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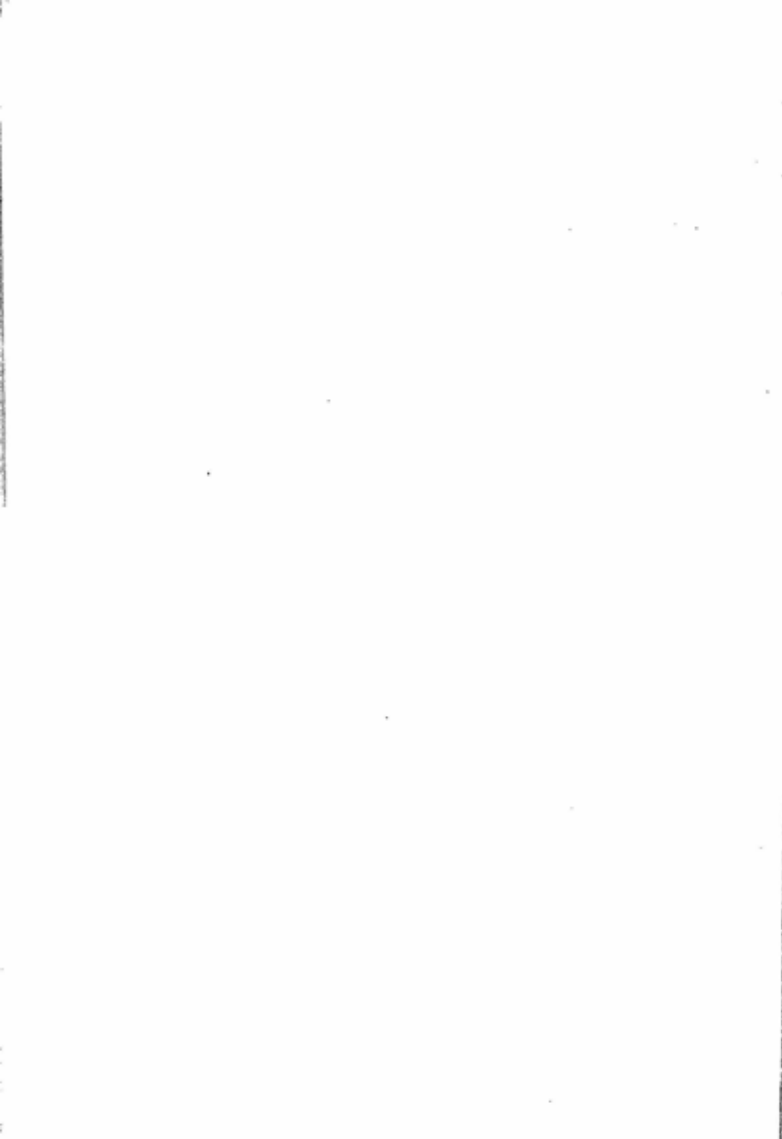
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RENAISSANCE IN BENGAL
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1800—1860



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ARABINDA PODDAR



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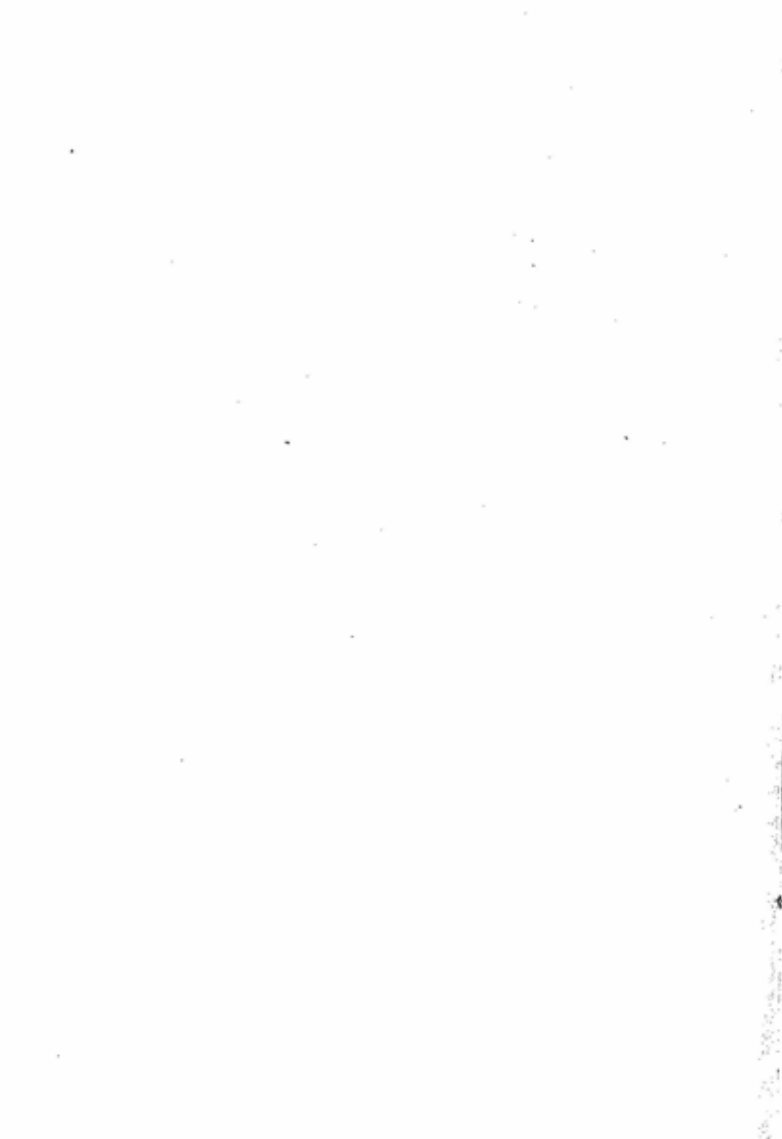
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To

NIHARRANJAN RAY

whose advice and affection
had always been
a source of encouragement.



P R E F A C E

The following pages are an attempt at an evaluation of Bengal's renaissance, the promises it held out and the fulfilment it achieved, during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century. These are not, however, to be read as a systematic historical account of the intellectual movement; for they neither analyse nor have recorded the contributions of each and every participant in the ferment. Assessment has been made entirely on a selective principle; that is, on the basis of a study of the contributions of only those considered to be representatives of the epoch. The major rays of the spectrum have been noticed, the minor or secondary ones left out.

At the start, through an analysis of the historical situation, following the impact of the West, the notion of an intellectual as against a mere "intellect-worker" has been sought to be clarified, and the criterion therein set up has guided the subsequent interpretation. In the consideration of individuals Rammohan naturally has figured prominently, as have Derozio and the Derozians. Radhakanta Dev has not been forgotten, even though his inclination was to obstruct rather than to facilitate the course of events. The field of contemplative intellectualism is represented by Akshay Kumar Dutt, the field of action by Vidyasagar, and of creative literature by Madhusudan. The growth of scientific associations and of the scientific spirit has been briefly noticed; and in a final chapter an explanation has been offered, through an account of the transformation of Calcutta from a cluster of huts to a cosmopolitan city, as to why the rays of the renaissance did not reach the dormant villages.

If any one cares to go through the pages he will see that as the analysis proceeds it assumes a direction which makes this conclusion unavoidable that the tasks of renaissance have largely remained unfulfilled. Whether or not one agrees with this viewpoint will depend on the perspective one adopts and on the importance one attaches to the meaning of 'alienation'. This question, however, may still be kept open.

The author wishes to thank all his friends in Calcutta and colleagues at Simla with whom he had had occasion to exchange views on the subject, even though a few of them could not subscribe to his views. He also thanks the library and the administrative staff, including the typist friends, of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study for the timely co-operation they had rendered unto him.

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ARABINDA PODDAR

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Evaluational disagreements surround Indian society of the latter half of the eighteenth century. Perspectives vary, and, therefore, lead to conflicting conclusions. The choice of a perspective is without doubt an intellectual choice, but it is also influenced by the nature of one's involvement.

A few western scholars, attracted by India's rich antiquity, prescribed for her a destiny that would rediscover the past in the present and also in the future.¹ But since they were in no way involved in the evolution of her socio-political institutions their prescription retains only an academic interest.

Many eminent Indians also shared this view. Swami Vivekananda, for instance, atoned for his early criticism of contemporary values by constantly exclaiming towards the close of his days: "Thou blessed land of Aryas, thou wast never degraded".² For M. G. Ranade, rebelliousness did not imply denial of traditional moorings; and he claimed for the Brähma leaders of Bengal "a long ancestry, as old as any of the sects prevailing in the country". The Brähma movement, for him, was only a "reflection" and "off-shoot"³ of two thousand years of speculative thinking. Identical views were expressed by Sri Aurobindo also. He analysed the "dormant" present as "only a last deposit of the past at a time of ebb", and the decline as "the ebb-movement of a creative spirit which can only be understood by seeing it in the full tide of its greatness".⁴ All of them loved to picture India as moving forward yet standing still on the first principles of traditional values.

But there were also others, who, though equally involved, spoke differently. Prominent among them were the radical

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intellectuals of the Hindu College (Calcutta, 1817). One of its first pupils, Madhab Chandra Mullik, blatantly declared that nothing could excel Hinduism in its incentive to evil-doing, and in its power to deprive millions of their peace and happiness, and that nothing could desist them from their resolve to destroy such an irrational religion.⁵ Another, Rashik Krishna Mullik, a man of rare attainments, declared in a court of law, "I do not believe in the sacredness of the Ganges", and refused to swear by any of the usual forms of swearing.⁶ All of them relished beef and beer and with Krishna Mohan Bandyopadhyay, afterwards the Rev., launched a crusade against prevalent practices, the vehemence of which was felt even much later in the century. Their words vibrated among the English educated circles, and even in the twentieth century there were no dearth of people who could be equally vociferous in their denouncements of that society, although they were not linked to it by any of the conceivable or inconceivable ties.

But divergence of perspectives and apportionment of praise or blame do not alter the basic structure of the society. The one which the European traders found in India was closed, introvert, and hence also masochistic. This was manifest in both its organisation and the outlook of its members. On the physical plane, it perfected a social system to which going out into the world was anathema and mobility, inhibition. On the mental, its effects were even more disastrous. The doctrine of *karma* and predestination, and cultivation of the virtue of non-attachment to things perceived and even enjoyed, infused in the people a sense of nothingness and morbidity. What bliss this philosophy of non-attachment produced in a deeply contemplative mind it is difficult to ascertain, but for the general mass of people the loss was twofold; it destroyed the world of sense but could not give them that of the spirit. Indeed, it nullified the very importance of man in his own history. To live was, as it were, to wallow in sin; and such a heavy load of detestation was hurled

at the sin of living that even the stupidest member realised the folly of it. So there developed a strong tendency to withdraw from existential reality into spiritual emptiness and helplessness. Human sensibilities thus became deadened, and, ultimately, it mattered little if one continued to live or ceased to do it. With the outer world closed, this masochism was internalized with dire consequences for both the society and the individual who, nonetheless, continued to exist, if not to live. It, on the one hand, institutionalized social hatred and oppression by refusing to recognise the humanity of those lowly placed in the caste hierarchy or outside its pale; and, on the other, sanctified through custom such acts of debasement of and aggression towards women as the *sati* rites (burning of women in the funeral pyres of their husbands).

It found a further outlet as aggression towards children as seen in the practice of flinging of their offspring by mothers into the Ganges at Saugor Island. This aggression was embodied in the familial and filial relations also, which were dominated not by love or affection, but by the prerogative of the pater familias to demand service and inflict injuries. The injuries were varied and many. Shivrath Sastri, the Sādhāran Brāhma Samāij leader, has in his autobiography⁷ recorded times without number how his father used to beat him inhumanly for minor offences or departures from what he considered good conduct, though the father himself was a learned agnostic. Sastri's childhood story will find echoes in the lives of millions before and after him, and illustrates the perversity they were heir to. The same spirit pervaded the atmosphere of the village primary schools. The Rev. J. Long, in his introduction to William Adam's *Report on the state of Education in Bengal* (1835-1838), has enumerated a number of methods employed by teachers to punish the unmindful learners. These are as shocking as they were barbarous in design and execution. It is not to be wondered, therefore, why children preferred ignorance

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to knowledge and why education itself was considered to be of no consequence at all. When the children themselves grew up and became identified with the ossified social system, they followed in their fathers' footsteps and thus became instrumental in the perpetuation of its mores.

Hatred of foreigners was another channel in which the introvert-masochist behavioural pattern found an outlet. This element of xenophobia was noticed by Alberuni centuries ago. The Europeans noticed it in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, some to their utter disgust. In the opinion of one, the new arrivals in Pondicherry held "the Farangis in most singular aversion, trembling at their approach, more especially the women". He also advised Europeans to "arm themselves with great patience and prudence, for not a soul will sepak to them",⁸ this being the universal practice. People existing outside the closed system were unclean and impious, and so any form of social intercourse with them was violently detested. This, however, was not wholly true of the pre-Muslim period of Indian history. Perhaps, the aggressive nature of medieval Islam might have been responsible in some measure for the genesis of xenophobia in the Hindu mind.

However that may be, the closed society, with increasing weight of centuries, became submerged in the deepest layers of darkness. To this darkness the members individually were offered as sacrifice, though existence at some levels was illumined by rays of speculative brilliance. Their independent individual existence was neither recognised nor encouraged. On the contrary, the individual became the unfortunate victim against whom the collective aggressiveness, within the societal or familial framework, was directed or internalized. The psychological tension which this aggressiveness might have given rise to could not take root, since submission to what was imposed on him was the individual's fate and since no human joy or dignity was attached to the state of being alive.

The individual's submission was enjoined for the cohesion and collective interest of the family, the social unit, and, through families, for the preservation of the social entity. Thus left without any choice or wish and light, the individual could only grow up under the ancestor's shadow. A few cases of deviation from and disregard for hereditary professions or ancestral shadows may be gleaned from literature, but for the vast majority, who had neither the will nor the courage, the psychological orientation was much the same. (No distinction is here being made between the Hindu society and the Muslim society; for, in spite of differences in religious persuasion and social customs, their structures were essentially the same. They imbibed the same preferences and the same prejudices). With the spirit of independence and individuality unborn and intelligence stunned, the mind of the individual, in most cases, presented a total blank. Moral excellence or correct conduct resided in, according to Sri Aurobindo, an "unintelligent practice of received forms",⁹ leading invariably to "a petrification of the mind and life".¹⁰ Expressed differently, conformity to the institutions and relics of a no-longer-living culture was the only permissible avocation for any one born here.

No doubt, therefore, that the field of intellectual enquiry was extremely limited. Since growing up in the ancestor's shadow was the desideratum, a scholar, however eminent, could never think in terms of originality of thinking or of questioning the validity of existing systems or texts. A scholar's sole intellectual preoccupation was exposition and elaboration of those texts or clarification of existing commentaries, which, in the words of an eminent intellectual of today, "not infrequently became exegesis of exegesis".¹¹ Viewed through modern eyes, that was a sad abandonment, a "slumber", of "the critical mind as well as the creative intuition".¹² Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay has published a long list of treatises on law and literature written by Bengal scholars from the

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beginning of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century. Save and except a very few, they deal with subject matter like *Sahanūmaran-vivek* (on Sati rites), *Prāyaschittasār-saṅgraha* (on purification rites), *Bibāhabyabasthāsanket* (on marriage ceremonial laws), *Kālanirnaya* (determination of auspicious moment), *Achāranirnaya* (on observance of rites), *Durgotsavanirnaya* (on Durgapuja festival), *Smritisār* (essence of religious law), *Srāddharahasya* (essence of srādh ceremony), etc.¹³ These titles speak for themselves, and called for no intellection on the part of their writers. They were, indeed, exegesis of exegesis.

It has, however, to be remembered that traditional Sanskrit scholars had to depend for their *tol*s, *chatuspathis*, etc., on the munificence and liberality of local rajahs, zemindars, or wealthy or otherwise influential gentlemen, shown by occasional endowments of land and not infrequent gifts of money both to teachers and students at weddings, funeral feasts, dedications, etc. One reason why Nabadwip became a great centre of learning may be traced in the fact that the Kings of Bengal and the latter rajahs of Nadia endowed some teachers with lands for the instruction and maintenance of learners; and the support given to scholars and pupils attracted many Brahmin pundits to settle there, and this also gave to the district a unique reputation for scholarship.¹⁴ Thus, the teachers, and in some cases also the students, were held by a sort of personal tie, or were bound to a particular social system the perpetuation of which was also to their interest. Some scholars received financial grants even from the East India Company,¹⁵ and many professed to William Adam "their readiness to engage in any sort of literary composition that would obtain the patronage of the Government".¹⁶ The import of this confession is very clear. A scholarly life, independent of the munificence of benefactors, they did not look forward to, but a willing subservience to whoever would pay the piper.

The same was true of the elementary vernacular school teachers, who had to depend entirely on the schools for subsistence, and were very poorly rewarded, sometimes being paid in kind by their students. Also of Muslim teachers of Persian and of Islamic theology. Although, in the opinion of Adam, "superior in intelligence to the Bengali and Hindi teacher", they were also in most cases "the retainers or dependents of single families or individual patrons, and being thus held by a sort of domestic tie they are less likely to engage in the prosecution of a general object".¹⁷ It may be of some interest to note here that the Mughal emperors did never tolerate any show of independence on the part of learned scholars dependent on royal favour. Abul Fazl in his *Ā'in-i-Akbarī* has given a few instances which show that scholars had either to lose their jagirs or their very life on that account. "Abdul Qadir, whose duty it was to say daily prayers at the audience hall of Fatehpur Sikri... had his considerable jagir cancelled because he refused to say prayers at the private residence of Akbar. Maulana Alauddin, who had for a time served as Akbar's teacher, happened to occupy a seat at a darbar in front of that of a leading officer... When asked to go back, he retorted: "Why should not a learned man stand in front of fools?" The result was that he had to leave the hall, to which he never returned again. Mir Nurullah, an eminent jurist and for a long time qazi of Lahore, offended the emperor by a 'hasty word' for which he was executed".¹⁸ The same tradition must have obtained through subsequent centuries down to the time we are writing about, denying to learned professions all independence of intellectual life.

The scholastic pursuits we have so far discussed do not, however, come within the category of intellectual activities, as we understand them today. What distinguishes an intellectual, in the context of our modern life, is his concern for the values of rationality and free thinking, his refusal to accept the

conditions of life passively and conform to set patterns of behaviour. Non-conformism is his principal asset, which, with its constant accent on critical evaluation of experience, seeks to establish new standards of taste and conduct. Thus, while intellectualism confronts old values, it also has its eye on new ones. Judged from this angle, an intellectual creates, carries, and embodies culture, desirous all the while to live by the values dear to him.

This basic characteristic of an intellectual was totally absent from the mental paraphernalia of traditional scholars. The difference between them and the transformed modern phenomenon, the intellectual, has been sharply brought out, among others, by Daniel Bell. He writes, "The differences between the intellectual and the scholar, without being invidious, are important to understand. The scholar has a bounded field of knowledge, a tradition, and seeks to find his place in it, adding, in mosaic fashion, to the accumulated, tested knowledge of the past. The intellectual begins with *his* experience, *his* individual perceptions of the world, *his* privileges and deprivations, and judges the world by these sensibilities. Since his own status is of high value (because of the tradition of learning), his judgments of the value of the society reflect the treatment accorded him. Any man might say, "The world owes me a living", but society could easily reject the claim if the man has no talent or contribution to make. But the status of the intellectual, because of the presumed intrinsic value of the position, is a different one; and no society can reject the intellectual's claim out of hand. In a business civilization, the intellectual felt that the wrong values were being honored, and rejected the society. Thus there was a "built-in" compulsion for the free-floating intellectual to become political."¹⁹

Bell's formulation stresses only one aspect of the intellectual's critical stance—his distinct position as an individual. Another aspect which may be termed a concern with the "totality of

the historical process" has been emphasised by Paul A. Baran, who thinks that this concern is "not a tangential interest but permeates his thought and significantly affects his work".²⁰ An "effort to *interconnect* things", he says, "constitutes one of the intellectual's outstanding characteristics". One of the principal functions of the intellectual in society is "to serve as a symbol and as a reminder of the fundamental fact that the seemingly autonomous, disparate, and disjointed morsels of social existence . . . can all be understood (and influenced) only if they are clearly visualized as parts of the comprehensive totality of the historical process". The intellectual thus emerges as a dominant social critic, who is concerned with overcoming "the obstacles barring the way to the attainment of a better, more humane, and more rational social order. As such he becomes the conscience of society and the spokesman of such progressive forces as it contained in any given period of history". Consciousness of his own individuality and an eagerness to contribute to the advent of a more rational social order thus separate the intellectual from the mere scholar. Totality of perception and a will to compel social reality to bend to his formulations lend to the intellectual's activities an immediacy that was ever beyond the grasp of the scholar.

Following the formulations of Bell and Baran, we may conclude that conformism was an enforced and cultivated virtue of all scholastic activities in pre-British India. The agile, self-conscious, and analytical mind was not just there to build a new metaphysic or to attempt a re-valuation of existing values; nor could the scholars be in any way called the conscience of the then society. So, intellectualism went by default. Centuries of conformism lent strength for the social hierarchy to become despotic in its administration of justice and authoritative in its prescription of values, as is seen in the existing social stratification. The scholar acquiesces in and maintains, and is unaware of his own individuality, but the assertion of indivi-

duality is with the intellectual the starting premise. But as has been pointed out, individuality is a value not cultivated by that society; and this explains why there were no intellectuals there, but only scholars.

If we see those scholars engaged in their day's work, and examine the pattern into which the hours were divided, we will immediately realise why they failed to bring into their thinking the intellectual's awareness and perception of the world. This will also show why they could not go beyond the given existential limits to measure the broad world and to inter-connect events, as the intellectual always seeks to do. This was the routine generally followed by teachers of Sanskrit learning:

"The school opens early every morning by the teacher and pupils assembling in the open reading room, when the different classes read in turns. Study is continued till towards mid-day, after which three hours are devoted to bathing, worship, eating, and sleep and at three they resume their studies which are continued till twilight. Nearly two hours are then devoted to evening worship, eating, smoking, and relaxation, and the studies are again resumed and continued till ten or eleven at night."²¹

This placid existence, with the outer world excluded and engrossed in recapitulation of forms received for generations, was deficient in both vigour and consciousness. So, the scholars are to be left at that point. For the intellectual's emergence the break up of the societal structure and the consequent introduction of the element of mobility in organisation, the birth of individuality, were necessary preconditions.

II

At this stage a few questions are to be asked and answered. Did the introvert societal structure inhibit progress and the cultivation of individual virtue? Had the human element any inherent capacity for improvement or reorientation of life? Was intellectuality in any form atrophied?

On these questions we have a mass of contradictory European evidence. The Europeans came to India as sons and daughters of a sensate and extrovert civilization. They saw in the Indian character certain traits that shocked and scandalized and even irritated them in the extreme. Their shock and abhorrence they articulated in the letters they wrote and on the pages of journals some of them privately kept. But since the immediate concern of this essay is the intellectual history of Bengal, the opinions of a few of such Europeans only as stayed in Bengal for some time will be cited as specimens. Their comments on Hindus in general will have more relevance in respect of Bengali Hindus.

Mrs N. E. Kindersley, writing in the sixties of the eighteenth century, found the Hindus to be "the most tedious people in the world", "superstitious, effeminate, avaricious, and crafty, deceitful and dishonest in their dealings and void of every principle of honour, generosity and gratitude". But she also found them "gentle, patient, temperate, regular in their lives, charitable and strict observers of their religious customs".²² Major Rennell writing in 1768, said, "To see them under Misfortune you would conclude that they had no passions ... The Bengali People certainly suffer Pain and misfortune with much greater Philosophy than Europeans do". William Carey, who contributed much towards Bengal's reawakening, wrote from Serampore in 1794, the Hindus were "literally sunk into the dregs of vice. 'Tis true that they have not the ferocity of American Indians, but this is abundantly supplied with a dreadful stock of low cunning and deceit. Moral rectitude makes no part of their religious system, and therefore no wonder they are sunk, nay wholly immersed, in all manner of impurity". Dr Buchanan, who made a survey of the condition of education in the first decade of the nineteenth century, said, "Hindoos are destitute of those principles of honesty, truth and justice, which respond to the spirit of British administration and have not a disposition, which is in accordance with the tenor of

Christian principles". Lord Hastings in 1813 wrote, "The Hindoo appears a being nearly limited to mere animal functions and even in them indifferent. Their proficiency and skill in the several lines of occupation, to which they are restricted, are little more than dexterity which any animal with similar conformation but with no higher intellect than a dog, an elephant, or a monkey, might be supposed to be capable of attaining". In the fourth decade of the century Macaulay pronounced his classic denouncement of the Bengali character of which perjury and forgery were said to have formed the integral part.

Some informed 'native' opinions also appear to concur with some of the accusations contained in the above-noted comments. Raja Rammohan Roy, in 1831, accused a section of population living in towns of perjury and forgery. On another occasion he described the native Bengali character as "wanting vigor of body, and adverse to active exertion, remained during the whole period of the Muhammadan conquest, faithful to the existing Government, although their property was often plundered, their religion insulted and their blood wantonly shed".²⁸ Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of Rabindranath Tagore and an associate of Rammohan, wrote in a letter to the *Englishman* in 1838: "The present characteristic failings of natives are—a want of truth, a want of integrity, a want of independence"; and proceeded on to account for these failings by adding: "These were not the characteristics of former days, before the religion was corrupted and education had disappeared. It is to the Mahomedan conquest that these evils are owing, and they are the invariable results of the loss of liberty and national degradation. The Mahomedans introduced in this country all the vices of an ignorant, intolerant and licentious soldiery. The utter destruction of learning and science was an invariable part of their system and the conquered, no longer able to protect their lives by arms and independence, fell into opposite extremes of abject submission, deceit and

fraud. Such has been the condition of the Natives of Hindustan for centuries."²⁴

Rammohan and Dwarakanath squarely blamed the Muslim rule for current degeneration of the Hindus. No doubt true, but only partially. For, they did not take into account the introvert-masochist outlook fostered by the societal structure, want of education for the many and only a debasing sort of primary education for a few, non-cultivation of moral values, etc. All these factors, including the Muslim misrule, contributed to the intellectual morass.

Every coin, however, has the other side. Writings on the reverse more than compensated for the abuse thrown in the above-mentioned comments on Bengali Hindus. Bishop Heber, who was the Lord Bishop of Calcutta, said in a letter to R. J. Wilmot Horton (Dec. 1823), though aware that lying and perjury were "so common", "I do not by any means assent to the pictures of depravity and general worthlessness which some have drawn of the Hindoos. They are decidedly by nature, a mild, pleasing, and intelligent race; sober, parsimonious, and, where an object is held out to them, most industrious and persevering".²⁵ Another of his observations on Hindus, quoted by the Rev. James Long runs thus: "They are a nation, with whom whatever their faults, I, for one, shall think it impossible to live long without loving them—a race of gentle and temperate habits, with a natural talent and acuteness beyond the ordinary level of mankind, and with a thirst of general knowledge which even the renowned and the inquisitive Athenians can hardly have surpassed or equalled".²⁶

Bishop Heber was not alone in showering such encomiums. Adam, writing in 1836, has recorded: "The humbleness and simplicity of their (i.e., the pundits) characters, their dwellings, and their apparel, forcibly contrast with the extent of their acquirements and the refinement of their feelings. I saw men not only unpretending, but plain and simple in their manners

... inhabiting huts which, if we connect moral consequences with physical causes, might be supposed to have the effect of stunning the growth of their minds, ... and yet several of these men are adept in the subtleties of the profoundest grammar of what is probably the most philosophical language in existence... ; and indulging in the abstrusest and most interesting disquisitions in logical and ethical philosophy. They are in general shrewd, discriminating, and mild in their demeanour. The modesty of their character does not consist in abjectness to a supposed or official superior, but is equally shown to each other".²⁷ C. E. Trevelyan, a civilian, writing in 1838 had this to say on traditional Sanskrit scholars: "Their ponderous and elaborate grammatical systems, their wonderfully subtle metaphysical disquisitions, showed them to have a German perseverance and Greek acuteness; and they certainly have not failed in poetical composition".²⁸

Long before these words were written, Bengal had known a good number of Europeans, indeed, a generation of them, who mixed with and befriended the Bengalis, visited their houses, played with the children, ate Bengali food, and sometimes even dressed in the Bengali style. Halhed's is a cherished name in Bengal; he wrote and printed the first Bengali grammar in 1778, spoke colloquial Bengali, and "was known when disguised in a native dress to pass as a Bengalee in assemblies of Hindoos".²⁹ But the name most fondly cherished by Bengalis is that of David Hare, one of the architects of Bengal's renaissance. No other individual did more for the spread of enlightenment and education there. His humanity was unbounded. He had a standing arrangement with a sweetmeat shop where his school-going friends were entertained; he often accompanied them back to their houses, visited and nursed them at times of illness, looked after them with paternal affection, and rendered all possible help, financial or educational. Christians considered him to be a Hindu, and, after his death,

closed the gates of the Christian cemetery to his dead body. His Hindu admirers and beneficiaries buried him at a place west of the College Square;³⁰ at a stone's throw stands his marble statue and by its side, the Hare School. Without a firm belief in the inherent worth of the people as capable of advancement, one cannot be a martyr to the cause of their intellectual promotion.

One word on the state of current intelligence of the Bengalis. Rammohan Roy, while answering to a question—'What degree of intelligence exists among the native inhabitants?' wrote, *inter alia*, "among those who enjoy this species of learning (i.e. Persian and Arabic—author), as well as among those who cultivate Sanskrit literature, many well-informed and enlightened persons may be found, though from their ignorance of European literature, they are not naturally much esteemed by such Europeans as are not well versed in Arabic or Sanskrit".³¹ This may be taken as a correct assessment of the situation. Of the inquisitiveness of young learners Perowne of the Church Mission Society of London, reporting in 1822 on the performance of the boys in their Burdwan English School, wrote that they could then "think and reason, and frequently pretty correctly, even in support of their own customs", and that some of them were "very shrewd, requiring an explanation of everything".³² The same view had been corroborated by George Smith, the biographer of the Rev. Alexander Duff, who said that "the Bengali boy just before or at the age of puberty is the most earnest, acute and lovable of all students".³³ And Adam could report with confidence in 1838 that, "the native mind of the present day, although it is asleep, is not dead. It has a dreamy sort of existence in separating, combining, and re-casting in various forms, the fables and speculations of past ages. The amount of authorship shown to exist in the different districts is a measure of the intellectual activity".³⁴

In other words, the Bengali mind, still alive, needed to be awakened by the dynamic impetus of a sensate culture to recognise the challenge of the time. That it did recognise this and marched ahead at an astounding pace, the whole of the nineteenth century bears abundant testimony to. The only pre-condition of this response was that the immobile society was to be reshaped into a dynamic entity.

III

This is how it happened.

One of the first effects of British conquest and the consequent economic reforms was the gradual dissolution of the village community. Sir Charles Metcalfe, first a member of the Governor-General's Council, and afterwards Acting Governor-General of India, had very fine words to say on the endurability of those communities, which could weather through the centuries all political vicissitudes. But it did not take even half a century for the English to destroy them once for all. They introduced an economic system that tied the Indian plough to the wheels of capitalist development in England.

The introvert Indian society was stirred and attacked by western sadism, if we are justified in describing the desire for military conquests and personal self-aggrandizement as sadism. The clash of these opposing attitudes was of great historical import. It broke the isolated character of Indian villages, and the spell of introvert outlook was definitely lost. Sensitive souls who came under its influence were called to a new awakening, and in course of time bade farewell to their forefathers' masochistic mode of perception. Thus, altogether new currents of feelings were brought into play by the impact of western civilization. If we are to give them a name, we may call them a strong dynamic joy in the human status. Of this more will be said in the course of this essay.

Every social transformation has its own tale of woes and

travails to tell, and the one we are talking about was no exception. Only a small part of the tale we have to retell; it will, on the one hand, bring into focus the enormity of British exploitation in India, and, on the other hand, illustrate the potentiality of the people, who, though literally bled white, could yet reach commendable heights of intellectual attainments within a very short period.

Everyone is aware of the phrase economic drain. Only two authorities will be cited to indicate what this meant to the people of India as a whole. Montgomery Martin wrote in 1838: "This annual drain of £3,000,000 on British India amounted in thirty years, at 12 per cent compound interest to the enormous sum of £723,997,917 sterling; or at a low rate, as £2,000,000 for fifty years, to £8,400,000,000 sterling! So constant and accumulating a drain even on England would soon impoverish her, how severe then must be its effects on India, where the wages of a labourer is from two pence to three pence a day?"³⁵ Perhaps a shameful realisation of this led F. J. Shore to put in record in 1837 these remorseful words: "The halcyon days of India are over; she has been drained of a large proportion of the wealth she once possessed; and her energies have been cramped by a sordid system of misrule to which the interests of millions have been sacrificed for the benefit of the few".³⁶ The words of Lord Cornwallis still ring in our ears: "I may safely assert that one-third of the Company's territory in Hindustan is now a jungle inhabited only by wild beasts."

Sensitive souls who were witnesses to this devastation either wept in silence, or at times cried aloud in desperation. One of them was Sayyid Ghulam Hussain Khan, the writer of *Siyar Mutakharin*, who prayed, "O God! come to the assistance of thine afflicted servants, and deliver them from the oppression they suffer".³⁷ Another was Ramprasad Sen. Many of his Bengali religious lyrics echoed the gloom, anarchy, and helplessness of the people, which, judged from the element of passion

he embodied in his poems, he hardly could bear. Driven to despair, he cried out in one of his lyrics, *Ebār kālī tore khābo* (Now, Kali, thou will I eat). If the sociological import of his lyrics was studied and the lyrics were regarded as his responses to the stimuli received from his environs, we will obtain a clearer picture of the reality, and, in that case, the words of Lord Cornwallis, quoted above, will sound truer. Yet, life continued to flow.

Bengal, in particular, proved to be the best soil for British tradesmen "to improve a small fortune in". Her annual revenue far exceeded that of either Bombay or Madras; she shouldered the financial burden of an expanding empire; and so fortune-seekers of every description and variety flocked there in thousands. Only one instance will give us an idea of the flow of Europeans into Bengal. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, there were between five hundred to one thousand Europeans engaged in indigo plantation alone. They annually exported nine million lbs. The amount they paid for rent and labour totalled £1,680,000; the commodity on its arrival at Calcutta was valued at £2,403,000, and realized in England £3,600,000. This indicates the amount of wealth earned.³⁸ Another illustration will show the ruthlessness of the process of disintegration of indigenous cottage industries. Between 1780 and 1850 total British exports to India rose from £386,152 to £8,024,000, i.e., from one-thirty second part to one-eighth of British exports.³⁹ "In 1824 the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 1,000,000 yards while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards. But at the same time the population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants, to 20,000".⁴⁰ In the 1820's there were in Calcutta 32 European mercantile houses against 15 in Bombay and 10 in Madras.

The volume of the Bengal trade and the increasing volume of European participation in Bengal's socio-economic life could not but cause a vast commotion. This brought and continued

to bring a large number of Bengalis into contact with Europeans as agents, interpreters, associates or accomplices, money-lenders, servants, or labourers. Motives of gain impelled a good number of them to seek European contact. An early European-Bengali contact in many parts of the province infused an element of dynamism into the apparently inert society, and at long last the hitherto unchangeable began to stir and change. The volume of European participation also explains why Bengal found herself more favourably placed to take intellectual lead over the other provinces of India.

The process of disintegration was set in motion; circumstances compelled individuals to break through the orbit of their family occupations and taboos to find situations inconceivable to earlier generations. This, for the individual, connoted emancipation from the surveillance of the family as well as from the moral obligation of growing up under ancestral shadows.

In another aspect the spirit of transformation made itself felt. With the introduction of English land reforms and concept of property, land for the first time in India's history became a marketable commodity. People suddenly became land-conscious, and selling and buying of land became an everyday phenomenon. These transactions brought in their wake an ever-increasing volume of litigations. The latter began to affect familial relationship, thus further undermining the sense of cohesion. Rammohan Roy also had to get involved in a number of litigations,—particularly, in a suit brought against him by his nephew at the instigation of his mother, Tarini Devi. What is significant in this suit is not the question of proprietorship or volume of the property involved, perhaps other factors were more important. The point to note is that a new element has entered into the traditionally sacred and inviolable parent-son relationship. Sense of possession of property, or, in other words, commodity or money has begun to infiltrate into and even replace the element of affection in such ties.

The individual's sense of importance, his need and his capacity to carve out a career for himself, his power to reject the tradition and creed of his family, etc., were being felt more and more; and when the tumult of conquest subsided and the calm of existence was considerably restored, the freed individual emerged as the new intellectual, courageous enough to grapple with his environment.

IV

It would not perhaps be out of place here to probe into the European mind that accosted India in the eighteenth century. The Europeans who came to India during that century had the heritage of the Renaissance and about two centuries of scientific progress and rational thinking and all the paraphernalia of a secular life. This statement does not of course imply that the marauders, the sadistic interlopers and the mercenaries who found themselves involved in the affairs of India, or the young lions who regarded India as the shortest cut to wealth and to the title of the 'Nabob' when back in England, cared a whit either for the renaissance or for the revolution in science. But there were also countless others conscious and proud of their intellectual heritage, and at the same time possessing the gift of inquisitiveness to understand the newly known. These were by history destined to be the carriers and propagators of the sensate, extrovert, and hedonistic western culture then completely alien to Indian thinking.

They were the Company's civil servants, Royal officers, judges of Supreme and High Courts, lawyers, priests, physicians, engineers, journalists, and numerous others who formed a distinct segment of the civil population. Through them were disseminated western light and learning and values,—such as, elevation of the human status, philanthropy and humanistic ethic, ideas of social revolution, and, over and above, an

empirical philosophy of life. Through them, a silent acculturation mechanism gathered momentum.

Ideas and influences were bound to remain complex and indefinite, but a general notion of them can still be formed. This we can do by an assessment of the cultural equipment of the eighteenth century Europeans through a glance at the books they read, or at the diversions they allowed themselves, or even at their pastimes. Among the books they brought along with them, there was an enormous volume of religious texts, commentaries, and theological works in several languages, such as, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, Dutch, and English; they also read a great variety of secular texts, such as, Select dialogues of Plato, Aristotle's *Opera Philosophia*, tragedies of Sophocles, Plutarch's *Lives*, Livy's History, Justinian's *Institutes*, Rousseau's *Emile*, Voltaire's *Memoirs*, Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, and also works of Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, Montesquieu, Newton, Addison, Dryden, Pope, Gay, Johnson, etc. Of the composers Bach, Handel and Herschel were prominent.⁴¹

Here are three typical notices:

- (1) Selection from the Books of James Brenner. 1775 (*Bengal Inventories*, XIV, No. 80)
 Bach's Periodical Overtures.
 Abel's Six Symphonies.
 Pugnani's Six Overtures.
 Handel's Overtures in 4 Books.
 Correlli's 12 Sonatas in 3 Books.
 Handel's Sampson and Esther.
 Handel's 12 Grand Concertos.
 Herschel's six sonatas.
 Other music books filled about two pages in the *Inventory Books*.

There were 200 other books, which included:
 Tristram Shandy.

Montesquieu's *Espirit des Lois*.

Rousseau's *Emile*.

Telemarque.

Butler's *Hudibras*.

Milton's Works.

Jones' *Persian Grammar*.

- (2) Selection of Books on Sale in Calcutta, 7 Oct. 1784
(Seton-Kerr: *Selections from the Calcutta Gazettes*, 1784-1823, ed. 1864)

Orme's *History of the late War in Hindustan*.

Burleigh's *State Papers*.

Richardson's *Persian Dictionary*.

Blackstone's *Commentary*.

Phillidore on Chess.

Chesterfield's *Letters*.

Dr. Johnson's *Dictionary*.

Abbe' Raynal's *Revolution in America*.

Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV and XV*.

Voltaire's *Memoirs*.

Arabian Nights Entertainment.

Whiston's *Josephus*.

- (3) Selection of books advertised for sale from the Library of
Calcutta, (1785) (*The India Gazette*, 31 Jan. 1785)

Richardson's *Persian Dictionary*.

Chippendale's *Designs of Household Furniture*.

Boyle's Works.

Hawkins *History of Music*.

Raynal's *Histoire des Indes*.

Hume's *History of England*.

Locke's Works.

Priestley's Works.

Johnson's *Poets*. (68 vols.)

Annual Register, 1758-82.

These books are a good index to the intellectual growth of

those who chose them for companions. They also indicate the various contours of their consciousness as also the directions in which their minds were being taught to move. So, whatever their attitude towards India and her inhabitants, they could not help being committed to values and behaviour-patterns which their peculiar culture and attainments prompted them to uphold. As such, people who came in their contact, either as agents or interpreters or sycophants, could not but be impressed by their way of life and secularized thinking. Imperceptible radiation of ideas and influence was bound to occur, whether they wished it or not, and even when there was no intentional tutoring.

Their pastimes included garden parties, exhibition of fireworks, dancing, and numerous attended ball and supper, to which occasionally a select group of Bengal gentry were invited. But, it is the theatrical performances rather than the assorted varieties of amusements, which contributed substantially to the transformation of Bengal's social and intellectual life. The Europeans, to amuse themselves, began to organise theatrical performances as early as the fifties and sixties of the eighteenth century, leading ultimately to the establishment of theatrical houses in Calcutta, all of which unfortunately were destroyed by fire. These houses used to present mainly Shakespeare's and Goldsmith's plays, and also short comic pieces and interludes with coarse raillery.

Bengali gentlemen, who were invited to these performances by their English friends or masters, must have developed a strong fascination for the delightful spectacles of this exotic art. And one may safely presume that their enthusiasm was an active inspiration to Lebedeff, the Russian wayfarer, to establish in 1795 the first Bengali theatre. The inaugural notice said, "By permission of the Honourable the Governor General, Mr Lebedeff's New Theatre in the Doomtullah, decorated in the Bengalee style, will be opened very shortly, with a play called *The Disguise*; the characters to be supported by performers

of both sexes. To commence with vocal and instrumental music called The Indian Serenade. To those musical instruments, which are held in esteem by the Bengalees, will be added European. The words of the much admired Poet 'Shree Bharut Chundro Roy' are set to music. Between the acts some amusing *curiosities* will be introduced".⁴² Bengali theatrical performances done by Bengalis was a unique thing at the close of the eighteenth century; and it did not take much time either to become an important diversion and even a vogue. In those days, in Calcutta men who could spend lavishly on such items of imported excellence were not in short supply. Wealthy 'babus' were prepared even to spend the fantastic amount of one hundred thousand rupees for a single performance, as was done by Nabinchandra Bose in 1835 for the production of Bharat Chandra Roy's *Vidyasundar*.⁴³

But the European community of those days was a conglomeration of diverse elements, where wisdom consorted with folly, and discrimination with perversity. Especially purblind seems to have been their criminal law and the mode of administering justice. A few examples will bring some interesting facts to light. On December 10, 1802, the Supreme Court, Calcutta, passed among others the following sentences:

"Joseph Mari Leperrousse, for murder and piracy—death, and that his body should be afterwards hung in chains. Byjoo Mussalchy, robbery—death! Pauly Stratty, Anunderam, and Catoul Kissen, for conspiracy, two years' imprisonment and to stand in the pillory. Ramsoonder Sircar, for perjury, to be transported for seven years! Ter Jacob Ter Petruse, a clergyman, for perjury, imprisonment for two years and a fine of one rupee."

On November 4, 1804: "John Maclauchlin, found guilty of man-slaughter, to be fined one rupee, and imprisoned one month. Mahomed Tindal found guilty of man-slaughter, to be fined one rupee, and imprisoned one month. Mathew Farnes,

found guilty of man-slaughter, to be fined one rupee, and imprisoned one month....Radeca, otherwise Jesse, for stealing on the high seas, to be transported for seven years, and kept to hard labour during that period. Mritonjoy Coomar, for robbing the mint, ditto, ditto." On December 4, 1806, "A Portuguese man and an Indian were also convicted of man-slaughter and sentenced to be burnt in the hand, imprisoned for one year and a fine".

Then consider this, "On the 21st April, 1828, Fukrun Nissa Begum was brought up in the Supreme Court at Calcutta, on a charge of having caused the death of a slave woman in the service, by beating her with billets of fire-wood; three of her servants also assisting in the deed. The case was proved, and the prisoners were sentenced to be "imprisoned until twelve o'clock tomorrow, and then to be discharged." Against this lenient sentence the Begum petitioned. The petition represented that she viewed with such horror the disgrace of a public exposure in a court of justice, which was to her much worse than any punishment the court could inflict on her, that rather than submit to it she pleaded *guilty*, in the hope that no judgment would be passed upon her, but that the case might be sent home to His Majesty, to whom she would sue for a pardon". And on certain conditions "the judgment was respited" by the order of the Chief Justice.⁴⁴

What emerges from the judgments of the Supreme Court is that human life was then considered to be neither sacred nor inviolable; it was not as important either. For stealing one got transportation for seven years with *r.i.*, while for killing a man one paid a fine of Re. 1 and got imprisonment for only one month; nay, one could even get off, like the Begum, scot-free, and commit a second murder with an equally care-free artistry. These anomalies, we may almost say perversities, were permitted by law, and the law was interpreted by the Chief Justices, the cream of European enlightenment in India. But

that these militated against the very spirit of enlightenment was a realisation neither the law-makers nor the interpreters seemed to have been capable of.

Another thing that is transparent is that in the committal of crimes Europeans found good accomplices in Indians; and that the Calcutta criminal-world soon became adept in European-style crimes. Mritonjoy was not alone in the art of cheating, but two other Bengali criminals—Calley Pershad Chatterjee and Rameonnoy Ghose—forged a treasury bill for Rs. 2,500, and were sentenced on June 10, 1807, to “two years’ imprisonment in the house of correction and to stand once in the pillory”.⁴⁵

Morality and religion were also at a very low ebb in those days. Carey has mentioned that even in aristocratic circles and top societies there was little respect to outward religious observances; nay, there was a positive want of even common morality. Church-going was considered unfashionable.

Instead, drunkenness, gambling, profane swearing, etc., were practised universally. The contemporary journals testify to the absence of “decency and propriety of behaviour” in social life. In the opinion of one of them (December, 1780) Europeans of all ranks ordinarily made Christmas festivities “a plea for absolute drunkenness and obscenity of conversation, etc., that is, while they were able to articulate at all”. It cautioned respectable people about subjecting their wives to such impure and injurious associations.

Wives, however, were not to be seen in good numbers in those days. Nearly all the Europeans were unmarried, and, hence, they found it convenient to live in acknowledged concubinage with Indian women. The author of a work called *The East Indian Vade Mecum* considered concubinage a matter of necessity, and advised young European lions as to the female establishment they should set up, its proper cost, etc. Not merely that, even places of learning were not immune from

sexual immorality. In the Calcutta Supreme Court records (June 10, 1807) there is to be found the case of a schoolmistress who was brought up on a charge of "prostituting one of her scholars for money".⁴⁶

On the whole, the European mind of that century was a repertoire of divergent and even conflicting tendencies and preferences; here the highest virtues went hand in glove with the vilest crimes, philanthropy with lust and greed, refinement with stupidity, sensitive awareness of the mind of a society in transition with total indifference. Above all, of course, reigned the enriched, extrovert, and hedonistic mode of its perceptions. To all these virtues, preferences, and derelictions the newly-emerging Anglo-Bengali society and her Anglophile sons were legitimate heirs.

V

Indeed, imitation of the English began early. The desire to learn and speak English was also voiced almost simultaneously. It is not correct to say that imitation of English habits and costumes started in the late twenties of the nineteenth century with the Young Bengal group; at that time it really had an ancestry, as this narrative written in 1780 by an Englishman would testify to:

"The attachment of the natives of Bengal to the English laws begins now to extend itself to English habiliment. Rajah Ram lochun, a very opulent Gentoo, of high caste and family lately paid a visit to a very eminent attorney, equipped in boots, buckskin breeches, hunting frock, and jockey cap.

"The lawyer, who was employed for the improvement of the revenues of Bengal, was in gerat astonishment at the lively transformation of his grave Gentoo client, who, it seems, was dressed in the exact hunting character of Lord March, and had borrowed the fancy from one of Dardy's

comic prints. The Nabob Sidert Alley, when lately at the Presidency, employed Connor, the tailor, to make him the following dresses, viz., two suits of regimentals, ditto of an English admiral's uniform, and two suits of canonicals.

"At the same time he sent for an English peruke maker, and gave him orders to make him two wigs of every denomination according to the English fashion, viz., scratches, cut wigs, and curled obba, queues, majors, and Ramilies; all of which he took with him when he left Calcutta".⁴⁷

The 'grandpas' of the Young Bengal group had already started the process, and as the decades rolled on, it gathered added momentum to engulf their whole life. In 1789, on the 23rd day of April, appeared an advertisement captioned "A Card" which announced the following "humble request" of several inhabitants of Bengal: "We humbly beseech any gentlemen will be so good to us as to take the trouble of making a Bengal Grammar and Dictionary, in which we hope to find all the common Bengal country words made into English. By this means we shall be enabled to recommend ourselves to the English Government and understand their orders; this favor will be gratefully remembered by us and our posterity for ever".⁴⁸ Thus, the desire for English education was articulated by the same generation; and they spoke not on their own behalf alone, but on that of posterity also.

In other spheres also they took the lead in absorbing English styles. In 1792, in the house of "the most popular of the Hindoo gentlemen", Sookmoy Roy, "a novelty was introduced in the Pooja ceremonies, namely, a combination of English airs with the Hindostanee songs". This innovation seems not to have succeeded, "owing to the indifferent skill of the musicians".⁴⁹ And when Bishop Heber arrived at Calcutta in October 1823, he could write to a friend to the effect that

"... at present there is an obvious and increasing dis-

position to imitate the English in everything, which has already led to very remarkable changes, and will, probably, to still more important. The wealthy natives now all affect to have their houses decorated with Corinthian pillars, and filled with English furniture. They drive the best horses and the most dashing carriages in Calcutta. Many of them speak English fluently, and are tolerably read in English literature; and the children of one of our friends I saw one day dressed in jackets and trousers, with round hats, shoes and stockings. In the Bengali newspapers, of which there are two or three, politics are canvassed with a bias, as I am told, inclining to whiggism.... Among the lower orders the same feeling shows itself more beneficially, in a growing neglect of caste—in not merely a willingness, but an anxiety to send their children to our schools, and a desire to learn and speak English....”⁵⁰

On Hurri Mohan Thakorr, who with Radha Kanta Dev strived most jealously to preserve traditional Hindu rites and customs from being changed by English law, Bishop Heber made the following comment: “Nor are his carriages, the furniture of his house, and the style of his conversation, of a character less decidedly European”. Hurri Mohan, the same authority informs us, was also an imitator of many other English habits. (Letter to Rt. Hon. Charles W. Williams Wynn, Oct. 29, 1823). Another Englishman, Thomas Baken, told the Parliamentary Select Committee of 1832 that, “being so much more with Europeans”, the Bengali citizens of Calcutta were “divested in a much greater degree of their prejudices and habits than others”, and also that they consumed “a great quantity of wine”.

Nor is indigenous evidence on the subject of imitation lacking. Letters published in newspapers in 1830-31 are full of them. In one of these an orthodox Hindu gentleman complained that his son, a student of the Hindu College, had given up

the Bengali dress and traditional customs, that he combed his hair, wore English shoes, ate before he had his bath, neglected all religious rites and never put on anything symbolising ceremonial purity. Another complained that his son, also educated at the same college, when asked to prostrate himself before the goddess Kali at Kalighat and pray in the traditional fashion, did his obeisance by simply saying, "Good morning, madam".⁶¹

Such instances can be multiplied indefinitely. But there is hardly any need. The only point to be noted is that this change in social behaviour and attitude is a proof that social introversion which found expression in a morbid xenophobia, caste prejudices, and aggression towards children and women, had already begun to give way to a positive and hedonistic outlook on life in general. The ancestor had receded into the womb of the past, and his shadow did no longer count.

VI

Of education, particularly of English education and social mobility, we shall speak in a separate chapter. Here we will be concerned with one of its specific effects, and it is this. The introduction of English education completely changed the notion of an educated and cultured being. Henceforth an educated being implied one educated in English, one who had received and accumulated western ideas and modes of perception. English education, *ipso facto*, implied a weaning away from the circumscribed exclusiveness of traditional education, and also both freedom and material gain.

We have already noticed in the previous section how purely pragmatic considerations drove a good number of Bengali gentlemen to seek, through newspaper, assistance for gaining a smattering of English, be it only pidgin English. But what was then considered to be of only pragmatic importance became, within a decade or two, a pursuable value in itself,

an intellectual 'must' to dispel the outgrowth of traditional learning. Seen in this light, the evolution of the intellectual is the story of a gradual widening of the area of his perception and of his studies. Pragmatism opened the door to visions of sublimity.

This accent on English education as a value in itself and as a means of intellectual sublimation was also voiced early. Any one could feel the stir in the air. At a time when the East India Company could not decide upon a definite policy of education for Indians, and when individual lovers of education were themselves divided into Anglicists and Orientalists—this controversy was finally decided once for all by Macaulay's Minutes on Education, 1835, in favour of the Anglicists—Rammohan Roy wrote a historic letter to Lord Amherst in 1823. In that letter this aspect of English education as a value was repeatedly emphasized. At one place he declared :

"If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian Philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of the Schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a liberal and enlightened system of instruction embracing Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, with other useful sciences, which may be accomplished with the sums proposed by employing a few gentleman of talent and learning, educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with necessary books, implements and other apparatus".⁵²

It is to be noted that considerations of pragmatic or immediate usefulness did not weigh much with Rammohan.

His primary concerns were elevation of mind and conquest of ignorance; for this purpose the pursuance of English education was as indispensable as it was in itself valuable. The same argument and conviction were expressed by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar in the fifties of that century as Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College, but with added authority and directness. He wrote: "For certain reasons, which it is needless to state here, we are obliged to continue the teaching of the Vedanta and Sankhya in the Sanskrit College. That the Vedanta and Sankhya are false systems of philosophy is no more a matter of dispute. . . . Whilst teaching these in the Sanskrit course we should oppose them by sound philosophy in the English course to counteract their influence". (Letter to the Council of Education).

This attitude towards English prevailed throughout the entire century, and also in the first few decades of the current. This was as true of the first stalwarts of the Hindu College as of the intellectuals of today. The Rubicon had already been crossed in the twenties of the last century, and with every addition in the list of authors read, studied or followed, the horizon continued to widen ever and ever more; and towards the close of the century the beam of English light produced a most beautiful spectrum. A glimpse of this spectrum can be obtained from the portrait of a character named Amarnath in Bankimchandra's novel '*Rajani*' (1877), about whom the narrative ran as follows:

"He did not disclose his business, nor could I ask him outright. So we discussed social reform and politics. I found him an accomplished conversationalist. His mind was cultivated, his education complete, and his thought far-reaching. There being a pause in the conversation, he began to turn over *The Shakespearean Gallery* on my table. In the meanwhile, I had a good look at him. He was a most handsome man; fair, rather short but neither stout nor lean;

his eyes large, hair fine, curly and carefully arranged; he was not over-dressed but was perfectly neat; a man with an exquisite conversational style and a beautiful voice. I could plainly see that he was a sophisticated person.

"Amarnath did not come to business even after the plates of *The Shakespearean Gallery* had been gone over, and began to discuss the pictures. His thesis was that it was an audacious conceit that tried to depict in a picture what was expressed in language and through action; such attempts could never be successful, nor were these pictures successful. He opened the picture of Desdemona and observed: 'You get her patience, sweetness and modesty, but where is her courage with the patience, and her pride of constancy with the modesty?' He pointed to the illustration of Juliet and said: 'You have here the figure of a beauty in the first flush of youth, but you miss youth's irrepressible restlessness'.

"Amarnath continued in this vein. From Shakespeare's heroines he came to Sakuntala, Sita, Kadamvari, Vasavadatta, Rukmini, and Satyabhama, and he analysed their characters. The discussion of ancient literature led in its turn to ancient historiography, out of which there emerged some incomparable exposition of the classical historians, Tacitus, Plutarch, Thucydides, and others. From the philosophy of history of these writers Amarnath came down to Comte and his *lois des trois etats*, which he endorsed. Comte brought in his interpreter Mill and then Huxley; Huxley brought in Owen and Darwin; and Darwin Buchner and Schopenhauer. Amarnath poured the most entrancing scholarship into my ears, and I became too engrossed to remember our business".⁶³

Here we have a most attractive portrait of a man of education and accomplishment. It is, however, not to be supposed that such characters had no objective determinants, that they were

mere fictions of the imagination. No, such characters did really exist in the latter half of the nineteenth century Bengal. Bankimchandra himself was one, Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya, who taught at the Presidency College and afterwards became the Principal of the Ripon (now Surendranath) College, Calcutta, was another. A man of wonderful versatility, the latter was deeply versed in Sanskrit, English, and French literatures and philosophies, and could make the most facile journey from one area of investigation to another. To the list of authors mentioned in the passage quoted above, one could add the names of Voltaire, Rousseau, Spencer, Buckle, Fourier, and those of many others; this then would give us a completed picture of Bankimchandra's intellectual world. Vast areas had to be navigated, that was the logical culmination of the desire to pursue English education as an independent value. And they did.

From what has been said above it would become apparent what kind of intellectual agility and critical alertness an intellectual was expected to bring to bear upon his environment. His was definitely not the attitude of a commitment made centuries before his birth by some distant progenitor, but the one born of his interaction with his milieu, and of the intention to remould it according to the best of his light and beliefs. Even household truths and objects of adoration had to be re-evaluated vis-a-vis truths newly received and notions newly acquired. This attitude involved a keenness of perception and a flexibility of approach that were absent in the scholar's scheme of things. Bankimchandra shared with the scholars their concern for the maintenance of traditional values, but yet their intellectual worlds were ages apart. A sophisticated catholicity of perception could never be attributed to those scholars, but this was Bankimchandra's most distinguishing mark. When we place this in the background of the insular pattern of traditional learning, we cannot avoid the conclusion that it was a total

metamorphosis of personality which brought the intellectual into existence. This was possible because English education was pursued as an end in itself.

VII

It must have been noticed in the foregoing discussion that two distinctive features in the main marked out the intellectual. These are, first, his relative freedom from the rigidity of caste-bound mentality as also from masochistic modes of perception; and, secondly, his new education, which made him, in the words of Sri Aurobindo, "denationalised" in his "mental attitude".⁵⁴ Any of these features, in the early nineteenth century context, was inordinately strong enough to create a rift between him and the society he sprang from. The inevitable consequence of this could not be anything other than what we now prefer to call alienation.

Since English education was the intellectual's most powerful asset—his capital—it would be helpful to remind ourselves of its sociological implications. He was the child of a moment of social tension born of interaction of two mutually exclusive social patterns. This interaction historically necessitated the emergence of a new class in society. That this class was altogether new, had no status or dignity in the old social order, but yet had come to occupy a very important position among both the highest and the lowest,—was taken cognizance of by a Bengali journal in 1829.⁵⁵ The journal commented that countless social benefits were being accrued from the emergence of this class, and that it was also an index of the prosperity and stability of the British empire. It further commented that in the near future that class was destined to achieve independence. This class and its offspring were the first to go in for English education.

But this education created an unbridgeable gulf between themselves and the others who did not receive it. A new caste—the English educated caste—emerged. And because of their

peculiar social position as also because of the peculiar nature of ties—occupational, commercial and compradorial—they succeeded in establishing with the administration, they began to be considered as props on which both their own security and prosperity as well as that of the British masters to some measure rested.⁵⁶ It has already been hinted in a previous section that the British authorities were, at the initial stages, hesitant about the introduction of English education; but subsequently administrative necessity, particularly the urgently felt need to curtail expenditure, compelled them to accept it as a part of their administrative programme. The obvious purpose was to train Indians for occupying junior and subordinate positions in the services. But there was also an ulterior motive, which found the most candid expression through the limpid words of Lord Macaulay in his Minutes on Education. He said, "We must do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, and in intellect". These words were written in 1835, but the process of denationalization through tutoring and through a deliberate inculcation of a feeling of inferiority among Indians (so that they might take to imitating European customs), had begun long ago, as we have already analysed before. The cumulative effect of that process became evident in 1830, even before Macaulay's Minutes, when in February of that year some Hindu College boys started a magazine entitled *The Parthenon*, its first issue was however also its last. Therein they declared, "Hindu by birth, yet European by education and its concomitants, they need some organ for the communication of their sentiments, some tablet where they may register their thought".⁵⁷ We have had a foretaste of the kind of sentiments they were very much eager to communicate in the words of Madhabchandra Mullik and Rashik Krishna Mullik cited in the first section of this chapter.

Now, to be a European by education and its concomitants implied a great many things. On the positive side, it meant bringing into play a creative, dynamic mind that was prepared to confront any social question with the strength of its rationality. In our analysis of the intellectual's growth we have already noticed a keen critical awareness on his part of his situation. But, on the negative side, it implied acceptance of "the occidental view of our past culture as only a half-civilization",⁵⁸ which, translated into practical life, meant its total rejection with all its paramount values and norms of individual behaviour. That they achieved remarkable success in this sphere within a very short time is borne out by what an English civilian wrote of them in 1838. Here are some of his comments: "(The educated youths) speak of our great men with the same enthusiasm as we do. Educated in the same way, interested in the same objects, engaged in the same pursuits with ourselves, they become more English than Hindus, just as the Roman provincials became more Romans than Gauls or Italians"; "... (they) look upon us as their natural protectors and benefactors; the summit of their ambition is, to resemble us"; "... There is no class of our subjects to whom we are so thoroughly necessary as those whose opinions have been cast in the English mould; they are spoiled for a purely native regime; they have everything to fear from the premature establishment of a native government; their education would mark them out for persecution".⁵⁹

One particular point on which eighteenth century European opinions of Indians converged, was that their religion was synonymous with their life. This opinion in the then prevailing context, could not be dismissed as incorrect. Religion was indeed their predominant concern, and determined the minutiae of their everyday behaviour. So, when the early nineteenth century fathers, who had sent their sons to English schools, had to face their sons' open denouncement of

their religion and their preference for a different value system, they had to confront the most trying and crucial situation imaginable. For, their choice lay between the son and religion. Religion and caste had at any cost to be preserved; otherwise, it would provoke social ostracism and consequently end in the total loss of identity. So, the safer of the two courses was adopted; the son was sacrificed, this again being an instance of the traditional aggression towards children. During the first six decades of the century many young men had to leave their ancestral roofs. Some embraced Christianity, some sought unity under a new church, while the courage of yet others helped them brave the storms of vilification and boycott independently. Thus, estrangement or a sharp cleavage between the individual and the society was the inevitable consequence, although the latter could not but feel the impact of the former's dynamic counterblasts. However reluctant, it too had to move on.

Alienated from the people, the intellectual elite recommended themselves more strongly to the establishment, and in the process developed certain other tendencies. First, they demonstrated very early a sort of filial dependence on the administration for protection and promotion. As C. E. Trevelyan was clever enough to notice it, from acquaintance with the doctrines of social philosophy they took the English as liberal, judicious and just in their approach to socio-political problems; so, unqualified reliance upon them could only bring the desired upliftment. The trend of nineteenth century politics would bring this out. Although a slight shift in political relationship appeared to have occurred in the eighth decade of the century, yet signs of dependence were too visible to be missed by anyone. One may refer to Sankaran Nayar's Congress Presidential Address in 1897 in which, *inter alia*, he said, "It is impossible to argue a man into slavery in the English language". In saying this Nayar was merely echoing Burke's

lofty sentiments embodied in his American conciliation speech. So, the elite community was obliged to form a kinship totally different from one based on blood and social relationship.

Secondly, what followed logically from the above, they began to identify themselves with the establishment, as belonging to or part of it. The intellectuals as a newly emergent group conferred upon themselves the status of safety-valve needed for the security and prolongation of the British empire. In the late fifties the British Indian Association of Calcutta, in a petition, asked the Government to recognise "the importance of the promotion of a territorial aristocracy as a political safety-valve for the state;" and in September 1870, i.e., at a fairly advanced stage of their political consciousness one of their prominent spokesmen, Sisir Kumar Ghose, said, "If we demand a parliament of our own from the English people, it is to lighten their trouble".⁴⁰

Thirdly, an uneasy, almost quivering, feeling of nostalgia, as of belonging to some other place now forgotten—a feeling most pathetically illustrated by Michael Madhusudan Dutt's (Bengali epic poet and dramatist) deep sighs for 'Albion's distant shore'. This feeling of homelessness (Madhusudan embraced Christianity and had to leave his parental house), consequent upon alienation, could not but culminate in painful strains and tensions that were not at all easy to overcome. Even those who remained within the Hindu fold and continued to practise rites enjoined by their religion must have felt such strains caused by daily contact with the *mlechhas*. Many of them, after returning home from office, would purify themselves by ablutions and prayers, and then take food in the eighth part of the day. Long before, in Rammohan Roy himself had been seen very palpable signs of imbalance and self-contradiction. A converted hedonist, he must have at times felt pained at the thought of a possible loss of identity. So, in him we notice an attempt to combine his westernized preferences with tradi-

tional behaviour patterns. He, it is said, used to have Bengali lunch, but English dinner. He was in reality all for the European style of living, enjoyed drinking wines, and was a victim neither of xenophobia, caste prejudices, nor of aggression towards women, indeed, he was very respectful and courteous towards the second sex, yet took Brahmin cooks to serve him in England. This may be explained as to mean that he wished to demonstrate in England the caste purity he himself had violated in his own country. Of his two Calcutta houses⁶¹ — it was often said that one was in every detail Indian except the owner, while the other was demonstrably European except the owner. The owner, i.e. Rammohan Roy, was neither here nor there, but had an existence in-between.

This element of uncertainty in the elite's social and intellectual position we have to accept as a fact of history; for, this was inherent in the very tension of which they were the product. As the century wore on, the sense of alienation grew keener, causing soul-killing frustration in some, and forcing others to relapse into total inactivity. At this stage, Rajnarayan Bose, Madhusudan's class-mate at the Hindu College and later a front-ranking Brāhma leader, remorsefully declared that it would have been much better if they had not at all learnt English;⁶² while Madhusudan himself was desperately trying, through his Bengali sonnets, to expiate his sins by prostrating himself before Mother Bengal.

This was the intellectual's lot. The more sensitive amongst them suffered intense agony; a deplorable want of conviction and fear of loss of identity had a benumbing effect on them. Prof. Toynbee has analysed the intellectual's position with delicate critical perception. He says, "the artificially manufactured intelligentsias suffered from the double handicap of being born *novi homines* and exotics.... The non-Western intelligentsias, unlike the Western middle-class, were products and symptoms of their societies' discomfiture in encounters

with a Western World which had been raised . . . to a height of prosperity and power at which it was more than a match for all its contemporaries. In short, the Western middle-class stood for strength, whereas the Westernising intelligentsias spelled weakness.

"The intelligentsias, for their part, were sensitively aware of this invidious difference between themselves and the Western middle-class; for the task of coping with this aggressive adversary was the intelligentsias' *raison d'être*, and they were condemned to spend themselves in this distressingly unequal contest on behalf of members of their own household from whom they had inevitably been alienated in the act of being trained to perform a social service that was as exotic from the standpoint of their native cultural tradition as it was vital in a world over which the West had cast its shadow".⁴³ As a result they had and continue to have an existence in-between two worlds, into neither of which their identity could be merged.

Their intellectual stance was iconoclastic. The spirit of rationalism with which they were indoctrinated urged them to renounce all ancestral beliefs and observances and caste restrictions. They ceased strictly to be Hindus. On the other hand, all of them did not embrace Christianity; the few that did were not socially accepted by the European community, although the Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay succeeded in getting his daughters married to Europeans. The void thus remained unbridgeable. "Intellectually they were children of the English, socially they were a class apart, divorced on their own initiative from orthodox Hindu society. There was little sympathy either between them and their countrymen, or between them and the English; they had been raised out of one society without having a recognized place in another."⁴⁴ They were destined by history to remain "an anti-Hindu leaven in society", working through conscious or unconscious effort for the dissolution of its structures and traditional mores.

One of their most outstanding representatives, Jawaharlal Nehru, has expressed himself thus: "I have become a queer mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approach to life are more akin to what is called Western than Eastern, but India clings to me as he does to all her children, in innumerable ways. ...I am a stranger and alien in the West. I cannot be of it. But in my own country also sometimes I have an exile's feeling".⁶⁵

These words define the position of the intellectual community as it was in the nineteenth century, and as it exists, to a certain extent, even to-day. They also account for the elite's ambivalent attitude towards their own people. There prevailed a strong current of restlessness and uncertainty among them in those days, a sort of built-in response that dreaded the given situation, and an equally strong desire to find a home, if at all possible, anywhere in the Western hemisphere. As a result of this there occurred what Prof. Edward Shils has called the "displacement" of the "location of the intellectual centre of gravity". It became located firmly in the western countries. This displacement was due fundamentally, according to Prof. Shils, to xenophilia; but whatever be its sources, that it had been detrimental to India's culture and intellectual and material development cannot in any way be denied. Concurring with this view he goes on to say that "xenophilia is injurious because it manifests and fosters a severely deficient lack of intimacy with the social material environment, and thus, at bottom, a form of blindness to the capacities and incapacities of one's fellow-countrymen, to their problems, and to their disposition to rouse themselves to do something about them".⁶⁶

Consequently, the identity of the intellectuals remained blurred; even to-day they are largely aliens, afraid of belonging to their own people. To reiterate a very familiar metaphor, the lamb has indeed strayed far from the flock, and perhaps a second metamorphosis would be needed to bring it back home.

NOTES

1. James H. Cousins, *The Renaissance in India*, Madras, 1918, pp. 6-10.
2. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, Calcutta, 1963, Vol. IV, p. 314.
3. M. G. Ranade, *Religious and Social Reform*, quoted by Charles H. Heimsath in *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton University Press, 1964, p. 183.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India* Calcutta, 1937, second impression, pp. 24-25.
5. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Sambādpatra Sekdār Kathā* (in Bengali, cullings from old newspapers), Calcutta, Vol. II, p. 52.
6. Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Unabimśa Satābdīr Bānglā* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1941, p. 174.
7. Shivnath Sastri, *Atmācharit*, Calcutta, 1952, New Signet Press edition.
8. Manucci, *Storia de Mogor*, quoted by Percival Spear in *The Nobels*, Oxford Paperbacks, 1963, Appendix D, pp. 195-201. This section records specimens of 'European and Indian mutual opinions'. Opinions of several other Europeans, both favourable and unfavourable, may be read with interest.
9. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p., 43.
10. *Ibid*, p. 29.
11. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Intellectual in India*, New Delhi, 1967, p. 3.
12. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
13. Suresh Chandra Bandyopadhyay, *Smaritishāstre Bānglā* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1958, pp. 22-35.
14. William Adam, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal, (1835-38)*, edited by Rev. J. Long, Calcutta, 1861, p. 49.
15. William Adam has mentioned in his first report (1835) the names of a few pundits who received pensions from the Government during 1813-1830. These are as follows:

District of Burdwan—Rambullubh Bhattacharyya, for the support of a religious institution and seminary, Rs. 60/- per annum.

- Nadia —
1. Balanath Siromani, son of Ramchandra Vidyalankar who enjoyed an annual allowance of Rs. 71/- received the same amount.
 2. Sivnath Vidya-Vachaspati, son of Sukra Tarkabagis, the same amount enjoyed formerly by his father, Rs. 90/- p.a.
 3. Sriram Siromoni, who kept a *chhapari* or seminary endowed by the rajah of Natore, Rs. 36/- p.a.
 4. Ramjaya Tarkabangka, Rs. 62/- p.a.
 5. Ramchandra Tarkabagis, Rs. 24/- p.a.—the same amount enjoyed by his father while at Rajshahi. Rs. 100/- p.m. was also sanctioned for the upkeep of students numbering between 100 to 150, who came from places more than three days' journey

from Nuddia, individually the students received something like 12 annas to Re. 1 per month, which nearly sufficed to procure them food.

- Murahidabad — 1. Kali Kanth Sarma, son of Jaya Ram Nyaya Panchanan who enjoyed a pension of Rs. 5/- p.m. originally endowed by Maharani Bhowani. After his death his brother
2. Chandrasiva Nyayalankara, the same amount.
3. Kishanath Nyaya Panchanan, son of Ram-Kishore Sarma who enjoyed a monthly pension of Rs. 5/- since 1793 till his death in 1822, the same amount.
- Rajshahi — 1. Kassessur Bachusputy.
2. Govindram Sirhat, and
3. Huriram Sarma Buttacharjee, sons of Chunder Sikar Tarkanshes (-nabis) who received an allowance of Rs. 90/- p.a. for the support of a college from Rani Bhowani, the same amount.
16. William Adam, *op. cit.*, Third report, p. 199.
17. *Ibid.*, Third report.
18. B. B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Class*, O.U.P. 1961, p. 63.
19. Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology*, Illinois, 1960, p. 372.
20. See his article "The Commitment of the Intellectual". *Monthly Review*, May, 1961; reprinted in *The Call*, Delhi, July, 1968.
21. W. Adam, *op. cit.*, First report, 1835.
22. This and the comments that follow have been taken from Percival Spear, *op. cit.*, Appendix D, pp. 195-198.
23. Rammohan Roy, *Appeal to the king in Council*, quoted by R. C. Majumdar in *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Bombay, 1965, Part II, p. 12.
24. Kishorichand Mitra, *Memoirs of Dwarkanath*, quoted by R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.
25. Bishop Heber, *Narrative of a Journey, through the Upper Provinces of India* (1824-25) London, Vol. II, p. 307.
26. Rev. J. Long, *Handbook of Bengal Missions*, p. 40 footnote; quoted by R. C. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
27. William Adam, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal*, Second Report, 1838, p. 137.
28. C. F. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, Calcutta, 1838, p. 113.
29. W. H. Carey, *The Good Old Days of Honorable John Company*, Calcutta, 1964, abridged Quins Book edition, p. 123.
30. Jogesh Ch. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 105.
31. *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, Calcutta, 1933, Part II, p. 81.

32. Quoted by M. A. Laird in his article on "The Contribution of Missionaries to Education in Bengal during the administration of Lord Hastings (1813-1823)", in *Bengal: Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, Calcutta, 1967.
33. George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff*, 2 vols., London, 1879, p. 141.
34. W. Adam, *op. cit.*, Third report, p. 199.
35. Quoted by R. C. Dutt in *Economic History of India*, Second edition, London, 1906, Vol. I, pp. 409-10.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 411-12.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
39. R. P. Dutt, introduction to Karl Marx's *Articles on India*, Second Indian Edition, Bombay, 1945, p. 8.
40. Karl Marx, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
41. Percival Spear, *op. cit.*, Appendix B. pp. 186-191.
42. W. H. Carey, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
43. Bepinbehari Gupta, *Pardān Prasāngā* (in Bengali), Vidyabharati edition, Calcutta, 1966, p. 85.
44. The foregoing catalogue of judgments delivered by the Supreme Court has been taken from W. H. Carey, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-107.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106.
46. W. H. Carey, *op. cit.*, chapter on "Immorality", 1906 edition, Vol. I, pp. 455-458.
47. *Ibid.*, Quins Book edition, p. 244.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
50. Bishop Heber, *op. cit.*, p. 307, letter to R. J. Wilmot Horton, Dec., 1823.
51. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 165-176.
52. *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, 1933, Part II, p. 23.
53. Nirad C. Chaudhuri's translation. Vide *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, New York, 1951, pp. 184-185.
54. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
55. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 398, quoted by the present writer in his *Bankim Mānas*, 4th edition, Calcutta, 1966, p. 21.
56. This point and the resultant estrangement of this class from the people have been elaborately analyzed in my *Bankim Mānas*, 4th edition, 1966, Chapter I.
57. Quoted by Binan Behari Majumdar in his *History of Political Thought from Rammohan to Dayanand*, Calcutta, 1934, p. 88.
58. Sri Aurobindo, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
59. C. E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, 1838, pp. 190, 192, 194 respectively.
60. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
61. Rammohan, at different times, possessed four houses. He inherited a house at Jorasanko at the time of partition of parental estates. In 1814 he bought two other houses, one at Chowringhee from one Elizabeth Fenwick at Rs. 20,317; and the other at Simla from one Francis Mendes at Rs. 13,000/-. Then he had his Maniktala gardenhouse built and furnished in the European style for him

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by his cousin Ramtanu Roy. Perhaps the Jorasanko and Chowringhee houses were subsequently sold off. Vide S.D. Collet: *Raja Rammohan Roy*, edited by D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli, 1962, p. 96.

62. Rajnaryan Bose's *Sekālār Ekāl* lecture in Bengali, Calcutta, 1872, p. 79.
63. A. Toynbee, *The Study of History*, O.U.P., 1954, Vol. VIII, p. 342.
64. L.S.S. O'Malley, (ed) *Modern India and the West*, O.U.P., 1941, p. 66.
65. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, London, 1936, Epilogue, pp. 597-98.
66. Edward Shils, *Role of Intellectual in Developing Community*, Calcutta 1958, p. 28. His overall conclusions are, however, misleading.

CHAPTER II

RAMMOHAN ROY

THE CONFRONTATION OF AN INTELLECTUAL

Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) was Bengal's first non-conformist of importance, and, therefore, her first intellectual, who, incidentally, symbolized in himself the inauguration of the modern era in India. For ever eager to live by and for ideas, he stressed the need for intellectual apprehension of reality, so that a cultural regeneration might be effected through socio-religious reforms and the guarantees of the newly established political system.

Both a non-conformist and a combatant, he had the intellectual's passion not to suffer his environment passively, and fought valiantly to compel it to respond to human needs and aspirations more satisfactorily. He broke away from traditional modes of perception and behaviour, and strove for a self-assertion that was European in content and altogether new to India. This attitude of his—this non-conformism—may be called hedonism, a sort of going out into the world instead of withdrawing into the cocoon of one's self. This new spirit, no doubt, militated strongly against the old introvert-masochist outlook, and to Rammohan's great credit it must be added that he was courageous enough to bear the brunt of the schism that followed as he was equally sensitive to recognise the superior material advantages of the western civilization. He succeeded in making a momentous break-through, which the fierce challenge of orthodoxy and the acute tension of the historical situation made all the more glorious. But, there was yet an element of utilitarianism, of pragmatism, and even of eclecticism in his hedonism, that had left its imprints on Bengal's intellectual movement. Subsequent analysis will bring this out fully.

The fact of Rammohan's life, his ^acampaigns for socio-religious reforms, and plea for the spread of western education, etc., are fairly wellknown. So, we will not recapitulate them; nor shall we assess the cogency and relevance of his religious tracts. And since our interest is in Rammohan the intellectual, we shall draw such outlines of his evolution as an intellectual as would suggest lines of convergence and reveal the man.

It will be noticed that his non-conformism regarded every stage of his life as both a success and a preparation for further battles. The way ~~he~~^{he} equipped himself and fought his battles is astounding. For, even when he was in the thick of battle he could find time to master new languages so as to find access to new doctrines. Sandford Arnot, his secretary in England, has mentioned that "the Raja was acquainted more or less with ten languages: Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Bengali, English, Hebrew, Greek, Latin and French. The first two he knew critically as a scholar, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth he spoke and wrote fluently; in the eighth, perhaps, his studies did not extend much beyond the originals of the Christian Scriptures; and in the latter two his knowledge was apparently more limited."¹ But the way he acquired the languages is what impresses one most. Childhood education through the Persian and Arabic languages (in which he studied Plato and also the logical system of Aristotle) opened the gates to Islamic theology; this was followed by a few years of Sanskrit scholarship at Benares. Urgent practical needs made the learning of English a must, while an unusual inquisitiveness for rediscovery of religious truth brought in Hebrew and Greek, in which he read the Bible; and to crown all, in the closing years of his life he began learning French, because of his admiration for Revolutionary France.

His life thus was, as it were, a voyage that had yet to find the last harbour. The knowledge he gained of different religious disciplines and systems of thought was knowledge acquired

always at first hand, through strenuous labour and keen devotion. Knowledge strengthened him to understand the dissimilar and seemingly unconnected morsels of social existence as one entity, and to visualise the essential oneness of the human situation. This prepared the ground for crusades against such attitudes and ideas as did not recognise that unity and as prided themselves on the residue of an unenlightened heritage, forgetting the high values it once stood for. Knowledge for him, thus, was but a prelude to action, to a vigorous campaign. But action with him was not of a simple unilinear dimension; for, tuned to achieve multiple ends, it had of necessity also to have multiple dimensions. If we remember this we will be better able to guess the kind of intellectual force he had to exert and the volume of mental energy he had in possession.

II

But before we begin to follow him along specific lines of development, we would analyse the element of utilitarian pragmatism in his outlook, in his awareness of the contemporary situation.

It has been established convincingly that in 1797 Rammohan was a businessman of standing in Calcutta doing money lending business and also dealing in Company's paper.² Business brought him fortune. For, two years later, we find him purchasing two landed estates—Govindapur and Rameswarpur with an annual income of Rs. 5,000. Subsequently, he bought four other petty estates: (1) Langulpara in 1803-04, (2) Birluk in 1808-09, (3) Krishnanagar in 1809-10, and (4) Srirampur in 1809-10, all in the district of Burdwan. These four collectively fetched him a further annual income of five to six thousand rupees. So, by the year 1810, he was a landowner of no inconsequential wealth and influence in Calcutta. Even when he served John Digby, an East India Company official, for short spells within the decade and had to reside in the mofussil, his

Calcutta business was creditably conducted by his agent Gopimohan Chatterjee. So, there could not occur any gap either in his income or in his influence.

That the Europeans were the principal source of his income is a truism that needs no elaboration; for, it was mainly they who borrowed from him. To many he was both a benefactor and a boss. Not only that, through business transactions he could even exert considerable influence over the Stock Exchange, an influence which continued to grow in volume till his departure for England. As evidence, if evidence at all were needed, it may be cited that he was "elected a member of the Committee of Management and also joint-treasurer of the "Commercial and Patriotic Association" formed mainly by the European business community of Calcutta on the 31st January, 1828".³ His election to this post perhaps came both as an honour and recognition of the services he rendered unto important members of the European community, individually. Even if there had been no intellectual appraisal of the situation on his part, at least for the prosperity of his business Rammohan had to endear himself to Europeans and also to pick up some of their habits, such as, drinking. In this purely material incentive and relation may be traced a source of his preference for a hedonistic outlook on life. A few months after that election, he, as it were, repaid the compliment by advocating the theory of colonization of India by Europeans. At a public meeting held in the Town Hall, Calcutta, on Dec. 15, 1829, he declared, "I am impressed with the conviction that the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs".⁴ One member of his intimate friends' circle, Kalinath Ray, even "persuaded a number of persons to sign a petition to Parliament in favour of colonization".⁵ Thus, it is evident that a link between his becoming an office bearer of the Commercial and

Patriotic Association and his advocacy of the theory of colonization can be established.

But colonization by Europeans or no, the present moment could not be allowed to slip. Rammohan correctly, although pragmatically, analysed the historical process, determined the direction in which the forces were likely to converge with their promise of both material and spiritual advancement, and in a letter to a friend declared, "I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interest. The distinction of castes, introducing innumerable divisions and sub-divisions among them, has entirely deprived them of political feeling, and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise. It is, I think, necessary that some changes should take place in their religion *at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort*".⁶ (italics mine)

The pragmatic content of the italicised words is perspicuous. What Rammohan articulated in theory he also practised in life. Reformation of his religion followed. Already a convert to hedonism, he imbibed the spirit of western intellectual heritage, and gradually attained to a stature of eminence, morally, intellectually, and even materially.

The same is true of eclecticism. Religiosity, his biographers inform us, was a strong feature of his character; but it was a religiosity which was elastic enough to be at home in all the three systems—Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Not only so, he could zealously defend one as against the others. That is to say, he could choose to be eclectic at will. For this, he was called by some a Maulavi, by others a Christian *padre*. He was, of course, neither; though reformed in religion, he stood firm by Vedic monotheism which preserved his Hindu identity. Yet, in 1820, he wrote and published *The Precepts of Jesus* in the name of Prusunnu Koomar Thakoor, as he considered the precepts

to be the best to improve the moral and social state of mankind. But the very next year he published *The Brahminical Magazine* (I, II, III) under the pseudonym of Ram Dass to vindicate Hinduism against attacks from the Christian missionaries. What compelling sense of expediency urged him to take shelter under pseudonyms we cannot now decipher, nor is it important either. But the eclectic nature of his choice is self-evident. This is borne out more sharply by his "*Remarks on Settlement in India by Europeans*", which, written on July 14, 1832, appeared in the General Appendix to the Report of the Select Committee of the House of Commons. In that document we find him envisioning the union of England and India as "two free and Christian countries, united as they will then be by *resemblance of language, religion, and manners.*"⁷ (italics mine)

Evidence shows that Rammohan was not in favour of conversion of Indians to Christianity, he himself resented strongly when such overtures were made to him by no less a person than Dr Middleton, the Bishop of Calcutta.⁸ Yet, in the above-cited "Remarks" he envisaged a Christian India, envisaged resemblance of language and religion, etc. No logical explanation for this standpoint can be found, unless we accept this as an illustration of his eclecticism. Or could it be taken as an expedient, merely verbal, concession to the British authorities to be repaid by them in the form of provision of additional advantages for the educated middle class in the new charter! one wonders.

Rammohan's association with the Rev. Alexander Duff's School bears additional testimony to his eclecticism. Duff came to Calcutta in 1830 as a proselytizer, his intention being to find converts through English education. But he found it difficult to get a house for that purpose. Rammohan immediately offered the Brāhma Sabhā hall and at a lower rent too (he himself paid to the owners Rs. 50 per month as rental, but got it for Duff at Rs. 40), and removed the Sabhā to his own newly

erected house. He also exercised his influence to procure for Duff his first batch of pupils. The School was opened on July 13, 1830, Rammohan himself being present there "to remove the prejudice against reading the Bible".⁹ While inaugurating the School, Duff recited the Lord's Prayer in Bengali, and gave each pupil a copy of the Bible. He then asked some of the senior boys to read from it, but the boys remonstrated. Thereupon Rammohan said

"...that they were mistaken. 'Christians, like Dr Horace Hayman Wilson, have studied the Hindu Sastras, and you know that he has not become a Hindu. I myself have read all the Koran again and again, and has that made me a Mussalman? Nay, I have studied the whole Bible, and you know I am not a Christian. Why, then do you fear to read it? Read it and judge for yourselves. No compulsion, but enlightened persuasion, which you may resist if you choose, constitutes you yourselves judges of the contents of the book. Most of the remonstrants seemed satisfied....Daily for the next month did the Hindu reformer visit the school at ten for the Bible lesson, and frequently thereafter till he left for England, when his eldest son (Radhaprasad Roy) continued to encourage the boys by his presence and their teacher by his kindly counsel. But all the Christian missionaries kept aloof..."¹⁰

Rammohan was against conversion, as has been pointed out earlier; but yet he indirectly helped Duff in his proselytizing mission. This eclecticism became part of Bengal's intellectual heritage. When decades later, Keshub Chandra Sen established The Calcutta College, then also, before beginning the school work, the boys had to recite the Lord's Prayer. Many pupils of those days who continued to live in the twentieth century, including Nilmani De, the brilliant student of the Hindu Metropolitan College (a short-lived institution, estd. 1852)

used still to recite it everyday after bath along with *slokas* from Hindu Scriptures.¹¹

This focus on Rammohan's pragmatism and eclecticism is not to be construed as an attempt to set his contribution to our regeneration at a discount. For, these elements notwithstanding, his vigorous intellectual output and his still more vigorous campaigns for reform reveal his urge for involvement in life's manifold possibilities. Without this involvement no permanent benefit could have followed. Without this involvement he could not become the perturbed conscience of his society, yearning for a superior social order and better human understanding.

III

Let us now follow him along the lines of his involvement; we would take up the province of religious reform and his campaigns for the same first.

In the previous chapter, we have analysed how the impact of western intellectualism helped sensitive young men to achieve a sort of emotional revolution, which liberated them from debasing modes of thinking, and at the same time released a great amount of creative energy. Rammohan also must have gone through similar emotional experience and exuberance. Otherwise, one finds no explanation why in 1803-04 he, without any apparent reason and/or provocation from any quarter whatsoever, chose to publish his Persian monograph *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* (a gift to monotheists). There he appeared in the role of an iconoclast with reason—the "intuitive faculty of discriminating good from evil", "truth from untruth"—as his invincible weapon attacking all established faiths and also their founders, and in the end arriving at the fundamental unity of the godhead. And the line of worship he envisaged was one that would gain "the union of hearts with mutual love and affection of all their fellow-creatures, without difference in

shape and colour or creeds and religions, which is a pure devotion acceptable to God, the creator of Nature".

But why did he publish this tract at all? What was the urge behind? The only assumption is that the intellectual forces of westernization—that is, the conquest by extrovert modes of thinking of the introvert-masochistic thought-processes—were silently working out an intense emotional revolution. Eager minds were seeking out a way of release. The Persian tract was Rammohan's first response to that impact; and it was also his first measure of himself.

He settled permanently in Calcutta in the year 1815, and started immediately his life-long crusade against all forms of Hindu orthodoxy, against idolatry, polytheism, and degrading social practices, such as polygamy and burning of widows, questions that were discussed and debated in public and private at that time. While attacking all varieties of orthodoxy and religious perversities, found either in scriptural texts or in prevalent practice, Rammohan stood firm on the loftiest form of Vedic monotheism. In his own words, he "endeavoured to show that the idolatry of the Brahmins was contrary to the practice of their ancestors and the principles of the ancient books and authorities which they prefer to revere and obey". He stood by those ancient texts. A slight shift in his attitude is noticed here. Reason is not as paramount here as in the Persian text, for an element of faith can be discerned in his acceptance of the Vedic texts. Nonetheless, throughout the controversy he maintained that the authority of the scriptures must always depend on their consonance with reason. Here also one discovers the presence of that critical, analytical faculty which sought to evaluate our socio-religious situation from a historical and rationalistic point of view, and to interconnect events and experiences as constituents of the reality of his situation.

In 1820, Rammohan found himself entangled in a polemic, which also lasted long, with Christian orthodoxy, much to his

surprise. This was caused by an unwarranted attack by Dr Marshman of the Serampore Baptist Mission on his book *The Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*. Rammohan's offence was that in extracting these precepts he accepted neither "the Divinity and Atonement of Jesus Christ" nor "the Divine Authority of the whole of the Holy Scriptures". As for the miracles, he did not find them to be in consonance with reason and justice. He was stirred by the moral sublimity of the precepts, and was of the mind that, if properly inculcated, these would "improve the moral, social and political state of mankind". His rejection of the divinity of Jesus and of the divine authority of the scriptures naturally displeased the devout Trinitarians, so much so that they sensed danger and immediately sought to rescue their faith from the mishandling of a heathen. But from the disputes Rammohan emerged in redoubled glory.

With William Adam and a few other friends he established the Unitary Church in 1821, though it did not have a very active existence. An interesting observation on the existing Unitary Church in America may here be noted. Prof. Kopnin, Director of the Institute of Philosophy of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, who visited America in Dec.-Jan. 1964-65, has described the Unitary Church as an assembly of "near-atheists". He has further observed that "it is a place for timid, fearful, and hesitating atheists afraid to confront religion and to struggle with the social order. This church is a gradual transition from the old obscurantist Church to a society without a church".¹² Although near-atheism is not the correct word to describe Rammohan's religious view-point,—for the consensus of all contemporary evidences points to his deep religious feelings, yet that it was undergoing a process of secularization is manifest in his treatment of Jesus Christ.

At home neither in Hinduism nor in Christianity, he, with a few companions, established his own theistic church, the Brāhma Samāj, in 1828. The trust deed of the Samāj, enacted in 1830,

said that the church temple was "to be used, occupied, enjoyed, applied and appropriated as and for a place of public meeting, of all sorts and descriptions of people, without distinction, as shall behave and conduct themselves in an orderly, sober, religious and devout manner"; and the worship was to be conducted in such a way as would lead "to the promotion of charity, morality, piety, benevolence, and virtue and the strengthening of the bonds of union between men of all religious persuasions and creeds". In his several appeals to the upholders of Christian orthodoxy he had earlier prayed, "May God render religion destructive of differences and dislike between man and man, and conducive to the peace and union of mankind".

Both the words of the trust deed and those just cited reveal a quest for positive mundane values, such as, charity, benevolence, the peace and union of mankind, etc. This quest, coming as it does from a child of the introvert social order, is a proof that the old self-repressive modes of masochist perception, its morbidity and pessimism, the negation of man in his own existential context, etc. have been thoroughly mastered. It speaks a different language, and is eager to go out into the world to dominate it. Here, man in his full humanity has been recognised; and, we also feel a dawning of that cosmopolitan sense of human reality which characterised Bengal's intellectual life throughout the century. And implicit in these words is also the idea that only such a philosophy or religion mattered as could suitably minister to man's social needs. Incidentally, it may be of interest to know that Kissory Chand Mitter, a distinguished member of the elite community, in an article entitled "What was the Religion Rammohan believed in" described him as a "religious Benthamite," and commented that Rammohan "estimated the different creeds existing in the world, not according to his notion of their truth or falsehood, but his notion of their utility; according to their tendency, in

his view, to promote the maximization of human happiness and the minimization of human misery".¹³

In this connection we must also remember his attacks against polygamy, caste and accessory evils, his ceaseless endeavours for securing the natural rights of women, including rights of inheritance, his agitation for the abolition of the *sati* rites, although he was not perhaps the first to point out that these had no scriptural sanctions behind them. He, of course, could not accomplish what he sought to, but in some spheres, as in the abolition of *sati*, he succeeded. It is said that he was greatly disturbed at his failure to prevent, in his youth, the wife of his deceased cousin from becoming a *sati*. Also said that on that very day he resolved to put an end to this abominable practice by launching a country-wide agitation against the rite. Ultimately he did succeed, when with his own unbounded zeal was added the active humanism of an Englishman, Lord William Bentinck. In such acts as these we once again notice a welcome release from masochist social behaviour, and, on the positive side of it, a loud proclamation of human dignity.

IV

Rammohan's attitude towards the problem of freedom shows a parallel development, although the element of utilitarian pragmatism is even more palpable here. It is highly commendable that at that early stage of Bengal's evolution as a modern society, he did not only think of individual freedom, but also of that of nations and states, the political counterpart of the aforesaid cosmopolitan view of human reality. The psychological revolution we have spoken of had already transplanted him on the broad human situation, and he had begun taking increasing interest in the political affairs of different continents. John Digby has recorded that "he was in the constant habit of reading the English newspapers, of which the continental politics chiefly interested him";¹⁴ and

afterwards, in June 1829, Rammohan could completely surprise Victor Jacquemont, the French naturalist and traveller, "by the accuracy and range of his knowledge of the various States of Europe".¹⁵ This interest in contemporary politics brought in such outstanding questions as the frontiers of nationalism, sovereignty and inter-dependence of states, etc., which problems we shall discuss later.

Love of freedom, as his friend and admirer William Adam said, "was, perhaps, the strongest passion of his soul—freedom not of the body merely, but of the mind—freedom not of action merely, but of thought". Again, "He must breathe an atmosphere of freedom, and not finding one ready-made to his hand, he made one for himself. . . . If an attack was made, even, by implication merely, on his mental freedom, he resisted it with an irrepressible sense of deep injury and insult".¹⁶ So, while he could fully appreciate the merit of English social and political institutions, he could yet prove his mettle when occasions for fighting for the guarantee of fundamental rights presented themselves. In 1823 he stopped publication of his Persian newspaper *Mirat-ul-Akbar* as a protest against restrictions imposed on the Press in India with these bold words, "The respect which is purchased with a hundred drops of hearts' blood, do not thou, in the hope of a favour, commit to the mercy of a porter".¹⁷

Similarly, when in 1821 the constitutional government of Naples was overthrown, he was so dejected that he cancelled his engagement with Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*. In a letter he declared, "I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been, and never will be ultimately successful".¹⁸ When, in 1823, he was told of the liberation of Spanish colonies of South America, he was so thrilled that he celebrated the occasion "by illuminations, by an elegant dinner to about sixty Europeans,

and by a speech composed and delivered by himself." A pertinent question about the illuminations brought out this ardent reply, "What ! ought I to be insensible to the sufferings of my fellow creatures wherever they are, or howsoever unconnected by interests, religion and language?"¹⁹ These words bring to our mind the equally noble words of Russell Lowell, "In the gain or loss of one race all the rest have equal claim". Within Spain itself, his sympathies were with the liberals fighting against tyranny. It was a sympathy born of concern for human aspirations, in full recognition of which the Spanish Constitution of 1812 declared at Cadiz was dedicated to him *liberalismo; noble, sabio, y Virtuoso Brama*.²⁰

In Oct.-Nov., 1830, the year of the Second French Revolution, "so great was his enthusiasm" that "he could think and talk of nothing else!" On his way to England he met at Cape two French frigates under the glorious revolutionary tricolour, and, though himself at that time nursing a nasty wound, yet, visited them to pay his tributes. "His reception was, of course, worthy of the French character and of him. He was conducted over the vessels and endeavoured to convey by the aid of interpreters how much he was delighted to be under the banner that waved over their decks,—an evidence of the glorious triumph of right over might; and as he left the vessels he repeated emphatically "glory, glory, glory to France!"²¹ Subsequently, in his petition to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France for a passport to visit that country, which he did, he declared: "All mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches".²²

This brings in the question of inter-dependence of nations about which Rammohan held very distinct views. In a letter to Mrs. Woodford, April 1831, he wrote : "The struggles are not merely between the reformers and anti-reformers, but between liberty and oppression throughout the world ; between

justice and injustice; and between right and wrong."²³ So liberty cannot just simply be an isolated phenomenon; it has to be gained throughout and for the whole world, to be restored universally to all the subjugated nations. Rammohan's political insight brought home to his realisation that nationalism in India would gain ground only when the western nations had become free in the truest sense of the term. All the emancipated nations of the world would then co-operate, under similar principles of government, to constitute a happy family of mankind.²⁴

This vision about the future of humanity is indeed superb; since these words were uttered in the early years of the nineteenth century and in a social milieu where the very idea of nationalism was in an incipient state. Rammohan's idealism and cosmopolitan perception of the human situation were appreciated and also honoured by Europeans, as the dedication of the Spanish Constitution would show. But his intellectual position *vis-à-vis* the British rule in India had obvious limitations, and took away something from his love for abstract freedom.

For, his love of freedom was unfortunately wedded to the theory of colonization of India by Europeans and also to a glorification of the civilizing role of the conquering people. Like many other members of the elite group, Rammohan accepted British rule as an act of Divine Providence, which delivered India from the tyranny of the former rulers and placed her under the government of the English. The theory of colonization was nothing but an explicit declaration of subservience to British rule. His political hedonism did not recognise any contradiction between love of freedom in the abstract and playing a subservient role to Europeans in practice. The testimony of Victor Jacquemont's journal on this point is very clear. He reproduced Rammohan's arguments thus:

"National independence is not an absolute good; the object,

the goal, so to say, of society is to secure the happiness of the greatest possible number, and when, left to itself, a nation cannot attain this object, when it does not contain within itself the principles of future progress, it is better for it that it should be guided by the example and even by the authority of a conquering people who are more civilized".

"The metaphysical intellect of Rammohan Roy did not let go this opportunity of playing upon the words 'dependence' and 'independence'. 'When we have to depend', he said to me, 'by the very conditions of our existence on all things and all beings in nature, is not this fiery love of national independence a chimera? In society individuals are constantly driven by their weakness to seek help from their neighbours, especially if the neighbours happen to be stronger than they; why, then, should a nation have the absurd pride of not depending upon another? Conquest is very rarely an evil when the conquering people are more civilized than the conquered, because the former bring to latter the benefits of civilization. India requires many more years of English domination so that she may not have many things to lose while she is reclaiming her political independence'.²⁵

We have quoted his words at some length in order not to allow any gap to creep into his argument. So far as abstract principles go, the verbal logistics of the above passage are irrefutable. Dependence-independence relationship has been brought out with force, and, viewed through humanity's cosmic eyes, it may also be conceded that national independence can never be an absolute good. But when translated into the concrete Indo-British relationship, where does this lead us to? Does not the entire passage sound like a sedate rationalization of his own and also India's subservient position *vis-a-vis* British domination? Does it not read like an apologia? The fact is that the immediate benefits that were gradually accruing to the newly evolved middle classes were too numerous and lucrative

for them to think of a possible separation from the ruling community. Their filial dependence on British administration has already been analysed in the preceding chapter. To trace its existence in Rammohan's thought is only to recognise an historical necessity. Moreover, it does not devalue his intellectual and cosmopolitan view of reality, notwithstanding its inherent pragmatic significance.

V

Now, keeping the focal point in our mind—that is, the recognition of the essential humanness of man, his freedom and of the necessity of satisfying his social needs—we can make an over-all assessment of Rammohan's achievement.

Viewed from intellectual criteria, his unique merit lies in his sure grasp of the historical situation, with all its tensions and discomfitures. When in 1815 he started his campaigns for religious and social reform, the effects of the impact of British conquest of India had just begun to be felt. With almost all the princely states and domains annexed, the economic, social and even the demographic set-up of the land came under a process of transformation. The superiority of English institutions had been recognised, as they appeared to be founded, at least theoretically, on a humanistic ethic. Imitation of English manners and customs had started, and individual efforts for the spread of English education had also begun. That was not the time to critically examine the residual effects of the conquest, but to accept what English 'civilizing' gratuity was pleased to give, and also to acquiesce in the Englishman's assessment of India's cultural heritage.

For good or bad, the future of India belonged to the English, as well as her present prosperity. People who were circumstantially so placed as to be of service to the English, had gained not only in wealth and material comforts, but became aware of a sudden mobility which neither traditional sloth nor a feeling

of existing on a timeless plane could check. The challenge of the time could, therefore, be accepted only by a genuine willingness to change, and change in the desired English way.

Rammohan grasped this situation in its totality. There were a hundred guarantees of political advantage and social comfort in English laws and institutions. But before one could demand them as a matter of right, one had to be prepared both mentally and intellectually to receive them. Preparation in the contemporary context meant a farewell to all sorts of obscurantism in personal and social behaviour as well as to all varieties of medieval cants and obsolescence. By his intellectual vigour Rammohan had already gained that freedom as was also gained by many others on a lower plane. But freedom for him was not an unmixed blessing; for its inevitable consequence was ostracism,—not only social but familial and even conjugal. Sad at heart but yet undaunted, he determined to make everyone else share in that freedom and plunged into action with an urgent sense of immediacy which was as worth emulating as it was rare.

He wrote, published, debated, appeared at intellectual jousts and disputations, published newspapers, established schools and printing presses, enrolled disciples and friends, faced and hurled ridicule, agitated and moved men in power and authority; in other words, he created and organised an intellectual thought movement which took the eyeless Hindu orthodoxy by storm. Books and pamphlets written by him in English and Bengali (some of these were translated and published in Hindustani also) number over sixty. Most of these were printed at his own cost and distributed free; and when the Baptist Mission Press refused to print his *Final Appeal to the Christian Public* because of his controversy with them, he installed his own printing plant—the Unitarian Press—and had it printed there. Buckingham, the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, has recorded that Rammohan supported the Unitarian Chapel, the Unitarian

Press, and the expense of his own publications "out of a private fortune of which he devotes more than one-third to acts of the purest philanthropy and benevolence".²⁶

Of his debating skill many Europeans have spoken with admiration. The following remark made by an Englishman will show the esteem he commanded. "It was in argument, however, that this exalted Brahmin was most conspicuous: he seemed to grapple with the truth intuitively and called in invective, raillery, sarcasm and sometimes a most brilliant wit, to aid him in confuting his opponents: if precedent were necessary, a remarkably retentive memory and extensive reading in many languages supplied him with a copious fund: and at times with a rough, unsparing, ruthless hand he burst asunder the meshes of sophistry, error and bigotry in which it might be attempted to entangle him. In conversation with individuals of every rank and of various nations and professions, he passed with the utmost ease from one language to another, suiting his remarks to each and all in excellent taste and commanding the astonishment and respect of his hearers".²⁷

Rammohan's was indeed a dedicated soul; he dedicated himself to the cause of annihilation of medievalism from the sphere of ideas as well as to the creation of a culture consonant with the spirit of the age. This spirit of dedication distinguishes the intellectual truly great from the merely academic. William Adam writes correctly when he says of Rammohan that "he seemed to feel, to think, to speak, to act, as if he could not but do all this, and that he must and could do it only in and from and through himself, and that the application of any external influence, distinct from his own strong will, would be the annihilation of his being and identity".²⁸ These words bring immediately to one's mind the historic saying of Martin Luther, "By this I stand, I cannot do otherwise". In both, there was the same recognition of their individual roles in shaping the course of history and in leading their people to a new harbour

of self-assertion. In both is noticed an unshaken faith in their own missions; both of them were, truly, the thinking organs of their own societies.

England, it has been said, was history's unconscious tool in bringing about a social revolution in India. But that revolution was the positive effect of a negative act, the destruction of political medievalism in India. England, therefore, prompted by her own imperialist motives, was building a new India from the exterior, without any commiseration for the spirit of the vanquished culture; Rammohan, through his critical endeavour to create a dynamic social mind, was trying to build from within. His insistence on the sovereignty of reason, on the right of individual conscience to determine what was good, his rejection of ancestral prerogative to prescribe his own destiny, over and above his vigorous campaigns for social justice, etc., were calculated to encourage generations of young men, and also women, to decry their medieval past and march ahead to the creation of a new culture, based on European modes of perception. Indeed, for decades Bengal's intellectual growth had followed in his footsteps. His intellection, vision, and thought-movement added considerable momentum and also gave direction to whatever unconscious stir was caused by the British conquest. His new church—the Brāhma Samāj and monotheistic religious persuasion also indirectly became a source of social dynamism. England, by unifying India politically, had already opened a new chapter of her political advancement; Rammohan, by the application of a mind fully responsive to the changed conditions, and equally eager to understand the laws of motion and to visualise future development, accelerated greatly the rhythm and process of that development.

This, in the given context, was the highest function an intellectual could be asked to perform. Rammohan did all this and more, even if some pragmatic motivation could be dis-

cerned in his acceptance of the British rule as Divine Dispensation. He embodied in himself both the challenge and the response of his epoch.

VI

With his contribution assessed, we may now consider the nature of Rammohan's involvement, and also the intriguing question of a possible loss of identity on his part.

We have at first to confront a few interesting remarks made about him and by him. In 1823 Rammohan sent a letter to Lord Amherst advocating western education for India, to which we have referred in the preceding chapter. But no reply was considered necessary. The President of the General Committee of Public Instruction, J. H. Harrington observed, "... it was entitled to no reply, as it has disingenuously assumed a character to which it has no pretensions. The application to government against the cultivation of Hindu literature, and in favour of the substitution of European tuition, is made professedly on the part, and in the name of the natives of India. But it bears the signature of one individual alone, whose opinions are well known to be hostile to those entertained by almost all his countrymen. The letter of Rammohan Roy *does not, therefore, express the opinion of any portion of the natives of India, and its assertion of that effect, is a dereliction of truth, which cancels the claim of the author to respectful consideration*".²⁹ (italics mine)

Protesting against Rammohan's advocacy of colonization one correspondent of *Samāchār Darpan*, Bengali journal run by the Serampore missionaries, wrote on Oct. 15, 1831, "It is not the wish of the great body of the Hindus that the English should come and cultivate the land and become landlords", and that Rammohan "*can by no means be considered as a promoter of the general welfare of India*".³⁰ (italics mine)

Rammohan himself is reported to have once said that opposition against him at one time reached such a height that

"I was at last deserted by every person except two or three Scotch friends, to whom and the nation to which they belong I always feel grateful".³¹

At another place he has recorded, "By taking the path which conscience and sincerity direct, I, born a Brahman, have exposed myself to the complainings and reproaches of my relations, whose prejudices are strong, and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system. But these, however, accumulated, I can tranquilly bear, trusting that a day will arrive when my humble endeavours will be viewed with justice—perhaps acknowledged with gratitude".³²

The first two observations suggest that Rammohan was an estranged being, with neither following nor social prestige, and was regarded as suspect both by men in power and by a great body of the general public; no trust was placed even on his good intentions. On the other hand, his own statements reveal his own painful recollections of severance of familial ties, and of consequent finding himself often in the minority of one. For, even his close friends and associates must have at times found it inconvenient to keep company with him. He had to go his way all alone.

Rammohan had to face what intellectuals in every country and in every epoch have to face, that is, the problem of alienation. There had been persecutions and even cowardly threats to his life. But yet he did not commit that unfortunate blunder which many latter-day intellectuals have been very prone to commit, namely, total withdrawal from the mainstream of national life. Not only did he not give up the battle against the preservers of tradition, but manfully resisted temptations of worldly glory if only he embraced Christianity, to which we have already referred. It speaks volumes for the courage of the man who suffered all sorts of indignities at the hands of his countrymen on the one hand, and, on the other, waged successful intellectual battles against Christian prosely-

tizers, in order to preserve his national identity and also to assure himself that he stood by his people, even though he was a member of the "artificially manufactured intelligentsias" of the East, analysed by Professor Toynbee.

This almost inhuman courage and capacity for forbearance deserve a homage from all. Although a bitter critic of castism, he yet never intended to lose his identity. He observed all outward performances, which a Brahmin in those days was obliged to perform. European observers explained this as a manifest desire to "retain his nationality".³³ Analysing Rammohan's intellectual standpoint Surendranath Banerjee in a memorable speech declared that "his was no violent alienation, no bitter estrangement, no sudden cutting adrift from the sheet-anchors of the past".³⁴ This view has been fully corroborated by Bipin Chandra Pal. In the words of Bipinchandra, "The Raja's movement could hardly be called a movement of religious and social *revolt*. While claiming the right of private judgement in the interpretation of ancient scriptures, the Raja never repudiated their authority; nor did he, while seeking to assert the right of individual conscience to determine for itself what was right or wrong, ever repudiate the authority of that social conscience which spoke through ancient social laws and sanctified social traditions".³⁵

It has been mentioned in the above analysis that while attacking Hindu orthodoxy, Rammohan stood firm by Vedic monotheism as against latter-day off-shoots and overgrowths of Brahmanism; that he also defended Hinduism against the Christian missionaries. He only wanted the old pristine purity of Brahmanism re-established in Indian life, and degrading social customs and abhorrent practices abolished. But in the heat of controversy, his adversaries forgot that, though westernised intellectually he still remained a Hindu in feeling, intuition, and in religious practices. One of his adversaries once advised him to possess his own soul in patience and not to

disturb the tranquillity of the idol worshippers' life. To him Rammohan replied thus:

"In thanking him for his offering me this counsel, I must, however, beg the learned Brahman to excuse me while I acknowledge myself unable to follow it; and that for several reasons. First, a feeling for the misery and distress of his fellow-creatures is, to every one not overpowered by selfish motives, I presume, rather natural than optional. Secondly, I, as one of their countrymen, and ranked in the most religious sect, of course participate in the disgrace and ridicule to which they have subjected themselves, in defiance of their spiritual authority, by the worship of idols, very often under the most shameful forms, accompanied with the foulest language, and most indecent hymns and gestures. Thirdly, a sense of duty which one man owes to another compels me to exert my utmost endeavours to rescue them from imposition and servitude, and promote their comfort and happiness".³⁶

The reasons he assigned for following the path he did actually follow are: (1) a sensitive awareness of the misery of his fellow creatures; (2) a deep sense of participation in the prevailing disgrace of the country; and (3) a pressing sense of duty which conscience and sincerity impelled him to discharge towards all. These, apart from testifying to the virtues of manhood which he possessed in full, also illustrate the nature and quality of his involvement. He, a westernized individual, with whom intellectualism had always been ascendant, was both sophisticated and wealthy enough to lead a life of luxury and angry indifference. But, instead, he chose the path of embitterment and combat; and that for the spiritual and material amelioration of those who threw all sorts of dirt at him. He, therefore, was unique in the quality of his involvement. His was a case of identification and discovery of himself in the abounding disgrace, in the abject slavery, and in the total

absence of moral values. In his very act of moving away, he also sought to move in. His crusades had to be directed against all, even against his own self if need be, so that all sources and evidences of degradation could be eradicated; so that instead of the kind of death-in-life that all in India had been living for uncountable centuries, they could re-establish joy in the very state of being human. This outlook was no doubt western in inspiration, but there was no obstacle in its being made also eastern.

This deep sense of involvement distinguished Rammohan not only from some of his prominent contemporaries, but from distinguished Brāhma leaders of the latter half of the nineteenth century. The latter were much too absorbed in their personal religious problems to afford leadership in any other sphere. A nation's consciousness of itself, however, is to be measured not by the intellectual brilliance of a few individuals, nor by their relative freedom from bondage to customs, but by signs of vivification of the people as one entity. If this statement is considered valid, then the intellectuals' obligation is not to cut themselves adrift from the totality of their environment, but to discover themselves as born to belong and stay there. An acceptance of this state of belonging together can only promote exploration of means for change and betterment, and, at the same time, give potency and force to the words of the intellectuals. With Rammohan this feeling was keen, and so, even when he felt to be in the minority of one, he could provide intellectual refuge and a sense of identity to others who also worked for change.

It has already been pointed out that he was born of a moment of tension and that he himself was a symptom of the Indian society's discomfiture at being accosted by an aggressive western civilization. So there was bound to be a certain element of instability in his standpoint and position. He was a child of masochism, but chose to turn hedonist. His position in society was pre-

carious; and, as such, he could not but show signs of imbalance.

Moreover, an element of masochism may still be traced in him. Let us, for instance, take the case of his advocacy of colonization of India by Europeans. The very utilitarian hedonism that was the parent of this advocacy was itself born of a masochistic recognition of one's own inferiority and lack of power. Reference may also be made to his support of the indigo-planters, whose barbarous atrocities to peasants were a matter of grave concern to the government itself. Rammohan's support for them implies not only a masochistic admission of the white man's superiority, and perhaps, indirectly, also an involvement of self-interest, but also runs sadly counter to his own love of freedom.

However that may be, he stood by what he did, and perhaps could not do otherwise. The element of ambivalence also it was not for him to conquer. But great social mobility is often created by people who are incompletely socialized, or who are obliged to stand apart from their fellow beings. Rammohan, by his compelling sense of devotion, created that mobility; nay, he was the creator of the most effective social mobility in modern India. The entire burden of his intellectual quest was for elimination of points of dissimilarity in personal conduct, feeling and perception; and, when transferred to the broad human phenomenon, to devise ways and means for what the physicist-philosopher L. L. Whyte has termed "decrease of asymmetry".³⁷ The decrease of asymmetry at both individual and national levels, and in matters religious, social and political, would enable one man to confront another on the same plane. Rammohan as an intellectual envisaged all this, and though enamoured of the "pirate" civilization of the West, yet intellectually strived for humanity's progress, dignity and freedom. He was thus an embodiment of liberated energies; and, as such, became the spokesman of all progressive forces latent in the Indo-British society of the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

1. Quoted in *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, Calcutta, 1933, Part II, p. 132.
2. Sophia D. Collet: *Raja Rammohan Roy* ed. D. K. Biswas and P. C. Ganguli, Calcutta, 1962, pp. 54-57.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.
4. Quoted by B. B. Majumdar in his *History of Political Thought*, Calcutta, 1934, p. 72.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.
6. *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, 1933, Part II, p. 92.
7. S. D. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 338.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.
9. George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff*, London, 1879, p. 76.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
11. Manomohan Gangopadhyay, *Bāṅglār Nava-jāgarānēr Śoddkshar* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1963, pp. 60-61.
12. Howard L. Parsons, *Soviet Philosophy Speaks: Some Contemporary views*, pp. 32-33, Occasional Paper no. 6 (1967), American Institute of Marxist Studies.
13. Quoted in *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, 1933, II, p. 168.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
15. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, New York, 1951, p. 414.
16. Vide *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, II, p. 68.
17. S. D. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 455.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 162, and Plates VIa and VIb.
21. This is how James Sutherland who also sailed to England with Rammohan described the scene. Quoted by S. D. Collet, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-08.
22. *Ibid.*, Appendix IX, p. 502.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
24. *English Works of Rammohan Roy*, pp. 316-17, quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.
25. N. C. Chaudhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 414-415.
26. S. D. Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
27. Quoted by Bradely-Birt in his *Twelve men of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1910, p. 8.
28. Quoted by Collet, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
29. *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, 1933, II, p. 45.
30. Translated and quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 74. An error in translation has been corrected.
31. George Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
32. Quoted by P. K. Sen, *Biography of a New Faith* Vol. I, Calcutta, 1950, p. 83.
33. George Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
34. Speech at the Rammohan Roy Memorial Meeting, Calcutta, Sept. 27, 1888; reprinted in *Rammohan Centenary Volume*, II, pp. 193-99.
35. B. C. Pal, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Battle for Swaraj*, new edition, Calcutta, 1945, p. 13.

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36. 'Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of Vedas'; quoted by P. K. Sen, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.
37. L. L. Whyte, *The Next Development in Man*, Mentor edition (Second Printing) 1961, Chapter II, p. 17.

CHAPTER III

RADHAKANTA DEV

A STUDY IN CROSS-PURPOSES

The career of Raja Radhakanta Dev (1784-1867) provides an interesting study in cross-purposes. He headed the orthodox challenge against Rammohan's and later, Vidyasagar's social reform movements, and exerted himself to the utmost to prevent Hindu customs and religious practices from being altered by English laws. But, yet, he also appears to have been one of history's unmistakable tools for heralding the desired renaissance in Bengal, although the purpose and direction of most of his activities bluntly crossed those of Rammohan Roy's and, later, those of the radicals.

By virtue of birth and marriage he found himself positioned to lead the Hindu community. His grand-father, Raja Nabakrishna Dev, founder of the Shovabazar family, got him married to the daughter of the *gosthipati* Gopikanta Sinha Chaturdhurina of Gopinagar. This marriage subsequently elevated him to the position of the *gosthipati*, and entitled him to "the first honours in every formal assembly of Hindus".¹ But the first in honour was also the first in responsibility; the head of the community was also expected to be the head custodian of its ethos as well as its material well-being. Radhakanta proved to be a very worthy custodian.

Sincerity marked whatever he did to preserve the community's interest, though his sincerity could well be denounced as bigotry. Here is an example: In a meeting held by the Hindus of Calcutta to vote an address of thanks to Lord Hastings on his leaving Bengal, Radhakanta "proposed as an amendment that Lord Hastings should be particularly thanked for 'the protection and encouragement which he had afforded

to the ancient and orthodox practice of widows burning themselves with their husbands' bodies—a proposal which was seconded by Hurru Mohan Thakoor, another wealthy Baboo. It was lost however, the cry of the meeting . . . being decidedly against it".²

This incident is an index of the warmth of his orthodoxy, but, to do him justice, one must also add that there was an element of judicious sensibility in his orthodoxy, that he read into it the message of a sublimated existence. He strongly argued with Bishop Heber to convince him that the prohibition of particular kinds of food, the rules of caste and of purification, etc., had a deeper significance than was apparent on the surface, and that these "were intended to act as constant mementos of the duties of temperance, humanity, abstraction from the world, etc.". On another occasion, he told the same gentleman that it was "very true that we did not use to shut up our women till the times of the Mussalmans. But before we could give them the same liberty as the Europeans they must be better educated".³ He defended his point with the force of conviction, demonstrating that his championing of and conformity to traditional values were neither dull nor ill informed. Because of this fact, perhaps, Bishop Heber found him to be a "pleasing man", and also anxious "to vindicate his creed in the estimation of foreigners".

But notwithstanding this anxiety, he also could not help being entrapped in the snares of history, or adding his voice to the chorus of change. In fact, the process, so far as he individually was concerned, had started much earlier with his grandfather, Raja Nabakrishna Dev, who served Robert Clive as his agent and was variously rewarded. Clive's munificence was the source of his immense fortune. Thus, association with and dependence on the English and the English administration were indispensable factors in the family's prosperity. As such, even Radhakanta's elevation to the role of *gosthipati* could not in any

way halt the spirit of westernization that was reshaping the minds and temperaments of the members of the family. He himself profusely imbued the same, and when on March 8, 1824, he first visited Bishop Heber, he could impress him with his pleasing gait and elegant conversation. Heber has recorded that Radhakanta's "carriage, silver sticks, and attendants were altogether the smartest I had yet seen in India. He is a young man of pleasing countenance and manners, speaks English well, and has read many of our popular authors, particularly historical and geographical. He lives a good deal with Europeans, and has been very laudably active and liberal in forwarding, both by money and exertions, the education of his countrymen".⁴

Though resisting the introduction of western humanistic ethic into Hindu social customs (for example, his opposition to attempts to abolish *sati* rites), he yet lived a good deal with Europeans, which fact could not but have undermined, intellectually, the strength of his attachment to time-honoured values. Devout in the profession of his religion, he yet developed a strong interest in western science, as this narrative from his biography shows: "So long as he could give play to his active energies, he was to be seen moving about in learned societies, forming schemes for the mental advancement of his countrymen, lending his prestige in every useful undertaking, and seeking opportunities to enlighten his mind by his constant attendance at the experiments in the Medical College, the evening lectures on National Philosophy at the Hindu College, or diverse scientific exhibitions at the houses of his European friends: he used very often to beguile his afternoons at the Botanic Garden to hear the lucid explanations of the wonders of Botany, from the most intimate and erudite friend, the late lamented Dr N. Wallich".⁵ He found nothing objectionable in dissection of human bodies and encouraged financially young graduates to get trained in England.

His orthodoxy did not block the road to intellectual agility, and, with increasing defeats, perhaps decided ultimately to keep the gates open. A more illiberal child of the introvert society could not have taken so much interest in practical demonstrations of the sciences imported from the West. Nor could he have exerted himself so much for the spread of English enlightenment, had he been less sensitive to the urgency of change. Acting mainly at cross-purposes, his orthodoxy was yet not blind. It combined, in the words of H.H. Wilson, "a devoted attachment to the institutions and religion of his country, with a liberal participation in all public measures for improving the education of his countrymen by the efficient cultivation of the English language and European literature and science".⁶ This estimate by a friend and contemporary points to the creative duality produced by the conflict of cultures in minds still trying to salvage the withering values.

By his leadership of the Hindu community as well as by the cultivation of intellectual pursuits he attained to a position of great eminence. He was a Director of the Hindu College, Member of the Calcutta School Book Society, "Native" Secretary of the Calcutta School Society, Vice President of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society, Corresponding Member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, etc. Not merely that, any opinion coming from him on ancient literatures of India was entitled to the highest deference.

Indeed, his public position was so unassailable that even the radicals and promoters of change and dynamism could not afford to do without him. Prasanna Kumar Tagore, a principal coadjutor of Rammohan, joined with him to establish in 1837 the Zamindari Association; and when in 1851 this association was merged with the Bengal British India Society formed in 1843 by the radicals of the Hindu College to form the British Indian Association, he was elected its first President. When,

again, Debendranath Tagore sought to establish a free model school for Hindus to counteract the activities of Christian missionaries, Radhakanta co-operated not only by monetary subscriptions but was chosen President of the school committee.

He served for long thirty four years as Director of the Hindu College, and was chiefly instrumental in removing, in 1831, the Eurasian teacher Derozio, the centre of violent social commotion of the late twenties; was the "native" secretary of the Calcutta School Society for the entire period of its existence (1818-1833), and insisted successfully on the removal of Rashik Krishna Mullik and Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay from Hare's School, as has already been mentioned in chapter I. These were undoubtedly severe and retrograde steps, for which he had earned posterity's rebuke. But yet, while accepting his resignation the Board of Directors put this on record that Radhakanta had been "so instrumental in encouraging" "the spread of that enlightened spirit of intelligence", which goes with a nation's consciousness of itself.

On the intellectual plane, the most outstanding achievement of his life was the compilation, in seven large volumes, of the encyclopaedic Sanskrit dictionary, *Sabdakalpdruma*, a source book of inestimable value. It took forty years of strenuous work to compile it; the first volume was published in 1822 and the last in 1852, and an appendix was added in 1858. The publication of this monumental work was greeted with tributes, appreciations and rewards from almost all the learned bodies and potentates of Europe and America; and with warm felicitations and public reception by his countrymen, including the most radical members of the elite community who, earlier, tried lustily to vilify him in both private and public.

Here, then, was a personality, who dominated the love of friends and also conquered the wrath of adversaries. All the committees and institutions he was connected with have spoken of his laudable exertions for enlightening his countrymen;

though he had no pretension to western-type intellectualism. He was neither a non-conformist nor a lover of ideas *qua* ideas, bent upon creating a new culture. His intention was to incorporate the radiance of the newly-received forms and at the same time to perpetuate the old ones. Hence, he was never a victim of emotional crisis or tension, being always at the head of his community. This perhaps explains why Rammohan Roy's association with Europeans was disfavoured by many, but his was not.

It has been very well said that in a cross-purposed and emerging milieu no voice is wholly lost; Radhakanta's also was not. For, if the dynamics of social mobility be traced back to the creation of an intellectual ferment, and if education be reckoned a contributory factor in that ferment, then we are sure to hear his voice there. He, of course, did not create any mobility, rather he always tried to retard one; but yet, by helping many young men to receive education at the Hindu College some of whom in after life became his adversaries, he, against his own will, contributed much to the creation of that mobility.

Viewed from a distance of about one hundred and fifty years one can see the rationale of his intellectual stance. He did never want his community to lose its identity or its ethos; and so, by implication, he did not consider, contrary to Rammohan, changes in religious practices and social customs to be necessary preconditions for progress. He therefore reacted violently against Rammohan's progressive movements and against any show of defiance to authority, but was farsighted enough to recognise the importance of the mother-tongue in any system of education, and also to diagnose the danger inherent in the current craze for unpurposive English education.

He was asked by governmental authorities to express his opinion on vernacular education based on Lord Stanley's Despatch of 1859. Fully endorsing Lord Stanley's views that provision of primary education for the masses should be made

and that the medium of instruction should be the vernacular languages of India, Radhakanta said: "As soon as the people will begin to reap the fruits of a solid vernacular education, agricultural and industrial schools may be established in order to qualify the enlightened masses to become useful members of society. Nothing should be guarded against more carefully than the insensible introduction of a system whereby, with a smattering knowledge of English, youths are weaned from the plough, the axe, and the loom, to render them ambitious only for the clerkship for which hosts would besiege the Government and Mercantile Offices, and the majority being disappointed (as they must be), would (with their little knowledge inspiring pride) be unable to return to their trade, and would necessarily turn vagabonds".⁸

Although the verity and clear-sightedness of this assertion could not be doubted, his was an ineffectual voice; for, he said what no over-enthusiastic Anglophile would have said. Nor was his voice instrumental in moulding the educational policy of the province.

He and the Anglophiles assumed antagonistic positions, but, because of the queer dialectical interplay of emotions, motives and urges, found themselves posited to accelerate the same social process. In a public meeting held on July 29, 1853, he, after exhorting the people to strain every nerve and use all their energies for the welfare of the country, declared, "Fortune attendeth that lion amongst men who exerteth himself. They are weak men who declare fate the sole cause. Subdue fate and exert human strength to the utmost of our power".⁹ Here their intentions and purposes, although studiously divergent, converged and flowed into the stream of a common awareness of reality. Serving as antithetical components of the same social entity, they all worked to hasten the birth of a new one. Perhaps a recognition of this truth impelled the Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay, the very Young Bengal radical whom Radhakanta

caused to be removed from Hare's School, to pay warm tributes after the latter's death. In a brief account of his life and character Krishnamohan said, "To the remarks made on the Rajah's retrograde movements and his obstructions to progress, I can only say that it is unfair to compare him with persons who were his junior by more than half a century. . . . A man in this respect can only be compared with his own contemporaries. Judged by such a standard, the Rajah would certainly appear not behind, but in advance of his equals in age".¹⁰ A just tribute which found echoes in other hearts and removed a lot of misunderstanding concerning his contribution to Bengal's awakening.

NOTES

1. *A Rapid Sketch of the Life of Raja Radhakanta Dev Bahadur* by the Editors of the Raja's *Sabdakalpadruma*, Calcutta, 1859, p. 17.
2. Rev. R. Heber, *Narrative of a journey* (1824-25), London, Vol. I, pp. 71-73.
3. *Ibid.*, record of conversations of April 21, 1824—Heber's 42nd birthday.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
5. *A Rapid Sketch of the Life of Raja Radhakanta Dev Bahadur*, p. 30.
6. Article in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. 13, Part II, p. 209, quoted in his biography mentioned above.
7. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, in his *Unabimsa Satābdār Bāṅglā* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1941, p. 62.
8. Quoted by Rev. James Long in his introduction to *Adam's Report* on the condition of education in Bengal (1835-38).
9. Quoted in *A Rapid Sketch of the Life of Raja Radhakanta Dev Bahadur*, p. 31.
10. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

In the year 1816, in a lecture delivered at the Fort William College, Calcutta, Lord Hastings (Lord Moira) declared: "It is human, it is generous, to protect the feeble, it is meritorious to redress the injured, but it is a God-like bounty to bestow expansion of intellect to infuse the Promethean spark into the statue and awaken it into a man". Of this expansion of intellect and the consequent mobility that stirred the statues into manhood we shall speak in this chapter.

It has been pointed out in Chapter I that purely pragmatic considerations prompted the Bengali compradores to acquire fluency in pidgin English. But English in the Europeans' attempt at educating the Bengalis entered the stage much later. Individuals and missionaries, at first, pinned their faith on the efficacy of vernacular schools as stepping stones to western knowledge and to English education. But their early efforts were often greeted with unexpected resistance.

A few instances of this are here narrated in order to show both the stupid slumber that eroded the contemporary social mind and the gushing currents that suddenly revitalised it. May, a missionary, started in 1814 his first vernacular school in the Dutch Fort at Chinsura. While paying high tributes to May's labours, Lushington, in his *"History of Calcutta Institutions"* has recorded¹: "At first a Brahman boy would not sit down on the same mat with one of another caste. The teachers also made the same objection, which has of late been voluntarily relinquished".

Captain Stewart of the Church Missionary Society established at Burdwan two vernacular schools in 1816. At the commencement of his efforts he also had to encounter stiff

opposition; "reports were industriously circulated among the natives that it was his design to ship all the children to England", and there was "sufficient objection to a book being read if it contained the name of Jesus, and a case occurred near Burdwan where a Hindu rather than give up his child being educated by the missionary, left it out at night to be devoured by jackals! There were five Brahmanical schools in Burdwan; the masters of which were afraid that their own institutions should be broken up by the Missionary Schools; they, therefore, fulminated curses against any natives who should send their children to Capt. Stewart's schools, but he chose his teachers from the ablest natives in the villages... and thus disarmed opposition by the bait of interest, and the five Brahmanical schools were soon abandoned. The introduction of printed books into the schools (also) at first caused some alarm; the natives apprehended it was some plan for ensnaring their children and destroying their caste! as all instruction was previously conveyed through manuscript...".²

The Calcutta School Society, in 1821, transferred some of its schools to the Church Missionary Society, one Mr Jetter becoming their Superintendent. In a letter Jetter stated that "the mention of the name of Jesus in a book has kept several boys away from school; that on introducing writing by dictation into a class he offered one boy a tract as a prize for his good dictation,—the boy flung it on the ground saying it contained the words of Jesus Christ. In one of Mr Jetter's schools, the teacher objected to instruct the boys out of a book in which the name occurred, on which a Brahman stood up and said—do not be afraid, I have read the book, and I am not a Christian. This gave confidence and the book was read".

Resistance in some shape or other continued to manifest itself for decades to come. The 'Bengal Spectator', bilingual journal founded by the Young Bengal radicals, said in an article in September, 1843, that when, in the late twenties, the

Hindu College boys began to taste caste-forbidden food such as biscuits from a Muslim bakery, their parents became alarmed to such an extent that they tortured, imprisoned and even tried to poison their sons to death.³ And when another boy, in an irresistible spurt of exuberance consequent upon his newly received enlightenment, addressed the goddess Kali as "Madam", the frightened fathers immediately withdrew their wards, and as many as 185 boys stopped going to the college.⁴

At one stage Duff also encountered similar opposition. A general ferment was created by the undaunted bearing and violently critical attitude of his pupils among orthodox Hindus. The cry, "Hinduism in danger" was raised and fanned to a pitch by *Samāchār Chandrikā*, organ of the Dharma Sabha of which Raja Radhakanta Dev was the chief patron. "The decree went forth that all who attended the General Assembly's Institution (now the Scottish Church College) were to be excluded from caste, and it was urged that a yellow flag or other unmistakable symbol should be planted in front of the building to warn the unwary against the moral religious pestilence".⁵ And one forenoon, of the 300 pupils only half a dozen appeared in the class-room. For a time, the normal functions of the school were paralyzed, but the *Chandrikā* counterblast did not last long; all the boys were back to school after about a week or so.

The resistance to the efforts of evangelical missionaries, however, was based on valid apprehensions. Their "repugnance to Hinduism and Islam and all the 'abominations of heathenism' was so great, and their denunciations of them so violent, that they propagated the idea of Indian society as irredeemably corrupt and degraded".⁶ Most of them, backed by powerful bodies in Britain, sought to dispel Hindu darkness by Christian light, which in simpler language meant crude unadorned conversion. Hence, estrangement, fear, and resistance, however, ineffectual, were the consequences.

Rammohan Roy in his *Brahmanical Magazine* (1821), in which he defended Hinduism against missionary onslaughts, complained: "But during the last twenty years, a body of English gentlemen, who are called missionaries, have been publicly endeavouring, in several ways, to convert Hindoos and Mussulmans of this country into Christianity. The first way is that of publishing and distributing among the natives various books, large and small, reviling both religions, and abusing and ridiculing the gods and saints of the former: the second way is that of standing in front of the doors of the natives or in the public roads to preach the excellency of their own religion and the debasedness of that of others: the third way is that if any natives of low origin become Christians from the desire of gain or from any other motives, these gentlemen employ and maintain them as a necessary encouragement to others to follow their example". That the missionaries were ready to seize upon any opportunity for their proselytizing work is further proved by the fact that when a tumult was raging in the Hindu College regarding the intellectual activities of Derozio and the Derozians, some of them began lecturing on the superiority of their own faith to disgruntled pupils in the periphery of the College.⁷

Opposition based on religion and caste, although enfeebled, continued to be offered even as late as the sixth decade of the century. In the early fifties the government decided to open the gates of the college for non-Hindu students; Hindu orthodoxy immediately raised a hue and cry, and expressed its disapproval and apprehension by establishing the Hindu Metropolitan College. Journals and newspapers became loud in advocating the exclusive right of the Hindus over the Hindu College, since it owed its existence to the bounty of the Hindus alone.⁸

But such resistances were poor answers to history's inner compulsion to change. These could neither check its movement nor control its direction.

II

Formidable other forces, including psychological ones, were in operation, which transformed early apprehension and fear into wild love and appreciation, notwithstanding the indifference or lack of policy of the East India Company as regards education.

English education was neither encouraged nor adopted as a matter of policy by the government in the early decades of the century. Influential members of the Home authorities were in favour of supporting the evangelical work of missionaries, and succeeded, towards that end, in passing a resolution in 1813 to the effect that out of the Indian revenue one lakh of rupees would be set apart every year "for the introduction of a knowledge of European sciences among the people" of India. From 1813 to 1823 when a General Committee of Public Instruction was formed in Calcutta, no substantial work was carried out and most of the money remained unspent. The establishment in 1823 of the Calcutta Sanskrit College further demonstrated the Indian authorities' unwillingness to foster western learning in preference to the oriental. But the Home authority's Despatch of February 18, 1824, directed them not to spend money on unprofitable projects, such as popularising Hindu mythology or the teaching of the Quran. Strict attention was to be paid, perhaps in full conformity to James Mill's instructions to the diffusion of European education and useful knowledge.

With this Directorial Despatch to make education utility-oriented other motives—both economic and political—came to be associated when Bentinck took over as Governor-General in 1828. During the years immediately preceding his arrival in India the Company's Indian budget showed an average annual deficit of £30,000,00. He, therefore, had to devise ways and means to wipe out or at least minimize the deficit, and succeeded before the expiry of his term to transform the deficit into a

surplus of £20,000,00. He expressed himself strongly in favour of appointing English-educated Indians to positions of responsibility, and, accordingly, necessary provisions were incorporated in the Charter Act of 1833 (the highest posts then offered to Indians were those of Deputy Collectors). Two years later, came Macaulay's famous Minutes on education, which, while emphasising the civilizing role of English education, stressed the need of creating a class of Anglophiles who would have a somewhat in-between existence between the rulers and the ruled. Bentinck's policy reflected the economic interests of the Empire, while Macaulay's Minutes gave the most eloquent expression to its political interests. For, the Anglophiles of Macaulay were intended to be mere political slaves. However that may be, the recognition of eligibility of Indians to higher posts gave an additional impetus to the cultivation of English education, which was further boosted in 1843 when the post of Deputy Magistrates was created, and when, the following year, it was declared that selection of candidates for public appointments would be based on "merit and attainment", that is, proficiency gained through English.

Within this matrix of the government's education policy we shall study the dynamic of English education. It will be seen what a high premium was set on it as an independent value or end in itself, when exigencies of the given situation sought to make it merely utilitarian.

To the missionaries of course must go the credit for setting the pace of social dynamism through diffusion of education; but for its impact to be fully perceptible one had to wait till the establishment of the Hindu College in 1817, and of the Calcutta School Book Society and Calcutta School Society in 1817 and 1818 respectively. The last-named body, working in collaboration with the sister organisation formed one year earlier, was to assist and improve existing schools, to establish and support new schools and seminaries, and thus facilitate dissemination

of useful knowledge. It worked admirably for fifteen years and established the important secular principle of admitting boys of every caste and religious persuasion without distinction. To lay caste as well as religious distinctions aside demanded courage in those days, but the School Society succeeded in eliminating these barriers and thus generated a wholesome social mobility and intercourse. Its primary accent was on vernacular as the medium of education, but even then a loud call arose for imparting instruction in English. The amount of enthusiasm created by the activities of these societies may be gauged by this simple illustration: The Serampore missionaries used to publish a bilingual (English & Bengali) magazine called *Dig Darshan*; by an arrangement the School Book Society printed and organized the sale and distribution of the same for use in the School Society's schools. By 1821, that is, roughly in little more than three years, it "had to print no less than 30,000 copies" of the magazine, which was "read aloud to appreciative audience in villages even in the relatively remote Contai area" (in Minapore).⁹

By the third decade, English was ascendant. Reference to Rammohan's letter to Lord Amherst in 1823 has already been made in Chapter I. Government initiative or no, English schools were springing up here and there, and, correspondingly, the number of boys receiving English education was also on the increase. And the Government education committee reported in 1831 that "a taste for English had been widely disseminated, and independent schools conducted by young men reared in the Vidyalaya (Hindu College) are springing up in every direction".¹⁰ Several wealthy gentlemen also were said to have established English schools at their own expense in their respective localities; and associations were also formed for the same purpose at different places in the interior.

Early in the fourth decade Alexander Duff became the great

centre of educational interest. His own words give us a graphic picture of the consequent commotion and mobility:

"Throughout the whole process of these preparatory arrangements the excitement among the natives continued unabated. They pursued us along the streets. They threw open the very doors of our palankeens, and poured in their supplications with a pitiful earnestness of countenance that might have softened a heart of stone. In the most plaintive and pathetic strains they deplored their ignorance. They craved for 'English reading',—'English knowledge'. They constantly appealed to the compassion of an 'Ingraji' or Englishman, addressing us in the style of oriental hyperbole, as 'the great and fathomless ocean of all imaginable excellences', for having come so far to teach poor ignorant Bengalees. And then, in broken English, some would say, 'Me good boy, oh take me'; others, 'Me poor boy, oh take me';—some, 'Me want read your good books, oh take me'; others, 'Me know your commandments, thou shalt have no other gods before Me,—oh take me';—and many by way of final appeal, 'Oh take me, and I pray for you'. And even after the final choice was made, such was the continued press of new candidates that it was found absolutely necessary to issue small written tickets for those who had succeeded; and to station two men at the outer door to admit only those who were of the selected number".¹¹

It will indeed be difficult to find a parallel to these emotion-surcharged evocations. Meanwhile, contemporary Bengali newspapers were urging the government to establish English schools and not to spend money on useless Sanskrit learning. The Bengali journal *Sudhakar* in its issue for Sept. 7, 1833, said: "The amount spent on Sanskrit College or School is of no benefit to the people in general, for only Brahman students are admitted there. Besides, institutions for teaching Sanskrit were never wanting in this country, and Sanskrit education would not have

suffered much even if Government had not extended its patronage to it. . . . Therefore the Government should sow the seeds, all over the country, of that type of learning which can remove the darkness of ignorance and make a man fit for administration and other public activities. It is necessary to establish an English school for this purpose in every village."¹²

English was the cry heard in all directions, and "English books were in any demand: upwards of 31,000 English books were sold by the School Book Society in the course of two years, while the education committee did not dispose of Arabic and Sanskrit volumes enough in three years to pay the expense of keeping them for two months, to say nothing of the printing expenses". This will be evident from the following statistics: Between January 1834 to December 1835, the following sales were effected by the aforesaid Society—English Books 31,649; Anglo-Asiatic, or books partly in English and partly in some eastern language 4,525; Bengali 5,754; Hindee 4,171; Hindustanee 3,384; Persian 1,454; Uriya 834; Arabic 36; Sanskrit 16.¹³ Indeed, books in Sanskrit, Arabic, etc., were "such a complete drug in the market" that ultimately the Society ceased to print them. Even the education committee had to decide similarly; but at the time this decision was taken they had some 23,000 volumes, "most of folios and quartos" in their library "or rather the lumber-room", in the words of C. E. Trevelyan.

Passion for English education and western knowledge penetrated even the obscure and the remote regions of Bengal during this period. Steam-boats plying in the Ganges were often boarded by Bengali boys, begging not for money, but for English books. The following incident¹⁴ speaks eloquently for itself:

"Some gentlemen coming to Calcutta were astonished at the eagerness with which they were pressed for books by a troop of boys, who boarded the steamer from an obscure

place, called Comercolly. A Plato was lying on the table, and one of the party asked a boy whether that would serve his purpose. 'Oh yes', he exclaimed, 'give me any book; all I want is a book'. The gentleman at last hit upon the expedient of cutting up an old Quarterly Review, and distributing the articles among them. In the evening, when some of the party went ashore, the boys of the town flocked round them, expressing their regret that there was no English school in the place, and saying that they hoped that the Governor-General, to whom they had made an application on the subject... would establish one."

The records of schools and colleges tell the same story of a glowing enthusiasm for English education. The average monthly collection from students of the Hindu College for February-March, 1836 was *sicca* Rs. 1,325; while at the Sanskrit College having the same roof, during the same period, 30 students were hired at Rs. 8 each, and 70 at Rs. 5 each, or Rs. 590 a month in all. On the opening of the Hoogly College, in August, 1836, students of English flocked to it in such numbers as to render the organisation and classification of them a matter of difficulty. 1,200 names were entered on the books of this department within 3 days, and at the end of the year above 1000 were in attendance. An auxiliary school was started within two miles of the college, the English department was instantly filled, numerous applicants were sent away unsatisfied. When additional means of instruction were provided for at Dacca, the number of pupils rose at once from 150 to over 300, and more teachers were requisitioned.¹⁵

According to *Samāchār Darpan*, the Serampore newspaper, in 1828, the Hindu College had 400 and other institutions about 1,000 students receiving English education. Macaulay in 1836 saw 1,400 such students in one mofussil town alone; and in the same year Horace Hayman Wilson estimated that 6,000 students were studying English in Calcutta.¹⁶

These figures and those incidents reveal that the slumbering villages of Bengal had already received in their bosoms the Promethean spark and were busily preparing themselves to 'burn in splendour'.

III

Metaphors apart, English education had in reality begun transforming the mental and moral physiognomy of those who received it. The Calcutta School Society, whose European secretary was David Hare and the "native" Raja Radhakanta Dev, laboured hard to bring about a moral revolution, where, previously, only chaos prevailed. Little importance was attached to moral ethical values, and, as such, all youthful virtues were either unknown or derelict. By straining himself to the utmost Hare made delinquent truants conform to ethical standards, and thus effected that change of wind in the youths' conduct which was mightily strengthened by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831), when he joined the Hindu College as its fourth teacher in 1826.

Derozio literally was the cause of the intellectual stir of those decades. To realise the enormity of his contribution to Bengal's renaissance, we would do better to recapitulate what "A Friend to the College" wrote in *The Calcutta Courier* in its issue for June 5, 1833. He said;

"The master-spirit of this young man, whose premature end will be deplored by every friend of humanity and of literature, called forth all the energies of the human breast. The charm of his eloquence nerved his young disciples to the most daring—yet the noblest acts, doing what is unparalleled in the annals of any college, or even in the history of mankind. He infused into the infants the sternness of manhood, and taught them to sacrifice home and every kindred tie at the altar of Truth. Those who were near felt the violence of the times, and though his best friends applauded, yet that appa-

use was not altogether unqualified; yet this one good was achieved—the Rubicon, that great moral barrier of Hindoo refinement, was crossed, and the triumph of reason and philosophy over ignorance and superstition may now be regarded as fixed and irrevocable."

He used to give "weekly moral and intellectual lectures" to his own pupils and to those of Hare's School. Of these lectures the anonymous friend observed:

"I remember with feelings of pleasure the glow of enthusiasm visible on every countenance assembled on these occasions. Love, gratitude, truth, honor, appear to have been the prominent features of his short but brilliant career; and the spell that bound his pupils around him, served alike to animate them to almost super-human exertions. Those who benefited most by his instruction have brought themselves conspicuously forward; some editing respectable periodicals, others aiding by contributions; while a third class, moved by a congenial spirit, have spread themselves abroad and are benefiting their fellow countrymen by the establishment of gratuitous Seminaries, devoting thus not only their hands but their purse in the glorious cause of moral improvement...."¹⁷

One of his own pupils, Pearychand Mitra, had written that "he used to impress upon them the sacred duty of thinking for themselves—to be in no way influenced by any of the idols mentioned by Bacon—to live and die for truth—to cultivate all the virtues, shunning vice in every shape. He often read examples from ancient history of the love of justice, patriotism, philanthropy and self-abnegation; and the way in which he set forth the points stirred up the minds of his pupils. Some were impressed with the excellence of justice, some with the paramount importance of truth, some with patriotism, some, with philanthropy".¹⁸

Indeed, Derozio, by his unwearied exertions, exhortations,

and by his animating, cheerful and enlivening conversations wrought such a change in the minds of the students that the term college boy became "a synonym for truth"; "and it was a general belief and saying amongst our countrymen, which those that remember the time must acknowledge, that "such a boy is incapable of falsehood because he is a college boy".¹⁹ But, if college boy was a synonym for truth, Derozio, for a time, was that for the Hindu College. The two were so identified that one could hardly separate one from the other.

This noble-hearted teacher was to be removed as he had taught his pupils to throw off the fetters of orthodoxy which still clung to their countrymen. But before the resolution of the Directors of the College could be implemented, Derozio himself resigned. His removal, however, could not stay the progress of moral revolution. Derozio and the Derozians were thus Bengal's new stars, who shone in the firmament and called all other people to rise against tyranny, ignorance, superstition, and, in that way, to hasten their rebirth.

The academic world of Calcutta reverberated with such slogans as "down with orthodoxy" and with such impudent statements as Macaulay's "a single shelf of a good European Library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia", often repeated by the Hindu College boys. Since then Kalidasa was dislodged and Shakespeare installed instead; the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* had to give way to *Edgeworth's Tales*; and the *Vedas*, the *Vedānta* and the *Gītā* proved to be no match for the *Bible*.²⁰ Unintelligent faith and belief in received forms which constituted the only shafts in the orthodox armoury, they discarded; their answer to traditionalism was Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, which soon became the rage. How explosive was the impact of this book may be guessed from the following: One Calcutta bookseller indented 100 copies of it, and advertised them for sale at rupee one per copy; but the demand rose so high that he sold them at rupees five per copy. Not only that,

according to *Calcutta Christian Observer*, some Hindu College boys even offered eight rupees for a single copy!²¹ Portions of it were translated into Bengali and published in newspapers. This was corroborated by Duff, who wrote, "Here the evil genius of Paine was again resuscitated. Passages from his *Age of Reason* were often translated verbatim into Bengalee, and inserted in the native newspapers".²²

From this it is not to be presumed that Hinduism alone had to bear the brunt of their virulent heterodoxy; Christianity also was not spared. The Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay has recorded in his autobiography that for nights he, accompanied by many of his friends, used to roam through the streets of Calcutta; their purpose was to render the missionaries ridiculous and hated in the eyes of the people by pretending to propagate the Gospel through incorrectly pronounced Bengali words and equally incorrect applications of Bengali words and phrases.²³

The apex of the matter is that within the span of one single decade the understandings of the recipients of English education had expanded, and their feelings, taken the proper direction and that they were learning to reshape their lives in the light of liberty and truth. This, in other words, means that the challenge of the time had been well taken, the beaconings of the future well perceived. If, in moments of exhilarations, some had erred, some had also exercised wisdom in assimilating the best in literature and in philosophy. The recognition of necessity and the response that followed may be best described in the words of Prasanna Kumar Tagore:

"The influence of liberty and truth has spread and is spreading far and wide, and nothing can check its course. There was a time when the natives of this country were looked upon as a race of unprincipled and ignorant people, void of all the qualities that separate the human from the brute creation. But look at the contrast now. Is it possible that at the

present day an impeachment of such a dark character will be allowed to bear the slightest colour of truth?

"... Our ideas do not range now on the mere surface of things. We have commenced probing, and will probe on, till we discover that which will make us feel we are men in common with others, and, like them, capable of being good, great, and noble.

"Assisted by the light of reason, we have the gladdening prospect before us, of soon coming to that standard of civilization, which has established the prosperity of the European nations."²⁴

To that end, the guidance of the "ensign of liberty and truth" was passionately sought.

IV

Nor was guidance an unwilling partner in the process. The English educated youth lost no time in demonstrating their pride in what they had learnt as also in proclaiming their mastery over the ideas they had received. The alacrity with which they got hold of ideas often staggered the European witnesses of the process. One Mr Henry Young of the Western Indian Civil Service speaking of the intellectual attainments of Duff's pupils wrote in a letter to the Rev. John Wilson (Nov. 15, 1831), "and it quite astonished me to find how clearly and attentively they followed Mr Duff in the most abstract and metaphysical discussions, taking up the weaker parts of an argument with a readiness which showed how fully they had comprehended what was addressed to them".

The same gentleman, when he visited the Hindu College, asked some senior boys to write a short discourse on "Is Paley's definition of virtue, viz., that it is doing good to mankind for the sake of everlasting happiness, correct?" On the impromptu performance of the boys his comment was: "I was surprised to find...that one went directly to refute Paley, and establish the

mortality of the soul and the futility of any hopes as to futurity".²⁵ In November 1831, Derozio could not be seen at the Hindu College, for he had resigned his post previously in April, but his animated spirit was still at work there.

Years ago, in 1828, his pupils, at his own inspiration, had founded the Academic Association which met weekly, first at his house and then at the garden house of Srikrishna Sinha, one of the Directors of the College. They discussed: "Free will, free ordination, fate, faith, the sacredness of truth, the high duty of cultivating virtue, and the meanness of vice, the nobility of patriotism, the attributes of God, and the arguments for and against the existence of the Deity as these have been set forth by Hume on the one side, and Reid, Dugald Stewart and Brown on the other, the hollowness of idolatry and the shams of the priesthood, . . . which stirred to their very depths the young, fearless, hopeful hearts of the leading Hindoo youths of Calcutta". These discussions were frequently interspersed and enlivened by passages from most popular of the English poets, particularly from Byron and Scott. These discussions attracted so much attention and elicited so much applause that, apart from the universal friend David Hare, men like Sir Edward Rayan, a Judge of the Supreme Court, Dr. Mill, Principal of the Bishop's College, Alexander Duff, Colonel Benson, personal secretary to Lord Bentinck, frequently attended them as spectators.

The same batch of people, joined by a few others, established in 1838 the "Society for the acquisition of General Knowledge"; its object was to acquire and diffuse useful knowledge, pertaining especially to the conditions obtaining in the country. For some years the Society functioned admirably and in 1843 had 200 names in the members' list. Its transactions for the years 1840-1843 were subsequently published in three volumes (the less important papers having been excluded); these bear good testimony to the gradually widening area of their

intellectual interests as well as excellence already attained. Some of the select titles from transactions are noted below:

1. Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay—On the nature and significance of the Study of History.
2. Udaycharan Addy—Importance of the cultivation of the mother-tongue.
3. Rajnarain Dev—On Poetry.
4. Harachandra Ghosh—A Geographical and Statistical account of Bankura.
5. Gourmohan Das—On Knowledge.
6. Mahesh Chandra Dev—Condition of Hindu Women.
7. Govindachandra Sen—An Outline History of Hindusthan (four papers).
8. Govindachandra Basak—Descriptive account of Chittagong (four papers).
9. Pearychand Mitra—Condition of Hindusthan under Hindu Rule (five papers).
10. Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay—General and Social Reform among the Educated of the Land.
11. Govindachandra Basak—Plan for a new book on the learning of spelling.
12. Govindachandra Basak—Descriptive account of Tripura.
13. Prasanna Kumar Mitra—Physiological aspect of dissection.²⁶

One striking feature of the transactions of the Society was that discussions of religious matters were scrupulously eschewed. Their intention, perhaps, was not to besmear their intellectualism with religious controversy. One member of the elite community, Kishorichand Mitra, independently formed "The Hindu Theophilanthropic Society" early in the fifth decade, under inspiration from Duff. The range of its discussions varied from abstract theology to practical political problems.

But this intellectual quest was not confined only to pronouncedly westernized elite. Men of lesser pretensions also

were working their way towards the same goal. Even before the emergence of Akshay Kumar Dutt, Ramchandra Vidyabagis, who prevented the Brāhma Samāj from extinction during 1830-1843, delivered a course of twenty four lectures to Hindu College boys on ethical and moral principles. Some of these crossed their bounds so as to embrace such topics as Patriotism (no. 10), Peace and War (no. 19), On the Origin and the Necessity of Government and the principal forms thereof now prevalent in the world (no. 20), On the Necessity of obedience to the lawful authority and the liberty of the subject (no. 21), On the Origin and the institution of Law (no. 22), On International Law (no. 23)".²⁷

Mention should also be made of the *Tattwabodhini Sabhā* of Debendranath Tagore, the poet's father, established in the late thirties of the century, whose contributions in the fields of education and culture constituted one facet of the intellectual progress. It held weekly and monthly sittings, where papers not merely on religious subjects but on various other topics of current interest were presented and discussed. The *Sabhā*, according to Sivanath Sastri, the Brahma leader, "commenced its career with only ten young men as its members. But so great were the energy and enthusiasm with which its proceedings were conducted that in the course of two years the number of members rose to 500".

But the most fruitful work towards intellectual growth was done by the Bethune Society, established in 1851 jointly by Europeans and Indians to perpetuate the memory of John Drinkwater Bethune, whose name is inseparably associated with the spread of female education in Bengal. It met every month at the 'theatre' of the Medical College, and was for many years the centre of attraction of the educated elite of Calcutta. The orthodox Brahmins could be seen there taking part in the intellectual ferment with Young Bengal radicals, who, with higher ideals placed before them, "found a new vent for (their)

seething aspiration".²⁸ Bengali Christians there took their place beside those belonging to other religious denominations. Princes and zamindars who visited the metropolis returned, much impressed by the Society's activities, to their own capitals to form similar institutions. Moreover, there was the added attraction of interesting "lectures from every Englishman of note in or passing through the city". From the Proceedings and Transactions of the Bethune Society from Nov. 10, 1859, to April 20, 1869-1870 it is gathered that the Society in 1870 had in its membership-rolls 306 names, 225 Indians and 81 Europeans.²⁹

Alexander Duff was persuaded to become its President in 1859; and he, in order to encourage private industry and research, immediately established these sections with their respective presidents: (1) Education—Henry Woodrow, President; (2) Literature and Philosophy—E. B. Cowell; (3) Public Health and Medicine—Dr. Mouat; and (4) Sociology—Rev. James Long. The introduction of this plan gave a strong incentive to young minds, far beyond the anticipation of the sectional chiefs. Cowell in his report said:

"We saw a large and ever growing account of native talent, which lay round us like a wide region of soil newly cleared and ready for cultivation. It was our aim to stimulate a process of self-culture in the members, of our various sections, by which each might carry on for himself the work of self-education—work which properly then first begins, when the student has bid farewell to the lecture-room and henceforth follows his own path for himself. It is then that our sections are to take him up—not as the passive recipient of lectures, but as himself the living agent to carry out their plans. The members are to act as the Society's eyes and hands and feet in carrying on the diverging researches which our various sections embrace".³⁰

That the response was quite adequate to the stimulus will

be proved by the titles of some of the papers presented by Bengali scholars between 1859 to 1869 at the Society's assemblies. These are: (1) *The Aryan Vernaculars of India*—Rajendra Lal Mitra; (2) *The History, Economic Uses and Prospects of Indian Cotton*—Nobin Kristo Bose; (3) *Agriculture with special reference to the Exhibition held at Alipore*—Kissory Chand Mitra; (4) *The Electric Telegraph in India*—Sib Chandra Nandy; (5) *Writing in Ancient India and the Sanskrit Alphabet*—Rajendra Lal Mitra; (6) *The Physical Varieties of Man*—Nobin Kristo Bose; (7) *The Objects and Advantages of a Periodical Census*—Maulavi Abdul Latif Khan Bahadur; (8) *Combustion*—Kanay Lal Dey; (9) *The Effects of English Education in Bengal*—Mohesh Chandra Banerjee.³¹

The Rev. K. M. Bandhyopadhyay also, on different occasions, presented papers on (1) *Sanskrit Poetry*, (2) *On the Relation between Hindu and Buddhist systems of philosophy and the light which the history of the one throws on the other*, (3) *Ancient Asian Schism and Conflicts in India*, and (4) *The Proper place of Oriental Literature in Indian Collegiate education*.³²

Similar other academic and professional associations, prominent among them the Bengal Social Science Association, were in existence during the period; but a glimpse of the activities of only one or two such bodies have been presented here to indicate the areas covered by the new elite's intellectual quests. No area was left out, no problem by-passed. These learned societies and the large number of newspapers and periodicals in both Bengali and English that were published at the time discussed all questions connected with local politics, social reform, education, literature, religion, metaphysics, jurisprudence, political economy, scientific outlook, theories of state and of society, colonial administration and the future political shape of India, etc. Their multiple voices and ideas,

moving on parallel lines or intersecting, formed the totality of the milieu; and it did not require much of a sensibility to feel that Calcutta was breathing, growing, fermenting.

Intuition brought Alexander Duff to Calcutta in 1830. For, he considered this city the "brain" of Hinduism, while other cities like Benaras, Puri or Bombay "might have been its heart"; and the zealot that he was, he wanted to strike Hinduism at its brain.²³ Whether or not he succeeded in his mission, his recognition of the fermenting Calcutta was a tribute to its intellectual vigour.

V

English, to be sure, was at the crest of the ferment. But, since it acted as both a catalytic and a weaning agent, it will be profitable to take cognizance of its residual effects as well as of the elementary education of the masses.

Adam, on the eve of starting on his commission to report on the state of education in Bengal, said in a letter to Lord Bentinck (January 2, 1835), "To labour successfully *for* them we must labour *with* them; and to labour successfully *with* them, we must get them to labour willingly and intelligently *with* us. We must make them, in short, the instruments of their own improvement". He, therefore, suggested that all schemes for improvement of education should start with the existing institutions as the base. He, like other European patrons of learning, as has already been noticed, pleaded for the cultivation of vernaculars.

Indeed, to many of them in those decades the idea of English becoming the medium of education was preposterous. Holt Mackenzie, a civilian, while eulogizing the Calcutta School Book Society in the early twenties, commented that through the mediation of different languages only we get to know different feelings and interests, and so their enrichment was sure to yield rich dividends.²⁴ But, as time marched on, the tide turned

entirely in favour of English; Bentinck merely steered the tide when on March 7, 1835, he declared that "all the funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone". Since then, for two decades the vernaculars remained in eclipse.

This question was revived in the Despatch of 1854, known after Sir Charles Wood, President to the Board of Control, and fully corroborated by Lord Stanley's Minutes of 1859. Its main object was to direct the efforts of the Government of India from the education of the higher classes to the wider diffusion of education among all classes of the people, and especially to the provision of primary instruction for the masses. Such instruction was to be provided by the direct instrumentality of the government. It said, "attention should now be directed to a consideration... how useful and practical knowledge, suited to every station in life, may be best conveyed to the great mass of the people". For that purpose "Schools — whose object should be, not to train highly a few youths, but to provide opportunities than now exist for the acquisition of such an improved education as will make those who possess it more useful members of the society in every condition of life—should exist in every district of India". The Despatch urged for "the improvement and far wider extension of education, both English and vernacular". English was to be the medium of instruction in the higher branches, vernaculars in the lower. English was to be taught if there was a demand for it, but not to be substituted for the vernaculars.

These directives, if adhered to, would have resulted in the boosting up of the regional languages of India, and also in an increase in the percentage of literacy. But no such improvement has been registered. On the contrary, a decline is noticed in respect of elementary education of the people. In 1835, Adam calculated that the aggregate average of literate adults in Bengal was more than 5.5 per cent; but Woodrow, Inspector of Schools

in 1861, estimated that "in the most populous and richest portion of Bengal, there were about 3 persons in every 100 under education".³⁵ The proportion in England in the corresponding period was 1 in 7.75. Another aspect of the picture may be obtained from Dr Mouat's reports, who for many years was Secretary to the Council of Education. He, in his report as the Inspector of Jails, said:

"Of the 95,951 prisoners in 1866—324 or 0.34% were fairly educated, 5,367 males and females or 5.61% could read and write, and 85,075 males and 5,168 females or 94.05% were entirely ignorant. In the preceding five years (1861-1865)—2,974 men and 2 women or 0.98% were fairly educated; 20,798 males and 31 females or 6.87% could read and write; and 269,014 men and 10,496 women or 92.15% were absolutely ignorant. On this dismal state of things his comment was: "The collection of these statistics shows that marvellous as the progress of the University of Calcutta is, the education of the masses of the people who form the bulk of the criminal population makes no advance, if the offenders against the law are a fair sample of the state of the general population in this important particular".³⁶

The conclusion seems inevitable that despite the Despatches of 1854 and 1859 and an increase in the number of primary schools, scant attention was paid to the education of the people. Bengali was pushed back to an inconsequential position, so much so that even in the eighth decade of the century, Anglophiles, in the opinion of Bankimchandra, considered Bengali to be the language of the uneducated or at best of the half-educated. People were so persistently made conscious of the inferior status of Bengali that, until very recently, the undergraduates of the Calcutta University had to prove their proficiency in the mother tongue by their dexterity in translating English passages into Bengali!

This systematic neglect of the education of the people angered

Howell, who in his *Note on Education*, in 1867, wrote: "It may perhaps, therefore be asked in the words of the Despatch of 1854, how far does the Bengal system tend to confer those vast moral and material blessings which flow from the general diffusion of useful knowledge? There is satisfactory evidence of the high attainments in English literature and European science in the few, but how does the system provide for the extension to the general population of those means of obtaining an education suitable to their station in life which had therefore been too exclusively confined to the higher classes?"

"Do native gentlemen, like English gentlemen, return to their Zamindari from a University career, to spread around them the reflex of the enlightenment they have received themselves? Does the process of highly educating a few, and leaving the masses, tend to increase, or to diminish, the gulf between class and class? Are there any indications of a decrease in crime, or of a dawn of intelligence in the agricultural classes. . . ?"³⁷

Indeed, judged from the larger perspective of the education of the people and the culture of a nation, the system of education introduced by the ruling authorities presents almost a blank. It has failed to regenerate the people. Of course, this was not part of their imperialist design, having absolutely no stake in the fortunes of the land. Credit, however, has to be paid to those magnanimous few, who envisaged but could not implement their policy for a cultural regeneration of India.

But it is comparatively easy to start a process, difficult to cry a halt. So the cultivation of Bengali continued to make advance to assume, in the second half of the century, almost a staggering dimension. One or two Young Bengal radicals even, for instance K. M. Bandyopadhyay, so noted for their elocution in English, used to present competent papers in Bengali, as the proceedings of Hare's death anniversary meetings show.³⁸ The Hare Memorial Committee also awarded various prizes for meritorious essays in Bengali. Akshay Kumar Dutt's essays

in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* in the forties and early fifties demonstrated how abstruse philosophical and political questions could be made intelligible and discussed in Bengali. His tradition was further enriched by Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan through his weekly journal *Shomprakash* established in 1858.

James Long in a report submitted to the Government of Bengal in June, 1854, regarding his investigation into the condition of vernacular printing and publishing between April 1853 and April 1854, gave the following statistics:

Presses that print Bengali books	46
Books and pamphlets printed	252
No. of copies printed	418275
No. of newspapers and periodicals	19
No. of copies circulated	8100

While expressing his sense of satisfaction at the progress made, Long pleaded "for effective measure being taken to create a healthy literary taste among the people by a sound vernacular education".³⁰ What transpired after that has already been discussed.

The process, however, had its own dynamic. In Rammohan Roy had been noticed the dawn of the cosmopolitan sense of reality as well as an adequate grasp of the historical necessity. Whether or not one subscribed to his views, this heritage was not lost; on the contrary, through the instrumentality of English education and European science, and through the currency of newspapers and journals and printed books, it became the intellectuals' habitual means of comprehending reality. And their impact, felt variously and at different levels, was itself the cause of social mobility.

We should, however, put on record the elite community's indifference, nay, even antipathy, towards education of the people. Bankimchandra, in the journal *Bangadarsan* (1872) complained that there was no community of feeling or of understanding between the educated and the uneducated. Sisir

Kumar Ghosh in an article on 'National Education' (February 21, 1878) frankly disapproved any portion of the money so long utilized for promoting higher education of the middle classes to be diverted for the promotion of primary education of the people. He was not altogether against "mass education", but he strongly pleaded with the Government not to disturb the present scheme of education for the new elite.

VI

Of social mobility, a few indications should be sufficient. It has been pointed out in Chapter I that changes in the societal structure broadened the individual's range of selection; his choice of an occupation was no longer conditioned by his belonging to a particular caste. This facilitated one's movement from a caste to an economic class, and, at the same time, brought about a revolution in perception.

The social mind, so long confined to the narrowest of bounds, was also showing signs of awakening. *Samāchār Darpan* reported in January, 1830 that twelve years ago when it first started printing, some subscribers used to rebuke them for publishing news about lands whose very names were unknown to them; but recently letters from mofussil subscribers had been received to the effect that if the newspaper did not print news of various other lands as was done by its rivals, they would abandon it.⁴⁰ About the same time one Brahmin from Chinsura sent a letter to the same newspaper to say that if the women were not given instruction along with the men, then the country would take a long time to prosper; that if the women remained ignorant then how the men could become civilized.⁴¹ A rather unexpected comment from a child of the masochist society which, until very recently, used to burn their widows. This, one would consider, signified a remarkable change in the people's world view. The consciousness gained ground that all doors leading to the safety of the past were closed; the chorus of all voices and

activities—reformative, educational and socio-economic was trying to identify not the past but the future.

The mobility made itself felt also in the gradual broadening of the dimension of political aspirations. The new elite accepted the position of subservience to the British rule; and when the Young Bengal radicals formed the Bengal British India Society, they in a resolution declared "that the Society shall adopt and recommend such measures only, as are consistent with *pure loyalty to the person and government of the reigning sovereign of the British dominions* and the due observance of the Laws and Regulations of this country" (italics mine).⁴² But thirty years hence it was found very difficult to hold on to that position. By that time the rank of the elite had vastly increased, with consequent ramification of political views held or lately received from Europe; and they began to have new visions. Sir Richard Temple in 1880 recognised the new glimmerings as distinct signs and recorded: "The educated Natives are also moved by aspirations for self-government, for political power, and even for representative institutions, the concession of which does not at present fall within the range of practical politics". "They are already raising a cry, louder and louder, the purport of which is 'India for Indians'".⁴³

NOTES

1. Quoted by Long in his Introduction to *Adam's Reports*, p. 3.
2. This and the incident following had also been quoted by Long, *op. cit.*
3. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
5. George Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff*, pp. 141-142.
6. Percival Spear, *The Nabobs*, p. 141.
7. Pearychand Mitra, *A Biographical Sketch of David Hare*, Calcutta, 1877, Chapter I.
8. See editorial comments of *Sambad Prabhakar* (Bengali), from Dec. 1852 to July 1853.
9. M. A. Laird, *The Contribution of Missionaries to Education in Bengal during the administration of Lord Hastings (1813-1823): Bengal Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, 1967.
10. Quoted by C. E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, Calcutta, 1838, p. 81.
11. George Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-138.
12. Translated and quoted by R. C. Majumdar in *The British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance, Part II*, 1965, pp. 35-36 from B. N. Banerjee's *Sambadpatre Sekaler Katha* (in Bengali), Vol. III, pp. 9-10.
13. C. E. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 79, 80-81.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.
16. Quoted by B. B. Majumdar *op. cit.*, p. 160.
17. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-135.
18. Pearychand Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
19. Words written in eulogy by Haramohan Chatterjee, a clerk of the Hindu College. Quoted by Edwards Thomas, *Biography of Henry Derozio*, Calcutta, 1884.
20. Shivanth Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tattkalin Benga Samaj*, p. 115.
21. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
22. Quoted by S. C. Sanial, *History of the Press in India*, Calcutta Review, January, 1911; see also B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
It may be of interest to know that the whole of Paine's *Age of Reason* was translated into Bengali by Durgacharan Gupta, and was published in two volumes in 1855 by Gupta and Brothers, New India Library, Calcutta.
23. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
24. Quoted from his essay captioned "Address to our countrymen" in No. 2 of the *Reformer*, 1831, by W. H. Carey, *The Good Old Days of John Company*, New Quins Book abridged edition, 1964, pp. 127-128.
25. Quoted by George Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.
26. See Pearychand Mitra, *op. cit.*, Chapter II.
27. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.
28. Quoted from George Smith's *The Life of Alexander Duff* by Manamohan Gangopadhyay, in his *Bānglār Nabajāgaraner Sudakshar* (In Bengali), Calcutta, 1963, pp. 30-31.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
33. George Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.
34. Pearychand Mitra, *op. cit.*, Chapter II.
35. Quoted by Long in his Introduction to *Adam's Reports*.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. See Pearychand Mitra, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV.
39. Selections from Records, Bengal Government, No. 22, 1855.
40. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *Sambādhātre Sekāler Kathā*, Vol. I, p. 96;
quoted in full in the author's *Bankim Mānos*, fourth edition, 1966,
p. 37.
41. B. N. Bandyopadhyay, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 99.
42. Quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 234-235.

CHAPTER V

RADICAL INTELLECTUALISM

THE DEROZIAN

Enough has already been said in the preceding chapters about the intellectual and social stir caused by Derozio and the Derozians. The present chapter seeks to throw light on their individual achievements in various fields, which provided the base for succeeding generations to build their intellectual edifice upon. The first in consideration should of course be

I. HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO (1809-1831)

Derozio was what in those days used to be called a Eurasian, born of a Portuguese father and an English mother. Educated at Drummond's Dharamtala Academy, he showed early promise of his later eminence. In addition to his winning gold medals and other prizes in school exams, he also distinguished himself in other capacities. In those days annual examinations of schools created much public enthusiasm and were witnessed by many distinguished visitors. Of one such annual function of Drummond's Academy Dr John Grant, editor of the *India Gazette*, wrote in his paper, "The English recitations from different authors, were extremely meritorious and reflect great credit upon scholars and the teacher. A boy of the name of Derozio gave a good conception of Shylock; . . . Colman's humorous Vagary of the Poetical Apothecary, was recited also by Derozio, and with capitally ludicrous effect".¹ And of the general climate of the school Dr Grant added, "It was an interesting sight to behold the native children sitting side by side with the sons of Europeans. This is as it should be. Those who are educated together must consult kindly feelings towards each other, and this must in the end prove generally beneficial".

This racially free atmosphere at school must have inculcated in Derozio the spirit of liberal humanism which served him well when he himself became a teacher.

But he had to leave Calcutta and school at fourteen to serve as a clerk in a mercantile firm at Bhagalpur in Bihar. His new abode, however, proved to be fruitful in another way—he discovered in himself a poet. Poetic efforts brought him back to Calcutta and to the Hindu College in 1826 as a teacher in the senior department. Not an unpromising aspirant to poetic eminence, Derozio published, in the following year, a slender volume of poems which, in the judgment of the *Calcutta Gazette*, “evinced a vigour of thought, and dignity of conception, a play of fancy, and a delicacy of tone”.

Derozio, thus, could supply a needed and timely literary inspiration to his pupils. His poetic practice was fully commensurate with his radical thinking; he sought in poetry to give expression to such values only as were intellectually both satisfying and explorable. For that purpose, his intensive reading in Byron's poetry proved to be of invaluable assistance. As a poet, Derozio was literally under the spell of Byron, and was affectionately called by friends and contemporaries “the Eurasian Byron”. He had in full measure the English poet's unbounded enthusiasm, sweep and passionate exuberance of both thought and emotion. He also shared in no small measure in Byron's violent resentment of wrong. Of the sixty seven poems included in Bradley-Birt's² selections from Derozio's verse, there are at least a dozen poems which are his characteristic responses to stimuli received from *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan*. All of these have Greek or Italian themes, and show as overpowering a passion and as self-devouring an anxiety for freedom as enliven many of the cantos of Byron's poems. Not only that, he tried to recapture Byron's poetic idiom and technique for his Indian tale—*Fakir of Jungheera*, composed much in the vein and imitation of Byron's Turkish verse-tale *The Giaour*.

Unrestrained march of freedom and intellect, and development of man's innate faculties were foremost thoughts in Derozio's mind; these permeated the whole of his being and affected all his deeds. As such, he did not shrink from the conclusions of his own criticisms, nor from conflict with opposing forces. His pensive-looking face concealed an indomitable spirit within; and he roamed through the hazards of life, "darkness without, within consuming flame"—his own words so sharply expressed in his poem *The Neglected Minstrel*. For a man of such a flaming temperament, there was no little reason for gratification to see his own pupils heralding a new era in Bengal. He viewed his own work with extreme delight and embodied the same in a good but irregular sonnet:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers
 I watch the gentle opening of your minds
 And sweet loosening of the spell that binds
 Your intellectual energies and powers, that stretch
 (Like young birds in soft summer hour),
 Their wings to try their strength. O how the winds
 Of circumstance, and freshening April showers
 Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
 Of new perceptions shed their influence,
 And how you worship truth's omnipotence!
 What joyance reigns upon me, when I see
 Fame in the mirror of futurity
 Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain
 And then I feel I have not lived in vain.

Derozio, indeed, had not lived in vain. Apart from engineering the social commotion discussed previously at length, he helped his pupils in finding out a new and pervasive rhythm of life, enriched and enlivened by a taste in literature.

He, moreover, was free from that unfortunate and also inexplicable attitude of many members of the Eurasian community, who looked fondly up to England as their 'home'

and upon India as the empire to exploit. Deep penetration helped him to realise the fallacy of such an attitude, and to correctly recognise his own community's involvement in the affairs of India, not as aliens but as permanently condemned insiders. This consciousness produced, when this poet-teacher was only eighteen, some inspiring and dignified pieces like the one quoted below, which initiated many an educated Bengali to patriotic visions:

To India, My Native Land

My country! in thy days of glory past
 A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
 And worshipped as a deity thou wast—
 Where is thy glory, where that reverence now?
 Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last,
 And grovelling in the lowly dust art thou,
 Thy minstrel hath no wreath to weave for thee,
 Save the sad story of thy misery!
 Well—let me dive into the depths of time,
 And bring from out the ages that have rolled
 A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,
 Which human eye may never more behold;
 And let the guerdon of my labour be,
 My fallen country! one kind wish for thee!

One of the earliest patriotic effusions, this poem laments the present dust and decay. Lamentations, however, were only very short-lived; for, soon they paved the way to passionate indignation in which mood he cried out, "our country writhes in galling chains, when her proud masters scourge her as a dog" (*The Golden Vase*). His poetry abounds in similar expressions. The wounded force as well as the obvious political suggestion of such utterances were too telling to be missed by any

of his pupils, too perspicuous not to have stimulated and elevated them politically. Thus, before he died a few months after completing his twenty-second year, Derozio succeeded in leading his pupils to an awakening and an awareness of the contemporary human situation, to a political evaluation of the state of their being, which, while looking eagerly towards British benevolence, learnt yet to look beyond to freedom and eradication of evil, and consequently to regeneration of mankind. Love of truth and hatred of evil gained a permanent soil in their hearts. Derozio's indeed "was the first glad song of conscious power",³ which thrilled and strengthened those who were there to hear it.

His pupils have, one and all, testified to the healthy stimulation of the intellect and the will and of the veneration his glowing words inspired in them, and also to his affection and kindness as a teacher. To Radhanath Sikdar Derozio's instructions were not only "invaluable" but the very guiding principle in whatever he succeeded in achieving in life. He has also recorded that Derozio was the inexhaustible source from where love of truth and hatred of sin emanated. An objective and faithful account of Derozio's conduct as a teacher has been given by Haramohan Chattopadhyay, a clerk of the Hindu College, who maintained:⁴

"The students of the first, second, and third classes had the advantage of attending a *conversazione* established in the school by Mr Derozio, where readings in poetry, and literature, and moral philosophy were carried on. The meetings were held almost daily after or before school hours. Though they were without the knowledge or sanction of the authorities yet Mr Derozio's disinterested zeal and devotion in bringing up the students in those subjects was unbounded, and characterised by a love and philanthropy which, up to this day, has not been equalled by any teacher either in or out of the services. The students in their turn loved him most tenderly;

and were ever ready to be guided by his counsels and imitate him in all their daily actions in life. In fact, Mr Derozio acquired such an ascendancy over the minds of his pupils that they would not move even in their private concerns without his counsel and advice. On the other hand, he fostered their taste in literature; taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstition; and so far formed their moral conceptions and feelings as to place them completely above the antiquated ideas and aspirations of the age. Such was the force of his instructions, that the conduct of the students out of the College was most exemplary and gained them the applause of the outside world....".

Yet, entirely baseless and vile charges were brought against him by some conservative Directors of the Hindu College. These came in as the culmination of wild rumours systematically engineered by pathological mischief-seekers regarding Derozio's personal beliefs and conduct. These charges were that (a) he did not believe in the existence of God, (b) he did not consider respect and obedience to parents as forming part of one's moral duty, and (c) he considered marriage between brothers and sisters as innocent and allowable. The Board of Directors, disregarding protests from a few far-sighted members and unwilling in any way to wound Hindu bigotry, decided upon his removal; but Derozio having clearly sensed what was coming himself resigned. In a letter⁵ addressed to Dr H. H. Wilson, Vice President of the Board of Directors, he refuted the charges in words that brought into fullest play the dignity, elegance and moral strength of his personality.

Portions of this letter deserve to be quoted, not so much for the forcefulness of his refutation as for the masterly defence of his intellectual position as a teacher of youth. "Entrusted as I was", he said, "for sometime with the education of youth peculiarly circumstanced, was it for me to have made them pert and ignorant dogmatists, by permitting them to know what

could be said upon only one side of grave questions? Setting aside the narrowness of mind which such a course might have evinced it would have been injurious to the mental energies and acquirements of young men themselves. . . . I can vindicate my procedure by quoting no less orthodox an authority than Lord Bacon: "If a man", says this philosopher. . . . "will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts". This, I need scarcely observe, is always the case with contended ignorance when it is roused too late to thought. One doubt suggests another, and universal scepticism is the consequence. I therefore thought it my duty to acquaint several of the college students with the substance of Hume's celebrated dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo, in which the most subtle and refined arguments against theism are adduced. But I have also furnished them with Dr Reid's and Dugald Stewart's more acute replies to Hume—replies which to this day continue unrefuted. "This is the head and front of my offending". If the religious opinions of the students have become unhinged in consequence of the course I have pursued, the fault is not mine. To produce convictions was not within my power; and if I am condemned for the atheism of some, let me receive credit for the theism of others.

"Believe me, my dear Sir, I am too thoroughly imbued with a deep sense of human ignorance, and of the perpetual vicissitudes of opinion, to speak with confidence even of the most unimportant matters. Doubt and uncertainty besiege us too closely to admit the boldness of dogmatism to enter an enquiring mind; and far be it from me to say *this is* and *that is not*, when after the most extensive acquaintance with the researches of science, and after the most daring flights of genius, we must confess with sorrow and disappointment that humility becomes the highest wisdom, for the highest wisdom assures man of his ignorance. . . ."

To pay compliments to such an elegant-minded teacher

would be superfluous. But the intellectual challenge of which he was the embodiment went a long way to hasten the emergence of generations of Bengalis who earned distinction as much for their mental vigour as for heralding a new epoch in Bengal's cultural history.

II. TARACHAND CHAKRABORTY (1806-1855)

Senior to Derozio in respect of age and acclaimed universally as the leader of the Derozians, Tarachand appears to have led a chequered life. Born poor, he lost his father at ten, and had to exert himself prematurely for the maintenance of his family. For a time he read at the Hindu College as a free boy of the Calcutta School Society, but, yet incapacitated financially, left school in 1822, after which through the exegencies of Rammohan served as the English translator for Buckingham's *Calcutta Journal* and also for two Bengali journals, namely, *Chandrikā* and *Kaumudi*. Various assignments followed; such as, that of a teacher, of the Deputy Registrar of the Sadar Dewani Adalat, of the manager of the Burdwan estate, etc. Lastly, for different spells and at different stages of his career he was engaged in business with friends like Ramgopal Ghosh and Pearychand Mitra.

Tarachand's intellectual activities included translation into English of some traditional scriptures which greatly helped Dr H. H. Wilson in preparing his commentaries on them.⁶ He edited the *Manu Samhitā* with original Sanskrit text and Jones's English translation thereof, and added elaborate commentaries on them. The work, highly commended by Rammohan, had unfortunately to be abandoned after the publication of the fifth volume, because of want of funds. Needless to mention that he was associated with all intellectual and reform movements of the newly emergent elite; moreover, he did not only contribute to the journals of the Derozians but assumed editorial responsibility for their organ the *Bengal Spectator*, although Ram-

gopal Ghosh as editor continued "to be the puppet show".⁷

Rammohan had high esteem for his capabilities and chose him to be the first secretary of his Brāhma Samāj. This distinction, we may presume, was not conferred on an unworthy collaborator.

The principal trait of Tarachand's character was independence of mind and an uncompromising sense of personal dignity. On more than one occasion he refused to kotow before the arrogance of supercilious officers at the cost of his livelihood. The following is an interesting incident which demonstrates the show of firmness and self-respect he was capable of. On February 8, 1843, was held in the Hindu College auditorium a meeting of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, at which a paper on 'The Present State of the East India Company's Criminal Judicature and Police under the Bengal Presidency' was presented by Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay. When only half of the paper was gone through, Captain Richardson, Principal of the College, stood up angrily and said that 'he could not permit it (i.e., the College hall) to be converted into a den of treason, and must close the doors against all such things'. Tarachand, who was the President of the meeting, immediately retorted: "Captain Richardson! with due respect I beg to say that I cannot allow you to proceed any longer in this course of conduct towards our Society, and as the President of the Society, and on behalf of my friend Babu Dukhin, I must say, that your remarks are anything but becoming. I am bound also to add that I consider your conduct as an insult to the Society, and that if you do not retract what you have said and make due apology, we shall represent the matter to the Committee of the Hindu College, and if necessary to the Govt. itself. We have obtained the use of this public hall by leave, applied for and received, from the Committee, and not through your personal favour. You are only a visitor on this occasion, and possess no right to interrupt a member of this

Society in the utterance of his opinions. I hope that Captain Richardson will see the propriety of offering an apology to my friend, the writer of the essay and to the meeting".⁸ Other speakers, including Dakshinaranjan, also strongly supported Tarachand, and Capt. Richardson was in the end obliged to tender an apology.

The matter, however, did not end there. Pro-government newspapers, such as the *Englishman*, *The Friend of India*, etc., began a sarcastic, slandering crusade against the Young Bengal radicals; and since Tarachand was their leader, they sarcastically referred to the group as the 'Chukerberty faction'.⁹ *The Friend of India* tried to draw the attention of the Establishment by recording that such speeches, if made at places like Batavia or Samarang, would have been rewarded with transportation for life, to imagine the least.¹⁰ Tarachand was not noted for elocution, but his unassuming demeanour and want of conceit and his firm resolution both endeared him to and inspired his friends; and he fully deserved the tribute paid to him by George Thompson on the occasion of the establishment of Bengal British India Society on April 20, 1843: he was "a man, whose earnest and quiet zeal, whose retiring modesty, whose benevolent feelings, and whose incorruptible integrity entitled him, and had, he believed, won for him the esteem and admiration of all who knew him".¹¹

III. K. M. BANDYOPADHYAY (1813-1885)

Born of poor, *kulin* parents, Krishnamohan of all the brilliant group of Derozians was "the readiest, and most effective speaker, unaffected in manner, calm and unimpassioned, though sometimes bursting into vehemence, and always practical". (*Hindoo Patriot*)¹²

But this man of intellect and wit and resource had to leave his family dwelling in the midnight of August 23, 1831. The incident that preceded his expulsion was this: that evening,

when he was out, a party of his radical friends assembled in his room and began denouncing caste and convention. One of the party suggested that they must give practical demonstration of their heterodoxy by eating beef, which was immediately brought in from a shop and placed on the table. All present tasted the forbidden stuff, but as it did not prove very palatable to unused tongues, a good quantity remained unconsumed. By that time Krishnamohan had returned to join his friends. One enthusiast proposed that the left-over be thrown into the compound of a neighbour, an orthodox Brahmin, which proposal was promptly put into action with lusty shouts of 'beef! beef!' Infurated at this blasphemous insult, the neighbour along with a group of other people attacked the radicals, and threatened Krishnamohan's family with ostracism if they did not disown the heretic. Shocked and frightened beyond measure, the family asked Krishnamohan either to abjure his heresy or to accept the fate of an outcaste. Since apologies were not considered to be enough, he left the parental roof to which he never returned.

This incident caused an unprecedented uproar in the city; the horror and indignation of the Hindus knew no bounds. Many parents, viewing with alarm the apparent danger of an English education, withdrew their wards from the College. Some of the obstinates were forced to recant and to return to the orthodox fold.

By that time Krishnamohan, as the editor of *The Inquirer* (weekly, May 17, 1831—June 18, 1835), had earned much notorcity for his violent denouncements of Hindu superstitions and conventions and religious observances. Every week saw the display of new invectives. Not satisfied with that, he wrote a play entitled *The Persecuted*, "in which he showed, with much wit and sarcasm, that those members of the Hindu community who passed for orthodox were in reality hypocrites and that, in truth, there was no such thing as caste".¹³ His vetuperations

were mainly directed against Radhakanta Dev and his associates. The vehemence of his onslaught as well as his determination to continue to wreck Hinduism can best be illustrated by his own words: "Does not history testify that Luther, alone and unsupported, blew a blast which shook the mansions of error and prejudice? Did not Knox, opposed as he was by bigots and fanatics, carry the cause of reformation into Scotland? Blessed are we that we are to reform the Hindu nation. We have blown the trumpet, and we must continue to blow on. We have attacked Hindooism, and will persevere in attacking it until we finally seal our triumph". He studied parallel developments in Europe during the days of Reformation, and, perhaps, liked to portray himself in the role of a Luther or a Knox.

When he was passing through such emotional strains and stresses as well as estrangement, a friend of his one afternoon "asked me to accompany him to the Rev. Mr D.(uff), who never lost sight of us in our wanderings. . . . Mr D. received me with Christian kindness and inquired of the state in which we all were. . . .

"The Reverend gentleman, with great calmness and composure said, that it was true that I could not be blamed for my not believing in Christianity, so long as I was ignorant of it; but that I was certainly guilty of serious neglect for not inquiring into its evidences and doctrines. This word 'inquiring' was so uttered as to produce an impression upon me which I cannot sufficiently well describe. I considered upon my lonely condition—cut off from men to whom I was bound by natural ties, and thought that nothing but a determination on the subject of religion could give me peace and comfort. And I was so struck with Mr D.'s words that, we instantly resolved to hold weekly meetings at his house for religious instruction and discussion".¹⁴

Of his Hindu College friends, Mahesh Chandra Ghosh first

embraced Christianity; he himself was the "next candidate for baptism". Accordingly, on Oct. 17, 1832, the sacred ordinance was administered by Duff. After his conversion to Christianity, Krishnamohan for the second time became the object of social commotion in Calcutta, of which a very vivid record has been given by Duff himself. "What man, woman, or child, in Calcutta, had not heard of the name, and some of the doings of Krishna Mohan Banerji? Hence his baptism, in particular, became the theme of conversation and discussion with every group that met on the street or in the bazaar; in every coterie reposing under shade from the mid-day sun; in every school; and in every family circle. Hundreds, or even thousands of baptism among the low caste, or illiterate grades, generally would not have excited a tithe of the mental stir and inquiry then exhibited among all classes; and among the higher order, probably none at all".¹⁵ Krishnamohan is said to have recalled in imagination after fifty years the event how it might have affected his mother to whom he was fondly attached in childhood. He is reported to have said that "he could still hear the piercing shriek with which his venerable mother heard the news—a shriek which Christian England has never heard and can hardly yet appreciate".¹⁶ His conversion, however, estranged him further; but, undaunted, he weathered all orthodox attempts to render him miserable, and strove to rise high, till he attained to a position of eminence and influence.

In 1839 he was ordained priest, and a new church—Christ Church in Cornwallis Square (now Azad Hind Bag) was built for him. On his missionary activity and possible influence over the young Iswar Gupta, an eminent contemporary, composed a satirical couplet asking young people to refrain from going to the Cornwallis Square lest they should be "put in chains by Krishna Bandyo". He retired from the ministry of the Church in 1852, and served the Bishop's College for sixteen years as a teacher. Was elected a fellow of the Calcutta University in

1867-68, and to the Corporation in 1880, and was chosen to become the first President of the Indian Association, formed on the initiative of Surendranath Banerjee, Ananda Mohan Bose and others.

But change of faith could neither impair his sense of involvement in the affairs of his country nor diminish his patriotic zeal. He continued to take important part in all the social, philanthropic, intellectual and political activities of his friends. In every literary assembly his was a prominent presence, in every public function eagerly sought for. He knew as many as ten languages—Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Oriya, Persian, Urdu, English, Latin, Greek and Hebrew; and was known to be the only person in his time who could express himself equally competently in both English and Bengali. He, under the patronage of the Government of Bengal, edited *Encyclopaedia Bengalensis*, also called *Vidyākalpadruma* (13 volumes, 1846-1851), which was printed in both English and Bengali and contained articles on various subjects, such as history, literature, science and mathematics. This *Encyclopaedia* "not only contributed to the enrichment of the vernacular, but also enabled Bengalees to study Western literatures and sciences in their own language".¹⁷ In 1851 he edited *Purāna Sangraha* with an English translation, which was followed in 1861 by *Dialogues on the Hindu Philosophy*, again in both English and Bengali—a work highly praised by the famous Orientalist Dr Theodor Goldstucker.

In 1867 he established the Family Literary Club, an association open to men of all religious denominations,¹⁸ which used to hold periodical meetings at the residences of prominent citizens of Calcutta. The transactions were conducted in English, and papers on diverse subjects were presented. Among the subjects debated during the first two years of its existence were: 'Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen', 'Advantages of moral education', 'The Parliamentarians were justified in executing Charles I', 'Advantages and disadvantages of society',

'Early Marriage', 'Polygamy', 'Female Education'. At the thirteenth anniversary of the club a paper on 'Eclecticism' was presented,¹⁹ on which occasion the "eclectic and fleeting" nature of Brāhmaism was exposed by Krishnamohan. Contemporary evidences show that his papers and intellectual discourses were always exceedingly interesting, impressive and even telling.

He was elected a member of the Philological Committee of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, and, in collaboration with Dr Rajendra Lal Mitra and others, produced some valuable work; and for his contributions in the field of oriental studies he was made a honorary member of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. The University of Calcutta conferred on him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, and the British government the rank of Companion of the Indian Empire (1885).

But though largely preoccupied with intellectual and evangelical activities, his keen interest in the political welfare of India did never wane. Whatever governmental measures were considered unjust or detrimental to the interest of the people, he did not hesitate to attack in his capacity as a leader of public opinion. These attacks always bore the mark of a fearless independence of character and of a storn attachment to truth. This trait brought him into the whirlwinds of politics when he was past sixty. Surendranath in his autobiography has paid homage to Krishnamohan in words of stirring warmth and respect; "A scholar and a man of letters, it was not till late in life that he began to take an active part in politics. He was associated with the Indian League and subsequently became President of the Indian Association. Once thrown into the vertex of public life, he was drawn into its deeper currents. . . . He was then past sixty; and though growing years had deprived him of the alertness of youth, yet in the keenness of his interest, and in the vigour and outspokenness of his utter-

ances, he exhibited the ardour of the youngest recruit to our ranks. Never was there a man more uncompromising in what he believed to be the truth, and hardly was there such amiability combined with such strength and firmness.

"It is this type of character that I am afraid is fast disappearing from our midst".²⁰

Like Rammohan, Krishnamohan also did not withdraw from the main stream of national life; and although persecution on the one hand and love of rationalism and urge for a religious umbrella on the other impelled him to become a Christian, he never wished to lose his identity as a Bengali and an Indian. Hence his multiple involvement in the various affairs of the land. His strong voice could be heard in every encounter, social or political. The Indian Association, while condoling his death, recorded their sense of great loss at the passing away of one "whose ripe scholarship, broad sympathies, untiring zeal, fearless independence, and unwearied exertions in the cause of social, moral, intellectual, and political advancement of his countrymen entitle him to their lasting gratitude".²¹

IV. RAM GOPAL GHOSH (1815—1868)

One of the prominent members of the Anglophile elite, Ram Gopal was actively associated with all the intellectual and literary pursuits of the Derozians, although much of his time was consumed by commercial activities.

After the completion of his studies at the Hindu College, he worked with one Mr Joseph, a Jewish merchant, on a petty salary; then became a partner of a firm Messrs Kellsall and Ghosh, but retired after a few years and set up a mercantile firm of his own, R. G. Ghosh and Co. with branches at Akyab and Rangoon; he made profitable trade in Arakan rice. Commercial success placed him at a position of standing, and he was elected a member of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce.

While still a student, his highest studies within the college-

walls were Locke's and Stewart's philosophy, Russel's Modern Europe, Shakespeare's plays, and the Elements of Natural Philosophy. He delivered a course of lectures on moral philosophy and on English poetry to the Debating Society of the Derozians. But he wrote chiefly on commercial and political questions. Among his notable contributions were a series of articles written under the pseudonym "Civis" on the subject of inland transit duties.

It is as an orator, however, that Ram Gopal earned distinction and came to be known far and wide. "At a meeting of the inhabitants of Calcutta for doing honour to Lord Hardinge, he carried his proposal of erecting a statue of the Governor-General against the three eloquent barristers of the time,—viz., Messrs "Turton, Dickens and Hume". The next day the *John Bull*—a periodical of the day, made the startling announcement that a young Bengalee orator had floored three English barristers, and called him "the Indian Demosthenes". His speech at the Charter Act meeting was lauded by the *Times* as a "masterpiece of oratory".²²

His politics was the politics of subservience to British supremacy, and on many occasions he categorically stated his conviction. At the inaugural meeting of the Bengal British India Society in 1843, he declared that, though the Muslim rulers had been more liberal in the distribution of high offices, yet he "desired nothing more sincerely than the perpetuity of the British sway in this country". In the same ardent vein he added that "while he was a friend to every wholesome reformation, he was the ardent and attached friend of British Supremacy, and should bitterly deprecate any event, which should weaken the ties, which bound India to the people and government of Great Britain".²³ During the Black Acts agitation by the Europeans he wrote a pamphlet on "A few Remarks on certain Draft Acts, commonly called Black Acts" and tilted at the racial vanity of the European community and argued

strongly in favour of equality of British-born subjects with Indians before courts of justice. But that impaired neither his attachment nor subservience to British rule in India. The same sentiments were re-echoed in 1861 at the Harish memorial meeting. He declared that he "did not find fault with the existing rule; perhaps it was the best they could have under present circumstances". The only criticism that he liked to make was that "with an exclusive civil service and no outlet for career there was no stimulus to exertion".²⁴

At other meetings he spoke eloquently for throwing open the civil service without any reservation to Indians, but his loyalty was never shaken and he died a true Anglophile, in both word and deed.

V. DAKSHINA RANJAN MUKHOPADHYAY (1814-1878)

Of the Hindu College elite, Dakshina Ranjan, according to Peary Chand Mitra, was an ardent optimist,²⁵ and received all the good influences with genuine interest. He was one of the four called by Mitra fire-brands, the other three being K. M. Bandyopadhyay, Ram Gopal Ghosh and Rasik Krishna Mullik. He established in 1831 the Young Bengal journal *Gyananeshun*, and took a foremost part in all their zealous activities.

Demonstrably radical in both views and personal conduct, he later secretly got Basantakumari, the young widow of Maharaja Tejaschandra Bahadur of Burdwan, brought to Calcutta and married her in the presence of a police Magistrate according to English civil marriage laws. Gourisankar Bhattacharya, editor of *Bhāskar*, signed as witness. Long after the incident he jokingly told Rajnarayan Bose, when the latter visited him at Lucknow in 1867-1868, that his marriage was at once "a widow-remarriage, inter-caste marriage and civil marriage. Where could one get a better social reformer?"²⁶

He was a Brāhma, but not of the Brāhma Samāj. For, he was of the opinion that service in the assembly of Brāhmas

should consist of only readings from the Upanishads and devotional songs, as was the practice during Rammohan's time. Because of their departure from the original practice, Dakshina Ranjan wrongly called the Samāj "non-Hindu Brāhma Samāj".²⁷ Rajnarayan has further recorded that during a discussion on religious topics with a European gentleman he suddenly pointed out to nature's beauteous expanse on the other side of the river Gomati and commented, "There lies the Bible of the Brahmins". "The Vedas", he said, "means knowledge. Knowledge is the word of God". He was deeply attached to Upanishadic monotheism, and told Rajnarayan that the Upanishads should constitute the Bible of the Brāhmas. Hence, Rajanarayan calls him "a Upanishadic Brāhma".²⁸

In politics also young Dakshina Rajan was extremely radical. In his essay on "The Present State of the East India Company's Criminal Judicature and Police under the Bengal Presidency",²⁹ he declared that all societies in the beginning lived a primitive communistic life; having been born and created equal, men enjoyed natural equality and perfect freedom. Destruction of this equality by the Brahmanical priesthood was the main cause of India's degradation. They sowed "the seeds of division, alienation, disorder and anarchy, diserving the joint and aggregate interests of the commonwealth into separate and jarring elements, connected with the rivalry of clanship, and the hostility of religious sectarianism, to which our country has been more or less a prey in the course of successive eras, and which were first introduced by an ambitious and domineering priesthood, and subsequently upheld and sanctified by ignorance and error, tending to stultify human reason, lest it should remind men of their right to think for themselves, and to strip them of their physical strength, lest they should be able to assert their native dignity."

Proceeding farther he declared that it was for the preservation of the natural rights of the people that government came

into being. "When men first laboured to raise themselves out of a condition of barbarism, it was at once apparent, that certain conventional rules and restrictions were indispensable for giving consistence to a plan, that confessedly sought the general advantage.... A code.... was framed.... It was presently perceived, that no government could be lasting, not even the most despotic, which did not exercise a large portion of its authority for the guardianship of the helpless and indigent, from the encroachments of the wealthy and powerful. Thus, at the outset of social advancement, it was acknowledged, that all governments were bound.... to render equal justice to their subjects".

Coming down to the present state of India, he said that colonists everywhere rule a subject nation "for the gratification of their love of gold, seldom, unhappily actuated by the philanthropic desire of promoting the welfare of the native races". "It is undeniable, that if all our forests and mountains were peopled and turned into cities and villages, the internal resources of India are so vast and abundant, that if the country were governed according to a free and generous policy, it would be found.... capable of affording the inhabitants the means of plentifully supplying themselves with comforts". But under British hegemony that was not to be.

Dakshina Ranjan, however, could not save his radicalism from total extinction. His true Anglophile complexion came out during the Sepoy Revolt, when he wrote one or two articles in the London *Times* against the sepoys and in support of the English. This blatant advocacy did not go unnoticed, and he was soon rewarded by Lord Canning, after the suppression of the Revolt, by a gift of a landed estate in Oudh, in Uttar Pradesh.³⁰ In gratitude Dakshina Ranjan founded the Canning College and the Oudh British Indian Association in Lucknow.

The objective socio-political conditions of Oudh brought about an unexpected transformation in his life. He lived and

moved like a devout Hindu, and was largely instrumental in the cultural regeneration of the province.

VI. RASHIK KRISHNA MULLIK (1810-1858)

Rashik Krishna studied at the Hindu College for nine years and left it in 1830 with certificates of merit and proficiency. He was to his fellow-students and friends "an oracle of learning and wisdom",³¹ and achieved wide reputation for his intellectual gifts and attainments. To Ramtanu Lahiri, fellow-Derozian and one of the most distinguished educationists of the century, Rashik Krishna was his "guide, philosopher and friend".³² His memories would bring tears to his eyes, and he would often repeat "A thoughtful man like Rashik I have never met. He dared to think for himself".³³ Eminent Sanskritist Dr H. H. Wilson was full of praise for him. A regular participant in the debates of their Academic Association, he carried the minds of his audience whenever he chose to speak. After his death in 1858, Harish Mukherjee, the editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*, while paying warm tributes to his memory, recorded: "His ready elocution won for him deserved applause of the Academic Association. . . . With a rich and fertile mind, replenished with the sentiments of the best English authors, and disciplined to an admirable training, he was a pride of the old Hindu College".³⁴

He began his active career as a teacher in Hare's school, but was removed as a consequence of the beef-eating incident at Krishnamohan's house which culminated in the latter's expulsion from home. The said school, though founded by Hare, was under the management and supervision of the Calcutta School Society, of which Radha Kanta Dev was the 'native' secretary. As the head of the orthodox Hindu community he wrote to the Society on September 2, 1831, "I think you might have heard the particulars of the dinner of the two teachers of the Putuldanga school, and consequently wish

to know whether you are determined upon removing those outcastes from the school, or retaining them to corrupt the Hindu pupils". Thereupon, in a personal note to Radhakanta, Hare wrote that Krishna Mohan and Rashik Krishna "were so well qualified as teachers that he would certainly be sorry to lose them".³⁵ But the inevitable could not be averted; both of them were compelled to leave.

Wild rumours were at that time current that Rashik Krishna also would renounce Hinduism and follow Krishna Mohan's suit. Dreadfully alarmed, the members of his family administered him some drug which kept him in an unconscious state for the whole night. Next morning when he was being put into chains to keep him away from "evil" company, he resisted to his utmost and left home for good.³⁶

After that, Rashik Krishna assumed charge of his friend Dakshina Ranjan's journal *Gyananeshun* as the editor and transformed it into a bilingual weekly in which articles in both English and Bengali were printed. As motto, they printed on the top a Sanskrit verse, which, rendered into English, read thus: "How we wish wisdom to descend on us, to establish both pity and truth, to remove darkness of ignorance in men's minds, and to kill deceit once and for all time". His principal contributions as a journalist were a few impressive articles on educational reforms and on the necessity of adopting Bengali for administrative purposes. He wrote, since contact with the native population was an everyday exigency, the Government should adopt their language for transaction of business in courts of law and government offices. It is good to mention here that in 1838 the Government accepted this principle.

On his initiative a largely attended meeting of the local elite was held early in 1834 to finalise a memorial to be addressed to Lord Bentinck persuading him not to allocate funds for useless cultivation of Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, but to divert the same for the cause of English and the vernaculars.³⁷ He

argued strongly that no permanent improvement in the governmental machinery could be effected if the masses of people were left without education. "Therefore, it becomes the paramount duty of our government, if it really have the good of its subjects at heart to spare no means in its power to facilitate the education of the natives; nor can we be said to be expecting too much, when we request it to appropriate a part of the immense revenue that India yields to the intellectual improvement of her benighted sons". Diffusion of useful education was to him "the best means of reforming the character of the people".³⁸ He himself, emulating the example of Rammohan, established a free elementary school—Hindu Free School—at Simulia, where, according to *Samdchār Darpan* for June 18, 1831, eighty boys were given instruction. In respect of text-books also the boys had to pay only half of their actual price.

Within the general outline of Anglophile politics Rashik Krishna introduced and maintained a tone of alert criticism of the East India Company Government. In an article he said, "The administration of justice in British India is so much characterised by everything that is opposed to the just principles of government, that we offer no apology to introduce it to the notice of our readers. . . . A body of merchants has been placed over us as our sovereigns. The question is, how far can they frame laws and administer justice, so as to protect our rights and liberties, consistently with their mercantile spirit? The administration of British India must necessarily be composed of a council of merchants, whose principal aim as such will be to promote their own interests, and to manage their affairs with as little expense as possible. In a word, they will try to make their government subservient to one ignoble principle of gain". In conclusion he said, "every provision that has been made for the distribution of justice, has been dictated by the all-absorbing idea of self-interest".³⁹

Rashik Krishna was one of the main speakers at the meeting

convened by representatives of both the European and Indian communities to voice their dissatisfaction with the Charter Act of 1833. This Act, though it abolished the trading rights of the East India Company, contained provisions which went glaringly against the interests of the people of India. Three such provisions were: (1) amalgamation of the Company's debt incurred in running the administration with their already heavy commercial debt. This clever trick almost doubled the volume of India's indebtedness. (2) Increase in the number of missionaries in India for imparting religious instruction to the Company's servants; but the expenses to be incurred on this head were to be met from the Indian revenue. (3) Abrogation of the hitherto existing provision that the Governor-General, before promulgation of any legal measure, should obtain prior sanction of the Calcutta Supreme Court. The new provision made the Governor-General the supreme authority in respect of India's administration.

The meeting was held on January 5, 1835. Two prominent English barristers—Theodore Dickens and Thomas E. Turton—strongly argued that the provisions of the Act would frustrate the very purpose of establishing a just government in India; while Rashik Krishna “exposed with great ability the utter want of consideration for his countrymen manifested in this measure”. He was, however, appointed a Deputy Collector in 1837, which position was thrown open to educated Indians by this Act. This appointment drew a curtain over his public and political activities.

In the opinion of Peary Chand Mitra,⁴⁰ unlike Ram Gopal, Rashik Krishna was not a smart speaker; but in his style of presentation and in argumentative flare there was a brilliance which compelled people to heed his words attentively. We may conclude this section by citing two extracts from his speeches:

- (a) At the Rammohan memorial meeting held on April 5, 1834: “To his going there we are in a great measure

indebted for the best clauses in the new charter, bad and wretched as the charter is. (*laughter*) Though it contains few provisions for the comfort and happiness of the millions that are subject to its sway, for the interests of millions were sacrificed to the interests of a few tea-managers—yet bad and wretched as it is, the few provisions that it contains for the good of our countrymen we owe to Ram Mohan Roy".⁴¹

- (b) At the meeting convened on June 8, 1835, to protest against the Press Act of 1823: "Mr Osborne had contended that the native press should have been continued shackled—should not have been set free because it circulated not among the highly civilized but only among wealthy natives, and that its contents were worthless. Yet the learned gentleman confessed that he could not understand the native Papers, could not even read their names, and yet he condemned them! (*cheers*).... Neither the European nor the native press would advocate licentiousness, and the native press could be restrained by the same laws that applied to the English. I would conclude by calling the attention of the opponents of the native press to a passage from Milton—he 'who kills man, kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself; kills the image of god in the very eye! Many a man lives a burden upon the earth, but a good book is the precious life of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond life'.⁴² (*loud cheers*)

VII. PEARY CHAND MITRA (1814-1883)

Peary Chand, of all the members of the Hindu College elite, was perhaps the most prolific writer. For, in addition to his contributions to the Young Bengal journals like *Gyananneshun* and the *Bengal Spectator*, he wrote essays and articles on a great

variety of subjects for the *Calcutta Review*, *India Review*, *Indian Field*, *Englishman*, *Indian Mirror*, *Bengal Harukaru*, *Hindoo Patriot*, etc., The range of subjects varied from biographical sketches of Bengal celebrities to the economic consequences of the permanent settlement, literary, educational and quasi-political topics coming in-between. He published worthy and well-documented biographies of David Hare, Sir John Peter Grant and Ramkamal Sen.

A few years after the completion of his studies he was appointed, through the instrumentality of Peter Grant, the Deputy Librarian of the Calcutta Public Library when it was founded in 1836. This Library was later to become the Imperial Library of Calcutta. In 1848, at the death of Mr Stacy, the Librarian, Peary Chand was simultaneously made the Librarian and Secretary. He himself resigned in 1866, but was persuaded to function as the Honorary Librarian and Secretary. The same year he was chosen an honorary curator also. From 1874 till his death in 1883 he functioned as a member of the Library Council.

He appears to have been actively associated with all the educational, cultural-regenerative, political and social-service associations of the epoch, from the Bengal British India Society to the District Charitable Society. Concurrently, business enterprises also consumed much of his time. In 1839 he, in partnership with friends like Kalachand Sett and Tarachand Chakraborty, floated a firm entitled "Kalachand Sett and Co." and started export-import business. Tarachand retired in 1844, while Kalachand died in 1849. Pearychand, thereupon, took the sole responsibility of the firm on his own shoulders, and in 1855, with his two sons as partners, founded another firm, "Peary Chand Mitra & Sons," which transpired to be the main source of his wealth. His connexions with British commercial houses were both intimate and profit-earning. He was made a director of the Great Eastern Hotel Co. Ltd., Port Canning

Land Investment Co., Howrah Docking Co. Ltd., Bengal Tea Co., Darrang Tea Co., etc.—all British-owned concerns.

He, in collaboration with Radhanath Sikdar, founded a monthly journal for the education of women, called *Māshik Patrika*, in 1854, and sustained it for about four years. It was in this paper that his novel *Āldlergharer Dulāl* was serialized, for which pioneer work in the field of fiction Peary Chand alias Tek Chand Thakur occupies a permanent place in the history of Bengali literature. The novelty of the work lies in the fact that in violent reaction to the highly Sanskritized prose style of his day, he wrote this novel—or rather a loose disjointed sequence of sketches and portraits—in the colloquial and at places in the cockney Calcuttan language. The characters, too, were in every way home-spun. This new experimental style, however, set the pattern, and greatly helped the emergence of the new Bengali prose. In the words of Bankimchandra: "He was the first writer who, instead of searching for the left-overs of English and Sanskrit authors, drew his material from the infinite stock of the real life. Only one book, *Āldler Gharer Dulāl*, fulfilled the twin purposes. It will occupy a permanent and immortal place. A better work might have been written after it or may yet be written in future, but no work has served or will ever serve Bengali literature in the way it has done".

VIII. RADHANATH SIKDAR (1813-1870)

"Radhanath", wrote Peary Chand Mitra, "had an ardent desire to benefit his country. His hobby was beef, as he maintained that beef-eaters were never bullied, and that the right way to improve the Bengalees was to think first of the *physique* or perhaps *physique* and *morale* simultaneously".⁴² He cultivated both and was noted as much for his *physique* as for integrity of character.

During the last three years of his stay at the Hindu College he, as a pupil of Dr Tytler, studied Newton's *Principia*. He

and Rajnarayan Basak were the first Indians to study *Principia*. His scientific and mathematical studies, though interrupted for some years, were again taken up when he was appointed, on the recommendation of Dr Tytler, a surveyor of the great Trigonometrical Survey of India, of which the Surveyor-General was the renowned mathematician Sir George Everest. Under such an eminent guide, he studied Laplace and Newton.

Sir George Everest had a very high regard for Radhanath's attainments, and strongly opposed his intention to leave the department for higher emoluments elsewhere. In a letter to the government requesting to sanction higher salary for men like Radhanath he wrote, "Of the qualification of Radhanath I cannot speak too highly; in his mathematical attainments there are few in India whether European or native that can at all compete with him, and it is my persuasion that even in Europe those attainments would rank very high". He concluded that "computers comparable to Radhanath cannot be hired in England at a price less than a guinea per diem", and that even if found, they would not agree to undertake the business on any terms that could probably be offered to them.⁴⁴ Radhanath, fortunately, did not have to leave the department. In another letter dated July 3rd, 1840, to his father requesting him to pay a visit to Dehradun Everest wrote, "for not only would it have given me the greatest pleasure to show you personally how much I honour you for having such a son as Radhanath but you would yourself have, I am sure, been infinitely gratified at witnessing the high esteem in which he is held by his superiors and equals".⁴⁵

Everest retired in 1843, while Radhanath became stationed at their Calcutta Headquarters in 1850-51 as the chief computer. During 1845-50 the heights of 79 Himalayan peaks were observed. Of these 31 had local names, and these were accepted by the Survey department. The rest were designated by

numerals, as nos. 1, 2, 3. While comparing and computing the results of their observations Radhanath discovered that peak no. 15 measured 29,002 ft. and was the highest peak on earth. He immediately rushed to Sir Andrew Waugh, the successor of Everest, and informed him of the result of his computation. Waugh proposed that the said peak be named after Sir George Everest, his predecessor. On this point the renowned British journal *Nature* published an article captioned "Mount Everest: The story of a Long Controversy" by S. G. Barard in its issue for November 10, 1904; the fact of Radhanath's computation was explicitly stated in the following words: "About 1852 the chief computer of the office at Calcutta informed Sir Andrew Waugh that a peak designated XV had been found to be higher than any other hitherto measured in the world. This peak was discovered by the computers to have been observed from six different stations; on no occasion had the observer suspected that he was viewing through the telescope the highest point on earth".⁴⁶ Jealousies of lesser talents desperately sought to deprive Radhanath of his credit; to this we are coming later.

Towards the end of 1852, he concurrently became the Superintendent of Government Observatory in Calcutta. In 1851 he published his mathematical work *Auxiliary Tables*, which much facilitated the computing work of the Survey department. An enlarged edition of the same was brought out seventeen years after his death on governmental initiative in 1887. Later, Radhanath, was elected a corresponding member of the Society of Natural History of Bavaria.

In 1851, was published the *Manual of Surveying*, the first ever Indian publication on surveying, compiled by Capt. R. Smyth and Col. H. L. Thuillier, the Deputy Surveyor-General. But the entire technical and scientific portion of the work was written by Radhanath, which fact was fully acknowledged in the Introduction in the following words:

"In parts III and V, the compilers have been very largely

assisted by Babu Radhanath Sikdar, the distinguished head of the computing department of the great Trigonometrical Survey of India, a gentleman whose acquaintance with the... forms and mode of procedure adopted on the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, and great acquirements and knowledge of scientific subjects generally, render his aid particularly valuable. The Chapters 15 and 17 up to 21 inclusive, and 26 of part III and the whole of part V, are entirely his own, and it would be difficult for the compilers to express with sufficient force, the obligations they thus feel under to him, not only for the portion of the work which they desire thus particularly to acknowledge but for the advice so generally afforded on all subjects connected with his own department".

The second edition, published in 1855, contained the acknowledgment unexpurgated. A third edition was issued in 1875 five years after Radhanath's death but strangely enough, the aforesaid acknowledgment portion was deleted in its entirety. This aroused strong indignation of Radhanath's European admirers and loud criticisms were made by leading English journals and newspapers like the *Englishman*, *Pioneer*, *Friend of India*, *Statesman*, etc., The then Deputy Surveyor-General, Lt. Col. John Macdonald, in an impassioned article said, "...in the third edition the direction of the wind is shown by the omission in the preface of proper and respectful acknowledgment to the best of the original authors of the compilation, and the debt due to Radhanath Sikdar is wholly unacknowledged. Penance must be performed for this cowardly sin and robbery of the dead. Already this dishonesty of purpose has been four times noticed in the public journals, and it is certain that castigation will be inflicted at regular intervals as it is on habitual criminals, until the cause is removed, this edition called in, and a proper, honest acknowledgment made for the personal appropriation of the best chapters in the book,

—we mean those devoted to a description and practical application of the working of the “Ray Trace System” invented by Everest, and practically explained by the Hindoo gentleman we have mentioned”. “We feel quite certain that we shall command the sympathy of every highly educated native in India for our determination to rescue the name of one of the greatest mathematicians who has adorned the honourable list of those who measured and computed the great Indian arc, from neglect by those who owe so much to his memory”.

But nothing came out of the agitation, only that Lt. Col. Macdonald was demoted and suspended from departmental duty for a period of three months.⁴⁷

Mention has already been made that Radhanath and Peary Chand Mitra jointly founded and edited the *Māsik Patrika*, intended for women. Radhanath, noted for his fondness of Greek and Latin literatures, contributed in it essays and stories on subjects gleaned from Plutarch, Xenophon and other writers.

Gentle and modest, Radhanath commanded respect for his remarkable personal integrity, sense of self-respect and independence of character. The following description in his own words of his quarrel with Magistrate Vansittart of Dehradun in 1843 will speak for itself. The coolies of the Survey Department were frequently forced by the magistrate's men to do gratis service for him. On one such occasion Radhanath detained the goods of the magistrate. Thereupon the latter, accompanied by a military officer, came to Radhanath's office. Then “one of these gentlemen called out ‘Who has detained my property? I answered: ‘It has been detained by my orders’. He continued, ‘What business had you to detain my property?’ I replied: ‘Just as much as you had in pressing and maltreating my people to convey your baggage; and I intend to take legal measures’. He rejoined, ‘I certainly gave orders to my people to procure coolies, but not to press private servants; and I shall discharge the whole set of my burkundazes’. He now

beckoned to Mr Keelan (an officer of the Survey Department) and asked him to persuade me to give up the property. Mr Keelan replied, 'But what security shall we have against the recurrence of the proceeding complained of?' I then observed, 'There is no regulation authorising the forcible seizure and employment of anybody'. Upon which the gentleman in question in a loud and authoritative tone said: 'Do you know who I am?' At this moment, the other gentleman, who had remained silent, sprang forward and questioned me, 'Who the devil are you?' I answered, 'A man, and so are you'.⁴⁸

IX

Some interesting facts emerge from the sketches drawn above. Of the seven prominent members of the intellectual elite, three, in addition to other occupations, were engaged in profitable trade, one was awarded a zemindary, one embraced Christianity, while the other two held substantive appointments under the Government. Like them, many other intellectuals such as Chandrasekhar Dev, Sibchandra Deb, Gobinda-chandra Bysack, Madhabchandra Mullick, etc., who, though equally brilliant, did not play as prominent a part in public affairs as the seven discussed, were high-ranking state officials. They were helped to their respective positions by English education.

English education, thus, was made to serve two purposes. On the one hand, pursued as an end in itself, it opened a new area of value formation, where, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, European enlightenment was the dominant formative influence. On the other hand, it pointed out to a successful professional career and to material prosperity.

Both of these ends, i.e. value-formation and promise of prosperity, drew the elite closer to the Establishment, and, logically, away from the soil of their birth. The admission and advocacy of British supremacy became a pragmatic necessity. As such,

the new elite came to occupy a position which psychologically was amorphous and socio-politically ambivalent and uncertain. They were of the soil, and yet not of it; intellectually they sought to be of the West, but yet could never be of it.

In any case, one true element of Anglophilism can be traced to the very palpable promise of pecuniary gain and a prestigious status *vis-a-vis* the Establishment that the new economic and state structure held out.

NOTES

1. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
2. Bradley-Birt (ed.), *Poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio*,—a forgotten Anglo-Indian poet, O.U.P., 1923.
3. Thomas Edwards, *Henry Derozio, the Eurasian Poet*, Calcutta, 1884, p. 220.
4. Quoted by Thomas Edwards, *op. cit.*, and also by Shivnath Sastri in *Rāmtanu Lahiri O Tatkālīn Banga Samāj* (in Bengali), p. 106.
5. Dated the 26th April, 1831.
6. Mentioned by Pearychand Mitra in "Tarachand's biographical sketch" in *Indian Review* in its issue for March, 1840; quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-149.
7. Ramgopal's letter to Govindchandra Basak, *The Calcutta Review*, January 11; quoted by B. B. Majumdar, p. 110, and by J. C. Bagal, p. 152.
8. *The Bengal Harakarn*, February 13, 1843; quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108.
9. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
10. *The Friend of India*, February 16, 1843; quoted by J. C. Bagal, p. 158.
11. B. B. Majumdar, p. 107; J. C. Bagal, p. 155.
12. Quoted by Harihar Das in his treatise "*The Rev. Krishna Mohan Bajerjee, D. L., C.J.E.*", *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. 37, January-June, 1929, p. 135.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
14. Alexander Duff, *India and India Missions*, 1849, Appendix, p. 651.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 679-680.
16. Quoted by Harihar Das, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
17. Harihar Das, *op. cit.*, Vol. 38, Part I, p. 51.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
19. *Ibid.*
20. S. N. Banerjee, *A Nation in Making*, Calcutta, 1963 (reset and reprinted), pp. 56-57.
21. Quoted by Harihar Das, *op. cit.*, Vol. 38, Part II, p. 149.
22. From the biographical sketch by Amrita Lal Basu in *Public Speeches of Ram Gopal Ghosh*, 1885.
23. *Bengal Harakarn*, April, 24, 1843; B. B. Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 85.
24. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
25. Peary Chand Mitra, *A Biographical Sketch of David Hare*, 1877, Chapter I; Bengali translation, 1964, p. 36.
26. Rajnarayan Bose, *Atmcharit* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 4th edition, 1961, p. 76.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
29. *Bengal Harakarn*, March 2 and 3, 1843; partly quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63.
30. Rajnarayan Bose, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.
31. B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
32. Shivnath Sastri, *Rāmtanu Lahiri O Tatkālīn Banga Samāj*; p. 130-131.
33. Bepin Behari Gupta, *Purāṇ Prasanga*; reminiscences of Umesh Chandra Dutt, Calcutta, 1966, p. 159.

34. January 21, 1858; J. C. Bagal, p. 164; B. B. Majumdar, p. 56.
35. J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-169.
36. P. C. Mitra, *op. cit.*, Chapter I; p. 36.
37. *The Calcutta Courier* (supplement), April 5, 1834; J. C. Bagal, p. 176.
38. Quoted by *India Gazette*, March 29 and February 1, 1833; B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
39. *Ibid.*, April, 1833.
40. P. C. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
41. J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
42. *The Calcutta Monthly Journal*, 1835; J. C. Bagal, p. 180-181; The speech reported in indirect form has been made direct.
43. P. C. Mitra, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
44. Quoted from the *Hills* by the *Hindoo Patriot* for April, 18, 1864; J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 195-196.
45. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
46. Quoted by J. C. Bagal, p. 202. This has been corroborated by Col. Kenneth Mason, an Oxford geologist of renown. In 1928 Mason delivered an interesting lecture at Simla on "Himalayan Romances", published subsequently in the *Englishman* in its issue for November 10, 1928. In course of the lecture he touched upon the subject of nomenclature of Mount Everest and said, "It was during the computations of the north-eastern observations that a babu rushed on one morning in 1852 into the room of Sir Andrew Waugh, the successor of Sir George Everest and exclaimed, 'Sir, I have discovered the highest mountain on the earth'. He had been working out the observations taken to the distant hills. It was Sir Andrew Waugh who proposed the name Mountain Everest, and no local name has ever been found for it (on) either the Tibetan or the Nepalese side". (J. C. Bagal, p. 204.)
47. For relevant information on this subject see J. C. Bagal, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-218.
48. Reports concerning this case were published in the *Bengal Spectator* for september 1, 9 and 13, 1843; B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

CHAPTER VI

AKSHAY KUMAR DUTT (1820-1886)

THE QUIET INTELLECTUAL

Haraprasad Sastri, the great Indologist, in his essay on *Bengali Literature of the Present Century*, has written that *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, under the editorship of Akshay Kumar Dutt "was at that time the missionary of European culture in the whole of Bengal. Akshay Kumar Dutt was the first writer to introduce western outlook and mentality among Bengali youths. He is the moral preceptor of New Bengal".¹ This statement, however, errs in point of both factual correctness and exaggeration, since western ideas began to percolate long before his appearance in the intellectual scene through the writings of Rammohan Roy and through the journals of the Hindu College elite. Yet, it conveys a basic truth. Akshay Kumar edited the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* for a long spell of twelve years, from 1843 to 1855, during which period the journal exercised redoubtable influence over educated youths eager to find a way out of orthodoxy and convention. Remarkably alert about the intellectual growth of Europe and the speculative traditions of his own country, as also about the current needs of the time, he, like all other prominent contemporaries, found in rationalism the surest guide to truth and social justice, and by expounding its tenets contributed substantially to Bengal's intellectual heritage.

By adopting rationalism Akshay Kumar, however, was only furthering the process set in motion by Rammohan to whom he paid glowing tributes. In the introduction to his outstanding work *Bhāratbarshiya Upāsak Sampradāy* (Indian Religious Sects) he declared that Rammohan's "clarion call in favour of science is still ringing in our ears". But he himself went a few bold steps forward. For, religiosity which constituted an essential part

of Rammohan's intellectual make-up, formed absolutely no part of his own. He was fully prepared to go the full length rationalism led him to.

As such, the first thing that strikes an investigator is the absence of any idea of providence in his mature writings and in his scheme and analysis of the universe. He believed that the universe, of which the other name is Nature, was the great original scripture;² that careful observation and investigation could help man discover the laws that regulate Nature's life. Nature reveals and will ever continue to reveal the inner harmony that underlies all her processes. It is not a closed book, nor will ever be; since all the relations of all the objects of nature will perhaps never be disclosed to human consciousness. This being the nature of truth, Akshay Kumar considered knowledge to form a spectral continuum, both increased in volume and enriched by generations of enquirers. It will go on for eternity to come. In a remarkable speech³ he declared:

"Universal Nature is our scripture. Pure rationalism is our preceptor. Whatever truth has been discovered by Bhaskara and Aryabhatta, Newton and Laplace, forms part of our scripture. Whatever logical theories have been propounded by Gautama and Kanada, Bacon and Comte, are also our scripture. Whatever has been disclosed by... Moses and Mohammed, Jesus and Chaitanya, about man's spiritual good, is also included in our Brāhma faith".

And again: "This is not our contention that the tenets of our Brāhma faith have been determined once and for all time, and that there is nothing more to add to these. (On the contrary) whatever has been accepted before and will be decided upon by subsequent generations, will also be included in our Brāhma faith. Even if after a thousand years a new theory of religion is invented, that will also be assimilated in our faith".

This speech exhibits a laudable open-mindedness and an

independence of spirit which many of the Brāhma leaders including Debendranath Tagore were not catholic enough to subscribe to. A slender thread of eclecticism may be noticed here, but, by and large, this speech is a bold recognition of the indivisible character of human knowledge. It also demonstrated Akshay Kumar's vast intellectual superiority. Debendranath Tagore, although he had contributed much towards rational interpretation of the sastras, and even got a few scholars trained at Benares, was not openminded enough to incorporate in his own world-view the cosmopolitan and radical opinions of Akshay Kumar. The former at times felt deeply concerned at the outspokenness of the latter, who all through his association with the Brāhma Samāj, campaigned for setting their faith on a rationalistic and scientific footing. He was against the use of flowers, sandal wood or any other variety of offerings in worship; and was instrumental in conducting formal prayers in Bengali instead of in Sanskrit. Not only that, the staunch and uncompromising rationalist that he was, he found no utility for worship at all. Once, it is said, he established the nullity of worship in the form of a mathematical equation,⁴ which ran thus:

labour=(yields) fruit

worship + labour=(also yield) fruit

∴ worship=zero (yields nothing)

To the orthodox Brāhma leaders the Vedas were the word of God and therefore infallible. This view was strongly repudiated by Akshay Kumar, who in an intellectual disputation converted Debendranath Tagore to his own views. Accordingly, in 1850, at the annual assembly of the Brāhma Samāj Akshay Kumar's views were officially propagated that the Vedas were not the word of God, that the Universal Nature was the real word, the real scripture.⁵ It would thus be evident that though a voracious reader of books on religion, he attached little or no importance to religion *qua* religion; and that though connected

with the Brāhma Samāj, his Brāhmaism differed radically from that professed by others. He emphasized the critical, non-conformist and purely intellectual tradition of the Brāhma movement, and in his capacity as a dispassionate rationalist, he strived to enrich the same.

Philosophical enquiry as to the nature and origin of the universe led him to the atomist philosophers of the pre-Socratic Greece, in particular to Democretus. He upheld the great Greek philosopher's belief that the universe could be analysed by purely mechanical processes, without believing in a primary supra-sensory entity, or intelligent cause working through it with a particular end in view, or more simply, without the concept of God. Following the atomist philosophers he concluded that all phenomena are composed of atoms that are eternal and, at the same time, uncaused. The field of cognition is, therefore, strictly limited by the world of phenomena. Hence, for him human knowledge was limited by sensory perceptions, and it was nothing but cognitive summation of the data provided by the senses. He anticipated the verdict of the atheistic and scientific century that there is clearly no beyond, and that the idea of a providence is automatically ruled out.

Though in his writings, particularly early writings, he mentioned the word 'God', he did not give it the same connotation commonly attached to it. His God was the laws that regulated phenomena. One interesting fact may here be noted. In those days it was customary, while writing a letter, to insert the name of God at the top in some form or other. Akshay Kumar, since the cementation of his philosophical views, gave up this practice, and, instead, used to inscribe at the top the word 'Viswabij' or the universal seed, which for him meant the atom, eternal and uncaused.⁶ The same story has been corroborated by Justice Sarada Charan Mitra, the executor of his will, in a different context. In his reminiscences⁷ of Akshay Kumar, Mitra has recorded that a few months

before his death Akshay Kumar sent him a draft copy of his will written in Bengali. Mitra made some corrections in order to make it legally flawless and asked one of his clerks to make a fair copy of the same. The copyist inserted the word 'Sri Sri Hari', i.e. God, as was usually done in respect of wills made in Bengali. On receipt of the fresh copy Akshay Kumar sent for Mitra and asked him if it was obligatory for him to write the name of God. Mitra explained that that was the general practice, whereupon he asked, "Would it be harmful if I inscribe the word Viswabij?" Mitra assured him that it really did not matter, that he might or might not write anything at all. He steadfastly held and delighted intellectually to hold such views as would offend the susceptibility of the believer.

Consequent upon this philosophical standpoint, Akshay Kumar's religious views underwent a revolutionary change. For him religion signified conformity to the laws of Nature. He wrote: "Such actions alone are desirable as conform to the general laws by which the ruler of the universe is governing it. Religion consists in performing these as expression of our love for it". For obvious reasons and in the light of the above analysis we have to underscore the phrase "the ruler of the universe". It was a firm conviction with him that harmonization of the human body, intelligence, morality, social organization, etc., with the natural laws constituted religion. He sought to get this view accepted by the Brāhma Samāj. Contemporary Brāhma opinion of him may be summed up in these words: "He abolished the supremacy of the Vedas and propagated that Nature was the great book of religion, and, by incorporating this view within the tenets of the Brāhma Samāj, he preached Brāhmaism as the natural religion. The fundamental basis of his religion was intellect and rationality. By making rationality the sole denominator he preached Brāhmaism as a rigorous form of Buddhism".⁸ For these reasons, Rajanrayan Bose called him "an agnostic", while to Debendranath Tagore

he was frankly 'an atheist.' That he was a non-conformist, every inch of it, can never be over-stressed. He was indeed a non-conformist among non-conformists; hence his ultimate breach with the Brāhma Samāj. He delighted much in doing exactly the opposite of what others in general were in the habit of doing. One of his biographers has recorded that while most of his contemporaries started their work or journey on auspicious days, he calculatedly started his on what the superstitious people called inauspicious days; and that while they went *en masse* to the Ganges to dip in the holy water on ceremonial occasions, he deliberately chose to go to the neglected pond to have his bath there.⁸ Never did he lose faith either in himself or in his rationalism.

II

Akshay Kumar Dutt's philosophical frame-work was provided by the atomists, as we have discussed in the previous section. In his sociological thinking can be traced the influence of great many western thinkers beginning from Aristotle down to Comte. In the process he also assimilated in it dominant features of Indian social ethics.

He started with Aristotle by maintaining that society originated from men's instinctual drives, and not from any contractual arrangements; and then gradually proceeded to propound the organismic theory of society then current in Europe. Citing the very handy example of the bees he argued:

"It is the instinct of the bees to live and work together. If the bees are isolated from one another and placed, individually, in separate and big flower gardens and thus debarred from leading a community life, they may each gather plenty of honey, but they can never derive the same pleasure and happiness that result from a feeling of togetherness and from instinctual co-operative efforts; nor can they have the same efficiency in work. As such, each of them would undoubtedly

be compelled to live in unhappiness. The same is true of men.... To live together in organized rural and urban communities should also be the ideal for men; they should never dissociate themselves from the company of other men or from society".

Certain faculties are congenital with men, such as, love, affection, pity, etc., for the blossoming and fulfilment of which the instinct of gregariousness is also born with them. This instinct of gregarious interdependence, Akshay Kumar maintained, led to maximum happiness that could be desired under given conditions. In another passage he said:

"Co-operative inter-dependence of men is the source of immense happiness. All tangible means of happiness such as house-building, cultivation of crops, boat-construction, weaving of cloth, etc., issue from men's collective efforts. These deeds could never have been performed by one single individual. Besides this, because of our gregarious living many of our mental desires get satisfied, and thus contribute to endless happiness.... He who has endowed us with this instinct of happiness, without any doubt, also desires that we live in organized communities. Because of the active presence of this instinct men naturally crave the company of others".

The Benthamite complexion of these sentences is too palpable. He, like his contemporaries, seems to have uncritically accepted Bentham's views; for, he also subscribed to this belief that self-interest, to gain money and maximum material comfort, was the strongest psychic drive in men. As such, men could hardly be asked to give up their greed for material satisfaction. Satisfaction, on the other hand, could be gained through a combination of efforts, which held out promises of co-ordination if mankind lived an organized life. The end of life, again, was to seek happiness and avoid pain; this could well be achieved if each and every individual agreed to pursue a policy of enlightened selfishness.

There are obvious gaps in the thread of this argument. But in fairness to Akshay Kumar it must be added that he also took altruism to be an equally strong psychological motive in men. Thus, the idea of co-existence in the mind of every individual of the motives of selfishness and altruism supplied the base on which he constructed the organismic theory of society. He compared the organization of human society to the mechanism of a watch. The limbs of a watch are each distinct in point of both construction-mechanism and function; yet they are closely related to each other and synchronize the mechanism of the whole. Similarly, each man possesses a distinct individuality of his own, but yet forms an integral part of the social mechanism. The collective organism—that is, the society, has to be so organized and functions distributed in such a way that they further the collective instincts in the very process of their satisfying individual self-interests, and thus lead to maximal individual and collective happiness.

In this analysis he assimilated the principles of Indian social ethics which enjoined upon men certain obligations, which they as members of society were bound to fulfil. These are: that one should preserve one's health, educate oneself and one's children, and promote the interests of others in such a way as to enhance the totality of the society's happiness and progress. These obligations were to act as cementing agencies in his organismic view of society.

With this theory at the back of his mind, he found an immediate opportunity to probe into the poverty of the masses of people as it existed in rural Bengal. In his view, "The existence of poverty of the masses is detrimental to the interest of the whole society. If no attempt was made to alleviate the misery of the poor, the number of dull and inefficient men would increase, drunkenness would prevail to a large extent, and the number of ignorant men would also multiply. These men would certainly not benefit the society; they would rather be extremely

harmful to it. They would become thieves and robbers and thus bring about insecurity of property. They would not know anything about the laws of health, and even if they knew, would not be able to maintain them because of their poverty. So these poor and ignorant people would become unhealthy and diseased. If the poor break the physical laws and in consequence suffer from contagious diseases, their rich and prosperous neighbours would not remain unaffected. The epidemic would fall equally upon the rich and (the) poor, educated and ignorant, gentle and rude... it is the interest of everyone to promote the interest of others".¹⁰

Moreover, the existence of chronic poverty feeds the criminal propensities of men, and the vices and crimes committed by them seriously distort the society's organismic character. So, if the material, intellectual as well as moral well-being of the organism was to be secured, poverty in the first instance has got to be eradicated.

In Akshay Kumar's opinion, poverty was due to mental debility, early marriage, superstitious rites, intoxication, oppression of landlords, commercial dishonesty, and natural calamities like flood, etc. . . . Certain of these causes, he thought, could be eliminated through correctly canalising the co-operative efforts of society. Measures suggested by him on this point were: "First, education conducive to the moral and material improvement of the poor, should be imparted freely and compulsorily to all. When properly educated, the poor can effect their own moral, physical, intellectual and material improvement. Secondly, law and custom should be made favourable to the well-being and comfort of the poorer classes. Thirdly, efforts should be made to invent labour-saving machines which will enable men to produce food and clothes sufficient for the requirement of the community. If such machines are employed, every class of people will get enough

leisure, which they would utilise in satisfying their intellectual curiosity and religious instinct",¹¹

Akshay Kumar, it would be evident from an analysis of his views, was enmeshed in the tangle of his bourgeois idealism, borrowed from the West. He strongly supported Malthus's theory of population, and disfavoured marriage of those incapable of maintaining their family in reasonable comfort. He advocated the cause of the wealthy that they should not be dispossessed of their wealth, and yet wanted equitable social and economic justice administered to the poorer segment of the population. He favoured industrialization, which, he thought, would remove poverty. But this truth did not dawn to his consciousness that mere spread of education and a policy of effective industrialization cannot eradicate the people's misery unless the property-relations were also changed and the society transformed into a community of free men. He did not live to see the misery, wretchedness and exploitation that industrialization, within the capitalist mode of production, brought in its wake. Yet, by his sympathy for and advocacy of the cause of the poor, even though within limited terms of reference, he eagerly sought to rouse the elite to the reality of the national situation and the Government to its sense of duty towards those it governed.

This was, from another angle, an assertion of his intellectual involvement in the affairs of his people, as well as a declaration of his identity.

III

Intellectual preoccupations were primary concerns with Akshay Kumar, and so we do not find any record of his participation in the socio-political activities of the period, though through his writings, especially through the editorials of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, he became the spokesman of all the progressive forces that the changing constellations of the historical

process brought into being. He was one with the widow-remarriage campaign and with the one against polygamy launched by his friend Vidyasagar, and strongly advocated their cause through his journal. In an impressive editorial¹² he argued in favour of widow-remarriage, which even out-classed Vidyasagar's tract in logical invincibility and argumentative flare. He adduced nine reasons why it should be declared legal: (1) If it is not sinful for a man to re-marry after the demise of his wife, why then should it be considered sinful on the part of a woman if she, after the death of her husband, takes a second husband; such logic is incomprehensible. (2) In this country a wife has to depend completely on her husband in all matters, especially in matters financial. At the death of her husband the other members of the family take full advantage of her helplessness and mete out to her a treatment befitting a slave, the severity of which, when one ponders it, cannot but bring tears to a compassionate heart. (3) The widowhood of one is a source of pain to many. For parents who have a widowed daughter happiness does no-where exist. (4) It is absolutely unnatural that child-widows will for the rest of their lives tread the paths of virtue. If it were at all possible, then tales of disgrace and blots regarding widows would never have been heard in Bengal. (5) Foeticide is the inevitable consequence of this inhuman custom, i.e., prohibition of marriage of widows. (6) Because of *kulinism*¹³ the number of widows in Bengal are on the increase, leading invariably to endless mischiefs and evils. (7) Since marriage of widows is not permitted, many a widower in ripe old age marry girls in their early teens. That such alliances are misalliances is well-known to all. As a result, these young wives are led astray by their instincts, and thus disgrace not only themselves but their husbands also. (8) Authors of scriptures and benevolent rulers in the past had declared themselves in its favour, but unfortunately could not secure its general acceptance. Now, the abolition by law of the

sati rites has made it an imperative necessity. (9) Many deceitful persons are propagating the view that once widow-remarriage is declared permissible by law, wives would not hesitate to kill their husbands. Against this mischievous view it may be argued that if husbands with full freedom to practise polygamy refrain from killing their wives, then wives too would never be guilty of killing their husbands.

Akshay Kumar had thought long and deeply on the institution of human marriage and its evolution in India. The palpable incongruities and hindrances to happy married life and the evils that originate from illogical marital customs he examined under strict scientific scrutiny in his book *Dharmaniti*,²⁴ and pleaded for their replacement by customs based on scientific truth. He was one of the earliest to emphasize the harmfulness and undersirability of early marriage. He argued that in ancient India men married and started their family life only after the completion of their studies, which kept them engaged for 12 or 18 or 24 or even 36 years, and that the wives they got were also matured young women capable of choosing their husbands. Early marriage was not at all in vogue then. He then cited the example of contemporary Germany, where the marriageable age for men was fixed at 25 and that of women at 18. He referred also to the law of Lycurgus, to the instructions of Plato and Aristotle, and cited expert medical opinion—all strongly disfavoured early marriage. Akshay Kumar argued that from the eugenic and physiological points of view also early marriage was disastrous. But, since irrational social customs, particularly at the low ebb of moral life in India die hard, he urged the Government to interfere and raise the marriageable age for both men and women by legislative measures. Without this he found no hope for the dawn of a prospective new era in India. This invocation was made in the year 1855, when few people in this country gave their attention to this vital problem.

The scientific bent of his mind was fully conscious of the

influence that climatic conditions exerted on puberty, and stressed the need of determining the marriageable age after taking into consideration this important factor. He stated clearly that what was ideal for the cold countries could not be ideal for the tropical climate. But that the marriageable age in India had got to be raised and that the Government as the sublimated form of civil society should intervene in this matter were points which nobody could dispute. The sooner that was done, the earlier would the calamities following upon early marriage be averted.

Akshay Kumar's other observations on marriage made in the aforesaid book were both interesting and much ahead of his time. First, he favoured courtship. He wrote: "Boys and girls, before marriage, should meet each other, exchange views, probe into each other's mind and character and preferences, test each other's virtue, and thus grow into each other's life through love." Secondly, in the direction of their minds, in methods of work and in religious matters there should be complete agreement between husband and wife. Thirdly, one should not take a husband or wife from any of the branches ramified from the parental stocks, either paternal or maternal. Fourthly, one should not marry a diseased, invalidated or an imbecile person, nor a libertine. Fifthly, one should not marry before puberty, or when enfeebled by age or when nearing that stage. Sixthly, monogamy should be the ideal for all; under no circumstances should one practise polygamy. Seventhly, dissolution of marital ties should be sanctioned by both law and custom in case of cruelty or adultery committed by either partner.

These views, read in the mid-nineteenth century context, give an extraordinary ring to the ear, and confirm the intellectual integrity of the man who did never shrink from the conclusions rationalism helped him to arrive at.

IV

With problems of education Akshay Kumar was more directly concerned, since he himself served as a teacher, first of the Tattwabodhini Pathsala at Bansberia, and then as Headmaster of the Calcutta Normal School, established by Vidya-sagar. He wrote suitable text books, and portions from his various essays were also included in text books prescribed for different standards. Through these he exercised for several decades the most profound influence over young learners, thus substantiating Haraprasad Sastri's view quoted at the beginning of this chapter that he was the moral preceptor of young Bengal.

On education he laid the greatest possible stress. In his opinion education was needed not only for the moral and intellectual benefit of the people but for the amelioration of their material condition as well. He categorically demanded of the Government that there should be provision for compulsory education for all children up to the age of fifteen. Children of even the poorest strata of society should not be sent off as apprentices to any trade without first imparting to them this education.²⁶ From the strength of this assertion one is tempted to conclude that, as early as 1855, Akshay Kumar was pleading for the introduction of free and compulsory education in India, when even the most advanced countries of Europe had not as yet embarked upon the course. It was indeed a bold and courageous plea.

One pertinent question as to the availability of adequate funds for the aforesaid purpose he answered thus:

Let the Government of the land check its passion for waging unnecessary wars, and let the wealthy of the land abstain from indulging in frivolous pleasures on which they squander away money; then there would be no dearth of funds for implementing the scheme of universal education. He also at one time advocated collection of an educational cess

from people, who, he believed, would ungrudgingly pay the same, since the education of their own children was involved.

In a previous chapter we have analysed how the ascendancy of English as the medium of education was established. The Anglophiles, big and small, were all in its favour. But against this consensus of elite opinion, Akshay Kumar held out a well-reasoned out plea for the adoption of Bengali as the medium of instruction for all the stages of learning, primary, secondary and higher, through the editorials of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*. In one such editorial¹⁶ he approvingly quoted the advice of John Drinkwater Bethune, President of the Education Council, to the English-educated youths of Bengal to cultivate the vernacular. Bethune in his speech said, "The intelligence of Hindu youths is so keen that, if they do not give up cultivation of knowledge at a tender age, they would soon establish their supremacy in the world. But they should impart to their countrymen their knowledge of various subjects gained through the medium of English. This would, however, never be feasible if they do not cultivate with diligence their own mother tongue. For, it is next to impossible that millions of their countrymen would some day become well-trained in English". Akshay Kumar elaborated the view-point of Bethune and deplored the fact that neither governmental nor private enterprise was directed towards adequate cultivation of the vernacular.

He adduced further reasons in favour of the vernacular. First, knowledge gained through English was coterie knowledge, the rest of the country derived no benefit from it. Secondly, it fostered the spirit of xenophilia, with the resultant hatred of one's own culture, country and people. Thirdly, the cost of education through English was four times heavier than that conducted through the vernacular. Fourthly, in reply to the objection that there were no good text books in Bengali it might be said that the works of such masters as Bacon, Locke, Newton, Laplace and Humboldt could be translated into the native

tongue. On the whole, Akshay Kumar found no substantial ground why a policy of imparting education up to the highest level through Bengali should be dismissed as impractical; on the contrary, he urged the Government to adopt and implement such programmes with earnestness. For, as it was the bounden duty of the Government to preserve peace within the country, so was it their duty to impart education suitable to promote the material, physical and mental well-being of the people.

But it was in the drawing up of a scheme of education, starting from the nursery to the higher stages, that his imaginative ingenuity and love of originality were most strikingly manifest. In his work *Dharmaniti*, which is resplendent with brilliant ideas, he has elaborated his scheme. According to his view children were to be sent to school at the very tender age of two. "These schools should be of such a type as to make the children believe them to be play-grounds. Here by practical demonstrations the children are to be taught cleanliness and the other elementary laws of health. They are to learn here the plan of living and acting in co-operation with others. Various natural and manufactured articles are to be brought before them and explained. Their latent good qualities are to be worked by the conversation and example of the teacher. If any child manifests in his behaviour any kind of baseness, he or she should not go unpunished. But the punishment is not to be corporal in character and must not be awarded by the teacher alone. In case of any transgression of duty on the part of any child, the teacher is to convene a panchayat of all the children and he himself is to act as the president or judge. If the offender is censured by such a body, it will not only make him ashamed of his own conduct, but also will set a salutary example before others. In this type of school object lessons and arithmetic are to be given greater importance than mere spelling and other purely mechanical things. The teachers of this type of schools are first to learn the science of teaching in Normal Schools and

then to engage themselves in shaping and moulding the character of the future citizens”.

“The next type of schools are meant for children from the age of six or seven to fourteen or fifteen. The school compound should contain shady trees, bowers, and various plants, amidst which some seats are to be provided. In the bye-paths of the groves and bowers, statues of men like Socrates, Bacon, Newton, Franklin, Pascal, Washington, Aryabhatta, Bhaskaracharya, Rammohan and others should be placed. Mottos containing truths of physical science, ethics and religion should be inscribed on wooden slabs and placed at short distance from one another. In the secondary stage lessons on Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Geography, History, Languages and literature are to be imparted. Pictures, drawings, and practical demonstrations are to form the chief means for conveying education”. Text-books on History should not glorify the life and careers of despots and war-maniacs and enemies of humanity, such as Caesar, Alexander and Napoleon Bonaparte. In his opinion “character of such conquerors are to be depicted in such a way as to create an aversion to war, enviousness and greediness in the minds of the readers”. Moreover, the physical training of children should never be neglected; for, he said, in the past many glorious civilizations had disappeared from the face of the earth for want of physical prowess of their builders.

“In the third type of schools only the selected few should be admitted and they should continue their studies up to the twentieth or twenty-second years of age. For the majority of the students” there should be provision for “technical and vocational education, instead of theoretical university education. . . .

“Government should establish and maintain schools of technology as well as of agriculture. In the former engineering, ship-building and the process of manufacturing instruments should be taught”.¹⁷

He also stressed the need of establishing public libraries and

reading rooms in towns and villages. It was impossible, he maintained, for any one individual to possess all the essential books he required. Hence, public libraries and reading rooms would satisfy a much-felt want. Interested persons would go there and derive celestial pleasure from reading books dear to their hearts.

Akshay Kumar thus gave to his scheme of education the elaborate touches of an adroit planner, with his gaze always fixed at his ideal of collective weal. It is not unlikely that his germinal ideas might have influenced some idealist thinkers and planners of education in Bengal.

V

To Akshay Kumar, a supporter of the organismic theory of society, government reflected the organized civil life of the people, or simply that it was the administrative representative of the people. As such, it had obvious obligations to the people both as individuals and as the collective entity called society. Its sphere of activity included and should include all the branches of human exertions and all the aspects of life in society, the motto being maximum good to individuals, as individuals and also as forming one community.

Judged from this criterion, the British administration in India presented to him a lamentable picture. In a severe indictment on the Government he said that it had not only failed to ameliorate the material and moral condition of the people, it had even failed to infuse in their minds a feeling of security of life and property. On the other hand, consequent upon misgovernment, the number of criminals were increasing alarmingly, and the peasants were sinking into the lowest depths of degradation and wretchedness. In a tone of angry impeachment he said that, under their present rulers, the people had greatly "suffered in health, longevity, strength and religion."¹⁸

It has been pointed out earlier how he conducted the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* to serve also as a mirror to the deplorable plight, wretchedness and despondency of the peasantry of Bengal. He could, as it were, hear their cries. His attacks were, in particular, directed against the native landlords and the foreign indigo-planters, whom he considered to be the two great enemies of the Bengal peasants. In two brilliant and forceful articles¹⁹ he exposed the severity of exploitation and the inhuman extent of tortures perpetrated on them by the landlords; and in another,²⁰ equally argumentative and vehement, he exposed the barbarous cruelty and oppression committed by the indigo-planters. He wrote, "It is really very difficult to distinguish between the multifarious acts of violence constantly being done by both the landlords and the indigo-planters; for, the suffering caused by their violence are without precedent and beyond description". At another place he pointed out that the atrocities of the latter surpassed those of even the most powerful landlords. The indigo-planters had one freak of law in their favour that they could not be tried and brought to book by any subordinate law-court existing in the mofussil area, because they were Europeans. Thus emboldened, they could well play the role of little Tamerlaines, terrorizing, looting, beating, burning and killing at will, if the peasants did not accept their terms. Describing this in detail, Akshay Kumar commented: "The authorities in England, in order to protect the vanity of a few members of their own race, did not step forward to aid millions of their subjects".

He concluded the article with this lamentation: "It is beyond anybody's conception when or how this immeasurable suffering is going to be ended. There is oppression of the landlords, tortures of the indigo-planters, exactions of the officials, and, over and above, misgovernment and injustice of the government itself. Can they have any residue of their strength left, who are constant preys to such co-ordinated violence? They are poor

in wealth, poor in knowledge, poor in religion, and even poor in strength and vigour. Is there any way to remedy this desperate and terrible situation? There exists no unity among the people; nor is there any feeling of oneness among the upper and lower classes of our society. Those who are desirous of ending the misery lack strength and power; those who have power have no will. . . . No one doubts that the Government could greatly ameliorate their present condition if they so desired. . . . But, alas, they do not move even at the sight of peasants writhing under brutal tortures and oppression. Hence, they are hopelessly failing in their obligations, for which they would surely be guilty in the eyes of God".²¹

Akshay Kumar lived long enough to see further deterioration of the condition of the poorer segment of the population, particularly the peasantry. Grieved much, he reiterated his accusations and appeals to the Government to redress the misery of the people. He appealed to their sense of moral obligation towards the people of India, to the British people's philanthropy and pity to look into the "un-British" rule in India which had rendered Indians even incapable of representing their own pitiable condition. He concluded by exclaiming, "Goethe died with the words 'light, more light', we too in the dying condition are crying, England, pity, more pity".²²

The indictment voiced by Akshay Kumar points out to a certain erosion in the existing Indo-British relations. Although he did not foresee definite rupture of Indo-British ties, yet the buoyant advocacy of a Rammohan or a Ram Gopal Ghosh for British supremacy was also not repeated. Nor did he believe in the civilizing role of the conquerors. On the contrary, his writings were a subdued indication of the anger that was brewing within, and which was, in less than two more decades to come, to erupt into strong currents of nationalism.

VI

Modest and without a grain of vanity but firm in his beliefs, Akshay Kumar was a man of wonderful and versatile intellectual interests. In addition to subjects like Religion, Philosophy, Ethics, History, Political Science and general literature, he took a keen interest in Geography, Physical Geography, Geology, Astronomy, Physics, Botany, Zoology, Physiology,²³ etc. It is not at all to be supposed that his interests were merely those of a rover, of a dilettante, moving in a leisurely fashion from subject to subject with genuine love for none. His were the interests of a master, of a connoisseur, whose thoroughness in those subjects evoked the wonder of many. He wrote exceedingly well on these subjects and was perhaps the first Bengali writer to write about scientific matters with diagrams and illustrations in the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*.²⁴

Justice Sarada Charan Mitra, to whom reference has already been made, was asked by Akshay Kumar a few months before his death to make a catalogue of his books and to keep them with him after his death for twenty years so that these could be of use to scholars. In his personal reminiscences he has recorded, "while preparing the catalogue I was astounded to look into the pages of a good number of books selected at random. He had read all the books or had them read to him. There were marginal notes at many places in the penny cyclopaedia. There were many books on the mathematical sciences; he had read even calculus, and there were comments on fluxion too. Astronomy, archaeology, geography, botany, physiology, linguistics—there were books on all these subjects, nay on almost all the branches of science. He had read all the books, for the margins contained comments in his own handwriting".²⁵

The last years of his life were spent in a small house at Bally, near Calcutta, where he lived alone looked after by an attendant-friend. Surrounding the house there grew up a

graden, known to contemporaries as the 'little Botanic Garden', which contained trees and plants and creepers of innumerable variety indented from different regions of India and even from abroad. It had also a small orchid house. Sarada Charan Mitra, who was a frequent visitor there, has testified to Akshay Kumar's loving interest in the trees and plants which were the "inmates" of his ashram-like house. Many of these had their botanical names affixed on them. Akshay Kumar observed and studied the mystery of plant life and vegetation with the help of a microscope. He was so earnest about his new love that he wanted his friends and visitors to get interested in his inmates on whose life he would give them instructive lectures. He also had a tiny chemical laboratory inside.²⁶

For interior decoration he used petrified animal figures, dead and dried up sea snails, conch-shells and similar other items. His bedroom walls were beautified with portraits of Newton and Darwin, drawings of the position of stars and planets in the sky, and pictures of animal and human skeletons.²⁷ Sarada Charan, who himself was taken for a man of considerable erudition, was stupefied at the deep and penetrating studies made by Akshay Kumar on various subjects enumerated above. In his essay, from which we have already quoted several times, he has also mentioned that about two months before his death Akshay Kumar ordered for some geological specimens from England which, unfortunately, reached Calcutta only after his demise.²⁸ But this absorbing passion for scientific investigation could exhaust neither him nor his powers. For, while these experiments and investigations were being carried out, he yet found time to write two stupendous volumes in Bengali on the religious sects of India (*Bhāratbarshiya Upāsak Sampradāy*), of which the second volume was dictated by him. At that time, greatly reduced in physique and bodily powers because of chronic ailments, he could not himself write. But yet, says Mitra, the glow of intellection could never be missed.

Incapable of giving concrete shape to his thoughts, yet he remained deeply immersed in thought. The him Akshay Kumar appeared to be an "extraordinary man".²⁹

In the evolution of the Bengali prose-style also this extraordinary man occupies a position of distinction. Communication of scientific truth asked for an adequate prose-style, pliant and civilized enough to march in natural grandeur and with words newly coined or borrowed from English. Language must be a mirror to the thought it seeks to convey. Akshay Kumar devoted much attention and care to the creation of such a vehicle. Contrasted with present-day Bengali prose-style his style appears to be a wee bit sombre and over-loaded, but yet it has a rigid masculine structure and moves with a rhythmic pomp of its own. Moreover, it truly reflected the depth of the author's intellection. The text-books, particularly those on geography, which he wrote as a youthful teacher, showed early promise of stylistic flexibility and rhythm, and were, much later in the century, highly praised by Rabindra Nath Tagore. Tagore wrote that Akshay Kumar's early writings, before the advent of Vidyasagar, could successfully protect themselves from the coarse sophistry and vulgarity of the countryside.³⁰ For some decades to come his style provided a suitable ideal for writers of reflective essays; and in the works of many prose-writers, both contemporary and of a later generation, his direct influence may easily be traced.

To end: this impeccable and unassuming savant of science, who loved and lived a quiet life, was indeed a veritable intellectual giant, and could establish the salutary example that Bengali intellectuals also were capable of taking a measure of the world of learning. Born of a moment of flux and tension, he was yet rooted to the soil, and never lost himself in the clumsy noise of Anglophilism. And by his advocacy of the cause of the afflicted peasantry of Bengal, of the vernacular as the only correct medium of education, as also by his endeavours to

propagate the truth of science and life through Bengali, he gave his society a share of his own enlightenment and thus enriched and revitalised it.

NOTES

1. Quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*, Calcutta, 1967, p. 304.
2. *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Falgun, Saka 1773.
3. *Ibid.*, Vaisaka, Saka, 1777.
4. Nakurchandra Biswas, *Akshay Charit* (in Bengali), p. 39, foot-note; quoted by Sourendramohan Gangopadhyay, in his *Bāṅglār Rāshtrachintā* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1968, p. 59.
5. Rajnarayan Bose, *Atmācharit*, Calcutta, p. 42 (4th ed., 1961).
6. From Satyendranath Dutt's introduction to Akshay Kumar Dutt's book *Charupath*, Part III, 1924 edition; quoted by Benoy Ghosh, in *Sāmayik Patre Bāṅglār Samāj-Chitra* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1963, Vol. 2, pp. 639-644.
7. *Bangadarsan*, Bhadra, 1312, B.S.; quoted by Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 657-663.
8. Quoted by Sourendranath Gangopadhyay, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
9. Mahendranath Roy, *Life story of Babu Akshay Kumar Dutt* (in Bengali), p. 306, quoted by Gangopadhyay, p. 80.
10. *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, Saka 1776, no. 140; translated and quoted by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
11. *Ibid.*, Saka 1776, Paus, B. B. Majumdar, p. 74.
12. *Ibid.*, Saka 1776, No. 140, Chaitra.
13. A system by which a group of Brahmins usurped unto themselves the highest dignity in respect of ancestry and social status, etc. Daughters born to Kulin Brahmins could marry into only a Kulin family; as such, many of them remained unmarried throughout life.
14. Chapter V; see also B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.
15. *Dharmamiti*, Chapter VII-VIII; B. B. Majumdar, p. 70.
16. Saka 1771, Baishak, No. 69; Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-418.
17. Summarized and translated by B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
18. *Bhāratbarshiya Upāsak Sampradāy*, Vol. II, Introduction; B. B. Majumdar, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
19. Saka 1772, nos. 81 and 84, Baishak and Srabana; Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-117, and 117-125.
20. Saka 1772, no. 88, Agrahayana, Benoy Ghosh, pp. 125-132.
21. Benoy Ghosh, pp. 131-132.
22. *Bhāratbarshiya Upāsak Sampradāy*, Vol. II, Introduction; B. B. Majumdar, p. 73.
23. Satyendra Nath Dutt's introduction to *Charupath*; Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 643.
24. See Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 and 659 for some of the illustrations published in the journal.
25. Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 663.
26. Satyendra Nath Dutt's introduction, Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 644.
27. Sarada Charan Mitra, Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 660.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 663.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 660.
30. Quoted by Satyendra Nath Dutt, see Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 643.

CHAPTER VII

ISWARCHANDRA VIDYASAGAR

QUEST FOR HUMANITY

Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) was brought to Calcutta in 1829 by his father, who got him admitted into the Sanskrit College where he was to study Hindu philosophy, law and Sanskrit grammar. In Calcutta was then blowing, as we have already seen, a strong wind of heresy and non-conformism, viewed by some with awe and bewilderment, by others with appreciation.

The source of this heresy was the Hindu College; Vidyasagar attended the Sanskrit College. But in those days both the colleges were housed in the same building, having the same premises. Vidyasagar probably used to come across those ardent faces of the leading Hindu College boys, and perhaps also overheard their animated discussions and arguments, but yet nothing for certain is known about his own opinion of them, or for that matter, that of the Sanskrit College boys in general. We do not know if he ever attended their debates, or what books he prized most in those early years, or even if he allowed himself to be impressed by anybody's ideas or viewpoints. We cannot also ascertain whether or not the Sanskrit College boys were emotionally stirred by the unprecedented social commotion.

Biographical records portray Vidyasagar as engrossed wholly in his studies. The hardships he had to go through at that time are unthinkable; but these could not bend the determination of the boy who soon established himself as the first and foremost student of the Sanskrit College. His vast, almost encyclopaedic, reading in Sanskrit literature astounded even the most versatile of his teachers. Excepting this, no other information about

his mental life is available. Only this bit of amusing news strikes us that at that time he occasionally refrained from performing daily religious observances. But how far this reflected the outer social tension is a question we would better keep open. Moreover, though he happened to know Ram Gopal Ghosh, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Ramtanu Lahiri and other members of the elite group, his acquaintance with them did not mellow into fruitful exchange of views. He, of course, had opportunity to learn English for some months at the Sanskrit College, but direct and closer contact with Englishmen or civilians did not take place until he joined the teaching staff of the Fort William College.

He was under the strict surveillance of his father, whose instructions could in no way he violated; and over and above, there was no end to his toils. Under pressure of heavy load of everyday responsibilities his willingness to participate in the currents of life and to investigate the ideas newly propagated by Hindu College boys might have got suppressed. But, still, history was at work behind the enforced calm and tranquillity.

The life and career of Vidyasagar bears the clearest testimony to the complex and imperceptible ways in which the inner compulsion of an epoch works itself out. For, the twelve years he spent on Sanskrit learning proved to be of absolute futility so far as his spiritual life was concerned;—Hindu philosophy, speculative thinking, systems of law and religious injunctions could leave no lasting imprint on his mind. On the contrary, European rationalism and liberal humanist ethics, etc., to which he had so far only an indirect and very distant access, had won a new convert in Vidyasagar. The moment he emerged into the field of action, it was discovered that the spirit which worked through the Hindu College boys also found an explosive outlet through him; but this time with keener intensity and greater social relevance. At the time when he was outwardly calm and speechless, his heart perhaps

became ebullient with words he could not utter, and restless with a will that looked into the future for a chance to erupt.

II

What he could not accomplish as a student, Vidyasagar gained in the practical field, viz., proficiency in English; and with the parental authority gone, he could gradually strengthen himself to take a measure of the existing social life. During this period, he came into intimate contacts with Captain Marshall, the Secretary of the Fort William College, and with Dr Mouat, Secretary to the Education Council; and their high regard for Vidyasagar's capabilities must have been compensated for by their influence on his mental life. Through their instrumentality he was appointed the assistant secretary of the Sanskrit College; but because of disagreements with and non-co-operative attitude of Rasamoy Dutt, the Secretary, he resigned in annoyance. Later, through the same instrumentality, Vidyasagar became the Principal of the College, the posts of secretary and assistant secretary having been abolished. This gave him the much desired opportunity to give practical shape to his ideas.

The following were some of the measures immediately enforced by him:

Formerly, in deference to age-old convention, the Sanskrit College remained closed on the first and eighth days of the new and full moon; Vidyasagar immediately abolished this irrational convention and brought the College in line with the English schools which remained closed on Sundays only. Till then boys of Brahmin and Vaidya castes only were allowed to read in the Sanskrit College; but within six months of his principalship, the gates were opened for Kayastha boys, and before the completion of the year, for boys belonging to all other castes. Eminent Sanskrit scholars, his own former teachers and present colleagues, alarmed that such extra-liberal programmes would

spell doom for Hinduism, tried to organise resistance; but Vidyasagar disarmed them by pointing out with telling force the disparity that obtained between their own theoretical standpoints and practical deeds. He argued, if the *sudras* were really to be debarred from learning the sacred language, then why did they not prevent Radha Kanta Dev from studying and culturing it? And why, again, did they themselves, from motives of monetary gain, teach the subject to Europeans, who were *mlechchhas*? These words were enough to silence opposition.

Contemporary teachers of Sanskrit, again, had no sense of time; they lived, as it were, on a timeless plane. They would come to and go from college according to their sweet whims or convenience. Vidyasagar compelled them to keep to specific hours. He himself wrote grammatical texts to make Sanskrit learning and teaching comparatively easy for beginners, and, in 1853, introduced the teaching of English and through it of European moral and ethical philosophy, in conformity with a well-spanned out scheme.

Thus from the very start of his public career he effected reforms in the Sanskrit College which were calculated to bring a welcome change in the educational and psychological climate of Bengal. A little probe into the ideas which worked as stimulus for the reorientation of the Sanskrit College curriculum would provide a sure guide to an understanding of his mind. Dr Ballantyne, Principal of the Benares Sanskrit College, sent in a report to the Bengal authorities on the Calcutta Sanskrit College. Asked to give his comments on the same, Vidyasagar said in a letter to the Education Council that the sole object of his life was to train a batch of people who would be well versed in traditional scriptures but who would, at the same time, be free from the prevailing prejudices of their countrymen. All his efforts as Principal of the College would be spent towards that end. His experience, though only of a couple of years, had

confirmed the impression that every year a determined batch of young men would come out from the Sanskrit College who would be both enlightened and unorthodox. In due course this body of liberal-minded youths would spread out in the villages to disperse the light of learning among the ignorant masses, and, thus, indirectly, would act as harbingers of a new life and builders of a new nation.

In the same letter he expressed his very critical views about Hindu philosophy and his attitude towards Sanskrit learning. He stated: "For certain reasons, which it is needless to state here, we are obliged to continue the teaching of the Vedanta and Sankhya in the Sanskrit College. That the Vedanta and Sankhya are false systems of philosophy is no more a matter of dispute. . . . While teaching these in the Sanskrit course we should oppose them by sound philosophy in the English course to counteract their influence". The same argument prompted him to exclude Bishop Berkeley's works from the curriculum. For, Berkeley's philosophical conclusions were, in his opinion, also as far from truth as those of the Vedanta and Sankhya systems. As a result, through acquaintance with his philosophy, the students, instead of being drawn away from those systems, would be drawn increasingly into them; and thus the very object of sublimating their minds and of engrafting on their minds the love of rationalism and truth would be frustrated. Under the circumstances, he considered the inclusion of John Stuart Mill's works in the curriculum as 'indispensable'.

In another letter to Dr Mouat (5-10-1853) Vidyasagar wrote that if, for proper cultivation of Bengali the study of Sanskrit could be re-orientated, and that, if after that, the minds of the learners could be enlightened through English, he would consider the mission of reform would have been fulfilled. These assertions, together with the directness they embodied, clearly demonstrated his preference for western learning, as well as the direction his reform activities were positively given.

Indeed, there was absolutely no difference between him and the Hindu College boys so far as the pursuit of English as an independent value, as the surest road to enlightenment, was concerned. The absence of any half-heartedness or scruple in discarding traditional philosophies has also to be taken note of.

His sensitive mind, fully conscious of the historical situation and necessity, was violently disturbed at the bigotry and superstition of his fellow countrymen, especially at those of the learned. He could hardly contain his passion. In his comments on Dr Ballantyne's report he declared: "The bigotry of the learned in India, I am ashamed to state, is not in the least inferior to that of the Arab". He could see no chance of bending the bigots to see the reality; so, he did neither expect nor seek their co-operation. There was no need either. One very hopeful sign of the time was that their influence on the people was dwindling day by day. Hence, it was not for Vidyasagar to get alarmed at their resistance.

It speaks volumes for the courage and resolution of one single individual to defy the authority of the entire society of the learned to get his own vision of the future accepted by the Bengal authorities. Yet, the man himself learnt and cultured the sacred scriptures of the land for long twelve years. The secret of the matter is that a keen insight into the historical process took him to a different harbour. The dynamism of western ideas had set his being into a state of convulsion. The spirit of revolt was stirring within him; he resolved to make the east-bound Bengali society turn west.

Farsightedness and a cosmopolitan view of the contemporary situation had led Vidyasagar to this conclusion that, if India were to be rescued from her present degradation, the inert Indian society was to be made dynamic through western mobility. He knew for certain that western hedonism alone could dispel India's spiritual gloom. But he also fully realized

that, under the prevailing state of English education, it was not at all possible to communicate its message to the remote villages. As such, so far as Bengal was concerned, his intention was to communicate the same through the medium of Bengali. For that purpose, from the very start he stressed the need for the establishment of Bengali schools. In the year 1844, Lord Hardinge decided to establish one hundred experimental Bengali schools. Vidyasagar, as was natural for him, co-operated actively to make the experiment a success. But, unfortunately, only 33 of these survived. Then, after a fairly long interval, during the administration of Sir Frederick Halliday (1854-1859), the first Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, model Bengali schools were established on the approval of the Home authorities and the Lt.-Governor himself. These were run entirely on the scheme drawn up for them by Vidyasagar. Now that governmental initiative, finance and co-operation became wedded to his ideas and drive, he plunged into action, heedless of personal interest or private consideration. Between August, 1855 and January 14, 1856, he founded twenty model schools in Nadia, Hooghly, Burdwan and Midnapore districts, five schools per district. Concurrently, in order to supply suitable teachers for these schools, he elevated the *pathsala* or elementary school attached to the Sanskrit College to a Normal school.

Meanwhile, by virtue of his ceaseless efforts, Vidyasagar had become the leading figure in the field of female education too. England's conquest of India historically paved the way for bourgeois democratic development in India, which immediately brought to the fore the problem of emancipation of women from social fetters and disabilities. The elite, without any doubt, responded to the challenge. The Christian missionaries also were contributing their little bit to hasten the process; but their proselytizing motivation stood greatly in the way of dispassionate dissemination of knowledge. On the other hand,

though Radha Kanta Dev did never fail to associate himself with every effort for the spread of education including women's education, his conservative instincts did not allow his efforts to achieve wider dimensions. The Young Bengal radicals talked much but did little. Hence, the problem of education for women, instead of being tackled courageously and collectively, was left to take its own course.

Ultimately, John Drinkwater Bethune, Legal Member of the Governor-General's Council and President of the Council of Education, in 1849, established in Calcutta a public school for girls, with the co-operation of progressive elements of the Bengali community. In the initial stages it encountered, as can be well imagined, vehement opposition from the orthodox section, but vigorous campaign on its behalf by the elite community helped it to weather the storm. Vidyasagar took over the charge as its secretary in December, 1850. It was indeed a good start made, and Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, happy at the outcome, recorded that Bethune had "earned a right not only to the gratitude of the Government but to its frank and cordial support". Government's policy as regards female education, however, remained very cautious for some more years to come, though they started assisting the existing schools by a system of grants-in-aid.

In spite of that, schools for girls began to come into existence, with Vidyasagar always ready to welcome them with his infinite energy for action. But this new activity added yet another dimension to his already numerous exertions. Sanskrit College reforms, establishment of Bengali schools, widow-remarriage, development of Bengali prose, female education, campaign against polygamy, in each and every field of cultural regenerative activity Vidyasagar's was the foremost name. He did not really live, he acted. Life had to be re-created, every facet of it had to be decked with promise and potentiality. Vidyasagar wanted, as it were, to infuse into the still life of the villages the

tumult of a river in spate. Without wasting a single moment on such thoughts as whether or not financial aid would be forthcoming from the Government, he, between November, 1857 and May, 1858, established as many as 35 schools for girls, all in the villages, with a total enrollment of 1,300 students. Schools for girls were a totally unimaginable phenomenon in the villages of Bengal in those days, which were given a sudden shaking to awake to the realities of life. Campaign for the education of women, needless to add, took the women emancipation movement one farther step forward.

Vidyasagar once said that his resolve to remove the superstition and ignorance of his people would find fruition through his ashes. Indeed, the work started in his youth continued till to the end of his life. Whenever and wherever a new school either for boys or for girls happened to come into existence, it invariably received from Vidyasagar either financial aid or, what was considered to be more important, benediction.

III

The question of widow-remarriage was also demanding immediate attention. The *sati* rites had long been abolished by law; but the widows in general had not been granted a fruitful entrance into life. History, undoubtedly, was silently preparing the soil for that also; and some day it was sure to find fulfilment.

Talks on the subject were naturally in the air, not only among the western-minded elite, but among the traditional scholars also, some of whom had on occasions declared themselves, at least theoretically, in its favour. But when the crucial question of practical implementation was raised, they shrank in terror and declared widow-remarriage to be unlawful. This double standard maintained by the traditional scholars greatly angered Vidyasagar, who once declared, "I deem it a positive insult if any body calls me a Brahmin pundit". The shameful

duplicity of the learned will be evident from this incident. Shyama Charan Das, a blacksmith of Calcutta, asked of the learned pundits for permission to give his widowed daughter in remarriage (incidentally, she became a widow before the consummation of her marriage). All the distinguished interpreters of Hindu law and scriptures, such as, Muktaram Vidyabagis, Bhabasankar Vidyaratna, Kasinath Tarkalankar, Ramtanu Tarkasiddhanta, and others declared unequivocally that it was permissible according to sastric provisions. But, afterwards, almost all of them stood against widow-remarriage. The conduct of Bhabasankar Vidyaratna was all the more shameful. In an intellectual disputation he, arguing in favour of widow-remarriage, defeated Braja Nath Vidyaratna of Nabadwip, and as a reward was given a pair of costly shawls by the Shovabazar zemindars. But subsequently he opposed it vehemently. The English-educated elite, on the other hand, were most vocal in supporting it. That the women should be given equal rights as men was a conclusion long ago arrived at by them, following the western mode of perception. The only thing needed in the situation was a strong and resolute will that would break the ice and, if necessary, also hit back at the adversaries.

Vidyasagar discovered in himself the fountain of that indomitable courage and will. His mind, however, he had prepared long ago. While still a student, he was shocked to find his teacher Sambhucharan Vachaspati in ripe old age taking a young girl in her teens as his wife. He was so infuriated that he refused to drink even a glass of water at Vachaspati's house. Determined to put an end to such "crimes", he ransacked the vast range of scriptures, commentaries and literary texts to find out if the remarriage of such girls who were sure to be left widowed was contrary to Hindu law. His delight knew no bounds when, contrary to popular beliefs and convention, widow-remarriage was found permissible under

certain conditions and under certain others made obligatory. In January, 1955, he published his first tract on the subject, 2000 copies of which were sold out in one week. Three thousand copies were reprinted, but these too were sold out in no time. This was no doubt an unprecedented phenomenon in Bengal's literary history, but it also indicates the stir caused by his tract. In the following October Vidyasagar issued his second tract on widow-remarriage, this time much enlarged in volume, in which he replied bitterly to his orthodox critics, who presented a sort of united front in attacking him. Through these tracts, he appealed to his countrymen passionately in such words as "Countrymen ! how long will you suffer yourselves to be led away by illusions ! Open your eyes for once and see, that India, once the land of virtue, is being flooded with the stream of adultery and foeticide. The degradation to which you have sunk is sadly low. Dip into the spirit of your Sastras, follow their dictates, and you shall be able to remove the foul blot from the face of your country". (Dr B. B. Majumdar's translation; vide *History of Indian Social and Political Ideas*, p. 154).

In the same month, i.e., October, 1855, an appeal signed by about a thousand people was sent to the Government of India to remove legal bars to widow-remarriage. Some of the influential and enlightened zemindars also submitted a similar petition separately. But the conservative segment of the population could hardly be expected to take the affront calmly. They became even more vociferous, and submitted a counter-petition bearing signatures of nearly forty thousand people urging the Government not to temper with Hindu social customs. But this memorial was pre-destined to fail to evoke any response, since the indirectly progressive role which the English were playing in transforming India's socio-political life was not yet over. Vidyasagar's appeal was accepted and by Act XV of 1856 re-marriage of Hindu widows was declared legal.

It may be of interest to quote some portions from the said appeal:

"2. That, in the opinion and firm belief of your petitioners, this custom (i.e., prohibition of marriage of widows), cruel and unnatural in itself, is highly prejudicial to the interests of morality, and is otherwise fraught with the most mischievous consequence to society."

"5. That your petitioners and many other Hindus have no objection of conscience to the marriage of widows, and are prepared to disregard all objections to such marriages, founded on social habit or on any scruple resulting from an erroneous interpretation of religion".

"10. That such marriages are neither contrary to nature nor prohibited by law or custom in any other country or by any other people in the world."

This clause testifies to the already dawned cosmopolitan sense of reality as also to the intention of the petitioners to lead their country from the savagery of custom to the light of civilization. The Government in passing the Bill declared: "It will interfere with the tenets of no human being; but it will prevent the tenets of one set of men from inflicting misery and vice upon the families of their neighbours, who are of a different and more humane persuasion".

But a legal provision was not in itself sufficient; it had to be supplemented by action to get it socially accepted. Vidyasagar devoted his attention to that end also and soon found in his friend Sris Vidyaratna a courageous partner ready to become the hero of the first widow-remarriage in Calcutta, performed amidst scenes of grandeur and pomp. Within short intervals a few other such marriages took place but though social resistance to it was gradually on the decline, it did not receive that wide and diffused acceptance which the leaders of the movement expected it would. Vidyasagar, however, got his son married to a widow.

Simultaneously, closely following the memorial for widow-remarriage, another petition for prohibition of polygamy was sent to the Government. The main target was not polygamy in general, but the "grievous and revolting" practice prevalent among the *kulin* Brahmins. But, in the meantime, the outbreak of the Sepoy Revolt completely altered the socio-political climate of India; the attention of the Government became focussed on problems of graver import, and, in the process, the memorial against polygamy remained unheeded. Even after the suppression of the revolt, because of increasing sensitiveness on the part of the Government and the changed political context, the authorities declined to respond favourably to the said petition. Vidyasagar's confidence in the nobility and profound sense of justice of the English was rudely shocked; but he did not give up the battle. He changed his tactics, sent fervent appeals to the Brahmins themselves, but with little appreciable success.

As happens with every great social movement, the campaign for widow-remarriage also, after a few years of vigorous activity, exhibited signs of withering away. Financial assistance from friends or associates either ceased to flow or grew meagre, the volume of his personal debt went on accumulating, lechers succeeded in deceiving him in the name of widow-remarriage, and the affronts hurled at him had no limit. But yet the warrior continued to fight out his lone battle almost unaided. The whole of his life, as it were, he staked for this cause. Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the epic poet, warmly wrote of him that Vidyasagar had "the genius and wisdom of an ancient sage, the energy of an Englishman, and the heart of a Bengalee mother". Vidyasagar in the full flood of his campaign for marriage of widows fully deserved the compliment.

IV

He, as an intellectual, found in practical action the sole

validity and utility for acquired truths, and thus embraced newer ideals of life, newer values and spiritual understanding. Or, conversely, it could also be suggested that because he discovered through intellection new values of life, he could plunge into heroic deeds calculated to revolutionize Bengali social life. But it matters little how we argue, the basic assertions remain unchanged.

These are that man in his full concreteness and humanity has to be recognised within the various relations of this earthly life. He is to be taken as an end in himself, to be understood as both the source and the object of all human activities. This man is above all considerations of caste and religion and race—he is a supreme entity by himself. He is also not to be measured by wealth, or by religious faith or customs; nor by the economic or social position he may happen to occupy. Beyond and above all such fetters, he is just himself, waiting for our recognition and acceptance. This individual man has to be restituted in his humanity and freed from the social forces that imprison him, within the existential relations of life just then unfolding itself, with all his hopes and aspirations, his desire for happiness and to be at peace with himself and the world around fully materialized. It is not to be presumed that Vidyasagar got this lofty idea from European socialist literatures; no, he did not have any access to them. He reached his conclusions by his instinctive insight into the human condition, and could therefore succeed in basing his action on humanistic principles.

Needless it is to point out that this reading of the given situation was quite in tune with the inner urge of the historical epoch. We have already discussed how, because of the impact of the West, hedonistic ideas and an extrovert attitude towards life were gradually becoming ascendant, how western liberal humanism was slowly percolating to different social strata. The spread of English education had already created a con-

genial climate. Not so much perhaps through intellectual exertions as through keen awareness and sensibility, Vidyasagar embodied in himself this message of European enlightenment, and strived to vitalise the Indian society with its aid. Rammohan, we have already seen, was the first to respond successfully to the challenge of the time; Vidyasagar, following his lead, organised a broader response, since his reform movements were movements of wider participation by the masses of people and also of closer and intenser involvement in their own affairs. The most outstanding mark of his character was the unity of wisdom and action, of intellectual attainments and practical deeds. This unity of acquired truths and the act of living according to their dictates took him from the bounds of his private life into the domain of social existence; he dedicated himself to the cause of humanity.

His social campaigns reveal him completely. The place action occupies in his life and the complete indifference he showed to spiritual quests would convince anyone that he did not recognise truth as being a supra-mundane entity, beyond time and space; nor did he have any need for such truths. Truth is real, and is being constantly born of existential human relations; it has therefore to be recognised within the matrix of such relations. It is said that in his old age Ramkrishna Paramhansa paid him a visit. On reaching the threshold of Vidyasagar's room he said: "I have come to see the ocean" (*sagar means ocean*). Vidyasagar's characteristic reply was: "Most welcome, please take back a bottle of saline water with you". He indeed cared neither for God nor for salvation.

There are innumerable and complex problems floating on the surface of life. To comprehend them and to find adequate solutions for them so as to make for a better society were for Vidyasagar truth manifested and understood in the given context. This truth he loved and grappled with. He sought to bend the present in order to anticipate the future, which no

non-existential truth could ever create. Vidyasagar demonstrated this, not through intellectual discourses, but through practical action. He also demonstrated that unless one dipped deep into life, the flowing river, one could not be expected to have a commanding grasp of reality or the human significance of it.

His fairly long life was a fairly long combat with reality, and a fairly long and bold proclamation of Man's humanity. Two or three interesting incidents from his life may here be narrated:

The year 1867 saw a devastating famine in some districts of Bengal. Vidyasagar immediately opened a relief centre at his own village, where hundreds of people of the lower castes and even outcastes were fed and given shelter. His order was that no one should remain unfed in his locality; so the kitchen remained open throughout the whole day and night. When he stayed there, he himself served the famished people. He could be seen nursing the sick or massaging their body with oil; and so magnanimous was his heart that he even got certain female rites performed for those who were in an advanced stage of pregnancy, and that in a relief centre! Tales of suffering would bring tears to his eyes.

.... In 1868 he spent a few weeks at Burdwan for a change. Close to his quarters stood a Muslim bustee. As was natural for him, he picked up intimacy first with the children and afterwards with their fathers, to end subsequently by spending an enormous amount of money for their amelioration. He returned to them the following year to serve them when a cholera epidemic was raging there. Muslim babies, frail and enfeebled by disease, found cosy shelter on his lap, but they did not thereby descreate either his sacred thread or his Brahminism.

.... He used to spend a few weeks every year at Karmatar

among his Santal friends. From early morning they would begin coming to visit him, some saying, "Vidyasagar, I require so many annas, give me the coins and you take this bundle of maize." In this way, in the early hours of morning a considerable quantity of maize got stocked. But before the morning was out, others would come and say, "Vidyasagar, we're hungry, give us something to eat"; and soon the stock of maize would vanish. This was with him almost an everyday occurrence. He could be seen walking fast through the Santal villages with his box of homeopathic medicines with him. For the entertainment of his Santal friends he got sweets brought in from Burdwan and dates from Calcutta. And of course, before long, there emerged a school for the Santal children, built and run solely at his own expense.

These incidents are an index to the enormous humanity which enriched his heart. Like his Anglophile contemporaries, like Rammohan himself, Vidyasagar also had a buoyant faith in the English social institutions and sense of justice, and above all, in the liberal humanism of the post-(French) Revolutionary Europe. But what was striking in his case was the way in which theory merged into practice. None of his contemporaries took practice in such a prodigious measure. Enlightenment of the people through education, sanction of just and equitable social rights for them, removal of obstacles that stood in the way of re-creation of life, and recognition of man's humanity—through action calculated to secure these ends Vidyasagar became a pilgrim in the temple of life. In the process he cemented his identity and sense of oneness with his people, and also set up a universal example before them.

It cannot be ascertained if Vidyasagar himself was conscious of the deep revolutionary significance of his campaigns. But these bore such an imprint of manly determination and strong personality that one would feel that he could not breathe without *doing*. This joy in action gave a sharp edge to his sen-

sibility and rendered his action as meaningful as they were fearless. And, once again, there existed no beyond.

It is indeed a very striking feature that the man who was born in an orthodox and superstitious Brahmin family, who studied Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit grammar for long twelve years, and who, throughout his life, clung to his slippers and chadar, was never for a moment perturbed by thoughts of personal salvation. On the contrary, during his life time he came to be known as irreligious, and even as an atheist. The accusation of irreligiousness was perhaps not entirely unfounded. He was a member of the *Tattwabodhini Sabha*; he was its last secretary, and a very intimate friend of its intellectual leader Akshay Kumar Dutt. Under the latter's leadership the members were said to have once sought to decide the attributes or the existence of God by democratic means, by votes cast in favour or against. Debendranath Tagore, pained at such demonstrations of heresy wrote in his autobiography, "I do not any more notice any religious spirit and piety among many who at present are my closest associates." It is quite probable that Vidyasagar's name figured prominently in the list of offenders. Instead of God, as we have argued, he worshipped man.

The emergence of Vidyasagar is therefore a significant milestone in the cultural history of nineteenth century Bengal. For, the values he stood for were contrary to traditional beliefs and customs. Tradition never recognised the value of man as man. The orthodox Hindus, under the leadership of Raja Radha Kanta Dev, were desperately trying to protect their obsolete gods and social customs from the tyranny of English laws; Vidyasagar, on the other hand, was leading the people away from the gods and into the field of concrete social relations. Nearness to man was for him more important than idle nearness to the gods. This was the only thought worth thinking about. Never for a day did he vacillate, never for a day did he

feel tired and exhausted in his fight against whatever was inert, dead and fossilized. In the memorable words of R. C. Dutt: "On one side self-interest, inertia, stupidity — on the other, against them, Vidyasagar; on one side, social oppression on widows, heartlessness of men, torpor of a society in decadence — on the other, against them, Vidyasagar; on one side, age-old superstitions and the dead weight of evil customs — on the other Vidyasagar; on one side, lifeless, static and spiritless Bengali society — on the other Vidyasagar." (English rendering mine). There was no room for compromise in this fateful struggle. Rarely do we find in history a revolt so courageously waged and led by one single individual against an ossified social system whose adherents were still strong enough to pronounce social sanctions against or cause multiple injuries to one they took for their enemy.

V

Vidyasagar did never discuss the present or future consequences of the British rule in India; nor was he ever involved in any political discussion as to the permissibility of its continuance or a possible secession of ties with England. But the radiant confidence that he placed on the good intentions of the English, and the way he pleaded for their intervention in the social life of India, as also the fact that during the explosive days of the sepoy revolt he unhesitatingly allowed British soldiers to be garrisoned at the Sanskrit College, show that he, too, like all other Anglophiles of the time, regarded the British conquest of India as a Divine dispensation. The time for strong contrary currents had not yet arrived.

But, yet, there was a heaven and earth difference between his identity and that of the Young Bengal radicals. For, his social reform and educational campaigns carried along with them a greater, wider and keener social relevance, to which the uproar caused by the Hindu College elite had no pretensions.

The latter were artificially manufactured, to borrow a Toynbee phrase, and were the children of such families as depended mostly for their social and financial status on the new establishment. Moreover, imitation of the English in modes of speech and manners and in the style of living was for them a passport to continentalism. Hence, they were taken by the people more as aliens than as belonging to the soil. In fact, in their case the bonds of unity and identity were definitely lost. As such, their revolt and clamourings could easily be dismissed by the people as empty vapours which would soon vanish. More so, because they were absorbed in their own problems.

But, no such casual reference or neglect could be maintained towards Vidyasagar, though he too was a product of the same milieu, and owed for the genesis of his liberal views to the same tension caused by the impact of western culture. While they were content with having uttered a few harsh words, Vidyasagar acted. Moreover, the aping of English manners formed part of neither his style of living nor his dress and general demeanour. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, his slippers for ever remained absolutely his own slippers. Little did he depend on the English for his sustenance. The story goes that when he resigned from the principalship of the Sanskrit College, one English civilian commented, 'how would he live'? When reported to Vidyasagar, he retorted, 'Why, I'll sell vegetables in the market'. Such was the confidence of the man in himself.

So, the qualitative character and texture of his campaigns were totally different from the paper campaigns of his Hindu College friends. While the aggressive intellectualism of the latter never crossed the frontiers of academic clichés and coteries, the action-surcharged intellectuality of the former spread out into the quiet of the villages in search of living humanity. While many of the Hindu College giants were wasting their talents through excessive drinking and associated vices, Vidyasagar, by organizing a campaign against drinking itself,

was striving to keep the road to resuscitation free of dangerous pitfalls. The light of life must shine brightly but also steadily; and the torch-bearers of enlightenment should themselves be as free from vices and prejudices as there should be a transparent radiation of learning everywhere. Moreover, their identity as Indians and as born to belong to their own people must never be lost. This inner compulsion of the age found, as it were, a most exalted vehicle in Vidyasagar.

Vidyasagar, with his vast erudition and grasp of contemporary situation, could have produced ponderous volumes of commentaries and elucidations on traditional scriptures and texts; or he could have astounded the world of letters by compiling gigantic encyclopaedias, if he chose to. Instead, he chose to write such books as were intended to make the learning of Sanskrit easier than before, or the inordinately heavy Bengali prose-style sonorous and responsive to the rhythmic beats of time. Now, if literary efforts are taken as a way of universalizing the ego, then here also we have an indirect projection of the same emulative objective, to move into the life of common humanity, to discover them anew.

Indian societal structures never recognised a status for the humanity of man as an end in himself, in spite of what might have been uttered by the sages of the Upanishads. Indeed, on the face of it, Upanishadic humanism forms a very lofty tradition in this country, though it is recognised more in its denial than in its affirmation. Vidyasagar, it would seem, was striving hard to save from extinction and rebuild the tradition of humanism in India. All his efforts, intellectual and agitational, were directed towards that end. He, therefore, stands out as the conscience of the society of his day, looking forward to a better social order. It is for this reason perhaps that Madhusudan Dutt regarded him as "one of nature's noble man", and as the "greatest Bengali".

This essay is based on the author's Bengali essay on Vidyasagar, *Bāṅglā Samāji Biplabe Vidyasagar*, included in his *Unabimsa Satābdīr Patik*, Calcutta, 1955, now out of print.

CHAPTER VIII

MADHUSUDAN

THE INTELLECTUAL AS A LITERARY ARTIST

In a finely written essay on Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) Bishnu De, eminent Bengali poet, has said : "Madhusudan's private and poetic life is a noble tragedy of which the other name is England's work in India. He is to us a symbol of genius. His tragedy is a drama of running after false analogies in the gloom of Indo-British history".¹ Indeed, his life and poetry were the culmination of the Anglophile vision of life, its ideas, emotions and perspectives, and embodied in themselves the lofty aspirations as well as the lowly frustrations, the joys as well as the woes of a consciousness that sought to sustain itself by the reflected radiation of an adopted parentage. His life was the symbol of hope as well as of despair inherent in the total historical situation of the early Bengali renaissance in the first half of the nineteenth century, and deserves to be retold, if for nothing else at least for understanding how the intellectual as a literary artist fared, struggled, achieved and suffered.

I

Son of a wealthy, well-to-do and later successful lawyer, Madhusudan entered the Hindu College in 1833, and, as a boy of extra-ordinary talents, blazed his way to the upper forms. His father was a man of means but was also a man of disastrous sense of personal values. His indulgence helped the growth in Madhusudan of certain tendencies and precocities which a more careful father would never have liked his son to develop. These, however, did not prevent the growth alongside of his intellectual pursuits. In the College his reading was extensive

and multifarious. To his friends he was "the Jupiter", in the opinion of one;² in the opinion of another,³ he was "the Jupiter among the bright stars of the college". And all agreed with this view of Gourdas Bysack that "Madhu was a genius. Even his foibles and eccentricities had a touch of romance, and a taste of 'the attic salt' that made them savoury and sweet'. Quite early in life he discarded the *dhoti* for pyjama-achkan, and soon the latter for the English coat and pantaloons.

The English coat and pantaloons, however, were only the outer manifestation of an inner fixation, to do the absurdest thing on earth, to become thoroughly and completely English-like, and, above all, to be hailed as an English poet. He started composing poems in English which were published in local journals and magazines and had the courage even of sending them for *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Bentley's Miscellany*. England was the dreamland and the land of poetry and of poetic fame. This fixation was so strong with him that he did not find any incongruity in the belief that once he were in England he would certainly become a great poet of England. In one of his early poems he wrote:

I sigh for Albion's distant shore,
 Its valleys green, its mountains high ;
 Tho' friends, relations, I have none
 In that far clime, yet, Oh! I sigh
 To cross the vast Atlantic wave
 For glory, or a nameless grave!

 And, Oh! I sigh for Albion's sand
 As if she were my native-land!⁴

His inner self was convulsed, and intellectually he was exerting himself to prepare for what he believed to be the destiny—his voyage to England. About this time for a short

journey he went to Tamluk in Midnapore, which once stood by the sea. The sight of the sea immediately brought to his mind the lusty association and thrill of a voyage to England. From there he wrote to his life-long friend Gourdas: "I am come nearer that sea which will perhaps see me at a period (which I hope is not far off) ploughing its bosom for England's glorious shore;" also "The sea from this place is not very far. What a number of ships have I seen going to England!"

The last few years he spent in the Hindu College were in reality lived in a state of convulsion. His eager mind was seeking an opportunity he could seize upon to make the desired trip. Could conversion to Christianity be of any help? He met the Rev. K. M. Bandyopadhyay several times about which the latter has recorded: "He called upon one day and introduced himself to me as a religious inquirer almost persuaded to be a Christian. After two or three interviews and a great deal of conversation, I was impressed with the belief that his desire of becoming a Christian, was scarcely greater than his desire of a voyage to England".⁵ Religious conviction was not the primary or even the least consideration. Biographical records also make it clear that at that time his parents were trying to get him married to an unenlightened village girl; Madhusudan was not only against this match but he became a suitor for the hand of Krishna Mohan's second daughter Debaki, who was educated and accomplished.

He, therefore, judged the question of a change of faith from the pragmatic, expedient angle of fulfilling two purposes: (1) to secure the desired woman, and also (2) to secure facilities for sailing to England. He became a Christian; the Baptism took place on February 9, 1843. Strict secrecy was maintained by the missionaries about it and for some time Madhusudan was kept away from people's sight in Fort William under military guards.

His conversion was the starting point of the tragedy. His

calculations all went wrong; he could secure neither the woman nor the ship to England. On the contrary, he had to leave both parental shelter and the Hindu College, the doors of which were at that time closed to Christian boys. The missionaries proffered little or no help at all for the completion of his studies, which remained disrupted and discontinued for about two years. During this period his life too remained veiled in gloom and anxiety and uncertainty. In 1845 we re-discover him as a student of the Bishop's College in the general department, where he found opportunity to learn Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Sanskrit. But before long he came into clash with the authorities because of their policy of racial discrimination between Europeans and non-Europeans in respect of dress and even food. He protested and gave angry demonstrations of his protest, but to no avail. Life at the Bishop's College having thus become embittered, his stay there also became precarious. Then suddenly, early in 1848, without the knowledge of any one this literary adventurer after fame left Calcutta "half mad with vexation and anxiety", as he himself wrote to a friend, and reached Madras, though there he knew none who could render him help in this desperate situation. Regarding the Bishop's College incidents Krishna Mohan has written: "He was a person of great intellectual power, somewhat flighty in his imagination, strong in his opinions and sentiments of an independent mind very tenacious of personal rights."⁶

II

With his hope of a passage to England long ago shattered, he found in Madras Christian kindness and sympathy which the missionaries in Calcutta withheld from him. Madras was no literary Bohemia; but he could stay there for eight years, and also could establish himself first as a teacher and then as a journalist and poet. There he also married an English woman, a fact he was inwardly proud of, though he had "great

trouble in getting her". But impulsiveness was a dominant factor in his character, and the earlier fixation was perhaps claiming for a satisfaction however distorted and wayward. Madhusudan found himself courageous enough to commit the highly indiscreet act of deserting her after some years in order to live with a French woman, who eventually became his life-long companion and a helpless victim of the tragic destiny that ultimately engulfed him.

Here he resumed writing verses in English, and published two long Byronic poems—*The Captive Ladie* and *Visions of the Past*. (1849)

Up to this point in his career Madhusudan seems to have taken Byron as his hero and ideal. Derozio, the Eurasian Byron, had created a Byronic atmosphere in the Hindu College which continued to prevail even after his departure and death. Hence, Madhusudan, growing up in that intellectual climate, could not but be enamoured of the English poet. He was drawn as much to the dazzling personality as to his flowing poetry. Byron was his 'noble favourite' as he told Gourdas in a letter. In another he fondly called him 'my Lord Byron', and at another place he described 'pilgrim' Harold (hence also Byron) following Byron himself, as "an orphan of the heart".⁷

This fascination and this affection were the spontaneous overflow of an instinctive kinship he felt with the English poet; and his letters wherein Byron is discussed are so revealing as deserve to be considered as mirrors to his own inner self. In a letter dated the 25th of November, 1842, he wrote: "I am reading Tom Moore's life of my favourite Byron—a splendid book upon my word! Oh! how should I like to see you writing my life if I happen to be a great poet—which I am almost sure I shall be if I can go to England". And only two days later he continued, "I have done with Tom's *Life of Byron*. The Chapter, wherein the death of my noble favourite is detailed, drew forth tears from me rather in an abundant

degree. . . . So interesting it is, that nothing can be pleasanter—at least to me, than its pages;—full of everything to make the reader—gay—sad—thoughtful and so forth". These sentences lead us to the conclusion that in Madhusudan too there was the unconscious stir of the sea.

It has been correctly stressed that romanticism in modern Bengali poetry originated with Madhusudan, although all his first poems were in English. And that his romanticism was inspired largely by Byron and in a lesser degree by Moore is also undisputable, though a transformed Madhusudan could easily write that it was only on occasions that Byron reached the sublime in poetry.⁸ However that may be, his *Captive Ladie*, the most known among his English poems, has not only these two lines from Byron's *The Giaour*

"Love will find its way
Through paths where wolves would fear to prey"

inscribed as motto for Canto I and a few lines from Moore's *Lalla Rookh* for Canto II, it also recapitulates in flashes the spirit, tempo and the atmosphere of Byron's poem through adventurous raids and tournaments and "Love's accents in their acry spell". It has also lines not entirely unworthy of Byron. Several other poems, both in English and in Bengali, besides having Byron's lines as mottos, bear distinct echoes of Byronic sentiments and flights of fancy.

Not only in the sphere of poetic inspiration alone, but in his hatred of the philistinism of a settled and contented life also was Madhusudan most Byron-like. Even after the publication of his epoch-making epic *Meghnādvadh Kāvya* (The Fall of Meghnad) early in 1861 and after having been acclaimed by his contemporaries, again on false analogies, as 'the Milton of Bengal' or as 'the Goethe of Bengal', we find him writing to his friend Rajnarayan Bose on August 29 of the same year,

"Or must I sink into a writer of occasional lyrics and sonnets for the rest of my life? The idea is intolerable. . . . I like a subject with oceanic and mountain scenery, with sea-voyages, battle and love adventures. It gives a fellow's invention such a wide scope". The image of Byron in these lines is too vivid to be missed by any student of literature. And so he did not stop, and moved on to explore new idioms and forms in the field of poetry and new, though pathetic, adventures in England and in France in the sphere of practical life.

Of greater emotional significance and of more sustaining value, to my mind, has been the influence exerted by the revolutionary in Byron in forming and moulding Madhusudan's temperament. In his discourse on *The Anglo Saxon and the Hindu*, he referred to Byron and his works on several occasions, and at two places at least he spoke of him with high feeling and emotion. Here are his words: "See the wild Macedonian rushing forth like a mountain-torrent, carrying everything before him, as the tempestuous wind carried the dark cloud onward", and again "The pilgrim Harold wept over desolate Rome—for he was an orphan of the heart and turned to her; and the eloquence of his grief, the sweet and soft voice of his sorrow, swelling like a stream of rich yet mournful music, still saddens the soul; and yet he was an alien, a wanderer from a colder, a cloudier clime! *What would he have done, had he stood where I stand; had he been what I am?*" (emphasis added) These are crystal musings, the transparency of which reveals the heart of the speaker as well.

Equally "proud, silent lonely man of song" (Madhusudan's own words about himself), he imbibed many of the characteristics that go with the name of Byron; such as impulsiveness, recklessness, impetuosity, eccentricity and hatred of a sedate life. Yet, both the men were greater than our idea of them. Just as in Byron the crust of his ego broke in the end to absorb in himself the sorrows of humanity, so in Madhusudan we

notice the gradual annihilation of his ego (his conversion to Christianity proved no bar, it rather accentuated the process) to absorb in himself the agonised cry of his native land. Both of them had known calumny, dishonour, ostracism and disaffection; torments and sufferings both of them had known in abundance. But suffering in each case was only a prelude to sublimity. And, if in the case of Madhusudan, his grief could not be broadened into Byron's cosmic passion, it at least brought home to his consciousness the inherent tragedy of his situation, from which his constant sighings for "Albion's distant shore" were powerless to protect him. The conflict and struggle that ensued in his sub-conscious between the earlier fixation to become thoroughly Anglicized and the increasing conscious realisation of the absurdity of it was thus working for a reassuring change in his personal attitude and belief. It also was silently pointing out the direction in which he were to canalize his emotions and feelings.

In Madras *The Captive Ladie* was appreciated, but in Calcutta was not. A copy was sent to Bethune, Chairman of the Education Council, whose immediate comments were: "As an occasional exercise and proof of his proficiency in the language, such specimens may be allowed. But he could render far greater service to his country and have a better chance of achieving a lasting reputation for himself, if he will employ the taste and talents, which he has cultivated by the study of English, in improving the standard and adding to the stock of the poems of his own language . . .". This just comment of an Englishman was soon communicated to Madhusudan by Gourdas, and might have appreciably weakened the fixation while at the same time strengthening his consciousness about the invariability of his position. The struggles within the sub-conscious were gradually easing out, and the ships bound for "England's glorious shore" were going out of sight.

One sudden morning Gourdas received from Madras a

letter which said, "....Can't you send me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabharat by Cosidoss as well as a ditto of the Ramayana,....Serampore edition. I am losing my Bengali faster than I can mention. Won't you oblige me, old friend, eh, old Gour Das Bysack?" In quick succession another followed, which read: "Perhaps you do not know that I devote several hours daily to Tamil. My life is more busy than that of a school boy. Here is my routine: 6 to 8 Hebrew, 8 to 12 school, 12 to 2 Greek, 2 to 5 Telegu and Sanskrit, 5 to 7 Latin, 7 to 10 English. *Am I not preparing for the great object of embellishing the tongue of my fathers?*" (emphasis added).

The emphasized last sentence, indicating both the resolution of the conflict and the resulting triumph, today reads almost like a prophecy. The man, who in his student days wanted to forget the mother tongue and who from Madras could not communicate to his father the news of the birth of a daughter because he did not know how to manage it in Bengali, now looked upon "embellishing" it as "the great object" of his life. The decision to return to Calcutta was taken, but mystery still surrounds the suddenness of the act as also the fact why Madhusudan needed the camouflage of a pseudonym (Mr Holt) on his way back to Calcutta.

III

The literary prodigal returned to Calcutta in 1856, but neither in glory nor to generous affection. He was obliged to accept the office of a head clerk, and then that of an interpreter to a junior police magistrate. Such appointments for the man who wrote ambitious Byronic poems, edited English journals, and sighed for England's glorious shores! But his occupational humiliation and the apathy of the conceited were well compensated for by his meteoric rise to literary fame.

Gourdas introduced him to Maharaja Jatindra Mohan

Tagore of Pathuriaghat and to the Rajas Iswar Chandra Sinha and Pratap Chandra Sinha of Paikpara, who were exerting themselves for radiating the rays of renaissance through histrionic activities. Madhusudan was given an assignment to translate into English a Bengali play—*Ratnāvali*—which was to be performed soon, for the benefit of the English-speaking guest-spectators. One evening, during rehearsals, he expressed his utter dissatisfaction with such miserable dramatic stuff, and told his friend Gourdas that he could himself write a good Bengali play, which none thought he was capable of. But he did really come out with a play—*Sharmisthā*—which, published and staged in 1859, cut the gordian knot and created, in his own words, an “indescribable” impression. It was Bengal’s first play built upon European models and signified the triumph of the new spirit over the withered and the decadent, which still lingered on. In a letter to Gourdas he confidently wrote: “I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will be in all likelihood, something of a foreign air about my drama; but if the language be not ungrammatical, if the thoughts be just and glowing, the plot interesting, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing? Do you dislike Moore’s poetry because it is full of Orientalism? Byron’s poetry for its Asiatic air, Carlyle’s prose for its Germanism? . . . it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by servile admiration for everything Sanskrit. . . .

“In matters literary, old boy, I am too proud to stand before the world in borrowed clothes. I may borrow a neck-tie, or even a waist coat but not the whole suit”.

With astonishing enthusiasm and industry (“Now that I have got the taste of blood, I am at it again”, he told Gourdas) he wrote another play—*Padmāvatī*, to closely follow *Sharmisthā*. In it he engrafted “the exquisite graces of the Greek mythology on our own”, his own words though used in the context of *Meghnādvadh*. In between the two were written two social

comedies, not highly meritorious pieces in themselves, of which one ridiculed the foibles and follies of the new elite, while the other those of the older generation.

Within the next three or four months came out *Tillottamā*, his first Bengali poem in blank verse, if we leave out of account the small pieces in blank verse he tentatively introduced in *Padmāvati*. The idea of making this experiment cropped up as a challenge from conversation with Jatindra Mohan Tagore, who had grave doubts about its suitability to Bengali language and verse-tradition. Madhusudan accepted the challenge, while Jatindra Mohan offered to stand all expenses to see it through the press, if he came out successful. He took the traditional fourteen-syllable Bengali couplet and informed it with the grandeur and sublimity of the Miltonic blank verse. The immediate reaction of the literati, however, was a heap of abuse, ridicule and detraction hurled at the bold experimenter. But the reassured Madhusudan wrote to Rajnarayan Bose in perfect confidence: "I began the poem in a joke, and I see I have actually done something that ought to give our national poetry a lift, at any rate, that will teach the future poets of Bengal to write in a strain very different from that of the man of Krishnagar." And again, "The fact is, my dear fellow, that the prevalence of Blank Verse in this country, is simply a question of time. Let your friends guide their voices by the pause (as in English Blank Verse) and they will soon swear that this is the noblest measure in the language."

The two succeeding years saw the publication of his masterpiece, *Meghnādodadh Kāvya* and *Virāṅganā*, respectively, written in blank verse. His consecutive successes with the new verse-pattern trumpeted its supremacy; and, rightfully delighted, Madhusudan wrote: "Even the stiff pandits are beginning to unbend... Blank verse is the 'go' now". Meanwhile, in order to demonstrate that he was a master not of the epic and blank verse, but could handle rhyme and the lyric with commandable

felicity, he published *Vrajāṅgaṇā* in the conventional Bengali rhyme scheme *payār* and *tripadī* on Radha-Krishna theme for which he had an instinctive attraction. And already in 1860, he had composed a sonnet and sent it to Rajnarayan Bose with this note: "I want to introduce the sonnet into our language....What you say to this, my good friend! In my humble opinion, if cultivated by men of genius, our sonnet in time would rival the Italian". All his sonnets, however, were written at Versailles in 1865 (the one alluded to above was also revised and rewritten) and sent back to Calcutta for publication.

Thus, within the very short span of only four years, Madhusudan, Bengal's prodigal son, thoroughly revolutionized the literary climate and totally altered the course of Bengali poetry. He gave Bengal her first modern tragedy, the first social comedies, the first epic and blank verse, the first sonnet; along with these went a secular elevation of theme and mighty music altogether unknown to the men of letters.

IV

The apex of his poetical career had already been reached, but he refused to accept the contented grace of a settled life. His boyhood obsession for Albion's shores returned with the recovery of ancestral property from the usurping hands of his relatives; and he felt: "But I suppose, my poetical career is drawing to a close. I am making arrangements to go to England to study for the Bar and must bid adieu to the Muse... No more Modhu the *Kavi*, old fellow, but Michael M. S. Dutt Esquire of the Inner Temple Barrister-at-law!! Ha!! Ha!!"

The arrangements he spoke of regarding matters financial were made and he sailed for England in the middle of 1862. But, if conversion to Christianity was his first blunder, his going to England was the second, which, however, threw into intenser relief the tragic lustre of the symbol. For some months the

arrangements worked according to plan, but then broke completely because of the betrayal of his nominees. Financially stranded, his wife left Calcutta to meet with him in England. Disgraced and humiliated for growing indebtedness, the family crossed the English Channel for France and came to Versailles. But this flight proved to be moving from the frying pan into the fire. At last on June 2, 1864, Madhusudan wrote to Vidyasagar the following letter, which vividly described the desperate plight he was in:

"You will be startled, I am sure, grieved to learn that I am at this moment the wreck of the strong and hearty man who bade you adieu two years ago with a bounding heart and that this calamity has been brought upon me by the cruel and inexplicable conduct of men, one of whom at least, I felt strongly persuaded, was my friend and well-wisher, namely Babu D(igamber Mitra). The whole thing is a tale of cruel shame, but I must tell it to you in confidence, of course.

"When I left Calcutta, my wife and two children remained behind, and it was arranged between Mahadeb Chatterjee, my patneedar and myself that the former should give my family 150 Rs. a month. Baboo D—consented to see the things arranged were properly carried on and so I started. A part of the money was paid in advance and deposited in the Oriental Bank. This was in June 1862. How poor Mrs Dutt was treated I have not the patience to describe. They troubled her to such an extent that she absolutely fled from Calcutta with our two infants. She reached England on the 2nd of May, 1863. From that day to the present, we have not received a pice from India, although there has been money due, some for the year 1862, and some since December last from the Talooks, and the only letter which Baboo D—wrote to us, was written just ten months ago. We have since written to him no less than 8 letters, but not a line have we received from him.

"I am going to a French Jail and my poor wife and children must seek shelter in a charitable institution tho' I have fairly 4000 Rs. due to me in India. The Benchers of Gray's Inn, from whom I was compelled to draw 400 Rs., have suspended me and this is the third term I am losing this year. I also owe 260 Rs. to Monou, who poor fellow, is no doubt quite inconvenienced by my failure to pay him.

"You are the only friend who can rescue me from the painful position to which my confidence in D—has placed me, and in this, you must go to work with that grand energy which is the companion of your genius and manliness of heart".

In another letter of the 18th June he said:

"If we perish, I hope, our blood will cry out to God for vengeance against our murderers. If I had not little helpless children and my wife with me, I should kill myself, for there is nothing in the instrument of misery and humiliation, however base and low which I have not sounded. God has given me a brave and proud heart or it would have broken long ago".

Vidyasagar, as was characteristic of him, raised money in great promptitude and disbursed the same to France to save the national poet from further humiliation. Madhusudan returned to England to re-enter Gray's Inn, and came out successfully in November, 1865. But he did not immediately leave Europe for home. The hedonistic perception of life which was one thesis of the ideology of our renaissance captivated him again, if not with the force of the original fixation, at least with such power as to make him forget the painful memories of his immediate past. Even in the very abject state of his humiliation he could write, "I wish to leave my children behind—and I want them to be thoroughly Europeanised". In another letter he declared, "This is unquestionably the best quarter of the globe. I have better dinners for a few francs than the Raja of

Burdwan ever dreams of; I can for a few francs enjoy pleasures that it would cost him half his enormous wealth to command, —no, even that would be too little. Such music, such dancing, such beauty! This is the *amaravati* of our ancestral creed. Come here and you will soon forget that you spring from a degraded and subject race. Here you are the master of your masters!" Again the old crippling desire to wipe out the disgrace of complexion and blood; and once again thinking in terms of the false and fatal analogy from Europe to India.

But, even the gloomiest of days could not crush his intellectual interests. With aching sadness in his heart he could yet write: "Though I have been very unhappy and full of anxiety here, I have very nearly mastered French. I speak it well and write it better. I have also commenced Italian and mean to add German to my stock of languages, if not Spanish and Portuguese before I leave Europe." Alongside this, he also vividly recollected, in the darkest hour, his childhood memories of nature's green expanse, the chirping birds, the river Kapotaksha, the immortal mythological poets of Bengal, and made the recollections eternal in his Bengali sonnets. These sonnets also include those on Goethe, Tennyson, Hugo, Dante and others. That on Dante was composed on the eve of his hexa-centenary celebrations and was sent to the King of Italy with French and Italian translations done by himself. This was perhaps the first attempt by a Bengali poet to establish cultural relations with other nations, though in his epics Madhusudan had given ample evidence of his world-wide literary affiliation.

In the accompanying letter⁹ to the King of Italy, he, full of humility, wrote

"Sir,

A poor rhymers who does not dare give himself the name of a poet, born on the shores of the Ganges and a passionate admirer of the father of Italian poetry, takes the liberty of

presenting at the feet of your Majesty, along with this letter, a Bengali sonnet, a little oriental flower which he wishes to join to the garland to be wreathed in Italy, for decorating the tomb of the illustrious Dante.

	Of your Majesty,
12, Rue-des-Chantiers,	the very humble servant
Varsailles, 5th May, 1865.	Michael Madhusudan Datta

This letter received a gracious reply from the "Minister of the Royal Family, First Division",¹⁰ which said,

"Sir,

The King, my august sovereign, has received the poem on Dante which you have so graciously offered on the occasion of the centenary of our national poet.

His Imperial Majesty has heard with lively satisfaction, that the profound and noble harmony of the Italian genius finds an echo on the shores of the Ganges and he welcomes with pleasure the oriental flower which you desire to place on the grave of Aligheri and he thinks that the moment is not very distant when Italy will see accomplished her auspicious destiny of being the ring which will unite the orient with the occident."

To be an ambassador of India's love for Dante was, one would consider, extremely becoming of an intellectual with a cosmopolitan view of life and literature.

V

Madhusudan returned to Calcutta early in 1867, but there was a wilful delay in admitting him to the Bar. For months he was kept hanging on, and it was only in May following that he could make a beginning as a Barrister of the Calcutta High Court.

At that time he stayed at the expensive Spences' Hotel where

he lived alone, but had in his possession three spacious rooms. Here he lavishly entertained his friends for whom his cellar was always kept open. His earnings as a lawyer (estimated roughly at Rs. 1,500/- — Rs. 2,000/- per month on the average) fell sadly short of his extravagant expenses. He sold his properties in order to free Vidyasagar from the encumbrances and debts the latter had to incur on his behalf. But his desire to play the role of a master of masters soon was faced with incalculable handicaps to fruition. In 1869 his wife and children returned from Europe. Madhusudan rented a big house in Loudon Street on a monthly rent of Rs. 400/- ; and as his income began to show signs of an alarming decline, he joined the translation division of the High Court's appellate section on a salary of Rs. 1,000/- to Rs. 1,500/- a month. He stuck to it for about two years, but the salary was too meagre for the kind of fast living that he became accustomed to since his return from Europe. He returned to the Bar, but, soon left it to serve as legal adviser to some native states, rejoined the Bar after a few months. By that time he was a complete broke.

The end was approaching faster than one could imagine. The decrepit body rendered further enfeebled by fresh attacks of various ailments found shelter in the library room of the Zamindars of Uttarpur, with his family accompanying him. His wife too was then bedridden. The helpless invalidated man of song could offer little resistance to the rapidly encircling gloom. They were brought to Calcutta in the hope of betterment, and Madhusudan was taken to the General Hospital which then admitted only Europeans.

His wife died on June 26, 1873, and only three days later the prodigal himself breathed his last.

VI

Great poetry is born of an acute emotional crisis, just as

thought itself is born of failure. In the highly distressed condition of his being the suffering mind becomes occupied as much with the human state as with the exclusively private; and through an agonised process of building, discarding, re-building and synthesis arrives at an imaginative re-creation of reality which holds up a mirror as much to the present as to the future. The individual and the general human states become fused into one.

The genesis of the crisis in Madhusudan's life has to be traced to his conversion to Christianity. It was quickly intensified, and also exceedingly, during his stay at the Bishop's College, and by the time he reached Madras, it had so deepened and assumed a proportion that it could not be either dissolved or diminished by offering any marginal or superficial solution. The transient calm and happiness that he found there helped the crisis to journey further within in the hidden layers of his mind. The crisis was taken into the unconscious, and the conflict that eventually ensued between his obsession (to become English-like) and the consciousness forced upon him by the brutal experiences of life regarding the impossibility of its fulfilment, revived in him his childhood loves, phantasies, memories of the speech spoken and heard by him. His sudden intention to regain his Bengali through the Ramayana and the Mahabharata took him back once again to his mother who in his childhood implanted on his mind love of mythology and love of heroic themes.

There was no easy road to freedom, and the struggle had to be carried on. The cold reception that his *Captive Ladie* was given in Calcutta inflicted another blow on his obsession, and in a valiant attempt to regain his identity through the mother tongue, he found access, again through his mother, to the myths, folk-lore, fairy tales and popular beliefs, in a word to the collective unconscious which, before it was disturbed and disarrayed by the impact of western culture, was the very

rich store of values built through the centuries and of a world-view shared in common.¹¹ Thus, he succeeded in re-establishing a positive, fruitful relationship with the language and with the values enriching it, and, through it with the people born to it. The same critical experience he had to live through once again during the bleak days of his stay at Versailles. His eager hapless mind in search of shelter and security and also of identity went back to the reminiscent rays of childhood memories, the beauties that adorned the everyday rural life shared by all. He became increasingly aware that he could not have a name or an identity if he continued to dress in borrowed suits, speaking intellectually; that it was through the language alone that one could choose or build the world-order one was to live in; and also that imaginative re-creation of both the private and universal states became a success and a reality when embodied in the language carried through the gene.

During the latter half of his stay at Madras this awareness consequent upon victory over the obsession was preserved and accumulated in his subconscious. So that, when in Calcutta the distorted associations were clearing up and chance circumstances were throwing before him opportunities to express himself, the aforesaid awareness and relationship gushed forth into print with tremendous force and veracity. In a letter to Rajnarayan Bose on his poem *Tilottamā* Madhusudan wrote:

"I am afraid you think my style hard, but, believe me, I never study to be grandiloquent like the majority of the 'Barren rascals' that write books in these days of literary excitement. The words come unsought, floating in the stream of (I suppose I must call it) Inspiration! . . .

In two other letters on *Meghnādadh Kāvya* he said:

"I must tell you, my dear fellow, that though, as a jolly Christian youth, I don't care a pin's head for Hinduism, I love the grand mythology of our ancestors. It is full of

poetry. A fellow with an inventive head can manufacture the most beautiful things out of it."

And again:

"I had no idea, my dear fellow, that our mother tongue would place at my disposal such exhaustive materials, and you know I am not a good scholar. The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves, words that I never thought I knew. Here is a mystery for you...."

The mystery was the mystery of reaching back to the collective unconscious, and of establishing positive ties of fruitful relationship.

In thus regaining the vital roots of his identity he allowed himself to be shaped by the language and the world-order envisioned by it. But, simultaneously, he also made the language what it could be. Here we have to remember the secular elevation of theme and passion that he gave to it as also the innovations that he introduced into it. He gave it a further elevation by making it capable of forming new values.

In *Meghnādodadh Kāvya* he completely reversed the prevalent scale of values. The war between Rama and Ravana had traditionally been viewed as that between good and evil, with the good eventually triumphing over the evil. In Madhusudan's poem Rama wins no doubt, but his heart goes in weeping for the defeated. In a letter he wrote, "People here grumble and say that the heart of the poet in Meghnad is with the Rakhasas. And that is the real turth. I despise Ram and his rabble; but the idea of Ravan elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a grand fellow." In another, "It cost me many a tear to kill him (Meghnad)". He reversed the order of values perhaps because, intellectually, he stood violently against Aryan philistinism and cunning; because he considered that Aryan philistinism could not and should not be allowed a welcome

entry into poetry. For poetry *qua* poetry should have a crystal purity, above and beyond all deccit, hypocrisy and pretensions. Here perhaps can be found an explanation of his hatred of Rama. Here again, in the transvaluation of values, can be traced the birth in Bengali poetry of modern humanism; and Madhusudan was the first Bengali humanist poet.

One significant episode newly invented by him for his poem is Rama's descent into hell to meet his father Dashratha there, which is not found in Valmiki's poem. He might have got the idea from Dante's *Inferno* but the horrid pictures he has drawn of punishments to sin and sinners could only be drawn by one under terrible strains of inner conflicts in a desperate search for values that sustain humanity. This quest was in essence a re-affirmation of his faith in himself and in humanity. Here is a glimpse of the nether world, "a world where millions of creatures were swimming, struggling, and sinking in a lake of fire; where shadowy herds of human beings were driven like leaves before the wind; where women wan as the moon at daytime tore their hair in rage for the vain care they bestowed on it in life; where beauties decked out in meretricious ornament entwined with men of god-like appearance, but suddenly turning from lascivious tenderness to frenzied hate, rent them with tooth and nail, till blood flowed and each couple rolled on the ground like maddened beasts locked in fight; where even the virtuous had such shadowy insubstantiality that one could pass through them as one passes through crepuscular darkness".¹² A dreadfully fascinating picture that originated from an abhorrence of sin and love of purity and virtue.

The poem ends with Ravana bewailing the death, in a notoriously unjust war at the hands of an Aryan prince, of his beloved and patriotic son Meghnad. The whole kingdom is in mourning, tears rolling down from every eye; and a serene gloom pervades the whole atmosphere. If we ponder over this

it would appear that this was nothing but a projection into the world of imagination of a more aching gloom obtaining in life and reality. This impression is further strengthened by the fact that the same mood of decay, frustration and heavy loss—"oblivion's unfathom'd waters dark", "Tears welling up, blind these eyes of mine,"¹³ etc.—was recaptured by Madhusudan in his last sonnet written at Versailles in an hour of resounding pain. If we inter-connect the events of his life, the emotional undertones of his poems, and visualize them as parts of a comprehensive totality which was the historical situation, we would read into them a deeper meaning. The tears blinding his eyes were shed as much for Ravana, the "grand fellow", as for the independence and dignity that was lost, and for the possible loss of identity even. These were the emotional emissions of a bitter agony burning within. But it is needless to point out that this agony was a creative agony, since it was seeking life, not death.

VII

The intellectual implication of Madhusudan's tragedy is clear. Estrangement is a barren and negative relationship with the life and culture of the people to whom one really belongs. It helps neither the estranged being nor those estranged from. The identity that spatio-temporal relations bestow on one is definitely lost, resulting in the emergence of an existence where original relationships are hated and those artificially developed valued. Taken to extremes, it ends in a tragedy similar to Madhusudan's. Even his marriage with an English woman had had a symbolic portent, such as, India's renaissance wedded to England foretold disaster for itself, as had really been the case. The stunted and hybrid growth of India's renaissance and its non-fulfilment are a miserable tale of thinking in "analogy from Europe to India",¹⁴ and of abandoning the real for the unreal, the original for the artificial,

and certainly of the loss of identity through the loss of language.

Madhusudan's life has an instructive lesson for all of us. In a remarkable letter from Europe he said :

"There is nothing like cultivating and enriching our mother tongue.... I pray God that the noble ambition of Milton to do something for his mother tongue and his native land may animate all men of talent among us. If there be any one among us anxious to leave a name behind him, and not pass away into oblivion like a brute, let him devote himself to his mother tongue. That is his legitimate sphere, his proper element Let those who feel that they have springs of fresh thought in them fly to their mother tongue. . . Our Bengali is a beautiful language, it only wants men of genius to polish it up. Such of us, as owing to early defective education know little of it and have learnt to despise it, are miserably wrong. It is, or rather, it has the elements of a great language in it."

Every language has in it the elements of a great language. India's renaissance could have fulfilled itself only by seeking identity through her languages.

NOTES

1. *Michael and our Renaissance* included in "*Madhusudan O Uittarān*", a collection of essays edited by Biren Chattopadhyay, Calcutta, 1962, Indiana, p. 26.
2. Bholanath Chandra; see *Complete Works of Madhusudan* (in Bengali), Calcutta, 1965, introduction, p.12.
3. Gourdas Bysack; see *Ibid.*, p. 12.
4. Written in Calcutta in 1841.
5. See *Complete Works*, introduction, p. 13.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
7. *The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu*—an address delivered by Madhusudan at Madras in 1854.
8. Madhusudan's letter to Rajnarayan Bose: "I do not think R(angalal) either reads or can appreciate Milton; otherwise he would not have made those remarks in the concluding portion of his article. He reads Byron, Scott and Moore, very nice poets in their way no doubt, but by no means of the highest school of poetry, except perhaps Byron, now and then. I like Wordsworth better."
9. See introduction, pp. 41-42, *Complete Works*.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
11. This point has been convincingly illustrated by Bishnu De in his essay referred to above in note no. 1.
12. Abridged translation and summation by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, see his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, New York, 1951; p. 187.
13. This sonnet has been translated and quoted by Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Ibid.*, p. 182.
14. Lord Canning's phrase quoted by Bishnu De in the essay cited above.

CHAPTER IX

GROWTH OF SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

The origin and growth of scientific study and research in Bengal dates back to 1784 when, on the initiative of Sir William Jones, the Asiatic Society was founded in Calcutta. On his invitation 30 distinguished scholars representing the elite of the European community met on January 15, 1784, and Jones delivered a 'Discourse on the Institution of a Society for enquiring into the History, civil and natural, the Antiquities, Art and Science and Literature Of Asia'. In his address he stressed the need of an objective, on the field study of the cultures of Asia. He continued,

"You will investigate whatever is rare in the stupendous fabric of nature; will correct the geography of Asia by new observations and discoveries; will trace the annals and even traditions of those nations who, from time to time, have peopled and desolated it; and will bring to light their various forms of government, with their institutions, civil and religious; you will examine their improvements and methods in arithmetic and geometry....their systems of morality, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic; their skill in chirurgery and medicine; and their advancement, whatever it may be, in anatomy and chemistry. To this you will add researches into their agriculture, manufacture, and trade; and, whilst you enquire into their music, architecture, painting, and poetry, will not neglect those inferior arts, by which comforts, and even elegances of social life, are supplied or improved."

Finally, he also added: "If now it be asked, what are the intended objects of our enquiries within those spacious limits, we answer, Man and Nature; whatever is performed by the one, or produced by the other".¹

Thus was born the Asiatic Society of Bengal which was to implement in the field of practical research the grand idea of an objective, graphic study of man and his culture, as obtained or once existed in this vast continent of Asia. The comprehensive phrases embodied in Jones's speech have since been paraphrased into the following sentence: "The bounds of its investigations will be geographical limits of Asia, and within these limits its enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by man, or produced by nature".²

During the initial stages it was, however, found difficult to keep the Society alive, because of lack of scholarly papers and also of interest and enthusiasm proportionate to that of Jones himself. Yet, the almost superhuman energies of the founder and a few of his colleagues helped it to survive and live up to its great expectations. Upto the middle of the nineteenth century the Society had a practical monopoly of the new learning; and whatever original contributions were made in the field of Asian geology, meteorology, zoology, botany, etc., were done at the instance of and through its agency. The results of various investigations of its members were published in the Society's Journal. The emergence of highly specialized studies, however, was slow until after the middle of the century, when the above-said branches of scientific knowledge blossomed forth into separate departments and carried on their respective studies independently.

In the year 1866 was passed the Museum Act under which the Asiatic Society transferred all its zoological and archaeological collections to a Board of Trustees, and the Indian Museum was properly organized. The geological collections were entrusted to the Geological Survey of India.

In his inaugural address Jones mentioned that the qualification required for a membership of the Society was nothing more than "a love of knowledge and a zeal for promotion of it". But this criterion was neither accepted nor applied univer-

sally in actual practice. Indian scholars were not taken as members until 1829, that is, up to its forty-fifth year of existence. After that year leading members of the Bengali elite community began to associate themselves more actively than before with its exertions and their contributions too were more frequent. In spite of this early discrimination Bengal's intellectual movement owes much to the Asiatic Society and, in particular, to its founder Sir William Jones. For, Calcutta's European scholars were in fact the pioneers of the Sanskrit renaissance which elicited so much admiration of the learned in Europe. It has been claimed for Jones, especially by Sir Henry Maine, that he gave to the world "the modern science of Philology and the modern theory of race".⁸ Even if one hesitates to subscribe fully to this claim made on his behalf, one would gladly agree that his keen interests in the languages and peoples of India led ultimately to the discovery of her rich civilization.

From the particular angle of Bengal's intellectual interests, his endeavour to propagate his Indian studies among European scholars and learned bodies was indeed far reaching in its effects. It, on the one hand, made Europe aware of a rich ancient civilization and debarred arrogance from belittling it; and, on the other hand, it instilled in Bengal's new elite a love and a pride in her past glories, which were among the main emotional drives of Indian nationalism. It also inspired objective critical assessments of India's social institutions, which increasingly were subjected to deep historical and sociological scrutiny. These studies helped people engaged in academic pursuits to acquire an intellectual discipline and a clearer view of India's history.

II

The other important scientific bodies and institutions that came into being or were in existence during the period may here be noted. The Calcutta Botanical Gardens was founded

in 1788 at Sibpur, Howrah, at the instance of Col. Alexander Kyd. As it began to expand in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it created considerable interest among the Calcutta elite, many of whom, including the conservative-minded Raja Radhakanta Dev visited the Gardens to listen to interesting discourses by Dr Wallich. It also encouraged individual scientific enquirers like Akshay Kumar Dutt to have their own 'little Botanic Gardens' where to study plant life. (see Chapter VI).

In Calcutta an observatory was maintained⁴ in the Survey office buildings in Park Street from 1824, shifted afterwards to its own spacious buildings at Alipore. Radhanath Sikdar (see Chapter V) was made the Superintendent of Observatory towards the end of 1852.

The first scientific service to be established in India was the Trigonometrical Survey with Col. Lambton as the geodesist in 1800. It was later changed to the Great Trigonometrical Survey in 1818, also under Col. Lambton. There were also Topographical Survey and Revenue Surveys. All the three surveys were grouped in 1817 under Lt. Col. Colin Mackenzie, the first Surveyor-General in India. Later, in 1878 these were united as the Survey of India. A few Bengali intellectuals served in the Great Trigonometrical Survey, of which Radhanath Sikdar was, "a shining ornament".

In 1820 was established the Agricultural Society of India, the nomenclature of which was changed in 1823 to Agricultural and Horticultural Society, and still later to Agri-Horticultural Society. Radhakanta Dev, Peary Chand Mitra and others were actively associated with this society; the former made valuable contributions on the subject of horticulture which were appreciated.

In emulation of an English institution a Mechanics' Institute was established in Calcutta in 1839. Tarachand Chakraborty, the leader of the Young Bengal radicals was a member of its

executive committee since its inception; and George Thompson, of anti-slavery agitation fame and President of the Bengal British India Society, addressed the students of the Institute in 1843. But it did not survive long, and for very obvious reasons. In England the Mechanics' Institutes came into being in the wake of the Industrial Revolution which called into being a great number of engineers and mechanics. These institutes imparted to them basic instructions on chemistry, mechanics, economics, etc. and became a very popular feature of life in the industrial complexes of England. In 1823 "the *Mechanics' Magazine* sold 16,000 copies; and 1500 workmen subscribed a guinea apiece to the London Institute."⁵ In Bengal at that time the requisite social and industrial background was absent, and so the Mechanics' Institute of Calcutta found a natural death for want of sustenance.

In the year 1854 Col. Goodwin, an engineer, read before the Bethune Society a paper on "Union of Science, Industry and Art", and incidentally made a proposal for the establishment of an industrial art school. Accordingly, on a subsequent occasion a "Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art" was formed with Cecil Beadon as the President and the Rev. Long, W. Money, Kishorichand Mitra, Pratap Chandra Sinha and others as members of the executive committee.⁶ On the auspices of the Society was established the Calcutta School of Industrial Arts, for which a lump subscription of Rs. 3,555 was collected from prominent members of the European and Bengali communities. Most of them also agreed to pay monthly subscriptions for meeting the recurring expenses. Pratap Chandra Sinha also offered their large building at Natun Bazar, Chitpur, for the institute, rent free. Subjects like carpentry, pottery, drawing, sculpture, architecture, lithography, photography, etc., were taught at the school.⁷ According to a news item published on 24 August, 1854, all the seats for the drawing and pottery sections were filled up on the very opening

day and many had to go back frustrated. The paper⁸ estimated that the number of students would exceed 500, if accommodation could be provided for them by the authorities. Contemporary evidences show that the government also sanctioned a monthly grant of Rs. 200 for the school, and that annual exhibitions of works done by the students were also held.⁹

On the whole, interests in scientific studies and applied sciences were on the increase. Contemporary newspapers and journals were not only printing attractive articles on the subjects, but demanding their substantial cultivation and encouragement by the government. We have already discussed *Tattwabodhini Patrika's* efforts towards this end (see Chapter VI). Other newspapers, *Sambād Prabhākar* in particular, were also insisting on this; demands for technical schools were voiced as early as 1847, and in an editorial published on December 22, 1863, *Sambād Prabhākar* strongly pleaded for the establishment of an agricultural school so that improved methods of cultivation could be adopted.¹⁰

III

Arrangements for imparting medical lessons to learners were made in both the Calcutta Madrasa and the Sanskrit College. Instructions, however, were confined to the *Yunani* system of medicine in the former and to the Hindu system in the latter. These comprised of oral lectures only, and no demonstration or practical work was called for. Nor was there any idea of dissection.

In 1822 was founded the Native Medical Institute for the training of Indian physicians intended to serve in the army under European superiors. Here also instructions were given through lectures only, and there was apparently no demonstration or practical work, except compounding. Dissection of human bodies did not form any part of the curriculum.¹¹ Trevelyan has recorded that "there was only one teacher

attached to the institution, and he delivered his lectures in Hindusthancee. The only medical books open to the pupils were a few short tracts which had been translated for their use into that language; the only dissection practised was that of the inferior animals....The knowledge communicated by such imperfect means could neither be complete nor practical".¹²

Moreover, no attention or consideration was given to the medical needs of the civil population. The expanding empire needed not only an increase in the number of doctors but their easy availability also. The need of a broad-based Medical College was felt, which would train physicians upto the European standard of the time. Accordingly, in 1835, the Calcutta Medical College came into being. Special accent was given on its civil character, the diploma-holders were expected to serve under government in essentially civil capacities. The instructions were to be imparted in English, while the principles and practice followed there were to be those of European medical science. The founding of this college was really a milestone in the history of scientific studies in Bengal; for, here, in its precincts, was performed in 1836 the first dissection by an Indian—Madhusudan Gupta that, while shocking the superstitious credulity of his countrymen, trumpeted the victory of scientific spirit. To this we are coming later.

In 1839 the first batch of medical students sat for the final examination. There were altogether 11 students; 1 Christian, 1 Brahmin, 5 Kayasthas and 4 Vaidyas.¹³ Of these the first two dropped out, and of the rest five came out successful. These were: Uma Charan Sett, Dwaraka Nath Gupta, Raj Krishna Deb, Nabin Chandra Mitra, and Shyama Charan Datta. All of them were appointed sub-assistant surgeons. In those days and even long after the covenanted medical service was not open to Indians.

In the year 1844 the Calcutta business magnate and philan-

thropist, Moti Lal Sil, made a generous gift of a piece of land adjacent to the Medical College, for the purpose of construction of a hospital intended for the poor. On this plot was subsequently constructed the Medical College Hospital, the foundation stone of which was laid by Lord Dalhousie on September, 3, 1848, and the hospital was declared open in 1853. The timely foundation of this hospital contributed greatly towards dispelling people's inhibitions regarding European systems of medical treatment and helped popularising the same.

IV

But in the annals of the progress and cultivation of science in India the name of Madhusudan Gupta stands out as both outstanding and symbolic. He was the first Indian who, in courageous defiance of the abounding disgrace caused by superstitious beliefs, performed the first dissection on a human body, so long looked upon as a harrowing sin. To generations of medical men in Calcutta he became a symbol of the triumph of the modern scientific spirit. He was also a pioneer in writing medical books in Bengali.

Born c. 1800 at Vaidyabati, a few miles from Calcutta, he joined the Sanskrit College in mid-twenties of the last century, and acquired proficiency in both Sanskrit literature and Hindu Medicine. His uncommon success in his studies conferred on him a unique distinction : he was made a teacher while he was still a student or Head student by which name he was known to all. This came in the wake of resignation on health grounds of their teacher of Hindu medicine, Khudiram Visharad. He remained in the teaching staff of the Sanskrit College from 1830 to the middle of January, 1835. During this period he translated into Sanskrit Hooper's *Anatomist Vademecum*, for the benefit of students of the medical section. This work was rewarded with a prize of Rs. 1,000/- by the Bengal government. After that he was appointed a demonstrator of anatomy

and surgery, when the Medical College was established in 1835.

It was here on January 10, 1836, that he performed the historic dissection that totally altered the course of medicinal ideas and treatment in people's minds. It was also a vigorous blow on the prevalent prejudice against it. John Drinkwater Bethune, while unveiling his portrait in 1849, vividly recalled the scene in the following words:

"At the appointed hour, scapel in hand, he followed Dr Goodeve, into the godown where the body lay ready. The other students, deeply interested in what was going forward but strangely agitated with mingled feelings of curiosity and alarm, crowded after them, but durst not enter the building where this fearful deed was to be perpetrated; they clustered round the door, they peeped through the jilmils, resolved at least to have ocular proof of its accomplishment. And when Madhusudan's knife, held with a strong and steady hand, made a long and deep incision in the breast, the lookers-on drew a long gasping breath, like men relieved from the weight of some intolerable suspense".¹⁴

The occasion was celebrated by gun-fire from Fort William. The gun-fire resounded with echoes of the end of one as well as the beginning of a new epoch in Bengal. Truly has it been recorded, "The day will even be marked in the annals of Western Medicine in India when Indians rose superior to the prejudices of their earlier education and thus boldly flung up the gates of the modern medical science" to our countrymen.¹⁵

Madhusudan, by his exertions and perseverance, learnt English, though he was fairly advanced in age, and sat for and obtained the diploma in the highest medical examination of the College in 1840. During 1843-1844 the Military or the

secondary section of the college was reorganised and he was made the superintendent of the section in addition to his duties as demonstrator. In the new department he taught his Hindustani-speaking students physiology, surgery, etc. He was made a sub-assistant surgeon (class I) in 1848, and the following year the government honored him by placing his portrait at the Medical College Theatre, painted by Mrs. Belnos and unveiled by Bethune.

As an author also Madhusudan earned distinction. He translated into Bengali and published in 1849 an English work entitled *London Pharmacopoeia*, and also published an original work on anatomy in Bengali. He instilled confidence in the minds of others to discard prejudices that barred the road to progress. Muslim students of the secondary section, equally prejudiced against dissection, were encouraged by him to perform the deed, which they did. He was thus a living inspiration to all students and seekers after knowledge, and was held in high esteem by the elite community for his scholarly attainments, efficiency at dissection, and, above all, for the spirit of liberation from obscurantism which he symbolized.

NOTES

1. Quoted by L. L. Fermor in his annual address; Year Book of Asiatic Society of Bengal for 1934; Vol. I, 1935, p. 16.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
3. Quoted by Risley in his speech at the annual meeting of the Asiatic Society in 1904.
4. See Fermor's speech cited in note no. 1.
5. G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, London, 1948, pp. 479-480.
6. Quoted by Benoy Ghosh, *Samayik Patre Bāglār Samājchitra*, Calcutta, 1962, Vol. I, p. 535.
7. *Sambād Prabdhākar* for 24.5.1854; Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 351.
8. *Ibid.*; Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 359-360.
9. Manmathanath Ghosh, *Karmavir Kishori Chand* (in Bengali), p. 94, quoted by Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, p. 535.
10. Benoy Ghosh, *op. cit.*, pp. 67 and 115.
11. See Lt. Col. D. G. Crawford's article "The Centenary of the Calcutta Medical College," in *Bengal Past and Present*, Calcutta, July-December, 1934; pp. 71-77.
12. C. E. Trevelyan, *On the Education of the People of India*, Calcutta, 1838, p. 27.
13. Crawford, *op. cit.*
14. Quoted in the Appendix to the Bengali Translation of Pearychand Mitra's "A Biographical Sketch of David Hare"; Calcutta, 1964, pp. 257-258.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 258. Quoted from *The Centenary of the Medical College*, 1935, pp. 12-13.

CHAPTER X

THE URBAN ELITE AND BENGAL'S RENAISSANCE

The progress of the intellectual movement synchronised with the urban transformation of Calcutta which became its nursery. She proved to be an extremely jealous mother. The affection and love she instilled in the hearts of her new-born elite were too strong to allow them to help radiate the rays of learning among the rural 'savages'. Indeed, it remains rather a perplexing problem why so vociferous a movement failed to bring the countryside within its orbit or to effect a fundamental change in the world-view of the people residing there. The answer seems to lie to a large extent in urban psychology and in the peculiar history of Calcutta's development.

An attempt to explain the phenomenon has been made in this chapter.

I

Calcutta, hailed in the latter half of the nineteenth century as 'the Brightest Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire', had in the beginning neither physical glamour nor cultural ancestry.¹ It was in the seventeenth century and even in the early eighteenth an anomalous cluster of hamlets and huts of which the three relatively important ones—Sutanati, Gobindapur, Kalikata—on their coalescence into one formed the nucleus. Encircling the nucleus were a good number of insignificant hamlets, known as *panchannagrams* or fifty five villages, which were incorporated later, when British paramountcy was finally established after 1757 and 1765. Of these altogether twenty villages comprised the area of Calcutta proper, while the rest surrounded it as suburbs of a fast growing metropolis.

Holwell, the zemindar of Calcutta, in fact the Magistrate-Collector, divided the town towards the middle of the eighteenth century into a number of distinct quarters, allotting each to one occupational group or caste. "Thus originated *tolas* and *tulis*. . . . Kumartuli for the *Kumars* (potters), Collotola for the *Kulus* (oil pressurers), Jeliatola for *Jelias* (fish catchers), Domtooly for the Doms or scavengers or basket-makers, Goalatolly for the *Goalas* (Holwell's 'palanquin bearers, milkmen'). Ahirtola for the *Ahirs* (Behari goalas as distinguished from the Bengali goalas), Cossaitola for the Cossais (butchers), Patuatola for the Patuas (painters), Sankharitola for the *sakhari's* (conchshell workers), Beparitola for the *Beparis* (petty traders). . . ."² In addition to these there were also other localities divided occupation-wise for sweepers, tailors, washerman, and Muslims. Urbanization of Calcutta thus honoured the traditional caste-division of Hindu society.

Side by side and facing the 'native town' stood the European or 'English' town, which was a 'fenced city' sharply demarcated from the former. The two towns existed as separate dissimilar entities with no social intercourse whatsoever, and meeting only at centres of commerce. The old Fort William was completed in the first decade of the eighteenth century. At that time there were a considerable number of Armenian and Portuguese cloth merchants inhabiting the area. All of them along with their neighbours and with also a few Dutch and Danes clustered round the Fort and the adjacent European factories.

Population increased proportionately and soon assumed a magnitude. "When Holwell looked after the zemindari of Calcutta there were 14,718 premises or *pattas* and population was approximately 120,000 (A. K. Ray—*Calcutta Town and Suburbs*, 1902, pp. 61-62). In 1802, according to an estimate of the magistrate of 24 Parganas, the population of Calcutta was approximately 600,000 (Fifth Report, II, 435)".³ By 1850 the increase in population was tremendous. For, in that year

the total number of dwelling houses was estimated at 62,565.⁴ That is, in about a hundred years' time, the number of premises increased by 47,847. Of the total premises there were 5,950 one-storeyed buildings, 6,438 two-storeyed, 721 three-storeyed, 10 four-storeyed and 1 five-storeyed building. The remaining 49,445 premises were huts.⁵

II

Calcutta's population became strikingly heterogeneous. Her original dwellers were cotton weavers and fishermen; with perhaps a few other non-descript inhabitants. The Brahmin family of Kalighat who owned the Kali temple had little to do with the conglomeration of huts called Calcutta, nor the Brahmin zemindars of Behala, standing farther south. But as the town developed as the nexus of continental trade in cotton cloth, various other people belonging to different castes began to throng there, either as agents or writers to foreign merchants or as just fortune seekers. In Harrington's list of occupational castes paying occupational tax in Calcutta in 1788 the following castes were included: "Brahmins, whose occupation was sacerdotal attendance on lower castes, Brahmins, who received offerings at funeral ceremonies, weavers (Tauntee and Jugee), iron mongers, barbers, sellers of betel and betel nuts (Teyley and Tamboolee), brass and copper-smiths, shell workers, sellers of spiceries, florists, confectioners, milkmen, sellers of gold and silver bullion, washermen, manufacturers and sellers of oil, blanket manufacturers, sellers of rice, fishermen, carpenters, gold and silversmiths, sifters of grain, shoemakers, boatmen, wax manufacturers and match workers, rope makers... Besides the above there were shopkeepers, painters and women of the town" (G. G. in Council-revenue-Vol. 132).⁶

Superseding and discarding caste-limitations grew the business community, which amalgamated all castes; and by

that time Calcutta's indigenous business had begun to be dominated by higher caste Hindus, like Brahmins and Kayasthas. In a "petition presented by ninety-five of the principal native inhabitants of Calcutta in 1766 against hanging a man for forgery more than eighty were high caste Hindus with such surnames as Mukerjee, Banerjee, Sarma, Tagore, Datta, Mitra, Ghosh, Sen, etc. Most of them were Calcutta Banians (*Long : Selections from unpublished records* No. 840)".⁷

Not merely that, in the vivid words of Dr S. K. Chatterjee: "Expansions of British trade attracted to Bengal a growing number of non-Bengali Indians.... Bankers and financiers from Rajasthan, Panjab and Uttar Pradesh, dealers in country produce which had export value from the whole of North India, importers of English and other foreign goods, and men of humbler ranks who were required in the various walks of civil life for which the local Bengalis were not prepared, began to throng to Calcutta—servants and day labourers, watchmen, sepoys from Bihar and U.P. (Bhojpurias who gradually replaced the Telugu-speaking Telinga or *Colinga* sepoys from Madras brought to Calcutta by the East India Company — these people were accommodated in the area formerly known as *Colinga* Bazar, then changed to Colin Street), grooms for horses, palankeen bearers from both Bihar and Orissa, etc., and persons (mostly Muslims) who trained themselves up to be domestic servants of English sojourners in Calcutta, also found ready jobs in Calcutta. Musicians, artistic craftsmen and sellers of luxury goods began to come to Calcutta, where they were sure to obtain the patronage of both the Bengali *nouveau riche* from among the landlords and merchants".⁸ Thus was added an important new element to the local population of the growing city.

The foreigners also grew numerous. In addition to the European nationals named above, there came French, Italian, German, American, Jewish and even a few Swedish⁹ nationals.

There were also Moors, Central Asians and even Chinese nationals¹⁰.

Calcutta thus quickly expanded into a cosmopolitan city, and Indo-European co-operation in matters of trade and commerce became an important feature of its economic life. It assumed a new name—a 'banian' city, a compradore city.

III

A most hectic pursuit of wealth started. The banian residents of Calcutta and the neighbouring European settlements came to occupy a very significant position in all commercial transactions and thus to exercise a not inconsiderable domination over their European employers. An eighteenth century banian was "an interpreter, head book keeper, head Secretary, head broker, the supplier of cash and cash keeper". Again, "A banian is a person by whom all purchases and all sales of goods, merchandize and produce are made and through whom all shipments are made on account and on behalf of the merchants or mercantile firm in whose establishment he is a banian. Such a banian is therefore responsible for the quality and quantity of the goods, merchandize, produce and shipments made through him or his Sircars, or servants whom he employs. He has to make good any deficiency in weight or quality, to make compensation for any fraud in shipments of such goods or produce. The banian receives a dustoree or a percentage of the sale and produce of goods and merchandize".¹¹

The banian's influence over his employers was in direct proportion to the volume of work done by him. It is not to be supposed, however, that the banians were impeccable men of virtue and conscience, or that they cared a pin's head for professional integrity. In fact, they earned, perhaps deservedly, a very bad name. "Macrabie and Mrs Fay describe them vividly. In Macrabie's Journal dated February 21, 1776, there

is an entry in which the words uttered by a banian are exactly reproduced—"Yes, yes, very right, what master says, my way, bad way, master account right". Mrs. Fay wrote in 1780, "The banians outbid each other. One says, 'master had better take me; I will advance five thousand'; another offers seven and perhaps a third ten thousand". (Mrs. Fay's letters, page 140)¹²

An enormous amount of wealth got accumulated in their hands. "The East India Company's total debts on 31 January, 1793, amounted to C. R. 9,08,45,508. Cornwallis wrote that the 'natives' were the largest holders of the Company's bonds. According to Tucker, financial adviser to Wellesley, the bonds held by the natives of Bengal on 31 January, 1801 amounted to S.R. 1,89,45,000 while those held by Europeans amounted to S.R. 6,69,20,000."¹³ This decline in the value of bonds held by Bengalis is perhaps explained by the fact that the banians after 1793 had begun investing on land and acquiring large properties in Calcutta.

The opulent banians demonstrated their wealth by spending extravagant amounts of money on marriage and *sradh* ceremonies. Raja Nabakrishna of Shovabazar was said to have spent 9 lakhs of rupees on his mother's *sradh* ceremony, and Ganga Govinda Sinha, on a similar occasion spent 12 lakhs according to some and 20 lakhs in the opinion of others. Gokul Ghosal distributed food to 1,800 persons every day. Only these three cases are mentioned to indicate what lavish expenditures the banians were in a position to make. They also constructed bathing ghats on the eastern bank of the river Hooghly, perhaps to expiate for the dishonesty and sin committed by them in commercial dealings. Thus was established in Calcutta the aristocracy of wealth.

Some grew fabulously rich. One of them was Ram Dulal Dey. It is gathered from records of a case instituted by one of his assistants claiming a share of the commission received

from supplies made by Dey's firm in Hannay Sahib's Kothce that between 1797 and 1821, they supplied cargo to 155 vessels worth Rs. 367.20 lakhs.¹⁴ Ram Dulal died in 1825, and after his death his two sons were considered to be two of the wealthiest men in Calcutta.

During the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century three Indians figured most prominently in Indo-British business partnerships. They were Dwarakanath Tagore, Rustomji Cowasji and Motilal Sil. The two first named were, besides being Directors of the Union Bank and of docking companies, "connected with British partners in the Hope River Insurance Company, Globe Insurance Company, Oriental Life Insurance Company and Alliance Insurance Company." Moreover, Dwarakanath was associated with Carr Tagore & Co., and the Bengal Coal Co., and Cowasji with Rustomji Turner & Co., and the Bengal Salt Co. Motilal Sil was regarded as one of the dictators of the Calcutta money market. "He began as a dealer in bottles and corks. . . . He became very prominent not long after in export import business. He began to send cargo of indigo, salt, sugar, saltpetre and opium in distant ventures. He turned his attention to shipping as well. Some of his tug steamers were used in coastal shipping."¹⁵

Dwarakanath Tagore's properties would be testimony enough to what the Bengali business men as a community owed to British paramountcy.

"Dwarakanath's Will (O. W. 15736): An Inventory of his estate and effects:

1. Real properties in Pabna, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Dacca, Junglemahals, Tipperah, Faridpur, Hooghly, (mention of two Patni taluks), Izara mahals in Cuttack and Jessore.
2. Indigo factories in six places.
3. Kumarkhali silk filatures.
4. Salt works.

5. Hauts, bazars and lands:—

- (a) Dwelling house at Jorasanko.
- (b) Belgatchia Garden.
- (c) Three storied mansion at 41, Chowringhee.
- (d) Two other pieces of land at the same place.
- (e) Upper roomed house at Ballygunje.
- (f) Three houses at Jorasanko.

House and buildings at Jorasanko, godown at Tallah, houses, buildings, tanks in Beliaghata, Bhowanipore, Entally, Tangra, an estate in 24 Parganas, land at Baranagore, Tangra and other places.

51 Union Bank shares.

11 shares in Oriental Life Assurance Co.

10 shares in Steam Navigation Co.

3 shares in Calcutta Steam Tug Association.

3 shares in Assam Co.

1 share in Bombay Bank.

"I Dwarakanath Tagore have placed at the disposal of the said firm of Carr Tagore & Co. as a loan to the said firm and for Capital stock of the said co-partnership business the sum of Company rupees one million."¹⁶

This obsessive pursuit of wealth could succeed only because a congenial atmosphere was created by imperialism and an acquisitive psychology was most cunningly engineered by it. Without the British conquest of India this banian community could never have come into existence and amassed so much wealth at the cost of the poor in India. So, whoever was engaged in trade or commerce in whatever proportion or of whatever status was not only subservient to the British rule but prayed for its perpetuation. An open declaration of loyalty was made as early as 1798, when "several of the principal native inhabitants of Calcutta, who were desirous of testifying their loyalty to the King of England....held a meeting on the 21st of August, 1798, and determined to raise a subscription among

their body, for the same purpose... viz., to assist the Government in carrying on the war then raising in defence of England, and her Eastern possessions. The signatures to the requisition for the meeting were: Gourchurn Mullick, Nemoy Churn Mullick, Ramkissen Mullick, Gopeemohan Tagore, Collychurn Holder, Russick Lall Dutt, and Gocool Chund Dutt... all wealthy and loyal subjects, and who showed their liberality by subscribing a sum of Rs. 20,800 at once".¹⁷

IV

The banian city had meanwhile acquired the prestigious status of a metropolis. Since the days of Warren Hastings it had become the seat of supreme revenue administration, the supreme courts had been instituted there, and had virtually become the capital of England's Indian empire. This dignity and expansion of Calcutta spelt inevitable doom for Bengal's once prosperous cities and centres of learning, like Dacca, Murshidabad and Krishnanagar.

Dacca was once a city of great trade, four miles long and two and a half miles broad, and was also at one time the capital of Bengal. European traders—the Armenians, the Dutch, the French and the English—went there in good numbers for "investment and private trade" in the world-famous muslin cloth. But before the eighteenth century was out, it declined considerably. In 1799 the English commercial resident at Dacca reported that "the industry was diminished to one-fifth of what it had been till 1792. The value of the Company's cotton goods export from Dacca fell to about 3½ lakhs in 1813. The factory was closed soon after. The population dwindled to 200,000 (Taylor—Cotton Manufacture of Dacca)".¹⁸ In 1830s it further dwindled to the insignificant figure of 20,000 inhabitants.

Murshidabad, the capital of later Muslim rulers of Bengal, was much larger than Dacca. But it also soon became a desolate town of "roofless palaces and weed-choked tanks". The

devastating famine of 1770 and the transfer of Dewani offices in 1772 to Calcutta started the process of disintegration. "So long as criminal justice and police were in the hands of the Naib Nazim the city had some importance but when in 1790 Cornwallis took over the administration of criminal justice and police and transferred the Sadar Nizamat Adalat to Calcutta the city lost even its vestiges of greatness". Its silk trade still attracted traders, indigenous and foreign, but they did not come to stay but went away with the local produce. Interpreters of Muslim law, Muslim physicians and administrators soon found themselves reduced from a position of eminence to one of nullity. Md Reza Khan, who was entrusted by the Company with the administration of Bengal, civil, criminal and revenue, himself transferred his residence to Calcutta. "It was reported in 1801 that the high road of communication immediately through the city of Murshidabad was so completely out of condition as to be absolutely impossible for carriages. It was cut up, full of holes, with encroachments of the holding on all sides, hardly leaving room in some places for the passage of palanquins (Fifth Report, Vol. II, p 587)".¹⁹

Maharaja Krishnachandra of Nadia died in 1782; his death synchronised with the decline of Nabadwip-Krishnanagar as the centre of traditional Sanskrit learning and culture. In Calcutta the British administrator-scholars were getting interested in Hindu law, social institutions and Sanskrit literature, and a need was felt for having them translated into English. For this purpose they required competent scholars who could interpret as well as teach the same to them. So, a demand for Sanskrit scholars was created and many eminent Sanskritists found their passage to Calcutta. The men who helped Charles Wilkins to translate the *Bhagbad Gita* into English or who helped Sir William Jones to acquire proficiency in Sanskrit were men of exceptional personal integrity. Amongst them were also "men who refused to accept more than

the moderate daily subsistence of one rupee each day during the term (1773-1775) they were employed in the compilation of Halhed's compilation of the Code of Hindu Laws" (Br. Mus. 14060 C. 7).²⁰ Sanskrit scholars who assisted Halhed in the work were: Ramgopal Nyaylankar, Bireswar Panchanan, Krishnajiwan Nyaylankar, Baneshwar Bidyalankar, Kripa Ram Tarkasidhanta, Krishnachandra Sarbabhouma, Gourikanta Tarkasidhanta, Krishna Keshab Tarkalankar, Sitaram Bhattacharjee, Kali Sankar Bhattacharjee, Shyam Sunder Nyaya Sidhanta (*A Code of Gentoo Laws*—Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, 1776)".²¹ Three other eminent Sanskritists were also there. They were Pandit Ramlochan, Jones's teacher, Jagannath Tarkapanchanan, who edited Jones's *Digest of Hindu Law*, and Radhakanta Sharman, who worked with Warren Hastings and John Shore.

Verily, the banian city had been transformed into a centre of enlightenment and culture. In the middle of the eighteenth century Calcutta perhaps did not have a single *tal* (Sanskrit school), but in 1818 it possessed 28 *tal*s as against Nadia's 31; and in 1830 Dr H. H. Wilson found 25 *tal*s existing there.²² That is to say, in twelve years' time Nadia lost six more of its Sanskrit schools.

Nabadwip-Krishnanagar, thus, as a centre of learning and princely patronage began to recede into the past. Calcutta, on the other hand, both enticed away its scholars and usurped its distinction.

V

With the establishment in Calcutta of a good number of schools, both English and vernacular, on individual and collective enterprise during the first decades of the nineteenth century, the number of educated people rose rapidly; and there was witnessed an almost explosive craze for English education (see Chapter IV). Schools came to be founded at district

administrative centres also, but these pale into insignificance when compared with Calcutta schools in respect of strength or popularity.

The following return of the number and caste of students in educational establishments as on April 30, 1845, shows the relative positions of Calcutta schools and those at other centres of administration maintained at the public expense.²³

<i>Name of Institution</i>	<i>Caste of students</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Hindus</i>	<i>Mahomedans</i>	
Cal. Sans. College	—	189	—	189
Cal. Hindu College	—	516	—	516
Cal. Patsullah	—	188	—	188
Cal. School Society's School	—	469	—	469
Cal. Madrasa	—	—	152	152
Cal. Secondary School	1	14	66	81
Hooghly Mohsin Coll.	10	598	208	816
Hooghly Branch School	3	252	48	303
Midnapore School	1	136	4	141
Dacca College	17	301	24	342
Comillah School	4	119	18	141
Chittagong School	16	72	14	102
Sylhet School	5	45	3	53
Jessore School	—	96	3	99

The numerical superiority of the Calcutta students over the combined strength of their mofussil brethren is a sufficient indication of the psychological impetus people living within or in the periphery of European settlements received from contacts with westerners. Hooghly, which along with Serampore and Chandannagar and Chinsura formed one complex of European settlements, went far in advance of Dacca and Murshidabad, one time capitals of Bengal.

In rural Bengal, the Brahmins still had a virtual monopoly of Sanskrit learning as the following statistics supplied by Adam

and arranged in a tabular form by the present writer bear testimony to.²⁴

**POSITION OF SANSKRIT LEARNING IN DISTRICTS
AS IN 1838**

District	Number of Sanskrit Schools	Number and caste of teachers		Number and caste of students
		Brahmins	Vaidyas	
Murshidabad	24	24	—	153 (152 Brahmins, 1 Vaidya)
Birbhum	56	55	1	393 (380 Brahmins, 9 Vaidyas, 3 Viash- nabas and 1 Daiva- jna)
Burdwan	190	186	4	1358 (1296 Brahmins, 45 Vaidyas, 11 Daivajnas, 6 Baishnabas.

In respect of Persian and Arabic learning even the pre-eminent position among the Hindus was occupied by the Brahmins, the Kayasthas coming next. Murshidabad had 17 Persian and 2 Arabic Schools, and Burdwan 93 and 8 schools. Of the 62 (61+1) Hindu students in the former 27 were Brahmins, 15 Kayasthas, Kurmi 6, Kaivarta 4, Aguri 4, Suvarnabanik 2, Napit 1, Mali 1, Sutar 1, and of the 452 (448+4) Hindu students in the latter, 153 were Brahmins, 173 Kayasthas, Sadgop 50, 42 Aguris, 4 Vaidyas, 8 Suvarnabaniks, etc. Birbhum had 73 (71+2) such schools; of its 245 Hindu students 111 were Brahmins, 83 Kayasthas, 10 Vaidyas, etc.²⁵

But in Calcutta's relatively caste-restrictions free cosmopolitan atmosphere, the Brahmins had to relinquish their position of

supremacy. Of the Hindu College elite who in the thirties of the nineteenth century made their mark in the intellectual world, the following were prominent; Tarachand Chakraborty, Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay, Ram Gopal Ghosh, Rasik Krishna Mullik, Madhab Chandra Mullik, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Radhanath Sikdar, Ramtanu Lahiri, Peary Chand Mitra, Kishori Chand Mitra, Chandrasekhar Deb, Sibchandra Deb, Tarak Chandra Bose, Kashiprasad Ghosh, Mahesh Chandra Ghosh, Govinda Chandra Bysack, Govinda Chandra Dutta, Tarinicharan Bandyopadhyay, Raj Krishna De, Digambar Mitra, etc. Of these 6 were Brahmins, the rest non-Brahmins. The Hindu College elite, as we have seen, were the most vocal segment of Calcutta's population and the most intellectually stirred.

By the first quarter of the nineteenth century Calcutta had become the nerve centre of the economic, political and intellectual life of Bengal. The first campaigns for religious and social reforms were launched here, first by Rammohan and later by Vidyasagar, with all the progressive elements behind them. The first songs of a reawakened life were sung here. Thus was established in Calcutta the aristocracy of intellect.

VI

Calcutta then was the new elite's London. It was the only city in Bengal, nay, perhaps in India, where life could be lived in the European way. Evening parties could be attended, enormous quantities of liquors could be swallowed, concerts and dances could be enjoyed, and the glamour of exotic beauties could be felt. For the satisfaction of hedonistic propensities and for the pleasures of surrendering oneself with gay abandon to the splendour of a commercial society it provided opportunities which no other town could provide.

But, then, it was also the place where the latest advancements in philosophy, political science, literature and general science

were best and easily obtained. Ideas flew more quickly to Calcutta than to any other place. And ideas kept the new elite spell-bound; they nourished, fed and stimulated them into new thinking and activity. Hence their paramount importance in the life of the elite. The thrill of Rammohan at the success of freedom movements in Europe and America and that of the Hindu College students over Tom Paine's *Age of Reason* knew no bounds. So, life in Calcutta gave a satisfactory taste of life in London or Paris. Living here one could breathe the free air—hedonistic, humanistic and intellectual—of a distant clime.

So, Calcutta grew into the elite's bones. Even when they had to leave the city for service elsewhere, they looked back to it with emotion, and seized upon the first opportunity to return to its bosom to share visions of life with kindred spirits. The more enthusiastic of them carried the new message and the new enlightenment to the places they served as administrators or teachers; but these new centres could never boast of either an independent elite or of originality of perceptions. They echoed and re-echoed the illustrious voices heard in Calcutta, and shone, if they shone at all, in a reflected glory.

VII

Thus Bengal's cultural centre of gravity became located in Calcutta. The historical process of its evolution as outlined above made this inevitable, perhaps even desirable. But there would have been no cause of concern if the process of displacement stopped there. It did not, and consequently, Calcutta's intellectual centre of gravity became located in London. If the promise of Bengal's and also India's regeneration was imported from there, the fatal constraints to its fulfilment were also unloaded from the same ship. Instead of being enamoured of itself, it transferred its love to the pirate. As for the new elite, as has already been analysed in Chapter I, they were raised

out of one society without any recognised place in another, however they might have aspired to it. Even English wives and conversion to Christianity proved to be totally ineffectual guarantees. Hence, they continued to have an existence in-between two worlds. They were denizens of neither, and so, notwithstanding the loudness of their protests, they remained embodiments of weakness.

Indeed, with English education establishing itself as imperialism's intellectual weapon for consolidating the empire, and with the elite's perverse resolve to speak and think in it only, emerged the most harmful restraint to the fulfilment of India's renaissance—alienation, consequent upon the loss of language and of the means of communication with the people. It fostered a myopic and deficient outlook, which refused to see the reality of the situation, and established with the environment and the people an absolutely negative relationship. On the contrary, they identified themselves with the Establishment and claimed a share in the administration and, therefore, also in the exploitation of the common people.

In fact, very few of the intellectuals were prepared to accede to the people a legitimate share in the life of the nation. Rammohan, undoubtedly, was keenly aware of his involvement in the affairs of the people but his preferences for western style of living and eclecticism could not be reconciled to his sense of involvement. The Hindu College elite were, with the exception of one or two, frankly totally estranged beings, suffering from a built-in dread of the given situation. Akshay Kumar Dutt was an enquirer after scientific truth living in detachment and seclusion; so his impact was not widely felt. The only glorious exception was Vidyasagar, but, unfortunately for Bengal, there emerged no second Vidyasagar to emulate his example or to undertake the completion of his work. As such, the elite community's talk of freedom or of love of the country remained mostly a mere intellectual conceit, an empty

cliche. The nature of their alienation did not only block their way back to the people, but it also prevented the latter from having an entry into the periphery of their mental life or world-view.

This was inherent in the inexorable logic of the situation, and is an indisputable fact of history even when we remember the exuberant propagation of new ideas through Bengali journals during the forties and fifties of the last century. For, even then the masses of people had no access to these journals. A scheme of universal mass education through Bengali and of imparting education at all levels through Bengali had been neither accepted by the Government nor demanded by the most articulate section of the community.

Hence, the mobility caused by western impact and the resultant ferment remained confined to the fences of Calcutta, the banian metropolis. Intellectual ferment hardly moved beyond its outer fringes, where the pull of traditional restraints were still strongly felt and where cultural regenerative aspirations remained largely atrophied. This was perhaps also because of the fact that urbanization in Bengal was an extremely uneven and haphazard process. So, a renaissance which assured the people neither a recognition nor a place in the manifestation of its will was from its very inception, from both qualitative and quantitative considerations, a distorted sapless renaissance. England having been its wet nurse, it was, as it were, an English renaissance in quite a different garb enacted on India's soil. Every facet of it proclaimed the triumph of the white master. Generations of Indian associates of the British empire-builders—from the eighteenth century banians to the nineteenth century intellectuals and intelligentsias—bore eloquent testimony to it. The Indian illiterate 'savage' was, and perhaps still is, only a disconcerting memory.

Pulsations of a new life, as analysed earlier in the book, were undoubtedly there, and the feeble rays of a different sort

of awareness were also perceptible. These rays represented a body of wishes which after 1860 was given the name of nationalism. After 1860 more attention was focussed on the 'savage'; for it was felt that without his aid the elite would not be able to push themselves to positions of power. But even then he was a means to an end, and not an end in himself. He was not the central focus of the renaissance.

As such, the promise of an Indian renaissance, in the period under discussion, awaited and still awaits fulfilment.

NOTES

1. For interesting accounts of Calcutta's growth as an urban city see *Bengal Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, 1967, and *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1968; particularly the article of Dr N. K. Sinha in the former and that of Dr S. K. Chatterjee in the latter. See also *The Economic History of Bengal* by Dr N. K. Sinha, Calcutta, 1962, Chapter IX, pp. 215-232.
2. *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1968, p. 111.
3. N. K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1962, p. 220.
4. *Sambād Prabhākar*; quoted by Benoy Ghosh, *Sāmayik Patre Bāṅglār Samājchitra*, Calcutta, 1962, Vol. I, p. 175.
5. *Ibid.*
6. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 220-221.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
8. *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1968; p. 10.
9. Hicky, founder-editor of *Bengal Gazette*, "had a grievance against John Zachariah Kiernander, the Swedish missionary, who helped the proprietor of his rival newspaper the *India Gazette* and published a most slanderous libel against him in his paper". *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1968, p. 68.
10. Tong Atchew, a Chinese adventurer, got a land-grant from Warren Hastings of about 650 bighas, 6 miles south-west of Budge Budge at a yearly rent of Rs. 45/-, established a Chinese colony and a sugar mill there. The place subsequently developed into a town, known as *Atchepur*. In 1781 he sent a memorial to the Supreme Board for protection and complained that his workers requisitioned from China were being enticed away by the vagabond and fugitive Chinese sailors of Calcutta who had no ostensible means of livelihood. He died about the year 1783, but the sugar mill continued to work till 1804, when it was advertised for sale. *Atchepur* afterwards became an ordinary village of Bengal. *Bengal Past and Present*, January-June, 1934; pp. 120-122.
11. Quoted by N. K. Sinha *Bengal Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, 1967; pp. 112-113.
12. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 225.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
14. *Bengal Past and Present*, Diamond Jubilee Number, p. 115.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.
17. W. H. Carey, *Good Old Days of John Company*, abridged Quins Book edition, Calcutta, 1964; p. 60.
18. N. K. Sinha, *op. cit.*, p. 228.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 229.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 226-227.
22. Adam's *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* (1835-1838) First Report, 1835.
23. Quoted by B. B. Misra from Parliamentary Papers 48 (20) of 1847-48 in his *Indian Middle Classes*, O.U.P., 1961; p. 402.
24. W. Adam, *op. cit.*, Third Report, 1838.
25. *Ibid.*



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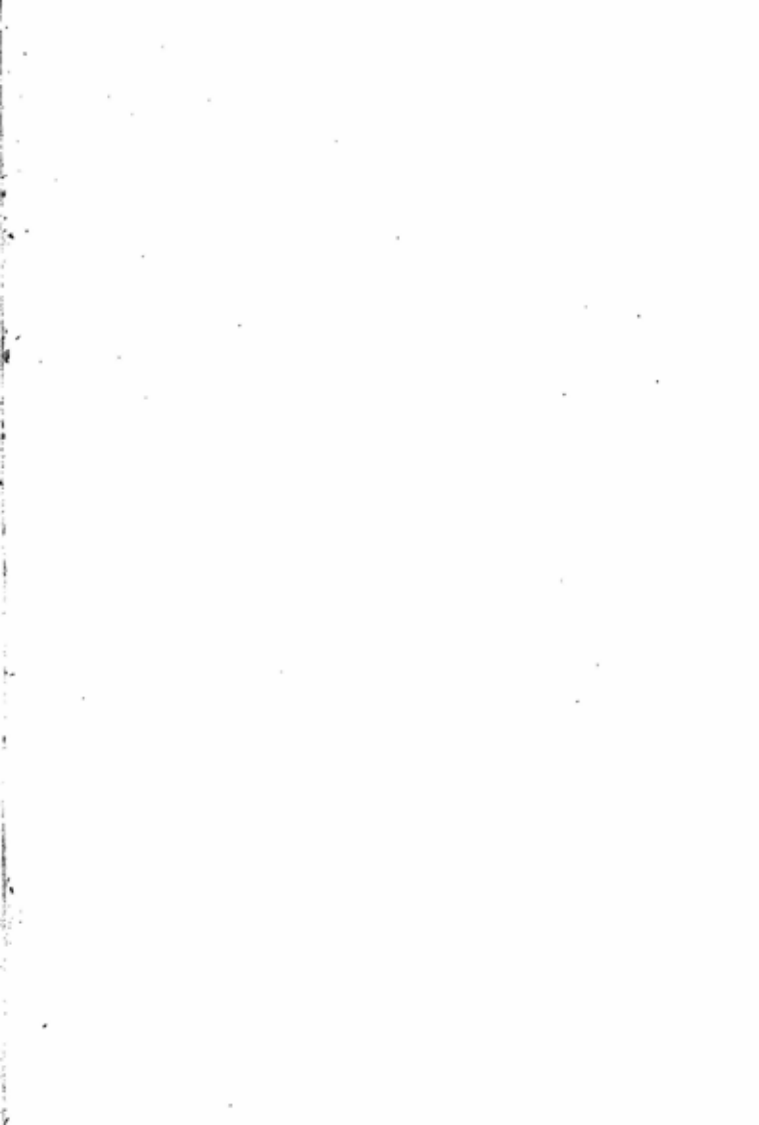
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