The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta

The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta (henceforth The Persecuted) was written by Krishna Mohan Banerjee in the year 1831, when he was about eighteen years old. Krishna Mohan dedicated The Persecuted to “Hindoo Youths” with (in his own words) “sentiments of affection, and strong hopes of their appreciating those virtues and mental energies which elevate man in the estimation of a philosopher” (Preface, The Persecuted).

For more than a generation, The Persecuted remained the solitary dramatic effort in English not only in Bengal, but anywhere in India. It is important to consider the reasons why Krishna Mohan chose to express himself in the dramatic medium because the author does not seem to have ever intended his play to be really staged. There can be little doubt that this drama was written with a particular purpose, as Krishna Mohan himself made it clear both in the extended title and also in the Preface to the drama:

The author’s purpose has been to compute its excellence by measuring the effects it will produce upon the minds of the rising generation. The inconsistencies and blackness of the influential members of the Hindoo community have been depicted before their eyes. They will now clearly perceive the wiles and tricks of the Brahmins and thereby be able to guard themselves against them (Preface to The Persecuted).
Obviously then, the drama was intended to challenge the Hindu youth towards social reform and make them commit themselves to "Truth" as they came to perceive it through their "liberal education".

At the time the play was written, Krishna Mohan was strongly under the influence of Derozio and believed in no religion at all. He had caught the atheistic and anti-religious trend of the day and joined the crowd of self-styled reformers. Though he was to convert later, until this time Krishna Mohan had not yet manifested any interest in Christianity. All his efforts were directed towards bold criticism of the inconsistencies and superstitions of the Hindu religion, but he had no belief in any religion or any god whatsoever. In fact, as is recorded by Lal Behari Day in Recollections of Alexander Duff (1879), at this point of time the Christian Missionaries were as much an object of ridicule for him and his friends as were the orthodox Hindus. In Day’s own words: “At that time I was perfectly regardless of God, and never took the trouble of thinking of Him” (Quoted in Abhijit Dutta 178).

The Persecuted is an autobiographical play, based on a real life incident in the life of Krishna Mohan, but since it was written in the “pre-Christian” phase of his life, we must remember that in spite of its anti-Hindu tirades this play had no Christian agenda behind it and we should place and study it in the context of the first eighteen years of Krishna Mohan’s life.

Krishna Mohan Banerjee was born in May 1813 in Calcutta. His parents were orthodox Kulin Brahmins. At the age of five, he was initiated by means of shastric rites into the life of a student. When he was eleven years old, Krishna Mohan was invested with the Brahminical thread. In February 1824 he was admitted to the Hindu College and
there he commenced his study of Sanskrit and English. Krishna Mohan was a diligent student and often won prizes in College competitions. He was an enthusiastic participant in college cultural functions as well. In 1828, at the age of fifteen, he lost his father, but having obtained of the Education Committee’s scholarships, he was able to continue his studies.

On the first of November 1829, he left college and was appointed assistant teacher in David Hare’s school. He married in the same year. The newly introduced English education had resulted in alarming and unprecedented effects on the young educated Bengali. Lai Behari Day speaks of how the young Bengali mind, released from the bondage of age-old tradition, ran wild and the Bengali intellect adopted the boldest forms of scepticism:

> From implicit faith in the religion of their forefathers, they rushed into blank scepticism. They became sceptical over the very existence of God. “What proof is there”, they asked, “that the national religion is not a cunningly devised fable, palmed off upon ignorant populace by an interested priesthood?” They began to question Hindu taboos on eating forbidden food and drinking spirituous liquor, and questioned the infallibility of those who were instrumental in framing these taboos.


The Derozians gave vent to their apathy for decadent Hinduism through their periodical *The Parthenon*, which was, however, soon discontinued by the Hindu College.
authorities owing to its radical anti-Hindu propensities. The discontinuance of *The Parthenon* did not deter the Derozians who had come to be known as “Young Bengal”. They continued to attack orthodox Hindu society and its superstitions through the press. On 17th May 1831, *The Enquirer* was published under the leadership of Krishna Mohan. This journal was to serve as the mouthpiece of the liberals, through which they planned to carry out their anti-religious propaganda.4 In the journal, Krishna Mohan wrote violent articles on the errors of Hinduism and its leaders. *The Enquirer* inveighed against the corrupt tyranny of the Hindu priesthood, and the social evils of *Sati*, female infanticide and *Kulin* polygamy.5 In the July 1831 issue of *The Enquirer*, Krishna Mohan wrote:

> The rage of persecution is still vehement. The bigots are up with their thunders of fulmination. The heat of the *Gurum Sabha* is violent...Excommunication is the cry of the fanatic. We hope perseverance will be liberal’s answer. The *Gurum Sabha* is high; let is ascend to the boiling point.6 The orthodox are in a rage; let them burst forth into a flame. Let the liberal’s voice be like that of the Roman, a Roman knows not only to act but to suffer. Blown be the trumpet of excommunication from house to house. Be some hundreds cast out of society; they will form a party, and object devoutly to be wished by us. (Quoted in Krishnakali Biswas, *Unabingsha Shatadhir Aloke Revd. Krishna Mohan Bandopadhyay*, 31)

In the eyes of the orthodox Hindu society, Young Bengal was committing a vicious sacrilege by questioning Hinduism. This orthodox society could not accept these
insults and hurled rampant abuses at what it characterized as the seditious anti-orthodox propensities of these befitting, spirit drinking "rascals".

On numerous occasions the leaders of these radicals were summoned before the tribunals of the orthodox to answer for their conduct. Lal Behari Day has wonderfully eulogized Krishna Mohan Banerjee's role in the entire situation. Krishna Mohan had become the eye-sore of the orthodox Hindus and therefore also the hero of the ultra radical anti-idolatrous section in Calcutta. His house became the resort of all the ultra radical youth. Certain less prudent and over-emotional Derozians gradually turned their self constructed liberty into license. Thus on the evening of 23rd August 1831, a Derozian group assembled in the residence of Krishna Mohan. Krishna Mohan himself was absent in this assembly. The youth took beef and wine and threw the bones in the inner courtyard of an adjoining house inhabited by an orthodox Brahmin. This act was brazen enough to provoke the Brahmin who rallied thousands of his bigoted allies to redress his humiliation at the hands of these youth. They assailed Krishna Mohan's family to publicly disown him or face excommunication. Having no other alternative his family summoned Krishna Mohan to their presence and presented him with the alternatives of both recanting his errors by an open disavowal of his past actions, and proclaiming his belief in the Hindu faith or to leave his ancestral home permanently and be forever deprived of all the privileges and immunities of caste. Krishna Mohan chose the latter extremity and left his home.7

This odious separation from his beloved kith and kin took a heavy toll on Krishna Mohan's health and threw him into a paroxysm of rage against those who had been instrumental in this separation. This bitterness found vehement expression in the
columns of The Enquirer where he broke forth in vituperative denunciation of Hinduism:

We left the home where we passed our infant days; we left our mother that nourished us in our childhood; we left our brothers with whom we associated in our earliest days; we left our sisters with whom we sympathized when we were born.8

These words undoubtedly portray the pain that Krishna Mohan felt on being turned out of his home. But now he became even bolder in his denunciation of Hinduism. He remarked, “Persecution is high for we have deserted the shrine of Hinduism” (Ghosh, Bidrohi Derozio 10). Speaking of his difficulty in being able to carry on his journal smoothly Krishna Mohan wrote in The Enquirer:

Persecution has burst upon us so vehemently, that on Wednesday last we were left without a roof to cover our head. At last in spite of the bigot’s rage and the fanatic’s fulminations, we have been able to be settled in a commodious place, through the exertions of two affectionate friends and warm advocates of truth. We were, however, so troubled in settling our domestic affairs that we have not been able to start our present number to our satisfaction. If our readers conceive the difficulties we were placed in, expecting nothing but the rage of bigots and foes, and suffering the greatest hardships for the sake of truth and liberation, they will undoubtedly excuse our present defects.9

Besides denouncing in no unmeasured terms in his journal Hindu idolatry, caste-system, Hindu mythology and its “absurdities”, together with the blazing
immorality pervading the ranks of Hinduism, Krishna Mohan sought to ridicule the Hindu society and religion through the play *The Persecuted* (1831) where Hindu orthodoxy was assailed and the hypocrisy of the Brahmin priesthood was mercilessly exposed. Krishna Mohan’s anti-caste-system sentiments found candid expression in this play. The elaborate title of the play explains the theme clearly: *The Persecuted, Or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative Of The Present State Of Hindu Society In Calcutta*.

It was about this time (1831) that Krishna Mohan’s attention was drawn to Christianity. Alexander Duff, the noted Scottish missionary, had just landed in Calcutta. In the words of Lal Behari Day,

Duff noticed the situation springing out of Young Bengal’s tirade against the shackles of Hindu orthodoxy and superstition, carefully watched the revolution which was taking place before his eyes, and resolved to give it a wholesome direction (Day *Recollections of Alexander Duff* 27).

Duff decided to fill up the vacuum that was created in the minds of the Young Bengal. Duff expressed his deep sympathy for Krishna Mohan’s sufferings and asked him to examine impartially the claims of Christianity. Krishna Mohan has recorded that,

At that time I was perfectly regardless of God, and never took the trouble of thinking of Him. This ingratitude was overcome with kindness by Him, for though I never did seek after the nature and attributes of my great creator, yet, as a merciful father, He forgot me not. Though I neglected Him, yet He had compassion on me, and without my knowledge or inclination, created, so to speak, a circumstance that impelled me to seek after Him (Quoted in Abhijit Dutta 178).
It was not very difficult to fill the vacuum that was created in Krishna Mohan’s life because of his excommunication. Duff ultimately influenced Krishna Mohan to embrace Christianity. Krishna Mohan was baptized on 17th October 1832. He regarded the incident as a “public recantation of all error and public embracing of the truth, the whole truth, as revealed in the bible.”

Krishna Mohan’s conversion raised a storm in Hindu society. The journals of the day were full of angry tirades against the activities of the Christian missionaries. He himself was too independent a man to remain silent, and declared his determination to pursue with steadfastness his course of action and endure with patience all persecution.

Krishna Mohan passed away on 11th May 1885 at the age of seventy two. An active mind, with a passionate desire for truth, a powerful will prepared to face any opposition, a determined courage to do what was felt to be right, produced an unusual richness of life, action and thought from which both the Church and the country benefited. After his death, The Bengalee wrote,

Another representative man has just passed away— perhaps the most notable survivor of a generation that has now well nigh become extinct… the men of light and leading, who, though perhaps in their first freedom from ignorance and superstition, committed some excess, which when living in less excited times, we are not able to approve of, were nevertheless the pioneers of that great movement for reform, which, for many long years yet to come, will continue to produce an abundant harvest of good. We can not perhaps sympathise with Krishna Mohan and his comrades who ate beef and threw the remains thereof in the house of
their pious Hindu neighbour. But these very excesses marked the strength of the new movement and they displayed the resolute daring and complete emancipation from prejudice... Comparing small things with great, who does not regret the September massacres and the other incidents of horror that accompanied the birth of the French Revolution! ... So too, while we can not but admire the fierce spirit of independence which Krishna Mohan and his contemporaries exhibited, they were at times led into extremes which we can not approve of, and which they themselves could not have afterwards approved of. But these very excesses were inevitable in the case of a new movement for reform and were not without there warning to those to whom the movement came as a legacy (Italics mine) (The Bengalee, 16 May 1885).

The composite nature of the awakening in Bengal in the nineteenth century is often surmised as historical discovery, linguistic and literary modernization and socio-religious reformation. While William Jones represented historical discovery, Ram Mohan Roy socio religious reformation, and William Carey development of the Bangla language, Krishna Mohan, though to a lesser extent, was involved in all these three aspects of the renaissance.12

Conversions have always been a matter of debate and converts have always been looked upon uneasily, and with a sense of distrust. But as postcolonial theories of conversion argue, conversion may also be seen as a form of resistance. Whatever may have been the context and the immediate cause of Krishna Mohan’s conversion, his later life testifies that side by side with the process of Christianizing himself, he was also to a
great extent, indigenizing Christianity. For one, he used to preach and interpret Biblical sermons in the Bengali language. Moreover, Krishna Mohan’s rebel spirit continued to spur him whenever he was faced with discrimination. Thus, in the year 1847, he voiced his opinion against the domination of the church by the European missionaries, and demanded that native and European missionaries should be paid equally. When the church did not accept his demand, he refused the post at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Again, in his *Aryan Witness* (1875), Krishna Mohan argues that the *Prajapati* of the *Vedas* is Jesus Christ.13

Thus Krishna Mohan never lost his fiery zeal throughout his life. He was always ready to challenge the powers that be, whether his Christian Missionary superiors or the orthodox society. It is this spirit of rebellion that sparks in his play *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the present state of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. In the title of his play, “Persecuted” refers not only to Banylal, the protagonist of the play, but also alludes to Krishna Mohan himself. In the manner of classical Greek drama, *The Persecuted* begins *in medias res*, that is, in the moment of crisis. Banylal, the son of an orthodox pious Hindu Brahmin is discovered by his father’s old servant while he and his friends were eating beef and drinking wine in his inner chambers. It is at this moment of crisis that the drama opens. The situation is terse, full of dramatic potential. It is true that the dramatic possibilities are not really explored to the fullest extent. And the reason for this is provided by Krishna Mohan himself in the preface:

The author feels inclined to observe that the reader will be disappointed if he looks after dramatic excellence in the following pages. The intention was not to preserve that link unbroken which tragedies and comedies are
Though *The Persecuted* cannot be said to touch the heights of "dramatic excellence", neither can it be dismissed as a "crude presentation". Rather, it performs quite well the task that it was meant to achieve: to produce certain "effects... upon the minds of the rising generation". *The Persecuted* however, does not lack in dramatic quality. If we regard that "conflict" is the essence of drama then *The Persecuted* has conflict at its heart. The "conflict" in this play is on many levels. Firstly of course, there is the external conflict: the conflict between the orthodox Brahmins and the Western educated, liberal minded Banyalal (*Bany = Saraswati*, Hindu goddess of learning; *lal* = son) and his friends. The conflict here is between two opposing schools of thought, between two opposing ideologies. Banyalal represents the group to which Krishna Mohan himself belonged— the western educated Young Bengal, while the other group is that of the orthodox Brahmins.

But the conflict in this play is not limited to the external clash of ideologies. The author also presents very dramatically the internal conflict that perplexes Banyalal when he is faced with the choice of either clinging to "Truth" or to obey his doting old father:

> Are these the effects of knowledge? - Disagreement between father and son? The Almighty was wise when he forbade man to taste this baneful fruit. What? Is knowledge to produce all these? Is a man by renouncing superstition to fall into such difficulties? Are we to set ourselves at
defiance to all calls of nature? Is education to blunt our feelings and render us indifferent to our brothers and sisters? Is knowledge to render us indifferent to a father's comforts? Are we to stand unmoved and cold when a father kneels before us? Nature shirks with horror at these conceptions. What? Was I so brutal, so unnatural, as to have disregarded a father's entreaties upon his knee? Is knowledge the cause of all this revolt against nature? Shame me! ... Heavens! What do I conceive? - a father versus Truth! ... (11)

As noted historian Tapan Raychaudhuri has rightly observed, Intergenerational conflict was probably no part of the Indian life experience in pre modern times and the dominant values emphasized the supreme importance of filial piety. Parents were gods on earth. The nineteenth century memoirs document a remarkable survival of the emotional affects associated with such beliefs. These affects heightened and complicated the tensions generated by the ideological stances of the younger generation... The reforming youth went through experiences which could be far more traumatic than any social persecution (Raychaudhuri, *Perceptions* 1999).

After undergoing immense mental anguish, Banyal is ultimately able to overcome the conflicting pulls as he finds the claims of Truth to be stronger than all else. He reaches the resolution that,

A father's cries are not stronger than those of truth. Bear strong in my mind and slacken not. A father may weep; a mother may shed tears; ... a sister
may repine; but let them not triumph over truth. A father's feelings are not more to be consulted than the dictates of TRUTH. Bear witness my mind, I neglect a father for her. I break down the chains of filial duty for Truth; witness this and do me justice... (11)

What is this notion of “truth” that spurred Banylal/Krishna Mohan to reject the claims of their father/family? It could not have been an alternate religion like Christianity as Krishna Mohan himself has recorded his apathy to all religions at this point in his life. What Banylal calls the “truth” was perhaps the awareness/perception that Hindu religion was too bigoted and superstition ridden.

It is interesting to read Krishna Mohan’s delineation of Mohadeb’s character. Though this play is autobiographical in essence, Krishna Mohan here departs from the facts of his own life. Krishna Mohan’s father had died when he was about sixteen years old. Thus Krishna Mohan did not experience the ideological interface with his father that Banylal does. However, Krishna Mohan did experience extreme mental torture and anguish on being separated from his family (records of his responses to his excommunication have been furnished above). Mohadeb is a god fearing pious man and a loving father. Though belonging to the orthodox school, he has neither the cunningness nor the malice that characterizes Bydhabagis, Turkolunkar or Lallchand. Mohadeb is puzzled by Banylal’s fixation for “Truth”. He simply cannot understand how “truth” can be so important that it makes Banylal indifferent even to the threat of being excommunicated. Mohadeb, out of love for his son, even bribes Bydhabagis. But he has to give in at last and the doting old father swoons as he has to sign his son’s expulsion.15
A notable feature of *The Persecuted* is that there is not a single woman character in it. It is true that in those days women were mostly confined to the inner chambers and had little scope of participating in the world of men. However, the character of a mother figure is conspicuous by its absence in this play.

Krishna Mohan includes some farcical elements in this drama. The characters of the two greedy Brahmins, Turkolunkar and Bydhabagis have been sketched farcically. They are shown to be outright greedy and malicious, hypocrites par excellence, condemning publicly the very actions that they themselves love to indulge in privately. At first they are introduced as a pair and each serves to bring out the evil in the other. Turkolunkar and Bydhabagis revel in the foolishness of their ignorant and credulous "sishos" (followers). They are seen to be wary of the Europeans, "a set of men not in favour of our aggrandizement..." Of the two, Bydhabagis is more confident and also more malicious. He proclaims complacently:

>We are too firmly established to be shaken off. The Hindoos adore us and look upon us as Gods... Our position is strong; we have a greater command over the minds of men than you suppose. The Bramin [sic] is a blessed man. He tramples upon the very persons whose bounty feeds him... may we thus subsist upon the clever tricks we play, and the frauds we practise upon the Hindoo! (11)

In their next appearance in the play, we find that Bydhabagis is "uncomfortable" as he had been drinking the previous night. Very shamelessly he announces his evil tricks:
I have expounded a course of *shasters* to them where I allowed drinking! They are happy—they like me exceedingly. Their veneration for me is particularly great because I permit sensual gratifications”. He goes on to say “they never read the *shasters* and so did I; but I invented a set of doctrines and recommended to them as their *shasters*—they are particularly glad that drinking is allowed (12).

The farcical element is stronger in the burning-coal episode which involves Kamdeb, Lallchand and Debnauth. Kamdeb is satirically drawn particularly in his use of the English language. Krishna Mohan adds a note that “This is an instance of the manner in which many, pretending to know the English language, murder it in a cruel manner.”

Here is an instance of Kamdeb’s English—

“Yesh,Yesh; I rich man, he not make me respect. We must order Mohadeb to transportation him from house; and we must excommunicashian him.” In his excitement Kamdeb drops his hookah accidentally and it falls on Lallchand and burns his feet. Perhaps this is the author’s way of punishing the evil Lallchand (18).

Lallchand is presented as a cunning man, influential and rich, and an outright hypocrite. He is an opportunist, changing allegiances as the need may be. Lallchand owns a press, and he makes the utmost use (abuse?) of the power of the pen in harnessing public opinion against Banylal. He too is a self professed drunkard: “are we not regularly drunk every night? Yet what? Do we confess what we do before the public? These villains have got their brains turned out; they speak of truth and call me a hypocrite.” He bears a personal grudge against Banylal and thus rejoices when Banylal
is in an adverse situation—"Banyal thou hast always been wicked and hostile to me. I have got thee on the hip thou rascal" (17). Lallchand’s hypocrisy is revealed again when he is seen to be weighing the pros and cons of whether or not to send his son to an English school:

Am I to train him in the orthodox way or in the heretical? If he be brought up as a religious man he will certainly suit the present time and I may go with my slanders consistently. But I must have some eye upon the time coming. I must think that heresy will soon be the order of the day… I must devise some means that heretical opinions may be implanted in his mind. But care must positively be taken that he imbibes not those dry and useless nonsense about TRUTH. I am sure TRUTH would have ruined me if I had conformed to it (14-15).16

Lallchand is successful in bringing about Banyal’s excommunication. A helpless Mohadeb has to expel his son with great pain in his heart. Mohadeb collapses as he signs his son’s expulsion.

Krishna Mohan’s delineation of the old and the young servant is also interesting. The old servant is a loyal servant and is orthodox in his ideas. The young servant is opportunistic and selfish. His supplies Banyal and his friends with beef and wine and when he fears that his “Kurta” (master) will come to know the matter, he advises Banyal to deny the whole affair. In sharp contrast to the young servant, the old servant is presented as an honest old man, orthodox no doubt, but very genuinely concerned about his master’s well being. He is the sole comfort of Mohadeb in his hour of distress. Though it is he who unveils Banyal’s beef eating to Mohadeb, he does it from a strong
sense of duty rather than any ill will towards Banylal. He loves Banylal like his own son. He is very perplexed about Banylal's westernized thought and behaviour. Krishna Mohan devotes an entire scene to the old servant exclusively where he soliloquizes his innermost feelings:

Why is a servant paid? – for the mechanical drudgery he has to perform. Why is a servant treated with regard and affection? ... the affection proceeds from the regard we entertain for our masters. The ardent love proceeds from our mutual sympathy. The affection arises from the sincere interests we take in our master’s welfare. The attachment springs from the interchange of our hearts (9).

The fact that Krishna Mohan devotes an entire scene exclusively to the old servant illustrates the point that the drama is not just a “crude presentation”. Krishna Mohan devotes a whole scene to this subaltern character (who though a servant, is a part of the family), which is noteworthy because most of the literature of this period (a notable exception being Lal Behari Day’s Bengal Peasant Life) was engaged in representing the middle classes. It is also significant that Krishna Mohan makes him soliloquize, because in a drama soliloquy denotes the convention by which a character, alone on stage, utters his thoughts aloud. This convention is used as a device to convey information about a character’s motives and state of mind, or for purposes of general exposition, and sometimes in order to guide the judgments and responses of the audience (Abrams, Glossary 196-7). The soliloquy gives the old servant some amount of individual space to express his thoughts and feelings.
Krishna Mohan’s presentation of the two servants indicates that he was not biased in his ideas about the old and the new. All that is old (the old servant, is loyal, truthful, anxious for his master’s welfare) is not summarily rejected by Krishna Mohan, neither is all that is new (the young servant is greedy, deceptive, opportunistic and a blatant liar), shown to be good. In fact the same may be said of Krishna Mohan’s portrayal of Mohadeb, who, though orthodox, is not a bigot. The scene where the old servant gives vent to his deepest thoughts is important for the characterization of the old servant and also Mohadeb. The old servant’s words not only elucidate his own character, but also that of his master. We come to know of the kind and loving Mohadeb:

My master Mohadeb has always considered me as one of his family; he has shed tears at my sickness and felt happy at my prosperity—He has congratulated me upon my prosperity, and sympathized me in my adversity. If ever I was ill, he attended me in person; if ever I was aggrieved, he has been my best consolation... (9).

This provides glimpses into the traditional Bengali family, its set-up, values, and mores. Seeing his master’s miseries the old servant is deeply troubled and recalls the relationship of Pisanio and Posthumous\(^\text{17}\) and that of Adam and Orlando\(^\text{18}\). Since it appears unusual for a domestic servant in early nineteenth century Bengal to have knowledge of Shakespeare, Krishna Mohan adds the following note:

In Hindoo tradition instances of this kind are very rare. The author in consequence availed of those names in order to be clearly understood by Europeans. The author surely does not give his “old servant” a knowledge
of Shakespeare's characters. The reader should note that "Pisanio" and "Adam" are used as two words signifying each, a good servant (36).

Pallab Sengupta finds this apology a rather poor one and he regards the Shakespearean and Greek allusions as "faults" of the drama (17). However, it would be too simplistic to regard these allusions simply as "faults". The use of these allusions as well as the author's apology for it brings up important contextual issues, such as those of cultural equivalence and readership.

Hindu youth would not need to be explained what a "good servant" in a Hindu household would be like. Contrary to what Krishna Mohan says, loyal and devoted servants like the old servant were not unheard of, perhaps were rather common, in a middle-class Hindu household. These servants would often become a member of the household and they often had the right to discipline the children or the younger members of the family. Krishna Mohan's explanation is surely for the benefit of his European readers (as he himself says) and thus it throws light on the fact that though Krishna Mohan had dedicated his drama to "Hindoo Youth", the European reader was an important part of his audience. That Krishna Mohan's audience was primarily English is also clear from the preface.

The author... can not help acknowledging the great encouragement he has received from the English community... several gentlemen having each subscribed for, from two to six copies (Preface to The Persecuted).

Again, Krishna Mohan attempts some kind of a transcultural translation by means of this kind of intertextuality where the subalterns of the two cultures are
juxtaposed. The old servant of Krishna Mohan is doubly subaltern because he is not only a servant, but also belongs to the colonised class.

Though this is the only direct Shakespearean allusion in the drama, there is no doubt that many of the dialogues are Shakespearean in tone and syntax. Instances are plenty:

Mohadeb: My son! My son! You are undone! What misfortunes have you brought upon me! You have ruined my family; you will ruin yourself and me... look upon me with pity. Forget not the interests of your father. Acknowledge the filial tie that binds you. Do not persevere in your obstinacy... hurl me not into misfortunes. Let me not be ashamed of you (10).

Or,

Banylal: Dear Sir; be comforted: how can I with a safe conscience disgrace philosophy, disgrace humanity, and disgrace the character of man by uttering what is not a fact (11).

Or again,

Banylal: ... Let us enter the field with fortitude and perseverance—let us handle this sacred cause, and desert it only by our death. Our lives may be lost; but let us not shrink—Let “Bear on, bear nobly on” be our watchword. Let us prove ourselves dutiful sons of our country by our actions and exertions. Now let us see what strength can ignorance and bigotry bring into the field. Let us mark how feeble is prejudice when rational beings attack it with prudence. Perseverance and Prudence be our
motto and let us hold out our position in spite of all difficulties and all dangers that may fall into our way (Italics mine) (34).

The Shakespearean tone is unmistakable in these and many other passages in the play. Banylal’s words often echo those of Brutus and Cassius in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar. For the Hindu College educated Krishna Mohan, Shakespeare must have been more than just literature.19 D. L. Richardson’s “On the Education of the Natives” (prefatory essay to his collection of poetry, Literary Leaves), gives an idea of how Western literature was received by the Hindoo College students. The complete text of Richardson’s essay is included in Appendix B of this thesis. In The Perishable Empire, Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that “The reception and assimilation of Western literature in nineteenth century was complicated by several factors difficult to unravel from this distance in time.” She quotes the following passage from Tagore’s Jiban Smriti (1911) where he writes reminiscently of the 1880s:

Our literary gods were Shakespeare, Milton and Byron. What moved us most in their work was the predominance of passion, something that remained concealed in British social behaviour, but surfaced with intensity in literature. Excess of emotion culminating in a passionate explosion: this seemed the characteristic feature of this literature. At least what we learnt to think of as the quintessence of English literature was this unbridled passion… the fury of King Lear’s impotent lamentation, the all consuming fire of Othello’s jealousy — these contained an excess that fuelled our imagination” (6).
These words of Tagore are representative of the emotional response to English education that was common to all its recipients throughout the nineteenth century. English was not just a language. It symbolized a whole way of life. A way of life that was progressive, dynamic, and desirable. Krishna Mohan’s apology in the Preface about any imperfection that may be there in his drama reinforces the fact that English inspired awe:

It is just as well for the author to make an apology for the imperfections in style and English composition that his work may contain... Under the consideration... that he was born of parents and brought up by men whose language, manners, and customs are in no respect similar to those of the people in whose dialect he has published the following production... (Preface to The Persecuted).

Interestingly, though Krishna Mohan renders the above apology, he does not deter from satirizing the people who are really weak in the English language, and of whom Kamdeb is the representative in the drama. Kamdeb is obviously contrasted with the well versed Banylal and his friends who speak in flawless English. It is true that at the time the drama was written there were a number of people who “cruelly murdered” the English language. But what is really interesting is the fact that Krishna Mohan seems to use the knowledge of English as some kind of a marker of virtue. 20

In The Persecuted English education is obviously symbolical of a better, rational understanding and even of moral superiority because almost all the characters (except the old servant and Mohadeb) catering to the orthodox school are also shown to be morally debased. These questions were important questions of the day and were
discussed by Richardson in his essay “On the Education of the People”, as has already been discussed above. Though Krishna Mohan did not produce any further creative writing yet the question does arise again —how much does the choice of the writer’s language, and hence of his audience, determine his tone and attitude?

Written about four years before the passing of the Educational Minutes of 1835 which made English the official language of higher education in India, The Persecuted is important for its emotional response to colonial education. It is the voice of the colonised, seeking to represent his predicament in the context of the east-west socio-cultural and religious interface. A play like this little deserves such comments as “it is a play in stilted prose, quite obviously and even fragrantly motivated... presenting insufficient action and wooden characterization, lacking in dramatic tension” (Amalendu Bose 5).

Krishna Mohan’s play was quite evidently hampered by the absence of the range of registers that would have been available to him had English been his mother tongue. In English he had by and large one linguistic code at his disposal—the formal literary style to which his class of men had been exposed through English education. Thus the servants and the western educated Banylal speak in the same manner. Krishna Mohan does however attempt to include a variation by making Kamdeb speak a corrupted version of the language. But rather than a truly stylistic variation, it is more of a corruption.

It is true that the play does not end in any “action”. But it does end with a resolution for action. The play ends with a promise for social reform, with a promise for change. Banylal and his friends (the liberalists) are seen to come together with the
moderates in the interest of social good. As Banylal says "...dear friend let us forget all in the task we have undertaken, let all animosities, all personal enmities yield to our duty... to our own solid interest... march hand in hand and exert your utmost for bestowing that knowledge upon your countrymen the fruits of which you are now enjoying" (Italics mine). Banylal's plea is answered by the "moderate" Bhyrub who pledges—"as long as I live, I will be a devoted servant to the cause of truth and Hindoo reformation".

Though Krishna Mohan was to convert in a short span of time, yet there is no mention of Christianity as an alternative religion in this play. This is because it was only later that he came under the influence of Alexander Duff and became a Christian. Thus there is no concrete alternative that Banylal can promise his countrymen. They do speak of truth and reformation, but the terms of such reformation are not quite clear.

The Persecuted has not been the subject of interest or serious study by literary critics. A review of this play appeared in Samachar Darpan dated 3 December, 1831. Krishna Mohan's language was praised in this review but his attitude to Hinduism was severely criticized. Other than this review we have no evidence of what his contemporary readers thought of this drama or whether any one read it at all in the century that followed. At present, the solitary copy of this text is preserved in the National Library, Calcutta. Those interested in the history of Indian writing in English know about the existence of the play, but even for them it has been a little more than a dead entry carried over from one bibliography to another. Even those critics who made dismissive references to it hardly took the trouble to explain what exactly was wrong with it.
The Persecuted is a fascinating text for the use it makes of the English language, the handling of the dramatic mode, its attitude to Hinduism and to society and social reform. However, it would be wrong to say that that is all the relevance that this first English language drama by an Indian has. We can hardly agree with M.K. Naik when he says that The Persecuted is “a somewhat crude presentation of the conflict in the mind of a sensitive Bengali youth” (Naik 98). It is certainly a text that cannot be ignored. It is a potent site for discussing crucial questions about language, culture, colonization and representation. In the words of Sukumar Sen,

The subject matter of the drama was his own personal problem which was also the most acute problem facing the young recipients of the English education, that is, the growing and apparently irreconcilable impact of the English educated modern mind on the stolid conservatism of the orthodox society. Had the drama being written in Bengali, the regeneration of Bengali literature would not have been retarded for nearly a quarter of a century. (Bengali Language 185)

The “regeneration of Bengali literature” was ultimately brought about by Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73). Of all of Madhusudam’s plays it is his Bangla farce, “Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata?” (EKBS), or, translated in English, “Is This Called Civilization?” which is of immediate significance to us, because, like The Persecuted, this play also deals with the Western impact on the Bengali society. EKBS satirizes the half educated rich youth aping western manners. EKBS is not as propagandist as The Persecuted. It is more oriented towards being an entertaining kind of play, from its very conception it was meant to be staged as a kind of comic dramatic relief sandwiched
between two serious dramas *Sermista* and *Krishnakumari*—"we must have a farce with the tragedy… The farce will make the old fellows laugh away all sorts of ill humours, but I shall make the Tragedy as short as I can. Instead of lengthening it, I would rather write a farce to be acted with it." (Dutt, *Is This Called Civilization?* 2-3).23

It is interesting to read *EKBS* and *The Persecuted* together. Though separated by a gap of thirty years, and though written in Bangla and English respectively, these two plays may be read together because they emerged as responses to the same socio-historical context and because both the plays not only deal with "Young Bengal", but are written by those who were both self professed members of the Young Bengal group. *EKBS* satirizes the neophytes of the so called Western culture who were at the helm of unrestrained immoral activities under the guise of the ideals of progress and liberty.

While Banylal is portrayed as the ideal Young Bengal, Nabakumar (*naba*=new) represents the negative aspect of the same Young Bengal. Nabakumar and Banylal thus represent the two faces of Young Bengal. Nabakumar, is a comic "type" character. However, at times it does seem that through the character of Nabakumar, Madhusudan was critiquing himself and the excesses of his youth.24 To project oneself as an object of satire signifies the ability to look at things at a distance. Beneath Madhusudan’s progressive self, there seems to be a second self which stands apart and visualizes in a mood of detachment. It is this sense of detachment in this play which has created the scope for satire and humour, which, in turn, has secured an important and permanent place for this play not only in the history of Bangla Literature, but also of Indian Drama. No doubt, Sukumar Sen calls it one of the "best farces in Bengali" which "influenced almost all subsequent productions of the type" (199).
From *EKBS* we may now turn our attention to another prose piece which also dates from the same period and which also portrays the scene in Calcutta in the 1830s, (particularly the impact of the Western education), debates the relevance of Hinduism, and actually shows a conversion taking place. This piece is aptly titled *Scenes in Calcutta*. It was published in *The Hindu Pioneer*, vol. I, no. 7, March 1836, and its author is Kylas Chunder Dutt (1817-1857) (whose revolutionary text *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* is one of my primary texts in the next chapter). The piece was subsequently published in 1977 in *Counterpoint* vol. I (Ed. Alok Roy). In the note on the authors, the following entry is made by the editor of *Counterpoint* under the name of Kylas Chunder Dutt:

Son of Russomoy Dutt; born 1817; educated at Hindu College (1830-37); edited the Hindu Pioneer (September and October 1835); joined the Revenue Department as Superintendent of Akberee Settlements; nominated as a Justice of Peace (1842); died 1857.

Kylas Dutt’s education at the Hindu College places him in the same milieu with Krishna Mohan and Madhusudan. He was the product of the same socio-cultural climate and a Young Bengal. His fictional works, *A Journal of Forty-eight Hours of the Year 1945* (the first piece of fiction in English by an Indian, written in 1835) and *Scenes in Calcutta* (1836), both have strong Young Bengal characters. *Scenes in Calcutta*, has a similar theme as *The Persecuted*.

*Scenes in Calcutta* is not a drama, but a piece of prose fiction. It is interesting that *Persecuted* is also described as *Scenes* in its elaborate title. It is difficult to fit this piece into any of the conventional genres. The plot is simple; the length of the narrative
is like that of a short story. The narrative portrays some “scenes” which are not related by way of any unity of action, but by the fact that they project different aspects of the theme of western impact on the socio-cultural and religious situation prevailing in Bengal (Calcutta to be precise), at that time. The first scene is chiefly in the nature of a kind of debate between the orthodox Brahmins and a youth who has received western education.

The very beginning of this narrative indicates to the reader its author’s contempt of Hinduism as it takes the reader into the house of Golucknath:

I beg leave to conduct the fashionable reader, to a dirty, dingy chamber in the house of a respectable Hindu, where everything offensive to the sight, ear and the olfactory nerve he must patiently endure. The room was dimly lighted by a flickering cherag, placed in a corner, where the smoke had blackened the wall up to the ceiling.... Some large bolsters, a hooka and a few portraits of the gods—caricatures I should call them—whom the Indians, as Voltaire somewhere jocosely mentions, scourge to extract favours—gave the grand finish to the furniture of the room. Leaning upon one of the bolsters sat the venerable Golucknath, his grey hairs were fashioned in the antique way, he had a fine dhotee... On his right sat in a row the Brahmins, the Druids of the land, whose avaricious, assuming, and pedantic cast of features, was strongly antithetical to the clownish, quiet, and vulgar demeanour of those who sat opposite them ...(Kylas Dutt, Scenes 156).
We may note the very apologetic manner in which the author "beg[s] leave" of the "fashionable" reader. Who is this "fashionable" (fashionable=chic, stylish, trendy, smart, the latest thing) reader of the Hindu Pioneer? Is he the western educated, native, intellectual youth, or the westerner himself, or both? Again, why does the author refer so dismissingly to the portraits of the gods as "caricatures"? A similar passage is to be found in Bankimchandra's Rajmohan's Wife (1864) (I have discussed this text in detail in Chapter Seven) where he describes Mathur's chamber. In Mathur's bedchamber the varnish of the almirahs and chests has been "considerably...soiled by time and rough usage" and the walls are decorated with two large paintings "from one of which glowered the grim black figure of Kali and the other...displayed the crab like form of Durga" (italics mine). In discussing the novel Meenakshi Mukherjee comments that "The unusually negative charge in the description of the goddesses is surprising because in Bankim’s Bangla writing we never find these icons treated in such a dismissive manner." She also asks "Does the choice of language—hence inescapably, of audience—inaudvertently condition the semantic connotations of a text or implicitly determine its ideological base?" (Rajmohan's Wife 141)

A debate on the impact of the western education and Hinduism is started by one of the Brahmins present in the room: 26

Is it not strange, gentlemen, that persons should abandon their friends and family, the religion of their fathers and the true faith, and embrace the abominable creed of the heretics. The age, in which we live, is infected with the spirit of infidelity—high and low are deserting the standard of Hinduism. But the cause of this is, the communication of European
learning to the children of the East—abolish all schools and colleges and you will see how manners will be purified and opinions changed. But I predict that those who have tampered with the wine cup and danced with the fair-haired, blue-eyed, light-footed damsels of the West, will be happy to undergo every penance to be considered hereafter a member of the Hindoo community.... (157).

The speaker's words are supported by Golucknath who says,

Your observations are just... I cannot but think that *European education is the fountain of corruption...* these pretending, good-for-nothing, atheistical fops... instead of learning the dictionary by heart, modern scholars are engaged the whole day in angles and triangles... [They] never bow down before a Brahmin; never say grace before dinner, nor ever listen to the expounding of the shastras (Italics mine)(156).

At this point the youth (who has been sketching mathematical figures with a pair of compasses in his hands and is thus a "modern scholar"), exclaims, "The Hindoo religion is a mass of inconsistencies, absurdities and falsehoods!" He also challenges the Brahmins, "... these learned men here ... cannot tell me, with all their sagacity, the distance of the sun from the earth, and the figure of the globe we inhabit." When one of the Brahmins in the room says that according to the shastras, "The sun is about eight hundred thousand miles distant from us, and the figure of the earth is triangular", the youth laughs out loud and exclaims that "Why, for very reason, the shastras should be consigned to the flames. Damn the shastras and its votaries." The Brahmins are incensed at this and when one of them "collared the youth", the youth "struck the insolent
Brahmin with his fist on the face." An affray follows and the youth finally "took up his ruler and broke more bones than he intended." The Brahmins are "indignant" and leave the house cursing. The extreme behaviour of the youth as he actually assaults was very much a character of the class to which he belonged. Young Bengal was known for its excesses and its "hot blood":

We agree... that some of the Hindoo Reformers in their strong enthusiasm in the cause of truth and in their abhorrence of superstition have been in some instances carried away by the violence of their feelings into foolish extravagances and very idle bravadoes. These errors... are so natural to youth and so difficult to avoid in a time of natural excitement... for these gentlemen, though highly accomplished and intelligent, are young in years and full of the fire and spirit that are characteristic of the spring of life. They are dazzled and intoxicated with the loveliness of truth, and look perhaps with too unqualified contempt and abhorrence on those amongst their countrymen whose eyes have not yet been couched by the hand of reason... (Bengal Hurkaru, 25 October 1831).

The author then introduces the reader to Golucknath’s son Ramkissen, "a short, fat, business-looking man". Ramkissen is crest fallen because of the transfer of the judge Mr. Doucer with whom he was in favour, perhaps because he could be "doused" for favours. Ramkissen is described as follows:

This great personage from his youth showed a great aptitude for business—he was not educated in any school, but had served under many great Europeans... It is impossible for anyone to be offended with him...
Before Europeans veal, jelly, and burgundy are his delights, before Hindoos his abominations... He is a member of the Beafsteak club as the Dhurma Shubha... Principles the Baboo has none; he acts upon instinct, as Falstaff did upon a memorable occasion (159-60)²⁷.

In this description of Ramkissen there are notable similarities with the two corrupt Brahmins of The Persecuted, Bydhabagis and Turkolunkar, though of course Ramkissen is a much more clever and skilful deceit. He has learned well that to eat beef and drink wine is not a fault as long as one may dissemble and so long as he does not openly declare that he is doing so. The comparison with Falstaff is a marker of the author’s internalization of British literature, and says as much about the author as it does about Ramkissen.

The next scene takes us to Mr. Dupe (dupe= deceive, con, swindle?), the newly appointed judge. He is invited to the house of a certain Baboo and the description of the inner chambers of this house is obviously made to contrast it with the house of Golucknath. This is representative of the newly emerging cultural scenario:

The suite of apartments in this beautiful villa was fitted up with extraordinary taste. The drawing-room was the most splendidly furnished, the carpet was genuine Mirzapore, chairs of mahogany with cushions of sky-blue colour, sofas covered with damasks of great brilliancy, pictures with imitations of Raphael and Claude with some originals, which seemed living realities, diamond cut wall shades with brilliant drops were arranged with art, two tables of solid marble, white as morning snow, with two large chiming clocks and other ornaments of the most curious
workmanship, were a part of the gorgeous furniture... (Ray (Ed.): 161: 1977)

The “imitations of Raphael and Claude with some originals, which seemed living realities”, is again an indication of how these European artists had become part of the Bengali culture, symbols not only of wealth, but also of “superior” tastes and learning. 28

As Mr. Dupe enters these splendid apartments, he is welcomed by the “Baboo”. The text does not specify the identity of the “Baboo”, and, as the name “Dupe” has been chosen to indicate certain qualities of character, as is done while naming “type” characters, it seems that the author just wanted to showcase the general socio-cultural scene rather than an isolated incident. Soon, “refreshments were ordered and partaken, and the cup was introduced which was not likely to be soon relinquished. Cup after cup was drained of its delicious draught...”. The next few lines of the text are the most interesting:

The cup continued to make its circuit, and the friends being a leettle flushed, exchanged their head dresses. Mr. Dupe placed the turban on his head while the Baboo bonneted himself. “Don’t we look superb, now? Let us see.” And taking each other arm in arm, they stood before a large mirror. “Yes, indeed, as I guessed. By heavens! I shall never use hat more, the turban sets me off to the best advantage. What have we here, “the fall of Nineveh”, grand sight! See how the fellows are staring at each other—there is Bellshazar, the vile, profane wretch that drank out of the flagons of Jerusalem. See the fingers of the deity on the wall; how the monarch stares, how ghastly he looks! You remember the lines.

“The king was on his throne
The satraps throng’d the hall
A thousand bright lamp
Shone o’er that high festival” (162). 29

The racial cross dressing described here raises crucial questions about the nature of culture. Is culture something that can be exchanged, put on or taken off? How easy is it for a person to change cultures? Can culture be changed while one’s essential character remains the same? What notions of pleasure, transgression, power and knowledge does the text embody?

In her article, “Difference, Intersubjectivity, and Agency in the Colonial and Decolonising Spaces of Helen Cixous’ ‘Sorties’”, Sue Thomas discusses the concept of cultural cross-dressing in literature as a “strategic sign of [the] ability to cross barriers of difference” (Thomas 9). 30 Taking on the garments of another allows the individual a release from their own existence, “the promise of transgressive pleasure without any material penalties of actual change.” However, Thomas goes on to critique this idea, in that such cultural cross-dressing does not contribute to the subversion of existing hierarchies of power. What is interesting in this text is that the cross dressing takes place in a state of inebriation, and that Mr. Dupe in the state of inebriation and wearing the native’s turban, alludes to The Book of Daniel 5 where Belshazzar commits an “act of blasphemy” by drinking wine and praising gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone, and is duly punished for this action 31. The scene ends with Mr. Dupe being offered a huge sum of money by way of a cheque by the “Baboo”. It is significant that Dutt shows that the native “Baboo” offers money to the Englishman which he accepts. The money that passes hands is certainly not “official” as is evident from the furtive
manner in which the transaction takes place. Thus the coloniser and the colonised are implicated in a symbiotic relationship.

While the only link between this “scene” and the previous one is the character of Mr. Dupe, and seems almost like an interlude, the final scene in this piece is a conclusion to the first. It shows the “punishment” of the youth who had assaulted the Brahmins:

Many respectable Brahmins were in consultation, which ended in their declaration that the prisoner was guilty of the charges laid against him; that to save the house from utter destruction, he must undergo certain degrading penances. This the youth totally refused, and the consequence was that he was obliged to show a fair pair of heels (164-5).

The fate of the youth is thus similar to that of Banyal in The Persecuted. But Kylas Dutt goes a step further than Krishna Mohan to actually show how the youth is converted. We may here recall the persecution that Krishna Mohan had faced in his real life following the beef eating incident and his subsequent conversion. The young hero of Kylas Dutt’s narrative shares the real life fate of Krishna Mohan:

Month after month passed away, and little or no notice was taken of him till at last it was understood that he had fallen in with certain Missionaries and was on the point of being converted... the entreaties of his friends had no effect on him... A few days afterwards he was conducted to the Cathedral, where... the solemn ceremony was concluded, and he went with Mr. Zeal [missionaries were indeed very zealous or enthusiastic] to
partake of his evening collation. The Christian Observer sounded the

triumph of the Gospel over heathenism excellently... (165)

The text ends with the announcement of the marriage of Mr. John Omesh (the youth is named here for the first time in text) and Mrs. Joan Gomes in the “Domestic Occurrences” section of the Hurkaru:

“At the cathedral, on the 1st August, 1835, by the Revd. Mr. S. Zeal, Mr. John Omesh to Mrs. Joan Gomes, she relict of Mr. Lopez Gomes, Undertaker” (165-6).

The distinction of this text lies in the fact that it is the first text in Indian Writing in English that showcases conversion, and not only that, it also shows the marriage of a Bengali youth to a Christian widow. Written about five years after The Persecuted, it is as though Kylas Dutt takes the story of Krishna Mohan’s (who was not only himself to become a convert, but was also instrumental in converting other Hindus), Banylal to its inevitable closure.

The Persecuted is a picture of the contemporary social situation. It takes a look at a society that was undergoing immense psycho-social changes. Much of this change was to do with the new education that opened up newer areas of knowledge and learning. One of the consequences of this learning was the desire to judge critically and question certainties, which led to the interrogation of colonialism itself. In the next chapter I discuss two texts by Kylas Chunder Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt respectively which have the theme of rebellion against the British Rule.
Notes and References

1 Krishna Mohan Banerjee, *The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta*. Calcutta, 1831. A solitary copy of this text is preserved in the Rare Section of the National Library, Kolkata. All subsequent references to the text are from this edition.

2 *Kulin* Brahmin is the highest strata of upper caste Brahmins in India's caste system. This term is more generally used to refer to upper caste "twice-born" Brahmans in nineteenth century Bengal, who considered themselves to be more purer, fair skinned, more erudite and more knowledgeable as regards the scriptures as compared to other Brahmans.

3 A general examination... of the students of the Hindoo College took place on Saturday... After the examination those who took important roles in the cultural programme with the students were (1) Krishna Mohan Banerjee, (2) Rasik Krishna Mullick, and (3) Radhanath Sikder were notable. (*Calcutta Monthly Journal*, 14 January 1828).

4 At this point of time the Derozians were influenced by the atheistic moorings of Derozio, and believed in no religion at all. It was only subsequently that some of the Derozians, including Krishna Mohan, came under the influence of the Christian Missionaries like Duff, Mackay etc. but at this time the Christian missionaries were as much an object of ridicule for them as were the orthodox Hindus.

5 During the early part of nineteenth century Bengal, *Kulin* Brahmans gained notoriety by indulging in polygamy for the sake of getting dowries. Fathers of nubile girls would (often following the dictum of the *Manu Smriti*) get their young daughters married off to a senile Kulin Brahmin, rather than have her (upon reaching marriageable age) marry a non Kulin Brahmin or even someone who was not born a Brahmin. This was directed largely by fear and anxiety over racial contamination from non Kulins, Brahmans or otherwise.

6 The *Gurum Sabha* was "a society which breathes fiery defiance to all other sects and parties. Its chief object is to preserve the adoration of fire pure... The hundred and eleventh meeting of the Gurrum Shubba, then, was held at the house of Baboo Bhoojunram, situated in Ottupara... on Sunday last... Baboo Pallaram Chundid [said]... as the establishment of schools of all sorts, and the consequent diffusion of knowledge, prove prejudicial to our own religion, it will be proper henceforth not to encourage
Baboo Sheetal Nausuck proceeded... "... ever since the coming of Velatee men into this country, our Religion has been treated with disrespect, but from the time of Gurrum Shubha has been established, all this has ceased... the Hindoos are so effeminate and timid...the more fiery our measures, the better shall the tenets of our god be obeyed. (Calcutta Monthly Journal May 1830)

7 This incident is described in Shibnath Shastri's Ramtana Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj.

8 This has been excerpted in John Bull dated 1st October 1831. It was originally published in an issue of The Enquirer which is not extant.

9 Excerpted in John Bull dated 1st October 1831

10 There can be but little pretension of the fact that Krishna Mohan's discomfiture was utilized by Duff to his own advantage. The adoption of Christianity by a native of high-caste would be a triumph for Christianity in Bengal as hitherto Duff had to remain satisfied with the nominal conversions of the poorer and lower sections of Hindu society: the conversion of Krishna Mohan was a momentous event in the history of nineteenth century Bengal. That he, a Kulin Brahmin, could shake off the shackles of idolatries and caste, amidst stringent persecution at the hands of his bigoted countrymen—forsaking the tender affections of a loving mother and fond relations—and avowing his conviction in Christian truth, was indeed enough to excite a deep interest of his heathen contemporaries in an alien religion (Abhijit Dutta 182).

11 Before his conversion Krishna Mohan wrote the following letter to his friend Govindcharan Basak:

Wednesday, 16th October 1832.

My dear friend,

Through the mercy of a Gracious Providence, I intend being baptized this evening at the house of Rev. A. Duff and as you were one of those with whom last year about this time, I began first to examine the claims of Christianity, it will give me great pleasure to see you witness my declaration before God and man, of what is now my faith, and my admission into the visible Church of Christ.

Your most affectionate friend,

Krishna Mohan Banerjee
Krishna Mohan was essentially a social reformer but later he also developed interest in political activities. The second paper he presented at the 'Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge' was on "Reforms Civil and Social”. Gautam Chattopadhyay has remarked, "...it is a remarkable document, reflecting accurately the throbbing pulsating minds of the Young Bengal" (Awakening in Bengal xxxvi).

Krishna Mohan’s knowledge of history, Western as well as Indian, ancient as well as modern, was amazing. In almost all his writings, his approach was historical. His book Dialogues On Hindu Philosophy and his article ‘The Transition States of the Hindu Mind’, are examples of how he applied his tool of historical criticism to the Hindu Scriptures. His historical investigation of the relation between Buddhism and Hindu philosophy or on the original home and early adventures of the Indo-Aryans can be considered as a new development in Indian historical writing. The study of history for him was a means both for pleasure and enrichment of the mind: “History restores to our fancies those great and good men of antiquity and whom we so fervently desire but in vain to see with our physical eyes. We are carried back to the age of Asia’s christened glory. But it is not nearly an entertainment under languor of idleness that history promises to the inquisitive student. It is impossible for us to reflect upon the eventful records of individuals and nations without imbibing the most important lessons. We can not survey the actions and exploits of our fellow creatures without considerably expanding our intellectual powers and without rectifying our judgments” (K.M. Banerjee, The Nature and Importance Of Historical Studies 15).

He authored many significant treatises. In 1876 he received an honorary Doctorate from the Calcutta University. His intellectual abilities were of a high order and he had used them to acquire a sound knowledge of Indian philosophical thought and considerable scholarship in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin and Hebrew among other languages. He translated into English the Brahma-Sutra with Sankaracharya’s commentary, the Mahimnastava, a hymn to Shiva, and published Rig Veda Samhita with notes and explanations. He also edited the Raghuvamsa, Kumarsambhava, Bhaktikavya for university students, the Purana Sangraha in the original, the Markandeya Purana, and the Narada Panchatantra. He was the editor of Vidyakalpadrum, an ambitious work in the nature of an encyclopaedia, which facilitated the study of western science and literature in the vernacular.

The following entry in The Enquirer (of which Krishna Mohan was the editor) is interesting in this context: “Education is rapidly advancing in this country, and sentiments of liberalism are entertained by
the Hindoos... Their minds, from the shackles of prejudice, are undergoing a complete change. Superstition, which kept them so long involved in moral debasement, is vanishing from their minds. Knowledge enlightens them and enables them to feel the truth and conform to her dictates...” (Italics mine).

Excerpted from The Enquirer in the India Gazette dated 10 September 1831.

15 “Parents and relations lived in great fear that their educated children would accept Christianity or Brahmoism... or be involved in the movement supporting widow remarriage. Any such action might involve excommunication ie, loss of caste for the entire family... we read of a young man from Orissa who had become a Brahmo howling in misery as his father dashed his bleeding head against a wall. The poet Michael’s mother pined away when he converted to Christianity”(Raychaudhuri, Perceptions 12-13).

16 Lalchand’s dilemma about his son’s education was a common feature of the day. Similar ideas find expression in D. L. Richardson’s ‘On the Education of the People of India through the Medium of the English Language’, which he wrote as a kind of preface to Literary Leaves; Or, Prose and Verse Chiefly Written in India. I have included the entire essay of Richardson in Appendix B.

17 Shakespeare, Cymbeline: in the play Pisanio is the loyal servant of Posthumous, and when his master goes into exile, he is left behind in Britain and he acts as servant to Imogen and the Queen

18 Shakespeare, As You Like It. Indeed, his words—“would I had wings to soar above with my master on my back that he may avoid these miseries”—recalls the words of Adam in As You Like It: “Master, go on, and I will follow thee/To the last gasp with truth and loyalty.” (AYLI: II, iii) Shakespeare, William. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Co., 1980.

19 In the Calcutta Monthly Journal dated 29 January 1827 the following entry is to be found, which would be significant in this context: “The half-yearly Examination of the students of the Hindoo College... took place yesterday... after the examination several recitations took place—such as the speech of Norval, Anthony’s address over Caesar’s body, Brutus’ address etc. [Shakespeare, Julius Caesar] The speech of Brutus struck us as the best delivered; and to one given to reflection, it could not but be matter of pleasing surprise to see a Hindoo boy personating the noble Roman, and giving utterance with “good emphasis and good discretion” to the sentiments of Shakespeare.
In the “Afterword” in her edition of Rajmohan’s Wife, Meenekshi Mukherjee points out that “In many of Bankimchandra’s Bangla novels the English knowing urban dilettante is the butt of the author's ridicule (for example, Debendra in Krishnakanter Will) but in Rajmohan’s Wife Madhav’s knowledge of English and his Calcutta background are set up as signs of moral superiority at a crucial moment in the narrative. We find Madhav Ghose reclining on a ‘mahogany couch covered with satin... Some two or three English books were scattered over the couch and one of them Madhav held in his hand...’ The English books are obviously signifiers of a more civilized way of life - as is the western furniture...” (140-41).

In his Preface to Bengal Peasant Life, Lal Behari Day comments on the incongruency of such use of the English language when the peasants in Day’s novel speak fluent English. See Chapter Six for details.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s Sermista (1858), to use Madhusudan’s own words, was “… the first attempt in the Bengali language to produce a regular and classical drama” (Das: 2000: 184) Bengali Drama originally took off by imitating the English and Sanskrit Plays. In the initial phase of Bengali Drama, Kiritbils and Bhadrajuna had carved a distinct niche for themselves. In the middle of the 19th century, many plays were authored on burning issues like widow remarriage, child marriage etc. Notable among them were ‘Kali Kautuk Natak’, ‘Sapatni Natak’, ‘Bujhle Kina’ etc. Ram Narayan Tarkaratna was the greatest playwright before Michael Madhusudan Dutta. However, it was Madhusudan who brought a remarkable change in the art of playwriting. He introduced ‘tragedy’ in drama inspired by the Greek school of drama. He was equally unrivalled in writing comedies and satires. He introduced the famous ‘Amitrakshar Chhanda’ or blank verses which added a new dimension to Bangla literature. Some of his remarkable plays which are worth mentioning are ‘Buro Shaliker Ghare Ron’ (1860), ‘Padmavati’ (1860), ‘Sharmistha’ (1958), ‘Ekei Ki Bale Sabhyata’ (1860) etc. (http://www.catchcal.com/kaleidoscope/literature/literature2.asp) Madhusudan, like Krishnamohan, studied in the Hindu College. Like Krishnamohan, he had also converted to Christianity and had to similarly face exile in the wake of his conversion. But the motives behind the two conversions were not quite the same. Madhusudan’s conversion has been variously traced to being either a perverse reaction against the Hinduism he had come to hate, or to his desire of being more completely English and to go to England and become an ‘English’ poet. In any case, he does not seem to have led a particularly Christian life. Dutt is today recognized as the first modern Bengali, and Indian poet-dramatist of true importance.

90
Ultimately however, the play was not staged. “But an adverse circumstance occurred which prevented their being brought on stage. A few of the ‘Young Bengal’ class getting a scent of the farce Is This Called Civilization? and feeling that the caricature made in it touched them too closely, raised a hue and cry, and choosing for their leader a gentleman of position and affluence who, they knew, had some influence with the Rajahs, deputed him to dissuade from producing the farce on the boards of their Theatre. This gentleman (also called a Young Bengal) fought tooth and nail for the success of the mission. The Rajahs would not yield at first, but under great pressure were obliged to give up the farce” (4).

What makes the treatment of the theme of Westernization in EKBS interesting is the fact that Madhusudan himself was highly Westernised in thought, action and even in dress and food habits. Madhusudan himself was one of the pioneers of the new (Western) education and the new (Western) culture. From his early life he strongly believed that only Western education and Western lifestyle would rectify the “sorry state” of Indians. Madhusudan was a great patron of women’s education, women’s liberty, rationalism and advocated the defiance of religious customs and rituals. He was a hedonist in thought and action. Many of the characteristic qualities of Madhusudan are seemed to be present in the character of Nabakumar (Bangla Naba= new ) in EKBS, a conspicuous exception being Nabakumar’s attraction for public women which Madhusudhan did not share. Also, Madhusudan was a poetic genius, which Nabakumar was not.

I will discuss A Journal of forty Eight Hours of the Year 1945 (which has the theme of armed rebellion as its subject) in the next chapter.

Debates on western education, on the various facets of Hinduism and on the subject of conversion were the order of the day at the time. These debates were carried in private meetings of different ‘sabhas’ as well as through newspapers and journals. Contemporary periodicals such as Calcutta Monthly Journal, Parthenon, Enquirer, John Bull, India Gazette, Bengal Hurkaru, Reformer, Friend of India, Hindu Intelligencer, Hindoo Patriot in English and Samachar Darpan, Sambad Prabhakar and many others in Bengali record numerous such debates.

Falstaff, Sir John, a character in Shakespeare’s 1 and 2 Henry IV and The Merry Wives of Windsor. His literary foundations lie in the stock figure of the Vice. He is fat, witty, a lover of jests, and skilful of turning jokes against him to his own advantage—“I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is
in other men" (2 Henry IV, 1. ii. 8-9). In 1 Henry IV he is shown as the drinking companion of Prince Hal, and anticipates great advancement when Hal becomes king. In 2 Henry IV he is seen little with Hal but portrayed as old, ill and unscrupulous. On succeeding to the throne Hal/Henry V rejects him. The Falstaff of The Merry Wives of Windsor is a diminished figure, whose attempts to mend his fortunes by wooing two citizens' wives simultaneously end in his discomfiture in Windsor Forest.

28 Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio) (1483-1520), Italian painter, born in Urbino. He worked in Perugino's studio and then in Florence, and succeeded Bramante as architect of St. Peter's. Throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries Raphael was generally revered as the greatest of all painters.

Claude Lorrain (1600-82), landscape painter from Lorrain, who worked mainly in Rome. He was the first artist to be inspired the the Roman Campagna and its legends. Romantic poets, such as Keats, were inspired by him.

50 These are the opening lines of Byron’s Vision of Belshazzar from his “Hebrew Melodies”.

51 Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. 2 While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. 3 Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. 4 They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone. 5 In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. 6 Then the king’s countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other... (Book of Daniel 5).