a remarkable diversity of interests and alignments. That in the course of 1920–22 the Non-Cooperation Movement in Bengal acquired mass base of varying intensities in urban, mofussil and rural areas owed much to the equations between leading politicians, factions and their networks of mass mobilization.[6] But even amidst the factional competitions and the clash of interests the assertion of a formidable regional identity was unmistakable.[7] Das strongly argued for the idea of a relatively autonomous 'region-nation' as distinct from the 'country-nation' and the realization of the former through federated form of governance.[8] The regional and linguistic orientations of the new provincial leadership from within the Bengali Muslim middle classes was an initial obstacle to the spread of the Khilafat cause as the majority of Muslim peasantry were slow to relate to the crises of the Caliphate. Neither did the Bengali Muslim leadership uncritically follow the AIML dominated by elite Muslims from upper India and the Punjab thus crafting for itself a distinctly regional identity.[9]

Mainstream illustrated miscellanies like *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* reflect these different approaches to the principles and programs of non-cooperation, nurturing and sustaining readers' interests in various aspects of the agitation and informing reception of Gandhian political philosophy. Both these leading periodicals emerged as stridently Gandhian, elucidating for their readers, the ethical content of Gandhi's political philosophy and using the occasion for lengthy deliberations on Non-Cooperation programs and economic regeneration through revival of cottage industries and agriculture. They provided a fertile, flexible space for debates on Gandhian principles, the political philosophy of Khilafat-Non-Cooperation and the mass mobilization strategies of the Congress. In fact periodicals without extensive political debates and editorial commentaries found it hard to survive in the market. The profusion of engagements with the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation, both textual and visual testifies to the dissemination through print of the political principles of Gandhian movement. The diverse range of opinions that *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* accommodated, helped normalize political concern as a morally binding practice.

Both *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* were stridently nationalist. Yet neither displayed any overt sense of urgency – refraining from sensationalism and carefully retaining a distinction between propaganda and the efficacy of subtle

6 Ibid., pp. 305–310.

7 Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp. 130–137.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., pp. 101–105.

persuasion. In this sense periodicals were affirmative but not jingoistic like some of the radical segments of the newspaper and pamphlet press. Open to a diverse range of opinions, responses and contestations, they reveal how ideas of political nationalism were contested and circulated among ever expanding readerships. Not all voices were laudatory or uncritical about Gandhian mass mobilization strategies and the effectiveness of the *carkā* in making the nation economically sovereign. Skeptical voices in the public sphere testified to the distinctiveness of Bengali regional nationalism vis-à-vis the pan Indian nationalism of the Congress high command. More importantly, the capacious and polyphonic nature of this public domain produced a remarkable variety of contradictory and frequently non-conformist opinions, implying sustained engagement among publicists with different political possibilities. Assimilation of Gandhian principles among Bengali readers was evidently complex and rife with contradictions. The sheer range of analytical political opinions that were available to the Bengali reader transformed the very nature of literary encounters and relations that were brought within the purview of discourses on mass political campaigns. Editorializing nudged readers in to thinking critically over issues that were not only seen as of pressing concern but would likely have impacted their decisions on political participation. As Robin Jeffrey has pointed out in context of Kerala, the authority and moderation of the printed word made criticism justifiable and possible to articulate in a manner that would be difficult to take seriously if simply spoken.[10] In a way therefore, editorials and informed essays were arguably more effective than speeches by the campaigning Congress leaders. Print was crucial in crafting discretion and political thinking among readers. Unlike the newspaper, a periodical did not normally take up news coverage and since it remained 'current' till the appearance of the next issue, its contents would probably have been read and reflected on with much deliberation. The approach of *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa* for instance, was analytical and holistic journalism in as much as they were usually open to a varied range of opinions.

A sizeable section of the Bengali periodical press was consistently critical of the Gandhian injunction on *carkā* and its viability in bringing in economic freedom. Endorsing a write-up that appeared in the fortnightly *Prabartak*, *Bhāratbarṣa* argued that in an era of industrialization when factory produced textiles unquestionably outdid handspun yarn in terms of quantity produced and competitive pricing, it was imprudent to hope that *carkā* would liberate

10 Robin Jeffrey, 'Testing Concepts about Print, Newspapers, and Politics: Kerala, India, 1800–2009', *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 68, No. 2 (May) 2009, pp. 465–489.

the country from its economic dependence on Britain.[11] Pramatha Chaudhuri, the editor of *Sabuj Patra* and a formidable voice in the Bengali public sphere, expressed his strong disapproval of Congress's campaign strategies that had been in his opinion reduced to boycott of Legislative Councils and withdrawal of students from schools and colleges. He squarely held responsible Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Ali brothers Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali for what he considered to be indiscriminate withdrawal of students from educational institutions. Boycott of British law courts by practicing Indian lawyers, he argued would have had a more meaningful impact as it meant lawyers, an eminent group within the nationalist leadership, foregoing their lucrative income.[12]

In a series of editorials at the height of the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation movement, the *Prabāsī* editor Ramananda Chattopadhyay in an unambiguous espousal of Gandhian principle argued that *ahiṃsā* or nonviolence was the preeminent and lone means to achieve independence and nothing short of full autonomy (*pūrṇa svādhīnatā*) could be acceptable as a legislative option. Sovereign statehood and the uninhibited blossoming of individuality he asserted were mutually constitutive. Chattopadhyay identified three domains of conflict within Indian society – religious sectarianism, caste divides and the question of women's education and their suffrage rights. Colonial rule had not only done little to resolve these conflicts, but had mostly exacerbated them. Precolonial indigenous society, he argued, possessed its own modalities of social reform exemplified in the emergence of Buddhism and the Bhakti movements of Sikhism and Vaishnavism. Islam and Christianity (in the coastal south) had been equally instrumental in social reform. The *Prabāsī* editor reiterated his conviction that complete autonomy could eradicate sectarian and caste divides and usher in the wellbeing (*maṅgal*) of the nation. As for the question of women's rights, he strongly condemned the Bengal Legislative Council's indifference to the question of women's voting rights.

A vocal defendant of Gandhian principles and the *carkā*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, refrained from taking sides in the ongoing debates on whether small scale and decentralized handloom production could make the economy

11 Selection from *Prabartak* reprinted in the *ālocanā* section, *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.8, pt. 2, # 1, Pouṣ 1327 / December 1920-January 1921. *Prabartak* argued that for every sari, twenty two thousand yards of yarn was required. Assuming four to five hours of spinning daily, it would take a month for an individual to produce yarn for a single sari – a proposition that was sheer unfeasible in economic terms (i.e. in terms of wage and productivity).

12 Pramatha Chaudhuri, "Bāṅglār Kathā" (A few words about Bengal), *Sabuj Patra*, v.7 # 7, Kārtik 1327 / October-November 1920 and reprinted in "saṅkalan" section *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.8, pt. 2, # 1, Pouṣ 1327 / December 1920-January 1921.

self-sufficient in textiles. Rather his argument in favor of the Gandhian instruction was premised on a different register, that of social economics. The benefits of adopting *carkā*, he argued extended to discipline rural life and work habits that in turn would alleviate recurrence of famine. He endorsed spinning in every household as a means to overcome what he saw as an all pervasive lethargy, to purify the mind and cultivate habitual labor especially among the rural poor. Spinning and handloom weaving, he elaborated, could provide the peasantry with supplemental income that could see them tide over frequent crises of food shortages. The remuneration acquired from cottage industry was therefore a means to offset starvation during famines. Whether cottage industry (*kuṭīr-śilpa*) was capable of transforming the nation's economy towards self-sufficiency was for the *Prabāsī* editor not the core issue. Rather the viability of promoting handloom lay in securing what remained of the rapidly impoverishing agrarian economy. Additional income from handloom production could potentially hold back the distressed peasantry from being converted into wage laborers. Factories, Chattopadhyay explained, estranged the peasantry from their natural habitat and livelihood, profoundly altering their humanity.[13]

Chattopadhyay's social thinking was shared by several contemporary publicists who voiced similar concerns regarding the social disruptions that industrialization was responsible for. For instance, C.F. Andrews wrote in *Young Men of India* (July 1921) that industrialization eroded the "old domestic morality of the Indian agricultural life".[14] What is significant about Chattopadhyay's writing is how he deployed editorializing to shape a broad consensus regarding the exploitative nature of factory relations and the destruction of the economic and moral fabric of society that industrialization brought along. Culling information and opinions from different sources, these editorials provide a remarkable insight into the multiplicity of concerns that went into the making of the public discourses on Non-cooperation. An unfaltering advocate of the *carkā*, he carefully bypassed the question whether handspun yarn and handloom alone could make the nation sartorially self-sufficient. Rather drawing on the Swadeshi lesson, he differed from Gandhi on the issue of boycott of foreign textiles, steadfastly discouraging his readers from what he saw as the frenzy of boycott, which for the most part he believed was sheer destructiveness. The Swadeshi Movement, he explained, faltered because the leadership had focused more on the boycott of foreign goods and setting them ablaze without a

13 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Durbhikṣa o Kutīr Śilpa" (Miscellaneous Matters – famine and cottage industry), *Prabāsī*. v.21 pt. 1, # 3, Āṣāṛh 1328 / June-July 1921.

14 Cited in Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Bideśī Bastra Barjjan" (Miscellaneous Matters – boycott of foreign cloth), *Prabāsī*, v.21 pt. 1, # 4, Śrāvaṇ 1328 / June-July 1921.

concomitant effort at indigenous manufacture. Sovereignty over indigenous work processes (whether handspun and handloom or mill produced yarn and textile) and the products, were what Chattopadhyay argued for. Since the nation was not politically sovereign, it had no control over imposition of import duties to discourage textile merchants from trading in foreign cloth. Boycott could not be a particularly viable option because neither was it possible to curtail import nor could merchants persuaded to forego profit. He recalled the instance of the Marwari trading community in Calcutta, whose response during 1905–08, had been one of indifference, thereby exposing the limited appeal and efficacy of the boycott program. Indigenous manufacture had to take precedence over boycott – without self-sufficiency in production the hiatus between import (supply) and the domestic market (demand) would continue to be disproportionate, making foreign cloth indispensable. So he urged the Congress leadership to encourage bulk production of yarn, ensure fair pricing of khaddar and make khaddar sartorially fashionable.[15]

Other voices within the polemic spectrum too supported the spread of *carkā* as an act of patriotism – for instance the ulema urging the faithful to join and work in unison with others in initiatives that aim for self-sufficiency like spinning yarn, weaving and other manufacturing projects. Muslims were thus instructed to pursue *halāl* professions, i.e. those endorsed by Quranic *āẏet.*[16] Most of these other voices emphasized a renewal of indigenous production and even called for a revival of precolonial economic forms. Precolonial modes of production, such publicists argued could be viable only if modern luxuries like toiletries and western sartorial fashion and vestiary etiquettes could be forgone. In this discourse the revival of peasant economy and handicraft industries called for a return to the idyllic, self-sufficient village community and premodern ways of living and entertainment.[17] By the autumn of 1921, one notices a shift in the perception of the *Prabāsī* editorials. *Carkā*, Chattopadhyay argued was different from other handcrafted jobs like knitting, crochet,

15 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – Bideśī Bastra Barjjan".

16 Address by Maulana Sham Sufi Mohammad Abu Bakr Saheb reprinted from *Islām Darśan* in "saṅkalan" section *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.8, pt. 2, # 1, Pouṣ 1327 / December 1920-January 1921.

17 Basantakumar Chattopadhyay, "Carkā" in *Bhāratbarṣa*, v.8, pt. 2 # 5, Baiśākh 1328 / April-May 1921. Chattopadhyay depicted the vision of a self-sufficient, peaceful village community free from diseases like malaria and situated in the lush countryside of Gangetic Bengal where crops were abundant and a healthy livestock that provided plenty of wholesome milk for children. This idealized countryside was one in which zamindars lived and supervised welfare tasks like clearing forestlands and constructing tanks for clean drinking water. This paternalistic zamindari stood in sharp contrast to the post-Permanent Settlement absentee landlordism, the abandonment of village home for a city living and severe rent extraction that impoverished the peasantry.

embroidery in so far as homespun yarn and khaddar fabric had a bulk demand in the swadeshi market. Several thousand yards of cotton cloth, Chattopadhyay argued were best produced in factories. Alongside, he also noted that the monotony of work that the *carkā* entailed could be detrimental to human values and happiness. He urged for ceiling on work hours for cottage industries as much for factory laborers.[18]

An impressive array of responses from Bengali readers shows how the *carkā* had aroused tremendous enthusiasm among ordinary middle-class people. *Bhāratbarṣa* in particular publicized the use of *carkā* and also responded to readers' queries on aspects of operating the spinning wheel. Some of the more common questions from readers were: whether handloom weavers used mill yarns or *carkā* spun yarns; which yarn was costlier – the ones manufactured in indigenous mills or the ones that were imported; the average monthly wages of weavers and the quantity a single weaver was capable of producing; how to toughen *carkā* spun yarn; whether such yarns were suitable for crochet and lace works; queries on competitive pricing and relative durability of handspun yarn vis-à-vis mill yarn and so on.[19] Apart from answering queries, *Bhāratbarṣa* provided its readers information on various retail stores selling *carkā* and their addresses; new, improved variety teak *carkā* and mechanized *carkā* available at a store on Cornwallis Street, near Star Theatre; list of stores on Ezra Street in Central Calcutta, Nundy Street near Ballygunge railway station and Muktarambabu Street in North Calcutta that sold *carkā* priced according to their efficiency.[20]

The scope of these queries and comments, especially in *Bhāratbarṣa* makes possible recovery of voices of ordinary readers earnestly committed to the cause of the *carkā*. Readers were clearly no longer passive recipients of printed information. The surge in reader responses does indicate a consolidation and expansion of a nationalist readership, a radicalization affected, even if partly, by reading. However, what seems more important is how periodicals became freighted with political significance. Periodical reading and the *carkā* alike took up vital shares in the daily routine of Bengali middle-class readers. Reading was a means of self-enhancement and a window to the world beyond. Working daily on the *carkā* was an obligation towards the nation. Both of these actions now came together as duties that bound every individual to the nation's life. What might appear to be inconsistencies or differences of opinions

18 Ramananda Chattopadhyay, "Bibidha Prasaṅga – carkā" (Miscellaneous Matters – carkā), *Prabāsī*, v. 21 pt. 1, # 6, Āśvin 1328 / September-October 1921.

19 "Sampādaker Baiṭhak" (The Editorial Meeting), *Bhāratbarṣa*, v. 8, pt. 2 # 3, Phālgun 1327 / February-March 1921.

20 "Sampādaker Baiṭhak", *Bhāratbarṣa*, v. 8, pt. 2 # 4, Chaitra 1327 / March-April 1921.

are in fact the multiplicity of voices that the periodicals network incorporated and were ably moderated by the moral authority of the editors. The representations, in *Prabāsī* and *Bhāratbarṣa*, of events relating to Congress led mass agitations and constitutional negotiations were mostly affirmative and in line with that of the Indian National Congress. Amidst a huge output of print and the corresponding tightening of censorship laws by the Raj, it were the exceptional and highly regarded editorials by Ramananda Chattopadhyay and Jaladhar Sen that balanced the ideals of nationalism and lawful journalism. Their editorializing was admirably impartial and receptive making them leading organizers of public opinion. Towing a polemic close to Gandhian principles, they rejected moderate nationalist methods as outmoded, disclaimed colonial rule as devoid of political legitimacy (especially after the Jallianwalabagh massacre of 1919) and refused anything short of decolonization.

2 The Call of *mahāsṛṣṭi* (the Grand Creation): The Gandhian Spinner or the Tagorean *Byakti-mānab*

Describing nationalism as an apparition that had traumatized the whole world during the War (1914–1918), Rabindranath described his educational institution the Visva-Bharati Brahmacarya Asram as an antidote for getting rid of the phantom.[21] He also refuted charges that his non-participation in the Khilafat Non-Cooperation mass campaign of 1921 meant that he was indifferent to state-perpetrated violence. He reminded his readers that following the tragedy at Jallianwallah Bagh in Punjab (1919), none except him had voiced the nation's silent anguish and horror against the brutal firings on the peacefully gathered protestors.[22] In explaining why he chose to remain detached from the 1921 movement, Tagore made his differences with Gandhi respectfully unambiguous:

> I believe that there is something greater than one's nation and it is only by acquiring that, that the nation will excel. The person who does not accommodate for doors and windows while building the walls of his house is really not the one who truly loves his own home. Rather the householder who genuinely loves his home would let in the breeze and

21 Rabindranath Tagore, "Rabīndranāther Ekkhāni Ciṭhi" (A letter from Rabindranath), *Prabāsī* v. 21 pt. 1 # 2, Jyaiṣṭha 1328 / May-June 1921.

22 "Ālocanā – Sampādaker mantabya" (Discussion – editorial observations), Bidhusekhar Bhattacharya's letter to the editor and editor Ramananda Chattopadhyay's response to Bhattacharya, *Prabāsī* v. 21 pt. 1 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1328 / June-July 1921.

> sunlight. The other day the newspapers reported that Mahatma Gandhi had called upon our women to quit reading English. My fears about raising walls seemed to be coming true. We have come to think that the way to freedom is in raising walls and turning our homes in to prison cells. By banishing light from the house, we have prepared to worship the darkness within our own home – forgetting that God despises equally those aggressive nations who aspire to be superior by hurting others as well as those who by turning away from others willfully become sterile".[23]

The poet's critique of Gandhian nationalism grew from his apprehensions about what he saw as the movement's tendency towards chauvinism. Time and again he would reiterate the lower priority he accorded to territorial decolonization in contrast to the decolonization of the mind. Clearly for Rabindranath, decolonization in the sense of nationalism's triumphalist march towards the nation-state was narrow and reductive. Instead it implied emancipation of the mind from instrumental reasoning and unthinking, passive compliance. In two other letters written from Switzerland to one of the teachers at Santiniketan, Rabindranath reiterated that his educational institution had to remain isolated from the domain of politics. Visva-Bharati (the motto of the institution being "where the world has a nest"), he explained was an invite to the world to come together, a confluence point for ideas and literatures of all human beings irrespective of their nationalities, ethnicities and race. This convergence he was convinced could open up India's thoughts and perspective. For Tagore the philosophy of Visva-Bharati was an alternative to the idea of a territorially bounded nation. He refused to let his *āśram* be swayed by any instantaneous rage that mass movements instigated.[24] Through his letter, he reminded readers that the philosophy (*tattva*) of Visva-Bharati transcended modern India's aspirations for statehood (*rāṣtra-tattva*). Disengaging Gandhian mass political agitations from his own vision he was categorical that the newspaper (*khabarer kāgaj*) press was unfit to be the mouthpiece of Visva-Bharati. Not surprising that the addressee, a teacher at Santiniketan chose *Prabāsī* as the medium for publicizing Tagore's take on the 1921 Movement. Reacting sharply to reports that Gandhi had called upon to women to relinquish reading English, Rabindranath argued that such a move was tantamount to building a house without ventilation, a folly that could bring the nation's life to stagnation and breed

23 Rabindranath Tagore, "Letter to the Superintendent of the Santiniketan Brahmacarya Āśram".

24 Rabindranath Tagore's letter to an unnamed teacher at the Brahmacarya Āśram, Santiniketan; *Prabāsī,* v. 21 pt. 1 # 3, Āṣāṛh 1328 / June-July 1921.

uninformed chauvinism. For him, a self-conceited patriotism that refused to engage with other cultures was as unfortunate and doomed as the imperialism of the aggrandizing nations. Refraining from expressing any opinion in favor or against Non-cooperation, he adhered to his belief that Visva-Bharati needed to be conserved from the infringements of political upsurges without placing any ban on its students or teachers to participate in the movement.[25]

Subsequently, in a well-known essay 'Satyer Āhvān' (The Call of Truth) written after his return from Europe, Rabindranath spoke of his initial optimism at Gandhi's call for non-violent Non-cooperation.[26] For him Gandhi's love (*prem*) for his country people was self-realizing / self-fulfilling (*svaprakāś*) – it had elicited the authentic nation that had little to do with the presence of the colonizers.[27] This, he argued, was in contrast to the earlier generation of nationalist leaders who rarely bothered to look beyond the English educated. For them, Rabindranath argued, the nation had been engendered by bookish knowledge of England's history – being nothing more than a phantasm created by the English language in which Burke, Gladstone, Mazzini and Garibaldi were only chimerical presences.[28] He saw in the advent of Gandhi a horizon of hope, trusting that the latter's experiments with truth would reveal the authentic spirit of the nation:

> … Gandhi emerged at the doorstep of millions of impoverished Indians – in their own attire, speaking their own language. This was a genuine thing devoid of all that was bookish. Mahatma is a truly appropriate honor for him. Who else before him has been able to make every Indian his own? … His compassion awakened the 'truth' that had remained buried within millions of Indians….
>
> The news of this wonderful awakening of the Indian heart to the call of love reached me in a far away land. In delight I started nourishing a hope that now it would be our turn for being summoned at the gateway of Enlightenment (*udbodhaner darbāre*)…. For me this signaled true emancipation….

For Gandhi the *carkā* symbolized India's struggle to liberate itself from the monopoly of Manchester textiles. Economic independence, it was hoped would

25 Rabindranath Tagore, "Letter to a teacher at the Santiniketan Brahmacarya Āśram", *Prabāsī*, v. 21 pt. 1 # 3 Āṣāṛh 1328 / June-July 1921.

26 Rabindranath Tagore, "Satyer Āhvān" (The Call of Truth) in *Prabāsī*, v. 21 pt. 2 # 1, Kārtik 1328 / October-November 1921.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

eventually lead to political decolonization. Promoting the production of hand-spun *khādi* was not only the way to undermine imported mill textiles but also meant reclaiming and disciplining the bodies of colonized Indians – making them more productive to the life of the national community, shaping uniform consumer habits and finally creating the ideal citizen-subject.[29] Besides, several Gandhians rationalized *carkā* as a way towards rural regeneration. In the same essay Tagore elaborated on the elements of his differences with Gandhi, particularly on the meaning and significance of the spinning wheel. The *carkā*, according to the poet was just another machine not unlike the Manchester factories or the European military camps in terms of their inhibiting effects on the human mind. Machines, Rabindranath contended, reduced human beings to mere appendages, forcing them to behave in a perfunctory manner that entailed no creativity. It was the sheer simplicity of the whole exercise that for the poet seemed threatening. The repetitiveness and monotony of the spinning motion could potentially debilitate the mind and strip its capacity for creativity. Bereft of imagination, the mind, he feared, would become barren and uncritical, pliant enough to conform to the dictates of power. Human life then was condemned to a state of sterile, neutered existence:

> He [Gandhi] merely urged all to spin and weave. Is the call *aẏantu sarvata swāhā*! the call of *mahāsr̥̄ṣṭi* (grand creativity) of the New Age? … Spinning on the *carkā* is very simple and therefore grueling for all concerned. The call of simplicity is not for human beings but for bees. When Nature called upon bees to a confined life in the hives they responded to the effortlessness of the enterprise. As a result they became condemned to a life of the neutered (*klīvatva*) that was accompanied by a loss of freedom. A human being can express himself with all the opulence of a revelation only when encountered with the challenge to make the most of his ability.… Human existence can be disgraced by both big and small machines – whether it is an engine or the *carkā*.… *Svarāj* is contingent not merely on affluence of textiles. Its true foundation is in our mind.[30]

The debate on the *carkā* continued up to 1926 with a brief intermission when Gandhi was incarcerated in 1922 and Tagore refused to publicly criticize the Mahatma anymore.[31] On the latter's release from detention however the

29 Lisa Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: homespun and modern India,* Indiana University Press, 2007, pp. 69–71.

30 Rabindranath Tagore, "Satyer Āhvān".

31 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore 1915–1941,* National Book Trust 1997, p. 9.

sequences of the earlier debate were taken up once again and while each respectfully disagreed with the other they remained firmly committed to their own convictions. The essence of Tagore's argument remained consistent throughout and when criticized by the renowned scientist and Gandhian worker Prafullachandra Ray for not supporting the *carkā*, the definitive symbol of patriotism, the poet argued:

> It may be argued that spinning is also a creative act. But that is not so: for, by turning its wheel man becomes a mere add-on to the *carkā*; … he converts his living energy in to a dead circular movement. The machine is solitary, because being devoid of a mind it is sufficient unto it and knows nothing outside of itself. Similarly, the human who is confined to spinning is a loner, for the yarn he spins does not bind him in social relationships. He feels no need to be concerned about his neighbor: like the silkworm his activity is centered on himself. He becomes a machine – isolated and companionless.[32]

Many contemporaries and perhaps even Gandhi saw his differences with Rabindranath in terms of a divergence between the 'political' and the 'literary' – categories that had come to represent disaggregated, self-sufficient domains. The world of letters, construed as romantic, was seen as unconnected with the materiality and afflictions of the real world. The purpose of taking up this debate is not to underscore the ideological differences between Gandhi and Tagore, both of who, in their own ways, were unrelenting critics of modern Western civilization.[33] Rather the emphasis is on the terms of Rabindranath's critique of Gandhian nationalism – especially why he saw in *carkā* a coercive, disciplinary aspect of mobilization and how his apprehensions about the *carkā* were implicated in his more general contentions about the 'literary' as uninhibited by the orthodoxies of modern political formations, its potentialities in creating affective bonds and as a connective across multiple spaces from the local to the global.

Rabindranath, once at the forefront of the Swadeshi agitation against the partition of Bengal, had in the subsequent phase, developed serious reservations about the strategies of mobilization and the need for and means to

32 Rabindranath Tagore, "Striving for Swaraj" in *Modern Review*, September 1925.

33 Tapan Raychaudhury, "Gandhi and Tagore: Where the Twain Met" in *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-Colonial Experiences.* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999. See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya ed., *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India* Orient Longman Ltd, 1998, Uma Dasgupta's essay "Tagore's Educational Experiments in Santiniketan and Sriniketan".

discipline the masses. Much of the disciplinary methods adopted to enforce boycott of British goods during the Swadeshi Movement were drawn from traditional caste sanctions that involved both social and physical coercion.[34] For him, *ātmaśakti* or self-potency involving self-improvement and constructive activities were superior to the perpetuation of boycott, ostracism and violence. Faced with tremendous unpopularity and grossly misunderstood, Tagore had distanced himself from political agitations. The concern however was far from over for him. In several outspoken essays and his controversial 1916 novel *Ghare Bāire* he interrogated this paradox between a supposedly liberal and progressive politics of the nationalist movement and the instrumentality of caste sanctions that the nationalist elite came to wield as a disciplinary mechanism. Tagore argued strongly for the need of consent and persuasion as means for mobilization.

It was this question of balance between coercion and persuasion that would resurface during the Non-Cooperation Movement. As Ranajit Guha has shown, though Gandhi's own position on social boycott was clear, describing it as an "unpardonable violence", certain ambiguities in his instructions to volunteer non-cooperators had led to continued incidence of social boycott, ostracism and violence at local levels. Guha argues that given the territorial extent and mass participation of 1921, the incidence of violence and coercion was insignificant when compared to those of the Swadeshi movement – indicating a more mature leadership.[35] Gandhi set moral standards in his political program that abjured all forms of violence and pleaded for persuasion instead of persecution in mobilization. Yet, as Guha has shown, the counter hegemonic aspirations of the nationalist bourgeoisie fell far short of realization, making discipline necessary to compensate for the failure of persuasion.[36] In Guha's words, "…what the people brought to the nationalist campaigns was a discipline that informed the politics of the subaltern domain – a discipline governed by those rules of association which made them work together in the production of goods and services as well as in the articulation of a shared spiritual culture."[37] More than a conflict between indiscipline and discipline, it was a question of substituting the discipline characteristic of the subaltern domain of politics by the discipline of the elite domain. In other words, as Guha explains, given the irreconcilable nature of the politics of the elite and

34 Ranajit Guha, "Discipline and Mobilize", *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997, pp. 116–122

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., p. 141.

subaltern domains and the failure of the nationalist elite to acquire hegemony over the masses, Gandhian leadership "amounted to a formula to … open up a space for the nationalist elite to step in with its own will, initiative and organization in order to pilot the political activities of the masses towards goals set up by the bourgeoisie. Discipline, in the lexicon of Gandhism, was the name of that mediating function."[38] The need for discipline was rationalized through vocabularies of service to the nation, eroding the economic foundations of British imperialism and achieving national self-sufficiency. The *carkā* for Gandhi could well have been a strategy for harnessing mass energy away from indiscipline and violence towards constructive work. In this, the Congress's local level organization, the volunteer units, were to ensure that *carkā* spinning was promoted and practiced widely in every corner of the subcontinent. *Carkā* became a prime measure of patriotism and means for ensuring discipline through service to the nation.

Evidently Rabindranath was not convinced by the much trumpeted claim that the *carkā* would lead to the nation's self-sufficiency in textiles and undermine the structures of colonial dominance. Neither was he persuaded by the assertion of several Gandhians that handspun yarn would help alleviate rural poverty. No doubt he saw Gandhi as the much needed intervention in Indian politics; especially the latter's insistence on persuasion over coercion. His critique of the *carkā* was however far more profound – that what was apparently a call for service to the nation through self-control and the homogenous, compulsory act of spinning was indeed an imperceptible violence, more devious than the outright repression of the colonial state. A deeply anguished Rabindranath wrote:

> I sensed a tremendous burden on the nation's mind. It was as if some external force was compelling everyone to conform to the same vocabulary and the same action.… There was coercion (*uṭpīṛan*) in the country's air – it was not an oppression of the baton but an unwarranted and unseen intimidation.… Only conformity (*badhyatā*) was to be adhered to. Whom to conform to? Conformity was to a *mantra* and to blind faith.… Fate had endowed Mahatmaji with the power to beckon … this could have been our moment (of triumph). But his call was confined to a parochial domain only.

Gandhian principles of truth and nonviolence had evoked a sense of optimism in Tagore only to be belied by what he saw as the eventual tyrannical turn

38 Ibid., p. 143.

towards imposing hegemony and uniform compliance on the masses. The enforcement of the *carkā* as an act of sacramental service to the nation, Tagore felt demanded uncritical allegiance (*badhyatā*) and submission to the nation-state. So even as it seemed to have offered an alternative to the constitutional politics of the earlier Congress, Gandhian nationalism was eventually trapped in the teleology of the nation-state, its governance apparatuses and its commercial resources. Expressing in unambiguous terms his fundamental mistrust in the historicity of the nation-state and the coercive face of an emergent counter-hegemonic nationalism, Rabindranath's was once again the disillusioned, lonesome voice. So while Gandhi rationalized the *carkā* in terms of every citizen's moral obligation towards the nation, for the poet enforced conformity to the *carkā* implied an unseen censorship intolerant towards plurality of thought and deviations from a hegemonic mainstream nationalism. Tagore feared that even an apparently positive strategy could be coercive: the *carkā* as much as factory machines could turn individuals into mere appendages, produce social alienation and militate against creativity. Dismissing *carkā*'s capacity for historical transformation towards decolonization, he reiterated that the sovereignty of a nation (*svarāj*) depended not on its self-sufficiency in textiles but on the autonomy of its mental faculty.

The post-Swadeshi Tagore had become deeply ambivalent towards the turns that the anti-colonial struggle had taken: shifting his quest towards the possibility of a sovereign literary domain uninhibited by political or commercial gains. The poet's post-Swadeshi turn was towards a less well defined, creative entity that for Partha Chatterjee was rooted in a moral aesthetic inherited from the romantic tradition and can best be described as a 'non-nation'.[39] The distinctive feature of the Tagorean 'non-nation' was trenchant critiques of the modern state, the "scientization of power" and attempt by the operational forces of the state to reduce the diverse "social exchanges among people to certain rules of technology".[40] The metaphoric allusion to bees confined within their habitats in hives, the repetitiveness and monotony of their honey producing action and their doom in neutered (non-creative) existence seem to have been informed by Rabindranath's sense of the *byakti-mānab*, the key constituent of a liberal literary sphere. Bereft of creativity, the *byakti-mānab* would be left with a flawed critical spirit – an intellectually neutered existence inept in differentiating between autonomy and coercion. By extension then, freedom for independent thought was a necessary precondition for the making of

39 Partha Chatterjee, "Tagore's Non-Nation" in Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2011, pp. 94–126.

40 Ibid., pp. 122–126.

a political self. Only a free mind could lead to the redemption of society. Even if Gandhian mass mobilization could ensure uncritical conformity to the organized cult that nationalism had become, it was only the creative instinct, the 'literary' that was capable of regenerating society. The literary sphere then becomes, for Tagore, the space to accomplish the task of creating a just society where differentiations based on divisive social categories such as caste and religion become non-existential. The creative space was inclusive in a new sense in so far as people were not born into status groups similar to class or community based ones. His sense of social unison had always been deeply implicated in affective bonds that creativity could generate between individuals. No compulsion imposed from above – whether repressive mechanism enforced by the state or the silent coercion of a hegemonic nationalism that the *carkā* symbolized – could replace ties produced by creative encounters. The allusions of his argument were unmistakable: that so long as the ultimate goal of the nationalist movement remained directed towards replacing foreign governance with a national one, even "spiritualized politics" could acquire semblances of chauvinism. The poet's answer was not an alternative "aestheticized politics" or a philosophical universalism that superseded the nation-state. Rather his quest was to create a different paradigm for achieving emancipation and a new space for reworking the relevance of the 'literary' and the 'creative' in human life.[41]

What distinguished the 'political' and the 'literary' was that the former was inherently divisive and destructive. The brutalization of humanity by the War had shaken the conviction in the European liberal political traditions and the ways in which they defined politics and constituted authority. The 'literary' by contrast was conceived of as a domain free from bondages of commerce and the state as also from the cruelties of indigenous rituals and customary practices. Alienation bred within modern societies and status differentiations based on indigenous social configurations – were both seen as encumbrances to the search for a literary alternative. One is left wondering whether Tagore saw the 'literary' as capable of foregrounding itself as a resistant principle pitted against the spirit of mechanization, commercial exchange and power structures of the modern state. Could the deeply ethical concept of the *byaktimānab* as an emancipated self-replace the devout nationalist *carkā* spinner? Or was it meant to be an insinuation to the 'political' to introspect and develop its own self-criticism?

41 Sudipta Kaviraj, "Tagore and Transformations in the Ideals of Love" in Francesca Orsini, *Love in South Asia: a cultural history*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2006, pp. 179–182.

3 Summoning *Mahāpralaẏ* (the Grand Catastrophe): Nazrul Islam, *Dhūmketu* and the Contemplation of Cosmic Dissolution

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976) served as Havildar in the forty-ninth Bengal Regiment (the 49th Bengalis) stationed at Karachi during World War I.[42] On his return to Calcutta after the regiment had been disbanded he was appointed joint editor of the new evening daily *Nabayug* (The New Era) started by Fazlul Haq[43] as the mouthpiece for his Krishak Praja Party in May 1920.[44] *Nabayug* was Nazrul's first editorial venture.[45] Before this editorial venture Nazrul had written intermittently for the *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*, *Moslem Bhārat* and *Saogāt. Nabayug* immediately became a favorite for its formidable editorials, some of which were written by Nazrul.[46] After the closure of *Nabayug*, Nazrul continued to write for *Moslem Bhārat* – his poems and a serialized novel drawing extensive attention from readers. The eminent critic, later an associate of the *Śanibārer Ciṭhi* circle Mohitlal Majumdar, Tagore's private secretary Sudha Kanta Raychaudhury and the literary journal *Nārāẏaṇ* applauded Nazrul's creative potential.[47] *Nārāẏaṇ*'s admiration of Nazrul's poems brought

42 Nazrul's first appearance into the Bengali literary field was not as a poet, but rather as a fiction-writer. His writings were first published in the Jyaiṣṭha 1326 / May-June 1919 issue of the monthly *Saogāt* edited by Mohammed Nasiruddin – a short story titled *Bāunduler Ātmakāhinī* (The Autobiography of a Vagrant). His poem *Mukti* appeared in the Śrāvaṇ 1326 / July-Aug 1919 issue of the *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā* edited by Mohammed Shahidullah. See Mobashwer Ali, *Nazrul O Sāmaẏik Patra*, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 1998, pp. 3–7.

43 Fazlul Haq was a well-known advocate at the Calcutta High Court and a prominent leader of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League in Bengal. *Nabayug* was a single sheet evening journal but quickly became very popular. Priti Kumar Mitra, *The Dissent of Nazrul Islam: Poetry and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, p. 39.

44 The other editor was Muzaffar Ahmad who had been the assistant secretary at the Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti [The Muslim Literary Society of Bengal]. Even before they met Nazrul had correspondences with Muzaffar Ahmad (from about 1918) in connection with his contributions to the *Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā*. Mitra, p. 35.

45 *Nabayug* lasted for only about six months. Mitra, p. 67. Nazrul and Ahmad had apparently planned to set up a Communist Party of India but the idea did not turn up.

46 The three most well-known articles included: 'Nabayug' (The New Era), 'Dyer-er Smṝtistambha' (The Memorial for Dyer) and 'Muhājirin Hotyār Janya Dāẏī Ke?' (Who is responsible for the Killing of the Muhajirin?). Both Nazrul and Ahmad left *Nabayug* in December 1920 because of internal dissentions and the journal was terminated in January 1921.

47 *Nārāẏaṇ*, Bhādra 1327 / Aug-Sept 1920 and Agrahāẏaṇ 1327 / November-December 1920. Majumdar's early appreciation of Nazrul is well-known. Later he became one of Nazrul's severest critics.

the latter in touch with Barindra Kumar Ghosh, who had been convicted in the 1908 Alipore Conspiracy Case.[48]

The most famous among Nazrul's radical poems calling for the destruction of power and constraints, were composed in the early nineteen twenties, during the Khilafat-Non-Cooperation agitations in India.[49] The 139-lines colossal poem 'Bidrohī' followed later in 1921.[50] It gave Nazrul the soubriquet of Bidrohī Kabi or the Rebel Poet.[51] The poem was published successively in three journals – *Bijalī* (January 1922), *Prabāsī* (February 1922) and *Moslem Bhārat* (February 1922) – bearing out its immediate popularity. The poem was a celebration of the invincible and resolute rebel self that called for annihilation of authority and a delight in the imagination of cosmic dissolution of all worldly boundaries. 'Bidrohī' was soon followed by other well-known poems written mostly between August 1921 and August 1922.[52] The poet's use of spectacular often dramatic metaphors were interpreted variously as powerful and inspiring by some and mindless obsession by others.[53] Nirad C Chaudhuri wrote of his very explicit dislike for Nazrul and his poetic aptitude:

> This [Nazrul's military experience] made him inclined to make use of some cheap military claptrap in his poems, which were accepted then as the expression of a new revolutionary spirit. Through all that he became something of a rage. But in spite of having a good deal of untaught skill in the use of language and meter, to me he seemed very superficial,

48 Barindra Kumar Ghosh was one of the founder-patrons of *Nārāẏaṇ*. The Alipore Conspiracy Case was a landmark court trial during 1908–1909 that hauled up for trial more than thirty suspects. It followed an unsuccessful bomb attack on the presidency magistrate Kingsford by two teenagers Prafulla Chaki and Kshudiram Bose. Important members of the Yugāntar revolutionary group of Aurobindo Ghosh were arrested. Chittaranjan Das was the defense lawyer for Ghosh. Aurobindo Ghosh was acquitted; his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh along with several others was deported to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman's while Ullashkar Dutta and Kshudiram Bose were hanged. Chaki had shot himself before capture. See Peter Heehs, *The Bomb in Bengal: the rise of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal, 1900–1910*, Oxford University Press, 1993.

49 Nazrul's poems 'Raṇabherī' (War Trumpet, August 1921), 'Kamal Pāśā' (October 1921) and 'Anowar' (September 1921) celebrated the nationalist uprisings in Turkey. While Indian Muslim sentiments were predominantly in favor of the Khalifa (Caliph) Nazrul was a rare exception raising his voice in jubilation at the nationalists' triumph under Mustafa Kemal Pasha.

50 'Bidrohī' was written in December 1921.

51 Mitra, p. 51.

52 These poems included: 'Pralaẏollās' (Reveling in Total Destruction), 'Dhūmketu' (The Comet), 'Raktāmbara-dhāriṇī Mā' (The Mother in Blood-Red Garb), and 'Śikal Parār Gān' (Celebrating Incarceration).

53 The review of Nazrul's poems appeared in *Prabāsī*.

> undisciplined and frothy.… I was repelled by his references to torpedoes and mines as symbols of the revolutionary spirit. I had outgrown even the Bengali revolutionary spirit of the early days of the nationalist movement and was not likely to be impressed by the exhibition of it in a weak and spurious form.[54]

References to Nazrul's verses as gratuitous, repetitive and un-Islamic poured in from conservative journals like *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, which described his use of metaphors drawn from Hindu mythology as a "clamor of superfluous words".[55] Such criticisms were related to the question of working out a shared literary space that could accommodate both Bengali Hindu and Bengali Muslim sensibilities. Nazrul's experiments in verse were a radical deviation from the literary languages developed by the Bengali Muslim and Hindu intelligentsias. His unconventional usages made his writings controversial but none could quite dismiss this remarkable moment in the post-Tagorean poetic tradition that had come to shape and dominate the Bengali literary world in the first decades of the twentieth century.

3.1 *Dhūmketu*: Cacophony or a Militant Call for *Buddhir Mukti*?

In August 1922 Nazrul initiated his own bi-weekly journal – *Dhūmketu* (The Comet) – right after the publication of his book of poems *Agnibīṇā* (The Flaming Lute).[56] The poem "Bidrohī" (The Rebel) compiled in *Agnibīṇā* was identified by the Librarian of the Bengal Library as "objectionable" and "actionable".[57]

---

54 Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand Great Anarch*, 1987, pp. 148–149.

55 For instance, Azizar Rahman, "Islām O Nazrul Kāvya Sāhitya" (Islam and Nazrul's Verse Literature) in *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Pouṣ 1335 / November-December 1928 and S. Wajed Ali, "Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Sāhitya Sādhanār Path" (The Bengali Muslims' path of literary practice) in *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, Pouṣ 1336 / December-January 1929.

56 *Agnibīṇā* was dedicated to the legendary Bengali revolutionary Barindra Kumar Ghosh who was one of the founder members of the secret society *Yugāntar*, was convicted for conspiracy against the Govt. in the famous trial that came to be known as the Alipore Conspiracy Case (1908) and had been deported with a ten years sentence to the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands. *Agnibīṇā* was a compilation of twelve poems including 'Bidrohī', 'Kamal Pāśā', 'Maharram', 'Dhūmketu', 'Bhāṅgār Gān' and 'Pralaẏollās' and was proscribed immediately. The first issue of *Dhūmketu* carried an advertisement of *Agnibīṇā* which was priced at Re 1.

57 The Political Dept. Files of September 20, 1935 maintained: **The Rebel:** In this poem the author sings a hymn to the rebel, whom he likens to all those forces whether of nature, legend or of human character which are powerful, awe-inspiring, irresistible, out of the common, unconventional or such as we commonly describe under the rather comprehensive objective "rebellious". This is a powerfully worded and vigorous poem, though the similitudes are not always consistent or clear. The poem is a very well-known one. It will

But the government nonetheless chose to keep a close watch on the circulation of the poem – i.e. the sale and possession of *Agnibīṇā*. The poems of *Agnibīṇā* were described as "powerfully worded", "vigorous" but the similitude as "not always consistent or clear".[58] *Dhūmketu* was a short-lived periodical but has been considered a breakthrough in the Bengali literary world. *Dhūmketu* kindled the minds of the Bengali readers and branded Nazrul as the notorious *rājadrohī* (rebel against the Raj).[59]

For Nazrul, British rule in India was an unprecedented historical crisis with which he struggled to deal through literature. This perhaps made Nazrul so deeply committed to what he saw as the reality – the strangulating hold of colonialism and exploitation at every level of social relationships. The ideas of *golāmī*[60] and *dāsatva*[61] frequently transpire in Nazrul's writings. For him these concepts of subordination were multivalent – signifying the 'political' and 'cultural' survival of the colonized population. In the very first editorial Nazrul called for a *pralaẏ* or catastrophe that would devastate everything, rid society of its decay and stimulate its self-confidence (*ātmanirbharatā*). In a later issue Nazrul went on to elaborate *Dhūmketu*'s agenda: *pūrṇa svādhīnatā* or complete independence.[62] The call for total political autonomy was not new. Extremist campaigners, especially Balgangadhar Tilak, Bipinchandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay had criticized moderate constitutional agenda as passive and inadequate.[63] Armed revolutionaries had also sought to drive out the British through sustained conspiracies to

---

not be seen to be that it in the correct perspective to take the word used in it too seriously or to interpret that literally. Much of it is poetic license.

58 Ibid.

59 The Confidential Report on Publications in the Presidency of Bengal for the year 1922 observed: *Agnibīṇā* (The Lyre of Fire), by Kazi Nazar-ul-Islam, recently convicted of sedition for certain articles appearing in a newspaper edited by him, shows a very unhealthy mentality, taking a ghastly delight in bloodshed, war, revolution and even cosmic dissolution.

60 *Golāmī* (derived from the Persian word *gulam* meaning slave) = slavery

61 *Dāsatva* (derived from Bengali term *dās* meaning slave) = slavery

62 The Thirteenth Issue (Oct 13, 1922) that appeared a fortnight after the twelfth issue (September 26, 1922) that was banned.

63 From about 1906 the political extremists articulated strong disapproval of moderate constitutional politics, arguing that without freedom no regeneration of national life was possible. The extremist campaigns henceforth remained not simply confined to an abrogation of the partition of Bengal but enlarged into a broader campaign for complete independence or *svarāj*. Their agenda included boycott of British goods and institutions, developing indigenous alternatives, civil disobedience of unjust laws and if necessary violent confrontation. Of course these programs anticipated much of the later Gandhian strategies. See Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, Orient Longman, 2004, pp. 256–257.

exterminate colonial officials. What was unique about Nazrul's call for absolute independence was that it was the first occasion in which a literary journal made such a radical and unequivocal call for emancipation. It was an instance of a distinguished litterateur making unconcealed demands for political independence, and that too at a time when various factions within the Indian National Congress were weighing different options for constitutional covenants and even Gandhi had limited his agenda to only social programs like campaigns against untouchability and promoting the *carkā*.[64] By articulating the ultimate demand that of complete independence, *Dhūmketu* empowered the 'literary' with a political language of its own. Like Rabindranath, Nazrul's sense of autonomy cannot be reduced to territorial decolonization alone. For him autonomy was indistinguishable from social equality. *Dhūmketu* called for the erasure of all divisiveness, inequalities and exploitations that were structured around socio-religious and economic power relationships. Muslim women writers for instance found in *Dhūmketu* a space to express their dissent against the patriarchy and demand restoration of rights conferred upon women by the Quran.

Looking back nostalgically on the *Dhūmketu* days, Achintyakumar Sengupta, a prominent writer of the avant-garde magazine *Kallol* recollected how Nazrul's writings radicalized the reading public, especially the youth:

> Like Nripen, I was a first year student. Every weekend in the evening we like many others, would wait eagerly at the junction near Jagu Babu's bazaar for the newspaper vendor to arrive with bundles of *Dhūmketu*. People would rush to grab copies and there would be stampede on the streets. Those were editorials written with not ink but blood! … We were familiar with stories of how during the Swadeshi days Brahmabandhab would write in exactly the same way in his *Sandhyā*. What words! What raging sensations! The writings were such that reading once would never suffice.

64 Following the withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement, the consensual unity that Gandhi had helped to build cracked from within. The Congress was now divided into pro-changers and no-changers. The no-changers wished to stick to the Gandhian path while the pro-changers or the Swarajists under the leadership of Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das preferred to go back to constitutional politics. Nehru and Das launched the Swaraj Party within the Congress and their aim was to intensify participation in council politics and shatter the constitution from within. Gandhi on the other hand, after being released from jail in 1924 concentrated on his campaign for *carkā* and building *āśram* at Sabarmati in Gujarat. He would renew his mass agitation campaigns for civil disobedience in 1930. But it was really not until August 1942 that Gandhi gave the unequivocal call of 'Quit India'. Bandyopadhyay, p. 311 for the debates between the Congress socialists like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose and the Swarajists like Das and the senior Nehru.

> The prose and verse were equally forceful. All were songs of destruction, invocations of impending cataclysm …[65]

In explaining Nazrul's extremist aesthetics, contemporary and later commentators have most often reflected on his impatience with subordination (*parādhīnatā*) and his commitment to the cause of complete independence. His writings were seen as reflecting conscious alignment with armed revolutionary actions. The Yugāntar group of revolutionaries considered *Dhūmketu* to be their own organ, partly also because of Nazrul's regard for Barindra Kumar Ghosh.[66] Gopinath Saha, a youth of barely eighteen who frequented the *Dhūmketu* office misunderstood it for a meeting place for revolutionaries.[67] He mistook one Mr. Day for the Police Commissioner Charles Tegart and killed him in January 1924. He was hanged the following March.[68] Nazrul however was never a participant in armed conspiracies and in this sense his writings were not collaborative.

Through *Dhūmketu* Nazrul attempted to motivate the public in the void caused by the abrupt suspension of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation. It brought together in its pages prose and poetry of noted writers like Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Priyamvada Devi, Nripendrakrishna Chattopadhyay, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Communist intellectuals like Muzaffar Ahmad and Hemantakumar Sarkar. Evidently *Dhūmketu* marked a conscious effort towards moving beyond the existing practices of writing, uncovering new and potentially far-reaching relations with social groups that still lay outside the realm of literary publicity. Tagore's brief eight line verse *Dhūmketu* appeared as a blessing-adornment on the first page of every issue.[69] The final couplet of Tagore's poem directed attention to *Dhūmketu*'s central agenda – incorporating the subaltern groups whose participation within the nationalist movement was still described as generally 'incomplete'.[70] While political participation was a manifest action, partaking in literary

65 Achintyakumar Sengupta, *Kallol Yug*, p. 29.

66 Muzaffar Ahmad, *Smṛtikathā*, p. 155, quoted in Mitra, p. 59.

67 Ibid., pp. 159–160 quoted in Mitra, p. 59.

68 Mitra, p. 59.

69 The first issue of *Dhūmketu* appeared on August 11, 1922. The final couplet of Tagore's verse was as follows:
Jāgiẏe de re camak mere'
Āche jārā ardhacetan
[Arouse with a blow all those who lay half-awakened].

70 Tagore uses the prefix *ardha* (meaning half / semi) before the term *cetan* (conscious) instead of *a* (literally standing in for the English 'un-') – implying perhaps that the masses had been only partially roused through Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement.

publicity was intangible. *Dhūmketu*'s agenda was to draw a discernible alignment between the two – that the two were not mutually exclusive – *Dhūmketu* provides a significant initial experiment with socialist ideology in Bengali literature. At the time he brought out the journal, Nazrul was already in close intellectual proximity with Muzaffar Ahmad, a renowned communist. Later Nazrul would initiate his second periodical venture – *Lāṅgal* (The Plough) that was more coherent and forthright in articulating an egalitarian program. *Dhūmketu* in fact provided the first trials of a vaguely socialist aesthetic as a means to democratize the literary public sphere and make literature more representative of the political nation.

It was not until the verse editorial of *Dhūmketu*,[71] purportedly a hymn to the Goddess Dūrgā which appeared on the eve of annual autumnal festivities that the colonial authorities could really crack down on Nazrul. He was arrested on November 23, 1922, tried at the court of Swinhoe, the Chief Presidency Magistrate in Calcutta and judgment proclaimed on January 16, 1923. Nazrul was sentenced to a year of rigorous imprisonment under Section 124-A of the Indian Penal Code.[72] This was perhaps the first instance in Bengal of a poet being arrested on charges of sedition. After the news of the trial sentence was made public *Dhūmketu* published an essay by Nazrul entitled *Rājbandīr Jabānbandī* (Testimony of a Captive of the Raj) that he had actually written while in detention and had read it aloud in the courtroom when Swinhoe had proclaimed his judgment.[73] In prison Nazrul took to fasting and continued composing his other well-known radical songs and poems that agitated fellow prisoners.[74] He was isolated, put in a cell and his pen and paper confiscated. Rabindranath Tagore sent a telegram to Nazrul urging him to discontinue his hunger strike but his message was not delivered.[75] A massive rally presided over by Dr. Suhrawardy and C.R. Das was held to demonstrate solidarity with the poet. Nazrul terminated his fast after thirty-eight days.

---

71 Nazrul Islam, "Ānandamaẏīr Āgamane" in *Dhūmketu*, September 26, 1922. This Twelfth Issue of *Dhūmketu* was ostensibly proscribed for another essay 'Bidrohīr Kaifiẏaṯ' (A Vindication of the Rebel) by an eleven year old girl Lila Mitra. Nazrul was convicted under Sections 124-A and 153-A of the IPC on grounds of sedition and provoking riots respectively.

72 *Sāhitya Sādhak Caritmālā*, Volume XVI, pp. 23–33.

73 Nazrul Islam, 'Rājbandīr Jabānbandī' written in jail on January 7, 1923. Mitra, p. 132.

74 Nazrul was detained at the Presidency Jail and Alipore Central Jail in Calcutta and later moved to penal complexes in Hughli and Baharampur.

75 Rabindranath Tagore in a letter to his son Rathindranath Tagore, When Nazrul was imprisoned Tagore dedicated his lyrical ballad *Basanta* to Nazrul. See Mitra, p. 133.

Subsequent collections of Nazrul's verses were proscribed under Section 99A of the CPC and Section 124A of the IPC for 'sedition'[76]: *Biṣer Båśī* (The Poisonous Lute, 1924), *Bhāṅgār Gān* (The Song of Demolition, 1924) and *Pralaẏśikhā* (The Flame of Cataclysm, 1930). *Rudra-Maṅgal* (Invocation of Rudra, 1925), a volume containing editorials from the *Dhūmketu*, *Sarbahārā* (The Dispossessed, 1926), a collection of socialist poems that had previously appeared in *Lāṅgal* and *Phaṇi-Mansā* (Desert Cactus, 1927), another volume of poems were noted with seriousness by the home political department but were not forfeited, neither was Nazrul prosecuted.[77]

Nazrul was perhaps the only pre-eminent Bengali poet whose publications were continuously subjected to surveillance by a vigilant colonial bureaucracy. What nonetheless remains significant is that *Dhūmketu* was never proscribed by the government apart from the single instance of its twelfth issue that contained the verse editorial 'Ānandamaẏīr Āgamane' (On the Arrival of the Goddess of Happiness) that appeared on the eve of the annual autumnal festivities in Bengal.[78] The Pujas were the time when several literary miscellanies brought out special autumnal issues (*Śāradīẏā Saṃkhyā*) containing larger numbers of poems, essays, fiction and attractive illustrations. The *śāradīẏā* times therefore meant more enthusiastic and busy readings than the usual pace of the rest of the year. By the 1930s the special autumn issues had become part of a festive practice: new fictions and poetry being as much part of the celebration platter as new dresses and furnishings. 'Ānandamaẏīr Āgamane', the verse editorial was probably very consciously occasioned – appearing as a pre-Puja number that in all likelihood would attract more readers than the usual numbers.

The entire poem was an allegory that read literally constituted an invocation of the resplendent and redoubtable Divine Mother, appealing to her to overwhelm the demonic forces personified in Mahiṣāsur. Implicit throughout the poem were powerful indications which left little doubt that the imageries of Mahiṣāsur alluded to the British rulers. The slaying of Mahiṣāsur was therefore a metaphor for the annihilation of British rule. Drawing on Bankim's use of the Dūrgā imagery in his novel *Ānandamaṭh* the Divine Mother represented a resurgent and independent nation. The poem also included unambiguous

---

76 It is worth observing that Nazrul's poems were proscribed only after they appeared in collected volumes. The same is true of Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Pather Dābi* that was serialized in *Baṅgabāṇī. Pather Dābi* was proscribed after it appeared as a book.

77 Sisir Kar, *Nishiddho Nazrul* (Nazrul Silenced), Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1983, pp. 10–11, 14–16, 48–49, 50–51, 95–97, 111–112.

78 An integral aspect of the rituals involves the invocation of the Goddess Durga, praying to her so that her divine prowess may awaken to annihilate all tribulations personified as the demon Mahiṣāsur. Invocation hymns for the Goddess are commonly known as *Āgamanī*.

references to Gandhi, Aurobindo Ghosh and the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands off the eastern shores of mainland India.[79] The annual celebrations that involved the majority of Bengali Hindus and a large section of urban wage-earners and professionals returning to their country homes for the festivities indicated the possibility of political turbulences. Making the Mahiṣāsur stand in for the British had been a powerful visual and literary strategy right from the days of the Swadeshi Movement. Not surprising that 'Ānandamaẏīr Āgamane' would be a cause of much disquiet amongst the colonial bureaucrats.

The passionate metaphors and unmatched imageries of his writings had the potential to enthrall readers, while the striding rhythms and extensive use of alliterations made the poems effortlessly accessible to listeners as much as readers. Nazrul's poems were politically volatile precisely because their theatrical quality made their publicity easy. The poet made extensive use of cosmic imageries drawn from Hindu mythological traditions deploying them to conjure up visions of liberation attained through cataclysmic confrontations. His writings also drew from the history of Islam and used imageries from Islamicate civilizations to glorify resistance (*bidroha*) and martyrdom (*śahādat*). In its most basic and accessible rendition *bidroha* embodied an upsurge against colonial domination. However, Nazrul believed that liberty was impossible within the existing paradigm of socio-political and discursive structures that sustained the equilibrium of domination and oppression. Emancipation was attainable only by breaking all social inhibitions and through the destruction

79 The poem contained the following lines with explicit reference to Gandhi (as Viṣṇu, the preserver) and his carkā campaign:

Viṣṇu nije bandī āji chaẏ-bacharī phandī-kārāẏ
Cakra tāhār carkā bujhi bhanḍa-hāte śakti hārāẏ
[Intrigue has incarcerated Viṣṇu for a six-year term / His weapon, the carkā now in wrong hands has lost its force]

The poem also carried open reference to Aurobindo Ghosh (referred to as Maheśvar or Śiva, the slayer), the extremist Congress leader who had withdrawn himself from politics and had assumed the life of an ascetic in Pondicherry, a small sea-side town on the south eastern shores of the sub-continent:

Maheśvar āj sindhu-tīre yogāsane magna dhyāne
Arabinda citta tāhār phutbe kakhan ke she jāne
[Maheśvar is in the midst of profound meditation on the sea-shores / Who knows when his *arabinda* (lotus) conscience will blossom]

Referring to the political prisoners serving terms of rigorous imprisonment at the Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands, the poet wrote:

Deb-senā āj ṭānche ghāni tepāntarer dvīpāntare
Raṇāṅgane nāmbe ke ār tui nā ele kṝpāṇ dhare?
[The fighters of virtue serve arduous terms in the faraway islands / Who else but you with the sword in hand will alight on the battlegrounds?]

of all known and unknown oppressions. His works therefore exemplify an intolerance of things that had acquired staidness and his *bidroha* directed towards every form of hegemony.

In his introductory editorial of the August 11, 1922 issue, Nazrul laid out the objectives and aspirations of *Dhūmketu*. Rejecting all social reforms efforts as futile, he called in unambiguous terms, for a dismissal of the old order. Explaining why cosmic dissolution seemed to be the only possible path to redemption, Nazrul stated:

> … This society has become rotten from within. Decay has struck such deep root in its arteries and marrowbones that it is impossible to create a new nation from this disintegrated mass. Any structure raised on such a foundation is bound to crumble…The old base has to be uprooted and groundwork has to begin anew … *Dhūmketu* will initiate the much needed *pralaẏ* (disaster) by declaring war against the enemies of the people and by eliminating all that is false, hypocritical and artificial …

Dhūmketu or the comet represents a phenomenal celestial occurrence, a fleeting moment that lights up the night skies. The uncommon sight of a comet, the suddenness of its appearance and the luminosity of its trail made up the awe-inspiring, sublime metaphor of total annihilation and the signaling of a new beginning. This was neither a call for organized violence nor any ambition to capture power. It did call for a subversion of the old order and so was potentially anarchic and an affirmation of liberty. The profusion of allegorical expositions of the notion of *bidroha* testifies to his impatience with all that were normative and conventional. What seemed to many of his contemporaries as mindless and restive verbosity was indeed a vision aligned to revolutionary possibilities and opening up an alternate order free of social injustices and inequalities.

Nazrul's rebellious verse and prose were almost unprecedented since the times of the Swadeshi Movement. In his writings, he made extensive use of *calit bhāṣā*. Formalized *calit bhāṣā* had been consciously developed to accommodate new and diverse groups as potential reading audiences. Nazrul's distinctive style was the creation of a composite literary language whose rhetorical concepts were drawn equally from Hindu mythologies and the Islamic traditions of distant west and central Asian lands. His writings embraced passionate allusions to emancipation from colonial practices of thinking. His critique of domination implied not just the exploitative operation of colonial capital but incorporated a radical questioning of social classifications created and entrenched by colonial rule, especially the divisive categories of the 'Hindu' and

'Muslim' predicated on differences in religious practices.[80] Being closely aligned with the *Buddhir Mukti Āndolan* and the *Saogāt* quarters, liberation of the mind continued to be an overriding trope in most of his writings. In creating his own distinctive poetic language Nazrul forwarded the possibility of a modern, non-communitarian aesthetic that was not simply an amalgamation of Hindu and Islam imageries but was in fact born out of a violent rejection of religious boundaries perpetrated by colonialism.

More conventional Muslim Bengali journals like *Baṅganūr*, *Māsik Mohāmmadī*, *Naoroz* and *Islām Darśan* were severely critical of Nazrul for what they deemed as his "un-Islamic" literary sensibility. While none quite dismissed Nazrul's literary brilliance most Muslim intellectuals called for bridling his untamed intellect.[81] Indeed domesticating Nazrul meant forcing him to reject the ways of the *kafer* or the non-believer, i.e. Hindu allegories and references to Hindu divinities in his writings. The literary injunctions on Nazrul were tied up with the larger project of modernizing Musalmāni Bāṅglā. Musalmāni Bāṅglā as the expressive medium of Bengali Muslims had to be differentiated from Bengali loaded with Hindu-imageries and words describing Hindu concepts and practices. The dominant approach was to use Arabic, Persian or Urdu words for those Islamic concepts and practices that did not have appropriate Bengali synonym. For several Bengali Muslim intellectuals associated with the more conventional Muslim journals Nazrul's use of Islamic and Islamicate imageries, Persian-Urdu words and even poetic meters borrowed from the Arabic verse tradition, afforded a significant experiment with new forms of Musalmāni Bāṅglā. Nazrul's use of Hindu imageries, they believed were disruptive of the Bengali Muslims' literary agenda that could have otherwise benefitted from Nazrul's poetic flair.

The constitutive relations between the 'literary' and the 'political' therefore needs to be understood in terms of a widening political culture whose articulations were not limited to only fostering patriotism and reflecting on the

---

80 For a narrative of how the requirements of colonial governance created divisive social categories based on religious differences, see Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990. Though written at a later date, Nazrul's well known poem *Kāṇḍārī Hůśīẏār* (Helmsman Beware!) warned the leader of people who asked whether his followers were 'Hindus' or 'Muslims'.

81 Abdul Majid, 'Bāṅglār Musalmāner Bhāṣā O Sāhitya' in *Saogāt*, July, 1926, reproduced in Mustafa Nurul Islam ed., *Samakāle Nazrul Islam, 1920–1950*, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, 1983 and quoted in Mitra, p. 210. Ibrahim Khan's letter to Nazrul dated 1925 and published in *Naoroz* in 1927, Mitra, p. 213. Sheikh Habibar Rahman, 'Sāhityaratna' (Literature's Jewel) in *Islām Darśan*, Māgh 1334 / Jan-Feb 1928. Rahman described Nazrul as *pather pāgal* (the roadside lunatic), the devil and called upon Muslims to reject Nazrul. Mitra, p. 215.

vicissitudes of the anti-colonial agitations. This political culture nurtured a remarkable diversity of thoughts and responses, opened up to the wider world and brought home for readers, knowledge, literature and news from across the globe.

Conclusion

Reading, it has been argued, is not as innocuous as it might seem. In fact it has, on several occasions ushered in radical historical transformations: "... Think how often reading has changed the course of history – Luther's reading of Paul, Marx's reading of Hegel, Mao's reading of Marx."[1] What and how individuals in a particular society and at a specific historical moment read can reveal how they made sense of the world around, the priorities in their lives, what interested them and above all how they connected with each other.

The focus of this book has been on the changing contours of literary production in colonial Bengal: how aesthetic taste and social sense were determined through intense debates in the literary public sphere. Periodicals I have argued were a new communicative mode that had succeeded in opening up social participation howsoever limited and were producers of new forms of social bonding that had significant implications in creating for the nation, a life of its own. It has attempted to see how periodicals constituted an important mode of communication and the ways in which periodical literature attempted to transform social sensibilities of print literate (mostly middle-class) groups at a critical juncture in history. In the process the literary periodical formed a public space in which multiple, often conflicting discourses on society, culture and the nation were formed. This sphere, despite the prejudices and idiosyncrasies emanating from class, gender and community loyalties, was remarkably eclectic and polyphonic – not just in terms of the plurality of voices that were represented and the diversity of experimental forms but also in terms of its tolerance towards differences in opinions. Over time the Bengali literary sphere came to be constituted by multiple reader groups differentiated in terms of class, gender and community.

Periodicals, as much of the book argues, reveal a deep commitment to and preoccupation with questions of social change and self-cultivation. This is not to see in literature 'reflections' of contemporary social life. Rather periodicals offered a whole range of imaginative explorations that inspired narratives containing both social realities as well as the latent possibilities. The purpose was to effect a transformation of life at the level of everyday morality and behavioural conduct. To take up one such instance, unlike the mid-nineteenth century debates between liberal reformers and Brahmanical orthodoxy over the scriptural sanction of widow remarriage and whether the practice could be

1 Robert Darnton, "Toward a History of Reading", *The Wilson Quarterly*, v. 13 #4 (Autumn 1989), pp. 86–102.

© koninklijke brill nv, leiden, 2020 | doi:10.1163/9789004427082_009

legalized through legislative intervention, twentieth-century periodicals seldom charted the path of debates. Rather, the social stigma against widowhood and the predicaments of young widows constituted a major preoccupation in the pages of the periodicals, especially in fiction. Following Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Biṣabṝkṣa* (serialized in *Baṅgadarśan*) and Rabindranath Tagore's *Cokher Bāli* (serialized in *Baṅgadarśan Nabaparyyāẏ*) the romantic relationships and sexual desires of young widows, transgressions of socially sanctioned boundaries and the vulnerability of these women became an enduring trope in fiction. Such engagements could possibly insinuate a more foundational change in society's approach towards widows' problems and work towards a consensual resolution rather than pushing through legal reforms. Literary periodicals were therefore not simply 'evidences' of social change but agents that motivated transformations in attitude and approach to social life. They structured the temporality of Bengali middle-class households providing glimpses of both the real world of their readers and the world that they desired.

The Bengali *bhadraloks* have been the privileged subjects of continued historiographical investigations that have explored innumerable dimensions of this social group – the materiality of their socio-economic positions within colonial political economy, their agency in engineering a Renaissance and formulating nationalist discourses and of course their hegemonic socio-political aspirations and relations vis-à-vis the other not so privileged social groups of the South Asian subcontinent. Historiographical debates have stimulated researches on the 'completeness' or otherwise of *bhadralok* status as the Indian bourgeoisie, the nature of their connections with agrarian economy, the urbaneness of their city habitations, their elite class positions signified by privileged access to education and the pedagogical and modernizing aspirations of their cultural and nationalist agendas. By the opening years of the twentieth century the *bhadralok* as a social group had become immensely heterogeneous in terms of their education, profession, property and landed connections,[2] access to channels of power, social networking, residential localities, affiliations to caste associations, internalizing of community-oriented religious discourses and a variety of other socio-cultural determinants.[3] More recently the focus

2 The income sources of twentieth-century middle classes have been addressed variously in Amiya Bagchi, *Private Investments in India*, 1972; Tanika Sarkar, *Bengal 1928–1934*; Rajat and Ratnalekha Ray, "Zamindars and Jotedars: A Study of Rural Politics in Bengal", *Modern Asian Studies*, volume 9:1, 1975.

3 Sumit Sarkar points out the inherent ambiguity of the term bhadralok: "the trouble with this term … is that it is much too broad, ranging presumably from the Maharaja of Mymensingh to the East Indian railway clerk". Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, p. 509.

has shifted to understanding class in terms of material culture and especially consumption patterns. Consumptions of a diverse range of print and the associated linguistic practices have been identified as crucial markers of social stratifications within the bhadralok class.[4] So too has culinary practices: experiments involving innovative cooking methods and new ingredients, and how social differentiations came to inflect dietary habits of the Bengali bhadralok.[5]

I have attempted to make the necessary linkages: between the highly differentiated impact of print, the socio-economic dimensions of its productions and the social meanings of literature; between formations of reader communities and the making of socially sensible individuals. The majority of the readers of these literary periodicals were drawn from the middle classes, cutting across gender, caste and communitarian divides. Reading practices and receptions of literary works were a significant marker of bhadralok identity. Here aesthetic taste and a particular way of being cultured became a significant characteristic of bhadralok class position. As the socio-political urges behind class mobilization intensified the literati themselves drawn from various socio-economic backgrounds within the middle classes, reiterated the need for a widening sphere of public engagement. Evidently such needs were not just about making necessary connections across the wide spectrum of the *madhyabitta*. Literary dialogues had to negotiate across communitarian and gender boundaries as well and in the process the conceptual trope of 'middle-class' readerships became complex and mutable. By the early decades of the century, the category of *madhyabitta* became far more complicated and resistant to categorical determinations. The increasing fragmentation within the Hindu middle classes limited the *bhadralok* and entirely occluded the new Bengali Muslim *madhyabitta*.

In this concluding chapter I would like to turn briefly to these connections by reflecting on the ways in which a distinct sense of middle-classness became representative of the Bengali nation. This calls for a problematization of the conceptual category of middle-classness (*madhyabittatā*). There is somewhat of a consensus that university and school teachers, moderate income lawyers, doctors and office goers, the average trader and the modest income *kerāni* or clerk suits the designation of *madhyabitta* most comprehensively. Yet it becomes rather difficult to explain how a petty *bhadralok* and a high profile Congress leader like Chittaranjan Das could share similar reading habits. In terms

4 Anindita Ghosh, pp. 296–297.

5 Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middleclass*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

of middle-classness (*madhyabittatā*) of literary participation, the bhadralok equally included rich aristocratic families as the Tagores, the unemployed or nominally employed educated young men like the *Kallol* writers, family men like Nazrul who found it perpetually impossible to make both ends meet, university professors like Abul Hossain and medium-profile pleaders like Upendranath Gangopadhyay who resided in Hazaribagh-Madhupur area of present day Jharkhand.

It is here that aesthetic taste and judgments of literary production assume a centrality in middle-class lives. It would be simplistic to assume that the aesthetic criterion that in the post-Swadeshi decades shaped the lineaments of middle-class lives were continuous from the mid and late nineteenth-century refined culture of the high caste landlord bhadralok gentry. In terms of linguistic practices and literary preferences the mid-nineteenth century had articulated sharp polarities.[6] The world of *Baṭtalā* that catered tracts, farces, plays, romances and almanacs was far removed from that of Akshay Kumar Dutta's erudite journal *Tattvabodhinī Patrikā.* The history of mid and late nineteenth-century print cultures reveal not simply encounters between Western traditions of knowledge and the indigenous middle classes but also intense struggle for social and political visibility amongst various groups. The lesser end of the print spectrum constituted by non-literate and partially literate groups registered significant resistance to the cultural norms of respectability forged by the more prosperous and educated bhadralok groups. The Swadeshi Movement proved to be simultaneously a moment of unprecedented solidarity and a statement of bhadralok failure to mobilize beyond class and communitarian frontiers. Rabindranath Tagore, then editor of *Baṅgadarśan* (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) expressed satisfaction at the fact that the new century has drawn in new social groups within the literary sphere. The pluralization of the literary sphere that Tagore hinted at was at least partly enabled as lower spectrum of the middle classes increasingly traversed into the domain of these privileged periodicals.

In the post-1905 decades literature became a domain for a different kind of mobilization. While the turn of literature had to do at least partly with colonial surveillance and the ban on several front line nationalist newspapers, the failure of Swadeshi ideology to transcend social barriers was in itself an important

6 The past few years have seen historical research concerning themselves with the heterogeneity within the *bhadralok* group. In spite of the wide differences in the economic background of the bhadralok it was the common ideology about class, education and culture that made the bhadralok seemingly homogeneous. Veena Naregal (in the case of Maharashtra), Tithi Bhattacharya and Anindita Ghosh have all addressed this question of heterogeneity and have identified a sort of lower echelon life of the lesser middle classes in the production of cheap prints like those coming out of *Baṭtalā.*

critique of bhadralok political agenda. Periodical literature of this period bears a testament to how the Bengali middle classes turned away from the urgent political engagements of the period and sought to bolster the foundations of their language and culture. The ideas of middle-classness that emerged through their engagement with literature can be seen as distinct from the normative socio-political category of the bourgeoisie. Literary debates on taste and culture in the pages of the periodicals reveal contentions over the exact nature of this middle-classness. As the prospects of political-constitutional autonomy became increasingly credible and the imperativeness of anti-colonial propaganda diminished, literature re-scripted Bengali identity on a distinctly cultural cartography. Partaking in that identity implied claiming bhadralok respectability for oneself.[7] But it never acquired predominance in the sense of a fixed belief system. It is paradoxical that though the eclectic idea of cultural identity based on literary practice proved to be fascinating, at critical historical moments it would be subsumed within the more dominant notion of culture as essentially 'Hindu' and occlusive of Muslims.

The ideologies of Bengali *saṃskṝti* (culture) and its *madhyabittatā* (middle-classness) were predicated on a certain idealism that derived at least in part from Tagore's notion of culture as a continuous, interminable process of doing. During the 1920s and 1930s conceptions of literary practice as *sebā* or service to the nation had transformed to signify a redemptive action. In conceiving the social function of literature in terms of deliverance, the figure of the *kerāni*, typically the lower middle-class clerk assumed a centrality. The everyday struggle of existence, financial hardships and the miseries of urban habitat that the *kerāni* (clerical classes) represented emerged as the most suitable imaginative trope to convey the sense of middle-classness.[8] By upholding for the lesser middle income groups like the clerks or *kerāni*, the imaginative possibility of liberation from the grinding realities of the everyday, literature succinctly produced an aesthetic strategy that could democratize the literary sphere and indicate its emancipatory potential for every social group.

7 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Adda: A History of Sociality" in *Provincializing Europe*, p. 198 points out that the very meaning of respectability had changed in the 1920s and 1930s. To be a literary person, even if he was unemployed conferred a certain social propriety.

8 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Nation and Imagination", in *Provincializing Europe,* pp. 163–172 has discussed in detail Tagore's prose-poem "Bẩśī" that dealt with the expectations, romances and frustrations of petty clerical lives. What is perhaps important here is even Tagore who was widely seen as an aristocrat unfamiliar with poverty and misery and who possessed strong reservations about literary permissibility, had to address the question of middleclassness as embodied in the life of a petty clerk.

The daunting economic conditions of the post-War years renewed anxieties about middle-class literary tastes that presumably became vulnerable in the face of economic hardships. This book has therefore sought to address questions of readership and reading practices in the context of the colonial political economy of the early twentieth-century decades. Who were the people who were reading *Prabāsī* or *Sabuj Patra* or *Kallol* or *Kohinūr*? These questions become urgent all the more when we look at the radical periodicals (late 1920s onwards) that were gradually delineating an alternative socialist world. I have here in mind the turn to a more radical leftist aesthetic in journals like *Saṃhati-Lāṅgal-Gaṇavāṇī*. Which readers took to this radicalism? The radical socialist turn of these post war journals provided an alternative aesthetic to the underprivileged sections of the middle-class reading public. The idea of the *daridra madhyabitta* or the poverty-stricken middle class becomes central to this radical turn in Bengali literary aesthetics. A study of public encounters in these journals reveals multiple ways through which social transformations and the formation of the ethical social subject came to be conceived. During the 1940s sustained interest in the analytical concept of culture, the very middle-classness of its content and its moorings in literary practice came under serious scrutiny and gave way to theoretically nuanced understanding of capitalism and the role of its functional modes in creating social inequality.

This work has sought to offer a different narrative of middle-class agency through a history that has partly attempted to recuperate their reading practices as evinced by the sheer diverseness of available readings and high-low distinctions that were made between various periodicals on the basis of the readerships that they catered. Literary periodicals opened up an entire domain of public engagements between readers, writers and editors. The interplay of these multiple public voices across various sections of middle-class interests and gender and communitarian divides shape a world where imaginative experiences of literature and the politics of mass participation become mutually responsive processes.

Bibliography

1 Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Bengali Periodicals (Name of Periodical, Editor(s) and Year of Commence)[1]

Aitihāsik Citra, Nikhilnath Ray and Yogendrachandra Gupta; 1312 BS / 1905 CE.

Āl-Eslām, Muhammad Manirujjaman Islamabadi; 1322 BS / 1915 CE.

Antaḥpur, Banalata Devi, Hemantakumari Chaudhury, Kumudini Mitra; 1304 BS / 1898 CE.

Bāmābodhinī Patrikā, Umeshchandra Datta, Basantakumar Datta, Suryakumar Chattopadhyay, Ushaprabha Datta, Santoshkumar Datta, Anandakumar Datta; 1270 BS / 1863 CE.

Baṅgabāṇī, Dineshchandra Sen, Bijoychandra Majumdar; 1328 BS / 1922 CE.

Baṅgadarśan, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay, Srishchandra Majumdar; 1279 BS / 1872 CE.

Baṅgadarśan (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Rabindranath Tagore, Satishchandra Majumdar; 1308 BS / 1901 CE.

Baṅgalakṣmī, Kumudini Basu, Hemlata Devi; 1332 BS / 1925 CE.

Baṅgīya Musalmān Sāhitya Patrikā, Maulavi Muhammad Shahidullah, Muhammad Muzammel Haq, 1325 BS / 1918 CE.

Baṅgīya Sāhitya Parishat Patrikā, Kshetrapal Chakrabarty (First Editor); 1300 BS / 1893 CE.

Bhāṇḍār, Rabindranath Tagore; 1312 BS / 1905 CE.

Bhāratmahilā, Sarajubala Datta; 1312 BS / 1905 CE.

Bhāratī, Dwijendranath Tagore, Swarnakumari Devi, Hiranmoyee Devi, Sarala Devi, Rabindranath Tagore, Sourendranath Mukhopadhyay, Manilal Gangopadhyay; 1284 BS / 1877 CE.

Bhāratbarṣa, Amulyacharan Vidyabhusan, Jaladhar Sen, Upendrakrishna Bandyopadhyay, Phanindranath Mukhopadhyay, Sudhangshushekhar Chattopadhyay; 1320 BS / 1913 CE.

Bibidhārtha Saṃgraha, Rajendralal Mitra, Madhusudan Mukhopadhyay, Kaliprasanna Sinha; 1258 BS / 1851 CE.

Bicitrā, Upendranath Gangopadhyay; 1334 BS / 1927 CE.

Dhūmketu, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Amaresh Kanjilal; 1329 BS / 1922 CE.

Gṛhastha, Hariprasanna Mukhopadhyay (First Editor); 1316 BS / 1909 CE.

Jāhnavī, Naliniranjan Pandit; Girindramohini Dasi; 1311 BS / 1904 CE.

1 BS refers to *Bāṅglā Sāl* (Bengali Year) which is also known as *Baṅgābda*.

Kāli-kalam, Premendra Mitra, Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay, Muralidhar Basu; 1333 BS / 1926 CE.
Kallol, Dineshranjan Das, Gokulchandra Nag; 1330 BS / 1923 CE.
Kohinūr, Mohammad Raoshan Ali Chaudhuri, 1305 BS / 1898 CE.
Kohinūr (*Nabaparyyāẏ*), Mohammad Raoshan Ali Chaudhuri, 1318 BS / 1911 CE.
Mānasī O Marmabāṇī, Jagadindranath Ray, Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay; 1322 BS / 1916 CE.
Māsik Basumatī, Hemendraprasad Ghosh; 1329 BS / 1922 CE.
Māsik Mohāmmadī, Muhammad Akram Khan; 1334 BS / 1927 CE.
Māsik Patrikā, Pyarichand Mitra; Radhanath Sikdar; 1261 BS / 1854 CE.
Māṭṛ-Mandir, Akshaykumar Nandy, Surabala Datta, Sushila Nandy; 1330 BS / 1923 CE.
Moslem Bhārat, Muhammad Muzammel Haq; 1327 BS / 1920 CE.
Nabanūr, Syed Imdad Ali; 1310 BS / 1903 CE.
Nabyabhārat, Debiprasanna Raychaudhury, Prabhatkusum Raychaudhury, Phullanalini Raychaudhury; 1290 BS / 1883 CE.
Nārāẏaṇ, Chittaranjan Das; 1321 BS / 1914 CE.
Paricaẏ, Sudhindranath Dutta, Hirankumar Sanyal; 1338 BS / 1931 CE.
Prabāsī, Ramananda Chattopadhyay, Kedarnath Chattopadhyay, Ashok Chattopadhyay; 1308 BS / 1901 CE.
Pragati, Buddhadev Bose, Ajit Datta; 1334 BS / 1927 CE.
Pūṇya, Prajñasundari Devi, Hitendranath Tagore, Hritendranath Tagore; 1304 BS / 1897 CE.
Sabuj Patra, Pramatha Chaudhuri; 1321 BS / 1914 CE.
Sādhanā, Sudhindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore; 1298 BS / 1891 CE.
Sāhitya, Sureshchandra Samajpati, Panchkari Bandyopadhyay; 1297 BS / 1890 CE.
Saogāt, Muhammad Nasiruddin; 1325 BS / 1918 CE.
Śanibārer Ciṭhi, Sajanikanta Das, Niradchandra Choudhury, Parimal Goswami; 1334 BS / 1927 CE.
Śikhā, Abul Hossain, Motahar Hossain; 1333 BS / 1927 CE.
Uttarā, Atulprasad Sen, Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay, Suresh Chakrabarty; 1332 BS / 1925 CE.
Yamunā, Dhirendranath Pal, Phanindranath Pal; 1316 BS / 1909 CE.

2 Official Records (Reports, Serials and Monographs)

Act XXV of 1867: An Act for the Regulation of Printing Presses and Newspapers for the Preservation of Copies of Books Printed in British India, and for the Registration of such Books.
Act XXVII of 1870: An Act to Amend the Indian Penal Code.

Act XIV of 1922: An Act to Repeal the Indian Press Act, 1910, and the Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act, 1908, and to make certain provisions in regard to the liability of editors of newspapers, and to facilitate the registration of printers and publishers; and to provide for the seizure and disposal of certain documents.

Annual Reports on the Working of the Imperial Library, Calcutta.

Blumhardt, J.F., *Catalogue of Bengali Printed Books in the Library of the British Museum*, London 1886.

Blumhardt, J.F., *Catalogue of the Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese, Oriya, Pushtu, and Sindhi Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum*, London, 1905.

Blumhardt, J.F., *Catalogue of the Library of the India Office*, Vol. II, Part IV, Bengali, Oriya and Assamese Books, London 1905.

Blumhardt, J.F., *A Supplementary Catalogue of Bengali Books in the Library of the British Museum, acquired during the years 1886–1910*, London, 1910.

Blumhardt J.F. & J.V.S. Wilkinson, *Second Supplementary Catalogue of Bengali Books in the Library of the British Museum, acquired during the years 1911–1934*, London, 1939.

Bureau of Public Information: Guide to Prominent Newspapers and Periodicals in English and Indian Languages Published in British India and Indian States; Confidential Record, Bureau of Public Information, GOI, New Delhi, December 1937 to January 1940.

Catalogue of Sanscrit and Bengalee Publications Printed in Bengal – Compiled by J. Wenger, Officiating Bengali Translator to the Government of Bengal and submitted 30th January, 1865.

Indian Press Act, Act VII of 1908.

Linguistic Survey of India – Volume V (Indo-Aryan family) / Part I (Specimens of the Bengali and Assamese Languages), Compiled and Edited by G.A. Grierson, 1903 (based on the 1901 Census of India).

List of more important Libraries in India, 1905, 1907 and 1912.

List of Periodicals Received in the Imperial Library, Calcutta 1913.

List of Periodicals Received in the Imperial Library (Second Edition), Corrected up to January 01, 1933; Calcutta GOI Press 1933 (with a note by K.M. Asadullah, Librarian, Imperial Library).

List of Proscribed Publications sent to the India Office Library, London (for the relevant years).

List of Publications proscribed under Section 19 of the Sea Customs Act, 1878.

Long, James, *Descriptive Catalogues of Vernacular Books and Pamphlets*, Calcutta, 1867.

Quinquennial Report on Female Education for the Dacca Circle Comprising the Dacca, Rajshahi and Chittagong Divisions from 1917–18 to 1921–22.

Reports on Prices of Staple Food grain in Bengal, Land Revenue Dept.

Report on the Survey of Primary Education, Bengal, 1919.

Report of the Muhammadan Educational Endowments Committee, Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1888.

Report of Committee on Muhammadan Education, 1915.

Secret Report, Parliamentary Branch Sedition Committee, 1918.

Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department: Publications Issued and Registered in the Several Provinces of British India [for the relevant years].

Statement exhibiting the Moral and Material Progress and Condition of India [for the relevant years].

Statistical Tables and Note on Publications in the Presidency of Bengal [for the relevant years].

The Indian Press Ordinance, 1930.

Twenty Years' Statistics – Education; Record Dept.

3 Published Books in Bengali

Abdul Mannan, Sayyid (et al.), *Rokeyā Racanāvali* (Collected Works of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain), Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993.

Akhtar Shaheen & Bhowmik Mousumi (eds.), *Zenānā Mehfil: Bāṅgālī Musalmān Lekhikāder Nirbācita Racanā, 1904–1938*, Stree, 1998.

Alam, Tahmina, *Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain: Chinta-Chetanar Dhara O Samajkarma*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1992.

Ali, Mobasver, *Nazrul O Sāmaẏikpatra*, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 1994.

Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Mānas O Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, Pratibhas, Calcutta, 1999; first published in Bangladesh, 1964.

Anisuzzaman, *Muslim Bāṅglār Sāmaẏik Patra, 1831–1930*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1969.

Bandyopadhyay, Brajendranath, *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik Patra*, Volume I: 1818–1868 (published by Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1936) and Volume II: 1868–1900 (published by Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1952).

Bandyopadhyay, Brajendranath, *Sāmaẏik Patra Sampādane Baṅga Nārī*, Bisva-Bharati Granthanbibhag, Kolkata, 1950.

Bandyopadhyay, Brajendranath, *Sāhitya Sādhak Caritmālā* (6 volumes), Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, Calcutta

Bandyopadhyay, Chittaranjan, *Dui Śataker Bāṅglā Mudraṇ O Prakāśan*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1981.

Basu, Sankariprasad and Sudip Basu (ed.), *Ramananda Chattopadhyayer Prabāsī: Itihāser Dhārā*, Volumes 1 and 2, Pashchim Banga Bangla Academy, 2009.

Basu, Swapan & Muntasir Mamun, *Dui Śataker Bāṅglā Saṃvad Sāmaẏikpatra*, Pustak Bipani, Kolkata, 2005.

Basu, Somendranath, *Sāmaẏikpatre Rabīndra Prasaṅga*, Kolkata, 1976.

Bhadra, Gautam, *Nyāṛā Baṭtalāẏ Yāẏ Kabār?* Chatim, Kolkata, 2010.

Bhattacharya, Sutapa, *Strī-svādhīnatā theke Nārīmukti – Meyeder Cokhe*, Papyrus, 2005.

Catalogue of Periodicals in Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1818–1930; compiled: 1935.

Chakrabarty, Sambuddha, *Andare Antare: Uniś Śatake Bāṅgālī Bhadramahilā*, Stree, Calcutta, 1995.

Chattopadhyay, Gita, *Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik Patrikā Pañjī*, Volume I: 1900–1914; Volume II: 1915–1930; Bangiya Granthagar Parishad, Calcutta, 1990 and 1994.

Chattopadhyay, Partho, *Bāṅglā Saṃbādpatra o Bāṅgālīr Nabajāgaraṇ: 1818–1878*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1977

Chattopadhyay Ramananda Papers, Rare Book Section, National Library, Calcutta.

Chaudhuri, Nirad C., *Bāṅgālī Jibane Ramaṇī: Ābirbhāv*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta 1968.

Chaudhuri, Pramatha, *Prabandha Saṃgraha*, Visva-Bharati Granthanbibhag, Calcutta, 1993 (first published 1952).

Chaudhuri, Pramatha, *Bīrbaler Hālkhātā*, Visva-Bharati Press, 1409 / 2002 (First Published – 1324 / 1917).

Das, Ranjankumar (ed.), *Śanibārer Ciṭhi Prabandha-Saṃkalan*, Nath Brothers, Calcutta, 1997.

Dattagupta, Sarmistha, *Saogāt Patrikāẏ Bāṅgālī Nārīr Ātmaprakāś, 1927–47*, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 2007.

Devi, Santa, *Bhārat-Mukti-Sādhak Ramananda Chattopadhyay O Ardhaśatābdīr Bangla*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 2005.

Devi, Santa, *Pūrbasmṛti*, Thema, Calcutta, 2006.

Devi, Purnashashi, "Smṛtikathā" in Arunkumar Bandyopadhyay and Abhijit Sen (eds.), *Pūrṇaśaśī Devīr Nirbācita Racanā*, School of Women's Studies (Jadavpur University) and Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1998.

Dutta, Bijitkumar (ed.), *Serā Sabuj Patra Saṃgraha*, Mitra & Ghosh Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, 2000.

Dutta, Kalyani, *Pīñjare Basiẏā*, Stree, 1996.

Gangopadhyay, Upendranath, *Smṛtikathā*, Calcutta, 1951.

Ghosh, Baridbaran (ed.), *Kuntalīn Galpa-Śatak*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta 1989.

Ghosh, Baridbaran, *Bhāratbarṣa Prabandha Saṃkalan*, Nath Brothers, Calcutta, 1999.

Ghosh, Baridbaran, *Kallol Prabandha Saṃgraha* (Collected Essays from *Kallol*), Punashcha, 2006.

Ghosh, Benoy, *Sāmayikpatre Bāṅglār Samājcitra*, v. 1–7, Papyrus, Kolkata, 1978.

Ghosh, Sudakshina, *Swarnakumārī Devi*, Bharatiya Sahityakar Granthamala, New Delhi, 2001.

Hossain, Imran, *Bāṅgālī Muslim Buddhijībī: Cintā O Karma*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993.

Huda, Mohammed Nurul (ed.), *Nazruler Lāṅgal*, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 2001.

Islam, Mustafa Nurul (ed.), *Bāṅglādeś: Bāṅgālī: Ātmaparicaẏer Sandhāne*, Dhaka, 1990.

Islam, Mustafa Nurul, *Sāmaẏikpatre Jīban o Janamat, 1901–1930*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1977.

Kar, Sisir, *Niṣiddho Nazrul*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1983.

Majumdar, Mohitlal, *Ādhunik Bāṅglā Sāhitya* (first published: 1343 / 1936); eighth edition, General Printers and Publishers, Calcutta, 1998.

Maneer, Shahjahan, *Bāṅglā Sahitye Bāṅgālī Musalmāner Cintādhārā*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1993.

Nasiruddin, Mohammad, *Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug*, Published by Nurjahan Begum, Saogat Press, Dhaka, 1985.

Rahman, Habib, *Bāṅgāli Musalmān Samāj o Buddhir Mukti Āndolan*, Mitram, Calcutta, 2009.

Rahman, Mohammad Siddiqur, *Ātma-aṇveshāẏ Bāṅgālī Musalmān O Anyānyo Prabandha*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1995.

Ray, Annadashankar, *Rabīndranāth, Pramatha Chaudhuri O Sabuj Patra*, Pashchimbanga Bangla Academy, 1999.

Raychaudhuri, Subir & Abhijit Sen (eds.), *Jyotirmoẏī Devīr Racanā Saṃkalan*, Dey's Publishing, Calcutta, 1994.

Roy, Anuradha, "Dukhini Satī Carit: Uniś Śataker Nārīder Upanyas", Ababhash (*Uniś Śataker Bāṅglā Upanyas*), Year 6, # 3, October-December 2006.

Roy, Anuradha (ed.), *Svādhīnatā Saṃgrāmer Gān O Kabitā: Biṃśa Śatābdī*, Sahitya Akademy, New Delhi, 2011.

Roy, Satyendranath (ed.), *Rabīndranāther Cintā-Jagat: Sāhitya-Cintā*, Rabindra Racanā Saṃkalan, Visva-Bharati Press, 1989.

Samajpati, Sureshchandra, *Baṅkim-prasaṅga*, Calcutta, 1893.

Sarkar, Pabitra, *Bhāṣā Manan: Bāṅgālī Manīṣā*, Punashcha, Calcutta, 1992.

Sarkar, Susobhan, 'Rabindranath O Bāṅglār Nabajāgaraṇ' (Rabindranath and the Bengal Renaissance) in *Bāṅglār Renaissance*, Dipayan, 1397 / 1990.

Sen, Sukumar, *Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās*, volumes 1–5, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1999.

Sen, Sukumar, *Baṭtalār Chāpā O Chobi*, Ananda Publishers, 1984.

Sen, Sukumar, *Islāmi Bāṅglā Sāhitya*, Eastern Publishers, Calcutta, 2nd Edition, 1973.

Sengupta, Achintyakumar, *Kallol Yug*, M.C. Sarkar & Sons Pvt. Ltd., Calcutta, Seventh Edition, 1988.

Sengupta Subodhchandra (et al), *Śarat-Racanābal: Janma-śatabārśik Saṃskaran*, Volume 5, Sarat Samiti, Calcutta, 1980.

Sripantha [Nikhil Sarkar], *Jakhan Chāpākhānā Elo*, Pashchim Banga Bangla Academy, Calcutta, 1996.

Sripantha [Nikhil Sarkar], *Baṭtalā*, Ananda Publishers, Calcutta, 1997.

Tagore, Rabindranath, Unpublished Correspondences, Visva-Bharati Archives, Rabindra-Bhavan, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan; Relevant Files.

Tagore, Rabindranath, *Ciṭhipatra* (Correspondences of Rabindranath Tagore), Visva-Bharati Press, Relevant Volumes.

Tagore, Rabindranath, *Jībansmṛti*, First Published in *Prabāsī*, Bhādra 1318 – Śrāvaṇ 1319; first published as book, 1319 / 1912; Current Publication: Visva-Bharati Press, 1411 / 2004.

Wadud, Kazi Abdul, *Bāṅglār Jāgaraṇ*, Visva-Bharati Granthanbibhag, Calcutta, 1956.

Zaman, Layla, *Saogāt Patrikār Sāhityik Abadān O Sāmājik Bhūmikā*, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, 1989.

Zaman, Selina, Bahar (ed.), *Nazruler Dhūmketu*, Nazrul Institute, Dhaka, 2001.

4 Published Books and Journal Articles in English

Acharya, Poromesh, "Law and Politics of Primary Education in Bengal" in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1998.

Adams, Amanda, "The Uses of Distinction: Matthew Arnold and American Literary Realism" in *American Literary Realism*, vol. 37, no. 1 (Fall, 2004), pp. 37–49.

Ahmad, Rafiuddin, *The Bengal Muslims: 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1981.

Ahmad, Zaheda, "State and Education" in Sirajul Islam, *History of Bangladesh 1704–1971*, v. 3 (Society and Culture), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1997.

Akhtar, Shaheen, *Women in Concert: An Anthology of Bengali Women's Writings, 1904-1938*, Stree, Kolkata, 2008.

Ali, Azra Asghar, *The Emergence of Feminism among Indian Muslim Women, 1920–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

Amin Shahid, *Event, Memory Metaphor: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992*; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

Amin, Sonia Nishat, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal, 1876–1939*; Brill Publishers, Leiden, 1996.

Aquil, Raziuddin, *In the Name of Allah: Understanding Islam and Indian History*, Penguin Viking, New Delhi, 2009.

Badia, Janet and Phegley, Jennifer, *Reading Women: Literary Figures and Cultural Icons from the Victorian Age to the Present*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2005.

Banerjee, Himani, "Fashioning a Self: Educational Proposals for and by Women in Popular Magazines in Colonial Bengal", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct 26, 1991.

Banerjee, Sumanta, *The Parlor and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1989.

Banerjee, Sumanta, "The Bogey of the Bawdy: Changing Concept of "Obscenity" in Nineteenth Century Bengali Culture", EPW, July 18, 1987.

Barrier, Gerald N., *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907–1947*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 1974.

Basu, Aparna, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898–1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1970.

Basu, Subho, *Does Class Matter? Colonial Capital and Workers' Resistance in Bengal, 1890–1937*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004.

Baumer, Rachel Van M. (ed.), *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*, Asian Studies at Hawaii, no. 12, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1975.

Bayly, C. A., "The Indian Ecumene: An Indigenous Public Sphere" in Finkelstein & McCleery (eds.), *Book History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2003.

Bayly, C. A., *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870*, Cambridge University Press, 1997 (Reprint 2007).

Beetham, Margaret, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800–1914*, Routledge, London, 1996.

Bhabha, Homi K, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994.

Bhattacharya, Abhijit, *A Guide to the Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Collection*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1998.

Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915–1941*, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1997.

Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi (ed.), *The Contested Terrain: Perspectives on Education in India*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1998.

Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi, *Talking Back: The Idea of Civilization in the Indian Nationalist Discourse*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2011.

Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Interpretation*, Viking/Penguin, New Delhi, 2011.

Bhattacharya, Sabyasachi, *Bengal: 1920–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

Bhattacharya, Tithi, *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal* (1848–85), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2005.

Blackburn, Stuart & Vasudha Dalmia (eds.), *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2008.

Borthwick, Meredith, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal, 1849–1905*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

Bose, Neilesh, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture and Islam in Colonial Bengal,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

Bose, Sugata, *Peasant Labor and Colonial Capital: Rural Bengal since 1770*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Bose, Sugata & Ayesha Jalal, *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1984.

Brake, Laurel & Julie F. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers*, Palgrave Macmillan, United Kingdom, 2005.

Breckenridge, Carol A. and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1993.

Broomfield, J.H., *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*, University of California Press, California, California, 1968.

Burton, Antoinette M., *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 1994.

Burton, Antoinette M., *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2003.

Calhoun, Craig, *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992.

Calhoun, Craig, "The Public Sphere in the Field of Power" *Social Science History*, Vol. 34, no. 3, In Honor of Charles Tilly (Fall 2010), pp. 301–335.

Certeau, Michel de, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2000.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, "Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India" in *Subaltern Studies*, Volume VIII, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and His Empire of Truth*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015.

Chakrabarty, Smarajit, *The Bengali Press: 1818–1868: A Study in the Growth of Public Opinion*, Calcutta, 1976.

Chakrabarty, Usha, *Condition of Bengali Women around the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1963.

Chatterjee, Partha, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.

Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* Zed Books, 1986.

Chatterjee, Partha (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1995.

Chatterji, Joya, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–1947*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1995.

Chartier, Roger, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, Stanford University Press, California, 1994.

Chartier, Roger, *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1987.

Chaudhuri, Nupur, "Nationalism and Feminism in the Writings of Santa Devi and Sita Devi" in Bishnupriya Ghosh and Brinda Bose (eds.), *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, Francis and Taylor, 1997, pp. 31–44.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project*, Seagull, 2002.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka, *Freedom and Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2012.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka, *The Literary Thing*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2014.

Chaudhuri, Sukanta, *Calcutta: The Living City*, two volumes, Oxford University Press, 1990.

Chowdhury, Indira, *The Frail Hero and Virile History: Gender and the Politics of Culture in Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cohn, Bernard, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996.

Cohn, Bernard, *An Anthropologist amongst the Historians and Other Essays*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987.

Curran, Stuart, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 1993.

Dalmiya, Vasudha, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

Darnton, Robert, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, W.W. Norton & Co. 1996.

Darnton, Robert, "What is the History of Books?" in David Finkelstein & Alistair McCleery (eds.), The *Book History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2002.

Darnton, Robert, "Toward a History of Reading", *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976–), Vol. 13, no. 4 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 86–102. Accessed: 19–12–2017 10:11 UTC.

Datta Gupta, Sharmistha, *Identities and Histories: Women's Writing and Politics in Bengal*, Stree, Kolkata, 2010.

Davin, Anna, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal* 1978, Volume 5, # 1, pp. 9–66.

Davis, Natalie Zemon, "Printing and People" in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France,* Polity Press, 1987.

De, Amalendu, *Roots of Separatism in Nineteenth Centrury Bengal*, Calcutta, 1972.

De, Sushil Kumar, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Firma, KLM, Calcutta, 1962.

Deshpande, Prachi, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2007.

Devji, Faisal Fateh Ali, "Gender and the Politics of Space: The Movement for Women's Reform, 1857–1900" in Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar, *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2008.

Dirks, Nicholas B., *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001.

Eaton, Richard, The *Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, University of California Press, California, 1993.

Eagleton, Terry, *The Function of Criticism*, Verso Classics, 1984.

Eisenstein, Elizabeth, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.

Engels, Dagmar, *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal, 1890–1939*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

Finkelstein, David & Alistair McCleery (eds.), *The Book History Reader*, Routledge, London, 2002.

Forbes, Geraldine, *Women in Modern India*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

Ginzburg, Carlo, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 1992 (reprint).

Ghosh, Anindita, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2006.

Ghosh, Benoy, 'A Critique to Bengal Renaissance', *Frontier*, 4 (September 1971).

Ghosh, Bishnupriya and Brinda Bose (eds.), *Interventions: Feminist Dialogues on Third World Women's Literature and Film*, Francis and Taylor, 1997.

Ghosh, Semanti, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905–1947*; Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2017.

Goldman, Merle and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (eds.), *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 2002.

Goswami, Manu, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2004.

Guha, Ranajit, *History at the Limit of World History*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.

Guha, Ranajit, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1997.

Guha, Ranajit, 'A Colonial City and Its Time(s)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, v. 45 (2008), pp. 341–344.

Guha Thakurta, Tapati, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, 1850–1920*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Guha Thakurta, Tapati, *Abanindranath, Known and Unknown: The Artist Versus the Art of His Times*, Archive Series, v. 1, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 2009.

Gupta Abhijit and Swapan Chakravorti, *Print Areas: Book History in India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2004.

Gupta Abhijit and Swapan Chakravorti, *Founts of Knowledge: Book History in India*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2015.

Gupta, Charu, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2005.

Gupta, Swarupa, *Notions of Nationhood in Bengal: Perspectives on Samaj, c. 1867–1905*, Brill, Leiden, Boston, 2009.

Habermas, Jurgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, Boston, 1989.

Hatcher, Brian A., *Idioms of Improvement: Vidyasagar and the Cultural Encounter in Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1996.

Hossain, Anowar, *Muslim Women's Struggle for Freedom in Colonial Bengal, 1873–1940*, Progressive Publishers, Calcutta 2003.

Inden, Ronald*, Imagining India*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, United Kingdom, 1990.

Islam, Sirajul, *History of Bangladesh 1704–1971*, v. 3 (Society and Culture), Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1997.

Jackson, Ian, "Historiographical Review: Approaches to the History of Readers and Reading in Eighteenth-Century Britain", *The Historical Journal*, v. 47, no. 4, Cambridge University Press, December 2004, pp. 1041–1054.

Jalal, Ayesha, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850*, Routledge, London, 2000.

Jones, Kenneth W. (ed.), *Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India*, The New Cambridge History of India, vol. III.1, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Jordan, John O. and Robert Patten (eds.), *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth Century British Publishing and Reading Practices*, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Joshi, P.C. (ed.), *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, Vikas, 1975.

Joshi, Priya, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel In India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2002.

Jusdanis, Gregory, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1991.

Kaviraj, Sudipta, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

Kaviraj, Sudipta, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2010

Kaviraj, Sudipta, *The Invention of Private Life: Literature and Ideas*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2014.

Kaviraj, Sudipta and Sunil Khilnani (eds.), *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

Kejariwal, O.P., *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past: 1784–1838*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1988.

Kesavan, B.S. and V.Y. Kulkarni, *National Bibliography of Indian Literature*, volume 1 (Bengal).

Keymer, Tom, 'Reading Time in Serial Fiction before Dickens', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, v. 30 (2000), pp. 34–45.

Kopf, David, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, University of California Press, California, 1969.

Korshin, Paul J. (ed.), *The Widening Circle: Essays on the Circulation of Literature in 18th-Century Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Pennsylvania, 1976.

Kumar, Krishna, *The Political Agenda of Education: A Study of Colonialist and Nationalist Ideas*, Sage, 1991.

Kumar, Radha, *The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800–1900*, Zubaan, 2004 (first published, 1993).

McDonald, Peter D., *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*, 1880–1914, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

McGuire, John, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadralok in Calcutta, 1857–1885*, Australian National University, 1983.

McPherson, Kenneth, *The Muslim Microcosm: 1918–1935*, Calcutta, 1974.

Metcalf, Barbara, *Perfecting Women: Maulana Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi's Bihishti Zewar*, University of California Press, California, 1992.

Metcalf, Barbara, "*Islamic Revival in India: Deoband, 1860–1900*", in *India's Muslims: An Omnibus*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Minault, Gail, "Urdu Women's Magazines in the Early Twentieth Century", *Manushi*, 48 (Sept- Oct, 1988).

Minault, Gail, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1982.

Mir, Farina, *The Social Space of Language: Vernacular Culture in British Colonial Punjab*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2010.

Mishra, B.B., *The Indian Middle Classes: Their Growth in Modern Times*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1961.

Mitra, Priti Kumar, *The Dissent of Nazrul Islam: Poetry and History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

Mitra, Samarpita, "Arts: Women Journalists and Women's Press: India", Entry in Special Issue of online *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, 2017.

Mitra, Samarpita, "Bāṅglā Literary Journalism at Nationalism's 'Moment of Departure': Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Baṅgadarśan*" in Swapan Chakravorti and Abhijit Gupta (eds.), *Founts of Knowledge* (Book History in India, vol. 3), Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2015.

Mitra, Samarpita, "At the Altar of *Baṅgalakṣmī*: Literary Community (*sāhitya samāj*) and Literary Practice (*sāhitya sebā*) in Swadeshi Bengal", Occasional Paper 183, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, March 2014.

Mitra, Samarpita, "Periodical Readership in Early Twentieth Century Bengal: Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī*" *Modern Asian Studies*, v. 47, part 1, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, January 2013.

Mukherjee, Kamalika, *Parallel Lives: Charting the History of Popular Prints of the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies*, Archive Series 03, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 2011.

Mukherjee, Meenakshi, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985.

Mukherjee, Rudrangshu, *The Penguin Gandhi Reader*, Penguin Books, 1993.

Mukhopadhyay, Asoknath, *Early Bengali Serials: 1818–1950: A Shared Database of Library Holdings Worldwide*, K.P. Bagchi, Calcutta, 2004.

Murshed, Ghulam, *The Reluctant Debutante: Response of Bengali Women to Modernization, 1849–1905*, Rajshahi Sahitya Samsad, Rajshahi, Bangladesh, 1983.

Murshid, Tazeen M., *The Sacred and the Secular: Bengal Muslim Discourses, 1871–1977*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995.

Nandy, Ashis, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995.

Nandy, Ashis, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983.

Naregal, Veena, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India Under Colonialism*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2001.

O' Hanlon, Rosalind, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1985.

Orsini, Francesca, "Domesticity and Beyond: Hindi Women's Journals in the Early Twentieth Century" in *South Asia Research*, 19, no. 2, 1999.

Orsini, Francesca, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920–1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002.

Orsini, Francesca (ed.), *Love in Colonial South Asia: A Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Orsini, Francesca, *Before the Divide: Hindi and Urdu Literary Culture*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2010.

Owen, Nicholas, ""Facts Are Sacred": The *Manchester Guardian* and Colonial Violence, 1930–1932", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (September 2012), pp. 643–678.

Page, David, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control, 1920–1932*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

Pandey, Gyanendra, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1990.

Panikkar, K.N., *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007.

Phegley, Jennifer, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation*, Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio, 2004.

Pollock, Sheldon (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, University of California Press, California, 2003.

Price, K. & Smith, S., *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, 1995.

Priolkar, A.K., *Printing Press in India: Its Beginnings and Early Development*, Marathi Samshodhana Mandala, 1958.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891–1970*, University of California Press, California, 1997.

Ratte, Lou, *The Uncolonised Heart*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1995.

Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Exploring Emotional History: Gender, Mentality and Literature in the Indian Awakening*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001.

Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Mind, Body, and Society: Life and Mentality in Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995.

Ray, Rajat Kanta, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1984.

Ray, Utsa, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India: A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middleclass*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Raychaudhuri, Tapan, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities: Essays on India's Colonial and Post-colonial Experiences*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

Raychaudhuri, Tapan, *Europe Reconsidered*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2002 (reprint).

Rendall, Jane, "The Condition of Women, Women's Writings and the Empire in Nineteenth Century Britain" in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (ed.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, Cambridge, 2006.

Robinson, Francis, "Strategies of Authority in Muslim South Asia in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 47, 1, January 2013, p. 1–21.

Robinson, Francis, *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2003.

Roy, Asim, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1983.

Roy, Tapti, *Print and Publishing in Colonial Bengal: The Journey of Bidyasundar*, Routledge, London, 2019.

Roy, Tapti, "Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature" in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Samya, Calcutta, 1996.

Sangari, Kumkum & Sudesh Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1989.

Sarkar, Mohua, *Visible Histories, Disappearing Women: Producing Muslim Womanhood in Late Colonial Bengal*, Duke University Press, 2008.

Sarkar, Sumit & Tanika Sarkar, *Women and Social Reform in Modern India: A Reader*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2008.

Sarkar, Sumit & Tanika Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997.

Sarkar, Sumit & Tanika Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, People's Publishing House, 1973.

Sarkar, Susobhan, *Notes on the Bengal Renaissance*, Papyrus, Calcutta, 1985 (reprint).

Sarkar, Tanika, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2001.

Sarkar, Tanika, "Rhetoric against Age of Consent: Resisting Colonial Reason and Death of a Child Wife", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 1993.

Sartori, Andrew, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 2008.

Sartori, Andrew, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History*, University of California Press, Oakland, California, 2014.

Sato, Barbara, *The New Japanese Woman*: *Modernity, Media and Women in Interwar Japan*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2003.

Scholes, Robert and Clifford Wulfman, *Modernism in the Magazines: An Introduction*, Yale University Press, 2010.

Schorske, Carl, *Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture*, Vintage Books, New York, 1980.

Seely, Clinton B., *The Slaying of Meghanada: A Ramayana from Colonial Bengal*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Seely, Clinton B., *A Poet Apart: A Literary Biography of the Bengali Poet Jibanananda Das, 1899–1954*, The University of Delaware Press, Newark, Delaware, 1990.

Sen, Samita, "Motherhood and Mothercraft: Gender and Nationalism in Bengal" in *Gender and History*, v. 5, # 2, Summer 1993, pp. 231–243.

Sen, S.P. (ed.), *Social and Religious Reform Movements*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1978.

Sen, Krishna, Lessons in Self-Fashioning: 'Bamabodhini Patrika' and the Education of Women in Colonial Bengal", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 37, no. 2, The Nineteenth-Century Press in India (Summer, 2004), The Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals, pp. 176–191. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20084005> Accessed: 11-12-2017 05:56 UTC.

Shattock, Joanne & Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, Leicester University Press and University of Toronto Press, 1982.

Shaw Graham & Salim Quraishi, *The Bibliography of South Asian Periodicals: A Union-list of Periodicals in South Asian Languages*, South Asia Library Group, The Harvester Press, Sussex, 1982.

Shaw, Graham & Mary Lloyd (eds.), *Publications Proscribed by the Government of India: A Catalogue of the Collections in the India Office Library and Records and the Department of Oriental Manuscripts and Printed Books, British Library Reference Division*, The British Library, 1985.

Shukla, Sonal, "Cultivating Minds: Nineteenth Century Gujrati Women's Journals" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct 26, 1991.

Silvestri, Michael, "'The Sinn Fein of India': Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal", *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 2000), pp. 454–486.

Singh, Anita Inder, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936–1947*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987.

Sinha, Mrinalini, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Manchester University Press, United Kingdom, 1995.

Sinha, Pradip, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Firma, KLM, Calcutta, 1978.

Smith, Anthony D., *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nation and Nationalism*, Routledge, 1998.

Sreenivas, Mytheli, "Emotion, Identity and the Female Subject: Tamil Women's Magazines in Colonial India, 1890–1940" in *Journal of Women's History*, 14, no. 4 (2003).

Stark, Ulrike, *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial India*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2008, Second Edition 2012.

Tripathi, Amales, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910*, Orient Longman, 1967.

Trivedi, Lisa, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India*, Indiana University Press, Indiana, 2007.

Vann, J. Don & Rosemary T. Van Arsdel (eds.), *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire: An Exploration*, University of Toronto Press, 1996.

Venkatachalapathy, A.R., *The Province of the Book: Scholars, Scribes and Scribblers in Colonial Tamilnadu*, Permanent Black, Ranikhet, 2012.

Viswanathan, Gauri, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, Faber & Faber, London, 1989.

Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 1977.

Williams, Raymond, *Keywords*, Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 1976.

Zutshi, Chitralekha, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity and the Making of Kashmir*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004.

Index

A Doll's House 310n180
A.F.M. Abdul Haq 256
Abanindranath Tagore/Abanindranath 85, 90–95, 305n155
  short story 80n31
Abanindranath's
  early paintings 91
  writings 92n57
abarodh (seclusion) 317–318, 320, 325
Abarodh-bāsinī, serial narrative by Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain 321n233
abarodh-prathā (practice of seclusion) 319, 322
abasar (leisure) 122–123
  invention of 123
abasar samaẏ 123
Abbasid (period) 241
Abbasid Caliphate 259n294, 260
Abdali Shah 246
Abdul Halim Gaznavi of Delduar 201
Abdul Karim/Abdul Karim Sahityabisharad 192, 194n6, 207n53, 221
Abdul Mannan 227n156
Abdul Qadir 230, 253n272, 255n278, 256, 257n284
Abdul Wadud, Kazi 256
Abdullah (novel) 229
Abhijān 256n281
Abinashchandra Das 76n9
Abodhbandhu 43
  Biharilal Chakrabarty's literary monthly 42
Abul Fazl 237, 256
Abul Hossain 230n171, 256, 258n288
Abul Kamal Shamsuddin 229, 247
abuse of Press Acts 83
Acalāẏatan, lyrical drama 78
Achintyakumar Sengupta 1n2, 64n163, 76n14, 175, 182n226, 184, 188, 354, 355n65
Achintyakumar Sengupta's *Kallol Yug* 204
Act for the Regulation of Printing-presses and Newspapers 29n2
Act passed by Legislative Council of India (1856) 133
Act xxv of 1867 29, 31, 299n118, 300n125
  institution of 33
adhunik sāhitya 174, 178, 180, 187–189
adhunikatā or modernity 177, 181
Adi Brahmo Samaj 44, 77n16
Ādiras/ādirasā (primary *rasa* or aesthetics) 141, 172, 248
adulthood (*baẏaḥprāpta*) 47, 139
advertisement/s 205
  columns of periodicals 168
  from petty trading concerns 97n77
  in daily newspapers 100
  of books 97n77
  of toiletries 279
  pages 72
  Prabāsī received 97
  rates 99
  targeted specific reader groups 97n77
advice
  essays 276, 279n39, 290
  manuals 277, 282
Aesop's Fables 42, 109
aesthetic 118, 128, 139, 181, 267
  and literary categories 158
  and moral code 162
  bounds of literature 188
  category 174
  concepts 148
  different 126
  dispositions 15
  disputes 130
  experiments 16
  expressions 19
  forms 129, 248
  idea 46
  ideals 165
  imaginations 132
  index 132
  innovations 129
  license 169
  maturity 280n42
  necessity of psychoanalysis (*manabikalan*) 178
  needs 267

aesthetic (*cont.*)
perfection 9
person 106
persuasions 23, 84
practices, repertoires of 7
preferences 13
altered approach to 14
principles 118, 129
qualities, acquisition and cultivation of 15
reader 105, 115
refined 23
resolutions 153
sense of 16
sensibility/ies 13, 51, 73, 93, 114, 138
lack of 24
of Bengali Cultural life 185
shift 93
space shared by women 300
spirit (*sāhityik hṛday*) 67
taste/s 65, 93, 150, 362
threat 115
value of literature 10
values 149
world 46, 181
created 96
aesthetically uniform readership 118
aestheticization 108
"aestheticized representation" of modern life 140
aesthetics 127, 148n81
of middle class Bengali texts 137
principles of 126
Afghan 232
and Mughal imperia 234
and Mughal regime 233, 235
King Ahmad Shah Abdali 244
African cultural renaissance movements 330
Āgamanī 357n78
Age of Consent Bill 21, 170
(The) Age of Consent for girl wives 164n147
Age of consent for girls 169
Age of Consent (1891) of minor wives 124
Agnibīnā 352, 353n59
agrarian
political discourse 264
problems of peasant impoverishment 263
violence 98n81
Agricultural journals 56n132
Āguner Fulkī 77n17
"Ahel Tauhid" 260
ahiṃsā 27, 337
ahistoricism (*anaitihāsikatā*) 25
Āhmadī 56n133
Ahmed Shah Bangash 251
Aitihasik Citra (journal) 124n179, 142
Ajanta cave frescoes 90
Ajijannehar 197
Ajitkumar Chakrabarty 154n109, 173
Akbar 237
Akbar-e-Islāmīya 197
Akbaruddin 240–241
Akshaychandra Sarkar/Akshaychandra 49, 59, 105–106
Akshaykumar Datta Gupta 30n4, 31n9, 35–36, 299n118, 300n125
Akshaykumar Dutta 44, 365
Akshaykumar Maitreya 60, 77, 237
Akshaykumar Sarkar 67n172, 147n76
"Al Adl" 260
Al Farabi 260
Al Kindi 260
Ālāler Gharer Dulāl 54
Ālālī 54
alaṃkaraśastra 172
Alaoal 215
Alauddin 237
"alem samāj" 262, 262n310
Al-Eslam 192, 201, 206, 209n63, 210, 219n114, 220, 222n130, 226n146, 227n156, 228, 240n208, 253, 317
Alexander Dow 249–250
Alexander Dumas 38
Alipore Conspiracy Case 351n48
All India Congress Committee 333
All India Muslim League 194, 333
All India Women's Conference (AIWC) 287n80, 288
All the Year Round 49, 49n99
Allahabad 74–75, 116
Ālocanā (discussion) section of *Prabāsī* 80
alpa śikṣita 138n41
alternative
"aestheticized politics" 349
audiences 73, 126

forms of social service 297
literary sphere 25
piety 263
possibilities about society and politics 125
readership, narrative of an 192
formation of 24
reading 122n170
habits 42
socio-cultural worlds 323
solidarities 196
to Western Education 57
Amār Deś (song) 271
Āmār Jīban 45, 60n146, 122
Amaravati temple of the Gupta period 75
Amarendranath Roy 154n108
amateur
artists 95
author's apprehensions 184
authors 64
first forum for publication for 13
women writers 273
writers 20, 60
American
business 97
businessmen 99
Magazines 85n44
Amritalal Basu 41, 46, 56n134
Amritalal Shil 78n24
Amṛta Bājār Patrikā 26
anaislāmikatā (un-Islamicism/ahistoricity) 247, 249, 253
anaitihāsik (un-historical) 253
Analytical Psychology 189n255
Anāmikā (The nameless/undefined woman) 186
Ānandamaṭh 49, 59n140, 223, 240, 286, 357
'Ānandamaẏīr Āgamane' 357–358
Anandamohan Bose 293
Anaṅga-āśram 169, 172
anarchic
form of popular culture 143
social sphere 130
anarchical land 235
anarchist fiction 330
anarchy 24, 115, 128, 146n70, 187
ancient
India, architectural splendors of 76
Indian polity, citizen of 167
law giver, Manu 167
Sanskrit literature, spirit of 172
andarmahal 283
Anglo-Indian recipes 278n38
Āṅgur 201
Anjuman Ulema-e Bangla 192, 204n31, 228
Annadāmaṅgal 40, 42
Annapūrnār Mandir 176n203
Ānnesā (journal) 201
Annual
average retail prices 99n88
maintenance budgets for libraries 117n150
report/s 31, 35–36
of the *Bengal Library Catalogue* 200
Reviews 30–31, 33, 36
subscription (of *Prabāsī*) 99
subscription dues, advance payments of 100
antaḥpur 266–268, 271, 302
Antaḥpur (journal) 42, 51, 69, 157, 278n38, 291, 295, 305n156, 317
editorial office of 67
anti-fiction rhetoric 208, 227
anti-Islam (*Islām birodhī*) 206
anti-Islamic activities 206
Anti-modernists 188
anti-Muslim rhetoric 239
"antinuptial" love 247–248
anti-Partition agitations 332, 361
anti-Simon agitation 306n160
anti-Tagore
alliance of intellectuals 154n106
critic 155
anti-Tagorean pronunciations 154n106
Antoine Rous marquis de La Mazzeliére's 108n116
Antonio Gramsci 12n36
Anupama Devi 207
Anurupa Devi 108, 176, 298–299
Anusandhān (journal) 286
Appellate High Court at Calcutta 34
Arabian and Persian Tales, Bengali renderings of 40
Arabian Nights 42
Arabic 32, 216, 218–219, 221, 225–226, 232, 258, 360

and Persian scripts 215
characters, scripting Bengali in 222
Vocabulary 222
"Arabic and Bengali Books" 196
Ārabya Upanyās (*Arabian Nights*) 215, 248
Araṇyabās, Abinashchandra Das's 77n17
Archaeological Survey of India 231
Aristotle 260n296
Arjun 169n173, 171–172, 237
Arjun-Citrangada 170
Arnold's
line of appreciation 151
sense of urbanity 173
Arnoldian
form of critique 229
quest for perfection 9
Arnoldian's lines 151
art 72, 162
albums 93–94
authenticity of certain types of 93
-critic 72, 92
liberty of 161
-publics 94
work 73
"art for art's sake" 157, 162
Arthur Rakham 94
Arya Nari Samaj (1879) 293
Āryadarśan (journal) 49n94, 117
Asadunnessa 324
Asaṯ-sāhitya (dishonest/indecent literature) 156
Ashwini Kumar Dutta 324n246
Asia 85n44
Asiatic Society 231
aśikṣita 50–51, 138
aślīl or indecent 131,150, 153, 159, 171, 173, 189, 300
or ādirasātmak 170
sāhitya 174
works, task of purging 136
Aślīlatā (or obscenity) 24, 127–130, 132, 137, 149, 168–169, 173, 186, 190, 247
in Bengali periodicals, acrimonious debates over 130
regulative aesthetic 24
Aślīlatā Nibāranī Samiti (Society for the Eradication of the Obscenity) 136–137
Asutosh Mukherjee 116n149
Atia Hossain 274
ati-ādhunik sāhitya/*ati-ādhunik* literature 174, 176, 186, 188
Atmiya Sabhā 34n27
attributes of
gaṇadharma 63
the informed critic 151
Atulprasad Sen 80n29
Atulprasad Sen's *Uttarā* 63n160, 80
Aurangzeb 235, 237, 252
Aurobindo Ghose 159n130, 351n48, 353, 358
authentic
history 251, 253
'Islamic past' 25
scriptural tradition 270
authenticating literary production 149
authoritativeness of *gṛhadharma* 310
autobiography/ies 140, 235
autonomous (*svatantra*)
cultural space 158
literary agenda for Bengali Muslims 191
literary sphere 24
nation 330
national space 96
niche for the nation 93
space 178
autonomy
for women 294
in the literary field 266
lack of 293
of aesthetics 10
of poetry 10
of thought (*svādhīn cintā*) 259
avant-garde
journals 181, 205
literary practices 179n203
literature in Bengal 179
periodicals 179
Awadh Nawab 246, 250
Azizur Rahman 352n55
Azra Asghar Ali 312n195

Babu Rampran Gupta 236
Babur 245
Bagbazar Reading Library 116
Baghdad 261
Baidya Hitaiṣiṇī (journal) 20n46

Baikunthanath Das, co-editor *Pradip* 69
Baiṣṇab 20n46, 56n133
Baiṣṇab Sandarbha 20n46
Bāiṣṇab Sebikā 56n133
Baiśya Patrikā 20n46
'Bajramukuṭ o Padmābatī' (Abanindranath's painting) 91
Bālprabhākar (journal in Hindi) 95
Bāmābodhinī Patrikā (journal) 34, 44, 103, 277
Bāmābodhinī Sabhā 34n27, 44
Bamandas Basu 75, 79n28
Bamapada Bandyopadhyay 90
Bande Mātaram 26, 59n140, 240, 271
Bandir Bandanā 186
Banga Mahila Samaj (1879) 293
Baṅgabāni (journal) 36, 85, 147, 286, 357n76
Baṅgabhāṣā 191
Baṅgadarśan (*Baṅgadarśan: Māsikpatra o Samālocanā*) (journal) 7, 15n41, 22, 28–29, 35, 38, 42–47, 49–55, 59–61, 63, 69, 75, 120–124, 137–140, 149, 151, 208, 363
Baṅgadarśan Kāryālaẏ 47n90
Baṅgadarśan (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) 72, 142n62, 143, 144n66, 146n70, 363, 365
Baṅgadarśan's
  agenda 22, 51, 53
  purpose 46n84
Baṅgādhipaparājaẏ 143
Baṅgalakṣmī 72, 298n113, 306, 310
  reformist journal 302
Bāṅgālīr Anna-Samasyā (essay) 78
Baṅganūr (journal) 317, 360
Baṅgasāhitya 28–29, 47, 139, 195
Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ 219
Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya *Patrikā* (journal) 201, 229, 350
Baṅgīẏa Musalmān Sāhitya Samiti 191
Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ 43, 68
Baṅgīẏa Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ Library 116
Bāṅglā bhāṣā/"Bāṅglā Bhāṣā" 28, 54, 208, 223
Bāṅglā sāhitya 45
Bāṅglā Sāhitye Saogāt Yug 204
Bāṅglā Sāmaẏik-patra/*Bāṅglā Sāmaẏikpatra* (Bangali Periodicals) 17, 43n72
Bāṅglā Saṃbādpatra 59n140
Bāṅglār Kathā 206
Bankim's
  aesthetic world 142
  historical fiction 239
  historical novels 252
  nationalist agenda 60
  novels 47, 53n118
  own press 47n90
  popular novels 49
Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay/Bankimchandra/Bankim 5n17, 22, 28, 43–44, 46–47, 49, 50–52, 54–55, 57, 60, 63, 123, 137–138, 141, 151, 208, 238–241, 286, 363
bār-banitār prem 156, 158
Barin Ghosh/Barindra Kumar Ghosh 159n130, 351, 351n48, 352n56
Barkatullah 259, 261
bāro bhůiẏā 239
Basantakumar Chattopadhyay 166
Basanti Devi 267
basic principles of *purdah* 276
bāstab (reality) 177
bāstabatā 133, 177–178
bastutantrahīn (non-realist) 179
Basumatī 26, 85, 103–104
  publicist 166
Basumatī Sahitya Mandir 103n104, 104
Baṭtalā 40–42, 46, 51, 53n118, 56–57, 93, 105, 130–131, 135, 138, 146, 167, 283, 285
  fiction 315
  market 22, 40n56, 53
  print/s 135, 215
  productions 134
  world of 365
Baṭtalā puthi 215
Baudelaire 177
Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain 320, 324, 355
Begum Sofia Khatun 315
(The) Bengal Catalogues 35, 83n37
Bengal Legislative Council 337
Bengal Library 31, 35, 47, 61n152, 69, 140
Bengal Library Catalogues 29, 32–33, 34n29, 46n86, 47n90–92, 49n94, 62n158, 103n103, 150, 196, 200, 216
Bengal Library Catalogues of Books and Periodicals 31n9, 35n31–32, 36n38, 37n41, 47, 74, 90, 99n87, 111

Bengal Provincial Congress 333
Bengal Renaissance 18
Bengal's
  early colonial encounters 18
  literary history 188
  Muslim/s 25, 192
  Muslim community 222
  Muslim Society 207
Bengali
  aesthetic values 189
  criticism 151
  cultural consciousness 189
  cultural life 185
  education 73
  Hindu intelligentsia 214
  intellectuals 77
  intelligentsia 3, 7, 118
    English educated 50
  literary public sphere 9
  literary sphere 4, 6, 9, 19, 21, 24, 27, 63,126, 128–130, 186, 190–191, 321, 325, 362
    formative stages of 29
  literature (*Baṅgasāhity*a) 22, 45, 57, 59, 76–77, 83, 112, 139, 177
  *madhyabitt*a 122
  miscellanies 76
  monthly 99
  nation 364
  regionalism 258
  revolutionary spirit 352
Bengali middle-class/es 95, 124, 128, 135, 174, 366
  domesticity 310
  homes 21, 73, 104, 273
  Periodical/s 34, 80, 94, 125, 133, 210
  public sphere 7–8, 28, 147, 167
  readership 73, 182, 209
  social life 15
  society 50, 128, 158, 183
  Translator 32, 136
  writers 47, 67
Bengali Muslim/s 191, 194, 196, 207, 217–219, 224, 233, 253, 314, 360
  Artist 200
  Community 96
  intellectuals 212, 360
  Intelligentsia 209, 212, 219, 257
    reformist 315
  leadership 335
  literary periodicals 19, 197, 265, 317
  literary sphere 24–25,191, 201, 217, 227–228, 254, 257, 265
  *madhyabitt*a , new 364
  middle classes 217, 311, 335
  monthlies 96
  periodicals 18, 20, 126, 213–214, 192, 197, 201, 207, 223–224, 229, 231, 314
  publicists 25, 214, 218, 220, 233, 239, 265
  society 197
  women 26, 315, 319
    readership 315
  writers 209
'Bengalicization', process of 312
Betāl Pañcaviṃśati 42
Betāler Baiṭhak 80, 82
Bhabanicharan Laha 91
bhadralok 14, 41–42, 64, 98, 103, 105, 111, 124, 141n56, 165, 185, 266
  class 287, 364
  groups 365
  political agenda, critique of 366
  society 142
  status 363
Bhadramahila 122n169
  literate middle-class 301
  normative category of 312
Bhadramahila's social role 272n25
Bhāgavat 137
Bhāgyacakra 77n17
Bhāndār (journal) 210
'Bhāṅgār Gān' 352
Bhāratbarṣa (journal) 9, 23, 27, 49, 65, 70, 85, 91, 95, 103–104, 108, 126–127, 142, 147, 166, 168, 182, 196, 204, 211, 330, 335, 340–341
Bharatchandra 170, 171n183
Bhāratī (journal) 22, 35, 55, 60–63, 69, 72, 76, 90, 96,103–104, 117, 159, 210, 286, 305
Bhāratī o Bālak (journal) 61n152
'*Bhāratmātā*' (Abanindranath's painting) 92
Bhāratmātā 241
Bhatpara grammarians 54
Bhudev Mukhopadhyay 49, 286, 299
Bibidhārtha Saṃgraha (journal) 42–43, 105
Bicitrā (journal) 62, 155n112, 172n190

bidhabār prem 155, 158
Bidrohī Kabi or Rebel Poet 354
'Bidrohīr Kaifiẏaṯ' (A Vindication of the Rebel) 356n71
Bidyādarśan (journal) 47n91
Biharilal Chakrabarty, poet 43
Bihishti Zewar (Requisites of Islam) 314
Bijaẏa-Basanta 47n89, 139
Bijñān (journal) 20n46
Bijñān Darpaṇ (journal) 20n46
Bijñān Rahasya (journal) 34
Bijoychandra Majumdar 75, 77, 207
Bikramāditya Upākhyān 215
Bikrampur (journal) 56n131
bilingual
  indigenous male elite 269
  public sphere 270
binaries 19, 145
Binoy Ghosh 17n44, 18, 151
biography 25, 30, 35, 227
Bipinchandra Pal 42, 45, 77, 133n17, 154, 160n160, 181n225
'*Birahī Yakṣa*' (Abanindranath's painting) 92
Bīrbhūmī (journal) 56n131
Bīrbhūmī (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) (journal) 56n131
Bireshwar Chattopadhyay 182n227
Biṣabṛkṣa 46n89, 49, 121, 139, 144, 363
biśwajanīn dharmabād (universal religion) 260
Boycott
  British law courts 337
  of foreign goods 338
  of foreign Textiles 338
  of Legislative Councils 337
Brahmacarya āśram 77n16, 341
Brahmo 77n16, 132, 165
Brajamadhab Basu 47n90
Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay 17n44, 18, 50n100, 206
Brata/s 304
British feminists 303
British Museum Library 30
British Publishing houses 116
Buddhadev Bose 1n2, 177, 179, 181, 184, 188
Buddhibādi (rationalist) 257
Buddhir Mukti 25, 258, 260, 264–265
Buddhir Mukti Āndolan 255, 261, 360
Buddhir Mukti intellectuals 259
Buddhist literary theories 172
Buddhist monastery of Bodhgaya 75
Burke 343
byakti mānab (individual-human) 1–3, 348
  making of the 2
Byron 39, 42, 46, 254

C.F. Andrews 338
C.R. Das 333, 356. *See also* Chittaranjan Das
Calcutta dialect 224
Calcutta Medical College 185
Calcutta Public Library 40
Calcutta Review 35
Calcutta University 212
Calcutta's
  petty bourgeoisie 175
  pre-eminent elites 38
Calcutta-based monthly 72
Caliphal
  dynasties, histories of 242n221
  order 235, 262, 264
  polity 242
  state 242
Caliphate 260
Caliphs 241
calit bhāṣā (the spoken form) 66, 224
calit form 224
Campbell 39
Candraśekhar 49, 121, 143, 286
Cār Iyāri Kathā 66n168
Caritrahīn 128, 171
carkā 336, 340, 344–345, 354
Cārupāṭh 303n141
Cāṣbās (journal) 56n132
Casi Raj Pandit 249–250
caste and
  class boundaries 178
  religion 4, 196
caste based
  associations 20
  periodicals 20n46
caste journals 56
caste prejudices 4
catalogue/s 31, 33–34, 36
Catalogue of Books and Periodicals 62n159
catalogue compilation 30, 33
categories of morality (*dharma/nīti*) 172
Caturaṅga (journal) 66n168, 205

celibate widowhood 161–162
Cellular Jail in Andaman 358
censorial Act 134
censorship laws 83, 131
Census for registering oneself as educated 114
Census of 1921 112, 114, 211
Central Khilafat Committee 333
'Central or Standard Bengali' 224
centrality
  in the public sphere 124–125
  of physical desires 190n258
Chaitanya Library 28, 116
Chand Sultan 237
Chandicharan Sen 109
Chandranath Basu 35, 131, 143, 151
Chandranath Bidyaratna, the grammarian 54
changes in marriage
  practices 163
  principles 163
changing cultural politics 124
Charles Dickens 39, 49n99
Charles Tegart 355
Charubala Devi 207
Charuchandra Bandyopadhyay 92, 207
Charuchandra Mitra 242
chaste (*sādhu*) Bengali 25
chastity and promiscuity 161
Chatterjee's Picture Album 90n49
Chaudhuri (Pramatha) 65–66
cheap
  farces 42
  prints 135n25
  sensation fiction 67
  sentimental fiction 147
'cheap literature' 53
Chelebelā 119n157, 120n162, 121n165
  Tagore's autobiography 194
Cheleder Pāttāṛi (Children's Lessons) 101
Chicago Tribune 80n32
child marriage 145, 158, 161, 164, 315, 270
  age-old custom 168
  contestations about 168
  questions 170
(The) Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 272
childcare 44
  subjugation 14
children's
  education 75
  entertainment and lessons 101
  magazines 101
Chintamani Ghosh 74
Chittaranjan Das 95, 159, 364
choices of reading 146
Christian Tract and Book Society 196
Christianity 134
Cikiṯsā Darpaṇ (journal) 20n46, 56n129
Cikiṯsā Prakāś (journal) 20n46
Cikiṯsādarśan (journal) 56n129
Cikiṯsak (journal) 20n46, 56n129
circulation of
  Bengali Muslim periodicals 192
  books 23
  Ideas, social space for 7
citizen of ancient Indian polity 167
citizenship
  agenda of 2
  ideals of 6
Citrāṅgadā 170, 172, 175, 248, 286
  controversies surrounding 132
  criticism of 170
  debate 173
  Rabindranath's lyrical ballad 247
  Tagore's lyrical ballad 169
Citrāṅgadā's immoral content 171
'civil social institutions', modern 6
civil society 7, 173
civilizing
  and reformist discourses 41
  the heathen cultures 134
class-based ideology 118
classical Islam 235, 259
  pasts of 233, 242
classifying Indian literary traditions 32
code/s of
  feminine conduct 295
  Hindu respectability 167
  morality 135n23, 139
coercive power of Hindu marriage system 145
Cokher Bāli 142n62, 157, 161, 363
collective
  literary sphere 197
  readings of *pā̃ncāli* 136

colloquial
  Bengali 54n124, 214
  language 134
  prose 180
  rhetoric 141
  vocabulary 216
colonial
  administration 38, 52,79, 113, 133–134, 212
  administrators 232
  archives 21, 28–29
  Bengal 18, 23, 95, 99, 124,143, 282, 294, 362
  *bhadralo*k, making of the 185
  bureaucratic 49, 216
  bureaucrats 136, 269
  classes 120
  classificatory schemes 310
  critique 145
  discourse 239
  domestic space 121
  domination 40
  economy 95
  education 52, 238
    policy 52
    system 7, 107, 114, 236
      apparatus of the 53
      critique of the 50
  epistemology 32
  government 29n2, 271
  idea of education 51n105
  India 120
  intelligentsia 28–29
  judicial system 5n17
  knowledge 32, 36
  library series 40, 116
  market place 95
  middle classes 73, 120
  missionary-bureaucracy 173
  modernity 10, 18, 120, 195, 216, 231
  patriarchy 311
  policies 62
  policing 128
  politics 269
  power 114, 141n56
  practices in thinking 359
  public sphere 124, 269
  regime 120
  rhetoric around obscenity 131
  rule 4, 36, 50, 57, 114, 142, 212, 225, 313, 359
  rulers 136, 267
  state 3–4, 22, 41, 124, 128, 194, 219, 270, 347
    bureaucratic structures of the 33
    new initiatives of the 51
  state's
    legislative intervention 124
    perception and surveillance 36
    primary and higher education
      schemes 112
    resources 52
    role in fashioning a language policy 68
    urban habitat 183
colonialism 4, 17, 22
colonialist
  historiography 231
  justification of British rule 235
colonized
  babu 141n56
  Bengali intelligentsia 252
  Indian subjects 189
  population 353
  society 17
  subject 140
commercial
  dimensions 73
  literary periodicals 103
  market for print 149
  presses 40
  print market 22
  publications 40
  vernacular print 134
commercialization 37, 63, 68, 73, 95
  of Bengali literature 83
  of print 110, 148
commercializing
  a literary market 103
  market for periodicals 71
  phase of periodical production 118
commercially successful periodical 47
common
  art preferences 72
  Bengali readers, lives of 19
  domestic practice 17
  feature of *Prabāsī* 75
  literary public 64
  metaphor 156
  people 82
  readers 20, 115

"common reader" 109
communal
  animosities 194
  representation in University governing bodies 212
communication/s
  modern forms of 1
  premodern channels of 7
Communist intellectuals 355
Communist Party of India 350n45
community 4
  of ordinary readers (*pāṭhak samāj*) 114
  of readers (*pāṭhak samāj*) 4
companionate marriage 152, 286
compulsory primary education 113
concept of
  Islamic universalism 260
  the *bāstab* 176
  the *tāmasik guṇ* 186
  time 123
Congress 341, 348
  politics 83
  volunteers 333
consensual
  marriage 166
  wedlock 128
conservative
  critics 132
  intellectuals 154
  literary critics 24
  publicists 129, 190
  -revivalists 154
constitutional
  developments 19
  politics 2, 27
  procedures 83
contemporary
  journals 90
  literary discourses 26
  perceptions or social values 20
  periodicals 15, 207
  principles of literary realism 183
  publicists 201
  society 184
controversies over the death of a child-wife 169
conventional
  essay on Hindu marriage 163
  history writing 26
  ideas of chastity 24
  norms of society 132
  notions of leisure 121
copyrights 74
(*The*) *Cornhill Magazine* 49
cosmopolitan 19
  Bengali aesthetic 95
  literature 108
cost of printing *Pradīp* 90
costs in running a periodical 100
cottage-industry 75, 340
counter hegemonic literary initiatives 19
craft of homemaking (*gharkarṇā*) 25
creating
  a *lekhakgoṣṭhī* 60
  a new middle-class art-public 92
  an aesthetic 106
  refined literary tastes 130
  social awareness 145
creation of a modern nation-state 2
creative
  genres 200
  individuals 1
"critical anarchism" 152
critical reviews 148
criticism/s 11, 148–149
  of art 92
  of modernist aesthetics 133
  of novel-reading 143
  of the liberal variety 159
critics individual taste (*ruci*) 152
critique
  against Tagore 181n225
  of patriarchy 314
  of seclusion (*abarodh-prathā*) 319
Crusades 260
  experience of 261
cultivation of taste or *ruci* 105
cultural
  acceptance 143
  agent 73
  anti-colonialism 10n27
  commodity 24, 143
  consumption 118
  discourse 142
  displacement 189
  expressions 19

- hegemony 114
- identity 135
- knowledge 18
- nationalism 130
- obscenity 134
- sensibilities of the educated *bhadralok* 185
- sensibility 181

Culture and Anarchy 12n35
customary
- practices 15
- rituals 163

Dacca University 256
Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar 207
Dakshineshwar 104
Damascus 260
dān 69
Daniel Defoe 143
Dante 254
Dara Shikoh 257
Daulat Kazi 215
Deanglicising 50
debate/s 15, 20n47, 65, 106, 174, 194, 217, 221–222, 247, 251, 253, 257, 261, 271, 317
- among grammarians 55
- on child bride 132, 169
- on *Citrāṅgadā* 160, 169, 171–172
- on Islamic and Islamicate pasts 25
- on obscenity 161
- over genre 227
- over obscenity (*aślīlatā*) 127
- over some of Tagore's works 153, 155
- surrounding Hindu marriage system 145, 154

debating parties 170
Debendranath Sen 75
Debendranath Tagore 44, 293
Debi Coudhurāṇī 223
Debiprasanna Raychaudhury's *Nabyabhārat* 55
defunct periodicals 37
democracy 8
democratic 268
- readership 8

democratization 8, 29, 55, 177
- of print 73, 103
- of the public sphere 127

democratizing
- literary space 114
- public sphere 22
- nationalist public space 68

Department of Education 213
Deśbideśer Kathā 101
Deśer Kathā 101
Devadās 160
Devanagari 32
Dhaka 211
Dhaka district 213
dhārābāhik kathāsāhitya (serial fictions) 142
dharma (morality) 170
Dhumketu (journal) 323, 326, 331, 353–357, 359
Dhumketu's agenda 353, 356
Dhurjatiprasad Mukhopadhyay 3n9, 11
'dialect' 216
dialogues 20n47
- and debates 20

different
- groups of readers 24
- modes of reading 105
  - coexistence of 13

differentiated reader expectations 141
differentiations in education 53
Digdarśan (journal) 43
dilemmas of
- modernity 3
- the colonized 39

Dinabandhu Mitra 49
Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jāmāi Bārik* 41
Dineshchandra Sen 77
Dineshranjan Das 1n2, 174
Dineshranjan Das's *Kallol* (1923) 70
discourse/s 50
- about a Hindu nationhood 154
- about the social function of fiction 152
- of nationhood 145
- on education 306
- on femininity 306
- on women 270, 290

discussions on *Vāṭsyāẏan's Kāmasūtra* 167
distorted history/ies 232–233, 238
district
- bulletins 19–20
- journals 56

district dialects of Bengal 214
dobhāṣī/do-bhāṣī
  or Islami Bāṅglā tradition of the *puthi* 217
  romances 227
dobhāṣī Bengali 216
domain of
  Baṭtalā 138
  Musalmani Bāṅglā print 34
  Muslim-Bengali periodicals 34, 208
  politics 10n28, 306
  popular prints 115, 130
  print production 14
  rajdharma 63
  refinement and creativity 139
  Science and philosophy 261
  the state 146, 195
domestic
  advices 272
  age for literature 152
  duties 294, 303
  fiction 152
  ideals of *gṝhalakṣmī* 295
  lives 268
  market 73, 339
  space (*gṝha*) 153, 274, 281–282, 300, 310
  sphere 124, 268, 277, 310–311
domesticity 14, 131–132, 144–145, 268, 274–275, 277, 282, 298, 310
  and conjugality 268
  beyond the confines of 26
  bhadralok 14
  interactions between 22
dominant
  discourse 15
  European disciplinary paradigm 236
  'Hindu' interpretation of India's history 231
  historiographical practices 232
  literary canons 131
  narratives of nationalism 15
  'taste' 13
Dryden 144
Durani military camps 244
Durgacharan Roy 120
Durgadas Lahiri 237
Durgeśnandinī 41, 54
  Bankim's first novel 54
Durkheim 156
Dwijendralal Roy 151, 154, 132
  nationalist poet 160
  plays of 238
  poet 170–171, 187
Dwijendranath Tagore 44, 55, 61, 77, 79

earlier
  phase of Bengali Muslim periodical production 208
  reformist discourse 303
early
  history of Islam 242
  Islam 195–196
    philosophical traditions of 25
  modern France 23
  modern Islamic world 243
  periodicals 69
  phase of *Kallol*'s career 185
  print culture/s 23, 37, 254
  twentieth century 192
  twentieth-century Bengal 65, 204
  vernacular journalism 18
East Asia 80, 241
East Bengal 98
East India Company's political agenda 38
eastern district 216
eclectic literary culture 215
economic
  and socio-cultural markers 118
  desperation 174
  dislocations 23
  growth 121
  independence 343
  resources 114
Eden Hostel 208
Editor of
  Bhāratbarṣa (journal) 96
  Islām Pracārak (journal) 209
  the monthly *Sabuj Patra* 96
editorial
  experiments 62
  in *Prabāsī* 191
  office of *Antaḥpur* 69
Editorial Approach 57
Edmund Dulac 94
educated
  Bengali mind 18
  Bengali Muslim 217

bhadralok 41, 185
bilingual elite 44
Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia 26
Indians 117
middle class's encounter with 177
middle-class homes 14
Muslim women 314
Muslim youth 208
reader 114
upper class bhadralok 46
upper classes (*uccaśreṇī*) 50
in Calcutta 41
woman/women 267, 288
in Bengali 267
education (*śikṣādān*) 2, 8, 39, 54, 288, 308, 315, 318, 363
and aesthetic sensibility 151
and self-refinement 2
for women 304, 317
system 49, 52, 113
hierarchical and institutionalized 2
universal accessibility 7
educational
and professional opportunities 212
books 106
distinction 63
institutions 252, 291, 310
literature 40
educative value 144
Egypt 258, 262
eighteenth-century Maratha past 252
elective marriage 21
electricity connections in Calcutta 23n50
Eliot/T.S. Eliot 177, 179
Eliot and Baker hostels 208
elite 68
circles 221
hegemonic agenda 19
leadership
political and ideological modalities of 11
Elphinstone 251, 253
Elphinstone's *History of India* 249–250
Emdad Ali 247–248, 252
emergent
literary sphere 71
middle classes 254
public sphere 124
social sensibility 152
emerging
idea of territoriality 76
mode of literary communication 55
reformist intelligentsia 136
empirical
knowledge 238
practices 233
emotional companionship 164
employment of child labor 179
'encounters' among readers, concept of 20
end of the War 212
encyclopedia 82
encyclopedic 83
End of the First World War 176, 178
England 43, 49, 144, 343
English 54, 144, 220, 343
and French publics 154
books 33
editorial venture 92
educated Bengali/s 22, 41, 60
bhadralok 137
first generation of the 22
indigenous elite 135
intelligentsia 52
upper-caste Hindu Bengali 50
young men 208
education 39, 52, 94, 113, 219
emotions from 144
fiction 39–40, 44, 143
gentlemen 39
historians 249
literary studies 39
literature/s 35, 39
or Western education 38
periodicals 33
pundits 28
Romantic poets 39
enlightenment (*udbodhan*) 150
knowledge 184
entertainment (*āmod*) 144
needs of a juvenile community 217
entrepreneur-editor 204
epic 25, 40, 107, 249, 252, 254
text 249
works 220
epidemic in the body social 156
epitomize *yugadharma* 248

equivalence between women and wealth 165
era of *Baṅgadarśan* 151
Ernest Jones 182
erotic
  contents of medieval Bengali texts 146
  narrations 137
  tales 139
erudite
  commentator 65
  debate among grammarians 55
  elite 14
  scholars 59
Eslamabadi 234–235
essay form 13
essays 44, 49, 76
  and fiction 315
  on histories of classical Islam 241
Essays, Francis Bacon's 40
essential 'Hinduness' 191
ethical
  code/s 135,161
  critique of society 129
  governance 242
  merit 132
  principles (*naitik upadeś*) 248
  social life, modern sense 14
ethnic group 5
ethnographers 232
ethnographic surveys of the Bengali province 216
Europe 6, 80, 120, 189
  and the Islamic world 260
European 109
  ascendency 243
  critics 151
  fiction 61
    translations of 6
  historian 234
  literature 180
  mine and mill owners 179
  missionaries 269
  modernism 177
  modernist literature 174
  nations 262
  traditions 19
  works, reviews of 6
  world of letters 6
evening dailies 26n51
evidence based histories of Islamic regimes 233
expanding
  market for periodicals 103
  periodical market 29
  readership 29, 127
expansion
  in periodical reading 121
  in vernacular literacy 112
  of colonial educational and professional infrastructure 212
  of literacy 68
  of the literary sphere 177
expatriate Bengalis, achievements of 79
experiences of 1857 134
experiments
  in vocabulary 25
  with free verse or prose-poetry (*gadya sāhitya*) 180
exploring the subconscious 185
extant artifacts 73
extension of education 211
extremist
  campaigner 353
  Congress leader 45

fables 227
fairy tales 119
Faizi 254
family
  magazine/s 63, 101, 103
  periodicals 288, 328
  professions 50
Faraizi 263
farces (*prahasan*) 41, 135, 283, 284
  delightful 46
Fatimid Egypt 261
Fazilatunnesa 258
Fazlar Rahman Khan 250, 251
Fazlul Haq 350
female
  characters in novels 155
  curriculum/a 303, 306
  education 26, 271, 273, 276, 293, 298
  literacy 303
  readers 288, 313

readership 153, 268, 273, 277, 280–281, 288, 290
subordination 163
feminine 311
attributes 145
beauty 141
issues 295
reading spaces 277
virtues 298
and duties 269
'feminine' disposition 306
femininity 125, 279, 327, 328
feminist/s 271
or indigenous 283
Ferozshah Bahmani 237
fiction 25, 35–36, 41, 49, 76, 208, 227, 272, 297, 299
and essays 107
and poetry 185
and poetry, form of 228
based magazines 103
form 152
in its modern form 143
narratives 228
of India 143
reading 218
second category of 143
-writers 161
in Bengali literature 76
fictional
and theatrical narratives 239
and theatrical reconstructions 239
experiments of Tagore and Chattopadhyay 162
normalization 160
representations 144
financial
and social qualifications 113
provisions for English and regional vernaculars 113
Fine Art Printing Syndicate 205
Firdausi 254
first
Bengali literary endeavor (outside Bengal) 74
Bengali periodical 43
biographer (in Bengali) of the Prophet 236
epic work 243
generation of the English educated Bengalis 22
instances of Bengali prose 214
issue of *Prabāsī* 75
Karbala narrative 254
Muslim periodical 197
First World War 23, 84, 95, 178
End of the 176
fitna 311
folk
ballads 107
genres 215
performances 139
'foreign'
languages 220
Muslim power 243
foreign
cultural forms 127
import 144–145
Muslim rulers 234
form of the print media 74
formal
Bengali prose 209
education 108, 114, 268, 291
language 224
literary Bengali 310
political principles 195–196
format
constantly evolving 12
paradoxical middling 12
formation of
a readership 192
the modern self 123
Francis Bacon 40
free intellect (*mukta buddhi*) 208
"free mind" 209
'free press', ardent advocate of 83
French
literature 65
sources 62
works 79
Freud 182-183
Freudian
concepts of the self 184
psychoanalysis 174, 188
unconscious 186

function of (*cont.*)
  criticism 190
  the literary critic 151
functionally literate 112
fundamental
  institutional support systems 38
  producers of *strī-svādhīnatā* 295
  question of Hindu-Muslim 194
  social transformation 17
  transformation of a society's moral imagination 129
funds
  for periodicals 69
  from advertisements 69
Fyodor Dostoevsky 329

G.F. Watts 92
G.W.M. Reynolds 39, 109
Gadā Mālekār Puthi 196
Gaganendranath Tagore 90
Galpa Cāriṭi (The Four Stories) 82
Galpaguccha 82
Gaṇavāṇī 257
Gandhi 27, 95, 306, 333, 337–338, 341–346, 348, 354, 358
Gandhi's
  call 343
    for nonviolent non-cooperation 95
  campaign 331
  Non-Cooperation Movement 385n70
  political philosophy 333
Gandhian
  instruction on carkā 336–337
  mass mobilization/mass political agitation/movements/nationalism 276, 335–336, 342, 345, 348–349
  path 354n64
  political philosophy 83, 335
  politics 272
  principles 335–337, 341, 347
  program of *carkā* 27
Gandhians 347
Gandhism 347
Ganesh Banerjee, Half artist 205n39
Garibaldi 237, 343
gender
  and communitarian divides 367
  caste and communitarian divides 364
  differentiation 294
  divides 280
  inequality 174
  norms 139, 153, 275
  sexuality and tradition, controversies of 21
general
  education of the masses 57
  educational progress of Musalmans in Bengal 218
  knowledge essays 104
  movement of the economy 97
  pattern of public reading 116n145
  readership 61
  reading trends 40
genre/s 5, 13, 25, 37, 40–41, 55–57, 73, 103n104, 107, 114, 123, 137, 139–140, 142, 146, 192, 200, 211, 215, 226–227, 229, 238, 251, 253, 272, 275, 281n46, 284
  'inward looking' 228
  literary criticism 149–150
  of history 233
  of *sāmaẏik* or *māsik sāhitya patrikā* 35
  prioritization of 36
  sacitra māsik patrikā 85
genteel or *sādhu* form 66
George Elliot 39
Ghare Bāire (novel by Tagore) 66, 154, 174n195, 187, 346
Girindramohini Dasi 77, 267, 286
Girindrasekhar Bose, Dr. 174, 182–183
Girishchandra Ghose 109
Girishchandra Sen (Girishbabu) 208
Gītā (Dwijendranath Tagore's commentary) 79
Gītagovinda 137
Gladstone 343
Goethe 254
Gokulchandra Nag 70, 174, 175n196
Golam Mostafa 229
Golden Temple 75
Golebkāwālī 40, 42, 47n89, 139, 215
Gole-Hormuj 215
good homemaker or *sugṝhiṇī* 26
good reading habits 15
Gopal Haldar 125
Gopinath Saha 355
Gorā (novel by Tagore) 77–78
Gour 215

Government of India 30, 136n27, 372, 385
Government of India Act 1935 83
Great Expectations 49n99
gṝhadharma 295–297, 300, 310
gṝhalakṣmī 270, 278, 284n65, 295
gṝher bhāṣā of Bengal's Muslims 221
Grierson's 1903 Linguistic Survey 224
Grierson's project, divisive potentials of 216
group of
  formidable writers (*śaktiśālī lekhak sampradāẏ*) 207
  periodical readership 192
  theologian editors 201
  urban culture 6
Guido Reni 92
Gulistāṅ (journal) 205
Gupta Dynasty 78
Gupta period 75
Guptakathā or 'secret romance series' 283
Gurumukhi 32
Gyanendramohan Das 79, 116
Gyanendramohan Das's essays 79

Habermas 9, 110n121. *See also* Jurgen Habermas
habitual
  reader 115
  reading 14
  readings of diverse kinds 115
habituated readership 210
Hadith/Hadith Sharif 208, 211, 236, 259, 320
Hāfej 197, 254
Half-tone
  and colored prints 205
  blocks 90
Hanafi School of Islamic Jurisprudence 200
Haraprasad Shastri 35, 42, 51, 59, 61, 77, 160n130, 226
Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 109
Hasan Basri, Mutazila followers of 260
Hātemtāi 40, 215
Hazrat Muhāmmader Begonā Thākār Biṣaẏe Musalmān Moulaviganẹr Śikṣā 196
hegemony 113–114, 346n34, 347–348, 359
'Hellenic culture' 258
Hemantakumar Sarkar 355
Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay 43, 46, 59–60, 228, 247, 254
HemendranathMajumdar/HemenMajumdar 72n2, 91, 94n68
Hemendranath Tagore 281n47
Hemendraprasad Ghosh 104, 170n178
Hemnalini Basu 301
Henry Beverly 239n205
Henry Louise Vivian Derozio 39
heterogeneity 53, 365n6
  of the readership 110
heterogeneous 33, 363
  corpus of romances 215
  public/s 64, 149
  reading culture in nineteenth-century 47
  rural and semi-urban motley population 107
Heyyat Mamud, poet 254
Hibbert Journal 80n32
hierarchical 2, 52
  colonial education system 113–114
hierarchies of literacy or reading ability 24
high arts 9, 12, 92, 94, 139n45
  aesthetics 62, 105
high quality illustration 91
highbrow 9
  aesthetic 97, 107
  aesthetics sensibility 95
  literary periodicals 123
higher
  age of consent 166
  education 112–113, 185, 192, 213, 313
highly literate audience 84
Hindi 32, 68, 95, 197, 216, 252
  literary journal *Sarasvātī* 74
  magazines 70n189
  public sphere 84, 149
  speaking heartlands 80
  women's journal 277n37
Hindi-Persian verse tradition 215
Hindi-Urdu divide 191
Hindu 10n29, 24–26, 34n24, 191, 197, 235, 240, 245, 360
  adults 111n126
  and Brahmo
    intelligentsia 210, 218, 223, 317
    students 208
    writers 206

Hindu (*cont.*)
and Muslim
civilization 39
communities 207
empires 245
intellectuals 235
males and females 111
power in the subcontinent 245
publicists 231
readers 225
rural poor 215
and Muslims 207
authors and publishers 215
Bengali elite 50
Bengali women 284
Bhadramahila 338
civilization, ancient 39
conjugality 145, 154
domesticity 153–154, 169, 173
dominated national history 236
elite/s 216, 310
gentry 264
gentry's monopoly 263
historians 233
historiography 230, 232–233
history 231
household 104
-imageries 222, 360
inhabitant 231
intellectuals 226
intelligentsia 214, 223, 352
interpretation of India's history 231
literary sphere 25, 195
majoritarian discourse 238
male/s 111n126, 213, 219n116
marriage 21, 128, 145, 154–155, 163, 165, 168, 170
middle classes 98, 219n116, 364
monopoly over education 212
mythological tradition 358
mythology/ies 52, 169, 247–248, 352, 359
and legends 336
nation 163, 252
nationalism 154, 154n106, 313
patriarchal
norms 161
structure 164
patriarchy 163
population, majority of the 235
public sphere 265
readership 241, 320n230
religion (*bhāb*) and idolatry (*pouttalikat*ā) 191
religious ideas 225
revivalist-nationalism 167
revivalists 173
rule in Bengal 238
society 159, 163, 266
tradition 24, 128–129, 132, 132n15
wife's *satītva* 144
women 270, 313
writers 204, 206, 226, 237, 241, 248
"Hindu awakening" 192
Hindu College 39
Hindu Mahasabha 194
Hindu-Brahmo
Bengali opinion 239
domination of the Bengali literary sphere 218
journals, mainstream 217
literary sphere 192
mainstream 217
Hinduism 128, 145, 240, 305
redefined 21
Hinduized 225
histories 238
Hindu-Muslim
relations 83
relationship 194
Hindu-owned presses 205
(The) Hindus 4, 50, 192, 194, 197n17, 213, 217, 219, 221, 228, 232–235, 238–239, 241, 246–251, 257, 308n172, 309n173, 311
and Muhammadans 200
and Muslims 195, 197n17, 207, 211n82, 221
historians of
print 23
print culture in India 31
the Book in India 32
historical 252–253
authenticity 251
epics 254
fiction 252
memory 244
moment 244–245
narratives 18, 236, 243
origins of caste 4

personalities, prominent 238
researches 68, 110
scholarship/s 94,231
tradition (*itibṛtta*) 234
value 233–234
writings by the Hindus 233
historicity of Musalmani Bengali literary tradition 220
historicize reading 17
histories of
Bengal 233
classical Islam 241
early Islam 243
India and the Marathas 251
Islamicate cultures 243
printed book 23
the Bengal region 243
the Islamicate pasts 235
historiographical
debates 363
discourse 251
exercise/s 243, 253
investigations 363
practice/s 232, 234, 242
history of
a quotidian practice 124
Islam 358
literary sphere 192
print in colonial India 71
the Bengali Muslim literary sphere 191
History of India 250
Hitabādī 26, 286
home economics 44
Homer 254
Hossain, Prophet's Grandson 253
household/s 5, 8, 11, 13, 17, 44, 46, 57, 75, 94, 101, 104, 107, 117,119, 120, 122–123, 131, 145, 152, 155, 163, 165, 213, 267–269, 275–276, 281–284, 288, 290–291, 293, 295–297, 301–304, 308–309, 320, 324, 333, 338, 341, 363
chores 122, 275, 296, 301–303
of women 73
commodity 14
womenfolk of the 14
housekeeping duties 298
human mind 182n229, 245, 344
Humayun Kabir 194
Hutom Pyām̐cār Nakśā 54
Hutomi style 54–55
Hybrid form of Bengali 54

Ibn Rushd 257, 261
Ibrahim Gardi/Ibrahim Khan Gardi 244, 248, 251
Ibrahim Saber 324
Ibsen's *Doll's House* 154
illustrated
family magazine/miscellany 91, 103, 299
front covers 208
miscellany/miscellanies/monthlies/monthly miscellany/periodicals 23, 27, 46, 62, 63, 65, 70, 71, 73, 90, 91, 95, 100, 103, 125, 127, 305
miscellany *Prabāsī*, Ramananda Chattopadhyay's 23
quality journal 95
illustrations and cartoons 205
Imam Hossain 254–255
'immoral' readings 152
'immorality' 29n2
Imperial Library 30, 119, 371
Imperial Mughals 245
importance of public libraries 116
important spaces for circulation of periodicals 117
Iṃrejiwālā 42
indecency (*aślīlatā*) 247
independent thought (*svādhīn cintā*) 208
India 6–7
India Office Library 30, 233n183
India's
medieval past 233
Muslim rule 245
Indian
languages 68
philosophical tradition 182
press 30n3
Railways 34
readers 39–40
subcontinent 29
tradition of love 171
World 35
Indian *Bradshaw* 34
Indian Empire 134

Indian Muslims 220, 245–246, 251, 253–254, 258n287, 320
Indian National Congress 11, 65, 194, 341, 350n43, 354
Indian Press Act 1910 31, 80n29
Indian Press of Chintamani Ghosh 74
'Indian-style' paintings 94
indigenous 95
  alternative to colonial idea of education 51n105
  bilingual intelligentsia/educated elite/literati 33, 39, 41, 68, 106, 113–114, 123, 130–131, 134–135, 140, 209, 230, 303
  domesticity 141n56
  educational alternative 53
  middle classes 118, 125, 365
  modes of communication 53
  modes (*upāẏ*) of interactions 52
  population 50, 97, 113, 114n139
  social
    groups 108n116
    norms 144, 158
    relations 144
    structures 163
  society 53, 114, 136, 141, 158–159, 357
  Swadeshi enterprise 279
  tradition 9n26, 176
  Unitarian Brahmo 132n16
  value system 144
indigenously populated parts of urban Calcutta 116
Indirā 49
individual/s (*byakti*) 2, 16
  buyer-reader (*kretā-pāṭhak*) 23, 107
  reading 16
Indo-Aryan Family 216n104
Indologists 234
Indo-Persian 32
Indo-Persianate culture 234
institutions
  liberal political and cultural 8
  of commercial publishing 46
  of higher education 113
intellectuals 10n28, 11, 19, 26, 37, 44, 49, 55, 60, 67, 77, 79n26, 154, 154n106, 165n157, 191, 195, 210, 212, 216, 219, 220n121, 226, 235, 257, 259, 260, 264, 355, 360
Islam 25, 195–196, 200, 207–208, 233, 235, 241–242, 249, 253, 255, 257–259, 261, 264–265, 311, 317–318, 337
  influence of 207
Islām Darśan 201
Islām Pracārak 200, 200n21, 209–210, 227
Islam's
  history, triumphalist moments 236
  past 241
Islamabadi 259
Islāmi Bāṅglā 217
Islami Bengali 215–216
Islāmi bhāṣā 215
Islamic
  beliefs 200, 225
  Bengali (*Islāmi Bāṅglā*) 209
  -Bengali *puthi* ballads 192
  Bengali *puthi* texts 248
  community 243
  concepts 225, 360
  cultural tradition 243
  history 241
    unfolding of 26
  Jurisprudence 200
  languages 221
  laws 259
  philosophical tradition 257
  pietism 242
  piety 25, 192, 195, 224, 230, 253, 257, 263, 265
    conventional norms of 25
  principles 229, 235, 248, 262
  regimes in South Asia 233
  religious sect 200
  revivalist movements 215
  tamaddun 241
  tradition 314, 327, 359
  universalism 257
'Islamic past' 25
  authentic 25
Islamicate
  civilizations 242
  cultures 241
  histories of the Indian subcontinent 233
  interlude 231, 242
  past/s 232–233, 235
  societies of West Asia 19
  states, previous 235

world 241
Islamicization 215, 257
Islamicized Bengali 215
'islamicized' *nasihat-namahs* 215
Islamiya Art Press 205
Islamization 314
Ismail Hossain Siraji 210, 227, 253, 253n272, 254n276
issues of Islamicization of Bengal 239n205
Iswar Gupta 54, 137
Iswarchandra Vidyasagar 44, 116n149, 135n23
Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's *Sītār Banabās* 42

Jadunath Sarkar 18, 78, 84, 85n48, 207, 236, 252
Jagadananda Ray 61, 78
Jagadish Chandra Bose 75, 78
Jaladhar Sen 62, 65, 91, 96, 108, 176n203, 206, 341
Jāmāi Bārik 41
James Browne 249–250
James Grant Duff 249
James Long, Reverend 32n15, 110n123, 134, 197n17
James Tod 237
Janaki Majumdar 274
Jaṅgnāmā (on the battle of Karbala) 254
Jankoji Shinde 244
jārigān 254
Jasimuddin 10n27, 229
Jāti 4–5, 5n17, 214, 241
idea of 5
sense of 5
Jatindramohan Bagchi 77, 108n116
Jatindramohan Sinha 131, 155–156, 159, 172n190, 187, 228
jātīya jīban (nation's life/life of the nation) 1–5, 7, 17, 22, 28, 37, 125–126, 149–150, 190, 217
jātīya jībaner niẏāmak 151
jātīẏatā (nationhood) 11
jātrā (mobile theatres) 122, 137
jautha-paribār (joint family system) 161
jhumur 135
Jibanananda Das 10n27
Jībansmṝti 44, 120, 122
jiziya 235
John Bunyan's *Pilgrims Progress* 40, 109
Jorasanko 181, 205
Jorasanko residence 1n2, 148n77, 188, 281
journal/s 2, 7, 12, 17, 19–20, 28, 30, 34–35, 37, 43, 45, 51–52, 55–57, 60–63, 65–66, 68–69, 74–75, 77–78, 82, 91–93, 95–96, 98, 100, 103, 108, 114, 118, 124–126, 133, 143, 152, 154, 165, 181–182, 184, 197, 200, 205, 210, 224, 247, 256, 264, 272–273, 277, 280–283, 287–288, 290–291, 295–297, 299–302, 305, 315, 317, 321, 323, 330–331, 350–351, 356, 365, 367
journalistic
courtesy 265
innovation 204
literature 36
medium/a 12, 313
journals of various caste groups 19
Jurgen Habermas 6
Jyotirindranath Tagore 62, 77–78, 108
Jyotiriṅgan (journal) 34
Jyotirmoyee Devi 72, 123, 285–286
Jyotirmoyee Ganguly 267

Kabir Feserār Kecchā (Tale of *Kabir Feserā*) 196
kabiẏāl duels 135
Kaderiya (believers in human ability and agency) 260
Kaekobad 25, 229, 243, 245, 248, 249–255
Kaekobad's
Majhābī Śikṣā 247
un-Islamic aesthetic 247
kafer (non-believer) 206, 249, 360
kafer fatowā 262, 265
Kali (mother Goddess) 166, 241
Kali temple in Dakshineshwar 104
Kalidasa 172, 254
Kalidasa's *Kumārasambhāva* 172, 286
Kalighat *paṭ* 93
Kāli-kalam (journal) 175, 179, 185, 186n240, 205
Kaliprasanna Sinha 43, 54, 68
Kaliyug (the dark age) 104, 120, 130, 165
Kallol (journal) 1n2, 11, 16, 49, 60, 64n163, 70, 96, 133, 174–179, 182, 184–186, 188, 204, 354, 365, 367
Kallol yug 76n14, 204

Kalpakathā 109
Kamalākānter Daptar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's 5n17, 141n56, 47–49
Kāmasūtra, review of 167–168
Kāminī-Kāñcan dyad 84, 164–166
Kānākaṛi Prahasan (*Baṭtalā* farce) 285
Kant 129
Kantibabu (Kantichandra Ghosh) 208
Karachi 350
Karbala 254–255
  battle of 253
  narratives 254
  tragedy 253
Karimunnesa Chaudhurani 201
Karimunnesa Khanum 324
Kashiprasad Ghosh 39
Kasimbazar 68, 106
Kāśīnāth 160
Kāśirāmdās's *Mahābhārata* 42, 284
kaṣṭipāthar 63n162, 80
Kasturbabai Gandhi 267
kathak ṭhākur 52
Kavitā (journal) 175, 179, 181
Kāẏastha (journal) 114
Kāẏastha Patrikā (journal) 20n46, 56n130
Kazi Abdul Wadud 211n81, 217, 220, 222n129, 256–257
Kazi Anwarul Qadir 256
Kazi Motahar Hossain 256
Kazi Nazrul Islam/Nazrul Islam 27, 64n163, 185, 229, 257, 265, 325–326, 330–331, 350
Kecchā 196, 215
Kecchā Bhagabān Bhūt (The Tale of the Ghost Lord) 196
Keeper of the Catalogues 30, 47
Keshab Chandra Sen 136, 293
Keshabchandra Gupta's serial essays 233
Khan Bahadur Nasiruddin Ahmad 258n287, 262
Khan Panni zamindars of Karatiya 201
khemṭa 135
Khilafat-Non-cooperation Movement 27, 220, 288, 306, 329–332, 335, 337, 341, 242n222, 351, 355
khulafa-i-rashidin 262
ki majār śaṇibār (*Baṭtalā* farce) 46
knowledge 17–19, 32, 36, 50–51, 43, 68, 77, 80, 104–106, 138, 160, 183–184, 209, 211–212, 218, 238, 256, 256n283, 261, 269, 297, 304n152, 305, 307, 314, 326, 343, 361, 365
Kohinūr (journal) 197, 200–201, 206, 210, 294, 367
Kohinūr (*Nabaparyyāẏ*) (journal) 194n6, 207n53, 221n126, 223n134, 228n165, 233n180
Koran 207–208, 239, 254, 259, 318, 318n227, 320
  translations of the 34
Koran Sharif 236
Koran-Hadith 211
Koranic
  injunctions 318
  learning 318
  precepts 207, 318
  principles 26, 201
  scriptures 260
kretā-pāṭhak 24
Krishak Praja Party 350
Krishnakamal Mukhopadhyay 43
Krittibas 254
Kṛṣṇacaritra, discourse on Krishna 137
Kṛttivās Rāmāẏaṇa 42, 284
kṣanik sāhitya (momentary literature) 11
Kuntalin Press 75, 90
Kutchnama or *Tawarikh-e Sindh* 234

1916 Lucknow Pact 191
Laboring poor 53, 68, 179
Laharī (journal) 200
Lailā-Majnun/*Lailā-Majnu* 40, 42, 215, 227, 248
Lalbehari Dey 49
Laṅgal (journal) 175n197, 257, 331, 356, 367
language
  debates 25, 217–218
  -Mother (*Baṅgabhāṣā*) 191
  Musalmāni *puthi* 209
  of communication for Indian Muslims (*āntarjanīn bhāṣā*) 220
  question 192, 217, 222
  the scriptures (*dharma bhāṣā*) 219

leisure (*abasar/abasar samaẏ*) 8, 14, 17, 22, 106–107, 120–123, 125, 208, 279–281, 283, 291, 293–294, 296, 328
lekhakgoṣṭhī 60
Leslie Stephens 151
liberal 2, 159, 174, 212, 220, 230, 251, 261, 264, 312, 315, 317
 and progressive politics 346
 appreciation of history 232
 consciousness (*udār citta*) 1
 democratic possibilities 265
 literary sphere 84, 348
 minded journal 224
 minded periodicals 164
 -minded reviewers 161
 Muslim intellectuals 219
 political and cultural institutions 8, 10n28
 political traditions 349
 principles 7, 128, 257
  of democracy 242
  of literary practice 114
 progressive ideals 260
 public sphere 130
 publicists 26
 publicists' concern 263
 reformers 270, 362
 -reformist discourses 302
 reformists 154
 tradition of modern European thought 2
 trained in literary criticism 229
 values 6, 231
Librarian of Bengal Library 30, 35
Library Catalogues 31–32, 32n15, 33–34, 37, 111, 150, 196–197, 210, 216, 299
linguistic
 and literary kinship, bonds of 5
 hierarchies 53, 105, 108n115
 origin 5
 practices 53, 281, 364–365
 styles 42, 54, 215
 techniques 67
literacy 6–8, 14, 23–24, 37, 63, 68, 97, 105–107, 109–110, 112–115, 126, 130, 148–149, 177, 200, 212, 302
 and political activism 298
 female 284, 287, 303
 levels of 14, 237
 universal 57
literary
 agenda 46, 55, 277n37, 360
 and social thought 19
 Bengali 197, 257, 310
 categories 158
 communications
  widening contours 23
 community 16, 96, 113, 300
 conference in Rajshahi 3
 criticism (*sāhitya samālocanā*) 13, 24, 126, 130–132, 143, 145–146, 148–151, 187, 229, 240
 critics 15, 24, 64, 145, 155, 160, 300
 culture (*sāhitya samāj*) 3, 5, 9–10, 12, 24–25, 36, 54, 107, 121, 178, 192–195, 210, 215–217, 227, 234, 268, 300, 314
 emergent 25
 formative moments of 10
 in Bengal, modern 5
 of *puthi* 216
 debates 8, 15, 129, 147, 153, 159, 177, 181n225, 366
 discourse/s 17, 24, 26, 129–130
 education 38–39
 experimentation/s 23–24, 45, 128, 131–133, 162, 175
 fellowship 105
 field (*sāhitya kṣetra*) 8, 25, 36, 57, 67, 104, 147, 149, 153, 188, 266, 311, 350n42
 form/s 9, 36, 55, 146, 149, 174, 197, 276
 genres 5, 13, 25, 37, 55–56, 56n136, 57, 140, 192, 211, 238, 251, 253, 272, 284
 journalism 29, 36, 57, 63, 70, 74, 92, 268, 277, 298–299
 journals 20, 34, 83, 103, 124, 221, 283–284, 330. *See also sāhitya patrikā*
 kinship 5
 market/marketplace 23, 39, 74, 97, 103, 118, 133, 140, 142, 147, 284
 media 23
 miscellanies 12, 31, 43, 55–56, 100, 109, 155, 158, 284, 357
 monthly/ies 28, 35, 42–43, 55, 129, 137–138, 147, 153, 182n226, 204, 267
 obscenity 132
 periodical/s (*sāhitya patrikā*) vii, 5–7, 13–15, 17, 19, 22–23, 29, 34, 37, 43–44,

literary (*cont.*)
46, 49, 56–57, 61–62, 69–70, 73, 84, 103–104, 106–108, 113–114, 117, 121–125, 127, 138, 140, 146, 149, 152, 196–197, 201, 204, 207, 209, 211, 219n114, 256n281, 266–268, 276, 280n42, 286, 290, 301n131, 317, 330, 332, 362–364, 367
permissibility 131, 145, 170, 174, 186, 268, 366n8
practice/s 8, 12, 39, 61, 63, 96, 114, 121, 146, 149, 175, 179n213, 194, 208, 223n134, 300, 366–367
production 13, 29, 32, 65, 68, 133, 149, 237, 297, 319, 362, 365
public 1, 3–5, 9–10, 15, 20, 22, 53, 64, 68, 80, 85, 96, 105, 113, 132–133, 145, 147, 273, 302, 312n188, 326, 356, 362
public sphere 3, 5, 9–10, 15, 20, 22, 28, 53, 67–68, 85, 105, 132–133, 145, 147, 267, 273, 312n188, 326, 356, 362
in Bengal 22
publications 57
publicists 4, 22, 133, 146, 263
publicity 319, 355
representations 133, 174, 177
sense 130, 149
sensibilities 51, 96, 130, 216
societies 2, 7
space 10, 19
sphere 3–4, 7, 10–11, 14, 16, 19–20, 22, 24–27, 53, 56n137, 57, 59, 63, 65–67, 71, 84, 106–107, 109, 113–115, 125–126, 128–129, 131, 148, 151, 177, 186–187, 190–192, 194–195, 196–197, 201, 208, 211–213, 217–218, 222, 224–225, 227–229, 232, 247, 254, 257, 265–266, 268, 298, 306, 314, 321, 325–326, 328–330, 333, 335, 348–349, 362, 365–366
studies 38–39
system 68, 115
tastes 9, 40, 46, 59, 66, 77, 115, 130, 137, 150, 277, 301n131, 367
tradition of *jaṅgnāmā* and *jārigān* 254
traditions 5, 32, 36, 54, 195, 248, 311, 329
non-modern 5
vulgarity 131
works 13, 137, 152, 208, 229, 244, 248, 264
world of Bengal 7

(*The*) *literary Digest* 80n32
literate
audience 37, 84, 110, 111n124
Hindu males 213
populations 7, 108
Literature (*sāhitya*) 1, 3, 5, 8–10, 18, 30, 37, 39, 45–46, 49, 53, 59–61, 63, 66, 73, 80, 85, 96, 105, 112, 122, 125–126, 129–130, 133, 139–140, 145–146, 148–150, 152, 155–156, 158, 167, 170, 173–177, 179–180, 183, 187–189, 194, 208, 216, 227, 256, 266, 281–282, 307, 329–330, 342, 353, 356, 361–363, 365–367
and the periodical medium 18
capacity of 15, 124
educational 40
foreign 109
journalistic 361
modern 5, 13, 37, 128, 153, 159, 162, 211
momentary 11
periodical 108, 132
production of 67
readable 44, 148
reading 106, 152
western 67
lithographic prints 40
lokalakṣmī, Bengali name for 'public' 1
Lor Candrāṇī 215
love and courtship 128, 170
lower classes 50, 174
lower middle-class groups 42, 51
Lutfar Rahman 221
lyrical
ballad 21, 132, 160, 169, 247, 356n75
poetry 13, 25, 57

Macaulayan education 51
Macbeth 109
madhyabitta 67, 99, 118, 122, 147, 364–367
magazine form
dialogic structure of the 20
vernacular 52
magazines 12, 91, 97, 103, 121
children's 101
family 63
illustrated 90
international 80
literary 49

newer 104
one of the earliest 44
pedagogical 34
two-penny 72
Victorian 49
Mahābhārat 40, 42, 169, 184, 326
Maharram-parba (Maharram Episode) 254
Mahāśmaśān Kābya/Mahāśmaśān 25, 243, 245–249, 251, 253, 255
Mahatma 344. *See also* Gandhi
Mahendranath Gupta 165
Mahilā (journal) 69, 101, 210, 288, 290, 297, 317
Mahilā Jagat 325
Mahilā Majlis 101, 103, 288, 309
Mahilā Mehfil 302
Mahilā Saogāt (journal) 325
Mahmud's destruction of temples 234
Mahmuda Khatun Siddiqua 323–324, 326
mainstream 19, 95, 293, 303, 332
anticolonial nationalism 27
Bengali
literature 133, 176
poetics 173
counterpart 192
critique of the 25
'Hindu'
counterpart 191
literary sphere 195
Hindu-Brahmo 217
journals 210
Hindu-Brahmo 217
women's 317
literary
production (Hindu) 227
sensibility 118
literary sphere 24–25, 126, 195, 197, 247
Bengali 227
literature 194
miscellanies 175
illustrated 335
nationalism 348
nationalist *māsik patrikā* 126
periodicals 27, 194, 197, 218, 231, 233
public sphere (predominantly Hindu) 265
readership (mostly Hindu) 241
writers 176
Hindu and Brahmo 206
major 12–14, 23, 35, 60, 66, 80, 98, 100, 108, 126, 135, 141, 148, 169, 173, 177, 205, 218, 238, 363
administrative organs 134
Bengali Intellectuals 77
debates 25
economic losses 333
essays 92
illustrated periodicals 65
literary periodicals 332
metropolitan publishers 40
narrative forms 143
novels by Rabindranath Tagore 156
print forms 5
social transformation 12
twentieth-century literary magazines 49
writers 153
majoritarian 239, 244
collective identity 253
discourse 241
Hindu 238
nationalist 231
understanding of the past 238
majoritarianism 313
majority 23, 31, 37, 49–50, 55, 64, 68, 108–109, 113–114, 120, 175, 190, 192, 208, 210, 212–213, 217–218, 220–221, 223, 225, 231, 235, 237, 240, 262, 264–265, 267, 272, 296, 335, 358, 364
demographic 211, 241
Malik Muhammad Jaysi 215
Manchester Textiles 332, 343
Manilal Gangopadhyay 77, 109
Manindrabhusan Gupta, art critic 72
Manish Ghatak 185
Manmatha Nath Rudra 35
Manorama Devi 75
Manu, the ancient law giver 167
Mao's reading of Marx 362
Marathas 244–245, 249–251
Marathi Bakhar histories 245
marginal social groups 41, 52, 57, 175
marginalization 52, 57, 281
Marie Corelli 39
Marion Crawford 39
market 8, 21, 36, 62, 65, 69, 110, 116, 140, 192, 264, 270, 275, 311, 335

market (*cont.*)
  and bureaucracy 2
  Baṭṭalā 22, 53
  Bengali Muslim literary periodical 196
  book 56
  commercial 149
  commercializing 71
  creativity to 67
  domestic 31, 70, 73, 339
  for used periodicals 15
  global 212
  literary 23, 39, 97, 133, 142
    vernacular 142
  periodicals 29, 37, 64, 70, 75, 103, 111, 115
  print 68
  public 118
  -sensitive publishing house 104
  sub continental 40
  Swadeshi 340
  Swadeshi literary 284
  technology 95
  vernacular print 40
Marx's reading of Hegel 362
Māsik Basumatī (journal) 9, 23, 27, 46, 62, 64, 70, 85, 91, 94, 96, 103–105, 126, 165–166, 182, 218, 288, 297
Māsik Mohāmmadī (journal) 96, 194n8, 198, 199,211n82, 213n89, 214n94, 221n127, 222n129,223n134,236, 258n289, 265, 320n227, 321, 321n233, 352, 352n55, 360
māsik patrikā (monthly/ies) 13, 21–23, 28–29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61–63, 65, 67, 69, 71–75, 77, 79, 81, 83, 85, 87, 89–91, 93–95, 97, 99, 101, 103, 105, 107, 109, 111, 113, 115, 117–118, 121, 123, 125–126, 142, 280
māsik sāhitya patrikā (monthly literary periodical) 35, 56
mass education (*lokaśikṣā*) 7, 52
  modern mode of 22
Mathew Arnold 146, 151, 173
Maulana Akram Khan 210, 214
Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi 314
Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi 210
Maulana Shibli Numani 232
Maulavi Emdad-ul Haq 207
Maulavi Khondkar Anwar Ali 207
Maulavi Mohammad Naimuddin 197
Maulavi Syed Emdad Ali 207
Maulavi Syed Nawab Ali Chaudhuri 207
Maupassant, Guy de 108
May Fourth era 309
medical and science journals 56
Meghadūtam, Kalidasa's 172
Meghnādbadh Kābya 247
memoir 43, 45, 78, 105, 122, 204, 285–286
Michael Madhusudan Dutta 39, 42–43, 253–254, 286
'middlebrow literature' 9
middle-class
  agency 367
  art-public 92
  audience 164
  behavior 290
  Bengalis/Bengali homes 14, 106, 282
  bhadralok households 268
  bhadralok life in colonial Bengal 124
  bhadralok readership 174
  bhadramahila 286, 301, 312, 318
  daily lives of the 14
  definitions of domesticity 275
  domesticity 300, 310
    and sociability 17
  educated Bengali Muslims 311
  families 293
    Bengali 309
  groups 42, 51, 362
  homemakers 275, 277
  homes 19, 21–22, 73, 94, 123, 192, 273
    educated 14
  presence of periodicals in 17
  household/s 17, 94, 163, 276, 363
    in Bengal 165
    patterns of consumption and entertainment 14
    relationships within 5
  identity 123
  in Bengal 21
  literary tastes 367
  literate audience 37
  lives 6, 11–12, 14, 163, 365
    key indicator of 14
  male
    chastity 127
    intelligentsia 319
  men 153

and women 122
Muslim Women 314
Bengali 319
nationalist discourse 288, 290
non-elite 14
people 15, 340
reader/s 13–16, 19, 70, 100, 140, 177, 340, 364
audience 133
readership/s 93–94, 275, 330
specific needs and tastes of a 13
reading public 367
sections among Bengal's Muslims 24
segment among Bengal's Muslims 126
sentiments 128
women 268, 273, 275, 287
Hindu 270
married 313
women's
entry into the professional work 278
lives 268
participation in professional work-force 306
middleclassness (*madhyabittatā*) 364–367
Mihir (journal) 187, 227, 229
"(the) Mirror of Bengal" 47
Miscellaneous 20, 30, 37, 196–197, 279
books and periodicals 35
family periodicals 288
literary
journals 34, 43
periodicals 37, 62
periodicals 31, 34–35, 317, 330
poetry 32
print 35
missionaries 33, 43n72, 134, 135n23, 136, 201, 232, 269, 303
modern 46, 106 , 255
art
forms 92
indigenous 95
Bengal 168
citizenship 2
'civil social institutions' 6, 9
concept of love and conjugality 158
culturalism 229
culture 50
conceptualization of a 50
domesticity 282, 290
education 49, 53, 230, 318
educational setup 3
emotion of *prem* 182
European
novelistic tradition 140
thought 2
form/s of
communications 1
literary sociability 2, 175
print 140
reading 140
social life 17
French literature 173
genres 57, 114
historiographical practices 232
Indian art 92
indigenous culture 50
need for a 7
Islamic world 243
journals 96
literariness 7, 57, 196
literary
aesthetics
ordinariness in 14
Bengali 257
culture 54, 192
in Bengal 5
discourse 142
form 197
genres 5, 13, 56, 107, 140, 211
language 223
public 96
sensibilities 51, 107, 130
sphere 47, 53, 107, 211–213, 217–218, 222
literature 2, 13, 37, 128, 150, 153, 159, 162, 176, 211
in the Bengali language 13
principal culture of 37
reception of 13
middle-class/classes' private lives 17
configuration of 14
mode of mass education 22
Musalmānī
Bāṅglā 222
Bengali 214, 217
Muslim middle-classes 255
nation 268, 270

modern (*cont.*)
national literary public 105
nationalist art 94
nation-state 2
creation of a 2
notions of love 154
novelist 14
participatory reading culture 5
political
forms 4
leadership 3
politics 3
principles of association 2
print media 192
professional women 275
public
life 2, 73
sphere 73, 114, 223, 265
rational learning 51
readers (*ādhunik pāṭhak*) 11
readers' inability 12
readership 255
romantic love 162
aesthetics of 162
scientific research 189
sense of ethical social life 14
social and domestic fiction 47
society/ies 166, 349
standardized Bengali prose 214
state 2, 134, 235, 331, 348, 349
and nationalism 330
apparatus, emergence of 6
times 121, 163–165
characteristic feature of the 6
Turkey 262
vernacular
literary canons 139
prose 254
West 129, 158
western literary genres
indigenous adaptations of 13
modern Bengali 34, 60, 214
aesthetic values 189
appropriate for Bengal's Muslims 25
culture 158
fiction 158
literariness 22
prime formative phase 22
Muslim literary sphere 192
poets 46
prose 222
public sphere 28
speaking Muslims 252
modern India 37
Modern Review (journal) 35, 84, 92
modernism 129, 131, 179–180
colonial 177
European 177
literary 133, 189
modernist literature 174, 176, 183, 187, 189
modernists 15, 174–176, 180–181, 184–185, 188–189
modernity (*ādhunikatā*) 6–7, 9, 116, 121, 129–130, 133, 163, 177, 181, 229, 254
colonial 10, 18, 120, 195, 216, 231
colonized middle-classes' encounter with 14
dilemmas of 3
dilemmas with 329
distinctive feature of 13
experiences of 140
features of 14, 238
ideas of 327
literary 139, 180
political 11
primary communicative mode 7
urban 175
modernize 68
modernized 273
modernizing 270, 363
agenda 327
agent 22
Bengali Language 55
Musalmānī Bāṅglā 360
project 269
Mohammad Barkatulla 259
Mohammad Habibur Rahman 229
Mohammad K. Chand 226
Mohammad Lutfar Rahman 211, 220–221
Mohammad Nasiruddin 16, 200, 204, 265
Mohammad Qazem Al Qureshi (Kaekobad) 243
Mohammad Reyazuddin Ahmad 247
Mohammad Wajed Ali 191, 248, 364
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi 332. *See also* Gandhi

Monomohan Basu's *Madhyastha* (journal) 68
Montessori methods 303
monthlies 8, 12, 12n35, 43, 73–74, 82
  Bengali-Muslim 96
  illustrated 71, 76
  literary 35, 55, 147, 153, 267
  women's 297
monthly 34, 36, 47, 56, 70, 72–73, 96, 99, 127, 133, 142, 147, 154, 158–159, 192, 196, 228, 243, 291, 321, 325, 327, 340
  English 84
  illustrated 46, 65
  journal 28, 44, 100
    Maulavi Mohammad Naimuddin's 197
  literary 30, 42–43, 137, 204, 210
moral 4–5, 16, 26, 30, 37, 39, 67, 129–131, 135, 139–140, 142–143, 146, 151–152, 154, 162, 164, 167, 171–172, 174–175, 184–185, 187, 214, 228–229, 247, 272, 279, 313, 317–318
  burden 153
  codes 141, 173
  degeneration 147
  education 228
  pedagogy 14
  social order 1, 168
  universe 253
morality 124, 127, 130, 132, 135–136, 139, 144–146, 148, 152–153, 161–162, 172, 244, 272, 287, 294, 299, 300, 305
Moslem Bhārat (journal) 96, 201, 205, 229–230, 317, 350–351
mother language (*mātṝbhāṣā*) 8, 45, 214, 218, 220
motherland 28
Munshi Meherulla 210
'Musalmani Bengali' 34
  books 33
Muslim
  publicists 25, 192, 214, 218, 220, 223, 225
  rulers 234, 239, 242
  umma 242
  women 26, 206, 240, 257–258, 258n287, 278, 312, 312n192, 313–315, 317, 318n217, 319, 321, 323–325, 327–328, 354
  women writers 319, 323–325, 327, 354
  writers 204, 207, 209, 218, 222, 233, 238
Muslim and Hindu elites 310
Muslim journals 197, 231, 360
Muslim literary periodicals 19, 196–197, 219n104, 317
Muslim reader 210, 218, 227, 248
Muslim readership 209
Mustafa Kemal Pasha 329
Mutiny 29, 134
Muzaffar Ahmad 220–221, 331, 350n43, 355–356
mythological paintings 92, 94
mythological themes 40

Nabanūr (journal) 201, 206–207, 210, 229, 234, 242–243, 247, 249–250, 259, 317
Nabanūr critic 250
Nabaparyyāẏ Baṅgadarśan (journal) 22, 57, 62–63, 76, 83
Nabaparyyāẏ Saogāt (journal) 229, 256
Nabaśakti (journal) 26
Nabi 254
Nabinchandra Sen 45–46, 59, 122
Nabyabhārat (journal) 15n41, 22, 35, 55, 61–63, 76, 103, 117, 160, 286
Nagendrabala Saraswati 79, 295
Namāj Śikṣā 196
Nandalal Bose 90
Naoroz (journal) 360
Napoleon 237
Nārāẏaṇ (journal) 15n41, 49, 70, 95, 103, 154, 159–160, 350
Nārāẏaṇ's admiration of Nazrul's poem 350
Narendrababu (Narendra Deb) 208
narrative/s of
  alternative readership 192
  Bengali literature 18
  cultural refinement 162
  nationalism, dominant 15
nasihat-nāmāh 215
Nasiruddin 200–201, 205–206, 208–209, 213, 265, 325. *See also* Mohammad Nasiruddin
Nasiruddin's compendium 204
Naṣṭa-Nīr (short story by Rabindranath Tagore) 154
nation 1–2, 5, 26, 96
  formation, duress of 9
nation's life (*jātīya jīban*) 150

national
  and communal politics 196
  community 4, 75, 344
  education 51
  movements 9
  -popular domain 11
  self-sufficiency, spinning as means of 27
  thought 200
'national history' 229, 235, 242–243
National Magazine 35
Nationalism (Lecture by Rabindranath Tagore) 330
nationalism 1, 9, 15, 21, 26–27, 95, 106, 111, 114, 128, 130–132, 154, 158, 167, 262, 268, 275, 288, 294, 313, 329–330, 336, 341–342, 345, 348–349
nationalism's
  assertion of sovereignty 111
  confrontation with colonialism 114
  cultural politics 9
  pedagogic mission 1
nationalist
  agenda 149
  agitation 15
  concerns 36
  discourse 25, 50, 155, 363
  elite 131
  histories 25
  ideology 93
  imagining of the nation 313
  intelligentsia 150
  leader 14
  leadership 8
  literati 146
  modernity 6
  movement 8, 27
  periodical 168
  political mobilizations, period of 11
  project 139
  public opinion, primary producers of 26
  publicists 107
'Nationalist Hindu' 191
Nationalist School 85
nationalist school of art 92
nationalist-reformist strategy of indigenous men 267
nationalists 27
"nationalized" Hindu tradition 24
nationhood 3, 9
  bases of 3
  constructive relationship 11
  multiple imaginings of 10n29
nation-mother 240
nation-state, future 8
native
  colonized subject 39
  mind 39
  press 29n2
  speakers of Bengali 5
  youth 43
Nature or *prākṛti* 181
Nawab Faizunnesa Chaudhurani 201
Nawab of Awadh 244
Nawab Sir Khwaja Salimullah Bahadur 201
Nazrul Islam. *See* Kazi Nazrul Islam
Nazrul Islam's
  Mādhabī Pralāp 185
  poetic rebellion 27
networks of interactions 15
new
  aesthetic 92
    in literary experimentation 133
  aesthetics of romantic love 131
  alphabets in Bengali 25
  Bengal School of painting 93
  discourse of tastes and morality 124
  educational institutions 120
  field of circulation 37
  form of education 53
  form of love 142
  forms of social bonding 362
  genre of
    gārhasthya upanyās or domestic novel 142
    sāhitya patrikā 14
  intelligentsia 217
  language form 51
  literary
    culture 194–195
    experimentation 128
    genres 37
    innovations 16
    modern art 46
    periodical 44
    sensibility 46
    sphere 28

tastes 66
venture 55
literature 217
middle-class readership 92
notion of emotional love 144
patriarchy 294
periodicals 104, 125–126
political society 11
public media 57
readers 121
school of art 93
social and moral orders 4
social ethic of individuality 162
social life 14–15
social order (*nutan samāj*) 3
social spaces 28
society 3, 131
vernacular fiction 140
vocabulary 225
"new *Baṭtalā* sāhitya" 41
"new spirit" 36
newly urban 40
"Newspaper" 31
newspaper 6, 11–12, 14, 26n51
media 12
reportage 19
Nikhilnath Roy 78
nineteenth century 67–68
Bengal 227
Islamic revivalist movement 215
periodicals 17–18, 103–104
social reforms 15
Nirad C. Chaudhuri 351
Nivedita 92
non-bourgeois social groups 6
non-cooperation 27
non-elite middle-class reader 14–15
non-literacy 23, 57
non-literate (populations) 7, 22–23, 57, 114, 224
social groups 41
non-mainstream language 19
non-Muslim periodical 196
non-polarized society 195
nonviolent non-cooperation, Gandhi's call for 95
non-Western
modern intellectual tradition 19
nations 19
normative
codes, emerging 41
ideals 16
public sphere
notion of the 17
'reader' 16
norms of
decency 145
wifely chastity 21
notion of
education 8
indigenous conjugality 145
the *kretā-pāṭhak* 107
notions of
domesticity 5
society 3
'vulgarity' and 'decency' 142
novel 13, 24
novelistic genre 153, 161
Nripen 354. *See also* Nripendranath Chattopadhyay
Nripendranath Chattopadhyay 1n2, 175
"numerous less-able writers" 29
Nūr 201
Nurunnessa Khatun 324

obituaries 35
of prominent personalities 83
"objectionable" and "actionable", poem 'Bidrohī', identified by Librarian of the Bengal Library 352
objective of *sāhitya sebā* 97
objectives of epics (*mahākābya*) 254
obscene 21, 51–52, 57, 115, 135, 167, 170, 170n178
books 134, 136
obscenity (*aślīlatā*) 24–25, 126–127, 129–134, 136–137, 149, 174, 176
constructions of 182, 186
debates on 153, 158, 161
occasional
essays 302
readers of periodicals 117
official
archives 274
language (*rāj bhāṣā*) 220
stance on Muslim students 220

offset litho process in the 1930s 90
old
  Islamic order 242
  order, call for subversion of the 359
"old patriarchy" 302
Omar Ali or Sultan Saladin 237
Omar Khayyam (Khayyam's works) 208
"openness of periodical" 13
opposition
  between reason (*tauhid*) and conformism (*taqlid*) 261
  to novel reading 143
oral
  folkloric traditions 7
  transmission of literary texts 111n128
oral-aural reception 57
ordered carnality (*dharmārtha kām*) 167
ordinary
  Bengali readers 92
  Hindu readers 210
  householder/s 8, 46
  housewife 105
  individuals 140
  madhyabitta household 122
  middle-class
    homemakers 275
    lives in Bengal 21
    people 15, 340
    reader/s 100, 330
    social life of 15
  middle-classes 92
  people (*sādhāran*) 3
  reader/s (*sādhāran pāṭhak*) 9, 14–17, 20, 115, 228, 280
    voices of 340
  writers 157
organic
  analogies of society 156
  body 137
organizing of periodical publishing 16, 69
Orientalist 173, 231
  scholars 39, 232
orthodox 167, 258, 315
  critics 152, 161
  Hindu "tradition of her family" 299
  journals 95
  mollahs 205
  patriarchy 318
  principles 167
  publicists 24, 160–162, 167
  segment of the clergy 260
  sensibilities 159
  text (samarpitadi pl. check, this entry will be omitted)
orthodoxies of
  literary theory 10
  modern political formations 345
orthodoxy's
  denigration of liberal progressive ideals as un-Islamic 260
  furor over *Ghare Bāire* and *Strīr Patra* 154
  stand on democracy 131–132
'other'
  constructed 138
  of the conscious rational self 174
Outlook 80n32
overload of fiction in the periodical market 64

1937 provincial elections 83
pahari miniature paintings 90
Paikpara Zamindars Association Library 116
Pallīsamāj 169
pamphlets 12, 26n51, 84
Panipat 243
  third battle of 243
Paṭaldāṅgār Pā̃ncāli 185
pāṭhak samāj 24, 107. *See also* reader society
Pather Dābī 36
patriarchy 21, 154, 160, 163, 269–270, 275, 278, 282, 294, 297–298, 311, 314–315, 318, 320, 325–327, 354
patrikā 12, 63, 323
patriotism 26, 271, 331, 339, 343, 345, 347, 360
Penny Magazine 72, 91
periodical/s 5–9, 12–14, 17, 20, 23, 26–27, 37, 57, 69, 72, 97, 100, 117
  Bengali Muslim 18, 20, 24, 70, 126, 182, 196–197, 200–201, 207–208, 210, 217, 223–224, 229, 231, 233, 265, 314, 317
  literary 13, 15, 22, 34, 37, 43–44, 49, 61–62, 70, 73, 84, 104, 106–107, 113, 117, 123–127, 138, 140, 146, 149, 152, 196–197, 201, 204, 207, 209, 211, 219, 267–268, 273, 276,

280, 286, 290, 301, 317, 330, 332, 362–364, 367
market 23, 29, 37, 56n137, 64, 72–73, 107, 113, 126
in Bengal 75
media 56, 130, 139, 230
production 35–37
publishing 7, 16, 22, 73, 96–87, 112, 140, 192, 201, 204–205, 266
readers 16, 108, 147, 231, 330
readership 108–112, 117, 192
reading 12–14, 16, 26, 123, 125
uni-lingual 33
women's 25–26, 69, 268, 273, 275–278, 282, 287–288, 290–295, 308–309, 317, 328
periodical/s archive/s 18–19, 29, 31
periodical press 12n35, 15–16, 26, 45, 84, 94–95, 231, 246, 297, 336
Persian 32
Perso-Arabic tales 34
Perso-Arabic tradition 319
Perso-Arabic vocabulary 222
Pilgrims' Progress 40
political activism 8–10, 27, 62, 271–272, 292, 306, 310, 330
and constitutional ideologies 10n29
leaders (*netṛbṛnda*) 3
life, committed to 8
literariness 26
mobilization 2
process of 4
modernity, fulfillment of 11
organizations 4
phenomenon (the ultraright) 10n28
societies 11
polygamy 145, 271, 298, 315
popular
commodity 14
culture 130, 143, 154
anarchic form of 143
dramas 40
education 51
genres 57, 137, 139, 146, 215
popularity of romances 40
post-War years 67, 98, 147, 174, 177, 181n225, 205, 367
Prabartak (journal) 336
Prabāsī (journal) 9, 15n41, 23, 27, 35, 49, 62–65, 70, 72–78, 82, 86–100, 103–104, 106, 108–110, 112, 116–118, 123, 125–126, 165, 182, 191, 196, 204–205, 211, 218, 226, 237, 242, 286, 288, 305, 308–309, 329, 335–337
Prabāsī Bāṅgālī (Expatriate Bengalis) 79
Prabāsī editor 64, 78, 82–83, 93, 98–99, 101, 112, 117–118, 176n203, 237, 308, 337–339. *See also* Ramananda Chattopadhyay
Prabāsī office 100
Prabāsī Press 90
Prabhabati Devi Saraswati 73
Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay 77, 77n17, 176
Pracār (journal) 15n41, 223
Pracārak (journal) 196–197, 200–201, 209–210, 227
Pradīp (journal) 69, 91
Prafulla Chandra Ray 78, 173n195, 345
Prajnasundari Devi 281
prakṛti, poetic rendering of 181, 183
Pramatha Chaudhuri 12n34, 16, 28–29, 63, 65, 70, 77, 96, 151, 169, 172–173, 195, 224, 266, 337
Prayag (Allahabad) 74
prem (love) 155–162, 170, 174, 182, 186, 228n161, 277, 343
premarital 21, 247
courtship 21
romance and courtship, celebration of 21
Premendra Mitra 175, 175n200, 370
premodern 4, 7, 22, 25, 57, 107, 128, 140–141, 162n145, 192, 196, 214
Bengali, linguistic formations of 25
channels of communication 7
community identities (*Gemeinschaft*) 4
networks of communication 22
Vaishnava religious poetry 128
Presidency College 185
press censorship 84
primary education 22, 25, 37, 111n126, 112–113, 213, 287, 303, 318n217
print
domain of 14
forms 12
genre 29
media 6–7

print (*cont.*)
evidences of 10n29
medium 5
production 14, 23n50, 31, 35, 107
print culture
advanced phase of 2
print cultures in Bengal 5
printed
books 12
form 12
printing press/es 6, 25n50, 29n3, 65–66, 206, 226, 370
printing technology 90
private
citizens 6
individuals 2
retreat of the home 16
space 5
niche of 14
private and public 13, 17, 19, 73, 223
aspects of reading 17
domains 19
spaces 25
private-public binary 6
sedimentation of a 6
professional writers 63
professionalization 21–22, 29, 63–64, 122
of authorial conduct 64
of literary journalism 29
Prophet 26, 236, 253, 255, 262, 314, 320
psychoanalysis (*manabikalan*) 131, 174–176, 178, 182–183, 188–189
public 1–11, 13, 15, 17–23, 25–26, 28, 31–33, 35, 37, 40, 43, 53, 55, 57, 61, 63, 65, 67–68, 70, 72–73, 80, 82–85, 92–96, 105–107, 109–111, 113–114, 116–118, 124–128, 130–133, 145–151, 153, 156, 161, 167–168, 173, 175, 185, 187, 189, 218, 222–223, 227–228, 231, 237, 243, 248, 253, 255, 265, 267–270, 272–274, 277, 281, 283, 285, 287, 297, 300, 302, 304, 306–307, 310–315, 319, 323, 325–327, 330, 336–339, 341, 354–356, 362, 364, 367
consensus
gradual builders of 15
culture 24
dialogues 20
discourse/s
quality of 8
on culture 8
discussion 6
domain 4
interest 21
specific periods of boom in 12n36
libraries 171
increase in number of 51
library system 117
life of the nation 70
opinion 6, 12n36, 26, 73, 133, 201, 307, 341
space of reception of art 95
public sphere 3, 15, 17, 22, 28, 37, 43, 52–53, 57, 64, 66, 68, 70, 73, 84, 85, 105–106, 108, 110–111, 114, 124–125, 127, 130, 132–133, 142,145–147, 149–151,167–168, 173, 187, 189, 218, 223, 227, 230–231, 236–237, 253, 255, 265, 267, 269, 270, 371, 273, 277, 300, 307, 314, 319, 321, 325–326, 336–337, 356, 362
crafting of a 7
creation of 5–6
democratized 9
formation of the 7
in Europe, formation of the 6
inclusive 24
large and deorganized 8
literary 5
making of 6
multi-vocal nature of the 20
normative definition 6
Publication 13, 24, 30–36, 40, 43, 55, 57, 61, 64–65, 69, 74, 92, 115–116, 136, 194, 187, 200, 204–205, 216, 283, 288, 297, 299, 352, 357
publication of Quarterly Catalogues 30
publicists 3–4, 8, 11, 13, 15–16, 18, 22–26, 57, 67, 106–107, 112, 115, 128–129, 131, 133, 146,149, 153, 160–162, 167, 169, 190, 192, 201, 207–208, 211, 214, 217–218, 220–229, 231–232, 235, 237–240, 243, 248, 251, 253, 263, 265, 336, 338–339
publicity 70, 95, 297, 306, 310, 319, 321, 355, 358
Punjabi language 32
Pūṇya (journal) 281
Purāṇa 40–41

qisse in rural Punjab 107
quality 42, 151, 153, 158
  a literary language 214
  entertainment 14, 23
    and educative reading 138
  essays 61, 201
  illustration 91
  journal 95
  of city life 178
  of paper etc. 12n36
  of public discourse 8
  paper/s 53n118, 56, 91
    provided and the print 101
  periodical 206
  photographs and paintings 77n26, 90, 34n26
  print 205
Queen Alexandra 91
quest for
  aesthetic sophistication 21
  analogous cultural awakening amongst Bengal's Muslims 219
  high art 71
  high-brow literature 73, 126
  investment profitability 65
  perfection 9
  readable literature (*pāṭhopayogī sāhitya*) 44
  reviews 146
  self and community identities 285
  selfhood 217
  the "best self" (Arnoldian) 190
  the colonial state's primary and higher education schemes 112
  the Muslim *Bhadramahila* 312
  writings 34n26, 34, 64n163, 77, 101
question/s of
  abarodh 318–319, 320–321
  an authentic 'Islamic past' for Bengal's Muslims 25
  ascertaining reading trends 111
  authorship 235
  chastity and morality 130, 136, 152–153
  circulation and readership 118
  evidence based history writing 251
  federation 83
  formation of a parallel 'bhadralok' class within the Muslim community 312
  hegemony 114
  heterogeneity 365n6
  Hindu-Muslim relationship 194
  imposition of the *jiziya* 235
  languages 219
  liminality of the moral codes of society 141
  literary propriety 155
  love (*praṇaẏ*) 144
    and conjugality 158
  middleclassness 366
  mother tongue 257
  'Muslim Tyranny' 231
  Muslim women 313
  obscenity 174
  periodical consumption 111
  permissibility 150
  political conflicts 265
  political consciousness 324
  readership and reading practices 110, 367
  reform and rights of Muslim women 313
  social change and self-cultivation 362
  social reform, rational sciences and theories of religion 44, 124
  women's
    education 301, 337
    public engagement 306
    reading practices 284
    rights 337
    voting rights 337
quotidian
  domesticity 14
  religious knowledge 305
Quranic *āẏet* 339
Qutb Minar at Delhi 75

Rabindranath Tagore/Rabindranath 1, 10, 10n27, 12, 12n34, 21, 28–29, 42–46, 53, 57, 59, 62–63, 66, 69–70, 74, 77–78, 83, 106, 115, 118–119, 120–123, 131–132, 139, 150–151, 156, 161, 163, 169, 176, 187–189, 228, 247, 285, 291, 325, 330–331, 341–345, 347–349, 354, 356, 359, 363, 365. *See also* Tagore
Rabindranath Tagore's
  Citrāṅgadā 21, 132, 247
  Cokher Bāli 363

Rabindranath Tagore's (*cont.*)
  critique of Gandhian Program 27, 341–349
  speech 28
Rabindranath's reminiscences 121
Radhakamal Mukhopadhyay 78, 80n29, 133n17, 181n225
Radhakanta Deb 39, 116n149
Radhanath Sikdar 43, 280
Radhanath Sikdar's *Māsik Patrikā* 43
radical
  critique 189
  Historical transformation 362
  literary experiments 177
  modernists 15
  right in Europe
    emergence of the 10n28
  socialist turn 367
  turn in Bengali literary aesthetics 367
radicalism 3, 67
  of Kallol group 133
Rahasya Sandarbha (journal) Rajendralal Mitra's 34
rājadharma, domain of 63
Rajanī halo Utalā 184–186
Rajendra Chandra Shastri 35
Rajendralal Mitra 42–44, 105
Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay 49, 59–60
Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay 61, 77–78
Ram Varma 90
Ramakrishna Mission 165
Ramakrishna Paramahansa 104,164–165
Ramananda Chattopadhyay 57, 62, 64, 69–71, 73–80, 97, 100–101, 112, 182, 191, 288, 291, 309, 337, 341
Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabāsī* 62
  first editorial venture *Pradīp* 69
  illustrated miscellany *Prabāsī* 23
  illustrated monthly 71
Ramaṇī Rahasya 136
Rāmāyaṇ 40, 42, 284
Ramdas Sen 49, 59
Ramendrasundar Trivedi 61, 76–77, 117
Rameshchandra Dutta 61
Ramkamal Sen 39
Ramkinkar Beij 90
Rammohan Roy 39
Rampran Gupta's serial narration in *Prabāsī* 242
Rasasundari Devi 105, 122
Rasselas, Samuel Johnson's 40
rational
  historical methods 239
  piety 262, 264
  sciences 44
rationalism 195, 243
Ratnaji Viswasrao 244
Ravi Varma 90–91, 93
Raziya Khatun/Raziya Khatun Chaudhurani 318, 320, 323–325
readable literature 24
reader
  community 130, 148, 211
  society (*pāṭhak samaj*) 23
readers 16, 19, 190, 192, 201, 209–210, 218, 222, 225, 222–229, 231, 233, 237, 241, 248, 268, 272–276, 278–281, 283–284, 286, 288, 290–291, 293–296, 300–301, 305–306, 313, 315, 321, 325, 329–330, 332, 335–336, 338, 340–342, 350, 353, 357–358, 361, 363–364, 367
  individual and conjugal lives 161
  socially sensible 24
readers'
  choices 40
  existing aesthetic sensibilities 66
reader's taste, transition in the 47
readership/s 5, 9, 22–23, 25, 41–42, 57, 59–60, 65, 70, 73, 84, 95, 106, 109, 125, 127–128, 133, 152, 210–211, 214, 287, 356
  alternative 192
  amorphous 59
  Bengali 72, 182
  Bengali middle-class 275
  Bengali-Muslim 209
  Bengali-Muslim women 315
  broader 241
  burgeoning 104
  concept of widening 177
  confined 109
  democratize 8
  differentiated 104
  extended 115
  female 153, 268, 273, 277, 280–281, 288, 290

formation of a 182
formation of alternate 24
general 61
habituated 210
heterogeneity of the 110
hierarchies of 149
Hindu 245
incorporative 126
informed 149
journal 182
limited 97
literary 84
male 288
mass 110
middle-class 13, 92–94, 364
middle-class *bhadralok* 174
modern 255
multiple 24
nationalist 340
periodical 111–112, 117, 192
printed 133
quantifiable 111
questions of 367
secured 37
sizeable 104, 200, 206
targeted 51, 103, 111, 138, 280
uniform 118
widening of 29, 104
women's 293
reading 321
as habit 115
audience 106, 142, 148, 359
habit 15, 42, 44, 67, 106, 122–123, 147–149, 167, 264, 301
material in the vernacular 22
political and cultural investments in 16
practices 16, 42, 46, 73, 107, 130, 138, 272, 277, 284, 364, 367
of women 284, 294
public 110
creation of 13
reading culture 12
a modern, preparatory 5
realities of colonial subjugation 14
reconstituted Hindu tradition 24
redefined Hinduism 21
redefining the meaning of *aślīlatā* 173
"reflections of society" (*samājcitra*) 18
reform of aesthetic taste (*ruci saṃskār*) 228
reformed
education 264
madrasa scheme 243
reading, need for 14
reformism 21, 230, 318
reformist drive 22,105, 134
reformists 15, 21, 154, 269–271, 276, 317
Registration of Books Act 29
reinterpretation of devotion 26
religious
and caste violence 8
and mythological subjects 40
communities (*upāsak sampradāẏ*) 1
texts 41
Renaissance 93,363
African Cultural (movement) 329
Bengal 10, 18
Europe and nineteenth century Bengal 227
Reports on Publications Issued and Registered in the Several Provinces of British India 30
review of books 12, 35
revised textbooks 236, 238
revisionist discourse of history 236
revivalist
Hindu orthodoxy 21
nationalism 128, 132, 167
-nationalist publicists 161
Robinson Crusoe 42
Rohilla chief Najib-ud-daula 344
Rokeya's
literary strategy 321
style 321
See also Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain
role of an editor 84
romances and religious tracts among rural Muslims 192
romantic love 21, 24, 128–129, 131–132, 145, 153, 160, 162, 164, 166, 173, 187, 244
and courtship 128
and modernism 129
debates around 160
Romantic tales and mysteries 140
Rousseau 129
Rujuneekantu (*Rajanikānta*) 140

S. Wajed Ali 221, 224, 226
S.M. Akbaruddin 240
Śabdakalpadrum (journal) 69
Sabitri Library 116
Sabuj Patra (journal) 15n41, 16, 28, 63, 65–66, 66n168, 66n169, 70, 82, 96, 103, 154n107, 211, 224, 321n234, 337, 367
Sabyasācī 59
sacitra māsik patrikā 23, 62–63, 73–74, 85, 90, 93–94, 118
sacitra patrikā 92, 94–96
Sadashivrao Bhau 244, 246, 250
Sadat Ali Akhand 264
sadhabā 304
sadhabār prem 155, 158
Sādhanā (journal) 22, 28, 28n1, 44n77, 45n83, 61–63, 69, 83, 321n234
sādhāran pāṭhak (common reader) 14, 17, 106
sādhu bhāṣā (literally genteel language) 33, 66, 197, 222–223, 223n134, 224
(The) Sadler Commission Report (1919) 212
Sahacar (journal) 201
sāhacaryer śāsan 106
sahadharmī (writers akin) 115
Sāhitya (journal) 15n41, 22, 35, 49, 55, 60–62, 62n159, 63, 69, 76, 90, 93, 93n64, 95, 117, 127, 130, 150, 152, 154, 159–160, 169, 171, 186–187, 207, 210–211
sāhitya āsvādan 150
sāhitya bodh (sense of the literary) 130
sāhitya circle 187
sāhitya kṣetra 8, 67, 106–107, 227
sāhitya or literature 10, 22, 106
Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ 191
Sāhitya Pariṣaṯ Patrikā 117
sāhitya patrikā (literary journal) 5, 7, 12, 20, 107, 201
  emergence of the 22
  new genre of 14
sāhitya platform 169
sāhitya samāj 3, 16, 96
sāhitya samālocanā 24, 147, 171, 190
sāhitya sebā (literary practice) 22, 61, 70, 96–97, 112
Sāhitya's campaign 186
sāhitya-karmī 68
sāhitya-sebī 68
  against Tagore and Saratchandra 186
Sāhitye Svāsthyarakṣā 159
sāhityik aślīlatā 161, 174, 178
sāhityik nīti or *sāhityik dharma* (literary morality) 130
Sailajananda Mukhopadhyay 175, 179, 355
Sainik Badhu (short story) 324
Sajanikanta Das/Sajanikanta 186–188
Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar 61
Salimullah Bahadur, Sir Khwaja 201
samāj citra 229
Samajpati 128, 161, 171, 187. *See also* Sureshchandra Samajpati
Samālocanā 147–148, 151–152
samālocanā sāhitya 146
sāmaẏik (periodical) 12, 35
'Sāmaẏikī' 147
Sāmaẏikpatre Bāṅglār Samājcitra (Reflections of Bengal's Society in Periodicals) 17
Saṃbād Prabhākar (journal) 137
'Saṃbād Sāhitya' 187
Samser Ali 205
Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* 40
Sāmya (poem by Nazrul Islam) 331
Sanātan Dharmasabhā 34
sanctity of
  Hindu marriage 21, 141
  rural strictures 15
Sandhyā (Swadeshi era newspaper) 26, 271, 354
Śaṇibārer Ciṭhi (journal) 49, 60, 114, 115n142, 152, 186, 188, 350
Sanskrit 32, 35, 54, 159, 167, 216, 224, 226
  alaṃkār theorist 172
  alaṃkāraśāstra 172
  literary culture 234
  literature, ancient 173
  pandits 28
  poets 172
  words 55
Sanskritic
  aesthetic tradition 172
  alaṃkāraśāstra 173
Sanskritized
  Bengali of the
    Hindu and Brahmo intelligentsia 222-223
    Hindus 217

reformed Bengali prose 216
sādhu style 54
version of *Amir Hamja* 222
words 222
Saogāt (journal) 16, 96, 200n20, 201, 204–206, 208–210, 224, 229, 247, 255, 257–260, 262–265, 320–321, 321n235, 325–326, 350, 350n42
Saogāt editor 205, 210, 247, 262, 264, 320, 325
Saogāt era 204
Saogāt group 206, 264
Saogāt office 323
Saogāt writers 259, 262–264
Saogāt yug 200n19, 204
Saogāt's alignment with Nazrul Islam 265
Saral Kumar Dutta 324
Sarala Devi/Sarala Devi Chaudhurani 159, 161, 267
Sarasvatī (Hindi journal) 74
Saraswati Library 116
Saratchandra Chattopadhyay 49n98, 64n163, 131, 142n62, 153, 156, 159–160, 176, 187, 326, 355
Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's 161n137
major novels 142n62
manuscript 127
novel *Caritrahīn* 127n3, 171
novel *Pather Dābī* 36
novel *Srīkānta* 160n133
novels *Svāmī* and *Bilāsī* 159
Sarbahārā (Nazrul's verse) 357
sarbajanīn 111, 261
Sarojini Naidu 267, 307n162
Sarojnalini Dutta Narimangal Samiti 309
Library 291
Sashibhusan Basu 3–4
satīlakṣmī (novel) 284
satīlakṣmī and *sugṛhiṇī* 155
Satish Sinha 94
Satishchandra Mukhopadhyay's *Māsik Basumatī* 62
satītva 315
saṯ-sāhitya (good literature) 156
saṯ-saṅga (good company) 156
sattva or the introspective knowledge 183
Saturday Evening Post 100
Saturday Magazine 91
satyāgraha 27
Satyendranath Bishi 90
Satyendranath Dutta 46, 77, 77n17, 109
Satyendranath Tagore 44, 77
Satyer Āhvān (essay) 343
Sayyida Motahera Banu 325
scholarly journals 143
science and medical journals 20n46, 34
seclusion (*abarodh*) 26, 230, 258, 271, 273, 293, 297, 314–315, 317, 319–321, 323, 325
sedition 29n3, 357
sepia monotones 90
Serampore Baptist Mission 43
serial
fiction/s (*dhārābāhik kathāsāhitya*) 142, 299
novels 14, 22, 61, 77, 108, 121, 140, 200, 299
serialization
in periodicals 150
of a fiction 148
series of reports on libraries and reading facilities 116
Śeṣer Kavitā (Tagore's novel) 180
sexual
anarchy 167
and bodily pleasures 136
behaviors 185
of marginal 178
consent 132
desire/s 159–160, 168, 178, 284, 363
education 168
lust 132
misconduct 104
prejudice 179
sexualities 42
sexuality in print 149
Shah Jahan Nama 235
Shahidullah, Mohammad 220, 256
'Shājāhāner Mṛtyu' (painting) 92
Shakespeare 42, 254
Shakespeare's *Macbeth* 109
Shakta poets 54
Shamsuddin Ahmad 223, 247–248
Shamsunnahar Mahmud 324
Shanta Devi 74n5, 75, 77, 78n18, 80n30, 108, 110n121, 176, 176n203
shared
reading 107

shared (*cont.*)
social location 151
space 94, 248
of cultural experience 16
Sharia 206, 259, 311, 313–314, 320
sharif qawm 311
sharif space 311
sharif women 318
Sheikh Habibur Rahman 226
Shelley 42, 46, 286
Shivaji 237
Shobhabazar Zamindars 41, 68
short stories 13, 157
of Maupassant Guy de 108
Shuja-ud-daula 244, 246, 250
shurafa 311
Śikhā (journal) 205, 256–257
Sikhism 337
śikṣā (education) 317
śikṣita pāṭhak 114
Simlā Baṅgīya Sammelan 85, 85n45
Sir Jadunath Sarkar 18, 78, 78n24, 84, 86n43, 207, 233n183, 236, 252
Siraj and Mir Kasim 236
Siraji 210, 228, 237, 254. *See also* Ismail Hossain Siraji
Siraji's epic 255
narration of Karbala 254
Sita Devi 77, 108, 176, 176n203, 300n127, 307
Sītārām (Bankim's novel) 223
Sītār Banabās 42, 54n120
ślīlatā (i.e. decency) 129, 145, 155
'small books' 37
small-sized journals 66
social
acceptability 21
anarchy 168
and cultural world of Bengal 10n29
and economic stratification of the middle classes 53
and linguistic hierarchies 105
and literary life 204
and political
concerns 57
developments 18
discourses 1
and state resources 53
anxieties 16, 284
aspirations 41, 105, 130, 192
ban 285
-body 157
categories 3, 349, 360n80
classification/s 4, 359
range of 4
communication 52, 106
ethic/s (*samāj nīti*) 24, 128, 162, 165, 171
function of critics 150
functions of literature 106
groups 4, 6, 41, 51–53, 57, 64, 108n115, 113, 130, 175–176, 274n27, 355, 363, 365
institutions 6, 9, 9n26, 156, 189
institutions and practices 189
issues 15, 57, 83, 104, 201, 230
critical 15
life (*samāj jīban*) 2–3, 14–15, 17, 195, 331, 362–363
modern forms of 17
mobility and material wealth 114
norms and practices 15
novels by Bankim 140
order 1, 128, 143, 149, 162, 168
new 3
organizing principles of 1
orthodoxies 26
pedagogy 8
potential of literature 106
principles 169
reform/s 15, 44, 124–125, 132, 161, 204n31, 228, 270, 270n18, 272, 277n37, 298, 300, 310, 337, 359
debates 132
success of 24
reformers and public educators 161
relations 162
relationships 3, 140, 176, 187, 345, 353
resource 1, 114, 163, 210, 212
responsibility 149
sanctions and instincts 145
scientists 156
sensibility (*sāmājik ruci*) 152
service/s (*sāmājik paridhi*) 26, 297, 307
solidarity 70,107
space/s 5, 28, 276n33, 163
for circulation of ideas 7
status 163
and power 41

thought (*samāj citra*) 18–19, 78
unacceptable relationships 159
values 20, 153
world 108, 140, 151n94, 195–196, 251
assumed symmetry of the 141
'social constitution' 2n5
socially
differentiated readers 149
heterogeneous public 64
inclusive 96
sanctified norms, supremacy of 145
sensible readers 73
unacceptable relationship 159
societal concerns 15
society 1, 6, 24, 26, 37, 51, 125, 156, 160–161, 170, 187–188, 194, 208, 228, 256, 272, 275–277, 294–296, 300, 306, 319–320, 326, 330–331, 338–339, 349, 353, 359, 363
alternate 314
basis of 3
Bengali 50, 128, 158, 173, 183
bhadralok 142
civil 7, 124, 173, 323
colonial 16, 118
colonized 17
contemporary 3, 178, 184
conventional norms of 132
critique of 129
discourses on 362
heterogeneous 2
'Hindu' 159, 163, 266
idea of 4
Indian 195, 337
indigenous 53, 124, 136, 141, 157–159, 337
injunctions 144
lower orders of 136
marriage in our 164
Medieval Bengal 195
members of the 136
modern 166
moral
codes of 141
order of 168
Muslim 197, 200, 207, 209, 229
new 3, 5, 131
non-polarized 195
non-politicized 195
notions of 3–4
peasant 119
political 11
possibility of 128
poverty ridden 105
reader 23, 59, 152, 204
rural 264
under-capitalized 23
universe of 129
utopia of a 108
violation of 132
woman's place in 160
women and marginal groups in 66
socio-economic
backgrounds 64
differentiations 118
instability 147
resources 114
sociologist 3n9, 18
'sociology of literature' 5
solely women's journals 153
solitary reading/s 57, 107, 113
Sonābhāner kecchā 196
Sonār Tarī (Rabindranath's book of verse) 285
soujanya (courtesy) 173
Soumendranath Tagore 190n258
soundarya 172
and *satya* (truth) 181
soundarya bodh (sense of beauty) 130
Southey, Robert 39
sovereignty 53, 111, 139, 158, 260, 339, 348
space 5–10, 14–20, 22, 25–28, 34, 37, 43, 53, 57, 61–62, 64–65, 68, 72–73, 75–77, 79–80, 82, 91, 93–97, 99, 99n91, 103–104, 106–108, 113, 116–117, 120, 122–125, 131, 140, 141n56, 146–147, 153, 154n108, 158, 163, 165, 168–169, 178, 191–192, 194–195, 197, 204–207, 209, 213–214, 221, 267, 276, 293, 302, 311, 317
specialized
journals 37
writing projects 60
specific
formatting of periodicals 121
genre preferences 16
specifically modern form of leisure 121
Spencer and Durkheim 156

sphere of
  circulation 129
  sāmayik sāhitya 107
spinning 27
spiritual
  communities 20n46
  emancipation (*mokṣa*) 167
spoken (*calit*) Bengali 25
spoken form 66
spread of literacy 6
śramajībī (the working classes) 98
Srishachandra Majumdar 77
śṛṅgār 172
  aesthetic of 142
  aesthetics 141
  concept of love 141
  or *ādiras* ideal 141
standard education(*śikṣā praṇālī*) 156
Standardization of
  colloquial prose 55
  the spoken form of Calcutta 224
Star Theatre 340
Steam Navigation and Transit Companies 34
stereotypical 47
  ideas of the West 158
Strī-ācār 304
Strī-dharma 282, 297
Strīr Patra (Tagore's short story) 154
Strī-Svādhīnatā 271, 276–277, 295, 325
Subaltern Studies 11
subalternized
  bhadralok 142
  class 163
  existence 40
subcontinent 27, 29, 31–32, 38–40, 76, 79, 134, 169n173, 220, 231–233, 235, 245, 332, 347, 363
  South-Asian 75
sub-dominant colonial elite 125
sub-national Bengali Identity 73
subscriber household 101
subversion of creativity 67
Sudhindranath Tagore 28n1
suffrage rights 337
Sufi folk tales 215
Sufia Kamal 312n192, 323–325
sugṛhiṇī 300, 308
suitable reading (*supāṭhya*) 148
'Sujātā o Buddha' (painting) 91
Sukhalata Rao 90
Sukumar Sen 214–215, 223
Sultan of Turkey 200
Sultan Saladin 237
Sultanate 245
  and Mughal periods 238
Sun 80n32
Sunni revivalist 261
Suppression of eroticism and sensuality in print 139
Suprabhāt (journal) 35
Sureshchandra Samajpati 53n118, 60n147, 127, 132, 154, 159, 187
surrogate
  arenas 158
  Englishman 39
  or formal education 73
suruci (good taste) 173
Suśīlār Upākhyān (Tales of Sushila) 42
Svadeś or nation 76
svādhikār (own right) 326
Svāmī (Saratchandra Chattopadhyay's novel) 159–160
svarāj 344
Swadeshi
  agitation 345
  day newspapers 26
  days 10, 96, 354
  enterprise 279
  ideology 365
  lesson 388
  market 340
  movement 4
  phase 70
  responsibilities 279
  sāhitya or literature 10
  years 10, 92, 131, 271
Swadeshi Movement 4, 10, 84, 299n121, 307, 330, 338, 346, 358–359, 365
Swarnakumari Devi 55, 77, 108, 267, 286, 293, 298, 299n121
Syed Emdad Ali 201, 207, 224, 247, 253
Syeduddin Khan 262, 264
Syncretistic linguistic styles 42

Tabaqat-i-Nasiri 238

Tagore 1n2, 11–12, 28–29, 66, 69–70, 132, 132n16, 155–157, 161–162, 164–166, 170–172, 176, 180–181, 186–188, 281, 291, 341–342, 344–346, 348–349, 356, 365–366
Tagore family
 enterprise 69
 residence at Jorasanko 181
Tagore's 48
 aesthetic 21, 181
 argument 345
 associates 172
 autobiography *Chelebelā* 194
 brief eight line verse *Dhūmketu* 355
 Citrāṅgadā 21
  lyrical ballad 160, 169
 close associate Priyanath Sen 171
 Cokher Bāli (novel) 157, 363
 critique of the equivalence 165
 descriptions of *Citrāṅgadā*'s physical beauty 172
 exchanges with the modernists 181
 fiction and verse 286
 indifference 188
 negative response 179
 non-prose works 180
 notion of culture 366
 oeuvres like *Strīr Patra*, *Naṣṭa-Nīṛ*, *Ghare Bāire* and *Citrāṅgadā*
 poem 355
 poetry 181
 portrayal of courtship 132
 private secretary Sudha Kanta Raychaudhury 350
 prose-poem "Bām̐śī" 366n8
 rejection of urban squalor 179
 supporters 21
 take on the 1921 Movement 342
 tenuous relationship 180
 works 153, 180
  reception of 132
 writings 163–164
Tagorean 175
 aesthetic/s 21, 175, 177, 190
  and social ideals 167
  of love 167
  of romantic love 187
 byakti-mānab 341
 inheritance 179
 'non-nation' 348
 poetic tradition 352
 sense 1
Tagores 28, 65, 289, 365
Tahzib un-Niswan (Urdu journal) 313
Tales and Romances 47, 139
Tales like Rujuneekantu (*Rajanikāntā*) 140
Tales of Sushila 42
tamaddun 242–243
tāmasik guṇ, concept of the (dark attribute) 186
Tamil print production 35
taqlid (un-Islamic practice) 264
Tarabai Shinde and Pandita Ramabai 271
target audience 115, 174
target readership/s 103, 111
targeted readership 51, 138
Tarikh-e-Firishta 235
Tarikh-e-Hind 235
tarikhs 234–235
Tarūṇ (journal) 324
task of cleansing literature 146
task of mentoring new writers 208
Tattvabodhinī Patrikā/*Tattvabodhinī* 44–45, 55, 68, 103, 117, 365
Tattvabodhinī Sabha 68
"Tattvabodhinī" school 45
Tattvabodhinī writers 54
Tawarikh-e Sindh 234
team of defiance (*niẏom bhāṅgār dale*) 323
'techniques of mass contact' 26n51
Tekcām̐dī 55
terms of disjuncture 10
territorial decolonization 10n27, 354
text 16
textbooks 237
 by anti-Muslim Hindu writers 237
 for Muslim students 236
textile merchants 339, 347
textiles 347
textual
 and graphic 110
 and visual enjoyment 103
 tradition of *puthi sāhitya* 222
The Mussalman 262
The Tales of Pataldanga 185
The Translator 136

theologian-intellectuals 210
theologians 192, 200–201, 206–207, 228, 260–262, 325
theological
  and philosophical matters 19
  learning 229
theology 25, 228
theories of psychoanalysis 183
theory (*tattva*) 180
third battle of Panipat 25, 243
Thompson (English missionary) 172
threat of vulgar literary senses 149
threat to the moral order of society 168, 170
three forms of illegitimate love 158
three languages in question 219
three major debates 25
Tilak Swarajya Fund 333
Tili Samācār 20n46
Tilottamāsambhava Kāvya 43
Tolstoy, Leo 159
Tom Kākār Kuṭir (Bengali rendition of Uncle Tom's Cabin) 109
traditional
  and semi-oral literary genres 57
  genres 37
  patriarchy 154
  śṛṅgār concept of love 141
  Upper scribal castes 63
traditionalists 15
tragedy 253
  at Jallianwallah Bagh in Punjab (1919) 341
transformation of middle-class values 124
transformative capacity of 142
  literatures 15
  reading 17
transgressed societal boundaries 162
transgression
  and compliance 155
  of socially sanctioned boundaries 363
  of virtues 154
transition in the reader's taste 47, 139
translated and annotated versions 234
translating Persian sources 233
translation/s (*tarjamā*)
  and discussions 13
  from Persian and Arabic literatures 220
  of English emotions and ideas 144
  of European fiction 6
  of the Koran 34
transliteration 25
trans-periodical 20
trends in commercial publishing 96
tribal communities 178
tribute to Panipat 245
true space of Islam 311
Turkey 258
Turkish warrior 237
Tutināmā 215
Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri 235
twentieth-century 69, 72–73, 96, 107, 263, 352, 363
  colonial Bengal 109
  decades 367
  intellectuals 67
  literary sphere 57, 151
  periodicals 363
  turn of the 209, 240
two groups of
  periodicals 265
  readers 209
two memories 204
two sets of binaries 145
two-penny magazines 72
type of periodical 30
tyrannical foreign 'Muslim' 231

U. Ray & Sons 90
Uddīpanā 201
Ufāter Kabitā 196
ulema 192, 205–206, 228, 258n288, 262, 264–265, 317, 317n214, 339
  on part of the 264
  reform of the 264
ulema's
  deprecations of *mukta buddhi* 258
  "entrenched interests" (*kāẏemī svārtha*) 265
  monopoly 259
upper classes (*uccaśreṇī*) 42, 50, 221
upper crust journal 76
upper caste 258
  Bengali home 269
  Hindu Bengali elite 50
  Hindus 50
Umayyad Abbasid 241
  conflicts 234

Umayyad Caliphs 234
Umayyad monarchs 260
Umayyad Spain 261
Uncle Tom's Cabin 109
"un-historical" (*anaitihāsik*) 253
uniform reading habits 148
uni-lingual
  Bengali miscellaneous periodicals 34
  books and periodicals 33
un-Islamic 209, 215, 220, 253, 260, 264, 320, 324, 352
  aesthetic, Kaekobad's 247
  aesthetics 25
  literary sensibility 360
  practice like *taqlid* 264
  practices 248
  syncretistic practices 215
un-Islamicism (*anaislāmikatā*) 25, 247
United Province 167
United States of America 330
universal 157, 223, 272
  accessibility 7
  brotherhood in Islam 261
  literacy 57, 106, 148
  religion 260–261
universalism 257, 260, 349
University of Calcutta 137, 185
University of Dhaka 212
university professors 365
"unjust conservatism" (*anyāẏ gõṛāmī*) 264
unorthodox possibilities 331
unregulated
  carnality 168
  sexuality 168
    of women 127
unsophisticated readers 106
"untouchability" 224
Upāsanā (journal) 158
Upendrakishore Raychaudhury 90, 301n132
Upendranath Gangopadhyay 62, 62n160, 127n1, 155n111, 365
upgrading printing presses 23n50
urban 40, 73, 179, 217
  and rural lower middle classes 41
  and semi-urban areas 243
  Calcutta 177
    early twentieth century 116
    public libraries in 116
  culture, growth of 6
  habitat/s 175, 183, 366
  habitations 57
    marginalized 133
  Indians, young 189
  life 178, 189, 275
    in Calcutta 93
  lifestyles 275
  living 133, 175, 181
  lower classes as literary subjects 174
  mass culture 275
  middle and lower middle-class audience 164
  middle classes 118, 271, 281
  middle-class
    Bengali homes 282
    reader/s 108, 140
    religiosity 165
  middleclassness 14
  modernity 175
  mofussil and rural areas 335
  petty bourgeoisie 163
  poor 57, 221
  vices 52, 57, 138
  wage-earners 358
urbaneness 363
'urbanity' 173
"urbanity of style" 173
urbanization 97, 122
urbanized 192
Urdu 32, 68, 197n17, 215–216, 218–222, 225–226, 232, 318n217, 319, 360
  a language of India's northwest 221
  as a medium of expression 324
  cultural and literary traditions 311
  cultural traditions 192
  journal *Tahzib un-Niswan* 313
  literary
    sphere 232
    tradition 220
  speaking
    population 220–221
    residents of Bengal 221
  terms *salika* (meaning "taste") 296
  words 215, 225
utilitarianism 144
utopia of a society 108

Uttarā (journal) edited by Atulprasad Sen 63n160, 80

Vaiṣṇava 41
- and Śākta poets 54
- literature 159
- religious poetry 128
- tradition of Bengal 137

Vaiṣṇava Padābalī 159
Vaishnavism 337
value of
- a literary work 145
- *satītva* 144

Vamanacarya 172
Vāṯsyāẏan 167
vernacular 22, 45, 49–52, 55, 68, 104, 115, 129, 178n207, 206, 218, 220, 221–223, 226, 272, 283
- adaptations of sensational themes 67
- books and periodicals 35
- education 51, 73, 111, 115
- elite 96
- fiction 140
- for centuries 220
- journalism 18
- literacy 112
- literary
  - canons 130
  - field 36
  - journalism 36
  - market 142
  - production 32
- literate 57, 109, 123, 237
  - and lesser educated 57
  - readers 110
- literature 137
- magazine form 53
- medium 236, 303
- modern standardized and refined 33
- newspaper press 26
- periodical/s 112, 117, 138, 177
  - literary culture of 36, 121
  - production 36
- primary education 113
- print 40, 44, 97, 134, 147
- prose 54, 254
- public sphere 319
- publicists 231
- *puthi* 255
- reading 42, 114, 116
- reading public, making of a 11
- refined 33
- rendition of European texts 109
- school textbooks 47
- schooling 107
- societies 231
- writing 60

Vernacular Press Act of 1877 137
vernacular's consistent improvement (*kramonnati*) 117
verse editorial of *Dhūmketu* 356
Victoria Press, the owner of 136
Victorian 356
- and Orientalist perceptions 173
- bourgeois 134n21
- England 7, 91, 109
- feminists 269
- illustrators 94
- literary
  - periodicals, mid-century 140
  - public sphere 53
  - publicists 146
- magazines 49
- miscellanies 91
- morality 144
- women's periodicals 294

Victorian Protestant moral codes 135
Vidyasagar 54, 54n120, 206. *See also* Iswarchandra Vidyasagar
Vidyāsundar 137, 170
Viennese
- intellectuals 10n28
- intellectuals' disillusionment 10n28

vīj of *prem rog* 157
violating the Shariat 206
violation of
- civility 64
- domestic conventions 325
- *ślīlatā* or norms of decency 145
- society (*samāj*) and scriptural (*dharma*) sanctions 132

violence 3, 250, 330, 341, 346–347
- military 195
- organized 359
- political 195
- religious and caste 8

repressive 331
Virgil 254
virtual community of readers 80
visibility of women's writers 25
visual media 95
Visva-Bharati 342–343
Visva-Bharati Brahmacarya Asram 341
Visva-Bhāratī Press at Santiniketan 74
Viśvakoṣ 82
Viswasrao 250
Vivekananda 165
vocabulary 92, 152, 161, 224, 290, 301, 347
alternative 327
Bengali 204, 226
colloquial 216
new 225
nineteenth century reformist-nationalist 282, 306
of reforming public reading practices 130
Perso-Arabic 222
scientific 226
words 25
vulgar reading habits 167
'vulgarity' 139

W.E. Houghton 12n35
Wajed Ali 191
Walter Bagehot 151
Walter Scott 39
War 67, 83, 84n41, 95–96, 98, 98n82, 99, 118, 163, 178, 212, 245, 330, 341, 349, 353n59
war chronicle in verse 246
war slogans 252
War years 30, 64n163, 103, 118, 133n17
Warfront 84
warriors
Hindu 250
Maratha 244
resolute 244
Turkish 237
wars and warriors, descriptions of 249
war-time demands 178
wedding songs 40
weekly/ies 12, 12n35, 26n51, 223n134, 30, 100, 103n104, 126, 197, 265, 324
West Asia 19, 25, 242
history of 260
West Asian region 242, 258n287
noble migrants 311
Western 93
aesthetic standards 144
and central Bengal 179
civilization 345
classificatory Schemes 32
concept of 'love' 159
educated circle 41
education 38–39, 49, 57
Europe 93, 97
eighteenth-century 9
India 76
learning
among the upper caste Hindus 50
amongst the indigenous elite 39
literary genres 56n136
modern 13
literature 67
modernity 9, 9n26
notions of
copyright laws 33
love 159
parts of Bengal 224
perceptions of indigenous literary traditions 36
political philosophy of Rousseau and Kant 129
psychoanalyses and sociology 189
psychoanalysis 176
psychoanalyst 182
psychological theories 188
public spheres, norms of 7
sartorial fashion 339
scientists and philosophers 144
societies 166
thought 51
traditions of knowledge 365
westernized mobile woman 273
widow's love (*bidhabār prem*) 155
widowhood 161, 315
social stigma against 363
widows 157, 178, 272, 277, 293, 298, 308–309, 363
and prostitutes 178
wifely
chastity, norms of 21
devotion 24
William Wordsworth 39

woman's pre-marital relationship 155
womanhood
  and femininity 328
  ideals of 153
  notions of 153
womanly conduct 154
women 6, 15, 24–25, 41, 63, 66, 72–73, 77, 96, 101,103, 109, 112–113, 120, 122–123, 126–127, 137–139, 142, 144, 153, 157–158, 161–162, 165–166, 168, 172, 185, 206, 230, 240, 266–268, 270–271, 275, 280, 290, 302–305, 309–310, 314, 318–319, 321, 323–325, 328, 342, 354, 363
  and children in the vernacular 28
  and lower class Muslims 41
  authors 108
  Bengali Muslim 26, 278
  in colonial Bengal 270, 282
  laborers 179
  Muslim 206, 257–258, 315
  novelists 299
  of bhadralok households 103
  of middle-class households 94
  of the *antaḥpur* 42
  of the household 269
  reader/s 26, 44, 108, 185, 268, 273, 281, 283, 288, 293, 301, 305, 320
    periodicals meant exclusively for 24
  scientists and poets 103
  status for 267
  within marriage 132
  writers 25–26, 176, 267, 273–274, 277, 281, 286, 295, 297–299, 301, 315, 326
women's
  activism 327
  aesthetic sensibility 283
  and Bengali Muslim periodicals 70
  anonymous writings 297
  associations 291, 310
  awakening (*nārī jāgaraṇ*) 307
  cultural practices 130
  curriculum 307
  desires 275
  domestic space 302
  education 270–272, 287, 301, 303–304, 317, 337
  educational endeavors 44
  engagement in the public sphere 319
  entry into
    public spaces 325
    the professional work 278
  fashions 108
  health 284
  history 103, 313
  household duties 282
  income 308
  intellect 274
  involvement in the literary world 267
  issue/s 288, 319
  of the *Saogāt* (*Mahilā Saogāt*) 325
  journals 19–20, 44, 72, 113, 153, 210, 267, 273, 275, 278–279, 283, 287–288, 290, 293–294, 297, 304–306, 308
  and Bengali-Muslim periodicals 126
  language 302
  learning 298
  legal rights within the Islamic tradition 327
  life experiences 271
  lifestyles 26
  literacy 287
    and political activism 298
  literary
    choices 306
    cultures 268
    engagements as readers and writers 268
  magazine 276
    reading culture 287
  monthlies 295
  natural role 278
  need for pleasure 25
  new political demands 271
  or children's magazines 101
  organizations 272
  participation 266, 306
    in professional work force 306
  periodicals 25–26, 69, 268, 273, 275–278, 282, 287–288, 290–291, 293–295, 306, 308, 317, 328
  political activism 271, 310
  position 166
  professions 306
  "progress" 271
  progressive movement 323
  public

engagement/s 268, 306
involvement 306
participation 298
as writers 297
presence 267
role 288
question/s 288
within nationalist discourse 25
readership 293
reading 284
circle 122
practices 272, 277, 284, 294
preferences for *Baṭṭalā* fiction 315
readings 283, 285, 294, 304
and issues pertaining to women 317
rights 313, 326
in the public realm 327
section/s 101, 288
in miscellaneous 308
sociability 276, 320
social status 267
socialization 320
tongue 281
university 303
voices 270
voting rights 337
welfare 276
work 26, 278, 308, 310
outside home 278
writings 274, 276, 297
womenfolk 119–120, 122, 138n41, 179, 266, 294, 320–321, 323, 325
gossips (*āsar*) 119
in the family 119
of the household 14
or peasants 107
world of
Baṭṭalā 365
Bengal
literary 7
social and cultural 10n29
cosmopolitan art 94
culture 10n28
European paintings 92
periodicals 125
primary urban middle class readers 108
print 91n54
prurient print 41
the subalternized bhadralok 141n56
twentieth-century Bengal 133
women 325
World War I 98, 142n62, 299n121, 350. *See also* First World War
writer-reader society 59
writers of Islam's history 236

yamadut (the messenger of God) 225
Yamunā (journal) 127
Yogāyog (Tagore's novel) 155
young
men, educated 67
modernists 180, 189
modernists' criticism 181
Muslim men 208
Muslim students 211
Rabindranath's observation 12
readers 26
widow/s 157, 308
writers 67
younger group of poets 11
youth and middle class groups 108
youth hostels in Calcutta 208
yuddha kābya 246
yugadharma (the call of the times) 248
Yugāntar group of revolutionaries 355
yukta Islam or united Islam, the idea of 221
Yusuf-Julekhā 215

zamindars
affluent 108
agrarian power nexus of 262
zenana 321
zuafa 317