Can We Practice What We Preach?
An Inquiry into Systems of Knowledge in the Social Reform Period

Thesis Submitted to Kuvempu University for the
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Submitted by

Polly Hazarika

Centre for the Study of Culture and Society,
Bangalore

Under the Guidance of

Dr.Vivek Dhareshwar

Senior Fellow
Centre for the Study of Culture and Society,
Bangalore.

Kuvempu University Centre for Excellence
Bangalore.

Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Can We Practice What We Preach? An Inquiry into Systems of Knowledge in the Social Reform Period** submitted to Kuvempu University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy contains my original research done under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Vivek Dhareshwar, Senior Fellow, CSCS, Centre for Excellence, Kuvempu University, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree or any other similar title of any University or Institution.

Polly Hazarika

Place: Bangalore

Date: 31 - 8 – 2011

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **Can We Practice What We Preach? An Inquiry into Systems of Knowledge in the Social Reform Period** submitted to Kuvempu University by Ms Polly Hazarika for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is her work done under my guidance and supervision.

Dr Vivek Dhareshwar,

Senior Fellow, CSCS

Bangalore.

Dr S.V. Srinivas,   Ashish Rajadhyaksha

(Member, Ph.D. Committee)   (Director)

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE & SOCIETY
(Affiliated to Kuvempu University)
BANGALORE—560061
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This work is for my parents,

Julie and Kashi Nath Hazarika.

Because of whom I got this far.

As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity- the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.

After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not… in the knower's straying afield of himself?

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all... in what does (philosophy) consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?

Michel Foucault
History of Sexuality Vol. II

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Introduction
Can We Practice What We Preach?

This thesis fundamentally takes up three areas of investigation which are tied together. One, it traces a historiography of Reform discourse. It does not attempt to provide either a comprehensive historical account or any kind of exhaustive documentation of reform activities or ideas. Instead, it seeks to provide an overview of the way in which scholarship on reform has evolved, the routes it has taken and whether there has been any significant critical re-evaluation of the 'reformist' narrative of Reform. It also scrutinizes major reform arguments, which have, in some sense been taken for granted in reform scholarship and have acquired axiomatic status, in order to unearth the assumptions that underlie these arguments and the framework of knowledge that is implicitly required in order to give coherence to these arguments.

Two, it examines the encounter between colonialism and the Indian traditions. This encounter, on the one hand, gave rise to reform discourse, but on the other, also generated responses from the so-called 'orthodoxy' (or simply non/anti-reformist section of Indian society). So far, none of our historical studies into this period have attempted to dispassionately examine these responses in order to reconstruct the non-reformist voices responding to colonialism. All our historical accounts have always assumed that reform was an astoundingly successful project, which brought in its wake the 'modernization' of India. Thus, it is the trajectory of 'modernization' that becomes the subject of history. 'Tradition' usually features as the minor character passed by early in the plot, vanquished, and no longer having any significant role to play. It is the contention of this thesis that an engagement with the response characterized as 'tradition' or 'orthodoxy' to colonialism and Reform opens up an entirely new perspective on what 'modernization' has meant in the Indian context.

Three, the thesis tentatively proposes some ideas about the nature of Indian traditions and very specifically, the place of practice in these traditions. Although an examination of this third sphere need not be limited to the period of Reform, this period brings some crucial aspects of the Indian traditions into sharp relief and therefore, provides a good starting point for investigation.

Since the thesis does not seek to give yet another account of the history of Reform, but rather to acquire an understanding of the encounter between colonialism and Indian traditions and to provide a perspective on Reform discourse which takes into account the nature of this encounter, it highlights only particular moments in Reform history. These moments, such as the moment of the abolition of sati, are useful in so far as the debates taking place at this time outline positions that are typical of the three major participants in Reform – the so-called orthodox, the colonial and the reformer. There are clear patterns that emerge in the propositions and responses of each of these participants. Therefore, these moments serve to illuminate not just one specific historical moment of reform (such as the abolition of sati or the age of consent bill), but rather, serve as templates for the study of the systems of knowledge[1] that generate the three positions outlined above.

One such moment in history serves as an ideal starting point for the thesis. The time is 1877 and the story is about the wedding of Suniti, the daughter of one of the major Reform figures of nineteenth century Bengal, Keshub Chunder Sen, with Nripender, the Prince of Kuch Behar from an 'orthodox' Hindu Royal family. The story of the marriage showcases a classic confrontation between the reformist and orthodox positions. Since the objective of the thesis is to deconstruct Reform discourse, this extremely typical Reform story enables us to pick out the features of the Reform discourse that urgently require

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[1] Although I do not give a definition of 'systems of knowledge' in the thesis, a fair idea of what this means should be clear from the reconstructions of the three positions I provide in the thesis. A clearer articulation of how to define this notion awaits further research.

problematization.

I

One part of the setting of the story is nineteenth century Kuch Behar. But our historical accounts tend to be sketchy about the intellectual and social conditions[2] of the Princely states. By contrast, since historians have been much enamoured of the 'Bengal Renaissance'[3], we have a surfeit of information about Bengal, the other part of the setting for the story. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when the wedding between Suniti and Nripender took place, Calcutta was caught in the heart of the reform movement sweeping across British India. Always at the vanguard when it came to things Western, Calcutta had, by this time, colleges for English education, schools for girls, and a thriving Brahmo Samaj. Set up in the 1830's by Raja Rammohun Roy, the Samaj took up religious reform as its primary concern. Since Hinduism was supposedly riddled with problems such as idolatry and other 'false' practices, the Samaj did not claim to be a branch of Hinduism, but claimed its ancestry from the 'original Vedism' that was thought to be the pure and un-corrupted predecessor of Hinduism. In its first forty years, the Samaj had already seen debate, dissension and a split; demonstrating, among other things, the difficulty of the project of religious reform. By 1878 the Samaj would see another split, and the Brahmo Samaj would never regain its previous position as an idea on the brink of becoming a mass movement. By the turn of the century, the enthusiasm for the Samaj dwindled, and it remained, as it had begun, a movement involving a small section of the Calcutta middle-class with minimal influence in the mofussil areas.

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[2] The implication of course being that nothing of any intellectual or social significance took place outside British India.
[3] The reform period in Bengal was also referred to as the 'Bengal Renaissance'.

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884), Suniti's father, was the most illustrious and charismatic leader of the Samaj to hold the post of the Secretary of the Brahmo Samaj during this period. A Brahmin by birth, he initiated the first split from Devendra Nath Tagore's Adi Brahmo Samaj over the issue of the sacred thread, as he felt that none but Brahmos who had given up the thread should officiate at Brahmo ceremonies. Tagore continued to favour Brahmin Brahmos for these solemnities. Sen campaigned widely for a separate Brahmo Marriage act which sought to raise the age of consent to 14 for girls, and to legalize the Brahmo wedding ceremony which was completely different from the Hindu ceremony.

On the other hand, we know of the Royal house of Kuch Behar that the Maharaja had died in 1863 leaving the throne to his minor son Nripender Narain who was immediately taken under the 'guardianship' of the British Government in Calcutta. Kuch Behar's British Resident was given more powers and Nripender was given an English tutor whose brief was to introduce the young prince to an 'enlightened' and 'modern' way of thinking. The ladies of the Royal household, Nripender's grandmother and mother, disapproved of the Resident's activities. They took a special dislike to the tutor, Mr. Kneller, whom they accused of influencing the prince adversely (Dobson 1878). The British recognized the immense power that was wielded from the zennana[4], and in an attempt to circumvent it, planned to send young Nripender to study in England, so that on his return, he could set an enlightened example to all the other tradition-bound Royal families in British India. It was also generally agreed by the British authorities that his physical distance from the zennana was absolutely necessary for any improvement in his thought.

The women of the zennana resolutely refused to let the young prince go abroad. However, at the Prince's sixteenth birthday, pressure mounted on the Ranis and there was little they could do to prevent the Prince from travelling to

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[4] Indian language words are not italicized in the thesis since they are familiar to most readers.

England as per his own wishes. Since they could no longer detain the Prince, they requested that they be allowed to get the Prince married before he left. Permission was granted on the condition that they present no further difficulties to the Prince's foreign education. However, the Government insisted that the bride must not be a child and must be educated and from an enlightened family (Dobson 1878). The intention was to get the new Maharani to assist the new Maharaja's projected reform crusade rather than to reinforce the values of the zennana. This demand left the zennana in a fix, as no suitable Hindu household at that time would have a marriageable daughter above the age of eight.

At this time, the daughter of a Calcutta Brahmo was suggested as a possibility, and a representative of the British government went across to Calcutta to meet Suniti, Keshub Sen's thirteen-year-old daughter. On finding her quite suitable, since her father had raised her in a 'modern' fashion, the initial negotiations for the wedding were made in late 1877 (Mozoomdar 1887). The Ranis reluctantly agreed to this choice of bride, reasoning that apart from Keshub Sen's unfortunate conversion to Brahmoism, Sen's family was amongst the most 'respectable' that could be found.

At this time, Sen, according to his friends, was not overly concerned with the marriage of his daughter. Her being well past the suitable age for a traditional marriage did not cause him any anxiety; nor was he overly excited about the royal proposal. Having considered the matter carefully, he decided that to reject the match outright would simply mean falling short of the challenge presented to him to prove his commitment to Brahmoism (Mozoomdar1887). After all, his daughter was chosen precisely because he had raised her as a Brahmo. He was also aware that if he rejected the proposal, it would be made to any other Brahmo. A lesser man might simply renounce Brahmoism under pressure from the royal family after the wedding was over. Sen saw this as a chance to negotiate between his commitment to the ideals of Brahmoism, and the chance

to spread those ideals in orthodox Kuch Behar, without any kind of compromise.

A series of complications dogged negotiations due to the unprecedented nature of the circumstances. The kingdom of Kuch Behar was a Hindu kingdom, under which British law was not applicable. Thus, the Brahmo marriage act, which had been passed in British Calcutta, would not hold there. Sen could foresee that insisting on a Brahmo wedding in Calcutta would simply leave the way open for an 'idolatrous' wedding in Kuch Behar once the bride was in the custody of her in-laws (Mozoomdar 1887). He could not knowingly place his daughter in such a vulnerable position after having raised her to follow Brahmo ideals.

A further problem was that the wedding was to be effected immediately due to Nripender's impending departure for Europe. At this time, Suniti was only thirteen, and as mentioned before, Sen was one of the staunchest campaigners for a raise in the age of consent to fourteen for girls. The extraordinary circumstances of the wedding proposal for his daughter made the wedding desirable even though the bride would be under-age. A compromise was worked out whereby it was agreed that the bride and groom would not be expected to live together as man and wife until the prince returned from his studies. Thus, the wedding could be looked at as a sort of betrothal rather than a marriage.

Having settled the matter of her age, Sen turned his attention to the matter of the marriage ceremony itself. In order to avoid leaving his daughter vulnerable to a forced 'idolatrous' wedding Sen decided that there would be one hybrid ceremony including both Hindu and Brahmo rituals, so that there would be no question of the couple being married again. He demanded many modifications within the Hindu marriage rituals. The marriage ceremony must not have any 'idolatry', however, local customs which were not 'idolatrous', but simply

absurd or unreasonable, would be tolerated. He refused to permit his daughter to sit at the homa (the sacred fire around which the marriage ceremony is solemnized), or undertake the prayaschitta ceremony, a purification ritual performed by one who has lapsed from caste (Mozoomdar1887). And he wanted the prince to convert to Brahmoism. The government representative seemed willing to accommodate most of Sen's conditions and the next round of negotiations with the royal purohits were arranged. Within a week, the chief purohit of Kuch Behar was sent to hold consultations with the bride's party.

The negotiations were dominated by Sen's demands for the wedding ceremony. The Brahmo Samaj rejected 'idol worship' and acknowledged a 'formless god'. They maintained that the ancient religion of India, before it was 'corrupted', had divinely revealed texts, which spoke of 'true' worship to a formless god. To this end, they incorporated passages from the Vedas and Upanishads into their worship and ceremonies. To the Brahmos, an object in any place of veneration, during any ceremony could be 'idolatry'. Under these circumstances, how was Sen to ensure that his daughter's wedding did not, even accidentally, become an 'idolatrous' celebration? Was the pot of water at the mandap a representation of a goddess or were the vermillion and turmeric markings on it simply an aesthetic expression? Was bowing to touch a Brahmin's feet a sign of worshiping him 'as god' or simply a sign of veneration to an elder? Ironically, the Brahmos themselves displayed no clear idea what 'idolatry' could include. They were sure that there should be no physical depiction of God, but how could they know what objects the Hindus might use to depict God? Hindu rituals seemed constantly to escape the rational scheme imposed on them.

Effecting a Rapprochement

Sen had to inquire into every single action and object in the Hindu wedding ceremony. The Brahmo ceremony did not have this problem since the Brahmo rituals were invented from scratch. None of them were taken over from the

Hindus. And after Keshub's split from Devendra Nath Tagore's Adi Brahmo Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj rejected entry to Brahmin converts who had not renounced the sacred thread, doing away with even this expression of 'idolatry'.

Nothing was quite as easy with the Hindu priests. The Brahmos complained that the priests were so wily that they would not tell them what they knew, or so stupid that they no longer even knew the real reasons behind their own rituals. Thus, further complicating the task of putting together a hybrid wedding ceremony which would only include those Hindu rituals which were 'non-idolatrous'. The raj purohits gave no ready answers to questions such as: Why was Ghee put into the fire? Was it to 'appease' the god of fire? What was the meaning of the mango leaves? Did they suggest worship to the mango tree as a symbol of fertility, and thus, was the use of mango leaves in the puja actually symbolic of 'idol' worship?

In any case, as time was short, and the prince had to leave for England after the wedding, a list of ceremonies for the hybrid wedding was finally settled upon by both parties. These were: the Adibash the day before the wedding, the Brahmo divine service at the time of marriage, Bagdan, Stri-Achar, Svastivachan, Barnana, Kshama-grahana, Sanmati, Sampradan, Vara-Dakshina, Udvaha Pratijna and Prarthana (Dobson 1878).

The raj purohits went back with instructions that these were to be printed and distributed to all concerned so that there could be no confusion about the programme to be followed at the time of the wedding. On a supplementary sheet it was specified that neither the bride nor the bridegroom could take part in any 'idolatrous' rituals. No images of gods were allowed near the mandap. Only mantras which were agreed upon would be allowed. No mantra could be omitted or modified. To ensure the matter, Sen requested the signature of the Deputy-Commissioner of the British government on this paper and the matter was settled (Mozoomdar 1887). The wedding was to take place the following

week.

As the bride's party was leaving for Kuch Behar, a wire from Kuch Behar arrived saying that the royal household had not approved of the altered ceremonies. Sen was persuaded by the Government representative not to call off the wedding at once, with the assurance that further consultations could be held at Kuch Behar. At Kuch Behar, the palace announced its own demands; one of which was that Sen must not enter the wedding mandap as he had renounced his sacred thread and not performed the prayaschitta ceremony after his return from England. These demands were rejected out-right by a furious Sen.

The discussions collapsed and the wedding was on the verge of being called off. However, the British government, which was not particularly concerned with the modalities of the ceremony, had a keen interest in having the marriage take place. This spurred them on to mediate efficiently on both sides. In separate negotiations, they recklessly accepted all the demands of both parties with an assurance that they would intervene in every capacity if required.

Of Idols and Objects

The next day, the bride was taken into the ladies' chambers for the Stri-Achar or ladies' ceremonies. It was alleged that while she was there she was made to perform the prayaschitta ceremony. An eye witness later confirmed that the grandmother of the Prince had touched a gold coin to the bride's palm and laid it at the feet of the Brahmin and had told the girl to touch the Brahmin's feet (Dobson 1878). This sequence of events was the purification ritual. The Brahmos, however, refused to accept it as such, saying that the mere actions did not indicate any intention on the part of the bride who was unaware of what her actions meant.

While his daughter was in the ladies' chambers, Sen discovered that the mandap was replete with 'idolatrous' objects. There were plantain trees and earthen pots, an 'object wrapped in red cloth' and two wooden posts, all symbolising Hindu deities. He went in search of the government representative, who consulted with some of the purohits and reported to Sen that the objects were not, in fact, idols, but were merely present to 'lend an auspicious appearance' to the wedding scene (Mozoomdar 1887).

While this matter was being settled with the government representative, the bride and groom were ushered into the mandap and the rituals began. On hearing of this, Sen attempted to rush back to the spot, but was physically prevented from approaching the mandap. Much to his displeasure, his brother (who was not a Brahmo), was coerced into performing the kanyadaan, one of the key rituals that Sen had rejected outright. By this time, however, the ceremony had become something of a fait accompli, just as the government officials had hoped it would. The only remaining possibility was to get through it with as much grace as possible. Eventually Sen intervened and took his daughter away from the mandap. Since the kanyadaan had already been performed, the Purohits continued the homa ritual, placing an earthen pot wrapped in red cloth as a marker of the bride (Mozoomdar 1887).

Once the Hindu rites were over, the Brahmo rites took place. Sen stood at the altar and administered the vows to the young couple. Then some Brahmo hymns were sung. Once this battle over rituals was over, the bride's party returned to Calcutta expressing grave displeasure over the proceedings, while the Kuch Behar zennana expressed deep dissatisfaction with the way the wedding had been conducted.

II

The encounter between the ladies of the zennana and Keshub Sen typifies the encounter between Reform and Tradition, but the mode of its narration is atypical. While a reform story usually takes on a high moral tone and actions in the story take on epic significance[5], the story of the wedding (as re-told here), resembles a much less than heroic comedy of errors! This easy switch of genres should give us a significant insight into inherited notions of reform and the scholarship that has emerged around the question of reform. Reform scholarship has almost always taken on the didactic tone of the reform movement itself. It is only very rarely that the well-established halos around well-known reform figures are questioned or at least set aside and the reform movement becomes the subject of investigation rather than just celebration or glorification.

Notwithstanding the comical elements of the 'Nripender weds Suniti' story, there is much in the story that requires serious investigation. The most striking element perhaps, is the Brahmo emphasis on avoiding 'idolatry'. While most contemporary accounts of reform discourse take for granted what 'idolatry' refers to, it was clearly no simple and well-established matter for the Brahmos themselves. Thus, it was not simply the idea that worship ought not to be directed towards an idol that fulfilled Brahmo expectations. For most colonial officials who rejected Hinduism itself as 'idolatry', there would be little difficulty as all Hindus and their actions would automatically be 'idolatrous'[6]. But the Brahmos believed there was a monotheistic core to 'Hinduism'. Therefore, they were left with the unenviable task of distinguishing not only between 'idolatrous' and 'non-idolatrous' doctrine in the ancient texts, but also 'idolatrous' and 'non-idolatrous' practices.

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[5] Chapter I undertakes an investigation into the narrative mode and major assumptions underlying Reform scholarship.
[6] For a more detailed investigation into colonial attitudes to 'Hinduism', see chapter 2.

In terms of doctrine, the Brahmos believed 'Hinduism' had a monotheistic core which had been expressed in the ancient scriptures. This monotheistic doctrinal core had been 'corrupted' by 'false doctrines' and 'false practices'. However, as the wedding fiasco demonstrates, there was no clear notion of where this 'true doctrine' began and ended, what actions and objects could and could not legitimately be associated with it, and where 'traditional' practices ended and 'religious' practices took over. While we may find amusing Keshub Sen's inability to make these distinctions 135 years ago, the story demonstrates that we are actually none the wiser today in these matters. What sustains our condemnation of ideas like 'idolatry' while our understanding of what it involves remains so hazy, to say the least? Further, what makes this area of 'religious reform' so fraught that ideas as old as the reform movement itself do not seem to gain any greater clarity with time?

An examination of the Brahmo attitude to the Raj Purohits is also fairly puzzling. The Purohits are both 'wily' and 'ignorant'. They do not know the 'truth' about 'Hinduism' and yet they hide the 'truth' behind their practices! What truth do the purohits have access to that they do not divulge? What truth do the Brahmos have access to that the purohits are ignorant of? The Brahmos had, ostensibly, 'realized' the 'doctrinal truth' of monotheism underlying 'Hinduism'. The purohits are ignorant of this. However, the purohits purportedly conceal the 'true' connection between doctrine and practice. They refuse to divulge what symbolic significance objects or actions have; whether these practices have monotheistic or polytheistic implications; whether they are part of the 'corruption' of the 'religion' or part of its 'purer' expression; and finally, whether these actions are 'religious' or just 'customary'. It is strange that the Brahmos believe the purohits do not know their doctrine, yet, at the same time, they believe that the purohits know exactly what doctrines generate particular practices.

Another aspect that yields some interesting puzzles is the contrasting position of the Ranis and the Brahmos. For instance, with respect to the Prayaschitta ceremony, the Ranis required no 'intention' on the part of the bride in order for her to complete the ritual. The Brahmos did not believe, however, that the rite was complete without 'correct intention'. It is ironic that the purohits are the ones who ostensibly 'believe' in the rite, yet require no intention on the part of the bride for the rite to be complete; the Brahmos do not 'believe' in the rite, or rather, believe the rite to be 'idolatrous', 'false' and regressive, and yet, believe it would be 'complete' if it was practiced with intention. In effect, the Brahmos claim that even a 'false' practice could be completed with 'correct intention'. Then what renders a practice 'false'?

It is important to remember that these inconsistencies in the Brahmo position are not simply a failure of individual reasoning, or symptoms of inadequate understanding, which were remedied through further developments in the reform movement. In fact, these inconsistencies of reasoning remain unresolved today and mark not just the Brahmo position, but all reformist and contemporary reasoning.

The central terms of reform discourse – 'idolatry', 'priest-craft', 'superstition' – are all part of our every-day descriptions of Indian life. Each of these words carries a judgment against the Indian context, one that we first encounter in colonial discourse[7]. Since the judgment is echoed by the Indian reformers, it is assumed that it is not merely a colonial judgment but an indigenous one as well. However, the fact remains, that the only means of understanding these judgments is from within a colonial Christian framework. The emphasis on monotheism, the importance of intention, the notion of 'false' and 'correct' practices, that we encountered in the story above, are all clearly intelligible within a Christian framework. However, it is not clear what gives them

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[7] Chapter 2 takes up a detailed investigation into colonial descriptions of Hinduism. It is fairly clear that these descriptions in turn inform the Reform perspective on Hinduism.

intelligibility within the 'Hindu' framework. How do these ideals become intelligible to the 'Hindus' in the absence of Christian doctrinal support? Does the reformer understand something *more* about 'Hinduism' than the traditional native in his engagement with these ideas during the colonial period? If so, then reform accounts ought to provide a distinct and well-reasoned support for their perspective that does not require Christian assumptions to make it intelligible. If such a basis is not available, and one is compelled to link these to colonial accounts, how does one account for the reformist adoption of colonial discourse? This is one major question this thesis takes up.

Alternative accounts of the Indian traditions
What makes the task of answering these questions more troublesome is the fact that we do not have an account of 'Hinduism' or the Indian traditions that would allow us to adequately represent these traditions from a non-colonial perspective. The reformist account of 'Hinduism' is replete with inconsistencies, as we have seen above in the story. These inconsistencies give us enough reason to treat the reformist narrative with some suspicion and subject it to investigation rather than the unsuspecting acceptance that Reform discourse has enjoyed so far. What other account do we turn to?

One characterization of 'Hinduism' that has opened up possible directions for further research is S.N. Balagangadhara's proposition in his book, *The Heathen in his Blindness* (1994), that in conceptualizing 'Hinduism' as a 'religion', we have adopted a purely colonial perspective upon ourselves. Balagangadhara shows how the West sought to conceptualize bewildering native practices as religion (although a false one), and named it 'Hinduism'. The central implication being that the term really does not individuate anything (or grabs hold of everything as is evident from the thousands of definitions offered, including the only half-facetious one: 'anything you say about Hinduism is likely to be true'.

Balagangadhara provides an alternative characterization of 'Hinduism' as a set of traditions, which are distinctly different from religion and therefore require a whole new field of inquiry to emerge in order for us to investigate into their nature and functioning. In his essay, 'How to speak for Indian Traditions', he asserts, "[T]he Indian traditions have been hitherto presented in a distorted form and that more adequate theoretical tools than what we possess today need to be fashioned" (Balagangadhara 2011 forthcoming) in order to produce an intelligible account of these traditions.

Balagangadhara does not merely re-dub 'Hinduism' from a 'religion' into a 'tradition'. It is not a semantic quibble that is at stake. In fact, Balagangadhara proposes that what is at stake in generating an alternative understanding of the nature of Indian traditions is a theory that finally explains cultural difference. In the absence of such a theory, we instinctively use such formulations as 'cultural difference' to speak of anything from varying clothing styles to cooking styles, but are unable to provide any meaningful answer to questions such as why colonialism produced accounts of the Indian traditions that were so shockingly misrepresentative and so damningly infantilizing? Is it 'bad intention' that produces such accounts? Then surely this would be the best orchestrated propaganda campaign that history has witnessed, since it sustains itself even after those who produce such representations no longer have any political or economic stake in its perpetuation! After all, as post-colonial scholarship has acknowledged consistently over the past few decades, colonial representations of the East which render it puerile or immoral or that are simply distinctly different from the sense the East has about itself, are simply not cured by the end of political colonisation.

Balagangadhara proposes that the colonial description of India is not generated by willful slander, but genuinely from the Western experience of the East. The West, with its background of religion, could not but extend religion as an explanatory category describing all other peoples, and in the process, could not

but be shocked at how poorly 'Hinduism' compared to other Semitic religions. Let us say this is true. If so, then how do we account for reform discourse? How does the East generate a discourse about itself that is rooted in the Western experience of the East? If the thesis succeeds in demonstrating that this discourse could not possibly be generated from the reformer's experience of 'Hinduism', then what kind of engagement can we say reform discourse shows with Indian reality?

The thesis attempts at least partially to take up an alternative description of Indian traditions. In scrutinizing the place of 'practice' in these traditions, it raises some contrasts with the Christian and Reformist relationship to practice with that of a traditional relationship to practice. This does not give us the framework for an alternative characterization of Indian traditions, but it does serve to illuminate one interesting direction, thus suggesting that such a project is not only plausible, but sorely required.

<div align="center">III</div>

Foucault on 'care of the self' and Askesis: A model for this thesis

While it seems as if the task the thesis sets out upon is rather unprecedented, and indeed, it does not have any precursors in the Indian context, Foucault's work on the ancient Greeks and the transformation of their concepts and knowledge systems by the modern Christian West, serves as a very good model for the task at hand and how it is to be accomplished. Foucault's *Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2005) traces a historical moment from the ancient Greeks and contrasts it with what he calls the 'Cartesian moment' of the modern West. According to Foucault, the Greek injunction of '*epimeleia heautou'*, translated as 'care of oneself', came coupled with another injunction, '*gnothi seauton*', translated as 'take care of the self'. Thus, in Antiquity the two statements worked together and indicated an appropriate relationship to the self. However,

in the modern Christian West only one of these two statements survive as indicators of an appropriate relationship to the self. And more importantly, the complementary statement gains a negative connotation. One of the two closely related concepts, namely, '*epimeleia heautou*' or 'care of the self', *disappears* while the other gains extraordinary salience (Foucault 2005: 2). Knowledge of the self becomes the only paradigm in which the self is related to the self. The discourse about the subject and what the subject can know about himself changes when these two, closely related concepts diverge.

In a close reading of Plato's *Apology*, Foucault demonstrates how Socrates, with whom the idea of 'know yourself' is most closely linked in western philosophy, himself lays very much more emphasis on the activity of caring for the self. Thus it would be a mistake to assume, as we easily do, that the more important injunction was 'know yourself' while the additional guidance was 'take care of yourself'. Foucault demonstrates that "generally speaking the principle that one must take care of the self was the principle of all rational conduct in all forms of active life... especially during the 'high summer' of Roman and Hellenistic thought" (Foucault 2005: 9). Then he asks, quite pertinently,

> Why did Western thought and philosophy neglect the notion of *epimeleia heautou* (care of the self) in its reconstructions of its own history? How did it come about that we accorded so much privilege, value, and intensity to the "know yourself" and omitted, or at least, left in the shadow, this notion of care of the self that, in actual fact, historically, when we look at the documents and texts, seems to have framed the principle of "know yourself" from the start and to have supported an extremely rich and dense set of notions, practices, ways of being, forms of existence, and so on? (Foucault 2005: 12)

Foucault is indexing a process of change in the subject's relationship with the self. He argues, that for the Ancients, the relationship with the self was to 'take care' of it. However, in modern Western thought the only relationship to the self that can be articulated is 'know yourself'. Foucault is interested in the process by which a relationship with the self, encompassing both injunctions, gets thinned down to accommodate only one. The loss of the core injunction, 'take care of the self', indicates a flattening of the subject's relationship with the self. For instance, in the first kind of relation, where care of the self is emphasized, truth about the self is a condition to be arrived at rather than knowledge to be acquired. To arrive at the Greek notion of truth, various paths are available through the practice of the 'care of the self'. Thus, for the Ancients, knowledge was a process – caring for the self leads the agent to know the self. For the modern West, however, knowing the self is a matter of the subject gaining knowledge.

At this point, I would like to remove the focus from the actual phrases 'know yourself' and 'care of the self', and draw attention to what Foucault is *doing.* The modern West and the Ancients might not be speaking to each other because they are chronologically separated, but there is another reason why they cannot have a conversation. The distinctions of one group are lost in the discourse of the other.

Foucault attempts to reconstruct from the historical material, the order of thought which might have been extant, to render these concepts meaningful in the way that they appear in the original texts. His method is to reveal the range of ethical choices open to a man who functioned within the 'knowledge of spirituality'. This reveals a set of distinctions which contrasts with the way in which the modern West orders experience. Foucault calls the modern framework 'intellectual knowledge'. He then explores the non-coincidence of

these two kinds of knowledge. He identifies four conditions involved in the knowledge of spirituality.

> … [T]hese four conditions (the subject's change of positions, the evaluation of things on the basis of their reality within the *kosmos,* the possibility of the subject seeing himself, and finally the subject's transfiguration through the effect of knowledge) constitutes, I believe, what could be called spiritual knowledge. It would no doubt be interesting to write the history of this knowledge. It would be interesting to see how, however prestigious it was at the end of Antiquity or in the period I am talking about, it was gradually limited, overlaid, and finally effaced by a different mode of knowledge which could be called the knowledge of intellectual knowledge… it is no doubt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the knowledge of intellectual knowledge finally completely covered over the knowledge of spirituality, but not without having taken up a number of its elements. (Foucault 2005: 308-9)

In further pursuance of the distinctions between the 'spiritual knowledge' of the Ancients and modern 'intellectual knowledge', Foucault discusses the nature of *askesis*, defined roughly as the activity of the practice of the self on the self. "*Askesis* is not a way of subjecting the self to an external law; rather it is a way of binding it to the truth". There are a number of practices which it can include, such as "austerity, renunciation, prohibition, and pernickety prescriptive-ness" (Foucault 2005: 317). Thus, *askesis* was the name given to the set of practices linked to taking care of the self and knowing the self.

The modern West would ask: is it possible to know the truth about the subject in the same way as one knows the truth about objects in the world? Or put in another way, can the same mode of knowledge be applied to the subject as is applied to the things of the world? Is the subject a part of the knowable things of the world? (Foucault 2005: 318). Foucault argues that to ask the question in this way is to frame the self as an object in the world. This indicates a particular set of relations between 'truth' and 'subject' and 'knowledge' leading

to what Foucault would call 'intellectual knowledge' of the self. In the Hellenistic and Roman period, the relation of the subject to knowledge *never* arises in this form. The self is not a knowable object in the world. Rather, in this discourse, knowing and exercising the truth, enables the subject to act as he should act, to be as he should be and as he wishes to be. The constitution of the subject was a final end for himself through and by the exercise of the truth. (Foucault 2005: 319). In this formulation, a set of practices may transform the self into this or that, leading to what Foucault would call 'spiritual knowledge' of the self.

Two kinds of questions are typical of the knowledge of spirituality: what must the subject be in order to have access to the truth and what aspects of the subject may be transformed by virtue of his access to the truth? (Foucault 2005: 29). Foucault warns, "I think we should have these things clearly in mind, because, due to our culture and our own categories, there are not a few schemas in our heads that risk confusing us." (Foucault 2005: 317).

Foucault's warning serves us in the Indian context as well as it does the modern West looking at the ancient Greeks. Although the differences in the way that the modern West receives the Ancients is also marked by a difference in language, we can safely say, this difference is not *just* a matter of different languages. It is a function of the concepts within the language and knowledge systems which generate them. And these differences may be revealed in our everyday discourse, no matter which language we speak in. Such a method would be worthwhile to try and trace a map of cultural difference in colonial India. There is also something intriguing in the fact that Foucault outlines how the Christian West, when it looks at Greek practices, undervalues injunctions for practice and places emphasis on intellectual knowledge. That makes Foucault's work even more significant for the Indian context. Perhaps the fate of Antiquity and the loss of concepts it suffers when viewed by the Christian

West offers a similar pattern to the loss of concepts that Indian traditions suffer when they are viewed from the Western lens.

IV

The colonial, reform and native discourses display a strikingly distinct set of notions when dealing with the domain of practices and the individual's relationship to practice. The native's accounts of his practice are few and flimsy, while the coloniser's accounts of (often) the same practices are overwhelming in detail and analysis. In the subsequent chapters, I have tried to reconstruct the native's discourse on practices from several divergent and unlikely domains, to put together a semblance of the native's own discourse on his practices. The precise ways in which colonial discourse differs from the native's account allows us to understand the nature of difference between them.

Chapter 1 looks at the standard colonial discourse of practices which began with the period of social reform; it notices that all subsequent academic writing on these practices prefers colonial discourse over the native's in order to analyze these practices. Reform discourse, from the moment of its introduction to the present, continues to retain its core structure as an evaluative discourse, and oddly enough, the various academic positions such as Marxist, feminist or post-colonial, yield discussions of Reform within this same evaluative discourse.

In chapter 2 we look at the arrival of this evaluative discourse in the form of colonial discourse and how it was at first only intelligible to the colonizer. We trace the journey of this discourse through its initial introduction into this arena of cultural difference. This discourse faces pressure from increased contact and deepening relations and eventually expands and extends in a very culture-specific way. This chapter relies on European travelogues and the

colonial administrators' comments on 'Hinduism' and traces these from early to later sources. The objective is not to provide an exhaustive account of how colonial sources viewed 'Hinduism' but rather to show (a) how the Christian framework of knowledge impinges on their assessment of Indian life and (b) to demonstrate how Reform continues to speak of the Indian in the same vein.

In Chapter 3 we move to the next step; the Native 'learns' the use of colonial discourse. I draw extensively on two moments in history in order to examine this transition. The first moment is Rammohan Roy's publication of his translation of the Vedanta and a pamphlet on Christianity titled *The Precepts of Jesus*. This moment shows how the reformer, almost simultaneously, employs Semitic concepts in his descriptions of 'Hinduism', while at the same time failing miserably to coherently reconstruct these Semitic notions. The thesis thus proposes that the reformer's engagement in colonial discourse is an exercise in generating rhetoric and this discourse diverges significantly from his own experience of the Indian context.

The second moment used for investigation, is the discussion around the banning of sati. The reformer's position in this debate begins to show peculiar proclivity to notions of practice that are not shared by his fellow natives but seem to be drawn from the colonial conception of practice. This discourse seems to damage the native's ability to speak coherently of his practices and explain the salience of these practices in the native's life. As long as he speaks within colonial discourse, he speaks about the practices using the distinctions of the colonizer. This is the instance when the discourse deviates from the native's experience and is not able to articulate it. Instead, the discourse is only able to portray the native's actions and ideas negatively, making his practices look immoral.

In chapter 4, we look at the change from traditional discourse to colonial discourse. Within traditional discourse, practices are spoken of as

transformative of the self, while colonial discourse is not able to articulate or coherently re-construct this view of practices. This chapter takes up a study of Ramakrishna and his disciple, Swami Vivekananda. A study of Ramakrishna gives depth to the voice of tradition sorely lacking in colonial and reform sources. A review of scholarship on Ramakrishna also indicates how we seem to be losing the ability to grasp the distinctions which gave shape to this tradition of knowledge and instead, attempt to violently apply modern categories of thought onto this body of work. A contrast drawn between the way that Ramakrishna thinks of practice and the way that Vivekananda draws on this element also sets the stage for investigation into the next stage of history, the rise of nationalism. This investigation ends with the Reform period, however, and only indicates the kind of implications the study has for the nationalist period, as it emerges that nationalist discourse remains mired in colonial discourse in spite of its articulation of Indian specificities.

Chapter 1

The Emergence of Reform Discourse

The earliest scholarly works on reform are hagiographies of reformers which typically portray the reformer as a crusader against injustice and superstition in native society. The reformer was portrayed as someone who stood out from the rest of his society because of his early rational scrutiny of the 'false beliefs', which led to corruption in native practices[1]. Sumit Sarkar considered the predominance of such hagiographies as a major weakness in the area of reform historiography.

> Biographies of reform leaders written by their followers or admirers not unnaturally tend to present them as saints in shining armour, and this has happened often enough with figures like Rammohun, Keshabchandra, Vivekananda, Ranade or Dayanand Saraswati. Such biographical literature still contains abundant and indispensable first-hand material, but the work of critical reassessment remains. Most serious of all, may be, is the tendency to study individual reformers or reform movements in isolation, ignoring, in the first place, similar developments in other parts of the country in which the reform activities were taking place. (Sarkar 1975: 51).

Sarkar's observation that reform studies lacked "the work of critical reassessment" is an insightful comment[2]. However, Sarkar considered the hagiographic tendency itself as the problem with reform discourse, whereas it seems fairly clear that later developments in reform scholarship, which were not hagiographic also do not fulfill the expectation of a 'critical reassessment'. This chapter reviews some of the developments within the discourse in order to

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[1] The *Indian Social Reformer*, a journal which began in 1890 seems to have laid the foundation for the discourse of 'social reform'. This was the first time that a publication brought a set of people, ideas and institutions together under the term 'social reform'.

[2] I will consider in a later section whether Sarkar's proposal to improve scholarship on the reform period by studying in tandem the various reform movements taking place across the country, has much promise.

examine what directions were explored in the scholarly discussions around reform and assess whether these directions have developed adequate means to understand the historical events dubbed as 'social reform'. Although Sarkar found fault only with the hagiographic literature surrounding reform, there is a simple parallel between the hagiographic works and later discourse generated by Sarkar and others who rejected hagiography. The hagiographies praise the reformer while severely criticising particular native practices.[3] Later discourse reproduces this same evaluative pattern but the opposition drawn is between 'modernity' and 'tradition', or 'modern/liberal' values and 'orthodoxy'[4]. Instead of the life of the reformer, it is the values he seems to represent which are the heroes of the narrative[5]. Thus, it does not seem as if it is 'critical reassessment' that is achieved, but a rather peculiar expansion of the discourse which makes the work of critical evaluation even more difficult than in the relatively straight-forward hagiographies. While this is not a substantive criticism of later developments in reform discourse, it does seem odd that the evaluative framework, within which the discourse of reform operates, remains largely unquestioned. There has been one peculiarity about reform discourse that did come to light through recent research. Lata Mani's study of the discourse around sati called into question some of the crucial assumptions that underlay reform discourse and demonstrated that their roots lay in a colonial perspective on India. Her work served to question the new status that reform discourse conferred on certain ancient native texts, which rendered them into

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[3] Early hagiographies include those by Carpenter (1866), Chatterjee (1881) and Ghose (1901).

[4] The first collection of essays that concertedly took up this pattern of evaluation was rather predictably titled *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India* (ed. Joshi, V.C 1975)

[5] This transition is apparent just from an examination of the two commemorative volumes for the centenary and bi-centenary celebrations of Rammohun Roy's contribution. The centenary volume (which marked the centenary of his death), largely comprised of essays that are loosely hagiographic, assessing Roy's contribution from different religious perspectives. The bi-centenary volume titled *Raja Rammohun Roy and the New Learning* (which marked the bi-centenary of Roy's birth), edited by B.P. Barua (1988) smoothly shifts from an examination of Roy's life to an examination of his 'economics', his 'new learning', his 'quest for rationalism and toleration' and his contribution to 'Indian Liberalism'. Thus, Roy becomes a representative of the values of secular modernity and his contribution to *religious* reform is blurred if not erased.

'scriptures'[6] (Mani 1989, 1998). Mani's work opened up new interest into reform discourse and it became an area of examination of colonial attitudes rather than just the space to produce hagiographies of great men or 'modern' values. This chapter will trace the earliest reform discourse to its most current form in order to demonstrate that while the objects of reform have changed (and often in rather mysterious ways), this discourse remains fundamentally caught in a colonial evaluative paradigm.

I

Early Reform

Stories of reform begin to be told towards the end of the nineteenth century, in India. Historian R.C. Dutt, an ICS officer, who went on to become the President of the Indian National Congress in 1899, published *The Cultural Heritage of Bengal* in 1877. This was one of the earliest histories to give an account of the social changes that were still taking place in Bengal. The social changes were grouped around the life and actions of the earliest reformer, Rammohun Roy. Dutt's account of the life of Rammohun Roy (1774[7]-1833) would be repeated by historians almost verbatim for the next hundred and fifty years[8]. Dutt declared Roy to be:

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[6] Mani definitely raised doubts about viewing the *vyawasthas* and other such literature as 'scriptures'. Her work, significantly problematised the basis of colonial 'knowledge' generated about native society and religion. Mani acknowledges that it was Kosambi who first raised objections to the British "Brahminising tendency" (Mani 1989: 114). But the implications of Mani's work, though not fully explored in her book, move far beyond a critique of colonial policy for the 'brahminisation' of 'Hinduism'.

[7] The year of Roy's birth is under some dispute. Some historians place it in 1772 and others in 1774.

[8] The tone of these writings prompted one of Roy's later biographers Iqbal Singh to lament that there "has been a virtual absence of a coherent body biographical exegesis (and) the field of opportunity has been left wide open for all manner of edifying, if not always convincing, essays in hagiography and legendary build-up of… reputation"(Singh 1958: 2)

fully equipped for the great controversies into which he entered, on the one hand with orthodox Hindus with a view to lead them to the purer faith of their ancestors, and on the other hand with Christian missionaries who wished to replace Hinduism by Christianity in India (Dutt 1877: 93).

By 1881 the first full-length biography was published in Bengali. Written by N.N. Chatterjee, it was titled *Mahatma Raja Rammohun Rayer Jibancharit* (*Life of Mahatma Raja Rammohun Roy*). Mary Carpenter's *Last Days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy* which was published in 1866, dealt with the events of his stay in England where he died in 1833. Sophia Collet Dobson's *Life and Letters of Raja Rammohun Roy* in 1900 covered a more extensive period of his life and the main controversies that emerged around him. These hagiographies established a story about Rammohun Roy which could then be moulded to tell larger stories about India itself. Roy's progress as a reformer would be the model for India's progress as a nation.

In 1933, the Brahmo Samaj observed the centenary of Roy's death with the publication of a volume of essays called *Father of Modern India Commemoration Volume of the Rammohun Roy Centenary Celebration 1933*. This was the first time Roy was called the 'Father of Modern India', a title he retains till today. The centenary volume made a special effort to present views from all religions on Rammohun Roy. It is interesting that the thrust of the centenary volume was to show Roy's achievements as ones celebrated by all the different religious perspectives, all those who were interested in the 'fundamental or ultimate truth'.

Pandit Prathamanath Tarakabhushan the Hindu representative at the centenary celebration pointed to "the want of true religious education" that "had left the Hindus puzzled and bewildered". They had, according to Tarakabhushan, lost sight of the "basic principle of divine worship as propounded in the *sastras*, and took more and more to perverted and artificial

methods". Roy, with his translations of the *shastras* returned them to "monotheism, which is the very bed rock of Hinduism" (Brahmo Samaj 1934: 243).

Maulavi Abdul Karim, representing Islam, spoke about the syncretic nature of influences on the young Roy who was "deeply impressed by the universality and catholicity of the unalloyed monotheistic faith" of the Islam he had come into contact with. For the Maulavi, this interaction "broadened his views, and counteracted the influence of his surroundings". As a result, though Roy was "born and bred in an orthodox Brahmin family, he began, even in his teens, a crusade against the idolatrous practices and superstitious customs prevailing in the country" (Brahmo Samaj 1934: 244).

E.A. Arkie represented the Jewish voice and highlighted the significance of Roy's achievement in setting up the Brahmo Samaj since it ensured "(1) the worship of the Eternal, Unsearchable and Immutable Being" and "(2) that no graven image, statue or sculpture, or the likeness of anything shall be admitted". Arkie concludes by pointing out that "these are the basic religious principles of the two great Monotheistic traditions, Judaism and Islam" (Brahmo Samaj 1934: 246). Dr. Benimadhava Barua, the representative of Buddhists, said Roy opposed the "corrupt, superstitious and tyrannical ways of the Brahmins of his time" and "endeavoured to awaken them (the masses of India) to a new and better life" by giving them "a vivid picture of the clear thought and pure idealism of their remote forefathers". Needless to say, the pure idealism and clear thought was present in "the highly valued authoritative ancient texts" and all they required was "rational interpretation" which Roy provided (Brahmo Samaj 1934: 249). Swami Adyananda from the Ramkrishna Belur math said Roy was a great national hero, who, "during the dark hours of confusion, superstition and consequent degeneration showed a way of progress and freedom with great courage and conviction" (Brahmo Samaj 1934: 255-56).

These views established a pattern of evaluation which has gone largely unnoticed. Roy was important because his work established the 'truth' and more significantly, a truth purportedly shared by all religions. For Maulavi Abdul Karim and Arkie, that truth is fundamentally the truth of 'monotheism'. Thus, the value of Roy's work for these two, ironically, is that it upheld the truth fundamental to the Semitic religions. Tarakabhushan's emphatic claim that monotheism is in fact the "bedrock" of "Hinduism" is even more striking. It is obvious that the Muslim and Jewish representatives value monotheism. Why does the Hindu representative also value this claim? There are several assumptions that underlie this evaluative stance. One, that monotheism is a fundamental and unquestionable truth. Two, that all creeds, cultures and ancient texts expressed this truth. Three, that the reformer was one of the few of his culture and his generation who realised this truth and was able to uncover it from the ancient texts. The rest remained caught in the "dark hours of confusion and superstition".

What made monotheism a fundamental truth beyond all question? Why was it an *improvement* of 'Hinduism' to conceive of it as monotheistic? Present day studies of reform discourse would tend to ignore these assumptions about monotheism since we supposedly no longer consider this a significant claim to uphold about 'Hinduism'. Ostensibly, it matters little to us whether 'Hinduism' is monotheistic or not. But, it is significant that for the writers of Roy's centenary volume, this was the most significant factor that united their appreciation for him[9].

Let us examine some of the other factors they mention for their appreciation of Roy's contribution. Barua, the Buddhist representative, applauds Roy's opposition against the "corrupt" and "tyrannical" Brahminhood who had

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[9] Although this would be considered an out-dated claim which is no longer significant, it is my contention that it remains significant because the contemporary appreciation for reform initiatives also tends to be covertly based on their establishment of a monotheistic 'Hinduism'. I strengthen this claim in the next section as well as the next chapter.

twisted the "pure idealism and clear thought" of the ancient texts to suit their own purposes. This is purportedly the second major contribution Roy makes, the correct translation of the texts which exposes the corrupt priestly class. Consequently, he achieves the enlightenment of the "superstitious and ignorant" masses. The primary objects of negative evaluation are the Brahmins or priests. They are seen to be the cause of the flawed relationship between text and practice. It was alleged that the priests either from ignorance or malice allowed the text-practice hierarchy to shift in the first place. The reformer corrects this when he reasserts the text-practice hierarchy by giving the texts a 'rational interpretation' which in turn leads to 'true' practices. According to Tarakabhushan, Roy corrected 'false' practices, the "perverted and artificial methods" of worship which were in vogue. He established the 'true' practices by the correct translation of the *shastras*. I take up an examination of the assessment of the 'priestly class' subsequently. Here I wish to draw attention to the description of practices that emerges at this point. Practices are described as 'true' as against 'false' or 'corrupt'. But what is a 'true' practice? One can readily understand what a true or false statement is, but how do actions or practices acquire this attribute? For instance, under what circumstances is a traditional practice considered 'true'? As the subsequent discussion on sati will show, it is not by the establishment of whether or not the practice was in existence previously that the 'truth' of the practice is established. It is in fact through the establishment of some 'scriptural' sanction for the practice that the 'truth' of the practice is established. This brings us to the next set of assumptions. Not only is monotheism to be valued, particular texts are to be established as 'scriptures'. It is these 'scriptures' that would dictate practices. In so far as practices were derived from 'scriptures', they were 'true'.

As Lata Mani established in her influential work, cited earlier, "colonial officials assumed brahmanic scriptures to be normative and prescriptive texts that organized social behaviour and provided, as it were, the master narrative of 'Hindu' civilization" (Mani 1998: 30). While Mani accepts the colonial

nomenclature of these texts as 'scriptures', an assumption I will take up for scrutiny in the next chapter, she does see that these texts did not bear the same relationship to practice as did the Christian or Muslim holy texts. They were not "normative" and "prescriptive". After all, within the Semitic framework, a text was a 'scripture' and was prescriptive *because* it was 'revealed'. It was God's word. In the Indian context there were no texts that could be considered the revealed word of God. It was the ancientness of the text and its subject matter that decided its category. Thus the four Vedas were scriptures but the Natya Shastra was not, although they were all ancient texts.

As Amiya Sen points out, the very idea of the 'right scriptures' created many an absurd controversy.

> Major reformist bodies, it would appear, based their programmes on perceptibly different traditions or scriptural authorities. The Aryas took reformed Hinduism to be rooted in the Vedas, the Brahmos in the Upanishads, and a host of early twentieth-century thinkers in innovative interpretations of the *Bhagvad Gita*. But even those who claimed to follow a single text were not always entirely in agreement. In the 1880s Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1825-83) was drawn into some controversy with orthodox *pundits* at Kashi and Calcutta over which components within the Vedas, namely, *Samhitas, Aranyakas,* or *Brahmanas* were 'authentic' and acceptable for the modern Hindu. The problem of an universal scripture for Hindus became all the more critical with the emergence of new and radical viewpoints, as, say, from the leaders of depressed castes or communities. In the 1930s there was sharp difference of opinion between Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1864-1984) and Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956) over 'representative' texts for Hinduism (Sen 2003: 4-5).

Two concrete problems emerge within reform discourse. The first is the way that these texts are accepted as 'scriptures', a purely colonial and Christian perspective; and two, the relationship between text and practice that is

established through this perspective. It is ironic that both the monotheism that is valued and the scripture-practice relationship that is implicitly valued in an evaluation of the reformer's contribution show the underlying framework of a Christian colonial world-view[10]. The damaging impact this had on our understanding of practices has never been raised for examination[11]. It is, for instance, not by accident that the hagiographies place a negative value on practices like 'idolatory' or 'polytheism'. It is also not surprising then that practices that are considered 'idolatrous' are usually dubbed as 'superstition'[12]. Uniformly, none of the reform narratives describe the practices themselves. Often the writers resort to metaphors such as 'the sands and debris of creeds' or 'perverted and artificial methods' or even 'the dark hours of confusion, superstition and consequent degeneration', without elaborating on what practices lead to such dire consequences as 'degeneration' and why?[13] Thus, it becomes clear that it is not a particular practice per se, but any action for which the reformer cannot find 'scriptural sanction', or which is too far removed from a monotheistic world-view becomes dubbed 'idolatrous' or 'superstition' and may be mobilised as proof of the 'degeneration' of the natives.

While the above coordinates of evaluation are recognisably within a Christian colonial paradigm, there is an additional point that recurs throughout the

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[10] While Mani and Sen are both uncomfortable with the colonial assumptions that underlay reform discourse, neither of them have systematically brought to light the nature of these colonial assumptions and the fact that in light of these assumptions reform discourse can no longer be evaluated as a positive historical force. Thus, while Amiya Sen also points to these anomalies, he chooses to see their significance as being negative only in so far as they fed into 'revivalist' and 'right-wing' discourses. "Modern Hindus seem to have uncritically accepted Occidental theories about the static, grossly underdeveloped state of their society. The bifurcation of the social realm from the religions originated in European cultural assumptions of the time, but this also gave patriotic Hindus a cultural peg from which to hang their specious theories about a spiritually superior India countering the inroads of a materially advanced West" (Sen, Amiya P. 2003: 16).

[11] Part of the impact this had on our conception of practices is taken up in section III of this chapter. But this is a significant question which shapes the entire thesis.

[12] Durga-puja, Ayudha Puja and taking off ones shoes before entering a temple could be examples of the kind of activities referred to here. It is curious that the discourse always uses only evaluative terms such as 'idol-worship' and never the more familiar and evaluatively neutral term 'Durga puja'.

[13] See Bakhle 1938, Bose 1959, Chattopadhayay 1965 and Bose 1969 among the many who write about this period in metaphors, without any discussion of practices.

discourse. As seen above in Barua and Tarakabhushan's assessment of Roy's contribution, the evaluative field of reform discourse is crucially based on a set of statements about the 'priests' or 'Brahmins' and their relationship to the texts on the one hand and their fellow natives on the other. Typically, this story has three factors – the priests who mislead the masses, the masses who are misled, on whose behalf reform must be undertaken and the reformer who escapes the mischief of the priests and saves the masses. The priests are corrupt, greedy, ignorant and disturb the text-practice hierarchy (i.e. they privilege the practice over the text, whereas the *original* hierarchy *ought* to privilege the text over the practice). The reformer restores an *earlier* and *purer* relationship to the texts. Thus, in order to be intelligible, this position requires a 'true' and 'false' interpretation of texts, like the claims about 'true' and 'false' practices. The 'true' interpretation of the Vedas led one to monotheism, a 'false' interpretation led to idolatry and polytheism.[14] It is interesting to note that not all texts or any interpretation of any text is subject to this kind of criticism. For instance, the colonial authorities and native reformers did not seek to establish the 'true' interpretation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*. Thus, it was only certain ancient texts, again, those designated as 'scriptures' that had to have this quality of a 'false' and 'true' interpretation[15]. Already one aspect of the claim

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[14] From R.C. Dutt's *The Cultural Heritage of Bengal* (1877) to J.K. Majumdar's *Raja Rammohun Roy and Progressive Movements in India a Selection from Records* (1941), almost seventy years of reform writing employs this trope to explore native practices.

[15] Amiya Sen gives a brief insight into the kinds of controversies that broke out as a result of this search for scriptural sanction. It is not unusual that these controversies, which must seem embarrassing from the perspective of historians seeking to establish either reformer or reform values as rational, progressive and enlightened, do not find significant mention in reform historiography. "The recourse to the Shastras as a reliable guide to reform eventually proved to be an embarrassment to both parties since it progressively emerged that the Shastras did not always speak with the same voice and hence lent themselves to conflicting interpretations. There was, as we shall presently see, the intriguing choice of an appropriate text. However, but for a few short, reactionary spells when allegiance to the Shastras become the war cry of the conservatives, people from various walks of life had begun to accept the fact that modern problems could not be satisfactorily resolved in the light of older prescriptions. An orthodox Sanskrit scholar of Maharashtra once admitted to Chandravarkar that, left to themselves, members of his class would never be able to procure from the Shastras support for the kind of changes being contemplated, for, frankly, these simply did not exist. Significantly enough, he also went on to add that men such as him were in any case beginning to accept the changes occurring around them" (Sen, Amiya P. 2003: 21).

about Brahmanical 'corruption' becomes untenable if one questions the status of these texts as 'scriptures'.

In addition, some intriguing anomalies emerge when we study how the idea of the 'corruption' of the 'priestly class' or the Brahmins emerged and developed. This was not an idea that even the early reformers seemed to share and is in fact the result of a distinct expansion in the discourse of 'corruption' as it was mobilised by the reformers to the way it was mobilised by later historians. For instance, Roy's argument in his central discourse on Sati written in February 1818, *Conference Between An Advocate for, and an Opponent of the Practice of Burning Widows Alive* (Roy 1901), was that the scriptures could be interpreted to mean that widowhood was preferred over Sati. The text is a debate between two characters named only as the Advocate and the Opponent of Sati. Roy's Opponent of Sati argued that the texts were misread.

> All those passages you have quoted are indeed sacred law; and it is clear from those authorities, that if women perform Concremation or Postcremation, they will enjoy heaven for a considerable time. But attend to what Manu and others say respecting the duties of widows:... Manu directs, that after the death of her husband, the widow should pass her whole life as an ascetic. Therefore, the laws given by Angira and others whom you have quoted, being contrary to the law of Manu, cannot be accepted. (Roy 1906: 324-5)

The Opponent argues that the Advocates of Sati have misread the import of certain statements in the texts. He shows how the texts may be read without contradiction to mean that Sati is only an option, not a necessity.

Roy's writings on Sati suggest that the texts had not been correctly interpreted, and he quotes several authorities to support his reading. Roy does not argue that the Advocates of Sati were exclusively priests or Brahmins or that anyone was being prevented from reading the texts. Rather his pamphlet is structured as a conversation between two equals who display remarkable familiarity with

the texts. Neither is a priest or pundit. In his writings, Roy does not attack any group who monopolised the texts. In contrast to the notion that the priests had misled the people, Roy interprets Sati as the result of the excessive 'jealousy' of the Hindu male towards his females (Roy 1906: 475).

In his introduction to the Bengali translation of Sanskrit texts (Roy 1906: 21) Roy states that the Sanskrit texts allow idolatrous practices for those who cannot learn without them. His aim is to show what non-idolatrous forms are available to those who choose them. Thus, Roy's position does not contradict the orthodox position that the texts do not limit practices and instead seem to uphold a diversity of options available to all.

> It will also appear evident that the Vedas, although they tolerate idolatry as the last provision for those who are totally incapable of raising their minds to the contemplation of the invisible God of nature, yet repeatedly urge the relinquishment of the rites of idol-worship, and the adoption of a purer system of religion, on the express ground that the observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude. (Roy 1906: 21)

Roy maintains that the texts allow idol worship but *prefer* non-idol worship. Thus, in Roy's reading, idolatrous practices are sanctioned within the texts; the priests did not invent or misread or monopolise the texts to produce these practices. His explanation for idolatry is that the texts provide these practices as options for those who cannot raise their minds through abstract ideas. Thus there is a hierarchy of acceptable practices rather than dichotomy between 'true' and 'false' practices. He argues further that the ignorant interpret these practices as mandatory because they do not understand the 'better' way of non-idolatrous monotheism. While this still leaves Roy's preference for monotheism unexplained, it does show that the criticism of a 'priestly class' or Brahmins was a later development, which is read into Roy's work and does not emerge from it.

Thus, in the writings of the contemporary reformers there was no known group of priests or pundits who interfered with reform. The early histories however were already arguing that the monopoly of 'pundits', *prevented* the texts from being properly translated

> Rammohun selected for the modern Hindu his true position in the religious world, and he fortifies that position by translations from the ancient Upanishads and other Hindu scriptures, which had so long been the monopoly of a few Pundits, and which now came like a surprise and a joy to all thoughtful and pious Hindus.   (Dutt 1877: 93).

Dutt says the texts were the monopoly of a few pundits. None of Roy's writings suggest his familiarity with any such group. Indeed 'pundits' in Roy's time was a British word used to refer to the persons hired by the British to interpret 'Hindoo' scriptures. As far as the debate on Sati is concerned Roy and this 'pundit' were always on the same side of the debate with the argument that the Hindu scriptures prescribed widowhood over Sati for a woman who had lost her husband. If Dutt's 'pundit' is read to mean these persons at the British courts in Calcutta, then his account becomes incoherent. What kind of monopoly does a hired reader of law have over the native masses? Yet Dutt's formulation includes a group called 'pundits' who monopolised the texts and obstructed the Reformer.

There is also a further confusion. According to Dutt:

> … Raja Radha Kanta Deb headed the orthodox party in those days, defended existing practices, and stood forth against all reform. It was a curious spectacle, that of a Brahman seeking to remove the abuses of modern Hinduism and a Kayastha standing forth as their champion and defender. (Dutt 1877: 94).

On the issue of Sati, Roy had the support of the missionaries, and his opinion converged with the court pundits. The people he argued against, later loosely called the Dharma Sabha,[16] manifested their disagreement with his views by performing the occasional sati and by writing letters to the editor of a 'Hindu' journal. This Dharma Sabha, headed by Raja Radha Kanta Deb, consisted of men like Roy, businessmen, landlords and traders. Dutt's account accuses them of "defending existing practices" and rejecting all reform. On the other hand he expresses surprise that the objection to reform comes not from a 'pundit' but from a 'kayashtha'. Thus, although the historical events are of a Brahmin rejecting the scriptures and the non-Brahmin defending it, Dutt does not re-examine the central story about the corrupting influence of the Brahmins and 'pundits'.

How can we understand Dutt's position? He interprets the historical events of the 19th century as a problem between pundits who monopolise texts and reformers who seek to 'correct' practices. On at least two occasions historical events contradict his analysis. Roy does not speak of manipulation by a group of pundits, but speaks instead of a hierarchy of practices sanctioned by the texts. He argues that the texts prescribe idolatrous practice for the lower mind. Further, while his primary opponent was not a Brahmin interested in preserving the texts, but a kayastha interested in 'defending practices', Roy himself was a Brahmin.

Neither of these factors leads Dutt to re-examine his moral discourse where the key-players are still the 'evil Brahmin' the 'ignorant masses' and the 'brave Reformer'. This is a problem. What is the value of Dutt's historical research if it emerges that his views on the events of the 19th century are not based on an analysis of historical events but rather on an externally imbibed moral discourse? And more importantly where does this discourse come from?

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[16] For an extended discussion on the formation and activities of the Dharma Sabha see Brian.K Pennington's *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (2005).

On the other hand, within this discourse the reformer has gained positive value because of his 'rational' thinking, from his 'broadened views' and from a 'questioning mind'. Uniformly these values come to him from his interaction with external, British, Christian, or Islamic influences. Sometimes Marxist critics see the Reformer as 'rationalist' (Majumdar 1934) 'humanist' (Sushobhan Sarkar 1946) a 'renaissance mind' or a 'modern scientific mind' (Jadunath Sarkar 1948).[17] These influences set the Reformer apart from the rest of the natives. They enable him to transcend 'superstition'. But once we take away the supporting framework of 'true' and 'false' practices and 'true' and 'false' interpretations of so-called 'scriptures', how do we sustain such judgments about the reformer? While these may seem problems that are typical of early reform discourse, these problems resurface in different ways in later discourse. As is evident from the Marxist descriptions of the reformer quoted above, the hagiographies celebrated these values as traits of the reformer, while the later discourse celebrates these values in themselves and the reformer is celebrated in so far as he embodies these values. If this is the case, what progress has reform discourse made in a critical re-evaluation of reform?

II

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[17] Inevitably such arguments, in the interest of self-preservation, have to avoid the question of why so very few people saw how tradition was opposed to reason. These arguments give the answer in terms of a powerful 'orthodoxy' or the 'ritual power' of priests. By way of actual example of this power they describe how the reformers were publicly reviled, often socially ostracised, and at the height of the Sati controversy Roy was said to have faced a threat to his life and had to hire a body guard. It remains a question why, when the 'orthodoxy' had such 'ritual power', they needed to resort to such crude attempts at violence at all?

In the previous section I have raised anomalies prevalent in early reform discourse. I have also looked at the conflation of the pundits and Brahmins who become 'culprits of corruption', but historically, were partners in colonial administration and therefore within the reform agenda. This kind of conflation arises, I propose, because of an expanding discourse wherein 'Hinduism' itself begins to be understood and assessed within a Christian colonial framework. I take this up for detailed investigation in the second chapter. In this section I examine major trends in later reform discourse in order to see whether the anomalies in the early discourse resurface, or are dispelled from what is expected to be a better-developed understanding of reform. There are two basic categories within which all later reform scholarship may be placed. The first is a perspective of incomplete modernization best articulated by Rajat Ray below.

> When the centenary of Rammohun Roy's death was celebrated in 1933 by eminent figures of the 'Bengal Renaissance,' such as Rabindranath Tagore, Brajendranath Seal and Ramananda Chatterjee, it still seemed possible, in the declining light of the afternoon of that 'Renaissance' (the depression had set in by then), to take a heroic view of history, in which Rammohun Roy appeared as "a luminous star in the firmament of India's history," who shed radiance all over the land, rescuing it from the penury of self-oblivion. In 1972, when the bi-centenary of his birth was celebrated in Calcutta and elsewhere, it no longer seemed possible, in the prevailing mood of frustration among India's intellectuals, to take such a heroic view of history, and the outcrop of writing on Rammohun Roy exhibited reactions ranging from the debunking of "the Rammohun myth" by Professor R.C. Majumdar to the sombre and introspective review of the limits of the modernization process in colonized India and the constraints on the modernizing thought and activities of Rammohun Roy which characterizes the writings in this volume. The common theme which runs through the contributions on different aspects of Rammohun Roy's life and work is the theme of modernization of India. Because this process is still unfinished and is still very much to the forefront of the

goals set before our own generation, it is not surprising that the
reassessment of the Raja's role in modern Indian history in the light of
this current problem has revived old controversies about him (ed. Joshi
1975: 1-2).

This perspective sees the reform movement as either an incomplete or failed
attempt at modernisation. The most important contributions to this perspective
have come from the Marxist and the feminist perspectives. These perspectives
are similar in that they see reform as either an incomplete or unsuccessful
movement in the direction of legitimate and justifiable social change. They do
not question the agenda of reform, but criticise either the means to the end or
the extent to which these goals were achieved. There were later developments
in looking at reform which differed from these perspectives in that they sought
to examine the assumptions that underlay and directions that reform discourse
took in India rather than assessing the social contribution of reform. I have
categorised this as the post-colonial perspective since it usually seeks to
critique the colonial foundations of reform agendas. In this section I examine
the Marxist, Feminist and Post-colonial contribution to reform.

Marxist Reform

The Marxist historiography of reform made it synonymous with revolution
against authority and hierarchy. For Marxist historians Roy became an 'early
rationalist' (Sarkar 1975: 47) and 'Bengal's first non-conformist of importance,
and, therefore, her first intellectual' (Poddar 1970: 16). These histories do not
elaborate on how the interpretation of 'scriptures' might be termed either
'rational' or 'non-conformist'. Marxist histories argue that Reform was a
consequence of economic and political events such as, 'Muslim neglect' or an
antiquated Mughal taxation system (De 1975), British attempts to create an

educated class of petty officers, the collapse of traditional social structures, land reform, the 'loss of traditional occupations' (Sarkar 1975) and British intervention into closed traditional village economies (Poddar 1970) [18].

The changes brought about by reform were seen as 'limited and deeply contradictory' where things were mostly 'on the intellectual plane and not at the level of basic social transformation', with reformers like Roy trapped in 'Hindu-elitist and colonial' frameworks (Sarkar 1975: 46). Sarkar draws attention to collusion between colonial forces and the elite of Bengal. He argues that figures like Rammohun and his closest friend and reformer Dwarkanath Tagore, prevented anything like a 'real' Renaissance in Bengal: "the entire Bengal Renaissance has remained prisoner to a kind of 'false consciousness' bred by colonialism" (Sarkar 1975: 46). Sarkar's criticism of Roy is based on the reformer's failure to reject colonial oppression in the form of economic policies that destroyed small farmers, indigenous trade and industry, as well as traditional craftsmen. (Sarkar 1975: 47).

There are two major aspects to Sarkar's evaluation of the reform movement, limiting as he considered it – first, the contribution it made to limiting Brahmin influence and the second relates to recognising Bhakti movements before the nineteenth century within the ambit of reform and evaluating their contribution. To examine the first, Sarkar's criticism of Roy appears to be 'properly' Marxist if rather less than pertinent to Roy's own concerns about the nature of religion.

Appreciating Roy's limited efforts, in the matter of tradition, Sarkar says:

> (S)alvation through "bathing in a river or worshipping a tree… and hundred useless hardships and privations regarding eating and drinking…" is blown up with relentless logic, and shown to be invented

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[18] Others who make this claim include B.B. Roy 1987, Minni Thakur 1987, V.D. Divekar 1991.

by the self-interest of priests feeding on mass ignorance and slavishness to habit. (Sarkar 1975, 50)

Sarkar argues that bathing, worshipping a tree, and privations regarding eating and drinking were 'blown up with relentless logic'. While one clearly sees a repetition of the anomaly related to the evaluation of Brahmins and their role in religious rites as was seen in the earlier discourse, there is an added aspect related to the way Sarkar speaks of practices.

A person who does not eat beef is told with 'relentless logic' that the practice was 'invented by the self-interest of priests'. Finally he accepts the logic and is able to see that his privation was only a result of slavishness to habit and ignorance. In Sarkar's analysis not eating beef is a practice of the ignorant masses and the use of logic will free them from this privation and from their ignorance: the people who practice non-beef-eating, are caught in a 'false' practice out of 'ignorance' and 'logic' will make their practices 'true' again.

This brings us back to the problem of 'true' and 'false' practices. Thus, the anomalies which plague the early discourse of reform, re-emerge in later Marxist discourse as well. Each of the comments above require the same kinds of colonial assumptions about 'scriptures' and the logic that follows although this time they acquire the garb not of the 'truth' of religions, but the 'truth' of rationality.

The second contribution Sarkar finds worthy to praise in the history of reform comes not from Roy or the 'modern' reformers, but from earlier bhakti movements. Bhakti movements first came to be seen as 'reform' movements following Charles Heimsath's[19] definition of Bhakti as 'traditional' reform[20]. Thus, Sarkar's evaluation of Bhakti comes largely from this colonial writer.

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[19] Heimsath (1964) *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* Princeton: Princeton University Press
[20] Heimsath distinguished between 'traditional' and 'modern' reform movements. His work has been extremely influential in the location of Bhakti as reform.

In sharp contrast to what was to happen under British rule, social reform in the eighteenth century was essentially a lower-class affair, integrally bound up with the bhakti tradition of popular monotheistic sects. Ever since the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, these had periodically emerged in many parts of India usually as off-shoots of Vaishnava Hinduism, or Sufi Islam, attacking idolatry and Brahmin religious privileges, denying caste distinctions and the inferior status of women at least on special occasions like festivals, and sometimes (though certainly not always) preaching the essential brotherhood of Hindus and Muslims. The limitations of such movements considered as agencies for social reform are obvious enough: the absence of a secular or rationalistic outlook, other-worldliness and guru-worship, and above all the tendency to develop into isolated sects or what became virtually sub-castes, getting absorbed in this way into the traditional socio-religious structure. Yet the elitist English-educated reformers of the nineteenth century who are so much better-known surely suffered from other, not necessarily less serious, limitations (Sarkar 1975: 5).

Sarkar acknowledges that his views on bhakti as reform are derived largely from Heimsath's own study, but this has become a well-accepted paradigm for the study of bhakti. Let us briefly examine the reasons for bhakti to be valued as reform. Sarkar points to six reasons: that is it was "essentially a lower-class affair", it was "integrally bound up with the bhakti tradition of popular monotheistic sects", it seemed to be "attacking idolatry and Brahmin religious privileges", "denying caste distinctions" and fought at some points against "the inferior status of women" and sometimes preached "the essential brotherhood of Hindus and Muslims". While it is understandable that as a Marxist Sarkar values a lower class over an elite-led movement, it is less easily accountable why monotheism returns as the primary value of reform movements. Why is the value of bhakti movements related to their supposed 'monotheism'? And how is it that monotheism is automatically allied to 'rationality'? Is it rationally more acceptable that God be a singular entity? What is the rational basis for

any claim about God? Thus, rationality seems to become a veil for what is essentially a Semitic claim.

'Idolatry' and the role of 'Brahmins' again remind us of the old story of reform told by the hagiographies. The additional elements are the emancipation of women and Hindu-Muslim unity. Thus, there is certainly a bid to include more objects and subjects into the orbit of reform discourse. The question is, does this point to a critical re-assessment or merely an expansion of reform discourse? Without any concrete investigation into the assumptions of reform discourse can Sarkar claim he manages critical re-assessment to any degree? Although this perspective treats reform with greater scepticism, it is difficult to see what this new assessment achieves when it seems to reflect the same anomalies present in the hagiographic literature on reform.

Feminist Reform

A significant segment of contemporary discourse on reform has been generated by scholars interested in the question of reform from the perspective of its contribution to women's emancipation.[21] While most feminists have asked the question whether reform affected female emancipation and have answered it in several ways, the question I raise does not relate to this. My question is whether the feminist perspective has produced a valuable critical re-assessment of reform.

Uma Chakravarti in her essay 'Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?' (Chakravarti 1989) argues that the edifice of tradition "was carefully constituted, brick by brick" in the interaction between "Colonialism and

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[21] Scholars often disagree over the 'success' of the reform movement in the emancipation of women; some argue that the movement did bring improvement, while others argue that only limited emancipation was achieved. Uma Chakravarti 1989, Nair 1997 and Uberoi 1997 are among those who argue for limited emancipation while Burton 1995, 1998 Faver 1993, Kannabiran 1995 argue for improvement. In either case the discussion of reform is inevitably linked to the female subject as the means of emancipation from tradition.

Nationalism" and became "so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle classes that ideas about the past have assumed the status of revealed truth". She further argues that for women this "lost glory of Indian culture", became the burden of "Indian womanhood". This ideal of womanhood according to Chakravarti was intended only for the "upper-castes" (Chakravarti 1989: 35). However it was not only Colonial intervention which created this ideal. It was also the ostensible threat of the Colonial that led the 'upper-caste' male, to project this ideal onto the cause of 'Nationalism'. This upper-caste ideal of femininity, culled from 'upper-caste' texts was projected on all women, thus bringing all Native women including the 'vedic dasi' within the patriarchal and the Colonial fold. There are two important aspects to Chakravarti's claims – one, that tradition became 'ossified' as it were; and two, that high class and caste assumptions that underlay reform actually hampered the rights of women in other sections of society.

Chakravarty's study sets up a paradigm for most other feminist contributions on reform. There is, however, one additional dimension to the feminist perspective on reform which studied the impact of nationalism on reform and generally decried that reform was side-lined in order to meet nationalist goals. Patricia Uberoi's work has highlighted this idea. In *Social Reform, Sexuality and the State* (Uberoi 1996a) she claims that

> The image of the practices such as sati, foot-binding or female circumcision, has served a larger political function as an affirmation of European superiority and a justification for imperial enterprise. In reverse and reaction, the figure of the Indian woman in nationalist discourse has been invested with positive value as the symbol of a recovered Indian (or Hindu) tradition, and her place in the home valorised as the space of uncontaminated purity. Deployed in this way, as victim or as cultural heroine, the woman becomes merely the site on which larger political claims are made and contested- on behalf of the

nation as a whole or in the context of communal, caste or regional politics. (Uberoi 1996a: xii)

Uberoi asks "why the momentum for social reform, including the women's question, had flagged by the beginning of the twentieth century". She argues that "the women's question was co-opted into a larger political project, (and) put 'on hold' pending the achievement of other objectives" (Uberoi 1996a: x). 'Nationalist' concerns become the reason for the failed 'emancipation' of women and Indian women remain "subject to many abuses and institutionalised forms of violence, often sanctioned by religious belief and custom" (Uberoi 1996a: xi). Uberoi's views on religion and customs sound more or less similar to Chakravarty's views on tradition. She also seems to ally nationalism to tradition and customs. Thus, nationalism is a dynamic yet destructive force while tradition is an ossified and destructive force. They are on the same side against a dynamic, empowering reform ideal.

Partha Chatterjee in his *Nation And Its Fragments* (Chatterjee 1999) proposes a slight change to Uberoi's perspective in his argument that:

> The relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is to be explained not by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of 'tradition' (Chatterjee 1999: 117).

Chatterjee suggests that the discourse of nationalism places the "women's question" in an 'inner domain' and does not merely marginalise the question. Marxist and Feminist historians similarly argued that the inner/outer split, or what they called the public/private split, was disempowering to women. Since

women could not cross this divide, women could not privately enjoy the rights that were granted to them publicly. They were caught in oppressive gender roles brought in by colonial capitalism and could not enjoy the rights of the individual that came with this role (Sangari and Vaid 1989: 6,7).

What constantly recurs then is the emphasis on the role of 'tradition', the 'inner domain' in Chatterjee's view and that which generated the 'oppressive gender roles' according to other feminists. Chakravarty and others who highlight how reform discourse chose to norm particular practices and beliefs typical of the 'upper castes' have hit upon an interesting feature of reform discourse. This discourse seemed to be compelled to identify and generalise norms to all 'Hindus' which did not operate in traditional society in this way. Yet, all feminist accounts tenaciously hold on to the description of tradition as ossified and oppressive. If traditions were so varied and 'lower' sections seemed to have fairly egalitarian or 'progressive' norms, then what becomes the basis for the description of tradition as in itself regressive and static? Presumably feminists would answer that the need for reform emerged *because* of regressive practices and norms. Yet, feminists themselves have found that traditional society had within it practices and norms which were progressive[22]. Then what makes the judgment on tradition coherent? In this account it becomes ossified as well as progressive, oppressive as well as emancipatory, varied as well as static! More important than whether tradition was an inner or outer domain and its interaction with nationalism become the following questions: What is tradition? How has it been understood so far? Does one need to revise this

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[22] In the same volume, see Janki Nair's 'Prohibited Marriage: State protection and the Child Wife' (pp157-186) She traces the history of a law prohibiting infant marriages in the progressive princely state of Mysore. Madigas (a lower caste group) in the Mysore state practised child marriage but also practiced widow re-marriage known as *Kudike.* The existence of this custom created complications in the state logic of appealing to the growing number of child-widows, as an urgent reason to raise the age of consent. Lower caste women might be married early, but there is no bar on widows remarrying yet when Madiga men arranged marriages of their under-aged daughters they were liable to be penalized by the state. Muslims however were exempted from the age of consent law only because they permitted divorce and remarriage.
For another discussion on widow remarriage see Prem Choudhury's discussion on *Karewa* in 'Contesting claims and counter-claims: Questions of the inheritance and sexuality of widows in a colonial state.' (pp. 65-82).

understanding when it always generates an unjustifiable negative evaluation in all available discourses?

Post-Colonial Reform

The discourse of reform itself becomes a peculiarly self-contradicting body of writings. In early reform History we have heard Sushoban Sarkar say:

> Rammohan pronounced a scathing criticism of priest-craft which inculcated a vulgar religion of superstitious idol-worship for the masses and discouraged translations of the scriptures into the vernacular (Sarkar, Sushobhan 1946: 4).

Thus, in the early use of the evaluative discourse Roy's opposition was represented as 'priests' who discouraged the translations of the scriptures. However, by 1999 Chatterjee in his *Nation and its Fragments* says,

> It was colonialist discourse that, by assuming the hegemony of Brahmanical religious texts and the complete submission of all Hindus to the dictates of these texts, defined the tradition that was to be criticized and reformed (Chatterjee 1999, 119).

The colonialist discourse was wrong to assume the hegemony of Brahmanical religious texts. All Hindus did not submit to the dictates of these texts. Since all Hindus did not submit to the dictates of these texts they also had no need to read the texts in the vernacular. In that case why were Roy's translations of the Upanishads seen as an act of reform?

Thus reform discourse emerges as a series of judgements with no continuity, which produces and solves discursive problems.

III

Reforming Practices

All through the chapter we find that practices, whether referred to specifically or through labels such as 'idolatry', 'superstition' or 'tradition' seem to be oppressive or problematic and reform sets out to change or remove these practices. Yet, there is an interesting distinction to be drawn between two perspectives on practice – the colonial and the native. I examine one particular moment in reform history in order to bring out this comparison.

In 1826 Henry Derozio joined the Hindu College as a teacher. Soon he was at the helm of a popular movement comprising mainly of his college students, although there were also some others. The movement itself was not much more than the efforts of a few young men from Hindu College, Calcutta, who discussed ideas, began a newspaper,[23] debated and formed a group called the Society for the Promotion of General Knowledge.

In spite of indulging in such conventional activities the boys soon became a source of scandal. There were colourful accounts of the boys' radical behaviour. Hindu college became a place notorious for 'revolutionary' ideas, which were manifested in a rather odd clutch of practices. The young men asserted very often and in more ways than one, "if there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our heart, it is Hinduism." (Bose, N.S 1960: 39) To leave no room for doubt the young men attacked the practices of Hinduism. However there was something in the nature of their attacks that was very different from the earlier attacks of the past 200 years which had been launched by various missionaries and other European travellers. How were the attacks of the boys different? Unlike the Europeans the boys did not begin discussions with the priests or Brahmins about the nature, worth and meaning of their practices. They did not seek to demonstrate that the gods of the Brahmins were 'false'. Instead the

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[23] The *Parthenon* was forced to close down after its first issue due to very strong opposition from conservative Hindu and British quarters.

boys, uniformly of Hindu birth and upbringing, from well-known families in Calcutta, refused to follow the rules guiding Hindu practices and

> young men formed merry revolutionary companies in order to eat forbidden food and thus throw defiance against Hindu orthodoxy. The food favoured for this purpose was bread or biscuits baked by Muslims (this signified acceptance of 'water' from the hand of a Muslim) or preparations of beef [there was] a similar enthusiasm for meat-eating and drinking wine among young men of his time... when young Hindus were forced to worship in the family shrine, they refused to utter Vedic prayers, but recited passages from English translations of Homer's *Iliad.* (Bose 1959: 48)

Perhaps the most famous lament is this letter printed in the *Sambad Prabhakar* on 14th May 1831, when the debate about western influence on Indian society was at its peak. The writer recounts a narrative, possibly a rumour, certainly in wide circulation, which highlights the incongruity of the boy's actions and the incomprehension it evoked in their families.

> A young man who was a student of the Hindu College was once visited by his father who had come from a village. The father stopped in a shop in Kalighat, and after taking a bath in the Ganges, went with his son to the temple of Kali. The boy, however, refused to salute the image of the goddess, because it was only an idol. Eventually, however he gave in; but stood in front of the idol and exclaimed in good English, 'Good morning Madam!' His revolutionary faith was perhaps thus saved; but the poor father beat his forehead and lamented at the kind of 'education' that was being given in the Hindu College. (Bose1959: 49)

Other incidents are historically verifiable. Rasik Krishna Mallik, said to be a favourite of Derozio's, appeared in Court on one occasion and refused to take the vow on anything sacred to Hinduism. "I do not believe in the sacredness of

the Ganges"[24] (Bose 1960: 39) he declared and caused yet another scandal among the natives.

Finally there was pressure from both the British administration as well as native Hindu society to dismiss Derozio from his teaching post but before he could be dismissed, Derozio resigned. Many families withdrew their boys from the college. Others, who persisted in the 'scandalous' practices learnt at college, were compelled to leave their ancestral homes.

Why had the boys' seemingly youthful enthusiasms provoked such a sharp response? And what was the nature of provocation? Since the earliest contact with European communities, the Bengalis had been aware of European eating habits. Thus it did not bother them that beef-eaters lived amidst them. They took their own precautions, such as eating separately, or sitting at the table with European guests, while not eating themselves. The fact that the Europeans drank water from anyone's hands was also known to the Bengalis, as was the fact that Europeans knew poetry and prose in various ancient languages.

Since the practices themselves had been known in Bengal for at least a hundred years it was probably not these that caused the outcry. The only difference this time was that the practices were executed by Hindu boys, not Europeans. Let us consider this difference carefully. The Europeans knew and rejected from their earliest encounter with India 'heathen' practices such as the practice of Sati. To them it was of little consequence whose practice it was. Such a practice at any time and place was objectionable to them. As they saw it, the action itself was immoral.

In the case of Young Bengal, the young men ate beef and biscuits made by Muslim bakers. When Muslims eat beef and Europeans drink any water no

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[24] Hindus were initially administered the oath on a vessel containing water from the Ganga. This was later replaced by the Bhagavad Gita.

concern is aroused. However, when the young college boys follow Derozio and perform these actions there is a public outcry. How can we best understand this attitude to practices? Within the evaluative discourse of reform we find a familiar story:

> the mists of superstition, blind faith and obscurantism spread by the priest-craft and the feudal orthodoxy, were slowly being pushed back and efforts were being made to replace them by the sunshine of knowledge and truth. It was a hard and continuous battle and the progressives of today may well be proud of their distant fore-fathers, the courageous *Young Bengal* of the thirties and early forties of the last century, who fearlessly waged the two-fronted struggle against our own social backwardness as well as the evil effects of alien rule in India (Chattopadhayay 1965: xxvi)

In this account the native was caught in 'mists of superstition', which prevented him from noticing that the Europeans eat beef and drink water from anyone's hands without any adverse results. The evaluative discourse of reform can only articulate a highly reductive version of the native relationship to practices.

The European missions in and around Bengal had a significant part to play in the attack on practices. In the early years of Colonial administration the Government vehemently opposed Missions and would not allow them to operate in British India. This ban was lifted only in 1813 when the missions succeeded in rallying support in England against 'cruel and immoral rites, such as hook-swinging, practiced in the worship of gods, and the burning of widows' (Farquhar 1915: 8). Mission reports on heathen practices, circulated in England in the form of 'penny papers' put pressure on the British administration to take legal measures against these practices. [25]

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[25] For a recent and very comprehensive account of the role of missions in affecting policy change in India see Oddie (2006).

> [C]ertain other problems, the missionaries felt, should be dealt with at once, and firmly. Amongst these were the great idolatrous festivals, involving both cruelty and extreme degradation, which were held at various religious centres, and the practice of *sati*...They collected authoritative information relating to the evils they wished to counter. They presented it to the British public, both at home and in India, in a forceful yet scholarly fashion, and thus prepared the setting in which government action became inevitable. (Ingham 1956, 33)

The early missionaries made every effort to see that the practices of the native, particularly those which involved 'cruelty and degradation', were 'corrected'. However their understanding of the 'problem' and its 'solution' is severely limited by the evaluative discourse of reform. In all cases the Missionary had a uniform reaction against all heathen practices. The practice itself was seen as immoral.

The native on the other hand has a dual reaction – indifference to the European and anger at the Hindu boys for performing the same set of actions. This can be interpreted in two ways: beef eating is bad for one's spiritual health in the Hindu belief system and the native wants to ensure that all Europeans suffer in the after-life, or non-beef eating has no bearing on anyone except the group who does not eat beef. This means that when faced with a divergent practice which may be diametrically opposite to his own practices, the native does not attempt to 'correct' the other. His practices are not disturbed by the existence of divergent practices among other groups. The latter position helps us understand the relative calm of the native-colonial relations in the years before reform, before the colonial began to restrict native practices.

Reviewing Practices

As far as the events go, we can see that the native has a specific kind of relationship to practices and practitioners. The native does not treat practices

as universal and unrelated to the practitioner. He does not, for example, attempt to 'correct' beef-eating, in the same way as the Colonial tries to 'correct' Sati. This mismatch reveals two distinct ways of looking at practices one of which is lost in the evaluative discourse of reform.

This mismatch in the native and the Colonial's response to practices begs a re-theorising of practices. If the native does not follow the text/practice hierarchy an evaluative discourse with the text/practice hierarchy at its centre will not be able to articulate his position. From the Young Bengal controversy we can see that the native does not make a universal judgement about the nature of practices. His discourse of practices does not use the distinction between 'true' and 'false' practices that the text/practice hierarchy produces. The native's distinctions in relation to practices are related to the practitioner.

The native is indifferent to beef-eating among Europeans and Muslims but is enraged when a Hindu boy eats beef. Thus eating beef is possible human behaviour *in itself* but it is inappropriate behaviour for a Hindu boy. This immediately suggests that the native does not think of practices as universally 'true' or 'false'. For him there is no contradiction in a European eating beef and a Hindu avoiding it making the same practice appropriate for the European and inappropriate for the Hindu.

As a point in contrast, the European argues that the Hindu avoids beef out of 'superstition'. His attempts to 'correct' this are to get the native to first eat the beef, and then acknowledge that it has had no adverse effect. Thus the Europeans understand the Hindu as avoiding beef for some 'reason' (they 'worship' the cow). Further they argue that the 'reason' is false (the cow is not God, beef is acceptable food). Thus they take on the task of 'correcting' this situation. For the European, the 'truth' behind the practice is in its 'reason'[26].

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[26] The text/practice hierarchy is better described as the reason/practice hierarchy since the texts were understood to contain the explanations for the practices or in other words the reason for the practice. However it first appeared in the colonial period as a text/practice

And further, once everyone understands the true 'reason' there will be a uniformity of practice (all men will eat beef). Here again we see that the distinction of the evaluative discourse confines the European understanding of practices to a reductive 'true' and 'false' dichotomy which relies on 'reason'.

For the native on the other hand the eating of beef is the business of those who eat beef and is a matter of indifference to those who do not. Persuading those who do not eat beef to do so becomes an arbitrary way of reducing diversity in human behaviour. This attempt at uniformity is severely resisted by the native. The natives do not argue that the Europeans should give up beef, and yet they do not tolerate the attempt to make Hindu boys eat it. The native seems to favour the preservation of diversity and resist uniformity in practices. Arguments about the benefits of beef eating are met with indifference and no counter arguments for the benefits of not eating beef are offered. The only argument the boys' families make is that their boys should not forget their 'ways'. Thus when practices are threatened, the native does not respond to arguments for or against the practice itself but chooses rather to protect the *practising.*

However the evaluative discourse of reform leaves no room for such theorising because it cannot articulate the preservation of practices as anything other than 'the mists of superstition' or 'blind faith and obscurantism' which must be the work of 'priest-craft' etc. Thus we encounter a problem in reform discourse: it is unable to sustain a full and complex account of the events taking place in 19th century Bengal.

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hierarchy, I continue to use this term, to retain the route this attitude to practice and this discourse takes in India.

IV

Problematizing Reform in India

There are several aspects of reform discourse that have been raised so far. The discourse seems to put into place an evaluative paradigm which consistently generates negative judgments against Indian practices and tradition without actually having to generate any explanation for this judgment. This has served to obstruct all study of tradition and practice and an examination of available discourse only reveals contradictory stands which cannot be upheld at the same time. In addition, it generates historical anomalies which remain unaccounted for, such as the conflation of the pundits and Brahmins as well as the assumption of an oppressive class of Brahmin priests which emerges and remains a given even though no historical evidence is provided for this claim. While these problems seem to be related to specific assumptions within reform discourse, this section examines a problem that was raised about the idea of 'reform' itself. In a discussion that took place in 1977 at a conference at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, on "Dissent Protest and Reform in Indian Civilisation" C. Badrinath, in his paper titled 'Dissent, Protest and Reform: The Historical Context' raised the question: "Is it permissible to use words that arose in a totally different historical context, words like *protest, dissent* and *reform* while describing events in the history of India" (Badrinath 1977: 42). He clarified that the problem was far from being simply semantic.

> The basic objection is to something deeper – to the wrong understanding which is caused by applying to the Indian situation words that represent wholly dissimilar experiences of Christian-European history. Similarly, we use words like *renaissance, secularism* and *social change* as if there were in our history, too, the corresponding facts, of which there is no evidence. Since words have a cultural and historical context – experience

– by misapplying such words, we misjudge the Indian past; and, equally

thereby understand the present incorrectly (Badrinath 1977: 42)

Referring to the title of the conference he said political and theological events following Luther nailing his theses on the door of the Catholic Church gave special meaning to the word 'protest' and "hence the specific historical content of the words *protestant* and *Protestantism*" (Badrinath 1977: 42). Similarly the word *dissent* stood for the ideas and activities "of such sects as the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists; the Baptists, and the Quakers', whose dissent from the doctrines and government of the Protestant church had definite political implications" (Badrinath 1977: 42). And finally the word *reform* was connected to the constitutional history of England from 1832 to 1857, and stood for the significant changes, made periodically, and by the public will, in "the political structure of public institutions, such as church, Parliament, and the Magistracy" (Badrinath 1977: 42). In listing the historical circumstances in which the terms emerged, Badrinath expressed two things – one was the need for excavating the evaluative framework in which these terms are embedded and the second was the conceptual history by which this term became an acceptable description of social events in India.

Badrinath contended that several papers in the conference illustrated the "prescriptive use of the words dissent, protest and reform, unrelated to any historical experience, European or Indian" (Badrinath 1977: 43). The problem with prescriptive use, he says, is that it may be valid, or invalid, there is no test of either. "If the academia is unmindful of the words it uses, not seeing the incorrect understanding it leads to, the market-place politician quickly finds a use for that misuse. So that, every agitation, however misguided, is called protest!" (Badrinath 1977: 44). Badrinath objected to the indiscriminate use historians have made of these terms to study events in the Indian past such as: Buddhism and Jainism, Bhakti movements, Sikhism, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and Gandhism.

Badrinath asserted that "all knowledge is historical, in the sense that the use of words is contextual, and it is through words that we relate ourselves to reality. So if we misuse words, we misconceive reality" (Badrinath 1977: 42). Thus, the problem primarily was related to an incorrect understanding of historical phenomena that incorrect terminology generated, and in addition, the mobilisation of this terminology by any and all political interests in order to further their goals. The loose semantics of what Badrinath called the 'prescriptive' use of these words leads directly, therefore, to historical confusion and social/political opportunism.

After Badrinath had presented his thesis S.C. Malik commented: "After all the strong criticism, we expected Badrinath to give alternatives to the words dissent, protest and reform" (Badrinath 1977: 47). This was followed by S.C. Misra's question: "Are we to be imprisoned in (the historical) meaning (of words) without taking into account the changing context?" (Badrinath 1977: 48). Misra went on to say that if the words had a "logical consistency", then their use was permissible and a better alternative to not using words at all. J.S. Grewal commented that historical change "was brought about by protagonists of movements against the privileged established order. In this context of the experience these words arising in the European context do have a certain meaning for our discussions. The basic point is of consistency in our arguments" (Badrinath 1977: 48). Sudhir Chandra stated that Badrinath's argument "breaks down because he does not deny the phenomena in the Indian context". Chandra argued that reform ideas "did exist at an intellectual level" and "it is crucial to see how these were transformed in terms of social action" (Badrinath 1977: 49). Almost all the responses to Badrinath's paper expressed serious objections to his argument and reminded him that "meanings do not get frozen in time and that words continue to change" through history. These particular words, for instance, "existed much earlier than when they came into the context of Christianity". Most of the respondents

agreed that these words could be used if there was a consensus on their definition (Badrinath 1977: 48).

Badrinath's interlocutors defend the use of the *word* Reform. They argue that "reform ideas were present at an intellectual level". They feel certain that Indians too felt the desire to reject restrictive traditional roles in the name of individual freedom. They call this desire 'reform'. Reform becomes a word denoting the *name* of something. Thus, when they hear Badrinath question the use of the word they expect him to provide an alternative, because after all a thing must have a name. A desire is present among the people, what is it to be called?

While Badrinath believed that the confusions generated by such loose use of terms were a characteristic of 'Dharmic society', a position for which he provides no justification or explanation, it is still pertinent to examine the nature of the problems he raises. For one, Badrinath does not contest that meanings may change. However, his problem seems to arise from the fact that in the Indian context these words acquire so many meanings and are so loosely used that they become a liability to understanding and a weapon for opportunistic politics. Secondly, Badrinath's position also shows sensitivity to the evaluative framework within which these words remain caught. This becomes clearer if one examines his objection to 'secularism'.

> Similarly, there is the misuse of the word *secularism*. Our national policy is to keep the state aloof from any particular religion, create conditions where all religions may be freely practised, and, most important, to prevent religious strife from disrupting public peace. Considering how religious violence has in the past destroyed life and property in India, all thinking persons ought to work towards that goal of preventing disruption of public peace; but to do that is not the same as to work towards secularism. It creates confusion when that goal is called secularism and in the same breath it is added that secularism is not

anti-religion, when in the past three or four centuries of European history, where it originated it has been precisely that – anti-religion[27]. The tradition of secularism in modern Europe represents that body of thought which rejects the idea of God as necessary both to explain the world and to change it, and puts man at the centre of all explanations concerning man. Naturally it regards religion (with violence and superstition as its integral parts) as the chief obstacle to man rising to his true stature. This, evidently, is not what Indian leaders mean by secularism; what they mean is equal toleration of all religions, which is a perfectly lucid idea in itself. Then, why call it secularism, which evokes an altogether different order of thought...?" (Badrinath 1977: 44).

What Badrinath is frustrated about is a two-fold problem. Firstly 'secularism' is automatically considered the only positive goal in the relationship between religion and the state. Secondly while working towards 'equal toleration of all religions' may also be a perfectly legitimate and positive goal in the relationship between religion and the state, in order to indicate it as a positive goal we are bound to call it 'secularism'. We may nuance it further by calling it 'Indian secularism', and that remains the only positive term we may use for the relationship between state and religion.

Thus, even if definitions are agreed upon, how does one contest an alien evaluative framework which remains unexamined because of our use of this terminology? The second problem Badrinath indicates is that this kind of use of terms actually obstructs an understanding of 'reality'. Badrinath distinguished between the word and the phenomenon. He makes a distinction between rejecting the word and denying the actions, and says one does not lead to the other. Thus, Badrinath does not deny any of the historical phenomena associated with 'reform'. Yet, he claims that the use of the word reform obstructs our understanding of reality. As such just the fact that the actions

[27] While I do not agree with this position, I do not take it up for further examination here. Balagangadhara provides a convincing account of why secularism is not 'anti-religion' but, in fact, a part of religion and the world view it generates Balagangadhara (1994)

picked up by terms like 'reform' might have a different order of salience in the evaluative framework they are embedded is significant. But, there is a further point about this claim that needs to be examined. For instance, S.C. Dube defended Badrinath's position by asserting that "Badrinath was referring to the cognitive confusion which arises with the use of words without taking into account the native categories of thought. Meaning should not be superimposed" (Malik ed. 1977: 48). This introduces a new dimension to this question. What does the use of terms such as 'reform' do when it is used to refer to phenomena which were accounted for very differently in the native framework of understanding? In order to examine this question let us investigate the case of *bhakti,* a set of phenomena accounted for in a native account in one way and co-opted in the reform framework later. What happens to *bhakti* when it becomes 'reform'?

<div align="center">V</div>

Charles Heimsath, in *Indian Nationalism And Hindu Social Reform* (Heimsath 1964), argued that the term 'reform' could be meaningfully used to speak about various facets of the Indian past.[28]

> Long before modern times and Indian exposure to Western civilization, flexibility in customs, mobility in social relationships, and many cases of collective revolt against traditional social standards were already in existence in India (Heimsath 1964: 9).

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[28] Heimsath found Reform in Bhakti and Sikhism Heimsath (1964), Suresh Chandra finds 'protest which leads to reform', in the concept of Ahimsa (Malik 1977) Devahuti reads dissent in Emperor Ashoka's actions (Malik 1977) and B. Saraswati finds 'reform ideas' in the mystic Kabir (Malik 1977).

Heimsath argues that before the advent of Europeans, there were instances of 'revolt' against tradition. This is an attempt to extend reform discourse into the past. By doing so, the discourse of reform is de-linked from the advent of colonialism, making it appear as though the evaluative discourse of reform is a universal discourse on practice. If Badrinath is right, then this must have definite consequences for 'native categories' or what bhakti was, in the Indian context.

According to Heimsath:

> Because Vedanta, the dominant philosophical school of Hinduism, postulated the essential oneness of God and man, it "offers to man no real object of religious affection neither does it present to him any Being to whom he can pray." Man's need for prayer and for the assurance that there is more than an impersonal, unreachable and indescribable Force governing the universe inevitably produced the devotional, or bhakti, movements among the Hindus, even as their philosophers surged onward into the ineffable areas of pure speculation where the existence of a personal divinity was vehemently denied or disdainfully ignored (Heimsath 1964: 30).

Heimsath argues that 'man's need for prayer' produced the devotional Bhakti movements, since the philosophers pursued 'ineffable areas of pure speculation' which denied or ignored the existence of a personal divinity. This produces an interesting twist in reform discourse. The attentive reader will note that Rammohun Roy had presented arguments very similar to Heimsath's on the nature of 'abstract' worship. In arguing against idolatry Roy 'interpreted the scriptures' to show that idolatry was the 'last provision for those who are totally incapable of raising their minds to the contemplation of the invisible God of nature' (Roy 1906: 21). He further argued that the Vedas also 'repeatedly urge the relinquishment of the rites of idol-worship, and the adoption of a purer

system of religion, on the express ground that the observance of idolatrous rites can never be productive of eternal beatitude' (Roy 1906: 21). Roy had argued *for* the practice he described as 'abstract worship'. Heimsath argues that 'abstract' worship did not fulfil man's need for prayer and assurance, thus turning him towards the 'Bhakti movement'. He compares bhakti favourably with other 'lesser' practices like idolatry. Roy and Heimsath speak about 'abstract worship' using the evaluative discourse of reform. Roy's discourse evaluates it positively; Heimsath's discourse evaluates it negatively. In Roy's discourse it becomes the 'true' part of the native's practices which are to be preferred over the 'false' parts like idolatry. In Heimsath's discourse 'abstract worship' is unable to fulfil man's spiritual 'needs' which then find expression within the 'Bhakti movement'. Following Heimsath's argument further:

> Social and religious rebellions against the traditional authority of Brahmin priests and other high castes created new movements whose doctrines and practices differed from orthodox Hinduism; the medieval bhakti, or devotional, movements represented that form of rebellion, as did Sikhism in its early stages. Social revolts with more indirect impacts periodically emerged throughout India in the form of efforts to improve the positions of certain castes in their relation to other castes (Heimsath 1964: 9).

In keeping with the contours of reform discourse Heimsath brings in the figure of the Brahmin priest as the traditional authority. He argues that movements like Bhakti were social and religious rebellions against this group. The early writings on reform criticised priests for misreading texts and inventing practices. The argument was within the text/practice hierarchy. The texts were seen as the source of all 'true' practices and the priest's intervention was seen as immoral. Now Heimsath argues that some rebellions created new movements whose 'doctrines and practices' differed from 'orthodox Hinduism'.

In other words they produced practices which differed from those prescribed by the 'scriptures'.

The limitations of this discourse become clear. Producing new practices is a problem if the Brahmins do it and a solution to a problem if the Bhakti reformers do it. Yet there is no analysis of what makes the departure from texts on the part of the Bhaktas more acceptable than the departure from the texts on the part of the priests or Brahmans. There is no analysis of either the nature of the texts or the nature of practices. The same sets of actions are evaluated differently and there is no explanation for the judgements which are merely asserted.

We have already seen that the evaluative discourse of reform is centred around the central text/practice hierarchy. It seems as if the native's distinctions on practices: practising as an individual, indifference to diversity of practices, taking on or giving up practices in relation to her context and circumstances, do not have any salience within this hierarchy. The discourse describes a set of practices dubbed 'abstract worship' as the belief of the native group in the 'oneness of god' and his 'omniscience'. Roy speaks about this practice positively and Heimsath negatively. However, the native preserves *multiple practices* without placing them in a hierarchy. That is the only way one can comprehend the attitudes of the 'orthodox'. Thus within native ways of approaching practice the evaluation and the subsequent reversal of evaluation on 'abstract worship' becomes unintelligible. However, as the section on the Derozions shows, the native seems to prefer *preserving* practices rather than participating in moral arguments against practices. The native does not attempt to intervene in the practices of the beef-eaters or claim that the practice itself is morally flawed. In fact the diverse practices of the Europeans were a matter of indifference to the natives.

Reform discourse emerges as a growing body of evaluative judgements. The discourse addresses practices but merely produces reductive evaluative judgements which may be just as reductively reversed rather than any illumination of those practices. However, the events of 19th century India clearly show the existence of a completely different set of attitudes to practices. The native's distinctions on his practices are often at odds with the distinctions from the evaluative discourse of reform. The discourse of reform, however, now extends itself into the past, beyond its moment of inception. By doing so, it attempts a false universality. Heimsath projects the evaluative stance of reform into the pre-colonial past to argue that:

> for a Hindu, an outright revolt could take the form of excluding one-self from normal social and religious requirements by adopting the role of the sanyasi, or wandering ascetic; caste laws then no longer applied, and unorthodoxy in religious beliefs and behaviour was tolerated- or even revered, if it caught the popular imagination. (Heimsath 1964: 9)

Here Heimsath demonstrates again a lack of understanding of practices. He says Hindus could 'revolt' by 'adopting the role of a sanyasi'. Further, the sanyasi was 'tolerated' or 'even revered' if his 'unorthodoxy' caught the popular imagination. So, the sanyasi was a figure who gave up certain practices or at any rate was 'unorthodox' about them. Heimsath no longer argues for the primacy of Hindu 'scriptures', as such 'orthodoxy' is read broadly to mean those practices which are followed by the majority. This view sets up several contradictions. After all, individual natives had the choice of rejecting one set of practices and adopting sanyas. For this rejection the majority who still follow *those very practices* would often revere him. The householder does not reject his own practices in order to revere the sanyasi. His practices, although at odds with the sanyasi, continue to be appropriate to him. The sanyasi on the other hand does not advocate the 'reform' of a householder's practice. We see

again, the native attitude of tolerance towards *diversity* in practices. However Heimsath does not acknowledge this distinction. Within his evaluative discourse Heimsath must argue as if the sanyasi's rejection of one set of practices is a sign of the immorality of those practices. Heimsath further argues:

> Individual outrage against particular social customs and religious beliefs has always been a feature of Indian society, despite the high value that has always been placed on continuity, order, and the wisdom of social precedent. (Heimsath 1964: 9)

Even as he articulates the native relationship to practices Heimsath's evaluative discourse renders it opaque. Heimsath argues that individual outrage has always been a part of Indian society *despite* the value placed on continuity. This suggests that the value on continuity in some ways prevents the individual from showing his outrage easily. Two of the native's distinctions are present in a distorted form within this description. The native relates to practices as the concern of the individual, and the native attempts to preserve the continuity and diversity of practices. However the native does not pit one observation against the other, and hence would not link the two with a 'despite' and suggest an evaluative relationship between the two statements.

On the other hand Heimsath asserts precisely this evaluation. That the individual is able to voice his 'outrage' *even though* he is caught in a society which places high value on continuity. In Heimsath's description Indian society has some legitimately outraged individuals and a large number of others who form the 'orthodox society' and hamper his expression of individual outrage.

There is an additional dimension to Heimsath's thesis on bhakti as reform. He asserts, much in the same way as the Marxists and feminists, that bhakti failed as a reform project.

> it was not the primacy of spiritual concerns alone that caused the bhakti movements to fail in the transformation of social life; religious movements have been known to overturn social structures. Most bhakti sects, like other Hindu religious movements, leaned toward mysticism, as a method of spiritual revelation, and thus often encouraged a drawing away from worldly concerns. Individual salvation, not the salvation of society or group, was the reason for the result of the religious quest through mysticism. (Heimsath 1964: 37)

Now it turns out that within the evaluative discourse of reform, 'individual rage' against social customs is of less value than community rage against social problems. Individual rage leads only to solutions like 'mysticism', but community rage might have brought 'better' solutions like 'overturning social structures'. Within this limited evaluative discourse then, Heimsath argues that Bhakti movements failed to transform 'social life' because they leaned towards mysticism. The evaluative language is limited to the extent that it can only describe the overall impact of individual Bhaktas like Kabir or Meera as a 'failure'.

In other words Heimsath is looking for an explanation for one simple fact – if the individual rejected social norms, why did this not translate into a social revolution? Why does the Bhakti poet of reform discourse (as distinct from the historical figure of the Bhakta) live and die without bringing about lasting changes in social values? Why does Meera's rebelliousness not change the position of the Rajasthani woman? Within reform discourse it looks as if there is a contradiction in the fact that Meera was immensely popular and that her

message of 'rebelliousness' could not have 'mass appeal'. And yet what could explain her popularity today if not a 'mass appeal'? This is just one of the problems that arises in speaking about Bhakti poets and within reform discourse which values only their 'progressive social values'.

While Heimsath wrote about Reform in general there are also accounts of Bhakti within specific political groups. In *Rewriting History* Uma Chakravarti (Chakravarti 1998) speaks about 'Dalit Reform' and recounts the history of Bhakti movements in Maharashtra. In this case the analysis remains inconclusive as she finds that there are many historical exceptions to the conclusion that Brahmins opposed Bhakti, or that Bhakti came up in opposition to Brahmanism. Finally she concludes:

> Bhakti has remained a rich reservoir of living ideas, even when it has lost its vitality, providing an ideology to be dipped into by those seeking an alternative to Brahmanic ritual and the caste system, it has more appeal for Brahmana reformers than for Dalit radicals. It is not an uncritical legacy for those who wish to transform the material location of the Dalits, and those at the receiving end of the caste system (Chakravarti 1998: 24).

This account of Bhakti turns it into yet another kind of failure – the failure to be 'progressive' and speak for social equality. Chakravarti finds that the Bhakti movement does not 'completely emancipate' the Dalits. Is Bhakti reform literature a body of 'progressive' thought, which could not bring about any convincing social change? Is the Bhakti poet merely a failed social reformer? In fact the answer to both questions is yes, but only within the historical discourse of reform.

One finds a very different picture if one looks at the Bhakti ethos and the Bhakta in their own words. The concern with the individual human mind and its attitudes are primarily what Bhakti is about. Reform discourse not merely

sidelines the primary concerns of Bhakti which are related to the individual, but also declares it a failure for not living up to some external standards of social change. Reform discourse finds the most significant aspects of bhakti a failure and distorts our view of the past.

This is precisely what Badrinath and Dube pointed towards. If reform discourse prevents us from accounting for native attitudes or practices, renders practices either immoral or contradictory, or declares the Bhakti ethos a failure in spite of its existing mass appeal, then this discourse is a handicap rather than a strength. It also means that a large part of Indian social reality both contemporary and historical needs to be investigated from a fresh perspective.

Chapter 2
Texts, Practices and Cultural Difference

This chapter traces the origins and contours of reform discourse. We find this evaluative discourse on native practices in the works of early travellers, missionaries, orientalists and modern historians. The body of discourse expands at specific moments, under certain kinds of pressure, but the structure remains unchanged. We can see the underlying similarities in the remarks of early travellers and post-colonial historians when they argue from different points in history about the nature of Hinduism.

This discourse on native practices is uniformly produced by the west, and as Said has argued, reveals more about the nature of the west as a culture than about the practices of the native. The changes and expansions in the discourse are closely related to the history of the west and its increasing encounters with 'the rest of the world'.

I

Out into the World

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, when sea travel was long, arduous and only undertaken for the purposes of lucrative trade, the 'Orient' was still a remote mysterious land. Improvements in navigation and marine technology had made world travel possible. And Europe had been exploring the rest of the world in various degrees for the last two centuries. European travellers went back with fascinating stories about the exotic cultures they had encountered on their travels. Modern written accounts were in English, French Dutch, German, Italian and Portuguese, these accounts took the form of letters,

diaries, guide books and compendiums.[1] They were largely the records of people who had travelled abroad for personal, official and trade purposes. These early accounts combined fact and fiction, to produce fantastic accounts of exotic peoples and customs.[2]

The fantastical elements in these accounts, introduced initially due to a lack of information, were often retained, as a literary convention or a narrative device, as far as credulity would allow, as the accepted mode of narrating travels in these lands. As the knowledge about India increased, the elements of the fantastic in the descriptions were toned down, however, the element of the exotic was not affected.[3] Thus early accounts of travels in India highlighted the fantastic and the exotic, in the flora, fauna, customs and people. They focussed on conveying to the reader the *difference* between their own familiar contexts and these strange lands.

As ties with Europe grew, trade and traffic increased and so did these writings. More systematic accounts began to be written, as more areas, mostly along the

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[1] Major works on India from Europe include Italian adventurer Varthema who visited the coasts of Gujarat and Goa and cities inland in 1503. His major work *Itinerario* was translated from Latin to English in 1577. Linschoten a Dutch Protestant adventurer commented extensively on the religion of the 'gentiles' and was translated to English in 1598. Valle's was another influential travel account commenting on Indian belief and practice, translated into English in 1664 as *The Travels of Pietro Della Valle in India 1586-1652.* And Finally there were the works of well-known French travellers Francois Bernier whose *History* (also *Travels in the Mughal Empire*) ran into three editions in the English translation from 1671 to 1684 and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier whose *Travels in India* went into five editions between 1677 and 1688. Works in English include Fitch's personal accounts as a merchant traveller between 1583 and 1591in north India and Bengal, Withington's letters and accounts, a commercial agent with the newly formed East India company he travelled the country from 1612 to 1616. The accounts of Edward Terry, Chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe, the English ambassador to the Mughal Court, Henry Lord's *A Display of Two Forraigne Sects in the east Indies*, written between 1624 to 1629, while he was the company chaplain in Surat, and Company surgeon John Fryer, from 1672 to 1681 who wrote *A New Account of East India and Persia, being Nine Year's Travels*; and also John Ovington, Company Chaplain resident at Surat 1689-92. *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689.*

[2] Andrea Major in *Pious Flames* (2006) discusses the tendency to see India as a land of 'miracles and monsters'. As late as 1494 a pamphlet on India described 'one-eyed, dog-headed and headless men, pygmies, men and women with large feet used as a parasol, a winged snake, a flying panther and other strange beasts'. Sir Walter Raleigh defended the sightings of Anthropophagi by other travellers, although he admitted he had not seen them himself. (19-25)

[3] For a detailed study on the elements of the fantastic and incredible in accounts of India see Chapter one of Andrea Major (2006).

peninsular coasts, became accessible. In the mean time, the British East India Company was emerging as the single largest stake-holder in India, ably eliminating both foreign and Native opposition. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the battle of Palashi was won and British interest in India far out-weighed any other European interests. The British Company went from being adventurers to administrators.

While Europe had early encounters with the 'rest of the world' it was only in the middle of the second millennia that the cultural encounter (Europe with the rest of the world) grew into Colonialism. The earliest phase of colonialism saw the arrival of European travellers, adventurers and traders to India, Africa and China. Over time the trade in India turned lucrative enough for the travellers to set up some kinds of base camps – factories- from which to conduct regular trade and negotiations. Initially these factories were almost always situated at port cities where there was also the highest concentration of Europeans. In the second phase of colonialism the British had outweighed most other interests in India and were annexing vast areas of the country. They now moved from being mere traders to taking over the administration of the land. In this process they clashed violently with the natives on the question of practices. Colonial law became a dreaded instrument by which the colonial exercised power over the native's practices- this phase is now seen as the reform period. The late phase of colonialism saw the native take on colonial discourse and use it to demand political independence- this phase is now studied as the nationalist period. At present in the post-independence period colonial discourse is deployed without any reference to its complex origins and past. In this chapter we trace the early and middle phases which reveal fully the conflict between the native's practices and colonial discourse.

The Contours of a Discourse

The earliest modern written accounts of India often look like an indiscriminate description of customs, geography, food and mythology. The texts describe

practices, but in the description of the practices there is always an evaluative judgement.

In French adventurer and doctor, Charles Dellon's *Relation D'un Voyage Des Indes Orientales* from 1685, we see a typical 'account of India'. Dellon has just landed in the Malabar after a short halt at Surat; this is his first encounter with the Indian sub-continent en route from Madagascar. He writes descriptions of jack fruits, coconuts, elephants, tigers, snakes and the local hooch; and then:

> Les Habitans du Malabar sont bien faits, presques tous noirs ou fort bruns, & n'ont rein de difforme comme les Affricains: Ils laiffent croitre leurs cheveux fort longs, & ne manquent point d'esprit, mais ils le negligent, ne s'adonnant ny aux Sciences ny aux Arts, leur grand penchant est à la trahison; c'est une bagatelle parmy eux de violer sa parole.(Dellon:200-01)

> (The inhabitants of Malabar are well made, almost entirely black, or dark brown, and are not deformed like the Africans: they let their hair grow quite long, and do not lack spirit though they neglect it, and give themselves neither to the Sciences nor to the Arts. Their main talent being dishonesty; it is a bagatelle amongst them to break their word.[4])

Dellon's account describes the physical and moral characteristics of the people he sees. The men are well made, and coloured. He compares them to another set of people he has encountered. So the people of the Malabar are not 'deformed' like the Africans- and they grow their hair long. Dellon is aware of diversity among the natives of the world he travels; He has encountered the Africans but the people of the Malabar are not like them. He dwells on their characteristics- the colour of skin and the length of hair.

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[4] Translated by Parvati Sharma.

Finally he says the people of the Malabar do not lack spirit but they do neglect it. They do not commit fully to the sciences or the arts. 'Spirit' then is a human quality enhanced by pursuing knowledge- the sciences or the arts. There is also a reason why the spirit is lacking. Instead of pursuing knowledge the people here pursue dishonesty. It's a mere sport among them to break their word. Thus the people of the Malabar are different from the Europeans in crucial ways, they do not pursue knowledge or truth instead they neglect their spirit and break their word easily. Crucially it is a bagatelle among them to break their word. The inhabitants of the Malabar do not understand the value of honesty. They make light of it and break their word as a matter of sport. This is significantly different from meeting a group of foreigners and saying that some of them are liars. This observation suggests that the natives of Malabar do not understand the value of truth. This places the entire group outside the moral framework rather than indicating, as with every society, the lapse of some members.

These observations are far from unique to the good doctor. In the early period of Colonialism descriptions of lands and people often took this form. This prompted Said (2001) to argue for a common thread among these writings, naming them orientalist. Said argues that the moral judgement implicit in a description like this, is common to all literature written by the coloniser about the colonised. The kind of judgment present in this account - the lack of spirit and the tendency to dishonesty- can be found across European writings about the native.

Said argues that this is an elaborate justification for Colonialism. If the native lacks development and morality the European is superior to the native. However to suggest that the reason for these moral judgements is the desire for power, is to accuse the coloniser of being disingenuous. If we do not accept a malafide intention in the coloniser then how else can we understand the presence of these moral judgements in the descriptions of the colonised? The

moral judgement, implicit in the description indicates that the travellers actually 'saw' this moral flaw in the colonised; although they were otherwise observing the external world of fruits, flowers, animals and the physical characteristics of the people.

Observing Practices

Almost two hundred years after Charles Dellon, William Ward at the Sehrampore mission in Bengal, in his *View of the History Literature and Religion of the Hindus* which had come out in its third revised edition by 1817 writes:

> here sits a man in his shop, repeating the name of his guardian deity, or teaching it to his parrot, there go half a dozen voiragees, or other persons, making their journey to some holy place here passes a person, carrying a basket on his head, containing rice, sweet meats, fruits, flowers, &c. an offering to his guardian deity here comes a man with a chaplet of red flowers round his head, and the head of a goat in his hand, having left the blood and carcass before the image of Kalee there sits a group of Hindoos, listening to three or four persons rehearsing and chanting poetical versions of the pooranus here sits a man in the front of his house reading one of the pooranus moving his body like the trunk of a tree in a high wind and (early in the morning) here comes a group of jaded wretches, who have spent the night in boisterously singing filthy songs, and dancing in an indecent manner, before the image of Doorga add to this, the villagers, men and women, coming dripping from the banks of the Ganges and the reader has a tolerable view of Hindoo idolatry, as it stalks, every day, along the streets and roads, and as it may be recognized by any careless observer. (Ward 1817: lxxxii-xiii)

Here Ward is talking only about practices. He writes this as a description of what may be 'seen' in India. The man in the shop repeats the name of this deity or teaches it to his parrot. There are the voiragees (people who cultivate the

attitude of vairagya, or non-attachment) hanging around and some pilgrims going on a pilgrimage. One chap carries an offering of rice, sweets, fruits and flowers to his guardian deity. Another is back from a sacrifice and carries the head of the goat, leaving the rest for the deity. There are men sitting together and reading the puranas and a man at home reading the puranas, swaying his body to the rhythm of his reading. Some people who have spent the night at a jagaran return home while some have just arrived for their early morning bath at the river.

Ward ends by saying that Hindoo idolatry stalks every day, along streets and roads and may be 'recognized' by the careless observer. Ward says that one may 'see' Hindoo idolatry in these practices. The term 'Hindoo idolatry' is a moral judgement and certainly judgements are not to be 'seen' on the roadside. This means that the practices, which are easily visible, lead inevitably to a moral judgement, which cannot be denied. Seeing the practice inevitably confirms the moral judgement.

The description of quotidian practices ends with a severe moral criticism and Ward sees these activities as self-evident examples of 'Hindoo idolatry'. There are two aspects in this description- there is the description of the activities, which we find familiar and might even see being performed today. And completely separate from that is the severe moral judgement, which takes us completely by surprise. All descriptions of the 'orient' produced by colonialism have this quality. There are often very accurate descriptions along with a sharp moral judgement. Often the judgements are inferred from practices but the logic behind the inference remains obscure.

When Ward does explain, he explains the *existence of the practices* rather than the strong moral criticism of them. In his *View of the Literature* he explains:

> It is very difficult, perhaps, to speak decisively on the precise origin of
> any of the Ancient Systems of Idolatry; but not so difficult to trace
> idolatry itself to certain natural causes, and to prove, that the heathen

deities owe their origin to the common darkness and depravity of men who, rejecting the doctrine of the divine unity, and considering God as too great or too spiritual to be the object of human worship, chose such images as their darkness or their passions suggested. Hence idolatry has arisen out of circumstances common to all heathen nations; which fact, and another hereafter mentioned, will account for many coincidences in the mythology of nations the most remote, while differences in manners and customs, and in the degrees of civilization, may account for most of the diversities found in the images and worship of different idolatrous nations. (Ward 1817: xiii)

Ward's guiding question is- why does idolatry exist. His explanation cites the common darkness and depravity of men, who reject the doctrine of divine unity, because they consider god too great an object to be worshipped by man, and choose images as their darkness and passions suggest. This 'explanation', which is in fact nothing more than a set of assertions, allows him to argue for a common set of idolatrous practices which become different from each other according to custom and degrees of civilisation.

This argument tells us that Ward finds salience in the question of diversity. Diversity of practices is *not* a matter of indifference to him; diversity of practices among a group of people requires reasons and explanations. It is also clear from his earlier description that the existence of diverse practices is a matter of indifference to the natives. They inhabit a common space within which all manner of diverse practices are treated with mutual indifference.

Seeing Differences

In 1840 a Christian missionary J.W. Massie who is fresh off the boat on the western coast of the Indian peninsula, and has just hired a 'howdah' to take him to his host's house from the port. This is the account he writes of his first few hours on foreign soil. He sees some women at a water tank. After an

elaborate description of women and their hair, dress, gait and the pots which they carry, he says of the women-

> going to the Tank is their chief season of recreation and intercourse with their neighbours. Otherwise, the acme of female enjoyment in the highest circle, is the most perfect idleness, and to sleep as long as they are able. Hitherto, none of them have been trained to reading or habits of thought: the most influential natives have to this day resisted any attempts to introduce instruction among females. Upon what subject, then, can the poor creatures employ their minds, or what resources can they look to, that they may be sustained in the day of trouble? The Turks are consistent, for while they deny education, they also deny immorality to their women; but Hindooism is a fabric of inconsistencies. O that the light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God would chase away the shades of a dark and destructive superstition from among the inhabitants of these lands! (Massie 1840: 104)

From his howdah Massie sees a gathering of women at a water tank and he appreciates their grace and beauty. He can also 'see' that the visit to the tank is the most enjoyable activity in the day of these women. Wealthy women who do not have to perform this menial function choose the 'most perfect idleness' as their preferred enjoyment- and they 'sleep as long as they are able'. This, according to Massie is because 'none of them have been trained to reading or habits of thought'. The women are not educated and have nothing better to employ their minds with. Natives, even in the highest circles resist the attempt to educate their women. Thus the women have no resources to sustain them in their 'day of trouble'.

Massie argues that the lack of literacy or 'instruction' among these women leave them vulnerable in 'the day of trouble' and that Hindooism is a 'fabric of inconsistencies' since its women have permission to move about freely but they do not have the right to be educated. He then goes on to compare them with Muslim women, who are better off since the Muslims do not educate their

females but also do not allow them the freedom to move about freely. They are 'consistent' in that they deny education and 'immorality' to their women. He ends by saying that the glorious gospel can correct this 'dark and destructive superstition'.

The passage is remarkable for the inferences it makes. This account is a first timer's description of the country he is visiting where he has just landed. As he travels from the ship, which brought him here to his host's house, he is already able to make these pronouncements on the moral character of the natives. The women who are at the tank are performing what we recognise as a common household chore. Even today it is not uncommon to see talking and laughter, if not hot tempers rising, around a common water source in rural and urban India. However from this scene Massie draws other kinds of conclusions. When he sees the women at the tank he does not see hard working women, but immoral women, who are out unescorted for entertainment. Under the circumstances, the certainty with which Massie asserts this evaluation is entirely inexplicable.

After the account describing the women, Massie turns his attention to the real problem:

> this (Hindu) doctrine of polytheism, and the intrigues, criminal amours, quarrels, and stratagems of the gods, have produced the most fatal effects on the minds of the Hindoos. The polluted strains of their conversation, their lascivious and wanton intercourse, the lecherous familiarities of the pagoda Brahmins with their courtesan establishments, the general habits of the people from earliest puberty cannot be described; and no imagination can dream of the symbols of pollution which are used as ornaments for their pagoda architecture, or their distinguishing emblems. (Massie 1840: 276)

The Hindoo 'doctrine' of polytheism is source of much evil. The 'doctrine' of polytheism sets up multiple gods and goddesses who indulge in 'intrigues,

criminal amours, quarrels and stratagems'. The activities of these gods have had a damaging effect on the minds of the Hindoos. As proof of this damage we can take the example of almost anything: Their conversations and relationships with each other, the behaviour of their 'pagoda Brahmins', the brothels, the 'general habits' of the people and their temple architecture and carvings. Massie further argues that temple carvings in India were 'symbols of pollution'. But if the carvings were used to 'ornament' the buildings, it must follow that the natives did not think of them as 'polluting'.

Ward and Massie link the practices they find immoral to a *doctrine* called Hindooism. While Dellon merely refers to the natives as Heathens, the 19th century observers find that the natives belong to the Hindoo religion. What looks to us like quotidian practices, look to these observers as practices guided by a *doctrine*. That travellers saw natives first as Heathens and then as Hindoos has been explained by modern Hinduism studies scholars as an instance of too little information, which with growing contact rectified itself. But the prior question has never been asked. Why did the travellers 'see' a *doctrine* behind quotidian practices?

When the native bathed in the river, it was not the bathing per se that attracted questioning. It was not argued that bathing was in the Hindoo doctrines. But bathing at the river, or bathing more than once a day was seen to be practice of the Hindoo. A woman doing house-hold work was not a problem, but a woman doing house-hold work outside the house, unattended was a peculiar Hindoo problem, although it was equally a problem if she did the work inside the home but behind the purdah. Teaching parrots to speak is quotidian, but teaching it to speak the name of god is a Hindoo problem, while reading itself is not a problem, reading while swaying the body to the rhythm of one's voice reciting the puranas is a Hindoo problem. The only thread of similarity that runs through these activities is that in the form they are encountered in India these practices would have been unfamiliar to the

European. The European seeks explanations for practices he finds unfamiliar; he also links practices to a doctrine. This is clearly a culture specific response to practices.

II

In 'Language and Political Change' (Skinner 1989) Skinner takes up a discussion on values, around Raymond Williams' *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Williams 1983). *Keywords* was written as a lexicon and Williams' method was to demonstrate the changes and shifts in *meaning* in social and political discourse. His aim was to extend our understanding of current debates by looking at how historical debates have led to shifts in meaning. This focus on the dispute about meanings seems to ignore the evaluation embedded in certain words; what Williams calls 'strong' or 'persuasive' words and Skinner calls 'appraisive terms'.

Skinner argues that value becomes language through units of 'appraisive terms': words, which confer value and therefore have more than just the dimension of meaning. Therefore he contests Williams claim that the study of the history and development of these keywords and the debates around their meanings, will add to our understanding of current political and social debates. Williams does not clarify the relationship between the keywords and the values they confer. On occasion Williams shows how particular words had a certain meaning historically, but they could mean something diametrically opposite now. But he does not explain what kind of awareness comes from looking at the history and development of these words; he simply shows how several kinds of meaning *accrue* to these words over time.

Skinner protests that Williams writes as if all disputes about the keywords are about the disputes in meaning; as if the process of change involves confirmation, assertion and qualification of usage by the mutual consent of the users. But all debates about the use of a word to describe an act are not about meaning, some disputes may be about the value these words embody, and value cannot be settled by mutual consent. It has far wider implications for the group of language users. (Skinner 1989: 8).

Skinner proposes three requirements for a term to be correctly used as an appraisive term: the unit of discourse, which confers value on experience. First one should be aware of the range of criteria: in order to correctly use the term 'courage' we must know that the person acted voluntarily with awareness of danger, having understood the circumstances. Second we must know the range of reference: discerning, for example, between an act of recklessness and courage, which are close in meaning but far apart in appraisive value. Third we must know the range of attitude: the correct application of 'courage' commends and expresses approval and admiration (Skinner 1989: 11). Appraisive terms thus link experience to discourse while simultaneously placing value on it. While the act is a phenomenon in the world, the value is a human product, evolving over time.

To some extent this explains the feeling of separateness to the two parts of the European descriptions of native practices. The descriptive terms capture practices, which can be recognised even today whereas the appraisive terms condemn using an alien evaluative framework.

 Skinner is particularly interested in evaluative concepts: these concepts are for Skinner, at the root of the agent's ethical actions. Evaluative frameworks are composed of clusters of concepts, which support each other. The concepts are conferred onto experience through a series of appraisive terms. Thus if

'Christian' is an evaluative concept it is supported by words such as 'church' and 'prayer', which are appraisive terms. These are appraisive terms attached to things in the world- a building or a set of words. It would take a person who recognises the evaluative concept of Christianity, to recognise the objects in the world – a set of lines spoken, a building where people gather- in the corresponding appraisive terms. The evaluative framework links objects and actions in the world to values, which are uniquely human products.

Skinner argues that the relationship between the ethical actions and the language in which it is described is not "a purely external and contingent one" and language "helps constitute the character of (social) practices" (Skinner 1989: 22). Evaluative concepts do not have a unidirectional relationship with the world. These concepts determine the possible actions of the subject. For example in a life-threatening situation, the moral concept of Christianity structures prayer as a reasonable response. Since the discourse made up of these concepts place value on experience, they determine the range of ethical options the agent has:

> To recover the nature of the vocabulary available to an agent for the description and appraisal of his conduct is at the same time to indicate one of the constraints on his conduct itself. This in turn suggests that, if we wish to explain why (an agent) chose to concentrate on certain courses of action while avoiding others, we are bound to make some reference to the prevailing moral language of the society in which he was acting. For this, it now appears, must have figured not as an epiphenomenon of his projects, but as one of the determinants of his actions. (Skinner 1989: 22)

The evaluative concepts reveal the range of actions that it was *possible* for an agent to execute. The value placed on experience allows the agent to choose one action over another. The commendation or condemnation attached in language to an act in the world will affect his choice of acts. Thus the agent

does not act independently of his evaluative discourse he acts within it. Skinner draws attention to the relation between action and values when he says: if we wish to grasp how someone sees the world-- what distinctions he draws, what classifications he accepts- what we need to know is not what words he uses but rather what evaluative concepts he possesses (Skinner 1989: 7). This indicates that the terms used to describe things in the world may or may not have evaluative value depending on the evaluative concept behind the terms. Thus bathing may become *evaluate- able* according the evaluative concept in use. This means that if we want to understand why the colonial sees Hindoo idolatry in quotidian practices we must examine his moral concepts.

Skinner goes on to discuss another important aspect of moral concepts. He discusses the work of Ian Hacking, who suggests that what might appear to be 'discipline' in one generation might appear to be 'child abuse' in the next. Hacking makes the point that Victorian attitudes of 'disciplining' a child can easily be seen as 'child abuse' in the 21st century. However, when the 21st century father does not look at beating as a reasonable response to his child, we cannot conclude that the underlying moral principle has been rejected. This should also not be mistaken for a 'real' way of understanding of the actions (Skinner 1999: 71). Both 'discipline' and 'abuse' are terms which were used to describe the act of beating a child. The terms have opposite evaluative force but neither 'falsifies' the other. Rather "the underlying concept will come to acquire a new prominence and a new salience in the moral arguments of the society concerned" (Skinner 1999: 71). The shift from 'discipline' to 'child abuse' gives a 'new salience' to the concept underlying this extension. In this case the moral concept underlying the use of these appraisive terms is 'Rights'.
This term extends from the father who has a 'right' to beat his child and 'discipline' him, to the child who has a 'right' not to suffer any bodily harm and 'abuse' at the hands of an adult. The extension is in the range that 'rights' can

meaningfully extend to. From the privilege of the propertied male person of the 19th century, 'rights' have become a universal principle.

The extension of the moral concept changes the way in which value is placed on experience. However it cannot change the structure of that experience. In other words, the actions available to the agent of this discourse may have changed, but experience is still being moulded by the governing moral concept. In this case the agent can no longer look at beating as the appropriate response to a child, on the other hand he continues to relate to people as the bearers of rights. Thus the change in evaluation of the appraisive term does not bring a change in the structure of the agent's experiences in the world.

In other words the moral concept 'rights' structures one's response to others in the world, and the shift from discipline to abuse merely indicates an extension in the range of those others who one may appropriately respond to as the bearer of rights. The shift from Heathenism to Hinduism could be read as such an extension. The underlying moral principle remains, which looks at diversity in practices as *evaluate-able*. Thus the extension in range may change the appraisive value of terms such as idolatry, and revise such formulations as 'false gods' but this does not restructure the experience that unfamiliar practices present a problem.

Skinner discusses another kind of linguistic feature: *persuasion*. Here Skinner's interlocutors are the Ancients. Quoting from Aristotle's discussion on 'neighbourly terms' in the *Art of Rhetoric* he says "Slander can pass for frankness, recklessness for courage, extravagance for copiousness" (Skinner 1999: 68). Aristotle's discussion is different from Skinner's earlier example of 'abuse' and 'discipline'. In that example the agent could not choose reasonably between one or the other term. The usage was separated by a length of time, and over time one of the uses, 'discipline' drops out of usage. In other words, the moral concept of rights, of which these two words are appraisive terms, expands in one direction leaving behind an earlier use. The new use does not

falsify the old, but it also does not leave room for both to be simultaneously valid. Once the moral concept of rights has expanded as a universal concept, one cannot reject it. Thus one cannot say of a father who beats his child in 21st century America that his abuse can pass for discipline. Unlike Aristotle's terms these appraisive terms have a universal moral principal underlying them.

Aristotle's neighbourly terms are opposite in terms of evaluation but very close in terms of the actions they refer to. In fact they are alternative descriptions of the same action 'depending on how you look at it'. This indicates that one is not guided by an underlying principle which guides ones experience in a fixed way. 'Depending on how you look at it' could also indicate multiple priorities, or goals from the consequent action. What *does* depend on how one looks at it? Or rather, what persuades one to look at it in one way rather than in another? Placing the opposite evaluation in each case allows the agent to *act* differently. If one argues that ones associate is reckless one may avoid him whereas if he is courageous one may cultivate his acquaintance.

Skinner asserts that the more *persuasive* rhetoric is, the more likely it is to calibrate action. Kenneth Burke in his *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Burke 1950) suggests that "rhetorical language is inducement to action or attitude, attitude being an incipient act" (Burke 1950: 42). Rhetoric can persuade the agent to act in different ways. A domain that is open to persuasion suggests that the agent is not bound in this domain, by a moral law to act in one or the other way. Thus either action would not contradict an underlying moral law. If 'neighbourly terms' are used alternately for an action there can be no underlying moral law making the actions *evaluate-able*. The rhetorical persuasion to action can only be intelligible if it does not contradict any underlying moral concepts.

Skinner argues that the appraisive term that is accepted depends on the persuasiveness of the speaker. The use of the terms alternately rather than giving up one in favour of the other over a period of time is indicative that the

terms do not make the experience evaluate-able. In other words neighbourly terms give value to something in the world *without relating that experience to an underlying universal moral principle.* This becomes very important when we encounter the native's initial indifference to colonial discourse and then the sharp rejection of interference with native practices.

We have seen that moral principles structure experience using appraisive terms. The early European traveller and later the missionary and administrator all use appraisive terms to condemn the native practices they see. They interpret these practices, quotidian or otherwise, as guided by a doctrine, which they identify as Hinduism (earlier Heathenism). It is this doctrine which is 'false' (since Christianity is 'true'). Thus all practices guided by this doctrine are also 'false'. This is why Massie and Ward can 'see' immorality in every street corner; each unfamiliar practice they encounter, quotidian or otherwise, is a result of the Hindoo's 'false' doctrine of Hindooism. In this way, unrelated practices of the native, having the common thread of unfamiliarity for the European become related to that 'great fabric of inconsistency' that is Hindooism.

This discourse on practices has two features. It singles out practices, which are unfamiliar to the observer. Thus the discourse is closely linked to the observer's experience. Secondly it links practices to doctrines. These two features come together to give us the evaluative discourse on practices that was used by the earliest travellers as well as the latest historians.

III

Recognising the Other

Early writings from Europe divided the 'rest of the world' into four religions Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Heathenism. It was only after contact increased that Heathenism gave way to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. Oddie in his *Imagined Hinduism* says:

> The usual assumption of commentators in the seventeenth and
> eighteenth centuries was that there were four religions, namely Judaism
> Christianity, Islam and Paganism or Heathenism. But...was there no
> difference, for example, between the form it took in India or Africa, and in
> other countries? Should not commentators revise their ideas and,
> instead of thinking of four religions, think in terms of many more? Only
> in this way could European observers and scholars begin to understand
> and deal with the different peoples overseas. (Oddie 2006: 14-15)

Europe revises its early understanding of the native to see multiple different religions where it had earlier seen a single heathenism. Increasing contact with the 'rest of the world' put extreme pressure on the idea of a single heathenism. It was after all, only a matter of time before Europe found out that there was nothing similar between the practices of Egypt, China and India, other than their common difference from European practices. When Europe first goes out into the world it recognises three religions as familiar and where it did not recognise a familiar religion it called the religion of the native Heathenism. However, what consisted of Heathenism for the Traveller was merely a collection of unfamiliar practices that could only be explained by relating it to a 'false' doctrine. This indicates that there is an underlying principle of relating practices to doctrines. Over time, getting to know these diverse groups better it became clear that calling all the groups heathens did not help in understanding, the huge divergences in their practices.

Europe of the 18th century does not hesitate to call the native a heathen. It is only when it becomes increasingly clear that the diversities among the natives

are not explained by this single term that they start thinking of more terms. When Europe goes exploring the world all unfamiliarity is called Heathenism. When it is discovered that this term cannot sufficiently distinguish between the groups the evaluative term heathen, gives way to the evaluative term Hindooism. Both terms have an appraisive value suggesting that they support an underlying moral principle. The term heathen faces pressure from the extreme diversity of practices, and ceases to be useful. In discarding the term however, the structure of experience does not change. Unfamiliar practices are still explained by attributing them to 'false' doctrines. Thus the diversity of groups is understood as a diversity of doctrines. The underlying moral principal, which sees diversity in practices as evaluate-able does not undergo any change.

This is a peculiar principle, which sees diversity in practices as grounds for evaluation. In its encounters with groups around the world, Europe treats all unfamiliar practices of all groups as evaluate-able. Also in all cases *divergence is evaluated negatively.* Thus the discourse is structured in such a way that regardless of what the practices are, their unfamiliarity will be the cause of their condemnation. This is a rather peculiar feature of Europe's early inter-cultural encounters.

This discourse places all human practices on a scale of evaluation where familiar European practices are at the top of the scale as the 'norm'. 'Norm' here has no sense of the 'normal' which indicates that it is a middle point with divergences on either side- 'normal' children, for example, are neither geniuses nor intellectually challenged. In the case of Europe's response to practices however, the 'norm' is already placed at the top of the scale. Thus any divergence from this norm can only be negative. A discourse with such a moral structure can be called a Normative discourse. Thus as a result of the inter-cultural encounter between Europe and India, the practices of the native are caught in a normative discourse. This explains why the expansion from

heathenism to Hindooism could not illuminate the practices themselves any better. It will also explain why the further change from Hindooism to Hinduism shows a change in appraisive values while still structuring the experience of practices as guided by doctrines.

Routed Through History

The middle hundred years of colonialism, colonial administration across India spread and there was a sharp increase in the demand for Histories of the Orient. Orientalist Histories had some standard features. There is a search for similarities in the mythology, practices and texts of the diverse groups encountered. There were attempts to prove that the Indians were the lost tribes of Egypt,[5] that Jains were Pythagoreans,[6] or that the lost biblical kingdom of Ninevah was excavated in Iran.[7] In other words Europe's 'discoveries' across the world were being related to its existing history. Some of this 'history' at least, was from Biblical accounts, others were from Greek and Latin accounts. For a time at least the European traveller attempted to reconcile the stories in the Bible with the world as he found it. Travels in the world revealed immense diversity and the European traveller's early attempt was to reconcile this diversity with accounts from the Bible. This would mean that at the earliest moment the European traveller had a limited world-view shaped by the history of Christianity. He was restricted to believing that the Bible contained 'true' accounts of the world. His experience as a traveller was guided by this account. In the introduction to *The Practice of Conceptual History* (Koselleck 2000) Hayden White suggests that Reinhart Koselleck practices "a methodology of historical studies that focuses on the invention and development of the fundamental concepts underlying and informing a distinctively historical manner of being in the world" (White 2000: ix). Koselleck speaks of 'history' itself as an evaluative framework: an interface between our experience of the

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[5] Thomas Maurice *Indian Antiquities or Dissertations of Hindostan* 1809
[6] Edward Moor *The Hindu Pantheon* 1810
[7] Austen Henry Laylard *Nineveh and its Remains*.1847.

past and our discourse on it. History, Koselleck suggests, is not a universal category, but a specific way of giving order to human experience. History *became* the fundamental mode of relating to the past, and the process can be retraced. (White 2000: ix). It became the fundamental mode of relating to the past by casting itself in a normative framework. Thus other modes of relating to the past were evaluated negatively within the discourse of history. Without this concept, man can certainly think in terms of an 'inquiry', a 'past' a 'process' or a 'practice' such as memorialization: he need not conceive a difference between natural temporality and historical temporality (White 2000: ix). Koselleck sees this difference in temporality as crucial to the framework of History, which orders experience into a specific temporality.

Koselleck's interest is not in the *method* of writing history. His question is not: how can one write the best possible history? Or, which is the 'true' history? His search is for a model of relating to the past which distinguishes between a historical account of experience and a non-historical account. Every account of the past is not a history and what distinguishes a historical account from another account is what reveals history as a normative evaluative concept (White 2000: xii).

History as a concept has three features: historical temporality which is different from natural temporality, historical thinking which produces a pattern of a "rise and fall" or a pattern of "progress" indicating a very specific way of relating to experience, and finally historical thinking which comes out of an awareness of the gap between historical events and the language used to represent them. Each of these features determines the further expansion of the concept of History and what it can be employed to explain. White argues that this language which Koselleck sees as the language of historians, is one "that is ever more conceptually self-conscious, ever more aware of the difficulty of grasping the experience of others in terms adequate to its reality" (White 2000: xiii). Finally White sees Koselleck's work converge with Foucault's, in that both

speak of historiography as an evaluative discourse rather than a universal discipline. Both attempt to demonstrate the constitutive nature of historical discourse as against its claims to literal truthfulness (White 2000: xiv). In the writing of history itself, Koselleck distinguishes between social and conceptual histories both of which have "existed as explicit modes of questioning since the Enlightenment" (Koselleck 2000: 20). In speaking about history this way Koselleck alerts us to the dangers of speaking about history as a repository of 'truth' about the past. It is not merely a question of whose perspective History is written from, as it has become mandatory to ask since the arrival of Marxist, Subaltern and Feminist histories. The proper question would be: what can the past reveal to us if we look at it through the concept of History?

Like Skinner, Koselleck too thinks through the relationship between language and experience. He draws a connection between synchronically spoken speech and diachronically pre-given language (Koselleck 2000: 30). The pre-given language is the repository of all the shifts in meaning and appraisive value that *are possible* in different instances of synchronic speech. What happens in synchronic speech is always unique and new but never so new that social conditions, which are pre-given over the long term, will not have made possible each unique event. A new concept may be coined to articulate experiences or expectations that never existed before. But it can never be too new not to have existed virtually as a seed in the pre-given language and not to have received meaning from its inherent linguistic context (Koselleck 2000: 30). Thus, diachronically pre-given language, structures experience in ways that remain constant, despite the shifts in synchronically spoken speech. However, extreme pressure may cause a shift in appraisive terms, or cause an expansion in the range of the underlying concept, but the structure of experience is preserved by diachronically pre-given language.

As Skinner had put it, there is a mutual relationship between the actions of an agent and the language in which he speaks about those actions. In other words

the agent's ethical language already determines the range of possible ethical actions. Similarly there is a relationship between what is already historically known and what can legitimately be historically known. The historical questions the colonial raised in connection with the native's past then must have been related to the colonial's own relationship with his past. The accounts of the Bible had long guided the study of the past as the 'true' account of history. Thus the approach of the European was that the past, when studied as history could be true or false. For a long period the Bible was taken to be the true account. Thus early attempts at writing history were attempts to reconcile the evidence in the world with biblical accounts of history. However, travels to the 'rest of the world' put extreme pressure on this history. Retaining the structure Koselleck talks about, the bible became *symbolically* true, allowing other version of history to become factually true. But retaining in both cases experience of 'truth' in relation to ones knowledge of the past.

The Historical Frame

Thomas Maurice in 1806, wrote a treatise on the similarity between Greek and Indian religions. About the Hindoo religion he says: it 'wears the similitude of a beautiful and radiant cherub' who bears 'pardon and peace, and on his silken wings benefaction and blessing' (Ward 1817: ci). Ward disapproved of Maurice's Orientalist tendencies: "as a clergyman, Mr. Maurice should have known, that antiquity sanctifies nothing." (Ward 1817: c). Maurice argues to *reconcile* the two histories- native and European. He argues for a common human history Maurice claims:-

> Guided by.... indisputable authorities, I trust I have proved... that the whole jargon of the YUGS, or grand periods, and consequently all those presumptuous assertions of the Brahmins, relative to the earth's antiquity, have no foundation in the great solar and lunar cycles, or planetary revolutions; and that CHALDEA, and not INDIA, was the parent-country of mankind. In proof of this last assertion, I have

produced a few remarkable instances which evince the primitive languages of Chaldea and India not to be greatly dissimilar; that the name ADIM may be traced to the Sanscreet root, ADAM, or *the first*; that in the prophetic and regal title of MENU of India may be recognised the patriarch Noah; that their great hero BALI, an appellative synonymous with the Bel, or Baal, of their neighbours, is no other than Belus; and all the prodigies of valour and wisdom fabled of the renowned Dionysius of India, if true, are only true of Rama, the son of Cush. Whatever partial objections may be urged against the system thus adopted by me, I am convinced that it is the only basis upon which any solid history of Antient India can be founded; and every fresh inquiry confirms me in that opinion. (Maurice 1806: 24-25)

Maurice's has used all available information to disprove the idea of yugs, and other 'presumptuous' assertions that Brahmins make in relation to the earths antiquity. These he claims have no foundation in the 'fact' of the solar and the lunar cycles or in the movement of the planets. He has also 'proved' that Chaldea, not India, was the 'parent country' of mankind. And further he has shown that the languages of the two places were not dissimilar. Names like Adam recur in both languages, and other figures like Manu and Bali can be identified with their 'true' counterparts. Chaldea is claimed as the parent-country of mankind; a very important factor in the attempt to write a 'solid history' of ancient India. The only way to read these arguments coherently is to assume that human-kind had a common beginning which culminated in various separations.

Interestingly in this account, Maurice argues that he has disproved the 'false' account of the 'Brahmins'. The story of the yugs etc, is false because it does not fit into the history of man that Maurice, guided by biblical accounts of the past, is trying to demonstrate. Maurice argues that the presumptuous assertions made by the Brahmins are false; this verifies the general colonial understanding that the Brahmins are the cause of corruption within

Hindooism. In this case the accusation is that they misled the people about the 'true' nature of the world and its history. In Maurice's understanding it is these Brahmins who have corrupted the 'radiant cherub' bearing 'pardon and peace' that Hindooism once was.

This criticism of the Brahmin is entirely based on two cultural assumptions. First, that the occupation of Brahmins, like Christian priests, is to guide practices by interpreting doctrines correctly. Second, that biblical history is a true account of the world. While it may be true that the Brahmins speak about yugs in relation to time, it is pure speculation that the yugs were an account of the history of the world, or were understood as such. If the Brahmins used the yugs as a *metaphor* for time, for example, then the arguments of Maurice would make no sense to them or their audience. However the colonial sees any account of time, in relation to the past as either a 'true' historical account or a 'false' one.[8] This leaves no possibility within Colonial discourse for the articulation of different ways of relating to the past. While this does not illuminate the yugs any further it becomes clear that the Europeans comments on the yug, or on any native account of the world, reflect 'the truth' about European history rather than native practice.

Biblical history is no longer the accepted template for our understanding of the past, however the normative structure, of history as the 'true' relationship with the past remains. Since Biblical accounts of history are no longer seen as the 'true' history of the world it is easy to dismiss these early attempts to reconcile world history into Biblical history as 'mistaken'. However in dismissing these attempts we also lose the *process* by which Europe approaches cultural diversity.

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[8] Muller has famously declared "the old Hindus, simply despised history" (Muller 1964: 76). His comment demonstrated the reversal of appraisive value on the term while retaining its structure as the only 'true' way of relating to the past as the remark was made in connection with his observation that myths and legends were in fact the repositories of history for the primitive people. Thus any alternative relationship to the past is structured to look like the rudimentary form of history.

The shift from Heathenism to Hindooism has within it the method by which Europe reconciled itself to diversity. It reveals the uniqueness of European discourse on cultural diversity. Europe reconciles itself to diversity in a two-step process. First it relates practices to doctrines. Secondly it sets itself up as the 'norm': the group that has true *doctrines.* The result is that a normative evaluative discourse about the *doctrine* of the native becomes the only way in which to speak about his *practices.* In this way wherever Europe travels it understands diversity among groups as diversity in the doctrines guiding practices. With enough exposure to the 'rest of the world' the moral concept expands to reverse the condemnation of the doctrines of various groups as 'false'; this does not change the structure, which experiences practice as guided by doctrine.

The European traveller to India brought with him a normative evaluative discourse this helped him to come to terms with the tremendous diversity he encountered, while keeping his world-view stable. As trade and contact increased and multiplied the colonial constantly updated his knowledge of the native. The increasing information did not change the normative evaluative discourse; but the growing body of descriptions were mistakenly feted as emerging 'knowledge' about the Orient[9]. The study of the Orient within this discourse was enabled by the wide availability of material from travellers and traders. Eventually the actual need for travel to India ceased. The most famous expert on India at this time was a German who had never been here.

Max Muller, presented *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as Illustrated by the Religions of India* at Westminster Abbey in 1878. The very title

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[9] There was a profusion of Histories of India, such as those by James Mill's *History of British India,* John William Kaye's *Administration of India* in 1853; Henry Beveridge complied the Imperial Gazzetter; William Wilson Hunter wrote *Annals of Rural Bengal.* Others included Vincent Arthur Smith's *The Early History of India*, R.C. Dutt's *A History of Civilisation in Ancient India* and Jadunath Sarkar's *History of Bengal*, which earned him the title of the Gibbon of Bengal.

of his collection tells us what he is looking for. It is no longer possible to argue either that Christianity as a religion, or Biblical accounts of the world as history, are true- it is now religion itself (a particular way of relating to the world) that is true. This retains the link between doctrine and practice and universalises it. Groups that do not have a well-developed discourse are primitive but they still show a *tendency* towards this knowledge of the world. Thus what is now evaluated is the ability to understand that practices are guided by a doctrine. A primitive group has a less developed understanding of this than a more developed culture. Muller's discussion on Hinduism still stands as knowledge about the religion of the Hindus. While it may now be considered dated, it has never been considered inaccurate.

Muller discusses Hindu religion by looking at its oldest texts. He studies the Rig Veda and writes about the transition of the sun: "the sun is no longer the bright Deva only, who performs his daily task in the sky, but he is supposed to perform much greater work; he is looked upon, in fact, as the ruler, as the establisher, as the creator of the world." (Muller 1964: 264) The direction in which the study of the Rig Veda takes place is guided by Muller's conception of religion. There is no other reason why this pattern among all possible patterns in the rig ved should be singled out. In following out his interpretation Muller writes:

> The first step leads from the mere light of the sun to that light which in the morning wakes man from sleep, and seems to give new life, not only to man, but to the whole of nature. He who wakes us in the morning, who recalls the whole of nature to new life, is soon called "the giver of daily life".

> Secondly, by another bolder step, the giver of daily light and life, becomes the giver of light and life in general. He who brings light and life to day, is the same who brought life and light on the first of days. As light is the beginning of the day, so light was the beginning of creation, and the sun,

from being mere light-bringer or life-giver, becomes a creator, and if creator, then soon also a ruler of the world.

Thirdly as driving away the dreaded darkness of the night, and likewise as fertilizing the earth, the sun is conceived as a defender and kind protector of all living things.

Fourthly, the sun sees everything, both what is good and what is evil; and how natural therefore that both the evil-doer should be told that the sun sees what no human eye may have seen and that the innocent, when all other help fails him, should appeal to the sun to attest his guiltlessness! 'My soul waitheth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning.' (Psalm cxxx.6.). (Muller 1964: 265)

This analysis of the alleged shifts in the Rig Veda's representation of the savitur, the sun, is guided by the concept of an omniscient/present/potent god. Muller is working with the assumption that all groups have some awareness of such a god, and that this awareness comes slowly over time in the evolution of the group. This allows him to make the knowledge of god evaluate-able. Thus the earliest groups are polytheist, while more sophisticated groups are henotheists and of course the group which has a full and 'proper' awareness of god is monotheist. Muller interprets the Rig Veda according to this theoretical framework. At first the hymns talk of the sun as 'mere' light; this moves very quickly to the description of the sun as 'giver of daily life' in that the day brings to the whole of nature a 'new life'. Then the giver of daily light and life becomes the giver of light and life 'in general'. For Muller it is very important that the Brahmins (still seen as the interpreters of native doctrines) recognise the fact that the sun was the 'original' giver of light and life, and see the sun as the beginning of creation. In the next move the sun is seen to chase away the night and fertilize the earth- which makes it the defender and protector of all things, and finally the sun is sees all that men do- 'what no human eye may have seen'.

For Muller these statements are read as a 'progression' – the sun is 'no longer' the deva who performs a task in the sky, he becomes the establisher, the creator, of the world (Muller 1964, 264). This conflicts with the text itself which gives these accounts on the sun *simultaneously*. The text does not show any sign of a progressive argument, going back and forth between the various descriptions. The descriptions have to be organised into an order of salience only for Muller to fit the text to his template.

However there are some contradictions which are too glaring to ignore, and Muller argues:

> If we knew nothing else of the religious poetry of the Veda, we might, after reading such praises bestowed upon the sun, feel inclined to say that the old Brahmans worshipped the sun under various names as their supreme deity; and that in that sense they might be said to worship one god only, to be in fact monotheists. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. In this one evolution, no doubt, the sun assumed the character of a supreme deity, but even in the passages which we have quoted there is hardly an assertion of the sun's supremacy that could not be matched in hymns addressed to other Devas. He is totally different in that respect from *Zeus* and *Jupiter*. Nor do the Vedic poets hesitate for a moment to represent the same deity, the sun, who is at one time the maker and upholder of all things, at another time as the child of the waters, as produced by the dawns, a god among other gods, neither better nor worse. (Muller 1964: 270-271, emphasis, parenthesis in the original.)

The shift in the sun's status, from creator to 'one among others' is of salience only if there is any salience to the role of creator. The text, which places the sun in all roles simultaneously, does not seem to suggest any such salience; but Muller's interpretation requires the identification of a creator. Further the multiple roles of the sun in the hymns become a problem. The Vedas contain hymns, which represent the 'powerful' sun god in the relatively 'helpless'

persona of a child. Having observed this in the Vedas, Muller goes on to say that the very fact that the Vedas represent the same gods in positions of power at some time and positions of helplessness at other times, is proof that the Natives did not exhibit monotheism, but rather what he calls *Kathenotheism* or *Henotheism*

> a successive belief in single supreme gods, in order to keep it distinct
> from that phase of religious thought which we commonly call polytheism,
> in which the many gods are already subordinated to one supreme god,
> and by which therefore the craving after the one without a second, has
> been more fully satisfied.' (Muller 1964: 271)

Muller explains that the presence of various other powerful gods should not be mistaken for polytheism. He argues that the Hindus of this time practice Henotheism or a successive belief in single supreme gods. Thus Muller's interpretation of the Vedas is guided by the normative evaluative discourse peculiar to Europe. This discourse links practice to doctrine. Doctrines are related to an entity who 'gives' this doctrine towards whom practices are to be directed. When the text does not yield any salience to these descriptions, if they are present, time is inserted as a factor. Thus Muller argues that the early Hindus recognised the sun as 'mere light' and slowly began to see him as the powerful creator. Other figures replaced the sun in terms of power, but at all times that figure was the 'creator' of the world and by extension the giver of doctrines (or the guide to practices). The alleged 'progression' of these ideas does not have any salience within the text of the Rig Veda, as is evidenced from the fact that no claims can be made about the dates of this 'progression'. In other words the element of staggered time is introduced into the hymns, expressly in order to obtain the desired interpretation of the texts.

In this process Muller argues that the Hindus have doctrines (the Vedas etc.) which guide their practices. He argues that the ancient texts contain within them clues to their own early development. He further argues that the earliest

Hindu was a henotheist, this is of salience because in the early stages of religion man was either polytheist or henotheist, a process of 'growth and development' makes monotheism possible. In this process value becomes a function of time; the early stages were 'less developed' and the later stages are 'more developed'.

Muller argues as if all groups are guided in their practices by doctrines. The extensions in range in his discourse now enable him to speak about Hinduism, which is value neutral. However while doing so he is compelled to speak of a universal domain called religion; this domain is common to all mankind, although there are many diversities within it. Different groups have different religions, however all groups have some religion or the other, since religion is the domain concerning the doctrines which guide the practices of a group. He argues:

> It is utterly useless to say, for instance that religion meant this, and did not mean that; that it meant faith or worship, or morality or ecstatic vision, and that it did not mean fear or hope, or surmise, or reverence of the gods. Religion may mean all this; perhaps at one time or other the name was used in every one of these meaning... The mere savage may not even have a name for religion; still when the Papua squats before his *karwar*, clasping his hands over his forehead, and asking himself whether what he is going to do is right or wrong, that to him is religion. Among several savage tribes, where there was no sign of a knowledge of divine beings, missionaries have recognised in the worship paid to the spirits of the departed the first faint beginnings of religions... when Thales declared that all things were full of gods, and when Buddha denied that there weren't any *devas* or gods at all, both were stating their religious convictions. When the young Brahman lights up the fire on his simple altar at the rising of the sun, and prays, in the oldest prayer of the world, 'may the Sun quicken our minds' or when in later life he discards all prayer and sacrifice as useless, nay, as hurtful, and silently

buries his own self in the Eternal Self- all this is religion. (Muller 1964: 14)

Muller claims that religion is not to be given a prior definition; it may mean several things. However his list of examples is telling: The Papua's practice of squatting before the karwar, the savages' acknowledgement of their ancestors, Thales' claim that all things are full of gods and the Buddha's that there are no gods, the Young Brahmin when he salutes the sun with the Gayatri and even the older Brahmin who rejects all these practices. When he sees these people Muller says he 'sees' religion, the imagined doctrine behind the practices.

Muller's argument is that religion is a universal- and as evidence he points to the practices of various groups. This indicates that while the appraisive value of Christianity has seeped out the underlying moral principle has extended; the normative structure of linking practices to a doctrine has not changed. What has happened in the process is that the concept of religion has been extended to include too wide a variety of possibilities. The appraisive value on Christian religion has been extended to all religions, and practices of all people are related to underlying doctrines. In the final analysis though Muller's use of the term religion does not allow us to understand anything further about the practices of the Brahmin and the Papua.

IV

Hinduism Imagined

To test if the normative structure undergoes any change at all, we come to the most recent works on Hinduism. Here too we find that the discourse on practices retains the limitations we found in the early discourse. Constructivist

and anti-constructivist writings[10] on the nature of Hinduism employ the familiar structure that we have been tracing. Geoffrey Oddie in his *Imagined Hinduism* (2006) argues that Missionary criticisms of Hinduism reveal more about the 'real' nature of English politics rather than the 'real' nature of Hinduism. Oddie's analysis of the context in which Hinduism came to be 'imagined', and that imagined form consolidated, is rich in detail and a careful reconstruction of social history. He argues that the 19th century texts about Hinduism were very often written from a prejudiced point of view, without proper attention to the 'inner life' of the Hindu. Identifying some of the reasons why Hinduism came to be 'imagined' as it did Oddie says:

> as will become apparent, what is especially noticeable about the Protestant accounts of Hinduism in the first half of the nineteenth century is that they place a great deal of weight on its formalism and its rules and the externals of ritual and ceremony. While stressing the importance of inner religion for themselves they tended to objectify the religion of others, spending little time in attempting to discover the Hindus inner life. (Oddie 2006: 30)

Oddie uses the term 'inner religion' opposed to 'externals of ritual and ceremony'. He argues that the early travellers focussed only on the external ceremonies of the native and paid no attention to his inner life. Oddie writes as if it is the *Protestantism* of the traveller, which makes him stress his own inner life while focussing only on the formalism, rules and the externals of ritual and ceremony of the native. In this process Oddie speaks as if the relationship between doctrine and practice is universal.

Oddie says the accounts of the missionaries ignored the 'inner religion' of the Hindu's and focussed on the practices. We have already seen that the European first noticed practices, which were unfamiliar and many of these

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[10] See Frykenberg (1993), Jaiswal (1991), Richard King (1999), Lorenzen (2006), Mani (1998), Pennington (2005), Oddie (1979) and (1995).

were merely quotidian practices. The only unifying thing among these practices was that they were unfamiliar to the traveller. It is the traveller who projects a unified doctrine on these practices because it is his experience and history that practices are guided by doctrines. Thus when Oddie accuses the missionary of not focusing enough on the inner life of the Hindu, he speaks as if there is a 'true' inner life to be recognised. Oddie's argument replaces the descriptions of Ward and Massie with evaluative positions on their inability to see the 'truth'. Further Oddie argues:

> Certainly there was a tendency to think in terms of different, competing religious systems and to measure them as one would measure outward objects. Yet in one sense this is not what the evangelicals were doing with their own religion, and what is especially mystifying is why Carey and others (who dwelt on the importance of their own inner religion) so readily dismissed Hinduism as being all about externals when there was so little attempt to explore the Hindus inner life. This is perhaps a measure of the superficiality of the initial contact. (Oddie 2006: 30)

Oddie is covering over an important *process* with his criticism of 'superficiality of contact'. He identifies a problem- the early missionaries were all too easily convinced of the immorality of the native and his religion. Oddie does not examine how this happens. Instead he gives reasons for *why* this happens. This argument mirrors almost exactly the passage where Ward argues about *why* some groups tend towards idol-worship instead of asking the prior question; are these multiple activities idol worship? Oddie here is too quick to judge the missionaries for their condemnation of Hinduism while offering explanations such as 'superficiality of contact'. He omits to ask the prior question; are these multiple activities a unified body of practices guided by the doctrines of a religion called Hinduism?

Instead of examining the discourse of the missionary and the practices of the native, Oddie ignores the process by which the discourse expands to

accommodate diverse practices in India and perpetuates it by employing the evaluative discourse in relation to native practices. In Oddie's analysis this misunderstanding of Hinduism happens due to the minimal contact between the two groups initially. Oddie argues:

> missionaries started with the assumption that Christianity was superior to all other systems, there usually had to be special reasons for their taking up the study of Hinduism or non-Christian religions. Indeed, in some cases, there was a positive aversion to studying the details of Hindu religion- an attitude encouraged, for example, by comments in the widely-read CMS *Missionary Papers*. (Oddie 2006: 33)

Oddie argues that the missionaries began with the assumption of a superior Christianity and were reluctant to 'study the details' of Hindu religion. Here Oddie questions the missionary's unwillingness to 'study the details of Hindu religion'; he claims that if he had done so he would not have mistaken Hinduism to be merely the 'externals of ritual and ceremony'. They would have encountered the 'inner life' of the Hindu.

Oddie's argument makes the following salient points: 19th century Hinduism as it appears in the texts of the missionaries is an imagined entity. The Europeans arrived expecting to find 'Paganism', but the diversity they encountered soon made them think in terms of more religions and they found Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. This 'proves' to Oddie that 'depth' of contact helps one to understand the 'real' condition of the native. However, with the missionaries, although contact was 'more' than the early travellers it was still not 'enough' and the missionaries had a notion about the superiority of Christianity, thus they could not fully understand the 'inner life' of the Hindus. Oddie argues that this makes Hinduism that the Europeans spoke of in the 19th century an 'imagined' Hinduism. Implicit in this analysis, is that in the present, without the limiting small-mindedness of the 19th century there is the possibility of understanding 'real' Hinduism. The imagined Hinduism then is the one which

came about in the writings of the missionaries which did not take the 'inner life' of the Hindu into consideration. The real Hinduism on the other hand is the external ceremonies *accompanied* by the inner life or the doctrines, which guide these externals.

Oddie demonstrates the Missionary's blindness to the 'inner life' of Hinduism through a conversation between a missionary and his munshi. The text was published in 1856, a time when "European contact with the Natives was often rare"[11], so the "Munshi was not just a source of knowledge, but also a symbol of the Hindu way of life" (Oddie 2006: 127). This is a conversation from the London Missionary Society records, between William Drew and his tutor the Munshi:

> 'tell me Chiniah', I said solemnly one day to my moonshee, 'what are your hopes of salvation?- how do you expect to be saved?' An unmeaning laugh, with 'I don't know,' was his indifferent but affecting reply. And as they do not know so they do not care. They will turn aside the weightiest arguments with a smile or a stupid attempt at wit.' (Oddie 2006: 128)

In the conversation Drew finds the Munshi unconcerned about salvation in his after life. Oddie's suggestion is that minimal contact, and a prejudiced Christian outlook makes Drew dismiss the Munshi's religion as incapable of approaching the 'deeper truths' of life (Oddie 2006: 129). The Munshi admits that he does not know what his hopes of salvation are. Being unfamiliar with the Bible he is not even aware that he has a soul in danger of destruction, which must urgently be saved. He is completely unaware that his practices give him away as the follower of 'false' doctrines; and that as far as his employer is concerned he is in real danger of damnation. It is no wonder he answers laughingly that he does not know. He truly does not follow the contours and salience of his employer's well-meaning question. But Drew could acknowledge

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[11] Oddie's claim that contact was rare does not really stand up to scrutiny. All missionaries and administrative officials had at least a few trusted natives, in one or another position. Their contact with such natives, in their inner circle was fairly regular and familiar.

that his Munshi had an 'inner life' only if he was able to answer these questions correctly.

In other words, the inner life that Oddie insists the missionary should see are a set of doctrines underlying the practices of the Munshi.

The thrust of Oddie's argument is that the Missionaries were too quick to condemn the native on the basis of his practices, which they declared to be 'false'. They did not stop to examine the doctrines which made these practices coherent to the native. Oddie suggests that there are native doctrines which will make the natives practices coherent. Oddie argues that the missionary was too keen to see everything according to Protestant morality; the central Protestant belief was that God himself was moral and he made moral demands on his people (Oddie 2006: 229). Oddie further argues that the Protestants expected that other religions would have their own systems of morality and these should be judged, by contemporary Protestant standards (Oddie 2006: 229). This expectation led to difficulties says Oddie, as the Protestant did not understand that 'for Hindus morality was often closely associated with caste duties' and the gods in Hinduism ignore morality or behave in immoral ways. (Oddie 2006: 230)

Oddie falls back onto giving an explanation for practices- he says the Hindu's practices are guided by his 'caste duties'. But which of the Hindu's practices does he mean? The practices that were singled out for 'explanation' by the early travellers were the practices, which were unfamiliar to Europe. There is no other unifying thread among these practices, and the attempt to link them with a common doctrine (caste duty) is to merely perpetuate the normative evaluative discourse in which these practices were trapped from the earliest moment of the inter-cultural encounter.

Drew and Oddie are making opposite evaluative points. Drew sees the Munshi as 'ignorant' and Oddie sees him as having a 'rich inner life'. However while the evaluative stance changes, the structure of the discourse remains the same;

both unite in seeking doctrines behind practices. Oddie and Drew write from different moments, within the same normative discourse, which has expanded over time. While the appraisive terms have changed, the structure of the discourse has remained the same. Post-colonial embarrassment at the dismissive writings of missionaries prompts the current scholar to 'correct' their views on Hinduism. However the structure that still interferes with their understanding of native practices is the culture-specific response of looking for the underlying doctrines.

Imagined Practices?

Within a normative discourse all divergences from the norm are evaluated negatively. The object of a scholar's specific critique can lead us to a formulation of the precise form the normative discourse has taken at the present moment. Brian Pennington in his *Was Hinduism Invented?* (Pennington 2005) writes in his introduction that the idea of Hinduism being invented is tantamount to suggesting that what is practiced in India today is a spurious religion:

> I regard the appropriation of the authority to pronounce some version of a tradition an impostor as an illegitimate intervention of academic historiography into the sphere of religion itself, a sphere over which practitioners alone should have custody Many hundreds of millions of people today identify themselves as Hindu and resonate with the literary and ritual traditions that they associate with the idea of Hinduism. The claim that Hinduism is merely a modern invention is tantamount to a theological statement about the normative constitution of religious identity, hardly the appropriate or customary turf of the historian. (Pennington 2005: 5)

Pennington seems to be arguing that by suggesting that Hinduism is constructed one is also suggesting that the practices of Hinduism are constructed. The separation of practice and doctrine is simply not considered

as a possibility. The tone of his argument is distinctly moralistic, suggesting that the discourse he uses makes any stance vis-à-vis 'other peoples religion' evaluate-able. His central argument seems to be that the Hindus identify themselves with literary and ritual traditions of Hinduism, which leaves no space for any suggestion from the outside about the position of their religion. Again Pennington refuses to separate the literary tradition and the body of practices (he calls them rituals) from the underlying explanation that has accrued to them over the years of inter-cultural encounter with Europe. A person may acknowledge the ancient texts and may perform the practices- but it cannot be the case that the texts and practices come together as a religion called Hinduism.

We have seen that from the earliest moment of this encounter, only those practices unfamiliar to the traveller were singled out. Then an underlying doctrine was sought as an explanation for these practices. It is still these practices (now exalted to 'ritual') which are singled out as (now) having an explanation in 'ancient text' or 'caste duty'. The mix of practices seen as Hindu ritual, still consist of some quotidian practices – bathing, decorating the threshold, wearing flowers in the hair- which the early traveller found unfamiliar. Over time they have been given different kinds of doctrinal support. But these practices cannot have any experiential coherence for the native. Unless he approaches them with a prior knowledge of Hinduism, he cannot link these practices together since they are not unfamiliar to him. Thus Pennington's moral argument merely serves to demonstrate that the normative evaluative discourse that limits the west's understanding of practices is still being perpetuated in the guise of Hinduism studies.

Furthering his moral discourse Pennington argues:

> I cannot accept the position that Hinduism was invented in the 19th century by Europeans as an administrative or academic convenience that did violence to some vast array of mutually exclusive Indian religious

communities and tradition. First the claim that Britain invented Hinduism grants altogether too much power to colonialism; it both mystifies and magnifies colonial means of domination and erases Hindu agency and creativity. Second, the assertion that Hinduism is a concept and reality foreign to India prior to the arrival of the British introduces an almost irreparable disruption in Indian traditions that can only alienate contemporary Indians from their own traditions. (Pennington 2005: 5)

Repeatedly Pennington conflates the discourse of Hinduism with the existence of practices. His arguments have a highly moral tone and he criticises the process of granting 'too much power to colonialism and too little agency to the Hindu' but avoids considering the possibility that while the practices may indeed have always been a part of the native's life, the underlying explanation and unification given to these practices is the result of colonialism.

Pennington's difficulty with this proposition is that he cannot conceive how the native speaks about Hinduism and 'identifies himself as Hindu' if Hinduism is not the doctrine behind his practices. He cannot consider the possibility that since the native has no unifying doctrine behind his practices, any doctrine may be attributed to them without any difficulty. The problem only arises when there is interference with the practices, as we will see in the following chapter. This also takes care of Pennington's final moral objection that to say Hinduism is constructed is to 'alienate contemporary Indians from their own traditions'. The remarkable indifference with which large numbers of Hindus greet the idea that Hinduism is a colonial construct suggests that the proposition does not alienate them. Most objections come from academics (like Pennington who are outraged on behalf of the Hindus). However in contrast any move to ban or prohibit or 'reform' a practice even today is met with a spontaneous uproar within the practicing community. This suggests that the native is alienated from his tradition when his practices are curbed and not, as is being suggested, when the doctrines behind the practices are interrogated.

Arguing against the constructivist position is also David Lorenzen with *Who Invented Hinduism*? (Lorenzen 2006) He finds that Hinduism may be 'consolidated' 'demonised' 'mistranslated' in the colonial period but it was not invented out of thin air.

> If Hinduism is a construct or invention, then, it is not a colonial one, nor a European one, nor even an exclusively Indian one. It is a construct or invention only in the vague and commonsensical way that any large institution is, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, communism, or parliamentary democracy. In other words, it is an institution created out of a long historical interaction between a set of basic ideas and the infinitely complex and variegated socio-religious beliefs and practices that comprise and structure the everyday life of individuals and small, local groups. (Lorenzen 2006: 36)

The process of a set of practices acquiring doctrines is a long involved process which is influenced in many ways. In fact we have seen how one basic idea – all practices are guided by doctrines- guides the European through a maze of unfamiliar practices which he negotiates in complex ways, occasionally expanding the discourse or ignoring the evidence so that he may arrive at a body of doctrines which he recognises as the cause of difference between the native and himself. The only thing that Lorenzen does not confront, because he cannot escape the limits of this normative discourse is that the final product – Hinduism- is real only to the traveller, who requires it to structure his experience of difference in an inter-cultural encounter.

We now see that the evaluative discourse on practices that we identified in chapter 1 has its roots in the early moments of the inter-cultural encounter when Europe encountered the 'rest of the world'. In India the discourse expands in particular ways to produce an entity called Hinduism which may now be described as one of the constructs of this evaluative discourse. This

construct emerges to preserve the experience of the West when it encounters inter-cultural differences. The West responds to cultural differences by producing a normative evaluative discourse which renders the differences *evaluate-able*. It does so by linking doctrines to practices. The only other link we can find between the practices however is that they are unfamiliar to the European. This brings us to a serious puzzle.

A variety of native practices are linked together only in the experience of the colonial. They are a collection of all unfamiliar practices. In order to understand these practices the colonial projects a body of doctrines- first heathenism then a 'false' Hindooism and finally modern Hinduism. These are discursive constructs meant to solve a European problem in inter-cultural relations. The native does not experience any of his own practices as unfamiliar; he also does not need to explain their existence to himself. He cannot link the practices together into a common body as the European does because he does not know which of his practices will be unfamiliar to the European. If this is the case, in the early phase of colonialism, then how does the native participate so actively in debates on the 'reform' of Hinduism? How is it that the middle phase of colonialism is most famously known as the period of social reform in which natives actively participated? If the problem requiring reform arises from the experience of difference that the European has in India, then how does the native who does not have this experience participate in its solution? This is the investigation we will conduct in the next chapter.

Chapter 3
Colonial Discourse and Native Practices

In the previous chapter we have seen that colonial discourse on native practices is linked to the colonial's experience of diversity. Normative moral discourse structures colonial experience of native practices. This is a culture specific response to practices. The puzzle we arrive at now is in the arena of reform, in 19th century India. Leading members of native society spearheaded this movement for reform. These individuals employed colonial moral discourse and it was their participation in the project of reform that endorsed this moral language in relation to native practices. Further it was the response of these natives that allowed the colonial government to bring native practices within the ambit of colonial structures such as law and education. The project of reform employs a discourse on practices, which emerged to structure colonial experience of diversity. How then, does the native who lives in his own context and who does not share the colonial's experience of diversity, participate in this discourse?

In this chapter we examine the discourse of the earliest social reformer Raja Rammohun Roy. Roy is one of the earliest natives on record to have attempted to bridge the cultural divide between Europeans and the natives by employing European discourse. However within this discourse he is no longer able to articulate his experience. Roy acquires the moral language of the colonial to further the cause of reform. He participated in the Reform debates through his pamphlets in English on subjects such as Sati, monotheism, 'Hindu scriptures' and idolatry.

Roy's use of European moral discourse immediately made him acceptable to, and even sought after by the British public (in India and Britain), as an 'enlightened native'; When sati became an issue to be legislated on, the colonial government asked the culture specific question: was banning Sati interference

with the *religion* of the natives? Roy's participation in reform debates, using its moral discourse in his articles and pamphlets, made him extremely important to the colonial. His writings were welcomed as the 'enlightened native' voice, towards which all natives ought to aspire. Roy's writings were used to argue that the Sati ban would not interfere with native religion since the act found no mention in the 'Hindoo scriptures'.

Colonial moral discourse is normative and culture specific and it addresses the specific differences in culture. This discourse is the culture specific product of Europe in its encounter with cultural difference. It is normative in that the discourse places Europe as the 'norm' at the top of a moral scale. This moral discourse articulates practices as the outcome of doctrine, clearly linking texts and practices in a peculiar hierarchy. As a normative discourse it is peculiarly linked to the experience of the European, it is after all *difference* from European culture that is evaluated negatively. If one does not have the experience of being a European, how can one know which practices of the native diverge from the norm? Further, if one does not experience multiple practices in the world as practices which diverge from those of Europe, then one cannot experience the force of the normative discourse. If one does not know what (changing set of) practices constitute the norm, then one cannot evaluate any divergence from it. Thus the normative quality of the discourse cannot hook into the native's experience, as the foundation for the evaluation is absent.

The native user of European moral discourse may speak the normative discourse correctly and may even competently learn European practices, he will not however be able to *experience* diverging practices as problematic since his experience of divergence and familiarity is not the same as the Europeans. To him native practices are familiar, and European practices can be learnt; but he does not experience the native practices as immoral *because* they are different from European practices. He may learn that these practices are

immoral, in any number of independent ways. Practices may be rejected or banned following multiple negotiations. But there is a culture specific quality to isolating divergent practices as immoral because they subvert the text/practice hierarchy.

While Roy participated in reform debates using colonial discourse, other natives were simultaneously discovering that this discourse prevented them from articulating salient features of their practices. As a result there was a distinct resentment and hostility towards the colonial and towards the 'enlightened native' in whose discourse the native could not even recognise his own practices. To the native, his own practices are familiar and European practices are divergent. He may learn the latter and relinquish the former; he may learn to articulate practices in moral discourse, he may articulate preferences for European practices but he cannot *experience* native practices as divergent because to him, they are familiar. The normative colonial discourse, which articulates practices, emerges from the Europeans experience of difference and unfamiliarity in relation to native practices.

This moral discourse cannot be used to articulate salient features of the native's practices. The native's practices do not attach salience to evaluations based divergence from the practice; but his attempts to articulate salient distinctions on practices, while using colonial discourse only depicts the practices as immoral. The moral discourse of the colonial allows the native to argue with the colonial and to understand him better, it allows the native to participate in the process of colonisation, but it does not allow the native to articulate his own experience of practices.

The underlying moral principal evaluating divergence is not accessible to the native. Since he does not *experience* the divergence he first learns the moral language by *imitation*, much like a child learns expressions of a language before he has experienced what the expression articulates. However, since this is an inter-cultural interaction and not an inter-generational one, mere time or

living does not give the native the experience that he has learnt to articulate by imitation. The child's experience expands with time and soon expressions learnt imitatively are confirmed or discarded. However in the case of the native, the discourse learnt imitatively *cannot* be confirmed by experience since its evaluation of divergence is something the native will never experience.

I

In the middle of the 18th century, after the battle at Palashi was won, the British manoeuvred themselves into a position of supremacy among the various political players in Bengal. On 12th August 1765 Robert Clive was granted the Dewani of Bengal by the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. This allowed the 'Company Bahadur' to collect revenue and take charge of law and administration in what are now large parts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

Edmund Burke stated in the House of Commons that the area of Bengal and its subordinate provinces amounted to 161,978 square miles, 'considerably larger than the whole kingdom of France' (Marshall 1976: 112). The East India Company began to establish one of the earliest local bureaucracies in the British Empire. Its early administrative failure, caused largely from complete administrative inaction, became apparent during the great famine of 1770. As the number of casualties rose, it became clear that an efficient administration could have prevented the large-scale loss of human life and crucially for the company, a large scale-loss of revenue.

The Company went on to perform a more active role over the next twenty years. Warren Hastings, the governor of Bengal in 1772, was named the Governor-General of British India in 1773. He brought in a whole series of administrative changes, so that in its new avatar as administrator, the trading Company assessed and collected taxes, devised new schemes of land tenure, created a

new system of courts which applied newly codified laws, fixed the customs to be levied on trade, regulated currency and formed banks. A specialized administrative corps of Company servants were posted in what were termed 'districts' to act as Magistrates, Judges and Collectors of revenue, The Collector was the symbol, in the districts across British Bengal, of imposing British authority[1]. British Bengal with Calcutta as the capital had become the base from which the East India Company extended its influence over the rest of the sub-continent.

Introducing the Law

Around the last two decades of the 18th century, the newly formed British Administration began dealing with what it understood to be 'religious rituals' of the Hindoos. Hastings followed the Mughal practice of trying Hindus by Hindu law and Muslims by Muslim law in civil cases, and the attempt was to generate a uniform law for certain kinds of criminal cases. The colonial judicial system extended to the natives the freedom to follow religious laws in personal matters in accordance with the judicial system at 'home'. Initially, the Collector was the Judge of the Civil District Court which had Bengali Magistrates appointed by the British Administration. Appeals against the District Court in civil cases could be made at the Sadar Diwani Adalat. This was originally the higher court of the Nawab in Murshidabad. The British retained the name of this court to prevent confusion about the place for higher appeal, but shifted the court itself from Murshidabad to Calcutta.

Criminal law was dispensed under the Sadar Nizamat Adalat; the Naib-Nazim, the Nawab's Muslim judge was the head of this court and was retained by the British Administration for a period. In 1780, in an attempt to take more direct administrative control over Bengal, the Naib-Nazim of the Criminal court and the Bengali Magistrates of the civil court were removed and the judicial system

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[1] For a colourful account of Rammohun Roy's run in with a district collector see Iqbal Singh (Singh 1958: 112)

was brought completely under the Governor of Bengal, who was also the Governor-General of India.[2] Natives were kept at the periphery of the system as 'consultants' rather than participants. Hindu and Muslim 'experts' were retained in both civil and criminal courts to interpret texts, and give their opinions[3] on various cases according to local custom. The institutions of law and administration were now, for the first time, completely in British hands. This was an unprecedented moment in the history of a trading company. It is hardly surprising that the Company advised great caution all around. Any native opposition might upset the nascent administration.

For Every Problem There is an Equal and Opposite Religious Solution

The year is 1789. Nine years after the Company has taken over criminal justice, M. H. Brooke, the Collector of Shahabad, one of the districts of Bengal, has prevented a Sati ritual from being performed and has reported the matter to Governor-General Lord Cornwallis. In his reply to Brooke, Lord Cornwallis cautions him that the government does not

> deem it advisable to authorise you to prevent the observance of it (Sati) by coercive measures, or by any exertion of your official powers; as the public prohibition of the ceremony, authorised by the tenets of the religion of the Hindus, and from the observance of which they have never been restricted by the ruling power, would in all probability tend rather to increase than diminish their veneration for it, and consequently prove the means of rendering it more prevalent than it is at present. (Singh 1958: 195)

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[2]Hastings was the first governor of Bengal; when he was named the first governor-general of India, Calcutta was recognised as the first seat of British power in India. The other presidencies, Bombay and Madras, had governors who reported to the governor-general in Calcutta.

[3] The Bengali word for these consultations with the pundit in the case of Hindu laws was 'bewasta' which for a time passed into the official government documents as well. Bewasta in Bengali has far more the connotation of being an 'arrangement' or a 'solution' rather than a rule of law.

Preventing Sati by coercive measures or by exertion of force under the guise of 'official powers' might have a negative impact, which the administration is highly wary of. The letter indicates that the fear is not that the natives may revolt, but rather than obstruction might render it 'more prevalent'. The letter also indicates that the administration is aware that the natives have never been hindered in the practice of this ritual; the implication is that the Muslim Mughals also tolerated such pagan practices.

For the next 50 years the question of Sati caused furious debates within and outside the administration. Among the English speaking population the act itself was called a heinous murder; its status as a religious ritual caused genuine problems in preventing it. In 1829 Lord Bentinck signed the minute banning Sati, and in 1833 the King's council rejected the final petition against the banning of the practice. But there was only one way to do this. The debates over Sati in the reform period, centred around proving that Sati was not 'really' a religious practice since the Hindoo scriptures did not command it in any way. Arguments to explain its prevalence suggested that the priests for wilful gain, the family for property, or the native male out of superstition, had adopted this practice against the tenets of the Hindoo Scriptures. The banning of Sati was possible only after it had been understood as a religious ritual and then discredited as being a 'false' religious ritual, or a superstition.

Over the intervening years this issue grew into a bitter debate in Calcutta[4]; the site for the debates was the newly emerging 'public sphere'. This was made up of periodicals, newspapers and pamphlets,[5] which catered to the English

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[4] All the debates about Sati took place in Calcutta, the seat of British power, whether in the newspapers, journals, pamphlets or in the public meetings. The discussion went on until the early decades of the nineteenth century, although by that time the outcome of the debates had no implications for the city of Calcutta, as Lord Anstruther, the Chief justice of the Calcutta Supreme Court banned Sati in Calcutta in 1798. For the rest of British India the final ban on Sati came in 1833.

[5] This has prompted much comment by later writers on the connection between a modern point of view and a print culture. Partha Chatterjee, following Benedict Anderson, argues that the increase in print culture led to an enhanced sense of the nation inChatterjee (1999). Brian Pennington (Pennington 2005) takes the opposite position where he argues that this period

speaking audiences. Although there were many publications in Bengali and 'Hindustani' at this time, the tone of the writing suggests that the primary addressee of these papers was the government. There was an unspoken understanding that this 'public sphere' was the space within which the native could be heard by the government and the government might keep a finger on the native pulse. The administration had 'press officers' who translated and compiled the weekly 'native newspaper reports' which although written in Indian languages were structured by colonial discourse.

A native point of view, to be placed before the government would have the best chances if it were to appear in print within this 'public sphere'. The term 'public' at this moment is severely misleading since the publishing of pamphlets and newspapers was the occupation of only the very rich or of those who had some access to the English language. In most cases powerful native businessmen, European and East Indian planters and almost all the different missionary groups owned their own presses and published their own newspapers or weeklies. The government released a government gazette. Select opinions were there in public for all to read; but the newspapers had no provisions for representing general public opinion.

How to Raise a Burning Question?

The Sati motif had great potential for romance and consequently appeared in many accounts both real and imagined. Legend had it that in 1680 Job Charnock the supposed founder of Calcutta rescued a beautiful[6] Brahmin girl from the flames and later married her. In recorded history missionary William Carey conducted an early survey which suggested that in 1803 alone, within a

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finally developed what Hinduism was lacking, i.e. a central authority, by virtue of the fact that the orthodox group in Calcutta ran a newspaper called the *Samachar Chandrika* which attempted to guide Hindu practices definitively from their advice columns.

[6] The victims of Sati are almost without exception beautiful in all colonial descriptions. It is only when the woman in question is without any doubt of advanced years, that she is described as 'helpless', 'courageous' and 'dignified'. For a discussion on the gendered mode of telling the Sati story see Lata Mani's "Contentious Traditions" (Mani 1989).

30 mile radius of the capital Calcutta, 438 cases of Sati had occurred.[7] Missionaries, who were illegal on British soil till 1813 and conducted their affairs from the French, Dutch and Danish settlements around Calcutta, were particularly disturbed at what they called the ritual of 'human sacrifice' flourishing under British rule. After Mr Brooke's early effort in February 1805 Mr J.R. Elphinstone the then acting magistrate of Zillah Behar, prevented the Sati of a drugged twelve-year-old child (Majumdar 1941: 100). His report to the Nizamut Adalut at Fort William was forwarded on June 5th to the Governor-Generals office, the register of the court Mr Bayley wrote saying that the incident in Behar is cause for concern since

> Various incitements, especially that of promised happiness in another world, presented to an afflicted mind at the instant of the greatest sorrow, must too often induce a woman hastily to declare her intention of burning herself, and the fear of contempt and degradation may make her persist in the design through the very short interval which follows until its accomplishment. It cannot be doubted that persuasion is, at least sometimes, employed (though the contrary is said to be more frequent) to induce a widow to declare the design of burning herself, or to persist in it after making that declaration. (Majumdar 1941: 100)

The discussions on Sati inevitably consisted of enlisting the 'reasons' why she performed the act. Colonial discourse could argue against the practice only if they could list the reasons why it was performed and then argue that the reasons were false. Native informants repeatedly asserted that Sati was *optional* and *voluntary*, a *privilege* to be performed only by *worthy* women. Administrative language consistently found ways of arguing that the act only *appeared* to be optional and voluntary, while showing how in reality all women could be coerced into performing it.

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[7] Ashis Nandy has discussed at length the peculiar rise in the numbers of Sati in response to the British ban on it (Nandy 1975).

The natives repeatedly asserted that the widow could not be burnt without her own express desire to do so but they claimed that having once taken the 'sunkulpa'[8] to burn it would shame a widow to go back on her word. At first a number of explanations were thrown up for the widow expressing the desire at all: she is promised happiness in another world, such a promise might otherwise be ignored but presented as it is, 'at a time of great affliction' it was seen as the prime 'inducement' offered to the widow.

Conversely it was also argued that the fear of being treated badly after the death of her husband made her take the vow. A complex appeal to law was made in order to produce a 'reason' for sati. At this time the administration was aware of two legal systems at work within their Indian dominions. The Dayabhaga system was prevalent in Bengal, and the Mitakshara was followed in the upper provinces where the number of Sati's was miniscule[9]. Within the provisions of the Dayabhaga system a widow without a son inherited the whole of the deceased's property. In the Mitakshara system, a widow without a son would inherit the whole of the deceased's property *only if there was an unresolved breach* with the next in line of male heirs at the time of death.

This meant that widows in Bengal, who were not the mothers of sons, were deemed capable of inheriting and managing the property of their dead husbands. The administration interpreted this to mean that the widow in Bengal was a more likely victim of Sati since her relatives wanted her out of the way in order to get their hands on the deceased's property. In the upper provinces the widow without sons was given control over the property only if there was a breach with the deceased's family and the next male heir, at the time of death. The joint family structure ensured that the widow rarely gained control of her husband's property. This was interpreted as the 'reason' why

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[8] A term for expressing determination.
[9] See Colebrooke (1911), Nelson (1884) and Fras (1853).

unscrupulous relatives did not find the need to urge the widow of the northern provinces to participate in this 'heinous' practice.

This kind of reasoning begs a re-examination: why does a woman who inherits her husband's wealth fear being treated badly by her family? If she feels threatened over the ownership of the property, why not simply make over the inherited wealth to the next male heir in line, rather than assent to being burnt alive? The government did no studies to confirm that Sati's performed in the upper provinces were of women whose husband's died without resolving a breach with his family. There were no investigations to ascertain if the widow in Bengal declared her intention to burn out of pressure from the family. The official records merely note that persuasion is at least sometimes used to get her to announce her intention while simultaneously allowing, as Bayley does, that the relatives do also try to dissuade her on occasion from declaring her intention.

It is possible to say that reasons are generated as an 'explanation' for Sati, although they are neither examined very carefully nor confirmed by any means at all. As a result very often a practice will be given multiple, tangential and even contradictory reasons, with the caveat that at any time any one is the plausible 'real' reason behind the practice. This search for reasons, which appear 'reasonable', allows colonial discourse to reconstruct native practices into 'religious rituals'; ritual becomes a strangely mystical entity, which combines very wide and complex argumentation with an utterly simplistic understanding of action.

As a practice, Sati violated normative moral discourse by being highly divergent from existing European attitudes to widows.[10] This normative moral discourse,

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[10] Pompa Banerjee (Bannerjee 2003.), juxtaposes, for the first time the witch burnings of Europe with colonial widow burnings. She begins by asking : why did European travellers and writers fail to connect widow-burning in India with witch-burning in Europe? She further traces the diverse cultural assumptions that made it possible for Europeans to read the spectacle of widow-burning as the product of a heathen culture, which was at all times less

by the time of the Sati debates, had already expanded away from seeing Christianity as the norm, to seeing religion itself as the norm. It was at the cusp of such an expansion that the Sati debates arose. Thus we see that on the European side of the debate the missionaries still argue that Hinduism itself is false which makes practices like Sati a natural part of it, but also therefore false; Others like the colonial administrators argue that Hinduism, a religion in its own right, has been corrupted by priests (Brahmans) for private gain and practices like Sati, which do not have *scriptural sanction* have gained popularity among the ignorant masses.

Of the two positions, history views the former as the religious view and the latter as the secular or 'enlightened' view. These two positions have been taken as legitimate positions on the practice of Sati, when in fact they are merely the superimposition of European categories on Indian practices. The entire administrative argument against Sati was based on the issue of scriptural sanction; to this end the government depended heavily on those natives who could be relied on to read these 'scriptures' and confirm their 'findings'. This is the space that Rammohun Roy filled in the colonial equation on Sati.

II

In the first 50 years of administration, the East India Company chose to 'watch' the practice of Sati. It was determined not to appear intolerant of the practices of the natives after its take-over in 1757. The government was now negotiating a tightrope walk. By refusing to act swiftly it had merely aggravated the response from 'home'. In the years that followed Sati came under close scrutiny by missionaries both in England and India. There was immense public pressure from England due to strenuous campaigns. Once the Company took

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'civilised' than Europe, although as a practice, the burning of women alive was known to Europe.

over the administration of Bengal, missionary criticism was stepped up to express outrage at heathen practices continuing in areas protected by a British administration.[11] The pressure was so great that the government in England was obliged to take note of the missionary argument and call for a discussion on the matter.

The secular press in England also widely reported on Sati. It became a convenient means of attacking the monopoly over Indian trade held by the East India Company. Eventually, it became clear that pressure from 'home' on the colonial government would only increase if it continued to preside over the controversial practice (Oddie 2006). The more important Christian organisations working in India (though not on British territories until the year 1813) were the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) founded in 1792, the London Missionary Society (LMS) established in 1795 and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) established in 1799 and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) between 1814 and 1818, the Foreign Missionary Committee of the Church of Scotland (CS) in 1824, the Church of Scotland till 1843 and the Foreign Mission Committee of the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) after 1844.

It was a combination of forces that mounted pressure against Sati at 'home' rather than any real pressure on the ground. It was only when faced with repeated and strong criticism at 'home' that the Company decided to engage with the practice. The chosen course of action was to determine the status of the practice as a religious ritual. The government enquiry into the status of Sati began with asking about its religious and scriptural status. The Hindu pundit at the court was asked to answer several questions relating to Sati. In March 1805 Ghanashyam Sarma the Brahmin Pundit of the Calcutta Court clarified the Hindu legal position in a 'bewasta' according to the 'Shasters'

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[11] Oddie (2006) gives us a good overview of the 'war of the pamphlets' in England at this time. It was largely in these pamphlets that the role of the Company in tolerating such inhuman practices was ridiculed.

women who desire to join their husbands on the funeral pyre can do so
provided they have no infant children to look after, they are not pregnant
or in the period of menstruation, or are not minors. If a woman having an
infant child can make proper arrangements for the rearing of the child,
she can burn herself along with the body of her husband. But it is
against the Shastras or customs to apply drugs or intoxicants and to
make a woman lose her senses. Before a woman performs concremation
she must take a solemn oath and perform some other ceremonies. If a
woman performs the ceremony of concremation then she enjoys the
company of her husband in heaven for as many years as there are hair
on the body- for three and a half crore years. (Singh 1958: 196)

The Court informed the Government of this 'bewasta' and awaited instructions.
By December 1812 the Chief Secretary to the Government replied: the bewasta
of the Pundit was to be made public, and any Sati violating the conditions of
the bewasta was to be prevented. If the rules were not violated, the collector of
the district was to ensure that the police daroga go himself or send a
representative in the form of a mohurrir, or jemadar along with a Hindoo
burkundaz[12] to the site of the Sati. The official, a representative of Government
was to view the entire proceedings, ensure that no force was used with the
woman, ascertain the legality of the Sati on points of pregnancy, minority and
children and then write a complete report on the incident and send it along
with his regular monthly reports to Calcutta. The Government letter clarified
that this was the only measure it could take given that,

the practice, generally speaking, being thus recognized and encouraged
by the doctrines of the Hindoo religion, it appears evident that the course
which the British government should follow, according to the principle of
religious toleration already noticed, is to allow the practice in those cases
in which it is countenanced by their religion; and to prevent it in others
which it is by the same authority prohibited. (Majumdar 1941: 102)

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[12] Designated staff at the collectors office, posts occupied by 'natives of ability and
understanding' (Majumdar 1941:150).

The early stand vis-à-vis Sati was non-interference. And the government was fairly satisfied that the practice was indeed a religious ritual and the administration had no moral right to ban it. The only possibility was to ensure that it was conducted according to the rules prescribed in the 'scriptures'. The British followed a policy of religious toleration; once a practice was understood to be religious, non-interference was the only viable stand. The direct intervention into the religious activities of Natives was not judged to be 'safe' for the Government. The Sanyasi Rebellion of 1772 would have been fresh in administrative memory. It took Hastings aid from Bhutan and Benaras, several years, and a large amount of the Company's resources to put it down successfully. For a nascent administration, such expenditure and conflict was to be avoided wherever possible. The Vellore Mutiny of 1806, which erupted over intervention into Native practices led to further caution. The possibility of another revolt was very real to the government if their interventions into Native practices became a point of dispute.[13]

The involvement of representatives of the government in native practices was not well received by the people. There was a general discontent over the presence of outsiders at what was essentially a funeral ceremony. The paper-work required by the government was met with great suspicion. [14] All the

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[13] This early caution is in contrast to Lord Bentinck's comments in his minute banning Sati in 1829 where he says ".. so great is the want of courage and of vigor of character, and such the habitual submission of centuries, that insurrection or hostile opposition to the will of the ruling power may be affirmed to be an impossible danger." (Majumdar 1941: 143)

[14] The Government put in place a paper trail for every incident. The instructions to the Daroga who appeared before the woman as a representative of the Government were precise: A woman with an infant was to be informed that she may not burn unless she makes some arrangement for the child "whenever a person may undertake to do this, you (the daroga) will be careful to see that a written engagement in duplicate on stamped paper, and according to the following form, is entered into and duly attested, leaving one copy in the possession of the child's nearest of kin, or other proper person on the spot, and will transmit the other copy, with your report on the case, for the information of the magistrate." And the form reads "It being prohibited by the Shaster, that the ceremony of suttee should be performed by a woman having an infant under three years of age, unless some person will undertake to provide suitable maintenance for such a child; and (   ) being consequently prevented from burning herself with the body of her late husband, with the view of removing the above objection, I do hereby voluntarily engage to maintain, educate and support the child of/ children of the said (   ) in manner suitable to their

government moves were interpreted as attempts to prevent natives from following their practices. The Government regulation of Sati however had a direct consequence. The number of Satis increased alarmingly, and the native community alleged that the Government's intention was to convert its subjects to Christianity. The natives objected, not because Christianity was a 'false religion' but because converts to Christianity were made to give up their ancestral practices.

The Colonial government saw itself as ensuring that the ritual of Sati was being performed according to the 'Hindoo Scriptures' while the natives saw the government interest in their practices as a preliminary to converting them to Christianity. On the sudden increase in the number of Sati rituals the government at first reasoned that it was the 'greater vigilance on the part of the police, in ascertaining and reporting suttees which take place' (Majumdar 1941: 119) later it was also suggested that the two year long cholera epidemic around 1817 raised the mortality rate and consequently raised the incidence of Sati.

Mounting pressure from missionary groups made it increasingly clear that the rise in the number of cases was not the only problem; there was also a significant rise in the numbers of forced Sati rituals. There were numerous reports of women being drugged, tied down or thrown into the fire; there were also reports of unwilling women leaping out of the flames, only to be thrown back on them, or being rescued, only to die painful deaths having been severely burnt; pregnant and under-aged women were also found to be performing the ritual (Mani 1989, Majumdar 1941). These reports indicated that the rituals were being conducted in defiance of government regulations. The Government however had already made it clear that the regulations were merely

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rank in life, and my ability; and to neglect none of the duties which are incumbent on a father towards his own children. In failure whereof, I further engage to make good such sum, as the magistrate of the district, on consideration of all the circumstances of the case, shall judge it proper to direct." (Majumdar 1941: 111)

interpretations from the 'scriptures' by the (then) Hindu court pundit. The natives uniformly denied the authority of any scriptures over their right to a practice. They argued consistently that the 'ancientness' of the practice was its own justification.

Since the matter was reaching a peak with pressure from 'home' and a rise in the number of Sati related incidents the government sent the matter to the courts for a review. In 1817 the Chief Judge of the Sadar Dewani Adalat, the Supreme Court in Calcutta for civil cases, directed Mritunjay Vidyalankar its new chief pundit, to submit a report on the status of Sati in the 'Shasters'. Since Colonial discourse understood practices to be supported by doctrines it repeatedly approached the Sati problem in this way. If the practice was unequivocally commanded in the shasters there would be nothing for the government to do but ensure that it was performed according to the doctrines. However if there was any doubt about its position in the texts the government could ban the practice as illegal since those who followed it only did so out of ignorance about their own religion. The native argument that the practice of Sati was justified by its ancientness was seen as another example of the 'backwardness' or the lack of a 'properly developed' religious sentiment. In other words the colonial government dismissed the argument based on precedent as a mistaken one in relation to ritual. It attempted to 'correct' the native by asserting that the only 'true' rituals of any religion are those prescribed by scripture. Colonial discourse could only approach Sati as a religious problem.

Thus the report of Pundit Sarma of 1805 was set aside and the new court pundit was urged take another look at Sati in the shasters. Pundit Sarma had only managed to come up with the various sections in the shasters which mentioned Sati. His report combined stories of sati with descriptions or characteristics of the ideal sati and other instances where sati is mentioned.

His search in the shasters did not yield a section which expressly commanded or forbade the practice.

Vidyalankar's report a few years later was more in line with what the British were looking for. From his reading of the same shasters he produced a report which took the first step into making the practice of Sati *evaluate-able*. The Pundit reported that apart from discussions on sati the shasters contain guidelines for a life of chaste widowhood:

> in a person who is careless about absorption, and who is desirous to attain a paradise of temporary and inconsiderable bliss, the act of anoogamun[15] is justifiable as is the performance of any other voluntary act: but from this reasoning it appears evident, that leading a life of austerity is preferred as the superior alternative and the act of anoogumun is held to be of inferior merit. (Ray1985: 87)

The process of making a practice evaluate-able has very little to do with the nature of the practice itself. Within the pundit's bewastha the only way to show that Sati was *bad* is to show that some other practice was *better*. Both Sati and 'austere' widowhood then are acceptable but opposite practices for the Hindu widow. An 'austere' life of chaste widowhood may be of *more* merit than concremation or *anoogamun*. The result of Sati is claimed to be 'a paradise of temporary… bliss' while the chaste widow it is implied may look forward to more permanent happiness in the after-life. Based on the likely results of each act and on the projected 'benefits' to be gained from the act the writer deduces that one is *better* than the other. The practice is articulated in terms of other related practices and the reasons for the practices as well as the results of the practice.

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[15] The practice of the widow burning with the body of the husband, distinct from burning with an object belonging to the dead husband, but on his actual funeral pyre. Both were acceptable methods of performing Sati.

This ruling has a completely different tone than the one by Pundit Sharma which was presented a little over ten years earlier. Pundit Sharma did not compare the act of Sati to any other act of the widow. He merely pointed out the circumstances in which a woman *may* and may not perform Sati, rather than answer the question as to whether she *ought* to or not. The two different readings from the pundits make it clear that the 'Hindoo scriptures' could be read in multiple ways.[16] However the culture specific nature of the link between scripture and practice remains unquestioned. Although the native argues that his practice is justified since it is based on precedent, the colonial government insists that its justification must come from a 'correct interpretation of the scriptures'.

There is also a remarkable passage in the same tract which speaks about the nature of discussion of practices in the 'shasters'. This passage was entirely ignored in the discussion around the bewastha, and has since then has seen very little attention or analysis. The Pundit says:

> the directions of the Shasters on this head (the act of anumarana) apply
> only to such as are afflicted with pain arising from disease or separation,
> as consider death preferable to the sufferings they endure; and come
> forward, voluntarily, with a firm resolution, of putting a period to their
> existence. The act of dying is not enjoined; but merely the mode of it, as
> entering the fire, falling from a mountain etc. The shasters say, if you are
> obstinately bent on death, at all events, put an end to yourself by such
> and such means; as a father, after all his admonitions to the contrary,
> had failed of producing the desired effect, would point out to a son, who
> was obstinately bent on visiting a distant country, the proper path he
> should pursue. These observations apply equally to the suicide, (effected

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[16] Curiously the administration never looked back at the older bewastha to see how its pundit may have got things wrong. How was it that Pundit Sharma felt Sati is sanctioned by the scriptures when pundit Vidyalankar felt it was not? And how can both have been right? If such an exercise had been undertaken it would have allowed the administration to see that the questions were inappropriate to the texts they were being asked of.

by falling from a mountain, drowning, etc) in the case of persons afflicted with incurable diseases. (Ray 1985: 89-90)

Discussions of practices in the 'shasters' have the quality of prescribing the *best way of doing something* and not the best thing to do. In other words, the Shasters do not prescribe a practice, having decided on a particular practice, the person may turn to the shasters to learn how best to do it. This is a unique relationship to practices which the colonial administration does not recognise. By February 1820 Governor-General Hastings had to admit in a letter, to the Court of Directors in England that,

> we are reluctantly led to express our apprehensions that the greater confidence with which the people performed the rite under the sanction of government, as implied or avowed in the circular orders already in force, combined with the excitement of religious bigotry by the continual agitation of the question, might have tended to augment rather than to diminish the frequency of these sacrifices; and that if (not withstanding the cessation of the epidemic disorder) the reported number if suttees should continue to augment, or should not indeed be diminished, the last mentioned causes of the progressive increase since 1815 would acquire a high degree of probability; and that it might eventually become proper to prohibit officers of government from exercising that active interposition, in cases of this description, which had for some years past been authorised by the government. (Majumdar 1941: 119-20)

The discussion of the practice at government levels, what Hastings delicately calls the 'continual agitation of the question', seemed to be having adverse effect. There was a marked increase in the practice in direct relation to the government's interest in it. In other words, when the native felt that government interference might affect his practice his response was to continue practising with increased vigour.

The figures were indeed alarming. In 1815 the number of officially recorded Satis in districts around the Presidency of Fort William in Calcutta was 378. In 1816 this number rose to 442, by 1817 it was 707 and in 1818, by which time the government had begun to get very anxious, the number had reached 839 (Majumdar 1941: 119) Hastings and his compatriots across British Bengal were beginning to suspect that the government circulars were increasing rather than decreasing the number of Sati rituals being performed. The actual rise in the number of these rituals was concentrated in and around the Presidency area. This increase was enough to alarm the government into taking some action. The letter from Hastings drew this reply from the Court of Directors on June 17, 1823.

> it is to be apprehended that, where the people have not previously a very enthusiastic attachment to the custom, a law which shall explain to them the cases in which it ought not to be followed, may be taken as a direction for adopting it in all others.... It is moreover, with much reluctance that we can consent to make the British Government, by a specific permission of the Suttee, an ostensible party to the sacrifice; we are averse also to the practice of making British courts expounders and vindicators of the Hindoo Religion, when it leads to acts which, not less as Legislators than as Christians we abominate.(Majumdar 1941: 121)

The colonial position vis-à-vis Sati had reached a deadlock. No administrator could sit by and watch as his subjects participated in 'human sacrifice'. On the other hand the only thing he was allowed to do was to propagate the precise conditions under which Sati was illegal, thus indicating that it was legal in all other cases, and by extension propagating the very ritual he opposed.

On the other hand, the relationship between subject and administrator was very new and native reaction was very often a puzzle to the nascent colonial administration. The court of directors were anxious that the native might mistake the concern for the rules of sati being satisfied as government interest

in sati being performed. They note with concern the inability of the native to follow a simple moral argument viz- rituals which are not prescribed in the scriptures are 'false'. They are surprised by the almost total silence on the part of the native to the moral arguments they forward, and utterly taken aback by the native showing his defiance by *practising* instead of *protesting.*

The colonial moral argument against Sati, which was in circulation for more than half a century finally found a taker in the (initially) lone voice of Rammohun Roy. His response to the Sati issue, in terms of moral arguments employing colonial moral discourse, became indispensable to the colonial government. Roy became the 'proof' of the validity of their arguments. An 'educated' native had at last heard and followed their moral argument. The native himself was now making the moral argument against Sati: this proved that he could 'learn' what the west 'knew' about native practices. Roy's entry into the moral discourse of the west is by imitation. His attempts to defend his tradition within this moral discourse necessarily entail a criticism of native practices. His arguments centre around the absence of 'scriptural sanction' for Sati. In order to assert this he translates several ancient Indian texts which he claims are Hindoo scriptures, and argues for an ancient 'monotheism' (at par with Christianity, if not better!) on the bases of these texts. Roy favoured the ban on Sati and often called for strong measures to be taken against the perpetrators of this crime. He also wrote extensively in newspapers and produced pamphlets quoting extensively from the bewastha of pundit Vidyalankar.

By 1829 political circumstances allowed Lord Bentinck to declare the practice of Sati illegal. His minute briefly addressed the legality of the ban itself, and then dwelt at length on the reasons why this ban would not result in violent backlash. The question uppermost in the minds of the colonial administrator was what effect the ban would have on Native-Colonial relations. As it happened there was no violent backlash. Instead the native participated in the

legal process, which permitted him to challenge the ban. The 'orthodox party' organised a lawyer who was sent to England to make an appeal on their behalf to the Privy Council, which was the final appeal to the King.

Rammohun Roy embarked on a much-anticipated trip to England at the same time with the intention of blocking any such appeal. The anti-Sati bill was finally passed in England in 1833. Between 1829 when the orders banning Sati were issued by Lord Bentinck and the final passage of the bill at the Kings council in 1833 there were extensive debates on the issue. The addressee of these debates was uniformly the government to whom both the 'enlightened' and the 'orthodox' native appealed; even when written in Bengali, the debates followed the moral discourse of the government, arguing about whether or not it was 'just' to seek sanction for practices in texts. Attempts to articulate native distinctions on practices within this discourse only served to make the native sound immoral. Thus later historians dismiss these 'orthodox' voices in the debate with ease, suggesting, various 'reasons' for this immorality. As the debate proceeded, colonial moral discourse became the only language in which to voice an opinion about the practice of Sati in the 'public sphere'. It soon became obvious that the discourse itself would not allow the native to articulate his distinctions freely. The example with Sati showed the native that the 'process' put into place by the colonial regime was deeply flawed. When the natives protested Bentinck's ban their objections were dismissed as immoral; colonial discourse had already cast Sati as a religious problem, and hence arguments questioning the need for scriptural sanction were taken to be the last resort of the unscrupulous. Any native who attempted to speak of practices handed down by custom rather than scripture was immediately judged to be ignorant or worse, immoral.

III

Enter the Reformer

Rammohun Roy was born in 1774,[17] to a family of Brahmins who served under the Nawabs of Murshidabad. His great-grand-father, grand father and father all served at the court of the Nawab. Before the battle of Palashi, Roy's was one of the better connected families within the area of his native Radhanagar. Roy's father shifted loyalties from the court of the Nawab to the Raja of Burdhwan well before the battle that wiped out the Nawab. During Roy's early years he would have witnessed the changing structures of power which established the rule of the company Bahadur.[18] This was the period in which the British were attempting to establish some semblance of efficient administration after the great famine of 1770. The capital had just been shifted from Murshidabad where the Nawabs ruled, to Calcutta, the first city of the British Empire.

The son of a prosperous household at a time of uncertain shifts, the young Roy was given the traditional education for boys in his family. Initially educated in Bengali and Persian in his native Radhanagar, he was soon sent to Patna, where he pursued Arabic and Persian, a requirement at that time for anyone wishing to hold public office. His educational career continued in Banaras, which was the home of his maternal grandfather, a renowned Sanskrit scholar. He was sent there to study Sanskrit, in order to enable him to officiate at ceremonies as a Brahmin, should some suitable public office fail to come by.

Hagiographic accounts of Roy embellish his early life with extraordinary mental abilities and exceedingly rigorous learning, suggesting that at a very young age, he had read Aristotle and Euclid, apart from Sufi philosophy, before going on to

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[17] There is some disagreement among scholars and 1772 is sometimes cited as the year of birth.

[18] For accounts of Roy's life see Brahmo Samaj ed (1934), Carpenter (1866), Chatterjee (1881), Dobson (1962), Ghose (1901), Sastri (1912), Barua (1988), Bose (1959), Heimsath (1964), Joshi ed. (1975), Majumdar (1941), Mukherjee (1968), Sarkar (1975), Sarkar (1946) and Singh (1958).

master the Vedanta and the Upanishads.[19] This prodigious capacity for learning, it is suggested set him 'on a search for truth'; when he returned from his studies to his father's house, "he was a determined enemy of idolatry and the religious evils of his country" (Ghose 1901: iii). The moral discourse is clear, it is *because* Roy had the benefits of 'wider learning' (western and *ancient* Hindu texts) that he was able to reject idolatry (the uniform term used for puja in all reform discourse). Iqbal Singh's later biography also suggests that Roy's early education was more in keeping with the average young Brahmin boy's, and did not include the Greek, Hebrew and Latin of the hagiographic accounts.

On completing his studies, Roy returned to the family home where he participated in the family business. He also made independent efforts to generate his own wealth, which he invested in more land and property. He established a fairly stable and prosperous business. At some point he fell out with his family and left the family home. He traveled in the upper provinces for a spell before returning to Calcutta, the first city of the Empire. By this time Roy had learnt how to participate in the company Bahadur's fast changing colonial economy. He very often had company officials in his debt in his role as a money-lender. Very quickly he and a few other natives like Dwarkanath Tagore benefited from trade contracted under the protection of the Colonial administration. He acquired several prime pieces of property in and around Calcutta. In this period he set up his base in Calcutta severing all links with Radhanagar.

Hagiographic accounts tell us that a disagreement with his father over the 'idolatrous' practices of his family led to his departure from home. Roy is said to have lived away from the family home for the next ten years or so unwilling to compromise on his spiritual principles and unable to accept his family's continued idolatry.[20] These accounts claim that he traveled west from Bengal,

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[19] J.C. Ghose (1901) and Collet Dobson (1900) are among those who prefer this version, while Iqbal Singh (1958) is more sceptical.

[20] Carpenter, Dobson, Ghose, Bose and Chatterjee are among those favour this account.

and eventually wandered across to the northern country of Tibet, from where he returned determined to correct the misconceptions about religion his family and countrymen were laboring under. Singh argues that given the time it took to travel, he could not have travelled as far north as Tibet since he periodically resurfaced in Calcutta. It is much more likely that the young Roy travelled as far west as Benaras to his maternal grand-father, and from there he managed his still growing business empire spreading across the neighbourhood of Calcutta. (Singh 1958: 44). Business rather than spiritual motives could as well have motivated Roy's move away from his father's home.

Roy's father in Radhanagar was caught up in a ruinous litigation against his former employers the Raja of Burdhwan. With the death of the old queen Maharani Vishnukumari, her son Raja Tej Chand was free to charge the elder Roy with embezzlement that he had long suspected. The Roy family's fortunes were on the decline, as Roy's father and elder brother were sent to debtors' prison for financial irregularities. Records show that Roy bought vast properties in Calcutta even during the time that his father and elder brother were sentenced to prison. He also took the precaution of moving some of his most valuable property to the names of some faithful acquaintances in order to protect himself from the consequences of his family's financial difficulties (Singh 1958: 56). On the death of his father, Roy performed a magnificent Shradh ceremony alone in Calcutta, while his younger brother and mother performed one at the ancestral home in Radhanagar.

While Roy was a businessman, trader and money-lender in his own right, he also worked indirectly for the British government, with an East India Company official named John Digby. On many occasions Roy sought Digby's intervention for a permanent appointment with the company, however, his service with the company ended with Digby's (Singh 1958: 57). The desire for an official position was obviously for reasons other than a livelihood since throughout this entire period Roy continued to amass enormous wealth. Sale deeds of prime

properties all across Calcutta and Jagirs in the neighboring areas show that Roy could not possibly have needed the government job for the money (Majumdar 1941). He could reasonably however, have needed it for the status it brought. In the court of the Nawab of Murshidabad or the Raja of Burdhwan, political status was gained from the person of the ruler: to be permitted into the inner court and be invited to sit with the ruler himself sent clear signals of one's status to all concerned. In the fast changing economic structure one could only claim proximity to the anonymous company Bahadur by being seen with one of its employees.

Roy's education equipped him with Sanskrit and Persian the classical languages of learning in his context. However, he understood very early the value of English and the kind of currency it was soon to have. At the age of twenty-two, Roy began to learn the English tongue. His actual felicity in the language has been a question of much discussion among his biographers with differing accounts as to how well he could write or speak in it.[21] Whatever his fluency, during his later life, it was the English writings and translations that brought him into the public eye. He was an 'educated' native because he could participate in public debates using colonial moral discourse. At the earliest moment this discourse was available only in the English language, before native users began to coin terms for the alien concepts, or stretch existing concepts to accommodate the appraisive terms of this discourse.

In 1814 at the age of forty, Roy retired from active service. He was "busily engaged in studying the shasters, and in controversies with the Brahmins" (Ghose 1901: iv); and he "gave up all worldly avocations, and engaged in religious culture and in the investigation of truth" (Ghose 1901: vi). This was the most public period of his life, during which he set up two newspapers, and

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[21] Ghose, Dobson, Carpenter and Chatterjee disagree variously as to his felicity in English – minimally conversational ability to absolutely fluent. Ghose also asserts that he had learnt Greek and Hebrew, in order to understand the missionaries better, but almost all other biographers agree that this is highly unlikely.

generated in them debates on tradition and reform, focusing largely on questions of Idolatry, Monotheism and Sati. This period saw him translating what was now being called the 'scriptures' of the Hindus and his translations drew enormous flak from the native community. Sanskrit scholars claimed that his translations of the Upanishads and the Vedanta were unrecognizable and impertinent.

On the other hand he was also embroiled in a controversy with the Sehrampur[22] missionaries over his arguments about Christianity. When the missionaries refused to publish his writings he acquired his own printing press and published tracts and pamphlets as well as two journals, *Mirat-Ul-Akhbar* and the controversial *Sambad Kumudi*. The *Kumudi* began in 1819 and carried in its pages Roy's take on many of the most intense controversies of the time. Its interlocutors were the *Samachar Darpan* begun in 1818 and run by the Sehrampur missionaries[23] -the most famous of whom were William Ward, William Carey and Rev. Marshman- as well as the *Samachar Chandrika* begun in 1821 and run by a few influential people of Calcutta who later became known in reform scholarship as 'the orthodox party'; it was this group that formed the Dharma Sabha in order to oppose the proposed ban on Sati.

The debates in these newspapers initially showed a variety of distinctions on practices. The native responses show a pattern of change; tangential responses, clearly lacking the moral structure of colonial discourse become fewer in number. And the moral language itself expands and extends over different facets of the debates. In other words, these debates become the first public site where the native 'learns' colonial moral discourse. As the debates proceed, his hold over the terminology improves and colonial moral debates begin to look seamless. Often we find Roy resorting to a large number of pseudonyms, or even publishing his views in the names of his trusted

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[22] Sehrampur was a Danish colony outside Calcutta from where missionaries had been operating since 1799.
[23] The mission also ran an English language journal the *Friend of India.*

employees, in order to give the impression of a larger network of natives who participated in the debates using colonial discourse. This was not an unusual strategy at the time and writers both native and European often resorted to pseudonyms and aliases when writing on controversial matters. This often gave the impression of a wider debate.

Roy spent the rest of his life writing and publishing on matters related to reform. In 1829 William Bentinck the governor-general of British India passed a law banning Sati. The objection raised by the Dharma Sabha was directed to the Kings council in London. The Sabha hired a lawyer, Francis Bathie, and raised money to ensure that they were well represented when the matter came up before the council. Roy decided to go himself and support the ban. He arrived in England in 1831, and lived there till he died in 1833 a year before he turned sixty. He did however have the satisfaction of seeing the Kings council reject the appeal from the Dharma Sabha. This confirmed the banning of the native practice of Sati in colonial India.

A Religious Discussion Begins

Rammohun began his publishing career with several translations of Hindu 'scriptures'. Each would be first published in Bengali and sometimes also in 'Hindustanee'[24] and then quickly followed up by an English translation. These pamphlets were not bought or sold, but largely published and distributed free of charge at the writer's own cost. Each of Roy's translations was introduced to the public along with his express reasons for undertaking the project. The first, in 1816, was an eleven page text with an introduction elaborately titled *An Abridgment of the Vedant, or the Resolution of all the Veds; The most Celebrated and Revered work of Brahmunical Theology Establishing the Unity of the Supreme Being; and that He Alone is the Object of Propitiation and Worship.*

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[24] Rather than modern Hindi this was closer to Urdu.

These texts are the earliest examples of a native using colonial discourse to speak of his own practices. In Bengali, Hindustanee and English, the text displayed the concepts and evaluation of colonial discourse. As a result, the language was severely limiting, preventing Roy from articulating many pertinent distinctions. The introduction to Roy's text is addressed to "The Believers of the Only True God". It discusses the reasons and necessity for the translation. Roy argues that Hindoos and Brahmans in particular cannot justify the idolatry they continue to practice since "when questioned on the subject, in place of adducing reasonable arguments in support of their conduct, they conceive it fully sufficient to quote their ancestors as positive authorities!" (Ghose 1901: 3). Employing this discourse does not allow Roy to question the need for reason behind a practice; on the other hand it ensures that the justification of practice by precedent or custom appears unreasonable.

In the text Roy says that Hindoo theology is contained in the Vedas, which are metaphorical and therefore may be confusing or contradictory. This led to Vyasa composing the Vedanta[25], which is an abstract of the Vedas which also reconciles the texts which appear to be contradictory. This Vedant has always been of equal authority as the Vedas; "But from its being concealed within the dark curtain of the Sanskrit language, and the Brahmans permitting themselves alone to interpret, or even to touch any book of the kind, the Vedanta, although perpetually quoted, is little known to the public:" (Ghose 1901: 3). Roy identifies this text as the 'scripture' for the Hindoos and argues that the language and the Brahmans had so far made this text inaccessible to the 'public'. Roy's arguments coincide with European ideas of Indian religion and scripture; he writes as if the practices of Hindoo's are recorded in these texts and that the corruption of Brahmins has prevented the masses from a

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[25] Some traditions recognise Vyasa as the author of what is now called the Brahma Sutras, a difficult text, resolving possible contradictions in the Vedas. The text consists of five hundred and fifty-five lines said to be exceedingly cryptic without supporting commentaries. The aphorisms are divided into four chapters. Roy's text does not follow the structure of the original. It is a twenty-eight paragraph text which refers to some aphorisms in no particular order, while also bringing in examples and quotations from the four Vedas.

true understanding of religion. In this process he too adds to the misconception that the Vedas and the Vedant are Hindoo scriptures.

Roy's Bengali and Hindustani translations attempt to correct the problem he cites; the English translation is released so that the European community who has raised the issue as a problem in the first place might feel that an error is being corrected. This is the first time the 'scriptures' of the Hindu's are translated independently by a native. All translations hitherto have been by court pundits or Orientalists and their Munshis. Roy further argues that often Europeans who wish to "soften the features of Hindoo idolatry" are inclined to suggest that all "objects of worship are considered by their votaries as emblematical representations of the Supreme Divinity!" (Ghose 1901: 4). Roy insists that "the Hindoos of the present day have no such views of the subject, but firmly believe in the real existence of innumerable gods and goddesses, who possess, in their own departments, full and independent power;" (Ghose 1901: 4).

Roy argues that idolatry occurs because "to propitiate them and not the true god, are temples erected and ceremonies performed"; and finally he says "there is no doubt however and it is my whole design to prove, that every rite has its derivation from the allegorical adoration of the true Deity;" (Ghose 1901: 4). This is how Roy justifies Hindoo idolatry. The Veda's contain the 'true' practices of the Hindoo's while durga puja, or ganesh puja is a 'false' practice generated by the corruption of priests and the remoteness of the Sanskrit language in which the 'scriptures' are written. Even in contemporary India, with at least three hundred years of translations from Sanskrit to every Indian language and into English such a formulation of the relationship between the Vedas and common pujas sounds intuitively wrong.

Roy argues that pujas, called 'idol worship' in colonial discourse emerge when the common man takes literally the allegorical descriptions of the 'scriptures'. The agenda of his translation is to demonstrate these confusions in allegory.

He further argues that Orientalists try and mitigate the problems with Hindoo idolatry by arguing that the native idolater sees Divinity in the object itself. He considers this erroneous and argues instead that the idolater on the other hand believes that each of the objects of worship are gods with full and independent power. With this translation of the Vedanta, Roy claims to show that the present idolatry is a perversion of 'original' Hindoo thought. This is the only way that Roy can make a distinction between 'ancient Hindooism' and the present 'corrupt Hindooism'.

This distinction is a very crucial one for Roy as his aim is to locate native practices within the evaluative discourse of the colonial. His writings are an attempt to reject the uniform negative evaluation of the native. Within this discourse he can only reject it by accepting the appeal to history, which allows him to place the 'true' practices of Hindooism in the past. Thus he argues that the 'true' practices of the natives can be positively evaluated and the practices being negatively evaluated are merely the 'false' practices made corrupt over time. In this way Roy engages with the colonial on the matter of practices, using colonial discourse. However in order to positively argue for native practices he must submit to the structure of the colonial argument which sees practices as underlined by scripture.

Roy dwells on "the inconvenient, or rather injurious rites introduced by the peculiar practice of Hindoo idolatry which more than any other pagan worship, destroys the texture of society" he argues that compassion for his countrymen, compelled him to "use every possible effort to awaken them from their dream of error"; thus "by making them acquainted with their scriptures" he would "enable them to contemplate with true devotion the unity and omnipresence of nature's God" (Ghose 1901:5). He ends with the acknowledgement that his activities have brought censure from those "whose prejudices are strong, and whose temporal advantage depends upon the present system" (Ghose 1901: 5) but that he is able to bear such censure tranquilly.

Roy's translation of the Vedanta, bears a single minded agenda:[26] it compiles and translates freely, lines which are in agreement with Roy's general thesis about the nature of God. As an example:

> The Vedas not only call the celestial representations deities, but also in many instances give the divine epithet to the mind, diet, void space, quadruped animals, slaves, and flymen… The Veda has allegorically represented God in the figure of the Universe, *viz.*, "fire is his head, the sun and moon are his two eyes etc. And also the Veda calls God the void space of the heart, and declares him to be smaller than the grain of paddy and barley": but from the foregoing quotations neither any of the celestial gods, nor any existing creature, should be considered the Lord of the Universe, because the third chapter of the vedanta explains the reason for these secondary assertions thus: "by these appellations of the Veda, which denote the diffusive spirit of the Supreme Being equally over all creatures by means of extension, his omnipresence is established": so the veda says, "all that exists is indeed God" *i.e.*, nothing bears true existence excepting God, "and whatever thing that appears to us, relies on the existence of God. It is indisputably evident that none of these metaphorical representations, which arise from the elevated style in which all the Vedas are written, were designed to be viewed in any other light than mere allegory. Should individuals be acknowledged to be separate deities, there would be a necessity for acknowledging many independent creators of the world which is directly contrary to common sense, and to the repeated authority of the Veda.[27] (Ghose 1901: 10-11)

Roy's arguments are centrally concerned with the Supreme Being and its nature; he is guided by the evaluative distinctions of colonial discourse and interprets the ancient texts within this discourse. Idolatry is the first and most serious charge against the native in colonial discourse. Within colonial

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[26] His contemporaries, among them Court Pundit Mritunjay Vidyalankar, argued that the translations are more creative than selective or representative. (Ghose 1901)

[27] For the excerpted quotation Roy cites his sources: the Mukunda and Chandogya Upanishads as well as the 38th aphorism from the 2nd section of the 3rd chapter of the Vedanta.

discourse Roy cannot challenge the concept of idolatry without drawing moral censure. In order to defend Hindooism he must accept present practices as idolatry, the corruption of an earlier monotheism. His entire thrust in the interpretation of the Vedanta is to show that the text identifies a 'Supreme Being' who is the god of the monotheists.

Then Roy argues that 'ancient Hindooism' was monotheistic and current practices of 'idolatry' are caused merely by human corruption. One of the means of this corruption was that allegory was mistaken to be literal. Roy's introduction argued that since the texts were never translated and Sanskrit was not commonly known, people mistook the allegorical references to *attributes* of the Supreme Being, as the features of the being itself. He further explains that:

> Several other texts of the same nature are not real commands to worship... persons and things, but only direct those who are unfortunately incapable of adoring the invisible Supreme Being, to apply their minds to any visible thing rather than allow them to remain idle. (Ghose 1901: 13)

Suggesting that the ancient texts allowed those with a narrower vision to 'apply their minds' to real objects in the world, as this was 'better' than the minds remaining idle. It is in interpretations such as these that Roy betrays an alternate set of distinctions, which appear as inconsistencies within colonial discourse but are in fact the distinctions from Roy's native context. The Christian argument against native practices is that they are idolatrous as they are performed in adoration of 'false' gods. The gods are 'false' because they are given human attributes and form, reducing the omnipotent to representations with limited qualities. This worship is radically false argued the missionaries and 'conversion' is the attempt to correct this 'false' perception of god by the misled soul who will then worship the 'true' god.

From Roy's distinctions in the quotation above it is clear that Roy does not as yet have conceptual clarity on concepts like Scripture, Worship and God from colonial moral discourse. His argument suggests that *scripture itself* allows those 'who are unfortunately incapable of adoring the invisible Supreme Being' to 'apply their minds to any visible thing rather than allow them to remain idle'. Arguments against idolatry do not engage the mind of the individual. The appeal is made to the soul, and all souls have the capacity to worship god in his 'true' form. Those who do not do worship the true god are either misled by the corrupt or corrupt themselves. The appraisive term 'idolatry' does not require any distinction of the ability of the human mind. This is Roy's first publication in colonial discourse and it is clear that he is still learning its distinctions. Roy continues to translate and publish ancient texts as well as his own opinions in pamphlets through the next fifteen years. His works are an example of how colonial discourse was initially acquired by the native.

It is not very surprising that Roy's text provoked almost no reaction among the native population largely because far from being widely read, the few Bengali copies printed were distributed among Roy's own employees. The translated text was eventually re-published in the February 1816 edition of the *Government Gazette* and a review appeared in the *Missionary Resister*. It was the English text which gained widest circulation, but that was of necessity among the European community and the small English speaking native population of the time.

There was a curious reaction in the Madras presidency from a Mr Ellis a member at that time, of the Madras Literary Society and possibly an orientalist (Majumdar 1941: xx). At a meeting of the Asiatic Society Mr Ellis read a paper on literary forgery or religious imposition. This paper compared Roy's translation of the Vedanta to the spurious French work *L'Ezour Vedam*, which had famously reached the hands of Voltaire in 1761. The *Calcutta Monthly Journal* reported the event stating that Mr Ellis gave an elaborate analysis of

the real Vedas and compared them with the forgeries. He further stated that "the whole scope of the Pseudo-vedas is evidently the destruction of the existing belief of the Hindoos, without regarding consequences, or caring whether a blank be substituted for it or not" (Majumdar 1941: xx). His primary objection is that the translations (both Roy's and the earlier French version of the Yajur Ved) are not true to the originals, and seem to have a mischievous ulterior motive.

Religious Conversations and Heathen Interlocutors

In 1820 Rammohun Roy published a tract called *The Precepts of Jesus:* it was subtitled 'The Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament ascribed to the Four Evangelists with translations into Sungscrit and Bengalee' (Ghose 1901). The publication of this tract sparked off a controversy, which lasted more than four years. The main participants in this controversy were the Christian missionaries of Sehrampur on the one hand and Roy on the other, though over time many voices pitched in on either side. The Baptist Mission press, in Calcutta, owned by the Sehrampore Missionaries published this tract as well as the subsequent defence of it. Thereafter they refused to publish any more of Roy's writings in connection with the same subject compelling Roy to acquire a press of his own for his subsequent publications.

Till the publication of this tract, Roy's relations with the Sehrampore missionaries had been excellent. Many private letters from the missionaries indicate that they found Roy to be an intelligent and thoughtful Native. On religious matters they often had many satisfactory discussions; the missionaries were in fact convinced that Roy was most likely to convert to Christianity in the very near future. This conversion was awaited with much anticipation as the mission so far had a singular lack of 'respectable' native converts. The conversion of Roy would signal the success of their theological arguments instead of their charity. The fond hope of Roy's impending

conversion was dashed with the arrival of this tract. The tract encapsulated and highlighted exactly those points on which the missionaries and Roy had never agreed. The mission published Roy's tract, and their views on it, in the hope that a public confrontation might have more of an effect on Roy than the private conversations had; failing that, at least the inherent differences between Roy and the missionaries might become a matter of open knowledge.

Roy's text was an innocuous collection of sayings from the New Testament. In the introduction he explained his intentions in producing this book saying that it was important to lay "before his fellow creatures the words of Christ" without going into any doctrines. Further, in justifying his selection of only precepts to the exclusion of all else for publication he says:

> moral doctrines, tending evidently to the maintenance of the peace and harmony of mankind at large, are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion, and intelligible alike to the learned and to the unlearned. This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God... and is so well fitted to discharge of their various duties to God, to themselves, and to society that I cannot but hope the best effects from its promulgation in the present form. (Roy 1906: 485)

Roy's introduction to the tract hold several claims. It suggests that reading his excerpts from the Bible will benefit the natives who otherwise would not have read it. In this tract the teachings of Christ come in the form of simple moral sayings without any doctrinal embellishment. It says 'miracles' and other historical passages have been deliberately left out and only sayings actually telling men how to live have been retained. His work gave rise to a storm of controversy not for the excerpts he compiled but for his intention in publishing them.

He explained his decision to publish the excerpts: "I feel persuaded that by

separating from the other matters contained in the new Testament, the moral precepts found in the book, these will be more likely to produce the desirable effect of improving the hearts and minds of men of different persuasions and degrees of understanding." (Ghose 1901:11). It was precisely this attitude to what Roy called "other matters" that was the root of the missionaries objections. Roy's intention was to put before Calcutta's reading public the general precepts of Christianity, while omitting entirely the theology and the specific force of authority behind these precepts, the very features in fact which make them 'true'.

Roy argued that the precepts would help his countrymen to lead happy and peaceful lives. The Bible itself, he writes, might not have this direct and simple effect because "historical and some other passages are liable to doubts and disputes of free thinkers and anti-Christians". The passages he excerpts do not include the history or the miracles as they could be disputed as to meaning, interpretation and factual accuracy leading to conflict in the readers mind. In addition he argues that the miracles related in the Bible are "much less wonderful than the fabricated tales handed down to the native of Asia, and consequently would be apt at best to carry little weight with them." (Ghose 1901:12) Roy felt that Indian readers were far less likely to be impressed with Biblical 'miracles' in comparison to their own large stock of awe-inspiring stories. The stories of the natives fulfil the function of inspiring awe, which makes the stories of the Christian miracles unnecessary for them.

The missionaries argue that the miracles are a 'proof' of the greatness of god, which is *why* one must follow the precepts. To them the precepts alone, without the substantiating evidence of why they must be followed, are of no use to a heathen. Roy does not see this distinction immediately because he does not attach practice to doctrine. He sifts out the precepts which could lead to good action- thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt love thine enemy- he is satisfied that this is enough for a "peaceful and happy life"

(Ghose 1901: 488). The question – why should one follow these precepts? does not occur to him. Nor, as it turns out, does the answer- because they are the will of almighty god who can perform miracles if he chooses. This indicates Roy's incomplete grasp over the nature of scriptures and the conceptual entity that colonial discourse calls god.

A review of this work by reverend Schmidt and an editorial by Reverend Marshman both published in the *Friend of India* contained many harsh remarks against Roy. Schmidt insisted:

> the supposition of the moral sayings being sufficient for salvation, independent of the dogmas, is... radically false; and... it is the presumption of (the compiler) to think himself qualified to judge, independently of the Divine Teacher, what sort of instruction is advantageous for the happiness of mankind. (Singh 1958: 228)

Roy's claim is that happiness could come from following the moral sayings, or performing the ethical actions enjoined in the text. For Schmidt, the actions are not ethical without the agent's *belief* in the dogmas. Roy and Schmidt seem to have different criteria for ethical action. A relationship with texts based on *belief* was unfamiliar to Roy, whose relationship to texts was more axiomatic. Schmidt on the other hand sees arrogance in Roy's attempt to tell others what will be good for them, without himself having any religious sanction or the necessary faith in god to do so.

Rev. Marshman a friend of Roy's claimed that all true Christians who read Roy's work were disappointed

> when they found that this compilation... instead of exhibiting those precepts as a sample of the whole Scriptures, and representing them as affording indubitable proof of the authenticity of its narratives and the reasonableness and importance of its doctrines, were in reality separated from that gospel, and frustrates the grace of God in the salvation of men,

the apostolic axiom applying with as great force now as ever, 'if righteousness come by law, Christ is dead in vain.(Majumdar 1941: 25)

The disappointment stems from the fact that Roy's work, instead of giving the precepts as a sample of the gospel, separated them from the rest of the gospel as a free standing piece of instruction. Further, in the same piece Marshman goes on to say:

> It may be proper to observe, that we do not in the least censure any one's forming a Compilation from the Sacred Scriptures…but it is of importance that every compilation be given as a *sample* of the Sacred Writings in all their excellence and importance, and not as a substitute for the whole; in such a way as to create a deep reverence for every part of the scriptures, and not so as to depreciate the rest of the word of God…. These moral precepts were presented to the Natives of India as being of themselves sufficient to secure happiness and peace to mankind, while the great Doctrines of salvation were omitted as comparatively unimportant.(Majumdar 1941: 24)

The objection to Roy's work is that it claims that one could be happy simply by following the precepts of Jesus, whereas all Christians know that in fact one must first have *faith* in Jesus. Roy writes as if there is no element of faith necessary. The missionaries are united in their objection to Roy's claim that this compilation will help native Indians find a way to peace and happiness in their lives. Christian faith is the expression of a *belief* in god whose word is in the Scriptures.

The extent to which Roy is unable to understand his interlocutor's view is apparent in a rather disarming note on the question of the use of miracles in Christian discourse. Roy says Biblical tales are "much less wonderful than the tales handed down to the natives of Asia, and consequently carry very little weight with them." Since the natives of India have many more awe-inspiring tales in their own culture, they remain unimpressed by the tales from the

Bible. Roy suggests that a story like "Ugusti's"[28] was fairly hard to beat for generating wonder and awe given that "Ugusti is famed for having swallowed the oceans when it had given him offence, and for having restored it by urinary evacuation, and that at his command also the Vindhya range of mountains prostrated itself and so remains." (Majumdar 1941: 23)

Roy made no distinction between miracles of Christian and Hindu origin as being 'true' or 'false'; in his understanding both performed the function of captivating lesser minds, otherwise incapable of contemplating God in abstraction. How far off the mark he was we can see from Marshman's furious reply to the comment on the story of 'Ugusti':

> the introduction to this compendium, instead of treating with reverence the other parts of the Sacred oracles, unhappily tended rather to impugn them… these hints respecting the Sacred Writings… appeared likely to convey ideas of them so contrary to that deep and just reverence with which both the doctrines and the miracles they contain must be regarded if they became the means of salvation that those who duly venerate the Sacred Oracles, could not but feel grieved that they should be held out to those, who, despising idolatry for its grossness and folly, might probably be enquiring for something on which they might build their hopes of future happiness.(Majumdar 1941: 24)

Something about Roy's remarks comparing the biblical miracles to heathen stories of miracles is deeply unacceptable to Marshman. Roy's argument is that stories of miracles are told in order to inspire awe in the individual, and that awe leads him on to a reverence of God. The more awe inspiring the miracle, the more likely the individual will revere the God that performed it. With this reasoning Roy suggests that the miracles of the Bible can be left out of the book he is compiling, since the Indian individual already has stories a plenty of

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[28] The reference is to the Sage Agastya who makes an appearance in the story of the Mahabharata. As was common in this period the English spelling of native terms replicated Bengali speech patterns.

miracles – he gives Ugusti as the example - which produce the desired effect of awe. He chooses rather, to focus on the precepts, judging that words exhorting good actions are more useful to the individual.

Marshman clearly does not reason in this way. He called Roy "an injurer of truth", "a heathen" and "an infidel" (Majumdar 1941: 24). He went on to say that Roy's mind was clearly "as yet completely opposed to the *grand design* of the Saviour's becoming incarnate" and interestingly accused Roy of attempting to degrade "the Redeemer of the world" by putting him on the same plane as "Confucius and Mahomet" turning him thus into "a teacher and the Founder of a sect, instead of adoring him as the Lord of all, the Redeemer of men, the Sovereign Judge" (Singh 1958: 224).

His dispute with Roy is not about the efficacy of miracles in producing awe. He is disputing Roy's claim as to what a miracle actually is. The Christian miracle is in some ways a proof to all believers of the truth of God and his son Jesus Christ and thus Marshman argues that 'true' miracles are only to be found in the bible. All other miraculous stories are 'false' since they promote awe for the *wrong* entity; a Confucius or a Mahomet. These are not the true God, they are 'mere founders of a sect'. Similarly the miracles of Ugusti do not produce awe for the God of the bible and hence they cannot replace the miracles of the bible. Roy's argument pertaining to the exclusion of miracles shows Marshman quite clearly that Roy is not in a position to guide his fellow natives out of their 'gross idolatry'. Roy has not yet 'learnt' the conceptual difference between the 'true' religion and 'false' religions. Roy is a first generation, adult learner of the language he is conducting this debate in. It is very clear from his replies that he does not yet have a full grasp over this language. But it is also clear that the difficulty for Roy is conceptual and not linguistic. While he can imitatively reproduce appraisive terms, the concepts underlying these terms are not always apparent to him.

Roy's reply indicates that he was very hurt at being accused of unethical

behaviour; he also finds Marshman's arguments incomprehensible. In his reply to Marshman, Roy objected to being called a heathen and claimed that this attack "violated truth charity and liberality". He makes a forceful point against this allegation stating that he could not be called a heathen since he had always publicly rejected idolatry and asserted his faith in "the existence of a supreme superintending power, the author and preserver of the harmonious system" (Ghose 1901: 12), a deity he derives from the Vedas.

In his long interaction with the missionaries before the controversy broke out, Roy conversed with the missionaries about issues of interest to them, in their terms. In the process he picked up the use of several of their appraisive terms. Since the appraisive terms came from a discourse which was closely related to the inter-cultural *experience* of the European missionaries, Roy could only pick up the appraisive terms by imitation first and then try and relate them to his own experiences. The Missionaries were well versed with Roy's cultural context and guided his use of these appraisive terms. The Sehrampore Missionaries ran a newspaper called *Friend of India* which often carried pieces like this one on the nature of Hinduism:

> The Hindoos throughout India, believe the human soul to form an integral part of Burhma (sic) or the Deity, and hence esteem the summit of future bliss to consist in what they deem final beatitude, or absorption into Bruhma, whom they believe their souls to be a part. To the attainment of this all their endeavours are directed, for the sake of it the most tremendous austerities are performed, and nothing beyond that is supposed to be within the wish of man. But beside this, there are, according to their ideas, many heavens or inferior stages of bliss, to be obtained by certain meritorious deeds. None of these however is considered as lasting: but the duration of every state of bliss is, according to them, proportioned to the merit of the deed of which it is esteemed the reward. After this period is expired, the person is expected to be born on earth again, and to undergo numerous vicissitudes of

births till his mind be so purified, as to obtain final beatitude or
absorption into the deity which alone secures a person from the misery of
future transmigrations. (Ray 1985: 108-9)

Appraisive terms from Christian discourse have found equivalents in the
Indian context: thus soul and god become Atman and Brahman. The notion of
purgatory and the attainment of heaven are adjusted to accommodate the
'theory of karma'- which becomes the 'transmigration of the soul'. States of
'bliss' become superior or inferior and the goal is 'final beatitude'. It is among
such wisdom that Roy learnt to call the familiar Bengali festival of Durga puja
'idol worship' or an example of polytheism; he learnt that God must always be
'one' and 'true'.

By the time the controversy broke out, Roy had learnt the use of the appraisive
terms to be able to interact adequately with the missionaries, but he could
hardly defend himself when the very language he was using revealed
dimensions he was not familiar with. To Roy its looks as if the reverend
Marshman being quarrelsome. Roy's use and understanding of 'heathen' and
'infidel' was related to one who practices 'polytheism'. He is now being told that
his position on doctrines also reveals him to be a 'heathen'. Marshman's attack
comes as a surprise to him. And he reminds Marshman that 'heathen' was an
appraisive term which attached to 'polytheists' and 'idol-worshippers'. He was
neither. He had publicly renounced both and claimed to owe 'allegiance' to the
Vedas.[29] Marshman's refusal to entertain such arguments appear as
arrogance to Roy. His reply to Marshman indicates that he has a weak
conceptual grasp over the religious discourse of the missionaries, but also that
he does not see it as a weak conceptual grasp. This means that his use of the
appraisive terms he has learnt gives him the perception of having expressed
something, although he is unaware of the concepts underlying those appraisive

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[29] Again allegiance is a loose word since Roy clearly did not mean to say that the Vedas guide
his practices as the doctrines guide the Christians practices. His publication of *The Precepts*
clearly indicates that he did not link doctrine to practice.

terms.

Roy's biographers have often pointed out how many of Roy's British friends, seeing his readiness to agree to their ideas about god and worship and idolatry, constantly expected him to make a formal conversion to the faith and how he constantly rejected this notion by claiming that he had, in fact already accepted all the teachings of Christianity so in a sense he was already living a Christian life. While Roy sincerely believed this claim, his interlocutors knew that he was merely being the 'cunning' and 'inscrutable' native, who no matter how much they agreed, could not finally be trusted.[30]

The controversy did not simply die down. Roy, cutting his teeth in public now, launched a direct assault on the Trinitarian church[31] accusing it of polytheism

> If Christianity inculcated a doctrine which represents god as consisting of three persons, and appearing sometimes in the human form, at other times in a bodily shape like a dove, no Hindoo, in my humble opinion, who searches after truth, can conscientiously profess it in preference to Hindooism; for that which renders the modern Hindoo system of religion absurd and detestable is, that it represents the divine nature, though one... as consisting of many persons, capable of assuming different forms for the discharge of different offices. (Singh 1958: 235)

With this accusation Roy has come full circle. He has accused Christianity of polytheism. And charged it with idol-worship. The Trinitarian church reveres three separate entities, one of them is represented as a dove. Roy has learnt that the representation of God into shapes and forms is what leads to polytheism and idol worship and using this logic he finds the Missionaries themselves guilty. Since he cannot yet grasp the conceptual argument about a

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[30] Roy was thus described in a letter from Lord Bentick to the magistrate at the Calcutta court at the height of the Sati controversy. (Singh1958)
[31] Believing in the Christian doctrine of the trinity of the father the son and the holy ghost.

'true' religion, he finds a way to criticise the missionaries using their own appraisive terms. Roy argues that:

> (Marshman acknowledges) the fact of God's appearing in the shape of a Dove to testify the appointment of God the Son, stating that when 'God renders himself visible to man, it must be by appearing in some form.' But I wonder how after such an acknowledgement (Marshman)... can ridicule the idea of God's appearing in the shape of a fish or a cow, which is entertained by the Pouranik Hindoos? Is not a fish as innocent as a dove? Is not a cow more useful than a pigeon? (Singh 1958: 252)

If Marshman agrees that God must appear in some form, then why ridicule god appearing as a cow as opposed to him appearing as a dove? Roy forcefully makes the claim that Trinitarians who represent god in the form of a dove have no right to ridicule 'Pouranik Hindoos' (as opposed to Vedantic Hindoos like himself) who represent god in the form of a cow. Between the cow and the dove there is no great difference he argues. Roy goes on to assert that doctrines such as the Trinitarians were part of some later changes to Christianity, which in its early form must necessarily have been Unitarian, or worshipping one god. To support his arguments he mentions the pre-Nicene[32] creed as an example of what he calls "the first and purest age of Christianity" when the followers of Christ "entertained different opinions on the subject of the distinction between father and son and Holy ghost" (Singh 1958: 238). This argument exactly replicates the European argument for an 'original' Monotheistic Hinduism.

Roy has mastered the argument through imitation rather than conceptual clarity. He does not experience diversity as a violation of a norm, and native practices do not immediately pose a problem to him. He learns to see them as a problem and to see the 'ancient texts' as the solution. This is why he can argue that present day Christianity is corrupt and compare the Trinitarian Christian

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[32] The Nicene creed was adopted at the council of Nicaea in 325 ad, adopting a formal statement of Christian belief which is widely used in Christian liturgies.

to the Pouranik Hindoo. In such statements Roy demonstrates that his use of colonial discourse is merely imitative.

IV

Two years before this dispute, Roy was among the few natives of standing who shared a cordial relationship with the Sehrampore missionaries. The year 1818 saw a spate of very public debates on the subject of Sati. The major interlocutors were Rammohun Roy, the missionaries of Sehrampore, and the 'orthodox' voice which was later organised into the Dharma Sabha- a group of wealthy and well placed natives from in an around Calcutta who united with the aim of protecting the native way of life.

The first pamphlet came when the newspapers were regularly carrying letters and debates on Sati. Roy's *Conference Between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive* (Ghose 1901) put together his arguments against Sati. The 'orthodox' group answered Roy's pamphlet; their pamphlet was published without naming an author. The missionaries of Sehrampur commented on both the pamphlets and discussed their relative merits.

Religious Answers to Burning Questions

Roy's pamphlet is structured as a conversation between two people. An advocate of Sati and an opponent of Sati attempt to convince the other with the strength of their arguments. In this pamphlet both parties use concepts and distinctions from colonial discourse. The pamphlet gives voice to the 'educated native' in the figure of the Opponent of Sati and the 'uneducated native' in the voice of the Advocate of Sati. Both figures use the distinctions of colonial moral discourse. The argument centres around issues of colonial concern such as the injunction to perform Sati in 'Hindoo scriptures' and its interpretations.

The argument opens with the Advocate for Sati listing the 'ancient texts' which refer to Sati. It is worth noting that most of the references in these texts come in the form of a story of a Sati being performed. The Advocate lists the occasions on which great sages have mentioned or discussed Sati. The Opponent of Sati replies to this with a reference to Manu, where Manu urges the widow to emaciate herself, and live a chaste life without pleasures (Ghose 1901: 127). Although this is not a direct injunction *not* to perform Sati, the Opponent further cites scholars as saying that in case of discrepancy Manu's opinion should be considered better.

The argument now arrives at the question of interpretation of doctrine. How may the texts be read to reveal their position on Sati? Roy's Advocate says Manu's interpretations are, as far as possible to be *reconciled* with the other interpretations. He gives the example of Manu's advocacy of the Sandhya.[33] While recommending the Sandhya, Manu gives no indication of the status of another popular practice- Jap, or "calling aloud on the name of Hari" (Ghose 1901: 325). This should not be read to mean that Manu opposes the Jap. Similarly, continues the Advocate, "Manu has commended widows to live as ascetics; Vishnu and other Saints direct that they should either live as ascetics or follow their husbands. Therefore the law of Manu may be considered to be applicable as an alternative." (Ghose 1901: 325) Thus Roy's Advocate reproduces the argument for preserving multiple practices. The argument is that those who wish to emaciate may do so while those who wish to burn may do so.[34]

The Opponent refutes this argument claiming that the analogy does not hold: "In the course of the day the performance of Sandhya, at the prescribed time, does not prevent one from invoking Hari at another period... But in the case of living as an ascetic or undergoing Concremation, the performance of the one is

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[33] Morning and evening prayers.
[34] In the same sources, by the same token, marrying again was also an option available to the widow. Almost no notice taken of this option during the Sati controversy. See (Basu 1917).

incompatible with the observance of the other." (Ghose 1901: 326) The Opponent argues that in the case of burning or widowhood, there is no possibility of reconciliation as one contradicts the other. The only way in which practices can 'contradict' each other is if the same woman follows both practices, in other words if the injunction was read as a universal rule. However Roy's Advocate does not raise this point, since within colonial discourse a moral rule is understood to be universal. Instead the Opponent is allowed to go on with his argument. The Opponent argues that Angira and Harita and other such authorities on the texts have clearly spoken in favour of Sati as an indispensable duty, and as such can be said to contradict Manu directly. In this case as per the scholars themselves, it is Manu's law, which must be upheld.

In response to this the Advocate for Sati tries to bring in another kind of distinctions on the interpretation of texts. He says "we reconcile their (Angira and Harita) words with those of Manu, by considering them as used merely for the purpose of exalting the merit of concremation, but not as prescribing this as an indispensable duty. All these expressions, moreover, convey a promise of reward for concremation, and thence it appears that Concremation is only optional"(Ghose 1901: 326). The Advocate attempts to *reconcile* the contradictory readings rather than to set them against each other.

The argument continues with the Advocate of Sati now bringing the most ancient text, the Rig Veda, which says "O Fire! Let these women, with bodies anointed with clarified butter, eyes coloured with collyrium, and void of tears, enter thee, the parent of water, that they may not be separated from their husbands, but may be, in unison with excellent husbands, themselves sinless and jewels amongst women" (Ghose 1901: 327). The implication is that the most ancient text carries an unequivocal commendation of the act of Sati.

At this point the Opponent of Sati changes the thrust of his argument. He says, "all (these authorities) praise the practice of Concremation as leading to

fruition, and are addressed to those who are occupied by sensual desires; and you cannot but admit that to follow these practices is only optional. In repeating the Sankalpa of Concremation, the desire of future fruition is declared as the object." He goes on to quote from the Katha Upanishad "Faith in God which leads to absorption is one thing; and rites which have future fruition for their object, another. Each of these, producing different consequences, hold out to man inducements to follow it. The man, who of these two chooses faith is blessed: and he, who for the sake of reward practices rites, is dashed away from the enjoyment of eternal beatitude."(Ghose 1901: 327) He continues his argument with further quotes from the Mukunda Upanishad and the Bhagavad Gita on the superiority of "final beatitude" as the rewards of ones faith over the lesser goal of "future fruition" through the performance of various practices. This distinction comes directly from colonial discourse which places "Faith in god" above rituals which may slip into superstition or idolatry.

The Opponent now suggests that any action undertaken with a view to its rewards are of less merit than those undertaken without any such view. This idea of "nishkaam karma" from the Bhagawad Gita is given as an example. The Opponent quotes the relevant passages from the Gita "Also those who observe the rites prescribed by the three Vedas, and through those ceremonies worship and seek for heaven, having become sinless from eating the remains of offerings, ascending to heaven, and enjoying the pleasures of the gods, after the completion of their rewards, again return to earth."[35] Thus the Opponent concludes that the "observers of rites for the sake of rewards, repeatedly, ascend to heaven, and return to the world, and cannot obtain absorption." This

[35] In a modern translation of the same passages (chapter 3, verses 10- 13) the translator uses the term 'Sacrifice' for the original 'yajna', what Roy translates as 'rites'. The verses Roy summarises are given as " (10) Having created mankind along with sacrifice/ Prajapati, (the Lord of Creatures) anciently said/ "By this (i.e. sacrifice), may you bring forth;/ may this be your wish fulfilling cow./ (11) "By this (i.e. sacrifice) may you nourish the gods/ and may the gods nourish you;/ by nourishing each other, you shall attain the highest welfare"/ (12) "The gods, nourished by the sacrifice,/ Will indeed give you desired enjoyments;/ He who enjoys these gifts while not offering them in return./ Is a thief."/ (13) The good who eat the remainder of the sacrifice, are released from all evils;/ But the wicked, who cook only for their own sake,/ Eat their own impurity./" (sic)(Sargeant 1984: 201-204)

argument suggests that even if Sati is prescribed in the text, it is a rite, which produces the lesser benefit of "future fruition" over the superior "final beatitude" as such it should be rejected in favour of the higher spiritual goal.

The Opponent continues his argument saying that the woman is also on many occasions tied down to the pyre, the ritual is forced on her rather than being performed with the hope of any reward. The Advocate agrees that tying down a woman to the pyre is illegal, but he also gives a reason for this illegal activity saying it is necessary to save the woman from the shame of having failed in her resolve (Ghose 1901: 329). He argues that these actions preserve the dignity of the woman who would have to face the 'shame' of breaking her 'Sunkalpa' or firm resolve. When the Opponent points out the shame in this brutal act of violence the Advocate says "though tying down in this manner be not authorized by the Shastras, yet we practise it as being a custom that has been observed throughout Hindustan." (Ghose 1901: 330)

From this point on the argument breaks down, and Roy is no longer able to maintain the conversational tone he began with. The conversation of the Opponent of Sati sounds more and more pedantic while the Advocate becomes a belligerent figure who simply clings to his position refusing to engage in any further discussion. On being accused of "female murder" the Advocate says "this practice may be sinful or anything else, but we will not refrain from observing it." (Ghose 1901: 331). The discussion continues over the precautionary nature of Sati which the advocate condemns and the Opponent defends. According to the opponent the real 'reason' for Sati was to prevent widows from 'straying' after their husbands had died. It finally ends with the Advocate for Sati abruptly agreeing to consider the matters put forth by the Opponent.

Argumentative Turns

Within a few months the 'orthodox' group published a reply to Roy's pamphlet

anonymously. It followed the same form with the same interlocutors: a conversation between an Advocate and an Opponent of Sati. However there were significant differences. In the Dharma Sabha pamphlet the Advocate of Sati begins by suggesting that it is improper for the Opponent to place obstacles in the way of a custom that has been "ordained" by the "Srutee, Smritee, Pooranas and other Sacred Books" (Ray 1985: 100); he lists the texts in which the practice is mentioned. The chief mention is from Angira who lists the objects a woman achieves when she mounts the funeral pyre: she enjoys bliss with her husband in heaven, she dwells with him for as many years as there are hairs on the human body, (thirty-five million), she purifies three generations- her fathers, her mothers, and her husbands, a husband who is guilty of murder can be saved by this act of his wife; further instances are mentioned by Harita, Purasura and Vyasa.

This Advocate of Sati puts forward precedent as the overwhelming argument for the preservation of Sati. Unlike Roy's advocate this Advocate does not read the texts in order to see how Sati is evaluated as against chaste widow-hood. Rather the texts are read to demonstrate the fact that Sati has been performed in the past, and the Advocate's central argument is that it should therefore be preserved now. The principle guiding this Advocates argument is: practices that have always been performed should not be prevented.

The Opponent then tries to negate these instances with the injunction from Manu recommending chaste widowhood. As with the earlier pamphlet, the Opponent of Sati tries to show that Manu's text recommends widowhood over Sati, and that in all cases of doubts or contradictions Manu is to be followed. Again the Advocate of Sati does not simply accept the Opponent's argument asserting the superiority of Manu. He pursues the arguments forwarded in the earlier pamphlet. The Advocate of Sati here argues that if Manu were read to contradict the Vedas, the authority of all the earlier writings could be called into question. Any reading of a text, which causes conflicts with all other

known texts, cannot be accepted. The preferable method in relation to reading contradictory texts, is to reduce the discrepancies within the texts. To support this the Advocate produces a quotation from one of the commentaries on the Vedas: "where there arises an inconsistency among laws, that maintained by many is preferable" (Ray 1985: 106).

The Advocate of Sati in this pamphlet is trying to express a particular distinction in relation to the interpretation of texts. The key to reading a text is not to select parts of it as 'true' and dismiss other parts as 'false'. Such a reading violates the text and places the dimension of truth outside it. Another relationship to a text could be to see it as a repository of truth, where doubts and contradictions, which arise, are indicative of the readers inability to grasp the truth and not the falsity of the text. This kind of relationship of reader to text is unknown in the colonial debates on Hindoo scriptures. The attempt to articulate this position within colonial discourse results in arguments that sound weak at best and immoral at worst.

The strongest argument the Advocate makes is lost in the appraisive terms of the language he is forced to use: in English he is only able to say that one *cannot* call into question the authority of all earlier writing. Rather than argue about which interpretation of the texts prefers which practice for the widow, the Advocate in this pamphlet tries to argue that practices should be preserved. He gives a hypothetical example saying if Manu were interpreted to contradict the Vedas, then the Opponents view that Manu should be preferred over all other commentators would indicate that much of the writing on the Vedas before Manu could be called into question. However this attitude is *incorrect* says this Advocate; he argues that when there are questions about the text the preferable method is to reduce contradictions. And finally, where there is inconsistency in practice, the more common practice should be preferred. This assertion complicates the colonial text practice relationship but colonial moral discourse does not articulate this as an *alternative* relationship between text

and practice. It merely sees this as a *mistaken* attitude to texts and practice.

Another interesting argumentative turn focuses on the desires of the widow herself. Following Roy's arguments, this pamphlet too has a discussion of 'nishkaama Karma' from the Bhagwad Gita which suggests that acts practiced out of the desire for some kind of reward are to be avoided. The Advocate does not dispute the authority of the Gita over the Vedas, instead he asks the Opponent: "Listen then to a Shrutee 'A man wishing heaven for himself shall perform Ashwamedha Yajna' and again 'a man wishing heaven for himself shall perform Jotistuma Yajna'. These and other Srutees, are they to lose their spirits? That is, to have no effect? Say what is your answer?" (Ray 1985: 110). The Advocate quotes the texts saying that certain rituals are to be performed for certain kinds of rewards. He does not argue that this proves the theory of Nishkaama Karma wrong. Instead he turns the question back on the Opponent. Would the two contradictory statements mean that all the Shruti texts have no value? The Advocate here is pointing to the futility of trying to read the texts one against the other to arrive at a 'truth'. However the moral language he employs seems to blunt the force of his arguments.

The Advocate's position here does not match the position of Roy's Advocate at all. Here the Advocate argues for a position, which seeks to *reconcile* rather than reject contradictory texts. He does not read a text with the assumption that contradictions in meaning can prove it false. Instead he reconciles the contradictions giving the widest possible interpretation: "if a widow wishes to attain connubial bliss in heaven, she may burn herself, but if she wishes final beatitude, she may embrace a life of abstinence and self-denial... therefore a woman's burning herself for the sake of connubial bliss in heaven, has no way been forbidden" (Ray 1985: 108). There is no desire to universalize the practice in this argument. This argument also leaves the performance of the act as an option that the *widow* exercises. Practices continue on the strength of precedent and disputes are settled by preferring practices 'that are maintained

by many'.

Roy's pamphlet is still mentioned as the earliest opposition to the practice of Sati. The Dharma Sabha pamphlet does not even bear mention as an attempt to voice the native's position on Sati. The language of the pamphlets allows Roy's arguments look forceful and moral. By contrast the Dharma Sabha pamphlet seems to be making points that have no implications for the argument. Roy's pamphlet constructs an Advocate who easily accepts the accusation of 'female murder' saying that widows should be burnt as a preventive measure, before they are tempted into sexual misconduct. The Orthodox group do not acknowledge or refute this accusation; they attach no salience to the line of argumentation which attaches reason to practice.

Further, the orthodox group, far from giving reasons for why the practice ought to take place simply argue that on account of precedent, the practice should not be banned. The Advocate of the orthodox group merely desires to prove that Sati is not forbidden. He does not evaluate the two acts, 'concremation' or 'living a chaste life of austerities'. In the related dispute he does not argue that Sati is an act performed without hope of gain or reward. Instead he defends acts performed out of a hope for gain or reward. Within the colonial situation such arguments were merely seen as hopeless ignorance on the part of the 'uneducated native' whose religion had been 'corrupted' by priests leaving him unaware of the 'correct' relationship between text and practice

The Sehrampore Missionaries in their newspaper *Friend of India* reviewed the pamphlet produced by the orthodox group. The pamphlet is noted to be "without a name and without a title page' but it was common knowledge that 'it is the work of men by no means deficient in learning' (Ray 1985: 99). The review goes on to say 'every scrap of Sanskrit found on its side among Hindoo writers, are given in the original as well as translated into Bengalee." Given the reviewers understanding of the text practice relationship this would be of special significance because, apart from Roy's text on the same subject there

were no other texts that allowed 'common man' to understand his 'scriptures' on the subject of Sati.

Apart from the arguments, the language of the pamphlet came in for much criticism; it was deemed to have failed the standards of 'good English' and the reviewer made no pretence of neutrality while presenting the review. Thus:

> This work is evidently intended for the perusal of Europeans also; as an English translation (if it deserve the name,) is prefixed to the original Work... we shall content ourselves with merely adding a sentence or a word where the translation is not sufficiently intelligible. The work commences by the Advocate's urging the claims of his cause in the following pompous and sweeping declaration...(Ray 1985: 100. parenthesis in the original)

There is a sustained tone of sarcasm towards the writer's use of the English language. The review often criticises the Writers of this pamphlet for bringing in too few authorities ('but four' and later 'a solitary writer the author of the Matsya Purana') but the writer is also repeatedly berated for using 'every sentence and scrap of Sanskrit in support of the practice' where, in fact all that can be mustered from Angira, Harita, Vyasa in the Mahabharata, and Parasura is nothing stronger than a recommendation.

> The highest countenance given the practice therefore, by their own writers, amounts to only a recommendation of it from certain advantages the widow is deluded with the hope of obtaining; that is, the enjoyment of happiness with her husband- by no means to eternity, however, but for as many years as there are hairs in the human body, after which, gentle reader, she must descend to the earth again, and undergo all that the vicissitude of births, which in the opinion of the Hindoos constitutes future punishment. (Ray 1985: 103)

The texts are rejected because they do not 'command' but only 'recommend' Sati. The 'rewards' of Sati are examined for their relative merits. Through these

descriptions Sati changes from being a practice of the native people into a mysterious religious ritual. The 'reward' promised to the woman now becomes more important than the 'Sunkulpa' of Sati that she takes. 'Eternal beatitude' or 'enjoyment with her husband' for a vast number of years becomes the deciding factors to perform Sati rather than a valuation of her life as a wife and companion. The writer is criticised further for bringing such weak arguments when 'it was incumbent to bring forward the strongest authorities for a practice so repugnant to humanity' (Ray 1985: 103).

The review goes on to attack the writer on his appeal to the Rig Veda, which declares that women who immolate themselves with an object belonging to the dead husband rather than on the funeral pyre,[36] are not to be considered guilty of self murder. The reviewer delightedly exclaims that this 'plainly indicates, that if this be self-murder, in the opinions of the Hindoos themselves it would be condemned.' (Ray 1985: 103). This missionary statement regarding self-murder is puzzling by itself. It implies that the natives require an interpretation of the Rig Veda in order to understand that self-murder is condemnable. However it remains silent on the further question: why is Anumarana, or immolation with an object belonging to the dead husband *not* self-murder? Avoiding this direct question the missionaries present this syllogism: the Rig Veda acknowledges that self-murder is condemnable. Anumarana is self-murder. Thus ancient Hindoo texts can be said to be against Sati.

But the most curious piece of analysis in this review is related to another of the advocate's quotations from the authorities. This one among all others is deemed to be 'the voice of nature involuntarily speaking'. The lines in the quotation are: "Let not Brahmanis or wives of Brahmans suffer death by entering into a separate pile: but for the rest of the women, Brahmanis

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[36] Anumarana was an option available to those women whose husbands died in distant places, or those who after having fulfilled their earthly duties, seek to join their husbands after an interval has passed. This option is not recommended to Brahmin widows who only have recourse to Sahamarana, which is the practice of burning in the funeral pyre of the deceased husband.

excepted, this law is most preferable." (Ray 1985, 104). The reviewer interprets this passage thus:

> Now when it is considered that every authority adduced in favour of this practice is that of Brahmins, for no Shudra has ever yet become authoritative as a man of learning, this decides the matter at once. If it be meritorious privilege thus to ascend the separate funeral pile, why deny this privilege to the daughters of Brahmins? Why indeed, but because nature spoke in the breast if this writer? He was a Brahmin, and he shuddered at the idea of consigning his daughter to the flames for the sake of a worthless husband who might perhaps have treated her with neglect and cruelty all his life. (Ray 1985: 104).

The attitude to texts displayed here could not be more different from the native's attitude. In this passage the reviewer argues that the 'true' feelings, of the Brahmins who have written the Hindoo 'scriptures', regarding the burning of widows may be adduced from the fact that they prohibit their own daughters from committing Anumarana- burning after the event of the husband's death. This is the kind of argumentation we saw earlier regarding the property laws as an 'explanation' for Sati. Here too the question arises, if the Brahmins were 'naturally' horrified by the prospect of their daughters burning, why not disallow Brahmin women from burning in *all* cases? Why only in the specific case of Anumarana? Further if the husband is worthless why would the woman exercise the option of sati in the first place? Even the reviewer has to admit that according to the Advocate's quotations of authorities, 'Vishnu Rishi... leaves burning perfectly optional' (Ray 1985: 103). In arguments such as these it is clear that the missionaries, the natural speakers of colonial discourse use a set of distinctions markedly different from the natives, who are merely imitating this discourse in order to present their case. The attitude to textual discrepancies is a significant index of the difference between the two positions. In relation to the argument about contradictions in texts and conflict in practices the reviewer first ridicules the writer saying that since the advocate

knows that "no commentator can erect himself into a law-giver and abolish the law itself, (he) first attempts by affirming (that which no one denies,) that it is only the Smriti inconsistent with Manu which is unworthy of regard". This piece of analysis is singularly orientalist in origin as it is orientalist scholarship which identifies Manu as the 'ancient law giver'. The native, in as much as he participates in this discussion about texts, shows little preference for one over the other except to object to the disregard for Smriti texts merely because they contradict Manu. In fact the Advocate does not say that Smriti's inconsistent with Manu should be disregarded. The idea that one text can falsify another seem radically wrong to the native.

The reviewer goes on to argue that the Advocate makes the foolish mistake of arguing that "a woman can live a life of abstinence and chastity after burning herself, these two are of course not inconsistent!" The implication is that the 'uneducated native' is incapable of making plainly logical statements. The Pamphlet itself merely asserts that the two practices are not incompatible. Since the practices make no claim to universality the implication is that the widows may choose between them as equally viable options. Further the reviewer makes fun of the relationship between texts that the native attempts to assert. The native argument suggests that raising contradictions in texts reduces the value of the texts themselves, and the attempt should be to *reconcile* contradictory readings not to *falsify* texts based on such readings. To this the reviewer says "the Advocate for the burning system urges first, that to infer from the authority of Manu and the Veda, that a woman instead of burning herself, ought to embrace a life of abstinence and chastity, would strip the writings of those who recommend her burning herself, of all authority! an overwhelming argument truly." (Ray 1985: 107). Colonial discourse rejects any alternative relationship between text and practice by evaluating it negatively. In this case it is clear that the reviewer is poking fun at what he feels is the flawed argument of the native.

He goes on to say of the Advocate in the pamphlet "He then adduces a sentence from Manu, to shew that when one Smriti appears to have one meaning and another a different one, both are to be held as law! The plain inference from this would be, that a widow ought to immolate herself on her husband's funeral pile, and to embrace a life of austerity too!" again the attempt is to read the natives argument as illogical in the simplest sense. After a barrage of such arguments and criticisms the reviewer finally says:

> We have now before us, the actual grounds on which all those who oppose the abolition of the practice, still desire to preserve this privilege of burning alive their mothers, their sisters, and their daughters. It is not because it is sanctioned by the Hindoo law; for their greatest Legislator whose authority is paramount to every other, positively forbids it, by enjoining on widows a contrary course. It is not that those few writers who have recommended the practice (for none of them have the audacity to command it in opposition to their great legislator) recommend it as a superior course, the dictate of more exalted virtue, for they themselves despise the course they thus recommend to the poor widow, and regard with utmost contempt, the motive and principle of action they endeavour to infuse into her mind. But this unparalleled course of murder, is practiced wholly as a PREVENTIVE! But as a preventive of what? The effects of their dullness! Their inability to comprehend "the instructions of Sacred Wisdom"! What then, would be these effects? That they would live a life of abstinence and chastity from improper motives, from a desire after final beatitude! And losing final beatitude, only obtain heaven. Truly their thus forcing their burning system on the poor widow, from principles of such exalted benevolence, outdoes all that the Roman Catholics have ever done in the way of burning heretics out of pure pity to their souls. (Ray 1985: 113 emphasis and parenthesis in original).

This argument has many parts: natives who do not want the practice banned are understood within a set of projected motives. The missionaries do not recognise precedent as a justification for practice. They further insist on

reading Manu as the "greatest Legislator whose authority is paramount to every other" among the Hindus. Further they read Manu's comment on widows leading lives of poverty and chastity as a positive injunction against Sati. They further explain that in spite of these factors some Hindu's continue with this practice as a preventive measure. Since Sati takes one to happiness but not "final beatitude", these people try to give a woman at least that happiness. They believe that a woman living an ascetic life with the hope of gaining "final beatitude" would lose this final beatitude and obtain "only heaven", since actions performed with a desire for the result is not as meritorious as actions performed without the desire for results. It is not possible for a widow to live a life of privation without hoping to gain final beatitude, but in harbouring such a hope she loses her chances of gaining this end.

Thus the simplest way out of the problem, the missionaries argue, is for the Hindoo men to burn her alive with her dead husband. In this way she at least will gain heaven with him for "as many years as their hairs on the human body". This is another example of extremely complex argumentation to explain a practice. It immediately results in the native appearing as one incapable of simple reasoning and common logic.

There is almost no notice taken of the fact that the arguments of the native do not speak about practices in the way that the missionaries do. In fact the missionaries response clearly indicate that Roy speaks 'correctly' on the matter of religion and ritual while the 'uneducated natives' do not. The quotation of the Sanskrit verses is mistaken to be from 'their side of the argument' without noticing that the orthodox group in fact quotes Sanskrit texts to *avoid* getting into an argument about texts and its use of Sanskrit accounts about the practice of Sati are merely used to indicate a precedent.

The justification or questioning of a practice in print is seen as a positive outcome of British rule in India:

(the pamphlet) forms one of the fruits which have arisen from the
introduction of printing into India; and is the result of that wise and
benign sway exercised by Britain over her possessions in the east. Under
the Moosulman or the Hindoo governments which formerly existed here,
nothing of this kind could have appeared: as no one durst venture
publicly to question the propriety of any practice which professed to
derive its sanction from the Koran, or the Hindoo Shastras, its advocates
would not have found it necessary to bring any discussion respecting it
before the public, much less to submit those arguments on which it
might rest for support to public decision.(Ray 1985: 97)

Before this moment practices were neither called into question nor were they
justified through 'reason'. The missionaries correctly notice this but they also
evaluate the process of questioning practices as a positive development, a
result of the 'wise and benign' rule of Britain over India. The review continues:

Such... have been even the oblique effects of that diffusion of light which
the residence of Europeans has produced in India, that the natives
themselves begin to feel the necessity of recurring to reason as the test of
their conduct in things both civil and religious. They cannot but perceive
that this is the line of conduct observed by their rulers themselves; that
no length of time, no weight of authority, is thought sufficient to support
a practice which may be plainly contrary to justice and humanity, and
that the inveteracy of any abuse, so far from forming a reason for its
continuance, furnishes only stronger motives for its speedy abolition.
(Ray 1985: 97)

The 'test' of a practice for the colonial masters is 'reason'. When the native
perceives the rulers undertaking this inquiry he too follows. This is an accurate
description of the discourse on practices during the colonial moment. The only
inaccuracy in this description is that the missionaries embellish this
observation with a positive evaluative gloss, attached to the process of seeking
reason for a practice. In fact the only thing that can be said in this situation is

that the colonial and the native have different views on practices. The subordination of one to the other can only happen within colonial discourse. Further colonial discourse is unable to express these two attitudes to practice as diverse *alternatives*. Instead this discourse traps the native's attitude to practices in a very severe moral discourse.

V

By March 1818 Roy attempted to generate a 'discussion' around his recently published pamphlet. It had been published for more than a month now and the lack of interest from the native at such a path-breaking work was a matter of concern for the Europeans. The original tract was published in the name of Bykunthnath Bannerjee, who was the secretary of the Bramha Samaj and Roy's employee. Roy often published his works in the name of his employees and revealed himself as the author only after public reaction had been gauged.[37] He also regularly used pseudonyms to comment on his own works in public journals and newspapers especially those in English, which gave the impression of a larger debate. In one such conversation with himself in various personas, Roy wrote to the India Gazette, as Hurrihurand, on a pamphlet that Roy himself had published as Bykunthnath Bannerjee (Majumdar 1941). The pamphlet which was first published in Bengali:

> a translation of which into English is also before the public... maintains
> that it is the incumbent duty of Hindoo Widows, to live as ascetics, and
> thus acquire divine absorption, but also expressly accuses those who
> bind down a Widow with the corpse of her husband... as guilty of
> deliberate woman murder... I am at a loss to conceive how persons can

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[37] Majumdar 1941, Singh 1958.

reconcile themselves to the stigma of being accused of woman murder, without attempting to show the injustice of the charge, or if they find themselves unqualified to the reiteration of such a charge by further perseverance in similar conduct. I also feel both surprise and regret that European Gentlemen, who boast of the humanity and morality of their religion, should conduct themselves towards persons who submit quietly to the imputation of murder, with the same politeness and kindness as they would show to the most respectable persons; I however must call on those Baboos and Pundits either to vindicate their conduct by the sacred authorities, or give up all claims to be considered as adherents of the Sastrus; as if they do not obey written law, they must be looked upon as followers of blind and changeable custom. (Majumdar 1941: 113)

These interventions were written as much for European readers as for the natives. From the lack of response it may be surmised that even the strong moral criticism of 'woman murderer' does not have an impact on the native. Clearly not all natives follow moral arguments in colonial discourse. Roy's pamphlet argues that Hindu widows *must* live as ascetics and that men who tie down the women to the pyre before it is lit are murderers. The comment is that these are serious accusations not to be taken lightly. European Gentlemen should refuse to entertain any such Native against whom this accusation is made, until the matter is cleared up. Natives who have been so accused should either present texts to vindicate their actions or give up claims to be good Hindus. If they do not produce texts to validate their claims they must identify themselves as followers of 'blind and changeable custom'.

There was no immediate response to this letter from the orthodox community nor did this immediately arouse any controversy. In February 1822 Roy repeated the accusations in his own newspaper the *Sambad Coomoodi*[38] going

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[38] The *Sambad Coomoodi* or 'moon of intelligence' began to be printed and circulated in Bengali and English in 1819. It came out on Tuesdays and its monthly subscription was Rs 2. Bhabani

so far as to suggest that Sati had become an excuse to burn women, often even pregnant women, in the prime of their lives; that women were drugged and forced, even though this was clearly prohibited by the Shasters. In March 1822, after the 'continual agitation of the question' there was finally a response to this letter. The *Samachar Chandrika,* begun by the former editor of the *Coomoodi* and known for its conservative views, carried letters from correspondents who claimed to write with the consent of many "well-bred, virtuous, and rich inhabitants of Calcutta". This was what one of them had to say:

> So much as has been written in the *Sungbaud Cowmuddy*.... About the violence and injustice exercised in Concremation that it is beyond probability;... there are Magistrates appointed to preserve order and peace in the country. And the Magistrates never allow a woman to burn herself with her husband, before they have given the subject a serious and cool consideration, and found the woman to be devoid of all the passions, and to have a constant faith in her husband.... A woman burns herself publickly before all her relations and friends.- I would therefore advise the Editor, rather than ridicule those who conduct themselves consistently with religious principles, to mention the names and residence of the persons who brought him such intelligence, that we nay obtain information from them respecting such murders, and then endeavour to make them feel the justice of the Government; otherwise he

Charan Bandopadhaya was the official editor for the first thirteen weeks of its publication, during which time he referred to himself as the 'real editor's assistant'. According to one commentator, the *Coomoodi* was a newspaper advocating "freedom, civil and religious, opposed to corruption and tyranny, and labouring... effectively, to eradicate the idolatrous rites of the Brahmins, and to awaken the Hindoos to a sense of the degradation and misery into which they have been plunged." After a fall out with Roy over the Sati debate, Bhabani Bandopadhyaya left the *Coomoodi* and with the help of a few others, who would go on to form the Dharma Sabha, began the *Samchar Chandrika* on 5th March 1820. The *Chandrika* wrote against stamp duty, discussed British policy on land and rents from the native point of view, and lent support to educational reforms. It became a bi-weekly from April 1829 and by 1845 still under the leadership of Bandopadhyaya it had out lasted all its competitors. For a detailed discussion of the role of the *Samachar Chandrika* in guiding Hindu reform see Brian Pennington (Pennington 2005).

must be held as an Infidel, or one deprived of the use of his reason.
(Majumdar 1941: 124)

Roy's charge against the defenders of Sati was that they were guilty of murder due to certain reasons. In the reply, his interlocutor agrees that a Sati conducted under these circumstances is indeed a murder. If both Roy and his interlocutors agree on the circumstances under which Sati amounts to murder, then what is the nature of their disagreement? Based on these points Roy argues that every Sati is a murder, while the others argue that some Satis are perfectly legitimate. While Roy's description of Sati turns it into a universal and 'false' activity, his respondent tries to retain the nature of the practice which is inconsistent with the use of force. The nature of the practice is that it is an exercise of will. There is also a second letter written in a similar vein a few days later

> (there are) some improbable assertions advanced as to Concremation.…
> How did (the editor) come by his information that Widows who are
> pregnant at the time, or have not attained the age of maturity, are made
> to eat something which intoxicates them, and then burnt on the funeral
> piles of their deceased husbands? Was this the result of the liveliness of
> his own imagination, or has he printed that story in his *Cowmuddy*,
> tending to revile the manners and customs of his own country, merely to
> please some foreigners whose manners and customs are quite different
> from ours? (Majumdar 1941: 124-5)

Here the letter-writer accuses Roy of fabricating facts for ulterior motives. Such descriptions were common from Europeans who were given to generalising and making sweeping statements along with speculating on motives, but such writing from a native who would necessarily know better is disapproved of. There is also a sense that such descriptions are written only to get one noticed by the Europeans, who would hail such a writer as an 'enlightened native'.

Once the controversy picked up in the newspapers native interlocutors began to defend their position. The notoriously anti-Native *John Bull* published a couple of letters attacking Sati, to which some replies were made in the *Chandrika*. The common thread among these replies is summed up in this one signed by "A *Chandrika* reader" on May 25, 1822

> it is very improper to hold religious discussions with persons who differ in their manners and customs, and to wish to become acquainted with the authorities to justify the practice of Concremation; … it is altogether unbecoming for persons of a different faith to ridicule the religion of others. By this attempting to find fault with one another's religion, it would do mischief to the Government, and conduce to the misery of the subjects. These condemners of religion having published some erroneous conclusions about the injunction for the practice of Concremation; the subject is now in discussion even in England, and many doubts in the Hindoo Shastrus have arisen to those who are not versed in them. In order to remove those doubts, we shall here cite authorities written in every Shastru, and known in every country, for the practice of concremation, which is so very honest, and the means of obtaining final happiness; and the hope when the religious sceptics have made themselves acquainted with the meaning if the following passages, they will leave off those practices to which they have no right, and remain silent. (Majumdar 1941: 125)

This letter ends with quotations about the practice of concremation, from various texts. The points raised in this letter are at some variance from the ethical arguments of Colonial discourse. This letter speaks about the impropriety of holding religious discussions with people who have different *practices*. A more sustained argument from the orthodox group is found in a petition dated 14th January 1830 (Majumdar 1941: 156-63), addressed to William Bentinck, immediately after he has passed a legal ban on Sati in the territories of British India. This petition begins by defending the right of a group to follow its practices saying: "the Hindoo religion is founded like all

religions, on usage as well as precept, and one when immemorial is held equally sacred with the other" (Majumdar 1941: 156). This assertion directly contradicts Roy's method of argumentation.

The orthodox group assert that the custom is for women to perform this action out of choice. Rather than consider it a duty, they consider it a high privilege. The colonial understands this as the Native's inability to order text and practice 'correctly'. The suggestion of the petitioners is that only worthy women who deserve honour undertake this practice, which becomes a demonstration and a consequence of their virtue. This ties in with the earlier argument that Sati is not a duty but a choice that a widow may execute. Further that one must be considered *worthy* of being a Sati as it is a final expression of a life lived faithfully.[39]

Another thread in the petition to Bentinck follows the relation between practice and text. The petitioners object to the ban being upheld on the grounds that "there is no positive law or precept enjoining it" (Majumdar 1941: 157). They maintain that this is the result of misinterpretation; the question of practices should be settled only by "pundits and Brahmins, and teachers of holy lives, and known learning and authority". The question of practices is not to be solved by simply reading an authoritative text. It requires learned men, the teachers who have lived 'holy lives' and are recognised for their learning and authority.

Another objection raised by the orthodox group is on the question of the authority of the native supporters of the ban. The question of practices cannot

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[39] This comes out clearly in another letter, dated November 1st 1830, which describes the prevention of a Sati in the Burdhwan district. A woman of sixty resolved to perform Sati on the death of her husband. The government intervened and put a stop to it. The writer says: "By breaking a branch of a mango tree... she gave signs of a Suttee; and talked boastingly of her recollections of a former birth. But her contemptuous talk was of no force against the orders of Government, which accord with the best shasters." (Majumdar 1941: 179) Here the writer suggests that the woman was *boasting* about indications of Sati. Sati's were routinely understood to have heightened intuition before they performed the act. In this case however the writer says the woman falsely claimed such intuition. The claims were made to consider her *worthy* of performing the act. Since she could not perform the act, the claims to that exalted status were false.

be decided by those "who have apostatized from the religion of their forefathers, who have defiled themselves by eating and drinking forbidden things in the society of Europeans... (our hope is that) your lordship will not regard the assertion of men who have neither any faith nor care for the memory of their ancestors or their religion" (Majumdar 1941: 157).

Bentinck's final minute recommending the ban on Sati came on 8th November 1829. Bentinck set out the arguments which made the ban valid and appropriate:

> I know nothing so important to the improvement of their future condition, as the establishment of a purer morality, whatever their belief, and a more just conception of the will of God. The first step to this better understanding will be dissociation of religious belief and practice from blood and murder. They will then, when no longer under this brutalising excitement, view with more calmness, acknowledged truths. They will see that there can be no inconsistency in the ways of Providence, that to the command received as divine by all races of men, 'No innocent blood shall be spilt', there can be no exception; ... thus emancipated from those chains and shackles upon their minds and action, they may no longer continue, as they have done, the slaves of every foreign conqueror, but that they may assume their just places among the great families of mankind. I disown in these remarks or in this measure any view whatever to conversion to our faith. I write and feel as a Legislator for the Hindoos, and as I believe many enlightened Hindoos think and feel.
> (Majumdar 1941: 148)

The discourse on Sati in Colonial discourse now takes on a pedagogical tone. The exercise is an attempt to teach the Hindu about a 'purer morality', a better conception of the 'will of God'. The way to understand this is to separate religion from 'blood and murder'. The Hindu must be 'improved' and educated into seeing this. The ideal conditions are of course when they are no longer under the 'brutalizing excitement' of the sati controversy but can view

'acknowledged truths' with more 'calmness'. The orthodox group does not dispute the question of murder with the Colonial. Thus when the Colonial alleges that the orthodox group is guilty of murder, the reply of the group is not 'this act is not murder, it is religion'. The native agrees that 'the acts you speak of are murder but we do not perform those acts'. Sati results in the death of the widow, but is not therefore a murder.

The Colonial objection is that the practice, in that it causes the death of an 'innocent' victim, is a murder. For the orthodox group if a woman is forced to perform the act, then the act is a murder. But, there are circumstances under which the practice does not amount to murder. The resolve to perform the act, when taken by a woman, signals her extraordinary situation. She immediately becomes an object of reverence and awe. Speaking the resolve, the 'Sunkulpa', or giving a sign of it, is the act that transforms the widow into a Sati. Under these circumstances the death is a Sati and not a murder.

Bentinck's minute however, continues as if his Native interlocutors do not know the distinction between death and murder. In fact, not only do they acknowledge this distinction they also have a further distinction of their own between kinds of deaths. Some die ordinary deaths and others become Sati. Contemporary reconstruction follows the colonial moral discourse and understands the widow in spite of her actions. When she rejects the pyre and leaps out she is acting 'truly', but when she accepts the pyre and walks to it unforced she is acting under the 'misguidance' of her religion and therefore must be 'saved'. The loss of native distinctions on the practice of Sati goes almost entirely un-noticed in the present discourse on the practice.

There is a further interesting argument made by Bentinck about the need for this 'improvement' among the natives. 'False' practices keep the Native in subjugation to the conquering races. As Bentinck puts it the native will become "emancipated from those chains and shackles upon their minds and action"

which is the result of their following false practices[40]. Then, "they may no longer continue, as they have done, the slaves of every foreign conqueror"; as a people with 'true' practices they will have the ability to stand up to foreign conquerors instead of becoming enslaved by them. Once they do this, the natives "may assume their just places among the great families of mankind".

Bentinck's minute makes an interesting claim about the relationship between groups. He argues that groups that pursue false practices become weak in relationship to other groups, and run the risk of being subjugated by them. He sees the role of England and correcting these false practices of the Indian native and raising them up in such a way as to stand up against the foreign conqueror. Mughal rule over India had been understood for a while now as the result of the 'enervation' of the Hindoo.

Bentinck's argument brings forward another difference between native and colonial discourse. While the native speaks about the individual who is interested in performing sati- the widow, colonial discourse consistently speaks about the group, which shares the doctrine behind the practice- the Hindoo. Thus the Hindoo must be reformed before the Hindu nation can 'take its place among the great families of the world'. In other words, the nation is understood to be a group with a common set of 'true' practices emerging from 'true' doctrines. In traditional accounts of the history of India we find that the reform period gives way to the nationalist period, and here we can now account for this as an expansion in colonial moral discourse. Reform was the colonial

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[40] After Lord Bentinck's ban an editorial in the *Bengal Hurkaru* a leading newspaper of the time, commented on the question of abolition of Sati in reply to Sir Charles Forbes who referred to the ban as a 'dangerous experiment'. "A *dangerous* experiment! Why Sir Charles! Not a dog has barked the more for it, and the few opponents of the measure in Calcutta have quietly petitioned parliament to be allowed to roast and fry their faithful spouses, mammas, and grand mammas, as in duty bound; and, had you been desirous of information on the subject, there is not an individual, who has any knowledge of India, in London, who could not have afforded you enough to shew you the absurdity of talking about the danger of the measure, and from Rammohun Roy or Mr Crawford you might have heard enough to convince the most sceptical of the perfect safety of it." The general understanding being that the natives had enervated themselves with a surfeit of 'false' practices and now no longer had the manly courage to stand up and fight for them. (Majumdar 1941:193)

correction of false practices, and nationalism becomes the self-correction of false practices. The discourse shifts from the domain of religion to that of political relations.

Chapter 4
Practice and Experience

In the previous chapter we have seen two shifts. In the first case a practice, in this instance Sati, is turned into a religious ritual. In the second case a new discourse about practices emerges which pins practices on reason and treats them as true or false. In this chapter we will look at a famous teacher and disciple pair of Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and their approach to practices. At the heart of the Reform moment this pair embodies the shifts we have been noting in practice and discourse. The master's discourse is untouched by colonial evaluative categories and his discourse renders practice as personal and structured around the transformation of the self. The swami on the other hand speaks in the new colonial discourse. His discourse is deeply influenced by the master, but he employs colonial categories and its evaluative framework. For him the salience of a practice lies in the relationship that is formed between practitioners. In a study of the two figures we can see how colonial discourse interferes with the continuance of practices.

I

19th century Bengali mystic, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa rose to popularity in the thick of the reform period, but was himself remarkably untouched by the reform project. His nearest connection to the reform movement was the young men from Calcutta who flocked to see him in the last ten years of his life. Ramakrishna, born in 1836, was the son of a poor Brahmin. He had almost no formal schooling and was trained in the family profession of officiating at ceremonies. With the help of his elder brother he landed a job at nineteen with a Zamindar's family officiating at the ceremonies in their Kali temple. This temple at Dakhineshwar remained his seat till the end of his life. Towards the

end of his life he suffered from throat cancer and died in 1886, at the age of 50.[1]

Current scholarship on Ramakrishna relies heavily on the five volume *Kathamrita* (M. 2001). This is a unique text containing conversations with the master, as well as an occasional mention of his day-to-day activities, taken down by a disciple, Mahendranath Gupta. In most cases the diary entry was written immediately after the conversation took place, the attempt was to retain the master's words verbatim. The commentary was often no more that setting the conversations in context, or enumerating the other people present. This adds a dimension of immediacy to the *Kathamrita* (from here KA).

All five volumes of the text are composed of excerpts from Gupta's diaries between 1882-1885. In the course of conversation events from 1881 appear as also events after the master's death in August 1886. Gupta scrupulously maintains a chronological order within each volume and a meticulous record of the time date and place of each conversation although the volumes themselves are not chronologically progressive, each volume covering roughly the same period between 1881 and 1886. The text was translated into English as The Gospel of Ramakrishna and the five volumes were published in Calcutta in 1902, 1904, 1908, 1910 and1932. Almost all biographies of Ramakrishna rely on the conversations in this text to reconstruct the master's life. Sumit Sarkar has noted that this text may be treated as more authentic than the biographies, since the latter are routinely selective in the specific accounts they include from the *KA*. (Sarkar 1985: 2).

The text of the *KA,* read in the original Bengali, seems to have two languages.[2] One is the rustic colloquial idiom spoken by Ramakrishna and the other is the

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[1] The major accounts of the saints life include the first Biography in Bengali *Shri Shri Ramkrishna Paramahamsa Deber Jiban-Brittanta* 1890, Swami Saradananda's *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga* in two volumes (reprinted 1979-82), *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings* by Max Muller 1898, Romain Rolland's *Life of Ramkrishna* 1929 and Christopher Isherwood's *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* 1965.

new written prose of the late-nineteenth-century Calcutta in which the early nationalist writers produced Bengali 'High-literature'. This is an important distinction already lost to readers in English, as the English text strives for a uniform formal tone. Gupta used the Bengali of 'high literature' for his commentaries and retained verbatim the language of the master. It is clear that as an 'educated native' Gupta's Bengali was highly influenced by his study of English. Occasionally he uses English terms such as 'free-will' and 'determination' at other times he adds notes about popular theories of religion or morality, and references to figures such as Francis Bacon or Max Mueller. Ramakrishna however is completely untouched by this language and its reference points and he never shifts from his 'rustic colloquial'.

Gupta's text records the voices of several interlocutors and disciples, mostly Bengali bhadralok. Apart from conversations Gupta included many narrative passages linking one set of conversations with another. He also placed titles and sub-titles on the conversations according to theme, interlocutor or place of the conversation. Chatterjee notes that it is remarkable the number of times Gupta titles the sections of discourse in English (even in the original Bengali text) attempting to latch the master's discourse onto existing debates within the English educated elite, to which Ramakrishna himself never referred (Chatterjee 1992: 43).

Gupta often places headings such as "The Meaning of Free Will" (M. 2001: 400), "Harmless Ego" (M. 2001: 481), "Reincarnation of Soul & Inscrutability of God's Ways" (M. 2001: 154) on conversations with the master. In many of these cases he retains the English words soul, ego, free will etc. The use of English terms and concepts does not end there as Chatterjee points out, occasionally Gupta provides us with a footnote to explain his master's words in English terms, or compares his master's discourses with ongoing debates within European philosophical traditions. Chatterjee also points out that Gupta

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[2] This has been noted in Chatterjee (1992) and Sarkar (1985).

embellishes the text with Sanskrit quotations, while the master's own use of Sanskrit was minimal (M. 2001: 45).

In a self-effacing gesture Mahendranath Gupta recorded himself only as 'M' in the text: his first meeting with the Paramahamsa as a young man of 28 left a deep and lasting impression on him. Gupta was the headmaster of a local school, and among the few, but increasing, number of 'educated natives'. Educated at an English school and later at the Presidency College, Gupta had already taught at three different colleges before he became the head-master of a school in North-Calcutta run by the well-known educationist and social reformer Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. Eventually his dedication to the master became a point of contention with Vidyasagar. Mahendranath resigned from the post when the boys fared poorly in an examination and Vidyasagar explicitly blamed Mahendranath's continued 'obsession' with the master. However Gupta was not an exception among the disciples of the master. In the last ten years of his life, Ramakrishna attracted a large number of young educated men. Among the young men who formed the inner core of Ramakrishna's disciples in the last ten years of his life many were the educated youth of Calcutta.

Although he lived almost parallel to the high Reform period, (1836-1886) Ramakrishna's story remarkably escapes the reform template that others in this period such as Keshub Chunder Sen and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar are subjected to. His story as a 'spiritual leader' among the Hindus now appears mostly as a precursor to elaborations on the activities of his most famous disciple Swami Vivekananda.

The master's most beloved disciple was Narendranath Dutta (1863-1902), who he first met in 1881. Narendra was a young boy in college pursuing the new learning of his times. He had studied under Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and later at the Presidency College, Calcutta, where he acquired a Bachelor of Arts degree and a fluent command over English. Narendra spent 5 years in

association with Ramakrishna, during which time he quickly became a favorite with the master. During the master's last illness Narendra and a few other disciples took on the responsibility of his full time care. They left their houses and lived with him till his death in 1886. After the master's death these disciples renounced the world and became monks. Narendra took the name Swami Vivekananda. Eventually in 1897 they began the first Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Calcutta.

Vivekananda became the first Hindu to travel and teach Hinduism in the west. In 1893 he participated in the World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. After his appearance there he was widely sought by a variety of western audiences to lecture on Hinduism. He spent the next three years travelling across the United Sates delivering lectures on Hinduism. He returned to India in 1896.

Like Rammohun Roy, Vivekananda was an 'educated native'. He had gained a thorough education at the institutions of new learning which were flourishing during his time. He also found a guru in Ramakrishna. In his orange robes, with his fluent English, the swami was able to speak to the west about Hinduism in a language they could understand. The knowledge of Hinduism in the west had so far been through Orientalist and Missionary writings, in the tone of a 'discovery' of Hinduism. Vivekananda was a Hindu, who spoke about Hinduism in a language that was accessible to the west. In the process, the practices of the master, become the rituals of the swami, but the trajectory of the discourse reveals the limitations of colonial discourse on practices.

II

Narrating a Life

Born as Gadadhar Chatterji, Ramakrishna's story begins with an experience he had while at his mother's house in Kumarpukur, Bengal. The story is originally told by the master himself as recorded in the *KA*, it has been reproduced a number of times in many different biographies and compilations. The incident itself is worth mentioning as it is often called Ramakrishna's first 'god-vision'. A young Gadadhar between 6 and 10 years of age walks across a rice field munching on some muri (rice crisps), when the sight of some white cranes flying against the backdrop of a huge dark monsoon cloud causes him to faint. The beauty in the contrast, the white cranes against the black clouds, overwhelmed the boy. He was found unconscious in the field with his little snack scattered in the mud. He could not be revived after much effort and was finally carried home to his mother in that state.[3]

The master tells this story when asked about his first 'religious experience' or his first 'vision' of god: in a sense he acknowledges this as the first instance when he came to 'know' god. The story does not explain why the child faints, or why all cranes against all black clouds do not have this effect, or why no one else perceived the 'vision'. The implication is that Gadadhar faints while others do not because he has the 'vision of god'. The 'vision of God' is not so much in the cranes and the clouds as it is in *Gadadhar's* seeing them. The story suggests that there is a further dimension of beauty than the visual contrast in nature. One may *experience* beauty intensely and the master recognises that as the young Gadadhar, he had such an experience.

In this case we see that the trigger for the experience may be prosaic- as in this case- some birds flying in the sky. The narrative recounted in the ordinary details- the mud banks on the green rice fields, the darkness of the monsoon clouds, the white birds and the spilt rice snack- somehow convey the intensity

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[3] This incident has been recorded in Saradananda 1972, M. (1904) as well as in Yogeshananda 1973, and Kripal (1995) among many others.

of the experience. In his later life Ramakrishna remembered and recognised this as the beginning of a series of highly intense experiences, which more often than not left his already frail body devastated. Clearly, what Ramakrishna calls 'god-vision' is not about the visual recognition of some or the other entity.

The master narrates many such experiences in his discourses. His claim is very often that he has 'seen' god. At each of these 'sightings' he describes the circumstances under which he saw and recognised the Divinity in whatever form it came to him (Sita, a Prostitute, Kali, Jesus, a little girl in anklets). The narrative about Ramakrishna's encounter with divinity is all about the experience of that encounter:

> One day I was sitting and meditating on Her in the Kali Temple. I
> could by no means bring the Mother's form to my mind. Do you
> know what I saw then? She appeared as the prostitute Ramani,
> who used to bathe at the temple ghat. She peeped at me, hiding as
> it were, behind the worship jar. I saw it and laughing said, "thou
> hast the desire, O mother, of becoming Ramani today. Very good.
> Accept the worship today in this from." As she did so she seemed
> to be saying: a prostitute is also Myself; there is nothing except
> myself. (Yogeshananda, 1973: 32-33)

The 'vision' of a prostitute as the Divine Mother is another way of relating the experience of equating the two. The insight that Ramakrishna arrives at through this 'vision' of Ramani the Prostitute as the Divine Mother is clear: 'a prostitute is also myself; there is nothing except myself'. This insight about the basic shared nature of beings, helped the seer to understand something about reality. To onlookers the sight of the master offering puja to a prostitute might seem incongruous. However, through these actions Ramakrishna understood that the Divine Mother has many ways of making her presence felt. And it is possible that the prostitute Ramani was embarrassed to be addressed as the seer's Divine Mother. However this identification of women as 'visions' of the

Divine Mother was not uncommon for Ramakrishna. On one occasion he identified his wife Saradamoni as the Divine Mother and performed a puja to her.

These incidents narrated by Ramakrishna help him understand the nature of the Divine Mother. While narrating the incidents Ramakrishna is charting out his own route to the state of consciousness he finds himself in. Each incident helps him break out of a set of conceptual restrictions in his mind. He 'understands' that the prostitute and the Divine Mother are 'the same' thing. The 'vision' of the Divine Mother may have been merely the prostitute Ramani peeping out to catch a glimpse of the seer. However, the master's understanding of it as a 'vision' of the Divine Mother allows him to come to a final understanding about the nature of the world. Thus it becomes irrelevant to some extent to decipher if it was 'really' the prostitute or 'really' the Divine Mother in human form. The only thing of importance is that reducing the differences between the two entities -Prostitute and Divine Mother gave the seer an intense experience.

Living in the World

Ramakrishna first travelled out of his village Kumarpukur, in Hoogly district, Bengal, at the age of 19. He was sent to earn a living by helping his elder brother, who was a senior priest, at a Kali temple near Calcutta. Rani Rashmoni and her son-in-law Mathur Babu had recently established this temple, at Dakhineshwar. They were local zamindars who remained patrons of the seer throughout his life. His brother's untimely death saw Ramakrishna become the chief priest at the new temple in 1856 at the age of 20. His life as the priest was marked by his own search for the experiences which in later life he called 'god-vision'. During this period his behaviour became most unorthodox and he was initially the subject of scandal. He routinely broke the order of puja and treated the idol of Kali with extraordinary familiarity.

He was often found offering food to the idol after having tasted it himself, and on one occasion after having fed a cat with it. He would touch the puja flowers to his own feet before offering them to the deity, address the deity in familiar terms and occasionally sleep with the idol next to him. These and many such other activities would have been enough to get him dismissed, but he never was, due to the abiding faith his patrons had in him. The Rani and Mathur Babu recognised very early that Ramakrishna was not an ordinary man. And it was under their protection that the seer's early unorthodox behaviour was tolerated.

One story often told about Ramakrishna is testimony to the devotion and patience of his patrons. One morning while the puja was being performed, Ramakrishna suddenly turned and slapped Rashmoni across her face and curtly informed her that if she could not bring her mind to concentrate, she should leave. Instead of taking offence the Rani left quietly, admitting that she was a little preoccupied at that moment with a legal tangle that she was involved in. It is also to the credit of the two patrons that they never allowed the incident to become controversial. Both merely acknowledged that the seer was right the Rani had been inattentive at an inappropriate moment and needed to be reminded.

On one occasion, Ramakrishna expressed a desire to see the various holy spots of the Hindus along the Ganges and Mathur Babu took him on a pilgrimage. They made up a small party, which travelled by boat to Varanasi, Allahabad and Vrindavan. On this occasion they broke journey one night at Baidyanath Dham where a number of famine affected people from the neighbouring areas had come for relief. The poorest of these were the starving Santhal inhabitants. On seeing them Ramakrishna was utterly overcome. He sat down with them and refused to touch the provisions the travel party had brought with them. Further when it was time to continue on the pilgrimage he refused to leave. No amount of reason worked. He could not be persuaded to either eat or leave the

famine victims to their fate. Finally Mathur Babu had to intervene- he spent a great deal of money to ensure that the victims would have enough resources to survive the famine. It was only then that Ramakrishna agreed to continue on his travels.

This story is often told as an instance of Ramakrishna's 'childlike' behaviour or as an instance where he was able to 'blackmail' even his own patron to do good to others. Whatever motives may be ascribed to him it is interesting to see the position he takes vis-à-vis suffering in the world. At a time when social reform discourse uses the discourse of charity and pedagogy, to 'correct' the suffering in the world Ramakrishna's attitude is startlingly different. He neither shuns suffering nor tries to avoid or alleviate it. His reaction to suffering is to *participate* in it. The position of one participating in the act of suffering is distinctly different from the position of the one who can stand outside it and alleviate it, or 'correct' it.

In a sense, Ramakrishna perceives suffering in the world as *someone's* suffering in the world. Further he is able to extend his identification with the sufferer in such a way that their suffering becomes his own. In a process similar to the dropping of differences between Ramani and the Mother, he participates in the suffering by dropping the distinctions between himself and the sufferer. The only ethical response the seer can give when faced with human suffering is to participate in it. Another word for such an attitude could be 'compassion' which still carries some sense of its Latin root *compati*- to 'suffer with'.

The Difficulty of Doing Good

Ramakrishna was also extremely critical of the contrasting tendency to charity or philanthropy. He says elsewhere that philanthropic activities present a real

danger. In a famous story, Ramakrishna is on a boat trip on the Ganga as a guest of the reformer Keshub Sen and several disciples. They are discussing the nature of work in the world:

> MASTER: You people speak of doing good to the world. Is the world such a small thing? And who are you pray, to do good to the world? First realize God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others; otherwise not.
>
> A BRAHMO DEVOTEE: "Then, sir, we must give up our activities until we realize God?"
>
> MASTER: "No. Why should you? You must engage in such activities as contemplation, singing His praises, and other daily devotions."
>
> BRAHMO: "But what about our worldly duties-duties associated with our earning money, and so on?"
>
> MASTER: "Yes, you can perform them too, but only as much as you need for your livelihood. At the same time, you must pray to God in solitude, with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner. You should say to Him: 'O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer; otherwise, O Lord, I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities. I may think I am doing unselfish work, but it turns out to be selfish'. People who carry to excess the giving of alms, or the distributing of food among the poor, fall victims to the desire of acquiring name and fame. (M. 1942: 142-43)

In this extract we see Ramakrishna reducing one set of distinctions related to work: work done for oneself and work done for another. The questioner asks about them as two different sets of activities clearly demarcated as 'worldly duties' works and 'doing good in the world' or 'selfish' and 'unselfish' activities. For Ramakrishna however that distinction does not arise. His concept of work does not distinguish between who enjoys the fruit of the labour: whether the individual enjoys the fruit of his labour or performs the labour so that others may enjoy the fruit. At one level all work takes one away from god says this Bhakta. Thus his distinctions first equate all work as taking one away from

God. Then, since one needs to work even to merely keep body and soul together he allows that one must work for one's livelihood. But there the work is best kept minimal; 'only as much as you need'.

This work, required for one's livelihood, should further be performed with a particular attitude. The seer says one must pray hard for the right *attitude* towards labour- 'you must pray to God in solitude, with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner'. One begins by asking for a reduction in worldly duties, since it leads to a turning away from divinity-'I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities'. Further there is a difficulty in telling the difference between 'selfish' and 'unselfish' works: 'I may think I am doing unselfish work, but it turns out to be selfish'. Thus the nature of the work does not identify the work as selfish or unselfish. Rather it is an *attitude* of the individual that makes these distinctions. The individual himself may also be fooled into thinking he has the correct attitude and is doing 'unselfish' acts but they may turn out to be selfish. Since it is difficult at first to know the difference between them, the master suggests that one keep all work at a minimal level and concentrate on the attitude to be achieved. This he expresses as 'First realize God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others'.

More important than doing works of charity is to 'realize God'- by this he means something of the experience of being able to see the Divine Mother in Ramani, and having the compassion to share the fate of the famine victims. Once this attitude is in place, the kinds of work performed are immaterial. On the other hand, work done for the 'good of the world' without this attitude in place, might lead to another kind of danger: 'People who carry to excess the giving of alms, or the distributing of food among the poor, fall victims to the desire of acquiring name and fame'. Thus the 'unselfish' attitude which one must pray for is the opposite of the 'desire to acquire name and fame'. The

danger of charity is that it gives one a heightened sense of self. The correct attitude to perform even daily activities of the individual is 'unselfish' in the sense of 'acting without a sense of self', and not, as is understood commonly to 'act in favour of others'.

Although the seer's discourse is in Bengali and the translator introduces the English words 'selfish' and 'unselfish' and concepts like 'charity', it is fairly clear from the discourse what concepts the master is working. Thus the distinctions related to action are almost uniformly about the sense of self and its lack. Within the seer's discourse the appropriate way to act in all cases is without a sense of self. It is interesting to note that in Ramakrishna's unique view the question of charity revolves around the attitude of the person doing the charity not the needs of the person receiving the charity. Thus when he sits down with the famine victims he dissolves his limiting sense of self and participates in their suffering. To ask how his actions help the sufferers would be to ask the wrong kind of question about his actions. In another context the master says: "Householders engage in philanthropic work, such as charity, mostly with a motive. That is not good. But actions without motives are good. Yet it is very difficult to leave motives out of one's actions." (M. 1942: 400)

The Salt Doll

Ramakrishna's stories give a clear account of his idea of the individual. His attitudes to charity, social work and the Divine Mother are all consistent with his concept of the individual. Very often he speaks of the relationship between himself and the Divine Mother as "I am the machine, you are the engineer" he urges his disciples to "give your power of attorney to god" (M. 1942: 214). On other occasions he compares the relationship between a cat and her kitten, to that between the Divine Mother and himself, emphasising the helplessness of the kitten in relation to its mother. These and many other such examples articulate the seer's unique distinctions in relation to what it means to act

'without a sense of self'. In a much-repeated parable in the *KA* the master talks about the nature of the self. He says:

> sometimes God effaces even that trace of 'I'. Then one experiences jada samadhi or nirvikalpa samadhi. That experience cannot be described. A salt doll went to measure the depth of the ocean, but before it had gone far into the water it melted away. It became entirely one with the water of the ocean. Then who was to come back and tell the ocean's depth? (M. 1942: 201)

While the analogy of the kitten or the machine was held in relationship to the higher entity- the cat or the engineer, in this analogy, which describes a higher state of awareness the relationship is between the ocean and the doll made of salt. The quest for knowledge is rewarded with a dissolution of identity. And the term Samadhi in Ramakrishna's discourse refers to the highest state of consciousness. Thus the highest state of consciousness that the individual is capable of will dissolve his sense of individuality. Further, we have already seen that the master advocates actions without motives. These are unique distinctions on the individual and his actions. Since they are counter-intuitive in the language of translation- English, many of these distinctions are lost, or lose their salience in the translated text. This brings about the very real danger of making the master's discourses unintelligible. As with the case of the salt doll, although it is very central to the seer's conception of consciousness, and he repeats the story almost ten times within the text, it is rarely used to understand Ramakrishna's ideas of the individual and its relation to his concept of Divinity.

Another Kind of Free-Will

In a conversation with disciples one afternoon, the master said:

> It is God alone who has planted in man's mind what the 'Englishman' calls free will. People who have not realized God would become engaged in more and more sinful actions if God had not planted in them the notion of free will. Sin would have increased if God had not made the sinner feel that he alone was responsible for his sin. Those who have realized God are aware that free will is a mere appearance. In reality man is the machine and God its Operator, man is the carriage and God its Driver. (M. 2001: 400)

The conversation is centred around the concept of 'free-will' which is given an almost bizarre description by the master. The master's distinctions conflict with the common sense use of the term. The master says free will is a divine creation. It prevents man from committing sinful actions. Man refrains from sinful action because 'free-will' makes him feel responsible for each action: as long as man feels he is responsible for his actions he will not act sinfully. However, free-will is required only for those who have not 'realized god'. Thus the man who has a higher awareness *does not need free-will.* He becomes aware that 'free-will is a mere appearance'. In other words he understands something more about the nature of responsibility for actions. He sees the mechanism of free-will as a means to an end: to help those without a higher awareness to act responsibly. However the individual who has 'realized god' realises the true relationship between man and his actions 'in reality man is the machine and God its operator'.

The English term free–will has its origins in Christian Theology. Man has the free will to choose between good and evil. It leads to certain kinds of questions about man, God and the nature of divine justice. In this usage free–will enables man to exercise a choice between better and worse action. In the master's use of the term, free-will allows one to *feel responsible* for the action one chooses. It is a mechanism to ensure that man chooses better actions. The difference between the two terms is distinct and cannot be reconciled. Either it is the case

that free-will allows man to feel responsible for his actions and hence choose better actions over worse ones, or it is the case that free-will is the ability to know the difference between better and worse actions and to choose freely between them according to ones inclinations. The term cannot convey something that helps one choose better actions but also helps one choose freely between better and worse actions.

There is a further distinction between the two uses of the term, which render the two meanings irreconcilable. In Ramakrishna's discussion free-will is related to *responsibility* for ones actions. And it is only present in those who have not 'realised god'. Theologically free-will cannot be applied selectively. Either all people have free-will or they do not. It is a concept related to the nature of man and his choice of actions. It is not the nature of a select group of men, and if it is employed to understand the nature of man, it must be employed as a universal concept or it fails to generate any meaning.

This is a crucial difference indicating that the master is not using the theological term. It is not as though he is using the theological term in a 'loose' sense or with an 'alternative' but possible meaning. In fact the master's use of the term free-will is at *odds* with the theological use of free will. The two concepts cannot be used alternately. The English term free-will is used to translate the master's discourse merely because they both refer to man and actions. However the master's distinctions on man's relationship to action are completely different from the distinctions brought in by the English term.

Between Body and Soul

At another instance the master has been translated as-

> Everyone can attain Knowledge. There are two entities: Jivatma, the individual
> soul, and Paramatma, the Supreme Soul. Through prayer all individual souls
> can be united to the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas, and
> gas can be obtained from the main storage-tank of the Gas Company. Apply to
> the Company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will
> be lighted. (M. 1942: 210)

The master is first making a point about Knowledge- everyone can have it he
says. He then identifies two entities the Jivatma and the Paramatma and links
them through an analogy. The analogy he gives is of an application to the gas
company for a steady supply of gas, which will put an end to the darkness of
the house. The master says that through prayer all Jivatma can be 'united'
with the Paramatma. The Jivatma is the house, which is 'united' with the
Paramatma by means of the light which comes from burning the gas. Since the
master has been speaking about acquiring knowledge- we can already see that
the lighted house is the analogy for the Jivatma having knowledge.

In his analogy prayer is the application- by which one may get a supply of gas
into ones connection in the house and light it up. The already present
connection for gas 'Every house has a gas connection' is indicative of the
possible connection between the two entities. However without the application
there is no flow of gas. Thus without the 'application' there is no knowledge: it
is the only coherent meaning we can give to the master's discourse. He speaks
about the availability of knowledge to all, and thus, the possibility of everyone
lighting their homes with the gas from the 'main storage-tank'.

The master's talk of Jivatma and Paramatma does not overlap with our
common understanding of the body/soul dichotomy and the religious
discourse of God that it is related to. Here the link between Paramatma and
Jivatma is through Knowledge gained by application. The simplest
understanding of the soul is that it is the part of man which is distinct from his
body. In this analogy, of the house in darkness we cannot recognise any such

distinct entities. In fact in order to speak of the Jivatma the master does not need to contrast it with the body. The Jivatma is the house of the analogy. It is the space in darkness which gets lit up by the application.

Although the translator has used the word 'soul' Ramakrishna's metaphor cannot accommodate the soul/body dichotomy. If the body is the house applying for the gas connection by which one is enlightened, for the analogy to hold one must be able to say who applied for the gas connection? Who says the prayer/ makes the application by which the house is lighted? The soul/body dichotomy does not allow any such agency to the body. However if the 'soul' applies for the gas connection then, within the analogy there is no distinction between body and soul, both of whom are in darkness.

In a common sense discussion about the body/soul dichotomy and its relationship with God, no meaningful position is articulated by collapsing the body/soul distinction. In fact the relationship to god is understood better through the distinction: the soul is the entity which unites with god and the body is the material part which is left behind on earth. However the master's discourse conflates this all-important distinction by using an analogy in which the two entities are conflated with the dark house. The analogy speaks of the gas company sending gas to the house in order to light it up- while the master says 'all individual souls can be united with the Supreme Soul'. The Jivatma is the house- the individual object in darkness. It may be lit up with gas from the Paramatma. Lighting the house unites the Jivatma with the Paramatma. Thus the master says 'through prayer all individual souls can be united to the Supreme Soul'. The use of 'united' here is in the sense of 'having a connection with' rather than 'merging into'. Thus the gas flows from the 'main storage-tank' to the house and unites the Individual and Supreme Soul.

The point of the analogy is to show that 'Everyone can attain knowledge'. The possibility of gas lighting up every house is present in the fact that each house has the connection for gas. All that is required is the application to be made to

the company. Thus the analogy is meant to convey that every person/ Jivatma may gain knowledge, and that knowledge is to be gained by approaching the Paramatma; in this process one will gain the knowledge which connects one with the Paramatma. Knowledge and through it the connection to the Paramatma is available to everyone

This analogy has been easily translated as being about Individual and Supreme 'Souls'. However, the connections between the Soul and God are not mediated through any kind of knowledge. Furthermore the discussions on the soul always require a contrast with the body as the 'not soul'. Thus the use of the term individual soul for Jivatma and universal soul for Paramatma is bound to create contradictions. In the master's analogy, the house is dark, but one must make an attempt to apply for the gas. In this analogy it is perfectly possible to say that one may continue to live in darkness. Thus the master is making a point about the kind of effort one must make bring light to the house. He is not speaking about the constitution of man as made of body and soul. His distinction lies in the difference between a dark house and the lighted house. According to this analogy one may be living in the world, in a dark house, because one has not yet been able to apply to the gas company for light. Thus the lighting of the house is a matter of effort.

A Time for Ritual

Similarly of rituals, the master said-

Without having realized God one cannot give up rituals altogether. How long should one practice the sandhya and other forms of ritualistic worship? As long as one does not shed tears of joy at the name of God and feel a thrill in one's body. You will know that your ritualistic worship has come to an end when your eyes become filled with tears as you repeat 'Om Rama'. Then you do not have to continue your sandhya or other rituals.

When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit,

> and rituals are the blossom. "When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit, and rituals are the blossom. When the daughter in -law of the house becomes pregnant, she cannot do much work. Her mother-in -law gradually lessens her duties in the house. When her time arrives she does practically nothing. And after the child is born her only work is to play with it. She doesn't do any household duties at all. (M. 1942: 498)

One may give up rituals after one has 'realized' god, and realization comes with some signs in the body- tears in the eyes and a 'thrill' in the body. The relationship with rituals is a stage in the process of the Bhakta's growth. One must perform the rituals till a certain experience is achieved. Once it has been achieved they may be abandoned. Rituals then lead to some kind of *experience.* Once the experience has been achieved, one need not continue with the rituals any longer. The master explains this experience: 'when your eyes become filled with tears as you repeat 'Om Rama'. The analogy used by the master is that of a fruit and flower. He says the experience or 'love of god' (elsewhere 'god realization') is the fruit and the rituals are the blossom. The analogy suggests a natural progression from flower to fruit rather than a rupture in the 'giving up' of the rituals. The analogy suggests that the rituals will 'fall off' rather than that they need to be actively stopped.

Further, the master uses a domestic analogy to explain the workings of rituals. In a house-hold the mother-in-law would keep an eye on the household duties to be fulfilled by the younger women. In the case of a pregnancy, household duties of the daughter-in-law are reduced as the pregnancy advances. Finally when the infant arrives, the young mother is freed up of duties so that she may give the child all her time. This is used as an analogy for the giving up of rituals.

In this analogy the household duties are compared to the rituals like sandhya, which the master says may 'fall off' after they have fulfilled their purpose. The

woman is compared to the bhakta, who must perform the rituals till 'god realization' is gained. When the child is on the way the mother needs to perform less and less of the duties, as a bhakta may do less and less of his rituals, as he gets closer to 'god realization'.

In the master's example birthing a child is analogous to 'god realization'; the arrival of the child frees the mother from all her household duties as the arrival of 'god consciousness' frees the bhakta of the need for rituals. When the mother 'plays' with the child, she is still performing a task more important than any household duty. Similarly the bhakta's direct 'realisation of god' is more important than the rituals he used to perform. In this analogy the mother-in-law recruits the young woman to perform household duties only so long as she is not pregnant. The duties are appropriate for one who is not pregnant. Thus the bhakta who is unable to begin the process of 'god realization' must continue on the path of rituals, until he experiences something different. The experience manifests itself as 'tears of joy' at the name of god and a 'thrill in the body'.

This view of rituals does not allow us to see them as a means to an end. It is not that the woman gets pregnant *because* she performs household duties. Rather the pregnancy is in the normal course of being a married woman in a household. Thus being a bhakta, one will eventually have the experience one seeks, but before that one must continue ones duties. This way of looking at rituals does not allow us to link the final 'god conciousness' to the performance of rituals. Rather it tells us that this experience removes the need for rituals. Colonial discourse on practices looks for meaning in rituals in exactly the opposite relationship and argues that men perform rituals *in order* to gain Divine grace. It cannot accommodate the alternate relation made by Ramakrishna that 'god consciousness' (Divine Grace in Colonial discourse) indicates that a man *need not* perform rituals any longer.

These excerpts from The *KA* indicate that the master has a unique set of

distinctions related to man's work in the world, relationship with god, and the performance of rituals. The distinctions do not link practices to reason. The goal of the practice is not a higher state of being, rather the practices are to be performed until the higher state of being is arrived at. These distinctions are often lost in translation and contemporary scholars betray no awareness of them in their analyses of the master's discourses.

<div align="center">III</div>

Contemporary scholars have given accounts of Ramakrishna's life, within narratives of 'Hindu revivalism'. Swami Vivekananda began the widely known Ramakrishna Mission and Math-which still performs charitable works in education and healthcare. Although Ramakrishna himself held a complex view on charity, today the mission carries out social service along the lines of 'service to the poor', as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda. The popularity of the master demands an acknowledgement of his presence in history, although there is no ready template in which to record his story. In the last ten years of his life Ramakrishna enjoyed a huge popularity in Calcutta the first city of the empire. Several important natives, reformers, the orthodox, government servants, actors, businessmen and private individuals associated with the master. However the life and works of the master resist an easy retelling in terms of the reform template. The life of the master cannot be contained within the evaluative discourse of reform. Contemporary re-tellings of the master's life make use of the distance in time to reconstruct the master's life in a way that could fit the reform template, but such attempts remain inconsistent.

A Post-Colonial Problem

Partha Chatterjee's 'A Religion of Urban Domesticity: Sri Ramakrishna and the Calcutta Middle Class' (Chatterjee 1992) sets out to explain the 'reason' for the popularity of the master; he looks for reasons in the emerging needs and

insecurities of people caught in a colonial situation. The nature of the master is that people flock to him; in other words *because* he is a master people come to see him. On the other hand asking for a reason will also require demarcating what can and cannot be an answer. Thus the master's young disciples would probably have said that people flock to see their master because he is a great Kali Bhakt. However this domain is not available to Chatterjee who must look elsewhere for the answer.

Chatterjee's arguments begin from the condition of colonialism and its consequences in Bengal. In his *Nationalist Thought… A Derivative Discourse?* (Chatterjee 1993) he argues that the elite among the Indians were subordinated to the lowest white man the class structure of the colonials. According to him, race theory ensured that the elite were in an extraordinary position of being the elite over the indigenous people, and subordinated to the entire class structure of the Colonizer. Thus in the entire (supposed) class structure of a colonized community, the 'middle-class' was in-fact the indigenous elite.

His interest is in the 'mediation' of this Bengali middle-class, for whom the "political and economic domination by a British colonial elite was a fact." He defines the two-way relations that constitute this class. The class was created in a relation of subordination. "But its contestation of this relation was to be premised upon its cultural leadership of the indigenous colonized people" (Chatterjee 1992: 41). Thus, the Indian middle-class was politically and economically dominated by the colonizer, while at the same time it did not fit into merely the category of the dominated because, in turn, it dominated the "indigenous people" over whom the middle class retained "cultural leadership" (Chatterjee 1992: 42). For Chatterjee, the location of the middle-class is between the colonizer who subordinates it and the indigenous people who it dominates. It is this sense of 'middle-ness' that Chatterjee evokes with his middle-class (Chatterjee 1992: 42).

Chatterjee employs class discourse with a post-colonial 'twist'. Accepting

western economic theories as given, he merely wishes to place the post-colonial caveat. In this case it suggests that the colonial situation gives rise to a unique class structure. The relations between classes in classical economic discourse has been a range of negotiations between the bourgeoisie the upper classes and the proletariat. In the colonial situation however, Chatterjee focuses on the relations between the colonizer and the colonized middle-class, (who are actually the indigenous elite!) who show signs of 'mediation'; the proletariat is excluded from these relations. Chatterjee's "indigenous people" are only visible in their imitation of the cultural leadership of the mediating middle-class.

We now have a clearer picture of Chatterjee's questions and where he might legitimately look for an answer. A figure like Ramakrishna can cause problems at multiple levels within this theorising. On the one hand Ramakrishna is from a rural and poor background and thus not a part of the 'indigenous elite'; he does however have a large following. The followers seem to come from the elite of Calcutta. But this group, within Chatterjee's theorising, should be the 'indigenous people' who follow the example set by their 'indigenous elite'. Here the one of the 'indigenous people' seems to have become an object of veneration for the 'indigenous elite'.

There is also another kind of problem Chatterjee recognises an attitude in his context: "in the public postures of the Bengali intelligentsia to this day, its relationship to Ramakrishna has been both uneasy and shamefaced" (Chatterjee 1992: 65). So the intelligentsia has never been able to 'explain' the popularity of the master. However a lack of explanation itself does not account for the feelings of shame and unease related to the master. As we have seen the 'educated native' learns to evaluate certain activities negatively. Idol-worship was one of them and there was no doubt that the Kali Bhakta was an idol worshipper. But these were the objections of the earliest 'educated natives' as western learning spread. Eventually the evaluation on worship wore off but the figure of the 'godman' was still suspect. Colonial discourse on practices creates

an uncomfortable relationship between the master and present day scholars. The intelligentsia cannot reconcile the facts of the master's life within the new colonial discourse.

The non-intelligentsia however did not have any problem accepting and revering the master. Thus Chatterjee's problem can only be solved if it takes into account and gives adequate explanation for both these facts: the master's life embarrasses the intelligentsia while the non-intelligentsia reveres him. For Chatterjee this is indicative of a split in thinking among the colonized people. He reads the *KA* as "a document of the fears and anxieties of a class aspiring to hegemony." For him it is "a text that reveals to us the subalternity of an elite (and tells us) a great deal about the Bengali middle class." (Chatterjee 1992: 42). The *KA* will demonstrate the plausibility of Chatterjee's class theory with the post-colonial twist, by showing us the 'subalternity' of the colonized elite. Thus the problem of Ramakrishna's (embarrassing) popularity is solved by reading the *KA* as a text which depicts the fears and anxieties of the elite in a colonial period; the peculiarities of the colonial period creates unique fears and anxieties which the master responds to with unique solutions. In this way the embarrassment of the intelligentsia can be addressed as they are given 'real' reasons for the popularity of the master; the master offers a solution to the fears and anxieties of the 'subaltern elite'. Although it is not clear how this solves the problem of the embarrassment felt by contemporary intelligentsia, it allows Chatterjee to substantiate the class model he proposes and speak about Ramakrishna's discourses as a new religion of urban domesticity.

Solving the Problem

The unique 'middle-class' that Chatterjee identifies is in a "double-bind"; they are subjected to "political and economic domination by a British colonial elite" while they are seen as the cultural leaders of the "indigenous colonized people". This class creates for itself a 'new' approach to the urban life. Chatterjee's suggests that the *Kathamrita* be read as the location of "the construction… of a

new religion for urban domestic life" (Chatterjee 1992: 41-2). He argues that this 'new religion' advocated a suspicion of reason, a withdrawal from karma and jnana and a fear of kamini-kanchan[4]. Chatterjee interprets each of these terms and demonstrates how and why this 'new religion' takes an adverse position to them.

When the "middle-class mind" is faced with external pressures it reacts in several ways. The first is that it develops a "fear of the Englishman" (Chatterjee 1992: 49). The next is its "withdrawal from Karma" since "worldly pursuits occupy a domain of selfish and particular interests" over which the subject can have no control. He escapes into "his own world of consciousness, where worldly pursuits are forgotten". Chatterjee suggests that this escape is into the world of devotion (Chatterjee 1992: 50). In doing so he gives a unique interpretation of 'devotion' one that the master himself would not recognise. The master often tells disciples to reduce their involvement on the world so that they may spend their time in devotion but this reduction of activities is not to be seen as an escape, since he also advises that the householder first fulfil all his duties before surrendering to a life of devotion.

Ramakrishna often advises his disciples that book-learning produces pride rather than true knowledge. Chatterjee critically reads these passages to argue that that the educated native 'resonates' with this position and withdraws 'from Jnana'; he says the subject is already "convinced of the limits of science and rational knowledge" (Chatterjee 1992: 51). The master also cautions his subjects against "woman and gold" what he calls 'Kamini-o-kanchan'. Chatterjee reads it as a caution against "maya, man's fickle attachment and greed for things particular and transient" (Chatterjee 1992: 53). Chatterjee further argues that this is the "economic and political domination of the respectable male house-holder in colonial Calcutta" (Chatterjee 1992: 61). This

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[4] Karma meaning work or action, Jnana meaning wisdom or learning, and Kamini-Kanchan meaning woman and gold; the latter was often used by the master as an example of the temptations that make a man vulnerable.

combination of "woman and gold" also signified the "the enemy within: that part of one's own self which was susceptible to the temptations of an ever unreliable worldly success" (Chatterjee 1992: 61). Another reaction of the colonial subject, when faced with colonial pressures, is to inflict upon itself "a fierce assault of self-ridicule and self-irony" (Chatterjee 1992: 61). Chatterjee argues "the mode of self-ridicule became a major literary form of expressing the bhadralok's view of himself" (Chatterjee 1992: 63). Thus the problem is brought down to the split in the subject who publicly ridicules himself and privately withdraws into the inner world which was "a haven of mental peace, spiritual security and emotional comfort" (Chatterjee 1992: 61). The terms 'inside' and 'outside' become the parameters within which he argues about the colonial native.

Chatterjee argues that the *Kathamrita* is a text which constructs "a new religion for urban domestic life". A new religion is needed because the colonial situation is unique in that the subject faces the dual pressure of being subjected to "political and economic domination by a British colonial elite" and being the cultural leaders of the "indigenous colonized people". When the pressures on the colonial subject become too great, he resorts as the dominated subject, to self-irony and as the failed cultural leaders, to self-humiliation. This also splits the subject into an "ingenious and not always comfortable separation between… the outer and the inner selves" or "the public and the private selves" (Chatterjee 1992: 65).

To sum up Chatterjee's nuanced argument: the educated native faces unique pressures as the elite of his people and the subject of Colonial powers. In response to the pressure he faces he develops a 'split'[5] which translates into an inner or private life and an outer or public life. One of which is the 'escape' from the other, which causes him aggravation.

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[5]Chatterjee locates the split both in the subject's mind as well as in the social domain.

The Problem with Reason

Chatterjee argues that the unique middle-class, in the colonial situation rejects 'Reason'. They have already found that "the discourse of Reason was not unequivocally liberating":

> The invariable implication it carried of the historical necessity of colonial rule and its condemnation of indigenous culture as the storehouse of unreason, or... of reason yet unborn-which only colonial rule would bring to birth- made the discourse of Reason oppressive. It was an oppression which the middle-class mind often sought to escape. (Chatterjee 1992: 46)

The indigenous elite had learnt that colonial rule was 'inevitable'. New-learning made colonialism appear not merely inevitable, given the strengths of the west and the weaknesses of the east, but also desirable. This new learning looks at indigenous culture as the 'storehouse of unreason' or in the progress of civilisations as 'reason yet unborn'. Chatterjee argues that the new middle-class, caught as it was under the domination of the colonizer would seek to 'escape' this kind of reasoning which it found 'oppressive'. Chatterjee argues that this makes the educated native turn to Ramakrishna's 'new religion'. Chatterjee assumes that the new learning made available to the native used 'reason', which could not be countered by the native. He does not demonstrate the compelling nature of the argument. As we have seen, it is not the reason that traps the native in this discourse it is the nature of the evaluative discourse itself. The native is unable to articulate his distinctions on practices without attracting a sharp evaluative judgement. Within this discourse there is no way of challenging this evaluation.

Chatterjee remarks on the number of times Mahendranath Gupta titles the sections of discourse in the *KA* in English, attempting to latch the debate onto existing debates in English, to which Ramakrishna never referred. The use of English terms and concepts does not end there as Chatterjee points out,

occasionally Gupta provides us with a footnote to explain his master's words in English terms, or compares his master's discourses with on-going debates within European philosophical traditions. Chatterjee also points out that Gupta embellishes the text with Sanskrit quotations, while the master's own use of Sanskrit was minimal. Based on Gupta's use of language Chatterjee argues that both Gupta and his reader must have a *familiarity* with European thought: it is an area that is-

> familiar, yet foreign- from which they set out to discover, or perhaps, rediscover, the terrain of the indigenous and the popular, a home from which they have been forcibly wrenched. The bilingual discourse… takes place within the same consciousness, where both lord and bondsman reside. Contestation and mediation have taken root within the new middle-class mind, a mind split in two. (Chatterjee 1992: 45)

European thought becomes the ground from which the educated native sets out to 'discover or rediscover' the 'the indigenous and the popular'. Chatterjee's argument in fact claims what it has yet to prove- that the native was able to grasp and access European concepts and arguments in such a way that they changed the way in which he understood his own practices- 'the indigenous and the popular'. Although by calling them 'indigenous and popular' Chattejee perhaps wants to suggest that they were not the practices of the 'elite' native in any case, by also referring to it as the 'home from which they have been forcibly wrenched' he simultaneously suggests that these practices were familiar.

This argument does not consider that the native may have picked up colonial evaluative *discourse* in an attempt to converse with the coloniser. Once the nature of the discourse is understood, we can see that the normative evaluative discourse of the west cannot be 'learnt' by the native since he does not share the experiences which guides the evaluative content of this discourse. He does

not belong to western culture, and is thus unable to mark the divergence in practice, which triggers of the evaluative judgements.

Chatterjee does not investigate the process by which the educated native is 'forcibly wrenched' from his home, except to suggest that the colonial process exerted power in such a way that produced 'fear of the Englishman' and a lowered self- worth in the native. If the native undergoes a paradigmatic shift towards his own practices as Chatterjee suggests, we must minimally be able to say what his position on his practices were and how they shifted. However in this argument Chatterjee asserts this shift and focuses on the aspect that is of further interest to him. The bilingual discourse appears to Chatterjee as evidence of 'a mind split-in two'.

By pitching the problem at the level of the 'mind split in two' and locating the split 'within the consciousness' Chatterjee obfuscates the importance of the problem that he raises. We have already argued that the native receives concepts in his new learning, which do not link to his experience. Gupta for example is learning new concepts from European discourse and he attempts to place the master's discourse within these concepts. By arguing (rather arbitrarily) that the educated native is familiar with these European concepts Chatterjee asserts what he has to prove.

The European concepts can become familiar to the native only if he understands them. However the concepts preserve a view of the world which is not experientially available to the native. It incorporates a process of negatively evaluating divergences from *European practices.* In order to understand the evaluative value of these terms the native would have to experience the divergences *as* divergences. If the native is not able to understand the evaluative value of European concepts then how could they be familiar to him? And further how could he use them to 'rediscover' the 'terrain of the indigenous and the popular'?

Chatterjee argues that the educated native seeks escape from his 'prison house of reason'. He finds this one of the major reasons for the rise in popularity of the 'new religion for urban domestic life'. The native is caught in the prison house of reason by new learning, which argues for the inevitability and desirability of colonial rule. In order to escape from this 'reasoning' the native turns inward. Thus Chatterjee makes the case that the native is unproblematically able to understand and employ concepts from his new learning. However there is no analysis of how this comes about.

Karma

Chatterjee argues that the Bengali Middle class came to Ramakrishna in order to escape from the contentious 'outer' world of colonization. In a section entitled 'Withdrawal from Karma' Chatterjee argues:

> (T)his is a recurrent message that runs through the *Kathamrita*. Worldly pursuits occupy a domain of selfish and particular interests. It is a domain of conflict, of domination and submission, of social norms, legal regulations, disciplinary rules enforced by the institutions of power. It is a domain of constant flux...and humiliation. It is a domain the worldly householder cannot do without, but it is one which he has to enter because of the force of circumstances over which he has no control. But he can always escape into his own world of consciousness, where worldly pursuits are forgotten, where they have no essential existence. This is the inner world of devotion, a personal relation of bhakti with the Supreme Being. (Chatterjee 1992: 50)

The argument suggests that the outer world uniformly has these characteristics and the colonial situation is perhaps the extension of degree rather than kind. Furthering his argument Chatterjee quotes a section from the *Kathamrita* where the master discusses the nature of work. On Charitable works the master says:

You speak of people doing good to the world. Is the world such a small thing? And who are you, pray, to do good to the world? first realise God, see Him by means of spiritual discipline. If He imparts power, then you can do good to others; otherwise not…. It is not good to become involved in too many activities. That makes one forget God… Therefore I said to Shambhu: "suppose God appears before you; then will you ask Him to build hospitals and dispensaries for you? (*laughter*) A Lover of God never says that. He will rather say: "O Lord, give me a place at Thy Lotus Feet. Keep me in thy company. Give me sincere and pure love (*bhakti*) for Thee. (Chatterjee 1992: 49-50, parenthesis in the original).

On the worldly duties of the house-holder he quotes the master as saying:

You must pray to God in solitude with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner. You should say to him: "O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer, otherwise, O Lord, I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities. I may think I am doing unselfish work (*nishkaama karma)*, but it turns out to be selfish. (Chatterjee 1992: 50, parenthesis in the original)

Chatterjee argues that this attitude to work is a strategy.

The strategy of survival in a world that is dominated by the rich and the powerful is withdrawal. Do not attempt to intervene in the world, do not engage in futile conflict, do not try to reform the world. Those who do these things do so not because they wish to change the world for the better but because they too pursue their particular interests- fame, popularity, power. This is a very strong element operating in that part of the middle-class consciousness in which it is submissive, weak, afraid of its fate in the world. (Chatterjee 1992: 50)

Since the middle class is 'submissive, weak, afraid of its fate in the world' it relates very strongly to the withdrawal from work that the master recommends.

Thus the educated native survives by acknowledging that charity, reform or any other kinds of intervention in the world is to be avoided. The reason given is that such actions are pursued only out of selfish interests such as fame, popularity and power.

But there is a very crucial difference between the master's distinctions and Chatterjee's. For Ramakrishna activities involving the household or the world at large should be avoided because the first distracts one from the contemplation of god, and the second inculcates a false sense of pride. In both cases the master says that the more desirable thing is devotion to god. In fact it is because the devotion to god is disrupted by household activities that one should do only as much as is absolutely necessary (M. 2000: 43). Similarly, as we can see from the example of Shambu Mallik, it is only because the false sense of pride interferes with one's relationship to god that one should avoid getting too involved in philanthropy. Thus in the master's discourse the reason why one should reduce ones activities is because excess of activities prevent one from having the correct attitude of devotion.

In his argument Chatterjee does not mention the master's crucial point: one must reduce activities for a purpose. He misinterprets this as a solution to the difficulties of performing such activities. The master asks men to withdraw from actions in order to have the correct attitude of devotion. However, Chatterjee argues, that the master's words were appealing to the 'subaltern elite' because they had already been humiliated in the 'outer' world, which was routinely full of struggles. This alters the salience of the master's argument and makes the native appear disingenuous. If the native does not want to engage in worldly activities because he finds them too hard, then why go through the charade of pretending that he is avoiding them in order to have a proper devotional attitude?

The master's discourses reveal that work of any kind is to be forsaken only to gain the devotional attitude "O Lord, give me a place at Thy Lotus Feet. Keep

me in thy company. Give me sincere and pure love (*bhakti*) for Thee". Thus work is to be renounced for a higher goal, which is bhakti. Chatterjee employs an evaluative discourse, which does not give salience to the concept of bhakti. In his interpretation the educated native knows that work in the outside world is necessary but too difficult for him; thus he turns to Ramakrishna who suggests that renouncing work is a way of gaining bhakti. Essentially the native avoids action because it is too difficult to perform and justifies this by giving pious reasons. Chatterjee's complex and nuanced post-colonial reading of the native's relations to actions is exactly the same as the early missionary's on 'puja' or the administrator's who sought complex reasons for Sati. This indicates that Chatterjee is using the same evaluative discourse as these colonial figures. While Chatterjee's discourse is more nuanced and sophisticated than his colonial counter parts, the evaluative judgments from all three coincide. This indicates that there is a common evaluative language which all three employ.

Jnana

Having 'explained' the native's relationship to action or work, Chatterjee now discusses Jnana or knowledge. He narrates an incident from the KA, in which Ramakrishna requests his disciples to have a debate in English. As the boys begin a discussion the master loses interest in it. Later he tells Narendra that he was disturbed by the discordance produced by arguing. Chatterjee comments:

> Ramakrishna is heard repeating the argument several times in the *Kathamrita*. Learning is futile. It produces no true knowledge, only the pride of the learned. While acknowledging the pursuit of knowledge by the Vedantic scholar, he pronounces this an impossible project for the ordinary man in the present age... he is curious about the forms of logical argument in European philosophy... but his impatience soon gets the better of his curiosity.

> This attitude strikes a sympathetic chord in his disciples. They are convinced of the limits of science and rational knowledge, of their failure to grasp the truth in its eternal, unchanging essence. Trained in the new schools of colonialism, some like Narendranath in fact being highly proficient in several branches of modern European knowledge, they feel oppressed in the prison-house of Reason and clamour to escape into the vicara-less freedom of bhakti. (Chatterjee 1992: 51-52)

Chatterjee argues that the master rejects learning as futile and opts for devotion as a 'better' option. He uses the terms Jnana and Bhakti, following the master. However, there is a crucial distinction which his interpretation does not account for. The master does not place Jnana and Bhakti in a relationship *against* each other. In other words, Chatterjee argues that the educated native is convinced of the limits if rational knowledge and desires to escape into the freedom of bhakti. If the natives were convinced of the limits of science and rational knowledge then we should be able to access the arguments, which convinced them of this. In the argument however, Chatterjee merely asserts that the educated native finds it *convenient* to agree with Ramakrishna on matters of learning and hence bhadralok disciples flock to him. Further he suggests that they having *rejected* knowledge they can now 'escape to the vicara-less freedom of bhakti', where vicara is being used in the sense of 'inquiry'. Thus bhakti becomes an escape route for which educated natives flock to the master.

This interpretation of bhakti is entirely at odds with the master's discourse. In the process of forwarding his post-colonial theory Chatterjee has argued that the natives flock to the master because bhakti is a means of escape from jnana. However the master's discourse has a different nuance in relating bhakti and jnana. In different sections the *KA* records:

> M: "Isn't it possible to develop both jnana and bhakti by the practice of spiritual discipline?

MASTER: "Through the path of bhakti a man may attain them both. If it is necessary, God gives him the Knowledge of Brahman. But a highly qualified aspirant may develop both jnana and bhakti at the same time. (M. 2001: 368)

MASTER: "Reasoning is one of the paths; it is the path of the Vedantists. But there is another path, the path of bhakti. If a bhakta, weeps longingly for the Knowledge of Brahman, he receives that as well. These are the two paths: jnana and bhakti. (M. 2001: 757)

MASTER: Jnana and bhakti are one and the same thing. The difference is like this: one man says 'water', and another, 'a block of ice'. (M. 2001: 863)

To begin with the master does not speak of Jnana and Bhakti as mutually exclusive. However, it is difficult for anyone but a "highly qualified aspirant" to achieve both. Both Jnana and Bhakti seem to be 'paths' or methods for achieving some life-goal. This goal may be achieved by "reasoning" like the vedantists or by "weeping longingly" like the bhakta. The distinction then is in terms of the *method* of Jnana and Bhakti and not in the goal. Jnana employs reasoning as the method for its goal. The master claims it as one of the legitimate paths leading to the goal of nirvana.

Chatterjee argues that the educated native flocks to the master who preaches bhakti; they seek to escape the prison house of reason, which Chatterjee also conflates as jnana. However the master clearly says that both bhakti and jnana are paths to the same goal. He does not suggest a conflicting relationship between the two.

Chatterjee has already argued that the educated natives 'are convinced of the limits of science and rational knowledge, of their failure to grasp the truth in its eternal, unchanging essence'. This analysis becomes incoherent in the light of the master's discourse. Chatterjee's conflations of 'science and rational

knowledge' with the master's term jnana becomes increasingly untenable. The master asserts that both jnana and bhakti are paths to the same goal. Thus if there are limits to science and rational knowledge then these are not to be conflated with jnana, or the limits do not affect the final goal that jnana can lead to. Rejecting jnana and choosing bhakti is not related to the limits of jnana as a method.

Chatterjee's argument about the popularity of Ramakrishna amongst the middle-classes in colonial Bengal relied on the assertion that the master offered a 'way out' of the prison-house of reason. In fact the master's discourses, free from all colonial evaluations did allow the native to escape the confines of colonial evaluative discourse. In the discourses of the master the educated native found no unfamiliar judgements on quotidian practices. Thus the master's popularity could have something to do with the rejection of the colonial world, but the categories in which Chatterjee tries to argue for this merely confuse the issue rather than clarify it.

Chatterjee's reading of Ramakrishna is nuanced and complex, but it sheds more light on Chatterjee's concerns (class, power) than on Ramakrishna's. In fact, as in the last example some of Chatterjee's assertions make Ramakrishna's discourses incoherent. Alternately if the coherence of Ramakrishna's discourse is maintained, Chatterjee's discourse becomes incoherent. Minimally, the discourses do not illuminate each other; they seem to be mutually exclusive.

Sexual Preferences and Holy Feet

Chatterjee's concerns were post-colonial, and in that sense he was not attempting to understand Ramakrishna the man. His analysis was based on understanding the master's popularity based on class relations in the colonial context. In this section we will look at an extreme example of modern day scholarship which focuses on the man himself. Jeffry Kirpal has attempted a

psychoanalytic reading of Ramakrishna in *Kali's Child* (Kirpal 1995). With more accuracy than he could possibly have been aiming at Kirpal writes in his preface:

> If Ramakrishna were alive and could fully understand what follows, this work would deeply affect *him*, for he could then read his life through the lens of mine and see things he never saw before. (Kirpal 1995: xv)

While Kirpal means this in a positive way, it remains true that his psychological readings of Ramakrishna employ a discourse entirely alien to the master. While this discrepancy does not bother Kirpal, it is certainly of interest to us.

Kirpal's first focus is on the many descriptions of Samadhi that the master falls into. In this state the master would lose outward consciousness. He would sit still for hours, or fall unconscious towards the end. On some occasions, when he was seated at the edge of his bed, while in the state of Samadhi, he was known to extend his foot and touch a disciple with it. There are many discussions of his placing his foot on the disciples sitting near him while in this state. The 'meaning' of this foot is what Kirpal investigates in his opening chapter.

> When Ramakrishna went into *Samadhi*, a type of mystical absorption, he would sometimes place his foot "in the lap" (*kole*)- that is, on the genitals[6]- of a young boy disciple. Observers were scandalized by this "sinful" foot and would angrily confront the saint when he eventually came down from his ecstatic state. Ramakrishna never denied the troubling actions of his foot, but neither did he have an answer for his critics. In the end by his own confession, he simply could not explain it. Nor could his disciples.... I will argue that Ramakrishna's mystical experiences, far from being examples of simple *Samadhi*, "without even a

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[6] Ramakrishna scholars and many native Bengali speakers have objected very severely to this translation of 'kola' into 'genitals'. They claim it is an incorrect extension from 'lap' to 'genitals'.

smell of lust" were in actual fact *profoundly, provocatively, scandalously erotic...* he could not be forced to complete the Tantric ritual of *maithuna* or "sexual intercourse" with a woman, for example, *not* because he had somehow transcended sex (the traditional claim) but because the ritual's heterosexual assumptions seriously violated the structure of his own homosexual desires. (Kirpal 1995: 2)

Kirpal claims that Ramakrishna's experience was not that of a 'simple Samadhi', which was "without even a smell of lust" (this is a quotation from one of Ramakrishna's disciples describing the master's Samadhi). The reason that the master's Samadhi was not 'simple' was because it was 'profoundly, provocatively, scandalously erotic'. Thus a 'simple Samadhi' was an asexual state and the master's Samadhi was a sexual state. Further Kirpal argues that the reason why the master could not complete a ritual involving sexual relations with a woman was not because he had 'somehow transcended' sex but because he was in fact homosexual. The fact that his marriage was never consummated, that he had only male disciples, that he instructed them to avoid 'woman and gold' and that he placed his feet on the genitals of young boys were 'proof' of his homosexuality.

Kirpal argues that the master was often 'confronted' about his foot. The *KA* records one such conversation between the doctor who attended to Ramakrishna during his last days, as he lay dying of a cancer in the throat.

> DOCTOR: (To Sri Ramakrishna) "Well, may I say something? When you are in ecstasy you place your foot on others' bodies. That is not good."
> MASTER: "Do you think I know at that time that I am touching another with my foot?"
> DOCTOR: "You feel that it is not the right thing to do, don't you?"
> MASTER: "How can I explain to you what I experience in samadhi? After coming down from that state I think, sometimes, that my illness may be due to samadhi. The thing is, the thought of God makes me mad. All this is the result of my divine madness. How can I help it?"

DOCTOR: "Now he accepts my view. He expresses regret for what he does. He is conscious that the act is sinful"

MASTER (to Narendra): "You are very clever. Why don't you answer? Explain it all to the doctor."

GIRISH (to the doctor): "Sir, you are mistaken. He is not expressing regret for touching the bodies of his devotees during samadhi. His own body is pure, untouched by any sin. That he touches others in this way is for their good. Sometimes he thinks that he may have got this illness by taking their sins upon himself. Think of your own case. Once you suffered from colic. Didn't you have regrets at that time for sitting up and reading till very late at night? Does that prove that reading till the late hours of the night is, in itself, a bad thing? He [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] too may be sorry that he is ill. But that does not make him feel that it is wrong on his part to touch others for their welfare."

Dr. Sarkar felt rather embarrassed and said to Girish: "I confess my defeat at your hands. Give me the dust of your feet." He saluted Girish.

(M. 2000: 951-2 parenthesis in the original)

The Doctor objects to the master's placing of his foot on another person. The conversation is coherent only if the objection is to the disrespect inherent in touching another person with ones feet. If one reads the objection as an indirect objection to touching another person's *genitals* with ones feet the conversation becomes incoherent.

The doctor says it is 'not good' that the master touches other with his feet. The master does not argue about the wrongness of that gesture- instead he pleads ignorance. He says that in the state of Samadhi he is unaware that he touches another person with his foot. Further he says that sometimes he feels that he may have fallen sick due to this very gesture of his. The doctor picks this up and argues that the master too knows that touching another with his foot is not the right thing to do. He mistakes the master's answer as an expression of regret. However the master gives up saying he cannot explain the state of his Samadhi. He asks one of his disciples to carry on the conversation with the

doctor (the master would get tired very easily and often during these last days, as recorded in the *KA*). Girish answers the doctor to the satisfaction of his master.

In his answer Girish gives the example of the doctor himself who contracted colic due to staying up late and reading. Although staying up late resulted in something painful for the doctor, one could not say that staying up late itself was a bad thing to do. Similarly the master touches people when he is in Samadhi 'for their own good'. By touching them he 'takes their sins on himself'. His own body 'is untouched by sin' but he feels that the tumour in his body is a result of 'taking on others sins'. However just because the tumour has manifested, it cannot mean that touching people for their own good during Samadhi is itself a wrong thing to do.

The doctor accepts this example and explanation. Clearly when Kirpal argues that neither Ramkrishna nor his disciples could explain the foot, he means that they could not explain it to Kirpal. Among themselves there was no confusion as to the 'meaning' of the foot. Kirpal reads the foot as a sublimated sexual reaction which 'proves' that the master was attracted to his young male disciples. However, the example given by Girish becomes incoherent at best and deceitful at worst if one tries to understand the placing of the foot as a sexual act. Further Kirpal has to assume that the doctor and the master are not speaking frankly; they are talking about sexual acts while not mentioning it explicitly. He can only do this if he does not take seriously the disapproval of one person touching another with his foot as a sign of disrespect to the individual. But that reading of this particular action, we know, is entirely culture specific.

IV

Hindu Religion, Hindu Nation.

At the parliament of religions, Vivekananda spoke about the Hindu religion and the relationship between religions in the world. He spoke against religious fundamentalism (what he called fanaticism) of any kind. He spoke about Hinduism as one of the most tolerant religions.

> I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both toleration and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. (Majumdar 1963: 215)

While speaking about the qualities of Hinduism, the swami speaks about its 'tolerance' which comes from the belief that 'all religions are true'. Then, equating 'religion' with 'nation' he takes pride in belonging to a nation, which has sheltered refugees of all religions and all nations in the world. This is an interesting conflation. For the swami, the Hindu religion could be meaningfully extended to mean the Indian nation. The presence of other religions within the Indian nation proves that the Hindu religion is tolerant. The swami's terms and distinctions are uniquely his; his master has never spoken of either the Hindu religion or of the Indian nation. The master's concern has always been with the individual and his actions.

Both religion and nation are terms that do not refer to individuals. The English words are *evaluative terms* from colonial discourse. The terms indicate a group of individuals bound by common goals and practices. Both having a religion and belonging to a nation are signs of being a 'civilised' people. However there may be problems in relationships *within* these groups; the swami says sometimes religions cause violence between groups:

> Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence,

drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. (Majumdar 1963: 75)

The problems he mentions have a bad effect on the earth, and on 'human civilisation'. And if it were not for these problems, 'human society would have been far more advanced than it is now'. Religion then can cause 'sectarianism' and 'bigotry' and also lead to violence and destruction. And violence caused by religion can prevent the advance of human society. These distinctions on religion do not appear anywhere in the master's discourses. His concern is for the individual who must learn to perform motive-less action. He never speaks of any kind of group formation or group activities as religion. The master and his disciple seem to be working with two different notions of religion. The difference can only be put down to the swami's colonial education.

When the swami speaks about the individual he does not use the same distinctions as his master. The question of practice is almost entirely absent from his discussions on the individual. Elaborating on the attitude of the individual, which causes religious conflicts the swami tells this story in a discourse, entitled "Why We Disagree":

> A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog… Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.
> "Where are you from?"
> "I am from the sea."
> "the sea! How big is that? Is that as big as my well?" and he took a leap from one side of the well to the other.
> "My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how do you compare the sea with your little well?"
> Then the frog took another leap and asked, "Is your sea so big?"

"What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!"

"Well then," said the frog of the well, "nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow is a liar, so turn him out."

That has been the difficulty all the while. I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his little well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world. (Majumdar 1963: 178)

The frog in the well is unable to understand how big the sea is, since he has never been out of the well. The swami extends this analogy to religion. He says the each individual sits in his own well thinking that the whole world is the well. As with the frog when someone comes along to disprove the idea, such as the frog from the sea, then he is turned out as a liar.

Thus the swami argues that the cause of conflict is ignorance. At the end of the discourse the master says that the attempt should be to "break down228the228barriers228of228this little228world228of228ours". In other words the barriers of ignorance should be overcome. Knowledge about each other's religions will prevent chauvinism and conflict. Thus the solution to the conflict and violence that he had noted before is to move out of the 'little world' in which we are caught like frogs in a well. The story teaches us something about the nature of relations with others. Religious identity may act as a barrier to understanding others, and this could become a problem. These distinctions about religious identity can only occur in the swami's discourse. In the master's discourse the individual and his actions can never become a source of this kind of conflict.

When Ramakrishna speaks about the relationship between faiths he says:

The devotion of the wife to her husband is also an instance of unswerving love. She feeds her brothers-in-law as well, and looks after their

comforts, but she has a special relationship with her husband. Likewise, one may have that single-minded devotion to one's own religion; but one should not on that account hate other faiths. On the contrary, one should have a friendly attitude, toward them. (M. 2001: 229.)

Using a domestic allegory the master explains the relations between faiths. Unlike the frog who has not seen the sea, the wife knows her brother-in-laws well. In fact their presence does not come as a surprise to her but is merely a domestic fact. Their presence does not impede her single-minded devotion to her husband. In fact, the presence of the brothers-in-law cause no conflict in this analogy. The woman in question has to make no special effort to relate to the others. The curious thing about the master's example is that the woman's devotion to the husband is the metaphor for the bhakta's devotion to the object of his bhakti. In the example then the other brothers-in-law will have their own wives who are devoted to them as the bhakta is. The story talks about the attitude of the wife to the *brothers-in-law* and not to the wives of these brothers-in-law. In other words the master advises the individual to respect all *objects of devotion* equally. The master's story is silent on the relationship *between* the devotees of different objects of devotion. Thus the master's discourse does not place any emphasis on 'religious identity', which is essentially the marker of difference between people of different religious practices. Rather he highlights the nature of the relationship between the individual and objects of devotion- this emphasizes the *attitude* of devotion for the individual rather than any kind of religious *identity* for a group.

When the swami speaks of individuals he speaks about their identity rather than their practices, and when he speaks of practices he relates them to a group. These are crucial differences between his and his master's discourses. In his travels across the world the swami very often picked up and discussed the differences in human practices in different parts of the world. However his distinctions in discussing practices emphasised more on the group identity of the person practicing rather than the individual who practices. Speak about

the difference between India and the west he says:

> In a warm country like ours, we drink glass after glass of water; now,
> how can we help eructating; but in the West, that habit is very
> ungentlemanly. But there if you blow the nose and use your pocket
> hand-kerchief at the time of eating- that is not objectionable, but with us
> it is disgusting. In a cold country like theirs, one cannot avoid doing it
> now and then. (Vivekananda 1944: 35)

The swami speaks about two groups of people, the Indians and those from the west. He points out innocuous but common practices among each set of people, which are frowned upon by the other set. He adduces a reason for the practice, the difference in climactic conditions, and demonstrates that the reason for the practice being climactic it is not 'reasonable' to judge a people based on such practices. This conversation about practices uses a set of distinctions that are not to be found in Ramakrishna's discourses. Ramakrishna's concern when it came to practices was the motive and attitude of the individual. Whether it was a common practice or one related to the individual in a unique way the master was concerned about the attitude behind the practice. His discourses laid no emphasis on a group of people with a common practice, nor did they attempt to place any reason behind the similarity or difference in practices. Since the object of interest was the practitioner's attitude, the practice itself was not of central interest. Thus there was no interest in the similarity or dissimilarity of these practices.

Taking further this difference in practices, which is the core of group formation the swami elaborates on the nature of nations:

> Every nation has a corresponding national idea. This idea is working for
> the world and is necessary for its preservation. The day when the
> necessity of an idea as an element for the preservation of the world is
> over, that very day the receptacle of that idea, whether it be an individual
> or a nation, will meet destruction... Why did not this Hindu race die out,

in the face if so many troubles and tumults of a thousand years? If our customs and manners are so very bad how is it that we have not been effaced from the face of the earth by this time? (Vivekananda 1944: 4)

The swami's talk builds a network of relations between groups of practitioners, and works in motivations and justifications for the existence of differences in practice. He argues that every nation has a 'corresponding national idea'. He seems to suggest that this idea is responsible for the difference in practices. Apart from setting nations apart from other nations this 'idea' is also 'working for the world and is necessary for its preservation'. This links individual and nation to an idea and the idea to the 'preservation of the world'. The individual with diverse practices is linked to a 'nation', which has a 'national idea' which is necessary for the 'preservation of the world'. The diversity in the individual's practices is 'explained' by an elaborate set of relations. This explanation can only be offered where the guiding question is 'why do practices differ?' As we have already seen this kind of a question on practices comes in with colonial discourse, which attempts to evaluate diversity in practices. Within this discourse the swami is able to reverse the evaluative judgement on diverse practices by suggesting that the diversity is necessary for the 'preservation of the world'. But this does not change the basic structure of colonial discourse, which demands an explanation for diversity in practices.

The swami's discourse is unlike the master's in that the master does not give any salience to diversity of practice. In this argument the swami defends the Hindu nation. This is presumably the nation comprising of all those people who share the same 'Hindu' practices. And yet, even in the master's discourse there is no mention of a group being formed out of what are essentially the practices of the individual. The swami on the other hand justifies the continued existence of the practices, saying that since it has not yet been 'effaced from the face of the earth' it must mean that it is necessary for the preservation of the world. Thus he argues; "The reason that we Indians are still living, in spite

of so much misery, distress, poverty and oppression from within and without is, that we have a national idea, which is yet necessary for the preservation of the world." (Vivekananda 1944: 4) Colonial discourse has caught the swami in its trap. Even while evaluating Indian practices positively the swami, in speaking this discourse must link practices to reasons.

On French, English and Indian 'national Ideas' Vivekananda says:

> French subjects bear calmly all oppressions... heavy taxes...[compulsion to join] the army...but the instant anyone meddles with [their] political independence, the whole nation... will madly react- this is the root principle of the French character. He must suffer, who will try to interfere with his freedom... To the English, equity, equal partition of privileges, is of essential interest [he] humbly submits to the king and to the privileges of the nobility, he is ready to obey and honour [the king]... but if the king wants money, the Englishman says...I must have my say in the matter of how it is to be spent and then I shall part with it... the Hindu says, that political and social independence is well and good, but the real thing is spiritual independence,- Mukti. This is our National purpose.
> (Vivekananda 1944: 20)

The swami identifies the 'national idea' present in the French and English nations and finally identifies the 'Hindu' national purpose as Mukti. Thus he now argues that since Indians preserve the idea of 'mukti' the Indian nation is necessary to the world. The world still needs the ideal of 'mukti' in its progress and preservation. He defines Mukti as 'spiritual independence'. Elsewhere he argues that god-men like his master pursued and attained this goal of mukti. Thus it is people like Ramakrishna, in Vivekananda's view who keep the 'national idea' of Indians alive. This way of speaking about Mukti is unique to the swami. Ramakrishna himself only spoke of 'god-consciousness', which the individual might reach if he calls 'sincerely on the name of god'. The master's discourse did not touch upon a group called 'Hindu's' who shared a common 'national idea', which was Mukti.

In contrast the master says:

> MASTER: "What need is there of your counting the number of trees and
> branches in an orchard? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes.
> Do that and be happy. The aim of human birth is to love God. Realize
> that love and be at peace. (M. 2001: 495)

This formulation does not require the recognition of others who share practices and belong to the same 'Hindu nation'. There is no concern for an explanation of the 'preservation of the world'. In fact the experience is made akin to actually eating the mangoes. It leaves no room for speculation on the numbers of mangoes on the tree or the number of such trees in the orchard. The master's distinctions are only about individual attitude to practice rather than the formation of a group around that practice. Nonetheless, the swami's attempt is to cast his master's discourse within the colonial discourse he has newly learnt, and in the process he places positive evaluative value on his master while trapping the figure in the normative structure of colonial discourse.

While Vivekananda argues that his master is the 'national ideal', his discourses very often differ from his master. The differences come from the fact that one was untouched by colonial discourse while the other was trained in it. In his talks about religion the swami often made use of the stories and parables used by his master. However, his changing perception of religion brought about some changes in the master's stories. In a discourse on the nature of Hinduism the swami says "the233whole233religion233of233the233Hindu is233centred233in233realisation. Man is to become divine by realising the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood: but on and on he must progress." (Majumdar 1963: 198) This view of Hinduism speaks in the abstract about 'realisation', and about the support and means that a man must use to 'progress'. This is usually the kind of description the swami gives to religion. There is never a

direct reference to experience. In contrast we have seen that Ramakrishna's talk about religion was always related to experience. He would either give an analogy to experience or try and describe his own experience. For example Ramakrishna uses the term 'god-vision' or 'god realisation' and speaking about his experience of this realisation he says:

> Spiritual discipline is necessary in order to see God. I had to pass through very severe discipline. How many austerities I practiced under the bel-tree! I would lie down under it, crying to the Divine Mother, 'O Mother, reveal Thyself to me.' The tears would flow in torrents and soak my body. (M. 2001: 245)

The struggle that the master describes, the austerities and tears, are the process of what the swami calls 'becoming'. However these two excerpts show distinctly the different positions of the master and disciple. While the master almost always spoke about his experience and used parables which illuminated his discussion on experience, the swami rarely spoke about experience. His discussions were shaped around the concept of religion in an abstract way. Thus he would much more often speak about the nature of Hindu religion than his experiences with it. He spoke about the worship of forms:

> By the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it keeps his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipotent. (Majumdar 1963: 210)

This analysis gives a 'reason' for the Hindu's idol worship. The 'use' of the image is that it keeps the 'mind fixed'. The Hindu knows the 'truth' that the image is not God the omnipresent. His use of the Idol is explained as perfectly 'reasonable'. Simply put the practice of idol worship is being sanitized by giving it a reasonable explanation. This is a far cry from the master's talk of the use of images. Ramakrishna says:

A brahmin used to worship his Family Deity daily with food offerings. One day he had to go away on business. As he was about to leave the house, he said to his young son: 'give the offering to the Deity today. See that God is fed.' The boy offered food in the shrine, but the image remained silent on the altar... Again and again he prayed to the Deity, saying: 'O Lord, come down and eat the food. It is already very late. I cannot sit here any longer.' But the image did not utter a word. The boy burst into tears and cried: 'O Lord, my father asked me to feed You. Why won't You come down? Why won't You eat from my hands?' The boy wept for some time with a longing soul. At last the Deity, smiling, came down from the altar and sat before the meal and ate it. After feeding the Deity, the boy came out of the shrine room. His relatives said: 'The worship is over. Now bring away the offering.' 'Yes,' said the boy, 'the worship is over. But God has eaten everything.' 'How is that?' asked the relatives. The boy replied innocently, 'Why, God has eaten the food.' They entered the shrine and were speechless with wonder to see that the Deity had really eaten every bit of the offering. (M. 2001: 354)

In this story the little boy contradicts the relationship to god that the swami asserts. Far from using the image to concentrate on god, the master's story highlights the fact that the little boy's devotion in fact makes the image 'real'. The fact that the food was eaten suggests that the 'image' came 'alive' to eat it. Within this story it is the boy's extraordinary devotion that makes this happen. This story does not suggest that the boy knows the image is not 'real' and that he merely uses it to 'concentrate his mind'. Rather the boy knows the image is 'real' and this is what actually makes it real in the end.

In a parallel story the master tells a story of a little boy who is afraid to cross the jungle to go to school. His mother teaches him to call out to Madhusudhana (another name for Krishna), who she says is his older brother. The next time the boy is afraid while crossing the forest he calls out for his 'brother' Madhusudhana. And then:

God could no longer stay away. He appeared before the boy and said: 'Here I am. Why are you frightened?' And so, saying He took the boy out of the woods and showed him the way to school. When He took leave of the boy, God said: 'I will come whenever you call Me. Do not be afraid.' One must have this faith of a child, this yearning. (M. 2001: 354)

Both these stories, talk about an attitude towards god. In one case there is an image in the other there is no image. The presence or absence of the image is *of no salience* to the master's story, where extraordinary devotion is discussed. In each case the central point is that god 'appears' before the devotee because he can 'no longer stay away'. In each case the child's single-minded devotion is recommended as a superior attitude.

In another example the master makes this more explicit:

MASTER: "Well, do you believe in God with form or without form?"
M., rather surprised, said to himself: "How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black?"
M: "Sir, I like to think of God as formless."
MASTER: "Very good. It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form; that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction." (M. 2001: 357)

Again the master recommends an attitude to the listener. Being aware of different practices, the devotee is not encouraged to think that his practice alone is true and all else false. Contradictory practices are to be reconciled but the devotee must not let go of his conviction. This is a rare attitude that the master is highlighting. The idol-worshipper is to hold fast to his conviction that

idol worship brings one closer to god. At the same time he must not judge or scorn the vedantist who does not worship the image. He must not ridicule the others who worship or belittle it. Thus the ideal attitude for the practitioner is set out in fairly elaborate detail.

Often we can see the difference in the master and the swami's discourse in the similar stories that they tell. We find that in each story the master's highlights an attitude while the swami preaches a moral.

A story told by the swami went like this:

> A disciple went to his master and said to him "Sir, I want religion." The master looked at the young man, and did not speak, but only smiled. The Young man came every day, and insisted that he wanted religion. But the old man knew better than the young man. One day, when it was very hot, he asked the young man to go to the river with him and take a plunge. The young man plunged in, and the old man followed him and held the young man down under the water by force. After the young man struggled for a while, he let him go and asked him what he wanted most while he was under water. "A breath of air.", the disciple answered. "Do you want God in that way? If you do, you will get him in a moment," said the master. Until you have that thirst, that desire, you cannot get religion, however you may struggle with your intellect, or your books, or your forms. Until that thirst is awakened in you, you are no better than any atheist; only the atheist is sincere, and you are not. (Majumdar 1963: 178)

Ramakrishna often told a similar story:

> You know that story of the man who asked his guru how God could be realized. The guru said to him: 'Come with me. I shall show you how one can realize God.' Saying this, he took the disciple to a lake and held his head under the water. After a short time he released the disciple and asked him, 'How did you feel?' 'I was dying for a breath of air!' said the

disciple. "When the soul longs and yearns for God like that, then you will know that you do not have long to wait for His vision. (M. 2001: 981)

Between the two stories there are some subtle differences. In the master's story the young man wants to know how 'god can be realized'. In the swami's story the young man wants 'religion'. In both cases the older man imparts some learning to this young man. In the first case the older man used the effects of a hot day to get the younger man to take a plunge in the river, once he plunged in he was held down until he was struggling for air. In the second case the young man is told 'come with me I will show you'. Thus the plunge in the water needed no deception and the young man participated in the swim as a learning exercise. Here too the young man is held under water.

In both cases the struggle leaves the young man gasping for air. In the first case he is asked if he 'desires god in that way?' He is told that if he desires god in this way he will 'get him in a moment'. But until then, without that 'thirst' he cannot have religion. In fact the young man may struggle with intellect and books and forms or images (idols) but his position would be no better than the atheist, who openly rejects god. The questing young man in fact becomes a hypocrite in comparison to the atheist because he says he seeks god but does not do so sincerely. In the swami's story the attempt to teach the young man how to get religion compares him to some other individual. In this case the atheist shows up the questing young man and his myriad methods as 'false'.

In the master's story the guru holds the young man down in the water so that he may experience the 'dying for a breath of air'. When the young man has had that desperate desire for a breath of air, he is told that when he 'yearns for god like that', then he will not have to wait for long. In this story the young man comes asking how god can be realized and the guru answers him by simulating an experience rather than initiating a comparison. When the man feels for god, as he does for air when he is drowning, he will soon realize god. Thus the young man's experience of being breathless is used to make him understand

how to 'realize' god. The attitude conveyed to him is that one must want 'god-realization' as much as one wants life itself. This is the proper attitude to have while 'seeking god'. In this pedagogic process the older man makes no use of any external subject other than the seeker's own experience.

The master's story is used to teach the proper attitude related to the quest for god. He had once told this story in the context of Vivekananda's (then Narendra's) own search for god. Noticing a change in the young Narendra's state of mind the master said "How wonderful Narendra's state of mind is! You see, this very Narendra did not believe in the forms of God. And now you see how his soul is panting for God!" (981) The master used the young man's desire for the breath of air as a parallel to Narendra's own quest for god. Thus the story was meant as a way of understanding the change in Narendra's state of mind, from one who did not believe in rituals and worship to one who was 'panting for god', or had in other words, acquired the right attitude for 'god realization'.

The master's stories and parables have a unique feature which is missing from his disciples discourses. From his earliest memory to his most compassionate discourses, Ramakrishna's central attempt is to articulate and convey experience. In order to teach an attitude the master picks up a parallel but common-place experience and uses that as a pedagogic tool. For instance when he compares the quest for the divine as a drowning man's gasp for air, the guru is able to convey something crucial to his listeners. His discourse does not tell them what divinity is or what the various methods of approaching it are, or what the consequences of seeking divinity might be. He tells them what it *feels* like. And this he does by pointing out something that feels similar. In other words, one may have the feeling that one is on a search for divinity, but the search will be fruitful if one seeks it as a drowning man seeks air. The experience of drowning and gasping for air is knowable. And it becomes the pedagogic tool by which the listener understands the experience of sincerely

questing for god.

In all stories the master uses such simple everyday situations with which to convey the attitude or experience to his listeners. It is not as Chatterjee suggests that his 'simple rustic' personality has led him to use such pedagogic tools. Rather it is the nature of his pedagogy. The master's aim is to alert people to a state of consciousness, which he calls 'god-vision' or 'god-realisation'. But he does not attempt to describe this state abstractly. He advises practices and methods to achieve this state and in each case he can point out the proper attitude with which one must follow these practices and methods. Since the test of his method is really a transformation of the individual, only the individual can gauge his progress. The master can only advise on how best to effect the transformation given the individual peculiarities of a disciple.

The master's method reveals two aspects of his discourse. Firstly his teachings are to do with the transformation of the individual. Secondly, an efficient way to convey experience is through a similar experience. This suggests that experience is not best conveyed through description or theorizing, but rather through simile. When the swami switches over from the master's 'rustic colloquial' in which he learnt, to the colonial discourse in which he preached, this focus on attitude, and similarity of experience was lost. The swami's discourse was trapped in a normative structure, which spoke about practices as the practices of a group, which were all underpinned by 'reason'. In order to reverse the evaluative judgment on native practices the swami had to speak about practices of a group, which form an identity rather than practices of an individual, which create an attitude.

This process of change from the master to his most beloved disciple tracks the way in which the discourse on practices is interrupted and deformed by colonization. Over time it is the swami's discourse, which proliferates while the precise distinctions of the master's discourse are lost. The swami uses colonial

discourse to reverse the negative evaluation on Indian practices in the 300 years of cultural encounter with the west. However we can see clearly that in order to reverse this evaluative judgment, the swami must enter colonial discourse. Within colonial discourse he can no longer articulate the distinctions that were salient to his master's discourse. The discourse itself takes on a normative structure and while the previous evaluative judgements can be reversed, one can no longer speak about practices using the master's distinctions.

There are specific changes in the swami's discourse on practices. The swami speaks about groups who share practices and who identify each other and rival groups based on difference in practices. He also speaks about the reasons for diversity of practices, and firmly links practice to an underlying reason. Even at the time of the swami's greatest popularity his discourses led the west to understand more about Hinduism the group practice of the Indian natives. At the same time the west lost access to a unique way looking at practice.

Among the natives this new discourse was an immediate object of aspiration. It allowed the native to articulate himself and to be understood by the colonial, giving the impression that there was a dialogue of equals taking place. However the native was in fact prevented from articulating his own experience. This discourse did not allow one to learn from individual experience in the same way as the master's discourse did. Instead it set up a structure where one was identified as a member of a group with a group identity. This structure gave no salience to the experiences of the individual. At the same time it was a discourse about practices, which suggested that practicing was related to these goals of group formation and identity. Thus the discourse about practices set up goals for the native which were not related to the goals of the practices themselves.

No amount of 'concentrating one's mind' on an idol would produce the feeling of being related to other 'Hindus' through that practice. This is simply because

the nature of the practice is to encourage individual transformation by allowing the individual to have a relationship with an inanimate object. But the process of doing so is to imagine a presence around the idol, and to 'gasp for god' as the drowning man gasps for air. There is no room within this practice between individual and deity, for the consideration of the next individual and his relationship with deity.

Colonial discourse on practices interrupts and impedes the continuity of native discourse on practices; it also interferes with the practices themselves. Over time, the practices themselves and the peculiar discourse on them diverge entirely. The practices are geared towards the formation of appropriate attitudes while pursuing the goal of individual transformation, the discourse on these practices talk about group formation, identity and very often, conflicted relations between groups with different identities. The body of native practices become a fertile ground for colonial discourse to locate groups, inter-group relations and reasons for practices.

Employing a discourse on practice, which is utterly divergent from the practice, is unique to the process of colonisation that we have tracked. The inability of this discourse to illuminate the practices does not hamper its status as the preferred public discourse on practices. The mechanisms of colonisation ensure that this discourse is privileged over all others. Its normative structure confers value on it and makes it difficult to articulate any alternate distinctions. The ability to speak about native practices without the burden of this normative evaluative discourse may be the first step toward decolonising the native.

Chapter 5

Conclusion: How to tell the Story of Nationalism in India?

The intercultural encounter between Europe and India led to the formation of a specific kind of discourse which we have identified as colonial discourse. This discourse was employed to articulate the native's practices; however, it illuminated European culture more than native practices. The peculiar features of this discourse are retained even as the discourse expands in response to increased interaction with native culture. We have seen how this discourse expands in such a way as to allow a reversal of evaluative judgement without changing the normative structure. The normative structure distorts native practice in such a way that it can no longer resonate with the native's experience. Thus the use of colonial discourse to describe native practices produces descriptions of practices which are nobody's practice.

The normative structure of colonial discourse relates practices to doctrines and identifies groups as a collection of individuals who share a doctrine. This group is entirely discursive (as in the earliest group identified as Heathens and then 'Hindoos') in that the term relates to people who share a common doctrine, which results in a particular practice. The native however looks at the practice as the domain of the individual and does not link his practice to any doctrine. The native relates practices to a transformation in the experience of the individual who practices. In the colonial situation however, the native is rewarded for using colonial discourse to describe his practices although the discourse cannot alter his experience of these practices. In other words the colonial discourse prevents him from articulating his experience.

I

We have seen over the last two chapters how the native begins to use colonial discourse. In the case of Roy there was a long period of public learning, in which he had to learn the correct use of evaluative concepts *imitatively* since he could not experience the normative moral structure of the concepts. The colonial's experience of unfamiliarity with the native's practices led him to use a normative discourse which evaluates all divergence negatively. In the case of the native he could only use the evaluation in discourse he did not experience the divergence. In the case of Vivekananda, who had early access to this new learning, he had complete command over the learnt concepts of colonial discourse, but he could not articulate the parables of his master within these concepts. They underwent a crucial change. Within colonial discourse Vivekananda spoke about practices as though the group who performed the practice was of extreme salience to the practice. This group, which is projected on the basis of a normative understanding of practices, could only be called discursive, since it is projected entirely in discourse.

The colonial state relied on its institutions of law and education to govern the natives, and within these structures the native was initially rewarded for using colonial discourse. Thus the projected group appeared within colonial discourse but it could not find a route back to the native's experience. In other words the native could identify with the practices being described within this discourse, in much the same way as we can recognise familiar quotidian activities in the descriptions of Ward in his works on the hindoos. Wearing flowers in the hair, bathing in the river, bhajan, kirtan, jagaran, these are activities which can still be recognised in India. What is unfamiliar is the moral judgement that Ward places on these practices. And in a later period, 'educated natives' like Vivekananda speak about these practice as if performing them makes one a part of a larger group; the swami calls this group Indian and Hindu alternately. However, the practice itself gives no salience to any such

group formation. Ramakrishna was consistent in asserting that the point of practice is the transformation of the self. Thus practice itself cannot make one into a member of a group unless one *already knows* that one becomes a member of a group by practising. Thus if one comes to practice through the route of that 'new learning' which makes Vivekananda an 'educated native' one no longer speaks about practice as a transformative exercise, rather one identifies oneself and others as members of a group based on it. The logic for group formation lies buried deep in the initial inter-cultural encounter and the initial use of normative discourse to articulate cultural difference. Only by revisiting that moment can we see where and how exactly the link to experience is disrupted.

The unique feature of the discursive group projected by colonial discourse is that the earliest identification of the group was based on practices, which differed from those of the early European traveller. The normative structure of the discourse evaluated cultural difference negatively. Thus these practices became the identified 'problem' with the native leading to the discourse of reform. Once the native learns the discourse of reform, he cannot articulate salient features of his practices and simultaneously use this discourse consistently. Within this discourse, he is compelled to reject the evaluative judgement of the colonial. The reversal of the evaluation merely results in an expansion of the underlying concept and does not help the native break out of the normative structure. Thus the reformer gives way to the nationalist and while the former attempted to 'correct' native practices the latter 'defends' them. The emergent discourse of nationalism is not an alternative to colonial discourse but merely an extension of it. The normative structure of the discourse ensures that the practitioners are related to each other as members of a group. The practices themselves give no salience to the relationship between practitioners. Thus the educated native learns that the practices make him into a group entirely discursively. Thus when the native used colonial

discourse he spoke about practices which made him a part of a group, but the practice itself did not yield the experience of belonging to a group.

The process of speaking about practices in relation to groups led the coloniser to project groups which expanded and changed over time. For example we have seen that in the middle phase of colonialism a group of 'hindoos' in the Indian sub-continent was projected from within the larger group of 'Heathens' in Asia and Africa. It was the European/coloniser who saw a group being formed out of individuals who performed similar practices. In other words the group of people with a common doctrine, the 'hindoos' existed for the coloniser who saw them as a group with practices coming from a shared belief in some specific doctrine. The coloniser experienced the native as a group of hindoos. The projected group then is not a discursive structure to the coloniser; to him the practices make natives a part of a group; he uses a culturally specific mechanism which projects a doctrine/practice hierarchy and links doctrine to group formation. For the coloniser the inter-cultural encounter with the Indian sub-continent reveals that the natives are members of some group (Heathens, Hindoos, Hindus) who share a common doctrine which may undergo change from time to time and knowledge and contact and the natives own self-description changes.

Eventually the evaluative discourse expands and puts extreme pressure on its normative structure. Colonial discourse now projects the group called Indians, who belong to the nation. The normative concept of religion begins to give way to the concept of the nation. Here too the normative structure remains unchanged in that the members of this group are projected as sharing some common history. In this expansion history becomes the factor, which unites individuals into a group in exactly the same way that doctrine was projected as uniting individuals into a group. However, the native did not experience his relationship to the past in the same way; thus the nation, based on a common

history again becomes a discursive structure, which finds no resonance in his experience.

Vivekananda spoke of a group of 'Hindus' who shared a national purpose among the nations of the world. This was the early discourse of nationalism, using which the native initially reversed the evaluative judgments on Indian practices. The discourse of nationalism retains the normative structure of reform discourse; the expansion in discourse is merely at the level of the reversal of evaluative judgments and the projection of a new group. The discourse of nationalism projects a group with a shared history and no such group can exist among the natives since the mechanism of group formation is culturally specific to the coloniser. The expansion of discourse indicates that the use of colonial discourse on native practices will necessarily yield such projected groups.

Almost all current studies of nationalism discuss the discourse as a product of the interaction between colonial and native. They argue that the native is able to mould the coloniser's discourse in order to articulate his own concerns. They further argue that this negotiation with the coloniser leads to the specificity of the Indian nation state, which is created with colonial impetus, but with native specifications.

II

In the light of our investigations, we must now re-examine the familiar terrain of nationalism as post-colonial scholars in India have studied it so far. Partha Chatterjee's early work *Nationalism a Derivative Discourse* (Chatterjee 1993) looks at the *events* of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and retells them using the explanatory framework of Gramsci's the 'passive revolution'; he also examines the *ideas* circulating at that moment and

understands them in terms of a thematic and a problematic. There is already an indication that Chatterjee is groping towards the discourse/practice dichotomy that we have traced.

In Chatterjee's analysis the thematic is the complex relation between colonial and nationalist thought, which share the same discourse; according to Chatterjee the complexity lies in the fact that one is not simply derived from the other. The problematic arises when nationalist thought has to demarcate it difference from colonial thought precisely. Here Chatterjee indexes a paradox:

> there is... an inherent contradictoriness in nationalist thinking, because it reasons within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate." (Chatterjee 1993: 38)

The paradox, simply asks how nationalism succeeds in being nationalist and, at the same time, rejecting its roots in European ideas. If it does not do so, then asks Chatterjee, how can it be 'authentically' nationalist? It is Chatterjee's claim that the moment of nationalism gives rise to 'nationalist discourse'- a unique discourse of nationalism. He explains this saying: when the bourgeoisie wages a 'war of position' in the process of the 'passive revolution', it does so with this discourse of nationalism. Thus the nationalist discourse is something the bourgeoisie uses in order to assert their rejection of colonial power, while also co-opting the 'masses to be represented' (Chatterjee 1993:39). Nationalist discourse then, crudely put, is a discourse emerging from the native's *conflict* with colonial discourse; it is deployed in the rejection of colonial oppression but it also co-opts the 'popular'. This is the story of nationalism that Chatterjee wishes to tell. Nationalism is a 'derivative' discourse, of course, since it emerges from the point where the 'native' speaks to the colonizer in the colonizer's language. However, once the discourse has been grasped the native makes it his own, and articulates his concerns in it.

But how does he make it his own? We could ask, and Chatterjee will tell us:

> nationalist texts will question the veracity of colonialist knowledge,
> dispute its arguments, point out contradictions, reject its moral claims.
> Even when it adopts, as we will see it does, the modes of thought
> characteristic of rational knowledge in the post-Enlightenment age, it
> cannot adopt them in their entirety, for then it would not constitute itself
> as a *nationalist* discourse. (Chatterjee 1991.42)

And yet we persist, but *how?* When modes of rational knowledge are not adopted in their entirety are there still modes of *rational* knowledge? How can Enlightenment ideas be used in ways which give them a particularly *nationalist* meaning? Somewhat disingenuously Chatterjee tells us that "a different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another: that is my hypothesis about nationalist thought." (Chatterjee 1991:42)

Of the 'difference' of the one and of the particularity of its 'domination' by the other some questions must certainly be asked as we now face a dilemma. Chatterjee argues that the ideas of nationalism percolate down from colonizer to native; the native learns to use these precepts as political tools in the project of gaining political independence. This 'learning' is the part that now poses problems. Is it that Indians were waiting for a discourse to arrive before they could articulate an experience - in this case the injustice of colonial rule? In other words how did the Indian discourse speak about colonisation before the discourse of nationalism was made available through the process of social reform?[1] If it turns out that the native was silent, then the question that needs to be asked is why it was so. Were Indian traditions themselves lacking in ways

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[1]Elsewhere Chatterjee has argued that: "In India, for instance, any standard nationalist history will tell us that nationalism proper began in 1885 with the formation of the Indian Nationalist Congress. It might also tell us that the decade preceding this was a period of preparation, when several provincial political associations were formed. Prior to that, from the 1820's to the 1870's, was the period of "social reform", when colonial enlightenment was beginning to "modernize" the customs and institutions of a traditional society and the political sprit was still very much that of collaboration with the colonial regime: nationalism had still not emerged." (Chatterjee 1999: 5)

of understanding the processes of colonization that they required conceptual tools from Europe? This gives rise to the dilemma of an 'authentic' Indian response that causes Chatterjee so much trouble.

The authentic Indian response also raises some questions: why, for example, did the 'authentic' Nationalist not simply reject European discourse, and produce an Occidental description of colonialism? Why was 'social reform' required to make the 'native consciousness' see the worth of certain values and *then* act in order to secure it using the methods and discourse of the very colonizer they were rejecting? How is it that the so-called nationalist was saying *both* that the Indian tradition was worth saving and this meant throwing the colonizers out of the nation, *and* that the only way to do it was through a discourse of the nation that the colonizer had in fact introduced? This would imply that the discourses available within tradition were not able to perform the task of ensuring that values which were so obviously desirable were also implemented.

Chatterjee's position seems to argue that: The Indian people, or at least some of them, could understand the desirability of certain European values but were unable to put them into place without the intervention of discourse from the west. This argument leads us inexorably towards flogging the old horse of 'tradition'. The native's cultural and social context is fractured into progressive and regressive practices, and the negotiation between them is said to require tempering with European values. The difference in the western and Indian modernity has lead Chatterjee to further ideas such as 'our modernity', where the element which makes it specifically Indian has something to do with 'Indian traditions' or an Indian 'way of being', or 'problems specific to India'. Whichever way it is put, no post-colonial scholar wants to deny the specificity that tradition brings to the Indian way of being a nation. There is something about Indian tradition, which is valuable and which must be preserved, or at any rate the idea is not that India must *duplicate* the western ideal. Which means that

none of the theorists are willing to say that in the pursuit of values from the west, India should *become* a western nation. Instead there seems to be an agreement that India will preserve her own 'authentic' identity. This identity is to be found nowhere other than the 'tradition' which remains in many ways elusive.

Chatterjee's arguments do not acknowledge the rhetorical quality of the native's nationalist discourse. He does not take in to consideration the possibility that the native's use of colonial discourse might have no co-incidence with his experience. Thus Chatterjee is compelled to argue as if the native's use of concepts and values are indicative of the native's experience. However if one does not look at colonial discourse only as the moment of nationalism, but from the earliest moment of its inception with the arrival of the earliest travellers, one is able to see a uniform similarity in the discourse of the west in relation to the native; this discourse expands and extends over years of contact and is finally learned *imitatively* by the native due to the pressures of colonialism. Recognising the native's speech as rhetorical allows us to understand the ramifications of cultural difference within this encounter.

III

While pursuing the story of nationalism in India, the discourse is caught in a cross-cultural encounter. However the discourse of nationalism is not unique to the colonial encounter, it has flourished in Europe and led to significant historical events. Foucault demonstrates the possibility of another kind of story of nationalism in his *Society Must Be Defended* (2003) where he looks at the normative expansion of the discourse from the medieval period to the present *within* a European context. He traces the origins of the concept of the 'nation' into medieval Europe. The concept of 'nation' far from being a product of 'modernity' is rather a concept as old as monarchy, which has undergone

specific changes, due to specific historical reasons. The complex set of negotiations between the monarchy and the nobiliary to begin with and later between the third estate and the nobiliary are minutely examined. As such it demonstrates the impossibility of transferring this discourse outside its context.

Foucault argues that it appears as if once the idea of a 'nation' has been put into place, it becomes a real entity, which can be used to understand any domain. For his part, he demonstrates how the concept of the 'nation' gets repeatedly filled with the appropriate content depending on the particular dynamics of the power struggle it is being deployed in. Foucault's story allows us to understand how, once the normative concept of 'nation' enters discourse, it can be filled with the particular content that the particular dynamics of the power struggle requires. What Foucault points out is the normative structure of this discourse, which is independent of the evaluative terms used within it at various moments.

There is a great difference in calling nationalism a 'discourse' as Chatterjee does and calling it a 'deployment' as Foucault does. As a discourse it has truth and falsity attributed to it, whereas as deployment it is a mere a tool. Foucault's starting point is the absolute monarch, an institution which finds its ratification in the church. The monarchy is envisioned as

> the absolute monarchy's thesis was that the nation did not exist, or at least that if it did exist, it did so only to the extent that it found its condition of possibility, and its substantive unity, in the person of the king. The nation did not exist simply because there was a group, a crowd, or a multiplicity of individuals inhabiting the same land, speaking the same language, and observing the same customs and laws. That is not what makes a nation. What makes a nation is the fact that that there exist individuals who, insofar as they exist alongside one another, are no more than individuals and do not even form a unit. But they do all have

a certain individual relationship- both juridical and physical- with the real, living, and bodily person of the king. It is the body of the king, in his physico- juridical relationship with each of his subjects, that creates the body of the nation. (Foucault 2003: 217)

Thus the 'nation' to begin with is contained in the body of the king. The king's body and not some territorial entity is the nation. In the construction of the monarch the nobiliary finds itself outside the loop of knowledge, which till now is produced solely for the benefit of the king; as an aid to governance. This nobiliary begins to construct an identity of itself to counter this position. By now the idea of the nation is linked by the nobiliary to notions like the 'purity of blood' (what Foucault calls the racist discourse) an ancient people, who conquer by invasion, and whose rights and freedom is guaranteed by the fact that they are the conquering race. Thus in this formulation

the nobilliary reaction derived a multiplicity of nations (well at least two) from this nation- which is in a sense merely a juridical effect of the body of the king, and which is real only because of the unique and individual reality of the king. The nobiliary reaction then establishes relations of war and domination between those nations; it makes the king an instrument that one nation can use to wage war on and dominate another. It is not the king who constitutes the nation; a nation acquires a king for the specific purpose of fighting other nations. And the history written by the nobiliary reaction made those relations the web of historical intelligibility. (Foucault 2003: 218)

We see a move from the juridical idea of the nation, which rests entirely in the body of the king, to the politico-historical idea of the nation, which allows the nation to be spoken of in terms of conquest and race. This kind of a move, where a concept is used, by giving it new content is what Foucault calls a 'tactic' or a 'deployment'. Having deployed the 'tactic' with the monarchy, the nobiliary finds itself in a position where it has to assert two kinds of rights. Speaking of a historical moment in England Foucault says

So, a struggle on two fronts, but it cannot be waged in the same way on both fronts. In its struggle against the absolutism of the monarchy, the nobility asserts its right to the basic freedoms, which were supposedly enjoyed by the Germanic or Frankish people who invaded France at some point. So, in its struggle against the monarchy, the nobility claims freedoms. But in the struggle against the Third Estate, the nobility lays claim to the unrestricted rights granted to it by invasion. On the one hand, or in the struggle against the Third Estate it must, in other words, be an absolute victor with unrestricted right; on the other hand, or in the struggle against the monarchy, it has to lay claim to an almost constitutional right to basic freedoms.(Foucault 2003: 144)

The tactic employed by the nobility soon becomes available to the third estate, who give further content to the concept 'nation' in order to place themselves in the discourse.

This (the bourgeoisie using the discourse of history in the political fight) certainly did not occur because the bourgeoisie at some point somehow acquired a history or recognized its own history, but as a result of something very specific: the reworking- in political and not historical terms – of the famous notion of the "nation", which the aristocracy had made both the subject and the object of history in the eighteenth century. It was that role, that political reworking of the nation, of the idea of the nation, that led to the transformation that made a new type of historical discourse possible.(Foucault 2003: 217)

What was this historical discourse of the nation? It is the one we find more familiar today.

We have an inversion of the temporal axis of the demand. The demand will no longer be articulated in the name of a past right that was established by either a consensus, a victory, or an invasion. The demand can now be articulated in terms of a potentiality, a future, a future that is immediate, which is already present in the present because it concerns

a certain function of Statist universality that is already fulfilled by "a" nation within the social body, and which is therefore demanding that its status as a single nation must be effectively recognized, and recognized in the juridical form of the State. (Foucault 2003: 222)

Thus the Bourgeoisie now constructs the nation as constituting some kinds of infrastructure, "functions and apparatus" of which it is solely in command. The nation then becomes something which has "works", or "first agriculture; second, handicrafts and industry; third trade; and, fourth, the liberal arts. But in addition to these "works", there must also be what he calls "functions": the army, justice, the church, and administration." (Foucault 2003: 219) The familiar picture of the nation we recognize begins to come into focus. Once it has come into focus in this way, we see that the nation no longer needs

physical vigour, it military aptitudes, or, so to speak, its barbarian intensity, which is what the noble historians of the early eighteenth century were trying to describe. What does constitute the strength of a nation is now something like its capacities, its potentialities, and they are all organized around the figure of the state: the greater a nation's capacity, or the greater its potential, the stronger it will be. Which also means that the defining characteristic of a nation is not really its dominance over other nations. The essential function and historical role of the nation is not defined by its ability to exercise a relationship of domination over other nations. It is something else: its ability to administer itself, to manage, govern, and guarantee the constitution and workings of the figure of the state and of state power. Not domination but state control.... The state insofar as it is being born, is being shaped and is finding its historical conditions of existence in a group of individuals. (Foucault 2003:219)

And in this formulation we have in clear focus the shape of the nation as we know it now. What has Foucault's story changed in Chatterjee's saga of nationalism? In Chatterjee's analysis the nationalist elite manoeuvred the

discourse of nationalism and secured a passive revolution. His objection is that the passive revolution serves the purposes of the elite but not of the masses. The traditional order was oppressive but the bourgeoisie, using the discourse of nationalism which they appropriate from colonial discourse, is able to free itself from the traditional order after the 'passive revolution'. Now it is only the 'masses' of the 'real' India who are caught up in both the class hierarchy of the bourgeoisie and the oppressive traditional order.

Is it Chatterjee's case that the native recognized that his traditional order was oppressive but was waiting for colonial intervention to help him articulate it? Or is it the case that without colonial intervention the native could not even recognise certain values? In either case it is fair to ask then what are the native's traditional values worth? Here Chatterjee seems to be caught in an impasse.

In the Foucauldian model, the 'nation' functions as a normative concept. From the earliest instance of its use it is filled with whatever content its deployment requires in order to maintain the norm. The discourse, once in place, seems to enable the articulation of various kinds of claims. The claims are in themselves as different as the classes of the nobiliary and bourgoisie, however, the same discourse, which raises the question "who is the nation?" allows both groups to successfully answer "we are".

What can we make of tradition in this scheme? Foucault's story does not tell us anything about a cross-cultural transfer of a normative concept. His story follows closely the events of European history and does not set up the rise of nationalism as a critique of traditional order, as we have come to see it post-colonially. In his account we are not pressed to understand the rise of nationalism as a response to a problem with tradition. What happens in India, between the 'traditional' and the 'nationalist' in the period of nationalism? Recalling Foucault's story the 'nation' and its discourse 'nationalism' gets a deployed, by various groups over time, in order to articulate themselves in a

particular framework. By the time the British set up their administrative apparatus in India, the 'nation' in the West, post the French Revolution constitutes, primarily the 'bourgeoisie'. They are at the helm of some kinds of infrastructure Foucault calls the "functions and apparatus" of the nation.

For the coloniser the discourse of the 'nation' in India, takes the form of the constant reiteration that 'India is not yet a nation'. India seems to lack any group, which controls anything like the functions and apparatus' of the nation, and which draws on some kind of history to link itself to the land, or, which can make the claim for antiquity through a history of a blood line. Thus for the British, there is no nation. This colonial assertion of the factors which make India 'not yet a nation', becomes the object of deliberation for both nationalists and the post-colonial historians, who deny the claim and vigorously demonstrate various kinds of histories and bloodlines and functions and apparatus'.

There is however another way of viewing this allegation about the lack of nationhood which does not require us to go through the cumbersome process of digging about for a history or a blood-line. If following Foucault we recognize this as the deployment of a discourse then we can give up the frenzied attempts to prove that India too has those particular functions and apparatus', which ensured that the bourgeoisie in Europe claimed the nation as theirs. In fact put in this form, the very attempt to acquire those 'functions and apparatus' seems a mistaken project and nothing really hangs on the discovery of the same in the past. The accusation that these are missing and the counter-claim that they are actually present, will not make something called a 'nation' a reality; instead it is more fruitful to see them as discursive manoeuvres, made in a struggle for power. In the case of India this struggle for power is infinitely more complex because of the peculiar relationship of cultural difference between the two sides.

IV

Given that the articulation of 'nationalism' emerges as a discursive manoeuvre in the struggle for power, and is expressed by the nationalists, at a particular moment of history, it would be pertinent to ask our earlier question about tradition again. How do the nationalists relate to tradition? Does the deployment of discourse change their relation to social and cultural practices? In his *The Nation and its Fragments* (1999) Chatterjee discusses *Kamalakanter Jobanbandini,* a play by Bankimchandra. In the play a court-room scene is being played out "Kamalakanta has been called in as a witness in court in a case of petty theft" the oath taking presented a problem as "Kamalakanata,… raised a series of unanswerable objections to the oath he was required to take" but the "difficulties had somehow been overcome and the identity of the witness was being recorded" (Chatterjee 1999). The play proceeds:

> The lawyer then asked him, "what jati are you?"
>> K: am I a jati?
>> Lawyer: what jati do you belong to?
>> K: to the Hindu jati.
>> Lawyer: oh, come now! What Varna?
>> K: a very very dark varna.
>> Lawyer: what the hell is going on here! Why did I have to call a witness like this? I say, do you have jat?
>> K: who can take it from me?
>> The magistrate: you know there are many kinds of jati among the Hindus, such as Brahman, Kayastha, Kaibarta. Which one of these do you belong to?
>> K: my lord! All this is the lawyer's fault! He can see I have the sacred thread around my neck. I have said my name is Chakravarti. How am I to know that he will still not be able to deduce that I am a Brahman?

The magistrate wrote, "Caste: Brahman"" (149?)

Kamalakanta is a mad character in a fictional work: perhaps it is only through such a character that the nationalist playwright can now articulate the nuances of tradition. Between Kamalakantas multifarious uses of the word jati including his refusal to recognise it as any kind of identity and the magistrate's comment "caste: Brahman" lies the real difference between the concepts of jati and caste, of which only the latter is a unit of colonial discourse. The conceptual difference between jati and caste is in some ways the index of the problem with trying to represent native values in colonial discourse. If we do not want to be caught in a Chatterjeesque impasse, we must recognise that the search for native values within colonial discursive structures is bound to be futile. Native values will not emerge from a study of nationalism alone, or from economic and political effects alone, or from the effects of colonialism alone. In fact none of these can be completely studied unless we evolve a way of speaking about the traditional, which does not rely on *external descriptions*. As we have seen, Chatterjee's attempts remain firmly within the framework of colonial discourse. This suggests that there is a problem with using colonial discourse to articulate native values or practices. Post-colonial discourse carries with it the normative structure of the very discourse it is trying to reject. De-colonising this discourse will be the first step towards articulating ourselves authentically.

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