FROM THE PROFANE TO THE PROSCENIUM:

Re-reading the Early Farces of Colonial Bengal

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by

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Certificate

This dissertation titled "From the Profane to the Proscenium: Re-reading the Early Farces of Colonial Bengal" submitted by Priyanka Basu, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.

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Declaration by the Candidate

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Dedicated to

The memory of Nati Binodini, who desired for a Theatre of her Own...

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Contents

Introduction

I. About 'Seeing' and 'Hearing'

It is a waste of time hating a mirror
or its reflection
instead of stopping the hand
that makes glass with distortions. (Audre Lorde)

Can juvenility be the only distinguishing marker of laughter? This dissertation comes as a tribute to the little boy who pointed his little finger to the naked emperor believing himself to be donning his new clothes – not because the lad was 'bold' so to say in transgressing the bounds of being a docile subject despite his tiny stature, but simply because of the fact that he evoked 'laughter'. Leaving aside the juvenility inherent in this 'laughter challenge', one might just proceed to take up the 'diabolical' instead as the marker of subversive laughter.

Ronald Takaki, in *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, uses the term 're-visioned' history. Initiating his argument with Gloria Steinhem's concepts of 'revolution from within' and 'unlearning' history, he moves towards Mitsuye Yamada: 'To finally recognize our own invisibility, is to finally be on the path toward visibility' (Yamada 40), and ends on Audre Lorde's note: 'To become visible is to see ourselves and each other in a different mirror of history.' (quoted in Takaki 426) The history of 'laughter' is embedded in this 'different mirror' of history. Discourses on laughter are classified into many categories: humorous, farcical, satirical, slapstick, burlesque, etc. No 'laughter' attached to any of these above-mentioned categories is ever apolitical. The politics of and behind each and every kind of 'laughter' composes in itself the numerous microcosms that make up the macrocosm of the 'laughter' world. In such a macrocosm, however, some voices are suppressed while the others are highlighted more than the adjacent ones. Whereas each one of these is a 'laughing' voice, distinguishable in terms of its composition and context of composition, the 'difference' is rarely brought to the fore-front.

It is an aim here to excavate that 'difference', probe deeper and finally celebrate it. John Man in his book, *The Great Wall*, speaks on the uniform one-dimensional discourse of the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall is a national symbol of China, a unified structure that symbolizes power. However, the Wall was not a construct of a single emperor, nor is the Wall a uniform, single one. It is actually a conglomeration of multiple walls built from time to time by various individuals. Interestingly, walls built differently, at different time periods do not conform to a strong nationalistic, monolithic discourse. It is the single Wall which grasps the smaller walls in the process of formation of the one, acceptable discourse.

What and how does the above analogy contribute to the discourses of laughter? Going back to what had been said a little while ago about the various ways of 'viewing' history, one can discern as many as three stages that contribute to a 're-visioned' history:

- Unlearning history
- Recognizing one's own invisibility
- Being on the path toward visibility

In 'The Small Voice of History', Ranajit Guha says:

> It is this ideology, henceforth to be called statism, which is what authorizes the dominant values of the state to determine the criteria of the historic...That is why the common sense of history may be said generally to be guided by a sort of statism which thematizes and evaluates the past for it. (1)

The 'institutionalization' of history in the West was appended by three processes:

1. History developed as a 'normal science' and 'was integrated into the academic system as a fully secularized body of knowledge with its own curricula and classrooms as well as a profession devoted entirely to its propagation by teaching and writing' (Guha 1996, 2)
2. History acquired a 'new' place of its own 'in the increasing expanding public space where the hegemonic process often appealed to history in order to realize itself in the interaction between citizens and the state.' (2) This was the site, Guha emphasizes, where history finds a 'public' and precisely, a 'reading public' that were voracious consumers of a product that 'catered to a new bourgeoisie taste for historical literature of all kinds'. (2)
3. 'It was this literature ranging from school manuals to historical novels which helped to institutionalize the writing of history by constituting it into imaginative and discursive genres equipped with their distinctive canons and narratologies.' (2)

Guha says, 'The institutionalization of history had the effect, on the whole, of securing a stable case for statism within the academic disciplines and promoting hegemony.' (2) For the colonial state, however, the path of 'institutionalization' and 'statism' was not bereft of potholes. The colonial state and its citizens could not be equated with the civil society of the British in England. In the colonial state, it was the right to conquest rather than the consent of its subjects that decided its charter and hence 'dominance would never gain hegemony it coveted so much'. (3)

> The inadequacy of statism for a truly Indian historiography follows from its tendency to forbid any interlocution between us and our past. It speaks to us in the commanding voice of the state which by presuming to nominate the historic for us leaves us with no choice about our own relation to the past. Yet the narratives which constitute the discourse of history are dependent precisely on such choice. To choose means, in this context, to try and relate to the past by listening to and conversing with the myriad voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands. That is why we don't hear them. That is also why it is up to us to make that extra effort, develop the special skills and above all cultivate the disposition to hear these voices and interact with them. For there have many stories to tell – stories which for their complexity are unequalled by statist discourse and indeed opposed to its abstract and oversimplifying modes. (3)

What Guha describes as 'hearing' the 'myriad voices which are drowned in the noise of statist commands' can be substituted by 'seeing' too, by what has been said earlier about the three stages of 're-visioned' history. Within both the cases of 'hearing' and 'seeing', there exists a preliminary category of 'choice' – the choice that allows the boy subject of the naked emperor to laugh at the latter's gullibility, a choice which urges one to find the even 'smaller' walls within the small walls of the 'Great Wall' of a monolithic discourse and finally, a choice that pushes one forth to engage critically in finding the 'differences of laughter' within the 'laughter world'.

To engage oneself with the 'differences of laughter' here, means to re-read the early farces of colonial Bengal. Ranajit Guha says in the same article that I have been quoting from above:

> It is a level of abstraction where all the stories ... are assimilated to the story of the Raj. The effect of such lumping is to oversimplify the contradictions of power by reducing them to an arbitrary singularity – the so-called principal contradiction, that between the colonizer and the colonized. (6)

The aim of this dissertation is to negate the uniformity of 'the story of the Raj'. In so doing, this research looks at certain dramatic texts of the colonial times, specifically the second half of the nineteenth century in terms of their social, economic and political relevance.

II. Considering the Renaissance: Need for a Changed Methodology

Shibnath Shastri, in his *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (1903), considers the twenty years between 1825 and 1845 as the birth period of the Renaissance in Bengal. For him this was the time when social movements and the spread of education witnessed a re-nascence for the Bengali. The centre of major incidents in the nineteenth century, however, lies a little later than that prescribed by Shastri. Within this centre and those surrounding it, the question which becomes imperative to the Renaissance as well as the scope of this research is that: was the Renaissance a pan-Indian/national phenomenon or was it the cavalcade of a handful of the comprador class of the Bengalis lapped up in wealth? Such a question as this takes one inevitably to the greater question of idolization or hero-worshipping which has been conducted throughout with regard to the Renaissance figures of Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Ishwarchandra Vidyasar, Harish Chandra Mukherjee and so on. To cast the mast-bearers of the Renaissance in the light of scrutiny of personal lives breeds a discomfort that makes the Renaissance model 'unsteady'. Waiving such questions easily allows the myth of the Renaissance to continue without poking the gaps and fissures in the posed continuum of events.

In re-reading the early farces of colonial Bengal, this research negates to a certain extent the 'ideal' mythicized model of the Renaissance. The Renaissance, in all its 'greatness', was nearer to that of an exultation of changing times, and in considering this exultation, the braided nature of social, economic and political incidents cannot be discarded. In attempting such an alternative

historiography, one has to move beyond the prescribed time-line of 1825-1845 and reach the point of initiation of the process of churning brought in by colonialism. The Renaissance in Bengal, as would also be validated by the Renaissance in England, would have been impossible without the emergence of the bourgeois class. However, the case of the Renaissance in Bengal was also somewhat different from that of England. In a colonial location like Bengal, the fetters of colonialism could never allow the kind of 'liberalism' that England witnessed during its Renaissance. Thus, in the context of nineteenth century Bengal, the individual freedom allied to such liberalism and the views for it can have no historical basis or meaning.

In the context of this view of the Bengal Renaissance, social revolution appears to be based not on as solid a footing as claimed by some existing models. The traditional structures of social composition did not exhibit many signals of re-modelling. The absence of a socio-economic restructuring was also aided by a lack of indigenous enterprises that would make the influx from rural districts to the urban centre inevitable. Many such indigenous enterprises, as would be revealed in a later chapter (Chapter III to be specific), were also crushed by the colonial government making space for a continuing feudal order. The occupants of the urban space – the *bhadrolok* – were guided more by a grand verbosity of ideas. The supremacy of ideas in the Bengali mind initiated the process of Revival – the revival of a Hindu past, the making of a 'Golden Age'. The need for a Hindu past and the construction of a Golden Age was paralleled by the crushing down of the Muslim section of society. This negation of the Muslims, particularly elite Muslims, was not without a context. 700 years of Muslim rule in India was overtaken by the fetters of European colonial invasion and expansion. The Muslim upper rung was the first to be crushed in such an expedition. The removal of Muslims from the military, tax and police departments fed into the process of uprooting. The culmination of such a process was reached with the Permanent Settlement with the burgeoning of a new Zamindar class, specifically Hindu in composition. The consequence was a bit more furthered in 1837 and 1844 by the replacement of Persian by English in the transactions of the Government departments as well as by the intake of English-educated individuals in the service of the Government.

Not only did the Permanent Settlement press down the supremacy of Muslims over the years in India, it also created a class whose bondage to the colonial state was fixed. The over-lordship of land passed from that of the aristocracy to a class which Marx terms as the 'Moneyocracy'. The Renaissance was made possible by the rise of an urban centre in Calcutta – a conglomeration of the three villages of Gobindapur, Sutanuti and Dihi Kolikata. It was herein that the new intellectual class of Bengalis was bred with the inflow of money from the rural periphery. The negotiations between the indigenous intellectual class and that of the colonizer

were based on a strange sense of servility and frustration. The making of the new landlord class and their profligacy, initiated through the promise of security in the Permanent Settlement (1793), bred an air of negation towards the colonial rule in the minds of the others. To understand the Renaissance in this light is to consider the intercourse of the three sections of the social strata – the Landed Aristocracy, Public Servants and Professionals.

The vexations of the side-lined Muslim elite by the favoured rise of Hindu servility towards the English in the guise of *baniyan*s, *mutsuddi*s and English-educated subjects found expression in the depredations of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. With the ultimate subjugation and deportation of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Muslim desire for re-establishment was completely overpowered. The post-1857 period marked a soaring of Hindu pride demarcating the Muslim from the Hindu and yet bearing a link to the question of Muslim revolt. The loyalty of the Bengali Hindu sections of society to the British aggravated this divide to a larger extent.

The Renaissance marked an uneven terrain in the urban centre of Calcutta. The etchings of a colonizer's tortures and punishments inflicted upon the *ryot* or the common masses are as true as the servility and the sense of anguish of the elite Hindu class. This dichotomy in coming to terms with the (colonial) self is as dichotomous as the innumerable phenomena characterizing the Renaissance in Bengal – the Hindu College, Calcutta School Book Society, Women's Education, Calcutta Madrasa, Serampore College, Government Sanskrit College, School for Native Doctors on the one hand, and the profligacy, alcoholism, concubinage, and wastefulness of the foppish dandy *babu*s of Calcutta.

III. Study of Early Colonial Farces in the Light of a 'Re-visited' Bengal Renaissance

Expressions of cultural negotiations in the colonial milieu can be traced through the downpour of literary texts in their various forms. The *Prohasan* or the farce in this sense can be deemed as a derivative discourse, borrowing from the Western tradition (as would be discussed it the indebtedness to Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* in the later chapters) as also from the more immediate genre of the *Naksha.* The *Naksha*, literally meaning a design, weaved in the different facets of the city life and its occupants. In this sense, the *Naksha* emerged as a mirror upholding the colonial broth in the form of a collage. The idea of the 'mirror' persisted in the farces and a wealth of *darpan* plays, the most noted being *Neel Darpan* (1861), was poured onto the performance space in the later half of the nineteenth century. In this sense the *Prohasan* was the literary descendant of the *Naksha.* However, the endeavour in this dissertation is not solely to trace the linkage between the *Naksha* and the *Prohasan* in all their similarities. This research seeks to trace a link, if not a continuum, between the highlighted markers of the 'profane' and the

'proscenium'. The idea of the 'profane' would be dealt with in a greater detail in Chapter I, entitled *The Laughable Monstrous*. The *Prohasan* or farce has been always accorded a caricatural stature, distortive and subversive in an alternative sense of the term. Representation in farce is essentially guided by the marker of the chimerical. Representation itself, within the context of the Renaissance, is a slippery domain with a hierarchy among the visual, auditory and print modes of representation. Within such a hierarchy, printing becomes the solution to the problematics of representation. To understand representation in the context of the Renaissance in Bengal, it becomes imperative to take recourse to the popular forms of visual and auditory representation in *Swang, Jatra* and *Kobigaan*. The profuseness of these popular forms in the festive spaces was marginalized by the coming in of the print culture and the setting up of printing presses in and around Calcutta. By the end of the 18th century, one witnesses the establishment of the English East India Company Press. Before the end of the 18th century, the Serampore Baptist Mission Press, headed by William Carey in the Danish colony of Serampore, conducted proselytization through translations of the Bible and other religious texts. In 1800 William Hastings established the Fort William College to educate the newly arrived young English officers in Bengali. The Baptist Mission Press engaged in printing Bengali and Sanskrit texts, especially the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* in parts. The full text of the *Mahabharata* was published in 1832.

The growth of Calcutta as an urban centre channelized colonial intervention into popular forms of performance – the spectacular nature of the *Swang*, the popularity of the *Jatra* or the impromptu musical compositions of *Kobigaan*. Such had been the marginalization of these forms that they were placed in the canons of Bengali literary history as 'cheap' and 'vulgar' forms of entertainment ushered in by the growth of the urban centre of Calcutta. A constant allegation against these popular forms of entertainment as well as literature (as many of the songs of the *Swang*s and the songs of the *Kobiwallah*s had been documented as collections of poems by the poet Ishwarchandra Gupta) was that of 'obscenity'. The side-lining of these forms was also paralleled by the wealth of texts printed continuously at the lower end of Calcutta print culture – Bat-tala. Bat-tala produced an immense volume of 'cheap' entertainment texts devoured by the lower rung of the *bhadrolok* in the city. The entanglement of the visual-auditory-print representation in the context of nineteenth century in Bengal needs to be understood also in relation to the desire of the intelligentsia for a theatre of its own. The 'proscenium' in this sense is held in opposition to the other highlighted marker of the title of this dissertation, the 'profane', but is not completely detached from it. To re-iterate, the Renaissance needs to be grasped from the perspective of various modes of representation vis-à-vis socio-economic progression.

The desire for a theatre for the Bengali *bhadrolok* is characterized by numerous shifts within and without. In his *Bat-talar Chhobi O Chhapa*, Sukumar Sen writes:

> The *patua*s were considered then as one of the lower castes. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, these *patua*s resided in the Thanthania area – in the south-eastern part of the slums occupied by magicians and monkey-owners. This area is marked now as the Patuatola Lane, reminiscent of the residences of the *patua*s. The *patua*s were entrusted with the job of painting *pat*s for wealthy families as well as the Thakurbari. From the middle of the nineteenth century, the taste of the wealthy babus of Calcutta underwent a change aided by a demand for land for settlement in the Thanthania area. On the other hand, Kalighat was slowly emerging as a hub of pilgrims and hence the *patua*s shifted from Thanthania to Kalighat. (However, it needs to be understood that Kalighat was from the very beginning the main market of the *patua*s. The pilgrims at Kalighat were the main customers of the *pats* of the gods and goddesses).
>
> The kind of *pat*s which interest the inquisitive artists were born much later than the circulation of booklets such as *Naba Babubilash* and the Bengali farces. Hence, it might be claimed that Bat-tala literature inspired and created many popular *patua*s of Kalighaat. (19-20, translation mine)

The displacement of the *patua* from his original locale as well as the emergence of newer varieties of *pat*s, on the basis of the Bat-tala literature and the farces, hint at the shifting tastes of the elite *bhadrolok* of the city. The shift in tastes demanded a theatre for the new *bhadrolok* of which the farces became part and parcel as performance pieces. However, these were not the farces produced in bulk at Bat-tala. The *Prohasan* in all its monstrous possibilities was witnessing a 'high' and a 'low' stature with respect to the license of performance. In this hierarchy of performative forms, once again, the fate of the Bat-tala farces were sealed with regard to the more mainstream ones, authored by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra.

The street and the parlour, as veritable sites of performance and entertainment, in the colonial capital of the British Raj, have been marked off by many as separate and disconnected. However, the journey or the transformation from the street to the proscenium had for its medium the parlour of the Bengali nouveau riche. This dissertation intends to problematize the one-dimensional teleological history of the two modes of performance, namely the popular and the theatre. In order to do so, the farces of Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra, have been taken up here for an analytical re-reading. As far as these farces are concerned, they have, so far, been primarily placed under discussion mainly in relation to their textual rather than their performative aspects. The farces have also been confined to the status of being period pieces. The farces by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna have remained cursorily mentioned in discourses on the history of Bengali literature. However, a compilation of all the plays by the playwright has been brought out by Sandhya Bakshi with a closer analysis and reading of the plays, both social and mythical. In addition, the farces by Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra occupy a prime position in the history of Bengali literature and have also been separately taken up for discussion in works by Bijit Ghosh (see Bibliography).

In dealing with the farces, one of the prime concerns of the research would be in establishing the hypothesis that these plays were the metamorphosed forms of *Kobigaan*, *Swang* and *Jatra*. Theatre or plays that later became one of the most important parts of Bengali literature and culture also had their initiation in these farces. Although these farces have been placed within mainstream literature, the 'popular' of the streets have not been accorded the same stature in the history of Bengali literature. A major part of this research would delve into the fact that these mainstream farces were in reality the continuation of a popular, comic tradition that was constantly under the colonizer's vexation. *It is this dual and ironic nature of the colonial project of nineteenth century Bengal that this research aims to highlight.* For example, Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neel Darpan* has been the most acclaimed of all his plays providing a strong social and colonial critique. Much of the importance of his farces has been marred by this importance given to a more serious social-realistic play and his farces *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* (1866) and *Biye Paagla Buro* (1866) have been read as politically innocuous despite the fact that the former was proscribed during the political upheavals of 1914. The dissertation would differ from existing research in highlighting the subaltern position and points-of-view of these forms of popular culture.

Questions pertaining to the nature of the colonized space, its constitution and its efforts in eluding its own constitution will be taken up in the course of this research. The repercussions of colonialism inscribed the body of the nation and the way it was produced from fragments of the past and the contingencies of the political scenario under the British regime. Where does the history of performance accommodate itself within this matrix? A reconstruction of the history of performance (theatre and other modes included) of the colonial past needs to get out of its indigenous, national and linear paradigms. The local variations of performance and their interaction with colonialism need to be recuperated from an immersion into the grand narratives of the nation and state. However, this recuperation is not an easy task; the fragment always invisibilizes something and reveals something else which is potent. The territorial and cultural inscription of the nation on local performances is important as long as it does not homogenize the colonial subject and its workings. The dissertation would deal with these issues, establishing them with constant references to the plays and popular modes of performances discussed earlier.

Within its length and breadth, this dissertation aims to look at certain key questions that further the scope of the research:

- Bereft of literary engagements with the comic body per se, how is it possible to trace its continuum in popular performance to the comic actor's body in the proscenium [taking into account the grotesqueness of the performing bodies in Swang, Jatra and Kobigaan to the pantomime forms popularized by Amritalal Basu and Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi]?

- How do the binaries 'effeminacy/masculinity', 'obscenity/morality', 'profane/proscenium', 'national/popular' play amongst each other in the context of the Renaissance in Bengal? How is the category of the 'national-popular' with respect to the plays of Girish Chandra Ghosh linked to the legacy of farces as well as their predecessors – *Swang, Jatra* and *Kobigaan*?
- What is the myth of domestic conjugality in the context of nineteenth century Bengal? How are instances of domestic conjugality, highlighted through the texts and performances of the period, identified as and against the pictures of domestic scuffle, manhandling of the *babu* by the concubine, and negotiating with 'time' amidst 'colonial modernity'?
- In what ways can one re-read the farce-writers of the more canonical camp – Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra – as and against the more marginalized group of farces sunk into oblivion by the politics of canonization?
- How do the farces append/appropriate/abrogate the process of nationalization so characteristic of the Renaissance? How do both the high-bred Hindu camp and the more radical Young Bengal participate within this process and how are they co-opted by the time the farces are composed?
- How important is the history of laughter in assessing these narratives? Does the history of laughter as well as laughter itself, need to be regulated? What is the politics behind the diabolical laughter inherent in the farces?
- How important is the act of proscription (not considering the Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876) in the re-reading of these farces?

In order to explore the above research questions, this dissertation moves to and fro in its chapterization. Chapter I, entitled *The Laughable Monstrous*, delves into a problematization of the 'comic' form taking up in due course the representation of the comic in the popular street and parlour performances of the nineteenth century. In this regard, Chapter I provides a cue to the entry into the farce proper in Chapter II or *Laughing at Selves and the 'Fairer' Sex*. This Chapter looks at the marginalization of the farces produced in the low life print culture of the city – the Bat-tala. A broader division within the farces re-read in this chapter is made in relation to *kulin*ism and polygamy, attempting also an initiation at the nascence of the farce form in Bengal. Following from Chapter II, Chapter III, or *Laughing at the Unsteady and the Immoral*, delves into the issues and problems of alcoholism and concubinage, within whose reference frames the farces are re-read. In its entirety of analysis, the farces under scrutiny are constantly placed within the contexts of class, caste and gender as being mirrored in the descendants of the *Naksha*. The engagements in the three chapters are brought to a conclusive closure validating the scope for further research in an area as 'inexhaustible' as the Bengali farce of the colonial period.

This dissertation does not propose to establish chronological linkages between popular literary and performative modes and the farces. Such an endeavour has already had mammoth dimensions in Bengali literary history. In its difference from the earlier groupings and re-groupings of farces within headings and sub-headings provided in the compilations of Bengali farces, this dissertation follows the same grouping/sub-grouping not to bear the risk of slipping into the old but to re-structure the already existent with the help of a newer reading of the Renaissance. For example, as Sumit Sarkar puts it:

> The transition from Banylal to Nabakumar and Nimchand, one is tempted to suggest, epitomizes the tragedy of Young Bengal and the crucial problem for the historian surely is to analyze and explain this process of degeneration and withering away of the original radical impulse. (1985, 23)

What Sarkar proposes here is an inquisitiveness that concerns the re-reading of literary texts as well as the more immediate archival evidences that a construction of history requires. In re-reading the farces of early colonial Bengal and in tracing a link between the profane and the proscenium, it is this idea of inquisitiveness vis-à-vis the literary text and archival evidence that becomes the key methodology of this research.

Chapter I: The 'Laughable' Monstrous

I. About Future, Past and the Present

Perhaps even if nothing else today has any future, our laughter may yet have a future (Friedrich Nietzsche)

This chapter moves backward from a 'future' in history to the 'past' in order to understand the 'present' better. One is specifically hinting at the 'national popular' here as the 'future' – the future of the nascent Bengali drama that had been initiated by the Russian enthusiast Herasim Lebedeff. At this point, the 'future' being the meta-point of inspection, one would take into consideration, not the whole of nascent Bengali drama, but the National Theatre, where the plays of Girish Chandra Ghosh stand as representative of the 'national popular'. One of Girish Ghosh's most popular representations of a historical character was Siraj-ud-Daula. Despite the stature and the seriousness of the subject involved, Ghosh nevertheless used such devices that would cater to the 'popular' taste. His critics (especially of those times) have frowned upon the scenes of comic banter between the two characters, Zehra and Karim Chacha, in the play and called them the 'vulgar popular'. Allegations have been hurled upon Ghosh, blaming him for bringing in the *Jeleparar Swang* to the proscenium and to the 'uneducated' public of the theatre audience. Girish Chandra did bring 'past' forms of *Swang* and *Kobigaan* onstage; however, his Siraj in *Siraj-ud-Daula* was also the principal voice of the 'people nation' against the dangers of foreign power. Notably, as criticism against Ghosh declared it, his plays had nothing of the 'brilliance' of Michael Madhusudan Dutta or Dinabandhu Mitra's works.

On 17th January 1873, Dinabandhu Mitra's farce *Biye Paagla Buro* was enacted at the National Theatre. Interestingly, it was also followed by *Mustaphi Saheb Ka Pakka Tamasha*, which was a mockery on an Englishman named Dave Carson. Dave Carson mocked the Bengali *babu* in the Opera House of Calcutta. Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi's attack on the Englishman ran thus:

The merry Christmas is at hand
Sherry Champagne let us try
And how 'twill be a jolly land
When pegs begin to fly

On what a cheerful eve
Let us all the highway cry
And how happily we shall live
When pegs begin to fly

Hum bara saab hai duniyamey
None can be compared humara saath –
Mr. Mastfee name humara
Chaatgaon mera aachhey bilaat –
Rom-ti-tom-ti-tom & C.

Gar ki malik aadmi ki malek
Lord of all hy-ham –
Nei sakta niggers kat mera tolerate
Chunaam gali mera dhaam –
Rom-ti-tom & C.

Dirty niggers I hate to see
Boro moyla uh baap re baap
Holway pills hum kayenge raatko
Health rakhney mera saaf
Rom-ti-tom & C.

Coat pini pantaloon pini, pini mor trousers
Every two years new suits pini
Direct from Chandni Bazar –
Rom-ti-tom & C.

Chingri fish and kaancha kala the Hazree once I [eat]
Chaarpai is my Palang Posh, Morah is my Royal [seat]
Rom-ti-tom & C.

Chorus-
I am a gentleman.

(qtd. in Mitra, I., 35)

On 8th March, 1873 was enacted Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*, Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* and a host of pantomimes. Two advertisements for plays to be performed at the National Theatre are reproduced below from the *Englishman*.

NATIONAL THEATRE
CALCUTTA
Special Night! Special Night!!
Special Night!!!
WEDNESDAY, 22ND JANUARY, 1873
By particular desire, the most Laughable Farce,
Entitled

JAMON KURMO TEMNI FOL
Grand Pantomime Show
1.- The Hunchback
2.- The Model School
3. The Goosequill Fight &C; &C; &C.
To conclude with the sudden transition from the
Land of Demons to Fairy Land.
Reserved Seats.....Rs. 2.00
1st Class.....Re. 1.00
2nd Class.....Re. 0.8
Tickets to be had at the Theatre
From 10 A.M. to 8 P.M.
If available
Doors open at 6 o' clock-Performance to commence
At half-past seven.

National Theatre! National Theatre!!
TOWN HALL! TOWN HALL!!
This Evening, Saturday, 5th April 1873
For the benefit of
The Charitable Section of Indian Reform Association,
The most Laughable Farce, entitled
"SODHOBAR AKADASI"
To conclude with the lamentations
Of Bharatmata
With her children
Doors open at 7 P. M., Play to commence at 8 P.M.
Tickets to be had at the Town hall on Friday and Saturday

It was on 5th April 1873 that the Hindu National Theatre at Lindsay Street Opera House saw the performance of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Sharmishtha* and also the pantomimes.

The need for the above engagement with advertisements of the performed plays is to underline the category of the 'national popular'. The cultural nationalism of the nineteenth century in Bengal and specifically in Calcutta, sought to become 'popular' through theatre – the National Theatre. For the 'public' of the theatre, the 'popular' invariably was the comic spirit of the street and parlour traditions which vexed the English to a great extent. Colonial Puritanism detested the festivities inherent in the everyday performances of these street and parlour traditions – the *swang* and the *Kobigaan*. (*Kobigaan* is being used here as an umbrella-term for several musical and performative traditions like *Kheur*, *Panchali*, *Akhrai*, *Half Akhrai*, *Tarja*, *Dara Kobigaan* and so on). As Ranajit Guha says in 'A Colonial City and its Time(s)', within the colonial cityscape of Calcutta, the new 'sarkari' (official) time overlapped with the native time:

> The very structure of governance made it necessary that the official time should impinge upon the time of the civil society.... it amounted to a tangle of two braided temporalities requiring each to resist as well as accommodate each other. From the rulers' point-of-view, all the inconvenience and confusion were due entirely to the peculiarities of an indigenous time prone to slowing down, interrupting, and otherwise hindering the smooth and effective flow of a master time governed by rules which the colonized, as a population of servants, could never understand or grasp. (321-322)

The amazement of both the colonizer and the colonized at each other's antics that produced innumerable contradictions within the nineteenth century city-space of Calcutta has been adequately captured by Mohitlal Majumdar:

> On the one side the pride of a job (under the English); on the other Mill, Bentham and Spencer; on one side panchali-songs of Dashu Roy; on the other Shakespeare, Milton and Byron; on one side the rathyatra of Mahesh and the profligacy at villas; on the other the solemn prayer at Brahmo temples – it was a wonderful comedy. (qtd. in Dutt, 1992, p.4)

Thus, the English Puritanism that was instrumental in creating the *bhadrolok* within the city-space was also designing, in a parallel mode, ways of marginalizing the existent of popularity of folk traditions. In doing so, however, the British colonial power operated at a number of levels, namely missionary, educational and administrative. (Banerjee, 1998, 11)

Reverend James Ward, one of the English clergymen in the city, was horrified by the Bacchanalia that ruled these folk performances. He said:

> ... Four sets of singers were present on this occasion, the first consisting of Brahmans [Horu Thakur], the next of bankers [Bhavanando], the next of Vaishnavas [Netai] and the last of weavers [Lakshmi], who entertained their guests with filthy songs and danced in indecent attitudes before the goddess, holding up their hands, turning round, putting forward their heads towards the image, every now and then bending their bodies and almost tearing their throats with their vociferations.... The whole scene produced on my mind sensations of the greatest horror. The dress of the singers, their indecent gestures, the abominable nature of the songs, especially (khayur), the horrid din of their miserable drum, the lateness of the hour, the darkness of the place, with the reflection that I was standing in an idol temple... All those actions which a sense of decency keeps out of the most in decent English songs, are here detailed, sung and laughed at, without the least sense of shame.... A poor ballad singer in England would be sent to the house of correction, and flogged, for performing the meritorious [sic]actions of these wretched idolators. (qtd. in Banerjee, 1998, 154)

Proselytization, probably, was not so much a difficult task for the English – the mast bearers of the 'civilizing' process – than civilizing per se the lesser mortals of the colonies. There is a 'monstrous' behind every laughable as laughter is never without a context, never sheer fun. Laughter serves a social, psychological or a physiological need. Within colonial paradigms this laughter, naturally, needs to be regulated both by the sword and the Bible in terms of a project entitled- the White Man's Burden. The colonizer manipulated, controlled and regulated the lives of the colonial subjects; he designed necessities and abrogation as far as everyday merry-making was concerned. And hence, there were methods of control such as the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 or the Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876.

It is here that one can go back and forth channelizing a link between the advertisements presented above as a part of the 'national popular' and the 'popular' of the so-called lower orders of the colonial city-space. Both Girish Chandra Ghosh's efforts and Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi's endeavours and enactments were bringing back 'popular' folk traditions to the stage of Bengal. Within the framework of the 'national' that comprised now of the reactions against the Swadeshi and broadly against the alien powers controlling the life of the colonial city, the 'popular' demanded to be recuperated. between the two Acts mentioned above – one that was concerned with literary refinement and the other that was initiated to proscribe reactionary performances (the tropes that the colonizer used was of course 'obscenity' and 'reactionary'). Interestingly, the performative piece that hurried the passage of the Dramatic Performances Control Act was a play/pantomime entitled *The Police of Pig and Sheep* apart from the three instrumental plays entitled *Sarat Sarojini*, *Surendra Binodini* and *Gajadananda.*

Having initiated the 'future' with insights into the 'past', it becomes imperative here to speak about the 'present' that one is majorly concerned with; the present that is replete with the farcical productions of the trio- Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and

Dinabandhu Mitra. Though the farces would be dealt with in the upcoming chapters, it must be mentioned that these belonged to an altogether different project of the Renaissance in Bengal – the Hinduisation project that concerned both the over-Sanskritized Bengali literati as well as the radicals of the Young Bengal. The concern with these farces, in between the 'profane' and the 'proscenium' as they were, is a concern that seeks to problematize them as a kind of middle path/detour that never or occasionally surpassed the norms of sanctity as had been laid down the monumental and documental procedure of Empire-building but could not in the process be purged of the laughable monstrous that was the spirit of the streets. Before that a complete tour of the 'past' is more necessary than any other musings on the farce per se.

II. Accounts of the Indigenous: *Swang*, *Jatra*, *Kobigaan* et al.

The Great Exodus: Performing Revels and Rebels

Kolir shohor Kolkatatir paaye nomoshkar!
Jar jaankjomoke Bhagirathir du-dhaar guljaar
...
Jar teendike jol shohor ghera – uttore bahali
Aha Bagbajarer khaaler seema, agnikone kali,
Aar ojdokhine aadiganga talir nala hali!
Jaar mathar dike Paikpara khure Khidirpur,
Jaar pubbu gheshe suro tali ghonje Alipur,
Jaar itdalane kholar chaale thekatheki gaaye,
Jaar girje mosheed thakurbarir churoye akash chhaye,
Jaar bajar goli, bishthenoli baire jwale jhaar,
Jaar buker opor beshyapara, methor hakaye shaand!
Jaar town jora polli duti sahib netib para,
Jaar chowrongi sonar thala shohor dhulor hara!
Jaar gas er aalo ratrikaale chokkhe lagaye dhandha,
Jaar kole dole lohar saanko edik odik bandha!
Jaar rastaghore shohor phure kaler paani chhote,
Jaar dudher kenrey khaanti pani teen po chhere othey!
Jaar desher chhele mitthebaadi sahib rajai sancha,
Jaar lambate goch cheharata phajli aamer dhancha;
Aha Bhagirathir dukul jora ruper chhata jaar,
Kolir shohor Kolkata tor paaye nomoshkar!

['Shohor Bandana'- Hutom Penchaar Gaan] (*Madhyastha*, 985)

The above was an invocation to the colonial capital of the Raj, a description that brings up clearly how the process of urbanization created new geographical markers for a space that was once merely a conglomeration of three villages named Dihi Kolkata, Gobindopur and Sutanuti. The transformation of a *bordhishnu graam* (well-grown village) to that of *shohor* (city) Kolkata can be well understood if compared with the following lines from Kobi Kankan Mukundaram Chakraborty's celebrated epic poem, *Chandimangal Kabya* from medieval Bengal:

Teer shomo chhotey tari taranger ghaaye
Chitrapur eraiya Shalikhate jaaye
Kolikata erailo baniyaar bala
Betarate uttorilo oboshane bela
Betanga Chandika puja kori shabdhaane
Dhanatar graam shadhu erailo baamey
Dahiney tyajiya jaaye hijulir path
Kiniya loilo raajhongsho parabat
Kalighata erailo baniyaar bala
Kalighaat uponito oboshaaney bela (Bandopadhyay, Ra, 18)

Mukundaram's poem exhibits 'Kolikata' as any other village that the protagonist of the poem passed through on his journey. The 'medieval' character of the narrative invests 'medievalism' on to the character or persona of village space that was soon to get transformed into an urban site, soon to be mapped according to the class composition of the people that set to inhabit its every nook and corner. And hence, began the compartmentalization of areas in the urban city-space of Calcutta – Black Town, White Town, red-light areas, Bat-tala, Bagbajar, Jelepara and so on. Areas comprise of people and the people who became the part and parcel of newly urbanizing Calcutta imported themselves through a Great Exodus – the exodus from the village to the city. The *Betorer Haat* mentioned by Mukundaram in his poem was the hub of traders travelling to and from Calcutta. The turmoil that the Muslim rule in eighteenth century Bengal created channelized this Exodus. A majority of the people who acted directly in this performance of Exodus were the innumerable toiling masses of the nearby villages – farmers, fishermen, sweet-meat makers, washer men, gardeners, tailors, architects, small-scale retailers and so on. This 'labour' class that swarmed in to the slowly urbanizing space of the colonial city was mainly employed by the English and the other colonial and foreign powers like the Portuguese, French, Danish, Armenians and Dutch. They would be included as servants, watchmen, peons, postmen, umbrella-bearers, clerks, *gomustahs*, coachmen, palanquin-bearers, and so on. Of all the paraphernalia that these new inhabitants brought along with themselves, were the cultural outputs of the rural environment – performances that were religious, social, festive and 'everyday'. In short, it was the 'comic' in the 'everyday' where they sought a temporary refuge after the day's ordeal – in the new urban site, the machine-world of Calcutta.

The incongruence that this newly emerged public had to experience in their everyday dealings within the city-space found a vent in the performance space – the performance of the old within a new environment, a new space and a new locale. In his 'The Scenography of Popular Entertainment', Brooks McNamara says:

> In the entertainment environment, it is the events that are fixed, and not the spectator, who is often completely mobile and presented with a large number of choices around which he organizes his own 'event'. Entertainment environments are of two types: those that redefine an already existing area for a short time and those that make up what might be called a self-contained autonomous environment...Self contained or autonomous environments use spaces solely devoted to entertainment. (19)

For the lower orders of the colonial city, adaptation to the entertainment environments came from a rebellious as well as a recuperating spirit within the fast-sprouting socio-economic order. This socio-economic order within the city-space did not offer a 'framework of social norms of solidarity', something that Emile Durkheim explains on his theory of anomie.[1] According to Robert Merton, in the analysis of deviance and crime – the anomic disjuncture between the 'culturally defined goals' and the 'socially approved means available to individual groups' – the latter resorts to four types of behaviour:

i. **Ritualism**, or following the approved means in a mechanical way without any hope of reaching the goals;
ii. **Retreatism**, or opting out from the struggle;
iii. **Rebellion**, or the desire to redefine goals and means, and change the entire socially approved system; and
iv. **Innovation**, or devising new means – outside the socially approved framework- to achieve the socially approved goals

For Merton, the fourth type of behavioural response includes crime. But one is concerned here with deviance, and particularly social deviance through the performance of the comic. Hence, both 'rebellion' and 'innovation' can be taken up to discuss the comic spree of subaltern performances in the colonial city-space. On the one hand, the comic spree is guided by 'rebellion' because it is a collective self-conscious effort against the colonial order and its off-shoots in the new Bengali *babu* and *bhadrolok*, and on the other hand, it owes to 'innovation' in adapting to the flickering, changing and critiquing tastes of the surveillance class. A little more occupation with the idea of taste may be required here. According to Pierre Bourdieu:

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[1] Sumanta Banerjee borrows Durkheim's theory of anomie in his *Crime and Urbanization: Calcutta in the Nineteenth Century* to reveal how crime per se becomes the 'other' to the societal norms and that criminal spirit can be guided by ritualism, retreatism, rebellion or innovation. Banerjee's explorations are dealt with here in order to borrow from the latter a framework and logic for the 'comic spirit' in the colonial milieu which came to be suppressed by the colonizers as it marked a kind of vandalism.

> Taste is a practical mastery of distributions which makes it possible to sense or intuit what is likely (or unlikely) to befall – and therefore to befit – an individual occupying a given position in social space. It functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position. It implies a practical anticipation of what the social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing will probably be, given their distribution in social space and the practical knowledge the other agents have of the correspondence between goods and groups. (466)

Taste, therefore, is guided by a primary idea of 'befitting' social position and social practices and the intuitive nature of taste provides a social boundary. The 'taste' of the 'bhadrolok' class of nineteenth century Calcutta for the artistic modes of the subaltern orders of the city was guided by this marker of 'befitting' the social order. Rural practices, and more specifically the ritual practices, that came with the Great Exodus, had to be morphed under the social conditions of the colonial climate – 'innovation' as Merton describes in his four-fold typology. However, the regulating nature of taste was more of a cusp between the 'rebellious' and the 'innovative' – both of which made up the 'comic' 'everyday' festivities on the streets and in the parlours.

To quote Bourdieu again: 'A group's presence or absence in the official classification depends on its capacity to get itself recognized, to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order.' (484) The social group one is speaking of here, within the colonial context, is not a homogenous group marked against the *bhadrolok* rung of the society. Homogeneity, in fact, also did not mark the *babu* as a social group altogether. Thus, the heterogeneity of the lower orders of the colonial city-space also marked heterogeneity in the innovations within the old rural forms of performances to suit the 'popular' taste. It was this heterogeneity that channelized the recognition of the lower orders as a distinct component of society. This was a 'subaltern' ingredient of the colonial broth that was Calcutta and 'to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order', it employed the agency of festive mirth – the revelry of the 'rebellious' performances which has been broadly classified here as the *Swang, Jatra* and *Kobigaan.* A detailed account of these forms and their relational status to the more important topic of concern, namely, the farces, is an obvious necessity. But before that this discourse digresses a little into the question and category of the 'comic' and 'laughter'.

'Why did I Laugh Tonight'?: Problematizing the 'Comic'

'Comic' is not synonymous with 'comedy'. The 'comic' is an identifiable mode or tone of writing that manifests itself in a multitude of media, genres and forms and need not stick to what one understands as 'comedy'. Taking recourse to a historicist view of the 'comic', one might seek to describe it in Bakhtinian terms. Bakhtin engages with two contradictory world views in his *Rabelais and his World*, essentially in the medieval period. These world-views include:

- 'Official culture', characterized as ecclesiastical, somber, excluding profanity, and suppressing the body, driven by the bureaucracy of the Church and the administration of Grace.
- The 'culture of the marketplace that included the popular and the boisterous voice of the people'. (Scott, 33)

Bakhtin writes about the second world order:

> This territory was a peculiar second world within the official medieval world order and was ruled by a special type of relationship. Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of language was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of the Church, palace, courts, and institutions. (154)

This second world order of the marketplace is ruled by a distinct kind of language – a language that is coarse, unlettered and uncontrollable by the 'official' markers and expectations of formality. The comic logic of this space violates officials and officialdom, violating the set rules, norms, etiquette and expectations of formal behaviour. It is the order of the marketplace and its irrepressible comic spirit that occasionally engages in mocking the 'official' order, humiliating it violently and subverting it. The marketplace, for Bakhtin, is a ritualistic space and precisely a 'totemic location' that engages vehemently in 'graphic descriptions of sexuality and bodily functions'- an exhibition of a culture at ease.

This brings one face to face with the idea of the 'carnival', literally a 'putting away of meat', signifying the sensual indulgence and misrule that comes before the Lenten fast.[2] The Battle of Carnival and Lent (1559), a painting by the Flemish artist Peter Bruegel on a popular medieval and early modern theme, presents Carnival as a 'gorged, corpulent, and self-indulgent figure', engaged in an endless contest with 'gaunt Lenten piety'. Bakhtin's view of the Carnival is akin to the eternal struggle between flesh and spirit, a way of manifest assertion of the popular order against the dominant one:

> As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (10)

However, the Bakhtinian view of popular discontent vis-à-vis the Carnival has been critiqued as a utopian view of medieval culture. Aaron Gurevich, for example, raises questions about whether Bakhtin had not 'transposed some aspects of contemporary life in Stalinist Russia into the epoch' he was dealing with (58).

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[2] Carnival is a period which occurs immediately before Lent – the Christian phase of abstinence that takes place over forty days in February and March with the conclusion on Easter Sunday. Carnival takes place on Shrove Tuesday, the day before Lent begins. In French speaking countries, carnival is called 'Mardi Gras', or fat Tuesday, According to the medieval calendar, carnival was a special holiday that permitted the temporary suspension of social rules and codes of conduct and deference. (Scott, p. 34)

On the other hand, Bakhtin's theory of opposing cultures has helped in the new historicist criticism of discourses. According to new historicist formulations of the configuration of state power, comedy is a medium that is simultaneously monitored and controlled by the authorities that it seeks to subvert. As Stephen Greenblatt says: 'authority is subjected to open, sustained and radical questioning before it is reaffirmed, with ironic reservations, at the close' (29). An alternative view is offered by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986) where some of Bakhtin's ideas have been rescued from the romanticization of the marketplace. Stallybrass and White see carnival and comic forms as addressing 'the social classification of values, distinction and judgments which underpin practical reason', where carnival 'systematically inverts the relations of subject and object, agent and instrument, husband and wife, old and young, animal and human, master and slave.' (56). Although carnival 're-orders the terms of the binary pair, it cannot alter the terms themselves' as inversion of the terms of normal social operation is not the same as that of redefining them. The carnivalesque, then, is not equipped with or aimed at toppling the dominant order; on the other hand the dominant order is unable to silence the carnivalesque.

> ...the 'top' attempts to reject and eliminate the 'bottom' for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other...but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primarily eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life. (Stallybrass and White, 7)

Comic inversion, therefore, constitutes of contradictions and unacknowledged dependencies.

Michael Bristol's *Carnival and Theater* (1985) problematizes the categories of 'carnival' and 'authority' further by borrowing from the anthropological model of Victor Turner. Turner distinguishes between types of festivities that are 'liminal' and 'liminoid'. 'Liminal' phenomena are festive activities that remain bound by their archaic form to the extent that they are simply the residue of a previously significant ritual or the repetition of an inversion that remains entirely unanalyzed by its participants. To exemplify the 'liminal' festivities, Turner cites the erection of a Maypole or the performance of a Morris dance in a modern town. 'Liminoid' activities, on the other hand, are not just reversive; they are 'subversive, representing radical critiques of the central structure and proposing alternative models' (Bristol, 38). 'Liminoid' activities therefore contain social commentaries and can be extended to theatrical performance or even to riots.

> Popular festive form reminds the ruling elite that they may actually rule relatively incompletely and ineffectively. Much of the conduct of everyday life, and many of the details of political and economic practice, proceed quite independently of the wishes of the power structure. Carnival is an heuristic instrument of considerable scope and flexibility. Though it is a festive and primarily symbolic activity, it has immediate pragmatic aims, most immediately that of objectifying a collective determination to conserve the authority of the community to set its own standards of behaviour and social discipline, and to enforce those standards of behaviour and social discipline, and to enforce those standards by appropriate means. (Bristol, 52)

The comic surely engages within itself the two essentials of the 'body' and 'laughter'. By 'body', one is concerned here specifically with the grotesque body. Paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516) portray the grotesque body being married to the repulsive and the comic. The grotesque body is situated at the site of the clash between two opposite orders in society. It marks the two facets/reactions towards the human body: the horrors of corporeality and the oneness of an organism. To understand the comic body, it is necessary to look at it as the body in abjection. According to Julia Kristeva:

> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. (4)

The grotesque is pitched between the two feelings of pleasure and disgust. The body engaged in ritualistic performance is a body in celebration.

Similarly, laughter has to be understood in the colonial context from the points-of-view of Christian laughter as well as the superiority and inferiority of concepts of laughter. Laughter is essentially related to the grotesque. The New Testament never portrays Christ as a laughing subject whereas he is seen twice to be weeping. Laughter, according to the Christian view, violated the pious abstinence that the ideal body had to uphold. It was a vulgar eruption of an impudent, ill-disciplined body. Even in *Leviathan*, Hobbes states that, 'much laughter at the defects of others is a sign of Pusillanimity' (43). The attack on laughter as an inferior mode was also an attack by the elite- an attack guided by sheer class positions and class consciousness.

The above problematizations on the comic, the grotesque body, as well as laughter, need to be placed, here, on the reference frame of the 'colonial'. Timothy Mitchell, in *Colonizing Egypt*, writes: 'Reality was that which presents itself as exhibit, so nothing else would have been thinkable. Living within a world of signs, they took semiosis to be a universal condition, and set about describing the Orient as though it were an exhibition.' (13-14) Europe became the 'world-as-exhibition', exhibiting the Orient as a picture – the picture of Empire-building. However, the European visitors to the Orient found themselves in a confused state in the process of grasping the dilapidated and mismanaged condition of the colony. Yet, this dilapidation and mismanagement needed to be recuperated in the 'world-as-exhibition' as a picture in its own. On the other hand, the ways to 'manage' the colony were constantly being devised by the colonial masters. The monumentalizing process in the colonial cityscape of Calcutta obviously had to pass through the chaotic order that was conceived by the European as the 'East'. In so doing and in creating a new servile order of the *bhadrolok*, the Empire-building process, with its gift-baggage of Western philosophical thoughts and Enlightenment, felt the need to probe into the existing cultural order of the city. The Bengal Renaissance that exhibits itself as a unanimous whole,

needed to assimilate and abrogate as per the needs of the colonial order. Whereas the monumentalizing process was carried on by Europe itself in order to transform a rural space to the colonial capital of the Raj, the new order of the *babu*s, trained in the latest of English education, felt the need for refining the society, purging it of whatever was 'unacceptable'.

The comic belonged to this domain of the 'unacceptable'. The festivities of the streets and the parlours needed to be regulated and hence, it was necessary to frame suitable modes of accusations against it. The grotesque body was a threat and so was the laughter of a bunch of colonial subjects, which constantly threatened to outcast the stronger 'outsider' other in the colonial power. The incongruity between the two orders-the colonizer and the colonized, made itself evident not only through the binaries of white/black and official time/time of civil society, but also through an eluded binary of the seriousness/laughter. The comic however, operated in the society in more than one ways mentionable. Proscription entailed new methods of inclusion. Of these new methods of inclusion, the early colonial farces seem to become one of the paradigmatic modes of viewing the Bengal Renaissance.

John Man, in his book *The Great Wall*, speaks of the uniform one-dimensional discourse of the Great Wall of China. The Great Wall is a national symbol of China, a unified structure that symbolizes power. However, the Wall was not a construct of a single emperor, nor is the Wall a uniform, single one. It is actually a conglomeration of multiple walls built from time to time by various individuals. Interestingly, walls built differently, at different time periods, do not conform to a strong nationalistic, monolithic discourse. It is the single Wall which grasps the smaller walls in the process of formation of the one, acceptable discourse. These smaller walls in this chapter comprise of the indigenous, the national, and especially the farces, which coalesce to form the greater wall of the Bengal Renaissance. To understand the Renaissance in Bengal, a variety of markers become a necessity and it is imperative to differentiate these markers from each other from under the umbrella-term of the 'Bengal Renaissance'. Thus, it is time for probing into the varieties of the indigenous in the cultural environment of colonial Calcutta.

Kobigaan: the musical duel

Subversion of the linearity of a historical as well as a cultural discourse has enabled one to view culture as a web whose analysis is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. The linearity of a cultural-historical discourse reduces 'Kobigaan' to such constructions as 'cheap entertainment', 'street-poetry', 'vulgar music', and 'temporary' within the discourse of Bengali literary history. Such constructs have over-simplified 'Kobigaan' to a mere musical debate between two musical groups.

The one-dimensional linear historical discourse traces 'Kobigaan' to the beginning of the 18th century or even beyond it to the 17th century, and shows the period of flourishing of the 'Kobiwalas' as between 1760 and 1830. However, this water-tight compartmentalization is a part of the dominant ideology of the age that produced it as well as the post-facto re-definition of this 'popular phenomenon' that still views it as 'cheap entertainment' and draws nourishment from the hegemony of a single notion. For the linear historical narrative, 'Kobigaan' is, over-simplistically, an urban mode of entertainment that started with the coming of the bourgeoisie in the newly developed cityscape of Calcutta, which dismisses the values of medieval village life depending on the whims of its patrons. The 'kobials', according to such history, did not have the blessings of proper education but were blessed with the power of composing songs impromptu and on the spot for the gratification of patrons like Raja Nabakrishna Deb of Sovabazar. In the new capital designed by the British, the old court of the king had passed out of existence. The king, who was earlier the patron of the 'kobi', was replaced by the nouveau-riche, a 'hothat-raja'/ 'sudden-king', for whom kobigaan was the perfect mode of entertainment. Quite obviously thus, other forms of 'cheap entertainment' like 'Kheur', 'Akhrai', 'Half-Akhrai', 'Jatra', 'Tarja', 'Panchali', 'Tappa' etc. have been deemed as parallels or contemporaries of 'Kobigaan' and clubbed together under the umbrella-term of 'temporary modes of popular entertainment'.

But, how temporary was 'Kobigaan'? Or for that matter, how short is its history? Some historians trace the existence of 'Kobigaan' to the pre-Chaitanya age where texts like 'Sri Krishna Kirtan' exhibit its nascent form. Following this, there is a total break in this musical form till it resurfaces in the 18th century. This gap, however, can be bridged by the fact that 'Kobigaan' is predominantly a kind of group-music that journeyed down from the Vaishnavites to the Mangal Kavyas to the urban taste of the middle class. The binaries of the liminal and fixed social structure can be well-perceived as to how from the Vaishnavites to the Kobiwalas, God is slowly replaced by man who will later become the exponent of self-fashioning in the Renaissance.

Vaishnavite music as well as poetry has the tag of being 'devotional'. These poems/songs deal specifically with the extra-marital love of Radha and Krishna, their love-tryst, joy, sorrow, hope and imagined re-union. The word 'devotional' that is boldly attached to Vaishnavite music is a misnomer in certain cases. It veils the medium of the body that these composers emphasize upon to reach the heightened domain of eternal love. The 'Shringar Rasa' of these songs are often displaced through an over use of 'Bhakti Rasa'. However, by the time 'Kobigaan' takes over, the religious sheen could not be appropriately used to smooth out the rough edges of this kind of 'cheap entertainment' and hence 'Kobigaan' emerged not only as the 'popular' but the veritable 'other' that was liminal and violated the norms of fixed social structures.

Domestication of Hindu divinities formed the crux of such forms as 'kirtans', 'mangal-kavyas' and other folk compositions. With the kobiwalas, the process of domestication of Hindu gods and goddesses gained a different momentum. The appropriations of these gods and goddesses reflected the surrounding reality more than anything else. The style of the songs were considerably changed to accommodate secular comments by adding an adjunct called the 'kheur' to the main divisions in a narrative song (the other two divisions in kobigaan being 'sakhi samvad', which dealt with the various stages in Radha Krishna's love affair, and 'bhavani-bishayak', which was in praise of Durga). In the songs of the kobiwalas, the complaints of Radha about an elusive Krishna dallying elsewhere with his mistresses could often be a transparent cloak for the bitter admonitions of a Bengali wife of a *bhadrolok* hurled against her profligate husband – a subject which was the staple of numerous social novels, poems, plays and farces in nineteenth century Calcutta.

To attach the suffix 'wallah', coming from the world of monetary transactions, to the word 'Kobi' or poet signifies not the stooping of literature during this time but rather critiques the transcendentalism that is attached to all dominant literary, cultural and specifically musical modes. That music had moved out from the temple space to the streets or the courtyard of the 'babu' provided a basis for 'thin descriptions' that saw 'Kobigaan' as the vulgar 'other'. In contrast to the serene and monumental historicity of the metropolitan capital to which Wordsworth paid his tribute, the capital city of Raj, driven by gossip and consumed by curiosity, was rocked by a perpetual restlessness. The performance spaces of 'Kobigaan' comprised festivals such as the Durga Puja and Dol – the parody highlighting how the purloined everyday returns to subject people to constitute a time of their own, a plenitude resistant to colonization and fragmentation. The everyday was irreparably split in the middle, with one part assimilated to official time and alienated from civil society, and the remaining everyday, intensified into festival, a communitarian experience for the colonized. The festival of the colonial city is a moment of self-assertion on the part of the colonized in an elevated and intensified presence inaccessible to the official time of the colonial machinery. Within this temporal discrepancy and displacement, the rhetorical public sphere as the performance space of 'Kobigaan' likens itself to a carnival of sorts distorting the impositions of official time and being constantly looked down upon in the then English newspapers.

The concept of culture is especially a semiotic one. And yet the semiotics of such a cultural phenomenon as 'Kobigaan' has been confined by the power-politics of both the contemporary and posterity. 'Kobigaan' definitely marked a heteroglossic domain that incited entertainment and laughter through pronounced statements on sexuality and immorality; yet its

musical content and nuances have been sacrificed at the altar of it being allegedly 'derogatory'. The battle between two singing groups, the night-time revelries, the foppish dandyism of the drunken 'baboos', the participation of the common man, the broken barrier between the monarch (who was now a common man too) and his subjects, the sloughing off of the poet-singer's religious skin, and undergoing a mode of subjectivization were phenomena of a transgressive bare life that the contemporary and slowly emerging Renaissance political life tried to control. 'Kobigaan' laid the democratic basis for the growth of arts. It even created the pre-condition for the establishment of the professional Bengali theatre, which was led by Girish Ghosh and his players for about 40 years.

One cannot dismiss the humour of these songs in the name of vulgarity; they often demonstrate serious social criticism. For instance, the street singer Ram Basu sang, 'The dog pisses on the Tulsi tree, / you pick Tulsi leaves to salute your god'. (qtd. in Dutt, 1992, 9), thereby critiquing religious bigotry. Again when the street singer Thakur Singha asks Anthony Firingi in the form of a song, why he has discarded his European attire, Anthony, showing his scepticism to racial stereotyping and distantiation, replies:

Ei Bangla e Bangalir beshey anondey aachi
Hoye Thakur Shingher baaper jamai kurti tupi cherechi (qtd. in Dey, 2006, 263)

Again, when Bhola Moira was once invited by the Zamindar family of the village of Jara to fight a musical duel with another kobi named, Joggeshwar, and in the *chapan*[3], Joggeshwar compared the village of Jara to Vrindavan, the abode of Lord Krishna and eulogized the Zamindar as the deity himself, Bhola Moira, in a scathing critique of such sycophancy and undue flattery offered by many kobiwalas to their patrons, replied:

Kamon korey bolli Joga, 'Jara' Golok Brindaban?
Ekhaney to bamun raja, chasha proja, choudikeyte bansher bon
Kobi gaibi poisha nibi, khoshamudir ki karon?
Kotharey tor Shyamkundu? Kotha re to Radhakundu
Banshbone aachey Dobakundu kor ge mulo darashan. (qtd. in Dey, 263)

Bhola Moira thus attacked Joggeshwar in direct words on his act of unnecessary praises for the Zamindar. One of the many characteristics of the Kobigaan was its directness of statement and the zeal for social commentary, critique protest – a trait that was inherent in most of the comic portrayals off- and on-stage in colonial Bengal.

[3] Chapan and Utor are the two parts of the dialectical repartee of the duel that Kobigaan is. They are equivalents for question and answer in the battle of words among the poet-singers in Kobigaan.

It becomes necessary to look at the precarious absence of female *kobials* in the performance space of Kobigaan although female *kirtaniyas*, *jatra* performers, and *khemtawalis* thronged the urban entertainment sphere of Kolkata. One can go back to the satire by Michael Madhusudan Dutta *Ekei ki bole Shobhyota* (Is this what you call civilization?) where there are character sketches of two *khemtawalis*, Nitombini and Poyodhori, donning the Gyanotorongini Shabha of the English-educated nouveau-riche of 19th century Calcutta. How were the female performers and their own repertoire different from those of the male performers? Why is there a lack of female performers and poets within this form? How does Kobigaan portray the image of the female in comparison to visual art forms like the *Patchitra* of Kalighaat? Why do women have a better access to the colonial stage of Bengal than the literature and performance space of *Kobigaan*? Such questions seem still to be wrapped in the official historical discourse of the city. However, in *The Parlour and the Streets*, Sumanta Banerjee writes:

> A later kobi mentions a few other names of women kobis – Swarmoni, Paroshmoni, Bidhukamoni and Adormoni – who were reported to have moved listeners to tears by their narrative abilities. In the early nineteenth century, troupes of some women kobis, by sheer force of their popularity, even threatened to oust the male kobis from the stage. In a Bengali newspaper, a letter written by 'vagrant muchi and dome kobiwalas' (from the lower caste communities) complained about some nedi (a term used to describe female Vaishanavites) kobis who were invited to sing and dance at almost every festival at the houses of the rich, and were posing a challenge to their male rivals in the profession. (101)

The Bengali film *Anthony Firingi*, on the street-singer by the same name, portrays one female Joggeshwari who is defeated in a musical battle with Anthony, but historical data does not provide much evidence of active female participation. This could be because the performance space that enabled the male singer to move about and gesticulate to illustrate each song barred the female for reasons of public gaze. Thus one has a long list of male 'Kobiwalas' like Bhola Moira, Keshta Muchi, Neetai Boiragi, Horu Thakur, Gopal Urey, Keshey Dhopa and others, but hardly any woman. A closer scrutiny of these names indicates that they comprised a class that stood between the middle and the lower strata of the society – a newly formed community who gave a new dimension to the then cultural forms. While Orientalists like Haraprasad Shastri, Indologists like Rajendralal Mitra, and literary exponents detested this form of entertainment, Vidyasagar, the product of orthodox Sanskrit education showed a Catholic taste in literature as he wrote in his journal *Bharati*: 'To keep the society of Bengal lively we need an occasional orator like Ramgopal Ghosh, a humorist like Hutom, the Owl, and a street-poet like Bhola Moira.' (qtd. in Dutt 1992, 8). Even to Tagore these songs struck as modern and contemporary.

In 1833, Lord William Bentinck, one of the more farsighted of India's Governors-General, urged his administration to encourage 'members of ruling and influential families' to visit the city of Calcutta and spend some time there:

> A twelve months' sojourn of such persons at our seat of government, viewing our arts and arms, the arrangement and magnificence of our buildings, the order and suitableness of our business establishments, our institutions for education, the ingenuity displayed in such machinery as has reached the east, and the ships carrying on our commerce, would do more to diffuse just notions of our power and resources, of the importance of our alliance than any measures we can pursue. By such means we should have a chance of becoming truly known throughout this great empire as the powerful people we in fact are.
>
> Seeing all these things too with their own eyes, it would be reasonable to expect that visitors would return to their homes improved both in knowledge and feelings, and therefore better qualified to discharge those duties for which providence has destined them. (qtd. in Guha, 2008, 345)

The official view of the city could not be more clearly and comprehensibly stated. As Bentinck saw it and wanted the native elite to see it 'with their own eyes' and for their own edification, Calcutta was the very epitome of Britain's power in the East. Everything it had to show – its arts, arms and education, its business, education, transport and technology – everything was governmental and stamped as 'ours'. The first person plural stands here for the Raj as rulers and proprietors – as 'the powerful people *we* in fact are' – dominating this representation completely and exclusively. There is no room in it for any of *them*, that is, any indigenous will or interest or activity which is not slotted into the grand imperial design.

The reduction of the colonial city to an entity which can be claimed as 'ours' from the standpoint of colonialism is exclusive because it is contained in official time and cannot see beyond it. It is a theorizing defined negatively by what it cannot see. What it is blind to is the city of the festival. The latter requires, for its representation, another theory, another way of seeing the world that the Kobiwalas attempted to portray in their songs. They were able to do so, because they belonged to that world in the plenitude of its own time, that is, festival time. Their competence to represent it derives also from the primordial and inalienable privilege of a native speaker for time and language work together in that world as the very condition of its narrative possibility. Kobigaan thus becomes the paradigmatic mode of reviewing the Bengal Renaissance.

The figure of Anthony Firingi becomes an interesting subject within the domain of Kobigaan. 'Firingi' was a word used for the half-castes and Anthony Firingi belonged to an Indian mother and a Portuguese father. What is worth looking into in such a 'kobi' is a representative of the master class singing in the language of the natives. In fact, the first Bengali theatre was established by a Russian adventurer, Herasim Lebedeff (1749-1818). Thus the project of colonization in post-colonial discourse cannot only be dispensed as a discourse of victimization. The figures of Anthony Firingi or Herasim Lebedeff deflate the official colonial-postcolonial discourse through their cultural exchanges or '*adaan-prodaan*'.

The development of Bengali *bhadrolok* culture marginalised the Calcutta folk culture. Both these processes were fostered by the British colonial powers at a number of levels, namely, missionary, educational and administrative.

> The emergence of distinct cultural forms that could be representative of the newly acquired economic status and educational position of the bhadrolok could be possible only by eliminating the various forms of popular culture which used to be a part of the common literary and musical heritage of the Bengalis. The urge to demarcate themselves from the lower orders prompted the new bhadrolok converts to Western education to dissociate themselves from the urban folk culture. (Banerjee, 1998, 153)

Yet there have been attempts at giving a religious angle to these songs. Aurobindo Ghosh in his translations of such songs transcreates words having sexual connotations to something spiritual; the veritable process of purification, purgation and sanitization that remains a nationalistic agenda. The usage of the word *peerit* by Horu Thakur becomes 'love for God' in Aurobindo's verse thus garbing the sexual significance that it carries. The signifier remains intact while the signified changes according to the flat one-dimensional definitions that distinguish a wink from a twitch, and that accept 'thin descriptions' for 'thick' ones. The process of sanitization is there in the Vaishnava tradition as well as the nationalization project taken up by Aurobindo. Kobigaan denudes the superimposed sanitization of both these projects and emerges as a rebellious Bacchanalian spirit that aimed at turning the official markers and edifices of the city topsy turvy. In this process, it was coupled with other forms like the *Swang* and the *Jatra*, accounts of which are taken up in the following section.

Swang and *Jatra*: the ritual modified

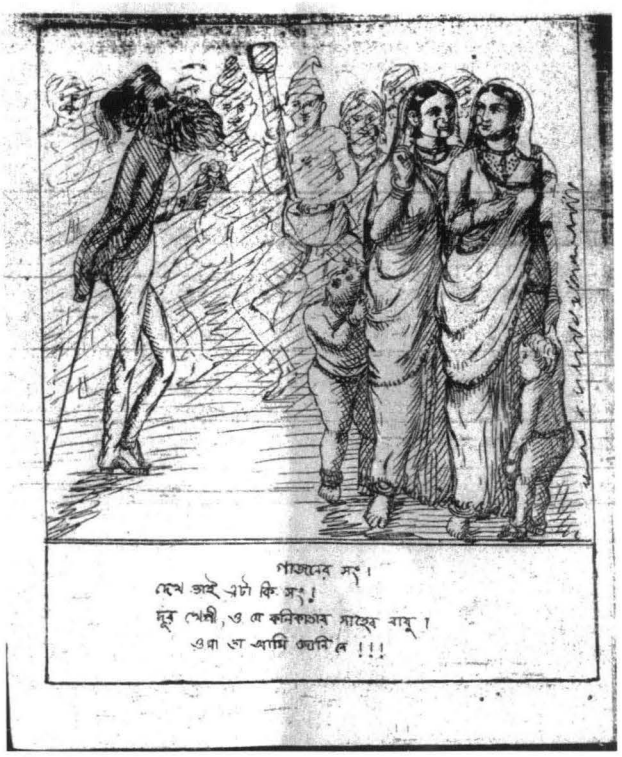
The 9th February 1792

Calcutta Theatre, this evening, the 9th of February 1792, will be performed a new Pantomime called Mungo in Freedom, or Harlequin Fortunate, with amendment. Boxes 1 gold Mohur, Pit 12 Rupees, and gallery Six Rupees.

(cited in Bandyopadhyay Bi, 11)

The English theatre in the city of Calcutta would have been much amused by the Pantomime performances of which the above advertisement provides evidence enough. However, for the greater Bengali public, or more specifically the rural folks of Bengal, the pantomime was akin to *Swang* that can be somewhat equated in a broader sense with forms like the commedia dell' arte or the Harlequin. *Swang* derives its linguistic identity from the Sanskrit root word *Samanga* – something that can be likened with the act of rhythmic physical gesticulations in music or caricature. *Swang* or Pantomime in the religious-cultural milieu of Bengal appeared with the ritual performance of *pujo-parbon*. These included the Durgapuja, Kalipuja, the Bengali New Year, marriages, and every other religious/social ritualistic festival that make up the saying that Bengalis observe thirteen rituals in twelve months. However, the festival that was specifically the insignia for the *swang* proper was the Chadak/Gajan – observed as a part of the cult of Shiva. In

fact, Kaliprasanna Singha's *Hutom Penchar Naksha* opens with the very setting of the Chadak festival and the spectacular visual descriptions of the antics and gymnastics by the *swang*s. The *Chadak* and *Gajan swang*s exhibited themselves during the months of March-April (the Bengali equivalent for which would be *Chaitra*). They would form group-processions, accompanied by the beats of the *dhaak* and the *kansi*. An etching by Sir Charles Doyly, entitled *Procession of the Churruck Pooja*, depicts *sanyasis* dancing with their bodies pierced. The act of body piercing was finally banned by the government in 1863 (Bandyopadhyay Bi, 6). Picture 1 below depicts the *Gajan Swang* in the rural space as depicted in the Bengali monthly *Basantak*.



The picture shows the *Swang* in the guise of a 'saheb babu', the performance space being entirely rural as is evident from the awe-struck expressions of the crowd and the mention of the fact that it is a 'saheb-babu' from Calcutta. This reminds one of the pantomimes of Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi mocking Dave Carson. It also traces the metamorphosis of the *Swang* itself from an entirely ritual performance to that of a more secular and 'nationalist' domain.

*Swang*s were employed by the rich *babu/bhadrolok* households in the city for entertainment in social gatherings, marriages etc. A newspaper report of 20th December, 1823 runs thus-

> Possession of a new house. Calcutta 11th December, Thursday ... In the evening Baboo Dwarkanath Tagore invited a host of fortunate Sahebs and Memsahebs to his new house and treated them to a sumptuous, delicious multi-course dinner. Satiated thus, the Sahebs enjoyed themselves through the entertainments provided by the English music and dance. This was also followed by the bhands performing different swang performances, though some of them who were dressed as cows, masticated grass. (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay Br, 1937, p. 138; Trans. mine)

The *swang* was also included as an interlude in between the *jatra* performances. The *jatra*, which was mythological in content, could not always pull the attention of the audience. Hence, *swang* performances in between the serious scenes would cater to the popular taste. The tropes for such popularity would be banter and fun employed in verbal language as well as bodily gestures. There was, however, a constant attack on such unrestrained show of fun that produced uncontrollable bouts of laughter. The Baptist Missionary, W. Ward, saw such performances (and even musical forms like *Tarja*, *Kheur*, *Akhrai*, *Half-Akhrai*) as 'obscene'. He said, 'The Songs of the Hindoos, sung at religious festivals, and even by individuals on boats and in the streets are intolerably offensive to a modest person' (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay Bi, 5).

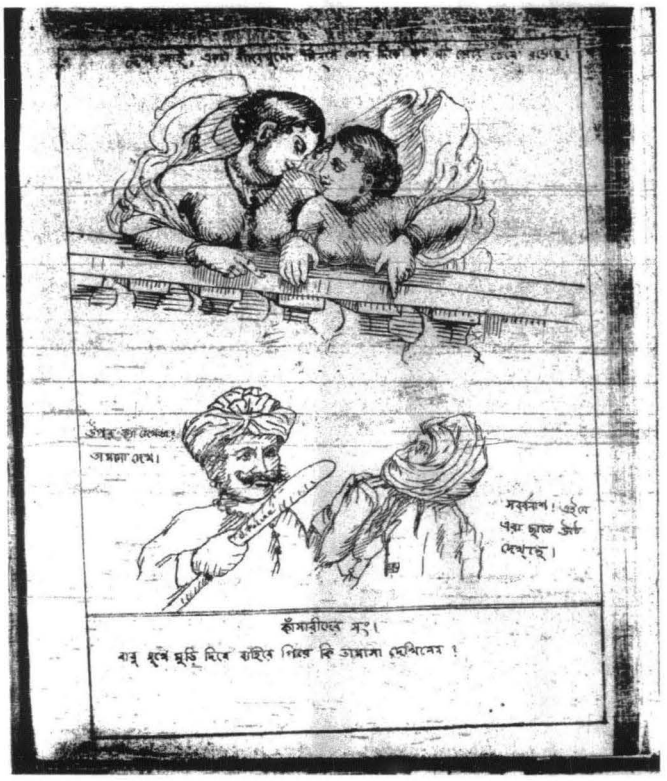
Depicting the apparently punishable 'vulgarity' of the swangs on the streets, Sumanta Banerjee writes:

> We hear of a swang, a live actor illustrating a proverb, during the Saraswati Puja (in honour of the Hindu goddess of learning) in February 1825. The Bengali proverb-'Pathey hagey ar chokh rangaye' (literally meaning: 'He shits in public and threatens others')- which was depicted by the swang was meant to lampoon the civic authorities who themselves violated all laws and yet hauled up the man in the street for the slightest misdemeanour. The display, quite predictably, annoyed the authorities. The police arrested the swang and his patron and brought them before the English magistrate, who reprimanded them for 'vulgarity' and imposed a fine of Rs. 50. (1998, 124)

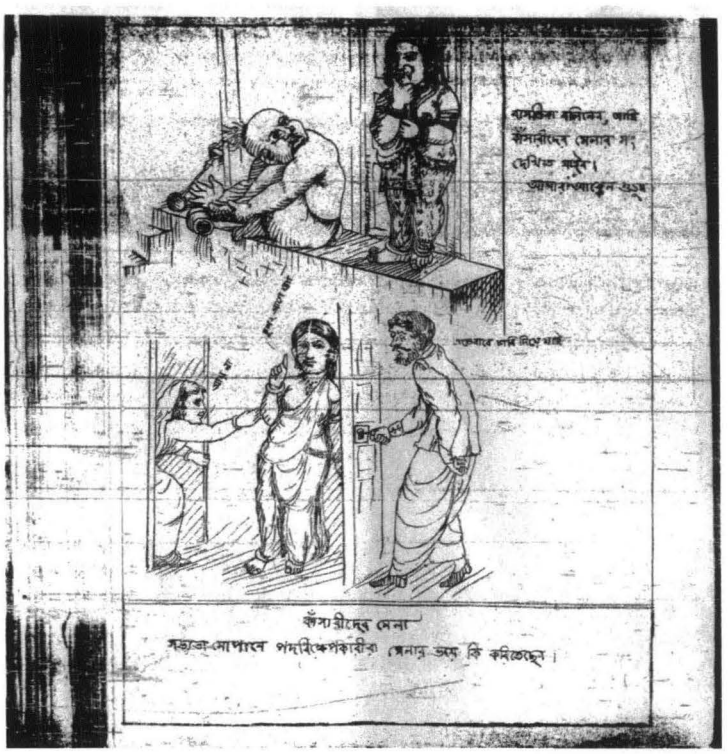
The swang performances would be enacted with the use of clay models made in the Kumartuli and also with musical compositions, the witty use of language of which marked their popularity. A swanger gaan, composed by Rupchand Pakshi, would run like thus:

> *Let me go orey dwari, I visit to bangshidhari,*
> *Eshechi Brojo hotey, aami Brojer brojonari*
> *Beg you door-keeper, let me get, I want to see crook-head*
> *For whom our Radhe dead, aami tarey search kori*
> *Srimati Radhar kena servent, ei dekho aachey dashkhat agreement,*
> *Akhon koribo present, Brojopure lobo dhori*
> *(Dashkhat dekhe ghuchbey jari)*
> *Moral character shuno or, butter-thief, noni-chor*
> ...
> *Kahe R. C. D. Bird King, black nonsense very cunning*
> *Flute e tey kore sing majayechey Rai Kishori.* (qtd. in Dey, 339)

The song represents the mocking tone that describes the mythological characters Radha and Krishna and their love-tryst. Of the various areas in the city that had their distinct *Swang* performances, Jeleypara (colony of fishermen) and Kansharipara (colony of the braziers) were the most prominent ones. Pictures 2 and 3 below portray the popularity of the Kansharipara Swang and the reactions towards it as portrayed in the *Basantak*.



Picture 2 above shows the Bengali babu veiled and disguised in order to witness a swang performance of the Kansharis. The audience-reception of the Swang was quite immense though it was also accompanied by proscriptions against obscenity.



Picture 3 above shows *Basantak*, the character from the magazine of the same name panic-stricken on hearing his wife *Basantika* expressing her wish to go to the Kansharipara Swang. It is a dig on the mast-bearers of Bengali civilization who are threatened by the outrageous comic spirit of the swang and who also have the added responsibility of marking off the inner and the outer domains for the women-folk.

The swang performance that ensued from the Baranasi Ghosh Street in north Calcutta was popularly known as Kanshariparar swang. The performance commenced from the year 1868/1872 and was patronized by respectable baboos like Taraknath Pramanik and Krishnadas Pal. The swang would be exhibited on a special horse-drawn carriage with short skits in between. The Kansharipara swang was banned by the government due to the hue and cry raised against its 'obscene' content by Babu Keshabchandra Sen who had also influenced certain members of the Bengali elite and English missionaries. All of them formed the *ashlilata nibarani sabha* (society for the extinction of obscenity) that channelized the banning of the swang performances. *The Hindu Patriot* writes in its April 13th issue of 1868:

> The Choitra Festivities
>
> The barbarous churuck has been replaced by two substitutes, one being of a somewhat gross description for the amusement of the mob, and the other of an elevating kind for the delectation of the cultivated classes which we trust will soon become institutions of the land. On Friday last the braziers of Baranassy Ghose's Street, an industrious and self-reliant class, contributed not a little to the amusement of not only the mob but also of the higher classes, by their ingenious and popular representations and caricatures. Their procession which extended over more than a mile started at about 6 A.M. and returned to the head-quarters at 5 P.M. there being continuous music, singing, laughing, pantomiming and what not for nine hours. The Streets, the house-tops, the verandahs, every nook and corner of the localities through which the procession passed, were filled with men, women and children, and though the sun shone with his full effulgence upon them, the excitement was so great that nobody gave the slightest thought to it. Some of the caricatures were very telling, for instance the Indigo vat with its thousand reminiscences, the Hell with its dismal horrors, the Burning Ghat cinerators with a posse of municipal officers, and the modern Bengali Theatre and concert with their stereotyped airs, songs and discourses. Of course mob amusements are not amenable to criticism, but we wish that somebody would point out to the promoters the propriety of avoiding grossness and coarseness as much as possible. We cannot also refrain from drawing the attention of the Commissioner of Police to the haughty officiousness of his model men, which went unpunished simply because the mob of Calcutta were not made of the stuff of Hyde Park agitators. What did it matter whether the prescribed time was exceeded by a quarter or half an hour when those in whose interest the rule regulating processions was made had discarded business for the nonce and were bent on holiday-making?

The report of *The Hindu Patriot* saw the holiday-making mood inherent in the swang performance as repellent to the official order of the city. The Baranasi Ghosh Street commenced from Jorasanko where Kaliprasanna Singha, the author of *Hutum Penchar Naksha* lived. Kaliprasanna captured the 'monstrous' other of the Raj merry-making on the streets – the market-place revelry of the lower orders, the noveau-riche dandies, the drunken torpor that is constantly reminded of the colonizer's presence through the firing of bullets to keep track of time – to subvert the 'profanity' on the streets that rattled the official order but never really terminated it.

The urbanization of Calcutta created a space where the rural forms of performance and entertainment were constantly being metamorphosed into newer forms of entertainment that suited the rhythm of the city, and the taste of the new order. However, the comic spirit could never be discarded in search of refined entertainment. The Ahiritola Swang sang:

Bando Mata Surodhuni
Purane Mahima Shuni
Patit Paboni Puratoni
Bishnu Padey Upadan,
Drabamoyi Tabo Naam,
Surasur Narer Janani

The journey of the 'popular' to the 'national', from the rural to the urban, was a journey of the rebellious in the comic spirit. This 'comic' cannot be read as one and a whole because it had multiple forms like the Swang, the Kobigaan, the Jatra, the popular proverbs, the Kalighaat pat, the Bat-tala literature, the Naksha and the farces feeding into the National Theatre.

The comic portrayal of one form would sometimes resemble another. For example, the nineteenth century also witnessed a form of performance that was a variety of the Kobigaan proper, popularly known as Dara-Kobigaan. These were solo performances that took place in the Jatra space and provided a social commentary in rhythm and in tune. Notable amongst its exponents was the revolutionary Dara-Kobi Mukunda Das. The Dara-Kobigaan of Mukunda Das bore striking resemblances to the songs of Jelepara Swang. While Mukunda Das sang:

Jedikey chai Bangladesher (aaj) shokol diki korche graash
Torai shudhu keranir dol, ek borer chaaley holi maat
Emon kore porer haatey bikiye dili sonar desh,
Dhik Bangali nirob roili, thakte koti koti haat.

(qtd. in Dey, 265)

The Jelepara Swang would voice out the same concern in a more comic vein:

Hetha Dalhousie to Chowringhee, dakhal koreche Firingi
Barobajar Baro dhingi marowarir jabor jongi
Armaner hoye shangi Kalutola, Murgihata joy Korechey 'nakhoda'

Both Kobigaan and Swang were popular modes of unrestrained merry-making. The Swang was essentially a rural, ritualistic mode of performance that passed through filtrations and recuperations within the cultural sphere of nineteenth century Calcutta. All these indigenous modes of performance, distanced from the Bengal stage , were undoubtedly rebellious in spirit and voiced out protest, but there was also a creation of a 'group identity' for them vis-à-vis the ways of their performances. One is reminded of the scavenger in Utpal Dutta's *Tiner Talowar*, who remains most of the time beneath a man-hole in the Renaissance city and occasionally peeps outside only to pour a pot of shit at the feet of the Bengali Baboo of refined tastes. *Tiner Talowar*

hints at the two polarities of the 19th century performance – the Baboo theatre constructed in imitation of the English theatre, and the street traditions of swang, kheur, panchali on the other. The latter belong to the subaltern strata of the city and hence like the scavenger remains beneath the man-hole. The 19th century Enlightenment does not light them up while carrying forward the grand, colossal, unified, nationalizing project of the Bengal Renaissance.

III) The Comic Retained, the 'Monstrous' Diluted: Contextualizing the Farces

Much has been said in this chapter about the 'comic', both within and without the colonial cauldron. Whereas the 'comic' body of the street and parlour traditions retained and exhibited the 'rebel', literary humour had to adjust itself and self-fashion its mode and content gradually. As Sudipta Kaviraj says in *Laughter and Subjectivity: The Self Ironical Tradition in Bengali Literature*:

> Literary humour came from several sources, classical, folk and the peculiarly derisive wit that the fragile prosperity of colonial Calcutta gave rise to: the humour of a people who were themselves somewhat bemused at their own historical good fortune, a subtle anxiety about the rapidity with which they were elevated, by their association with British rule, to positions of evidently undeserved eminence. This produced a genre of local town humour which consisted not only in lower classes satirizing the more fortunate, but also the babu bantering his own breed, a trend luxuriating in witty, often somewhat smutty songs. Colonial opportunity for self-advancement created inexplicable cases of rise to fortune which attracted acerbic comment. (382)

As Stephen Greenblatt puts it, 'Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language' (9). For the literati producing the plays, and specifically the farces, self-fashioning needed to be accomplished through the agency of language. It was not a language of the street or the parlour. This language was also not specifically the language of the *Naksha*, deemed to be the predecessor of the farce proper or *Prahasan*. Interestingly, the farces as comic portrayals were authored by the *bhadrolok*, who distinguished himself from the lower orders of the city identifying them as *chhotolok*. For this section of the Bengali intelligentsia, the need for a Bengali nation was more an immediate one than anything else. The need for nation was guided by two vehement reasons:

1. Recognizing the vacuum created by the breaking away of the older order (specifically the feudal order of the rural space), the Bengali now sought to fill up these lost spaces through the means of 'nationalism' – a concept that was fed to him by Western education and coming in close contact with the Western historical/philosophical/literary traditions.
2. A sense of self-respect cropping up due to the realization of the *bhadrolok* as the servile subject of the colonial master. This sense of self-respect has been summed up by Ranajit Guha in his *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and Its Implications* as: 'The self-respect at issue here was not ascribed to want of political independence, but to want of recognition within the framework of colonial dependence.' (qtd. in Roy, A, 9)

The Bengali *bhadrolok* took recourse to language in order to realize their sense of nationalism. Regional nationalism could not suffice to satiate the Bengali intelligentsia as it became 'coterminous' with the colonial order that had subjectivized them to this new notion of 'nationalism'. For this Bengali *bhadrolok*, language needed to be one and unanimous with the Hindu/Aryan identity that provided them the sense of being a 'national' community, an identity which also bound the greater Indian nation that was so diverse as regards the linguistic varieties within it. For the Bengali literati, this was the new Bengali language, not to be mixed with the mother language that they possessed, but a refined language based on the lines of the refined English language that they inherited from their English masters. There was another underlying problem within this recipe of language-based national identity. A certain distinction was necessary to be made from the language of the lower orders, or the language of the 'popular' forms within the colonial city-space of Calcutta. The language of the subaltern strata and the language that the Bengali intelligentsia sought to employ for their nationalizing process were incongruous by the very nature of their serious/comic binary. Satirists like Amritalal Basu commented on the attack on the alleged obscenity on the *Swang* by saying:

> We have lost a lot by derogating them as inferior, bad and obscene. If we seek to adopt the inferior as superior, bad as good and obscene as propriety, then a lot of subjects retain their individuality and are not frowned upon by the world-not belittled constantly.... Swang is not inferior, bad or obscene. In every country the Swang surfaces in the social domain in one or the other form. However, a certain group of uneducated and uncouth people in Bengal have tampered with the Swang and with the unsympathetic attitude of the educated gentlemen, Swang was continually being subdued. (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay, Bi, 5; trans. mine)

Consideration should be placed here not only on the fact that the colonial powers reacted against the indigenous forms as these threatened to expel the master order, but also on the fact that the attitude of the Bengali literati towards the indigenous was hugely disparaging. Amritalal Basu laments on the failure to value the *Swang* as a performance per se but the reasons of such lament stems from two causes:

a) *Swang* being employed solely by the subaltern strata of the society whom he distinguishes as 'uneducated' and 'uncouth'
b) The 'unsympathetic' attitude of the 'educated gentlemen' of Bengal.

The 'educated gentlemen' emerged as the mast-bearers of the Bengali nation. The inclusion of the 'national' into a 'popular' form like the *Swang* was carried by figures like Dadathakur Sarat Pandit and Amritalal Basu. They guided the patriotic, nationalistic fervour that constituted the *Swang* of the early twentieth century. The nation thus had little or no space for the grotesque Bengali 'other' within the greater Bengali nation. The imagination of a Bengali nation for the Bengali *bhadrolok* was also coupled with the craving for a larger 'Indian' nationalism. This identification of the Bengali self with Indian nationalism was channelized by the Young Bengal

or the Derozians, anglicized and antagonistic to the indigenous component of the colonial epicenter. With time, however, the Derozian sense of the nation that rang vehemently in 'My country! In thy days of glory past!' was replaced by a more Hindu/Aryan sense of nationalism that suited the Bengal Renaissance project more than anything else.

The early Bengali farces in colonial Bengal need to be understood within this reference frame of Bengali nationalism – a language-based national identity that sought hard to separate itself from the existent 'popular' order of the indigenous. The laughter of the indigenous 'other' and the grotesque bodies that violated both English Puritanism as well as the greater Bengali dream of 'nationalization' needed a silencing platform. This platform was the Bengali theatre, which owed its emergence to Herasim Lebedeff, but went a long way to incorporate the 'national popular' within its rubric. The theatre and the production of plays (early colonial Bengali farces in this context) was a sanctioned process that did not do much to shake the order of the colonizers. This came probably from the sanction that came from the Bengali elite who did not feel that their culture was being threatened by Western education.

> It was the Orientalist understanding and respect for Hindu civilization that probably impelled the founders to favour the idea of a Hindu College in the first place. The Orientalist belief that Western education should serve not as an end in itself but as the stimulus for changing the indigenous culture from within explains why Bengalis accepted the experiment without a recorded murmur of dissent. It was therefore not a really secular knowledge in Western dress that was to be imparted at Hindu College, but useful knowledge from the West transmitted without ethnocentric bias. (Kopf, 181)

The *bhadrolok* status of the inhabitants of the colonial city was not an ascriptive one; it was rather to be acquired. Within this *bhadrolok* conglomeration however, there remained a question of being or not being 'elite'. An impoverished Bengali Brahmin and a pleasure-loving son of a *Kayastha* landlord would both be included under the umbrella-term of *bhadrolok*. Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay in his *Naksha*, entitled *Kalikata Kamalalay* (1823), provides the hierarchical distinctions within the term *bhadrolok*, establishing the fact that the nineteenth century *bhadrolok* was never a homogenous class in itself. The *bhadrolok* community included rich *babu*s making a fortune as *mucchuddi*s, *dewan*s and *zamindar*s – a class wearing strange clothes and travelling the city-space in their palanquins. They were a leisurely class, spending time in *baithak*s and performing religious rites and rituals. This was the *abhijato* section of the bhadrolok, followed by the *madhyabitto* section which was similar to the preceding section but had less money and less leisure. The bottom of the *bhadrolok* social pyramid comprised of the *daridra athacha bhadrolok* or the 'poor, yet *bhadrolok*'. This section aimed at the same lifestyle of the above two sections but worked in the capacity of *muhuri*s, *bazaar sarkar*s of the *dewan*s, and *mucchuddi*s.

The Figure and Concept of the *Bhand*: from the *Hurbola Bhand*

Hurbola Bhand, the first cartoon magazine in Bangla, began publication from 1st January 1874, just thirty days before the publication of *Basantak*. The periodical was published and printed in the manner of *Punch* and did not continue for more than one year. The figure of the *bhand* in the *Hurbola Bhand*, as the pictures 4 and 5 below reveal, stand in stark contrast by the virtue of its grimace to the grim-faced elite. The long grinning face is consummate with a large head, discordant with the body of the *bhand*. Picture 4 shows the *bhand* sitting beside what is termed as '*tin avatar*' - Chand Bidyabagish, Das Tarkalankar and Aja Bakyabhushan. '*Avatar*' reminds one of Kaliprasanna Singha's naming of the *babu* as the *hathat avatar*. Picture 5 shows the *bhand* standing on mount Chitrakut with figures like Sugribkrishta, Srigalchandra, Hanuprasad, Byaghralal, Shukardas and Ulkamukhi Gupta. Both these pictures portray the difficulty of the inclusion of a figure like the *bhand*, who aspires to be one of the *bhadrolok*, within the social circuit of the *babu*s.

This is more evident from what comes as 'Babu Hurbola's Report on the Bridge' that runs as:

> Very unsubstantial-shaking. The intercourse nominal; confined to anatomical commingling of races, not extending to 'social'. No speaking terms. The Bible is supposed to forbid Christians to speak before introduction, and to command them to punch the heads of those who speak to them before. Hence Europeans enjoy among themselves and avoid their Aryan brethren with a 'how the d—l they got here' expression. The natives, too uncomfortable for conversation among themselves in the midst of crinolines and spurs, retire to one room and from their intrenchment stare at the Europeans-as-gods?
>
> A word to the wise. And to quote our contemporary the Hindoo Patriot's ancient instance – Rome was not built in a day. (*Hurbola Bhand*, March 1874; issue entitled *The Indian Punch*)

Babu Hurbola's report considers the 'otherizing' of the Aryan Bengali by the European master and hence the impossibility of 'bridging' the gap. Removed from this dichotomous position is the figure of the *bhand* itself.

The *bhand* of *Hurbola Bhand* is a caricature of the grotesqueness of the *Swang*'s body. By placing the *bhand* continuously beside the *bhadrolok*, there is an attempt to bring out the 'otherness' that is so specifically a distancing based on the physical constituent of the ideological framework of the nineteenth century Bengali elite. The *bhand* bears the remnants of the *swang* on the street or the strutting *Kobi* of the parlours. But it veers more towards the social pyramid of the *bhadrolok* in the society. Is the figure of the *bhand* therefore a social commentary upon the class composition of the *bhadrolok*? Perhaps it would be essential to analyze the fact that the *bhand* persona is not so much a figure of the indigenous cultural form. It is not the *Swang* and yet a self-fashioned Renaissance figure of nineteenth century Bengal – a concoction between the *abhijato* and the *madhyabitto* or *daridra bhadrolok* that signifies the greater dichotomies included within the great Bengali nationalism.

The farces in consideration here were products by the *abhijato* section of the *bhadrolok*. Of the early farce-writers of nineteenth century Bengal, Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra were the more privileged ones as far as popularity and recognition were concerned. Meanwhile, farce-writing as a genre was not restricted to the elite literati of the Bengal Renaissance. While there were farces for the productions at the theatre of the elite, there were also farces that catered to the tastes of the lower and the middle classes in the performance space of the *Jatra*. In *The Colonial Staged: Theatre in Colonial Calcutta*, Sudipto Chatterjee elaborates the Drama-Audience-Performer relationships of the nineteenth century city-space. Printed drama comprised of texts of the high theatre as well as Bat-tala drama and Jatra plays. The *babu*s, middle class and the lower class that formed the audience were drawn variously towards these forms that found expression in the performance space as public theatre, *Jatra* and other folk forms. It was majorly the *babu*s and the middle class that thronged the audience spaces of the public theatre – a veritable site for the high drama during the time when the farces in consideration were produced.

It has been an attempt in this chapter to acquaint oneself with the varieties of the 'popular'. There has been no concern or effort to trace a similarity or historical continuity between the various forms of indigenous performances, primarily because these were comic eruptions at different or contemporary points during the long nineteenth century in colonial Bengal and Calcutta. Instead, in engaging with the indigenous forms and in dealing with them through the reference frame of urbanization, the metamorphosis of the forms to suit constantly the 'popular' taste has been explored. Most importantly, the preoccupation with the idea of the 'national', as it emerged in the context of nineteenth century Bengal, forms a cornerstone of engaging in the following chapters with the farce proper.

The problematizing of the 'comic', the 'grotesque body' and the contexts of 'laughter' has been to understand the diversities within the greater 'comic' traditions in the nineteenth century urbanized city-space. The performative forms under analysis need to be distinguished from one another within the binaries of the 'liminal' and the 'liminoid'. The 'liminal' here comprises the rural forms that the Great Exodus brought with itself and yet which could not metamorphose under the chaos of colonial modernity. Within the 'liminoid', in fact, one can place the forms that transformed themselves as the changes took place in the working class and the maturing of the public sphere. This also brings one face to face with the situation of a feudal order giving way to an urban aristocracy that is not dependent on birth and lineage but on acquisition of wealth and knowledge imparted by English education.

This chapter also sets the pretext for an engagement with the farces vis-à-vis the problematics of language. Language, as has been said, constitutes the backbone of methods of conceiving the Bengal Renaissance. The language in the farces seems, on the surface, to represent the rebellious spirit of the indigenous. Yet, a closer scrutiny would reveal how and why language was becoming the mode governing the 'popular' taste. The dilution of the 'monstrous' and the retention of the comic thus is an obvious marker apropos the farces, not only because they have to be understood in connection with the indigenous forms of performance but also because they need to be read in their connectedness to the examples of the 'national popular' with which this chapter began.

The chapter began with an introduction of the 'future', 'past' and 'present'. In the course of its engagements, visions separating the three from each other may sometimes have been blurred due to the overlapping of one over the other. This is precisely because more than a linear notion of time here, what one was attempting was the eruptions of the comic and the subsequent effort to control the 'comic' in the 'future', 'past' and 'present' contexts. Interestingly, the 'present' that has been considered in between the 'future' – that is the dramatic productions just before the Dramatic Performances Control Act (1876) – and the 'past' – that is the ritualistic indigenous metamorphosed, controlled and abrogated – is the domain of the early farces of colonial Bengal. Both the 'future' and the 'past' underwent vehement regulations due to their obscene/reactionary contents by the Empire-builders whereas the farces seem clear of any such accusations. However, the farces are not unproblematic, as they are placed within the contemporary social scenario as well as make the constant effort of coming to terms with colonial modernity. The farces also reveal the 'tragic dichotomy' of 'autonomy without modernity or modernity with the acceptance of subjugation' (Kaviraj, 385). The subjects and themes of these farces are as diverse as the different social concerns, movements and attitudes in

the nineteenth century. How are such diversities fitted into the farce proper? Is farce a separate genre or only a possibility within the existing notion of comedy? How are the city and the country spaces reworked within the thematics of the farces? How does the playwright design the colonial subject as the character of his plays? Do these characters voice social concerns? Are they entangled in the language game of greater Bengali nationalism? Such problematics need to be addressed also from the points-of-view of the march against the allegedly obscene literature of Bat-tala, the movements against alcoholism and Kulinism, and the woman question in the inner and outer domains – issues that would be dealt with in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter II: Laughing At 'Selves' and the 'Fairer' Sex

I. About Farces: Bat-tala, Stage and the Comic Tradition

Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall down an open sewer and die. (Mel Brooks)

Distinctions between the genres of 'comedy' and 'farce' entail an imperative intrusion into the subtler distinction between 'high comedy' and 'farce'. To speak about 'high comedy' and 'farce', it becomes necessary to note that:

> These are the two opposite ends of the scale and it is not difficult to isolate the grosser forms of farce which have no ambition to be other than that. But farcical features are so persistent in every type of comedy that it is impossible to ignore them there or to detach them. How, for example, could one approach Moliere without an awareness of his farces and near-farces and their overspill into his most serious plays? There are the peasants and Sagnarelle in *Don Juan* and why did he put Orgon under the table in *Tartuffe*? ... These two concrete examples only begin to suggest the importance of farce as both a stage influence and a habit of mind in the comedy of the whole period... (Brereton, 2)

Farce, therefore, may or may not be a complete genre within itself, but can append to the existing paraphernalia of a comic presentation. The idea or characteristic of the farce per se is to be understood from the point of view of physicality or action within a comic act or performance. In this sense, a farce is entirely or nearly-entirely based on the nuances of the comic body in performance. A comedy is marked specifically by the highlighted wit and humour in its dialogues. Farce, on the other hand, not only takes recourse to the inherent absurdities in the dialogue, but imperatively the physical action on stage. For *Twelfth Night* to be marked distinctly as a 'happy comedy', one must not discard the whole comic physical combat in the sub-plots involving Sir Toby Belch, Maria, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Feste and Malvolio. Malvolio – cross-gartered and dancing in his yellow stockings – is essentially a farcical element within the more serious and official main plot involving Duke Orsino, Olivia, Viola and Sebastian.

Farce involves, distinctively, an act of subversion. This subversion might play within the existing elements of the comic act (or comedy) itself, or rattle the portrayal of the 'existent' within the context of the 'social' or the 'official'. Illyria can be both a utopic and dystopic world-view controlled by the tuning of the farcical. In combat with the official order thus, the 'farcical' threatens to terminate the former, but ends up giving only a nearly-plausible idea of such an act. It is in this sense that farces or the farcical need to be assessed on the reference frame of the given space and time – the nineteenth century in Bengal.

This chapter looks mainly at the 'farces' or 'farcical' plays written and produced on the social themes of Kulinism and Polygamy: *Kulin Kulshorboswo* (Ram Narayan Tarkaratna), *Jamai Barik* (Dinabandhu Mitra), *Biye Paagla Buro* (Dinabandhu Mitra), *Ubhoy Sankat* (Ram Narayan Tarkaratna) and *Nabo Natok* (Ram Narayan Tarkaratna). As the names of the playwrights and the

plays suggest, these 'farces', or what is more popularly named in the vernacular tongue of nineteenth century Bengal as the 'Prohasan', enjoyed the authority of that higher status vis-à-vis what was being produced in the 'low-life' of colonial Calcutta.

Bat-tala, in the colonial city-space of Calcutta, was akin to what one understands by Grub Street in London (presently, Milton Street). The word 'Grub' etymologically means 'an open drain'. In seventeenth century London, numerous lanes surrounding the 'open drain' or sewage system housed the lower orders of the city. This motley crowd comprised of poor, half-learned, hack writers as well as publishers. This part of the city was beyond the 'mapping' of the boundaries of the governmental orders and hence served as a refuge for many a protesting voice. Grub Street publications included Broad-side Ballads, Jest-books and humorous short sketches. The readership of this literature included the local residents of Grub Street and hence the themes of such literary productions centered on sex, scandal and other issues of subverting the official order. Figures like John Milton, Samuel Johnson, Alexander Pope and Jonathon Swift have been residents of Grub Street for considerable periods of time. Pope's *Dunciad* and Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* are deemed as memoirs of the Grub Street.

Similarities cannot be forcefully drawn between the Grub Street of London and the Bat-tala of colonial Calcutta. However, similarities between these two spaces 'within/without' the city can invariably be drawn on the basis of their geography and their literary productions. The similarity between Grub Street and Bat-tala vis-à-vis their literature stems from the genre of the 'popular'. Similarly, just as the domain of Grub Street existed beyond the boundaries of government control, Bat-tala belonged to that part of the colonial city-space which was known as the Black Town, strikingly different from the official world of the White Town.

The literature of Bat-tala was guided by the various residential orders and occupational areas of this space. This part of North Calcutta, unlike the Grub Street, was also the seat of many an elite and 'bhadrolok' of the city. It contained the Shobhabazar Rajbari on the one hand, where Raja Nabokrishna patronized the kobiwalahs of the day, namely Ram Basu, Haru Thakur, Ramprasad Thakur, Jaga and all, and on the other, it contained the 'Great Emporium' or Burrabazar – the market-place of the city. Bat-tala and its vicinities witnessed the other phenomena that characterized nineteenth century Bengal – the prostitutes of Sonagachhi, the Public Theatre in Chitpur, Hindu College, Oriental Seminary, Bethune School, the mosque of Reza Khan, Chitteshwari Temple and the Armenian Church. Detailed accounts of Bat-tala and its literature have been handed down by Reverend James Long in *A Descriptive Catalogue of Bengali Works, 1400 Bengali Books and Pamphlets* (1855); *A Return of the Names and Writings of 515 Persons, connected with Bengali Literature etc.* (1855); and *Publications in the Bengali Language in 1857* (1859).

> Sumit Sarkar has located the principal consumers of battala literature among the swelling urban clerical ranks in the numerous firms and government offices in Calcutta – in a world of 'genteel poverty' of a depressed upper-caste literati, 'within a kind of pre-industrial lower middle class'. Sarkar identifies these educated, high caste, petty urban service and professional groups as 'keranis' or clerks. He also included within the category, pundits losing patronage in the new era, obscure hack-writers, humble school teachers, and unemployed educated youth with highly uncertain job prospects. Comprised of a high-caste 'depressed literati', these petty bourgeois urban groups inhabited a 'liminal' world between the menials and the more prosperous rungs of bhadralok in the city of Calcutta. Rapidly losing their ritual privileges in a harshly competitive service world, typically high-caste fears dominated the literature that this group patronised. Sarkar paints a milieu ridden by anxiety of an upturned social order, as in the mythical apocalyptic doom of 'kaliyuga', in the cheap printed tracts at battala. The anguish and frustration of this group, he holds, were reflected in the flood of 'low' literature pouring out of battala from the 1860s onwards. The fears about the disintegrating social order that are encountered in the farces, Sarkar argues, were typically high caste and patriarchal in nature. (Ghosh, A. 4331)

The Bengali language in the nineteenth century evolved into a kind of modern vernacular that was vested with the capability of voicing the rational and the sublime. Bengali, for the bureaucracy, was a language that needed to be appropriated for administrative reasons and to gain 'crucial local information'. For the native intelligentsia and the literati, this new Bengali became the marker of Indianness as well as a mode of their cultural identity. The colonization/Renaissance project in Bengal strictly defined the boundaries between the 'obscene' and the 'genteel' thus distinguishing the two orders of the Bengali language – one that was 'genteel' and the vehicle of refined cultural expression and the other that was 'obscene', colloquial, polluted, rustic and full of abundant sexuality.

> The canons of polite speech and literature that came to dictate the cultural life of the educated classes in Bengal thus demarcated exclusive social spheres. The hierarchies so constructed were primarily of two kinds. The first established a divide between written and spoken varieties. The second sought to purge the Perso-Arabic element in the language. This was a departure from the folk language of medieval Bengal, which had been a highly syncretic one shared by Hindus and Muslims alike. It employed both colloquial as well as Perso-Arabic words, and borrowed idioms freely from local myths, beliefs and practices of both communities. (Ghosh, A. 4329-4330)

The othering of the unrefined woman, the lowly poor or the 'chhotolok' and the poor Muslims emerged out of the speech patterns and literary taste ushered in by the coming of print culture. The coming of colonial modernity underlined the binaries of 'bhadrolok/chhotolok', 'genteel/ obscene', 'inner/outer', 'national/popular'. The counter culture of Bat-tala ran parallel to the reformist zeal of the urban elite literati of the city – something that can be viewed even in the case of the production of the farces/social farces by these two classes.

This veritable process of dissociation of the Bengali 'baboo' from that of the 'subaltern' strata of the society was marked by the urge or need for a national theatre of the Bengalis – a theatre that was to uphold and cater to the taste of the new English-educated class. In 1835, the first Bengali play to be staged in the style of the European theatre was Bharatchandra Ray's 'Vidyasundar' at the palatial building of Nabin Chandra Basu in north Calcutta. One can witness

in 'Vidyasundar', the incident where Vidya urges Sundar to stay back at his in-laws' house and attempts to tempt him through the promise of a Kheur performance:

> *Nade Shantipur haite kheru anaibo*
> *Nutan nutan thate kheru shunaibo.* (Bandyopadhyay A, 358)
>
> (Would bring Kheur from Nadia, Shantipur
> They'd perform Kheur in ever newer tunes) translation mine

To incorporate the 'cheap' or the popular urban (i.e., the Kheur) into the modes of the English-styled theatre at Nabin Basu's house, there was a need for a license – a license that came both from the mast-bearers of the Hinduisation project of the Bengal Renaissance as well as the more 'radical' elitists of the Young Bengal. The reactions to 'Vidyasundar', however, were myriad and the label of 'immorality' was constantly attached to it even as late as 1873. *Madhyastha*, edited by Manomohan Basu, brought out an article in defence of 'Vidyasundar' in 1873. It said:

> Our sympathetic and empathetic reading circle would be much aggrieved to hear that the warriors who have taken up the enterprise of erasing immorality from the society have cast their benevolent swords first and foremost on Bharatchandra's 'Vidyasundar'. On that day, certain book-sellers of Battala were imprisoned for the sole crime of selling that book. They, however, have bailed themselves and a lawsuit would begin very soon. News has spread that the book-sellers are raising funds – many people apart from their own kith and kin have come forward to their help. Many of the high-bred Bengalis – who are well-educated and of a good moral character – who detest fully any and every kind of immorality within the society – have not shirked from helping those poor book-sellers. They assert that if 'Vidyasundar' is to be discarded, then Shakespeare, Byron, Fielding, Swift, Renald, Kalidas, Kashiram Das, Kabi Kankan should be unreadable... (*Madhyastha*, 740; Translation mine)

Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's (1787-1848) humorous sketches like *Kalikata Kamalalay*, *Naba Babu Bilas*, *Naba Bibi Bilas* etc., popularly known as 'Naksha', are deemed to be the predecessors of the farce proper/*Prohasan* on the Bengali stage or in Bengali literature. Another tremendously popular Naksha from later years was that of Kaliprasanna Singha (1840-1870), entitled *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (1862). The farce as a separate genre or a newly developed genre, particularly in the print-culture of nineteenth century Bengal can also be reviewed or understood from the perspective of the category of the newly developed Bengali language in the colonial social scenario. The closest English equivalent for the Naksha, as per the dictionary, would be 'a sort of literary burlesque'. Farce, in this regard, and also the farces taken up here for analyses, need to be understood from the points-of-view of what was sanctioned and what was 'not sanctioned' within the reformist project in nineteenth century Bengal. Numerous farces, listed below[1], were produced by the anonymous hack-writers of Bat-tala, which have passed into oblivion bearing the brunt of 'obscenity':

[1] The names of these farces have been obtained from Shri Nirmal Shil, who collected them from legal documents that served as contracts between libraries and publishers when the Bat-tala publishers sold their literature to the libraries and other buyers. The texts of these farces were sold off by Shrimati Sukumari Dasi to a government employee, named Shri Ramsahay Shil.

1. Akkel Gurum
2. Moja na Saja
3. Akal Kushmando
4. Lakh Taka
5. Jamai Bodol
6. Manik Jor
7. Abdarey Khoka
8. Chherey De Maa Kedey Bachi
9. Piriter Athakathi
10. Bou Babu
11. Bahadur Chhele
12. Gupto Gaya e Pindadaan
13. Aasto Pagli
14. Gulir Pindi
15. Premer Lukochuri
16. Akkel Golami
17. Baowa Dimer Bachcha
18. Tinguli Marfiya
19. Luchijal
20. Hitey Biporit
21. Dumurer Phul
22. Shob Bhul
23. Meye Churi
24. Jaal Manush
25. Lakshmir Jhaapi
26. Protidaan
27. Odol Bodol
28. Chor Hanumaan
29. Beshyabari Kapteni
30. Piriter Kaathpiprey
31. Panko Bhut
32. Ranga Bou
33. Beshyar Chheler Onnoprashon
34. Paashkora Maag
35. Jyanto Baaper Sraddho
36. Madhukhuro
37. Gai na Bolod
38. Swadheen Zenana
39. Adorer Dheki
40. Naak-Kata Shepai
41. Na Morey Bhut
42. Jamai Babu
43. Ranger Golam
44. Beshyaleela
45. Chiching Phaank
46. Thubro Meye
47. Chaturali
48. Shabash Jamai
49. Aatkurir Borobyata
50. Morey Bancha
51. Gupto Prem
52. Lochcha Babu
53. Pitrireen
54. Mastermoshai
55. Premer Pathshaala
56. Jaal Meye

None of the farces listed above can be found within the extant literature of nineteenth century Bengal. However, most of these farces earned accolades as popular jatra performances in the city-space of Calcutta. The marginalization of Bat-tala farces and the upholding of the 'high' farces in discussion in this Chapter is part and parcel of a singular process that channelized and witnessed the coming of the Public Theatre in Bengal. The need for a Public Theatre for the Bengali nation (and here, 'nation' is used as a marker for the urban, elite, reformist Bengali clan of the Renaissance) should not be understood from the perspective of the establishment of theatre per se by Herasim Lebedeff, for there is a distinction between the theatre practices of Lebedeff and the reformist Hindu Bengali. In view of the linguistic divide between the two varieties of Bengali language in conflict with each other, the farces in consideration were in the line of the performative circuits of the National Theatre of the Bengalis rather than the above-listed farces produced in the low-life print culture of the Black Town. This calls forth a necessary engagement with the category of 'farce' per se in order to understand the problematics of laughter with an eye for social reform. Before that, however, it is important to delve a little deeper into the nascent 'Bengali' theatre of the Russian enthusiast, Herasim Lebedeff.

II. From the English 'Jatra' to the National Theatre

The Bengally Theatre was initiated in the year 1795 by a Russian enthusiast named Herasim Lebedeff. The first play to be performed in this theatre house was *Kalpanik Swangbadal*, which was in turn a translation of the English farce entitled *The Disguise* by M. Joddrell. Lebedeff translated this and another farce, *Love is the Best Doctor*, under the supervision of his language-tutor, Golucknath Das. *Kalpanik Swangbadal*, the first Bengali farce translated from English, had several characters, like Chowkidar, Paharawallah, Chor, Ghunia, Ukil, Gomastah, Dakat etc. It was after its successful running for two consecutive nights that, Lebedeff wished to perform it within the city of Calcutta and also the rural precincts of the city. In fact, Lebedeff also wished to establish a permanent theatre in the city. However, none of the dreams of the Russian enthusiast could take shape. His dream project was hindered by his staunch rival, Thomas Roeworth, a member of the theatre company run by the East India Company. As a confidante in Roeworth's conspiracy, Joseph Battle joined Lebedeff's theatre group as a set-designer and was instrumental in channelizing actors and actresses to the Company's theatre. In consequence, Lebedeff departed to his homeland.

The above narrative points to the fact that Lebedeff was competing mainly with the English theatres within the city.Though Lebedeff sought to produce plays both in Bengali and in English, it is imperative to interrogate as to who were the audience for his plays and what made Lebedeff's rivals so apprehensive? Two consecutive advertisements for Lebedeff's plays (reproduced from Chowdhury, A., 5 & Joddrell, 6) ran thus:

By Permission of the Honourable the Governnor-General/-MR. LEBEDEFF'S/New Theatre in the Doomtullah/DECORATED IN THE BENGALI STYLE/Will be opened very shortly, with a Play called/THE DISGUISE./The characters to be supported by Performers/of both sexes./ To commence with Vocal and Instrumental/Music, called/THE INDIAN SERENADE.

Calcutta, Monday, the 21st of March, 1796/BENGALLIE THEATRE,/of Mr. Lebedeff/No. 25,/DOOMTOOLAH/THE DISGUISE,/A Comedy, in three Acts,/Written by M. JODDRELL, ESQ/TRANSLATED By Mr. Lebedeff/ACT 1. Entirely Bengalese- ACT II, Scene the /First, into Moors,-the Second Scene into Bengalese, and the Third (and last) Scene of this Act, will be de-/livered in English.- Act III, translated entirely into/Bengalese.

Both the advertisements for the play hint at the kind of audience that thronged the theatre spaces to watch the play. The one-act play of the first night was transformed to a three-act one in the second night. Questions arise as to whether the third scene of the second act of the three-act play, which was entirely in English, was also enacted by Bengali actors? More importantly, did the common Bengali masses formed part of the audience for this Anglo-Bengali production? The stilted Bengali dialogues of the play do not suggest that the indigenous lover of Kobigaan and Jatra would be enticed by Lebedeff's production:

> *Bhalo Ishwar onugroho korun, ami koriya enechhi ekti bishoy amar monoster. Shoshimukhi shondeho nasti amar kathaye pratyay koriyachen. ...*
> *Akhonkar diney strilok shokol amon motta hoiyachhe je kinchit morda akarer mayya hoy, taharai upojukto purush hoite.*

This was not the kind of Bengali that would be understood by the indigenous crowd of the city. Quite logically, then, majority of the audience for the play comprised the official orders of the White Town, and hence it heightened the apprehensions of the rival camp headed by Thomas Roeworth. The only other production of the period of a play translated into Bengali from a European language was at the Chandannagar Theatre in 1808, of a French play *L'Avocat.*

The indigenous endeavour for establishing a National Theatre was taken up by Prasannakumar Tagore who initiated the process with English translations of Sanskrit plays (*Uttarramcharit* translated by Wilson) and Shakespeare's *Julius Ceasar.* This endeavour, however, could not appease either the Hindu-Bengali camp or the English camp. The indigenous audience was more enamoured by the *Akhrai* and *Bulbulir Larai*[2], that were the most prominent and popular forms of entertainment. A handful of the readers of the then daily, *Samachar Chandrika,* complained that reports of the 'new' theatre have been published in the daily without even mentioning the *Bulbulir Larai* at the house of babu Ashutosh Deb or the musical *Akhrai* at the residences of Mohanchand Basu or Kashinath Mukhopadhyay (Chowdhury A., 283). The Bengali popular taste remained unchanged 26 years later too, when *Shakuntala* was enacted at the house of Babu Ashutosh Deb. Anyway, the theatre at the residence of Prasannakumar Tagore was opened on 28th December, 1831. The audience at Prasannakumar's residence comprised the Judge Sir Edward Ryan, Colonel Young, Radhakanta Deb and many others. Just as the enactment disappointed the indigenous lovers of the *Akhrai* in the city, the reaction of the White Town to the performance can be discerned from the reports of the English newspaper, *Asiatic Journal,* of the January-April issue of 1832 (the reviewer used the pen-name 'East Indian'):

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[2] The combat between birds was akin to the bear-baiting of Renaissance England or cock-fights that still take place in several parts of India. The spectacle attracted various classes of residents of the colonial city and were sponsored and housed by the elite babus of the city. Reports on the spectacle would form one of the main ingredients of bulletins of the then times. The term 'Bulbulir Larai' has come to be associated with the affluence, leisure and indolence of the nineteenth century Bengali nouveau riche of the city of Calcutta.

> We hear that the performances are to be in the English language. Who advised this strange proceeding we know not, but it is surely worth re-consideration – what can be worse than to have the best dramatic compositions in English language murdered outright, night after night, foreign manners misrepresented and instead of holding the mirror up to nature caricaturing everything human? We recommend our Hindu patriots and philanthropists to instruct their countrymen by means of schools and when they are fitted to appreciate the dramatic compositions of refined nations, it will be quite time enough to erect theatre ... A theatre among the Hindus with the degree of knowledge they at present possess will be like building a palace in the waste. (qtd. in Das Gupta, 283-84)

The earlier half of the nineteenth century was primarily a period of imitation of the English masters for the indigenous intelligentsia. The first play to be written by a Bengali was *The Persecuted* by Reverend Krishnamohan Banerjee in 1831, the same year as that of the establishment of the Hindu Theatre at the residence of Prasannakumar Tagore. Ironically, the name 'Hindu Theatre' accorded to this new residential space by Prasannakumar Tagore was specifically meant for the non-Hindu white and the English-educated literati audience.

The failure of both projects – Lebedeff's theatre and Prasannakumar Tagore's 'Hindu Theatre' – was guided by indigenous audience taste. Lebedeff may have been in love with the Bengali language and dreamt of producing plays in and for the Bengali, but his translation of popular songs from Bharatchandra and characters like the Chowkidar, Chor, Ukil, Gomastah etc., fell short of what the common Bengali enjoyed as popular entertainment. On the other hand, Prasannakumar Tagore's initiative of forming a theatre for the Bengali was meant only for a certain section of the Bengali – the upper crust. Here, was a deliberate or not-so-deliberate method of segregating the theatre audience. As is reported, many a times when the audience produced tickets to obtain a seat at the theatre performance, an individual would shout 'Sir, Front Seat!', 'Sir, Side Seat!', simply by judging the audience member by his dress.

The detailed account presented above on the duality and difference inherent in the theatre projects of the two individuals – the Russian and the Bengali – forms a cue to the re-reading of the farces taken up in this chapter and the consecutive one. The Bengali drama produced for enactment in the residence-theatres of the nouveau riche were mainly of two kinds – (a) adaptations of Sanskrit plays in Bengali and (b) translations of English or French plays in Bengali (of which Shakespeare was the most regular). Social drama in the garb of 'farce' formed a part of the reformist project of the mast-bearers of the Bengal Renaissance. Yet, the farces in analysis do not exhibit a continuum with respect to their propensity to serve as the methods of correcting the conduct of the masses – masses that remained enamoured by the spectacles of popular entertainment forms. Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, whose *Kulin Kulshorboswo* was enacted thrice at the house of Ramjoy Basak (March 1857), and *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal*, *Chokkhudaan* and *Ubhoy Sankat* were enacted 9-10 times at the Pathuriaghata Ranganatyalay and *Nabo Natok*

was enacted at the Jorasanko Theatre on 05.01.1867, was necessarily a part of the Hinduization project which voiced its concern against 'obscenity', was vocal about Sati, widow re-marriage and the Age of Consent Bill, and also maintained an obdurate stand-point against overt Westernization of traditional values. The changes in the content, language and dimensions of the farces probably came along with the changes in the spaces of performance production. To understand these changes within the reference frame of social upheavals is also to understand the farces in the light of the tripartite framework: society-performance text-audience.

III. The Woman and the Inner Domain: Facets of *Kulinism*, Conjugality & Emasculation of the Bengali Male

Kulin Kulshorboswo (1854)

The first indictment in the form of a social commentary, produced by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, is a prolonged essay entitled *Patibrotopakhyan* (1853). It was the announcement of a reward by the Zamindar, Kalindrachandra Roychowdhuri, of the Kundi district in Rangpur, which encouraged Ram Narayan to produce this essay. The content and theme of the essay was to centre on the subject of the *Pativrata* or the 'dedicated wife'. Ram Narayan established in the essay, with insights into other issues, that the traits of a perfect and dedicated wife is guided by the fact that she is pained by the husband's pain, is happy in the husband's happiness, grows pale and shrivelled in the absence of the husband and accompanies him on his funeral pyre (*sahamarana/ anumarana*). A woman possessing all of these above traits is termed by Ram Narayan as the *Sattvika Pativrata.* The system of Sati (comprising of both *anumarana* and *sahamarana*) had been banned by the colonial government in Bengal as early as 1829. However, Ram Narayan was still pro-Sati in his views as late as 1853 when he produced his essay.

Kulin Kulshorboswo (1854), the first play produced by Ram Narayan, was also written to earn rewards and accolades. It was on the announcement of the reward again by the same Zamindar, Kalindra Roychowdhuri, that Ram Narayan produced his *Kulin Kulshorboswo.* Ram Narayan, who was a student of the Sanskrit College, under the supervision of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar in 1843-1853, and also served as a teacher of the same college in 1855-1882, was deeply influenced by the social revolution that Vidyasagar sought to bring about in the context of the Bengal Renaissance. Vidyasagar began as many as three social reform movements: (i) Widow Re-marriage (ii) Abolition of Kulinism (or polygamy) from society and (iii) Abolition of Child Marriage. In fact, Vidyasagar considered *Kulin Kulshorboswo* as a literary mouthpiece for his reform movement. His will mentions that he had actually bought the copyright for this play.

Before venturing into a detailed study of *Kulin Kulshorboswo* as a play reflecting the contemporary social conditions (especially of the womenfolk) and also more importantly, as a farce per se, it is essential to consider a few insights into the more immediate topics of Sati and Kulinism. In 'Production of an Official Discourse on "Sati" in Early Nineteenth Century Bengal', Lata Mani points at the emergence of a discourse on Sati where on the one hand the woman never had any agency and on the other the indigenous 'other' only appended the banning of the ritual by the colonial government in redefining the *vyavasthas* mentioned in the Hindu shastras. This indigenous lot comprised of the high-bred pundits:

> It is evident that the arguments in favour of prohibiting sati were not primarily concerned with its cruelty or 'barbarity' though many officials did maintain that sati was horrid, even as an act of volition. It is also clear that officials in favour of legislative prohibition were not interventionists, contemptuous of indigenous culture nor advocates of change in the name of 'progress' or Christian principles. On the contrary, officials in favour of abolition were arguing that such action was consistent with the policy of upholding indigenous religious tradition, even that such a policy necessitated intervention. And indeed this was how the regenerating mission of colonisation was conceptualised: not as the imposition of a new Christian moral order but as the recuperation and enforcement of the 'truths' of indigenous tradition.... The arguments of abolitionists were thus developed within the ambit of "religion". The pros and cons of sati were systematically debated as doctrinal considerations. In this sense the debate on abolition might be fruitfully interpreted as, in part, a conflict over scriptural interpretation. In employing scriptures to support their view the abolitionists in effect resurrected the vyawasthas of pundits that had been marginalised in earlier official readings of the scriptures. In particular, they re-examined the discussions between officials and pundits leading to the formulation of the 1813 regulation. These previously marginalised vyawasthas were now reactivated by officials both as testimony of the safety of abolition and as index of the ignorance of natives. Official debt to the pundits in interpreting the texts was not acknowledged. (5)

The historical discourse on Sati has been tightly compartmentalized into the Anglicist/Orientalist binary. Lata Mani, on the other hand points towards the colonial intervention into this whole 'religious' system of the Hindus, which could not have been regulated/abrogated without indigenous (Hindu Brahmin) appendages. The abolition of the practice of Sati also based itself on the divide between the 'good' sati and the 'bad' sati. The British government, during the initial years of establishment in Bengal, had no intention of interfering with the 'religion' of the subjects. In fact the civil law courts were also allowed to carry on their legislation in accordance to the scriptures as well as in the indigenous language. On the contrary, when it became imperative to ban such 'barbaric' practices like the Sati, indigenous assistance needed to be sought from the Hindu pandits in order to textualize the colonial intervention in the production of the textual discourse on Sati. This discourse, which sought legitimacy from Hindu authorities, but articulated itself trough colonial dissursivization, was the more romantic kind that enabled visual imaginations of the inhuman treatment of the woman on the funeral pyre – images that have been etched profusely by artists like Charles Doyly and Solvyns.

The system of Kulinism was begun by the King Ballalsena. The Brahmins under this system came to be divided into Kulin, Srotriya, Gouna Kulin and Vamsaja. A Kulin girl, if married to any male from the other three Brahmin castes, was said to have become an outcaste. Ballalsena accorded the title of 'Kulin' to an individual only if he possessed nine specific qualities:

> *achaaro binoyo bidya pratishtha tirthadarshanam*
> *nishthabrittistapo danam nabadha kulalakshanam*
>
> (A Kulin is deemed as one who is traditional, polite, educated, established, has gone to pilgrimages, is dedicated, with occupation, and practices meditation and charity).

With the passage of time, however, Brahmins being unable to stick to the nine-fold qualities, Debibar Ghatak introduced a new system of hereditary classification among them. Before this classification, marriage could be conducted among any of the four categories of Brahmins, but now marriages could not be held outside a particular sub-caste. This left many Kulin girls spinsters, and a Kulin husband, being a rare species, had to marry innumerable times to save Kulin girls from the shame of remaining a spinster. In most cases, the Kulin husband was unable to bear the responsibility of his wives. A Kulin husband would visit each of his wives once a year or a lifetime, demand money from the in-laws in keeping with the status of his Kulinism and mal-treat his wife without even having the responsibility of leading a conjugal life with her.

Due to delay in marriage, Kulin spinsters would often lead secret 'immoral' lives undergoing abortion, committing suicide or running away as outcastes. A Kulin male, marrying innumerable Kulin women, could hardly lead a conjugal life with any of his wives. This led to 'immoral' practices amongst the Kulin wives and also to the system of marrying girls to old grooms. The children born to the Kulin wives out of their 'immorality' also came to be deemed as Kulins. On the other hand, with the abolition of Sati, the death of one Kulin husband meant the emergence of innumerable widows in society – another social issue addressed constantly by Vidyasagar. The system of Kulinism gathered a number of evil social practices and consequences around it of which dowry system should also be considered as one of the foremost. *Kulin Kulshorboswo* addresses Kulinism as also the consequential practices surrounding it.

Biographical data on Ram Narayan reveal that his play was shaped by a real-life incident. While studying in the eastern part of Bengal, Ram Narayan encountered a beautiful Kulin girl, Kamini, in the household where he stayed. Kamini's husband had a number of wives. Once, on his visit to the in-laws, the husband was infuriated to see Kamini reclined on the couch and screamed at her audacity demanding that she satiate him with wealth venerating his position as a respectable Kulin. Helpless and clueless, Kamini clarified that she did not have the wealth to satisfy him. The husband left, burning in rage and screaming that he had not been suitably treated, vowing never to return again. A few days after this incident, Kamini committed suicide.

If the above account holds true, *Kulin Kulshorboswo* can be hardly considered as a farce in the technical sense of the term. The story revolves around a number of characters and a single incident where the Kulin Kulapalak Bandopadhyay is frantically searching for a Kulin groom to marry off his four daughters aged 32, 26, 15 and 8 respectively. The marriage-makers find out an old and senile Kulin groom to whom the four daughters of the Kulapalak are arranged to be married. Ram Narayan designed his play according to the norms laid down in the *Natya Shastra.* Divided into six acts, the play makes use of such devices as the *naandi* (invocation of gods and goddesses) and *sutradhar.* The entry of the Kulapalak, or the father of the four spinster Kulin girls is aided by self-introductory dialogues that bear resemblances with Kalidasa's *Mudrarakshasha.* Most importantly, however, the initial dialogues of the play as mouthed by the sutradhar anticipate a clear picture of the class composition of the audience of the play. The sutradhar says:

> Sutradhar: There's no point in exaggeration; let me glance at the sabha. (*Looks all around*) Ah! What an excellent crowd. The sight of this sabha and pondering on it for a while leaves the soul swimming in the sea of peace and calm. This sabha is glorified by the presence talented pandits and the humble, wealthy babus. (translation mine)

The sutradhar further elaborates the fact that his aim is to introduce the audience to the excellent play that has been composed by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna in *sadhu bhasha.* The use of varieties of language and, colloquialism in accordance with the characters forms one of the distinguishing markers of farce as a genre. *Kulin Kulshorboswo*, as a play is replete with myriad characters. These characters exemplify the inner and the outer domains of the Bengali society of nineteenth century Bengal. However, considering the composition of the characters is from various rungs of society, the playwright has broadly based his dialogues according to the rules of Sanskrit drama. The Natya Shastra stresses that the language of dialogues to be delivered by the characters in a play must be classified into Sanskrit and Prakrit, with the Prakrit language being confined to women, lesser mortals and drunkards. The language of *Kulin Kulshorboswo* being entirely Bengali, Ram Narayan Tarkaratna attempts to mark off the language usage into Sanskritized Bengali and common Bengali. Within the garb of this Sanskritized Bengali, the playwright attempts to redefine the Kulin subject and his nine-fold qualities echoing and parodying Ballalsena. In Act II, the ghatak (match-maker) Shubhacharya describes the Kulin: as

Baladam Langalam, Jaulam, Kardamam, Moikarshanam
Chyacham Kshetram Kodalancha Nabadha Kastey Lakshanam

Quite clearly, this is Ram Narayan's dig at the purified, Sanskritized Bengali that marked the formal prose of nineteenth century Bengal. For Ram Narayan who was self-fashioning himself in the context of the Bengali Renaissance, the process needed to be accomplished through the agency of language. Hence there arises the need to redefine the usages and the users of the new Bengali and its forms within this context.

The common spoken Bengali (*chalet bhasha*) becomes the marker of the dialogues of the inhabitants of the inner domain of the Bengali household – the woman. For Tanika Sarkar,

> A dread of prolonged and fatally weakening fevers, and of sudden and unexpected epidemics, structured the self-awareness of Bengalis. Enough ecological information had come in by the first three decades of the century to build up a pessimistic picture of the land, the air and the people. Contrasts between an earlier era and present times were most often made in terms of impaired health. The woman in much of nineteenth century literature presides over the sick-bed. Interestingly even though children, young women and agricultural labourers were the worst victims of fevers and epidemics, it was the vulnerability and degeneration of the body of the Hindu male babu which became the most significant sign of the times. One might even say that this is how the Bengali middle class sought to express its hegemonic aspirations; not by attributing itself political or economic leadership roles, not through claims to power, but through ascribing to itself all the ills and deprivations that marked the nineteenth century Bengali society as a whole. (2001, 32)

The Bengali household in the nineteenth century was presided over by the authorial voice and position of the *karta* or the Bengali male. The *karta* within this inner domain performed the position which he could not play in the outer domain of the colonial milieu. The notion of the effeminate Bengali male and his subjection to the process of emasculation, constantly voiced in the nineteenth century periodicals were in contrast to the inner domain of the Hindu Bengali household where 'conjugality' meant the subordination of the female subject to the male.

> Women's voices had frequently been borrowed by male authors to express a profound sense of bleakness about her existence. Jayadev's Radha had remained implacably angry about sexual double standards. A particular stream within eighteenth-century Shakta devotional poetry- the Agamani songs- would use the mother's voice to mourn Durga's imminent parting at the end of her annual visit to her parent's home: Do not pass away the night of Nawami, leave her with me just a little longer.' These songs, enormously popular throughout the nineteenth century, would find a double resonance from within a very wide-ranging age group among Bengali women. (Sarkar, T., 2001, 45)

Kulin Kulshorboswo separates the two domains of the inner and the outer within the text of the play. Ram Narayan Tarkaratna makes profuse usage of the woman's voice within the inner domain of the household. These voices echo the parameters of conjugality that made the *karta*, the king of the inner domain. The myth of conjugality in the colonial context in Bengal was based solely on the concept of love. The womenfolk in the play mourn aloud and mourn the lack of love in the absence of the Kulin husband unable to pay regular visits to the wives. How real thus is Ram Narayan's concerned voice in the context of the play, with the woman question seemed to have been guided by the paradigm of 'conjugality through love', something that shaped the Pativrata of *Patibrotopakhyan*. The third act initiated by the entrance of the Brahmani, or the wife of the Kulapalak, marks the use of 'farcical' in language:

> *Chhita phota tantra mantra kotoi chharibo*
> *Bhera kore shey betarey rakhibo baritey*
> *Jeno aar nahi chaaye ghoretey jaitey*
> *E shobetey jobe bosh hoibe jamai*
> *Aar ki thakibey tobey shukher kamai* (*Kulin Kulshorboswo*, 21)

The Brahmani reveals her 'ulterior' motive of enticing the son-in-law through tantra-mantra so that he never speaks of leaving the house of the in-laws – an arrangement that would spell eternal happiness and bliss on the domestic scene. The outer domain marked by the strong claims of the reformists against the social evils of Kulinism, polygamy and widow re-marriage is starkly contrasted by the constant longing for love by the woman subject. A more grotesque form of the Brahmanni's desires is re-iterated in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jamai Barik* that strips off 'conjugality' and longing for love and upholds the domestic front as the site for a physical duel.

In a conversation amongst themselves the women in the play comment that their current ruler (here, the colonial government) refuses to interfere in the religion of the subjects. This is in direct resonance with the innumerable articles that were being published in the then periodicals against the system of Kulinism and polygamy like: *Samachar Darpan, Friend of India, Sambad Bhaskar, Sambad Prabhakar*, two instances of which follow:

CIVILIZATION OF THE HINDOOS

To

The Editors of the Friend of India

...We are, therefore, come to a resolution to entreat you, together with your contemporaries, and all the gentlemen of the first rank, that you will exert your liberality, by advising the Governor General, who we learn, like his predecessor, takes a great interest in the Natives, and spares no cost for their welfare, to be so kind as to pass a law for abolishing the practices of the Koolins.....

Yours obediently

Certain Inhabitants of Dacca

- Friend of India, 16.04.1840

We observe that the presentation of the petition for the abolition of Koolin Polygamy, by the Secretary for the promulgation of social reforms, among our countrymen, has produced some sensation among the Brahmins. Some of the more influential members of that order have, we hear, held two preliminary meetings in the premises occupied by the Hindu Metropolitan College, to concoct measure for calling a general meeting of the Koolin Brahmins, to petition the Legislative Council, soliciting them not to interfere with their domestic concerns.

- Hindu Intelligencer, 6.8.1855

(qtd. in Basu, S. 171, 176)

The farcical in *Kulin Kulshorboswo* is the farcical inherent in the whole system of Kulinism. But more than a farcical play, *Kulin Kulshorboswo* is an indictment against an existent social evil. When the male characters speak in the play, they speak against Kulinism, and it is in accordance to the norms laid down in the Shastras and scriptures of the Hindu religion. The debate between Dharma and Adharma, in Act IV of the play point at the dilution and contamination of the Hindu way of life. Dharma clarifies that the woman bought by a Kulin is less of a wife and more of a slave. Her sons, according to the Shastras, are to be deemed as sons of a slave. He adds

again that these sons of a sold woman are banned from Dharma and are akin to Chandals[3]. The character of Dharma in the play is Ram Narayan's mouthpiece for reminding the reader/ audience of the ideal way of life in a Hindu household closely knit by conjugal love – something that is at stake in the wake of colonial modernity. It is in the verbal duels between Dharma and the characters who are 'fake' Hindus that the humour of the play is brought out. However, this is not farcical humour that physicality of a situation evokes but a social commentary moulded in the satirical vein and adhering to the ideological crisis of the Hindu Brahmin Bengali male.

However, the farcicality inherent in physical action within the play is evident in the character of Bhola, the servant of the house-hold. Both his language and the comic gestures of his body bring out the streaks of the farce in *Kulin Kulshorboswo*. His dialogues smack of the more immediate concerns of existence than the reformist missions of the elite class. He says:

> *Mogar kopaley duk nekechhey Gosain*
> *Khatti khatti monu ettu boshti payi nai*
> *Boshi ghorey pyaat bhore khati nai payi*
> *Chakuri jhokomari kaam kori mui tai.* (*Kulin Kulshorboswo*, 38)

The farcical in these lines is more in line with the Bat-tala farces that employed characters from the lower rungs of society, their 'everyday' in gathering a two-square meal as well as their plight in the monstrosity of the 'modern' colonial condition. As Bhola says, '*Chakuri jhokomari kaam kori mui tai*', it contains the elements of aspiration and frustration that is part and parcel of the 'chakri' condition in the context of nineteenth century Calcutta. As Sumit Sarkar says,

> Ramakrishna's conception of evil repeatedly linked together kamini, kanchan, and the dasatya of chakri: lust, as embodied invariably in women, gold, and the bondage of the office-job. Wives with their luxurious ways instill into their husbands a thirst for money, and this in turn forces men into office-work. The temptations of kamini and kanchan are age-old themes, but their association with chakri is new.... For Ramakrishna, the woman to whom one could not relate as to a mother invariably represents the threat of kamini, lust incarnate. Not least among the many paradoxes of the Ramakrishna movement is the way a saint with such apparent misogynist traits came to have many enthusiastic women devotees: middle-aged or elderly bhadralok housewives and widows, even actresses of prostitute origin. This was happening after a generation of male bhadralok initiatives concentrated on women's questions and seeking what by the 1860s was being called 'stri swadhinata, the 'freeing' of women through education and reform from the more obvious of patriarchal disabilities and prejudices (sati, the ban on widow remarriage, polygamy). (1992, 1546)

The brevity of Bhola's dialogue and his curt presence on stage is a device that Ram Narayan uses as a strong ironical comment against the main incident of the play. Here is the comic body in action, screaming in colloquial subaltern tongue against the Hindu official order of the social strata. The female concern against the evils of Kulinism finds itself operating in occasional remarks that are sometimes farcical by virtue of their gesture of comic physicality:

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[3] Chandal is a part of the Shudra caste of the four castes in the Hindu system- Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Chandals were looked down as untouchables.

Aiburo theke mor boyish hoilo bhor
Nuro di mukhe Ballaler (*Kulin Kulshorboswo*, 34)

Kulin Kulshorboswo ends thus:

Bor dekhi bamagon kore gondogol
Bibaha nirbaho holo hari hari bol (*Kulin Kulshorboswo*, 75)

The final couplet starkly points to the inevitability of widowhood of the four daughters of Kulapalak as '*hari hari bol*' is not a celebratory utterance on the occasion of marriage, but the utterances on the way to the cremation ground. *Kulin Kulshorboswo* was first performed at the Oriental Theatre in the house of Ramjoy Basak in March 1857. It was performed thrice again at the same venue. Not altogether a farce, the play was instrumental in mouthing certain immediate social concerns and paved the way for various other farces that came to be written in later years on the same theme like: Loknath Bandopadhyay's *Kulin Charitra Natok* (1860), Shyamacharan Bandopadhyay's *Naboramani Natok* (1861) and Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jamai Barik* (1872).

Jamai Barik (1872)

If *Kulin Kulshorboswo* made rare departures to the 'farcical' in the portrayal of women and the lowly mortals, *Jamai Barik* (1872) emerges victorious to a considerable extent in pointing at the laughable monstrous. The play has nothing of the agenda that Ram Narayan constantly upheld in dealing with the subject of Kulinism. Whereas *Kulin Kulshorboswo* painted the picture of the 'conjugal' Hindu home as pathetic with the yearning of love by the womenfolk, *Jamai Barik* engages in recasting women in the light of being the 'monstrous'. Dinabandhu Mitra engages with ample physical action in the play, employs the language of the commonest of the commons throughout, and finally shapes a social commentary, a farce that subjects Kulinism to a reference frame that is bereft of the tag of agenda-literature.

Bittokoulinyo or polygamy that derives from the Kulinism of wealth has the added problems of having co-wives in the same household. *Kulkoulinyo* or the traditional form of Kulinism does not entail such dangers. *Jamai Barik* bespeaks of this system of *Bittokoulinyo* and the appendages of polygamy and sons-in-law residing forever in the in-laws' house (*gharjamai*). Abhaykumar marries Kamini, daughter of the Zamindar Bijoyballabh, and stays in the *jamai barik* (barrack for sons-in-law). However, he fails to consummate his marriage with Kamini because of her outrageous nature and short temper. Once Kamini's behaviour enrages him such that he leaves the in-laws' house for his own house but is calmed and brought back by the servants sent by his Zamindar father-in-law. However, Kamini's nature is incorrigible and Abhaykumar leaves once again never to return as his wife desires to kick him out of the room. Abhay leaves for solace in Vrindavan and is accompanied by Padmalochan who is also disgusted by the daily

scuffle between his two co-wives. Meanwhile Kamini realizes her fault and proceeds to Vrindavan in the guise of a Vaishnavite woman with the help of her confidante Bhobi Moyrani and her husband. It is in Vrindavan that she reconciles with Abhaykumar and discloses her real identity. It is also informed that Padmalochan's wives have been living a peaceful life after his departure and desire him to be back to the household. The play ends with Bijoyballabh arriving at Vrindavan to make preparations to bring Kamini, Abhay and others back with him.

It is said that *Jamai Barik* was actually written as an attack on a particular wealthy family in Calcutta that had the system of keeping *gharjamai.* In fact, the play shows the sons-in-law housed in a large room or 'barrack' in the house of the in-laws. Dinabandhu Mitra presents a conglomeration of the different varieties of the sons-in-law according to their nearness or distance in relation with the owner of the house: Jamai, Bhaijhi Jamai, Bhagni Jamai, Naat Jamai, Jamaiyer Jamai all staying cooped in a single room. In fact the barrack or *barik* of the sons-in-law is marked by a Bacchanalia of sorts, completely in protest against the stiff upper lip officialdom of the father-in-laws. The gharjamai is sleepy under the spell of *ganja* (marijuana), recites the lines from a Panchali poem or sings the *Sakhi-Sambad.* In fact the jamai barik or barrack presents exactly the market-place revelries of the lower orders in the colonial city-space threatening to throttle the seriousness of the official order.

The setting of the play changes time and again between Keshabpur and Beldenga and finally culminates in Vrindavan. The play begins with the usual tropes of the father of the spinster in conversation with a *ghatak* or match-maker. They discuss qualities of a certain possible Kulin groom, where the *ghatak* enumerates in rhyme the latter's traits:

Rakhal Rajar bhaab *katen gorur jab*
Dhenu loye goshthey gocharon;
Gente kolkey haatey niye *ghunter aagun diye*
Khashan tamak shejey khaaye
Lekhapada hadapoda, *kintu Kulin er gora*
Kulalakshmi ondho karunaye (Bandopadhyay, Br et. al, 6)

Bijoyballabh is not moved by such blatant remarks against such a suitable 'eligible' Kulin bachelor and is very sure that despite his profligate ways, the barrack would be fruitful in disciplining the wayward son-in-law.

The third act is set in the inner domain of the permanently settled sons-in-law in the barrack. The conversation among the many sons-in-law stem from their mobility into the inner domain of the house and more specifically into the bedrooms of their wives. Incidentally, to enter the bedroom the son-in-law requires an entry pass which is provided by a female servant, Panchi. The intervals between entries to the inner chambers of the house can be days, weeks, months or even a year. Most of the barrack dwellers lack education as well as occupation. They

sing the tunes of the street (Panchali, Akhrai, Kheur) and even narrate a popular version of the Ramayan subjecting the narrative and characters to humorous, popular and quotidian sketches:

Pancham jamai: *Ram ta bhyabagangaram; Lakar buddhite kharjjurkantakbat tikhno, chhal bal durbal, koushal taar shokoli hastagata – bolle dada tui kandish keno? Paanch paisar tikey kine aan, aar paanch buri paaka kola samgraha kor, ami tor Sita udhdhar kore dichchi. Ram tai kollen. Lakshman hanumandigake ek ekti kola diye boshibhuto kore tader lejey ek ekkhan tikey dhoriye bendhe dile. Tarpor bolle jao shob Lankar chaaley giye bosho. Hanumanera kola kheyechhen kolar kaaj na kolle kritaaghnata hoy – hup hup kore Lankar chaaley giye boshlo aar Lanka dogdho hoye gelo. Rabon shabangshey nipaat – bera aagun palabar jo nai – Lanka chharkhaar Sita uddhar.Iti Saatkando Ramayanang Samaptamidang. Ei hochhey Ramayan, ta beditey boshei bolo aar chaamor hatey korey bolo.*

Tritiyo jamai: *Balmikir shongey mele na.*

Pancham jamai: *Belliker Ramayan Balmikir shongey milbe kano? Kintu moo lei.*

(*Jamai Barik*, Act III, Sc. I, p. 47)

Where on the one hand they deflate and subvert the official discourse of Hindu religion, they also sing popular Muslim songs prevalent in the unofficial 'other' domain of the city. In fact, the jamai barrack mirrors the Saturday night frivolities of the colonial city and its indigenous orders that formed the beginning of the sketch of Kaliprasanna Singha's *Hutom Penchar Naksha.* The scene entails vehement physical action as a result of the drunken revelries of the sons-in-law. The barrack allows even a character like Habar Maa, the female servant of the house to hum a tune and shake a leg with the sons-in-law as a mark of her protest against the official order of the house. Dinabandhu Mitra's play presents a microcosm of the greater macrocosm of the city space that was being rocked by the over-Sanskritized literati of Hindu reformation as well as the surveillance of the colonizer.

On the one hand while *Jamai Barik* presents the rebellious spree of the sons-in-law in the pseudo-correctional space of the barrack, Dinabandhu Mitra was also painting a picture of the emasculation of the Bengali male and his failure in controlling the inner domain as the *karta* of the house. This is evident in Act III, Sc. II of the play where the scuffle between Kamini and Abhay Kumar forces the latter to venture to the sacred space of Vrindavan. Kamini laments her lot and the futility of a conjugal relation with her husband but in a mocking acerbic tone:

E ki babar bibechona
Deshey ki bor meley na
Shyaoragaachher keleshona
Ganjar khobor sholo aana
Taari haatey ei lolona! (*Jamai Barik*, 57)

Kamini's outrage finds expression in her obduracy in vowing to kick and drive her husband out of the bedroom. The verbal feud between Kamini and Abhaykumar finds a more physical counterpart in the bloody vendetta between the co-wives of Padmalochan, Bagala and Bindubashini in Act II, Sc. I and Sc. III. Padmalochan laments his fate to Abhaykumar saying:

Abhay: *Ki dada Haragouri hoye boshey royechho je-ardhek angey tel diyecho, ardhek anga rukkho rekhechho.*

Padmalochan: *Amar pakshaghaat hoyechhe- dui shatin e shorirte bhaag kore niyechhe; daan dikte boro abagir, ba dikte chhoto abagir. Chhoto abagi atokhon tel makhachhilo; chulchera bhaag, ba ange makhyechhe daan anga pore royechhe- dekh na daan dike teller daagti laageni; boro abagi aashey, daan dikey tel porbe, noile eirupei boshe thakte hobe.*

Abhay: *Apni kano daan dikey tel diye neye phelun na, bela to onek hoyechhe.*

Padmalochan: *Tahole ki aar asto thakbo! Boro abagi duddar kore kil marbe, kede bari mathay korbe, jhaata phirye ghaar bhangbe- bolbe amake ektu bhalobashe na, amar angata amar jonye rakhle na, apni tel dile.*

Abhay: *Tumi tobe to boro shukhi- tumi je dekhi gharjamaiyer baba*

Padmalochan: *Gharjamaiyer ekti baghini, amar duti.* (*Jamai Barik*, Act II, Sc. I, p. 23)

The descriptions of Padmalochan find exact physical replication in Act II, Sc. III, where Bagala and Bindubashini debate over their individual shares and divisions of the husband's body clarifying the consequences of trespassing:

Bindu: *Tor bhaager dikey tui boshli, tatey ki aami katha koi; aamar bhaag chhubi to jhaatar bari khabi-*

Bagala: *Chhobo na to ki tokey bhoy korbo, ei chhulem. (Padmalochaner baa paaye ek kil)*

Bindu: *Aamar paaye tui ek kil marli, aami tor paaye dui kil maari. (Padmalochaner daan paaye dui kil)*

Bagala: *Tobe tor paaye teen kil- (ba paaye teen kil)*

Bindu: *Tor paaye ei chaar kil. (daan paaye chaar kil)*

Bagala: *Bote ra shorbonashi, tobe dekhbi naki kamon kore toke raanr kori-* (boti loiya Padmalochanaer ba paaye ek kop) (*Jamai Barik*, Act II, Sc. III, pp. 40-41)

In *Bangalir Bahubal*, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay says that physical prowess is different from what he conceptualizes as *bahubal*. Physical prowess that is exhibited by the use of enthusiasm, unity, courage and diligence is akin to *bhaubal*. Bankim laments that the Bengali has always lacked *bahubal* but shows all possibility to acquire it. The idea of the effeminate Bengali was taken up in essays such as 'Bangladeshiyo Hindura ato alash, kshinobal o hinashahosh kano?' (*Somprakash*, 1862), 'Bangalidiger shakti o shahosharthey mangsho bhakshaner proyojon' (*Bengal Spectator*, 1842). This idea of the Bengali male in the outer domain of the colonial environment found a place of recuperation in the household of the Bengali Hindu, where:

> Women were primarily responsible for deciding household purchases. They, therefore, served as the target of both nationalist appeal and blame. A large body of tracts and folk art depicted the modern woman as self-indulgent, spoilt and lazy creature who cared nothing for family or national fortune. This charge encompasses the triadic relationship between women, gold and servitude- kamini, kanchan, dasatva- that the nineteenth century saint Ramakrishna was to engrave so deeply upon the Bengali moral order. The archetypal evil woman of these times was not the immoral or the economically independent one, but one who, inspired by modern education, had exchanged sacred ritual objects (the conchshell bangle, the ritually pure fabric, sindur) for foreign luxury ones. There was thus an interchange between economic compulsions and pleas for feminine commitment for ritual. (Sarkar, T., 35)

Interestingly, Kamini is the heroine of the play, *kanchan* (or wealth) is the guiding motif of the marriages that are conducted, and *dasatva* (or servitude) plays at several levels starting from the barrack to the personas of Abhay Kumar and Padmalochan. *Jamai Barik* presents the conflicting images of the Bengali male and female in light of the above formulations. As a farce, *Jamai Barik* engages in the monstrosity between these two images where the female order threatens to subjugate the position of the *karta*. The *karta* in the barrack does not even have the flexibility of mobility within the household, whereas in the 'conjugal' climate of Padmalochan's household, the *karta* succumbs to the order of women by choice. A question arises as to how reconciliation between the two orders can be achieved and more importantly, why such reconciliation is at all necessary. Padmalochan's second wife, Bindubashini, constantly mouths a couplet:

> *Bhiksha dao go brojobashi, Radhakrishna bolo mon,*
> *Ami briddho beshya tapashvini eichi Brindaban.* (*Jamai Barik*, Act II, Sc. I, p. 32)

Within the social scenario of the later half of the nineteenth century, one finds an indomitable urge for having a national theatre. Brajanath Deb, brother-in-law of Girish Chandra Ghosh took the initiative of constructing a public theatre during this time in Shyamapukur. However, the work ceased due to Brajanath's ailment. The National Theatre finally came into existence in 1872 in the courtyard of Madhusudan Sanyal's house in Chitpur with Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neel Darpan* (7th December, 1872). It was on 14th December, 1872 that *Jamai Barik* was performed for the first time at the National Theatre. To go back to the above couplet, the phrase '*briddho beshya tapashvini*' hints at the dangerous outcast – the prostitute. As Sumanta Banerjee says:

> In the period just preceding the colonisation of Bengal by the British, prostitution in the modern sense of wage labour was in a nebulous state. The traditional domination of the male over the female body (outside the institutipn of marriage) took various forms. The woman's surrender of her body to the male for a remuneration took place in the twilight area of changing social norms brought about by the collapse of the Moghul empire and the prevailing anarchy in the early years of 18th century Bengal. Faint silhouettes of the courtesans of yore were to be found among the free women living on the fringes of 'respectable society-the singers and dancers from the lower castes; the Hiindu widows who joined Vaishnavite 'akhras' or clubs and were free to choose their male partners; and the so- called 'fallen women' (those deserted by their husbands, or seduced by lovers to be abandoned later) forced to eke out a living after having been discarded by society. Segregated colonies of such women had become a part of village society, tolerated with some indulgence. Not all of them could be strictly called professional prostitutes, since they had other occupations (e g, flower- sellers, milk-women, barbers, etc). But self- employment allowed them certain freedom of action and movement which quite often made their company easily accessible to the village male looking for extra-marital or pre-marital sex. In keeping with the norms of their life-style-a grey area-they could however exert their own right in choosing or rejecting their clients, on whom in any case they did not have to depend solely for their living. (1993, 2461)

The use of the couplet constantly reminds of the image of the woman as a Vaishnavite and a prostitute (who had already entered the stage space as early as 1867 with the enactment of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota*) and threatens further to demolish the agency of the male space within the play. However, such a possibility is curbed when the final

reconciliation between Kamini and Abhay Kumar takes place in the sanctum sanctorum of Vrindavan where Kamini realizes her fault and vows to be a *'pativrata'* after shedding the garb of a Vaishnavite woman. One finds here the prelude to a later incident that would occur on the stage of Bengal itself, as Ramkrishna Paramhansa was to bless Binodini later with his words: '*Maa Tomaar Chaitnaya Hok*' (May you be bestowed with consciousness). This 'consciousness' is attached to the category of morality that Renaissance was continuously trying to project. The religious text runs parallel to the project of the national-popular on the proscenium space of the Bengali theatre. To bring the popular/profane of the streets to the sanctum sanctorum of the theatre space was a task that contained multifarious risks and ordeals of smoothening the rough edges of the comic that constantly threatens to topple the official moral order. In this sense, *Jamai Barik* cannot be deemed any less as a farce. However, the stage space that upheld the national sentiments of the Bengali male in *Neel Darpan* could not abrogate the masculine order altogether even in the context of the monstrous – the farce. This was the impossibility and a limitation that the Bengal Renaissance had already imposed on the mast-bearers of the Hinduization process. If, thus *Kulin Kulshorboswo* used religion as the mode of concern with the tag of 'farce', *Jamai Barik* was the farce that was guided more by the national-popular but not bereft of the 'religious' concern or connotation within the system of Kulinism.

IV. Marriages made in Heaven: Reading into the Polygamous Practices of Nineteenth Century Bengal

It is difficult to estimate the exact time period that marked the system of polygamy among the Hindus. However, the practice of keeping multiple begums by the Nawabs in the Muslim era might have influenced the Hindus as well. The license came with the practice of Kulinism much popularized by Ballalsena. Kulinism and polygamy as practices are intertwined in the context of the nineteenth century in Bengal. Before the initiative of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, people like Kishorichand Mitra and the Zamindars of Bardhaman, Nabadwip, Dinajpur, Nator and others tried devising a law that would ban the practice of polygamy. Both Vidyasagar and the Sanatan Dharmarakshini Sabha had proved logically through the Hindu Shastras why and how the polygamous practice could be abolished. They argued that no Shastra had initiated the practice of polygamy into Hindu society. Vidyasagar opined that it was the duty of the colonial state to abolish polygamy. It was thought that if a person remarrying in the lifetime of his first wife would have to pay a tax to the government, he would refrain from multiple marriages. However, this system would have done little good to society as the amount for the tax would have been extracted by the groom from that of the bride's family.

Polygamy and its practices formed a debatable issue among the conservative and the reformist camp of the Hindus in the nineteenth century. Such debates also made the colonial government anxious as the latter thought that the Sepoy Mutiny was initiated due to the passing of the law for widow-remarriage. The colonizer did not want to tamper with the restoration of peace brought in by the declaration of Queen Victoria in the post-Mutiny period. The government thought it wise not to interfere with the religion of the colonial subjects and hence the Vidyasagar camp fighting for the abolition of polygamy succumbed to such a decision. However, a part of this camp also thought that polygamy would cease as a practice with the spread of education and the emergence of liberal-minded individuals through education. This was considered to be a suitable arrangement in the absence of a law against polygamy.

In putting forward his views logically against the practice of polygamy in accordance with the Hindu Shastras, Vidyasagar enumerated that a Hindu male could marry more than once in certain specific cases: if the wife is given to alcoholism, is immoral, opposed to the wishes of the husband, perennially ailed, cruel in nature and profligate (cited in Bit, 49). Again, the husband can remarry if the wife is sterile, gives birth to a dead son, gives birth to daughters or speaks ill. The abolition of polygamy was sought all the more as it generated the added practices of abortion, becoming outcastes, suicide, prostitution, dowry, child-marriage and so on.

As early as 1852, Jogendra Chandra Gupta wrote a play, *Kirtibilash*, on the practice of polygamy followed in Tarakchandra Churamani's *Sapatni*. Farces on polygamy began in full swing with Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Nabo Natok* (1866) and *Ubhoy Sankat* (1869), Dinabandhu Mitra's *Biye Paagla Buro* (1866), Bipin Mohan Sengupta's *Hindumahila Natok* (1868), Manomohan Basu's *Pranay Pariksha Natok* (1869) and Harimohan Karmakar's *Maag Shorboswo Prohasan* (1870).

Nabo Natok (1866)

Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Nabo Natok* (1866) was written as a didactic piece of literature against the prevalent practice of polygamy. This play was also written for the attainment of rewards and Ram Narayan was rewarded by the Jorasanko Theatre. Unlike *Kulin Kulshorboswo*, where the text was based entirely on the subject of the traditional form of Kulinism (Kulokoulinyo), *Nabo Natok* deals with Kulinism as result of wealth (Bittokoulinyo). Zamindar Gabeshbabu, despite the existence of his wife Sabitri and sons, Subodh and Sushil, is hell-bent upon remarrying. His decision is supported by two of his confidantes – Chittotosh and Bidharmabagish and criticized by Sudhir. However, Gabeshbabu marries Chandralekha in his old age and she takes control of the household as well as the husband. The first wife, Sabitri, is tortured to the hilt by Chandralekha and Subodh leaves the house unable to bear the mal-treatment of his step mother.

Sabitri is bereaved and dies on hearing the news of Subodh's death. Gabeshbabu meets with the same fate. Finally Subodh returns to the household to discover the untimely deaths of his parents and faints on-stage. He is not seen to stir any more.

The play is divided into six acts and is nearer to the Sanskrit drama in style than *Kulin Kulshorboswo*. Pertaining to the methodology of Sanskrit drama, Act I is preceeded by a *naandi* and the appearance of the *nati* and the *sutradhar*. The *nati* and the *sutradhar* intimate the audience about the theme, subject and the playwright of the play. One of Ram Narayan's characteristic devices is to address the audience and also to comment on the composition of the audience of the play. The device is an anticipatory one at a glance but also signifies the kind of readership or spectatorship that the playwright desires for his play.

> Nati: (Sahasyabadane) *E nabo-natukey deshey nabo-natoker apratul ki? Koto chatok wallah natok akhon din din hoye uthchhey dekhcho na?*
>
> Sutradhar: *Na-na, shey shokol Natok e sabhatey abhinoy kora hobe na; ati subigyo samaj, e samajey shadupadesh-purno kono bishuddho Natok prakash korte hobe. Upodesh deowai natok prakasher uddyeshho.*
>
> Nati: ... *Samprati Ram Narayan Tarkaratna mahashoy je bohubibaho bishayak Nabo Natok pranayan korechhen shekhani to nitanto mondo noy, tai kano abhinoy koro na?* (Bakshi ed., 30)

Ram Narayan, through the voice of the *sutradhar* clarifies that the play is meant for the *subigyo samaj* which desires didacticism in the content of the play. In the process, the playwright also establishes his view that moral guidance should be the only objective of a literary piece and that the other contemporary plays that have been much 'popularized' and much accepted by the audience are '*chotok wallah*' and not suitable for moral disciplining.

Nabo Natok deals with the issues of unequal marriage, benefits of women's education, the plight of the woman in marriage, widow-remarriage, the Bahubibaho Nibarani Sabha etc. as the subtexts of polygamy. Within the Sanskritized Bengali profusely employed in the text of the play, Ram Narayan carefully distinguishes between the use of language by the male and the female characters. The play begins with the conversation between the two maid servants, Bhogi and Sabi, who mouth colloquial Bengali of a local variety. This is soon contrasted by the use of pure Sanskrit shlokas or Sanskritized Bengali by the male folk.

> Bengali too came under the criticism of the pandits, though it was of another kind. While pointing out that Bengali was the purest of the modern Indian languages because it was nearest to Sanskrit, a palpable hit at Persianized Urdu, they complained that vulgarisms were creeping into Bengali as written, because authors were ignorant of the rules laid down in the vyakaran and alankar sastras. One writer suggested that editors should submit their material to scholars for correction before passing it for publication. The term sadhu bhasa, popularly anglicized as chaste Bengali, came into use about this time, to describe that style of Bengali writing which conformed reasonably closely to Sanskrit usage. (Clark, 471)

The use of language at multiple levels and forms brings in occasionally the 'farcical' within the texture of the play. The subject of the play cannot be deemed as comic, let alone as farce proper.

The play ends on a direct pathetic, tragic level and has nothing of the physical action. It is only by the language-play that Ram Narayan allows the occasional side-lining of the 'religious' to bring in the 'popular' on stage. The colloquial Bengali used in the play is used only by the women folk and hence one finds a treasure-house of popular proverbs in their conversations - an immediate appeal to the audience of the play:

- *Aaltar guti aar tulor makati* (Act II)
- *Mukhey madhu hridey khur, shei to bishom krur* (Act II)
- *Pathshaley shatake paryey shotkey porichhi* (Act III)
- *Bairey kochar patton, bhitorey chhuchor ketton* (Act II)

In fact the facets of colonial modernity are brought to the forefront by the portrayal of the dichotomy between the indigenous Bengali and the 'affected' Bengali under the influence of English education. Act III brings out this 'difference' in language designed by colonial modernity in the exchange of dialogues between the Gramyo (the villager) and Nagor (the city-dweller). Nagor, whose name reverberates with the sense of nagar or the city, dreams and lives in the newly acquired English language that also serves for him as a means to upward social mobility. Within the colonial context and more directly in the reference frame of the Renaissance that ushered in new discourses in the social, economic and professional levels, language undoubtedly becomes one of the modes of self-fashioning of the indigenous component of the colonial broth. Ram Narayan's play probes into the new economic order of the colonial environment:

> The rent-revenue gap that the Permanent Settlement had generated and guaranteed had constituted the major security area for Bengal's middle-class bhadrolok. It had ensured a whole spectrum of fairly comfortable rentier incomes at many levels. Certainties of absolute manipulative power over rent began to be breached- though in a very limited sense- from the mid-nineteenth century by the Rent Acts of 1859 and 1885. They intended to give a measure of security to upper tenants and curb some of the arbitrary coercive powers excercised by the landlord's kutcheries on unofficial courts-cum-dungeons. The Rent Act of 1859 had come about partly as a result of missionary pleas on behalf of the tenant. Missionary-inspired colonial interference into the hitherto closed world of largely upper- caste Hindu zamindar and the lower-caste or Muslim peasant was curiously coextensive with very similar intrusions into the closed world of Hindu domestic practices. Both aroused a keen sense of the fragility of economic and domestic arrangements that had cushioned some of the traumas of the Hindu bhadrolok. After the 1859 Act, landlords had been complaining that the loss of disciplinary power had eroded their moral authority and affected rent collection. The grievance closely parallels the dirges that were composed over each colonial or reformist suggestion for new conjugal laws. Clearly, the moral order of Hindu patriarchy was in peril. (Sarkar, T. 2001, 36)

The emancipatory space for the new middle-class *bhadrolok* thus lay in the 'Hindu way of life'. The conversation between Gramyo and Nagor brings out the middle-class endeavour to recuperate the lost spaces within the new emancipatory space- to locate the new order of the city (and specifically, the linguistic order) within the 'Hindu way of life'.

Nagor: *na bhai tini akhono elen na, ami* think *kori, tar shey* danger *akhono* hang *kochhey; ta cholo jai amra khanik* walk *kori ge.*

Gramyo: *Ta bhai bolo dekhi, Kolikatar nuton khobor ki shuni.*

Nagor: *Kolikatar* news *akhon shokoli* new – of course, time *joto fichchey toto shokol bishoyeri* change *dekha jachchey, tab halo na holei ba* India-*r bhalo kishey hobe?* (Bakshi ed., 103)

The city-space of Calcutta is described by Nagor to be under a sea-change and the change is made more explicit not through anything else but by his motley language – a mixture of Bengali and English – the traditional and the modern within the colonial context. Debates on language get heightened in the verbal exchanges of Gramyo and Nagor:

Gramyo: *Oi to amader desher dosh, matribhasha shiksha na korye onno bhasha shiksha kora e aar kothao nai. Aar tomadero bhai Ingrejitey bilakshan bhakti jonmechhey, bangla jeneo Ingrejitey bolte tomra bhalobasho.*

Nagor: *Tao shotto katha. Ta bolobona kano? Amra to bohurupi horbolar jaat, ja dekhi tai shikhi. Dekho jokhon Hindu raja chhilo, tokhon shei byabohari korechhi, Sanskrito katha boltem, kushashoney boshtem, dhuti chador portem, porey jobonder odhikarey Farsi te onurokto hoyechhilam, godi, takiye, masland, aalbala, gurguri, e shokol byabohar, strilokke grihommoddhey ruddho kore rakha todobodhi to amader chole aschhey? Ingreji bhashaproti sraddhai ba kano na hobe? Aaro ekta katha boli bibechana karo, bhashantorer shonge jog na hole bhasha briddhio paye na.* (Bakshi ed., 104)

Language contains the anxieties of both the colonizer and the colonized. The change in power marks an ideological shift within the subjects. Within the colonial context, the change in the new economic order ushers in a new jargon, influence by English education, marking a subjectivization of the indigenous resident of the city. Ram Narayan brings in the old and the new face to face not to strike a moral judgement vis-à-vis language, but to etch the facets of colonial modernity, the heteromorphic linguistic identity to which the colonial subject is subjected. The entire Gramyo-Nagor episode reminds one of the Bideshi-Nagarbashi exchanges in Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Kalikata Kamalalay*. The exchange between Sudhir and Dambhacharya on the subject of *daladali* is also reminiscent of the earlier Naksha. Ram Narayan points also towards the acquired Bengali of the colonizer. The English judge says:

Tumi ke aachho, tomar naam ki aachhey, tomar ghar kotha thake, kano tumi churi korte gelo, tumi boro bura kaaj korechhe, ami tomake meyad debe. (Bakshi ed., 107)

The anxieties of language in the colonial milieu of nineteenth century Calcutta subjects both the colonizer and the colonized to recuperate in their own ways. While one is anxious about the White Man's burden, the other, standing within the clash of religion and the new economic order (a time-space which is aptly represented by Sumit Sarkar as *kaliyug*) seeks emancipation in the language of the Renaissance city.

Nabo Natok employs a motley crowd of characters and their manners. They constantly move in and out of the inner and the outer domains mirroring both these spaces in the ebb and tide of the colonial flow. In a narrow sense, the playwright is blamed for not shaping the women characters fully and investing more of the text in the other characters. To take this blame as a

cue, *Nabo Natok* does not mark the traditional form of Kulinism; it does not even choose to re-iterate the subject of the previous play, *Kulin Kulshorboswo*. *Nabo Natok* charts out the process that finds an opportunity for the Bengali *bhadrolok* to fetch back his 'lost glory' and the futility of such a project that culminates in the death of the major characters. Enacted on 5th January, 1867 at the Jorasanko Theatre, *Nabo Natok* is no farce in the sense of the term employed and enumerated herein. *The National Paper* wrote on 9th January, 1867:

> JORASANKO THEATRE. On Saturday night last we had the pleasure of witnessing the Jorasanko Theatre, established at the family house of Baboo Gonendra Nath Tagore, grandson of late Baboo Dwarka Nauth Tagore. The subject of the performance was the celebrated nobo natock,... the acting on the stage, which was pronounced by all present on the occasion to be of the most superior order. To choose out of two or more amateurs for especial commendation, would we fear, be doing gross injustice to the rest, each acquitted himself so creditably. Beginning with the graceful bow of the natee, the representation of every succeeding character, elicited loud shouts of applause from all sides, and rendered the whole scene an object of peculiar amusement to the audience. The concert was excellent. It had no borrowed airs, and was quite in keeping with national taste. (qtd. in Bakshi ed., 69)

However, the play brings out the comic and the monstrous inherent in the comicality of linguistic, social and domestic practices in order to uphold the flux of colonial environment.

Biye Paagla Buro (1866)

Biye Paagla Buro, Dinabandhu Mitra's first farce was designed in the mould of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay commented that *Biye Paagla Buro* was based as an attack on a living person (Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 1). The play was enacted during the Durga Puja in 1872 in the house of Lakshminarayan Dutta in Chorabagan, Calcutta. The play was performed at the National Theatre on 17th January, 1873 with Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi enacting the role of the protagonist, Rajiblochan. Interestingly, it was along with the performance of this farce that Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi also performed his *Mustaphi Saheb Ka Pukka Tamasha*.

Biye Paagla Buro is about a conspired plan that obstructs old Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay's desire to marry again. Rajiblochan's widowed daughters, Rammoni and Gourmoni, who stay in the same household with him, are disgusted with and opposed to their father's wish to remarry. They declare not to deem the new bride as their mother. Rajiblochan is also made the butt of ridicule by the young boys of the neighbourhood. They dress up Rata Napit (barber) as the bride, and Keshab, Bhushan and Nasiram as womenfolk. In the end however, to poke more fun at the old groom, the senile low caste woman Penchor Maa is revealed to be the bride. Rajiblochan excelled in the politics of *daladali*. These *dal*-s formed an entirely new mode of organizing and disciplining social practice in the colonial milieu. As a *dalapati*, Rajiblochan keeps Bhushan's family as outcaste and wishes to remarry at 60. He is least concerned whether his 15 year old

widowed daughter wishes to be married again or not. He refrains from any charity towards the poor but leaves his share of a plot of land in the greed of getting married. Most importantly, Rajiblochan is infuriated when addressed as an old man. He cooks up stories and goes to such an extent as to claim that the Battle of Plassey (1757) took place on the day of his marriage.

The play begins with the introduction of Rajiblochan's much-hated character by the young boys of the neighbourhbood. They say:

> Nasiram: *Buro byata bishwonindukey*
> ...
> Nasiram: *Matar opor shokuni udchhey, tobu daladali kottey chharey na. Aar botshor bagaan bechey daladali korechhilo; school e ekti paisa dite hole bole ami doridro Brahman, kotha hote taka debo?*
> (Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 3)

The boys sing a couplet to enrage the old Rajiblochan:

> *Buro bamna boka bor*
> *Penchor maare biye kor.* (Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 7)

Rajiblochan hates to be called 'old' and despises the old low caste woman, Penchor Maa, who he thinks reveals to the village the fact of his old age, thus hindering his remarriage. Dinabandhu Mitra uses the usual figure of the *ghatak* or the match-maker who finds a young bride for the old man. *Biye Paagla Buro* excels as farce both at the level of dialogues as well as action. The scenes of comic banter are especially those in which the old man is subjected to vehement physical torture at the hands of the youngsters. The boys make use of a paper snake with pin fangs to fake a scene of snake-bite for Rajiblochan. The incident involves Rata Napit as the healer for the panic-stricken old soul. Rata sings in gibberish, dances around and hits Rajiblochan continuously with a broom in the name of curing him from the fake snake-bite.

Biye Paagla Buro elucidates the plight of women through the woman's voice. Rajiblochan's daughters lament their widowhood and comment how their father is blind to the tortures of *ekadoshi*[4]. Rajiblochan is however against widow-remarriage. Ironically, Rajiblochan is made to marry the widow Penchor Maa, whom he much despises, and she becomes the only character who is shown to have an upward social mobility through widow remarriage at the end of the play. Penchor Maa sings of her dream to Rammoni and Gourmoni in Act II of the play:

> *Swapon jodi phale*
> *Jholbo tanar goley*
> *Haatey debo ruli*
> *Mom debo chuli*
> *Bhaat khabo thala thala*
> *Tel makbo jala jala*
> *Nater mukey diye chhai*
> *Aati dini shuor khai* (Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 36)

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[4] The ritual of *ekadoshi* subjected the widow to a day of starvation in order to observe penance in the memory of the deceased husband. The poet Satyendranath Dutta in his poem 'Dorokha Ekadoshi' represented the plight of the Hindu widow in contrast to the gluttony of the male occupant of the household.

Penchor Maa is all that the Hindu religious tradition of the upper caste Bengali Brahmin is scared of. She belongs to the caste of Doms, is a vagabond widow and has a pig for her companion. She threatens to transgress the official religious order of the social rung of Rajiblochan and such a possibility is ultimately given shape by her entry into Rajiblochan's household. She celebrates her new position in the Brahmin household:

Penchor Maa: *Buror betey Bamni hoichi, mui akon dumni bamni.* (Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 64)

It is interesting to note the use of the phrase *dumni-bamni*, a socially impossible dyad in the colonial space of nineteenth century Bengal. However, by juxtaposing the two socially opposite positions, Dinabandhu Mitra harks back at the Bacchanalia of the streets, the celebratory everyday and its comic cavorting that was performed on the streets of Calcutta. In form and content the play is thus much nearer to the class of farces that were being produced and performed in the unofficial Bat-tala circuit. *Biye Paagla Buro* uses comic action as well as personification. Whereas the situations involving Rajiblochan being subjected to the thrashings of the young boys exemplify the comic action that characterizes farce per se, the portrayal of Penchor Maa becomes a comic sketch poking its tongue at the rigid ritualistic space of the Brahmin class. Undoubtedly drawn from Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*, Rajiblochan is a much mellowed down version of Michael's protagonist, Bhakta Prasad. *Biye Paagla Buro*, as a farce, subverts the socio-religious order that attained an obnoxious height in the colonial context, subjecting the new social order of the Bengali *bhadrolok* to a critique on the proscenium space – a space that was slowly becoming a bearer of the nationalistic sentiments of the colonial Bengali. In so doing, the farce does mark the inheritance of the comicality of the street-traditions by the proscenium. The national-popular in the performative space of nineteenth century Bengal could not be bereft of the woman question – the *kamini* of the conjugal household. For the emancipation of the Bengali *bhadrolok* vis-à-vis the colonizer's surveillance, this woman question is nothing short of the 'nationalistic' zeal. Dinabandhu Mitra's farce, however, voices this concern in a different light altogether, bringing in the question of class and caste into the existent Hindu Brahmin ritual space. Quite logically thus, Biye *Paagla Buro* is not only a farce at the level of Rajiblochan being subjected to constant humiliation at the hands of the young tricksters, but also, at the more transgressive level, of his 'unnatural' marriage with a woman from the lowest rung of the society, Penchor Maa. Not only is she the 'dangerous outcaste' by the virtue of her class and caste position but also by the added fact of her only companion being a pig. She narrates to Rajiblochan's daughter, Rammoni, the kind of delicacy a pig's meat is. In the end when Rammoni is preparing to rush to the Holy Ganges in order to purge herself of the sin of touching the pig, Penchor Maa stands with the creature at the

threshold of the Brahmin household voicing her desire to be accepted as the newly wed bride. The play ends on this note of comic banter as well as the low-caste woman's possible mobility/entry/establishment in the upper caste Brahmin household. Penchor Maa, thus opposes all that is symbolized by Gourmoni and Rammoni – the frustration of being confined to strict gender roles (widowhood, *ekadoshi*, penance). It is they who voice their protest against Hindu rites in conversation amongst themselves but without any changes in their lives whatsoever. *Biye Paagla Buro* was staged at the National Theatre in 1873 – the same year that witnessed the incident of the murder of Elokeshi by her husband, Nabinmadhav, in suspicion of her liaison with the Mohanto of Tarakeshwar. The incident rocked the Bengali nation, giving rise to innumerable scandal plays on the subject, namely:

1. Tarakeshwar Natok Arthat Mahantoleela	**Suresh Chandra Bandopadhyay**
2. Mohanter Ei Ki Dasha	**Jogendranath Ghosh**
3. Mohanter Ei Ki Kaaj (Vol. I)	**Lakshminarayan Das**
4. Mohanter Ei Ki Kaaj (Vol. II)	**Lakshminarayan Das**
5. Uh! Mohanter Ei Kaaj	**Jogendranath Ghosh**
6. Mohanter Chakrabhromon	**Bholanath Mukhopadhyay**
7. Mohanto Pakshey Bhuto Nandi	**Harimohan Chattopadhyay**
8. Mohanter jamon Karmo Tamoni Phal	**(Anonymous)**
9. Mohanter Ei Ki Kaaj	**Jogendranath Ghosh**
10. Aajker Bajaar Bhao	**Durgadas Dhar**
11. Jamaloye Elokeshir Bichaar	**Surendra Chandra Bandopadhyay**
12. Mohanter Ki Durdasha	**Teenkori Mukhopadhyay**
13. Nabin Mohanto	**Rajendralal Ghosh**
14. Mohanter Dafa Rafa	**Suresh Chandra Bandopadhyay**
15. Mohanter Ki Saja	**Chandrakumar Das**
16. Mohanter Shesh Kanna	**(Anonymous)**
17. Bhanda Tapashvi	**Dakshinacharan Bandopadhyay**
18. Mohanter Karabash	**Surendra Chandra Bandopadhyay**
19. Mohanter Jyasa Ki Tyasa	**Narayan Chandra**
20. Elokeshi, Nabin, Mohanto	**Rajendralal Das**
21. Teerthomohima	**Nimaichand Sheel**

(Goswami, J., 33-34)

As Tanika Sarkar says in *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*:

> Other secondary aspects of Hindu conjugality were taken up energetically in interpretations of the scandals and in the scandal plays. Elokeshi's father was an old man who, apparently had been cruelly manipulated by the young and greedy stepmother. Unable to satisfy her sexually, he promised to buy her jewellery instead. For this purpose he allegedly sold off his own daughter to the mohunt. This theme dominated nearly all the scandal plays. The helpless lust of old men was a motif in many popular satires and farces, as was the husband's subordination to a young wife- which added a new bite to the popular theme of the henpecked man and domineering woman. More upmarket contemporary satires on the subject were Dinabandhu Mitra's *Biye Pagla Buro* and Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron.* These not only influenced the representation of the motif in the scandal plays, their popularity also shaped the reception and treatment of that aspect of the scandal in the public mind. This inversion of the regular conjugal hierarchy was shown as the cause of familial disorder, of an abdication of the father's sceptre, of a collapse of moral regulations. Characteristically, in the popular, semi-obscene bazaar literature, the more mortal sin was not an old man's possession of a young woman against her will but the latter's power over the man. In the Elokeshi episode, where male guardians within the Hindu family and society emerge as decisively unworthy, and where the culpability of the unchaste woman is somewhat undone via rape and murder, the focus on a greedy and corrupt woman relocates the story to a more familiar and acceptable register of misogyny and restores the trope of a female folk devil who gives a wrong twist to social order. (86)

If the time of performance of *Biye Paagla Buro* and the incident of Elokeshi-Mohanto have to be tied under the above point, it is necessary to expand Sarkar's argument a bit more to the National Theatre of Bengal. *Biye Paagla Buro* was performed first in the National Theatre on 17th January, 1873, the year that witnessed the Elokeshi-Mohanto incident. To pass from the first performance of the play in 1872 to the much more popular second one in the National Theatre in 1873 marks how the farce had been remoulded in the national sentiment and mindset to suit the social order. Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* was performed at the National Theatre on 8th March, 1873 and Dinabandhu's *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* on 5th April, 1873. The performance of these farces on the theatre space of Bengal symbolized by 'nationalism' also stresses upon the fact as to how the metamorphosis of the written text into the performance text is guided both by the national and the popular sentiment – that a scandalous incident can reshape the performance literature of the period based on socio-religious paradigms. In this light, the 'female folk devil' in the play can be none other than Penchor Maa, who waits at the threshold of the house to be welcomed inside. Whether she enters the domestic space is garbed in ambiguity but streaks of impossibility arise in the ultimate dialogue exchange of the play, where the woman is finally moved out of the precincts of the house temporarily:

Penchor Maa:	*Boro meye gelo, chhoto meye gelo, morey ghorey tole keda, mor bamun bhatar koney gelo?*
Prothom Shishu:	*Dur biti dumni.*
Penchor Maa:	*Buror betey bamni hoichi, mui akon dumni bamni.*
Rata:	*Olo dumni bamni, amar shongey aaye, tor haradhan khujey diyge.*

(Bandyopadhyay & Das eds., 64)

The comic transgression is thus put on hold in a counter-attack of the national-popular.

Ubhoy Sankat (1869)

Ubhoy Sankat was produced in 1869 by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna on the theme of polygamy and battling co-wives. Farces on this theme and subject began with Jogendra Chandra Gupta's *Kirtibilash* (1852), progressed in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Biye Paagla Buro* (1866), reached its climax in Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Ubhoy Sankat* (1869) and saw its denouement in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jamai Barik* (1872). The play was enacted along with Ram Narayan's other farce, *Chokkhudaan* on 26th February, 1870 at the Pathuriaghata Ranganatyalay of Jatindramohan Tagore.

Ubhoy Sankat literally means an impending danger from both sides. The play begins and ends with a day's incident pointing at the daily scuffle of the *karta*'s co-wives and his helpless situation in it. The plot of the play is simple; the scene is set on the day following *ekadoshi*. The first wife goes to fetch water after her domestic chore of peeling vegetables. The second wife comes home to throw away the vegetables chopped by the first wife out of sheer spite. Again, when the second wife goes outside to get tamarinds, the first wife breaks the earthen oven debarring the co-wife from cooking. They quarrel vehemently alleging and abusing each other and forgetting about the household work. The husband returns weary in the summer afternoon only to find himself lunch-less amidst complaints of the co-wives. However, the wives calm down after a while only to realize that they have served no food to the *karta* of the house. In the rush and eagerness to attend to the husband that follows, the wives waste the available food in the house. With no other options remaining, they seek to help the husband to relax. Debate arises soon as to who would massage his legs and who would fan him. Totally disgusted, the husband decides to go to sleep and the play ends on the continuing scuffle between the house-wives and their tug of war in order to drag the husband to their respective bedrooms.

Ubhoy Sankat is a one-act play with only four characters – Karta (husband), Boro Bou (first wife), Chhoto Bou (second wife) and Gowalini (milk-maid). The character of the gowalini is introduced in the play only to bring out the situational difference between having and not having co-wives. The play is short and crisp with abundant asides and a difference vis-à-vis the language (the Sanskritized Bengali) usually employed by Ram Narayan Tarkaratna. However, Ram Narayan adheres to the imitation of Sanskrit drama in shaping his farce as a *Sankirno Prohasan* (narrow/limited farce). A farce of this kind, according to the Sanskrit dramatic stylistics is a one or two act play dealing with a single character. The playwright makes use of popular proverbs in order to bring out the colloquial tongue of the womenfolk in their verbal battles:

- *Asairon saite nari*
  Shikey boshey jhuley mori (p. 6)
- *Je meye shotiney pore*
  Takey bidhi bhinno gorey (p. 7)

- *Gholey jholey dudhey omboley,*
  Chirey kaachkolaye aar aadaye alocheley. (p. 10)

The comic action of the play attains its heights in the last sequence where the co-wives engage in a tug of war in order to possess the husband:

> Karta: *O ki? O ki? Praan jaaye je, eki! Birur modongopaler dol naki? Gelem je! Gelem je! Ore tora na hoy amake ardha ardhi kore kete bhaag korene.*
>
> Boro Bou: *Sheo borong bhalo.*
>
> Chhoto Bou: *Bhaager bhatar bishom jala*
>
> Karta: *Tateo prostut, ayaan! Bole ki? Eder shorirey doya dharma nai. Ha bhogoban, amar adrishtey ato dur likhechhile!!! Athaba tomar dosh ki? Ami nijo buddhi doshey, apnar jatona apni briddhi korechhi; Protikshane, protidande, proti muhurte, jatona bhoger bichhed nai, sangsharik shukh kake bole ebar jante parlem na. Orey chherey de, praan jaaye, praan jaaye, ekbaar chhari; aami sabhya mohashoydiger ekta katha jigyasha kori, haat chharey na je, kritanjoli hote pelem na, ki kori sabhya mohashoy ra, ekta katha boli, orey ektu sthir haw, aagye mohashoyera, amar durgati apnara dekhchen, apnader moddhe amar moto shoubhagyoshali purush keho thaken tini amon shomoy uposthit hole na-jani ki koren, bodh kori taar o eiroop ubhoy sankat.* (Bakshi ed., 188)

The Padmolochan episode in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jamai Barik* is completely inspired by *Ubhoy Sankat.* Ram Narayan does not refrain again from asserting in the last lines of his play that the audience for his play is the *sabhya mohashoy* of the city who is aware of the ills of polygamy. *Ubhoy Sankat* is both an attack on the existing perils of polygamy as well as an apology on behalf of the Bengali *bhadrolok* for the inadequacy of his reformist agenda and action. Within the trope of the comic, Ram Narayan Tarkaratna charts out his play as bearing a suitable reformist agenda of the Hindu camp of nineteenth century Calcutta.

V. The 'Self' and the 'Other' in the Fun-House Mirrors of a Colonial City

> Social farces – popular one- or two-act skits composed in a coarse colloquial, dwelling on everyday social problems and contemporary moral decadence – suddenly swept the print market in the mid-nineteenth century. They rose from sixty-four and sixty-three titles in 1876 and 1877, respectively, to 104 in 1878.Those that were received well would almost invariably run into two or three editions with average print runs of one to two thousand. The Bengal Catalogue described them as "little books ... humorous, and some very coarse." The general format of these farces was fairly simple. Characters were few and drawn from daily life, and categorized quite visibly as virtuous or nonvirtuous. The offenders were invari- ably members of the more "respectable" echelons, while the earthy wisdom of common folk voiced a stringent critique of their deplorable behavior. But the genre had not been spun out of nothing, nor was its phenomenal appeal based on seemingly superficial laughter. The ribaldry and irreverence toward social superiors and the bawdy humor evident in such works were drawn from preexisting traditions. A vociferous oral culture of abusive folk songs and lampooning pantomimes, built on pungent lower-order hatred of successful urbanites, thrived in the streets of Calcutta in the first half of the century. Basic to all of them was mocking laughter, sometimes light-hearted but often derisive and even hostile. Such lively images of daily life, and the insults and humor derived from them, were formalized through their incorporation into the genre of the social farces printed at Battala from the 1860s on. (Ghosh An, 22)

The basic premise in this chapter has been to chart out the definite comic spaces in nineteenth-century colonial Bengal through a re-reading of its farces. The endeavour has also been to etch a continuous comic tradition from the street to print and finally to the proscenium (specifically, the National Theatre). In Chapter I, the subject of the 'dilution' of the comic had been taken up in detail only to serve as a cue to the musings in this chapter. The farces dealt with here under two broader heads note a comic distortion of sorts akin to the distortion of images in the fun-house mirrors in a carnival space. However, the question arises as to the limits of such a distortive process as well as the replication of the ribaldry of the streets in order to suit the desire for a 'national' performance space for the Bengali of the nineteenth century Calcutta. Comic distortion characterizes a farce to a considerable extent at the levels of linguistic concoction as well as physical exaggeration. In form and genre, the farce or *Prohasan* is a direct descendant of the *Naksha.* However, such directness in lineage has to be placed on the reference frame of critique. The *Naksha* specifically captured the turmoil of the colonial city of Calcutta moving to and fro continuously into the rural space in order to rattle the binaries between the city and the country in general, between simulation and nature in a contextual sense. The farces discussed in this chapter present the self-reflexivity that was an inherent project in the *Naksha.* This self-reflexivity ensued from a process of subjectivization of the Bengali male face to face with a new socio-economic order that threatened to overthrow the traditional Hindu way of life.

This chapter looks specifically at early farces, some of which set the ball rolling for the later farce writers of the city. The site of marriage and the problematics of conjugality in the Bengali household form the crux of these farces. In clubbing together these farces under umbrella terms such as 'marriage', 'Kulinism', 'polygamy' etc. the aim is to uphold the kind of agenda-literature they were meant to be. More than the written text, it was the proscenium that helped in moulding the texts as per the ideologies of the reformers of the Bengal Renaissance.

As early as 1872, Girish Chandra Ghosh had left the National Theatre because of his discomfort with the term 'national'. The National Theatre had been split into two: National Theatre, comprising Girish Chandra Ghosh, Dharmadas Sur, Mahendralal Basu, Motilal Sur, Gopal Chandra Das, Shib Chandra Bhattacharya, and Teenkori Mukhopadhyay; and the Hindu National Theatre, comprising Ardhendushekhar Mustaphi, Amritalal Basu, Nagendranath Bandopadhyay, Belbabu, Kshetrababu, and Kiran Chandra Bandopadhyay. The split was overtly due to a greater problem within the theatre activists of nineteenth century Calcutta. The National Theatre came to existence in the meeting of the 'Hindumela', established by Nabagopal Mitra[5], in

[5] Nabagopal Mitra was a social activist and was attached to a number of the nationalist organizations, which had the title of 'national' in the forefront. Mitra rose to prominence with the Hindumela of 1867, and was popularly known as 'National Nabagopal' and was the one who proposed the name 'National Theatre'.

1873. *Bharatmatar Bilap* was performed as the opening performance of the National Theatre. That the National Theatre stemmed out of the nationalistic sentiments of the Bengali is marked by the fact that the house of Madhusudan Sanyal in Chitpur, which was deemed as the space of the National Theatre in its initial days, also witnessed innumerable meetings of the Hindumela. However, a group of activists at the National Theatre proposed the system of tickets for the audience. They opined that in order to meet the audience's demand of new plays regularly, it is imperative to have new sets and props on a regular basis too. Such an enterprise could not be fulfilled through contributions, which in itself was cumbersome as well as insulting. However, Girish Chandra backed out of this proposal saying that they lacked the infrastructure for being a 'National Theatre'. He pointed at the potential danger of the theatre space being thronged by people of all classes if the system of tickets was to be introduced under the name of 'National Theatre'. Interestingly, Girish Chandra composed a song lampooning each of the members of the National Theatre after he left it. The song ended thus: *'sthaan mahatye haadi, sundi paisa de dekhe bahaar'* (qtd. in Roychowdhury, 37) Girish Chandra was critical of the mingling of classes. The National Theatre was not meant for the subaltern strata of the city, Bat-tala farces and *jatra* performances of the 'semi-obscene' literature was enough to cater to their tastes. The National Theatre with its erudite position was to remain as the emblem of the nationalist Hindu Bengali.

> The new public theatre was, especially, a space shared between highbrow connoisseurs and a petit bourgeoisie of skilled artisans, clerks and hack writers who patronized the theatre enthusiastically, and who sometimes managed to dictate the terms of its survival and success. The newly formed Bengal Theatre had opened with two erudite plays by the great playwright Michael Madhusudan Datta on classical themes. Both were miserable flops. In despair the management experimented with a play by an unknown playwright, Lakshminarayan Das. His scandal play, *Mohanter Ei Ki Kaj!* (Is This Worthy of a Mohunt?) seems to be the only thing that he ever wrote that made a name. Nothing else is known about him except that, unlike most authors of Battala pulp, he probably belonged to a low Shudra caste. In fact, quite a few of the authors of these farces were men of relatively low castes. A later play refers to Das's parlour at Panchanantala at Howrah, where street beggars pick up songs on the scandal. For a brief moment, then, he seems to have become a well-known figure in the city, a point of reference, although it seems that his fame did not survive the play. (Sarkar, T., 2001, 66)

Notably, while Ram Narayan Tarkaratna produced his farces, he was also profusely writing Bengali mythological plays. His *Benisamhar Natok* was performed at the Bidyotsahini Rangamancha in 1856 and 1857, *Ratnabali* was performed at the Belgachia Theatre in 1858, the Oriental Theatre in 1873, and the Bengal Theatre in 1873 and 1874, *Rukminiharan* was performed at the Pathuriaghata Banganatyalay in 1872 and the Bengal Theatre in 1873 and 1874, and *Malatimadhab* at the Oriental Theatre in 1873 and the Bengal Theatre in 1874. The farces on the other hand were performed on a more regular basis and found much popularity amongst the audience of the National Theatre.

The Bengali male had more or less sided with the colonial powers in support of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Apart from specific historical instances of *dasatva* on the part of the Bengali male, he led everyday a subjugated existence in the outer domain of the colonial environment. For this Bengali male, 'effeminacy' was a part of the identity of the colonial subject. Othered thus by the colonial master in issues of physical prowess, the home front or the domestic space became for him the space for rebuilding once again his masculine identity. This masculine identity was based on the reformist zeal of the nationalist Bengali who had to compromise everyday in his servility in the outer domain. This masculine identity also cast the woman as the evil 'other' who had to be disciplined on moral grounds within the discourses of conjugal love. The nineteenth century Bengali woman of the domestic front was thus a doubly marginalized entity, constantly kept away from the surveillance of the white master.

The text and performance of the farces discussed above present this 'daily drama' of the Bengali male in the inner domain of the household. Rocked by nationalistic zeal and the urge for reform, he sought refuge in the act of purifying the city of the impurities and immoralities ushered in by the colonial modernity. The farces became easy modes of accomplishing such a purgatory act. They distorted images, brought the home-front to the public domain and laughed at selves and at the fairer sex, but not without an eye for reform. Any other form of drama, and particularly the Sanskritized mythological drama of the literati, proved a failure in this enterprise of laughing and being laughed at. More importantly, these farces had to be held in 'difference' to the kind of farces that the low life of print produced in Bat-tala. In so doing, not only do the farces mark the difference between the texts of performance but also the politics and ideologies that construct the coming of the proscenium and its survival. The proscenium survives through the popular and in the course shapes the tastes of its audience through careful portrayals of chosen images. What this chapter also tries to probe into is the subalternization of performance and performance spaces in order to segregate the motley crowd of a colonial city. The segregation of spaces of performance does not necessarily always mean a complete abrogation of the 'other' (the 'street' here in contrast with the proscenium), but a cautious and regulated inclusion of the 'popular' elements for the survival of the 'greater popular'. If Charles Darwin was writing about the survival of the fittest and the methods of natural selection in the 'home' of the colonizer, the ideas reached the colony only to be distributed to a handful of the *bhadrolok* class that was deemed as the English-educated, refined, nouveau riche literati. This section of the colonial Bengali, with its passion for theatre, had appropriated the method of 'natural selection' adapting itself and the proscenium, thus ensuring its survival. The Hindu Bengali *bhadrolok* selected the comic from the street as its primary ingredient, chalked out a new recipe of national

identity building and prepared the *Prohasan* or the farce for the Bengali stage. The *Prohasan* was the product of this new sense of the self and the other for the Bengali *bhadrolok* who came to be situated midway between the master of the city and the mistress at home. For the colonial Bengali, it was a bold act indeed to look into the fun-house mirror and be shocked at his bloated/shrivelled image in the *Naksha*. However, the act was soon rehearsed obsessively, in the *Prohasan* to suit a new kind of 'knowledge' of the self that adjusted itself with the harrowing sense of being 'othered' with a parallel process of 'otherizing' the better half at home.

Chapter III: Laughing at the 'Unsteady' and the 'Immoral'

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim: (John Keats: Ode to a Nightingale)

Musings such as these, on the effects of wine, could have hardly been produced in the period that concerns this discourse – the nineteenth century in Calcutta. However, alcoholism was brought into the colonial city of Calcutta with the introduction to Western colonialism and more importantly, the Western way of life. The attraction towards wine was soon to be appended by the passion for the 'fallen woman'. This chapter looks at farces that deal with both these aspects of alcoholism and womanizing.

Alcoholism and womanizing are closely intertwined in the context of nineteenth century Calcutta. The two were brought under the tag of 'immorality' out of sheer concern towards which the colonial government could hardly be negligent. Prostitution was taken to be the cause of the spread of alcoholism in the city. However, the government did not put a ban altogether on prostitution. Prostitution bred a number of dangerous diseases and hence it was essential for women in sex-work to register themselves for medical check-up in order to check the spread of contagious diseases. Such a concern led to the passage of The Indian Contagious Disease Act or Act XIV in 1868. That the law had caused a considerable effect on the lives of the prostitutes and the babus has been elaborately painted in the farces produced during this period.

The spread of alcoholism was also paralleled by the movement against alcoholism. Raj Narayan Basu established the Surapaan Nibarani Sabha in Midnapore against alcoholism. Pyaricharan Sarkar, influenced by the ideals of David Hare, was instrumental in the movement as well. His initiatives resulted in the establishment of The Bengal Temperance Society on 15th November, 1863 in Calcutta. The duties of this Society were thrust upon Pyaricharan and some of his friends, both Hindus and Muslims. However, the efforts of the Society went in vain due to the alcoholic tendencies of some of its own members. Alcoholism was finally proscribed against in the year 1878 by the colonial government. The erasure of womanizing and alcoholism from the end of nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century was channelized by the unstable economic order in Bengal as well as the waning prosperities of the once nouveau riche of nineteenth century Calcutta and Bengal.

I. Babbling and Wobbling in a Colonial City: Viewing and Re-viewing Alcoholism

The conservative Hindu section of the nineteenth century Bengali society was vocal against the violation of Hindu rites and rituals as well as the radical behaviour of the Young Bengal, inspired by the thoughts and ideas of Derozio. The spread of alcoholism was accorded to the ways and attitudes of these Derozians. The poet Ishwar Gupta, who was himself given to the love for wine, wrote vehemently against the radicalism of the Young Bengal. Though the poet preferred not to write much about the alcoholic tendencies of this group, he did write sometimes:

> *Dhanya re botolbashi, dhanya laaljal*
> *Dhanya dhanya bilater sabhyatar bal*
> *Dishi Keishna manineko rishi Krishna joy*
> *Marydata Marysuto very good boy*
> *Ja thake kopaley bhai tebileyte khabo*
> *Dubiye dober tobey chapeletey jabo* (qtd. in Jowardar, 247)

The conservative Hindu camp blamed Derozio for the rapid spread of radicalism among the members of the Young Bengal. However, Derozio himself never inspired the students to become Christian converts or practice non-Hindu ways. The Derozians, on the other hand, believed that to consume stuff that the Hindus deemed as inedible is the only way to achieve liberalism and salvation. Guided by such a view, they began consuming tea, biscuits, bread, beef and wine, all considered as sacrilege by conservative Hindus. A prominent member of the Young Bengal, Radhanath Sikdar (1813-1870), opined that Bengalis would never become physically as strong as the English without eating beef. However, as Susovon Sarkar says:

> The flutter caused in Bengal society by Derozians was, however, in the perspective of history something ephemeral and unsubstantial. They failed to develop any movement outside their own charmed circle and the circle itself could hardly keep significant form. ... Their only trait which was widely copied in contemporary society was the escape from social conventions, but mere evasion. This led to sad corruptions in which there was amongst the imitators no trace of the personal integrity and courage of real Derozians which have such a charm even today. (qtd. in Bhattacharya, N., 30-31)

Harishchandra Mukhopadhyay, the editor of the *Hindu Patriot*, wrote against the vices of alcoholism in a review 'Vices of Young Bengal' to Pyarichand Mitra's book *Mod Khawa Boro Daaye, Jaat Thakar Ki Upaye* on 5th December, 1860:

> The vice of drunkenness has been declaimed against from the beginning of society and we have no arguments to bring against it. There are few offences man can commit which procure so little enjoyment and leave such acute remorse behind. The most ignorant, and veriest boor feels it and the suffering of the educated man is proportionately greater. As an incentive to crime it has few equals among other motives (to take up a very low ground) drunkenness offers no profit no temporal benefit. Intoxication is a punishment in itself, and leaves behind it others, the acutest of their kind ... such wicked things are sometimes done under influence of intoxication that many feel strongly inclined to commit suicide to escape the constant bitterness of feeling, which is kept up by the recollection of these deeds. .... Young Bengal is now a turn of decision. It is applied to those of our young men, who openly eat and drink in public places, and are not ashamed of getting drunk. (qtd. in Bhattacharya, N., 249)

In the 1830s and 1840s, the spread of alcoholism could be noted amongst the students of the Hindu College. Soon it was to spread profusely among the middle class families of Calcutta irrespective of wealth and stature. Alcoholism crossed the bounds of the Hindu College to spread amongst teachers, lawyers and medical practitioners. Doctors were given to alcoholism more as the dispensaries sold liquor in bottles of medicine. Apart from the English-educated class of the Bengalis, alcoholism spread even amongst the conservative Hindus in the name of the Tantra cult. Akshay Kumar Dutta wrote in the *Tattvabodhini Patrika* of July 1845 how villages adjacent to Nabadwip, which never had the custom of drinking even twenty years back, are immersed in the vice of alcoholism. The increase in alcoholism amongst the English-educated and the conservatives channelized and increased the demand for liquor between the decades of 1860 and 1870. Whereas the East India Company earned nearly two lakhs of rupees from the selling of alcohol in the year 1818, the figure rose enormously to 13 lakhs in 1876-77. The increased demand and selling of liquor was also caused by the low price of alcohol.

Even as late as 1873, *Madhyastha* published articles accusing the government for spreading the ill-effects of drinking in 'E Desher Paan-Dosher Adhikya Jonyo Government Daayi Ki Naa?' Alcoholism came to be intertwined with the life of the Bengali in the nineteenth century. The class of babus, under the influence of Young Bengal, gave themselves to drinking irrespective of English education. The movement against alcoholism gained momentum with the writings of Pyarichand Mitra, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Dinabandhu Mitra.

The English-educated class dreamt of a new socio-economic order as a result of the youth being exposed to the Western thoughts of individualism, positivism, new values and a new capitalist order. However, unrestricted alcoholism dealt a blow to such dreams and possibilities. The movement against alcoholism was primarily a middle-class initiative that knew the stakes of the *samaj* and the *paribar* – the outer and the inner domains of Bengali life.

In 1818, a Temperance Society was established in Ireland against alcoholism. The movement soon spread all over England with prominent centres in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The movement was spread throughout England by the missionaries of the Church through the medium of a contemporary periodical known as the *Temperance Society Record.* The British and Foreign Temperance Society was established the very next year in London as a result of the popularity of the movement elsewhere. The movement against alcoholism began in India in the decade of the 1830s. The mast-bearers for this movement were Christian missionaries. Reverend Thomas Evans, Reverend Kenneth McDonald and Reverend Buchanan Blake were some of the prominent figures who rose against the vices of alcoholism in India. In 1852, the *Hindu Intelligencer* complained:

> The majority of the native inhabitants of Calcutta are now become more or less accustomed to the use of wine. Drunkenness is sometimes exhibited here in its most frightful colours, entailing misery and ruin on the family of the individual who is addicted to it. It had spread into the interior and there is scarcely a village which has not its grog shop. (qtd. in Oddie, 196)

However, the initiatives of the missionaries were not much fruitful in lessening the alcoholic tendencies of Bengalis. The establishment of three Temperance Societies in central Calcutta, Kulibazar and Barrackpore could not do much to influence the lives of the Bengalis. However, the efforts of the missionaries influenced the intelligentsia and the literati of nineteenth century Bengal. The consciousness against the vices of alcoholism was produced in words as early as 1840 by Akshay Kumar Dutta and gained momentum with plays or farces produced between 1860 and 1870. Maheshchandra De's *Neshakhuri Ki Jhokomari* (1863), Nabin Chandra Bandopadhyay's *Baruni Bilash* (1867), Ram Chandra Dutta's *Mataler Jananir Prolap* (1874) and Gyanadhan Bidyalankar's *Sudha Na Garal* (1870) were among the popular plays against alcoholism. However, Michael Madhusudan Dutta's *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* (1860) and Dinabandhu Mitra's *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* (1866) were among the most popular plays on the subject performed during this time.

Thousands of booklets were published on the subject of alcoholism and alcoholics from the presses of Bat-tala. The sellers of these books travelled in the countryside to dance and perform the texts. These booklets were also popularized in the city itself. These booklets were also popular and constantly circulated amongst the half-learned people of the lower strata of the city. They were read out aloud by one and heard in groups by large numbers of people.

The alcoholic Bengali also formed a topic for the Swang performances especially during the Gajan or Charak festivals:

> *Anurakta amra bhakta, tomar seba kori;*
> *Kripa kori, kripa koro, Debi Sureshwari.*
> *Bhashbo shobai shukher kuley, shokol dukkho jala bhule*
> *Bhaktadaley lao go tuley, bhore paaper tori.*
> ...
> *Rekho kore chirodas, nanan rogey baromaash,*
> *Jibon joto pabe hraash, rakhbe tumi dhori.*
> *Thakbo tomar jhonke shukhe, tomar stuti chhutbe mukhe,*
> *Porbo lutey dharar bukey – diye goragori;*
> *Jakgey putro paribar – anahery mori.* (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay, Bi., 355)

The following song of the Swang that commenced from Manashatala Narkel Bagaan of Khidirpore is marked by a dig at the so-called 'cultured' Bengali of the city:

> *Sabhatey jayi khaddar dhaki, chatsama dhuti pore,*
> *Duchokhe boye snatar pani, bharat matar tare*
> *Manchey manchey hnakiya kahi, koro na madyapaan,*
> *Ghorey dhuki kori dakadaki, ekta botol aan.* (qtd. in Bandyopadhyay, Bi., 355)

The plea of the Bengali reformist against the constant spread and vices of alcoholism was not unmixed with the vexation at the newer forces of Westernized colonial modernity and the constant effort to co-opt it in the 'indigenous' ways of life. The humour and irony in the farces produced on alcoholism hinted at an effort towards self-reflection as well as an aspiration for the desired self. Hence, alcoholism as a vice was unequivaocally attached to the writings against the practice of prostitution in the city – the real 'immoral', shaping the loss of values and disregard for a 'pure' way of life amongst the drunken babus. The next section probes into the figure and profession of the woman in sex-work in the city.

II. The Woman outside the 'Home': Prostitution as a Transgressive Act

> *Sonagachhi udchhey dhvaja, boro dhoom purchhey gnaja*
> *Mod kheye korchhey moja, Mechhua Bajaar.*
>
> (Chandrakanta Sikdar, 1870, qtd. in Jowardar, 106)

A well-known tradition in Bengali society holds that the idol of the goddess Durga for the festival of Durga Puja, would be imperfect if not made with the earth outside the doorstep of the prostitute. As Sumanta Banerjee says,

> The peculiar logic behind this was the belief that the earth on the threshold leading to a prostitute's house was the purest since it contained all the accumulated virtues which were shed and left behind there by every man who lost them once he entered a prostitute's room! By turning her into an appendage to religious rites, an ingenious rural society made a religious virtue of a social necessity. (1993, 2463)

The 'prostitute' of the first generation in eighteenth and nineteenth century Calcutta was the rootless and destitute woman, affected by famine, abandoned or sold off by families as a result of being raped by the *bargi*[1], female slaves seeking escape from captivity, daughters and widows from Kulin Brahmin families considered as liabilities. The metropolis of Calcutta saw the settlement of prostitute centres, especially in the regimental bazaars. However, the change in the patterns of profession of the prostitute was aided by the change in the tastes and habits of the Bengali babu in the later half of the nineteenth century. The nature of the profession of the prostitute was thus guided amply and solely by the changing natures of her clientele.

The prostitute and her world were represented in Bengali literature from early times. Before the farce proper, its predecessor, the Naksha, documents this growth and change of flesh-trade and its traders in the metropolis of Calcutta. Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Naba Babubilash* (1825), *Dootibilash* (1825) and *Naba Bibibilash* (1822) represent the life and manners of the *beshya* and the *babu* in the rapidly growing urban centre of the colonial government.

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[1] 'Bargi' is the generic name given to Marhatta raiders who created periodic havoc through loot, abduction and rape of women in rural Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century.

Incidentally, 'babu' was a title that could be conferred upon the subjects only by the Nawab of Bengal. The Nawabs would confer the title only upon the respected and the wealthy. However, with the Battle of Plassey (1757) and the coming of the East India Company, the ruler himself was reduced to just another entity like his subjects. The Permanent Settlement (1793) bred a class of absentee zamindars whose influx into the metropolitan space soon made them acquire the title of 'babu' for themselves. 'Babu' became a marker for the Bengali male. The new socio-economic order made the use of 'babu' profuse. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in his essay 'Babu' lays down the markers for identifying the babu in nineteenth century Calcutta. One of these markers reveals the babu as *'Jini nijo grihey jal khan, bondhugrihey mod khan, beshyagrihey gaali khan ebong munib saheber grihey goladhakka khan, tini-i babu'* (15-16), Bankim thus summing up the mobility and the position of the babu in the inner and the outer domains. The babu in Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Naba Babubilash* is shown to be one who excels in the four 'p's: *pasha* (game of dice), *paira* (pigeon-fights, a game popular among Calcutta's gentry in those days), *para-dar* (liaison with another man's wife), and *poshak* (dress); as well as the four 'kh's: *khushi* (pleasure), *khanki* (whore), *khana* (lavish meals), and *khairat* (charity, the euphemism used to persuade the babu to spend all his wealth on his hangers-on!). On the other hand, the prostitute, on whom Bhabanicharan speaks at a greater length in *Naba Bibibilash* is required to cultivate the six 'chh's: *chhalana* (tricks and artifices), *chhenali* (coquetry), *chhelemi* (pretending to be younger than her actual age), *chhapan* (hiding the other customers from the main patron, the babu who keeps her as a mistress), *chhemo* (deceiving the babu with false stories if he comes to know about her entertaining other customers), and *chhenchrami* (collecting money from sundry customers – other than the patron babu – before entertaining them). (Banerjee, 1993, 2464-65)

The practice of prostitution in Calcutta in the later half of the nineteenth century, especially in the 1860s, had become more scattered and the clientele was more diverse than before. In 1867, the number of prostitutes in the city rose to 30,000 marking the ever-growing business in the red-light areas in between Chitpore Road, Cornwallis Street, Baghbazar north and Manicktala Street. The composition of the prostitutes in the first half of the nineteenth century was mostly Hindu rather than Muslim, owing to the prejudice against re-marriage and Kulinism.

> The development of prostitution as an industry in 19th century Bengal offered avenues of escape for daughters and wives of kulin brahmin families, who for almost 700 years suffered deprivation and humiliation locked up within the cell of kulin obligations. The collapse of traditional social norms under the impact of the colonial economic changes also led to the loosening of the tight hold of kulinism. It is not surprising therefore that official records, contemporary newspaper reports and literature repeatedly mention the tendency. of wives and daughters from kulin families (along with young Hindu widows, the other deprived section of Bengali women) to gravitate towards prostitution in 19th century Bengal. A mid-19th century official report estimates that of the 12,000 odd prostitutes in Calcutta, more than 10,000 were Hindu widows and daughters of kulin Brahmins. (Chakravarty, 97)

The later half of the nineteenth century marked a change in the nature of prostitution as well as its clientele. The babu now comprised of what Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay paints in his essay 'Babu' as the *dashavatar*[2]. The avatars of the babu and who they make succumb to their might are:

1. *Kerani avatarey baddha daptari;*
2. *Master avatarey badhya chhatro, station-master avatarey badhya ticketheen pathik;*
3. *Braahmavatarey badhya chaalkola pratyashi purohit;*
4. *Mutshuddi avatarey badhya banik Ingraaj;*
5. *Daktar avatarey badhya rogi;*
6. *Ukil avatarey badhya mowakkel;*
7. *Hakim avatarey badhya bicharathi;*
8. *Jamidar avatarey badhya proja;*
9. *Sampadak avatarey badhya bhadrolok ebong;*
10. *Nishkarmavatarey badhya pushkarinir matshya* (15)

The babu in the later half of the nineteenth century was broadly two kinds: one, the last generation of the descendants of the 18th century banians and dewans whose fortunes were being steadily dissipated by their grandsons on entertainments, who had declined from the lavish nautch sessions and maintenance of expensive 'baijis' as mistresses (which the grandees of the past indulged in) to orgies of drinking and gluttony and promiscuous whore-mongering; the other, a rising generation of a retinue class in the tertiary sector of the commercial, administrative and judicial systems – clerks, lawyers, and a host of professionals like teachers, doctors, engineers, etc. Similarly, the second generation of prostitutes who thronged the colonial city in the later half of the nineteenth century were mostly the children of the first generation of the prostitutes who came to Calcutta as a result of famines, slave-trade or as run-away daughters and widows of Kulins. The second generation of prostitutes marked a change in the practice of prostitution along with changes in the tastes and demands of the clientele babu.

> In addition to the old devices of coquetry and deception (now termed as 'thaat', 'mithya', 'maan' and 'kanna'), the new skills necessary to cultivate are 'thamak' (flaunting an affected gait), 'chatak' (dazzling the customer with gaudy glamour), 'chaal' (putting on airs and tall talking) and 'gaal' (use of abusive language). The stress is obviously on marketing the product to a clientele which is more attracted by the glitter and the tinsel of the commodity which it is using. Although deceptive devices like 'maan' (acting as if her pride has been hurt) and 'kanna' (weeping) are still being used to appeal to the emotins of the customer, the main direction evidently is towards attracting the new babu's taste for tawdriness, and catering to his limited desire for a veneer of 'fine feeling' to cover his actual act of consumption. (Banerjee, 1993, 2468)

[2] The Hindu god, Vishnu is said to have had ten reincarnations to curb evil and propagate the rule of the good. These ten reincarnations or *dashavatars* include: Matsya, Kurma, Baraha, Nrisingha, Vaman, Ram, Parashuram, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki. Bankim uses the mythological concept of the ten reincarnations to satirically highlight the reincarnations of the Bengali babu in the later half of the nineteenth century.

The farces produced in the later half of the nineteenth century represented not only the persona of the prostitute in relation to the babu but also documented the popular perceptions of the woman in sex work. The prostitute in popular sayings, songs, oral literature, nakshas and farces was a figure towards whom the popular attitude was that of fear and envy garbed in a tone of contempt and ridicule. The fear of the prostitute operated at the level of the latter's power in subjugating men. However, her figure also called forth the envy of people with regard to her ability to amass huge wealth from the babu by dint of her sexual skills. The sex-worker woman in the later half of nineteenth century Calcutta thus exhibited the transgressive possibilities outside the precincts of the 'home' of the respectable babu. But, in spite of the wealthy statures of these women, they were denied respectability. The practice of prostitution could not be curbed by any means and it could be only voiced against in literary forms and newspapers. The only other movement that could be carried on and the agendas propagated thus, was the movement against alcoholism which was closely attached to the practice of prostitution. Many Nakshas present the uneven terrains of a colonial city rocked by the unsteady footsteps of the drunken cacophonous babu in a bye-lane of the red-light area, driven out from the house of the abusive prostitute. It is through such representations that the farces do not restrict themselves to graphic representations and instead become the agenda literature that they are meant to be.

> The new patriarchy was also sharply distinguished from the immediate social and cultural condition in which the majority of the people lived, for the "new" woman was quite the reverse of the "common" woman, who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males. Alongside the parody of the Westernized woman, this other construct is repeatedly emphasized in the literature of the 19th century through a host of lower-class female characters who make their appearance in the social milieu of the new middle class-maidservants, washing women, barbers, peddlers, procuresses, prostitutes. It was precisely this degenerate condition of women which nationalism claimed it would reform, and it was through these contrasts that the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the Westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as the common women of the lower classes. Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. This was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question. (Chatterjee, P., 1989, 628)

The farces as parody literature sought to focus on the Bengali babu in the outer world and his wife in the inner world or the 'home'. The fear of being dominated by the prostitute in the outer world generated the need for the babu to exhibit his stronghold on the domestic front. The woman at home was slowly emerging as the one imitating the ways and manners of the Western woman given to useless luxury. The later half of the nineteenth century marked what Sumit Sarkar aptly calls the *kaliyug* characterized by *kamini*, *kanchan*, *dasatva* of the Bengali male. The *kamini* or the woman was both the wife and the prostitute of which the latter was more difficult to relegate because of her transgressive possibilities. *Kanchan* or gold marked the position of the

Bengali male vis-à-vis both females in possession of him. *Dasatva*, on the other hand, precisely meant the servility in *chakri* towards the colonizer. However, *dasatva*, in the context of the later half of the nineteenth century was also in a sense a kind of servitude to the prostitute, or the self-made woman, and servitude to wine. On the one hand, when servitude to the government marked the stake of the Bengali male identity that cast him as the dominating figure in the hierarchy of the conjugal Hindu household, a position that he had carefully shaped for himself, servitude with regard to women and wine outside gave a tottering picture of this hierarchical structure. It was a need of the hour therefore, to voice concern against the vices of alcoholism which naturally addressed the added vice of profligacy at the prostitute's parlour. The farces dealt with in the following sections reflect upon the dual concerns of the reformist project of the Bengali intelligentsia alarmed of its position face to face with Westernized modernity.

III. The Vices of Wine and Woman: Voicing a Reformist Concern

Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota (1860)

Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota represents a cross-section of the youth in the city of Calcutta, given to the wine and woman. Michael Madhusudan Dutta names the youth in his play 'Naba Babu', an apt title for a generation given to waywardness in its zeal to be anti-establishment. *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* becomes, on closer scrutiny, an indictment against the radicalism of the extremists of Young Bengal, interestingly of which, Michael himself was an ardent member. *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* marks the ever-continuing duel between the old and the new – the old that is the conservative Hindu sticking to the traditional beliefs and norms and the new, which is the all-violating English-educated members of the Young Bengal.

A stereotype in plays concerned with the agenda against alcoholism in the later half of the nineteenth century is the figure of the 'old fool'. The 'old fool' is personified as the anxious father of the radical youth of the Bengali home given profusely to the vice of drunkenness. For these youth, the figure of the father addressed as the 'old fool' also personifies the old and the withering tradition face to face with the burgeoning of Westernized, colonial modernity.

Naba: *... Dekho, Kali, tomar ke ekjon khuro porom Vaishnav chhilen na? Jini Vrindavan e giye moren.*

Kali: *Haan, ekta* old fool *chhilo botey tar naam Krishnaprasad Ghosh.*

Naba: *Tobe besh hoyechhe. Tumi tnaari porichoy diyo, baaper naam ta chepe jao.*

Kali: *Ha, ha, ha!*

Naba: *Dur pagol hashish kano?*

Kali: *Ha, ha, ha! Bhalo ta jeno holo akhon Vaishnav byatader dui ekkhana pnuthir naam to na shikhle noy.*

Naba: *Tobey to sharle. Ami to shey bishoye porom pandit. Rosho dekhi. (Chinta koriya) Srimadbhagavatgita – Geetgovinda-*

Kali: *Geet ki?*

Naba: *Joydev er Geetgovinda*

Kali: *Dhoro – Srimati Bhagabatir Geet aar – Binda dootir geet –*

Naba: *Ha, ha, ha! Bhayar ki chomotkar* memory. (23-24)

Naba Babu's father, Kartamashai, in *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* is a pious Vaishnavite initially unaware of his son's profligacy and immorality. The play begins at a crucial juncture that places (religious) tradition and (colonial) modernity on the reference frame of impending turmoil. Kartamashai returns after a pilgrimage from Vrindavan only to become an obstacle to his son's waywardness. It is his father's presence in the household which debars Naba Babu from drinking in the house and frolicking in the Gyanotarangini Sabha. Michael's critique of the Sabha was aimed at the Society for Acquisition of General Knowledge, established by the Derozians in 1838. In naming the Gyanotarangini Sabha, Michael was harking back to the establishment of the Bidyotsahini Sabha in the house of Kaliprasanna Singha. It was on 14th June 1853 that Kaliprasanna Singha, at the age of thirteen, along with other prominent figures of the age, namely Umeshchandra Mullick, Kshetranath Basu, Radhanath Bidyaratna, Krishnadas Pal etc. inaugurated the Debating Club. The Bidyotsahini Sabha was meant for the discussion of burning issues of the day like widow remarriage, child marriage, women's education and so on. However, the Sabha was also marked by the extravagant arrangements of food and wine and hence the Bidyotsahini Sabha was mockingly rechristened as the Madyotsahini Sabha (Jowardar, 250-51). It was on behalf of the Bidyotsahini Sabha that Kaliprasanna Singha presented Michael Madhusudan Dutta with a wine glass. Michael himself was given to regular bouts of drinking and made good use of his gift. The play, thus, reflects the dichotomous position of the playwright himself pertaining to the allusions of the Bidyotsahini Sabha as well as Michael's strong association with Young Bengal.

Michael brings in the figure of the two prostitutes in Act I, Sc. II face to face with the Vaishanavite servant of the Kartamashai, wandering haplessly in search of Naba Babu and his Gyanotarangini Sabha. One of these women blurt out:

Pratham: *Dnara na, bari jayi aagey. Aaj muro khengra de beesh jhadbo. Ami tamon banda noi, baba. Ei boyeshey koto shoto betar naaker jole chokher jole kore chherechi. Chol na, aagey Modonmohon dekhe aashi; eshey or sraddho korbo akhon.* (26)

Her words echo the transgressive potentialities of the woman in sex work whose ability lies in subjugating the new babus of the city and hence extracting the wealth out of them. The much feared persona of the prostitute is highlighted all the more in a conversation of the Vaishnavite Babaji, clueless of Naba Babu and the Sabha amidst a red light area. The women poke fun at him and he desires to flee:

Babaji: (*swagata*) *Ki bipod! Radhe Krishna.* (*Prakashey*) *Na bachha, tomra jao, amar ghaat hoyechhe.* (27)

Michael sketches the cacophonous voices in the city streets on an eventful evening that is evidently the 'everydayness' of a colonial city rocked by the presence of a motley crowd and its linguistic representations, drawing heavily from Hutom's vision of the city space. The languages of the city flit from the motley English of the Young Bengal radicals, Naba Babu and Kalinath, to the colloquial abusive tongue of the prostitutes peppered with an inherent rusticity that the city space cannot negate, the unclear utterances of the drunkard bumping into the pious Vaishnavite in a narrow bye-lane of Sikdarpara Street, the broken Bengali of the English sergeant surveying the nooks and corners of the indigenous spaces reminding one of the impending dangers to the Bacchanalia of the city evenings, to the disgust of the Muslim porters at the profligacy of the Hindu babus given to restoring the national pride and glory, and of course the vigorous pronouncing of 'Radhe Krishna' amidst all the transactions of the city space.

Chowkidar: *Khara rao, sala.*

Babaji: *Dohai Companyr – dohai Companyr.*

Sergeant: *Hold your tongue you black brute. Yeh bag mein aur kiya hai deke ga.*

...

Pratham: *Ih aaj je koto chhej petiyeche taar hishaab nai, mor gordaanta jeno bneke jachhe.*

Dwitiyo: *Dekh mamu, ei Hnedu betarai duniyadarir moja kore nyele. Betargo ki aramer din, bhai.*

Pratham: *Mor bekuf: O haramkhor betargo ki aar din aachhe? Ora na mane allah, na mane dyebta.*

Dwitiyo: *Lekin kyebal ei gorukhego betargo doulatei mogor pnochghar eto phnepe otteche: shaam holei betara badurer mafik jhnake jhnake aashey pore aar koto je khaaye, koto je piye jaaye, ta ke bolti pare.* (28-29)

Voices are heard in the background shouting and trying to sell off ice and jasmine – the two necessities at the prostitute's parlour. Soda water reached Calcutta in 1811 and in 1833 Tuscany brought in ice from England to Calcutta. These two commodities really enhanced the scope of enjoying every sip of wine among the wine-lovers.

> Full many a man, both young and old,
> Is brought to his sarcophagus
> By pouring water, icy cold
> Adown his warm aesophagus. (Bahadur, 139)

The qualities of ice were much praised by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar himself, who claimed that the three gifts that the English had bestowed on the colonial subjects were English Literature, bread and ice. (Jowardar, 289) However, it took considerable time for the entry of ice into the houses of the middle-class babus in the Native Town of Calcutta. The conservative Hindus denounced the consumption of ice, the frozen water of the *mlechchas*, deeming it as sacrilege. *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* points at the problematics of consumption not only at the level of wine but also of beef, ice and soda water, which, in the proximity of the prostitute, subject the Vaishnavite

to the realization that civilization is at stake. This realization comes gradually as he struggles to grasp the 'identity' of the Gyanotarangini Sabha which slowly symbolizes all the 'immorality' that the old religious tradition dreads.

> Babaji: *...Uh, thu, thu, Radhe Krishna! Ami to e Gyanotarangini Sabhar bishoy kichhui bujhtey pachhi na.*
> ...
> Babaji: (*agrashor hoiya swagato*) *E ki chamatkar byapar? Era to kashbi dekhtey pachhi. Ki shorbonash! Ami etokhone bujhte pachhi kandota ki. Nabakumar ta dekhchi ekebarey boye gechhey. Karta mahashoy eshob katha shunle ki aar raksha thakbe?* (29-30)

The witness to such linguistic transactions is none other than the member of the old camp – the traditional Vaishnavite. He is astounded by the ways of the 'new' city, the outer world of the evening city, given to leisure after work that contrasts starkly with the inner space of the home. This is a space that the Vaishnavite is unknown to and it vexes his 'self' placed in the religious space of Vrindavan. Quite aptly, thus, the playwright brings the two facets of the city space close to each other only to mark the progress of civilization initiated by the colonial endeavour. Michael's farce, within the greater trope of its reformist zeal in the wake of alcoholism and prostitution, does not fail to demarcate the babbling voices that make up the new socio-economic order of the colonial broth. Within this colonial broth the clash between tradition and modernity is shown to be an inevitable consequence of the new economic possibilities that were ushered in by the first half of the nineteenth century.

Act II Sc I focuses on the proceedings of the Gyanotarangini Sabha presided over by Naba Babu. Michael satirizes the fakeness and fetishism involved in the reformist project of the English-educated mast-bearers of civilization. Naba Babu elucidates upon the objectives of the Sabha and its agenda:

- Gentlemen, *ei sabhar naam Gyanotarangini Sabha – amra shokole er* member – *amra ekhane* meet *korye jate gyaan jonme tai kore thaki* – and we are jolly good fellows.
- Gentlemen, *amader shokoler Hindukuley jonmo, kintu amra bidyabale* superstition *er shikoli ketey* free *hoyechhi; amra puttalike dekhe hnatu nowate aar swikar kori ne, gyaaner batir dwara amader agyaan ondhokaar dur hoyechhe; akhon amar prarthona ei je, tomra shokole matha mon ek kore, edesher* social reformation *jate hoye taar cheshta koro.*
- Gentlemen, *tomader meyeder* educate *koro – tader swadhinata deo – jaat bhed tafat koro – aar bidhabader bibaho deo – tahole ebong taholei, amader priyo bharatbhumi* England *probhriti shobhyo desher shonge tokkor dite parbe – nochet noy!*
- *Kintu* Gentlemen, *akhon e desh amader pokkhe jeno ek mosto jelkhana; ei griho kebol amader* Liberty Hall *orthat amader swadhinata dalan; ekhaney jar je khushi, shey tai koro.* Gentlemen, in the name of freedom, let us enjoy ourselves. (35)

Naba Babu's speech is soon followed by music, dance and frolicking with the prostitutes, Nitombini and Poyodhori. Whereas the youth of the Sabha – namely, Naba, Kali, Chaitan, Mahesh, Balai, Shibu – stoop and leave in their drunken orgies, the musicians, a class much removed from the economic position of the babus of the Sabha, try the left over brandy and

come to the conclusion that the local marijuana serves them better. Michael problematizes the existing and pre-existing concepts of *shobhyota* in the face of the Renaissance in Bengal. *Shobhyota*, synonymous with modernity, is scrutinized in the play at several levels – the Vaishnavite coming face to face with the Sabha, Naba Babu enumerating the scope of a reformist project stemming from their own *shobhyota* and finally, Naba Babu's wife, Harakamini voicing out the reformist concern of Michael himself vis-à-vis *shobhyota*.

> Harakamini: ... *Behayara abar bole ki, je amra shayebder moton shobhyo hoyechi. Ha amar pora kopal. Mod mash kheyye dholadholi kollei ki shobhyo hoy? – Ekei ki bole shobhyota?* (41)

Michael voices the concern through the woman's voice who bears testimony to the plight at home. Naba Babu's mother is unshaken by her son's innocence even in his drunken stupor while Kartamashai passes the blame of sacrilege in alcoholism to the *kaliyug* of the heinous city Calcutta. It is Prasannakumari, Naba Babu's sister, and his wife, Harakamini, who elaborate the linkage between the alliterative entities in *sabha* and *shobhyota*, thus mirroring the heterogenetic space of the city, constituted and highlighted by the reformation project of the new Bengali youth and interspersed with characters that make the most of the inflow of ready money from the riches of such reformers. In the very first sequence of dialogues, Kalinath is seen to be apprehensive, at the arrival of Naba Babu's pious father, about the flowing in and out of the wealth that keeps their reformation project running in the Gyanotarangini Sabha:

> Kalinath: ... *Hah, e buro beta ki akaler badol hoye amader* pleasure *noshto kottey elo? Ei Naba amader shoddar, aar* money matter *e ei bishesh shahajjyo kore; e* charlie *je amader shorbonash hobe, tar shondeho nai.* (22)

Naba Babu reminds one, of the protagonist in Bhabanicharan Bandopadhyay's *Naba Babubilash* (1825). It was at the request of Raja Pratap Chandra Singha and Raja Ishwar Chandra Singha of Paikpara that Michael produced this play. The play was supposed to be enacted along with *Sharmishtha*, Michael's mythological play. However, the play could not be enacted due to vehement protestations of members of the Young Bengal. Disappointed thus, Michael wrote to his friend, Rajnarayan Basu on 24th April, 1860: '...but, to tell you the candid truth I half regret having published those two things.' (Gupta K., 123) By two, Michael also referred to his other farce, *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* (1860) that was also barred from enactment. However, on 18th July 1865, *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* was enacted for the first time in the house of Raja Debikrishna Bahadur, at the Shobhabazaar Private Theatrical Society. It was re-enacted in 1867 at the Jorasanko Natyashala and on 26th April 1873 at the National Theatre. As a play, *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* had much influence on Dinabandhu Mitra's *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* (1866).

Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi (1866)

> If this trash be ever put on the Stage, we cannot recommend a better place for its performance than Sonagachi and a better audience than its inmates and their patrons.
>
> (Rev. Lalbehari Dey, *Friday Review*, qtd. in Das Gupta, 1947, 82)

Dinabandhu Mitra retorted to Reverend Lalbehari Dey's allegations on *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* though the pseudonym of Totaram Bhaat. The retort proved to be the more prominent of the two in light of the immense popularity of the play and its constant performances throughout the later half of the nineteenth century. The Bagbazaar Amateur Theatre (later known as the Shyambazar Natyasamaj) performed this play first during Durgapuja (on the day of *Saptami*) in 1868 at the house of Prankrishna Halder in Bagbazaar. The second enactment took place at the house of Nabin Chandra Sarkar in Shyampukur during Lakshmipuja, the same year. The fourth enactment of the play in 1870 was marked by the performances of stalwarts as its characters:

- Neemchand- Girish Chandra Ghosh
- Atal- Nagendranath Bandopadhyay
- Jibanchandra- Ardhendu Shekhar Mustaphi
- Ram Manikya- Radha Madhav Kar
- Kanchan- Nandalal Ghosh (Mitra I., 37)

The National Theatre saw the enactment of *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* on 5th April, 1873 as a charity night for raising funds for the native Mayo Hospital. Literary historians have, however, accorded the popularity of the play to the influence of Michael Madhusudan Dutta who was instrumental not only in shaping the text of the play but was also the persona on whom the much talked about character of Neemchand is based. The drunken Neemchand Dutta rolls in the drains of Calcutta and quotes from John Milton on seeing the *paharawallah*'s lamp:

> Hail holy light! offspring of Heaven, first-born,
> Or the Eternal coeternal beam... (54)

In such acts, Michael himself is said to be painted by the playwright in the guise of Neem Chand. In fact, the name, 'Neem Chand' is held as an ironical opposite to that of 'Madhusudan'. When asked about the similarities between Neem Chand and Madhusudan, Dinabandhu Mitra replied: 'Madhu ki kokhono neem hoy?' (Can honey ever be bitter?), thus leaving the possibility ambiguous. (qtd. in Das Gupta, 1947, 82)

The play commences with Neem Chand and Nakuleshwar debating upon the issue of the Temperance Society for the erasure of drinking habits. Neem Chand, the dipsomaniac, is against any kind of abstention from wine even if it tells upon the health of a person:

> Neem Chand: *Roger bhoye mod na khawa othoba dhorey chherey deowa oti bhirutoro karma* –
> "To be weak is miserable
> Doing or suffering." (4)

In his constant quotations from English poets, Neem Chand mirrors Madhusudan, as does his criticism of the institution of marriage and the position of women in marriage. Michael resented when his father Raj Narayan Dutta tried fixing his marriage with a girl of eight years. Moreover, it is reported that he was deeply in love with his confidante, Gourdas Basak and wished the latter were a girl. (Bhattacharya Al, 63)

The figure of the 'old fool' recurs in *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* as the father of the drunkard son, Atalbihari. Jiban Chandra, Atal's father, is described by the son as: '*Amar baba porom dharmik, protyoho Shibpuja koren.*' (6) Jiban Chandra is critical of the new wave of change in the manners of both the sexes in the city. He is confident of his wife's sanctity of character and vents his disgust at the new woman: '*Tomar shekeley byan, tar chheletey shondo hoyna – ekeley byanera lekhapora shikhechhen, gown porechhen, baganey jachhen, eder chheletey shondo hobe*' (12). Caught between the *ekaal* and *shekaal*, or the old and the new, Jiban Chandra seeks refuge for the moral disciplining of his son in the penance of the Brahmo Samaj, something which he had earlier denounced because of its 'difference' with conservative Hinduism. Dinabandhu Mitra signals to the factionalism within the Brahmo Samaj itself, consequently leading to its bifurcation into the Adi Brahmo Samaj and the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in 1866, the year in which *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* was written. This was also the time when most of the Derozians had abandoned their anti-establishment views and were co-opted within the frameworks of the orthodox Hindus and the Brahmos – a journey which Sumit Sarkar traces through the characters of Banylal in Krishnamohan Banerjee's *The Persecuted*, Naba Babu in Madhusudan Dutta's *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota* and Neem Chand Dinabandhu Mitra's *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi.* (1985, 22-23)

More than indicating the role of alcoholism in the withering away of the possibilities of the English-educated youth in nineteenth century Calcutta, Dinabandhu Mitra uses Neem Chand's drunkenness as metaphor for the social upheavals throughout Bengal this time. Calcutta, at that time, was under the pangs of the famine of 1866-67 and was preparing itself for the disastrous cyclone of 1868. Neem Chand converses with majority of the characters in the play, bringing out their hypocrisy in due course.

> Neem Chand: *Achcha baba, Brahmodharmer tumi bujhecho ki?*
> Kenaram: *Ami Samaj er shompadok, ammi aar kichu bujhte parini.* (Act II, Sc. ii, p. 39)

Kenaram, a deputy of the provincial court, misreads the Bengali name Muchiram as Ghotiram and becomes popularly known as Ghotiram Deputy. His ignorance of the basic tenets of Brahmoism is hid from the common eye by his stature of a deputy and his affinity to the colonial government. He claims his inadequacy in reading Bengali with ease, thus standing shallow and in stark contrast to Neem Chand's constant quotations from Shakespeare, Milton and Byron.

Dinabandhu Mitra brings up carefully the agency of language in self-fashioning of the new composition of the city. Ram Manikya, an inhabitant of Dhaka-Bikrampur, is a veritable 'other' to the city-dweller as is evident from the sneer with which the character voices his inability at this deliberate self-fashioning that operates at several levels in the social framework:

> Ram Manikya: *Pungir bai bangal bangal koirya mastak guraidise- bangal kaush kyan- eto okadyo kaisi tobu koilkattar moto hobar parsi na? Koilkattar moto na korsi ki? Magibari gesi, maguri chikon duti poraisi, gorar barir biskat bokkon korsi, bandil kaisi- eto koiryao koilkattar moto hobar parlam na, tobe e paap dehotey aar kaaj ki, ami jole jaap di, amare hangore, kumire bokkon koruk* – (Act II, Sc. i, p. 31)

Ram Manikya, despite his efforts at consuming biscuit and brandy and visiting prostitutes, is frustrated by his failure to be assimilated among the city-dwellers. His inadequacy remains at the level of language – his Eastern Bengali dialect alienating him from the sophistication of the city. The distinction between the urban and the rural spaces becomes more pronounced in the marginalization through language. He is overpowered by those who have appropriated the language skills in their own spree for self-fashioning. Neem Chand quotes:

> "Little Learning is a dangerous thing
> Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring," (Act II, Sc. I, p. 31)

The context of 'Little Learning' here is that of English education, the graph of which is made evident by the playwright through the characters of Ram Manikya, Bhola and Atal:

> Ram Manikya: *Marddagor perloun-e* he, his, him, *oiche; maiyagor naam-e* she, her, her *koiche; jodi morddagor* "he, his, him" *oilo, tobe maiyagor* "she, shis, shim" *oibe na kyan?* (Act III, Sc. I, p. 77)

> Bhola: I join you sir, I join you sir, where you go I go, son-in-law join father-in-law, I join you sir – (Act II, Sc. ii, p. 27)

> Atal: *Ebar tui Shakespeare bolchish taar aar kono shondo nai – amra o* play *ta Hare Saheb er* school *e porechilem* – Merchant of Venerials *amra onek bar porichi* – (Act II, Sc. ii, p. 32)

This 'Little Learning' is validated by the essential prefix of *bhadra* that marks the respectability of the babu. Ram Manikya, on being introduced to Deputy Kenaram, desires to know the salary he earns in order to be able to judge whether the latter is a *bhadra* or *abhadra.* On the other hand, Atal's wife expresses the fact about her husband: *'Kishey lokey babu bolbe, kebol tai dekhey'*. The marker of *bhadra* is enigmatically questioned towards the end of the play by Neem Chand, when Atal sends a transvestite to the *andarmahal* of the house in order to hand over his mother-in-law to Neem Chand: *'E ki bhadrolok e pare?'* The *bhadrolok* is laid bare by Neem Chand when Atal mistakenly brings out his wife, Kumudini, for Neem Chand, and Atal puts the blame on Neem Chand to escape punishment. When questioned by the elder members of the household as to who the real culprit is, Neem Chand replies:

Neem Chand: *Shomoy. Shobhyotar shohit bidyabhaber udbaho holei birombonar jonmo hoy. Rambabu, chepey jao baba,* Let bygones be bygones.
"To mourn a mischief that is past and gone,
Is the next way to draw new mischief on."
Bishesh kono dosh drishto hoy na, jehetu Atal swiyo shahadharminir shohit alapchari korechhey, n ahoy atal ke straino bole ghrina korun; jodi bolen amar shumukhey enechhey, tatei ba dosh ki? Bhabun, apnar upojukto bhaipo shobhyotar onugami hoye tnaar hridoypriyo bondhur shohit alap koriye dichchilen – Female emancipation is not a bad thing among gentlemen. (Act III, Sc. iii, 87)

Perennially drunk, Neem Chand is the only vehicle of the playwright's voice and his view of *shobhyota* in the play. This is possible because of the fact that Neem Chand continuously undergoes self-reflection in the course of the play and understands how wine has alienated him from his kith and kin and cast him in the light of hatred for all around him. Yet, unlike Atal, who is both given to wine and the woman, Neem Chand is sympathetic of the plight of his own wife caused due to his alcoholism. His conversations with Kanchan, the prostitute, does not reveal him to be a *babu* for whom upward social mobility is guided by the consumption of the woman in flesh trade. Neem Chand blurts out his disgust at Atal's ignorance and his waywardness:

Atal: *Ami Meghnadbadh kinechhi.*
Neemchand: *Ami porbo.*
Atal: *Amar boro bhalo bodh hoy na.*
Neem Chand: *Or bhalo mondo tumi bujhbe ki? Tumi porecho Datakarna, tomar baap porechey Dasharathi, tomar thakurdada porechey Kashidas, tomar haatey Meghnad, kathurer haatey manik – Michael dada Bangalar Milton!* (Act III, Sc. iii, p. 82)

Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi becomes the dossier of all that the later half of nineteenth century Calcutta was. Dinabandhu Mitra etches out a collage of the city space with the help of myriad characters some which are claimed by literary historians to have been lifted from real life personages. If Neem Chand personifies the 'rebel' figure of Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Kanchan is apparently a replica of Swarna Baiji. Following from the farce of Bholanath Mukhopadhyay, *Apnar Mukh Apni Dekhun*, and Dinabandhu Mitra's own political play, *Neel Darpan*, *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* does not lag behind in upholding the mirror to the times it represents. Time becomes a synonym for the confusion that Calcutta was in the later part of the century and it is time (*Shomoy*) on whom Neem Chand transfers all the blame. *Shomoy* becomes an umbrella-term, an all inclusive category, echoing the voice of Kartamashai in *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota*, who refers to time as *kaliyug* that marks the end of a civilization. Neem Chand is thus the tottering Hercules posing himself in his drunkenness as an apology for the changing times:

Mataler maan tumi, ganikar gati,
Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi, tumi jaar pati. (Act III, Sc. iii, p. 90)

Neem Chand is a clairvoyant in the last dreg of the play directing the audience's gaze towards the failed figure of the nineteenth century Bengali *bhadrolok*, whose *dasatva* outside could only be erased by his dominance in the conjugal household, a position which he is bound to lose being

swept away in the fervour for wine and woman. *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* plays with the issue of alcoholism in presenting the characters as gripped by the intoxication of time/civilization/ modernity. There are ironic intertextual references, constant references to known tropes and figures, and yet, the play emerges as one of the most popular hits within the national-popular of the National Theatre – not only because it stands as a reminder of the nationalist project of the Bengali *bhadrolok*, long given to nation-building, but also because of the fact that it points equally to the withering state of the *shadhoba* or the married woman, the national icon. 'Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi' is the oxymoronic skin that is peeled through the play to remind the *bhadrolok* of his nationalist project of social reformation and women's emancipation.

IV. The Lecherous Male and the Chastity of Sita: Inner Crisis of the Times

Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ (1860)

The National Theatre witnessed the performance of *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* along with *Mustaphi Saheb Ka Pakka Tamasha* on 17th January 1873. On 8th March 1873, the play was re-enacted with Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* and a host of other pantomimes. *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* was the farce whose performance was shunned by conservative Hindus, the other being opposed to by the Young Bengal. Six years after its publication, *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* was first performed by the Arpuli Natya Samaj in 1866.

The issue of dispute regarding the play was none other than Michael's endeavour in critiquing the 'old' and the 'traditional' vis-à-vis the critique of the 'new' in *Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota.* The critique was aimed at conservatives through the pseudo-orthodox Vaishnavite, Bhakta Prasad, the old, lusty haggard whose mellowed down version was etched as Rajiblochan in Dinabandhu Mitra's *Biye Paagla Buro.* Michael's critique was not unproblematic as he questioned the whole paraphernalia of the 'Hindu' identity that stood in contrast with the subaltern Muslim subjects of the play, Hanif and Fatima. Written in the aftermath of the Sepoy Mutiny, the play becomes a socio-economic allegory to the withering feudal order of the country viewing the sea of changes in the urban centre of Calcutta from a distance. Michael's questioning of the existing order also arose for the sense of 'guilt' that was part and parcel of the 'loyalty' to the British throne in the Revolt of 1857. This sense of 'guilt' produced the nascent forms of Hindu nationalism in the post-1860s remarkably exhibited in the novels of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* pointed at a critical intercourse of time-lines signaling historical changes in the socio-economic order – the Battle of Plassey (1757), the Permanent Settlement (1793) and the Sepoy Mutiny (1857), interspersed with the eventfulness of the unfathomable first half of the nineteenth century in between.

Bhakta Prasad is undoubtedly the emblem of the feudalism in question, which is all the more aggravated by his pious, upper caste, upper crust, Hindu, Vaishnav identity. Interestingly, a Bat-tala wood engraving of the year 1860 shows a Vaishnavite image of a cat's face, with lusty human eyes and entitled *Beral Tapashvi*, marking the oxymoron intended in the appearance and reality of the creature. The Vaishnav identity was continuously at stake in the later half of the century as many of the Kalighat *pat*s pictured a woman hitting the Vaishnav with a broom. Even before Bhakta Prasad enters into the scene, Hanif's apprehensions about his inability as a Muslim peasant to pay taxes, introduces the power-relations within the play. The matrix of power is made clearer in the ensuing dialogue between Hanif and Bhakta Prasad:

Bhakta: *Toder phashal houk aar naa houk tatey amar ki boye gelo.*

Hanif: *Aggye apni hochchen katta-*

Bhakta: *Mar beta, Companyr sarkar to amake chharbe na. Ta akhon bol khajna dibi kina.*

(Act I, Sc. i, p. 45)

The hierarchical structure evident from the exchanges between Bhakta Prasad and Hanif reverberate the clashes of fear and desire, which becomes a central motif of the play. This dual play of fear and desire operates differently in the psychological terrain of the male characters marking the colonial re-orderings of the pre-existing economic arrangements in the post-Permanent Settlement period. For Hanif, the desire is echoed in his nostalgic musings of a time that witnessed the Muslim rule in Bengal: '*Amar baap dada nawab er sarkarey chakuri korechhey...*' (Act I, Sc. ii, p. 51). Doubly marginalized, in the wake of the last dreg of the century, both as a peasant and most importantly as a Muslim subject, Hanif's fear of being further subjugated shapes him as the indomitable 'other' to the Hindus higher in the newly-emerged power nexus. He is constantly described as *jamdoot*, an expression that marks the fear of the other characters in relation to him. For Gadadhar, servant to Bhakta Prasad the desire of upward social mobility and leisure is occasionally fulfilled by sitting and imagining on Bhakta Prasad's couch in the absence of the latter. As Gadadhar once says, '*Aha ki aramer jinish. Ei babu betarai moja kore nile. Jara bhaater shonge bati bati ghee aar dudh khaye, aar emni balisher upor thesh diye boshey tader kottye shukhi ki aar aache?*' (Act II, Sc. i, p. 56)

The Muslim 'other', is even described by Derozio as 'the lawless plunderers' and 'the savage, rude disturbers ... of peace'. In 1849, while Michael exchanged letters with John Drinkwater Bethune, on women's education and emancipation, Bethune put the blame of the ignorance and plight of the Hindu woman on the 'courtly imitation of ... Mohammedan invaders.' Thus, the Muslim was constructed as the 'other' not only by Hindu conservatives, but by a section of the reformist radicals and the British administration as well.

> The Orientalists advocated the view that the 'Hindu' past, though crude and primitive, was some sort of an enlightened age and hoped that the Hindus would look upto the British period as an age of Restoration and further progress as well. The occidentalists, again to be precise, Orientalist-occidentalists, on the other hand, though epistemically united with their counterpart, saw in it, no more than a replica of the 'barbaric middle age', a total antithesis of whatever 'civilized' Europe stood for. (Bandyopadhyay, S, 26-27)

By 1860, in the aftermath of the tumultuous Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the ongoing Indigo Revolt as well as the setting up of the Indigo Commission by the British Government, a shift in Michael's own position is notable vis-à-vis *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*. Michael's Hanif becomes a cue to Dinabandhu's Torap in *Neel Darpan* in all his transgressive act of being a 'rebel' who underlines boldly the inherent fear of being uprooted by Bhakta Prasad.

The exchange for a relaxed taxation on Hanif is fixed by Bhakta Prasad as the woman's body, notably the body of the subaltern Muslim woman constantly sneered by the Hindu characters of the play as *Neri*, a derogatory term of 'otherization'. Bhakta Prasad is skeptical for a while about the prospects of such a transaction: '*Musalman! Yavan! Mlechcha! Parakaltao ki noshto korbo?*', but soon convinces himself: '*Dinobandho, tumii ja karo. Hyaan, Strilok- tader abar jaat ki? Tara to sakshat prakritiswarupa, emon to amader shastre o promaan pawa jachche...*'. For Bhakta Prasad, desire works at the dual levels – possession of socio-economic power and the possession of the woman's body. This desire is coupled strongly with a fear of those whom he seeks to subjugate – the Muslim peasant Hanif and his wife, Fatima. The apology for this (sexual) desire is sounded constantly, thus, through the prayers of Bhakta Prasad.

Religion in the play is both a matter of agency as well as a power slipping out of hands. Colonial law had bestowed the power on indigenous religious systems to 'exercise control over the realm of belief and personal relationships.' (Sarkar, T, 2001, 71) The personal law courts that depended on the rulings by the pundits underwent drastic changes in the 1860s when the role of these pundits was dispensed with as a compilation and codification of a sizeable body of Hindu legal texts had been finalized. As Tanika Sarkar points out,

> The institution of a native jury system in seven Bengal districts by the 1860s – including Hooghly, ... expanded the scope of Hindu public opinion. English judges too deferred to Hindu custom when reaching their verdicts. (2001, 71-72)

The loopholes within the new arrangements in the native judicial system and the inevitability of Hindu customs, precisely religious customs, find expression in the loopholes within religion itself in the play. The impossibility of possessing Panchi, the daughter of a wealthy Hindu, in spite of her husband being posted in Calcutta is caused by the fear of society and relatives and friends and the concern it would cause among Bhakta Prasad's own breed of people. It is this fear which lurches till the end of the play even when Bhakta Prasad bribes both Bachaspati and Hanif with handsome amounts to remain tight-lipped about his act of lechery.

Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ was initially named 'Bhagna Shib Mandir', but Michael chose the former as the final title of his play. *Bhagna Shib Mandir* (dilapidated temple of Shiva) becomes a metaphor to the dilapidated state of the feudal order faced with the threat of upheavals. The lechery of Bhakta Prasad is laid bare by a Muslim peasant because of the affinity of the act to the *mandir*, while the authorial stature of the *mandir* as a sanctimonious religious space is made redundant, as Bhakta Prasad himself ironically remarks: '*Bhagna Shib e to Shibatva nai.*'

Bhakta Prasad brings out the pure/impure binary in his vision of the urban centre of Calcutta, where his son, Ambika is a student at the Hindu College. For Sumit Sarkar,

> Nineteenth-century Calcutta had become a real metropolis for the bhadrolok, providing education, opportunities for jobs, printed books, a taste for new cultural values. It was also, by and large, a city where the bhadrolok did not yet feel at home, am experience embodied in the practice of the Bengali gentleman, till well into the twentieth century, calling his city residence *basha*, reserving the more intimate term *bari* for the ancestral village home. (1997, 176-77)

Bhakta Prasad is vexed at the *adharmaacharan* (sacrilegious acts) that characterizes the city space – specifically the erasure of *jaat* or caste, and affinity with the Muslims. A same sense of fear also operates against the Christians (the colonizer's customs). Intimidated by a possibility of Ambika's transgression, so as to refrain from performing the last rites of his 'pious' father, Bhakta Prasad opines of bringing Ambika back. *Bari* becomes the paradigm of the pure space, by virtue of a continuum of Hindu religious practice there, in contrast to the violations to the same performed within and without the precincts of the *basha* in Calcutta. Here is also the broader fear of the extinction of Hindu religious customs constantly threatened by the immorality of *kaliyug*: '*Ki shorbonnash! Hinduanir maryada dekhchi aar kono prokarei roilo na! Aar roiboi ba kamon kore? Kolir pratap din din barchhey boi to noy*' (Act II, Sc. i, p. 55).

Hanif and Fatima negate the fetishized white sheet of purity pegged and overarched throughout the village space in the name of sanctity of (Hindu) religion. In hatching a conspiracy against the old Bhakta Prasad, Fatima is the least apprehensive of losing her chastity. Hanif, on the other hand, deems Bhakta Prasad as the *kafer*, whose act of touching Fatima is sacrilegious to the *izzat* of the Muslim subject. The woman's body becomes the site where the fixed religious categories of 'sanctity' are played upon. Unlike *Neel Darpan*, there is no rape in the play, no signs of molestation, because Fatima's role is constantly pre-fixed by the characters surrounding her. Pnuti, the go-between (*kutni*) who is appointed by Bhakta Prasad to bring Fatima to him, expresses her disgust at the Muslim 'other'. Fatima, as a Muslim woman (*Neri*) is bereft of any scope of sanctity or respectability by virtue of her community and stereotyped image. Pnuti indicates that her job of a go-between has led innumerable women to become outcastes and thus engage in flesh-trade. However, in the case of Fatima, as she keeps making statements to the effect, there is no possibility of such an act because of her stature as the 'other'. Fatima stands in

between the two clashing ideals, the Hindu and the Muslim, Bhakta Prasad and Hanif, the powerful and the powerless, to turn the world of religious order upside down. Finally, Hanif bashes Bhakta Prasad in the guise of a ghost or God, speaking from the precincts of the *bhagna shib mandir*. Tanika Sarkar, with reference to another farce, Surendrachandra Bandopadhyay's *Jamalaye Elokeshir Bichar* (1873), says,

> Popular imagination was so saturated with courtroom images that quite a few of the scandal plays were simply a duplication of the trials and of subsequent disciplinary proceedings. The divine world corresponded in many of these to the procedures of earthly justice. Elokeshi and her parents are tried in the courts of the gods where the prison guard and the police constables are Muslim spirits—'Mamdo bhoots'—since, in description of the actual events, the same personnel are shown as Muslim characters. (2001, 73)

Enacting this stereotype of the ghostly or ghastly, Hanif extracts a handsome amount from Bhakta Prasad, signaling, in a way, 'the objective formation of the subaltern social groups, by the developments and transformations occurring in the sphere of economic production...' (Gramsci, 52). Hanif's physical act of whacking Bhakta Prasad, the one at the top most rung of the hierarchical order, is a motif that is part and parcel of the farce. However, one cannot stop at the reductionist position of claiming victory of the good (Hanif) over the evil (Bhakta Prasad), simply because the self-reflexive critique of Bhakta Prasad is not to highlight the triumph or emergence of a new economic order, but to judge the withering values on the reference frame of 'morality' and hence the admittance of an 'immoral' act comes as the last words of the play from Bhakta Prasad himself. If Naba Babu was the questionable, wayward 'new', this farce questions the existent 'old' and comes out as an apology. It is this critique probably, which angered the conservative camp of Hindus, leading to a barring of the production of the farce.

Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal (1865)

Baire chhilo shadhur akar,
  Monta kintu dharma dhowa.
Punya khataye joma shunyo,
  Bhandamitey charti powa.
Shiksha dilo kiler chotey,
  Hnaar gnuriye khoyer mowa.
Jamon karmo phollo dharma,
"Buro Shaliker Ghaarey rõwa."

(Michael Madhusudan Dutta. *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*, 63)

Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* takes off from this point of departure in Michael's play and relates to the theme and subject of *'jamon karmo phollo dharma'*, the realization voiced out by Bhakta Prasad at the end of the play. *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* was performed eight to nine times in the Pathuriaghata Theatre in 1865 and was also performed at the National Theatre along with *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ* on 8th March 1873.

Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal bears semblance to the comic treatment in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal.* In fact, Sheridan's play was abundantly performed in Calcutta in the English theatres of the city marking a culture-specific-materialism in the colonial 'home'.

> In this Ironside scheme, then, the mechanical and extrinsic form (western) and the ethnic and artistic content (eastern) are casually integrated for the benefit of the displaced company officials- and, by extension, for the benefit of the colonial enterprise. And Sheridan's play – one such entertainment item – was thus similarly used as a device of acculturation, for creating a bond between the British audiences in London and Calcutta, between the cultural center and its peripheral replica, while erasing simultaneously the spatial and the cultural identity that was India. The play's comic resolution could then be seen as having created a cultural consensus in that the laughter abroad only echoed the laughter at home. (Choudhury, 321)

The reference to *The School for Scandal* is also to be found towards the end of Dinabandhu Mitra's *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi*, when Neem Chand suggests a reading of Sheridan's play to the other characters in order to be able to understand the waywardness and profligacy of the English-educated class of Atal. Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, however, employs the known device of Sheridan's play – the Curtain Scene involving the whole question of 'chastity' of the woman, Lady Teazle – in all its comicality. In Ram Narayan's play the situation is reversed, the question of chastity of the woman retained carefully as a central motif of the play.

Sudhir, after spending a considerable time in the city returns to his village home where he had kept back his wife, Sumati. The play begins with the husband and wife together after the husband's return, conversing in the bed chamber. Sumati raises the question of good moral character and chastity of a woman:

> Sumati: *Tumi ki amar charitra bhalo bole jano?*
>
> Sudhir: *Hyaan, priye, tumi je patibrata ta ami bishesh porikkha kore dekhechi.*
>
> Sumati: *Tobe amar proti tomar bishwash aachey?*
>
> Sudhir: *Haan, shompurno roop bishwash aachey. E katha aar bolcho kano?*
>
> Sumati: *Ekta katha tobe jigyasha korte holo. Balo, jodi kono strilok ati sucharitra thake, kono dushto purusheo to take noshto korte pare?*
>
> Sudhir: *Haan – kar shaddho.*
>
> Sumati: *Kano? Jodi raksha kore emon lok na thake?*
>
> Sudhir: *Nai ba thaklo. Stri lok ke louho srinkhole ruddho korye rakhleo raksha kora jayena; aar je stri aapnar sucharitra-srinkhale baddho shei surakshita. Tar dharma ke noshto kore?* (Bakshi ed., 153)

Divided into two acts, the second part of the play ensues from this issue of the *pativrata* woman struggling to protect her chastity in the absence of the husband. Sudhir, who trusts his wife completely and claims that he knows her moral character well enough to leave her all by herself in the village home, takes action in the second act of the play after hatching a conspiracy with his wife. The enactment of the plan of teaching the lecherous males a lesson stems not only from Sudhir's fury at the breach of trust by these males but mostly from Sumati's bid to prove herself as a *pativrata* (chaste wife) or the Sita in exile away from her husband.

Ram Narayan Tarkaratna plays on the theme of the chaste Sita, leaving the first act of the play only at the level of conversation between a husband and his wife. It is in the second act of the play that all the physicality that a farce demands is introduced so as to retain the essence of comicality. Drawing from the Curtain Scene in *The School for Scandal*, Ram Narayan reverses the role of the man and the woman in a common situation. It is the lecherous males, Bhola and the Munseb Babu, who according to Sumati's claims attempted to violate her chastity, who are made to hide in the bed chamber of Sumati in the midst of an act of offering love to her, intimidated by Sudhir's sudden arrival. The two men are punished for the trespassing of the moral codes by their faces being smeared with black paint.

Ram Narayan Tarkaratna uses the usual tropes of the farce in bestowing a comic justice to restore the order of a Bengali household. This restoring of order and peace in the play takes place evidently in the precincts of the *bari*, the ancestral village home, marked by the purity of rites and religious customs, standing in opposition with the *kaliyug* flux of the city. Within such a 'pure' space, characterized by a rural calm, the attempted violation of chastity of a wife becomes a punishable offence for those who seek to trespass the order of the *bari*. Undoubtedly, *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* was successfully performed during 1873 and even later, when the whole of Bengal was rocked by the scandal of Elokeshi and the Mohunt of Tarakeshwar and the murder of Elokeshi by her husband, Nabin. Within such a context, when an incident such as this influenced the public sphere to a great extent and found several expressions and interpretations in the contemporary modes of popular representation, the theatre found it easy to co-opt the play within the theme of enticement of the old male by a seductive 'female folk devil' rattling the social order. In its entirety, *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* is a farce characteristically sheathed within the questions of morality and chastity, employing and re-employing the chastity myth of Sita within the scope of the popular.

Chokkhudaan (1869)

On 26th February 1870, *Chokkhudaan* was enacted along with Ram Narayan Tarkaratna's other farce, *Ubhoy Sankat*, at the Pathuriaghata Theatre of Jatindramohan Tagore. On 3rd March 1870, *Sambad Purnachandroday* wrote:

> On last Saturday, a number of the educated gentlemen of the city were present at the theatre ... The way Jatindra babu has taken the initiative of producing good, advisory plays with the help of the respectable section of society is commendable with reference to the fact that it would help in curbing the immoral practices of the nation. (qtd. in Bakshi ed., 72, translation mine)

The play was re-enacted at the Oriental Theatre on 15th March, 1873.

In this play, Basumati is grieved by the fact that her husband, Nikunja, is an alcoholic and keeps company of a 'fallen woman'. Her grief provokes her to contemplate suicide. However, consoled and advised by the Napit Bou (barber's wife), she hatches a plan to teach Nikunja a lesson. The barber's wife disguises as Basumati's clandestine lover and enacts an apparent situation of secret liaison with Basumati in her bed chamber. At the heck of night when Nikunja returns to discover her wife's posed 'infidelity', he is infuriated and demands an explanation from her. The tensions are resolved with the barber's wife shedding her disguise, Basumati being restored to her stature of a *pativrata*, and the whole act corresponding to an eye-opener (*chokkhudaan*) for Nikunja.

In its theme and content, *Chokkhudaan* works upon the idea of the chaste woman in the inner domain of the *bari* constantly upholding herself in a light of dignity against the concubine of the outer domain of the parlour. She desires the conjugal love of her husband as she says: '... *E dana shonaye kaaj ki, e ghar baritei ba ki darkar? Bhalo khete potte chainey, dinante ba dudin antar jodi shakanno pai, gachchtolaye shui, sheo bhalo kintu jodi swamir shohagey thakte pai. Swami onner proti chok na deye striloker er cheye aar ki aachey?*' (Bakshi ed., 194)

A common theme of representation in the Kalighaat paintings of the later half of the nineteenth century portrayed the *babu* being manhandled in the parlour of the prostitute. Extravagance on wine, women, and the delicacies of life signaled the slow bankruptcy of the *bhadrolok*, which, in turn, forcefully distanced him from the money-making woman engaged in sex work. In her aggrieved musings, Basumati hints both at the bankruptcy of the male at the moral and economic level that distances him from the conjugal climate of the household. As Sibaji Bandyopadhyay observes about the Hindu woman:

> ... the Hindu woman was not simply a part of a totality, she stood for the whole; her abject and pitiable condition being the sole index, woman alone could testify to Hindu depravity. By linking the rest of the parts in a chain of metonymy-a chain in which the 'suffering Hindu woman' was the ultimate referent-any and everything could be summarily dismissed or condemned. By isolating the Hindu woman and insisting that she has been enhanced from time immemorial, by refusing to locate a moment of origin for such an inhuman practice, 'depravity' itself was posited as the original genius of the Hindus. (26-27)

In 1869, the authorities of the Jorasanko Theatre announced a reward for the composition of a play on the condition of Hindu women. Batubehari Bandopadhyay was appointed for the composition of the play. However, his *Hindu Mahila Natok* did not make him the recipient of the award. The play upheld the depravity of a Hindu woman given to a clandestine love affair with another man and attempting to murder her husband. The play based itself chiefly on the vices of prostitution and alcoholism. *Hindu Mahila Natok* failed in representing the plight of the suffering woman having to uphold her dignity through a test of her virtue.

Chokkhudaan begins where *Hindu Mahila Natok* fails in adhering to the ideals of the *bhadrolok* striving towards the liberation of the woman at home. The depravity of the *bhadrolok*, which demanded an apology for itself through a self-chastisement, sought to do so through the use of the chastity of the woman in the inner domain. Like Sumati in *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal*, Basumati narrates her plight at the very beginning of the play reasoning on her 'chastity'. But unlike Sumati, she actually appears for the test of her virtue – the myth of Sita recurring time and again. In fact, the name 'Basumati' literally refers to the figure of Sita, born out of mother Earth and finally returning back to the mother as a final voicing of the fact of her chastity. Basumati herself refers to the meaning of her name: '*...Ma amar naam rekhechhen Basumati, Basumati shob shojjho koren, okaron padaghat shojjho korte paren na, kintu ami emni Basumati je padaghat to padaghat, amar adrishte koto marmaghat shojjho kotte hochhe...*' (Bakshi ed., 195).

Unlike Sumati, whose name also signifies her virtuous nature as a woman, Basumati is the Sita-like ideal who restores the fissures in the conjugal sphere of the Hindu home rattled by the vice of woman and wine. Proposed as a farce, the comic elements are woven into the texture of the play in the second part like *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal.* In disguising the barber's wife as the clandestine lover, the author presents witty repartees between the two women, which evoke laughter through the medium of language, specifically a subaltern's language:

> Basumati: *Olo pagli, e shokol kaaje prem alaap kotte hoy.*
>
> Napte: *Prem alaap abar kamon taro bhai janine, ke ekta bol dekhi shuni?*
>
> Basumati: *Tobe boli shon, amar haat dhore bolbi, 'Priye; je obodhi tomar ruper madhuri ami nayane dekhechi, shei obodhi deho, mon, praan tomate sopechi.' Bol dekhi?*
>
> Napte: *'Priye; je obodhi tomar rupor maduli nayane dekhichi, shei obodhi deo mor praan tomake.'* (Bakshi ed., 200)

Chokkhudaan retains its farcicality solely through the structuring of its language of dialogue. Unlike *Jamon Karmo Tamon Phal* there is no physicality involved in the construction of the farce except for the usual trope of coming out of the disguise. It is through the use of language that Basumati seeks to cast herself in the light of infidelity; she is heard to speak of offering *paan* and jasmine to her 'lover' that infuriates Nikunja enough to blame her as a *kulakalankini.* The denouement involves the final realization of Nikunja who attempts to cater it as a moral judgment to the audience as well: '*Basumati, tumi aaj kebal amakei chokkhudaan dile emon noy; shonge shonge onekeri Chokkhudaan holo ... shobhyo mahashoyera ki bolen? E apnader o karo karo chokkhudaan.*' (Bakshi ed., 203) Here is the male recasting himself in the light of redemption successive to the test of chastity of the woman- the Sita of the 'home'.

V. Farces in the 'New' Theatre: Shifts and Adjustments

This Chapter, in the re-reading of the farces that it takes upfor discussion, moves to and fro into a number of political events that had shaped the socio-economic conditions of the rural and urban spaces of the then Bengal. The Permanent Settlement (1793), the Revolt of 1857 and the Indigo Revolts (1859-60) become essential backgrounds in probing into the texts as well as performances of the farces discussed in this Chapter. However, these farces are not given to heightened musings solely on the basis of historical events alone. What the farce-writers aimed at was possibly an essentialist engagement with the changing orders of the time within the purview of history. Hence, 'Time' becomes a voice by itself within these farces. It is the dread of *kaliyug*, an indigenous-universal variant of the colonial time within the city, divided between work and leisure, clock-time and indigenous time, that comes to represent this Time. The farces become apologies for the native's vexations and negotiations with the colonial framework through the category of Time.

Within the broad framework of Time, the problematics of Anglicization, alcoholism, womanizing, profligacy, religion, chastity and conjugality are inter-connected structures as represented by the farces. If the *Naksha* was instrumental towards a self-reflexive tradition that mapped the changing contours of urbanization in the city of Calcutta, the *Prohasan* as its descendant became the vehicle of realizing the 'changes', validating them constantly through the contemporary social and political agendas they represented. The Permanent Settlement had enriched the landlords enough, at the cost of the blood of the peasants to secure a 'future' for their sons in the city, bred on English education at the Hindu College. The sense of security, brought in by a constant flow of cash into their pockets from the rural home (*bari*) for these English-educated youth, drew them to the conclusion of 'worklessness', wine and woman. Thus, the inflow of cash that should have been guided towards investment in indigenous industries was fruitfully curbed by the project of the Permanent Settlement that equally nourished the feudal pride of the indigenous subjects.

> In fact feudal pride was so carefully nourished by the government, and new Indian enterprises so summarily crushed (for example the near-boycott of banker Ramdulal Dey by English firms, and the difficulties placed in the path of Carr, Tagore and Co.), that Indian land-owning families began boasting of pedigree and aristocracy although none of them could remember an ancestor earlier than Cornwallis, and began to pride themselves with inability to count and calculate. Commerce was infra dig for them – exactly what the East India Company wanted.
>
> These denationalized, anglicized, wastrels probably felt they were merely having a rollicking time; they had no means of knowing they were an unconscious part of a massive scheme to subvert the morale of the Indian masses, to deprive them of leadership, to turn the leadership against its own nation. (Dutt, 1992, 42-43)

Anglicization shaped the radicalism of the Young Bengal in the earlier decades of the century that continued (though not chronologically) but in spirit to Michael Madhusudan Dutta. The process of Anglicization was carefully designed by the colonial powers so as to curb the possibilities of an Indian Renaissance designed on the ideals of the European Renaissance. This was given shape to by crushing the growth of indigenous industries and enterprises that did not allow a revolutionary bourgeois class to raise its head.

For the most of the nineteenth century, '*bhadrolok*' remained a term initially indicating an elite defined by caste (*jati*), lineage (*kul*) and religious code (*dharma*), which gradually became a more open-ended educated elite with a component of Muslim and low caste 'respectable men' too (Ray, 13). In an engagement with the farces in this Chapter, the above idea of the *bhadrolok* has been strictly adhered to within the socio-temporal dimensions of a colonial urban/rural entity. A common feature of these farces was the 'mirroring' of the tastes of the public sphere, especially through the claimed employment of characters from 'real incidents'. In the contours of the performance space, these farces were all enacted in and around the year 1873, when the Bengali nation was rocked by the scandal of Elokeshi and the Mohunt of Tarakeshwar. As mirrors, these farces reflected back scandals of power and were essentially political in intent. If a serious play like *Neel Darpan* narrated the colonial misrule, European oppression, and the tyranny of the Indian elites in the most direct way and using melodramatic techniques of the stage, the farces constantly employed known comic tropes in order to uphold the sense of servility, crisis and fear of abysmal failure, all ensuing from the direct/indirect effects of the colonial rule. Clairvoyance is also inherent in these farces, expressed sometimes through the voice of the protagonist, sometimes through the progression of events in the text. They prefigured – through the gradual swelling up of multiple voices, use of common comic tropes, an uncanny sense of dialogues, and exaggerated actions exhibited by the characters – that the wings of farce as a medium of attack was soon to be clipped; the eventfulness of the Dramatic Performances Control Act in 1876 was not unanticipated.

A huge body of Sanskritized, mythological drama paralleled the train of farces. Influences of Kalidas and Shakespeare in the texture of the profuse productions of Sanskritized dramatic texts are noticeably strong and continuous in the theatre of the age. The Sanskritized drama was a common exercise among all the three dramatists taken up in this Chapter and in the length and breadth of this research. All the three dramatists presented here did not only write farces, but also realistic plays and also mythologicals and took pride in the same too. In fact, when Ram Narayan Tarkaratna was vested with the task of 'correcting' Michael's *Sharmishtha*, the play which was commissioned by the Belgachia Theatre, the latter wrote to Gourdas Basak in a letter:

I shall either stand or fall by myself.

> I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will, in all likelihood, be something of a foreign air about my drama; but if the language be not ungrammatical, if the thoughts be just and glowing, the plot interesting, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing? Do you dislike Moore's poetry because it is full of Orientalism? Byron's poetry for its Asiatic air, Carlyle's prose for its Germanism? Besides, remember that I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with Western ideas and modes of thinking; and that is my intention to throw of the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything Sanskrit. (Gupta, K. ed., 123)

On 3rd September, 1859, *Sharmishtha* was staged at the Belgachia Theatre. The play was enacted at the same Theatre six times and no other play was ever produced in the Belgachia Theatre. This was also because Madhusudan's farces which followed from the license of the huge success of *Sharmishtha* were shunned with an iron hand by both the conservatives and the radicals, both co-opted into each other by this time. Madhusudan felt his wings were clipped and wrote in a letter to Raj Narayan Basu on 24th April, 1860:

> As a scribbler, I am of course proud to think that you like my Farces, but to tell you the candid truth, I half regret having published those two things. You know that as yet we have not established a National Theatre, I mean we have not as yet got a body of sound classical dramas to regulate the national taste, and therefore we ought not to have Farces. (Gupta, K., ed., 129)

The Theatre is a slippery domain, where the rough edges of the dramatic texts constantly need to be smoothened and appropriated to 'regulate the national taste'. In the attempt of a not-so-chronological but a subjective analysis of the plays discussed above, the farce is seen to slowly progress towards proscription keeping in view the 'monstrosity' apparent in the conciseness of its form and thought. As Tanika Sarkar points out,

> Within a few years, the theatre ran into big trouble. An ordinance was enacted in 1875 with wide executive powers to control and prohibit undesirable plays. The following year the ordinance became a legislative act. In between, there were police interruptions of plays, the seizure of stage properties, and arrest of actors, managers, and directors – and the ensuing court cases.
>
> Oddly the texts of the suspicious plays were never prohibited: the law only reserved for itself the power to forbid performances. Control of the stage became a state necessity when theatre came out of the private domain of rich estates, where select guests were treated to performances from 1820s and 1830s. The state was, obviously, less concerned about written and printed texts and about oral-visual performances for large crowds. (2009, 158-59)

Containment of performances has continued to occur thus pertaining to the 'monstrous' intents of the genre in constant opposition with the posed placidity of a social order. For Sarkar,

> Shadhobar Ekadoshi, another play by Dinabandhu Mitra – politically innocuous, though a biting social satire – had been a runaway theatrical success all through the late nineteenth century, being performed frequently and without any trouble. It was banned in 1914 on grounds of obscenity, and the ban was lifted only in 1919 when some Bengali notables agitated. Obscenity was not however the most important issue. The government actually objected to the thinly disguised satirization of some senior officials. What enabled the ban was the changed political climate of militant Congress agitations against the partition of Bengal and of revolutionary terrorism. The edge of this particular repressive action was blunted by the proliferation of far more severe laws against political action around this time. (2009, 161)

The later decades of the nineteenth century saw the overlapping of a number of agendas in the form of movements, chiefly against alcoholism and concubinage. If alcoholism could be grouped with the greater events like the Permanent Settlement, flow of easy money, Anglicization, radicalism, concubinage also initiated the coming in of the prostitute actress on to the stage of Bengal in 1873. The Bengal Theatre, established in 1873 by Sarachchandra Ghosh, was aided by a committee comprising of the intelligentsia of the then times, like Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Umeshchandra Dutt and others. The need for a permanent theatre/ playhouse as well as the need of actresses on the stage was first proposed by Michael clarifying that the efforts of running a theatre with well-shaven boys in place of women would not yield desired results for long. The inaugural production of *Sharmishtha* at the Bengal Theatre was marked by the coming of four prostitute-actresses on stage, namely Golaap Sundori, Elokeshi, Jagattarini and Shyamasundori. (Bandyopadhyay, R.) This also resulted in the resignation of Vidyasagar from the committee. The coming of the prostitute-actress to the stage was not an abrupt incident as might seem from the initiative of the Bengal Theatre. The movement against prostitution, an agenda which the farces discussed above had taken up in full swing, culminated in the Contagious Disease Act or Act XIV of 1868. The result of this Act was two-fold, both guided by the economic deprivation of the sex-worker: (a) the side-lining of concubinage/ prostitution as the major way of bread-earning (b) the exodus of the sex-worker to the theatre, acting both as an alternative profession and a way of 'salvation'. Mostly in and around 1856-57, papers like the *Sambad Prabhakar* were constantly vocal against the woman in flesh-trade, raising constantly the issue of 'immorality' to which the Bengali *bhadrolok* had stooped. With the passage of the Act in 1868, the attitude towards the fallen woman witnessed a kind of relaxation evident from the report of the *Amritabazar Patrika* of 20.02.1868 and 21.02.1868 that enumerated the reasons (verbatim records) given by the concubines themselves for engaging in flesh-trade (Basu, S., 602-04). The gratitude towards the colonial government for the passage of the act was multiply stated, chiefly concerned with the (*uddhar*) liberation of the *beshya*:

HINDOO FEMALE

To the Editor of the National Paper.

DEAR SIR,--As we thank our wise Government for the operation of Act XIV of 1868 which has been doubtless enacted to suppress the spread of contagious disease in Bengal, we are surprised on the other hand to see instances of genuine modesty among the unfortunate daughters of infamy, many of whom if I am rightly informed, have left the city of palaces for the shame of exposing their persons before the Doctor Shahib of Lock Hospital and have sheltered themselves in Foreshdanga—the well known land of safety. Many have even gone so far to bid a farewell adieu to their ignoble profession, and contended themselves with accepting the humble but honorable office of maid servants for earning their livelihood....

Yours truly
A Hindoo

(Basu, S., 613)

Theatre, which was constantly accorded the stature of a pilgrimage in its role of regulating the 'national taste', thus had to emerge as the only mode of salvation for the fallen woman, who transgressed social norms and trampled over the moral terrain of the Bengali *bhadrolok*.

This Chapter has been an effort to grasp the vastness of events in the later quarter of the nineteenth century through a re-reading of the farces. The broad division of the farces into two major themes, of alcoholism and concubinage as also plotting the adjustments of conjugality to these two categories, has enabled the probing into the texts and their performances. The readings of the farces have been mostly conducted by taking up the various voices of the characters marking the farces' inheritance of dialogism from their predecessor – the *Naksha*. Such a dialogic form could not be analyzed in isolation from the socio-economic rubric of the urban/rural dichotomy. In the course of this Chapter, the engagement with the comic intent in the farce has not been underlined boldly because of an immediacy that required their analysis within the context of the century. However, the comic had never been discarded from the farce per se. To understand the comic here is to involve oneself in the process of 'dilution' that had been mused upon in Chapter I. Chapter III is a point of culmination (in a strict sense of the chronology of farces) of the process indicated in the journey of the 'profane' to the 'proscenium'.

Ekei Ki Bole Shobhyota and *Shadhobaar Ekaadoshi* are much nearer to the *Naksha* form in mirroring the milieu and its inhabitants. In such an endeavor the physical comicality of the farce gets limited by the punches essential in the dialogues. The comic operates between several levels of language and dialects in the progression of these plays. A constant effort of the farce-writer in succeeding the *Naksha*-writer is the representation of 'difference' in the idiom of the various sections of society. In *Hutom Penchar Naksha*, Kaliprasanna Singha clarifies the various *prakar*s or kinds of the *babu*s, thus attempting to collate the manners of the city-life in the format of a collage. In the farces, however, the process of collating is solely guided by a socio-linguistic representative element of the men and women. Within such broader divisions of the 'maleness' and the 'femaleness' of linguistic representation, there are minute factions and variations pertaining to region, caste, class, urbanity, rusticity, religious code and so on. In such a buffet of linguistic identities, the farces cannot be read in seclusion from each other, not only because of their engagement with common tropes and stock characters, but also in the collective mirroring/mapping of the play of languages.

The representation of language attains a posed communal dimension in *Buro Shaliker Ghaarey Rõ*. The idea of the subaltern cannot be left to an all-inclusive history within the fold of Western colonial hegemony. Taking cue from such a resistive position, the representation of both caste and class positions becomes important to understand if not a 'history from below', of

course a 'subject from below'. The inclusion of subaltern Muslim characters in the length and breadth of the farce cannot be of a reversible order that circumscribes the composition of the tumultuous epic, *Meghnadvadh Kavya* (1861). If Michael sought to restore a 'secular' order in the transactions between a subaltern Muslim (Hanif) and a subaltern Hindu (Bachaspati) character, the project is not unmixed with a nostalgic sense of deprivation born out of the idea of a Golden Age, going beyond the medievalism of Bengali social and literary history.

> A politically unified and culturally distinct Bengal did not emerge before Turkish rule in the time of Iliyas Shah. A generation after Iliyas Shah and Baru Chandidas, Vaishnava poets poured forth a voluminous flow of lyrical poetry around the theme of Radha and Krishna. At the same time, the composition of a Sufi verse narrative on Yusuf and Zulaikha by a Bengali poet named Shah Muhammad Sagir indicated that an indigenous Muslim population speaking Bengali sprung into existence. (Ray, 13)

The *Dobhashi* or *Musalmani* Bangla was heavily mixed with Persian and Arabic words. Michael employs this hybrid form of the Bengali language in shaping his characters in the play. The use of this form of the language ensued from the innumerable *Musalmani pnuthi* or booklets printed and sold at Bat-tala. The progression of events at the rural front of Bengal was slightly different:

> The reform process took time to gather momentum and did not influence the vast body of Muslim and low caste villagers. In the countryside, especially in and around Kushtea, obscure Baul fakirs, such as Lalan Sain and Panju Shah, were ensconced, unaffected by the West, in syncretic and folk cults which had never been approved by the orthodox Maulavis and Brahmans. In the same Bengal countryside, mass campaigns for the purification of Islam from folk and syncretic contaminations were being pushed by Muhammadi and Faraidi preachers who cared nothing for 'reform' in the sense understood by the Bhadrolok. The mutually antagonistic Baul cult and Muhammadi campaign were part of a lowly oral culture, which did not operate through print and press. (Ray, 15)

Considering the various strings of the reformist project, it might not be wise to reduce the farce to a level where one can pose an all-inclusive question such as: 'Can the subaltern speak? What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern?' (Spivak, 90) The elite, and preferably the Hindu elite, nurtured in the work and leisure of the colonial climate of nineteenth-century Calcutta would in the least 'watch out' for the subaltern section of the society. Hence, to reach a conclusion (as do many of the scholars of Michael's works, like Sitangshu Maitra, for instance) and claim that Michael attempted at a 'secular' sketch of the Hindu-Muslim wed-lock or achieved the excellence of a writer through a close imitation of the language of the Muslim subaltern, is to uproot him altogether from the context of the socio-economic relevance. Language as a category in the farces is not bereft of the anxieties of class, caste, religion and gender. Language does not become the agency for the subaltern in the content of the farce, let alone in the physical act of man-handling the religious, feudal representative in Bhakta Prasad. To vest the characters with an agency vis-à-vis language is to suit the text to the agendas of the time.

Understanding the farce as agenda-literature and also its adaptability with respect to the proscenium is something that must concern an elitist initiative. The representation of the subaltern (Muslim/non-Muslim) and the salvation of the fallen woman on-stage were made possible by the voices of concern in the farces. The events may not be directly linked up in this regard, but can be seen as an evolutionary process seeking a revolution in the proscenium. This Chapter has thus been an attempt to redefine some of the aspects of the farce (*Prohasan*) as a genre, specifically within the context of Bengal in the nineteenth century. In his autobiography, Amritalal Basu speaks about the composition of 'impromptu farce' and traces its ingredients to the cartoons of the *Amritabazar Patrika.* He speaks of the government circulars concerning the posts of the sub-Deputy and the comic representations of the Bengali *babu* in a gymnast's costume, fettered and tongs hanging from ears. Amritalal acknowledges the borrowing of the themes of the cartoons for the composition of the farces (cited in Gupta, B., 243). Notably what Amritalal deems here as the *Prohasan* (farce) as also does Girish Chandra Ghosh in a later context, is nothing but the comic representative form of the pantomime. This pantomime, Amritalal claims, enabled them to imitate physically the ways and manners of the Bengali *babu* as well as the English Sahib in line with the 'profane' popular of the streets. Most of these pantomimes were placed as performances in between or at the end of the performance of the farces in the National Theatre. In such a fluidity of the term *Prohasan* (farce), it is quite clear that the text that came to be constructed as farce needed to be re-constructed for the proscenium as not-so-much a 'farce' in the specific sense of the genre. The Victorian sense of morality that operated in the colonial climate became the regulatory device that licensed the staging of a farce, sifting from it the possibilities of transgression and designing it to suit the popular and the national. In its limited scope, thus, this Chapter has been a vehicle of (a) problematizing the farce as a term and genre in all its historicity, comicality; and performitivity; (b) placing the farce within the more immediate issues and agendas of nineteenth century Calcutta and Bengal, pertaining to caste, class, gender, reformation, morality and; (c) realizing a continuity of the medium of the farce in the 'national-popular' (of Girish Ghosh) with its culmination in the Dramatic Performances Control Act of 1876.

Conclusion: The Possibilities of Perennial Laughter

> *In short, the history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities, whereas history itself appears to be abandoning the irruption of events in favour of stable structures.* (Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*)

It has been an endeavour within the intent of this dissertation not to engage essentially with the existent 'stable structures' upheld by the history of the Renaissance in Bengal in the nineteenth century. In setting aside the continued axiomatic discourse of the Bengal Renaissance, the enterprise has been to re-read the texts in all their multiplicities. Within this enterprise too, there has been no 'stability' in the strict sense of the term. Possibilities of further re-reading of the discussed texts and added texts could offer a variant of the research attempted here in all its New Historicist engagements. There can be no reason or room for a 'single' claim within the scope of this research. In its engagement with the problematics of the topic of research, it was also an initiative to probe into a domain of the Bengali literary history that requires much more insight and re-reading than the limited length and breadth of this research has allowed it.

Engagements with the histories of the theatre in Bengal reveal a huge body of texts written and re-written from time to time by notable scholars, theatre critics as well as theatre activists. Most of these texts record the chronological progression of the performed plays and the occurrence/extinction of the theatre houses with detailed musings on the lives of the actors/dramatists. In mapping the progression of events in the literary history of Bengal, and particularly the Renaissance, there have been water-tight compartmentalizations in striving towards a 'stable structure'. In probing into the linear historiographies of these texts, one finds gaps and fissures that have been smoothened by an imposed continuation from one time period to the other. Given solely to a chronological survey of the literary history, these studies have retained the texts discussed in this research in all their 'datedness' as well parting terms of constant eulogizing of the authors/dramatists. There has been a conscious attempt in this study to demarcate literary history from theatre history so as to escape the braided-ness of the narratives as well as the problems of entanglements.

In terms of the scope and objectives of this dissertation, one has attempted not to distinguish between theatre and literature with respect to the discussed farces. The title of the research *From the Profane to the Proscenium: Re-reading the Early Farces of Colonial Bengal*, had offered the opportunity to redefine the qualifying markers of 'profane' and 'proscenium' pertaining to the braided-ness of theatre narratives and literary narratives. Proceeding from an alternative methodology, thus, the research has not been conducted within the predetermined chronologies of the existent texts, but within the paradigms of gender, class, caste and linguistic locations. The

engagements with colonization and the colonial subject have more often been subjected to a black vs. white discourse in many of the reductionist views following a Western model or methodology. This research has not engaged with any strict 'Western' model in the re-reading of the texts or the arrival of conclusions, constantly validating itself instead through evidences from contemporary texts, newspapers, songs, poems and popular sayings of the time period in consideration. The contributions of the existing literary texts and views in this regard cannot be denied, nor can the 'personal' element in the theatre memoirs be completely forsaken.

In all its dimensions, this research has been careful in handling the 'complexities' of a phenomenon called 'colonial Calcutta'. Facts, issues, engagements, re-engagements, readings, re-readings, criticisms, reviews, problematizations and the emergence of newer discourses with regard to colonial Calcutta as also colonial Bengal have been rather exhaustive. However, this research has also stemmed from a belief that much remains to be excavated in the light of 'colonialism', setting aside the Western model of critique for the time being. Two axes of time and space (which might be easier to grasp in the Bengali-ness of the terms: *shomoy* and *shohor*) have been retained as reference frame in the study of the colonial broth with respect to the texts of performance and the performance of the texts. Seemingly hemmed by the definitiveness of time and space, the research and within it the engagements with the variety of discourses have been broadened by the inclusion of gender, class, caste, religion, language and urbanity. Sometimes these markers have been taken up in their solitariness but, most often, such a possibility has been vigorously challenged by the overlapping of one with the other.

In all the enigmatic possibilities that this research was subjected to from its nascence, it was obviously and very importantly circumscribed by the idea of the 'comic' and its inseparable component of laughter. This is evident from the chapterizations and christening of the chapters on the numerous ways of segregating laughter. Chapter I ('The Laughable Monstrous') has been conceived in this regard not only to theorize upon or problematize the 'comic', but also to bring in the 'street' or the more 'profane' popular forms as a cue to this research. The birth of a city space and the vexations of the indigenous occupants of urban/rural locations with regard to the multiplicities of colonialism entailed a certain monstrosity that found expression in the various indigenous forms of popular performances: *Swang*, *Jatra*, and *Kobigaan*. The idea of the 'comic monstrous' has been dominantly retained throughout this dissertation pointing at its dilution and resurgence in the markedly socio-political turmoil of the physical and psychological terrain.

In an attempt not to solely lend this discourse to the performative space, Chapter I also introduces the questions or issues that are taken up in the course of Chapter II ('Laughing at "Selves" and the "Fairer" Sex'). With its insights into the low life print culture of the Grub Street

of colonial Calcutta – Bat-tala. The engagement with the literary productions as well the contour of the marginalized space of Bat-tala has enabled one to explore the side-lined farces of the low life print culture. With recourse to such excavations, it has been possible to enter into the more mainstream farces of the elitist kind that also raised the key question of terminology: the 'idea' and 'employment' of a farce. Problems of the 'comic' in a broader sense and the more immediate issues of conjugality and gender in the context of the nineteenth century have been also addressed in dealing with the farces in this Chapter. A presentation of the concise historiography of the nascent stage of theatre in Bengal has been attempted in this endeavour to provide a more direct cue to the texts analyzed from the points-of-view of performance and literary history.

In a way, Chapter III ('Laughing at the "Unsteady" and the "Immoral"') bears the traces of Chapter II but entails a lot more complexities in terms of social upheavals. Alcoholism and concubinage become the two broad divisions within which the readings of the farces are set. Such a broad division is, however, not bereft of a telescopic view of the various other underlying aspects from which the texts and their performances could be addressed. Chapter III signals at a further entry into the subject of the 'national-popular' that has found constant expression and interpretation throughout the dissertation.

An important dimension of this research has been to grasp the varieties inherent within the term *babu* and the appended term *bhadrolok*. As has been noted, the *Prohasan* was a descendant of the *Naksha*, a self-reflexive form that adequately problematized the selves (notably the *babu* and the city). In reading the *Prohasan* as following from the *Naksha*, the vexations of the *babu* in relation to the city space have been co-opted within the purview of serious agenda – a phenomenon that is tightly entangled with the need for a national theatre in nineteenth century colonial Bengal. In claiming that the *Prohasan* descended from the *Naksha*, one cannot, thus, miss the strict adherence to a wholeness of structure. Given more to the relational nature of the self to the city, the *Naksha*, in its cross-sectional view of the 'everyday' of an urban locale, did not attempt at a cohesive wholeness. This might be possibly because of the meaning inherent in the name itself: *Naksha*, a design, that the writer weaved in and out in his own process of subjectivization as a colonial subject. For the writer of the farce, the incompleteness of space could not be acclimatized with the greater agenda underlying the genre and hence cross-sections had to be dispensed with to make room for a wholeness of urban space, within which the indigenous subject could be placed in relation to each other.

The choice of farce writers in the scope of this research has been limited to three most well-known ones: Ram Narayan Tarkaratna, acclaimed to be the first composer of the genre, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, vested with the stature of one of the greatest luminaries of the

period, and Dinabandhu Mitra, who is opined to have taken the form to its zenith. However, the attempt in the course of this research has not been to validate the claims and eulogies accorded to these figures. The most immediate engagement with these writers and their farces has sprung from inquisitiveness about the showcasing and marginalizing they perform. Re-reading their farces has thus allowed one to muse upon two aspects: (a) finding the gaps and fissures within the farces that provide opportunities of a linkage, not chronological but thematological; and (b) re-reading the farces in their being 'main-stream' in relation to the innumerable farces that have been side-lined either due to the unavailability of the texts or due to the politics entailed within canonization. The aim of this research has specifically been to gauge this politics of canonization not only through the literariness of the texts but also through their performances.

This research has also been conceptualized to a certain extent by constant exposures to the remains of a city and its theatre that hark back to the Imperial past. The grandiloquence of the theatre houses, exposed time and again to fiery depredations and yet brought back to life, has awed many a theatre-lover of the city. Minerva, Star, Beadon Street, Ahiritola, Bethune College, Thakur Bari, Sonagachhi, Thanthania, Simla and many such markers of the map of north Calcutta have remained with their respective histories in narratives and narratives in histories. The sense of being thrust to the 'datedness' of the northern part of the city was slowly taken over by the possibilities of reading into the structures: the hanging verandahs, the imperial pillars, the narrow lanes and by-lanes, the names of streets, the tattered legacies of colonial times. Distinctly segregated from the more modern locales of southern Calcutta, this part of the city remains an ironical beginning to the whole process of urbanization. Inquisitiveness into the Renaissance of Bengal to which one had been introduced through one's curriculum at school had led to a considerably voracious reading of autobiographies and biographies in search of more information and insight. The idea of the research issued from the 'discovery' and reading of Nati Binodini's *Aamar Katha o Aamar Abhinetri Jiban* and Debjit Bandopadhyay's *Rangalaye Amarendranath*. Such accounts have fanned the desire for going back to the city of joy rocked by colonial interventions and finding cultural expressions in the theatre.

In a sense, this research has also been a fast-forward of an extant topic that suffered a procastination and demanded a lot more excavation: the popular forms of entertainment detailed upon in Chapter I. Thereafter, my encounter with texts, archival findings, interviews and personal analyses have contributed to the 'final' structure of the research. To contradict ironically herein, this 'final' structure awaits the burgeoning of further contemplated structures. In its being a personal learning experience and a mapping of critical thought processes, this research in all its establishment is a cue to fruitful further studies from different perspectives, different mirrors.

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