

Conflict Between the Old and the New and the Initiation of Tumultuous Social Upheaval

(Original Text: Ramtanu Lahiri o Tawtkalin Bawngoshawmaj – Chapter V – “Pracheen O Nobin-er Shawnghawrshon o Ghor Shamajik Bilplawb-er Shuchona”- Written by Sivanath Sastri, Published 1904)

Translation

Now, we reach a point of paradigm shift in the social history of Bengal. The 20 years between 1825 and 1845 can be regarded as a period of ‘rebirth’ for Bengal. During this period, sweeping changes were seen in politics, sociology, education and on every other walk of life. It was the beginning of a ‘New Age’. It has become necessary to map out the order of these changes.

The English had come to trade in this country and became rulers. History-readers are aware of this. However, it took many days for the merchants to adjust themselves in their new roles as rulers. As long as they were merchants, they would think, “What do we care about the happiness of the people of this country, with its improvement or deterioration? We will go back to our country after amassing wealth by legal and illegal means from this one” – such were their selfish thoughts. For a long time this attitude prevailed in the minds of the East India Company's officers and agents who would come to India. Initially, employees of the Company would receive such a low salary that no gentleman of good repute would come so far away from their homes for such low a salary. But the ways and means of amassing wealth through illegal means were so many that many Englishmen were tempted to come to this country. Most of these employees were called factors or Kuthiwals (overseer of plantation outposts). The Kuthiwals would visit the Company's Kuthis (plantation outposts), supervise sale and purchase of merchandise and the accounts thereof, and assisted the Company's business activities in various ways.

In 1765, Company was granted a diwani or revenue collection rights by the Nawab of Murshidabad (after defeating the latter in the Battle of Buxar). At that time, the Company's employees had to take charge of collecting taxes. Law and Order and Criminal Justice remained a responsibility of the Nababs of Murshidabad. When the revenue collection came in the hands of the company, its outpost-overseers were given additional charge as tax-collectors. They would stay in the districts, act as the company's agent in business transactions and, alongside, also work as Collectors. They had not yet rid themselves of merchants’ mindset. This thought was strong in their minds that money has to be collected through any means possible. The thought that they are the rulers of this country, and, as such, that they are responsible for the happiness and misery of its people. –did not occur to them. One direct fallout of this mentality was the famine of seventy six (a famine that happened in the Bengali Year and Tarikh-e-Elahi of 1176). It has been mentioned above that the newly established rulers did nothing to prevent the famine and the resultant misery of people. It saddens the mind to recall how almost one-thirds of the total number of Bengal's population had died in the year of the famine, and yet 'revenue-generation’

was not relaxed even by a bit. Any amount that could not be extracted by the Company during the famine year was more than compensated by the revenue earnings for the next year. From the letter that the then Governor General Warren Hasting wrote to English authorities on 17 November 1772, the following list of Revenue Generation can be obtained.

Taka/Rupees 1,52,54,856 in 1768-69;

Taka/Rupees 1,31,49,148 in 1769-1770.;

Taka/Rupees 1,40,06,030 In 1770-71 i.e. on the year of the famine;

Taka/Rupees 1,57,26,576 in 1771-72, the year after the famine.

It is clear how, even during the famine, the new rulers did not cease on extracting money from the famine-stricken people. Someone may ask, if one-third of the population died in the year of famine, then how could so much of revenue be collected the year after? To answer, I quote from the letter that Lord Hastings had written:

“It was naturally to be expected that the diminution of the revenue should have kept an equal pace with the other consequences of so great a calamity. That it did not was owing to its being violently kept up to its former standard . to ascertain all the means by which this was effected will not be easy... One tax, however, we will endeavour to describe, as it may serve to account for the equality which has been preserved in the past collections, and to which it has principally contributed. It is called Najar, and it is an assessment upon the actual inhabitants of every inferior description of lands to make up for the loss sustained in the rents of their neighbors, who are either dead or fled from the country.”

This implies that, the loss of the revenue incurred owing to the loss of one-third of the people in the year of the famine were extracted, principal and interest included, from the remaining two-thirds through application of force. In justification, Warren Hastings had merely stated that this was a prevalent rule in the country at that time, and that the Government did not give any direct order to earn revenue in such a manner. But there is no doubt that neither did the Government forbid any of its subordinate employees to extract the taxpayers in any way or offer any relief or respite from taxes. Furthermore, despite knowing that revenue was being collected by its employees in such heinous a way, they (the Government and the Company) ignored it.

My main point here is that the English did not take up the responsibilities of rulers for many years even after establishing themselves as the rulers of the country. It is not possible to do to the people what they did during and after the famine if one undertakes the responsibilities of a ruler. They did not even do what little landlords would do in the villages of their fiefdom. Native kings have always exempted taxes during to famines and epidemics, and they do this even now. Yet, there are no reports of the British doing the same during the famines. It is said in our village that, once, during the famine, the zamindar of the village had the arranged for cooked rice and daal and have fed the people, saving them from the famine and starvation for days on end.

In this way, it took many days for the English to transform their roles and responsibilities as traders to those of rulers. On the other hand, the people of the country also took a long time to put their faith in the new rulers. First of all, the people of this country could not understand, whether the British will settle and rule in this country. They won in the Battle of Palashi, but the shadow-insurgencies had continued everywhere. On one hand, they clashed with the Nawabs time and again, on the other, disputes continued with the Marathas in the south and west and the Maga people of the east. Even within Bengal, disputes and insurgencies continued in places like Bishnupur and Birbhum,. By 1825, most of these were quelled. From the beginning of the last (19th) century the people of this country began to feel that British rule is becoming permanent, and they were to be adjust and reform themselves according to the needs of this new Empire and its new Rulers. English rulers also began to understand that their Empire in Indian is on the verge of rapid expansion. And that the responsibility of that empire rested squarely on their shoulders.

Both the rulers and the ruled felt the ramifications this change so much so that the same question arose in the mind of both. The rulers began to think: 'In what ways should we rule this country? Should we rule according to its own ancient customs or should we introduce our new European ones?' At the same time, the people began to think: 'What should we embrace; - the old or the new?' In the twenty years between 1825 and 1845, both the questions were settled and resolved. So, I refer to this period as a juncture – a watershade between the old and the new. Later on, I shall discuss the manners in which the questions mentioned in this paragraph were settled and resolved.

As long as the new rulers could not understand this country and its people, in some divisions of work, they did not seek to overthrow the ancient with the modern. Hand in hand was their fear to incur the wrath of the orthodox and conservative sections by seeking such change. In matters involving politics, it was native Indians who had been working on behalf of the Company. In the beginning, a Naib-Divan would be appointed and given the direct charge of collecting revenue. So much had the national character weakened by subjugation to foreign rule that, in many places, these Naib-Divans would think thus: 'If these foreigners who have appointed us loot so much, why should we be left behind?' In this way, their oppression became so much that these posts had to be abandoned eventually. Many are aware of the activities of Clive's Naib-Divan Govinda Ram and Hastings's Divan Gangagobind Singha. This continued for a while. Finally, Lord Cornwallis removed all Indians from high ranks and placed Europeans in all those posts. From then onwards, the people of this country became lost their positions from the highest administrative ranks and fell into the lowest positions. Since then, until 1833, no native Indian was allowed to rise or be posted upwards beyond the rank of Sherestadar. This period can be regarded as the time when the country and its people found themselves subjugated completely by British rule. This is because it was from this time that the people of this country lost all chance to work in honourable posts, and all possibility of their progress and fulfillment of their ambitions disappeared. They were thus channeled towards the most indignant directions and small-heartedness crept in. The people of this country are still writhing in the throes of such timidity, lack of goals and small-heartedness. This lack of goals and ambitions, the currently prevalent situation where the thoughts and desires of Indians are being directed towards dead-ends, can be considered as the most devastating consequence of subjugation to foreign rule. For if a nation lives in this situation for some time, it finds itself bereft of humanity and greatness from their national life.

Regarding matters involving the law administration through the courts, the Company rulers were initially hesitant in departing from ancient tradition. In 1800, Lord Wellesley established Fort William College so as to introduce to the newly employed administrative officers of the Company to local Indian languages and laws – both of which would be alien to them when they would enter the colony to fulfill their employment duties. For many years, across many district courts, in addition to the Judges, one Hindu *pundit* and one Muslim *moulvi* would have to compulsorily be present so as to assist the judge in their interpretation of this country's laws.

Even when it came to the spread of education, for many years, the foreign rulers were in favor of the orthodox and traditional means and methods. Even when it came to the subject of medicine, for some time, in the Sanskrit College, there used to be classes on traditional Hindu medical scriptures by ancient scholars like Charaka and Susruta and there used to be classes on traditional Islamic medical disciplines including those by Avicenna in the Calcutta Madrasa that was founded during the tenure of Warren Hastings (1781). All these shall be described in detail later on.

It is clear that, during the initial years of Company rule, the English did not seek to change the ancient customs and, instead, to rule by these ancient norms. In some cases it was in the fear of incurring public wrath, in some to entertain the ruled, and, everywhere, to some extent, out of political prudence. It was during this juncture of the early to middle of the 19th century that great debates started rising on whether to continue ruling its Indian colony following the ancient rules and customs prevalent there or whether to introduce new elements of liberal thoughts and rule – those influenced by English and European Enlightenment and Rationalism. After vehement debates, it was decided that the new – that is new ideas – those produced by rational, liberal and enlightened thoughts, would replace the ancient customs, norms and mores of governance so far as the Indian colony is concerned. Among the English rulers, Macaulay and Bentinck were at the forefront of the English clamour for old being replaced and, in its place, a New Age being established in the Indian subcontinent.

This movement had its impact on the mind of the people of this country as well. At this juncture between the old and the new, they began to think and decide – whether to accept the new and reject the old, or to act otherwise. Among them, the educated, liberal and progressive sections of Indians decided to accept the new with wide open arms and reject the orthodox and conservative ways of life and living. Among the Indian civilians and natives, Rammohan Roy, David Hare and Derozio were at the forefront of this demand for the new, liberal ways to be accepted and adopted in place of the superstition and inequity laden orthodox ones.

The letter that Raja Rama Mohan Roy wrote to Lord Amherst in 1823 can be considered as the first drum roll of this new age. He turned the face of his countrymen away from the east and towards the west. But it is worth remembering that there were some qualities in him that no other leader could display during or ever since his times. While receiving the new with open arms, he did not reject the old in entirety. He realized the positive aspects of Hinduism and accepted those. However, he considered western rational science, liberal morals and welfare oriented mindset of the West good and worthwhile for the betterment of the plight of the Indians. All social movements constitute actions and reactions. So was the case in this situation. There came to be two camps, divided sharply between each other. On one side, lay supporters and proponents of ancient ways of life, while on the other were supporters of the

new ways. And, both resorted to excesses while rejecting the view-points of their opposition in entirety. Those on the conservative side began declaring that everything about these new ways was bad, while those on the liberal side began saying how everything about the orthodoxy was terrible. Shortly I shall describe the fallouts of such sharply divisive attitudes.

There exists one more reason for this addiction towards newness among the educated. The waves of the French Revolution had reached the shores of India. There would be no exaggeration in stating that the prose and poetry that were taught in 1828 and the minds of the teachers who would teach the same were saturated with ideals of liberty, self-determination and free thinking that the French Revolution espoused. When the Bengali youth started studying from these teachers and began to read these books, a new desire for free thinking and liberal values began to churn in minds. They sought to destroy the superstitions, sub-caste/religion systems and ancient traditions that had infested their immediate surroundings. It was as if their shibboleth became – “Break! Break! Break!” Such was the spirit in those years. However, this also became one of the reasons for excessive bias towards Western thoughts and ideals among the educated liberal classes. All in all, the spirit of the French Revolution has prevailed for many years among the liberal people of Bengal. Its effect can be noticed till date.

In the year of 1828, Derozio became a teacher of the Hindu College. In the same year, during the month of March, the then Governor General Lord Amherst left the country. During that time Lord William Bentinck was on his way towards India. Later Lord William Bentinck arrived in the country in July. It was a positive development in the history of Bengal. On one hand, Rammohan Roy had initiated religious and social reform movements and the maddening strength of the newly established English education had unleashed itself – creating a nascent class of liberal, progressive and English educated native Indians, while on the other, Lord Bentinck had arrived in Bengal. These led to many paradigm shifts in the history of Bengal.

During the commencement of this new era, both the virtues that were needed out of the highest-ranking ruler of a colony were present in fullness in Lord William Bentinck. Before taking a decision, he would think with judiciousness and patience while determining a course of action, and, when a course of action was chosen, his resolve to stick to the same in the face of all odds would be of unshakeable. His attributes were well recognized in all his sweeping contributions, and fructified through events such as abolition of suttee, suppression of thugees, spread of English education and establishment of the Calcutta Medical College. All these were historically landmark events. He took the responsibility expected of a ruler to the fullest extent and with firmness, determination and focused on all-round development of this country – as observed during the seven years through which he held the rank of Governor General. Because of this, he came to be disliked by his own countrymen.

When Lord William Bentinck arrived, Rammohan Roy's reformist zeal increased in leaps and bounds. His friend William Adam had ceased to believe in the Holy Trinity and had begun to believe in One God. Adam had to depart from the company of Serampore's Baptist Missionaries. Learning this, Raja Rammohan Roy became furious with the missionaries of Serampore and engaged them in fervent debates. Moreover, he began to print and circulate booklets and journals such as ‘Precepts of Jesus’, ‘Appeals to the Christian public’ and the ‘Brahmanical Magazine’. The Hindus had mounted fierce opposition to him from before. Now the Christians also turned against them. Rammohan Roy was

relentless. When the missionaries refused to print English text written by him in their press, he established a press called "Unitarian Press" in the Dharmatla region of Calcutta. He arranged for his friend William Adam to live and perform his weekly prayers and practices on the top-floor of an English language journal named 'Harkara'. He began to raise and collect funds for his friend's survival and upkeep, and also pay visits to Adam with his own children and friends. It is said Ram Mohan Roy gave ten thousand rupees to his friend. It cannot be ascertained whether he gave it all out of his own pocket. In all probability, he gave most of it and raised the rest through his friends.

The movement against suttee that began during the reign of Lord Amherst was not completely over even in 1828. Opinions of prominent personalities were taken, letters were sent to representatives of the ruling class in England and news about suttee was collected from different places. Eminent personalities such as Courtney Smith, Alexander Ross, and R. H. Rattray of the Nizamat Adalat-court had advised that the practice has to be stopped. Some high-ranking persons from the British ruling class advocated cautions and suggested at first a non-regulation based approach should be taken in some states to ascertain whether the subjects would take to it peacefully or otherwise. The year 1827 passed by in this way – collecting news and collating opinions. Thus, we see Lord Amherst writing in the beginning of 1828 –

"I think there is reason to believe and expect that, except on the occurrence of some very general sickness, such as that which prevailed in the lower parts of Bengal in 1825, the progress of general instruction and the unostentatious exertions of our local officers will produce the happy effect of a gradual diminution, and at no very distant period, the final extinction of the barbarous rite of suttee." –

Thus, in 1828, we find the outgoing Governor General hoping and expecting that owing to the spread of liberal rationalism through education and by dint of endeavours from Government Employees, the barbaric custom of suttee would soon cease to be. It goes without saying that an opinion like this did not go well with abolitionist reformers like Rammohan Roy. They stepped up on their movement against *suttee*. The primary plan of action was to visit places where the *suttee* was being conducted and oversee the state of affairs so as to ensure that the rules that Rammohan and other members of this anti-*suttee* movement had promulgated were being followed. This technique helped strengthen the movement against suppression of this custom.

During this year that is 1828, on 6th of Bhadra, Raja Ramamohan Roy rented an accommodation at the outhouse of Firingi Kamal Basu at Chitpur Road in Calcutta and established the Brahma Samaj therein. One Sunday, Rammohan Roy was returning from his friend Adam's house after a prayer session. His friends Tarachand Cjkrabarty and Chandrashekhar Dev were with him in the car. On the way, Chandrashekhar asked: 'Divan-ji, we go to a foreigner's place for worship. Why, do we not organize a place of worship for ourselves?' These words had a deep impact on Rammohan Roy. He thought about this for days on end. Then, he invited the friends - Kalinath Munsee, Dwarkanath Tagore, Mathuranath Mallik et al and floated this proposal. With the consent of everyone, it was decided that a space would be rented to facilitate this Brahma Worship. Accordingly, a space in Firingi Kamal Basu's house was rented. Thus began the work of the Brahma society (Brahma Samaj). Every Saturday evening there would be a Brahma worship session. The proceedings would go as follows: at first two Telugu Brahmans would read from the Vedas. Then, Utsavananda Vidyabagish would read from the Upanishad. After that,

Ramchandra Vidyabagish would impart religious advice. Finally, the Sabha (meeting) would end with music. Tarachand Chakrabarty was the first secretary of this Society.

The establishment of this Brahmo Sabha led to severe tumult within the Hindu society of Calcutta. Some people would visit the Sabha proceedings to witness how the worship and proceedings were performed. It was not just because of his role as the founder of Brahmo Sabha but also because of his lifestyle, beliefs and approaches to social matters that Rammohan became a blackguard – a subject of vile contempt – of the conservative factions. Vitriolic tirades would rain at him and about him on the streets and in the living rooms of the *baboos* of Calcutta.

When all these debates, movements and resistances were happening on one side, nothing short of a social revolution began from within the boundary walls of the Hindu College. It resulted from the presence of Derozio as a teacher there. The students of the college were drawn close by him like iron is drawn by magnet. Such a strange attraction, such relationships between a teacher and his students – were never seen before. Derozio could teach in the Hindu college only for three years. But within those three years he had planted something deep in the minds and hearts of his students. Many of those students were to become famous in different walks of life in their later lives. Nobody who had studied under Derozio in that department of Hindu College, could get away from his influence. I will talk about his famous students later on in this book. For now, allow me to introduce a strange and unknown student about whom very little could reach public knowledge and nothing has been retained in public memory.

Once I had visited the state of Bombay for some Prathana Samaj (a latter-day faction of the Brahmo Samaj) work. There, I heard a strange narrative from a well-respected and honorable civilian from that Province – Narayana Mahadev Paramananda. He told me that, during his youth, a strange monk had appeared in Bombay. He had since forgotten the monk's name. The monk was well-versed in the English language. Before going to Bombay, the monk used to live in the Katiwad region of Gujarat. Within a few days of his arrival, he began to publish a series of letters in a famous newspaper of Bombay. The series was titled – 'Misgovernment at Katiwad'. The letters reflected such a sense of wisdom, politeness, and sharp political acumen that, before long, people started talking about those. This reached the ears of the royal families. The King of Katiwad began to inquire about the author these letters. Soon, the monk were caught by the king's men and brought before the king. The monk did not conceal anything; He spoke thus to the king, "Your people had come to me and wept, so have I written their sadness down. I wish for you to improve your governance, or else you may do as you like." The king got the monk jailed. The monk suffered incarceration for a year. Meanwhile, there was a strong movement in the country. After a year, the king apologized to the monk and requested him to take up the post of Chief Minister. The monk refused, asking to the king -: "Had I had the lust for a royal post, would I have become a monk?" He added: "However, if the king wants to establish good governance, I can give advice." Then began the shadow-rule of the monk over Katiwad. The first advice that the monk gave was that that "As the highest ranked dignitaries it is crucial to appoint experienced persons who know English and are aware, through prior association, of the ways and means in which the British govern its territories. Such persons should be put to such offices and the existing corrupt officials needs to be removed." Accordingly, the monk came with Bombay and recruited a group of English-educated persons to serve as officers to the King of Katiwad. Narayan Mahadev Paramanand was one such person who had gone to Katiwad with the

monk. I heard from him that the shadow-rule of monk and his influence on the monarch continued for a year. After that, the old employees of the king who were removed from their posts conspired against this monk and succeeded in channeling the king's ire towards the monk yet again. A royal order was circulated ordering the monk to leave Katiwad within 48 hours. With the monk leaving, the young English speaking employees, Paramanand included, resigned and went back to Bombay. Paramanand had heard the monk referring to Derozio as his Guru and uttering incessant words of praise for Derozio. When I returned to Calcutta, I asked Ramatanu Lahiri, if he could remember any of his co-students, that is, any of Derozio's students in Hindu College, becoming a monk or taking sannyas. He could not remember anyone who did so.

Within one year of Derozio joining the Hindu College as a teacher, his students had become a strongly united group. Haramohan Chattopadhyay, a clerk with the Hindu College at that time, had penned how, by 1828, he had made deep-rooted influences on his students' minds and world-views. Portions from these writings have been quoted by Derozio's biographer Mr. Edwards. We get the following description from there.

"The students of the first, second, and third classes had the advantage of attending a conversazione established in the school by Mr. Derozio, where readings in poetry, and literature, and moral philosophy were carried on. The meetings were held almost daily after or before school hours. Though they were without the knowledge or sanction of the authorities yet Mr. Derozio's disinterested zeal and devotion in bringing up the students in these subjects was unbounded, and characterised by a love and philanthropy which, up to this day, has not been equaled by any teacher either in or out of the service. The students in their turn loved him most tenderly; and were ever ready to be guided by his counsels and imitate him in all their daily actions in life. In fact, Mr. Derozio acquired, such an ascendancy over the minds of his pupils that they would not move even in their private concerns without his counsel and advice. On the other hand, he fostered their taste in literature: taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstition ; and so far formed their moral conceptions and feelings, as to place them completely above the antiquated ideas and aspirations of the age. Such was the force of his instructions, that the conduct of the students out of the College was most exemplary and gained them the applause of the outside world, not only in a literary or scientific point of view, but what was of still greater importance, they were all considered men of truth. Indeed, the College boy was a synonym for truth, and it was a general belief and saying amongst our countrymen, which, those that remember the time, must acknowledge, that 'such a boy is incapable of falsehood because he is a college boy.'"

With such support and zeal did Derozio begin the work of the Academic Association. At first, the meetings and programs would be held at different spaces based on availability. Finally, a house in Maniktala became the place where such meetings and programs began to happen on a regular basis. The first secretaries were Derozio himself was and a young man named Umacharan Bose. Rasikkrishna Mallik, Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghosh, Radhanath Sikdar, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Harachandra Ghos used to be the primary speakers of the meeting, Ramtanu Lahiri, Shivchandra Dev, Parichand Mitra, et al would be present as enthusiastic member-listeners of the Association. These meetings soon began to attract public attention so much so that, on some days, people like David Hare, Col. Benson the then private secretary to Lord William Bentinck, Col. Beatson the

latter-day Adjutant General, Dr. Mills, the Principal of Bishop College et al would often be present to hear the speeches of the members and would express surprise and joy at their sharp thinking and elocution.

In different sessions of the meetings hosted by the Association, multiple the moral and social issues would be discussed by the participants in an independent and unconstrained way. As a result of such encouragement, the passion for free thinking arose among Deorozo's students. As a result, they began to discuss and deliberate on the ancient customs, norms and mores of the country. Quoting from the written description of the above-mentioned, Haramohan Chattopadhyay, I present below the result of such endeavours:-

*“The principles and practices of Hindu religion were openly ridiculed and condemned, and angry disputes were held on moral subjects : the sentiments of Hume had been widely diffused and warmly partonised * * *. The most glowing harangues were made at Debating Clubs which were then numerous. The Hindu religion was denounced as vile and corrupt and unworthy of the regard of rational beings. The degraded state of the Hindus formed the topic of many debates; their ignorance and superstition were declared. to be the causes of such a state, and it was then resolved that nothing but "a liberal education could enfranchise the minds of the people. The degradation of the female mind was viewed with indignation; the question at a very large meeting was carried unanimously that Hindu women should be taught; and we are Assured of the fact that the wife of one of the leaders of this movement was a most accomplished lady, who included amongst the subjects, with which she was acquainted, moral philosophy and mathematics.”*

Experiences and influences passed on from the older students of the Hindu College to the younger ones. The influences began to spread. The students began to quarrel with their elders at home. The elders began to discipline, persecute and punish them to no end. Late Parichand Mitra, the biographer of David Hare, writes: "The boys refused to take the sacred-thread. Many used to throw theirs away. When they would be forcefully locked in within the deity-rooms of their family homes to perform rites and rituals deemed sacred by their orthodox Hindu families, they would recite from selected portions of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey instead of performing such rites and rituals". Again, like I have heard from the old people from those times, the young boys would resort to excesses far more radical than this. When they saw the Brahmin Pundits, with anointments on their foreheads and big chignons on their shaven heads walking down the streets, they would chase such Pundits down and chant: “We eat cows, oh we eat cows!” to incur such a Pundit’s annoyance. Sometimes they would go to the rooftops of their own houses carrying the hookah of their fathers or grandfathers, call out to their neighbours, puff from those hookahs or put the end of the hookah-pipe through which the puffing is done, or drink the water in which the tobacco for such hookahs are washed, and shout: “Look look, we are drinking water touched by Muslim people!”

At that time there lived a poor Brahmin named Vrindaban Ghosal. He had nothing to do but take a dip in the Ganges every morning, take his religious utensils needed for bathing and worship, walk around and pay visits to the houses of rich orthodox people. He began to spread vile rumors about Derozio – stating that Derozio taught his students that there is no God and no religion, that it is not obligatory for children to obey their parents, that it is okay for brother and sisters to marry, that Derozio’s sister would soon

get married to Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay and many more of such harmfully slanderous gossip. Soon, scandal and infamy rose among the orthodox sections of the Hindu society and the news of this unrest reached the authorities of Hindu College. At first the College Committee warned Anselm, D., the then Headmaster of the College, to the tune that communication between students and teachers beyond class hours must be forbidden. An angry Anselm called for Derozio. Finding a fault in Derozio's work, Anselm was about to physically hit Derozio. Derozio moved aside. Incidentally David Hare was present in the room during that time. Seeing Hare's silence, an angry Anselm called him a 'flatterer', at which, David Hare asked: "whose flatterer?" David Hare was fond of Derozio and his method of teaching. Meanwhile, along with forbidding teacher-student communication beyond classroom hours, the Hindu College Committee also forbade religious discussions between teachers and students, and bringing food inside the school building.

Such tussles between the old and the new continued. Meanwhile, on 4th December of 1829, Lord William Bentinck passed the following order banning the system of *suttee*:-

"It is hereby declared, that after the promulgation of this regulation, all persons convicted of aiding and abetting in the sacrifice of a Hindu widow by burning or burying her alive, whether the sacrifice be voluntary on her part or not, shall be doomed guilty of culpable homicide and shall be liable to punishment by fine or imprisonment or both by fine and imprisonment."—Regulation of 4th December, 1829.

Within a few days of this, on the 11th day of the month of Magha in the Bengali calendar/ Tarikh-e-Ilahi for the English year of 1830, Rammohan Roy shifted the working space of Brahma Sabha at his new mansion. On the day this was established, the Trust Deed of the Society affirming its address at the Bhavan was read out: "This house shall be of use to persons of all caste creed and religion, and only god, as a formless entity of truth, shall be worshipped there. No other deities are ever to be worshipped in the house."

Owing to both these incidences, the orthodox Hindus of Calcutta Hindus enraged. Radhakanta Dev led the orthodox Hindu section in it clamour against the entry and spread of liberal values in society. He initiated a regular meeting called Dharma Sabha where protestations against the spread of liberal values were raised. Motilal Seal set up a branch of this Sabha at his residence in Kalutola. Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay, who was previously serving as the editor of Chandrika, began to promote the staunch orthodox values of traditional Hinduism with twice the enthusiasm. On the days when Sessions of this orthodox Dharma Sabha were held, the main street would fill up with parked carriages of its rich attendees. The members such meetings would express their anger and declare that, for a long time they had ignored Rammohan Roy's meetings and activities, but now they shall not ignore them at all. Instead they would now work actively to destroy him, his liberal ideals and his followers completely. This raw anger begun to translate into actual activities of these proponents of orthodox Hinduism. They began to call for complete social boycott of Rammohan Roy's friends and followers. There was even a call to socially boycott the Brahmins who would perform rituals or give blessing and take money in exchange from the households of Rammohan Roy's friend's and followers.

In these ways society was in tumult. Unperturbed and undeterred, Rammohan Roy, accompanied by his friends and followers, would travel to his place of worship and discussions at his newly established society. I had heard from people of those times that he would go to this temple of worship (of the newly formed Brahmo religion) on foot and return on his coach-car. When he would return, people would pelt stones and hurl mud and muck towards his coach. He would laugh, shut the doors of his coach-car and call out for his coachman-driver – “O Coachman, Drive Fast!” The orthodox members of the Hindu society were so much agitated by the formation of the Brahmo Samaj and the abolition of the *suttee* and so many were they and their followers in number that, countless signatures can be seen in a petition produced by this orthodox society against the abolition and in favour of discontinuation of the law that abolished *suttee* and consequent continuation of that particularly heinous practice. On the contrary, the letter sent by Raja Rammohan Roy to Lord William Bentinck congratulating the latter for effectuating the abolition of *suttee* through lawmaking contained only a handful of signatures – that too, only those that were put there by his friends.

A few months went by through such severe tumult caused by conflict between the old and the new – that is, between orthodox and liberal values. Then, famous Christian Missionary Alexander Duff came to Calcutta. Through conversations with Rammohan, Duff realized that one effective way of spreading Christianity in the country is through establishment of schools where the medium of instruction would be English and the subjects taught should inculcate European knowledge, morals and values among the students. He established an English medium school in Calcutta, almost without the consent of his senior Missionaries in Scotland. To facilitate the workings of this school, Rammohan Roy arranged for a space – being the house of Firingi Kamal Basu where Brahmo Samaj meetings and worship would happen previously before the Samaj’s activities shifted to a house brought by him for that specific purpose – and also for 6 students. One of them, Kshetramohan Chattopadhyaya, had become a rich man of the city later on.

Duff, hoping to stay close to the newly educated and liberalized youth of the Hindu College, rented an accommodation close to the college premises. Rammohan Roy, having helped Alexander Duff establish himself in his work in India, traveled to Britain. Many students of the Hindu College were inspired by the lectures of Duff and Dieltzy. They began to throng their lectures. Annoyed at this, the Hindu College authorities promulgated an order forbidding Hindu College students from attending their lectures. This was widely criticized. Many found this to be an excessive intervention into the realm of independent thinking.

Finally, in the April of 1831, the Hindu members of the Hindu College Committee decided to make serious moves towards discharging Derozio from his teaching work owing to his excess radicalism. Ramkamal Sen, the grandfather of Late Keshavchandra Sen, as a leader of the orthodox section of the Hindus, sent a formal request letter and asked for the removal of Derozio from his post as a teacher of the Hindu College. Thus began the process of inquisition for Derozio. In the first stage, the question around Derozio’s nature and character was raised. Given the mutual fondness and friendly relations between Derozio and his students, it was asked if Derozio had resorted to any ‘unnatural activity’ with any of his students and if any student was harmed by him. Dr. HH Wilson and David Hare summarily protested against this motion, and even many orthodox Hindu members of the College Committee decided against pressing such grave charges against him. In the second stage, the former proposal was

abandoned in favour of another proposal that was presented. This was to the tune that, given the current social conditions, would Derozio's continuing presence be beneficial to the College or whether it would be harmful. Wilson and Hare could not protest this proposal, citing their ignorance of local conditions as reasons behind their inability. Following majority opinion, the Committee decided to sack Derozio.

When Wilson carried this news to Derozio, the latter began to pen his resignation letter immediately. In that letter, he refuted all the charges levied against him. He wrote that he had never preached atheism to his students. Instead, he has taught his students to think independently and with a free mind on whether god exists or not, and decide for themselves accordingly. He denied that he had ever supported marriage between brothers and sisters. He also said that, far from teaching his students to be disobedient towards their parents, he had, in fact, punished his students for expressing disobedient or disrespectful attitudes towards their parents.

After leaving the College, Derozio began to publish a journal named 'East India' and became a prominent advocate for the causes of the Firingi (people of Anglo-Indian, Portuguese Jewish and other European descent) populace of the city. He was alive only for a few months after he had left his position as a teacher of the Hindu College. During those few months, he would be present in many activities that were conducted for the welfare and espousing the causes of the Firingi community of Calcutta. He used to toil day and night for their issues. While toiling thus, on Saturday, the 17th of December, 1831, he got afflicted with cholera. He stayed in deathbed for six days. As the news of his illness spread, his students such as Mahesh Chandra Ghosh, Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyaya, Ramgopal Ghosh, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyaya thronged by his side. They stayed by his side and took care of him day and night. However, he could not be saved. He breathed his last on the 24th of December. An Englishman incapable of running affairs of magazines and journals took charge of the 'East India' magazine, and, before long, led Derozio's family – comprising his mother and sister – to deep debt. Within a few years, they were forgotten by the society at large. After Derozio had passed away, a proposal of raising a tomb or sign to honour his memory was raised. Even a Committee was established to that end. However, it all faded with time. Even a faint sign commemorating one of the primary teachers and leaders of the New Wave of Bengal does not remain today.

Derozio left the Hindu College. But the wave and churning that he left behind did not cease to be. On 23rd August, 1831, some activities of his students led to full-fledged social scandal and tumult. A place of gathering for those students was the residence of Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyaya. On that day, his friends had gathered at his house in his absence. They would often buy boiled meat and bread from shops run by Muslim people. On that day, having eaten the meat, they threw the bones inside the residential area of a neighbouring house and began to shout: "Look there, bones of cows!" The Hindus of the region came out in numbers, seeking to beat these students up. They fled. Then, these orthodox neighbours of Krishnamohan teamed up and complained about the incidence before the maternal grandfather Ramjay Vidyabhushan. They told him to throw out his daughter's son, or else he would be boycotted by them. This old Brahmin became furious with Krishnamohan. Poor Krishnamohan was unaware of this entire incident. When he returned in the evening, he was denied entry. Left without an option, he sought and found shelter at his friend Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyaya's house. During that time, Krishnamohan and Rashik Krishna Mullick were teaching at Hare's school. From the month of May,

1832, Krishnamohan began to publish the Inquirer magazine. Through this magazine, he, along with the other students of Derozio began to heap scorn against the orthodox Hindus who had tortured them. The liberal youth had thus blown their war-horn against orthodoxy.

On 28th August 1832, it was published in the Inquirer magazine that Mahesh Chandra Ghosh, one of the prominent personalities among the students of Derozio, has converted himself to Christianity. In his adolescence, Mahesh was a frolic loving boy, given somewhat to excesses. That is why Ramgopal Ghosh would avoid his company. However, sweeping changes in his nature and character were noticed when he found the tutorship of Derozio. His devotion to religion and honest nature made him a person respected by all.

On the 17th of October 1832, Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyaya took to Christianity. I have heard from people who were alive in those days that these conversions had led to a gossip among the people that all the good students of the Hindu College would convert to Christianity.

Ramtanu Lahiri graduated from the Hindu College in 1833. On the 27th of September of that very year, Raja Rammohan Roy breathed his last in the city Bristol of England. Furthermore, on that year, owing to long-term efforts undertaken by Rammohan Roy and through the advice of Lord William Bentinck, high-ranking government posts were opened up for the English educated liberal classes of India. On that year, the East India Company renewed of their Royal Charter to rule India as a colony through the Charter Act. Section 87 of the Act stated:- *“And be it enacted that no native of the said territories, nor any natural born subject of his Majesty resident therein, shall by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour, or any of them, be disabled from holding any place, office, or employment, under the said Company.”*

From the time of Lord Cornwallis, no Indian could rise beyond the rank of sherstadars (office managers). Even Rammohan Roy could not rise beyond that rank. During his stay in Britain, he gave some advice to the British Royalty and Parliament on matters involving administration of rule and governance of India. He had made special requests for enabling higher official ranks to Indians. This law (the Charter Act, 1833), opened this door for native Indians. People who were educated in English began to be given posts of Deputy Magistrates and Deputy Collectors. Thus, a heavy stone was lifted from the path involving livelihood opportunities for the people of British India. Since then, these powers have hardly ever been abused by the native Indians who held these posts. The proactive and glorious roles that they have played as officeholders in high-ranking administrative posts have made all Indians proud.