

Orientalism and Neo-Hinduism

Orientalist Thoughts and Bengali Intelligentsia

Milan Fujda, Ústav religionistiky FF MU

College of Fort William: Recruitment of the Local Staff

Bengalis Hired at College of Fort William 1801

- Majority (Beng. dep. - Mrtyuṅjay Vidyānāth, Rāmnāth Vidyābāchshpati, Sripati Mukhopahyāy and Rājblochan Mukopādhyāy) - Brahman scholars coming to Calcutta in the 1790's from rural Bengal;
 - Most common professions: logician, law specialist, astrologer, instructor of Sanskrit poetics, sacred literature and Puranic mythology.
 - In the light of Rammohun Roy's works, contemporary Bengal had virtually no Vedantic schools and Vedantins (exceptions: Nabakrishna Deb's pundit, Jaganath Tarkapanchanan, Rammohun's pundit Ram Chandra Vidyabagish [Rāmchandra Vidyābāgis]).
- Persianized Hindus
 - Persianized cultural pattern pervading the arts, literature and etiquette

Literati Come to Calcutta

- Rapid drying up of the normal sources of patronage – literati flocked to Calcutta in search of a livelihood. 'In almost all cases, those without adequate private means sought careers in association with Englishmen.' (Kopf, p. 108)
- “The introduction of the private property principle into Bengal in 1793 and the growing importance of litigation in an expanding judicial system resulted in the creation of a new class of pleaders.” (109)
- The College of Fort William, with its peripheral and satellite institutions, provided a source of literary patronage. The Indian could develop into a teacher, prose stylist, philologist or linguist, compositor, printer, publisher or librarian.
- At first, the literati hired by the college as pundits with the general responsibility of assisting the professor in teaching classes, compiling

Literati at the College of Fort William

- **Examples:**
- **Taranicharan Mitra (*1772)**
- “one of the finest native philologists” produced by the College (Kopf, 110).
- Gilchrist’s project of simplifying Urdu by giving it “a regular set of principles based on European models”.
- Development of an improved methodology in applying Gilchrist’s orthographic innovations to transliteration both from one Oriental language to another and from Oriental language to English.
- Taranicharan demonstrated this system in *Oriental Fabulist* (1803), translation of popular fables of Aesop from English to Bengali, Persian and Urdu. Similar experiment was Mitra’s *Sakuntala*.

Mrtyumjay Vidyalkar

- Probably received a rigid, regionally traditional Sanskritic education, devoid of Persian and European influences. Around 1790's moved to Calcutta.
- Brahman possessing and unyielding cultural pride and prejudice in favour of his Sanskritic tradition.
- Wrote his works in vernacular prose as an employee of the College of Fort William - ghostwriter, substitute instructor and assistant lecturer, chief pundit of William Carey:
- earliest work *Batriś Simhāsan (Thirty-two Thrones)* kind of popular fable read by Brahmans before gatherings of peasants - **The significance of this work - 'willingness of Brahmans to communicate bits and pieces of their special fund of knowledge to an unknown reading public by means of printed word.'** (Kopf, 114)
- *Rajboli (Story of Kings)* - representative of the histories written by Brahmans for the College of Fort William - "curiously uninfluenced by the findings and techniques of Orientalist scholarship. [...] ignored numismatic and other evidence

Ramram Basu

- Textbook for Carey's Bengali classes *Prtāpāditya Charitra (Historical Sketch of Raja Prtāpāditya)*, Serampore 1802 - brought a historical awareness to contemporary Bengal, though not as an influence of the western historiography but rather of the Persian chronicles – in spite of combination of historical facts with “tradition” in the style of Persian narrative history of the day “modern research has been able to little alter what Ramram Basu wrote” Kopf, (123)
- Since 1780 private *munshi* of William Chambers, Persian Interpreter to the Supreme Court.
- Since 1887 *munshi* of missionary John Thomas. Thomas referred in one letter from 1788 of his tendency to accept Jesus Christ and of a gospel hymn on Christ composed of his own – first such a hymn in Bengali language (Kopf, 121).

Predecessor of Rammohan

- Tract *Jñānodoy* (Dawn of Knowledge) published by Serampore Mission “all the prevailing social and religious errors of Hindu Bengal were exposed with an almost evangelical indignation.” (Kopf, 125): “moral laxity”, “idolatry”, he “endowed the Vedic Brahma with the attributes of Jehovah”, **the first stage of invention of a monotheistic tradition in Hinduism.**
- Brahmans as conspiring.
- As later Rammohan, however, he preferred to reinterpret his own religion to conversion to Christianity (Kopf, 126).
- Christian background, anyway, clear: **‘Oh, Sir! I am most wretched, I understand something of the gospel, and can make it known a little to others, but I cannot leave my**

Ram Camul Sen

- Knowing Persian, Sanskrit and English first employed 1803 as a subordinate clerk's assistant at the Calcutta Chief Magistrate's office. Through Chief Magistrate Blacquiere made contacts with Asiatic Society, in Society or College he met Gilchrist and since 1804 worked as compositor for Hindoostanee Press. 1810 he met H.H. Wilson and 1814 he had been appointed the native manager of Hindoostanee Press. And during the following years "he became the most influential Asian in institutions as diverse as the Asiatic Society and the Calcutta Mint."

Printing Press in Bengal

- **“Calcutta seems to have had no [...] press equipped to print indigenous languages until 1778.** The growing need for reproducing governmental proclamations in the Indian languages and the rise of journalism helped Francis Galdwin create the Calcutta Gazette Press in 1783. [...] **It was the College of Fort William that made printing and publishing in the classical and vernacular tongues possible in India on a large scale.**” (Kopf, British..., 114)
- Art of printing oriental literature in authentic character initiated into India by Charles Wilkins 1778, assisted by Bengali called Panchanan, later Ward’s “most prized Asian associate in Serampore” (Kopf, 115).
- 1790 Panchanan employed by Colebrooke – transferred to Carey to help with establishing Mission Press in Serampore – working as a master type-founder since 1800. 1803 retired and passed his skills to son-in-law Manohar Karmakar, “who by 1850 had cut type for fifteen Oriental languages (including his gift to Marshman of a Chinese font with 43 000 characters).” (Kopf, 116).
- In 1801 – **Serampore Mission Press** was launched

Oriental Renaissance and Education

Despite Wellesley's concern with projecting Indian golden age into the future, practical policy targeted to "salvaging the literary remnants of the indigenous culture by generously supporting any attempt at intellectually reconstructing its content." (Kopf, 147) After 1807, **operations of the College of Fort William reduced to the training of civil servants expected to serve in Bengal »» more responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the Hindu elite in Calcutta.**

On March, 1811, Lord Minto signed a minute on education most probably written by Colebrooke which "contained the first time officially supported Orientalist programme for the 'improvement' of Hindu culture. There is no evidence of a single educational plan that was entirely Evangelical or Anglicist in sympathy. However, the deeper theoretical justification that lay behind each educational proposal soon revealed split among the Orientalists. **The 'classical' group favoured an elitist, Sanskrit high-culture program whereas the 'vernacularists' preferred a scheme**

Discussion on Education in Bengal

- Carey's proposal: training of Indian teachers at the College of Fort William so that they could transfer there obtained "new scientific knowledge" to students at their parent institutions
- J. H. Harington: rehabilitation of Indian institutions of higher learning at Benares, Bihar, and Bengal with attaching to them new libraries "in order that the fruits of the latest "cultural" discoveries of hitherto "locked up treasures" be accessible to Indian scholars." (Kopf, 151) Addition: to introduce European knowledge, because the indigenous knowledge was not "sufficient to rehabilitate a decadent "Oriental" culture." (Kopf, 151)
- Court of Directors, employed in 1814 "classically Orientalist approach" recommending to revival traditionally accepted

Policy of Social Action

- In October 4, 1813 Lord Moira (later Marquess Hastings) succeeded Minto as governor-general, studied both, but preferred vernacular strategy – hence prominence of Serampore Mission’s strategies.
- Biases
 - Not the classical heritage but ability of modern knowledge in vernaculars as basic principle of European Renaissance: Peasants, whether in Europe or in India, had to be made conscious of the practical value of the new knowledge, especially in the natural sciences, Such consciousness would prompt them to put that knowledge to use in an effort to improve their surroundings. (Kopf, 156)
 - 'False' religion propagated by Brahmans responsible for intellectual, spiritual, and moral degradation of natives.

Realization

- Modern Europe began with Renaissance and Renaissance was based on the development of popular languages. Printing press 'placed the means of acquiring knowledge within the reach of the great bulk of the people. In India, according to missionaries, the printing 'would demolish the power of Brahmanism as it had that of popery during the Reformation.' (Kopf, 158)
- Magazines
 - Serampore published in April, 1818, *Dig dar÷an (Magazine for Indian Youth)* - the earliest periodical in Bengali + the first journal disseminating bits and pieces of Western knowledge to students at Hindu College and the *pathsàlàs* of the Calcutta School Society. ... [F]rom its pages Calcutta youth first learned of Western history, literature, and science.' (Kopf, 156-157)

Realization

- This project designed for the mass education succeeded best among the children of Hindu elite in Calcutta, but failed in the countryside – due to poverty which forced parents to take children from school in order to work during the harvest and planting time, due to pupils' attendance to innumerable religious ceremonies, due to monsoon absences and due to periodic epidemics which decimated the population as well as made it move elsewhere (Kopf, 160).
- Further projects:
 - Calcutta School Society
 - Calcutta School Book Society

The Calcutta School Society – An Experiment of Orientalists

- Founded 1818 - same people as Calcutta School Book Society.
- Intended as a commission, whose aim to investigate conditions at Calcutta schools, main objective: 'general diffusion of useful knowledge among the inhabitants of India.' (Kopf, 160)
- In committee Europeans as well as Bengalis.
- First findings published 1819 - 190 Bengalee *pathshalas* in Calcutta, training in reading, arithmetics, sciences and moral duties not satisfactory.

The Calcutta School Society – An Experiment of Orientalists

- Society's schools - the stepping stones to Hindu College.
'Throughout the 1820th the Society with the support of Calcutta intelligentsia 'almost completely altered the existing system of lower education in Calcutta. [...] Though overshadowed by the dazzling achievements of Hindu College, the Society schools probably did the real formative work of training many of the students who later won distinction as Derozio's disciples.' (Kopf, 161)
- The Society schools administered by Orientalists and guided by the Marshman's manual.
- By 1825 Radhakant Deb reported satisfying progress and society managed 166 schools.

The Calcutta School Book Society

- Established 1817 at special meeting at College of Fort William.
- The aim – to supply lessons and books in the native languages to the indigenous schools of Calcutta.
- Committee of managers formed in the form William B. Bayley, Thomas Roebuck (Hindustanee Dep.), William Carey, Anthony Locket, Mrtyunjay Vidyalankar, Radhakant Deb and Taranicharan Mitra.
- Religious books whether Christian or Hindu were forbidden, anyway, 'works on 'inculcation of moral duties' were permitted.' (185)
- 'In theory, the Orientalists at first sought to democratize the traditional culture by laying open **'the stores of [indigenous] learning and literature which have hitherto shut off from the mass ... and confined to a few, who like the monks in the early period of European history are more solicitous about their own personal advantage than the improvement of the public mind.'**
- The Society aid for translations of British textbooks into vernaculars and sponsored original compositions. 'It was through these Society publications that Indian students first became acquainted with Western science, history, and literature.' (Kopf, 185)

Hindu College

- H. H. Wilson -during Hastings's administration 'a cultural and educational minister in Calcutta. - provided the philosophy for the new activist style of Orientalism under the Marquess Hastings, 'and more than any other single man he embodied these ideas in experimental programmes of higher education.' (Kopf, 179)
- He suggested union of proposed Sanskrit and Hindu College, which was in 1823 on the brink of financial collapse.
- Hindu College - founded in 1816 by a new Calcutta elite – founded, financed as well as managed by it – for the sake of providing its sons with advantageous European education.
- '[T]he twenty Bengalis who wrote the original thirty-four rules of the charter [...] were all conservative upper-caste Hindus. [...] It was [...] **not really secular knowledge in Western dress that was to be imparted at Hindu College, but useful knowledge from the West transmitted without ethnocentric bias**.' (Kopf, 181) 'Bengali writing was taught along with English, and Hindu

Sanskrit College

- Wilson's experiment: together with traditional Sanskrit studies of rhetoric, sacred literature, law and grammar it offered science curriculum of mechanics, hydrostatics, optics, astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, anatomy, and medicine.
- It was not compulsory, but even though almost half of students chose to study science and English – professors reported no difficulty on the side of traditionally trained Hindu students

College of Fort William Library

- 1818 it was made available to general public.
- It housed some of the best modern editions of the Greek and Latin classics presented from the University of Oxford – around 2000 vols., 2994 manuscripts classified according to twenty-one categories from 'copies of the Koran' to 'Sanskrit Treatises on all Branches of Hindoo Literature' (this constitutes the basics of contemporary library of manuscripts at the Asiatic Society of Bengal).
- All printed and manuscript sources of Orientalia according to Locket's catalogue contained 11335 volumes – compare with 1851 in Spain's Escorial and 1561 in Oxford and 7294 in Library of the Seraglio at Constantinople.