

IN THE NAME OF CULTURE

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Both in its history and historiography, nineteenth-century Bengal appears as a dramatic world of culture orchestrated by great men: men remembered for their scholarship, their reforms and their literary merits. In his autobiography Rajnarayan Basu, the Brahmo reformer, lists some class-mates from the first batch of graduates of Hindu College not with the fond nostalgia for a lost youth, but with the quiet confidence of social distinction. Amongst his associates were Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the poet, Pearycharan Sarkar, professor at Presidency College and the writer of one of the most popular text-books, Gyanendramohan Tagore, barrister, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, essayist and social theorist, Yogeshchandra Ghosh, Deputy Magistrate, Anandakrishna Basu, famous scholar and personal tutor to Raja Narendrakrishna and Rajnarayan Deb, Yagadishnath Roy, the first Bengali to become a district Police Superintendent, Nilmadhab Mukhopadhyay, the renowned doctor, Girishchandra Deb, principal of Hare School, and Gobindachandra Dutta, a high officer in the Treasury department.¹ Every arm of the state, every inch of the upper layers of the service sector was represented by a new band of eager professionals; it was the age of famous men.

The historiography of this period seems to be a corroboration of this history. Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and its Fragments* focuses on the specificity of colonial nationalism through a description of the role of the Bengali bhadralok in the cultural or 'private' sphere.² The bearers of his model of 'powerful and creative' nationalism are the colonial 'élite', and he emphasises their 'moral and intellectual leadership'. It is one of the aims of this article to revisit some of the arguments about the public and the private and to test their historic validity.

Self-definitions are curious artefacts. Besides serving as sociological shorthand for the past, they also retain a broad charismatic authority. The term 'bhadralok' is one such definition: a whole world of culture, morality and practices is evoked by it. Sumit Sarkar has achieved a precise analysis of the constituent elements of this definition. In their own perception this was a 'middle class (*madhyasreni*, *madhyabitta*) bhadralok world which situated itself below the aristocracy' but 'above the lesser folk' engaged in manual labour and distinct from

¹ Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmcharit*, Calcutta, 1909, pp. 27-29.

² Partha Chatterjee is one of the first Subaltern historians to shift historical focus to a 'private' world of cultural practices. He has famously argued that the Indian middle classes, being marginalised from the 'public' sphere of colonial life by the British, sought refuge in the 'private' sphere of culture, language and the familial in order to assert their autonomy. It was in this reconstituted domain of the 'private' that the nation was 'brought into being'. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1993, p. 6.

the lower castes or Muslims.³ What distinguished them from both was education of a particular kind, so much so that in commonsensical terms the pronouncements about education became the sole criterion for defining the bhadralok.

Culture and education, however, are rarely unrelated to social and/or economic power. More often than not, the non-institutionalised appearance of the former disguises access to the latter, and the relationship between the two forms the subject of profound divergences in the attendant scholarship. Most of these have their origins in the clash between 'class theory' particularly as formulated by Marxist writers, and 'élite theory' as expressed in the writings of Pareto, Weber and Mosca. Marxists understand class to be necessarily a phenomenon which expresses the *connection* between the economic order and other institutions in society. Élite theorists, however, wish to emphasise social relations of dominance that do not directly involve economic relations. 'Bhadralok' as a historical term expresses this legacy of theoretical disagreements in its definitions. It has been denoted variously as a class in the Marxist sense,⁴ a status group in the Weberian sense,⁵ and even as a 'mere category'.⁶ Before addressing the question of definition as such, there remains, however, the more important issue of why such a question about the bhadralok needs to be answered or, indeed, raised!

Discussion about the bhadralok, though plentiful, has been severely hampered by conceptual confusions and ambiguities. There are reasons for this. Although the idea of the bhadralok is a necessary link in any analysis of nineteenth-century ways of thinking and behaving, it is difficult to define. Indeed, it is far easier to catalogue what he stands for. Contemporary writings on the bhadralok are based not so much on observation but on belief rooted in a moral code, on the world of *ought*, not on the world of *is*. The only thing constant and easily identifiable in this world is the importance obsessively accorded to education and culture. What made a man a bhadralok was his taste in the arts, his diction, his social values and, above all, his education. But education itself was a loaded term. The editorial of *Reformer*, owned and supervised by the Tagores, had its finger on the pulse when it tried to define what was meant by education.

Education when applied in the sense we are now using the term, does not mean the knowledge of English or any particular language; but the cultivation of the understanding, the improvement of the moral sense and of good and correct principle. It is not 'the art of speaking any language correctly', but a science of the mind, dependent on no particular pursuit.⁷

³ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, Delhi, 1998, p. 169.

⁴ S. N. Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste and Politics in Calcutta, 1815-38' in E. Leach and S. N. Mukherjee, eds, *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge, 1970, pp. 33-78; Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Calcutta, 1978.

⁵ J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*, Berkeley, 1968, pp. 13-14.

⁶ By Ranajit Guha as cited in Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', p. 51.

⁷ *The Reformer*, 19 September 1831 in Benoy Ghosh, ed., *Selections from English Periodicals of Nineteenth-Century Bengal*, Vol. 5, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 47-48.

In this article I suggest that the constituent elements of the bhadrakok world, education and culture had not only material roots but also a material function. On the one hand, what appeared as *subjective* social codes of comportment, style and morals were in reality the result of *objective* social and economic relations: birth, schooling and other less formalised social networks. On the other hand, culture, or at least the rhetoric about culture gave a unified identity to the bhadrakok as they came from extremely diverse economic and social backgrounds. In place of the phenomenal relationship between historical variables such as level of education or social origin, which appear to be commonsense notions, and whose apparent explanatory power stems from the mental habits of commonsense knowledge of the social world, this article is an attempt to establish an exact relationship between well-defined concepts.

Rethinking the Bhadrakok

Who were the bhadrakok? The problem of definition is difficult because the historiography of the bhadrakok, with a few exceptions, takes its own history about itself too seriously. In most neo-Weberian and post-colonial writing, the term is used freely to give the impression that the bhadrakok is or was a cogent group of individuals sharing a similar if not equal social position, both culturally and economically. This homogenisation of the bhadrakok by scholars derives from a fundamental misrecognition of the term. What is essentially an ethic or a sentiment, held for various reasons by individuals from different class positions, is read as a social whole, even as a single class. Social commentators of nineteenth-century Britain often made the same error about the category of the 'gentleman'.⁸

The other important point of this article is the use of the term 'class'. Considered old-fashioned or, more accurately, as a hangover from 'grand narratives', the role of classes and class formations has recently taken a back seat in the study of colonialism. Marx's own discussion of the concept of class is notoriously unsystematic.⁹ This is not to say that it is impossible to reconstruct a coherent account of class from Marx's writings. G. E. M. de Ste Croix's attempt to do so in his history of ancient Greece is so successful that it is worthy of being quoted at length:

Class (essentially a relationship) is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure. By *exploitation* I mean the appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others.... A *class* (a particular class) is a group of persons in a

⁸ Clerical workers have been described in 1871 Britain as those who 'reside in a fairly genteel neighbourhood, wear good clothes, mix in respectable society, go sometimes to the opera, shrink from letting their wives do household work.' B. G. Orchard quoted in Alex Callinicos, 'The "New Middle Class"' in A. Callinicos and C. Harman, eds, *The Changing Working Class*, London, 1989, p. 21. Also see David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker*, London, 1958.

⁹ In Althusser's words, 'The reader will know how Volume Three (of *Capital*) ends. A title: Classes. Forty lines, then silence.' Cf. L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, London, 1970, p. 193.

community identified by their position in the whole system of production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labour of production) and to other classes....¹⁰

Given this definition of class, the bhadrakok posits a great theoretical dilemma. Describing a man as a bhadrakok tells one nothing about his job, let alone his relation to production. He would not be a peasant or a worker, Muslim, or member of a lower caste, but he might be a state official, a man of letters, a professional, merchant, banker, a low-position clerk in a government or private office, or an academic. He might simply live from the income he derives from urban or rural property or from money invested, perhaps in government securities. And continuing with Ste Croix's definition of class, it is important that this analytical and structural category is not used in this subjective sense. If class is determined by the subject's position (control or lack thereof) vis-à-vis the conditions of production, then it is impossible to call the bhadrakok a class. Indeed, individuals of different class backgrounds were regarded as 'bhadra'.

Such a situation confuses categories of social distinction. Non-economic categories (culture, taste and education) appear to erase differences between essentially economic categories. Thus by virtue of being 'bhadra' a lowly clerk could claim the same cultural genealogy as a deputy magistrate or an academic although they occupied very different stations in life.

As early as 1823, an excellent sociological account of the bhadrakok was provided by Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay (1787-1848). Bandyopadhyay was of the generation of men who witnessed the effects of Cornwallis's land settlement and the changes it brought to the rhythm of urban life in Calcutta. The self-sufficiency of the outlying areas being systematically undermined because of colonial pressures, Bandyopadhyay's father was one among many to come to the big city in search of employment from his native village of Narayanpur in Burdwan. Bandyopadhyay himself moved to Calcutta at an early age when his father bought a house in Kolutala in north Calcutta. *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (1823), a guide for the newcomer from the village, was his own tribute to the city.

There are three kinds of bhadrakok listed in *Kalikata Kamalalaya*. The first are those who are in 'high office', that is, are banians or dewans to the British. The second are the *madhyabitta*, the middle class, who are 'not rich but comfortable'. The third are the 'poor but bhadra' group who work as accountants or sarkars and are accountable on a daily basis to humiliating treatment by dewans.¹¹ This categorisation highlights the crux of the problem regarding the bhadrakok. The division *within* the group is made by Bandyopadhyay on the basis of wealth, but clearly wealth is not a constitutive factor for the group vis-à-vis the rest of society. The staying power of this association with wealth is great, for even 30 years later, the Inspector of Schools, Henry Woodrow commented that 'The *Bhadrakok* (the

¹⁰ G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, London, 1981, pp. 43-44.

¹¹ Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, ed., Bishnu Basu, Calcutta, 1986, p. 7.

respectable), not the *Dhanilok* (the rich) send their children to the Bethune School.¹²

The predominantly Hindu, upper-caste, Bengali composition of the *bhadralok* has not escaped the notice of scholars.¹³ It is significant, however, that the exclusionary mechanism worked to exclude not only the lower, but also the upper layers of society. The *Setts* and *Basaks*, the traditional trading partners of the British till 1753 and the earliest inhabitants of the city, never enter the chronicles of *bhadralok* studies.¹⁴ Nor do the *Marwaris* of the *Barabazar* area. The inhabitant of Calcutta in *Kalikata Kamalalaya* clarifies for us the yardstick against which the rich are measured:

Someone is a shopkeeper, a *kayastha*, he has made some money from his shop, the house he lives in is *pukka*, but if you offer him a book on *zamindari* accounts, what sense will he make of it? Another is disguised as a doctor, he carries a medical bag in his hand, but he treats people of the *hari*, *shuri*, and *dom* castes with roots and leaves; now you go and offer him *Bharat Mallik's* annotated works on medicine, what use is that to him?¹⁵

Books, and the knowledge therein, become coextensive with the social identity of the *bhadralok* in the above passage, giving us an idea of social power that is built on an edifice of books, journals, newspapers and magazines. *Kalikata Kamalalaya* gives form to an idea which was eventually to become the pre-eminent site for the constitution of *bhadralok* identity.

Bandyopadhyay's contempt for wealth without knowledge is only matched by his contempt for the caste of the men he describes, inadvertently pointing to another distinction of being '*bhadra*'. This unreserved derision for lower castes who have managed to make money was a relatively new development. Only eight years before the publication of *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, *Walter Hamilton* noted: 'The men of opulence now in Bengal are Hindu merchants, bankers, and *banyans* of Calcutta, with a few at the principal provincial stations.'¹⁶ The majority of these men came from intermediate caste origins and were certainly not marked for their education or knowledge. In 1822 *Radhakanta Deb*, himself *bhadralok*, compiled for *H. T. Prinsep* 'The accounts of all respectable and opulent natives of the Presidency'.¹⁷ This

¹² Cited in *Narahari Kaviraj*, 'Banglar Jagoron O Bhadrakok' in *Narahari Kaviraj*, ed., *Unish Shataker Banglar Jagoran: Tarka O Bitarka*, Calcutta, 1984, p. 226.

¹³ See, for example, *Sarkar*, *Social History*; *Broomfield*, *Elite Conflict*; and *Anil Seal*, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1968.

¹⁴ The *Setts* and *Basaks* were the merchants of cotton piece-goods whose influence waned with the discontinuation of the *dadni* system in 1753. In the nineteenth-century they were predominantly money-lenders in the city. See *B. Ghosh*, 'Some Old Family Founders in Eighteenth Century Calcutta', *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. 79, January-June 1960, pp. 42-55.

¹⁵ *Bandyopadhyay*, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁶ *W. Hamilton*, *The East India Gazetteer*, London, 1815, p. 136.

¹⁷ Reprinted in *B.N. Banerjee*, 'Raja Radhakanta Deb's Services to the Country', *Indian Historical Records Commission*, Vol. 9, 1926, pp. 105-9.

remarkable list was further revised in 1839.¹⁸ The list was by no means definitive of the 23 men mentioned, only three of whom were of Brahmin origin.

During Bandyopadhyay's time, wealth was still a stable referential to the men who made their precarious fortunes under the East India Company in the first half of the nineteenth century. The two decades succeeding *Kalikata Kamalalaya* are of vital importance in our analysis of the bhadralok, and this disjuncture is often overlooked in its historiography.

The men who found their place in Radhakanta's list were all newcomers to the city and had risen to their present opulence since the latter half of the eighteenth century. All of them had made their fortunes either as dewans or banians to the Company. The contours of this mercantile economy constituted the space for the inscription of wealth in nineteenth-century Calcutta. The display of abundance was not conducted in the individual anonymity of the private, but was grandly performed every day amidst the public life of the city. It was an item of public consumption, participation and curiosity. A reader of the *Samachar Chandrika* complained to the editor in 1832 that while the paper gave a full account of an English play sponsored by Prasanna Kumar Tagore, it failed to mention a cock-fight at Ashutosh Deb's house, and also the proceedings of the *akhrai* song competition at Rammohan Mallik's house at Mechuabazar.¹⁹ Whether as an actual participator in the grand ceremonies or reading about them in the newspapers and satires or recounting doggerel about the good life of the rich, the commoner was firmly situated in the spectacle of excess and patronage.²⁰

A contemporary journal described the funeral ceremony of Raja Nabakrishna Deb's mother as follows:

There were full thirty days between the death and the *sradh* day and Nubkissen's countrymen made good this advantage. At first the beggars, Bhats, and Pariahs undertook the journey. Next there were those whose conditions oscillated between decency and beggary. Lastly, men even in competent circumstances, tempted by large expectations and urged by greedy wives, complied with the small chance of being distinguished in the crowd, followed...as presents were given per head the very babies were brought and when many of them died of suffocation, the parents preserved them for the occasion and exhibit [*sic*] them as if they were alive, added to their incomes....²¹

¹⁸ Cited in Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay, *Sambad Patre Sekaler Katha*, Vol. 2, Calcutta, rpt 1994, pp. 753-58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁰ Good-humoured and indulgent criticisms of the high life of the rich formed the topic of tales and verses of this period. The babu's predilection for prostitutes was an acknowledged theme of verses, songs and Kalighat paintings. The cultural forms of *jatra*, *kheur*, *akhrai* and *hap-akhrai* mediated the social lives of the high and the low within a common sharing of ribald humour and narratives. For a detailed study of these expressions of cultural homogeneity see Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Street: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989.

²¹ Quoted in Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, pp. 220-21.

Nabakrishna, the famous banian of Robert Clive, was among the first generation of the so-called 'opulent natives' of Radhakanta's list whose dwelling houses in Shobhabazar were noted for their grandeur and style.²² Similarly, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Malliks of Barabazar are mentioned as banians in connection with various business transactions.²³ The pages of *Samachar Darpan* document vividly the accounts of this family, particularly when the Malliks held a *śradh* ceremony and the villages within a 30-mile radius of Calcutta were temporarily depopulated because everyone, in search of a spectacle, gravitated to the city to get a share of the Mallik largesse, so great was the reputation of the Mallik babus.²⁴

Wealth depended not so much upon rational calculation and sustained industry as upon speculation and varying degrees of idleness. The wealth of the banian was not dependent on his official income from the Company. It was not a salaried wealth, which is concomitant to the rhetoric of thrift or saving. At the time of the now famous funeral of his mother on which he is reputed to have spent Rs 9 lakhs, Nabakrishna's official salary was only Rs. 60. In 1766, Nabakrishna was awarded the title of 'Maharaja' by Clive, and offered a salary of Rs 2,000. The uncrowned Raja, now made official, refused this and asked for only Rs 200. However, he rode home from the ceremony on an elephant, scattering money all round him on the streets.²⁵ Prosperity was awarded or withheld by a certain degree of chance in the commercial enterprises of the banian. Walter Benjamin in his writings on Paris notes that in trade or speculation, the link between (labour) time and money is severed, and its corollary is thus indolence.²⁶ The cultural life of the banian corresponds closely to this idea. Far from being a private assertion of culture, the cock-fights, entertainment by the leading *bais*, the elaborate marriages and funerals constituted a theatre of leisure, a part of the fluid, unbounded time of the merchant.

This splendour and excess of the early half of the century was, however, short-lived. The spectacular city-scape of Calcutta and the dream-life of the banian were soon to become a fond memory amidst the social angst of a new generation.

From *Byabsa* to *Chakri*

English Policir ei ek bidhi, dhan tor amar buddhi
Ami manib, tui mutsuddi, labhya amar, tor kshati
Aha mari ki ashcharya, roge shoke, majlo rajya
Athacha bojhena arya, santane samaj gati
*Banijye basate Lakshmi, aneke ihar pabe sakshi.*²⁷

(This is the way of English policy, the capital is yours but the brains belong to me;

²² Mukherjee's *Magazine* (1861) quoted in Raja Binaya Krishna Deb, *The Early History and Growth of Calcutta*, 1905, Calcutta, rpt 1977, p. 54.

²³ *Calendar of Persian Correspondence*, Vol. 2, 1767-69, Letter no. 1, 517, p. 93.

²⁴ Bandyopadhyay, *Sambad Patre*, Vol. 2, pp. 538-39.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.46.

²⁶ See Graeme Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 157-60.

²⁷ Benoy Ghosh, ed., *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, Vol. 4, Calcutta, 1966, p. 957.

I am the master, you are the *mutsuddi* [Indian manager working for a European merchant], the profits remain mine, while you pick up the loss; O how strange! the land dies of ailment; Yet you fail to comprehend: only trade begets prosperity).

So ran a popular song composed in the mid-nineteenth century. The Bengalis, by then, were no longer harbouring ambitious commercial dreams of building railway lines, but were instead manning in large numbers the administrative, intellectual and professional occupations. Positing *byabsa* (trade) against *chakri* (salaried employment) and pointing out the slavishness of the latter against the independence and obvious superiority of the former was one of the most potent tropes of regret and nostalgia in the literature of this time.²⁸

The shift to the service sector has been interpreted by some scholars within a framework of status and social values, where it has been argued that 'these careers were more in accord with the *bhadralok* value system'.²⁹ John McGuire has given us a more material interpretation of the situation. He has identified three main reasons why the local entrepreneur had to move out of the capital accumulation network of the agency houses and the East India Company. The most evident cause was, of course, the financial crisis of 1830-33 when the leading agency houses collapsed and the situation in 1848-52 when the economy was depressed following the fall of the Union Bank. Indeed, the fall of the Union Bank in 1848 can be taken as a rough landmark for the change in the economy, and hence in social classes.

Second, the development of a monopoly through the managing agency houses served as a link with major finance groups in the city of London which provided the channel for the import of British finance capital, thus making the agency houses ultimately less dependent on indigenous capital. Another reason for lessened interest in merchant capital was the growing attractiveness of investment in rural ground rent. After 1806 the prices of holdings began to rise so that despite depressed periods, by 1857 they averaged over 500 per cent of that of the original settlement.³⁰ By the mid-nineteenth century the leading Bengalis of Calcutta owned

²⁸ The examples are numerous. For leading articles in contemporary newspapers urging Bengalis to trade see *Gyananeshawn*, 21 April 1838; *Sambad Prabhakar*, 23 November 1853; *Tattobodhini Patrika*, 14 May 1870; *Somprakash*, 29 July 1878; also see lesser known tracts like Chandrashekhar Sen, *Ki Holo*, Calcutta, 1875, pp. 46-47 and Tarakrishna Haldar, *Chamatkar Swapnadarshan*, Calcutta, 1867, pp. 16-24. For an interesting discussion on how the notion of *chakri* was caught up in the formulation of enslavement in a larger context see Tanika Sarkar, 'Rhetoric Against Age of Consent', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 36, 4 September 1993, pp. 1869-78.

²⁹ Blair B. Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in India*, Berkeley, 1976, p. 7. Morris D. Morris also makes a similar argument about entrepreneurial responses being determined by the particular community value of the group involved; see also Rajnarayan Chandravarkar's reply to this position, 'Industrialization in India before 1947: Conventional Approaches and Alternative Perspectives', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1985, p. 645.

³⁰ John McGuire, *The Making of a Colonial Mind: A Quantitative Study of the Bhadrakalok in Calcutta, 1857-1885*, Canberra, 1983, pp. 2-16. Also see Benoy Chaudhuri, 'Land Market in Eastern India, 1793-1940, Part 1: The Movement of Land Prices', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (hereafter *IESHR*), Vol. 12, No. 1, January-March 1975, pp. 1-42;

large zamindaris and taluqdaris in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Though these families continued to invest in the joint stock market, in each case the families or individuals concerned were also big rentiers.³¹ Indigenous capital, in the face of competition from British finance capital, was mainly channelled into ground rent. Also, there was a great expansion of overseas trade in 'primary produce' like cotton, jute, tea and oilseed. As a result, exports nearly doubled, making the possession of land even more lucrative from the mid-nineteenth century; and land prices continued to rise.

Most of the banians who made their money before 1800 had easy opportunities for investing in landed property.³² The families which remained closely connected to the leading European agency houses or tried to compete with them in the usual export trades were less lucky. The Burrals, who were banians of Alexander and Co. for at least two generations, went down when that firm closed its doors in 1832. Only those Indians whose fortunes could not be forfeited as belonging to nominal partners of European agency houses and who managed to create some substantial property in land or real estate escaped.

Let us recall the classification for the bhadrakok in *Kalikata Kamalalaya*: the rich banian, the comfortable middle class and the 'poor but bhadra' bottom rung. The rich banian had disappeared from the social-economic stage, and Calcutta was left with the remaining two categories.

The two above-mentioned social groups were the basic constituents of the bhadrakok. The *social* composition of the bhadrakok, however, occupied two *class* positions united by a common ideology of education. It is unlikely that the position of a man such as Pearychand Mitra (1814-83), a member of the Board of Directors for several business ventures including the Great Eastern Hotel Company, the Port Canning Land Investment Company, the Howrah Docking Company, the Bengal Tea Company and so on, can be equated with either the modest income of Vidyasagar or the grim realities of a clerk (*kerani*).³³ So the bhadrakok, far from being a homogenous category, was a combination of the landed rentier class and the petty-bourgeoisie.

There is little confusion about the class position of the first group of the bhadrakok and McGuire's analysis is very relevant to this class. Their families had made their fortunes as dewans and banians to the company, and with the change in the structure of the economy they invested in rural and urban property. When the brief heyday of the great banians was over, the accumulated wealth was invested in various urban and rural properties. The rent from these investments allowed a life of comparative ease, if not excessive affluence as before, to pursue culture and the arts.

Amit Bhaduri, 'The Evolution of Land Relations in Eastern India Under British Rule', *IESHR*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January-March 1976, pp. 45-58; and Ratna Ray, 'Land Transfer and Social Change Under the Permanent Settlement', *IESHR*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January-March 1974, pp. 1-45.

³¹ The number of directorships in the joint stock companies held by aristocrats increased from 3 to 15 between 1857 and 1866. See McGuire, *Making of a Colonial Mind*, p. 127.

³² Gokul Ghosal, the banian of Verelst and the Bhukailas Raj family are prominent examples.

³³ Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das, eds, *Sahitya Sadhak Charitmalā: Pearychand Mitra*, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 179-80.

Except in minor ways, this was not a class noted for its cultural achievements, barring a few literary figures like Pearychand Mitra and Kaliprasanna. (It is noteworthy, however, that it was precisely these individuals who launched a critique of opulence and privileged education and knowledge over wealth in their most famous works.) Their inclusion in the bhadrakok rhetoric often sublates this. Most of them were not a part of the Hare School/Hindu College nexus which developed later. Indeed some of their forays into the world of culture were received with scepticism, even ridicule.³⁴ The editor of Mukherji's Magazine confirmed in 1873 that 'mercantile men' were 'usually impatient of literature'.³⁵

If the merchants and the landed gentry were not the approved bearers of culture and education, who were? The *Friend of India* commented in 1859 that the 'leaders of society' in Calcutta were the 'salaried men'.³⁶ S. N. Mukherjee has provided for us an important statistical account of the number of Indians employed in government service, particularly in the Revenue and Judicial departments for Bengal (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Indians Employed in Government Service³⁷

Year	Europeans	Natives
1800	7,719	49,322
1810	10,715	77,125
1820	11,676	121,238
1830	15,701	96,897
1840	16,303	102,055
1850	26,803	126,910
1851	27,159	138,142

There are several factors involved in the growth of employment in the service sector, the most important being the importance of Calcutta as the capital of British India and the seat of commercial capital for the empire. The bulk of colonial trade passed through Calcutta, and a substantial proportion of the colonial administration was based there. According to one estimate, 18,950 people were employed in the government services in 1901, while the number of professionals was 22,530 in Calcutta alone.³⁸ These figures, compared to the number of people engaged in trade and commerce, are very high indeed. In 1891 there were only 57,615 people in trade, including banking, money-lending, etc., which is nearly half of the sum total of the former.³⁹ Obviously, the marginalisation of the natives from

³⁴ See Review of Raja Kalikrishna's work on Sanskrit shlokas, *India Gazette*, 21 October 1831.

³⁵ Sambhuchandra Mukherji to Bholanath Chandra, 13 January 1873 in Manmathanath Ghosh, *Manishi Bholanath Chandra*, Calcutta, 1924, p. 172.

³⁶ *Friend of India*, 21 July 1859.

³⁷ Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', p. 40.

³⁸ *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series: Bengal*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1909, p. 402.

³⁹ See Amiya Bagchi, 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta, 1860-1921' in Sukanta Chaudhuri, ed., *Calcutta: The Living City*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1990, p. 215.

the areas of capital accumulation in any real sense accounts for this disproportionality.

Despite the flattering comment in the *Friend of India* about salaried men, the salaries of these men were remarkably unflattering. Out of 2,813 Indians employed as uncovenanted servants in 1849, only 493 received salaries above £240 per year (roughly Rs 200 per month) and 1,147 received salaries between £24 to £120 per year (Rs 240-1,200 per year).⁴⁰ The *Hindoo Patriot* had a better grasp of the situation:

There are now in Bengal only two, perhaps three, families which can boast of a clear annual income of above fifty thousand pounds, or five lacs of rupees a year. The source of their income is, of course, property in land...[for] families of incomes ranging between ten and fifty thousand a year...the number...would be a hundred. The major part of this class...are ...land owners...and we know of but a single income derived from professional sources that exceeds five thousand pounds or fifty thousand rupees a year. The fact that there is not a single salaried income which amounts...to that figure has not only economical but a political significance.⁴¹

The ownership of land by the salaried masses is an unusual but relevant factor. Landed property and rent thereof was, as mentioned before, the only sphere of the economy left open to Indians. The amount of land owned, however, varied according to class. The landed gentry controlled substantial amounts of land from the mid-nineteenth century. For the majority of the salaried class, however, this was not the case. According to the *Census* of 1891, one-third of the shopkeepers, a tenth of the school-teachers, one-fourth of the doctors, pleaders and lawyers and one-sixth of the clerks had 'some interest in land, generally as intermediate tenants'.⁴² The crucial fact to keep in mind in this regard is that most of the people who manned the various public offices and low-paid clerical jobs in the cities were originally from some outlying village, where they had some landed property already. The landless peasant or the poor cultivator did not come in search of office jobs to the cities: those who came already had some access to education, and a knowledge of English even if only a smattering.⁴³

J. C. Jack, writing in the early twentieth century on the Faridpur district, observed that 'clerks, lawyers and government officers' who work in the headquarter towns 'very rarely bring their wives and still more rarely their children to the town to live with them.' This, he concluded, was 'partly due to the

⁴⁰ Mukherjee, 'Class, Caste', p. 41.

⁴¹ *Hindoo Patriot*, 11 October 1855, reprinted in Ghosh, ed., *Selections from English Periodicals*, Vol. 3, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 196-97.

⁴² C. J. O'Donnell, ed., *Census*, 1891, Volume III (Bengal), Calcutta, 1893, p. 291.

⁴³ Vidyasagar's father Thakurdas picked up English from a friend of his patron Jaganmohan Nayalankar in whose house he stayed when he first came to Calcutta. This private tutoring was necessary even for his minor job as a bill collector. See Chandicharan Bandyopadhyay, *Vidyasagar*, Calcutta, rpt 1990, pp. 9-11.

difficulties and expense of conveyance.⁴⁴ It was thus a class of petty landowners who came to the city under duress to become the white-collar worker or the much maligned *kerani*. While ownership of even a small holding in the village had provided a degree of status, the city in all its impersonal homogeneity and pecuniary hardship robbed the newcomer of even that. This genteel poverty was the background of the majority of the intelligentsia of the late nineteenth-century.

Hunter provided a rough summary for the number of people engaged in the service sector and petty trade in the 24 parganas in 1870-73. According to him there were 18,303 men employed under government, municipal or other local authorities. There were 33,996 men engaged as 'professional persons, including professors of religion, education, literature, law medicine, fine arts, surveying and engineering'; and about 31,395 men in small trade and shopkeeping.⁴⁵ The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Richard Temple, commented that the position of this class engaged in public and private professions was 'in some respects...improving fast; [but] in other respects it... [was] becoming harder and harder.' He observed that the supra-abundant availability of clerical labour made it so cheap that it failed 'to afford reasonable remuneration to those engaged in it'.⁴⁶ This was not news, for already in 1860 James Long had remarked that the Bengali *kerani* could be employed at one-third the cost of Eurasians.⁴⁷

There was a general recognition of the diverse composition of the salaried masses. Sumit Sarkar's elegant analysis of the recurrent myth about the present as Kaliyuga draws attention to this declining world of the *kerani*.⁴⁸ This class of the lower bhadrakols was the main consumer of the Battala texts from the mid-nineteenth century. In one such text, a fabulous reason was provided by one Taran Sharma for the penury of the professions and particularly of the *kerani*. In his grand venture entitled *Kerani Puran*, Sharma recounted a conversation between the Creator Brahma and his trusted sage Narad. Brahma was feeling sorry for the *kerani*, having cursed them previously to a life of hardship as they had plucked all of Brahma's swan's feathers to write with. Narad was accordingly dispatched to earth to alleviate their woes. Narad found the *keranis* to be of three castes: the first were the *kulin* amongst *keranis* who earned between Rs 200-400 a month; the second were the *bangsaj* with a salary of Rs 100-200; and below them were the *moulik* earning only Rs 30-100. Below the Rs 30 range were the menial *mouliks* and above the Rs 400 mark were the chief *kulins*.⁴⁹

Marx refers to the 'lower middle class' as that of the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan and the peasant, who may assist the working class in its struggle against the bourgeoisie, but only to avoid sinking into the ranks of the proletariat. They are the owners of small capital, trailing economically behind the

⁴⁴ J. C. Jack, *The Economic Life of a Bengal District: A Study*, Oxford, 1916, p. 77.

⁴⁵ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. 1, London, 1875, pp. 45-49.

⁴⁶ *Report on the Administration of Bengal, 1874-75*, Calcutta, 1876, p. 44.

⁴⁷ James Long, 'Calcutta in the Olden Times — Its People', *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 35, No. 69, September 1860, p. 170.

⁴⁸ Sumit Sarkar, 'Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth and History in Colonial Bengal' in *idem*, *Social History*, pp. 186-215.

⁴⁹ Taran Sharma, *Kerani Puran*, Calcutta, 1886, pp. 1-8.

big bourgeoisie and politically between the worker and capital. Their class position demands they be reactionary, even though at particular historical junctures they may play a revolutionary role against the bourgeoisie.⁵⁰ The main enemies for the *kerani* in the *Kerani Puran* are thus 'mass education' and female education.⁵¹ In a colonial situation the struggle for resources for the petty bourgeoisie was limited to the service sector. This is where all the rhetoric of loss and all the arguments for political unfreedom were played out. The avenue for survival for them was higher education. As a member of the politically radical group 'The Young Bengal', Kristodas Pal sarcastically commented in 1856 that 'a sorry feature' of the Young Bengal was that 'with all his knowledge and enlightenment, with all his boasted love of freedom, he prefers the kennel of a karanee.'⁵² But access to higher education was strictly differentiated according to class. The bottom rung of the petty bourgeoisie thus became the *kerani*, while the top layer was recruited to the slightly higher rungs of the colonial state. In 1833 the office of Deputy Collector was created for Indians, in 1837 that of Principal Sudder and in 1843, the Deputy Magistrate. A large section of the intelligentsia — Bankim, Shibchandra Deb, Vidyasagar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay — formed a part of this layer.

Culture Strikes Back

So far this article has tried to show the actual social divergence in the composition of the *bhadralok*. The question now remains as to how the *bhadralok* ethic mobilised these various social classes and to what effect.

'How shall I describe the physical appearance of the babu?' asks Shibnath Shastri, the Brahma reformer in his social history of the nineteenth century.

Their face, forehead and eyes are darkened with the excesses of the night. The head bears a wavy mantle of hair, the teeth are fashionably coloured with *mishi*, and a feather-light dhoti graces the body.... In the daytime these babus either slept or flew kites, watched cock-fights, or whiled away their time in playing musical instruments, and listening to obscene *panchalis* or *half-akhras* songs. Come night-time they would gather at the whorehouses and immerse themselves in the pleasures therein.⁵³

This portrait of gross physical pleasures was then the exact antonym of a *bhadralok*. But how does one recognise a *bhadralok*?

Etymologically 'bhadralok' is an almost exact equivalent of 'gentleman'. Already in the second quarter of the century there appeared in the *Bangadoot* an article comparing the new Bengali middle class to its European counterparts.⁵⁴ A leading student in the Hindu College, Kailashchandra Dutta, wrote an interesting article for the *Hindu Pioneer* in 1836 entitled 'What is a Gentleman?' Gentlemen,

⁵⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1968, p. 44.

⁵¹ Sharma, *Kerani Puran*, pp. 40-41.

⁵² K. Pal, *The Young Bengal Vindicated*, Calcutta, 1856, p. 23.

⁵³ Shibnath Shastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, Calcutta, 1909, pp. 55-56.

⁵⁴ *Bangadoot*, 13 June 1829.

the author was once informed by a lady friend, were 'a people of a particular sort with whom one likes to associate'. This delightful yet vacuous remark is then concretised by the author himself. He begins with the rejection of certain common assumptions about the word: 'most people' he says 'will exclaim that birth dubs a man a gentleman'. Of course by this he certainly does not mean to imply 'every kind of birth, because then a tinker or tailor would be one.' Thus the 'adjective *respectable* preceding "ancient family", may complete the sense.' Now comes the real twist in his argument. All preceding registers of eminence had been challenged by colonialism. Caste or rank no longer had their previous relevance, as was demonstrated by the meteoric rise of the banians. Dutt asks: 'Who will swear (except perhaps the present writer) that the long train of his ancestors has maintained an unspotted character, has been undisciplined by pick-pockets or murderers?' Thus, a new illustration for the gentleman is provided:

It matters little whether such men have smooth complexions, scarlet uniforms or fringed gloves.... If one of these men wears a plain dress, a leathern belt, a waistcoat not lined with silk, he is not the less esteemed.... In company he neither talks flippantly nor impudently, has not the air of a bravo or a beau, does not swagger or bully, or unnecessarily offer his gold snuff box with a looking glass under the lid, nor bows to the company before he takes his seat....⁵⁵

There are a couple of distinctive points in this definition. The first and the most obvious is the discarding of older marks of status such as caste, birth, etc. Dutta's own (kayastha) surname suggests a social mobility which would have been unthinkable in pre-colonial times. The Tagores were a plebeian version of Brahmins who would not have had the previous economic and later cultural dominance if not for the generalisation of resources by colonialism.⁵⁶ The second characteristic of the gentleman is his undisputed individuality. Ancestry, heredity and even profession is disregarded in the above passage in favour of inner marks of breeding — in other words, culture. The soul of the gentleman thus lay in liberal education and the rarefied life of the mind. Culture, while distinctive in general, enabled in this case the production of distinction. There was a uniform critique of excess in all forms and a privileging of education over material wealth.⁵⁷

This critique of wealth should not be seen as a pure conspiracy on the part of a section of the *bhadralok* to secure consensus among the more unfortunate. The tedium of a salaried job and constant humiliation from British superiors was a source

⁵⁵ *Hindu Pioneer*, Vol. 1, No. 5, January 1836, pp. 69-71.

⁵⁶ Rabindranath was married into a poor and undistinguished family, as not many Brahmins were willing to marry their daughter to one from the Pirali caste. Also certain prominent figures of the nineteenth century were from non-Brahmin or even non-Kayastha backgrounds, like Matilal Seal, Rasikkrishna Mallik, Mahendralal Sarkar and others.

⁵⁷ From pedagogic aphorisms to serious philosophical disputations this theme was widely prevalent: see for example, Kalikrishna Bhattacharya, *Naba Niti Sara*, Part 1, Calcutta, 1858, pp. 63-64; Gopalchandra Bandyopadhyay, *Hita Shikshai*, Part 1, Calcutta, 1869, pp. 31-32; Woomeshchandra Banerjee, *The New Infant Teacher*, Part 3, Calcutta, 1877, p. 27.

of angst for even the well-established bhadralok. Bankimchandra's brother Sanjibchandra was demoted for his (alleged) impertinence to a British judge.⁵⁸ In a telling anecdote of Haraprasad Shastri, Rajendralal Mitra's wife was reputed to have asked first whether his L.D. epithet would bring any extra income, and when told it would not she was supposed to have lost all interest in the honorific title.⁵⁹ There was hence a constant underlying anxiety about material life amongst all sections of the bhadralok which made the critique of wealth an acceptable commonsense.

But while a critique of wealth and conspicuous spending was a dominant sentiment among all classes of the bhadralok, it was also ironically a problem, as some of the major bhadralok figures did command substantial wealth. Debendranath Tagore, otherwise known as 'Maharshi' (Saint), despite his disavowal of material pleasures and wealth, never wore one set of clothes for more than a few days. His entire wardrobe was frequently handed down to servants and replacements made. He also never used towels for their rough texture; muslin was specially bought for him to dry himself.⁶⁰

The discourse about material wealth was therefore not a simple one. There was a delinking of wealth from money, as a distinction whereby wealth became denotative of a whole world of culture, politeness and respectability, 'bhadra', as it were, and though these dispersed fragments were constituted through money, money was exterior to the semiotics of the discourse itself. In certain instances money could represent wealth; but it did not define it completely. Wealth had a series of other representations in which money played only a minor part. Status came to be constituted anteriorly to wealth which money as a material substance could not buy. Consider, for example, an incident from the life of the Maharshi. Once he was invited to a performance at the Shobhabazar Palace. It was a grand occasion and all the wealthy and big names of Calcutta gathered. This was at the time when the Carr, Tagore and Company had just been declared bankrupt and Debendranath had to sell a substantial portion of the family property to pay debtors. The situation created intense speculation amongst the rich in the city as to what Debendranath would wear to the party. This was how the Maharshi presented himself, in the words of his grandson:

Kartadamashai [grandfather] was probably aware of such speculations. He called for the jeweler Karamchand and asked him to make a pair of velvet shoes encrusted with pearls...now there remained the question of clothes: what was to be the attire for the evening? The sarkars and dewans began to worry as to what they would be asked to make ready, expensive shawls, silk robes or what? Kartadamashai ordered: none of that, I shall go in white...On the appointed day he was all in white...no hint or trace of zari or velvet in his entire costume...except for the shoes. Everyone at court was in their best colourful clothes with jewels and ornaments glittering about their

⁵⁸ Satyajit Chaudhuri *et al.*, eds, *Haraprasad Shastri Rachana Sangraha*, Calcutta, 1981, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁰ Abanindranath Thakur, 'Gharoa' in *idem*, *Abanindra Rachanabali*, Vol. 1, second edn, Calcutta, 1975, p. 83.

bodies...therein entered Debendranath. The entire assembly fell silent as he sat on a couch only slightly extending his feet...The Raja of Shobhabazar was a friend of Kartadadamashai. He then turned to all and pointed to his feet and said 'Look at that, that is what is called taste, what we have adorned our bodies with, he has considered to be only worthy of his feet.'⁶¹

It is understandable why it were the attributes of richness, and not wealth itself, that came under scrutiny. The 1850s saw a generation of men for whom the commercial dreams were a very recent past. The changes in the economy made independent business even more attractive. The complaint of the age was not that Bengalis were rich but that they were not rich enough to take on the English. The criticism of wealth was on the squandering of it in a distasteful way, not on the actual possession of it.

All the moral tracts, whether by the lesser-known or the more famous authors, usually had a chapter on wealth and its successful and effective utilisation. *Artha* (wealth) was defined by one author as 'that which made exchange possible'. This particular book went into three successive editions, because of its popularity. The chapter on *Artha* was absent when the book was originally published, but was added to the second edition and formed the largest chapter (14 pages) of the book:

Artha is a fundamental necessity of human beings. Whether it be the care of the body, the welfare of the family, the propagation of *dharma*, or the earning of *vidya*, nothing can be accomplished without *artha*. Without it man can neither earn the jewel of *vidya* nor fulfil his duties to God...The illiterate and the poor eat indiscriminately, live in unorganised and dirty houses and lead slovenly lives without *artha*, which alone can open the doors to the world of *vidya*.⁶²

Vidya (education) was hence not only knowledge, but the mark of privilege. It was carefully disassociated from wealth, and placed above it. Thus, the only way by which *vidya* could be made to sit within the discourse without contradiction was by changing the boundaries of material wealth itself, such that both *vidya* and *artha* became the natural prerogatives of a particular group.

Mobilising Culture: Similitude and Difference

The sharpest and most coherent critique of wealth and conspicuous consumption came from the pens of the rentier class. Kaliprasanna Singha's *Hutom Penchar Naksha* and Pearychand Mitra's *Alaler Gharer Dulal* are particularly distinctive. The latter was a strong influence on the former; indeed some of his sketches are direct reproductions of some earlier writings of Mitra.⁶³ The relevance and acceptance of the new ideology espoused in *Hutom* can partly be judged by the vast numbers of

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

⁶² Becharam Chattopadhyay, *Griha Karma*, Calcutta, 1864, pp. 38-52.

⁶³ Characters such as 'Nakal Singi', 'Keshto' and 'Tepi Pishi' are all from Pearycharan Mitra's *Mad Khaoa Bara Dai Jat Thakar Ki Upaya*, Calcutta, 1859; see Nag, ed., *Satik Hutom Penchar Naksha*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 93, 95, 147.

tracts that were published soon after.⁶⁴ The majority of them were published from Battala and written by upper-caste men possibly pursuing the treadmill life of a *kerani*. *Hutom's* criticism of wealth and riches struck an immediate reverberating note. Here was a validation of their material reality conspicuously bereft of bright lights, flowing wine, or caprices with prostitutes. Not only that, here was someone saying loudly and clearly that all that was wrong and not to be aspired to. All of a sudden the city which had seemed a collage of unattainable luxuries was represented within a recognisable dichotomy of the useless and indolent rich and the hard-working, unhappy *keranis*, *shipsarkars* and head-writers.

Alas! those who were counted on to mitigate the woes of Bengal, those who are in possession of immense wealth and could care for the welfare of the jati and the motherland are the ones who indulge in the worst of vices and are the walking embodiments of sin. What could be more lamentable! It is nearly a hundred years since the British have come to this country and how has our situation changed? The same flaunting behaviour from the Nawabi days still prevail, the same fancy attires, and lavish hairstyles can still be seen; there has been some change amongst ordinary *madhyastha* people, but our lords refuse to change.⁶⁵

Hutom's text constitutes one of the first acknowledgements of the change in society from the days of the banian to that of the salaried masses. Its popularity was based on two things: first, the articulation of anger and frustration of a significant majority, and second, its language. Despite being a seminal text in establishing a moral point about wealth and riches being subordinate to culture, taste and education, *Hutom's* text is written in the everyday, earthy language of the street. It was, in this sense, a truly mobilising book, more so when one thinks of the efforts that a section of the intelligentsia was making at that very time to 'purify' the Bengali language. Kaliprasanna himself could not resist the urge to authenticate his true qualifications in the text, just so that it might not be confused with the work of someone truly obscure.⁶⁶

There are no apparent heroes in *Hutom*. Unlike *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, where the reader is meant to identify with Benibabu, the teacher and the younger, studious and pious son of the rich babu, Ram, there is no such clear-cut story in *Hutom*, it being a collection of sketches of everyday social life in Calcutta. The structure of the text captures the unconscious fragmentation of urban life with its almost conscious refusal of or resistance to the presentation of an overarching, integrated, coherent view of the city as a whole. Its imagistic and episodic approach

⁶⁴ It is impossible to give a comprehensive list of such tracts, but some of them are: Byomchand Bangal (Harishchandra Mitra), *Ghar Thakte Babui Bheje*, Dhaka, 1872; Bholanath Mukhopadhyay, *Koner Ma Kande Ar Takar Puntli Bandhe*, Calcutta, 1863; *idem*, *Apnar Mukh Apni Dekho*, Calcutta, 1863; Dwarkanath Mitra, *Mushalang Kul Nashanang*, Calcutta, 1864; Nabinchandra Chattopadhyay, *Baruni Bilash*, Calcutta, 1867 and others.

⁶⁵ Nag, ed., *Satik Hutom*, pp. 201-2.

⁶⁶ In the preface to his second edition in 1868 he thus mentions his achievements as the scholarly translator of the *Mahabharata*. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

highlights the spirit of a new urban existence: the fleeting fluidity of metropolitan life. Diverse and apparently incongruent elements are rudely dragged from their moorings to be reassembled in the glaring light of criticism. This shock-like character of the text matches its language and its harsh, unrefined critique. Historians of print have commented upon the disjuncture between the production and reception of printed texts. Kaliprasanna's own purpose in writing *Hutom* may have been a tangential acknowledgement of the need to move on from the luxuries of a previous era. There certainly was an element of settling accounts with particular immoral individuals;⁶⁷ but *Hutom* became a social text for a whole class of people far beyond Kaliprasanna's own life or known circles.

Despite the apparent absence of heroes in *Hutom*, the sympathies of this strange, cantankerous voice were not hard to discern. All through the description of the city are scattered stray references to the common bhadrakok, the not-so-rich layer of society. In one place he is unable to afford a carriage to go to work and is ridiculed by the coachman; elsewhere, he is harassed by the police or some minion of the colonial order. Indeed, the attitude towards the colonial order is one of gentle derision. The police and various functionaries of the law are represented as ruin for the poor. Missionaries are ridiculed.⁶⁸ In all of this, our lower bhadrakok is easily located in his conspicuous absence. *Hutom*'s criticisms are quite specifically aimed at two aspects of the social order: one, the renegade rich and two, the lower castes who have used their ill-gotten wealth to rise in society. In many cases the two points of derision are combined in the same person.

As the Brahmins and Kayasthas started on their trek to civilisation, all the Nabasak [lower caste], Harisak, Muchisaks of the city started to crawl as well; eventually we saw the rise of second Rammohans, Debendranath Tagores, Vidyasagars and Kesab Sens among the lower castes. Instead of the usual two chapattis and a bit of vegetable at dinner, 'fowl curry' and 'rolls' were introduced.... Seeing that carrying a bunch of keys to the shop and wearing the ubiquitous dhoti was no longer seeming, carriages and Broughams were procured.... Slowly through double-dealing and low cunning and investing money as banians, some really chotoloks of the city became rich.⁶⁹

Herein lies another crucial mobilising determinant of *Hutom*. Sumit Sarkar has made an important point about the social denudation of the traditional rural literati in the context of colonialism in general, and the rise of Calcutta as a metropolis in particular.⁷⁰ From the 1840s Sanskrit and the concomitant culture of traditional learning was definitely on the wane, and graduates of the Sanskrit College were finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs.⁷¹ Sarkar cites the example of

⁶⁷ Kaliprasanna's men were instructed to distribute copies of the text early in the morning to selected households; *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-49.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁰ See Sarkar, *Social History*, pp. 216-81.

⁷¹ Subolchandra Mitra, *Life of Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar*, New Delhi, rpt 1975, p. 113.

Ramkrishna and his brother Ramkumar: the former was finding life very hard as a pundit in one of the Calcutta *tois* and both brothers had to take up jobs, with considerable self-abnegation, as temple purohits to their lower caste Kaibarta patron, Rani Rasmoni.⁷² The changes in social structure spelled disaster for most of the petty bourgeois layer, whose memories of caste superiority and land ties with the native village made the humiliating drudgery of office work all the more unbearable. The caustic remarks of *Hutom* on lower castes who had made their money through either deception or favours thus evoked a powerful response. The moral content of the text, the scathing criticisms of the rich, and the compassion for the *madhyastha*, or the middle class, combined with the unique, accessible and humorous language, made *Hutom* stand out from all the straight-laced didactic literature of the times. It was an infallible invitation to the *kerani* to join the ranks of the *bhadralok* ethic.

Identity can be established as identification and/or as difference. One of the ways in which the differential realities within the *bhadralok* could be disregarded was certainly through categorising the areas of similitude. Another potent way was by pointing out difference. The availability of education and, more significantly, books, could not be regulated in the light of the widespread usage of cheap printing. Also, for all its problems, the colonial education system managed to establish, for the first time, at least the *principle* that education was a right and prerogative of all, irrespective of caste or creed. Thus the Lieutenant-Governor Richard Temple said with some pride in 1875 that the scholarship system in education carried out 'the true catholic principle that everybody of superior ability and character, to whatsoever creed, tribe, race, or class ... shall have his chance of rising from the lowest to the highest place in the educational roles.'⁷³ But if education and culture were constitutive of a *bhadralok*, then there had to be some mechanism by which the *bhadra* could be distinguished from the non-*bhadra*. If books signified an undifferentiated enlightenment for all, then what would happen to the distinctiveness of a few?

From the publication of the *Adam's Report* onwards, there was a growing concern in the administrative circles regarding the efficacy of the Filtration Theory. In 1863-64, the policy-makers lamented that education had scarcely touched the great masses of the people of Bengal, including the labouring and the agricultural classes. 'Various plans', as the Director of Public Instruction wrote in that year, 'have been devised and tried for bringing school instruction to bear upon them...but the result has almost uniformly been that the schools which have been organised or improved for their benefit have been at once taken possession of and monopolised by classes who stand higher in the social scale.'⁷⁴

The concern expressed here sounds a note of democratic impulse which deserves attention. The colonial authorities displayed the fundamental contradiction inherent in any capitalist ethos: on the one hand they advocated the demolition of all pre-capitalist superstitions, power structures and oppressive traditions, and on the

⁷² Sarkar, *Social History*, p. 226.

⁷³ *Report on the Administration of Bengal*, pp. 78-79.

⁷⁴ 'Note on the State of Education in India, 1855-66' in *Selections from the Records of the Government of India*, No. 59, Home Revenue and Agricultural Department, Calcutta, 1869.

other, they propped up the very same structures to facilitate capitalist production. For the colonial authorities, the specific privileging of individuals on the basis of customary authority or rank was one of the most backward manifestations of the indigenous social order. Coming from a social world which had already cut off the heads of kings and had entrenched a firm rhetoric against feudal privileges, the British found all institutions which bore such marks — from the caste system to the indigenous educational network — most repugnant. As far as education was concerned, therefore, the primary impulse was to eliminate all such traces and replace it with homogenous and uniform institutions. Poromesh Acharya has noted this change in his study of the indigenous *pathshalas*, whence he comments that all 'separate classes of institutions without any link or relation of any kind between them, each catering to a distinct class or community' were replaced by a 'complete and continuous Western system'.⁷⁵ The ideology of freedom, a necessary corollary to the freeing of labour power and the worker from his or her means of production, was used as a constant polemic against the natives.

For the *bhadralok*, however, this was not the case, and one needs to dissociate moral indignation and social critique from historical judgment. Caste and privileges of rank were registers of both political and social life, which all classes in the *bhadralok* conglomeration were used to. These were factors that marked them out from the peasants in their native villages and the new workers in the towns. The loss of these privileges was thus understandably treated with panic and despondency.

One can see why *Hutom's* stringent opprobrium of lower castes found such sympathy amongst all classes of the *bhadralok*. The major worry for the *kerani* was, as we have seen, 'mass education'. Thus Bengali tracts on education, from the high culture of Vidyasagar to the cheap tracts by unknown authors were united in their difference against those lower classes, who might as a result of education be unwilling to follow the callings of their fathers. One such tract thus worriedly speculated:

It has come to pass that people are leaving their hereditary professions to learn English. Why? In order to secure a job... Soon it will be impossible to live in this land. If the peasant does not plough the field but starts looking for an office job, either we shall all starve to death or, horror of horrors, have to take up cultivation ourselves... In this possibility of impending doom the only option is for people to stick to their traditional professions or to witness the dismantling of society altogether.⁷⁶

This was the ideological basis for much of the fears around the *Kaliyuga* myth. Between 1853 and 1867 more than 30 books had been catalogued on this subject, all uniformly published from either the outskirts of Calcutta, or in Calcutta from the

⁷⁵ Poromesh Acharya, 'Indigenous Education and Brahminical Hegemony in Bengal' in Nigel Crook, ed., *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 98-118; see especially pp. 98-99.

⁷⁶ Chandrasekhar Sen, *Ki Holo*, Calcutta, 1875, pp. 46-47.

Battala region.⁷⁷ This does not, of course, include the countless tracts that must have escaped formal cataloguing. Among 505 plays published between 1858 and 1899, 31 had 'Kali' as their titles.⁷⁸ As Sarkar has demonstrated, most of these tracts were the reworking of the apocalyptic myth of Kaliyuga with their specific focus on the tedium of *chakri* (service in employment), and opposition to the common folk posing as bhadra with a distinct misogynist slant. A fairly typical representative would be Shailendranath Haldar's *Kalir Sang* (1880). Here the servants outline the various features of Kaliyuga: the Brahmins have been rendered stupid and the peasant reads the *Vedas*. Charlatans and cheats lounge under the loving care of the rulers while the pundit goes hungry. Honest people earn no goodwill and swindlers are accepted approvingly. Alcoholism is rampant and women of virtue are derided in favour of harlots.⁷⁹

It was relatively easy for this ideology to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as far as the women were concerned, for the state's view on women's education favoured a 'womanly tendency' in their course structures for female schools.⁸⁰ It was possible that the book could import to the Hindu homes 'the evils of suffragetism, or the spirit of revolutionary and rationalistic iconoclasm, condemning all...ancient institutions that [were]...the outcome of a long past.'⁸¹ Hence a separate system of education stressing the virtues of *stridharma*, obedience and companionship to men found full support in both colonial and bhadralok discourse. It is well known how the 'novel-reading woman' emerges in this period as the antithesis to the 'good wife', whose greed, sloth and sexuality broke up many a peaceful home in the literature of the late nineteenth century.⁸² And as far as mass education was concerned, the answer lay in the practical employment of the conceptual strategies of the educational ideology — limited and particularised education for the many — and once again, on this the bhadralok was united in their difference from the non-bhadra.

One of the essential agreements that was secured among the bhadralok and the colonial state was that the education of the lower classes had to be effected with minimum resort to the printed book. For British discourse, both official and unofficial, this tacit understanding had two incentives. One was the cost involved in educating a whole population and the second, more serious, cause was what education would entail. Major Lees, the acting Director of Public Instruction, made

⁷⁷ Jatindramohan Bhattacharya, *Mudrita Bangla Granther Panji, 1853-1867*, Calcutta, 1993.

⁷⁸ Cited in Sarkar, *Social History*, p. 205.

⁷⁹ Reprinted in Jayanta Goswami, *Samajchitre Unabingsa Satabdir Bangla Prahasan*, Calcutta, 1974, p. 194.

⁸⁰ The education report of 1919 emphasises that the character of education given to the girls ignores their needs and the kind of life that they will lead in the future. It omitted what ought to be the essential elements in their short and precious period of training, namely the teaching of domestic duties and the implantation of the best Hindu ideals of womanhood. *Report of the Commission Appointed by the Government of India to Inquire into the Condition and Prospects of the University of Calcutta*, Vol. 2, Part 1, Calcutta, 1919, pp. 5-35.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² See for example, Ashutosh Basu, *Samaj Kalanka*, Calcutta, 1885; Ambikacharan Gupta, *Kalir Maye Choto Bou Orofe Ghor Murkho*, Calcutta, 1881; Batabihari Chakrabarti, *Kalir Kulta Prahasan*, Calcutta, 1877; Anon., *Hemantakumari*, Calcutta, 1868 and others.

the state's position very clear on this issue. He pointed pragmatically to the high price of elementary school books, and how the government should instead invest in a more practical educational approach for the peasant, with a telling comment about the fears around mass education:

Some caution and foresight are necessary, lest in our well intentioned zeal...we do not deluge the country with a large class of discontented men, dissatisfied with their position in society and in life, and disgusted with the...government that took them from what they were, to make them what they are. This would fill our bazars with socialism, and red republicanism instead of contentment and prosperity....⁸³

Gordon Young, writing on the need for training schools for teachers of the *ryots*, specifically emphasised that 'the study of *things*' was more important for the ryot, than the 'study of *words*'. Raising the curiosity and developing the various faculties, he felt was more important than 'book cram'.⁸⁴ As a result, writing at the end of our period, the missionary John Murdoch found the vernacular schools starved of books and printed literature:

A large proportion of the children in vernacular schools are *homo unius libri*, 'a man of one book'. A 'Reader' is often the only book in the actual possession of the child, constituting his entire library.... It is granted that the personal example of the teacher and his oral instruction are the most influential factors in a school. The training of teachers, however, is a slow and expensive process. On the other hand, books may be multiplied at once in any required number.⁸⁵

Books were the site of combination of the substance of European knowledge with native forms of thought and sentiment and its adaptation to the feelings, sympathies and histories of the people.⁸⁶ In a graphic description of the teaching methods employed in teaching peasant boys the tales of the Bible, James Long referred to the parables and the poetic form, essential in his opinion to the Orient, by which he had transformed knowledge 'in a way suited to their capacity and modes of thought'. Prose and its ancillary textuality were obviously considered unsuitable for the peasant.⁸⁷

What the peasant was to learn was, however, clearly marked out. The

⁸³ James Long, ed., *Adam's Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar, With a Brief View of its Past and Present Conditions*, Calcutta, 1868, p. 22.

⁸⁴ William Gordon Young, *Tracts on the Rural Population of Bengal and Behar*, Calcutta, 1858, p. 10.

⁸⁵ John Murdoch, *India's Greatest Educational Need: The Adequate Recognition of Ethics in her Present Transition State*, London, 1904, p. 9.

⁸⁶ *Second Report of the General Council of Education in India Formed with a View to the Promotion of the General Education of the People on a National Basis as Laid Down in the Educational Despatch of 1854*, London, 1883, p. 33.

⁸⁷ James Long, *How I Taught the Bible to Bengal Peasant Boys*, London, n.d., pp. 1-3.

complete exclusion from education was not a viable alternative, so a controlled participation was actively encouraged. 'Useful' knowledge, which would help the labouring classes to integrate more fruitfully to their labour, was the organising principle behind mass education as practised in this period. Seton-Kerr remarked that education should enable the *ryot* to write a letter of business, to draw out a bond, to understand the terms of a mortgage, to cast up his accounts and to know if his receipts for rent were correctly signed.⁸⁸ Pearychand Mitra qualified such statements by stating that village schools pupils should learn 'practically and not from books'. Nothing should be guarded against more carefully, felt Radhakant Deb, than the 'insensible introduction of a system whereby, with a smattering knowledge [*sic*] of English, youths are weaned from the plow, the ax, the loom, to render them ambitious only for the clerkship.'⁸⁹ It is important to note in this context, that the opposition to English education for the non-bhadralok did not merely signify a vernacular education for them. It is precisely in this period that the bhadralok were trying to restructure the Bengali language and strong claims were being made by them about the language being the key to national awakening.⁹⁰ The point of contention was the notion of a 'liberal education' of the sciences and arts of Europe, whether imparted in English or Bengali. It was ultimately what the *content* of mass education was to be, more than the medium of instruction, that was under debate.

In 1860, J. Peter Grant, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, submitted a plan to the government which declared that the education imparted to the rural population 'should range no higher' than that which was already being afforded by the indigenous *pathshalas*. The books to be supplied to these schools should contain in a compact form, according to this plan, all that had hitherto been taught at such places by dictation, namely arithmetic, agricultural and commercial accounts, forms of agreements and so on.⁹¹ Accordingly, in 1872, the Lieutenant-Governor directed the Director of Public Instruction to give special attention to the suggestion that book-keeping and zamindari management after the native methods should be taught in the lower and middle class schools. He particularly insisted that a prize be offered as an incentive, for the best handbook for school use on zamindari accounts and management, shop accounts and farm business.⁹² It is worth pointing out in this context that the radical peasant upsurges of the Indigo rebellion and the Santhal uprisings of this period gave the state a rationale for educating the peasantry in land accounts such that they would not be cheated by the land and plantation owners.⁹³ From the 1860s onwards there was a marked rise in the number

⁸⁸ Long, ed., *Adam's Report*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁰ See among others Haraprasad Shastri, 'Kaleji Shiksha' in *Haraprasad Granthabali*, Calcutta, n. d., pp. 321-24; and Rajanikanta Gupta, *Amader Vishwavidyalaya*, Calcutta, n. d., pp. 17-30.

⁹¹ Long, *Adam's Report*, p. 23.

⁹² General Proceedings, Education Department, No. 52, February 1872.

⁹³ Also the state saw the relationship between a 'civilising' education for the masses and the interests of the empire. The report on general or mass education of 1883 traced the causes of the Deccan riots to the 'ignorance of the peasantry' and their inability to read the documents that they sign. The report stated clearly that the condition of the masses was 'dangerous to

of books on zamindari and mahajani accounts. The noteworthy point of these publications was that they were issued mainly from outside Calcutta, and within Calcutta from the Battala area.⁹⁴ Even works by the bhadralok on this subject were published from Battala presses, which they generally avoided in the case of other educational and discursive works.⁹⁵

Gramsci noted an almost similar process at work in Italy under backward capitalist development. There was a 'fundamental division' in education between classical and vocational schools under the rational formula: 'the vocational school for the instrumental classes, the classical school for the dominant classes and the intellectuals.'⁹⁶ The attitude of the rentier bhadraloks on the education of their peasants followed identical principles.

In 1870 the government was toying with the idea of an additional land cess to fund popular education from the taxes of the landholders. The controversy that the plan unleashed in this class corresponded to their anxiety about mass dissemination of books and learning. Couched within a perspective of rights on land of the landholder, this debate clarified the agenda for what the nature of education in the countryside ought to be. First, a tax on land was considered entirely insupportable; instead, a tax on salt was suggested, which was payable by all. From the funds thus raised, a plan for the elevation of the masses was proposed. The money could be used to establish higher and lower agricultural schools in every sixth village, where these schools would be attached to high and low lands for agricultural and horticultural purposes, and where the children would learn their trade. The produce of the land would pay for stipends for each child in order to induce parents to part with their labour as well as to minimise investment. The higher schools were to conduct lectures in botany, physiology and the physical sciences in Bengali. In the recommendations of Takoordass Chuckerbutty:

In these agricultural schools, instructions should be combined with amusements and physical exercise, and the utmost attention should be paid to moral training. Lessons should be pictured out to the boys by questions and ellipses mixed. Starting points are merely to be taken from text books, but knowledge should be communicated to the students by oral gallery lessons. It should be kept in view that the students learn things rather than words, and that memory be not cultivated at the sacrifice of higher faculties.⁹⁷

the tranquillity of the empire'. See *General Council of Education in India Formed With a View to the Promotion of the General Education of the People on a National Basis as Laid Down in the Education Despatch of 1854*, London, 1883, pp. 3-11.

⁹⁴ See for example, Prasanna Chandra Sen, *Krishi Karjer Mat*, Dhaka, 1867; Dinanath Mukhopadhyay, *Jamidari Bigyan*, Hooghly, 1866; Kaliprasanna Sengupta, *Jamidari Darsan*, Hooghly, 1863; Tarinicharan Basu Chaudhury, *Jamidari Mahajani Hishab*, Dhaka, 1875, which ran into five successful editions; Harimohan Mukhopadhyay, *Krishi Darpan*, Calcutta, 1859, was issued from the Chanpatala Bangla Jantra at Battala.

⁹⁵ Prasanna Kumar Tagore published one such work from the Vidyaratna Press at Battala under the assumed name of 'Parashar' entitled *Krishi Sangraha* in 1862.

⁹⁶ A. Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, New York, 1971, p. 26.

⁹⁷ Takoordass Chuckerbutty, *Thoughts on Popular Education*, Calcutta, 1870, pp. 18-19.

The position of the non-bhadra thus was perpetually linked to an organic orality, within the culture of print but distanced significantly from it. The potency of the differentiation between the bhadra and non-bhadra on the basis of education was great. Powered by the fear of peasants and the low folks taking over their jobs, the lower rungs of the bhadralok were only too happy to concur with this ideology.

The Associations of Power

I have tried to describe in this article the class location of the social category of the bhadralok. In summary, the bhadralok was a composition of a landed rentier class and the petty bourgeoisie united under a common ideology of education and culture. The importance of education for this layer had diverse implications and different objective results. For the rentier class, indulgence in literary occupations was not so much a matter of necessity. For the salaried class of the bhadralok, on the other hand, education was not merely a source of material sustenance, but because it was such, the only register of self-identity. For the upper layers of this class, the rent from whatever small land-holding they might have was not enough to maintain a life of luxury and yet just enough to provide entry into elite educational institutions of the city. McGuire reckons that the Hindu College acted 'as a key socialisation agency for this earlier generation of *bhadralok*', as entry into these institutions assured one a place in the colonial bureaucracy.⁹⁸ We have noted earlier the brilliant trajectories of the first batch of its graduates.

Having said this, it is however important to re-emphasise that the new middle class was not the ruling class in the nineteenth century, nor were they an incipient bourgeoisie. The new middle class was clearly distinct from the colonial ruling class in two important respects — firstly in the nature of controls involved. Some writers have distinguished between two forms of effective possession of the means of production. On the one hand, there is 'allocative' or 'strategic' control, 'the power to employ resources or to withdraw them, in line with one's own interests and preferences'; on the other hand, there is 'operational' control, 'control over the day-to-day use of resources already allocated'.⁹⁹ Strategic control corresponds to Wright's category of control over investment and resource-allocation. This is essentially the prerogative of the ruling class. The new middle class is involved in operational control, making decisions within a framework laid down by those with strategic control. The practice of *suparish* (recommendation), and essentially managerial functions reveal the disparity between the classes.

The *Kerani Puran* lamented that neither education nor intelligence were prerequisites for obtaining a job whose imperatives rather were: very slight efficiency, *salams*, oil, auspicious offerings at the right places, and the benign glance of the Saheb.¹⁰⁰ Our new middle class also had a limited but significant role to play in this economy of favours. Sumit Sarkar makes passing comment on Vidyasagar's ability to acquire 'fairly important posts for some friends and clients'

⁹⁸ McGuire, *Colonial Mind*, p. 47.

⁹⁹ R. E. Pahl and J. T. Winkler, 'The Economic Elite: Theory and Practice' in A. Giddens and P. Stanworth, eds, *Elites and Power in British Society*, Cambridge, 1974, p. 114.

¹⁰⁰ Sharma, *Kerani Puran*, p. 8.

in the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁰¹ An indication of his importance in this regard is demonstrated by the fact that once when he was ill and off-duty for two weeks, a daily stream of notes and requests for jobs, around 25 every day, used to pour in for his commendation.¹⁰² Amongst the several mentioned by Sarkar, as the principal of the Sanskrit College and a member of the Board of Examiners, Vidyasagar was responsible for procuring a head-teachership for the Brahmo scholar Akshaykumar Datta in the normal school that he established in 1854.¹⁰³ Besides this he was also invested with limited control over the hiring and firing of subordinates.¹⁰⁴ Other prominent members of this class had a similar role in the colonial bureaucracy.¹⁰⁵ This, following Wright's definition, was operational control as all the decisions had to be finally ratified by a higher British official. Indeed, an embittered and frustrated Vidyasagar's resignation from all official posts in 1857, due to the various restraints put on him by the same bureaucracy of which he was a part, is a point that can bear out broad generalisations about the limited nature of indigenous middle-class control.¹⁰⁶

The second important feature of this class was that it lacked both the material and ideological resources to become a nascent bourgeoisie. The main reason for this has been argued very well in a recent article by Amiya Bagchi, where he shows how colonialism generated a political economy which created both market forces and structures that ensured their failure.¹⁰⁷ Political oppression that systematically prevents the natural expansion of the economy and its corollary, class forces, evokes a political response. The only barrier that, for example, impeded the entry of Indians into deserving posts in the social and economic system was the unavoidable fact of their Indianness.¹⁰⁸ It is this situation of engineered backwardness that created the social and political significance for the new middle class or the intelligentsia. In this respect a historic analogy, if not parallel, may be

¹⁰¹ Sarkar, *Social History*, p. 227.

¹⁰² See Vidyasagar's letter to Prasannakumar Sarbadhikari regarding one such applicant, a 'Gentleman's son' in Prafullakumar Patra, ed., *Vidyasagar Rachanabali*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 656-57.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 700.

¹⁰⁴ An emphatic example is the case of a bell-man Madhusudan who (in a manner reminiscent of James Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, 1985) had hit upon a scheme of combining two jobs, one at the Sanskrit College, where Vidyasagar was then Principal, and one at Fort William, and covering the former by getting someone else to work on his behalf. Given that his salary at the College was Rs 4 a month, it was a perfectly understandable act. Vidyasagar found out about this 'deception' and reckoning it to be 'highly improper' summarily dismissed Madhusudan. See Aurobindo Guha, ed., *Unpublished Letters of Vidyasagar*, Calcutta, 1971, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁵ Rajendralal Mitra for example wrote a letter of recommendation for Haraprasad Shastri, but which was unfortunately not accepted. See Satyajit Chaudhuri et al., eds, *Haraprasad Shastri Rachana Sangraha*, Vol. 2, Calcutta, 1981, pp. 72-73.

¹⁰⁶ For an illuminating study of this particular aspect see Asok Sen, *Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones*, Calcutta, 1977.

¹⁰⁷ Amiya Bagchi, 'Markets, Market Failures, and the Transformation of Authority, Property and Bondage in Colonial India' in B. Stein and S. Subrahmanyam, eds, *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 48-70.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-70.

drawn with Tsarist Russia and the exaggerated social significance of the Narodniks as the only group capable of articulating the desires of the many.

But the intelligentsia itself came from a variety of class locations and its own position in the political economy was severely confused and so which classes could it lead or guarantee liberation for? As some theoreticians have argued, as the 'only non-specialised section of society (because it was not locked into a particular class role within the relations of production) the intelligentsia...appeared to represent the interests of the "nation" as against conflicting sectional and class interests.'¹⁰⁹ Thus Aswinikumar Banerjee in his disputation with Pearymohan Mukherjee confidently affirmed that it was 'the middle class gentry' and not the 'mushroom aristocracy' that formed the 'backbone of the Congress'.¹¹⁰ We must remind ourselves that during the Swadeshi movement (1905), the first articulate expression of organised nationalism, the bulk of the industrial bourgeoisie remained indifferent.¹¹¹ The category of the bhadralok, including the struggling actuality of the clerk, the individual reforms of Vidyasagar and the landed interests of the Tagores, provided the only ideological basis for dismantling existing differences of class realities. Only from the pen of a bhadralok could come the evocative imagery of *Bande Mataram*.

Nationalism as an ideology is one of the various devices through which contradictions within classes and social groups may apparently be eliminated. The idea that different classes share a common interest as members of the same nation, or the 'imagined community', has the particular virtue that it is consistent with a limited degree of social conflict. Nationalist ideology need not deny the existence of class antagonisms. It merely insists that these are secondary compared to the shared identity of all citizens, whatever their class position. Nationalism as an ideology is, however, distinct from a nation-state, as the former arises before the latter, and can even exist only as an aspiration of the latter.¹¹² In the absence of a state, nationalist ideology necessarily serves a mobilising function; hence the increased importance of sublimating conflict.

The combined and uneven nature of development produced the bhadralok as an ethic and an ideology. This was to come to fruition in 1905 when zamindars, petty tenure-holders, print and railway workers and our historically neglected *kerani* were to come together to give political shape to the battle-cry of *Bande Mataram*. The nation was brought into being, not in a private world of culture as Partha Chatterjee has argued, but in the ideological dissolution of class conflict.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Cliff, 'Deflected Permanent Revolution' in *idem, Trotskyism After Trotsky*, London, 1999, pp. 60-69, especially pp. 67-68.

¹¹⁰ *Indian Mirror*, 23 September 1898.

¹¹¹ See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908*, New Delhi, 1973.

¹¹² The Kurds and Palestinians being potent examples.