The Politics of Time :

'primitives' and the writing of history in colonial Bengal

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Preface

This thesis is the product of three years of research, funded by the Felix Trust and housed by the department of history, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.

Professor David Arnold has supervised the thesis, from the very beginning when it seemed as if 'time' as a problematic could never become a viable historical project. Not only has he given an enormous amount of time and energy in the details of the writing, he has also relentlessly provided counter-arguments and counter-factuals, without which I could never have convinced myself of my own thoughts. He has also shared his own published and published works, frequently prevented my confidence from sagging, and unleashed a freedom of thought from the many constructed categories, which I had unwittingly 'normalised' myself into. Much of this work belongs to him.

The best way to preface my thesis is perhaps to admit that it is nothing if not a collective exercise. The errors are solely mine, but the ideas and the questions have always emerged in everyday conversations with my friends and colleagues. Special thanks are due to Dipesh Chakravarty, who demonstrated, amongst other things, how one's own past and biography must be relocated if one has to problematise temporality and history. Gautam Bhadra very kindly shared his insights about popular consciousness and his political enthusiasm, and remains an ideal of intellectual and personal emulation for me. Romilla Thapar directed me towards understanding pre-colonial Indian philosophies of time, which I was hitherto unaware of. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, who had also taught me in my M. A. days, shared his experiences of 'tribal' practices in the Birbhum area.

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At home, Javed, Jitendra, J. N. Singh, Pankaj, Uma, Sanjay and others have always given me perspective. Lata-di and Naga gave given unconditional affection and hope. Debu-da, perhaps my oldest and best friend, Ajay-da and Julte-da, who supplied me with many Bengali texts and provoked me with their extraordinary thoughts and lifestyles, and others have always welcomed me back from my detours. Without Mala-di, I would never have had the luxury of undisturbed days of study. Dadu and dida have demonstrated what resilience can mean.

I must also remember my friends and comrades from the earlier days of political activism. Though we have had some differences, they still remain an intrinsic part of my thoughts and research. It is my duty to especially remember my debt to Chandrashekhar, who died before his time, in a struggle and at a place where we should have all been there with him.

My father, among other things, taught me to read Marx. I wish he was here to share in my thoughts. Clem Alford has given me a home away from home, constantly reminded me that without music no language is complete and that it is not impossible to maintain a certain radicalism in the most despairing of days.

Jayasri Banerjee — musician, thinker, incorrigible enthusiast, and luckily for me, also my mother — reminds me that origins and beginnings occur more than once in life. She keeps up hope for better days, not only for herself but also on my behalf, and on behalf of strangers whom I still hope to meet. Without her, this work could not have been conceived.

And of course, Shailendra, even though so far away, offers me surprising proximities. And reminds me of the imminence of the future everyday.

Prathama Banerjee
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Introduction

> The future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold-of us. The other is the future.
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> — Emmanuel Levinas[1]

This thesis seeks to understand what can be called the 'temporal politics' of colonial modernity. It begins from the premise that modernity — and colonialism, which was both the precondition and the supplement of modernity — changed the world first and foremost by re-deploying time and the idea of time. Of course, the notion of modernity as an-attribute of society and of the thinking subject has multiple usages. The term 'modern' may be an adjective of technology, or of an individual who defies 'tradition' and professes 'freedom' of choice. Modernisation may indicate processes of institutional and economic development of a society towards greater complexity. It may also imply a history thematised and generated through the state-civil society binary. The 'modern man' may intend to mean a secular subject, or the ideal of the pure *homo economicus*. It may indicate a psychology, which is aware of itself and its own internal contradictions. Or it may indicate a being a la Descartes who cogitates and thinks about the reason to be. Or even a being a la Kant who differentiates between reason and intuition, rationality and aesthetics. Modernity may also be taken to characterise a self-conscious vanguard of self-propelled change. Or it may even be an oblique comment on the breakdown of morality, of gender-roles, of peace and leisure. However, underlying these multiple and everyday usages of the term 'modern', lies a common sensibility of time — the sensibility that despite some social costs, what comes later is generally an improvement on what came earlier.

This evaluation of the passing of time might seem truistic to us today. However, it must be remembered that this temporal assessment was by no means common to all times and all places. To rationalise the contemporary as both morally and practically better than the past, or to nostalgically see the past, the pastoral and the ancestral as the ethical and aesthetic inversion of the present, is an eminently specific and modern attitude. For, as Bruno Latour shows us, modernity was the effect of a process of back-projection, through which the present made itself into a unity — by bracketing and

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[1] *Time and the Other*, Pittsburgh, 1987, pp. 76-7.

stabilising an 'archaic' past and by historicising itself through periodisations and temporal hierarchies. Modernity was thus not so much a historical period as a reconfiguration of time itself, which is why no dateable rupture can be identified as the beginning of modernity in Europe.[2] With the rise of capitalism, as time seemed to accumulate like money, it appeared as if the more advanced a society, the greater the pile of time, experience and value that accrued to it. Therefore, modernity appeared to itself primarily as a temporal competence, an advantage that the posterior possessed over the prior, exclusively because of the former's advanced position in time. This temporal competence was that of the monumental accumulation of time as in production and in evolution, and at the same time that of the advantage of hindsight, as in history and ethnology.

With the rise of capitalism, the West appeared to control time itself, as capital shaped, to use Lyotard's phrase, the 'sequence of moments in such a way that it accepted a high rate of contingency.'[3] In other words, through capital, the modern subject owned up to the risks and vicissitudes of even temporality, seizing time, as it were, by putting interest and profit on its accumulation, deferral and return.[4] Capital even claimed the capacity to explode all 'autarchies', to translate all kinds of local and social labour into quantifiable and therefore commensurable labour-time units. Time – which was conceptualised in non-modern philosophies as the limit to thought[5] – became in colonial modernity the possession of the rational and thinking subject, who henceforth could judge others in terms of their lack and lag of temporality. Time thus itself became the 'universal' parameter of judgement, as colonised people became constituted as 'primitive' or 'archaic' or timeless. The secular time of natural history, and later of ethnology, classified the world into separate categories, species and locations.[6] As Johannes Fabian shows us, this was fundamentally different from earlier sacred and theological time-senses, which sought to battle, convert and win over non-believers and 'barbarians' rather than categorise them as another time. This secular time, later supplemented by the evolutionary law of Darwinian biology, socialised the law of Newtonian physics, the law that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. In order to usurp the colonised's world therefore, the Enlightenment West transposed Others to the time of the past.[7]

In course of this process, time was itself conceptualised as the Other of space. As O. Harris says, this allowed Europe to reproduce itself as a singular homogeneous presence, banishing its internal differences and its own antagonistic temporalities to distant and ethnologised lands.[8] The exile of convicts and riff-raff to 'empty' or 'aboriginal' islands was the most literal instance of this export of uncivilised and non-modern temporalities. Once others were wished away to another time, their alterity could be nullified and they could safely be made to reappear on the stage of history

[2] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Hemel Hempstead, 1993, p. 47.
[3] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, Oxford, 1991, p. 68.
[4] Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, Minneapolis, 1996.
[5] Time has been the most radical irresoluble in Western philosophy since St Augustine, who is routinely quoted as having 'confessed' that though he 'knew' what time was, he could never 'say' it. See H. Gadamer, 'The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time and the Limits of Thought', in *Time and the Philosophies*, intro. Paul Ricoeur, London, 1977, p. 35.
[6] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, London, 1970. For a discussion on the emergence of a secular, historical time of politics in Europe, see Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1985.
[7] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Objects*, New York, 1983, pp. 26-9.
[8] 'Time and Difference in Anthropological Writing', in *Horizons of Understanding*, eds., Jan Bremen et al., Leiden, 1996, p. 143.

through the technique of representation of other countries and societies. The Other, even as s/he remained temporally anachronistic and non-present, was contained within the representational space of history, seen by modern thinkers like Hegel as co-terminous to the globe. The presence of the non-contemporary and the colonised thus became exclusively dependent on their reproduction and depiction by the modern subject. The 'past' and the 'primitive' came to be re-presented in an abstract empty time that, precisely for being abstract, remained free from any contamination, even as 'primitive' labour and products were harnessed to the metropolitan location of capital.

Location of time: colonial Bengal

Based on the above perspective, this thesis seeks to analyse temporal politics by taking up the particular location of colonial Bengal. Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha and Sudipta Kaviraj have definitively shown how middle-class Bengalis, accused of lacking progressive temporality, responded to colonialism with resonant claims to historicity.[9]   However, while the 'historical' was the primary site where the colonised staked their claim to contemporaneity with the coloniser, Bengali historiography itself was founded on a counterpoise with the figure of the 'primitive'. This could very well have been a duplication of the trajectory of Western historiography, but for the fact that the colonised, while counterpoising itself to the 'primitive', also had to admit the 'primitive' within its own time and space. In Bengal, while the adjective 'primitive' was used to denote any person, practice or object which seemed inconvenient and irreconcilable to the unitary time of progress, the real problem was the proximal presence of peoples who seemed literally to be 'survivals' of another time. These real-life, extant 'primitives' – 'tribes' like Santals and Paharias – were indubitably part of the nation, who could not quite be expelled and who were in fact necessary for Bengali society and economy. This thesis argues that the historical claim of the colonised nation was founded on the thematisation of this problem of the *'primitive within'*. The argument proceeds by setting off Bengali historical texts against Bengali texts of geography, economics, poetry and philosophy on the one hand, and against Santal notions of everyday time, rebellious time, narrative time and debt-time on the other. In this sense, the thesis is neither a comprehensive account of Santal life, nor a complete analysis of colonial Bengali discourse. Rather it is a work about the Santal-Bengali counterpoise, a counterpoise that became the radical clue for the effecting of difference and for the 'thinking' of temporality by the colonised intellectual.

Before proceeding further a clarificatory word becomes necessary. It might seem from the way the thesis is formulated that I am proposing the Bengali middle-classes as a single,

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[9] Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-century Agenda and its Implication*, Calcutta, 1988; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton, 1993; Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, Delhi, 1995.

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homogeneous group. Needless to say, this was not the case with nineteenth-century Bengal, just as it is not the case with today's India. In fact, recent historiography has clearly shown that the group of educated Bengalis, who claimed a *bhadrolok* or gentrified status and who claimed to lead Bengal as a whole in its social reform project, was itself internally stratified in terms of wealth, cultural status and social habits. Sumit Sarkar's work particularly has shown how the lower middle classes, who constituted the third and fourth grade clerical staff in colonial offices, displayed social preferences and reading habits quite different from the more elite sections of the middle classes. The literature of *kaliyuga*, which formulated the colonial present as an already anticipated evil epoch, was consumed more amongst these lower middle classes than amongst the more consciously 'historical', and 'liberal', upper middle classes.[10] In fact, my first chapter intends to show how the emergence of 'history', as a specific genre of consciousness that could articulate the nation as a totality, was a process in deep disjuncture with the epochal and ironic sensibilities of these lower sections of the Bengali *bhadrolok*. Sarkar's work also points to an urban-rural divide, which seems to cut across purely economic class analysis. The *kaliyug* discourse as operative amongst the rural upper and middle-upper castes of Vikrampur, Sarkar shows, demonstrated an articulation with ideas of gender and femininity which was not quite the same as the 'reformist' discourse on women, domesticity and nation that Calcutta middle classes partook in.[11] It is as a constant reminder of these internal stratifications, that I use the term middle classes in the plural all through the thesis. Also, the thesis does not rest solely on a reading of high 'literary' texts of the nineteenth century. It deliberately reads people like Bankimchandra on the one hand, and a mass of 'smaller' texts, essays and booklets, on the other, written from different social positions. The latter could be produced by middle-castes as their caste-histories, or they could be produced by individuals in small towns like Andul or Burdwan, keen to make their voice heard through the new technique of mass communication, the print. They could be produced by *pandits*, written in the tradition of earlier *purankatha* and of the scholastic *mimamsa* tradition, Brahmans who felt they had lost their place to the new genre of school-books in the project of instructing the masses. They could also be the mass of 'plays' being produced in what was seen by the gentry as 'vulgar' and *adirasatmak* Bengali. In this, the thesis takes Sumanta Banerjee's lesson seriously – that even within Calcutta, Bengali middle classes were shaping themselves through the confrontation of 'literary and moral' positions with 'popular and vulgar ones', through the confrontation of texts published by presses like Budhodoy Press, Sanskrit Press, Victoria Press, Girish Vidyaratna Press etc with texts published by the well-known *battala* presses.[12] Despite these differences, however, there seem to be one unifying feature common to these discourses. Almost all the texts I came across, even when written before the 1850s, distinguished the Bengali *jati* from the *asabhya* or uncivilised *jatis* like the Santal. Of course, in the earlier discourses, the term *jati* did not unequivocally mean the 'nation', it could be caste, community (e.g. Hindu *jati*) or even regional or linguistic grouping (e.g. the Bengali). In that sense, the boundary between the *sabhya* and the *asabhya jatis* would probably have been negotiable, according to the context of the distinction being

[10] Sumit Sarkar, 'Colonial Times: Clocks and Kaliyuga', paper presented at the South Asia History Seminar, SOAS, London University, 20 June 1996.
[11] Sumit Sarkar, 'The Kalki-Avatar of Vikrampur', in *Subaltern Studies VI*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, 1992.

made. The *asabhya* in one context might signify the 'tribes' speaking Kolarian languages, it might signify in another context the Bengali-speaking *chasha* or 'rustic boor'. Yet whatever the *jati* claimed as its context or referent, it was seen in the nineteenth century as counterpoised not only to the coloniser, but also to the immoral, uncivilised, 'primitive', from which even the lowliest peasant or *sudra* had to be distinguished.

The issue becomes all the more complex, and perhaps telling, if we problematise the idea of the middle classes in terms of gender politics. We now know and agree that the construction of the Bengali *bhadrolok*'s own identity depended on his subordination and 'education' of the woman-at-home.[13] In fact, a complete nineteenth-century history of Bengal can and should be written in terms of what Partha Chatterjee had revealingly called 'the nationalist resolution of the women's question' – i.e. in terms of the attempts by the Bengali *bhadrolok* to make the interior of the home into a pure, 'spiritual' and uncolonised site, which contrasted with the colonised and 'materialistic' public space, the space that the Bengali man could never quite seem to master.[14] Recent historiography has also moved on from here to show that a history of Bengali middle-class women cannot be written by constructing them as victims or as objects of social and discursive violence, that 'victim' and agent cannot be seen as mutually exclusive categories from a feminist perspective. Attempts at recovering the Bengali woman's voice have thus indelibly fractured the apparently unitary project of middle-class history.[15] However, instead of going against my main characterisisation – that Bengali nationalist discourse depended on the counterpoise of 'historical' time with the time of the 'primordial' – gender studies helps me to make the point more forcefully. After all, in the discourse of patriarchy, 'woman' comes across clearly as an ethnological category – i.e. as a category determined more by biology than by culture. Just like the 'tribe', the 'woman' is pushed into the realm of nature. Nature is not only the uncultured, uncontrived ground, the counter-reason so to speak, for man's 'civilisation', nature is also primarily that with which man has always tried to establish an extractive, non-reciprocal object-relation. 'Primordial' nature also frightens man with her reprisals, with her fickleness and must be worshipped, aestheticised and indulged. In this paradigm, history appears as the story of man's struggle against and emancipation from nature – or in other words, the story of man's struggle against

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[12] Sumanta Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth century Calcutta*, Calcutta, Seagull Books, 1989.

[13] Sumit Sarkar, 'The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal', in *Women and Culture*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Bombay, SNDT University, 1985; J. Krishnamurti ed., *Women in Colonial India: Essays on Survival, Work and State*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989. For general reference, also see Dagmar Engels, *Beyond Purdah: Women in Bengal 1890-1939*, Delhi, OUP, 1996; Meredith Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849-1905*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984; Sonia Nishat Amin, *The World of Muslim Women in Colonial Bengal 1876-1939*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1996.

[14] Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question', in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1990, pp. 233-254; Dipesh Chakravarty, 'The Difference-Defferral of Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British Bengal', in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 373-405.

[15] Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice', *Wedge*, Winter/Spring 1985, pp. 120-30; Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*, Delhi, OUP, 1989; Rajeshwari Sundar Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Post-Colonialism*, London, Routledge, 1993; Lata Mani, 'The Female Subject, the Colonial Gaze: Reading Eye-witness Accounts of Widow Burning', in *Interrogating Modernity, Culture and Colonialism in India*, eds. Tejaswini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, Vivek Dhareswar, Calcutta, Seagull, 1993; Janaki Nair, *Women and Law in Colonial India: A Social History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1996.

the 'primitive' and/or 'feminine' forces which threaten to jeopardise 'civilisational' time. In fact, in a remarkable book called *Women: the Last Colony*, Maria Mies, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomson and Claudia von Werlhof demonstrates this ethnologisation of the category 'woman' by the capitalist world order.[16] In this sense, the category 'primitive' – that was variously used in the enunciation of historical time by the Bengali, male, upper-caste, educated *bhadrolok* – could be taken to signify women, peasants or 'real, extant tribes', according to the context of its utterance. Not surprisingly then, a Bengali traveller like Bholanath Chunder could openly desire, in the 1860s, the Santal woman as representative of all that was unavailable to the *bhadrolok* in his 'domesticated' wife. Or the process of 'civilisation' and perhaps 'Hinduisation' of the Chotanagpur 'tribe' of the Kherwars could also mean a progressive fall in the status of the 'aboriginal' widow, from a woman with a right to her own land to a woman with a right to only a maintenance plot and then to a woman entitled only to minimal maintenance by the husband's family.[17] This is not to say that amongst the so-called 'tribes', there was no gender politics in earlier times – that would be to speak like the nationalist who claimed that in Vedic times women were equal to men in education and public rights. In fact, we know that amongst Santals, women were prevented from touching the plough, from roofing the house, from worshipping the household *abge* bongas, from eating the best part of the ceremonial meat, the head. They were also hunted down as witches.[18] This, however, does not take away from the fact that Bengali men – often irrespective of their class and caste – perceived 'primitives' as practising frighteningly uninhibited and 'free' sexuality. And that this perception is not uncommon amongst Bengalis even today. A feminist deconstruction of nationalist and patriarchal discourse, thus, exposes the all-pervasiveness of the ethnological category of the 'primitive' in the construction of knowledge and of the nation – whoever or whatever the term's immediate referent was.

It was, therefore, not incidental that, in nineteenth-century Bengal, the first event of national history was imagined as the defeat of the non-Aryans by the Aryans. This battle was textualised as the foundational battle between the 'primordial' and the 'civilisational', the 'originary' battle which generated the time of history, as it were.[19] This antagonism was then brought forward into the present, through analyses of caste, disunity, immorality, and economic incompetence of sections of the nation's population. The problem of lower caste mobility depended on the *shudra* distinguishing himself from the 'fifth order' of society, the *asabhya* Nisadas. The question of Brahmanical morality, which easily slipped into a Victorian mould, was problematised in reference to the overtly sexual and omnivorous 'tribes'. The question of disunity was posed as the impossible schism between the two 'lineages' that existed in India, the *arya* and the *anarya*. And economic incompetence was embodied in the 'primitives' who did not know how to count and who were perpetually in debt to Bengali *mahajuns*. It was as if the 'primitive' continued to exist in all times, even in modernity, as a concrete,

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[16] London, Zed, 1988, pp. 89, 110, 180.
[17] Govind Kelkar and Devnathan, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests in Jharkhand*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1991, pp. 90, 103.
[18] Ibid., p. 98.
[19] Thomas Trautman, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley & London, 1997, p.194.

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eternal and demonstrable condition which justified and called for history and civilisation. The first question of Bengali history, thus, was formulated not in terms of the national-colonial dichotomy, nor in terms of the Hindu-Muslim binary, but as the question of the subordination of the 'primitive' to the subject of history. By virtue of its very origin, therefore, the historical time of the nation seemed permanently split into two – into 'civilisational' time and 'primordial' time. These contradictory times, evidently, could neither be resolved in historical practice nor be structured into a single narrative temporality. These times therefore had to be gathered spatially into a singular nationhood. This thesis tries to show how the Bengali middle classes constituted the act of *travelling the nation* into a necessary surrogate of history writing – as if spatial tracing integrated the time which historicisation bifurcated. This mode of travelling the nation was in turn supplemented by the forced circulation of 'primitive' or *jungli* bodies as migrant labour – such that peoples like the Santals who supposedly fell outside historical time, could be made to internalise the nation as a spatialised and integrated expanse. And through this forced transportation, 'primitives' were constituted as nothing but body-commodities, with no time other than that of circulation. Deprived of uses of time and culture, the 'primitive' thus seemed to lose some of its threatening alterity.

However, the self-aware spatial proximity of 'historical' and 'primitive' times foregrounded and emphasised their incommensurability and contradiction. The undeniable contiguity of these two temporalities therefore had to be punctuated and neutralised by inserting *money*, the universal translator and re-presenter, between them. Bengali middle classes openly argued that it were primarily moneylenders and merchants who could take civilisation to the 'primitive'. It was Bengali moneylenders who could teach the Santals the virtue of long-term and future-oriented saving and investment. Allegedly, the definitional trait of the 'primitive' was their 'immoral' and immediate extravagance, which disabled them from thinking of the future, either historically or financially. It seemed as if only through the enforcement of money-rationality could 'primitives' be made to simulate the future-oriented sensibility which historicity (and nationalism) called for. In this paradigm, the Santal rebellion – instead of being acknowledged as an 'act' of resistance against the abstraction of time into debt-money and interest – was represented as an 'event' in that very abstract time of historical chronology. This thesis argues that it was precisely this which was the critical move of nineteenth-century Bengali discourse – the move of denying the time of practice itself and of constituting practice in the structure of knowledge. This was done, as will become evident from the perspective of the Santal rebellion, by historicising rebellious *acts* as causated and predicted *events* in a universal and uninterrupted empty temporality.[20]

In colonial Bengal, history was formulated not only as identity and knowledge of that identity; history was also enunciated as the only valid mode of practice for the colonised. This was done by structuring practice in the epistemological modes of causality (*karma*) and discipline (*anusilan*).[21] At

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[20] About the centrality of the 'event' in history , see Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I*, Chicago, 1984, pp. 209-11.
[21] *Karma* and *anusilan* donot unproblematically translate as causality and discipline. The point being asserted in the thesis is that the educated Bengali middle classes attempted to constitute these terms as historical causality and discipline, by

the same time, this was done by reproducing the 'primitive' as an unthinking, practical and sensual mode of being. Time, which was allegedly absent in the 'primitive' condition, thus became a concept monopolised not just by history, but through the epistemologising of historical practice, by the field of knowledge. The historical subject, aware of time as repetition and causality, could synoptically grasp at a single moment of enlightenment all that unfolded in practice and in time.[22] It was only through this synchronic vision of knowledge that the colonised subject could grasp the nation as a totality, precisely because the nation was configured as an agglomeration of non-contemporaneous existences, which did not appear in and at the same time. In abandoning itself to 'history' – as the practical mode of salvation from simultaneous 'pre-modernity' and colonialism – the colonised therefore paradoxically abandoned time in favour of knowledge. As the Bengali middle classes ascribed to themselves the status of a pedagogical leadership, thought-knowledge was made into the *a priori* of practice. Instead of thought being temporalised as one kind of practice, practice was de-temporalised as the lesser other of thought. Practice became the application of thought. The accuracy of thought was autonomously and theoretically verified, and thought was allowed in the *a posteriori* mode to be contaminated by the immediacy, if not contingency, of everyday time of practice. Bengali historiography, which imagined the nation as a historical practice, thus, ironically, displaced practice from its own domain – that of time – to the realm of the Other of time. It was this, which compelled the colonial intellectuals to make education the primary historical agenda. Even when Bengalis critiqued the state-centricity of Western historiography and suggested a *samajik* or social history, they still read history, not in social practices, but in the textual genres of 'popular' narratives and art. The nation was thus constructed, not as a created and practical solidarity, but as an encompassing knowledge of pre-determined identity. If this identity seemed to fall apart in practice, as during communal riots or 'primitive' rebellions against Bengali moneylenders, this was ascribed to the necessarily erroneous nature of unthinking practice. Once the nation was accepted as historical, i.e. as always-already present in time, the modern subject could no longer admit, except at the 'secondary' level of strategy and tactics, that the lack of practical solidarity could effectively disrupt identity and repetition across time.

The central point of this work is thus to show that 'primitiveness', as embodied in so-called 'tribes' like the Santals, stood in colonial-modernity as the Other of thought. It was often repeated in Bengal, and elsewhere, that the 'primitive' was definitionally incapable of abstract conceptualisations. The Santal could not comprehend infinite abstract time and had to put knots on a thread to count days and years. In other words, s/he was incapable of conquering time – either by putting interest on accumulating temporal units, or by accelerating the arrival of modernity, or for that matter, by assuming the permanent presence of the thinking subject. Of course, the Bengali middle classes themselves faced time as a disadvantage. They seemed to lag behind the West in a state of perpetual 'backwardness'. They even seemed to lack enough time of their own, as their life became

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translations and conceptual negotiations, so as to fit them into the new epistemological paradigm being forged in late nineteenth century Bengal.
[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge, 1977, p. 82.

increasingly controlled by the routine of salaried office work or *chakuri*.[23] Time itself thus came across as the threatening Other in colonial modernity, and not just because life was finite and death inevitable. It was precisely in response to time as the Other, that the Bengali middle-classes advised a withdrawal into *gnyan* (knowledge), in contrast to what they conceptualised as the 'primordial' modes of being, constrained by everyday practice and mired in the colonial present. And it was as part of the very same response, that Bengali nationalists argued in favour of trade as a substitute for salaried work. After all, as Lyotard convincingly shows, monetary exchange constituted the future (payment) as a precondition to the present (sale).[24] Trade thus appeared as the supreme conquest of time-the-Other, in a coming together of perfect-information (knowledge) and the perfect translator (money). Not surprisingly then, the 'primordial' was written into modernity as a counterpoise to both knowledge-sense and money-sense – that is, as a counterpoise to infinite, cumulative, abstract time.

This thesis, in other words, tries to demonstrate the mutual complicity of two seemingly non-convergent processes in colonial Bengal. On the one hand, was the disciplining of historical knowledge and historical practice by the Bengali middle classes. On the other hand, was the making of the Santals of Bengal Presidency into the ideal 'primitive', who became the best land-reclaiming labour, the best migrating bodies, the most 'aesthetic' entity and the most sexualised, rebellious people in the perception of the historically-conscious Bengali *bhadrolok*. These two processes were supposed to have produced two subjectivities. As the nation, the Bengali became the subject of history and historiography; and as the 'primitive', the Santal became the subject of anthropology, history's counter-discipline, so to speak. Yet, it can be shown that in colonial Bengal, anthropology emerged as the shadowy underside of history itself. Evidently for the colonised, anthropology could not have been an unproblematic mode of knowledge. As early twentieth-century Bengali discourse shows, the ethnologised figure of the 'primordial' became more relevant in the field of a certain poetics than in the field of ethnology as a discipline. This poetics sought to reclaim a sense of practice, by invoking the 'primordiality' of the time of creation and destruction – a time beyond the limits of history, a time which could not be captured by knowledge but only invoked in imaginative acts. Yet, however 'originary' and productive it was, this creative time nonetheless was generated by the colonial context of unfreedom. The Bengali middle classes therefore felt compelled to distinguish this time of poetics from their everyday time of mainstream colonial experience. The Bengali poet and his favourite figure of the sensuous and valorous Santal therefore remained marginal to the historical time of modernisation and reform, which promised progress by eternally postponing, in the face of the improvement of the present, the creative time of the unprecedented future. The poetic insight that the 'primordial' was the only location that was definitionally inappropriable by the coloniser, thus, could never become a political lesson, nor could it become even a persuasive and public rhetoric.

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[23] Sumit Sarkar, 'Colonial Times: Clocks and *Kaliyuga*'.

Location of time: the modern West

In order to unpack the full implications of the temporal politics of colonial modernity, it is necessary to refer back to Western metaphysics. It is necessary to rewrite Western modernity in terms of its own temporal politics, such that it becomes evident how the colonial condition organically informed and constituted the concepts and the telos of European philosophy. One side of this project must be what Dipesh Chakravarty tellingly names the 'provincialisation' of Europe, the explosion of Western history's universal claims by showing up its local nature.[25] The other side of this project must be the exposure of the non-autonomous nature of Western philosophy, which, dependent on its reconnaissance of other worlds, was framed primarily in reckoning with peoples it called 'primitive'. Thus, Hegel – responsible for defining modernity as that which is historically conscious, of and by itself – founded his *Philosophy of History* on his 'knowledge' of Oriental and 'savage' lands. 'Savagery' to Hegel represented that stage of human consciousness where the 'difference' between the cognising subject and the natural world was yet to emerge, where time appeared as an imprisoning and endless present, where the mind could not comprehend abstraction and was therefore incapable of religion, art and philosophy. The Orient in turn represented a relatively evolved consciousness, but capable only of a metaphorical apprehension of reality. It was inspired by an inarticulate sense of 'difference' between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and was based on a relation of faith and obedience to what seemed to be an incomprehensible spiritual reality to the metaphorical mind. To Hegel, thus, Indian civilisation was founded on an unsynthesised and harsh antithesis, between the purely abstract unity of God and the purely sensual power of nature.[26] It is needless to emphasise how these ideas were repeated in contexts of colonial administration and education. Or in contexts where the Bengali middle-class intellectual felt compelled to differentiate himself, by virtue of his own tradition of 'high philosophy and religion' from the neighbouring 'primitive' Santal and the African 'Negro'.

What is significant for us, however, is not just the fact that Hegel constructed historical subjectivity by contrasting it with 'savage' and 'Oriental' modes of existence. Or that he made the trajectory of the *Geist* concurrent and coterminous with a specific and local phase of European history. Or even that Hegel made this theoretical sleight of hand seem logical and chronological by putting 'history' retroactively to effect, in a direction opposite to what he claimed to be the momentum

[24] Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, pp. 65-6.
[25] Dipesh Chakravarty, 'Post-coloniality and the Artifice of History: who speaks for "Indian" pasts', *Representations*, XXXII, winter, 1992, pp. 1-26.
[26] This summary of Hegel draws on Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination of Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore, 1973. Also see, G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 1822, reprint, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 56-7, 180-1.

of history itself. What is most significant for us, is the fact that to do all this, Hegel had to reconstitute the very nature of temporality. This he did on the one hand, by making time into the symmetrical and graphic Other of space, by arguing that history was the development of the Spirit in time, as nature was the development of the Idea in space. This reconstructed time allowed Hegel to harness to Europe 'other' lands, to which 'other' times from the West could be trans-located in a stereotypically anthropological/colonial mode. On the other hand, he reconstituted time by spatialising temporality itself. Hegel conceptualised time as the negative dialectical moment through which undifferentiated space became differentiated. He sought to express time by placing it in the relation of the point to space – the point was that which had position but no magnitude and which punctuated the relation of space/extension to itself.[27] Derrida deconstructs Hegel on this notion of time. He shows how, when Hegel named time as 'the negative unity of self-externality', he subsumed his sense of differentiation under his sense of spatial gradation – thus making time into a presence, which was, paradoxically, identical to the non-temporal in time.[28] However, what Derrida stops short of saying is that this hiding of difference and deferral, which Hegel effected in his articulation of temporality vis a vis territoriality, was itself the founding moment of colonialism – and of the historical concurrence of colonialism with the 'rational/universal' West.

Hegel's position vis a vis Western historicism and the absolutist state is of course well known. It is significant, however, that a century later, even Heidegger, despite his radical critique of Western philosophy, had to depend on the deployment of the 'primordial' for a phenomenology of time. Heidegger, in his efforts to de-construct the metaphysics of presence and to bring back temporality to Being, counterpoised the 'primordial' to what he called 'tradition'. Heidegger argued that tradition mastered thought by concealing its own origins, i.e. by delivering things to self-evidence. It was in tradition that Dasein, the Being for whom being was an issue, forgot its own 'primordiality'. It then proceeded via historiography and the sciences of objectivity to find the 'primordial' in 'exotic and alien cultures'.[29] To Heidegger, this 'primordiality' was a mode of being which must be phenomenologically reclaimed, because it was more 'authentic' than even the 'originary'. 'Primordiality' was non-deducible; it could not be derived from anything else, neither historically nor logically. It was a condition that could not be thematised even by anthropology, which studied 'primitives', not in their 'primordial purity' but in their everydayness.[30] This phenomenological 'primordiality', which even the best ethnographer could not reach, was characterised by what he called 'mineness' or 'ownness'. This 'mineness' through which the 'primordial' must be repossessed was the Other of other-ing, as it were. And this 'primordiality', to Heidegger, was nothing other than temporality itself – authentic temporality, which was forgotten when Dasein 'fell' into everydayness, forgetting its own being for the sake of being-in-the-world.[31]

[27] Herman Rapaport, Heidegger and Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language, Lincoln, 1989, p. 72.
[28] Jacques Derrida, Margins of Philosophy, Chicago, 1982, p. 44.
[29] Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, 1927, reprint, Oxford, 1995, p. 43.
[30] Ibid., p. 76.
[31] Ibid., p. 383.

This face of Heidegger is crucial to us because of his paradoxical position in German history of the 1920s-30s. It is impossible to impute a simplistic evolutionary sensibility to Heidegger or to say that he participated unconditionally in Western historicism, in the march of the Hegelian spirit, as it were. Yet there was a telling ambiguity in Heidegger's simultaneous use and rebuttal of the metaphysics of Spirit. In 1935, Heidegger argued for the absolute privilege of the German language precisely in terms of its spiritual quality. Less than a decade after publishing his *Being and Time*, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger invoked the 'historical mission of our people' and celebrated Spirit as a 'resolution which accords with the tone of the origin and which is knowledge'.[32] Evidently, he was trying to identify the question of Being with the question of Spirit, in an impossible reconciliation of Western rationalist epistemology with his critical phenomenology of temporality. In this, we see the irresoluble antagonism between aggressive nationalism and commitment to time, the antagonism which produced both critique and complicity in the same textual move, as in a figure like that of Martin Heidegger. It can be said, at the cost of being accused of over-interpretation, that this was the European location of the temporal politics of colonial modernity, which produced at and out of the same (historical) time both a militant nation and a claim to universality. Despite his disavowal of ethnology, Heidegger's harking back to the 'originary' and his alignment of German with Greek were efforts at this impossible marriage – between the 'primordial' time of being and the national-historical time of conquering progress. And this was the contradiction that was ironically reproduced within anti-colonial nationalisms. Derrida deconstructs Heidegger's 1953 engagement with the German poet Trakl to show how Heidegger thought temporality in terms of the annual return of the origin and the natural return of the morning. In an implicit critique of the idea of the Hegelian spirit returning to the future, Heidegger proposed the poetic spirit returning to the earlier, to the 'primordial'. To Heidegger, this returning time was more originary than the rising and setting of the sun, the Orient and the Occident, the rise and decline of history; it was the time before interpretations of time even began with Aristotle.[33] It is not surprising that a similar invocation of 'primordial' time was performed in early twentieth century colonial Bengal by poets like Rabindranath and by philosophers of articulation (*abhivyakti*) like Pramatha Mukhopadhyay. This is not to ignore differences – evidently, Bengalis and Heidegger never read each other. Rather, this is to argue that as much as the colonised, Heidegger too was marked by the antagonisms and the ambience of imperialism. Both Heidegger and sections of the Bengali middle classes confronted the irony of having to both harness and refute the force of temporality – of having to effect both change and sameness, both contradiction and identity in the same cognitive act and epistemological move. This thesis will try to show that this ironic unfolding of historical time in the time of colonialism was possible only through the deployment and exclusion of the figure of the 'primitive' and through a poetic, perhaps Heidegger-ian, disavowal of 'everydayness' as, paradoxically, the Other of time.

This configuration of temporal politics becomes all the more potent if we mention Marx here. From an entirely different perspective, Marx too returned to the deployment of the 'primitive' in his

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[32] Quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit*, Chicago, 1989, pp. 66-67.
[33] Ibid., pp. 89-91.

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radical critique of capitalism. If Heidegger found the everyday to be the 'inauthentic' temporality of Being, Marx named the pre-revolutionary duration of history as the as yet unfulfilled 'pre-history' of humankind. Though for Marx history was materialist history, he had to theorise transformative temporality without the comfort of a historical instance, without the illustration of an egalitarian society available in the historical past. In other words, unlike Heidegger who finally took recourse to Greek antiquity as did most Western philosophers, Marx had to function with the knowledge that his exemplary moment (of revolution) was uncompromisingly in the future. It was not a moment of identity through repetition, nor of return to the 'originary', but a moment of absolute, almost inconceivable, novelty. This lack of a paradigmatic past must have raised an unbreachable wall before his praxiological imagination. And Marx sought to circumvent this wall by invoking, in the logic of his times, the idea of the 'primitive'. Marx argued that if eighteenth-century socialists had found the 'primitive' to be an approximation of their utopian ideals of freedom and equality, they were yet to fully realise the temporal implications of this insight. Marx showed that to comprehend what was 'newest' in what was 'oldest', in a way 'which would have made [even] Proudhon shudder', was to harness time for the purpose of change.[34] Writing to Vera Zasulich, Marx categorically stated that transcendence into communism could not be a transition or succession from capitalism to socialism, but a temporal leap from the 'archaic formation' – the Russian commune – into the society of the unprecedented future.[35]

Marx's marginal notes on Maine, Lubbock, Phear etc show that this theoretical harnessing of the 'primordial' was more than a comment on the local and specific nature of Russian society.[36] Late in his life, Marx found it imperative to delve into empirical anthropology, in order to deploy the 'primordial' itself against the conservative time of scientific evolutionism. Still-existing 'primitives' in the modern world demonstrated that transitions were not genealogical, but mediated by the abstraction of social formations – their alienation from concrete life and their ossification in hierarchical relations. Social conditions thus passed not from one particular to the next but existed as separate concretions, without historical connection.[37] Change was thus produced, not by chronological succession in time, which presumed that the antecedent was annihilated before the future materialised. Rather, change was produced by the confrontation of different social conditions, by the confrontation of the 'primordial' with the 'historical', a confrontation both of metaphors and of temporalities. If I seem to be stretching the point too much in the name of Marx, it is because his 1880-2 texts are immensely suggestive of this interpretation. It must be remembered that Marx's analysis of the transition from feudalism to capitalism too was not a matter of the latter logically or genealogically succeeding the former. The contingency of colonial exploitation mediated the two and allowed for the primary accumulation of capital. And it was not accidental that Marx called this necessary event 'primitive' accumulation. In the last instance then, Marx's anthropological thoughts,

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[34] Marx, letter to Engels, 25 March 1868, in Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm, London, 1964, p. 141.
[35] Marx, letter to Zasulich, 8 March 1881, in Marx, *Pre-Capitalist*, p. 143. This point was explained to me by Professor Diptendra Banerjee, who died before his time and before he could finish his own work.
[36] *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, ed. Lawrence Krader, Assen, 1974.
[37] Ibid., introduction, pp. 15-16.

which are either disowned by traditional Marxists or seen as the least significant part of his *oeuvre*, emerge as the basis of his own radicality. In order to imagine a radical transformative temporality, Marx had to take recourse to a foregrounding of the 'primitive', even as he foregrounded the struggle over (labour) time as the central feature of capitalism.

The two irreconcilable paradigms – of Heidegger and of Marx – thus shared a radical problematisation of time through the invocation of the 'primordial'. The 'primitive' thus seems to emerge as the indissociable 'supplement', in the Derridean sense, to modernity's imagination of time. Here it becomes necessary to briefly mention Christopher Herbert's remarkable book on ethnographic imagination and *anomie* in the modern West. Herbert shows that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the idea of the 'primitive' threw its shadow over most of Western thought. John Wesley and his Protestant ethics formulated the virtues of Puritanism, disciplined labour and civilisation, in counterpoise to the motif of infinite 'primordial' desires. Mill, Comte, Spencer and later Freud all harnessed the metaphor of the 'primordial' dark forces 'suppressed at one place surging up hydraulically at another'.[38] This explains the widespread public approval in England of the hanging of Jamaican rebels in 1865 and of Santal rebels in 1856. It also explains the anxious attempts by early anthropology to prove that 'primitives' were after all not enviably free in their articulation of desires, but controlled by rigid, unchanging customs – the first major essay of evolutionary cultural anthropology was thus Henry Maine's 1861 *Ancient Law*. It even explains why Jean Itard, James Prichard and later Durkheim redefined untrammeled 'primordial' desire as the madness of anomic individuals unable to conform to the structure of society. And above all, it explains the ethnological basis of European political economic thought. Herbert shows how Bagehot's *Economic Studies* (1880) often ran into the study of 'savage tribes' and how Malthus's *Principle of Political Economy* (1820) rested on the idea of unlimited animalistic sexual desires. Political economy – by causally connecting money-price and desire – offered the assurance that representation (of one thing by another, of things by money, of object by subject, of the past/primitive by the present/modern) was the basis for all knowledge. At the same time political economy offered the assurance that representation contained and nullified subversive, 'primordial' desires. In fact, once desire was productively channeled through its representation by money, it became the political economic concept of demand, a positive force for the prosperity of society, rather than a negative, 'primordial' force generating immorality and conflict.[39] It is in this context, that Marx and Heidegger, and their irreconcilability itself, can be read together, in terms of their dependence on the 'primordial' and in terms of the critical temporal politics of colonial modernity.

By referring to Marx and Heidegger I am not only trying to argue that temporality was centrally predicated on the notion of the 'primordial' and the 'primitive'. I am also trying to say that the time of modernity required for its very perpetuation, the co-presence of the 'primitive', in a necessary denial

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[38] Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie*, Chicago, 1991, p. 33. Herbert also offers a reading of George Eliot, Shelley, Wordsworth, Hardy and Lawrence in terms of their invocations of the 'primitive'.
[39] See Herbert's discussion of texts like Adam Smith's 'The History of Astronomy' and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in *Culture and Anomie*, pp. 95-8.

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of, or perhaps in a necessary complement to, its own apparent evolutionism. It was precisely in order to allow this co-staging of antagonistic, non-contemporary times that temporality itself was re-constituted as a non-substantial and non-qualitative unity. This temporality, conceptualised as anterior and abstract, remained untainted by the entities, the events and the practices placed in it. And being marked by numbers, this temporality accumulated like money, as capital harnessed different social times and labours to itself. The metaphor of organism, on which evolutionary time was founded, was itself less an imagination of time, more an epistemological strategy – by which apparently autonomous and disjointed parts/organs of the social/global whole could be projected and deduced from the sense of the totality, despite the lack of direct knowledge about them. Evolution functioned less as a time in which everybody could progress, more as a paradigm in which the past, the future and the colonised Other – beyond perception and experience – could be represented, despite lack of present and presentable instances. The temporal politics of colonial modernity was based on the politics of representation – representation of the definitionally past in the realm of the present. Though the 'primordial' was conceptualised as temporally absent from modernity and spatially absent from Europe, it remained re-*presented* within the regime of knowledge, providing both the perspective and the prospective of European modernity.

Time and the Other: the practice of re-presentation

Once colonial modernity is thematised in terms of temporal politics, the question of the Other and the question of difference have to be rearticulated.[40] Foucault's work has already demonstrated that the force of 'construction' cannot be grasped if it is seen as proper only to the field of discourse. One must expose the practices and techniques of disciplining and construction by which the self not only appears in a certain image, but also conforms to its own construction.[41] Though Foucault does not quite address the question of the Other and colonialism,[42] his work has informed south Asian historiography, which strongly emphasises the practices and technologies of othering. Thus, David Arnold shows how medicine and clinical technologies other-ed the colonised body and anatomy as a time-less, 'natural-spatial' presence, and how this practice determined the history of Western medicine and race-theory.[43] Homi Bhaba shows how in both textual and everyday life-practices, the colonised effected irrevocable changes in the modernist discourse, which no longer remained what it had set out to be, rational, modern and righteous, in the mocking face of hybrid modes of existence.[44] At the same time, Ranajit Guha shows the limits of discourses of colonial modernity, which remained

[40] Needless to say, my understanding of the Othering force of colonialism began with the study of Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1978.
[41] 'Intellectuals and Power: Conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze', in *Foucault Live*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer, New York, 1996, pp. 74-5.
[42] Homi Bhaba, 'In a Spirit of Calm Violence' in *After colonialism*, ed. Gyan Prakash, Princeton, 1995, pp.326-344; Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, London, 1995.
[43] David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, Oxford, 1996; 'India's Place in the Tropical World', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XXVI: 1, 1998. For a critical discussion of how absolutely opposite versions of the Other could practically effect the same positioning of the colonised, see David Arnold, 'Hunger in the Garden of Plenty: The Bengal Famine of 1770', *Disaster in the Eighteenth Century: Cultural Responses to Natural Catastrophe*, ed. Alessa Johns, New York, forthcoming.
[44] Homi Bhaba, *Location of Culture*, London, 1994.

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to a significant extent, external to and untranslatable into local worlds and languages, thus making the hegemonic manufacture of consent to colonial rule incomplete and fragmentary. [45] To be sure, these newer perspectives on history and historiography restore political agency to the colonised and the subaltern, and show up cracks in the seemingly monolithic structure of capitalism and imperialism.

However, the question still remains – why post-colonial societies remain vulnerable to neo-colonialism; why collective practice and revolutionary change still seem either hyperbolic or illusory in discourses of freedom and liberation; why despite imaginative and subversive literature and poetry, despite an explosion of modernist realism, colonised societies still remain unable to produce a critique of the modern state and its biography. This thesis tries to explore this post-colonial predicament. The basic conclusion is that the temporal politics of colonial modernity caused the other-ing – not just of entities like the Orient, the 'primitive' and the 'tropical' – but of practice itself. This is because in modernity, the presence of the (modern) subject was theoretically ensured by counterpoising him to peoples, 'primitive', 'traditional', 'archaic' or merely 'backward', who were literally absent from the site of the present. In other words, the practices of other-ing, which founded colonial modernity, produced an unprecedented world where Others were not just different, exotic, inimical or threatening, they were literally an absence, an-other time. It was this othering of time itself which fundamentally disabled practice, by disallowing co-presence and simultaneity, the necessary ground for the practical creation of solidarity. It was this temporal politics which left 'post-colonial' nations helpless in the face of global capitalism on the one hand, and of internal identity-conflicts, the logical extreme of nationalism, on the other.

In colonial modernity, where the 'primitive' and the 'backward' lived in another time, the question of difference and therefore the question of translation and re-presentation emerged as the question, literally, of temporal negotiation. When the educated middle classes of Bengal engaged in the politics of representation, speaking for yet not as the 'primitive' and the 'backward' that constituted the body of the nation, they had to mediate between two incommensurable and non-contemporary times, times which though co-existent were not co-eval. That is, the practice of nation building became, inevitably, the practice of re-presentation of those not quite present in time. The practice of history thus became exclusively the practice of knowledge. After all, the universal claim of rationality was another way of saying that it was only knowledge – and money – which could effect exchange and travels across times, which could resist being eroded by time-shifts, which remained uncontaminated and unsubverted in contact with other times, products and worlds which were extant, utilisable yet irrevocably past. It is here that one must refer to Tejaswini Niranjana's critical insight, that in colonial modernity, the colonised subject lives always-already in a condition of translation. [46] I would use this insight to say rather that in colonial modernity, the subject lives in a mode of constant re-presentation – where both translation and exchange appear as the temporal act of re-presenting

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[45] Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography', *Subaltern Studies VI*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, 1989, pp. 210-309.
[46] Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Question*, Berkeley, 1992, p. 6.

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the non-present. It was this necessary representation which made both money and the middle-classes acquire the status of mediators in the nation. If the idea of knowledge or *gnyan* that Bengali middle classes celebrated and the idea of trade that captured the imagination of national self-sufficiency still fuel the statist discourse of post-colonial India, it is not just because colonialism was the ultimate lesson that scientific knowledge and aggressive commerce can simultaneously generate unlimited power. It is also because the mediating and trans-valuating regimes of reason and money seem indispensable in exchange across the non-contemporary times of the 'modern' and the 'backward'. Dipesh Chakravarty articulates this difference effected by colonialism with great exactitude, when he writes that non-colonial translations 'take barter for their model of exchange rather than that of a generalised exchange of commodities which always needs the mediation of a universal, homogenising middle term'.[47] The need for this arbitrating middle term was precisely because translation had to be done across times, and not just across languages and worlds.

This thesis therefore seeks to demonstrate the mutual articulation of knowledge and monetary rationality in colonial Bengal, the articulation which reproduced time as the time of re-presentation, as a time that was singular, abstract and cumulative, where inequivalent entities and life-practices could be placed in exchange, communication and aggregation. George Simmel captured this very paradigm of colonial modernity, without perhaps intending to do so, when he formulated money as the epitome of modern European rationality. At the very moment when knowledge proposed different worlds to be different times, money emerged as the abstract mediator, which produced a practical equilibrium between antagonistic products and acts. According to Simmel, who drew extensively from ethnographic examples, mediators like money (and reason) were not matters of knowledge per se, but tools for ordering practice by replacing substance with abstraction.[48] It is significant that Simmel distinguished the abstract nature of money as a sign from what he called mythological and 'primitive' symbols. It was after all precisely in the name of symbols that in the West, the Romantic critique of modernity emerged. Paul de Man says that through the use of symbols, European Romantics of the nineteenth century made an attempt to make sign and meaning co-terminous. This was an attempt to undo the tyranny of the autonomous sign by making it refer to the substantive and the sensuous. In a way, this might as well have been a description of the early twentieth-century Bengali middle classes, trying to harness time and the figure of the 'primitive' body, in the same textual and poetic move. Seemingly an attempt to defy the abstract time of the circulating money/sign, which emptied the mind of metaphor and imagination, this symbolic temporalisation invoked the 'originary', the 'natural' and the 'primordial', in a defence against what de Man calls the modern 'temporal predicament' of the author-subject.[49]

It must, however, be emphasised that de Man's reconstruction of the Romantic tradition is highly insufficient when placed in the context of the temporal politics of colonial modernity. A

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[47] Dipesh Chakravarty, 'The Time of History and the Time of Gods', in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, eds. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, London, 1997, p. 47.
[48] Georg Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 1900, reprint, London, 1990, p. 149-51.

superficial reading of Bengali poetics might make it seem as if Bengali poets like Rabindranath or sculptors like Ramkinkar, who figured originary time through symbols of the 'primordial' and of 'nature', were posing an internal critique of urban alienation in the way that European Romantics did. Such a reading would however completely miss the displacement effected by colonialism on the temporal concept of the 'originary'. In the West, the ideas of origin and of authorship appeared together, in the Biblical tradition as well as in the tradition of modernity. In pre-colonial India however the question of authorship, even of God's word, was subordinate. In the *darshan* tradition of philosophy, *sabda* or the word was taken as an epistemological proof, not because of the authority of the utterer, but because in realms like that of morality, it was through interpreting linguistic discourse, rather than through the possibility of empirical verification, that one could determine what to do. As Jitendra Mohanty argues, it was through intertextuality, rather than through a return to basic texts, that philosophy proceeded in pre-colonial India, in a tradition where it was impossible to find 'anything but the text ... anything but texts behind texts'. This was not only because no one could claim to have grasped the author's mind. This was also because the author could not claim an intellectual property right over the words of *apaureseyasruti* (the heard but not composed text); the author himself was also the interpreter of his own words.[50] With colonialism, however, the authenticity of early Indian texts had to be proved in terms of how ancient they were. The matter of contention was no longer the presently active and potent nature of texts, but the historical ancientness of their 'original' authors. Successive interpretations through time were rejected as interpolations. In the politics of reform like that of Arya Samaj, texts were fixed as law and scripture to which all times and contexts must conform. In the politics of knowledge like that of Bankimchandra, texts became the 'source' and 'evidence' of history from which all later accretions must be eliminated. The impossible predicament of historians like Bankim – trying to fix the singular and original authorship of texts like Mahabharata, which necessarily grew through progressive interpretations, additions and transformations – is evident in the nineteenth century.[51] In colonial modernity, therefore, the time of textualisation as a practice became irrelevant before the time of the original author as the subject. The poetic quest for the 'originary' and 'primordial' time in early-twentieth century Bengal, therefore, was marred by this anxiety of having to prove the original as authorial and authoritative. Though the poetic, non-chronological time of creation and destruction was articulated as superscribing the secondary temporality of progress, yet in the typical mode of colonial-modernity, the nation had to claim to be the author/owner of this time and this temporal insight. This caused the subordination of the critical poetic temporality to the cumulative time of history, of the time of creation and destruction to the neutralised time of accumulating knowledge.

The Santals, constituted in the nineteenth century as the 'primitive' Other of thought, performed a critique on precisely this authorial and authorised time of history. It is a difficult task to reconstruct this critique from within the parameters of history writing, for history acquired its

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[49] Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, London, 1993, pp. 187-92.
[50] Jitendra Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 272-4, 277.
[51] Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, p. 84.

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disciplinary status precisely by excluding and opposing the 'primordial'. Therefore, one cannot really expect to find 'historical evidence' on Santal uses of memories and pasts, or on Santal modes of social and practical temporalisations. Naturally, 'historical' studies on Santals have mostly been studies of their rebellions, because rebellions could be seen to simulate the traits of the ideal-typical historical event, in a way in which 'primitive' everydayness could not.[52] Of course, many of these historical studies have taught us much; they have even exploded the myth of 'tribal' exceptionalism and autarchy, by showing that Santals lived and rebelled together with other peasants and subaltern groups. However, these works do not explore the historiographical predicament of antagonistic temporalities and therefore of contending practices. There have also been recent historical studies of 'tribal' peoples, which have shown the category 'tribe' to be a colonial construction, which singularised and essentialised an arbitrary distinction between castes/peasants and 'primitives'/'tribes'.[53] However, to see the constructedness of the category is not to adequately expose the materiality and the effectivity with which the 'primitive' was deployed, literally and metaphorically, in the production of modernity and in the ordering of the world. Anthropology on the other hand, has tried to reconstruct autonomous social temporalities.[54] But different temporalities have been neutralised in this field by their spatialisation as coterminous to other lands. Of course, anthropological works, which study performance, rituals, and speech-acts, have tried to reconstruct the time of acts rather than the time of compartmentalised 'cultures'.[55] But even these are mostly silent about the politics of time, by which the anthropologist denies temporal coevalness to the object-society being studied.[56] A reconstruction of temporal contests between Santals and mainstream, 'modernising' society is constrained by these disciplinary limits. However, this thesis tries to read through all sorts of 'sources' in search of clues to contesting uses of time – revenue papers, files on emigration of labour, judicial files on Bengal, land settlement cases in Santal Parganas, Santal folk-tales recorded in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by missionaries, currently circulating Santal poems and songs, and contemporary Santal reconstructions of the Santals' own pasts. If read in relation to Bengali tracts and colonial ethnographies, certain moments of contest are illuminated, which expose to a significant extent, the temporal politics of colonial modernity.

This thesis argues that Santal rebellions and Santal narrations can be best understood if they are seen to be operating in the time of practice, in contrast to the time of knowledge and history which, in so far as the Bengali middle classes were concerned, defined the nation. In other words, this thesis tries to question the historiographical explication of the Santal-Bengali difference, as the

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[52] Dhirendranath Baske, Saontal Ganasamgramer Itihas, Calcutta, 1976; Tanika Sarkar, 'Jitu Santal's Movement in Malda, 1924-32' in Subaltern Studies IV, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, 1985; Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency, Delhi, 1983; Michael Adas, Prophets of Rebellion ,Cambridge, 1979.

[53] Nandini Sundar, Subalterns and Sovereigns: an Anthropological History of Bastar, Delhi, 1997; Ajay Skaria, 'Shades of Wildness: Tribe, Caste and Gender in Western India', Journal of Asian Studies, LVI: 3, 1997.

[54] The agenda of anthropology has been to neutralise contesting time-senses by enclosing temporalities within relativised culture-gardens. This is true as much of Evans-Pritchard, The Nuer, Oxford, 1940 as of Clifford Geertz, 'Person, Time and Conduct in Bali', The Interpretation of Culture, New York, 1973. This is true of comparative sociology as well, as much of Mircea Eliade, The Myth of the Eternal Return, London, 1954 as of Akos Ostor, Vessels of Time, Delhi, 1993.

[55] G. Gurvitch, The Spectrum of Social Time, Dordrecht, 1964; Jack Goody, 'The Time of Telling and the Telling of Time in Written and Oral Cultures' in Chronotypes, eds. John Bender et al., Stanford, 1991; Elizabeth Tonkin, Narrating Our Pasts, Cambridge, 1992.

[56] Fabian, Time and the Other, p. 151.

difference between myth and history, and as the difference between oral and literate traditions. Admittedly, both these distinctions can generate powerful criticisms in certain contexts. Ranajit Guha's emphasis on the cyclic time of Munda rebellion can indeed be a potent interrogation of the linearity of the modernist telos. Yet when Guha sees 'mythical' and 'oral' utterances as what he calls residues of 'the long night of early feudalism', he willy nilly admits the 'transition' (primitive communism – feudalism – capitalism) narrative, which stands 'true' only when colonialism can be historicised, like in Europe, as an event in another country.[57] Historians have indeed admitted that in the colonial context, the historiography of the glorious Indian past can be called historical as much as mythical.[58] That Gandhi's historicisation of the nation as a popular agenda can be called literate tradition as much as performance and orality.[59] This is because these antinomies fall through, when used in reference to the experiences of colonialism. Colonialism itself was a phenomenon of rupture in the narrative of transition, transition being the paradigm, which gave rise to these categories of succession, of myth-history, literacy-orality. It is more fruitful therefore, if we must take colonialism seriously, to recognise the mutual authentication and the practical confrontations of these seemingly neat and oppositional categories, which were supposed to stand in for mutually exclusive temporal stages. These co-existences and confrontations were the part of the practices of a present, which could not be placed in a continuous narrative precisely because of the externality and contingency of colonialism. And which implied that the present could not be formulated either as literate *or* as oral, either as mythical *or* as historical. In this sense, it is inadequate to try to understand Santal modes of temporalisation as either mythical or oral. The argument of this thesis is that if the Bengali middle classes perceived the Santal as their practical and sensuous Other, it is most meaningful to acknowledge the Santal as offering a practical interrogation of the nation, as the nation was sought to be generalised and legalised as an uninterrupted and common 'idea'.

The operative distinction in nineteenth-century Bengal was, therefore, not that between an oral and a literate tradition, nor that between a mythical and a historical consciousness. It was between practical and theoretical uses of the past – between an active temporalisation of pasts and times as contingent and irrevocable, and a stabilising historicisation of pasts and chronologies as 'factual' and 'finished'. That the Santals reclaimed their pasts as part of everyday activities, rather than in a state of suspension from the time of the everyday, made memory itself into a practice, dependent on work and not on knowledge/information. The Santal pasts therefore were not necessarily ordered into a narrative form, but existed often as almost free-floating, un-authorised insights, amenable to changing configurations in changing times. It is significant that, when the Santals rebelled, their act was re-presented by Bengali authors as resulting from a lack of 'rational' comprehension of the present – Santals failed to grasp the logical, chronological, fully explicable and inexorable triumph of the colonial regime.[60] The rebellion therefore seemed a kind of 'madness' that

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[57] *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1997, p.155.
[58] Indira Choudhury, 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity: The Making of a Hindu Discourse, Bengal 1867-1905', Ph D thesis, SOAS, London University, 1993.
[59] Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995.
[60] Digambar Chakravarty, *History of the Santal Hool*, 1895-96, reprinted in *Paschimbanga*, XXIX: 2-6, 1995, p. 8.

resulted from the lack of knowledge, understanding and patience. In contrast to this historicist position, it may be said, the Santals found rebellion to be a viable option. This was because, to the Santals, the past was as unknown or as known, as the future – the past had no particular privilege in terms of knowability, as it did for the self-aware historical subject. The Santal rebellion therefore sought, not to bring back a golden past, as national history sought to do, nor to effect a millennial end of history, as 'primitives' were supposed to do. The Santal rebellion sought to invoke the imperative of time itself. In other words, Santals articulated time as that in which the unimaginable and the unpredictable occurred. The Santal rebellion thus signified that the future, like the past, was neither logically nor genealogically connected to the present. Both the past and the future had to be temporalised in portentous and perhaps risky practice.

I argue that in the nineteenth-century, Santals constituted a crucial instance of how difference itself could be mobilised in terms of temporality – a mobilisation, which needed neither the de-temporalised Othering nor the progressive homogenisation that marked the time of history. The Santals enunciated their time as an increasing and contingent differentiation and scattering of peoples. If 'others' emerged as 'outsiders', they did so only in the course of time – as the Santals remembered, only when Bengalis turned into moneylenders, did they become inimical *dikus*. For the Santal, no difference was 'original' – Santals called themselves *hor* or just 'men'. For the Santal therefore the Other was neither an essential/original being, nor an unbreachable theoretical category, nor another location in time and space. Neither was the past another time, more originary and more 'authentic' than the colonial present. The past might have been better than the present time of inexorable indebtedness, but it was a sad time too. Concomitantly, the past was neither glorious nor determining. It was a time when people were practically and inexorably separated and other-ed from each other. It was a time that could not be an absolute ideal, because a return to a lost and sad time was neither possible nor particularly advantageous. As the Santals demonstrated, the time of their practices and pasts, unlike the time of the historical nation, was irreversible. It was in this time that irrevocable differentiations had occurred, this time did not and could not neutralise differences. The alterity of the Other, it may be said in interpretation of Santal acts, was thus like the alterity of time itself. The Other, like temporality, created limits to human practice. But like time itself, the Other too had to be harnessed in the practice for a desired future.

Before ending the introduction, I must clarify the approach of this thesis towards the reading and interpretation of Santal imaginaries. Rejected by early anthropology as magical, rationalised in early twentieth century as functional, narrativised in ethnological 'thick' descriptions as symbolic, and structured in post Levi Strauss anthropology as signs – 'primitive' imaginaries have always escaped the most well-intentioned, the most self-consciously empathetic of universal discourses. This thesis therefore, seeks to relocate them from the domain of knowledge and language to the realm of time. I shall argue that Santal ghost-spirits and rebellious imperatives seem fantastic in the paradigm of science and in the paradigm of history, because both reduce temporality to events which have already occurred, to objects already given – in other words, to the cognisable and conceivable past. Santals

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however articulated the temporal imperative precisely in opposition to this. To them, time was that in which the unimaginable and the incredible occurred. In a way, the genre of fiction currently called 'fabulous realism' has taught us to suspend common credulity before the 'politics of the possible'.[61] This thesis draws on that lesson. It argues that the Santal articulations of time existed in opposition to the time of history as predictable and predicative, as enunciated by the Hegelian tradition of the Zeitgeist.

This opposition becomes explicit if we refer to the remarkable interpretation of Hegel by Alexandre Kojeve – a thinker who was a Russian exile, a nephew of the painter Kandinsky, who confronted both Marx's and Hegel's philosophies of history during the October revolution, who learnt Sanskrit and Chinese, and who gave a famous lecture on Hegel in Paris in the presence of many luminaries of the French post-war intelligentsia. Kojeve announced that Hegel's world-philosophy and predictive insight into the 'end of history' – end of wars, conflict and struggle – was the result of his 'absolute knowledge'. It would be in this absolute knowledge, in the final future of the zeitgeist, that practice would end:

> The disappearance of Man at the end of History is thus not a cosmic catastrophe ... Man remains alive as an animal who is in harmony with Nature or Being as it is given. What disappears is Man properly so called – that is Action which negates the given, and Error, or more generally the opposition between Subject and Object. In fact, the end of human Time and of History ...all the rest can continue indefinitely: art, love, play, etc. – in short everything that makes Man happy.[62]

If in Kojeve we see a strange combination of Hegelian idealism and Marxist polemics, it is not accidental, nor exceptional – after all, in the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the debate on this prophetic end of history was resurrected. This is because Kojeve believed what epistemology always aspired to do – that is, suspend practice, and thereby imply that time itself permits its own cessation, in a truly theological, or should we say, 'magical' fashion. As we shall see in course of the thesis, Bengali intellectuals too proposed this end of karma or practice with the completion of knowledge – a proposal which was attributed by Western commentators to the essential Indian trait of renunciation, though it actually shared, of course with differences, something like Kojeve's Hegelian hope. However, if we foreground articulations of time like that of the Santals, the incredible but possible future appears as that which can only be negotiated in practice and as that which does not offer the assurance of prediction and anticipation. For time is the limit to knowledge, and knowledge by itself is never fully ready for the unprecedented future. Where knowledge ends, practice – including that of theorisation – begins. In a way then, it seems appropriate to end by mentioning Walter Benjamin – the archetypal figure of the Jewish thinker, suppressed at the very beginning of Biblical history and dying in resistance to the unmitigated and Nazi face of nationalism, who imagined the helpless angel of history, back turned to the future, towards which he was inexorably propelled as the past piled up before him.[63] If mainstream historiography could only interpret Santal rebellion as millenarian at its most radical, the same historiography could never fully admit Walter Benjamin, and his messianic disavowal of universal chronology. As Benjamin said, 'the

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[61] Kumkum Sangari, 'The Politics of the Possible', Cultural Critique, VII, fall, 1987, pp. 157-86.
[62] Quoted in Lutz Niethammer, Posthistoire, London & New York, 1992, p. 66.
[63] Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, London, 1992, p. 249.

nourishing fruit of the historically understood contains time as a precious but tasteless seed'.[64] In order to break out of this prison of the past, of the factual and the historical, Benjamin preferred the 'error-friendly state of the hypothetical'.[65] And the Santals acknowledged the temporal state of, what has been derogatively called, the 'supernatural'.

Colonialism and Continuity: a historiographical clarification

It must be apparent by now that, in the way it conceptualises 'colonial modernity', this thesis considers colonialism to be a clear rupture in the history of India, and of the world in general.   This can no longer be a simplistic assumption, or a self-evident 'experience' as presumed by nationalist historiography, which saw the battle of Palasi and the battle of Buxar as singular events inaugurating the modern period of colonialism in India. Recent research on the eighteenth century contest both the notion of colonialism as an event which happened once and for all in 1757, or in 1764, and the notion that colonial rule unequivocally and successfully disrupted the 'continuity' of Indian history. Much of this research has been in the domain of economic history, and has correctly criticised world-systems theories for making it appear as if pre-colonial societies were fragile and passive entities, which allowed themselves to be incorporated into the 'periphery' of Western capitalism without any resistance, and without affecting in the least the trajectory of European history or of metropolitan capital.[66] Research on the late Mughal empire makes it clear that the decline of the elite groups associated with the Mughal state resulted in the rise of vibrant regional political formations in India, more deeply rooted in the market place, and in the general expansion of trade and commercial production. Even military changes made arms more dependent on the ruler's ability to command cash than on his capacity to command assignments of land.[67] David Washbrook argues, that it is this pre-colonial context which drew the British into India, making an advantage out of the East India Company's ability to offer fiscal and military services to the regional formations. From this he even goes on to argue that 'in the last quarter of the eighteenth and the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the Company Raj was a state as much of indigenous as of British capital and, in certain ways, its rise brought to completion the processes of transition begun in the seventeenth century'.[68] C. A. Bayly argues that the East India Company's success lay in its becoming an 'indigenous capitalist'[69], and that early colonialism, instead of disrupting pre-colonial continuity, caused 'a

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[64] Quoted in Niethammer, *Posthistoire*, p. 118.

[65] Ibid., p. 118.

[66] Sugata Bose (ed.), *South Asia and World Capitalism*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990.

[67] Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707-48*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1986.

[68] David Washbrook, 'South Asia, the World System and World Capitalism', in *South Asia and World Capitalism*, ed., Sugata Bose, 1990, p. 73.

[69] *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

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remarkable reproduction of the power of the pre-colonial dominant groups'.[70] P. J. Marshall, on his part, argues that apart from the intellectual ferment in the nineteenth century which can be obviously attributed to colonial rule, it is impossible to clearly ascribe any change or interference to colonialism. India was already commercialised and market-driven, and colonial economic policies could not, in any case, make deep interventions in the local lives and in the production organisations of the rural population.[71]

There are, thus, two arguments in what can be called this 'continuity theory' historiography. One, that the eighteenth century had already begun to demonstrate capitalist potentials, and colonial rule did not bring in anything new to the Third World.[72] Two, that colonialism began with a fairly long period of what used to be earlier called 'indirect rule', basing itself on indigenous forms of economic and social organisation and thereby allowing the continuity of pre-colonial ways and customs in Bengal. My thesis is based on an implicit critique of both these arguments. Before going into this critique, however, it will be fair to mention what I consider to be a valid corrective offered by this historiography. This historiography has taught us that colonialism could not have been a one-time event. That would be to construct pre-colonial societies as curiously helpless, a construction that constituted the ideology of colonialism itself. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries expose the negotiated manner in which colonialism took effect – in the face of much local and political resistance. While retrospection may often suggest a kind of inexorability to colonial triumph, the rigorous empirical histories of early colonialism show how uncertain and exasperated early colonisers must have felt, in the face of indigenous recalcitrance and indifference.

However, it is one thing to say that colonialism was a negotiated process, and not an event. It is entirely another thing to say that colonialism smoothly slipped into the 'continuity' of indigenous history. Even if one accepts, against all senses of history and context, that pre-colonial India displayed the same economic or capitalistic propensities as that Georgian England, it can still be shown empirically how early colonialism caused a general fall in prices and agrarian stagnation in India. This could not have been if the East India Company entered the scene as merely another commensurable player in 'indigenous capitalism'.[73] However, there is more to this critique of the 'continuity theory' than economic facts and counterfactuals. The best version of this critique has been offered by Sudipta Sen, in his recent book, *Empire of Free Trade: The East India Company and the Making of the Colonial Marketplace.*[74] Sen shows that trade and conquest implied, from the 'very beginning', an attempt by the East India Company to build a powerful and intrusive state in India.

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[70] 'Indigenous Social Formations and the "World System", North India since c 1700', in *South Asia and World Capitalism*, ed., Sugata Bose, 1990, p. 139.

[71] P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India, 1740-1828*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 172.

[72] This argument must be distinguished from the argument of Frank Perlin, who says that India was on a proto-capitalist trajectory until colonialism intervened to cause 'underdevelopment' here. See his 'Proto-industrialisation and Pre-colonial South Asia', *Past and Present*, 98, 1983, pp. 30-95.

[73] This fact of agrarian stagnation was true not only for Bengal, as shown by Amiya Bagchi in 'Markets, Market Failures and the Transformation of Authority, Property and Bondage in Colonial India', in *Institutions and Economic Change in South Asia*, eds. Burton Stein and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996. It was also true for the Bombay Deccan region, as shown by Sumit Guha in his *The Agrarian Economy of Bombay Deccan 1818-1914*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985.

[74] Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.

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East India Company's demands for markets and commerce came face to face with a very *different* organisation of trade, market exchange and authority. And it was this *difference* which was crucial in determining the nature of the conflict of economic interests in eighteenth-century Bengal.[75]

The rupture in continuity arose from the colonial desire to promote a 'pure' and self-regulated market economy in a society where marketplaces and their patrons were part of an extended social and political-scape. Drawing from the insight of Karl Polanyi, Sen shows that it was a very specific and local European phenomenon that self-regulating markets became a 'totalising and pervasive' thing, enabling a fundamental separation of the economic and the political in social life. Opposed to this, was pre-colonial Bengal, where domains of exchange were not merely implicated in the particular hierarchy of goods that entered it, but were also 'competing denominations of various venues of exchange and communion': markets for temples, markets of mosques, markets for the emperor, markets for the landlords, and for the people. Confronted with this political determination of the economic regime, the East India Company began to disrupt 'continuity' even before 1757. The Company undertook the very political act of intruding in the trade in prestige items like salt, betel nut and tobacco, at a time when they had permission only to trade in ordinary though profitable items like silk and cotton (their trade in salt remained a bone of contention even in the twentieth century). The Company even began to issue passes to trade in these goods and sell these passes to petty brokers in the manner of indulgences. And since 1757, the East India Company attempted to 'free' markets from local control, patronage and redistributive efforts through an elaborate revenue and police administration, in the name of *laissez faire* and in the name of Scottish philosophy, which invoked principles of governance and laws of economy in the same breath, as formidable tools of civilisation and moral reform. It must be remembered that not only were pre-colonial marketplaces part of a wider political economy of redistribution by rulers, they were also traversed by various kinds of passages, that of armies, traders and most importantly pilgrims. As Sen tellingly says: 'Commerce, warfare, banditry and pilgrimage all locate[d] the marketplace differently in time and in place, rather than as a fixed entity in cartographic space', which required the East India Company to intervene as a political actor in the 'economy'. The Company sequestered indigenous marketplaces from their traditional lineage, caused a rapid expansion police and customs outposts and relentlessly tried to standardise money, bills and currency.[76] It was no accident that traders and shopkeepers who, for decades before the coming of the Company, had accommodated the levies of a host of political agents – *nawabs, zamindars* and *amins* – resisted the imposition of the Company's police tax with such unprecedented defiance. And popular rebellions, like the *sannyasi* and *fakir* uprisings, targetted precisely the Company's factories, *thanas* and customs outposts. This goes against the continuity argument, that the 'masses' were unaffected by early colonial rule.

Eighteenth-century marketplaces in pre-colonial India had indeed become sites of unprecedented political significance. Yet they could not have been mapped as standardardised and

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[75] Ibid., p. 3.
[76] Ibid., p. 17.

stable locations of totally enumerable revenue output. Nor could their significance have been grasped if seen from the point of view of a 'universal' observer and an anonymous public, reading gazetteers for information about trade, revenue and commercial geography of an area. In other words, commercial wealth did not constitute an autonomous field of knowledge, even information in pre-colonial India. Wealth was not identifiable as statistics. It could be produced and recognised as such only through active and political mediation. With East India Company's mapping of markets, however, came a utilitarian obsession with revenue statistics as valid in and for itself. This obsession with revenue at the exclusion of all other forms of political privilege, in turn, was based on the ideology of exclusive property rights of the state[77] in customs and tolls. This idea of exclusive and singular right of the state disallowed any significant collaboration with local merchants and bankers, who, perhaps in pursuit of their own profit, became dispensable instruments in the hands of the Company. In Bengal, the fate of not only Jagat Seth, but of Khushal Chand, Udwat Chand and Omichand, who was framed by Clive in a court case, goes against the continuity-argument, that colonialism reproduced the authority of local commercial powers. In fact, early Company rule was based on the 'suppression' of zamindari rights over the passage of boats, pilgrims and merchandise. In this, the zamindars were forced to withdraw into a role of mere landed potentates, with rights only on agrarian produce, causing a clear 'de-commercialisation', if the term may be permitted, of their power and influence.

That this contest was not purely economic, but political, becomes clear in other ways as well. Thus, in pre-colonial Bengal, the modes of authority were emulative, i.e. visible rulership was based on the regional powers emulating the conduct and acts of say, the emperor, including issuing coins and settling markets. In the formative years of colonial rule, when the Bengal army was being fashioned as the major striking force for expansion westward, the Company forcefully prevented local powers from sharing their signs of authority. Thus, a regulation passed in 1786 forbade local banias from dressing their servants in the red serge uniform of Company soldiers. Also, if local authorities sought compensation for dues abolished, they were asked to file documentary evidence, which more often than not was an impossibility. All this, Sen persuasively shows, marked 'the end of an era of continuity', when '[t]o this redistributive society, where the power to exploit often flowed from the power to give, the British rulers introduced the idea of legal entitlements based on exhaustive and public legal documents'.

> To them [the Company], all gifts, grants and donations were in essence legal conveyances, a transfer of private property. ... The colonial state refused to honour the unconditional grant that denoted the power derived from social and dynastic privilege and responsibility rather than from narrowly defined contractual privileges.[78]

By the end of the eighteenth century, then, a flood of petitions were being made to the colonial government, from families unable to live upto this colonial scrutiny and this demand for documented 'evidence' of rights and entitlements. And a large section of these families were also traditional

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[77] Sumit Guha shows how the Company failed to grasp the possibility of concurrent, identical rights on a single piece of property, forcing property to become a simple and homogeneous category contra the earlier compounds of lands, market rights, perquisites, gifts, ceremonial dignities, public offices, and tax liabilities; *The Agrarian Economy of Bombay Deccan*, p. 52.
[78] *Empire of Free Trade*, p. 143.

teachers, *maulavis* and *pandits*, whose *britti* or livelihood seemed to be jeopardised because they had no right anymore to draw subsistence from markets and from lands.[79]

It is based on this critique of the 'continuity theory' that my thesis proposes to see colonial modernity as a new experience in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Bengal. Not just mainland Bengal, but even its apparently 'impenetrable' forested and 'tribal' areas were being subjected to military and fiscal expansionism from the 1770s. The chapter on money and credit, particularly, emphasises this disruption. This chapter problematises temporality from the perspective that Birbhum and Damin areas were reproduced by colonial authorities as hitherto unfamiliar with money and trade − not only through discursive reconstruction, but also through active and definitive political interventions. For instance, the Company soaked up all the liquidity of the area and reinvested it in its wars with Tipu Sultan. And Cornwallis' currency standardisation policies diminished the general purchasing power of the people of this region. At the same time, the Company sought to curtail the political relations between 'tribes' and *zamindars* of Damin, and replace them in a 'purely' economic exchange-relation, which inaugurated a new regime of indebtedness for the so-called 'primitive' peoples like Paharias and Santals. With a different intellectual purpose, K. Sivaramakrishnan has shown how such apparently 'primitive' regions were recreated by the colonial government as 'anomalous zones' of exception and exclusion, even as the Company imploded administrative frontiers and reduced *zamindari* policing, by the first half of the nineteenth century.[80] It was also in the same region of what will soon become known as the Santal Parganas, that the Company intervened in the passage of pilgrims to Deoghar and thus in the constitution of religious fairs, markets and relations of Hindus with 'animist primitives'. Thus, for the first time with colonialism, a certain political economic rearrangement was effected, by which some peoples were reproduced as more 'primitive' than others − i.e. some peoples began inhabiting a time which came across as the past of others. No wonder then, the Bengali middle classes categorically formulated the 'primitive' condition of Santals as embodying a lack of financial and credit rationality. Behind this seemingly 'derivative' thought, learnt from the Western political economy and ethnology, lay this long colonial process of real constitution of some peoples as eternally indebted and unable to manage markets.

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[79] Ibid., p. 154.
[80] 'British Imperium and Forested Zones of Anomaly in Bengal, 1767-1833', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, XXXIII (3), 1996, pp. 243-82.

The Subject of Time, the Subject in Space :
the 'historical' and the 'primordial' in colonial Bengal

> [T]he past, far from being a dimension of time, is the synthesis of all time of which the present and the future are only dimensions. ... It is the in-itself of time as the final ground of the passage of time.
>
> – Gilles Deleuze[1]

With the coming of colonial-modernity, the Bengali middle classes' awareness of time was heightened and dislodged. *Chakuri*, or routine clerical work, was eating away at time, leaving no time for this-worldly duties, let alone for preparations for the next world. Despite the new labour-saving devices – railways and print – the new work-regime, the new desires instituted by modernity, and the rising prices came together to undo all the advantages of a fertile land where people could work less and think more. It was often said that the Bengali was being emaciated by over-work, and by its corollary, over-indulgence.[2] This was the singular feeling with which the Bengali middle-classes confronted the time of modernity. In pre-colonial paradigms, time seemed to appear in many ways – as an eternal substance or as instantaneous being, as a philosophical transcendent or as a philosophical indeterminate, as the concrete becoming of matter or as kingly calendar, and more commonly, as a normative judgement on the

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[1] *Difference and Repetition*, London, 1994, p. 82.

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appropriateness of specific everyday acts (as in almanacs) or as a political reconfiguration of regimes and epochs (as in *puranas*).[3] Out of these unlimited imperatives of time, capitalist-modernity re-constructed a series of empty, measurable units in which many things could happen, but which in itself remained singular and unqualified.[4] This time, like money, could be possessed, stolen and bargained for.[5] I begin my work by foregrounding this change instituted by colonial modernity in the Bengali experience of the everyday. With a concomitant change in the notion of the epochal, this transformed sense of everyday time caused a crisis of practice and possibilities in colonial Bengal. The middle-classes perceived this as a loss of continuity and duration, which could only be recovered through collective history-writing and through the relocation of a disrupted and defeated present in line with the 'authentic' and valorous past.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, thus, Bengal was marked by two critical temporal events – the disruption of everyday time and the call for the writing of history. Recent historiography has analysed these two events separately. On the one hand, there has been sophisticated work on the nation as a historical imaginary. Ranajit Guha has demonstrated the emergence of the nationalist imagination in the second half of the nineteenth-century, a time which had been historicised till then as the period of 'proto-nationalism', the time of social reform and renaissance, prior to nationalism as politics. Guha shows that by the 1860s-80s, the Bengali middle-classes already imagined the nation as a political identity – not just as an object-entity whose history could be written but as a subject-agent who could actively write and make history.[6] Partha Chatterjee shows how, in the same period, the notion of identity changed from that of the *praja* (or subject to a regime) to that of the citizen (or subject of a nation), as the subject-agent's position changed from that of customary right to the locality and to local resources to that of a historical right over the nation's destiny as a whole.[7] Sudipta Kaviraj shows that, even as the educated Bengalis accepted the 'theory' of Western history as a mode of consciousness, they reconfigured history as a motivated political practice by experimenting with the trope and diction of history-writing, by exploding conventional narrative closures and by renegotiating the boundary between truth and fiction.[8]

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[2] 'Bangadeser Bartaman Abastha', *Tattovodhini Patrika*, *sravan*, 1856.

[3] Romilla Thapar, *Time as Metaphor of History: Early India*, Delhi, 1996.

[4] Benedict Anderson, *The Imagined Community*, London, 1983.

[5] This has been discussed in context of Western modernity, by E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, XXXVIII, 1967; Chris Nyland, 'Capitalism and the History of Work-Time Thought', *British Journal of Sociology*, XXXVII, 1986; Nigel Thrift, 'The Making of Capitalist Time-Consciousness' in *The Sociology of Time*, ed. John Hassard, London, 1990.

[6] Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-century Agenda and its Implication*, Calcutta, 1988.

[7] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton, 1993, pp. 83-95.

[8] Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Construction of Colonial Power: Structure, Discourse, Hegemony', in *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India*, eds. Shula Marks and Dagmar Engels, London, 1994, pp. 47-52.

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There has also been definitive work on the temporal politics of capitalism in the colonial context. Following the perspective of E. P. Thompson, Sumit Sarkar has shown how Bengali middle and lower middle classes, increasingly constituted as a clerical labour force for the colonial government, struggled over work-time and leisure.[9] He has also shown how the assessment of the colonial present as *kaliyuga*, the evil epoch in which all normative hierarchies were inverted, informed the common-sense of not only educated middle-classes but also of the rural population.[10] In fact, the sense of *kali*, as used in everyday temporal-normative judgements, was not a particularly Hindu idea. Even as late as in the 1920s, when the communal question was clearly formulated, we see texts written by Muslims using the idea of *kali*.[11] Even so-called 'tribes' like the Santals and the Mundas, who were defined as both outside 'history' and outside Hindu caste-society, invoked *kaliyuga* in their songs and verses.[12] In this sense, the resentment about the theft of time and about the alienness of the colonial regime were experiences, to start with, more common and general to the people of Bengal, than the experience of the nation as a historical identity.

In the context of these two distinct strands of recent historiography, this chapter seeks to problematise the connection between the imagination of the nation as history and the experience of the everyday as disrupted. I shall argue that the call for history given by the Bengali middle-classes was not *directly* produced by either the common struggle over everyday time or by common-sensical notions of the epochal imperative. History-writing as a practice emerged in a bilateral engagement with colonial discursive practices, displaced from its relation with the everyday and the epochal. This chapter shows that this displacement caused a rupture between the enunciatory time of history and the enunciatory time of the narratives which sought to articulate the epochal imperative. It also seeks to show how historical chronology – whose primary imperative was not so much to thematise temporality as to institute identity as sameness through time – assumed the character of space, shorn of the substantiveness and momentum of the epochal and of the struggles and contradictions of the everyday. Once time assumed the nature of a divisible and aggregable space, time could be split into two – the 'historical' and its necessary counterpoise, the 'primordial'. With this bifurcation of time, self-criticism – which the decline and defeat of the nation had made unavoidable – could be directed against the disowned part of the nation's self, i.e. against the 'non-historical' and the 'primitive'. This chapter seeks to show that it was through this bifurcation of time that the problematic of history was fully

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[9] Sumit Sarkar, 'Colonial Times: Clocks and *Kaliyuga*', paper presented at the South Asia History Seminar, SOAS, London University, 20 June 1996.

[10] Sumit Sarkar, 'The Kalki-Avatar of Bikrampur', in *Subaltern Studies VI*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, 1992, pp. 37-8.

[11] For instance, Abed Hali, *Kalichitra*, Rangpur, 1926.

[12] For Santals, see Ch V, note 23. For Mundas, see S. C. Roy, *Mundas And Their Country*, reprint, London, 1970, p. 30.

articulated in colonial Bengal. As the subject-author of the nation's history assumed a unitary biographical form, identical to the thinking, educated individual, shorn of his corporeality, the subject-agent sought to claim a permanent metaphysical presence – not only *beyond* the vicissitudes of everyday and epochal temporality, but also *against* the lack of temporality seemingly embodied in the purely presentist and sensuous 'primitive'.

In this chapter the primary emphasis is on the constitution of the historical subject, though the later chapters will go on to show that the temporal politics of colonial modernity produced history as a disciplinary mode of writing and practice, irrespective of who the subject of this history was. The nation as an identity was possible only on the ground of an 'objective' knowledge of history, which reproduced knowledge as dissociated from practice and from concrete being, i.e. knowledge as the site of an abstract time wherein antagonistic and non-contemporary social temporalities could be re-presented without the time of the nation being jeopardised by them. This chapter shows that in order to claim this apparently incorruptible time of reason and representation, history had to first purify its author by eliminating the 'primordial' and the practical from the location of the subject. This is not to say that the author-subject of colonial-modern history was more exclusive than the author-subject of epochal discourses. This is to say that the exclusions effected by history were of an entirely different order, in history the first parameter of exclusion was temporal. Admittedly, the idea of *kaliyuga* articulated the inverted nature of the present in terms of the rise of the outcast and the woman. This epochal common-sense thus clearly referred to an upper-caste, male subjectivity, at war with the subaltern and the feminine. However, though historical subjectivity too was produced by the upper-caste male *bhadrolok*, it claimed to represent the entire nation, by opposing itself, not to another social class, but to what it saw as another time – the 'primitive'. In this, it denied position to the non-modern in the site of representation, by transferring him or her to an anachronistic temporality, to a temporal irrelevance. It was only by making peoples non-contemporary that the historical subject could assume the right to re-present those who, even though part of the nation, seemed absent from the progressive time of the self-consciously modern present.

The everyday and the epochal : the context of history-writing

In *The Poetry of Manifold Visions*, Dinanath Gangopadhyay lamented, that in the modern-age, too much time was taken up by the earning of bread and the learning of 'civilisation'. The only escape from this time-theft seemed a renunciation of the conventional householder's life. The only way to return to *darshan* – to envisioning and philosophising the world – was to flee the

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everyday and go on solitary travels.[13] In the colonial work-regime, it seemed, each day of the week came back with a new and independent texture. Saturday seemed a day when the dark, hidden tendencies of society rose to the surface – over-indulgence by working men, defiance by school-boys, mindless shopping and consumption by those returning from work, which made prices shoot up incredibly in Sunday markets. Nothing was good about the day except for waiting wives, whose husbands returned from the city that night.[14] Sunday, the day when work seemed forbidden, seemed suspect too – some feared that Russians might be plundering the streets and women dared not go to bathe in the Ganga.[15] And since 3 November 1763, the day when the government in Calcutta ordered that workers must remain in the office at noon, siestas in hot afternoons had become a thing of the past.[16] As days took on threatening idiosyncracies of their own, the Bengali middle classes began to find that time-management was a virtue to be systematically and deliberately cultivated. Advice on time-reckoning can be found in nineteenth-century school-books of all kinds. It was said that time arrived as the 'opposite of one's desire', that 'the movement of time [was] crooked', that time by itself brought down great edifices like that of Indian civilisation. The only moral position possible thus seemed to be to delicately 'hold time in the palm of one's hand', and to pass time consciously in virtuous company, virtuous discussion, charity, art and travelling the nation.[17] One should make the best of time, because both the past and the future were 'mirages'. School children therefore should be taught gunamulak or adjectival essays on 'laziness', 'practice', 'the vice of eternal postponement of duties' etc. Even themes like 'the night' should be formulated from this perspective. Thus, an 1874 school text publicised exemplary essays on the 'night' exhorting people to sleep early as in the past, and essays on the 'day' argued that not returning home for rest even on hot afternoons was a good, though new, idea because it saved much travelling time.[18]

Mid-nineteenth century almanacs textualised the sense of these racing and crowded everydays. Each day was characterised in these prescriptive calendars in terms of kriyas and kartavyas – of what ought to be and what ought not to be done. They listed the right time to make the plough, to harvest, the auspicious moment to dig wells, build boats, lay the foundation of houses, trade, take medicine, wear arms, or visit the king. Interpreted and explained by local village brahmins, the instituted generality of the average Hindu everyday preceded the printing of almanacs; calendars on tala leaves were already an object sold in village markets in earlier

[13] Vividhadarshan Kavya, Calcutta, 1865.
[14] Chandrakanta Sikdar, Ki Majar Sanibar, Calcutta, 1863, pp. 13-6.
[15] Sambad Prabhakar, 17 February 1854.
[16] Arunendraprasad Ghosh, 'Aitihasik Jatkinchit', Aryavartta, Oct-Nov 1911, pp. 542-43.
[17] Mohendranath Roy, Nabaprabandhasara or Moral and Entertaining Essays, 4th ed., Calcutta, 1874, pp. 12-3.
[18] Harishchandra Bhattacharya Rachansar, Calcutta, 1874, pp. 21-2, 129-38.

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days.[19] What was new in the *nutan panjikas* of the 1860s-70s, published by the Hindu Press, Gupta Press, Day, Law & Co etc, was that the presses now competed not so much over the accuracy of the list of *tithis*, as over the additional current temporal information provided in them – railway timetables, stamp rates, lists of names of officials, dividend rates of company shares, calculations of monthly salaries, number of guns to be fired in protocol greetings, rates and speed of the post, interest rates, court expenses along with equivalences across *sambat*, *saka*, *bangabda*, *magisan*, *hijri*, *fasli* and Christian calendars. The almanacs thus attempted to pack newer and older time-reckonings and mismatched temporal duties into the everyday without it falling apart, just as they printed photographs of Hindu deities next to those of train-carriages on their cover-pages.[20]

This experience of this aporetic everyday was translated into a sense of the epochal in nineteenth-century Bengal, as the colonial present was labelled as the evil *kaliyuga*. This epochal sensibility must not be confused, as is often done, with a cyclical notion of eternally recurring good and bad ages. The *yugas* constituted a theory of change, not a theory of time.[21] And in any case, in colonial Bengal, the epoch of *kali* was invoked in an absolutely presentist sense, in dissociation from the antecedent epochs. The dominant mode of the epochal articulation was through satires and farces. Thus, an almanac of 1877 darkly described Lord Shiva lying prone under a modern oil-painting after his mid-day meal, a book of satire on modern widowhood at his bedside. The goddess Parvati scratches his back while announcing the death of all that was hitherto meaningful. In her vision, she sees the colonial government's extravagant Delhi Darbar as the central event of 1877, and predicts that the workplace would become the pilgrimage of the year and the destiny of the nation would rest on the whims of fallen women.[22] Satires also abound about the illicit loves common to these times, resulting in untimely deaths. In *kali* even the dead had no future except to be disrespectfully disposed off by the lowest of the low castes, the *doms*.[23] *A Dramatic Writing of Tobacco Consume [sic] of the Kuleyug*,[24] about the vice which has captured even the very young; *Kalir Hat*,[25] *Kalir Kulangar*,[26] etc about hen-pecked and whore-loving sons who neglect their mothers; *Kalir Bau Har Jvalani*

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[19] John Warren, ~~Kala Sankalita: a Collection of Memoirs on the Various Modes According to Whom the Nations of the~~ Southern Parts of India Divide Time, Madras, 1825, p. vii.

[20] Anandamohan Bandopadhyay, *Nabapanjika o Pradarshika*, Calcutta, 1871-2.

[21] Jitendra Mohanty *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 185-88. Mohanty says that to read the *yugas* as cyclical time is like saying that classical economics believes time to be circular, merely because it talks of recurrent cycles of crisis in capitalism.

[22] Gosaindas Sarkar, *Adbhut Panjika o Apurva Directory*, Calcutta, 1871, Introduction.

[23] Kanailal Sen, *Kalir Dasdasa*, Calcutta, 1875, pp. 89-90.

[24] Hiralal Dutta and Anandoprasad Ghosh, Calcutta, 1870.

[25] Bhusanchandra Mukhopadhyay, Jessore, 1905.

[26] Harihar Nandi, Calcutta, 1880.

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and *Kalir Bau Ghar Bhangani*[27] about the home and bone-breaking modern wives; *Kalir Sang*[28] about clowning men and transgressive women – numerous farcical texts of this kind expressed the unprecedented unease of the times. Even texts on general themes – like the decline of kingship in Tipperah[29] or the common affliction of dengue fever[30] – articulated problems of disease and loss of legitimacy as characteristic events of *kaliyuga*. That this satirical mode was overwhelmingly presentist becomes clear if one notes their purposefully 'anti-historical' textual move – of removing the *kaliyuga* from the graduated and differentiated scale of decline through the many ages. The past epoch of truth, *satyayug*, was turned into a metaphor in these texts, abstracted from the narrative necessity for detailing and filling in, for making it even fictionally credible. The 'reality' of the *kaliyuga* was set off in great detail against the purely evocative 'spirit' of the *satya*. The past was staged such that the present could be presented as its mirror inversion. Thus *Natun Babu or Kalir Avatar* explicitly said that it sought to 'hold mirror' to the absurdity of the present;[31] and *Hak Katha or True Words* typically proclaimed, 'in *kali* everything stands on its head... the miracle of time, what else shall we see!'[32]

Another genre of popular texts emphasised, somewhat differently, the presentism of this mode of epochal temporalising. These used the older *purankatha* and *panchali* forms meant to be read out loud (in fact most of the farces too were plays to be seen and heard rather than read). These texts claimed to rewrite what had already been narrated in ancient texts like the *Bhabishyapurana,* for repeated hearing and learning of the present were the first steps towards release from it.[33] In this formulation, the present was marked by the rupture of familiar causalities. The very nature of *kaliyuga* was *bina meghe bajrapata* – thunder without clouds or pain without reason.[34] That there was no escape from this epoch was because antecedents in time no longer necessarily limited the events following them. The past had become irrelevant, except by way of formal contrast – or simply of nostalgia. And that too only for the privileged few who remained virtuous enough to retain some wisdom and memory of the past, and who were visionary enough to have had prophecied this unthinkable future, even when there remained no clues for ordinary causal anticipation.[35] That causes no longer retained any privilege, even temporal precedence, over effects was not because epochs arrived in recurrent cycles but because of the bulldozing motion of an alien temporality,

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[27] Munshi Namdar, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1868.
[28] Arya Natya Samaj, Calcutta, 1880.
[29] N.a., *Tipperah Shaila Natak*, Dacca, 1882.
[30] Maheshchandra Das, *Dengu Jvarer Panchali*, Calcutta, 1872.
[31] Satishchandra Chattopadhyay, Calcutta, 1904; pp. 1-2.
[32] N. a., Calcutta, 1873, p. 9.
[33] Bishwanath Mitra, *Bhavishya Puranantargata Kalirajar Mahattatattva I*, Calcutta, 1849.
[34] Ibid., p. 31.
[35] Jagamohan Tarkalankar, *Kalkipurana*, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1878, Introduction.

> You, in the form of Time, pervade the Universe. Endlessly you make things conform. Who knows you? You are the consequence of all things, the site of work without certainty of effects, you as Time are the cause of all things that are.[36]

In other words, in *kaliyuga*, familiar senses of causality and apprehension had ceased to be, and therefore, *kaliyuga* made time itself appear as the threatening Other.

Such was the power of this causeless present that *kali* seemed to contaminate even the past epochs of truth.[37] This alleged rule of the present over the past was quite the reverse of what history would seek to do in this context, i.e. reconvene the present in light of the past. In the past *kali* had a localised presence, but now it was all-pervasive, because time was personified into Lord Clive and circulated through the whole of Bengal in the form of treacherous trade.[38] Very little in these texts seemed to await the end of this cycle or view things apocalyptically. The incarnation of *kalki avatar*, who was to bring an end to these bad times, became, not a metaphor of future hope, but a proof of the already arrived present. Ancient texts had predicted that *kalki* would be recognised by his iron-chariot – and since the railways, the steam-emitting iron cart, was the defining marker of these times, it was evident that the present was indeed *kalikal*.[39] There seemed to be nothing more permanent than this present – where *kali* had learnt that virtuous acts were neither necessary nor effective. He, it was said, had become a Buddhist and propagated abstinence from work. As *kali* said: 'O you people attached to work - why do you labour in vain?'[40] As we shall see in course of this thesis, this idea of the futility of practice in *kaliyuga* was translated into the project of a purely epistemological imperative in Bengali intellectual discourse.

Sumit Sarkar has already analysed the senses of *kaliyuga* in colonial Bengal with great insight. One must, however, specifically emphasise the difference between this epochal temporalisation and the temporalisation of the emerging mode of history-writing in colonial Bengal. This section has demonstrated that, from the 1850s onward, two genres of Bengali texts were articulating senses of the disrupted everyday and the causeless, inescapable epoch. For one, there were the farces and the satires, textualised in the highly presentist, ironic mode. This was a narrative convention which sought to express a multiplicity of voices in the same text. This was done not only by creating a split between the authorial presence, which obliquely commented on the colonial times, and the narrated time of the present, which exhibited the

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[36] Narayan Chattaraj, *Kalikutuhal*, Calcutta, 1853, Invocation.

[37] Ramdhan Ray, *Kalicharit*, Calcutta, 1855, pp. 92-3.
[38] Chattaraj, *Kalikutuhal*, p. 80.
[39] Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, *Kalir Naba Rang*, Calcutta, 1876, p. 21.
[40] Narayan Chattaraj, *Kalikutuhal Nataka*, Srirampur, 1858, p. 24.

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absurd in everyday things and events. This was done also by directly quoting multiple colloquial and slang Bengali usages within the same narration. As Debes Ray has shown in his remarkable work on the Bengali novel, this genre was best represented by the social satirist Pyarichand Mitra alias Tekchand Thakur. With Bankimchandra, however, this genre of simultaneously textualising multiple and antagonistic social utterances was abdicated in favour of the singular time of history and the unified voice of the author-subject, claiming to represent the nation. It is not accidental therefore that the same author, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, who was seen as the first pronouncer of the call for history in Bengal, was also seen as the progenitor of a unified 'modern', literary Bengali language.[41]

Along with the satires and farces, there was also the genre of *purana* recitation which enunciated the present as unprecedented, causeless and therefore discontinuous. The narrative technique of this genre too was clearly anti-historical – in that it sought to enunciate the present as an always-already known future. Instead of the historical privilege of hindsight, these texts articulated the privilege of foresight. This narrative convention attributed to the subject-author, not the task of imagining a succession to the past, but the task of explaining and legitimising unprecedented change in the already prophesied present. In fact, it was precisely because of the unprecedentedness of the present epoch, that it seemed as if unprecedented acts could be undertaken now. The present in this mode of temporalisation could be enunciated as a hitherto unthought of possibility, where the temporal imperative was not so much of effecting a continuity through time as of effecting novel and unimaginable practices. The Brahmo Samaj used the very idea of *kali* to do something which had supposedly never been done before, i.e. promote widow-remarriage. The *Tattvabodhini Patrika* in 1854 listed the acts forbidden in *kalikal* by *Parasharsamhita* to prove that widow-remarriage was nowhere prohibited in the present, in the way that crossing the ocean, travelling too far on pilgrimage, fall from too high a place and celibacy were![42] In the texts which articulated everyday and epochal disjunctures, therefore, time appeared as the unmanageable imperative which could effect the inexplicable, the absurd, and the alien. Unlike the enunciation of history which sought continuity with the ancient past of the nation, these modes of temporalisation tried to sieze the experiences of discontinuity, disruption and irreversible change. Mark the many usages of the term *kal* or time in the following recitation about *kaliyuga*:

> *Kali kale kale kal hoiache*
> *emni kal se bisham kal*
> *nibe tore kaler kache*

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[41] Debes Ray, *Upanyas Niye*, Calcutta, 1991, pp. 4-12.
[42] 'Should There be Widow-remarriage?', *Tattvobodhini Patrika, phalgun, 1854*.

In the time of kali, the end of time has come in time
so fatal (kal) is this time (kal)
that you will be taken by Time (Kal).[43]

Antagonistic pasts : the historical and the 'primordial'

In contrast to the ironic and the prophetic modes of time-reckoning, which asserted the discontinuity of the present, history-writing emerged in colonial Bengal in order to relocate the present in line with the past. This historical consciousness emerged explicitly in response to the colonial accusation that the colonised possessed no history to call their own.[44] The dramatic staging of farces and the recitations of *purankatha*, addressed the local audience directly and figured the colonial ruler as the third person, as the object-they. Historiography, however, intended to demonstrate to the colonial ruler, the primary audience, the proof of history amongst the colonised. Even 'vernacular' texts constructed arguments meant to hold true before the haunting presence of the European judge. As Indira Choudhury has persuasively shown, the discourse about the historical autonomy and superiority of Hinduism, emerged in colonial Bengal as a direct and oppositional response to colonial discourse.[45] Bengali history, therefore, largely became forged through *inversion* as the primary mode of opposition to colonialism – therefore, the frequent historicisation of the spiritual East as the exact opposite of the materialist West, and the retention of the possibility of marrying the two seemingly mutually exclusive consciousnesses.[46]

By articulating time as 'historical', authors like Bankimchandra created a necessary disadvantage for the colonised. Unlike narratives of *kaliyuga* which formulated present subordination as without reasons and causes, history had to stage an explanation of colonialism in terms of past causes and 'facts'. That is, the 'historical' had to accept subordination, at least partly, to be the result of the internal dynamics of the nation. Hence the arguments that India was colonised because it lacked unity, or because it was emaciated by sheer age.[47] One way of

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[43] Ramlochan Das, *Srikalki Purana*, Calcutta, 1913, p. 10.

[44] Thus, in the first Hindu Mela, organised to commemorate the historical glory of the nation, Nabinchandra Mukhopadhyay poetically narrated Hindu historical achievements as direct replies to 'colonial accusations' of weakness, disunity, and lack of history and against 'colonial traits' of materialism and greed. *Banger Purvamahima Vaman*, 1867, reprinted in Rajnarayan Basu, *Nirbachita Rachana Sangraha*, Calcutta, 1995, pp. 164-69.

[45] 'Colonialism and Cultural Identity: the Making of a Hindu Discourse, Bengal 1867-1905', PhD thesis, SOAS, London University, 1993.

[46] Dwijendranath Thakur, *Aryami banam Sahebiyana*, Calcutta, 1882.

[47] Rakhaldas Bhattacharya, *Banger Adhonati*, Calcutta, 1886.

circumventing this self-criticism was to imagine an earlier outside influence, prior to the British, which could be blamed with weakening the fabric of Bengali civilisation and making it vulnerable to colonial rule. Historicising the middle-ages as the debilitating time of Muslim 'invasion' and persecution was just such a strategy. But this strategy merely displaced the question of 'downfall' onto a less immediate past, which still had to be answered with 'self-criticism' by the writers of history. By admitting time as historical continuity, the educated Bengali gave up the temporal insight found in the texts of *kaliyuga* – the insight that the colonial present could not be grasped in terms of pre-existing causes, it was analogous to *bina meghe bajrapata* or thunder without clouds, that colonialism could not and must not be part of the history of the colonised but an external and disruptive intervention into it. This chapter argues that this 'self-criticism', which 'historicity' forced onto the colonised, had to be neutralised, if the nation was to recover its pride, by a double temporal move – of splitting the presence of the nation into the perpetual contra-existence of the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' and of ascribing a spatiality to time itself such that contradictory social times could be configured and gathered across the same temporal-territorial expanse called the nation.

The middle classes insisted that Bengalis did possess a history, because they were by no means analogous to the unhistorical, 'primitive' races of the world. They engaged in many an anxious rebuttal of the colonial accusation that the Aryans invading India were so few that they were assimilated by the earlier 'Negrite and Tatar races'. Hindu philosophy, it was asserted, was 'too esoteric to belong to a savage race'. Cases like Bhim's blood-thirst for Dussasana in *Mahabharata* were poetic hyperboles rather than indications of 'primitive' violence. If India seemed to have disintegrated, it was not because it was *anarya* or 'primitive' but because it was old and tired. The emaciation of the nation was itself the self-evident proof that it was ancient, and therefore more historical than many a youger *jati*.[48] If Hindu society was disunited, it was not the fault of the historical nation itself, but a result of the contaminating presence of the 'primitive' *anarya* within the historical oneness of the *aryas*.

> Since time moves, there are two jatis. It can never be said that the disunity is owing to internal jealousy within one jati. The civilised Bengalis who reside near Calcutta and the uncivilised Santal living in the forests of Birbhum can never be the same jati. Though if these two jatis feel united with each other it will certainly be for the general good of society, it does not seem possible in any way.[49]

These *anaryas* represented the shadowy underside of an ancient historical nation. They were the dark, linguistically inarticulate, morally indiscriminate, flesh-eating worshippers of the sensuous and the inanimate. They never understood divinity, because they had no sense of the temporality of *sristhi-sthiti-pralay* or creation-conservation-destruction :

[48] Nilkantha Majumdar, *Are We Aryans?*, Calcutta, 1886, pp. ii, 17-20.
[49] 'Bangadesher Adhibasi', *Aryadarshan, chaitra,* 1874, pp. 549-58.

[The *anarya*] remains satisfied like animals with an unintelligent sense of the present, within him there is no sense of life after death. ... They can neither feel nor imagine that time can be historical, i.e. longer than the length of their individual lives.

The loss of history in the present was the result of the continuing influence of these people, who themselves possessed no sense of past (history) or future (transcendence). After all, if the dialect of the Bengalis of Birbhum and Bankura had become vulgarised, it was owing to their physical proximity to the land of the 'primitive tribe' of the Santals.[50]

Even Bankimchandra, who invited 'everybody' to write the history of the nation,[51] invoked this *arya-anarya* divide as the 'original' question of the nation's history: '[w]hy are there two human genealogies in the same nation? Are the Aryans living in the land of non-Aryans or are non-Aryans living in the land of the Aryans? This is the foremost issue of the history of Bengal'.[52] Manindramohan Basu contrasted Bengali society to the West in terms of this very divide. Hindus were not Darwinians, he said, who cruelly enforced the 'survival of the fittest'. The *anaryas* were therefore never completely erased in India. They continued to survive in the forests and the hills of the land, and were protected by the caste-system whose function was to include yet keep apart antagonistic social practices and temporalities. The 'original' difference – between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' – which produced historical time, thus, continued even in the present and kept alive the memory of the 'origin' of history itself, the memory of the foundational *arya-anarya* encounter. Basu argued, against what he called Darwinianism, that 'Eastern' *samajniti* knew some societies to be intrinsically 'primitive', a counterpoise against which others evolved historically.[53] The Aryan polity demonstrated, as the much quoted Orientalist text of George Cox said, that the difference between the *arya* and the *anarya* was not merely a chronological difference, but a permanent and qualitative difference: 'one class of men has risen indefinitely in the scale of being, while the other exhibits no power whether of self-culture or of imitation'.[54] It was from this perspective that the Ramayana was re-interpreted as a history of the original encounter between the historical and the 'primitive' – the monkeys, snakes and bears, who were won over by Ramchandra, were metaphorical representations of 'totemistic' *jatis*.[55] Even Lanka was barbaric and destined to fall before the *arya* king progressing southwards. Its grandeur was artificial – 'artificiality is a sign of a *jati* developed in luxury, though not like *aryas* in Principle and Dharma', i.e. in principles of civilisation. [56] A major work of linguistics and history, promoted by the Varendra Research Society, *The Indo-*Aryan *Races*

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[50] Ibid., pp. 552-57.

[51] 'A Few Words about the History of Bengal', *Bangadarshan, agrahayan,* 1880.

[52] Bankimchandra, 'Bangalir Utpatti', *Bangadarshan, poush,* 1880.

[53] Manindramohan Basu, 'Samajniti: Prachya o Pratichya', *Aryavartta,* Oct-Nov 1912, pp. 465-70.

[54] George W. Cox, *The Mythology of* Aryan *Nations,* Varanasi, 1870, pp. 15-7.

[55] Kedarnath Majumdar, 'Ramayani Sabhyata', *Aryavartta,* Sept-Oct 1910, pp. 386-89.

[56] Kedarnath Majumdar, 'Prachin Bharate Arya o Anarya Sabhyatar Kendrasthal', *Aryavartta,* June 1911, pp. 124-8.

sought to prove that, from the beginning of memorable history, *anarya* elements, though permanently present in Bengal, remained distinct from the run of *arya* history. Even the lowest rungs of Hindu society, the *sudras*, were not 'recruited' from the 'aborigines': '[f]or the true representatives of the Anaryas of the Rgvedic age we should look, not to the fourth order of the Vedic society, but to the fifth order, the Nisadas. The origin of this fifth-order – from Vena, 'a slave of wrath and malice' who was made to *nisida* or 'sit-in-submission' by the *rsis* of the Mahabharata – was categorically distinct from the creation of the four *varnas* out of the primary sacrifice of Brahma's body. That the fifth order remained generally hidden from and irrelevant to 'Hindu' history was proved by the *anaryas* taking refuge in forests and caves from the more powerful *aryas*.[57]

In Bengali middle-class discourse, therefore, the so-called 'original' *arya-anarya* difference represented the foundational moment of the nation's history. Apparently a racial or ethnic construction, this difference, however, was primarily temporal in its intent. The imperative to claim Aryanness, and thereby a commensurablity with the races of Western Europe, was less about claiming identity with the rulers, than about claiming an ancient enough past for the nation. That the first event of Indian history was that of encounter with the 'primitive' was proof of the immense antiquity of India's historical 'origin'. That European history hardly ever referred to the *anarya* was proof that Western civilisation was a much later phenomenon than the 'origin' of Hindu history. Early Bengali historians engaged in dispute with colonial historians precisely on this point – that the length of the credible past possessed by Hindus was greater than anyone else's, and greater indeed than the world was ready to believe:

> These days, according to a purely Western method, every respectable entity of the Indians is first proved to be of recent origin ... After this, if it is proved that this particular entity is mentioned in an ancient Indian text, doubts are raised about the ancientness of this text; or the section in which the thing imagined to be modern is mentioned is suspected as an interpolation and its authenticity questioned. Without doing this, it seems the scientific method cannot be maintained.[58]

Against the colonial accusation that ancient Hindu texts were actually interpolations from later times, Bengalis argued that the new method of time-determination (*kal-nirdeshan*) established by English historiography deliberately caused Hindu accounts of the past to look 'superstitious'. The primary mistake of the English was to accept Greece, Babylon and Egypt as the earliest sites of world-civilisation, as they dared not admit Indian civilisation to be older than them. What Western scholars failed to recognise was that in the *puranas* the names of kings were listed in the form of future prophecies, as a political strategy to make their rule seem inevitable – a mode

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[57] Rama Prasad Chanda, *The Indo-Aryan Races, I: A Study of the Origin of Indo-Aryan People and Institutions*, Rajshahi, 1916, pp. 4-6.
[58] Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, 'The Age of Sidhidata Ganesh', *Aryavartta*, July-Aug 1910, pp. 232-41.

of remembrance which did not make the memory any less factual.[59] As the historian R. C. Dutt wrote

> The history of ancient India is a three thousand year long history of the knowledge and progress of human kind. This history is divided into a few yugas. Each such yuga is temporally so long that it is greater than the entire histories of some modern nations. ...The literature of each yuga is a complete mirror reflection of the state of the Hindu jati in that age. Perhaps even the use of photographic techniques do not ensure such an accurate picture ... it does not require any labour of interpretation.[60]

This age-oldness of Hindu history – its *prachinata* – was validated by its enounter with the other 'pastness' – the *adimata* or 'primordiality' of the 'aborigines'. The *prachin* history of India was inaugurated at the moment of war with the *adim*. The *prachin* and the *adim* were qualitatively different types of times. The *prachin* signified a temporality where signs and morals of the past accumulated as permanent civilisational effects, creating a monumental time, attached to the present. The present was established as part of this extended and cumulative temporal edifice, for historical pasts did not vanish into non-existence like time, and progressive presents were never purely instantaneous. Though it preceded the beginning of history, the *adim*, however, unlike civilisational 'origins', could neither anticipate nor generate this monumental or historical time. The *adim*, by the dictionary, meant both 'old' and 'root/cause'. But for nineteenth-century Bengali history, the *adim* did not cause civilisation by its internal logic. Instead, it continued to represent the underside of history, that eternally sterile temporality, imprisoned in the present and the immediate. As a principle of counterpoise, it seemed to pre-exist every improvement and progress in the world, but it did not possess the weight and significance of the historically prior. Rather, it was the always-already present immoral, violent, non-discriminating and purely sensuous being, in contraposition to which 'civilisation' must necessarily happen to humankind. As Bankim said, if the nation's history had to be liberated from the *kalanka* or taint of unfreedom, it had to be re-textualised, in opposition to colonial historiography, through an invocation of precisely this ever-present *adimata* in Bengal.[61]

Arguing against the conclusion that Bengalis were always historically vulnerable to conquest and subordination, to 'Muslim rule' as much as to colonial rule, Bankimchandra restated the 'fact' that unlike in northern India, Aryan occupation was a late affair in Bengal. This was a matter of some anxiety to many Bengalis, that *arya* settlement was not as *prachin* in Bengal as one would like it to be. This 'fact', however, was turned around by Bankim to show that for a long time the inhabitants of Bengal were purely *adim anaryas*. He proved that the late

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[59] Sasibhusan Mukhopadhyay, 'Ramayan o Mahabharata', *Aryavartta*, Aug-Sept 1910, pp. 352-63.
[60] R. C. Dutt, *Hindu Aryadiger Prachin Itihas*, Calcutta, 1872, p. 103.
[61] Bankimchandra, 'Bangalar Kalanka', *Prachar*, 1884.

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arrival of *aryas* in Bengal did not imply a lack of *arya* power or influence. Quoting Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology,* he showed how the wet marshy lands of Bengal were initially uninhabitable for an advanced, agricultural people like the Aryans. At the time of Muslim conquest, therefore, the relationship of the civilised *aryas* of the north to the 'primitive' *anaryas* of Bengal was analogous to the contemporary relationship of the English to India. He showed from contemporary Brahmanical texts like *Khshitishvamsabali*, how even as late as in the eleventh century, Brahmans had not arrived in Bengal, until king Adisura, also the founder of the Bengali calendar, deliberately settled a few Brahman families in this land. Even afterwards, there were very few warring *kshatriyas* or trading *vaisyas* in Bengal. Bankim also used texts like *Samayprakash* (The Time-Expresser) by the archaeologist and historian Rajendralal Mitra for elaborate calendrical calculations and to prove that until the twelfth century, historical *aryas* were almost completely absent from Bengal. Thus two accusations against Bengalis were negated at one go: one, that they were not inheritors of the north-Indian *arya* civilisation as the Rajputs and Marathas were, and two, that *aryas* in Bengal were conquered by the Muslims. For since the *aryas* had hardly arrived in Bengal till twelfth century, it must have been the *adim* 'primitives' who were actually defeated and subordinated by 'foreigners'.[62]

The 'primitive' thus became the necessary figure in colonial Bengali historiography, which explained the defeat and disunity of the colonised nation. However, it is not useful merely to say that the Bengali intelligentsia admitted evolutionary categories because they 'derived' their knowledge from colonial discourse. After all, Bengalis could not have been uaware of the perpetual temporal lag that evolutionary theory attributed to them. If they still admitted a certain form of evolutionism, it was because their claim of historicity depended on it. It is therefore necessary to understand the uneasy relationship that colonial intellectuals had with the idea of evolution. The time of progress, in this version of social change, appeared identical with the concrete becoming and evolution of an organic social entity like the nation. Time itself seemed subsidiary to the evolution of being – evolution as an automatic and concrete process perpetuated time, rather than vice-versa. Most Bengali texts in the second half of the nineteenth century, whether they discussed evolution as a principle or not, exhibited a general allegiance to this evolutionary *unnati* or improvement of the self and society. If some authors accused Darwin of making human ancestors into apes or of demonstrating an ideological cruelty by propounding 'survival of the fittest', they could not fully reject evolution as a principle of social change.[63]

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[62] Bankimchandra, 'Bange Brahmanadhikara', *Bangadarshan*, 1885..

[63] For a discussion of influence of evolutionary ideas, see D. L. Gosling, *Science and Religion in India*, Madras, 1976.

This was because the evolutionary principle provided the temporal category of the 'primitive', against which historical time was enunciated. The evolutionary principle also assured the colonised to an extent, that however constrained political practice was in the context of colonial unfreedom, things would automatically and naturally progress in time. Above all, evolutionism, paradoxically, seemed to resolve the impasse of colonialism-nationalism itself. Both the colonised and the coloniser, despite their fundamental opposition, agreed to re-locate the present as a germinal potential in the far past, thus somewhat undoing the significance of colonialism itself as a 'critical event'. Colonial histories textualised the vulnerability of India to foreign rule as an ancient and long-term 'fact'.[64] In response, the colonised textualised the nation as the ancient 'spirit' of India. Concomitantly, both the colonised and the coloniser re-discovered the self (imperial and national) and the Other (the 'oriental' and the 'primordial') in the time prior to the colonial encounter. The urgent and overwhelming nature of the colonial present was thus to a large extent placated in favour of auto-generative evolutionary time. Evolutionism, in this context, provided the mechanism by which eminently modern phenomena – the nation and the 'primitive' – could be seen to have evolved from the far past into their present form. Social Darwinism, thus, which accused the colonised of not-yet being a nation, could itself be counter-deployed to prove the embryonic presence of the nation, and its Other, from centuries before.

The evolutionary principle – that the present was not unprecedented, rather it was a reiteration of what was already present-in-the-past – was harnessed by the colonised to prove not only the pre-existence of the nation, but also the pre-existence of history as practice, and of evolutionary theory as knowledge. Thus, the tradition of incarnations of Vishnu was taken as proof of pre-existing knowledge of evolution in ancient India. *Brahmavaivartapurana* was interpreted as an explication of stages of evolution: the time of creation was life-less, silent and unformed, with the absolute presence of nothing other than pure space, time and direction. This time was followed by the time of the fish and tortoise-forms, indicating that the earth was covered by water. Then followed incarnation as the boar, who shored up the earth for the birth of terrestrial life-forms. The lion-man or Nrisimha who followed, signified the struggle between animal and human-forms; Baman indicated the not-completely erect human form of the Pliocene age; Parashuram in turn signified the perfect human-form but represented 'primitive' violence. This stage was followed by the historical emblems of Ram, Krishna and Buddha, who indicated the various stages of historical-civilisational society.[65] It was argued that the Brahmanical 'apriori method of unpacking the mystery of creation later evolved into the a

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[64] James Mill, *The History of British India*, 5th ed., London, 1858.
[65] Gyanendra Mohan Das, *Puranas and Science in the Theory of Creation*, Calcutta, 1918.

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posteriori method of contemporary scientific evolutionism'.[66] In the same way, Bankim retroactively proved the presence of 'history' in ancient India. He argued that texts currently familiar as 'scientific history' were actually the evolved form of past historical-insights.

> First the naming, vishnu from the root vish [village community]. At the second stage, metaphor – three limbs of vishnu – some say the three positions of the sun, rising, setting and perpendicular to earth, some say the omnipresence of god in three worlds, some signify past, present and future. Third, history – e.g. the narrative of balibaman [the defeat of the non-Aryan king by the baman incarnation of Aryan-god Vishnu]. Finally the exaggeration and aestheticisation of history, as in the puranas.[67]

In other words, the seeds of historical-consciousness were ever-present, just as the nation was, it only evolved in time to its present form and textuality. Evolution thus assured the presence-in-the-past of all that the colonised were accused of lacking. The Bengali middle classes were thus freed from the burden of practically creating a new world. All they needed to do was to re-present that which was always-already there, and which had been only contingently forgotten. For this purpose, what was needed was not a painstaking practice, but a sufficient knowledge of the past and an evolutionary grasp of time.

Evolutionism however, had to be contested as well. For it remained in the last instance to the advantage of the 'modern' European nations, who had had a head start in the race for unnati or improvement. The evolutionary principle, if taken to its logical extreme, also tended to collapse the fundamental counterpoise between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised', which produced the momentum of nineteenth-century Bengali history. It could be taken to imply that the civilised was not the counterpoise but only the evolved form of the 'primitive'. Thus, a 1926 Bengali text called Hindu Social Science disputed the evolutionary claim that all the civilised nations of the world had gradually emerged from the 'primitive' state. In fact, the author argued, there were much evidence to the contrary. The fact that many jatis of Africa, Australia and India, had continued for centuries to live in a 'primitive' condition proved that they were intrinsically 'primordial' and could not 'evolve' into anything else. Hindus on the other hand were never 'primitive' – even when the ancient sages chose to live in forests, by gathering rather than producing food, they represented a highly civilised and introspective state of being.[68] In any case, unlike in the West, where it was not impossible to imagine a contingent intermixing and therefore co-evolution of antagonistic social entities, the caste-system in India, it was argued, prevented any problematic overlap between the 'civilised' and the 'primitive'. After all, if the worthy and unworthy mingle in society, the average standard of virtue is pulled down and unnati jeopardised. Significantly, the Bengali usage unnati signified 'improvement' through time in the evolutionary sense, yet in the name of progress or unnati itself, the text denied the possibility of

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[66] Ibid, p.36.
[67] Bankim, 'Krishnacharitra', 1892, in Bankim Rachanavali (BR) II, ed. Jogeshchandra Bagal, Calcutta, 1954, p. 444.
[68] Kaliprasanna Dasgupta, Hindu Samaj-Vignyan, Calcutta, 1926, pp. 124-5, 131.

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the 'primitive' evolving into the 'civilised'. This shows up the indeterminate relationship of the colonised to evolutionary principles. In the course of the researches of Varendra Anusandhan Samiti, Sasadhar Ray found that Santals believed that they descended from birds and animals – from this he concluded that they were organically in contradiction to the inheritors of civilisation.[69]

Thus, the evolutionary principle which had to be retained for the sake of national progress, had, at the same time, to be contradicted. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay disputed the colonial accusation, that the *puranas* were not historical but metaphorical narrations, by criticising what he called the 'mistaken metaphor' of Western evolutionism. To equate society to an organism was to erroneously imply that society must acquire nourishment from without. Bhudev argued that social vitality must be internally generated, which made historical temporality fundamentally different from the life-cycle of organisms.

> So, if one must use a metaphor, one should understand society as a divine body rather than as an organism. The former has no origin, no end and similarly no one can speak with certainty about the beginnings of a society. Just as divinity is ever youthful, so is society ... just as deities have their respective locations, each society continues to live by their singular root-foundation.[70]

In other words, societies cannot be classified as a species sharing a common evolutionary stage. Instead, one must recognise that each particular nation is marked by a singular temporality, a 'root foundation'. According to Bhudev, the foundation of Western history was the substratum of a unitary Graeco-Roman civilisation, overdetermined by 'barbaric' peoples. Indian history on the contrary, rested on a fragmented matrix of various *anarya*, 'primitive' peoples, overdetermined and unified by the *arya* civilisational and conceptual apparatus.[71] Therefore, though Europe was basically a cultural unity, it was continuously embroiled in cruel wars, while India, with a social fabric foundationally split into 'primitive' and 'civilised', still retained peace. In this paradigm, practice – of war in Europe and of peace in India – were derivative not of their respective evolutionary stages, but of the 'original' configuration of the 'primitive' and the 'historical' in their respective societies. The original configuration of the Indian nation, to Bhudev, was the structural subordination of the restless 'primitive' elements by the unitary and stable, conceptual mind, while that of Europe was the opposite.

The history of the nation, therefore, was characterised by the historical subject, the *aryas,* successfully and literally 'locking-in' the 'primitives' into islandic locations, 'where the land [was] infertile, paths mountainous, the earth forested , human stores empty of wealth'.[72] Located

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[69] Sasadhar Ray, *Manav-Samaj,* Calcutta, 1913, p. 65.
[70] Bhudev, 'Samajik Prabandha', 1892, in *Bhudev Rachanavali,* ed. Pramath Bishi, Calcutta, 1957, p. 46.
[71] Ibid., pp. 114-15.
[72] Bankimchandra, 'Anarya', *Bangadarshan, magh,* 1880.

in sterile lands, and hidden from even each other in forests, crevices and hills – the 'primitive' could never emerge as an identity like the Aryan.[73] Bengali historical discourse thus admitted the antecedence of the 'primitive', only as a temporal position to be conquered and besieged, as fertile plains were salvaged from unproductive 'tribes' for the sake of civilisation and cultivation. The 'primordial' continued to be present even in the historical period, as the counter-reason to progress, but remained landlocked, so to speak, surrounded by territories of civilisation – a spatial surrounding which by itself was the evidence, to the Bengali writers of history, of the real and moral subordination of 'dark' 'aborigines'. Admittedly, traditional Brahmanical texts too distanced lands 'other' than that of *Aryavarta* as morally inferior and contaminating. However, this moral exclusion did not make geographical distinction symmetrical to a temporal distinction. These texts sought to banish not only 'forest-people' but even Aryans like *yavanas, mlecchas* or Muslims and *vratya kshatriyas* to impure and infertile lands. Even the Bible was interpreted in this paradigm, as an acknowledgement that non-Hindus were originally exiled, that Adam and Eve lived naked in an otherwise uninhabited 'forest'.[74] The lesson of colonial-modern ethnography, however, was that those who lived in another land, also inhabited another time. That space and time were parameters which mutually signified each other, was an insight borrowed by the authors of Bengali history like Bankim from Western philosophy. In this paradigm, the Aryans embodied the monumental temporality of history and the spatial permanence of the *settled* village site, as the 'primitive' non-Aryans remained banished to unproductive lands and sterile times, living a sporadic, restless and nomadic life.[75]

This colonial concept of the undisturbed, Asiatic village-community was reinvented by Bengali historians, who argued that the real history of India was not the restless ephemerality of politics and regimes, but the unperturbed continuity of restful villages.[76] The refined and unchanged Sanskritic names of Indian villages proved that they were constructed during the height of *arya* glory.[77] Even though colonial officials sometimes argued that the 'unbroken' village-community could be found only amongst 'aborigines' like Santals, Bengali middle classes claimed that the settled site of the village was an 'original' Aryan achievement, imitated only later by neighbouring 'primitives'.[78] The village was turned into a metaphor of permanence, in contrast to the violent, nomadic and hunting 'primordials'. This permanence signified the

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[73] Bankimchandra, 'The Two Lineages of the Anarya: Dravid and Kol', *Bangadarshan, phalgun*, 1880.

[74] Nanda Kumar Kaviratna, *Sandeha Nirasana,* Calcutta, 1863, pp. 33-64.

[75] E. B. Havell, *The History of Aryan Rule in India*, London, 1918, pp. 10-11.

[76] This position was taken up by the editors and contributors of the first specialised historical journal in Bengali, which started in nineteenth century with an introduction by Rabindranath Thakur, and became somewhat regularised in the early twentieth. It was called *Aitihasik Chitra* or *Pictures from History*.

[77] 'Samalochana', *Aryavartta*, July-Aug, 1910.

[78] 'Pallisamaj', *Aryadarshan*, I: 8, *agrahayan*, 1874, pp. 359-60.

concretion and inscription of monumental time, traces of the past indelibly imprinted on the always-already present territory of the nation. It was this sense of permanence that made archaeological remains the best visual, because spatial, evidence of history in the perception of the early twentieth-century Bengali historian. Rajnarayan Basu, the well-known Brahmo intellectual who often spent his holidays in the forested retreat of Deoghar in Santal Parganas, unhesitatingly claimed in 1865, that 'primitives' like the Santals did not possess historical time because they had no permanent presence on the land: 'only *aryas* have a right to permanent works, uncivilised *jatis* may show momentary courage but they dissipate like the storm'.[79]

Chronology and geography: the spatial imperative of historical time

In Bengali middle-class discourse, therefore, the foundational split between the 'primitive' and the 'historical' was conflated with the division of space between productive and sterile lands, and with the bifurcation of time between the cumulative/monumental continuum of civilisation and the sporadic/dissipated existence of the non-Aryan. Underlying this spatial-temporal configuration, was the emerging idea of historical chronology as an abstract, spatialised site, which contained and gathered various incommensurable time-reckonings. Since the 1820s, colonial officials in India were undertaking extensive tabulations of various local modes of temporalisation. For the sake of administrative unity of the empire, a system of equivalence of time, across all localities and occasions, had become necessary. Colonial officials accepted that the existing systems of time-reckoning in India were complex and indeed accurate, resting 'on the immense scope of its cycles and the vast intervals of its epochs... expressed in natural numbers and amounting in some cases to thirteen places of figures'.[80] A new system was needed therefore, not for greater accuracy, but for the sake of a general calendrical consensus. Even if it might be more accurate to avoid, like the Bengali calendar, a purely numerical averaging of months, it was more convenient, stable and universal 'to give to the months an arbitrary but permanent duration'. [81]

The colonial context, of transition from local to universal calendars, which favoured inter-commensurability over accuracy, required the rejection and reconfiguration of 'traditional' modes of time-reckoning in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Bengal. On the one hand, the Orientalist scholars of the Asiatic Society of Bengal rejected the elaborate and complex time-

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[79] Rajnarayan Basu 'The Origin and Spread of the Aryans', *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, *bhadra*, 1865.
[80] Warren, *Kala Sankalita*, p. xi.
[81] Ibid.

cycles of the Hindu *shastras*, as strategies reinvented by Bengalis to attribute an exaggerated antiquity to their own past.[82] On the other hand, scholars and missionaries attempted to reconstruct Hindu time-cycles as synonymous to the chronology of Christian history, thus transforming chronology from a succession of particular events to the parameter of truth in itself: 'when the apparently same event is placed by different nations at epochs the most remote from each other ... it is a natural inference that one or all the narrations are unfounded.'[83] The 'remarkable and exact analogy' of Hindu and Christian times proved chronology to be a universal fact, based on natural and 'original' events like the deluge, which were common to all nations.

> The world and nations, with their ever repeated changes of form and fashion, of renewal and age, of progress and decline, constantly suggest the parallel of day and night, of sleep and waking, of life and death; and the facilities which figures afford for intricate problems and solutions, exercised their ingenuity and capacity for complicated and extensive ranges of thought and calculation, upon these analogies.[84]

Once this universal and 'natural' foundation of time was established, chronology became free of the events which it dated, as if making sense even if the events listed had not occurred. Chronology thus achieved the nature of a vessel that pre-existed its filling. In other words, even before geology (and evolutionary theories) fully replaced theology as the ground for the imagination of time in Europe, by the end of the eighteenth-century, historical chronology had already acquired the nature of space. The colonial world-order required that distant but co-existing societies become commensurable and aggregable, in order to allow exchange and accumulation. As C. P. Brown, who analysed pre-colonial modes of time-reckoning in southern India, tellingly said – India lacked neither accurate astronomical calculations of time, nor genealogical and political records. What it lacked was the ability to see time and succession as identical, i.e. it lacked history: '[w]e find lists of years alone, and lists of rajas alone; if the two are connected , it is so mysteriously.'[85]

We have already noted that nineteenth-century Bengali almanacs too had to provide a similar structure of equivalence across different time-reckonings. However, they continued to articulate time, not as a chronology pre-existing events and acts, but as acts of the body, as *nimesha* (the twinkling of the eye), as *matra* (metres and rhythms of utterence), as *pran* (a full breath) or as the subtlest moment of piercing a single lotus leaf with a needle.[86] Despite the fact that both historical chronology and Brahmanical time-reckoning used numbers, they remained

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[82] See the discussions on Hindu astronomy and chronology by John Bentley, William Jones, Francis Wilford, S. Davies and H. T. Colebrooke, in O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past 1784-1838,* Delhi, 1988, pp. 85-88.
[83] Alexander Hamilton, *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus,* Cambridge, 1820, p. x.
[84] S. R. Bosanquet, *Hindu Chronology and Antediluvian History,* London, 1880, p. 23.
[85] C. P. Brown, *Carnatic Chronology: The Hindu and Mahommedan Methods of Reckoning Time Explained,* London, 1868, Preface.
[86] *Madhavchandrasuryasiddhanta Nutan Panjika,* 1868-9, p. 43.

fundamentally different. Chronology imagined time a priori as numbers and Bengali almanacs saw time as post-facto enumerable. In the nineteenth-century, almanac-writers were becoming increasingly anxious about the need to 'update' their system of time-reckoning. The Bangiya Brahmansabha Panjika Committee argued that the Western system based time-calculation on the shifting position of the sun relative to the earth, i.e. on a non-fixed original point. Hindu astronomy on the contrary, rested on the fixity of a star in the sky. This *dhruva* or fixed cosmic point was the foundation of Hindu religious work, and could not be morally or philosophically replaced by a shifting reference-point in space. Most scholars therefore advised a practical adaptation of the numerals, though not the theoretical presuppositions, of the Christian calendar. *Prasna-Mimamsa* however tellingly argued that it was no longer plausible to deny the primary advantage of the Western system, which assured, by its 'emphasis on the earth's equator', *drik-tulyata* or comparability of visions and directions. The text therefore advised the bracketing off of unreformed *nirayan* time, to be used solely for 'internal' religious purposes, and the adaptation *in toto* of the Western *navigational* calendar, which fixed time-zones according to longitudes, and which facilitated cartography and travel across the world. It was by navigational time that all *pratyaksha*, i.e. visible/external/public affairs should be conducted.[87] The acceptance of the spatial intent of time was thus complete, even by the most conservative of the Bengali *brahman sabhas*.

In colonial Bengal, thus, we see glimpses of a self-aware transition to a spatialised time. In earlier traditions of *darshan*, one of the main philosophical errors that was sought to be avoided was the error of conceptualising time as symmetrical or even analogous to space. Even the Jaina school – which propounded an atomistic conception of time and which accepted that, like space, time too had *pradesa* or extension – distinguished time from other substances on the ground that the atoms of time could not be combined.[88] Time could be traced only in one direction, while space, and everything else, could be read in both. However, with the emergence of historical chronology as a space-like container category, independent of events and acts, time became a series of autonomous numbers, which could be synoptically viewed from both ends, forward and backward. It was in this time, analytically indifferent to the direction of its reading, that the past seemed, on principle, knowable and the future, with improved knowledge, predictable. It was also in this indifferent, space-like, abstract time that different worlds could be re-positioned as non-contemporary entities, their simultaneity replaced by mere spatial congruence.

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[87] Satkari Chattopadhyay, *Prasna-mimamsa*, Calcutta, 2nd ed, 1916, pp. 4-11.
[88] Anindita Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 79.

It was this neutralisation of time into a space-like site that permitted Bengali historical discourses to position and invoke both the 'primitive' *anarya* and the 'historical' *arya* within the same location of the nation. It was not accidental that many of the earliest Bengali textualisations of the nation combined history and geography in the same narration. In 1840, Surroop Chund Doss offered the comprehensive text *Sundesabally or the History of India, as regards the Geographical Description of all Principalities.*[89] And Sourindramohan Thakur's *Narrative of Events of History and Geography* revealed the mutual authentication performed by the study of the chronological past and the study of the always-already present land.[90] Even purely historical texts emphasised in their advertisements that the 'study of history [was] entirely relative (*sapeksha*) to the knowledge of geography'; that historical events could not be 'memorised' without the help of latitudes and longitudes marking the place of their occurrence.[91] It was presumed that the historical spirit of the nation could be seen mirrored in its territory. In 1869, *The Mirror of Bengal* described the nation as a rolling fertile plain, whose inhabitants were 'pleasant in appearance, intelligent, polite, virtuous and hospitable though lazy, weak and not so courageous ... who [could] acquire knowledge faster than any other jati'.[92]

> India is a large land ... a microcosm of the entire world. Treeless, ugly rocky and grassy lands can be seen too in the land of the *aryas*. But if you travel through India you shall mostly see endless plains covered in lush green crops, leafy trees full of fruits and flowers and far travelling rivers. It is mostly this that you can envision.[93]

Thus, the nation was primarily a fertile and bountiful land, enabling people to work less and think more, though, as *Bangadesher Vivaran* admitted in 1869, the western parts of Bengal were hilly and peopled by 'primitives' and remained a somewhat 'inferior' locale relative to the national average.[94] It was in terms of geography then, which mirrored the history of the nation, that historical time admitted the presence of the 'primitive'.[95] The 'primitive', as we have already demonstrated, was needed by the nation in order to conceptualise the 'origin' of historical-civilisational time in colonial Bengal, though history itself, by its own self-definition, could not thematise this internal 'primitive' presence. Therefore, geography was conceptualised as an essential adjunct to the writing of history, because geography, unlike history, could perform classificatory and aggregative functions across incommensurable social times. Geography texts,

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[89] Calcutta, 1840, pp. 288-90.

[90] *Itihas o Bhugol Ghatita Vrittanta*, Calcutta, 2nd ed, 1877.

[91] This was one of the more popular school books which ran into many editions and reprints. Ramgati Nyayratna, *Outlines of the History of India* , Hoogly, 3rd ed, 1876, advertisement printed at the beginning of the book.

[92] Ramkamal Chattopadhyay, *Bangadarpan*, Calcutta, 1869, p. 27.

[93] Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay, *Bhugolvivaran*, Krishnanagar, 9th ed., 1862, p. 20.

[94] Dinanath Sen, Dacca, 1869, p. 69, 128-29.

[95] One can make a long list of texts that count these uncivilised jatis as part of the national geography. One school text defines the scope of its geography as 'the land where Bengalis reside is called Bengal' and then goes on to list *jatis* like the Santals, Shyama Charan Chattopadhyay, *Bhugolankura*, Dacca, 2nd ed., 1862, pp. 7-8. Another extremely popular school text that ran into almost twenty editions, gives an elaborate description of the dark, long-haired, beardless Santals, who are carefully

written as tables of administrative districts, peoples, languages, religions and resources, were therefore common in colonial Bengal and provided the differentiated ground, upon which a unitary historical time could be constructed.[96]

That geography assumed the historical task of thematising the complex concept of 'civilisation' was partly the result of colonial theories of environmental determinism. H. T. Buckle's *History of Civilisation in Engand* influenced many Bengali historical works of the nineteenth-century, including R. C. Dutt's *A History of Civilisation in Ancient India*, which sought to displace the blame of India's decline from historical causes to the limiting conditions of nature and climate.[97] Harimohan Mukhopadhyay's *Bhuvrittanta, i.e. Natural, Practical and Mathematical Accounts of the Geography of the World* classified nations along temporal stages. The text demonstrated that while the *banya* or wild forest-people often failed to reproduce themselves, violently destroying each other and remaining imprisoned in immediate acts of survival, the fully civilised nations like England and America exhibited complete knowledge and complete freedom. 'Almost-civilised' nations like India also demonstrated knowledge and trade, but confined them amongst a few. This text eulogised geographical enterprise and narrated stories of Western voyages of 'discovery', where the civilised faced challenges and even death at the hands of 'wild' people.[98] Such texts seem to have been popular as school-books, and this particular 'comprehensive' geography published in 1868 had more than ten editions by 1876. It is important to remember, however, that these Bengali texts of geography cannot be absolutely reduced to a Bucklean sensibility. In colonial discourse, the identity between the hierarchy of lands and the hierarchy of times produced history and geography/ethnology as two separate disciplines which flourished, literally, in two distinct spatial sites. History became the consciousness of the self, grounded in Europe and ethnology became the consciousness of the Other, in evidence in the rest of the world. While it can be shown that history and ethnology drew legitimacy and evidence from each other, their formal bifurcation permitted an apparent export of the non-present times of the 'primitive' and the 'archaic' to other lands, thus keeping the time of the historical subject in Europe pure and uncontaminated. The discourse of the colonised, however, remained sharply conscious of the impossibility of this purification, it had to admit the presence of the 'primitive' within the nation itself.

described as a distinct lineage from that of the Hindus, Sasibhusan Chatterjee, *Descriptive Geography of India with a Detailed Account of Bengal*, Calcutta, 14th ed., 1876, p. 1, 39

[96] For instance, Banga Charan Chanda, *Bhugol Ratnakara*, Calcutta, 1868.

[97] Pauline Rule, *The Pursuit of Progress*, Calcutta, 1977, p. 101. Also see David Arnold, 'India's Place in the Tropical World', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, XXVI: 1, 1998, pp. 15-16.

[98] Harimohan Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1868, p. 14.

Middle-class historical consciousness, therefore, continued to be marred in colonial Bengal by an irresoluble tension between the sense of the subject-self and the sense of the 'primitive' but proximate Other. Writing a 'history of civilisation', Srikrishna Das admitted: 'travel to the interior villages of Bengal, and you will see that the *adim kal* is present again'.[99] In the context of this tension, the idea of progress appeared as much as a sense of developmental time as a project of spatial traversing, which sought to trace, integrate and overdetermine temporal differences by historical identity. Rather than permitting progress to fully extinguish the past and the 'primitive' as in the 'New World' of the Americas, progress in Bengal appeared as a lengthy journey, which began with encountering the 'primordial' *anarya* and ended with encountering the English trader. The nation thus manifested, in its interiority, the full journey of progress – displaying all the stages of world-history, from the most 'primitive' to the most 'modern'. Progress became crucial as that sensibility of passage and excursion which could signify both a territorial and a temporal imperative. The next chapter discusses this idea of travel as mode and metaphor of tracing the nation. Here it is sufficient to refer to a statement by R. C. Dutt: 'Just as while travelling on a highway one comes upon a milestone periodically to show how far one has progressed, after every five or six or eight centuries comes an age of progress to show how far human society has travelled'.[100] Dutt's metaphor of milestones does not suggest a sense of passing time and vanishing moments, rather it hints at a long path, which even though already traversed cannot be erased, a path which remains as a concrete, permanently present trace of what would have otherwise been merely memory. In this path of progress, the 'primitive' continues to survive even in the time of history, and can be sighted and befriended – as much in the time of Ram's epic progress to the south as in the time of Dutt's railway journeys to 'historical' sites of the north.

Biographies and caste-histories : the subject versus time

Yet, as the nation's history became symmetrical to the internally differentiated landscape of the nation, displaying all the stages of civilisation, the colonised appeared dissipated and lost in an uproductive plenitude of local identities, vulnerable to the divide-and-rule tactics of the foreign rulers. Pyarichand Mitra, the eminent social satirist, found that only 'primitive' *jatis* like the Santals displayed an undifferentiated unity, while civilised Indians were always bickering amongst themselves.[101] The question of unity, which haunted the Bengali middle classes in the

[99] Srikrishna Das, *Sabhyatar Itihas I*, Calcutta, 1876, p. 85.
[100] R. C. Dutt, 'Unnatir Jug', *Sadhana, chaitra*, 1892.
[101] *Abhedi*, Calcutta, 1892, pp. 1-2.

nineteenth century, was thus set forth more sharply as a historical question in counterpoise to 'primitive' communities. Bengali historical discourse went to great lengths to prove that though 'tribes' showed great solidarity, they were intrinsically *asabhya* or unfit for *sabhas* or regulated assemblies. This was because the unity demonstrated by the 'primitive' was not a historical unity. 'Primordial' unity was inert and sterile, unable to harness the passage of time. As nomads, 'primitives' failed to grasp the virtues of 'domesticity' and cultivation, i.e. they could not comprehend the world as products caused by their own labour. And without this consciousness of causality, 'primordial' unity, even as it created an immediate solidarity, was incapable of anticipating and causing a rational and plausible future.[102] To Akshaykumar Datta, historian and the one-time editor of *Tattovodhini Patrika*, 'primordiality' was a temporal stage where there was as yet no correspondence between human propensities and natural laws. This was a time when humankind was still unable to ascertain historical practice through the mutual articulation of social causalities and individual rationalities, and therefore still without the right to enjoy the world.[103] Bhudev Mukhopadhyay said:

> [T]he *adim* times of no nation can be recovered. ... Whichever the nation, if you investigate its history, you will find that before the *jati* which inhabits it currently arrived here, there was another *jati* occupying the land. If the earlier *jati* has a history, you will see that there was yet another earlier one who was replaced by it. This *jati* has no history ... But what is the proof then that they are the original inhabitants of that land?[104]

In other words, if a nation had a history, it could not have been 'primordial'. On the other hand, if there was no history, there was no verifiable proof of either 'primordiality' or 'unity'. The 'originality' and 'unity' of the 'primitive', though evident, was therefore neither historically true nor historically thematisable. 'Primitive' solidarity was therefore redundant in contexts of historicity. Like infancy, beyond the grasp of memory and recall, 'primordiality' could only be retold by a transcendental, parental subject – by the historical author who, to acquire historical consciousness, would have already renounced the unity of the 'primordial'.[105]

In contrast to the unproductive and inanimate unity of the 'primordial', was the unity of the historical subject, a conceptual unity which rested beyond the vicissitudes of time and politics. This ideal, historical unity demonstrated the coherence of an individual biography, as each historically self-conscious individual emerged as a metonymn of the nation's destiny as a whole. It was not incidental therefore, that nineteenth-century Bengal saw the publication of innumerable 'exemplary and instructive biographies'.[106] Though sometimes these were biographies of the famous and the exceptional, most biographies consciously thematised

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[102] 'Sabhyatar Itihas', *Aryadarshan, jaistha*, 1874, pp. 93-94.
[103] *Bahya Vastur Sange Manav Prakitir Sambandha Vichar*, Calcutta, 1851, pp. 14-26.
[104] Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, *Puravrittasar*, Hugli, 1867, p. 15.
[105] *Jagater Balya Itihas: an adaptation of Edward Claude's Childhood of the World*, Calcutta, 1875, p. 67.
[106] E. g. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, *Charitabali*, Calcutta, 2nd ed., 1857.

character-traits which were not extraordinary, i.e. which were amenable to being popularised and normalised as common or national virtues. Thus, Napoleon Bonaparte and Catherine the Great were characterised less by royalty than by determination and humanism. Napoleon demonstrated the possibility of rising to power from an obscure and poverty-stricken past, and Catherine of Russia displayed her devotion to her father and husband.[107] In this direction, numerous Bengali civil servants, landlords and teachers had their biographies published, often in their own lifetime and often at their own initiative. Even obituaries were published and circulated as 'instructive' biographies.[108] The best instance of this conflation of national history and individual biography was the text *Ramtanu Lahiri and Contemporary Bengali Society*, which remains till today one of the most 'authentic' sources on colonial Bengal for historians. The biographer, Sibnath Shastri, accepted that Ramtanu Lahiri was not as famous as some of his own friends, and that it was precisely because of his 'ordinariness' that he was the best historical representation of the exemplary nature of the nineteenth-century Bengali context.[109]

A biography published by the Self-Improvement Sabha of Andul, a small Bengali town, argued in 1893 that educationists and professionals of nineteenth-century Bengal were *kshanajanmas* or born at the right moment. Like the ancient Indian visionaries Valmiki and Agastya, these modern Bengalis envisioned and embodied the unfolding of history in their very lifetime. The founder of the English-medium school in Andul was an unknown individual, yet being a *kshanajanma*, his personal charities and griefs represented the benevolence and the suffering of the nation as a whole.[110] An 1864 school-text argued that biographies and histories were 'writings' of the same mode, differing only in scale.[111] An 1870 school-text could not have been clearer about the metonymic relation of the individual lifetime to the nation's history :

> The individual is like the face of the jati. Therefore in the progress of the embodied individual is the progress of the jati .... Doubtless, changes have occurred in collectivities through rules and legislations, but real progress is within the beings of the people of the regime.[112]

Unlike 'primitive' solidarity, which left no space for individual and future-oriented *unnati* or improvement, historical unity was based on the improvement of the individual. Each individual was the mirror of the nation, and each individual lent his personal virtues to the totality. The historical characteristics of a nation could therefore be formulated in terms of human vices and

[107] Ibid.; also see, Dwarakanath Bhattacharya, *Story of Catherine, Empress of Russia*, Calcutta, 1860.
[108] See for instance the collection of obituaries by Girishchandra Deb, Calcutta, 1870.
[109] Sibnath Sastri, *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, Calcutta, 1903.
[110] Avinashchandra Chakravarty, *Yogendra Jivani*, Calcutta, 1893, introduction.
[111] Gopalchandra Banerjee, *Sikshapranali*, Calcutta, 1864, p. 258.
[112] Somnath Mukhopadhyay, *Sikshapadhati*, Dacca, 1870, p. 33.

virtues – self-sufficiency, hard work and character could mark a nation as much as it could constitute an individual.[113]

If history was the biography of the nation, its subject-author appeared singular and self-contained, as if held within the same body. This was the unity of the soul or spirit, which remained unchanged and undistorted through time, through deaths, declines and even progress. It was this extra-temporality, rather than 'primordiality', which produced historical unity. As Purnachandra Basu wrote, it was only limited knowledge which made time appear as succession and God appear as *trikalagnya*, the knower of past-present-future. With perfect knowledge, however, reality is demystified, the illusion of time disappears, and prophecy and prediction become redundant as everyday, practical necessities. The subject-author of history must therefore strive, in principle, towards this completion of knowledge, which shows up the past and the future as equally present and continuous to being.[114] This timelessness of the subject-author could be variously named – it could be the Upanishad's self-evident and formless *parambrahma*, it could be the scientist's First Cause, or it could well be the Positivist's Ultimate Reality.[115] Rakhaldas Banerjee, the historian and the archaeologist who excavated the Indus Valley civilisation, formulated the historical author-subject as analogous to a 'rock'. This rock, created at the very instant of the creation of the world, displayed changes in form – as it was excavated from the earth, carried to the city, carved into a temple and so forth. Yet it remained always-already present as the timeless witness of history, who proclaimed, 'I have no idea of Time'. It was by virtue of this unbreachable presence before and beyond time, that the rock could envision the inauguration of history itself: 'it was by way of the war of the dark primitive and the fair *arya* that I first witnessed the light of fire'.[116]

This 'eternal' or the *sanatan* subjectivity remained uncontaminated by the time wherein conflict and colonialism occurred. The 1911 text called *Sanatani*, favourably reviewed in various Bengali magazines including the *Aryavarta*, stated that it was an error to assume that change was the essence of history. Though movement was universal, it was the axis of motion, the identity of the subject, which in the last instance, could make sense out of random and endless transformations. The axis of Indian history was *karma*, or indifference to the fruits of one's own labour. And this indifference, around which time surged, neutralised the contradictions through which history unfolded. *Sanatani* admitted that the Indian past was indeed a history of conflict

[113] Prasad Das-Goswami *Amader Samaj*, Srirampur, 1895, p. 4.
[114] 'Adrishtabad', *Aryadarshan*, I: 5, *bhadra*, 1874, pp. 201-05.
[115] 'Philosophy: Atma', *Aryavartta*, June-July 1910, pp. 278-81.
[116] Rakhaldas Bandopadhyay, 'Pashaner Katha: the Account of a Rock', *Aryavartta* I: 2, May-June 1910, pp. 90-100.

between the 'primitives' and the 'civilised', yet the spirit of the nation, once grasped as extra-temporal, could elevate the subject to a state of non-conflictual 'permanence':

> [I]n this *prachin* society, when all around *asur*, *dasyu* and monsters prevented the principle of the household, life was indeed conflict; afterwards when the influence of *rakshashas* was strong, life was a struggle too. Even in the youth of society, when external enemies were almost all annihilated, terrible conflicts existed amongst ourselves. But now we have great peace in India ... In place of the horse-sacrificing world of conquest we have arrived at the household stage of the un-indebted, domesticated family man, why should our life be conflictual?[117]

This ability of the nation to transcend time itself was centred in the phenomenon of caste. *Sanatani*, a clearly Brahmanical text, claimed that caste was less a mark of hierarchy than a sign of temporal resolution. Since caste fixed the position and potential of each Hindu at the very moment of his/her birth, it freed the individual from the anxiety of continuous temporal calculations and predictions. In the colonial context of chaotic change, it was caste which stabilised time and the aporetic everyday, and permitted the Hindu to overdetermine temporal contradictions by an internalised sense of a unified society, a society which prophesied the future of each individual biography, right at the moment of birth and origin.[118] If, as in the Brahmanical imaginary, the four original castes or *varnas* were actually parts of the divine body of Brahma, stratified Hindu society could simulate a oneness of body and the subject of history could appear as singular and embodied, like the subject of biography.

Caste therefore emerged as a particularly useful category of temporal resolution in Bengali discourse. As Susan Bayly shows, in colonial discourse, caste was constructed less as a social or religious or Hindu system of hierarchy than as an indicator of races and ethnic shades constituting the Indian population.[119] The Bengali middle-classes utilised this colonial-ethnological use of caste as a category, in order to resolve the contradictory temporalities of the 'primitive' and the 'historical', which tended to split the nation asunder. Caste performed as a double-edged concept. When required, it could separate and counterpoise the 'primitive' to the 'civilised'. It could also make them appear, when necessary, as part of the same synchronic structure, in order to prevent the nation from becoming temporally schizophrenic. Thus, the *Kayasthpurana* distinguished the 'aborigines' from the *sudras*. *Sudras* were originally Aryans, who contingently lost their status owing to fallen *samskara*-s or social habits. The 'aborigines' on the other hand were always opposed to the Aryans as a 'race', with no sense of practical specialisation or moral discrimination, who never cared about what what work they did, where they lived and what they ate. 'Aborigines', therefore, could never be expected to progress through improved and discretionary *samskara* and were ossified in time and eternally outside

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[117] Akshay Chandra Sarkar, *Sanatani*, Calcutta, 1911, pp. 52-5, 135-36.
[118] Ibid., p. 80.
[119] 'Caste and "Race" in the Colonial Ethnography of India', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb, Delhi, 1995.

history.[120] Bankimchandra on the other hand, went to great lengths to develop the concept of Aryanisation, to prove that *anaryas* could be made to adopt not only the language but even the religious *samskara*-s of the *aryas*, though it remained evident by their appearance that they were originally 'primitives'. He pointed out that the *jungli coolies* who were originally Santals were now all Hindus. Even though Muslims and Christians could not be reproduced as Hindus, because they had already assumed another historical trajectory, the non-yet-historical 'primitives' remained amenable to historicisation through Hinduisation.[121] And since the caste-system allowed simultaneous inclusion and segregation, the historical could escape excessive proximity to the 'primitives' and yet admit them into the unified nation.[122]

Yet, since the very intent of the *arya-anarya* counterpoise was temporal, spatial and structural strategies of national integration were bound to remain inadequate. As the Aryan and the non-Aryan were reproduced in colonial Bengal as the 'historical' and the 'primitive', their non-contemporaneity subverted all discursive attempts at narrating the *arya* and the *arya* as either structurally congruous (caste) or spatially adjacent (geography). It is significant therefore, that some nineteenth-century caste-histories translated the *arya-anarya* counterpoise in terms of political economy, exposing the colonial/capitalist logic underlying the configuration of castes in terms of temporalities of social practice. An 1875 Bengali text, thus, etymologically traced the noun *arya* to the Sanskrit root-verb *ri*, indicating the practical 'competence to acquire wealth'. In this paradigm, it were the agriculturist and the trader who were the 'original' Aryans. The Aryan was special, neither because he was a cerebral *brahman*, nor because he was a valiant *kshatriya* – but because he had the foresight to produce *surplus* wealth. The Aryan, 'one who made profits', thus implied a progressive and enterprising person who had the foresight to think of accumulation for the future.

> Agricultural production needs a sophistication and cerebrality from which trade evolves.... It is through agriculture that beast-like propensities have been replaced by divine tendencies in humans. If the *aryas* had not opened the door of progress called cultivation, all men in this world would have spent their lives in forests infested with deadly animals, wearing nothing except arms.[123]

By this logic, not only 'tribes' like the Santals but even low-castes like Doms and Hadis, otherwise accepted as Hindus, appeared as 'primitive' and therefore as superfluous to the nation, because of their inability to produce surplus.[124]

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[120] Sasibhusan Nandi, *Kayasthpurana II*, Bhabanipur, 1881, pp. 136-37.
[121] Bankimchandra, 'Bangalir Utpatti: Aryikaran', *Bangadarshan, chaitra*, 1880
[122] Bankimchandra, 'Bangalir Utpatti: Anarya Bangali Jati', *Bangadarshan, baisakh*,1881.
[123] Shyamlal Sen Munshi, *Jatitattva Viveka*, Barisal, 1875, pp. 19-20.
[124] Ibid., p. 58.

The future-perfect : dream-histories and the 'primitive'

As the 'primitive' and the 'historical' became irrevocably non-contemporaneous, antagonistic not only in cultural but also in political economic terms, Bengali historical discourse dreamed of an alternate temporal plane where identity could be imagined. It was this imperative which gave rise in colonial Bengal to the genre called 'dream-histories'. For it was only in dream-time, that the subject could both be timeless and yet be able to harness the eminently temporal logic of practically hastening a better future. Dream-time emerged as the site wherein the nation – marked not only by an intrinsic temporal lag but also by the internally present 'primitive' – could finally capture its perpetually deferred identity. The first issue of *Aryadarshan*, edited by Jogendranath Bandopadhyay as a journal of recall and commemoration of the national past, introduced itself through a poem about a historical dream:

> *Arya*! Oh blind youth, you dream in your nights sleep
> Go back to sleep so you can hear again
> That honeyed name ...
> If it is not a dream – the name that sank in the depths of time,
> ...
> 'History'! Oh disbelief, history is not a sea of guesses!
> Does your history say this, this very one is the land of *Aryas*?
> Could this be true? [125]

These 'dream histories' sought to utter all that disciplined histories could not. They recalled the past, not as it really was, but as that which could or ought to have been. Such 'dream histories' had nothing to do with sleep or with the unconscious – such dreams were more often than not provoked by alert and wakeful contemplation of empirical history. The dreams were clearly remembered afterwards, and generalised through systematic publication. Dreaming was a mode of re-capturing not only what was forgotten in wakefulness, but what was unrepresentable in the form of chronological succession. Thus Rajnarayan Basu, while contemplating the contemporary history of Bengal with its modern amenities but with its necessary unfreedom, claimed to have dreamt up a bright and clear vision of the Pala regime of Bengal. Circumventing the present, these memories directly led to the 'dream future' – when Bengal was completely free, and had overtaken England in progress. The people of England had begun imitating the Bengalis, wearing the *dhuti* despite the chill in the air. Most had accepted Hinduism, many from fear that they might otherwise be mocked as pagan and rustic. In place of economic classes, English society was now stratified in terms of religion and knowledge, and the king of Bengal had

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[125] 'Abataranika', *Aryadarshan*, I: 1, *baisakh*, 1874.

consecrated English philosophers as white-island Brahmans.[126] Though this dream-reality was never present, except as a potential, and therefore was unrepresentable, it was nevertheless a real though abandoned dimension of the past. The dream could therefore be legitimately enunciated as history.

These seemingly 'absurd' possibilities, recorded as rare visions of enlightenment, were no less 'actual' than the empirical. Dreams possessed an ethical imperative, for dreams did not lie, at least they could not lie in the way that consciously fabricated narratives, including histories, could. Dreamt in the isolation of sleep or of lonely contemplation, these dreams could be dreamt without fear and could be written by anybody and everybody who dared to transgress the given limits of the present. Thus, however impossible it might seem that a Bengali woman could generate high philosophy, such possibilities became available to her in her dreams. The authenticity of what she wrote lay not so much in the legitimacy of her authorship, as in the intrinsic truth and honesty of dreams.[127] It was only in the form of dreams that one could write about the bloodless war by Bengalis who, tired of their clerical routine, gathered bamboos from the Bengal and Assam forests, made them into spray-tubes and scattering chilli-water, defeated the entire colonial army.[128] The 'truth' of dreams was thus harnessed against the 'truth' of facts. In the colonial present, where truth was submerged in the conflict of many opinions, in the dazzle of novelty and above all in the limiting experience of unfreedom, truth could only be activated by a release of 'imagination' from the prison of representation and mimesis, i.e. from the prison of reality. (Significantly this formulation is quite the opposite of contemporary historiographical essays, which argued that Indian authors failed to write history because they suffered from an excess of poetic and mythical imagination.) Dwijendranath Thakur, in the early twentieth century, wrote how imagination had been suppressed by the over-use of irony in nineteenth-century historical thought. So he withdrew into dreams to find the true path that ran precariously through antagonisms and contradictions: 'on both sides the infamous knots of discord / On the left the high walls of time, on the right time's deep abyss'.[129] Pramathanath Raychoudhury too sought to banish 'the clever, satirical ones ... the wrinkled in mind, the pauper at heart', who disowned the truth of dreams.[130] In place of the discontinuous narrative of irony, historians thus sought out the evocative diction of dreams.

[126] Rajnarayan Basu, 'Ascharya Svapna', Vividha Prabandha I, Calcutta, 1882, pp. 94-97.
[127] Bhubanmohini Devi, Svapnadarshane Avignyan Kavya, Calcutta, 1877.
[128] Ramdas Sharma, Bharat Uddhar, Calcutta, 1878.
[129] Svapnaprayan, Allahabad, 1914, p. 214.
[130] Svapna, Calcutta, 1906, pp. 1-2.

In this same period, numerous Bengali texts recorded popular beliefs about dreams and about ways of making dreams come true. These expressed popular codes and usages, which to some extent are even today part of the Bengali common-sense. If dream-histories are read in association with these texts, it seems possible that in nineteenth-century Bengali perception, dreams were neither a sub-conscious phenomenon nor a matter of simple wish-fulfilment. Some texts like *Svapnatattva*, for instance, advised dreaming as a serious mode of introspection, because an intense enough dream illuminated truth better than any other cerebral act. One must learn the self-control and power to will dreams.[131] And one must be careful about articulating dreams. Revealing good dreams to a lowly or danger-stricken man caused the loss of dreams, to an enemy caused fear, to a fool caused quarrels, and to a seductive woman caused losses. The later in the night, the deeper in sleep, the dream, the more probable its actualisation.[132] To realise dreams, one must never fall asleep again after dreaming, one must act on one's happy dreams immediately.[133] An 1875 text *Svapnadarshan* argued that deeper truths emerge in the night, as the empirical gets 'wiped out of visibility'.[134] And an 1867 text *Chamatkar Svapnadarshan* listed advice about health, marriage and employment, and dreamed of the moral lesson of unity: 'while things remain discrete, they can never generate force; the moment elements are united, identities are constituted and great deeds accomplished.'[135]

Dreaming was thus the practice of willing a perfect future onto an imperfect present. And it was in dreaming that history achieved what it never could within the limits of ironic self-knowledge. It achieved unity. It is here that we must refer to the famous text by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay called the *History of India as Received in Dreams*. One day, as Bhudev was reading a book on the battle of Panipat, suddenly his throat became dry and his hair stood on its end, he could no longer bear to read about the historical defeats of India. He fell into a deep sleep, dreaming what would have happened if the battle had ended differently. When he woke, there were sheaves of paper on his bedside, on them was written the dream-history of India. Just as the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata had marked her ascendent past, the epic Revival marked this dream-future of India. This was the time of a unified world and true *laissez faire*. India had become the greatest merchant-nation of the world and had legislated that no trader could henceforth engage in imperialism. India, despite her global-mercantile power, claimed no colonies, *except* – and this is crucial for our purposes – in the 'primitive' islands of Andaman and south-east Asia. Bhudev's dream-world was thus ordered into the powerful and benevolent free-

[131] Krishnanda Svami, *Svapnatattva*, Benaras, 1914, pp. 4-11.
[132] Devendra Nath Chatterjee ed., *Svapnaphal Kathan*, Calcutta, 1908, pp. 157-59.
[133] Ibid., p. 19.
[134] Tarini Prasad Sen, Goalpara, 1875.
[135] Tarakrishna Haldar, Calcutta, 1867, p. 160.

trading nation on the one hand, and the 'primitive' on the other. Through the voice of an imaginary American missionary, Bhudev's dream verbalised this desired future, when 'the uncivilised peoples on the frontiers of India [were] gradually made peaceful, self-sacrificing and humble by Brahmans who had agreed to settle in forests'.[136] In a long section describing this process of converting and containing the *anarya*, Bhudev described how Brahmans and landlords taught 'primitives' the virtues of agriculture, modern medicine, mutual help, temporal foresight and restraint of the senses. The text dreamt of these 'uncivilised', 'violent' people begging to be given higher caste-status. But to acquire caste one needed more than one lifetime of labour – the first 'sanskritisation' caused the 'primitive' only to become *koch*, the second made them *kalita*, a third made them *satsudra*. 'Tribes' could not become Brahmans in one life, even rarely in the next, but in the dream future, the 'primitives' disciplined themselves in the hope of eventually being rewarded with the privilege.[137]

Bhudev's dream-history, thus, articulated the ultimate desire of the historical subject – the desire to undo the temporal contradiction between the historical and the 'primitive', the foundational contradiction which inaugurated the nation itself. Empirically, the nation was contaminated by the presence of the apparently sensuous and a-temporal 'tribes'. Historically, the nation was vulnerable and fragmented. In dream-time, however, the impossible was imminent – as India became the free and ascendent trader-nation and the 'primitives' became Hindu. Bhudev's dream, therefore, made an advantage out of the dark of the night, when dreams could play hide-and-seek with the legislative control of bureaucratic *chakuri* and the juridical control of enlightened, positivist history. At dawn, dream-history says to Bhudev: 'the dark of the night is almost gone, the eastern sky lightens. I must leave this earth for now'. Dream-history cannot occupy the same time as the evident and the illuminated. But dream-history returns over and over again:

> With the light of the sun and the moon, *Kalpurush*, Time, etches history on the surface of the earth, *Smriti*, the goddess of memory tries to recite parts of this history.
>
> I am her companion in the play of memories. When I feel that my friend is suffering in her attempt to pronounce all that Time writes, I make her forget Time's lessons. I cannot do it all the time. In the dreamy night, however, I succeed. My name is hope.[138]

The *kalpurush* who inscribes history on the empirical world is the inexorable, male, chronological time – perhaps truthful, but cruel and fatal. *Smriti* or memory is feminine, who hurts to recall the

[136] Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, *Svapnalabhda Bharatvarsher Itihas*, Hugli, 1895, p. 59.
[137] Ibid., p. 61.
[138] Ibid., p. 62.

deaths and declines that Time engenders. She must therefore reign in dream-time. With help from the other woman, hope, she utters the unprecedented and incredible words, denied by the time of history. These words are then recalled in wakefulness and inform collective practice, which history seeks to disable. At the very moment of its writing then, Bhudev had to deny history itself for the sake of the future and the dream, and for the sake of readmitting the 'primitive', who, so long as s/he remained banished from the time of the nation, conspired to contaminate it.

Tracing the Nation: travel, migration and the conduct of time

> The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality.
>
> — Henri Lefebvre[1]

The last chapter demonstrated the critical presence of the 'primitive' in nineteenth-century Bengali historical imagination. In colonial Bengal, the figure of the *adim* or the 'primordial' was repeatedly invoked – as a conceptual counterpoise to the nation's historicity, as an explanation for the nation's defeat and disunity, as a mark of difference to the Darwinian West and as a proof of the immense antiquity of the India's historical origin. Not only in the imagination of history, the 'primitives' seemed indispensable also in terms of the productivity and prosperity of the nation. The Santals, unlike 'civilised' Indians, willingly cleared forests, reclaimed wastes and made large plantations, like those for tea and indigo, possible. After all, it was the Santals who re-settled the 'wilderness' that Bengal had become, after the great famine of 1770.[2] As S. C. Dutt said, '[t]he Santal is absolutely the best specimen of the wild tribes of India ... a good hunter, a good herdsman, and a good agriculturist; self-dependent in everything and never idle, and necessarily almost never in distress.'[3] If however the 'primitive' was definitionally antagonistic to the time of the 'historical', how could s/he and her/his labour be harnessed to the nation, without compromising the nation's modernity? To circumvent this temporal paradox, of needing to simultaneously invite yet exile the 'primordial', Bengali historical discourse sought to harness the 'primitive' in the mode of *spatial* gathering. This spatial strategy, distinct from, yet necessarily attached to, the historical negotiation of time, consisted of two seemingly unconnected processes. One was the process by which *travel* became a central motif in nineteenth century Bengali discourse, as a mode of tracing and integrating the variegated land- and social-scape of the nation. Since the 1860s, the railways had irrevocably changed Bengali imagination of space and time. And following the capitalist logic of 'discovery' of 'primitive' lands, the Bengali middle classes sought to traverse and classify non-contemporary civilisational stages as locations internal to the space of the nation. Distinct from but simultaneous to this process, was the colonial process of re-

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[1] *The Production of Space*, Oxford, 1994, p. 37.

[2] *Morning Chronicle*, 1792, quoted in W. W. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, Calcutta, 1868, p. 219.

[3] *The Wild Tribes of India*, reprint, New Delhi, 1984, p. 68. This was written sometime between 1875 and 1885.

producing 'primitives' themselves as a migrating labour-force. Through enforced migration and transportation, 'tribes' like the Santals were constituted as pure body-commodities, shorn of all social temporalities except the time of circulation. Once the 'tribes' thus became purely a-temporal and a-social bodies, displaced from their spatial location and past collectivity, they no longer seemed to represent a potent counter-historical temporality. Their presence no longer threatened to contaminate, by another time and another practice, the continuous time of historical chronology.

Railways, time and money: the travel-imperative in colonial Bengal

In 1881, Rajrajendra Chandra concluded that, to prevent the ridiculous anachronism of 'precocious progress', the Bengali must first learn to travel the nation and only afterwards, dare to conceptualise knowledge.[4] Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay, whose geography schoolbook ran into more than twenty editions, emotively narrated the struggles of Columbus against his contemporary Portuguese conservatives.[5] And against Bengali orthodoxies, which forbade the crossing of the seas, Anandachandra Mitra argued that *digdarshan*, the envisioning of horizons and directions, 'released civilisation from its prison and enabled epochal changes in the span of a single year'.[6] In other words, the self-consciously 'progressive' Bengali argued that travel could effect rapid temporal changes. S. N. Majumdar-Sastri, in his introduction to A. G. Cunningham's *Ancient Geography of India* (1871) categorically asserted that a lack of temporal initiative could very well be compensated by travel initiatives. Therefore, even though ancient Indians lacked historical sensibility, their remarkable and accurate geographical wisdom functioned to generate civilisation just as a historical consciousness would have.[7] Akshay Kumar Datta acquired a historian's status by writing the *Sea Voyage and Commerce of the Ancient Hindus*. He argued that since ancient Hindus were known to be prosperous and civilised, they must have travelled great distances for conquest and commerce. It was logical to conclude that they too must have been great voyagers.[8]

This newly realised travel-imperative in Bengal must be distinguished from earlier travel modes. Rajnarayan Basu recalled how twenty years ago, travelling was a risky and daring business – Bengalis did not have even the concept of a 'bag' in which to carry one's belongings.[9] In fact, travel forced one to leave all attachments behind. In those days, travelling was as much a form of introspection as of outward movement – where hardship, tedium and the intense experience of the

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[4] *Akal Unnati*, Calcutta, 1881.
[5] *Bhugolvrittanta*, 9th ed., Krishnanagar, 1862, pp. 216-17.
[6] *Prachin Bharat o Adhunik Europer Sabhyatar Bhinna Murti*, Mymensingh, 1876, p. 245. This was the same author who wrote a text of 'political science' called *Vyavahar Darshan* in 1878. In this, he contrasted 'primitive' practice, generated by unthinking and a-social desires, to scientific social practice. For a discussion of this text, see Partha Chatterjee, 'A Modern Science of Politics for the Colonised', in *Texts of Power*, ed. Partha Chatterjee, Calcutta, 1996.
[7] S.N. Majumdar-Sastri ed., *Ancient Geography of India*, Calcutta, 1924, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.
[8] Calcutta, 1901, p. 21.
[9] 'Atmacharit', 1890, in *Nirbachita Rachana Samgraha*, Calcutta, 1995, p. 24.

road signified a critical and ruthless self-questioning. [10] At its ultimate, journeys of pilgrimage invited the excruciating temporality of measuring the road with the full length of the body, lying down flat on the face at every step (this is still practised in Bengal and Bihar in the *chat* festival). After all, a sacred destination could not be reached easily. As the colonial traveller noticed, Bengalis, instead of simply taking the train, often inflicted unnecessary pains on their bodies.[11] Thus, a pre-railway 1844 travel-text poetically listed the pains to be borne before one could reach Puri, the land of Jagannath. While this account listed numerical distances accurately, it also textualised the pilgrimage site as the sacred body of the deity and enunciated *yatra* or travel as temporal moments in the deity's auspicious routine.[12] In contrast to these self-critical journeys which marked the traveller's body with the pains and denials of the road, the new mode of travelling the nation eased the path and turned the traveller's gaze outward. Rajnarayan remembered that only when the Rajmahal forests were cleared for the construction of railways, was he, for the first time, able to gaze into the 'interiors' and to see the 'wild dance' of the 'primitives'.[13] As travel became fast and the time of travel shortened, Bengalis published books to help the passing of time on the train, e.g. *Railway Companion or Stories to be Told During a Railway Journey: Stories about Ghosts and Doctors*.[14] Travel-time evidently was to be passed in distraction. The path in itself held no value unless it led to destinations, which needed to be visualised and traced. The Bengali middle-classes interpreted this new travel-experience as a re-discovered sense of the value of time: 'railways are an amazing entity on which you can make a month's journey in a day'.[15]

In nineteenth-century Bengali imagination, senses of fast-travel, time and money directly articulated with the idea of historical time. In 1874, a schoolbook explained the nature of time by the metaphor of travel: 'like the train time waits for none'.[16] In 1855, *The Steam-Engine and the East Indian Railway containing the History of India with a Chronological Table of the Indian Princes from Judistir down to the Present*, said in so many words:

> Even now the people of our country understand only this about railways, that one can travel fast by them. They still cannot comprehend what that implies. They have not yet known that the accumulated form of time is money.[17]

This text argued that the villages and towns, linked by the railways, would in time become 'sites of great historical power', simply by virtue of the fact that people and commodities would be passing through them. It was in anticipation of this potential historicity, that he was writing the histories of the stations between terminals Howrah and Raniganj.[18] Speedy travel thus had become the precondition to history. 'Muslim' rule was dark because in those days highways were narrow, slushy and infested

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[10] This conflation of external travel and journeys of the mind continued in nineteenth-century texts of self-criticism like Dinanath Gangopadhyay, *Vividha-darshan-kavya*, Calcutta, 1865; Ramnarayan Biswas, *Manobharater Prakriti Darshan*, Dacca, 1871 etc. These texts however appear more as *kavya* or poetry than as travel-accounts.

[11] Valentine Ball, *Jungle Life in India or the Journeys and Journals of an Indian Geologist*, London, 1880, p. 245.

[12] Bhavanicharan Bandopadhyay, *Purushottam Chandrika*, Calcutta, 1844, pp. 1-10.

[13] 'Atmacharit', p. 27.

[14] Kashinath Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 1863.

[15] Akshay Kumar Datta, *Advice to Railway Travellers*, Calcutta, 1854, p. 3.

[16] Harishchandra Bhattacharya, *Rachansar*, Calcutta, 1874, pp. 21-2.

[17] Kalidas Moitre, Srirampur, 1855, p. 182.

[18] Ibid., p. 67.

with 'murderous dacoits'.[19] Historian Akshay Datta argued that nations which lacked fast transport, were necessarily inhabited by 'primitives', because such people were limited to the use of self-made things and incapable of distant trade.[20] Even civilised family-life depended on speedy travel, as husbands could return home everyday after work only when fast transportation became available.[21] To the ordinary Bengali, the train was a sure sign that the evil epoch of *kali* was here, after all the *puranas* had prophesied that *kalki would* arrive riding an iron-chariot.[22] Train travel thus became a central motif of the present. As mentioned in the last chapter, every almanac in the nineteenth century listed train-timings and fares along with auspicious moments of the Hindu calendar.

This apparently unmediated link between efficient travel and historical initiative became the presupposition underlying numerous travel-texts of late nineteenth-century Bengal. R. C. Dutt, historian and historical novelist, spent his time in England, where he had gone to take the civil service examination, armed with timetables and guidebooks, travelling to historical sites in Scotland and Ireland, and recalling the poetry of Walter Scott. Not surprisingly then, R. C. Dutt's Rambles *in India During Twenty-Four Years* began with the formulation of travel as an almost romantic act of recalling and envisioning history:

> For a Hindu of Bengal, his first visit to Northern India is an important event in his life. All that is heroic in Indian history and traditions, all that is brilliant in Sanskrit literature and poetry, all that is sacred in ancient Aryavarta connect themselves with Northern India ...Hindu history is recorded on its ancient ruins. A visit to Northern India is an education which our schools do not impart, it tells a history which our textbooks do not record.[23]

Travel thus emerged as commensurate to an act of temporal resolution, which spatially reconfigured the historical subject, so as to allow the worthy pasts of others to be attached to the Bengali self. Rajput events were not a priori constitutive of the Bengali past, yet by supplementing the text of history with the text of travel, Dutt made distant Rajasthan proximal if not identical to the Bengali nation. More significant than the gathering of strangers, was the spatial gathering of non-contemporary times. Ancient *Aryavarta* was temporally past, yet this past had a permanent presence in the form of inscriptions and monuments on land. Travel thus was a mode of gathering and integrating the spatial traces of past and 'primitive' times.

To connect Calcutta to the north-Indian historical sites of Allahabad, Delhi and Agra, the East India Railways had to cut through the 'tribal' belt of Rajmahal forests, as if the 'primitive' interiors of the nation spatially obstructed and temporally postponed the Bengali middle classes' access to the northern civilisational site of *Aryavarta.* Travelling on the railways, Pyarichand Mitra, the eminent social satirist, therefore, could stage an imaginary dialogue with the 'primitive' Santal, who appeared on the way to the north. The Santal demonstrated to Mitra an enviable 'primordial' unity and embodied the virtues of being truthful, neighborly, god-fearing and content with the fruits of one's own

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[19] Ibid., p. 61.
[20] Akshay Datta, *Advice*, pp. 1-2.
[21] Srimunshi Azimuddin, *Ki Majar Kaler Gadi*, Calcutta, 1863.
[22] Kalidas Mukhopadhyay, *Kalir Naba Rang*, Calcutta, 1876, p. 21.
[23] Calcutta, 1895, p. 1.

labour.[24] Mitra and his co-passengers were provoked into a debate about atheism by this encounter with the Santal. Mitra concluded that since no 'aborigine' was ever an atheist, disbelief in god must be an 'unnatural' condition brought about by colonial modernity.[25] Ensconced in the train-compartment, literally compartmentalised within the time and the symbol of modernity and speeding across the interiors, the Bengali thus literally discovered and textualised the 'primitive' into the nation. While the Bengali *bhadrolok* began using places like Madhupur, Jasidih, and Deoghar in the Santal Parganas as holiday retreats, away from the tiring work-regime of the city, the possibility of speedy travel allowed the Calcuttans to maintain a tourist status in Rajmahal. With the railways always accessible, the Calcuttan no longer needed to struggle through and participate in the materiality of the 'primordial' social-scape, nor was his historicity contaminated by long-term residence in 'primitive' surroundings. Rajnarayan Basu's Deoghar diary thus proceeds without any reference to Santals, except one description of a Santal dance staged by a local Bengali on occasion of his son's first rice-eating or *annaprasan* ceremony.[26] This diary records Basu's contemplation of the 'wilderness' which 'lit up thoughts to the Eternal', his criticisms of Darwin, and his lecture in the local school about long-distance voyages and 'colonisations' by ancient Hindus.[27] Thus, as Rajnarayan experienced spatial proximity to the industrious and 'enchanting' Santals,[28] his thematisation of history and time continued uninterrupted. What could have been a temporal confrontation between Basu's historiography and the Santal's presence in Deoghar was eased by its textualisation as a travelling and passing encounter.

Not only self-conscious intellectuals like Rajnarayan Basu, R. C. Dutt and Pyarichand Mitra; ordinary Bengalis too articulated travel as envisioning the nation's history. Kedarnath Das, an employee of Azamgarh *zamindari*, marvelled at the speed of the railways and at his first sighting of the 'aborigine': 'the image of the *asura* in our *durga-puja* is of the same colour as the Santals of Birbhum and Rajmahal'. To the author, these 'dark as ink-in-oil' people were those whom Ram had banished to the forests and who, being deprived of the comforts of civilisation, remained, unlike the lazy and effeminate Bengalis, hard working and brave.[29] A similar sense of surprised familiarity was expressed by a group of school-boys who had travelled to Sahibganj, a Santal and Paharia locality, where the boys found that 'down-country trees grow just the same, ...people are not so uncivilised,...[though] the women do not wear a long length of cloth like ours'.[30] Travel thus seemed to function as a historical act, by transforming spatial proximity into a simulation of temporal contemporaneity. This was a contemporaneity which the historical imagination could not accept as internal to time itself, because historiography had to construct an uninterrupted succession between the Brahmanical past and the modern present, disavowing all other social and practical times which contested the linearity of this enforced genealogy.

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[24] *Abhedi*, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1892, pp. 1-2.
[25] Pyarichand Mitra, *Jatkinchit*, 2nd ed., Calcutta, 1892, p. 1.
[26] 'Devgrihe Dainandin Lipi', 1879, in *Nirbachita Rachana*, p. 193.
[27] Ibid., pp. 175-85.
[28] Ibid., p. 193.
[29] *Bharatvarsher Pratichi Digvihar*, Baharampur, 1872, pp. 11-12.
[30] *Bhramanvrittanta, the Travels from Chinsurah to Monghyr by Students of Hoogly Normal School*, Hugli, 1876, p. 9.

Colonial transport: the penetration of 'interiors'

Needless to say, this Bengali travel-imperative drew its competence from the logic of colonial 'penetration' of interiors. The first colonial tracts on the Rajmahal hills, where Santals and Paharias lived, were military accounts, written by officials who literally fought to enter the dense and 'primordial' forests of Damin-I-Koh.[31] Prior to colonial penetration, this space was neither transparent, nor continuous, nor always-already present to the gaze.[32] As the colonial surveyor said, it was no accident that most Bengalis believed Rajmahal to be unpeopled – for, on the surface, all that could be seen were uninteresting, barren hill-sides. Only when the valleys and the forests were opened up, could the 'primitive' Santals and Paharias be seen and registered.[33] In colonial discourse, these closed and hidden 'primitive' spaces were identical to lost and forgotten times. With modern tools, techniques and transport, the colonial surveyor and the geologist seemed to probe and unravel layers of both land and temporality. It must be remembered that in colonial-modernity, time – whether as money and number or as geological and evolutionary traces – was in principle cumulative and monumental. Beyond the commonsensical idea that time passed, lay the scientific idea that time accumulated as sediments and traces, which could be analysed, mined and read as clues and evidences of the past. As anthropology developed in twentieth-century Bengal, H. C. Chakladar suggested that Bengalis must travel to Santal lands to peel off layers of time. If in Bengal, the wet river silt caused most spatial marks of time to be irretrievably buried, the Santal Parganas were dry and rocky and could therefore be unpacked to reveal layers of lost times under the earth's surface.[34] In this paradigm of exploration as penetration, the land and the people of the land were equated.[35] The 'primitive' inhabitants behaved just as the land did – both were opaque and obstructive, they lied and misdirected travellers and had to be similarly tamed and harnessed.[36] The people were rugged and prone to cataclysmic fits of violence. The 'tribes' descended from the hills like the *hurpa*, the roaring wave caused by the first rains, washing people and cattle away,[37] and set-off huge forest fires, burning scrubs and bush for cultivation.[38] The 'primitive' existed in this ossified, primarily physical state, except when they violently intruded into the flow of history, by surprise raids on plains-people

[31] Thomas Shaw, 'On the Inhabitants of the Hills near Rajmahall', *Journal of Asiatic Research*, IV, 1792; James Browne, *India Tracts containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts*, London, 1788.
[32] Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, London, 1997, p. 81.
[33] W. S. Sherwill, 'Notes upon a Tour through the Rajmahal hills', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, XX, 1851,   pp. 544-606.
[34] H. C. Chakladar, 'Prehistoric culture of Bengal I', *Man in India*, XXI:4, 1941, pp. 208-36.
[35] Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: an Essay in Spatial History*, London, 1987; Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream*, Sydney, 1991; Jose Rabasa, *Inventing A-M-E-R-I-C-A: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism*, Norman(Oklahoma), 1993; Edward Said 'Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element and the Methodology of Imperialism' in *After Colonialism*, ed. Gyan Prakash, Princeton, 1995.
[36] *Journal of Francis Buchanan kept during the Survey of the District of Bhagalpur in 1810-11*, ed. C. Oldham, Patna, 1930, pp. 48, 56, 87-90.
[37] Sherwill, 'Notes', pp. 562-68.
[38] Ball, *Jungle Life*, p. 68.

and on the Bengali pilgrims and merchants.[39] The Bengali construction of the 'primitive', e.g. in the geography books discussed in the last chapter, as derivative of wild lands must be understood in this context – as sharing the logic of colonial penetration of 'interiors', interiors which represented not only untamed lands but also untamed times, contained within but sometimes violently spilling over the confinement of 'primordial' landscapes.

Colonial officials accused pre-colonial Indian regimes, including the centralised Mughal state, of having lacked the power to 'penetrate' the 'primordial' lands of Rajmahal. The colonial geologist claimed that, even though ancient Indians must have surveyed 'aboriginal' lands, theirs remained a shallow and surface integration; even the mining techniques of this region remained restricted to an engagement with surface veins rather than with a penetration of depths.[40] The Bengalis were described as 'indolent' – who so lacked in travel experience that they mistook railway embankments for mountains.[41] In pre-colonial times therefore, the Bengali could 'see' the 'primitives' only when the latter deigned to show themselves, by coming down from the hill-tops to 'plunder' the plains.[42] Otherwise, the 'primitives' remained 'thrust back by the Aryan invaders from the plains ...like the remains of extinct animals found in hill caves'[43], reluctant to show themselves, 'careless of the future and do[ing] no more work than required'.[44] Colonial discourse argued that even in the mid-nineteenth century 'primitives' continued deeply to fear visualisation, which in itself was a proof that Indians had never been able to penetrate 'primitive' spaces. Sherwill remarked: 'I was always able at any given moment to disperse a crowd [of Santals] that had become troublesome by merely producing a sketchbook and pencil'.[45] It thus remained for the colonial state to not only visualise the deepest interiors, but also utilise resources and peoples of the interior for general society. It was the railways which symbolised this enterprise. Once the railways integrated the remotest of places, the historical subject no longer had to wait for the 'primitives' to show themselves; the historically-conscious learned the initiative and the virtues of pioneering and penetrative travels. The traveller himself exposed the hidden 'primitives' – and as we shall show in the next section, recruited the hitherto unutilised 'primitive' body, transported it to far away Assam and used 'primitive' labour to turn north-eastern 'wilderness' into lucrative tea-plantations.

Bengali historical imagination consciously tried to partake in this 'penetrative' competence of colonial travel. Bholanath Chandra, an erstwhile member of Young Bengal, wrote a voluminous travel-account called the *Travels of a Hindu*. In his introduction to the book, J. T. Wheeler claimed that the author's Hindu and introspective mode of travel was different from the colonial surveying and classificatory mode of travel.[46] Chandra, however, insisted that his travel was not in an introspective

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[39] Hunter described the untamed Santals prior to the 1790s as the marauding 'pests of adjacent lowland', *Annals of Rural Bengal*, p. 219.
[40] Ball, *Jungle Life*, pp. 167-72.
[41] Anon., *Rajmahals, its Railways and Historical Associations*, 1876, pp. 2-3.
[42] F. B. Bradley-Birt, *The Story of an Indian Upland*, London, 1905, pp. 41-6.
[43] W. W. Hunter, *A Brief History of the Indian Peoples*, 21st ed., Oxford, 1895, p. 42.
[44] W. W. Hunter, *A School History and Geography of Northern India*, Calcutta, 1891, p. 36.
[45] Sherwill, 'Notes', p. 568.
[46] London, 1869, introduction, p. xii.

mode, that his travel-account was in principle different from traditional stories of *digvijaya*, hunts, adventures and romance, which, as he said, 'put children to sleep'. His eyes remained keenly alert and 'wakeful'; his purpose was to keep the reader 'awake to the scenes and sights about him'. Instead of the traditional triad of the priest, the prince and the jester, he travelled in the triad of the scientifically-minded doctor, lawyer and engineer. His travel was a 'survey [of] the path of Time where ruin marks [the] way'.[47] Assessing this 'path of time', Chandra's 'wakeful' gaze entered the recesses and interiors of the nation, where he came across hidden and non-historical locations. He discovered scattered 'primitive' villages, which were still unintegrated either commercially or politically to mainstream society, and which had become visible only recently when the Grand Trunk road 'acted as an open sesame' upon this land. The vocabulary of penetration is evident. The river Barakar, which ran through this 'primitive' Santal land, had 'no history, no antecedents, no names' and entered history's jurisdiction only when historical travellers entered its 'wilderness' for the first time.

> The stream has no past – nor shall it have a future. It can never be utilised into a highway for commerce. It has flown on for many ages, and shall flow on for all its days, a desert river for desert solitudes. Banks without inhabitants look upon water without vessels. The lonely stream is a blank to the civilised world – a dead letter in creation.[48]

Chandra, however, assured his readers that, as history colonised such non-historical interiors of the nation, 'neat bunglows, pleasant country seats, warehouses and shops' would be set up in the 'primitive' space, making it in future as picturesque as Macaulay's vision of the English countryside of the past.[49]

This (penetrative) travel staged the first-ever visualisation of the 'primitive' as a discovery, if not invention, of a people who appeared not to exist prior to observation. The 'primitive' was thus denied his/her definitional antecedence which, if allowed to play out its logical possibilities, might dislocate history itself, by making the 'primitive' more originary than the 'historical'. Once the 'primordial' *anarya* was positioned at the 'origin' of Indian history, even as a counterpoise, s/he retained a claim, though suppressed, in the generative time of the nation's emergence. In Santal Parganas, for instance, the colonial administration denied the right of Bengali settlers precisely on the grounds that the 'primitive' Santals were more 'original' to this land than Hindus; and the politics of Bengalis in Deoghar became that of actively re-claiming the Hindu's tenancy-right over that space of the nation which colonial discourse named as 'originally' and purely 'primitive'.[50] In this context, once the 'discovery' of the 'primitives' was textualised as their first appearance in history, the problem of having to recognise them as 'originary' was somewhat neutralised. This must be the reason why Rajnarayan Basu imagined himself, ironically, to be Columbus:

> The people [of the interiors] thought that we were fabulous creatures. Whenever one of us would go from the steamer to buy milk in the villages, he would find that the entire village had run away. What a situation! We imagined ourselves to be Columbus and his sailors, like them we had discovered a new America; and the American Indians were running from us.[51]

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[47] Ibid., p. 139.
[48] Ibid., p. 177.
[49] Ibid., pp. 95, 139.
[50] Shashibhushan Ray, *Santal Pargana, Past and Present*, Deoghar, 1926.
[51] 'Atmacharit', p. 27.

This must also be the reason why, even today, the Bharatiya Janata Party which explicitly propagates India to be a Hindu nation, refuses to accept the currently common term *adivasi* (original dwellers) for 'tribes' and insists on calling them mere *vanavasi* (forest dwellers), after their spatial location.

Yet this colonial discourse of discovery also implied that undiscovered lands had till then been 'untouched by the stir of passing events' and were 'unresponsive' to mainstream Indian history.[52] This posed a problem for nationalism. The spatial strategy was indispensable to the nation, if the 'primitive' had to be integrated without disrupting the unitary time of history. Yet this very strategy reproduced the nation in the colonial image of a fractured and stratified terrain, Hunter's 'great museum of races ... from [the] lowest to the highest stages of culture'.[53] Once space was enunciated in the colonial mode as the Other of time, once land was seen as a permanent presence, divested of social and practical temporalities, spatialisation reproduced internal frontiers as 'objective' and permanent boundaries, boundaries which efficient transport could breach but could not undo. This spatial strategy of simultaneously instituting and penetrating frontiers, after all, was a logic which served colonialism and which the nation could invoke only at its own cost. The question whether 'tribes' should unconditionally be integrated to modernising mainstream society or should be protectively confined within spatialised and bounded 'culture gardens' thus became an irresoluble problem for twentieth-century nationalism and during the framing of the Constitution for newly independent India.[54] Therefore, even as the Bengali traveller ethnologised and neutralised the time of 'primordiality', by reducing it to a bounded yet aggregable spatial presence, he had to prevent the irrevocable fragmentation of the nation-space. Sibratan Mitra claimed that, while colonial authors had always found Birbhum to be forest-covered and predominantly 'primitive', he had discovered many ancient Hindu monuments inside the so-called 'tribal' land. This proved that there were indeed 'civilised settlements and villages of industrious and grain producing peasants amidst all that barbarism'.[55] Vivekananda's long journey to the southern-most tip of the Indian peninsula, where he sat and meditated on the nation, Gandhi's mass-contact journeys of *bharatdarshan* or the envisioning of the nation, Nehru's textualisation of national history as a 'discovery' of India – all these articulated travel as a breaching of internal frontiers and differences. In the next chapter, I shall argue that this evening out of the nation's space was primarily made possible by the imagination of the nation as a single market, as the circulation of money and commodities supplemented the tracing of the nation through travel. Colonial transport allowed the entry of Bengali moneylenders and merchants into the Santal 'interiors', effecting that very remix of population which colonialism wished to prevent and which nationalism hoped for, and which the historical subject could not achieve through mere travel and discovery. If the rhetorics of the national market and of national capital informed the politics of early twentieth century Bengal, it was founded on this primarily spatial necessity of having to integrate the nation across and irrespective of internal temporal incommensurabilities.

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[52] Bradley-Birt, *Indian Upland*, pp. 1-3.
[53] Hunter, *A Brief History*, p. 42.
[54] Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA (North East Frontier Agency)*, intro. Jawaharlal Nehru, Shillong, 1959.
[55] 'The History of Birbhum: Archeology and Ancient history', *Birbhumi*, I:11, *bhadra*, 1900, p. 340.

The nomadic Santals: the circulation of 'primitive' bodies

Simultaneous to the above process of constituting 'travel' as a historical act, was the colonial process of constituting 'primitives' as intrinsically nomadic, migrant bodies, who were allegedly indifferent as to where they were located and put to labour. Though it might seem that these two processes were unconnected, their simultaneous unfolding was not accidental. Both processes were generated more or less at the same time by colonial acts of penetrating the interiors, and by the construction of the railways. In the 1850s-60s, the laying of the rail-tracks 'open[ed] up' forests, cleared 'the growth of centuries' and removed 'tigers and cholera ...the deadly miasma of jungles'.[56] Railways at the same time, made Bengali historical-travel possible. The railways also permitted the recruitment from the 'interiors' of *jungli* or wild people and their forced circulation across the nation as migrant labour. Of course, the transportation of Santals to Assam was a process organised by the colonial state, without reference to the Bengali historiographical need of spatially gathering mismatched temporalities. Nor did Bengalis demand the forced migration of 'primitives' as a deliberate strategy of nationalising them. Yet these separate intentionalities came together to make it appear as if peoples like Santals, who could not be admitted to history, could nevertheless be nationalised by conducting them over the space of the nation. This strategic temporal resolution that migration and travel effected, cannot be analytically reduced to the intentionality of a single subject, either colonial or national. Yet if interpreted in terms of the articulation of effects, rather than of intentionality, the 'cultural' politics of Bengali travel and the 'capitalist' politics of 'tribal' labour-migration seem simultaneous and complicit – combining with each other to re-produce the nation as an extra-temporal, spatialised entity. This section will try to demonstrate the participation of Bengali middle-class discourse in the colonial constitution of 'primitives' as pure, transportable body-commodities, deprived of autonomous times and practices – because it was only by depriving the 'primitive' of all temporalities except that of circulation, could the historical subject cleanse the 'primordial' of some of his/her potent alterity.

The transportation of Santals as migrant labour was based on two assumptions. One, that being 'primitive' they were necessarily nomadic, and two, being naturally without location, all that the 'primitive' possessed was his or her body. If 'primitives' had a culture or a context, it was embedded in their flesh and embodied in their labour, which they carried wherever they travelled. These assumptions were shared by the colonisers, who organised the migration of Santals to the Assam tea-plantations, the Bengali *arkattis* or agents, who indentured and sold *junglis* to the planters and even the Bengali intellectuals who wrote and made nationalist history. As the Bhagalpur Commissioner said: 'from choice they [Santals] select the most wild spots and so great is their predilection for the

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[56] *Rajmahal, Its Railways*, pp. 2-3.

wildest places that they are seldom known to remain in one station longer than it takes to clear and bring it to cultivation'.[57] The superintendent of Damin-I-Koh or the Rajmahal foothills, which had been recently cleared by the Santals, worried endlessly about this slippery nature of the 'tribe'.[58] In his annual survey reports of the 1850s, Pontet repeatedly complained how impossible it was to pin the Santals to one spatial location.[59] Any doubt about the suitability of land, the failure of a year's crop, an epidemic, or even the anticipation of a flood, and the Santals wandered away.[60] Being 'uncontrollably independent', the Santals never considered themselves 'bound' beyond the 'immediate' present by any settlement.[61] This was contrasted to the permanently-settled regions of Bengal, where landowners saw land as passing genealogically through generations, where land was itself like the family, expandable but not replaceable.[62] The 'tribe' however would not allow the colonial official to identify and bound land to a single owner-proprietor, beyond the nominal act of setting up a bamboo-pole at the centre of the village-land and a rough guess at its expanse and circumference.[63] In fact, precise boundaries and limits were supposed to psychologically disturb the 'primitives', and Pontet argued that the colonial state must await the 'naturalisation' of Santals to a 'sedentary' way of life, before trying to settle and measure their lands.[64] Not only the colonial authorities, Bengali intellectuals like Rajnarayan Basu too distinguished the 'primitive' non-Aryans from the Aryans on the ground that the former, being definitionally nomadic, passed over lands without leaving any historical trace on them: 'kirti [works] of permanence is the singular right of the aryas.'[65] Bankimchandra defined the 'primitive' jatis as those who were not yet constituted into a society, who were not yet familiar with the values of family and monogamy. 'Primitives' therefore were defined as those who failed to comprehend time beyond bodily-cycles and failed to imagine the future as belonging to historical successors – as Bankim said, there was no other principle in the 'primitive' condition except the principle of the body.[66] Note that in this discourse, the 'primitive' was defined via the mutual articulation of three apparently separate ideas – that of morality (family, domesticity and fidelity as the consciousness of patriarchal genealogy), that of space (sedentariness or the location of permanent historical monuments) and that of time (planning for the future through domestic savings and financial investment, both of which 'tribes' were incapable of).

This nomadic and body-centric 'primitive' thus seemed intrinsically amenable to transportation and relocation. To permit this relocation of 'tribes', the land of the nation was constructed as an internally homogeneous space, colonial geographers and geologists even argued that distant Assam

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[57] Report by Ward, Commissioner, Bhagalpur to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, August 1827, Dumka Record Room [hereafter DRR].
[58] Flight and continuous movement as a strategy for escaping oppression was common to peasants of all castes in colonial India. See Aditi Nagchoudhuri-Zilly, The Vagrant Peasant: Agrarian Distress and Desertion in Bengal 1770-1830, Wiesbaden, 1982; Anand Yang, The Limited Raj: Agrarian Relations in Colonial India, Saran District 1793-1920, Berkeley, 1989. It is significant, however, that in both Bengali and colonial discourses mobility was made into a characteristic of the 'primitive'.
[59] Pontet, Superintendent of Damin-I-Koh, to Collector, Bhagalpur, 15 May 1854, DRR.
[60] Pontet to Coll., Bhagalpur, 20 July 1842; Pontet to Coll., Bhagalpur, 4 June 1847, DRR.
[61] Pontet to Coll., Bhagalpur, 5 Dec 1846, DRR.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Comm. of Circuit to Special Comm. of Santhal Insurrection, [?] Oct 1855, DRR.
[64] Asst. Comm., Bhagalpur to Coll., Bhagalpur, 11 July 1846, DRR.
[65] 'The Origin and Spread of the Arya Jati', Tattovodhini Patrika, 1865.
[66] 'Dharmatattva', 1888 in Bankim Rachanavali II, Calcutta, 1954, p. 658.

was originally the natural offshoot of the Rajmahal hills: 'the break in connection between the Assam and the Rajmahal hills which gave an opening for the east-ward flow of the Ganges [was only] comparatively recent.'[67] Only such a natural identity between distant lands could effect a smooth displacement of Santals from Damin-I-Koh to the tea-gardens. In any case, whether or not Assam was actually continuous to Rajmahal, it was as much a wilderness as the 'primitive' habitat of the Damin and was expected to appear home-like to the Santals. And like indigo-planting and forest-clearance, tea-planting too was supposed to attract the nomadic Santal, for it 'allowed him to work, according to his wont, by fits and starts, demanding that every sinew should be strained at certain seasons, and permitting of almost total idleness during others.'[68] The Assam forests needed, like post-1770 Bengal, to be reclaimed and settled. This could not be done by civilised people, because forests rapidly engulfed fences, boundaries and any other human constructions on this untamed land, and caused the complete devaluation of land itself in the speculative market.[69] Only people like the Santals, who had proved their 'primordial' worth by reclaiming post-famine Bengal, seemed capable of clearing Assam of these aggressive forests. Santals were therefore defined as the nomadic 'tribe' whose 'natural' tendency had always been to wander eastwards. Rev. Bodding, famous for his collection of Santal folk-tales, made an entry in the Santal Parganas gazetteer, summarising the contemporary debates about the origin and migrations of Santals and concluding that the east was their natural home.[70] Rev. Skrefsrud, famous for his recording of the Santal ancestor's story, testified before the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, that he owned a 420 acre tea-plantation himself and could easily make a hundred Santals migrate every year to Assam: 'there has been a steady movement of Santals eastwards as far back as their history can be traced, this movement continues and will eventually reach Assam'.[71]

Opinion thus seemed 'unanimous' that the *junglis* or 'wild tribes' were 'the best class of coolies in respect to work as well as adaptability to Assam climate'.[72] Bengali labour-contractors put advertisements in the *Planters Gazetteer* reading 'Coolies any quantity, warranted junglis'.[73] Labour-agents even painted and dressed caste-Hindus and sold them as 'primitives' to planters. Naturally such counterfeit 'primitives' soon fell ill and died in Assam, and officials advised buyers of 'primitive' labour to pay attention to the bodily structure of coolies. For anyone 'who knows the Sonthali type of face and figure' could not confuse a caste-Hindu with a *jungli*.[74] The distinction between *junglis* and Bengalis was that the former did not possess the 'intelligence' of the latter, this absence caused the 'primitive' to invest everything in bodily labour, thus enabling him like nobody else to turn up with bare

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[67] T. H. Holdich, *Regions of the World Series: India*, quoted in L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Santal Parganas*, Calcutta, 1910, p. 6.
[68] Hunter, *Annals*, p. 225.
[69] J. W. Edgar, 'Note Submitted on 11 September 1873', *Papers: Tea-Industry of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1873.
[70] O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, p. 91.
[71] *Proceedings, Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in the Recruiting and Labour Districts*, Calcutta, 1906, p. 16.
[72] Subdivisional Officer, Karimganj, quoted in *Special Report on the Working of Act I of 1882 in the Province of Assam, 1886-89*, Calcutta, 1890, p. 16.
[73] Rev. Charles Dowding, *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam: a Letter by Hon'ble J Buckingham, Replying to a Communication on the Subject in the 'Indian Churchman'*, Calcutta, 1894, p. 4.
[74]Comm., Assam Valley Districts to Chief Comm., Assam, 28 Jan 1892, no. 25-26, Bengal General Proceedings [hereafter BGP], 1892.

hands hard soil, full of stumps and roots.[75] Also, since the body-minded 'primitive' was incapable of abstract reasoning, s/he could not distinguish 'similarity' from 'identity', and could be made to believe that Assam was identical to the wilderness of Rajmahal. The same lack of discriminatory sense made the 'primitives' believe that nature itself was an extension of their own bodies; they therefore could use and harness nature just as they did their own limbs.[76] As David Arnold shows, this colonial distinction between the powerful, bodily 'primitive' and the malaria-prone, cerebral Bengali was more often than not accepted by the Bengali middle classes themselves.[77]

It must be noted that, unlike the Assam tea-gardens, tea-gardens of north Bengal complained that 'primitives' were unsuitable migrants.[78] The colonial state, trying to explain this difference in the way 'primitives' were perceived in Assam and in Duars, admitted that the clue lay not so much in the intrinsic bodily nature of the 'primitive', as in the respective modes of Santal travel to the two tea-regions. Santals travelled to Duars on their own initiative, and after earning a few weeks' wages, they returned to their homes in the Santal Parganas. They therefore seemed no different from other non-'tribal' migrants, who possessed memories of homeland and saw migration as only a temporary and seasonal option.[79] However, when Santals were indentured to Assam, they seemed perfectly to fit the stereotype of the pure 'primitive' body, with no sense of past (home) or future (return). This was because in the course of enforced transportation, Santals experienced their selves as commodities. They were explicitly sold for their bodies, they were constantly in the grip of disease and death, they were forcibly and unwillingly circulated with cargo, they almost always failed to return home – all this making their bodily functions and movements seem out of their own control. In other words, shorn of their own initiatives to leave and to return, indentured Santals experienced time as solely that of transport, sickness and mortality. It was this experience which heightened and dislocated their sense of their own bodies, depriving them of the use of 'culture' and of imaginations of long-term temporality. This section tries to show that Santals were materially constituted into pure body-commodities (to which the 'historical' Bengali *bhadrolok* contrasted himself), not only through discursive strategies, but through a very concrete, physical mode of transportation as indentured labour. Traces of this 'primitive' traffic to Assam exist in colonial emigration papers as a series of mortality and disease statistics. The Bengali press too registered migrants to Assam in terms of high death, high abortion and unnaturally low birth rates.[80] In the course of their travels and in Assam, labourers suffered from acute food scarcity – even the colonial authorities admitted that 'the number of imported labourers far exceeded the supply of food available to them'. Yet their deaths were explained away in terms of the intrinsic nature of their bodies – 'primitives' could not survive on a refined cereal like rice which Assam produced, and needed to be supplied coarse maize.[81]

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[75] Asst. Comm., Sylhet to Dy. Comm., Sylhet, 31 March 1879, Bengal Emigration Proceedings [hereafter BEP], 1879.
[76] Tea-district Labour Association, *Handbook of Castes and Tribes Employed on Tea Estates in North-East India*, Calcutta, 1910, pp. 60-74.
[77] 'An Ancient Race Outworn: Malaria and Race in Colonial India', in *Race, Society and Medicine*, eds. Waltraud Ernst et. al., London, forthcoming.
[78] Baboo Srigopal Mukherjee, Nedam Tea Estate, quoted in *Report of Duars Committee*, Shillong, 1910, pp. 60-74.
[79] Ibid.
[80] D. N. Ganguly et al., *A Note on the Present State of Inland Emigration in India*, Calcutta, 1889, pp. 9-12.
[81] J. G. G. Grant, Supt. Of Emigration, in *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1879-80, p. 4.

The first step in the alienation of the Santal from his or her own self and location was the mode of recruitment itself. Except during famines, the Santal had to be *forced* to migrate.[82] Since it seemed impossible to 'interest' Santals in travel, they were deceived into doing so.[83] The Bengali *arkattis* prowling the Santal villages, lied about prospective wages, created rumours, took advantage of domestic quarrels and of 'straying' young women, visited bazaars to pick Santals who seemed trapped in unacquittable debts, captured coolies 'in the night and [transported them] in covered carts lest they be seen or detected by their friends and taken away'.[84] *Arkattis* became so insidious that Santals feared every other Bengali to be a labour agent, every other hut a half-way house for captured coolies.[85] *Arkattis* were often erstwhile and dismissed government employees, who carried pieces of paper, made out like government licenses.[86] They were known to deliberately speak in Bengali to mislead Santals and often pretend as if the government had summoned 'tribes' to Chittagong for public-work and then exported them to Assam.[87] Even the capture of Santal women as coolies could not always be punished, because recruitment was not a legal offence like sexual abuse.[88] Many Santals went missing because they were removed by labour agents 'in the dead of the night' and *arkattis* became so ill famed that Santals often attacked them on sight.[89] Thus deceived out of their own homes, Santals were then taken to labour depots where they were assigned false identities and new names, so that they could no longer be traced to their villages.[90] They were then taken around to various middlemen, who touched and examined their bodies for signs of illness – after all 'primitives' were sold precisely because there were 'no rejections whatever on account of physical fitness' from amongst them.[91] Afterwards, they were sold to the highest bidder 'exactly as cattle [we]re', a transaction perceived by the Santals as 'sale of human flesh'.[92] Thus having lost familiarity with their own selves, probed, sold, renamed and cut loose from past ties, Santals were transported to Assam.

Once herded into railway compartments and steamers, the supposedly tough 'primitive' bodies fell into what seemed like a permanent grip of dysentery and cholera. Not only did Santals thus lose control over the movement of their bodies; they also lost control over their bodily functions. Indentured because of their so-called intrinsic resistance to the 'miasma' of Assam forests, 'tribal' bodies paradoxically entered the futureless-ness of death and disease, where time was reduced to the immediate context of fear, pain and solitude. This too was explained away as the inherent nature of 'primitive' bodies. Santals were accused of over-eating on the steamers and thus causing their own

[82] Ibid., p. 12.
[83] *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1883, p. 13.
[84] *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1891, p. 9.
[85] R. Carstairs, Dy.Comm., Santal Parganas to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 9 July 1892, BGP 1892.
[86] *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1883.
[87] SDO, Dumka quoted in *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1891, pp. 9-10.
[88] Sita Sontalini vs. Ruknuddin, Midnapur District Adalat, trial on 4 June 1891, BGP 1891.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Supt. of Emigration to Under-Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 15 Sept 1879, no.1916, BEP 1879.
[92] Carstairs to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 9 July 1892, BGP 1892.

disease.[93] To contain the excesses of the 'primitive' body, the food allotted to each 'tribal' was reduced to the 'smallest amount' possible.[94] The travelling body of the 'primitive' thus became like a commodity with no needs and no desires, assigned food 'less and less nutritive than [even] non-labouring prisoners' in colonial jails.[95] Since 'primitives' were supposed to be intrinsic nomads, they needed no facilities on the road;[96] they needed only to be physically controlled and clinically handled, which the migrants perceived, not wrongly, as 'tempting the gods of disease'.[97] Not only by disease, hunger and constant clinical tampering, 'primitives' were also made more intensely alienated from their own bodies by their strict segregation from other migrants. Even when the regular ship-space allotted to each coolie was reduced as a cost-cutting measure, 'primitives', prone to greater disorder and contagion, were separated from each other by greater deck-space.[98] 'Primitive' bodies therefore had to be individuated and segregated from each other, as much as from non-'primitives',[99] making the formation of any new and travelling collectivity impossible.

The journey to Assam was a journey into almost total physical control: 'from the time that they were recruited till they reached their final destination they [were] guarded not unlike prisoners'.[100] Migration-routes were pre-determined and under constant surveillance, to prevent junglis from freely roaming the country and from coming into 'contagious' and disorderly contact with settlements en route.[101] To keep them separate from regular travellers like merchants and pilgrims, it was ordered that 'primitive' emigrants 'be *compelled* to take the train',[102] and compelled to enter Assam only through pre-determined 'gateways' like Dhubri.[103] Surely, this was less an experience of travel than of 'transportation'. The labourers' encounter with the train, the machine breathing fire, which waited for no one, was often tragic. On 15 March 1866, 1200 labourers were jammed into a few train compartments. The train started before everybody had time to board, in the stampede many died and families got separated, there were no lights in the compartment, and many of those who did board died of suffocation. Of course the railway authorities blamed this on the lack of time-sense of the passengers.[104] Railway transport had its own time, which usurped the social time of travel as a familiar practice. The journey itself was timed by an autonomous clock. The time for food, the time to visit the toilet, the time to drink water, all were pre-fixed by the superintendent of emigration at Calcutta. And very often migrants were transported in goods trains rather than in conventional

[93] Under-Secy., Govt. of Bengal to Secy., Chief Comm., Assam, 10 Feb 1879, no. 74, BEP 1979.

[94] Dr V. Richards, Offtg. Supt. of Emigration to Under-Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 3 December 1878, no.4078, BEP 1878.

[95] Dy. Surgeon, General and Sanitary Comm. to Chief Comm., Assam, 12 February 1879, no. 3505, BEP 1879.

[96] Comm., Bhagalpur to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 7 March 1892, BGP 1892.

[97] Agents and Contractors of Free Labour, Raniganj to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 17 December 1892, no. 51, BGP 1892; Sanderson & Co to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 19 December 1892, no. 52, BGP 1892.

[98] Supt. of Emigration to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 20 June 1879, no. 1230, BEP 1879.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Report of the Tea-Commissioners of Assam, 1868.

[101] Comm., Bhagalpur to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 7 March 1892, BGP 1892.

[102] Magistrate, Purnea to Comm., Bhagalpur, 6 December 1892, no. 47,48, BGP 1892.

[103] Kilburn & Co, Managing Agent of Indian General Steam Navigation Company to Secy., Indian Tea Association, 4 Feb 1893, no.15-16, BGP 1893.

[104] East Indian Railways to Supt. of Emigration, 17 March 1866, BEP 1866.

passenger carriages.[105] Travel as indentured labour to Assam thus caused the 'primitives' to be circulated and transported like so many commodities.

I have detailed this experience of forced migration in order to show how travel deprived the 'primitive' of identity, of autonomous practice and therefore of autonomous temporality – they became literally body-commodities with no time but the abstract time of circulation. Even when they reached their destination, the tea plantation, this unsettled state of circulation was forcibly maintained. The planters were careful not to 'localise' the migrants, it was clear that their interest lay not in settling, but in keeping the labourers 'migrant'. The Assam government tried to implement a policy of waste-land settlement by giving forest-lands in nominal rent to newly arrived 'tribals'. The tea-lobby however effectively prevented this by arguing that settlement would make 'tribes' into peasants.[106] 'Tribes' had to be harnessed as migrating bodies. If the experiences of uprooting, segregation, transportation, control, disease and death reduced the Santals' temporal sensibilities to an immediate context of day-to-day survival, this shrunken temporality was more easily translatable into casual wage labour. This time of immediacy could not be allowed to pass into a sense of even a quasi-long-term that came with settled tenancy on land.[107] The tea-coolies, therefore, lived in Assam in a state of continuing movement. They repeatedly tried to escape, but were more often than not captured by chowkidars, ferrymen, dogs and local 'tribes' who were employed to track down fugitives. The planters had magisterial powers and indiscriminately inflicted corporeal punishment on tea labourers, 'the prevalence of sickness among the coolies would always be a reason to refer a death to natural causes'.[108]

This time of impermanence and immediacy, of corporeal punishment and mortality in turn (dis)articulated with the regime of work-time on the plantations. The planters, instead of counting the five-year contract as five years, made a complicated regime out of average work-days. The labourer soon lost track of his count.[109] They failed to comprehend the 'rational' work-regime where each was 'entitled to one day's wage for doing nothing'.[110] Moreover, the average work-day was not defined as synonymous with the rising and setting of the sun – a full day stretched far beyond daylight and was calculated unilaterally by the planter. Most days in the life of the migrant tea-labourer were known as half-*hazira* – literally, half-presence. This implied that though s/he had not been absent from work, s/he was recognised only as having completed half a labour-day.[111] There was no fixity in the terms of time-money equivalence. In the leaf-plucking season when work was light, labourers were paid by the hour. However, when work was heavy, like forest clearance, they were paid only when the full task was completed.[112] To the migrant, thus, contract time – though of five years – stretched much

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[105] 'Rules in Addition to Act I BC of 1889', *Calcutta Gazette*, 10 Sept 1890.
[106] See correspondence reprinted in *Colonisation of Wastelands in Assam*, Calcutta, 1898.
[107] Secy., Indian Tea Association to Secy., Bengal Chamber of Commerce, 30 November 1892, BGP 1892.
[108] Col. Hopkinson, Agent to Gov-Gen., North East Frontier, 9 May 1866, BEP 1866.
[109] *Annual Report on Inland Emigration*, 1885, pp. 11-2.
[110] *Special Report on Act I, 1882*, p. 215.
[111] Ibid., pp. 151-52,
[112] Ibid., pp. 221-23.

beyond. In fact, the tea labourer very often could not even distinguish whether they were working out the contract time or actually serving a jail sentence on the plantation. This was because the colonial government admitted that since imprisonment and hard labour characterised plantations as much as jails, punishment for desertion should be left to the planters themselves.[113]

Contracted labour-time was particularly long for the 'primitives' because, it was said, they had no sense of time and future. The 'time-expired' Santals failed to return home, because they were invariably in debt and could even be tempted with alcohol to sign longer contracts in a state of stupor. They allegedly spent all their money on food and drink, being indulgent and purely sensuous bodies. In fact, planters hoped that non-'tribals' would imitate the 'primitives' in eating and investing more in their bodies. The non-'tribals' were known to starve themselves in order to save money, in an abstract hope of returning home in the future. This future-mindeness of non-'tribals' made them worse bodies and worse labourers than 'tribals'.[114] In colonial officialese then, 'tribal' labour by the end of nineteenth century had almost become 'free labour', without roots and memories of past homelands – if a Santal vanished without trace, it could safely be assumed that s/he had been transported to Assam.[115] If a Santal tea-coolie did manage to return, he would find that his place in the family and the village was already taken by someone else.[116] Significantly, colonial papers repeatedly stressed faster transport as the means for this 'freeing' of labour. Thus the tramway linking Tista and Dharla rivers was expected to 'free' coolies by transporting them with, and as fast as, mail.[117] Transported like cargo, Santals thus became circulating bodies, 'freed' not only from their pasts but also from any sense of continuous time, in which a future or a return could be envisioned beyond the indentured present. Such was the fear of this transportation to Assam, that even railway clerks in Santal Parganas tried to dissuade Santals from buying tickets to the tea-gardens.[118]

B. C. Rai, labour-agent for Bijay Narain Kundu of Madhupur, admitted that in the Santal Parganas, junglis were inordinately hostile to Bengalis because Bengalis represented arkattis or labour-contractors.[119] Bengalis, thus, were as much a participant in the forced migration of Santals as were colonial officials. Not only arkattis, even Bengali intellectuals wrote about tea-coolies in the colonial mode. The middle classes, for instance, saw tea-labour to be 'free' in the negative sense of being morally unaccountable to historical society. R. C. Dutt, historian, historical novelist and travel writer, was magistrate of Midnapur, from where many Santals were indentured in the 1880s and 90s. He believed that 'young people who have not arrived at an age for using discretion, unprotected widows and young females of questionable character seem quite infatuated when in hands of these wily coolie agents'.[120] In fact, Bengali novels were written about the moral degradation of those who

[113] A & R Spicer to Dy Comm., Cachar, ? Oct 1872, Papers: Tea Industry, p. 150.
[114] Special Report on Act I, 1882, pp. 136-37, 215.
[115] Annual Report on Inland Emigration, 1892.
[116] Dy. Comm., Santal Parganas to Comm., Bhagalpur, 1 January 1893, no. 12-13, BGP 1893.
[117] Annual Report of Inland Emigration, 1881-82.
[118] Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, pp. 70-5.
[119] Ibid., pp. 74, 77.
[120] Mgst., Midnapur to Comm., Burdwan, 7 July 1892, BGP 1892.

allowed themselves to go to Assam, about impatient and greedy women who migrated to Assam and ended up compromising their chastity and character in order to survive.[121] The Bengali *bhadrolok* gave the impression that a tea-coolie was a person of suspect character, who, in trying to escape social and domestic hardships, fell to depths of vice and immorality. At the same time, Bengali intellectuals admitted that unobstructed Santal migration did indeed integrate the nation as a single space. Rajanikanta Das, an eminent 'foreign-returned' economist, argued that unlike Bengal, which was permanently-settled and therefore self-contained, Santal Parganas housed crowds of wandering 'primitives', who could easily be transported elsewhere. Since Assam was further away from Santal Parganas than from Bengal, migrant Santals had fewer chances of returning home, once they travelled to the tea-gardens. Transporting Santals, rather than Bengali peasants, therefore effected a much more stable remix of population in line with national unification.[122]

A number of historical judgements thus seem to come together around the phenomenon of forced migration – that in modern times amoral and unaccountable young people tended to migrate, that 'primitives' were intrinsically amoral and body-centric, that 'primitives' were nomadic and hence not pressed into any particular location by the accumulation of monumental-historical time, that 'primitives' anyway had no sense of historical continuity and could more easily be displaced, and that migration effected the necessary re-mix of population which gave the nation identity across space. Of course, the Bengali middle classes often showed outrage at the way planters and emigration authorities treated tea-coolies.[123] However, it was generally accepted that 'tribes' migrated either because, being nomadic, they could not help it, or because, being bodies, they deserved it – as if penetration, transportation and dislocation offered the 'primitive' the chance to enter mainstream society, releasing him/her from confinement in the hidden interiors. In colonial and Bengali discourses, it seemed as if 'free' migration was a temporal disjuncture, a new beginning, which could be effected by the 'primitive' only in the time of colonial modernity. This time of the so-called new beginning is most often found in missionary accounts – 'tribals' converted to Christianity were brought up to Assam so that they could start afresh on a new life, a new labour and a new faith.[124] Once the 'primitive' effected this temporal rupture, that is, once s/he was individuated and made into a pure body-commodity, s/he became less threateningly Other than those who lived in collectivity within the forest regions. Transportation was the moment, which separated the original 'primordial' condition from the modern condition of the migrant and labouring 'tribal'. Historical society could harness the latter, though not the former. The 'primitive' was useful, as it were, only when s/he permitted this disjuncture and came into circulation, only when s/he became a pure, virtually perishable body-commodity, shorn of threatening practices and times which might otherwise subvert the historical time of the nation.

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[121] Ramkumar Vidyaratna, *Kulikahini*, reprinted in *Dusprapya Sahitya Samgraha*, Calcutta, 1993. I could not find the original date of its publication, the author however lived between 1836 and 1901.
[122] Rajanikanta Das, *Plantation Labour in India*, Calcutta, 1936, p. 28.
[123] Ganguly et al., *Inland Emigration*.
[124] H. P. Boersson, *Report of the Indian Home Mission to Santals*, 1881-82, pp. 25-7.

Time as quest : ancestral travels of the Santals

Constituted as a pure body, with no culture except that of instinctual labour and with no time except that of circulation, the Santal voice was naturally erased from emigration papers. In fact, travel itself was regimented and structured in such a way that the migrant could not speak. Thus at the gateway to Assam, Dhubri, the migrants would be queued up, the deputy commissioner would recite their, often false, names from medical certificates, and reel out questions to check if all migrants were conscious, free and willing to migrate. Invariably, migrants would shout out affirmatives in chorus and seem to display 'a most enthusiastic ...demeanour'.[125] From this version of officially-supervised and ritual catechism, it is almost impossible to reconstruct the Santals' own perception of travel and transportation. I found only one recorded testimony of a Santal in the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee report, which was otherwise a collection of missionary, planter and labour-agent testimonies. Mohan Manjhi from Charanpur, Asansol – who was fortunate to have returned from a tea-garden, though only after twenty-five years – said

> I am a Santal. I was twenty-five years in a garden in Sylhet. I was happy and had good masters. I was bunglow chowkidar on Rs 7 a month. I got ill and when I recovered I came here. I would not go back to Sylhet. I can earn 10 or 12 annas a day here in collieries, whereas one only gets 15 pice there. The climate is bad there also. I was enticed away when a youth by promise of very high wages. I would go back for 8 annas a day. Santals might be glad to go there, if they were promised land.[126]

Mark the fractured nature of the testimony – the Santal said he was happy in the plantation but would never go back, that he had good masters but that he was deceived into going and that he earned less than he would have if he had worked nearer home.

Chotrae Desmanjhi was persuaded by missionaries Skrefsrud and Boerrson, after the rebellion of 1855, to go and settle new lands in Assam. His account, *Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha*, reads like a polemic against the Santal rebellion and like a story of the isolated endeavours of a handful of Christian converts, who, led by Kerap-saheb and Papa-saheb, chose a special and enlightened future away from post-rebellion, famine-ridden Benagaria. [127] However, if read against the grain, even this text seems to display narrative fractures. The mood and the intonation of narration are not unconditionally happy and celebratory. And on occasions when translation from Santali to English appears to have been impossible, the purely hermeneutic intent of the text, the Santal-missionary consensus about the new beginning in Assam, seems to fall apart. I shall try to reconstruct a Santal version of nineteenth-century travel out of these textual fault lines. It seems from the text that Chotrae was willing to go to Assam – there was nothing at home to hold him back. Since the rebellion, the Santals were anyway scattered and lost to each other. When the missionary asked why so few Santals attended church meetings, Chotrae reminded him that they had no cattle and no

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[125] Dy. Comm., Dhubri to Comm., Assam, 3 Dec 1888, *Special Report on Act I, 1882*, pp. 67-75.

[126] *Report of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, p. 8.

[127] Reprinted in Dhirendranath Baske, *Saontal Ganasamgramer Itihas*, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 159-98.

land, they were being carried away by ambiguous promises to distant lands.[128] Being a covert, Chotrae also felt somewhat estranged from his community. He remembered how a great assembly of Santals had, under the very *bel* tree which Chotrae once planted, ostracised Kolean Haram, for having narrated the ancestor's story to the missionaries. Kolean's son, who had also contributed to this missionary document, was desperate to be taken back into the Santal community.[129] Chotrae, though not ostracised, perhaps felt a similar isolation and was therefore more willing than anyone else to leave the Santal Parganas. Even so, it was not quite Chotrae's own decision to go to Assam. He was called by the missionary and told that the latter had decided to grant him a new *des*, a new country – 'Kerap saheb went to search for a country. He went to Calcutta, to talk to big men and consult books' and returned with the idea of Assam.[130] Skrefsrud then took Chotrae and a few other converts to the Dhubri region of Assam to show them new lands. But even though the Santals at home showed curiosity about the handful of soil and water they had brought back from Assam, most refused to leave: 'then the wives started screaming, we shall not go, we know there is a lot of violence in Assam, we will labour for wages here and live in poverty, but we will never go'.[131] It was only Chotrae and a few others who finally decided to travel to the new 'home'.

Chotrae recalls the journey to Assam as terrible and difficult – they suffocated and almost drowned in the steamer, the children suffered from continuous exposure, and the cattle died on the road. When they began clearing the land in Assam, all of them fell fatally ill with overwork and lack of food and shelter. Chotrae admitted that, but for the missionaries and their doctors, they would have all died in this wilderness to which they had been transported.[132] Chotrae's story ended by expressing gratitude to the missionaries for the new country. Yet his narrative rang with live memories of disease and pain and of a not entirely voluntary dislocation to an unfamiliar land. There seemed no indication that Santals 'naturally' moved towards Assam in course of their habitual migration, as Skrefsrud claimed. When Campbell granted land to Skrefsrud in Assam, he asked the missionary how many Santals he could persuade to migrate. Skrefsrud had replied: 'do not worry, I shall get as many subjects as you want, to clear as large a tract as you can grant'.[133] The point clearly was to *make* Santals migrate, so that the 'wilderness' of Assam could be reclaimed. It was another matter that this unfamiliar and uncultivated 'wilderness' threatened Chotrae and his group with separation from their ancestral village, with disease and as it seemed for a while, with possible extinction.[134]

Thus, whether converted to Christianity as in Chotrae's case or indentured as in most other cases, Santals who travelled to Assam perceived their recent dislocation as a temporal disjuncture. It is true that Santal ancestor-stories were tales of travel as well, which was why colonial officials and ethnographers defined Santals as essentially nomadic, and therefore necessarily 'primitive'. While

[128] Ibid., p. 185.
[129] Ibid., pp. 181-82.
[130] Ibid., p. 186.
[131] Ibid., p. 188.
[132] Ibid., pp. 190, 195-96.
[133] Ibid., p. 194.
[134] Ibid., p. 195.

editing Kolean Haram's narration of the ancestors-story, P. O. Bodding noted: 'it is in their blood to seek fresh fields; as they are often heard to say, they have a wish to "see" land'.[135] But what ethnographers refused to admit was the fact that these ancestral travels which Santals recalled were of an entirely different order, irreconcilable with the experience of transport in colonial modernity. This was the reason why Kolean and Juggi Haram did not narrate travels to Assam as continuous to their narrative of past times and travels. In any case, Kolean's 1871 narration of the ancestors-story was far from a tale of habitual or voluntary nomadism. To him, the journeys of the past were an eternal and tragic quest for a country that could finally be named as the Santals' own. The ancestors travelled, searching and clearing forests and invoking spirits in the four directions, yet they were repeatedly displaced from the new lands, which they had made productive and habitable by their own blood and sweat. Thus, the ancestors became 'exhausted' by wandering:

> From Sikhar some of us came to Tundi. Where shall we stay? – and a place there is nowhere. ... then we have gradually come to the Santal Parganas. We have come feeding and we exist like the silkworm. And some day we shall again go somewhere, who knows where. Some people have gone past Rajmahal to the other side of the Ganges. Who knows why Thakur is punishing us in this way.[136]

As will become evident in course of this section, the central motif of this narration was that of a quest – a quest not only for new lands but also for a future 'elsewhere'.

Unlike the nation of nineteenth-century Bengali imagination, this Santal quest for a country elsewhere did not project territory as an always-already present space, waiting merely to be traversed, visualised, bounded and signed by the subject-author of history. The Santal *des* was yet to be found. The Santal country did not pre-exist the arrival of the desired future. The quest was therefore both a temporal and a spatial pursuit. This Santal mode of travel was very different from both colonial ethnological travels and Bengali historical travels. While the latter conceptualised space and time as rectilinear and mutually exclusive co-ordinates of thought, the Santal 'elsewhere' however could not be analytically broken down into space and time as two perpendicular and distinct dimensions of experience. In fact, the Santal motif of quest implied an inextricable and *simultaneous* enunciation of time and land. In Santal memories, the passing of time was literally articulated as passing through lands:

> In a (good land) Hihri Pipri we were born
> We were sought after (by Thakur Jiu) in Khoj Kaman
> We replenished again in Harata
> We fixed our social orders in Sasan Beda.[137]

Each memorable land in this recitation implied a memorable act – birth, search, replenishment and social ordering. In other words, in the ancestors-story, spatiality was articulated in terms of practices of travel, quest, life and labour, rather than in terms of a pre-existing or foundational presence. If the temporal and spatial significations of the narrative seemed simultaneous, if not coterminous, it was because both territory and the past were presented as provisional and as sought out in the practice of journeying. Land did not provide, as it did in nationalism, an unquestionable and unceasing ground or

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[135] Bodding, 'Note', in Kolean and Juggi Haram, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, Oslo, 1942(1887), p. 21.
[136] Ibid., p. 14.
[137] Quoted and translated by H. Hembrom in *The Santals: Anthropological-Theological Reflections on Santali and Biblical Creation Traditions*, Calcutta, 1996, p. 9.

referent, which contained and moderated the inexorable passing of time. This was because Santals remembered being recurrently banished from lands, just as in colonial modernity, they would be banished from time. However, when the colonial ethnographer translated this recitation of Santal space-time, he based it on his prior decision to name the Santals as a 'tribe'. In the colonial document, the above lines were translated thus:

> In Hihri Pipri were we born
> In Khoj Kaman we were called for
> In Harata we grew up
> In Sasan Beda we became septs[138]

The use of the category 'sept' – which as the previous translation by Hembrom shows, was by no means an accurate transliteration of the Santali word for social order – proves the missionary's prior decision to name the Santal as the stereotypical nomadic 'primitive'. This was by no means a case of mistranslation. This was a temporal judgement prior to the act of translation. Thus the Santals' simultaneous enunciation of space and time was reinvented, through ethnographic translation, as the empirical proof of the exceptional and idiosyncratic nomadic habit of the anachronistic 'primitive'. If the Santals commemorated transformative moments in terms of their contingent locations, this mode of collective travel and temporalisation was neutralised and localised, so that it could no longer interrogate the otherwise universal and rational bifurcation of space and time – a bifurcation which colonial modernity instituted for the sake of ordering the world through temporal hierarchy and spatial integration.

Santals themselves did not partake in this dissociation of time and space as symmetrical and abstract opposites. When they said that it was at Sikhar that the Bengalis began moneylending or that it was at Tore Pokhori Baha Bandela that the ancestors met under a *sarjom* tree to frame new Santal customs, they were remembering significant conjunctures in time as much as memorable locations in space.[139] These past locations were not reducible to the exterior, visualisable, permanently present dimension of existence, to a space that could be conceptualised irrespective of travel and habitation. These past locations had intangible virtues to be grasped in relation to human practice – thus Hihri Pipri, where humans were born, was a 'good land' towards the rising of the sun.[140] Beyond the Ajay river, land was defiled and evil, where even the 'child in the womb must be nipped' before crossing.[141] In ancestral travel memories, therefore, lands had to be 'conceptualised', qualified and narrated just as time had to be. Space was invested with the temporality of social practice, with the temporality of travel, reclamation and cultivation. Land, like time, had to be passed and land, as much as time, seemed to generate irrevocable transformations. It was not incidental, therefore, that colonial authorities failed to match the place-names of Santal memory to extant cartographic locations.[142] For in Santal modes of articulation, land too, like time, could often be accessed only in memory. Lands too were often lost, like the past, to the present. If Bengali historical

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[138] *Horkoren*, p. 12.
[139] Ibid., pp. 10-4.
[140] H. Hembrom, *The Santals*, p. 9.
[141] *Horkoren*, p. 14.
[142] O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, Introduction.

imagination sought to contain temporal discontinuities within the vessel-like space of the national territory, to the Santal, repeatedly and endlessly displaced from lands which they cleared, even the assurance and permanence of spatiality was not available.

To the Santal, as Kolean said, there were many 'ways of wandering' – wandering the forest, searching for wood for the plough, searching for hunt, wandering the village looking for vessels and pots, wandering to escape moneylenders and *sahibs*. Or even wandering, leading to a wedding, to a meeting of villages. In a Santal wedding, the headman would ask the bridegroom's party: 'how is it have you come to get as far as here?'. The groom's people would reply that they had 'manifolded [their] steps', wandering great distances in search of the jewel (perhaps the bride). On the way, many events made them tarry. Often expressed as riddles, these events marked the passage of time in everyday and exceptional acts. On the way people saw 'wild bee honey in the crook of crab-grass', i.e. occasions for communal feasts or pregnancies. On the way people saw the blue-bird dancing, i.e. the act of weaving clothes or the occasion for men's festive dance.[143] And on the way the Santals were invariably delayed by the traders:

> On the rock at the lake bank
> The traders have camped
> You know father, there
> They are melting gold.[144]

Thus, the meeting of people, as in Santal marriages, was enunciated as the result of long journeys, and long durations, marked by waiting, delays, everyday acts and festive events. In this, the direction of travel signified the direction of time itself, both leading, simultaneously, to one group of Santals moving towards and meeting another group.

Travelling to new lands, therefore, was either a matter of meeting of new people or a matter of the scattering of peoples. It was in any case a collective practice – as Kolean Haram said, 'Santals do not build houses for themselves away from others, they build villages and there they live together in one place'.[145] The Santals generally left home in the months of Phalgun and Chaitra, the spring season. The journey, which followed, called for a simultaneous tracing of new lands and an imagining of new and possible futures. It was never enough to find a land with fertile and worthy soil. The new land could become a country only after the life-signs of the land were read and interpreted, life-signs which illuminated the future of the new village in the present. Thus, the birds had to be carefully watched, if they seemed to be flying away, it would be known that 'some day in the future a village here [would] be deserted'. A pot of water had to be kept uncovered, if the level fell, it would be known that rains would be scarce for the coming year. Chickens had to be tied to a post overnight, the scatter of their droppings would signify how far wealth would be distributed. In all the directions that the ants carried the rice, spirits had to be invoked.[146] Unlike the historical reading of spatial traces of the monumental past, this Santal mode of travel read traces of the future in the life-signs of the land.

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[143] *Horkoren*, p. 56.

[144] Ibid., p. 58.

[145] Ibid., p. 100.

[146] Ibid., p. 101.

The investigation of the land was thus at the same time a divination of the future. A Santal invocation, recited probably on occasion of propitiating the new land, asked the sun to illuminate the scattered signs that lay embedded in the earth:

O Sun, sin bonga, in heaven like a bamboo-mat you are spread, the four corners, the four worlds you have covered and you, the five and six of the earth, in your name, as you see here, in the new soil, the new forest we are seeking signs, this you show to us, the milk as milk, and the water as water, having judged show it to us.[147]

This 'lack' of categorical opposition between visualisable space and memorable time was attributed by colonial modern intellectuals to a more fundamental 'primitive' lack – the lack of abstract thought. The geologist, Valentine Ball, distinguished the Santals from 'other natives of India' on the ground that while the latter demonstrated accurate ideas of spatial distance, the Santals, despite their habitual nomadism, did not. Instead of expressing distance as a prior knowledge of the number of miles to be traversed, the Santal would just carry a sal-tree branch with him. When the leaves became so dry as to crumble to dust, the Santal would say that a kos or two miles had been passed – as if 'a kos would be short in hot or dry rather than cold or damp seasons'.[148] Evidently the Santals' seemed to grasp distance in terms of the effort spent in traversing it, which depended not only on the abstract measurable length of the path but on the time of the day and the season. Instead of articulating the path in terms of a pre-given knowledge of distance, this mode of tracing land invested the path itself with the temporality of travel as a practice. Distance had no meaning unless it was practically and actively traced. In other words, in Santal narrations of travel, space was not enunciated as an idea but only in so far as it was traversed, and traversable, in practice and in time. This investment of time in apparently inanimate nature was interpreted by contemporary ethnographers as 'primitive animism' – where land and nature were seen to manifest lives and times. Since 'primitives' were incapable of abstract thought, they operated under a fundamental confusion of categories, between universal 'ideas' like space and time and concrete 'things' like land and people.[149] From this 'lack' of ideas of abstract time and space, it was a small conceptual leap to formulating the 'primitive' condition as 'lacking' temporality itself. The next chapter analyses this temporal politics of abstraction in the context of money, market and the 'primitive'.

Conclusion

The Santal refusal to envision space as a strictly a-temporal category posed a problem for nationalism. If space, like time, was invested with the irreversibility and momentum of social practice, space would seem as differentiated and as un-aggregable as time itself. In Bengali discourse, however, space was precisely meant to neutralise temporal contradictions. True, in nineteenth-

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[147] Ibid. I have slightly changed the translation from Bodding's.
[148] Ball, Jungle Life, p. 235.
[149] Handbook of Castes and Tribes, p. 17.

century Bengali imagination, the space of the nation did not always appear as an abstract territorial category. The nation was often imagined as the valorised body of the mother-in-chains. Even castes were imagined as limbs of the unitary body of the original sacrificial *purusha*, Brahma, whose head represented the *brahmana* and feet the *sudra*. However, this nationalist personification of space was a self-conscious 'literary' strategy, a deployment of metaphor, meant to reclaim differentiated space as integrated body-politic. Space was not imagined as body in the first place, body was a metaphor for and therefore external and discontinuous to the 'reality' of space. For the Santals, however, the simultaneous enunciation of space and time was not a mode of literary figuration but a practical imperative. In Santal practices of travel and quest, space appeared neither as a category of knowledge, nor as the Other of time, nor as the essence of the always-already present nation. Land-names did not, either metaphorically or conceptually, *re-present* pasts. Land appeared as that which, like time, was traversed and passed and which, like time, was repeatedly lost.

By refusing to de-temporalise space, the Santal seemed to refuse his/her own spatial incorporation into the nation. It was this 'primitive' resistance to spatial aggregation that called for the forcible transportation and circulation of 'tribes' as pure body-commodities. If the constitution of 'primitives' into pure bodies seemed to somewhat mollify their temporal alterity, it also produced amongst Bengalis an anxiety about their own masculinity.[150] Once bodily-ness was relegated to a non-contemporary, 'primitive' Other, the self-consciously cerebral and moralistic historical subject-author felt emaciated and effete. As Hunter said, Bengalis had become effeminate because they had always delegated bodily labour to the 'aborigine'.[151] As colonial modernity sought to de-temporalise and commodify 'primitives' by making them pure bodies, they seemed to become increasingly desirable, as if possessing the secret of unabstracted sensuousness, which the *bhadrolok* seemed incapable of enjoying unconditionally. This produced the Bengali aesthetic imagination of 'primitives' as sensuous and uninhibited figures – to be painted, sculpted, filmed and desired. Even as Bankimchandra invoked the need to 'Aryanise' the 'primitive', his brother Sanjivchandra Chattopadhyay seemed to desire and recall the pure 'aborigine' in almost a therapeutic mode. At one point in his career, Sanjiv was compelled to spend some time in Palamau, a forest-land peopled by the Kols, a cognate 'tribe' of the Santals. In a very short time, Sanjiv returned home, unable to stand the isolation of the 'primitive' land, comparing his stay in Palamau to the exile of Rama in the forests. For a long time he seemed reluctant to even talk about it. Yet, in his old age, Sanjiv, at his own initiative, wrote up his memories of Palamau. It was this essay which made Sanjivchandra famous – Rabindranath Thakur later talked of it in euphoric terms and 'Palamau' became a compulsory reading for university students of Bengali literature.[152]

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[150] Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta, 'The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Colonial Bengal', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb, Delhi, 1995.
[151] Hunter, *Annals*, pp. 138-39.
[152] Asitkumar Bandopadhyay, 'Introduction' to *Sanjiv Rachanavali*, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 39-40.

In this account, published as a serial between 1880 and 1882 in Bankim's magazine *Bangadarshan,* Sanjivchandra re-negotiated both the concept of space and the image of the 'primitive' body. On the one hand, he acknowledged the limits of his knowledge and abstract thought. He admitted that 'in the hills, the Bengali is incapable of ascertaining distances'. His own vision was so limited by his own context, that initially he was incapable of envisioning the Kol land as anything other than an uninterrupted expanse of blinding forests. Only later did he find that Palamau was as variegated a land as any – marked by rivers, villages and peoples. On the other hand, Sanjiv admitted that his visit to Palamau had irrevocably altered his idea of the 'primitive'. He had always found 'tribes' to be ugly, when he saw them being transported to Calcutta or through Calcutta to the north-eastern tea-gardens. Yet in the interiors of Palamau, the Kols appeared unbearably beautiful and sensuous. He believed that even in old age, Kol women remained young.[153] And that no woman can laugh and dance as much as a 'primitive' Kol woman:

> All of the same height, the same black colour of stone, bare-bodied, on their naked breasts mirrors sparkle in the moonlight. Wild flowers in their hair and ears, smile on their lips. Brimming with pleasure, restless with pleasure, like a quivering, impatient mare, straining their bodies against the reins. ... If there can be a clamour of the body, then in the bodies of these young women [I saw] an outbreak of tumult.[154]

In contrast to this 'free' sensuality of Kol women, the limits of the author's own body became apparent. Sanjiv could never keep up with the Kols as they travelled miles by foot. To Sanjiv, the Kols seemed more valorous than not only the Bengali, but even the conquering British. Since the 'primitives' had no abstract notion of 'cause and consequence', they were audacious and daring like no one else.[155]

In his old age, Sanjivchandra Chattopadhyay admitted, his only pleasurable memories were the memories of the forest land of Palamau. It was a memory of his encounter with the 'primitive', a memory which he had repeatedly denied when he was young, a memory from the 'sub-conscious', 'as if from another life'.[156] Thus, it was in Sanjiv – known as the lesser sibling of Bankim, the epitome of nineteenth-century Bengali historical consciousness – that we see the mutual articulation of the processes discussed in this chapter. These were the seemingly independent processes – that of Bengali travel into 'tribal' lands following colonial administrative incursions and penetration of the 'interior'; that of the circulation of 'tribes' to tea-gardens which made the 'primitives', as Sanjiv said, look 'ugly' in comparison; and that of the Bengali *bhadrolok*'s uneasy realisation that he had indeed abdicated the sensuous and the valorous to the 'primitive' in his own pursuit of knowledge, abstraction and morality. As an author known, especially in comparison to his brother, to be unsystematic and uncaring about literary pursuits, Sanjivchandra seemed to articulate, though without really formulating it, the realisation that behind the image of the cerebral *bhadrolok* lay the effective and violent abstraction and transportation of the 'primitive' body. That behind the image of the poetic Bengali lay the invasive intent of modern transport, the unpacking of hidden spaces of forests and hills, where, it was said, the 'primordial' had retreated before even the beginning of history, before the 'original' aggression of the Aryan historical-subject. Sanjivchandra's text 'Palamau' thus brought together all

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[153] Sanjivchandra Chattopadhyay, 'Palamau' in *Sanjiv Rachanavali,* p. 381.
[154] Ibid., p. 393.
[155] Ibid., p. 387.
[156] Ibid., pp. 401-2.

these processes as generative of both Bengali identity and Bengali self-criticism. Here one may anticipate the next chapter. Sanjivchandra wondered why 'primitives' – who were courageous, tough and resilient enough to tame forests, beasts and epidemics – were dying out in modern times. The answer, he said, lay in moneylending. 'Just as Jewish moneylenders had once wreaked havoc on the "uncivilised" English', today Kols were being killed by indebtedness.[157] In the times of colonial modernity, even the strongest and the most 'primitive', Sanjiv said, could not resist the power of money.

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[157] Ibid., p. 398.

Money, Thought and the 'Primitive': exchange and the politics of time

> *Logic* – mind's *coin of the realm*, the speculative or *mental value* of man and nature – its essence which has grown totally indifferent to all real determinations, and hence unreal – is *alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract* thinking.
>
> — Karl Marx[1]

If there was anything which made 'primitives' absolutely different from 'historical' societies, it was – in nineteenth-century Bengali perception – the rationality of money. Colonialism had demonstrated to the middle-class Bengali not only that exchange was a source of unlimited political power, but also that monetary competence historically coincided with unlimited and universal knowledge. At least, that seemed to be the lesson of Western modernity – that the power of money *was*, indeed, also the power of the abstract Idea. Nationalist discourse therefore invoked both knowledge and commerce, in the same breath, as the two absolutes which the nation must strive for.[2] By the same logic, it constructed the 'primitive' as a being inherently incapable of just these two. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Santal came to be characterised by his/her perpetual debt to Bengali moneylenders and traders, who had followed colonial revenue officials into the newly established markets of the 'interior'. S/he thus became the empirical proof of the 'primitive' condition, where people lacked the temporal foresight and the numerical ability required for credit management. Indeed, s/he appeared to lack that very sense of abstract time, in which money generated interest and knowledge generated long-term predictions and programmes. The Bengali middle classes, therefore, counterpoised modernity – where time was incremental, continuous and chronological and the subject capable of abstraction and universal laws – to the 'primitive' condition, where time was immediate and unpredictable and the subject imprisoned in the particular, the sensual and the practical modes of existence. This chapter analyses the processes by which money came to become, in colonial Bengal, the sign of the modern, thinking subject and the mark of the fundamental 'primitive' lack.

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[1] *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Collected Works III*, Moscow, 1975, p. 330.

[2] The centrality of education in colonial Bengal is well known. For the centrality of the idea of the market, see Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India 1880-1905*, New Delhi, 1966; Satish Deshpande, 'Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-building in Twentieth Century India', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, XXV-VI, 1993.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the processes which reconfigured Bengalis and 'primitives' as non-contemporary entities. The colonial state physically circumscribed Santals from neigbouring, permanently-settled regions and by the force of law and revenue administration, tried to replace all direct and political relations between the 'aborigine' and the Hindu by relations of pure monetary exchange. The Santal and the Hindu no longer remained just antagonistic co-presences, in the image of the *arya* and the *anarya*, the civilised and the barbarian, the elite and the plebian, the moral and the immoral. They became non-contemporary, existing in succession rather than in simultaneity. Once the Santal was removed from the time (and space) of the Bengali, they could no longer confront each other without mediation. In other words, pasts and 'primitives' could no longer come face to face with the Bengali, without first being *re-presented* in the site of the present and in the time of the modern. This chapter argues that representation – the simulated presence of an entity which is actually absent from the time of the representing subject – was the foundational act of colonial modernity. And representation, as an act of temporal negotiation, was possible only through the analogy of money and reason – both abstract and purely a-contextual ideas which could exchange and translate not only inequivalent entities, but also incommensurable times. This becomes all the more evident, if the discussion is set off against a reading of Georg Simmel's 1900 text *The Philosophy of Money*, a text which formulated reason and money as simultaneous and synonymous achievements of modernity, and which constantly returned to ethnological Others to prove the universality of this teleology.[3] Surely, Simmel and Bengali intellectuals never read each other, though both did read Herbert Spencer. It seems all the more telling, therefore, that, to conceptualise the idea of money and modernity, both needed and invoked the 'primitive' in exactly the same manner.

Giving money to the 'primitive': the 'civilising' force of exchange

The forest-land of Damin-I-Koh, to be named after the Santals in 1856, was originally inhabited by the Paharias. To the East India Company, the new revenue *dewan* of Bengal, these Paharias seemed to be a violent 'primitive' people who 'always had been, and always would be, at open war with society in general'.[4] In the early 1780s, W. Hodges noted that the Hindus of the plains shunned Paharias as a rule.[5] In the 1820s, Bishop Heber found the Paharias 'making forays' into the plains and the 'Muhammedan zamindars killing them like mad dogs or tigers'.[6] Apparently, 'hillmen' and 'plainspeople', like the West and the colony, were closed off from each other and literally and metaphorically, at war. This colonial presupposition anxiously tried to deny the fact that in pre-colonial times Paharias existed in active political negotiation with the landlords of the plains. *Zamindars* often

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[3] 2nd ed., 1907, London, 1990.
[4] James Browne, *India Tracts Containing a Description of the Jungle Terry Districts*, London, 1788, p. 76.
[5] W. Hodges, *Travels in India during the Years 1780, 1781, 1782 &1783*, London, 1793, pp. 88, 92-3.
[6] Quoted in L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Santal Parganas*, Calcutta, 1910, p. 35.

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employed Paharias to fight other *zamindars* and even to support rivals in succession.[7] In fact, plains-people often disguised themselves as Paharias before making incursions on individual landlords.[8] It was not as if Paharias and plainspeople were homogenous. Yet, differences, neither absolute nor temporal, gave Paharias the power to negotiate the probably better-armed regimes of the landlords. Paharias specialised in tapping forest resources, in archery and in modes of guerilla and ambush warfare like no one else. *Zamindars* therefore had to align with, feast and even give tributes to Paharias. As Haroo Paharia recalled, by custom the Paharia chief was annually given a hundred rupees from the revenue of the locality, until the land was monopolised by the company-government.[9] Clearly, the Paharias had had a place in the general political hierarchy of the region. In fact, an entire category of people called *bundwaries* used to learn the Paharia language and negotiate with them on behalf of the *zamindars*. And in the great famine of 1770, many low-country Hindus went to live with the Paharias, who knew how to survive on forest produce even in times of absolute scarcity.[10]

These direct political relations seemed not only disturbing, but also inexplicable to colonial authorities – since Paharias 'in stature, features, language and manner ...differ[ed] as much from the subjects of Bengal as ...[Bengalis did] from the Natives of Africa'.[11] James Browne, who led the colonial army in the 1770s against the elusive Paharias of Rajmahals, argued that Rajmahal was literally an 'island', unconnected to any other hills and peopled by absolutely isolated 'primitives'. The clinching 'fact' of Paharia isolation, to Browne, was that they had no caste and 'of all things forbidden to the ... Hindoos, not one [was] forbidden to them'. Even though the 'aborigines' and the Hindus were spatially proximate, they were, as John Briggs concluded in mid-nineteenth century, absolute opposites.[12] It thus seemed imperative that all unregulated relationships between the Paharias and the 'civilised' Hindus must be forbidden. Browne suggested that *zamindars* should maintain village-registers and banish all unrecorded individuals from their estates, and that police-posts surrounding the hills should prevent Paharias from mingling with plains-people.[13] Once the 'primitive' Paharias were thus physically and conceptually closed off from 'historical' society, colonial officials argued, they must be supplied with enough money to engage in 'peaceful' exchange with the Bengalis. Augustus Cleveland, collector of Bhagalpur, wrote to Warren Hastings in 1780 that 'the disbursement and, of course, circulation of money in the hills by Government appears to me the most likely bait to ensure the attachment of the [Paharia] chiefs, and at the same time ... the civilisation of the inhabitants'.[14] It was by virtue of this insight, about the 'civilising' force of money, that Cleveland was named, by both colonial officials and Bengalis, as the pioneer who, by a 'rational mode of domination' and 'without bloodshed or the terror of authority' 'inspired' in the 'primitive' Paharias, 'the arts of civilised life'.[15]

[7] Browne to W. Hastings, 21 Dec 1777, Bengal Revenue Proceedings (hereafter BRP), P/50/7, OIOC.
[8] Browne, quoted in Collector, Bhagalpur to Hastings, 30 April 1778, BRP P/50/9, OIOC.
[9] Fombelle, Magistrate, Bhagalpur to Tucker, Sub-Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 27 Sept 1797, Bhagalpur Judicial Records (hereafter BHJR).
[10] Browne, *India Tracts*, pp. 81-4.
[11] Gov-Gen. to Mr. Wheeler, in passing through Bhagalpur by the Ganga, 16 Feb 1781, BRP P/50/32, OIOC.
[12] 'Two Lectures on the Aboriginal Races of India, as Distinguished from the Sanskritic or Hindu Race', *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, XIII, 1852, pp. 275-309.
[13] Brown, *India Tracts*, pp. 73-4, 85.
[14] Quoted in O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, p. 39.
[15] Inscription on memorial stone in Bhagalpur, quoted in O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, p. 41.

Governor-General John Shore himself wrote a monody on Cleveland, and Hastings wrote the epitaph for his grave. Undoubtedly, then, Cleveland and his Scottish Enlightenment ideas about money, drawn from Adam Smith, David Hume and Adam Fergusson, formed a significant dimension of early colonialism in India.[16]

If, at the end of the eighteenth century and in context of the 'violent' Paharias, Cleveland expressed the 'civilising' intent of money, at the end of the nineteenth century and in Germany, Georg Simmel philosophised money as the universal principle of peace. Simmel argued, quite like Cleveland, that 'primitives', instead of trading and working, preferred to 'plunder'. Plunder was the 'normatively unregulated seizure of what [was] immediately desired'. Money, however, indicated exchange under 'supra-personal and normative regulation', because money represented the temporal distance, the awaiting, between desire and its satisfaction, between subject and object. For a 'primitive', the 'object' of desire and knowledge existed as merely a thing of immediate satisfaction. S/he therefore had no idea of *means* and *mediation*, no idea of money, no temporal sense of deferral, and no grasp over tools like machinery and state.[17] Cleveland similarly argued that Paharias existed in a condition of unpremeditated and immediate subsistence-acts, to them 'the means appear[ed] as a secondary consideration'.[18] 'Primitive' violence was therefore impossible to tame by the power of the state and administration – Cleveland remarked that Paharias remained withdrawn, unresponsive and slippery, impossible to reach through juridical authority.[19] They, therefore, could only be tamed by money.

In the 1770s, Browne had noticed that Rajmahal suffered from the absence of money, both as a means and as an idea: 'there is no influx of money to the country from trade, in the least equal to the sum taken in the collections ... [the inhabitants are] obliged to borrow at a high rate of interest to pay their rents'.[20] Trade was necessarily small, the forest-produce which Paharias exchanged was perishable and bulky, and could only be locally traded. Money was therefore unnecessary, 'the greater number ... barter[ed] Indian corn and other grain that grows in the hills in exchange for liquor'.[21] In fact, trade was a disadvantage – if bought against money, Paharias would receive an exceedingly small measure per rupee, not because grains were scarce, but because coins themselves were. In Rajmahal, a limited trade was carried on by non-local Bengalis and Biharis, who maintained outposts in the forests. The Bengali traders bartered their 'inconsiderable cargo' of cloth, betel nut, salt and spices for large quantities of Paharia forest produce, which they resold elsewhere for cash. The viability of this trade was founded on the system of barter, a trade which would 'be destructive to one who attempted it on any other terms'.[22] W. W. Hunter later wrote that whatever money might have been in circulation in this area was actually put out of circulation by the colonial

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[16] P. J. Marshall and G. Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, London, 1982. See discussion in Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company 1770-1830*, Delhi, 1995, p. 171.
[17] Simmel, *Money*, p. 97.
[18] O'Malley, *Santal Parganas*, p. 38.
[19] Browne to Hastings, 29 July 1777, BRP P/50/1, OIOC.
[20] Browne, *India Tracts*, p. 15.
[21] Fombelle to Tucker, Sub-Secretary to Govt. of Bengal, 22 Oct 1796, BHJR.
[22] Browne, *India Tracts*, pp. 15-21.

government itself. In the 1790s the government soaked up all the liquidity as revenue and re-invested it in its war with Tipu Sultan. In any case, once Cornwallis decided that debased pre-colonial coins were to be accepted only after appropriate devaluation, there was a complete loss of purchasing power in the area.[23]

In this 'chaotic' world without money, Cleveland intended to introduce the civilisational time of exchange, by paying a monthly cash-pension to each and every Paharia chief.[24] Even their intrinsic violence could be traded against cash, by recruiting them as paid sepoys of the Hill Rangers.[25] In exchange for money, the government could buy the Paharia *sardar*'s consent to annually assemble at Bhagalpur and sit in trial over Paharia 'criminals' and the Paharia sepoy's promise to apprehend Paharia 'plunderers' and maintain 'tranquility'. This was no exceptional circumstance – this technique of 'paying' the 'tribes' in exchange for peace was also employed in the Malabar and Gujrat frontiers.[26] This trade promised to be effective because, except for the colonial state, the 'primitives' possessed no other source of money: 'except the species that goes into the hills through the medium of the pensions granted by the government and of the pay to the corps of the Hill Rangers, the inhabitants of the hills have no other pecuniary resources'.[27] However, what the colonial state could not anticipate was that money in itself was not enough, that money was neither necessary nor 'naturally' desired by the Paharias in every context. As the magistrate of Bhagalpur noted, even after ten years of being regularly given cash, money seemed to have left no permanent mark on Paharias.[28] Paharia *sardars* very often failed to even turn up to receive their pensions, despite government threats that 'tribal' headship was conditional on their accepting money honorariums from the state.[29] Nor was money exclusively controlled by the state. Bengali merchants devalued the copper paisa so much that Paharias found coins to be useless things.[30] To stabilise the idea of money amongst 'tribes', some officials suggested the use of gold coins. But the 'primitives' were 'almost, if not entirely ignorant of the relative value of Gold...there [would] be much difficulty in prevailing on them to acquiesce in that mode of payment'.[31] The Paharias therefore continued to 'plunder'[32] and local officials continued to recommended more money.[33] They were even allowed to keep part of the plunder, if they promised to enforce order amongst their own people.[34]

The little amount of money the Paharias received, instead of investing in saleable commodities, they spent on liquor. Paharias thus ironically reversed the 'civilising' impact of money, money seemed to promote further indiscriminate drinking, which the colonial officials saw as the singular characteristic of the 'primitive' condition. Officials were outraged to find that the pensioned

[23] W. W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, London, 1868, pp. 289-90, 311-21.
[24] Cleveland, Collector, Bhagalpur to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 19 Sept 1780, BRP P/50/30, OIOC.
[25] Cleveland to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 21 April 1780, BRP P/50/24, OIOC.
[26] Alavi, *The Sepoys*, p. 156.
[27] Fombelle to Tucker, Sub-Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 22 Oct 1796, BHJR.
[28] Fombelle to John Shore, Gov-Gen., 11 Jan 1793, BHJR.
[29] Fombelle to Sub-Secretary, Govt. of India, Jan 1802, Board Collections (hereafter BC) F/4/943.
[30] Fombelle to Shore, 21 Feb 1794, BHJR.
[31] Fombelle to Secy., Govt. of Bengal, 4 July 1794, BHJR.
[32] Fombelle to Shore, 31 March 1795, BHJR; *arzee* from Abdool Rasool Khan, Hill *sezawal*, 8 April 1795, BHJR.
[33] Fombelle to Shore, 29 June 1795, BHJR.
[34] Lieut. T. Shaw, Comm-Off., Hill Rangers to Fombelle, 16 July 1795, BHJR.

Paharia chiefs actually considered 'crimes' forgivable, if committed in a drunken state. That despite this, for fear of political unrest, the government continued to supply 'primitives' with money and with cheap liquor.[35] Apart from spending their money on liquor, the Paharias participated in, what the officials felt to be, a rather suspect trade with wandering marginals like *sannyasis, fakirs, banjars* and *nats,* accused of as much disorderliness as the 'primitives' themselves.[36] In fact, the 'primitives' seemed to turn the fact of money-payment into an argument against the colonial government itself. Commissioner J. P. Ward – who argued that Paharias be replaced as a group by a more ideal-typical 'primitive', the Santals – complained that by being given money, the former had acquired

> an idea that they occupy the hills as an independent nation, that as they contribute nothing to Government, on the contrary receive from the state very liberal pensions, they cannot be regarded as tenants of the government but rather as occupants of the hills of their own immediate right, with their goodwill and affection to the Government purchased at the expense of pensions to their chief'.[37]

That is, money confirmed the Paharia's 'proprietorship' of the hills and the forests. When the government offered them forest-land on condition that they reclaim it, Paharias made applications not for individual grants, but for the entire Damin territory as their natural *des* or country.[38]

It thus seemed clear that no amount of money could 'pacify' the Paharias into production for the market and into regular trade. Paharias considered 'ploughing' an unnecessary violation of the earth – which offered, without interference, timber, firewood, gum, honey, lac and khut, and which could be bartered for grain, tobacco and cloth.[39] In fact, even today Paharias generally refuse to clear forests, they cultivate beans which grow entwined with older trees and accuse the land-clearing Santals of deforestation.[40] By the 1820s, therefore, it appeared as if Paharias, who neither cleared forests nor laboured in the field, were not 'tribal' enough to be granted the legal exemptions, which a modern state owed to the 'primitive'. Far from existing in isolated 'primitivism', Paharias in fact, like the typical 'Hindu' landlord, rented out their foothills to Santals.[41] It seemed imperative then, to replace the Paharias by a more suitable 'primitive'. For the colonial state, this more suitable 'primitive' was the Santal, who seemed, to the authorities, more amenable to control, to forest-clearance and to 'tribal' autarchy. The colonial authorities argued, mostly in retrospect, that Paharias did not exhibit the intrinsic 'primordiality' of the Santals. The colonial ethnologist was familiar with local ballads about the brave Paharias who had defended the Rajmahal hill-passes against the Marathas. Yet to them, the Paharias did not seem as 'muscular' and as strong as the Santals. Thomas Shaw remarked that Paharias did not even live long enough to have to count their years.[42]

The Paharias seemed as 'arid' as the hills to which they confined themselves. If they had ever had the body of a stereotypical 'primitive', they had eroded it by mixing with mainstream society. For, unlike authentic 'tribes', the Paharias had no totem-system which prevented indiscriminate

[35] Fombelle to Tucker, Sub-Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 22 Oct 1796, BHJR.
[36] Fombelle to Committee Investigating the State of Police in Bhagalpur, 31 July 1799. BHJR.
[37] J. P. Ward, Commissioner, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Board of Revenue of Lower Province, 17 August 1827, Dumka Record Room (hereafter DRR).
[38] Ibid.
[39] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 2 July 1839, DRR.
[40] Samar Kumar Mallick, *Transformation of Santal Society: Prelude to Jharkhand,* Calcutta, 1993, p. 113.
[41] Report by Sutherland to Board of Revenue, 8 June 1819, BC (1827-28), F/4/953, OIOC.
[42] Thomas Shaw, 'On the Inhabitants of the Hills near Rajmahall', *Journal of Asiatic Research,* IV, 1792, p. 107.

marriages and intermingling.[43] Mark the contrast to the image of the Santal, which, as discussed in the last chapter, was constructed as that of an inherently powerful body. Paharia 'origin myths' claimed that Paharias, Hindus and even the English were brothers. They, therefore, failed to categorically distinguish themselves from mainstream society. [44] Neither were the Paharias an internally homogeneous community, as the 'primitive' was supposed to be. They sometimes existed as 'absolute aboriginals' isolated in hills, sometimes as 'semi-civilised' Hindus who were hostile to those amongst themselves who 'ate beef'. Thus, as Oldham noted in 1880, unlike the communitarian Santals, Paharias were 'each man his own sardar' – 'any cohesiveness that the Maler had was entirely due to the physical character of their situation; any which they still have is solely due to Cleveland's [monetary] system'. [45] In other words, the Paharias would disperse into mainstream society the moment their money pensions were cut off. Moreover, unlike true 'primitives', Paharias had a 'code of morals'. Oldham remarked that 'each successive step of removal from the original' had had a 'moral' impact on the Paharias.[46] Even though they drank as much alcohol as the Santals, they had come to grasp the idea of morality and time – the idea that sins of this life were punished in the next, the sinner might even transmigrate as an animal. This sense of time beyond life and memory was a sensibility definitionally absent in 'primitive'. Bainbridge argued that unlike Santals, Paharias were not imprisoned by legends of an ambiguous, 'mythical' far past – in this, they were potentially historical in a way in which a pure 'primitive' could never be.[47] Writing in the early twentieth century, the first Indian anthropologist S. C. Roy remarked upon the absence of 'tribal' traits like totems and exogamous clans amongst Paharias. In fact, S. C. Roy noted that Paharias exhibited a rather fast pace of internal transformation. Between the 1906 account by Bainbridge and the 1938 account by S. S. Sarkar, the Paharias had abolished the entire institution of common dormitories for the young. This was unlike the typical 'primitive', who changed, if at all, extremely slowly.[48]

Bounding the 'primitive': land, market and the Santals

By the 1830s, therefore, colonial officials in Damin-I-Koh had decided to replace the 'not-quite-primitive' Paharias by the ideal-typical 'tribe' of the Santals.[49] Once Santals were settled in Damin, it was administered as a purely 'primitive' land, physically circumscribed against mainstream society. And once the 'primitives' were literally fenced-in and bounded, the colonial state systematically instituted markets as 'neutral' sites of exchange between them and the 'historical' Bengalis. This strategy of containment and consequent monetisation reconfigured the locations of the 'primitive' and the 'historical' in such a way that they were no longer able to interact without the moment of mediation

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[43] R. B. Bainbridge, 'The Saorias of the Rajmahal Hills', *Memoirs of Asiatic Society of Bengal II*, 1907-10, pp. 43-4.
[44] Shaw, *On the Inhabitants*, pp. 46-7.
[45] W. B. Oldham, *Some Historical and Ethnical Aspects of the Burdwan District*, Calcutta, 1894, pp. 23-4.
[46] Ibid., pp. 10-12.
[47] Bainbridge, 'The Saorias', pp. 48-9.
[48] Sarat Chandra Roy, 'Introduction', in Sasanka Sekhar Sarkar, *The Malers of the Rajmahal Hills*, Calcutta, 1938, pp. ix-xi.
[49] Hunter, *Annals*, pp. 216-27.

and translation by money and by the colonial-modern state. In this way, it can be argued, exchange and the state emerged as the precondition of 'primitive' presence, in the time of modernity.

We have seen in the last chapter how Santals constantly moved over lands in order to escape colonial attempts to fix them to one location. These travels must have brought Santals into contact with many non-Santal peoples. It was precisely such unregulated encounters which the colonial authorities sought to prevent. To enforce the Santal's categorical containment, Damin was physically fenced off from neighbouring permanently-settled lands, such that no 'historical' entity, except the colonial state, could directly access the 'primitive'.[50] A 295 mile boundary of masonry pillars was constructed from Nowadah to the base of the Dumuriah hill, to Pertaulpur foot-hills and stretching upto the hill Kutheharry.[51] Initially a combination of natural frontiers and pillars, it soon became clear that this 'tribal' boundary had to be made more absolute in nature. As late as in 1853 the revenue surveyor Pratt complained that the 'primitive' presence seemed to be spilling beyond the original boundary mapped by Captain Tanner, for the Santals continued to travel beyond the demarcation-line and to put up pillars post-facto to mark new boundaries.[52] In other words, despite the boundary, Santals and 'outsiders' seemed to continue direct negotiations. The colonial government, therefore, instructed local administrators to erect additional posts and police-*chowkies* at small intervals, to stop the 'tribe' from crossing into non-'tribal' locations.[53] It was also argued that the boundary must be made purely cartographic, precisely mathematical and in straight lines wherever possible. Natural frontiers, the government argued, tended to be tampered with by the 'primitives' and by nature itself. After all, roads could be redirected[54] and even the river Ganga shifted its course in time.[55]

Once cartographic lines replaced experienced and 'natural' frontiers, encountered in everyday travels and crossings, Damin appeared as a representational space, rather than as purely a land. From their encounter with the Paharias, the colonial authorities had learnt the danger of defining a people in terms of their natural landscape. Such a definition held within it the danger that the inhabitants could claim the land as organically their own. The cartographic boundary, on the other hand, ensured the indispensability of the cartographer, of the totalising gaze which could envision the variegated landscape as a whole and aid the locals to interpret and admit conceptual boundaries as 'real' ones. The Damin boundary was therefore perpetuated by the colonial state, not so much as the perimeter of a country, but as a line dividing two kinds of conceptual terrains – the wild land of 'primitives' and the permanently-settled land of the mainstream Indian peasant. It differentiated two kinds of potential productive-times, the primordial time of sporadic and pure bodily labour and the continuous time of sedentary culture. It was to make Santals acknowledge and conform to this conceptual/temporal boundary, that the colonial state became a necessary and continuous presence in 'tribal' lands. And once Santals were enclosed within this 'primitive' time-space, they could no

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[50] Asst. Collector to Coll., Bhagalpur, 13 April 1830, DRR.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Coll., Bhagalpur to Pontet, 31 March 1853, DRR.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Coll. to Brown, Commissioner of Revenue, Bhagalpur, 6 July 1853, DRR.
[55] Coll. to Brown, 19 May, 6 August, 14 August 1853, DRR.

longer flee the state. The entire Damin was integrated by newly-built roads, which the colonial official followed in his chase and capture of the mobile 'primitive'. This obsessive building of roads is recorded in great detail in the reports of Pontet, superintendent of Damin-I-Koh. By 1849, he proudly claimed to have induced the Santals to build about 350 miles of roads in the 'interiors'. In fact, Pontet argued that roads were more significant in the long-term than immediate success in revenue collection. For it was roads which enabled the revenue-collector to track-down and arrest the wandering Santals within the boundary of the 'primitive' land.[56]

Earlier, Santal villages were a moving assembly of people, identified in terms of their collective biography rather than in terms of their spatial location. With boundaries and roads however, Santals were immobilised into fixed locations. Village-names came to signify particular and permanent spatial sites.[57] As Santal villages became fixed on land, border disputes became unprecedentedly common. Unable to travel elsewhere, Santals cleared more and more forests in one spot, and villages began to extend towards and confront each other. Even the cattle of one village grazing on the lands of another became a matter of discord. The colonial official emerged as a necessary arbitrator in these border-disputes. Pontet claimed that Santals had come to need and desire 'kind words' from the sahib.[58] As Damin was labelled as a 'non-regulation' 'tribal' district – free of all the laws meant for the general historical subjects of the empire – the 'primitive' was put in direct relation to the colonial state, at the exclusion of 'foreigners' like Bengalis. Bengalis were no longer 'permitted to hold land within ... the reserve for the aboriginal races'.[59] If they did, as ruled in January 1845, they would have to pay exceptionally high rents. Many Bengalis gave up their plots to the state, and those like Narayan Hajam and Anoop Mal who did not, hurriedly assured the government that they were tenants of the Santal Surmoyi Manjhi.[60] Thus, not only was the 'primitive' excluded from 'outside' historical society, the 'historical' too was denied presence in the 'primitive' location. In 1846, Pontet claimed that he had successfully excluded all caste Hindus and 'civilised' races from the 'primitive' land. The few Hindus and Mussalmans who remained in Damin had been there from 'time immemorial' by virtue of Ghatwali and other extraordinary customary grants.[61]

Effectively circumscribed within the non-regulation land of Damin-I-Koh, Santals were now placed in exchange relations with the 'outside'. Pontet argued that, since Santals were 'innocent' and 'primitive', they could not handle direct contact with historically evolved societies. Only in the site of the market could there be a 'primitive-civilised' contact, without it degenerating into violent confrontations. By 1850, Pontet claimed to have ensured the 'satisfactory' establishment of eighteen full-scale markets and numerous weekly hats, as Bengali traders from Murshidabad, Birbhum and Calcutta took the now 'straight and safe' route to Bhagalpur. In Sahibgunj even boats plied. In a Sultanabad hat established in 1842 even English longcloth, ready-made caps and jackets were sold.

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[56] Annual Report by Pontet, 1848-9, DRR.
[57] Sudder Board of Revenue to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 21 Nov 1836, DRR.
[58] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, Annual Report, 1844-45, DRR.
[59] O'Malley, Santal Parganas, p. 251.
[60] Collector to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 21 July 1851, DRR.
[61] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 22 August 1846, DRR.

In this period, numerous moneylenders and traders applied to Pontet for the opening of more markets, for grants of grazing-land for pack-animals, for permission to clear water-tanks adjoining potential market-sites, for construction of grain stores and parallel rows of shops, such that commodities on offer could not be missed by anyone even casually walking down the market street.[62] In 1851, revenue-surveyor Sherwill noted that the settling and bounding of Santals in Damin coincided with the organisation of an 'impressive' trade-network across Murshidabad, Jungypur, Suri and Rajmahal.[63] Markets generally consisted of about forty shops, selling cloth, spices, salt, tobacco, betel nut and similar accessory items to the 'tribes', and buying from them, and reselling, crude iron, fuel, wood commodities, grains, lac, honey, *kattha, mahua,* 'greens' and similar necessary products. Though the Paharias were still refusing to come to the markets, selling their forest produce at most at the foot of the hills,[64] 'primitives' in general had become attractive customers. Pontet claimed that 'tribes' were sought after by every market in and outside Damin, so much so that in 1845 an 'outside' *zamindar* was found to be seducing 'primitives' into his market by liquor. Pontet instructed that every Damin market should keep a register of attendance and that 'tribes' should be stopped from moving outside the boundary to buy and sell.[65]

It was not as if Santals were unfamiliar with exchange in pre-colonial times. Earlier traders used to travel across Damin in particular seasons and set up shops in the villages. They had a temporary access to the 'tribe', and operated on 'tribal' home-ground. This meant not only that Santals retained a certain bargaining power vis-a-vis travelling merchants, but also that merchants traversed and located on what later came to be 'primitive' spaces, temporarily occupying forested and cultivable spots. The colonial government objected precisely to this ambiguous overlap between 'primitive' and market sites. It ruled that trade must be confined only to authorised markets. Traders who located on 'tribal' lands were to be charged high *busowri* tolls. A clause was inserted in all land-grant *pattas,* making the grant conditional upon Santals preventing merchants from coming and settling in 'primitive' villages.[66] Traders who engaged in exchange with Santals anywhere other than in authorised markets were to be punished and fined.[67] An explicit temporal logic emerged out of this colonial legislation. To the Santal, exchange became an act, distinct from and external to their everyday village life. It seemed as if exchange between the 'primitive' and the 'historical' was possible only in the bounded, colonially-settled markets, under state supervision – 'primitive' locations were not to otherwise admit outsiders. These authorised markets emerged literally as little, bounded worlds of the 'outside', embedded into the 'tribal' land. The market, thus, assumed the status of the unique and singular 'civilised' site accessible to the 'primitive', who was cloistered for all other practical purposes within the enforced 'primordial' boundary.

[62] Pontet, Annual Report, 1848-9, DRR.
[63] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 30 May 1851, DRR.
[64] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 28 June 1845, DRR.
[65] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 20 July 1846, DRR.
[66] Collector, Bhagalpur to Pontet, 20 Oct 1854, DRR.
[67] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 22 May 1852, DRR. Of course, travelling merchants could not be taxed as systematically as settled markets could be.

Georg Simmel, not unlike Pontet, interpreted 'pre-modern' exchange as discontinuous and sporadic, outside the continuous time of money-circulation. To Simmel, money, the 'greatest advance of mankind', was the meta-temporal achievement of modernity – which made two completely different 'qualities and peoples ... comparable and measurable by referring to a third entity, money'.[68] While 'primitive' modes of plunder and barter interrupted the 'logical connection in the ideal line of the economic process', money instituted continuity across the most sporadic and the most independent of concrete values, products and lives.[69] This Simmelian philosophy of money evidently drew its illustrations from the kind of colonial context outlined above. The colonial event of first segregating and then exchanging non-contemporary worlds, produced not only the necessary stereotypes of the 'primordial' and the 'civilised', but also the necessary idea of money as the singular abstract *mediator*, capable of negotiating incommensurable temporalities and unbreachable time-lags. Of course, Simmel's text stops short of naming colonialism. In fact, it was through this very hiding of colonialism that the money-problematic was ordered in European thought. Money as a phenomenon was thematised in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe as a debate between those who considered money as a product of society and those who saw money to be a product of state legislation.[70] It is the legacy of this debate that even today it is generally believed that market and state exist in opposition, that the freeing of market forces necessarily calls for a rolling back of the state. Colonialism, however, reminds us that capitalism itself was the process of market expansion through state politics, and the increasing pervasiveness of the state apparatus in the wake of the capillary spread of market and credit.

The systematic institution of markets at the apparently impermeable boundary between the Santal and the Bengali was, therefore at the same time, also the process of insertion of the colonial state between the 'primitive' and the 'historical'. The Santals evidently knew that they had 'taken the place' of the Paharias via official policy. The Santals could not therefore stake an unmediated claim to this land by virtue of being 'original' inhabitants, as the Paharias could. The land remained estranged from them as a land which was emptied by the state of its 'original' people. Such a land, emptied of one people and filled by another, developed the characteristics of abstract space, a container category. Santals could not include such a land in their self-definition. For Paharias, land seemed to have no autonomous presence as a resource, outside the life of those who drew from and nurtured it. Santals however experienced Damin as a space which pre-existed their arrival, where they had only recently been given a place, *in exchange* for their promise to produce a taxable and marketable surplus.[71] By this policy of 'replacement' – of Paharias by the Santals – the colonial state had engendered a primary alienation of the 'primitive' from his/her location. The government ruled that unless Santals farmed one-tenth of their land within ten years of the grant, 'the tenures would be

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[68] Simmel, *Money*, p. 147.
[69] Ibid., p. 125.
[70] S. Herbert Frankel, *Money: Two Philosophies, the Conflict of Trust and Authority*, Oxford, 1977.
[71] In the course of my field-work in the Dumka region, I found that the Paharias still feel that they have been displaced by the Santals, and Santals admit to the fact that this was originally Paharia land. Significantly, the Paharias feel so alienated by the 'unjustifiable' presence of Santals in Damin, that they are the only 'tribe' who do not all participate in demand for an autonomous Jharkhand state, in which they fear that Santals will become more dominant. Santals in other districts, for instance in Burdwan, West Bengal, however remember Dumka as their original home.

deemed forfeitable to [the state] for future'.[72] The colonial assurance, that the wild lands of Damin were natural to and coterminous with the 'primitive', was overdetermined by this constantly looming threat, the threat that the 'primordial' land of Damin could be resumed by the state if Santals failed to perform the stereotypical 'primordial' labour. This 'primitive' labour – of forest-reclamation – was no longer seen as conditional upon the Santals location in forest-lands but as personified in their pure 'primitive' bodies. It was through this alienation of 'primitive' bodies from their location – this necessary undoing of Buckle's land-people equation – that *junglis* were put to circulation in the labour-market, as discussed in the previous chapter. And it was through this alienation that the state could successfully insert itself between people and their land – not only as the regime which judged the potential of land as resource, but also as the regime which judged the 'primordiality' of different peoples. By this judgment, Santals qualified to a 'primitive' status in a way in which the Paharias, organically entrenched in their lands, could never have.

In this novel, bounded location, Santals experienced the colonial state as omnipresent. Pontet and his staff constantly supervised standing crops and made Santals experiment with new products. They were induced to eat potato, to try growing coffee, and to cultivate oilseeds, sugarcane and cotton.[73] 'Primitives' were used in cash-crop experiments because, unlike the 'civilised', they ate everything and could survive, by scavenging the forests, despite the worst of crop-failures. Consequently to the Santal, the familiar land became estranged and unpredictable. Between 1855 and 1938, there were four major famines and a constant scarcity condition in Damin, as if land behaved differently once it was forced to yield money rather than food. Earlier, Santals cultivated only as much as they needed for subsistence. Rice-fields were laid out in restricted locations, in ravines and depressions naturally fed by the lakes and springs. The cash-imperative, enforced by the state, forced the extension of cash-crop cultivation even on uplands and ridges, where nothing but dry-crops would have been grown earlier. This raised the proportion of infertile and unprotected fields to the total Santal land, making it much more vulnerable to natural disasters. Once Santals were deprived of their right to cultivate only where and when it was safe, they became absolutely dependant, during scarcity times, upon the discretionary right of the state to exempt and waive revenue-claims.[74] In other words, the colonial state emerged as the necessary arbitrator exactly at the moment when money became the necessary mediator between the 'primitive' and his/her land, and between the 'primitive' and the Bengali.

Time-money: debt, interest and the Santals

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[72] Ward's Report, Aug 1827, DRR.
[73] Locke, Collector to Brown, Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 18 Sept 1850, DRR.
[74] S. C. Mukherjee ed., *Bihar District Gazetteer: Santal Parganas*, Patna, 1938, p. 215.

Santals claimed that they had become lazy once money appeared in their world. They no longer manufactured but bought ready-made things from the market. And once they began buying, instead of making things, they fell into a perpetual debt to outsider-moneylenders.

> In a former age there was no money, it is told, neither was there any buying and selling. All necessaries they were earning and making ... even salt they were preparing from saline earth. Oil they were pressing from different forest fruits, they were weaving clothes for themselves ... whether we formerly had gold or not we do not know. But in the old country they called gold samarom. [75]

Those days, when the Santals worked hard, 'rice grew ready husked, and the cotton bushes bore cloth all ready woven and men did not have to pick lice out of each other's hair; men's skull grew loose and each man could lift off his own skull and clean it and then replace it'. The sky was so close to the earth that the sun and the moon could be reached by hand. However, when the Santals became lazy, the sky went beyond their reach.[76] In other words, when Santals produced things for themselves, they recognised their own labour in the things they used. Such labour came easy, as if rice grew ready-husked. However, once commodities were bought in the market, they could no longer be identified as the product of one's labour. Needs were fulfilled by the labour of others, just as one's own labour was expended in satisfying strangers. Shorn from its fruits, labour became work-in-itself. This labour, without need, initiative and fruition, was more likely to be shirked than familiar labour practices. It now seemed as if work was an abstract and senseless intention, until it passed through the market and became purchasing power. The Santal lament about the alienation of the sky and the earth probably signified this sense of loss, when products of past labour no longer seemed familiar and accessible to the present labourers themselves.

Santals, left to themselves, were unpredictable labourers. Though capable of extreme hard work, they refused to extend cultivation and clear forests in excess of what they judged as necessary. The colonial state therefore had to enforce the idea of *surplus* production, as opposed to Santal 'indolence'.[77] To show labour to be a necessary and unqualified virtue, Santals had to be familiarised with the idea of exchange value and money.[78] They had to be taught that selling in the market was not merely a means of fulfilling present desires, in fact the present could be adequately fed by the production of use values. Selling for money was a matter of future desires, desires which could not even be conceived in the present. More than an immediate means of exchange, money was a congealed power over the future, a debt upon society which could be called in at a distant time. If Santals did not understand money as credit, it was because 'primitives' were inherently body-centric and non-cerebral, incapable of imagining time in the abstract, i.e. incapable of imagining a future which cannot be visualised and apprehended in the mode of the present. This absence of money-sensibility was analogous to the absence of the notion of sin amongst Santals — both implied that the 'primitive' had no anxiety about the time beyond the present. They therefore neither produced surplus, nor saved, nor postponed immediate satisfaction to secure the not-yet. As Reverend MacPhail said, the Santals were so sinfully indulgent, that they wanted holidays for every festival.

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[75] Kolean and Juggi Haram, *Horkoren Mare Hapramko Reak Katha*, ed. L. O. Skrefsrud, 1887, Oslo, 1942, p. 121.
[76] 'Beginning of Things' in *Folklore of the Santal Parganas*, ed. C. H. Bompas, reprint, 1981, Delhi, pp. 401-402.
[77] Ward's Report, Aug 1827, DRR.
[78] Marx, *Grundrisse*, London, 1973, p. 105.

Each Santal village held the festival on a separate day, so that everyone could drink and dance in every other village, without the celebrations clashing with one another. As if this were not enough, Santals 'appropriated' their neighbours' calendar too, celebrating even non-Santal festivals in characteristic alcoholic 'frenzy'.[79] Given this excessive and sinful presentism, money seemed to be the only short-cut by which 'primitives' could be reminded of the thing called future. Money could teach Santals the virtue of deferred consumption and surplus labour, without having to conduct them through centuries of civilisation. After all, purely abstract and monetised labour and purely body-centric and 'primitive' labour were both amenable to the highest velocity of circulation – as even Marx said, there was indeed an apparent similarity 'between barbarians who are fit by nature to be used for anything, and civilised people who apply themselves to anything'.[80] Being pure bodies without culture or time, 'primitives' could be put in circulation and in any kind of work, forest-clearance, mining, tea plantation or railway construction. That is, the market could make 'primitives' simulate 'civilised' and specialised labour, which was free and abstract enough to, as Marx said, 'apply to anything'.

Simmel argued, like the colonial officials and the missionaries, that – unlike in 'primitivism', where the future appeared as an absolute Other to the present – in modernity the future was captured and valued in the present. With money, the present came to signify the capacity, the potential and the chances one 'own[ed] for the future'.[81] Colonial officials, Bengali middle classes and Simmel all agreed that 'extravagance' was the defining trait of the 'primitive', which completely destroyed this 'rational sequence of purposes' in time.[82] If the Santal lived in festivity and extravagance, it was because s/he lacked a continuous time, which connected past debts to future interests. For the Santals, therefore, interest, the money-value of passing time, had a moral-civilisational lesson. As Soshee Chunder Dutt, uncle of the historian R. C. Dutt, said, it was moneylenders rather than missionaries who could really 'civilise' the aborigine: 'the blessings of civilisation among most of the tribes are now mainly represented by the presence of the mahajuns, moneylenders and spirit-sellers'.[83] This was because money liberated the imagination of time from dependence on an immediately present referent – from need, desire, body and practice. Money permitted a temporal distance between production and consumption, sale and purchase. With money, one's need to buy another's product no longer had to coincide with the other needing one's own. Money therefore enabled logical deductions across moments which were non-present and enabled thought without concrete referents. Money, as Simmel said, allowed foresight across 'contradictory stages of value and non-value'. 'Primitive and vacillating' thought, however, lost its way in the intermediate, reference-less stages of awaiting and speculation. 'Primitive' thought therefore remained viable only 'by moving via obvious and concrete statements' of barter and coincidences of need. 'Primitives' could only manage a short temporal distance between buying and selling, thus losing the flexibility required for a rational credit management and for the securing of the future.[84]

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[79] Rev. J. A. MacPhail, *The Story of the Santal*, Calcutta, 1922, pp. 68-9, 75.
[80] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 105.
[81] Simmel, *Money*, p. 243.
[82] Ibid., p. 248.
[83] *The Works of S C Dutt I*, London, 1884, pp. 183.
[84] Simmel, *Money*, p. 142.

It was not accidental that this Simmelian theoretical principle coincided with the empirical instance of the Santals' experience of the market. Santals found buying and selling in colonial markets to be curiously unconnected and inequivalent acts. The weights by which Santals sold their produce were called *becharam* or *chotobau*, the younger wife, by Bengali merchants. These were lighter in weight than the measures used for purchase, *kenaram* or *borobau*, the elder wife.[85] Evidently, these differentiated measures made Santals sell more than they could buy from Bengalis in return. Again, selling cheap in harvest-time, and re-purchasing their own product at unaffordable prices in scarcity-time, reinforced the Santals' experience of exchange as necessarily unequal.[86] In other words, Santals found that in the market, their own past labour, now an expensive commodity, was unattainable by their present labour. Practice and the product of practice, once mediated by the monetary moment, thus seemed wholly incommensurable. Marx described this rule by the past (commodified, dead labour) of the present (living, social labour) as the amnesia of alienated labour, which failed to recognise their own past in the fetishised thing called money.[87] In his critique of this Marxian theory of value, Simmel invoked what he called the 'primitive' error of confusing money, a pure sign, with a substance or a referent like labour. This 'primitive' error caused the 'astounding arbitrariness, instability and inadequacy of value concepts in primitive culture'.[88] According to Simmel, 'primitives' saw money as a consumable thing, just as they saw time as a qualitative experience. Simmel defined time as the average measure of the pace of events, and money as the abstract measure of the pace of exchange, such that neither could show substantive characteristics.[89] Colonial authorities complained, like Simmel, that Santals confused money with consumable substance, they failed to realise that money lost its value-significance unless its use was temporally deferred and negotiated. The moment Santals sold their produce, they immediately consumed their cash-earnings as tobacco or liquor.[90] Even as late as in the 1860s, officials complained that the people of Santal Parganas had not developed a sense of money as abstracted from its materiality. Petty merchants from the more 'advanced' markets of Birbhum, therefore, unhesitatingly released counterfeit coins in Damin, coins which the Santals accepted without question but with which they could never pay rent.[91] Most exchange here still took place in terms of barter or of copper coins and even the relatively 'civilised' *zamindars* and *ghatwals* could not quite comprehend the nature of paper-notes.[92] After nine months of trying to put them in circulation, the office in Deoghar had to return all the paper currency to the central treasury.[93]

The 'primitives' had therefore to be taught that money was a purely abstract sign, which, precisely being free of body and context, could defy erosion by time. It was not enough to engage in

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[85] Pontet, Annual Report to Collector, Bhagalpur, 1845-6, DRR.
[86] M. C. McAlpin, *Report on the Condition of Sonthals in the Districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Midnapore and Balasore*, Calcutta, 1909, pp. 25.
[87] Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Moscow, 1971, pp. 279-80.
[88] Ibid., p.97.
[89] Simmel, *Money*, pp. 140-42.
[90] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 16 August 1839, DRR.
[91] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 8 March 1840, DRR.
[92] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Commissioner, Santal Parganas, 2 May 1864, DRR.
[93] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Secretary, Board of Revenue, 19 May 1865, DRR.

trade, the Santal had to grasp the idea of debt and interest. By the second half of the nineteenth century, most Santals were being born into debt-bondage, a condition worse than slavery, the Assistant Commissioner of Deoghar argued, because the 'outsider'-moneylender had no interest in the person of the debtor, only in his possessions.[94] In fact, the moneylender, unable to find the particular Santal who owed money to him, often seized the land and cattle of another. As if every Santal was a defaulter, in a common and collective state of 'primitive' indebtedness.[95] To the Santal, therefore, the past appeared as a negative inheritance, the present as a time of repaying the past. The moneylenders often charged compound interest, despite laws against it. No matter when the loan was taken, interest was demanded for the whole year. If Santals repaid debts in kind at harvest-time, moneylenders accused them of returning bloated new paddy against matured, shrunken grains and demanded a greater volume than that borrowed in the first place. More often, interest was demanded in cash, a sure way of making the Santal lose his land. Moneylenders charged a hundred percent interest for seed-loans, because each grain borrowed was pregnant with its own future reproduction. In fact, debts became such an inexorable condition of Santal life, that some Santals turned indebtedness into a sign of respectability – a Santal would often boast, ironically, that he had more than one personal moneylender.[96] The Santal's 'innocence' and 'truthfulness', i.e. his/her 'primitiveness', became the ideal and corporeal form of his credit. Credit, as Marx said, is the 'economic judgement on the morality of man', where counterfeiting is done in the material of the debtor's own person.[97] As the old Santal lamented, though in old times Santals did not lie, now that they were so often taken to court by moneylenders, they had begun to lie and cheat.[98] In a passage recorded in 1871, Jaher Era, the forest-spirit, said:

> I came in haste, what my race, my birth may be. I might show twelve shapes, show twelve meanings, what it is, is fully true. Otherwise all is up. Wealthy people, stallions at the back of the house, in the eaves, gold silver they bury, put away. For what purpose would I bury, put away my race, my birth? ... Shopkeepers, peddlers for a seer of paddy, a basket of paddy they sell away, throw down oil, salt; as for my race, my birth. Whatever it may be, for a seer of paddy, a basket of paddy I may sell it away, throw it down with happiness, with easy circumstances I may strengthen, may apportion it, it is fully up.[99]

However may this passage be interpreted, it seems clear – in the context of nineteenth-century debt-bondage – that Santals were uttering the question of time and identity (birth, race) in reference to the question of money and market.

It seems evident, therefore, that the nineteenth-century Santal experience of money was primarily an experience of indebtedness.[100] Santals recognised this indebtedness as a recent phenomenon:

> In the Sikhar country, the moneylenders found us for the first time. There the first moneylender with the Santals lived in Nandura. From that time on, we are in their hands and they are tearing us like vultures. By constantly paying we become numb, still the debt never comes to an end ...at first they did not unrighteously charge us interest to such a degree, they were taking only 25 percent in paddy or money, but gradually they commenced to charge exorbitantly.[101]

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[94] Letter to Dy. Comm., Sahebgunj, 28 Aug 1858, DRR.
[95] Pontet to Collector, Bhagalpur, 20 July 1842, DRR.
[96] McAlpin, *Report*, pp. 25-6.
[97] Marx, 'Comments on James Mill, *Elemens d'Economie Politique*' in *Collected Works III*, pp. 215-6.
[98] *Horkoren*, p. 129.
[99] *Horkoren*, p.102.
[100] H. McPherson, *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in District of Santal Parganas, 1898-1907*, Calcutta, 1909.
[101] *Horkoren*, p.13.

They also identified debt and interest with the phenomenon of the 'outsider'. The term *diku* literally meant 'outsider' in Santali. However, the term was not indiscriminately used for any one who was not a *hor* or a 'man', as the Santals called themselves. Though it is difficult to trace the etymology of this word, it seems clear from nineteenth-century and contemporary usages, that *diku*-s were necessarily outsiders who were also moneylenders, or associated with moneylenders (police, shopkeeper, court-clerks etc.). This conflation of money and the Other was not accidental. As we have seen in the previous section, the bounding of the Damin in the 1830s and 1840s produced for the first time, a sense of an absolute 'outside' which was no longer easily accessible to the Santal. Revenue demands could no longer be escaped by fleeing to lands beyond this boundary. Santals therefore had to take loans to survive. The Santal experience of debt and the Santal experience of boundedness, thus, coincided in colonialism – making the creditor and the outsider appear simultaneous. (Interestingly, Simmel explicitly stated that money was always related to the idea of the stranger, because money was an abstract idea which did not require location or acculturation. He in fact argued that Jews were efficient money-managers precisely because they were estranged and exiled in the first place.[102]) As moneylenders emerged as 'outsiders', on whom Santals had no customary 'moral' claim, interest-payments could no longer be negotiated, waived or deferred. The numerical and incremental time of interest could no longer be interrupted by social relations and contingent bargaining.[103] And as outsiders began to control the value of time, time itself emerged before the 'primitive' as a threatening and abstract Other.

In the course of their 1855 rebellion, Santals categorically stated that if a length of time was not productive – as the length between sowing and harvest was – there could be no money-price on it. Since money itself was not a living thing, there could be no interest on cash-debts. Soorae Manjhi remembered the rebellious occasion, when

> the soubah buried a rupee and some dhan in the ground. When the dhan began to appear above the ground, he told the Sonthals that as dhan produced a return and a rupee in cash did not, therefore when they got grain from the mahajan they were to pay 4 annas interest in the rupee but when they borrowed cash no interest was to be paid.[104]

In capitalism, however, money *was* time. This was not just because of the capitalist transformation of money into a 'consummate automatic fetish', which obliterated the differentiated form of productive capitals and made money appear as an organic, self-multiplying thing.[105] It was also because of the capitalist transformation of time itself into an object which displayed the cumulative and incremental characteristics of money. Santals, like the so-called modern *homo economicus*, admitted that when productively invested, time generated value, in money-form or otherwise. What Santals did not admit was the curious phenomenon that, whatever the nature and use of a time, it was necessarily and primarily money. That is, Santals did not accept the presupposition that time had value – not as a positive trait of how the subject lived his/her time, but as a *negative* attribute, as the opportunity cost of a time which could have been invested elsewhere for better profit. This idea of opportunity cost – that time, in principle, could be confiscated like money from an idle subject and re-located in another

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[102] Simmel, *Money*, p. 227.
[103] This point was suggested by Dipesh Chakravarty in a private conversation.
[104] Statement of Runjit Manjhi of Sarmi to Brown, Commanding Officer, 13 Regiment NI, 23 Nov 1855, no. 52, vol. 303, Judicial Proceedings, West Bengal State Archives.

productive context – transformed temporality itself into a free-floating object, irrespective of practice, event and agent. In other words, time became extricable from society and autonomous of social temporalisations. This time was no longer perpetuated in local practice, but universalised by its prior evaluation through the idea of opportunity cost, of the *elsewhere* where time could have been more valuable and more profitably employed. In this paradigm, it seemed logical that the extravagant 'primitive' would pay higher than normal interest. This was the compensation extracted by the 'civilised', against the 'primitive' waste of time, a time which would have been more relevant and more appreciated, in both financial and historical senses, elsewhere.

Faced with this accusation, in the form of interest, that their money and time would have been of better use elsewhere, the Santals found their own social temporality becoming more and more superfluous. In Santal perception, festivities constituted productive time as much as labour did. The Baha or flower festival in spring or the Sohrae or harvest festival in winter enhanced the fruitful potentials of nature and life. This is not to say, as is usually done, that 'primitive' time was purely cyclical, returning like seasons to the beginning, rather than moving irreversibly like money towards a perpetually deferred future.[106] This is to show that for Santals, 'productive' time extended beyond labour-time and that 'enjoyment' was not always postponed to residual, after-work leisure. Indebtedness, however, caused such Santal practices, which did not partake in the time of money-circulation, to be ruled away into the inconcrete, immaterial sphere of 'culture'. And culture-specific 'subjective' time was forced to adjust to the universal 'objective' time of circulation and incremental interest. Social practice and its consequence, temporal intent and its effects were thus irrevocably split apart. If, through festivals, Santals intended to make nature and time flourish, festivities actually resulted in 'waste' and further indebtedness, and festive time appeared as an illicit leisure, opposed to the productive and cumulative 'objective' time. As Soshee Chunder Dutt said, in a necessary civilisational judgement:

> [the tribes are] represented by a continuous round of festivities and debaucheries, from one end of the year to the other, which has contributed more perhaps than anything else to their degradation ...it is scarcely right to attribute any degeneracy in their character to their dealings with the mahajuns and the moneylenders.[107]

In order to be valued then, Santals had to abandon their social time of practice and re-locate themselves in the abstract time of money-circulation. Money replaced practice as the referent of time. In this process, time seemed to lose its own materiality. Removed from the realm of practice to that of the infinite generative mode of money-interest, no end was valid in-itself, but only as a *means* for furtherance and re-production. This was the distinctive moment of capitalist modernity. Not that colonialism introduced money and market for the first time, but that with colonialism and capitalism money sought to become an autonomous representational space, where the sign of money could mediate and exchange all things and all times. Eric Alliez describes this as the replacement of

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[105] Marx, *Surplus Value*, pp. 454-56, 466.
[106] Boudhayan Chattopadhyay, 'Time in Economics and Social Analysis: a Case Study from Eastern India', in *Concepts of Time: Ancient and Modern*, ed. Kapila Vatsayana, New Delhi, 1996.
[107] *Works I*, p. 186.

economic exchange by 'chrematistic' exchange – where money traces its proper space as a self-enclosed 'private space', split off from social and political acts and judgements.[108] If Simmel argued that the circle of value and the circle of reality were irreducible to each other, that the objectivity of the economic was irrespective of the objectivity of the political[109] – it was because he presumed this chrematistic split between the conduct of money-time and the conduct of practical/political-time. It was this temporal split which depoliticised the moment of encounter between the 'primitive' and the 'historical' – as they became politically incommensurable but economically exchangeable. No wonder then, as colonialism sought to absolutely and physically separate Santals and Bengalis, it never forgot that the 'primordial' and the 'civilised' must be put to exchange – as an essay on the Santal rebellion in Calcutta Review categorically stated, 'trade is humanising'.[110] If this implied that Santals would fall into a perpetual debt to the Bengali, it would only be the natural and unacquittable debt of the 'primitive', the debt that s/he must owe to the 'historical', for surviving in a time not its own.

Thought and money: the abstraction of time

Thus, in colonial modernity, money confronted the Santals in the form of the inexorable temporality of debt. It can of course be argued that 'pre-modern' conditions too exhibited if not similar, at least analogous experiences of unmanageable, unrelenting time. The time of god and of nature, of the king and of disease surely appeared as capricious in pre-capitalist societies as time-money did in capitalist ones. However, there was a crucial difference between the two. With colonialism, things and ideas of everyday encounter began asserting a temporality of their own. The autonomous time of money (or of the railways, which I discussed in the previous chapter) could not have been explained away as the inexplicable will of the pure Other – as the time of god or of nature could have been. Pre-colonial societies did make everyday claims on god and on nature, yet these entities were also constructed as the metaphor of human finitude, as a reminder of the limits of human knowledge. Money, railways or the colonial state however came across not only as things of everyday time, but also as products of human will and ingenuity. However capricious and cruel they might have seemed, their time could not be completely other-ed, without the colonised losing the human status itself.

It must be remembered that in the colonial context, the clock, the train, the colonial state – ideas and things with autonomous time – assumed their appearance of modernity precisely from being alien. As Sumit Sarkar says, they were 'telescoped' into the colonised society.[111] In other words, they were not produced through social processes and struggles which could be recognised as one's own. They appeared as visitations upon colonial society, as abrupt insertions of islands of

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[108] Eric Alliez, Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time, London, 1996, p. 8.
[109] Simmel, Money, p. 62.
[110] Anon., 'The Santal rebellion', The Calcutta Review, March 1856, p. 263.
[111] Sumit Sarkar, 'Colonial Times: Clocks and Kaliyuga', paper presented at the South Asia History Seminar, SOAS, London University, 20 June 1996.

'modernity' in a sea of 'tradition', as it were. This 'telescoping' through time was precisely what produced fractures and mismatches within the colonised, as society came to represent an agglomeration of the inequivalent times of creditor-debtor, state-society, 'historical-primitive'. This not only meant that in terms of the 'universal' time of the creditor, the modern state and the historical, the colonised, the debtor and the 'primitive' were inherently marked by a temporal lags. It also made possible the conception of co-existing entities as non-contemporaneous, entities which, despite being together, failed to come face to face, failed to claim the same moment of time. Bringing these non-contemporary times into contact therefore required the a priori act of *re-presentation*, of the non-modern by the modern, the identification of 'primitive' entities and their re-textualisation as present 'survivals' of past centuries.[112] Hence the absolute centrality of money – and of knowledge – in the imagination of the nation. For only money and knowledge, being universal and abstract, resisted erosion and death in their travel across times. Time could destroy 'traditional' wealth and wisdom, but money and reason, being abstract, were free of the assessment of time, as it were, as they sought to represent and trade with non-present peoples and things. Exchange and representation, in fact, captured passing time, by representing it, by putting an interest on it, and by making time accumulate as capital and as history.

This section analyses the emergence of the idea of money in colonial Bengal as symmetrical to the idea of thought. Nineteenth-century Bengali texts categorically stated that commerce and credit were fundamental to civilisation because their absence made people 'primitive'. An 1871 school-text, written in the form of a catechism, began with the interrogation: 'Why are uncivilised people of the hill-tracts in such a terrible state?' This was because the *asabhya* did not understand the virtues of money and trade. Therefore, though these 'primitives' worked harder than anybody else, they nevertheless remained inadequately equipped for even an ordinary life.[113] Another text of 1870 argued that because 'primitives' did not rationally use money, because they neither saved nor traded, their poverty was far worse than the poverty of the Hindu poor – it was indeed a great waste that 'primitives' were allowed to occupy lands, which if commercialised, could have provided thousands of 'our own'.[114] This text argued that 'primitives' made the fundamental error of thinking that labour by itself generated value. Because one had to work more to acquire expensive goods, the 'primitive' mistakenly thought that high prices were caused by hard labour. Reality was just the opposite – value was determined in exchange, because despite the most earnest of labour, some things remained too costly to acquire.[115] Simmel published his philosophy of money thirty years later, and, in exactly the same mode of counterpoising the 'primitive', rejected Marx's labour theory of value.[116] Another 1866 text said, commerce was the noblest of nationalist acts, sometimes even nobler than medicine and religion. It required great insight, bravery and sacrifice, as the trader travelled vast distances, penetrated dense forests and hostile regimes, risked his life on the high seas. The lowliest

[112] Dipesh Chakravarty shows how D. D. Kosambi conceptualised many 'tribal' and women's customs as 'survivals' of the past. Chakravarty, 'Bharatvarshe Adhunikatar Itihas o Samay Kalpana', *Aitihasik*, VII: 2, 1996, pp. 121-28.
[113] Balaknath Ray, *Arthavyavaharer Prasnottar*, Hugli, 1871, p. 5.
[114] Rajkrishna Raychaudhuri, *Arthavyavahar or Money Matters*, 7th ed., Calcutta, 1870, pp. 8-9.
[115] Ibid., pp. 22-3.
[116] Simmel, *Money*, p. 96.

and the most complacent of acts was to remain rooted to ancestral land, hunting and scavenging like 'primitives'. The Bengali proudly announced that in this scale of nobility, the Hindus came first because they were world-traders even before the Phoenicians were.[117]

An early twentieth-century Bengali text about *aranyabas* or 'life in the forest' explicitly counterpoised the 'primitive' condition with the 'poor, but educated' condition of the enterprising Bengali trader.[118] A 'novel' by its own admission, this text claimed to represent the reality of the 'tribal' lands of the nation. It was the story of a Bengali who took the radical decision of renouncing the urban pleasures of Calcutta. A trader by caste, he decided to begin life afresh, in the forest lands of the Kol 'tribes'. It was a self-imposed exile, provoked by the realisation that it was irrational to suffer the anxieties and unfreedom of salaried work, when there still remained extensive and unutilised stretches of fertile land in the nation's 'interior'. After all, the author said, trade and cultivation were callings which best served the nation. He therefore bought a 'wasted' *zamindari* in Chota Nagpur at a very low price and soon, with the help of local 'primitives' like Kols, transformed its wilderness into a plushly cultivated stretch. Having learnt from the local English administrator, that 'trade [was] the basis of all power', he settled this 'tribal' land with markets and earned unexpected prosperity.[119] The author articulated his commitment to trade as a historical, civilisational act. According to him, since ancient times it were traders who acted as pioneers, opening up and 'civilising' the 'primitive' localities of the nation:

> In almost all villages *gandhabaniks* [a trading caste] from the east have come and settled. ... As they did the same in ancient times, they were called *visha* or pioneers. This is an *anarya* country. But even here they are seen to be present. ...you [traders] are still the real pioneers ... With and after you, *Brahmans* too have come to this region; ... After your example other castes will also turn up. By your settling in this *anarya* country, and by example of your customs and habits, the people of this area are also changing. Perhaps it was through you that in the ancient times Hindu civilisation was disseminated in the four directions.[120]

These 'primitive' interiors were marked by a duality, a contradiction between 'fear and prosperity', between 'beauty of the landscape' and 'wild beasts'. To resolve this 'primordial' duality, the Bengali trader was exhorted to inhabit the 'tribal' spaces of the nation, in emulation of the 'image of God', in 'a divine, non-contradictory state, to banish all that [was] wild and fearsome [from] here'. For trade, the author said, represented the final and divine principle of unity and integration.[121]

In this historic project of monetisation and integration, Bengali trader-pioneers harnessed 'primitives' to fight wild beasts and cut roads through the hilly terrain.[122] After all, 'primitives' were immaculate and excessive bodies, lacking conceptual tools to even appreciate the 'natural' beauty of their own landscape, let alone to grasp abstract imperatives like that of exchange:

> Natural beauty cannot get reflected upon the primitive. Like sunlight. Sunlight gets reflected more or less by all objects; but the way it does on clear water or transparent glass it cannot do on anything else. For this is required cultivated thought-capacity...[123]

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[117] Jogodish Tarkalankar, *A Treatise on Commerce*, Krishnanagar, 1866, pp. 21, 30-35, 57, 145.
[118] Avinash Chandra Das, *Aranyabas*, Calcutta, 1913.
[119] Ibid., pp. 352- 67.
[120] Ibid., pp. 210-11.
[121] Ibid., pp. 413-14.
[122] Ibid., p. 414.
[123] Ibid., p. 150.

R. C. Dutt contrasted this 'primitive' opacity to the clear transparency of the reasoning mind, in terms of thought and money. He believed that even the most uneducated and poor Hindu was more thoughtful than the purely body-centric 'primitive'. Even when living in the same village as the 'aboriginals', the Hindu refused to drink alcohol and indulge in loud merry-making, for the complexity of Hinduism made even the lowliest of castes 'contemplative'. It was this thoughtful life-style which made Hindus more 'frugal' with money and 'regular in habits, industrious in toil, peaceful in disposition'.

> The semi-aboriginal ... a striking contrast ... is of an excitable disposition and seeks for strong excitement and pleasure; he is incapable of forethought and consumes his earnings without thought for the future; he is incapable of sustained toil and therefore, often works as a field labourer than as a cultivator. Simple, merry in his disposition, excitable by nature, without forethought or frugality and given to drunkenness, the semi-aboriginal of Bengal bring to his civilised home many the virtues and vices of the savage aboriginals which his forefathers lived. [124]

R. C. Dutt, thus, found the 'primitive' to lack abstract thought-capacity and future-orientedness. He then represented this absence of thought as identical to the absence of thrift and credit sensibility. In this, the Bengali historian, historical novelist and civil servant seemed to be in prior agreement with the colonial administrator-ethnologist.

In his *Annals of Rural Bengal*, Hunter noted the 'absolute inability' of the 'primitive' to articulate 'reflex conceptions of the intellect'. Santali speech, it seemed, was totally 'barren' of concepts of 'matter, spirit, space, instinct, reason, consciousness, quantity, degree' etc. It was a language of 'sensation rather than of perception; of the seen rather than of the unseen; of the present rather than of the future and the past'.[125] Lacking abstract concepts, Santals lacked senses of future, of 'transcendence':

> The absence of abstract nouns renders it difficult to get at his real view on these subjects; but the most intelligent I have met, seemed to think that uncharitable men and childless women were eaten eternally by worms and snakes, while good men entered into fruit bearing trees. The common Santal's ideas are much looser. He believes that ghosts and demons surround him, who will punish him in body unless he appease them; but who these ghosts may be he knows not, and after death all is a blank.[126]

Apparently, 'primitives' imagined time as an endless replication of their experienced present. Reverend F. T. Cole for instance, recorded the Santal belief that after death there remained nothing but hard work. Dead Santals grind bones day and night, the only respite comes when men stop to chew tobacco and women to breast-feed their babies.[127] C. H. Bompas recorded that, after death, Santals expected

> a very hard time of it in the next world. Chando Bonga makes them work terribly hard; women have to pound the fruit of the castor-oil plant with a pestle; and from the seeds Chando Bonga makes human beings. ...in the next world also it is very difficult to get water to drink.[128]

It seemed to follow from this, that 'primitives' had no conception of eternity and of infinity, beyond death. As Hunter said, in Santali 'the longest period of time that [could] be expressed [was] the duration of a man's life', and instead of invoking the transcendent, Santal funerals were therefore merely 'occasions for gluttony and drunkenness'.[129] Interestingly, in Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu was told

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[124] R. C. Dutt, 'The Aboriginal Element in the Population of Bengal', *Calcutta Review*, CL,1882, pp. 245-46.
[125] Hunter, *Annals*, pp. 113-14.
[126] Ibid., p. 210.
[127] 'Santal Idea of the Future', *Indian Antiquary*, VII, 1878, pp. 273-74.
[128] Bompas, *Folklore*, p. 410.
[129] Hunter, *Annals*, pp. 124-25.

by old Kabyle, that '[t]he French act as if they would never die'. Bourdieu quotes this statement, about death as an end of time, to explain the difference between the time-sense of the Algerian peasant and that of the capitalist coloniser. The Kabyle peasants refused to admit the possibility of a predictable and manageable future, which was beyond the perceptible present, i.e. beyond death, but prior to a future which was as yet inconceivable. Thus, Kabyle thought seemed to proceed either by sensation/perception or by dream. The Kabyle, therefore, refused to 'postpone' present consumption for the sake of an uncertain future, for the sake of investment and interest.[130] In the paradigm of money-time, thus, even as radical a thinker as Bourdieu seemed to share, perhaps unwittingly, the colonial construction of the 'primitive' as without credit-rationality.

These conclusions about 'primitive' temporality – or rather the lack of it – were drawn not from analyses of Santal social practices, but from a classification of 'primitive' vocabulary. In the nineteenth century, vocabulary was accepted as the assemblage of knowledge-concepts. The temporal judgement about 'primitives' was thus a judgement more about 'primitive' knowledge than about everyday life. From Paharia language, Reverend Droese concluded that Mal Paharias did not understand infinite time; they could articulate the present only as continuous tense, and past and future only as simple tenses. They could therefore neither grasp continuity with the past, nor predict and manage the future. And instead of understanding time as immanent in the subject, Paharias apprehended time as a thing of the world, external and often lost to the individual – thus, instead of saying that 'one *is* so many years old', they said that 'so many years *belonged* to one'.[131] This inability to grasp time as the Kantian a-priori, as a precondition to the intelligent grasp of reality, implied that the 'primitive' was incapable of abstracting singular laws and general concepts from the plenitude of what they saw and felt – 'light, lux is a high abstraction which none of my informants can grasp, though they readily give equivalents for sunshine and candle, fireflame'.[132] And though 'primitives' had an 'excessive' number of specific and concrete words, they suffered from an 'absence of terms representing relationship in general ... conspicuously the relationship of cause and effect'[133].

If 'primitives' failed to comprehend abstract time, this was because they could not imagine that ultimate but simplest of abstractions, namely numbers. Sarat Chandra Mitra noted that Santals had no calendar and could not count beyond the fingers of their hands. 'Lapse of time' was grasped only as the completion of a task at hand.[134] If the 'primitive' failed to imagine duration beyond the duration of present practice, this was contrasted with the duration of nationalist history – wherein the nation existed in a durable and recognisable form, long before it could concretely and practically materialise as active nationalism in the nineteenth century. As S. C. Roy said:

> The historical memory of unlettered tribes is necessarily short and faulty. Young races like young children possess a short memory. The present fills their mental horizon ...and they have neither the capacity nor the leisure to look before and behind ... It was only when more settled conditions of tribal life allowed them time to think, that their traditions must have taken their rise.[135]

[130] P. Bourdieu, 'The Attitude of the Algerian Peasant towards Time', *Mediterranean Countryman*, VI, 1963, pp. 55-72.
[131] Ernst Droese, *Introduction to the Malto Language and the Malto Vocabulary*, Agra, 1884, pp. 50-1.
[132] B. H. Hodgson, 'A Brief Note on Indian Ethnology', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, March 1849, pp. 238-43.
[133] Hunter, *Annals*, p. 124.
[134] S. C. Mitra, *Further Notes on the Primitive Method of Computing Time and Distance*, Calcutta, 1920, pp. 85-6.
[135] S. C. Roy, 'The Origin of the Kol Tribes and Sources of their Ancient History', *Modern Review*, VI: 6, 1909, p. 326.

The 'primitive' was, by the same logic, contrary to the time of money. For money was the embodiment of temporal durability. Money, unlike things, were never consumed or withdrawn from circulation. Money, like the nation, could never perish and represented the time of infinite accumulation, of value and of history. A Santal could not grasp the institution of credit (and the history of the nation), not because s/he was 'innocent', but because s/he conceptually lacked this notion of temporal duration as infinity, as a continuity that remained after the end of work, after the demise of all that was practical, contingent and mortal. Money and numbers represented the 'civilised' desire for infinity, which went beyond need and labour, and became the sophisticated, quasi-religious desire for 'duration' beyond life.[136] For the educated Bengali, abstract laws and numbers answered this desire for duration: on the one hand, in the form of trade, 'company papers' and credit which continued to produce interest for generations after the 'death of the patriarch'; and on the other hand, in the form of chronology which promised progress and accumulation irrespective of deaths, defeats and *kaliyuga*. For the Santal however, money, credit and numbers seemed to bring only misery and fear. During the first census of 1871, the idea of enumeration agitated the Santals almost into a rebellion, even though the method of counting was allegedly imitative of 'primitive' modes. Each Santal *manjhi* was given black, red, white and yellow threads – each thread was to be knotted as many times as their were men, women, boys and girls respectively. Yet Santals suspected that counting heads could not be a benign or motiveless act, surely the government was conspiring to either indenture or conscript them.[137]

One must return to Simmel, to clarify what thus seems in colonial Bengal to be a commonly presumed relation between abstract thought and money-rationality. Bengali historiography and Simmelian philosophy of money both shared their theoretical foundation in an originary 'primitive'-modern counterpoise. Simmel's paradigmatic presupposition – that the 'primitive' existed in a state of passion and solipsism – was shared by the Bengali *bhadrolok*. This was the supposition that the primitive condition was a 'naïve projection' of the self onto the objects of need and desire, which disallowed the subject-object distinction and the rise of an abstract consciousness which could function without objects of reference.[138] 'Primitive' practice was therefore necessarily ineffective, because 'primitives' were 'driven' to act by passion and desire and often attributed inexplicable futures to magical authority. Modern practice on the contrary, based on abstract analytical thought, was not driven, but 'pulled' forward by the idea of potential consequences. To Simmel 'the great antinomy in the history of thought [was] between the causal approach and the teleological approach'. The 'causal' approach informed 'primitive' practice, which exhausted itself in action and impact. The 'teleological' approach informed purposive practice, based on analysis of the future.[139] 'Primitive' practice grasped

[136] Alliez, *Capital Times*, p. 8.
[137] H. Beverly, 'Knotted Ropes used by the Santals in Taking the Census of 1872', *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1872, p. 192.
[138] Simmel, *Money*, pp. 70-71.
[139] Ibid., pp. 204-05.

the object in an immediate and sensuous mode, while modern practice reached for the object through mediation by the highest conceivable tools, through money and the state.

The time of progress was thus founded on the idea of *means*, for tools and mediatory concepts were end-oriented, and therefore, by definition, willed the future.[140] To Simmel, therefore, the real question of practice was the production of means. The better the means, the easier it was to achieve the end without effort: 'one cannot promote the final purpose any better than to treat the means as if it were the end itself'. And money was the best instance of means becoming the end. In archaic times, continuity was founded on the finite permanence of land and the cosmos. In modern times, every end was experienced as a transitional moment in the advent of a further future. In modernity, time, like money, never terminated. Money thus destroyed 'the fear of the infinite' which marked the 'primitive'.[141] With the appearance of money as the ultimate abstraction, Simmel argued, exchange, 'the purest and the most developed kind of interaction', became the mode of all human relationships.[142] With money, even non-contemporary peoples could be put to exchange, as trans-valuation assumed the form of temporal re-presentation. After all, money perpetuated time as an uninterrupted and infinite continuum, where substantiality was indefinitely postponed in favour of seriality.

Conclusion

All the elements of Simmel's philosophy of money were thus present and active in colonial Bengal. Or rather, contexts like nineteenth-century Bengal were a precondition to the production of such Western philosophies of money as that of Simmel. These were the contexts of colonialism – where the colonised was forced to admit that commerce was the primary source of power and knowledge, where both colonial and 'vernacular' texts lamented the absence of abstract thought and monetary competence amongst 'primitives', where money was employed as the effective 'civilisor' of interior 'autarchies', and where the state sought to circumscribe the 'primitive' away from the 'historical' and then put them in monetary exchange. As colonialism proved that exchange and politics could be synonymous, civil service and commerce became the most prestigious professions among Bengali elites. And the market and the state came to represent desirable but not always accessible realms of universal time. These were sites where modernity existed uncontaminated by social and cultural temporalities, where universal mediators like money and reason operated irrespective of concrete and active differences. The modern state thus appeared to exist in 'advance' of society, which often caused the Bengali middle classes to abdicate the work of reform and education to the state. The 'free' market appeared to promise an unencumbered time of circulation, where duty and obligation,

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[140] Ibid., pp. 211-13.
[141] Ibid., pp. 231-43.
[142] Ibid., p. 82.

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i.e. politics as *dharma*, could be replaced by the more predictable and 'fair' moment of exchange, the state offering law and education to society in return for money, tax and revenue.[143]

This is not to say, by any means, that money and commerce were new to non-Western societies. Nor is it to attribute an autonomous causal power to money itself, changing social formations without reference to production relations. Nor is it to admit evolutionism through the backdoor, by suggesting that peoples like Santals and Paharias lived autarchic lives of 'primordial' authenticity until they were colonised since the late eighteenth-century.[144] In fact, I am arguing just the opposite – that Santals and Paharias did not exist as authentic 'primitives', until they were colonised, bounded and deprived of political and practical relations to 'mainstream' society. This was because colonial exchange was primarily founded on the prior temporal hierarchisation of communities, which were then re-placed, post-facto, in monetary contiguity. In other words, in the paradigm of colonial modernity, political practice was based on the re-production of money as an abstract mediating entity which could *trans-valuate* and *represent* incommensurable worlds, acts and things in universal and infinite ideal-time.

Late eighteenth and nineteenth-century political economy – based on imaginations of perfect information and free market, i.e. on principles of knowledge and money – theorised precisely this centrality of representation, where all social productions, endowed with monetary value, seemed capable of standing in for all others, where universal exchange replaced the transcendental signified as the basis for thought.[145] Once we recognise this re-presentative intent of colonial modernity, we can better understand the limits faced today by 'post-colonial' political practice. Founded on the temporal mismatch of peoples, modernity reduced both knowledge and political practice to re-presentation. Bengali middle-classes tried to attribute to themselves just such a mediating, re-presentative role – analogous to that of money and imitative of that of the modern state.[146] Their claim to this representative, mediating status was founded on the idea of modern knowledge, and on a denial of the practical and 'primitive'. After all, as R. C. Dutt claimed, the Aryans became great intellectuals precisely because, having once and for all suppressed the 'primordial' non-Aryans, they no longer needed to waste time in 'action', in the practice of politics and of war.[147]

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[143] It can be argued that it was through capitalism and nationalism that the state and the market emerged as coterminous, both of which came to represent universal and rational time. Substantiating this argument is a separate project. It will be sufficient here to refer to Steven Fireman's argument against Eurocentric historians who, familiar with mercantilism and colonialism as imperatives of the absolutist and modern states, have missed the trading functions of the 'sacred medicine of governing' of the African Lemma, a healing association which functioned as a trade network from north of the river Congo across into the Atlantic. See Steven Fireman, 'Africa in History: the End of Universal Narratives' in *After Colonialism*, ed. Gyan Prakash, Princeton, 1995, p. 48.

[144] For cultural variations in the meaning and use of money, see J. Parry and M. Bloch eds., *Money and the Morality of Exchange*, Cambridge, 1995 and Arjun Appadurai ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge, 1986.

[145] Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, London, 1991. Simmel himself stated that time in modernity signified on the one hand, the linear infinity of money transactions and on the other hand, the circular infinity of knowledge, 'in which every point is a beginning and an end' of thought and of exchange. Simmel, *Money*, p.115.

[146] For an analysis of the mediating intentions of the Bengali middle classes, see Partha Chatterjee, 'A Religion of Urban Domesticity: Sri Ramkrishna and the Calcutta Middle Class', *Subaltern Studies VII*, ed. Ranajit Guha, Delhi, 1992.

[147] Arcydae, [R. C. Dutt], 'Literature of Bengal', *Calcutta Review*, March 1874, p. 337.

The next two chapters will discuss this overdetermination of practice, and therefore of time, by the universal, abstract time of re-presentative knowledge. I shall try to argue that in nineteenth-century Bengali discourse, the nation was constructed through representation rather than through a practical creation of solidarity. It was nationalism in this form that reproduced the nation as identical to the national market and reduced a people to a state. Political and monetary representation – across temporal lags – articulated the principle that peoples and products not present in the time modernity could be harnessed in the sites of the market and the state. As temporal politics was reduced to acts of exchange and re-presentation, time itself was reproduced as an objective, abstract series. And with its abstraction, time was relocated from the field of practice to the site of thought, a relocation which took away the subversive force from temporal antagonisms. Society, now an agglomeration of non-contemporary locations, was shorn of the politics of time. And practice was banished to the pragmatic terrain of tactics and of strategy.[148] Knowledge was henceforth 'objectively' conceived, without reference to practice, as representation and exchange sought to conquer time itself. Law and knowledge conceded to local contaminations, in the process of their execution and implementation, just as the 'modern' conceded to accommodate the 'primitive' in the nation-state and in the market. And by virtue of this 'concession', the 'primitive' was placed in a non-dischargeable debt to the 'historical', just as the 'local' time of practice was placed in an infinite debt to the meta-temporality of the theoretical.

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[148] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 36-9. It can be argued that this exile of practice is central to modern European thought, which allows thinkers like Rorty to reject philosophy – not via the notion of political practice – but via the hope of free and individual 'pragmatics'. See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Brighten, 1982.

Time to Act: Historical Event and the Practice of Rebellion

> [O]ur crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable. This, my friends, is the crux of our solitude.
>
> – Gabriel Garcia Marquez[1]

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Santals rebelled. They rebelled against the colonial state and against the Bengali and Bihari moneylenders, and above all, they rebelled against what they rightly saw as the alliance between merchants, moneylenders, government officials and the police. To both the colonial state and the Bengali middle classes, this 'primitive' rebellion represented more than a threat of subaltern insubordination. It shook the middle-class certitude that the *anarya* was always-already suppressed at the very originary moment of history. It even seemed to subvert, by interrupting the time of debt and interest, the empty and continuous time of chronology itself. In colonial Bengal, thus, the 'primitive' rebellion represented the theoretically absurd moment of the past rebelling against the present, as it were. No wonder, it provoked more disbelief than outrage. This chapter does not seek to describe the Santal rebellion as an episode in itself – that has been done often and exhaustively enough.[2] Instead, it tries to problematise the Santal rebellion as a potentially critical act, which had to be not just defeated but also neutralised, if modernity and history were to become universal modes of contemporary existence. Historiography had to reconstruct the Santal *act* of temporal contestation into an exceptional and singular *event*, so that the 'primitive' rebellion could be put in succession to other events of nationalist history, and so that chronology, as a purely formal succession, could overdetermine and defuse what were clearly temporal contradictions between Santal practice and the colonial-modern teleology. This chapter argues that, by rebelling, Santals invoked, from a position marginal to the colonial present, the discontinuous and unpredictable time of willing a future other than that which seemed presently possible. This practical and portentous time confronted the incremental and gradual time of progress and interest. In this, Santal articulation of the rebellion and its memories provided a critique of the disciplining of time into chronology, and of the capture and reduction of temporal acts into synchronic and cumulative knowledge.

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[1] Quoted in Eduardo Galeano, *Memories of Fire*, London, 1995, p. 880.
[2] Dhirendranath Baske, *Saontal Ganasangramer Itihas*, 5th ed., Calcutta, 1995.

Historiographically, the Santal rebellion is placed in the year 1855. Yet, as this section tries to demonstrate, the rebellion could not be completely exhausted by this momentous date, this singular numerical instant. The judicial files of colonial officials – which tried to explicate, record and sentence the rebels and which became 'sources' for later historiography – show that Santal rebellious practices could neither be ascribed a clear beginning nor an effective end, nor could they be contained as a once-and-for-all occurrence. In other words, the magisterial and disciplinary discourse of the state, on which the historical discourse of juridical truth and evidence depended, failed to reduce the *hul*, as the Santals called their rebellion, into a single event, into a punctuation in time, which could be put in direct succession to that unilinear series of pure moments called chronology. The *hul* seemed to propose an altered everyday, irreconcilable with the continuity, the causal predication and the overdetermined eventualities that historiography could accept as chronological. To make it appear as a single event, colonial officials tried to document the *hul* as a centralised occurrence, where four brothers, Sidhu, Kanu, Chand and Bhairav were accused of mobilising all Santals. Yet the authorities had to admit that there were many versions of the beginning of the *hul*, and the simultaneous but disparate risings were not all explicable by the 'swift sending of letters' by Sidhu and Kanu to faraway villages. Most Santals arrested called themselves *manjhis* or headmen, and there was no way of separating leaders from the 'masses'.[3] The very fact that the Santals acted in solidarity – 'Santals have great unity; if in a crisis one beats the drum, in an hour 4/5 thousand Santals can collect on the hills, such solidarity can only be met by the army' – were invoked by the Bengali middle classes as 'proof' of the rebellion being one great conspiratorial event with one single leadership.[4]

Yet the central characteristic of the *hul*, which the authorities tried hard to understand and which later histories tried to underplay, was the massive participation of non-Santals in it. To say this is not to deny the Santals' initiative, but to indicate that the *hul* was more than a single event authored by a single agent. When none of the two hundred rebels arrested at one spot turned out to be Santals, the official wrote in confusion: 'I do not understand the system and reasons and no one here can enlighten me.'[5] Such was the network of common interests that initially the rebellion appeared to colonial officials to be a war led by the wealthy Amir Sahib of Hazaribagh, who used to hunt with the Santals and who was sent a letter by the rebels after they killed the *darogah* Mahesh Dutt.[6] Officials also noted the 'five favoured castes' that were always spared by Santals.[7] At Kumrabad, even as the Santals were suppressed, Haris, Bauries and other outcastes prepared to rebel.[8] Even as Bengali moneylenders petitioned for extra troops,[9] Santals brought in Brahmans to conduct *durga puja*, a

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[3] Special Commissioner to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 26 Sept 1855, Judicial Proceedings, West Bengal State Archives, (hereafter BJP), vol. 299, no. 21.
[4] *Sambad Prabhakar*, 11 July 1855.
[5] Loch, Special Commissioner to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 13 Aug 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 168.
[6] Commissioner of Circuit, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 20 Aug 1855, BJP, vol. 295, no. 107.
[7] Commissioner of Circuit, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 6 Aug 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 158.
[8] J. R. Ward, Commissioner on Special Duty, Raniganj, to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 20 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 297(I), no. 13.
[9] Petition of Gangaram Mundle et al., Parihapur, 17 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 51.

primarily Bengali festival.[10] In Jamtara, even a trader was found sheltering Santal rebels.[11] And though Paharias were bribed to inform against the Santals,[12] many joined in the rebellious activities.[13] Thus, while historiography recorded the *hul* as a 'primitive' event, it was evidently a far more general practice. In the rains of 1855, Basun Manjhi proclaimed: 'virtue lives in all joogs [epochs] – sathha, trota, dapur, kolee, what more shall we write'.[14] Like the Bengali, the Santal too used the motifs of *satya* and *kaliyugs* to indicate epochal temporality. It was this rebellious complicity between the 'aborigine' and the low caste Bengali – that defied the conceptual exclusion of the 'primitive' from historical society – which colonial officials and later historiography sought to wish away, by recording the *hul* as a purely Santal event, with a single perpetrator, a synchronic unitariness, an immediate and marked origin and a total and final end.

Colonial officials found it difficult to ascertain the precise beginning of the *hul*. Santals themselves perceived the rebellion as directly linked to their earlier 'dacoities'. In other words, the condition of rebellion evidently pre-existed the origin of acts apprehensible as a single event.

> It appears that the Sontals had collected from Beerbhoom, Bancoorah, Chota Nagpur and Hazareebagh, to the number of 6 or 7000, for the purpose of avenging the punishment inflicted on their comrades concerned in last year's Dacoities... committed on the Bengallee mahajuns[15]

Though Kolea Santal did not rebel, he was invoked as a leader because he had participated in the 'dacoities' of 1853-54.[16] Dhirendranath Baske mentions Santals rebelling as early as in 1785 – when Tilka Murmu was hanged for fatally wounding Augustus Cleveland.[17] This past rebellion was completely exorcised from historical memory – even Vidyasagar wrote in his *History of Bengal* that Cleveland died owing to the unhealthy climate of Rajmahal hills[18] – for Cleveland, as we saw in the previous chapter, was recorded by history, both colonial and nationalist, as the peacemaking civilisor of the 'violent primitives' of Rajmahals. The *hul* also continued beyond its alleged suppression. The official at Deoghar wrote, as late as in 1858 that Santals were continuing to assemble in large numbers, with bows and arrows, even when there was no hunt.[19] They insisted on hook swinging during *charak* festival, defying government orders against such 'violent' worship.[20] In 1859 Santals killed the *chowkidar* of Gopikander;[21] in 1861 they almost rebelled again;[22] in 1865 they assembled in Hazaribagh, circulated messages on chits of paper and promised to return on the full-moon of *baishakh* with two rupees from each village;[23] and in 1871, they rebelled against the census. By the end of the nineteenth and in early twentieth century, Santals organised the Kharwar movement;[24] and

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[10] Commissioner of Circuit, Burdwan to Magistrate, Birbhum, 24 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 87.
[11] Ward to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 5 Oct 1855, BJP, vol. 299, no. 59.
[12] Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 20 July 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 58.
[13] Commissioner, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 22 July 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 151.
[14] Basun Manjhi to Sidhu et al., BJP, vol. 294, no. 130.
[15] Commissioner of Circuit, Bhagalpur to the Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 9 July 1855, BJP, vol. 291, no.44
[16] Bidwell, Special Commissioner for Suppression of Santal Insurrection to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 13 October 1855, BJP, vol. 300(I), no. 21.
[17] Baske, *Ganasangramer Itihas*, pp. 11-5.
[18] Dhanai Kisku, *Baba Tilka Manjhi tatha Bhagalpur*, quoted in Baske, *Ganasangramer Itihas*, p. 13.
[19] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 11 June 1858, DRR.
[20] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Dy. Commissioner, Godda, 30 April 1858, DRR.
[21] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 8 November 1859, DRR.
[22] Home Political Files, 1861, National Archives, Delhi.
[23] Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar to Commissioner, Santal Parganas, 17 June 1865, DRR.
[24] P. O. Bodding, 'The Kharwar Movement among the Santals', *Man in India*, I: 3, 1921, pp. 240-61.

in 1917, Santals rebelled in Mayurbhanj against British attempts to recruit labour-corps.[25] Being armed was an everyday life condition of the Santals – officials tried in vain to persuade them that they need not carry bows, just arrows should suffice as the sign of 'tribalism'.[26] It seems then that the state of 'unrest' continued among the Santals much beyond 1855, an everyday state which defied a categorical containment within the idea of the event – especially since a 'momentous event' implied time standing-still until the uneventful time of the ordinary everyday resumed.

The *hul* passed in the course of the same year, from an act of protest into the time of the everyday. As we saw in the previous chapter, colonialism had authorised markets as the only possible site of 'peaceable exchange' between the 'primitive' and the mainstream society. Santal rebels, however, by the end of 1855, understood that the only relation to the market was and could be that of appropriation. They articulated going to markets as *dours* or 'runs',[27] used government certificates of pardon as money to 'plunder' shops, and hunted merchants and moneylenders as *shikar* or game.[28] Colonial officials rightly attributed 'the totally different character' of these acts to the rebels' perception that there was no return to the time prior to the *hul*.[29] Time itself was irrevocably changed. Even Santals with government certificates of pardon were no longer acceptable as 'innocent' and hard-working tenants.[30] Unlike earlier in the rebellion, when Santals would precede their attacks by messages of the *sal* branch[31] and arrive in clear daylight, they now moved and worked in the dark of the night. Unlike in groups of warring men, they now moved in much larger numbers with families and children, 'foraging' the countryside and living a life of defiant mobility.[32] They gave up living in villages, took off the roofs of their houses and stored their acquisitions from the market in them for general access of the people.[33] They began marrying their children in great haste, 'the Sooba baba having given out that no marriage [could] take place for twelve years'.[34] Evidently the rebellion had irreversibly changed the texture and quality of time, such that for as long as twelve years the Santals expected to live differently, with no time for social festivals. After the rebellion, times could never be the same again, and it was this change in temporality, which it was impossible to bracket within the formal duration, the pure moment of the event.

Thus, if historical narratives foregrounded the 'event' of the rising – battles, deaths, 'plunders', the face-to-face encounters of Santals with *dikus* and *sahebs* – Santals foregrounded the transformed nature of everyday time. In this changed everyday, *lag-lagin* snakes swallowed whole humans, women with equal number of children exchanged flowers and swore eternal friendship, people died in places where buffalo-cows grazed, leaders were born to unmarried girls. This was a time when *dikus*

[25] Sitakant Mahapatra, 'Raghunath Murmu's Movement for Santal Solidarity', in *Tribal Movements in India*, ed. K. S. Singh, Delhi, 1983, pp. 131-32.
[26] Quarterly Report of Asst. Commissioner, Deoghar, June 1858, DRR.
[27] Collector, Birbhum to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 6 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 297(I), no. 25.
[28] Diary, Collector, Birbhum, 22 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no.60.
[29] Special Commissioner to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 26 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 300(I), no. 4.
[30] Asst. Magistrate, Monghyr to Special Commissioner, 23 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 300(I), no. 5.
[31] Diary of the Collector, Birbhum, BJP, vol. 298, no. 43.
[32] Lieut. Col. Houghton, 63rd Regiment, NI to Brigadier Bird, Birbhum & Bankura Field Force, 29 Dec 1855, BJP, vol. 306, no. 59.
[33] Asst. Magistrate, Monghyr to Special Commissioner, 13 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 16.
[34] Ward to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 19 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 38.

were all to be killed. And so Santals must, henceforth, hang cowhides and flutes before their houses to prove that they were not *dikus*. Women were to be married off quickly, not with vermilion but with oil, and witches be 'brought to sword'.[35] Village-streets were to be cleaned, cowbells and brooms hung before them – for people were coming and must see everything shine. Houses and courtyards were to be decorated, and dances danced wearing ankle-bells.[36] The time of 'wanderings had begun', when men from five villages would walk through five others, teaching new songs, putting the sacred-thread on unmarried young men and handing over ploughs. Then the men from these villages would wander through five others, and so continue.[37] In this changed everyday, there remained no difference between the rebellious and the non-rebellious. Colonial officials requested martial law not because Santals were winning in battle, but because few could be convicted in regular trials.[38] All Santals lived transformed lives and no evidence could be brought against one that did not apply to all others.[39] This was the time when *sahebs* killed Santals and Bengalis followed colonial troops, burning and 'recovering' property from Santal villages.[40] As Chotrae Desmanjhi, who was a teenager in the *hul*, remembered: the *hul* was the beginning of a time of 'hunger worse than the burn of disease', as famines raged one after the other, 'even wet marshy lands cracked under the sun' and 'this became the time in terms of which we started calculating the age of our children'.[41] After the *hul*, Santals were forever separated from each other,

> scattered through poverty. ... [Santals] went to the towns...crossed the Ganges to earn our living and were scattered as far as the Pandua forests, Sikharpur, Catai and the country of Barin. It was then that we started selling fuel, leaves and charcoal. Some people did not return to their houses ...[42]

Contesting eventualities: causes and the rebellion

In conventional historiography, events are imagined as exceptional moments, foregrounded against and predicated upon uninterrupted and 'normal' everyday time. Colonial histories of India were thus histories of events like wars and defeats, which showed up the colonised as repeatedly falling prey to 'foreign' invasions. In opposition to this, nationalist history textualised *samaj* or society as the real uneventful state of the nation, a temporal continuity where culture resided and which the 'ordinary' Indian refused to stake in political contests and events. Evidently, both these histories shared the idea of the everyday as the location of the 'normal', which remained beyond the reach of extraordinary political events like rebellions and wars. If events had any connection with this uneventful everyday, it was mediated by the idea of causality. Causes were the antecedents, which could inhabit 'normal' time, but the events, which these causes produced, succeeded and superseded the realm of the ordinary. In other words, by making causes logically and structurally antecedent to events,

[35] Kolean & Juggi Haram, *Horkoren Mare Horkoren Reak Katha*, Oslo, 1887(1942), pp. 188-90.
[36] *Chotrae Desmanjhi Reak Katha*, reprinted in Baske, *Ganasangramer Itihas*, Appendix 2, p.162.
[37] *Horkoren*, pp. 189-90.
[38] Commissioner of Circuit, Burdwan to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 3 August 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 27.
[39] Commissioner, Burdwan to Magistrate, Birbhum, 10 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no.14.
[40] Finch, Commanding Nulhati Detachment to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 6 Aug 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 88.
[41] *Chotrae*, pp. 162-70.
[42] *Horkoren*, p. 190.

historiography suspended the concurrence of everyday and eventful times – as if, despite the occurrence of unserialisable events like revolutions, chronology seemed to continue uninterrupted, in a simulation of ordinary everyday life.

Santal rebellion, being a 'primitive' subversion of historical modernity, was just such an unserialisable act. It had to be therefore, contrasted to and causally predicated upon the 'normal' everyday life of the Santals. Santals, however, articulated the rebellion as a change in everyday time itself. Such a rebellious imperative could not be easily split into prior causes and a succeeding event. J. P. Ward – who had supervised the bounding and settling of Santals in Damin and who therefore was as familiar as any administrator could be with the 'aboriginal question' – was surprised to find that Santals were unable to give causes for their rebellion. Moneylending did not seem to be a cause, for Santals mentioned it 'with less fear and loathing than most ryotts of Bengal'.[43] Nor did they make a cause out of exploitation by railway officials, known to have molested Santal women.[44] Officials in Birbhum believed that 'there seemed to be no cause' except that Santals from Damin must have 'persuaded' Santals elsewhere to rebel.[45] On the other hand, officials in Damin believed that 'the cause did not originate here', for the axes used by rebels were alien to the area.[46] The Special Commissioner for Suppression of the rebellion in fact requested a complete map of Santal migration, trying to trace causes across the trail of past Santal travels.[47] Yet nothing was found which could serve as either the immediate or the sufficient cause, fully explaining the *hul*. Everything the Santals said seemed 'afterthoughts'.[48] It seemed to colonial authorities, therefore, that it could only be Santal 'primitivism' which could have caused the *hul*. Because Santals were a people absolutely alien to the 'rest of the inhabitants of the country', living in unthinking and habitual solidarity, it did not 'require any deep research to discover the cause of their conduct'.[49] For, what was not cause enough for the 'civilised' could very well suffice as a cause for the body-centric and unthinking 'primitive'. And since a cause is defined by its anteriority, the generic 'pastness' of the 'primitive' could by itself function as an adequate cause for 'primitive' acts like violence and rebellion. Colonial juridical discourse therefore decided that the cause for the *hul* was nothing other than the ambiguous Santal idea that this land was once theirs. For, as 'primitives', they could not grasp the temporal 'fact' that 'primordial' conditions were annulled long ago by history and progress.

To the question 'why', the Santals said nothing more, and nothing less, than that the time to rise had arrived. Not only Santals, a Muslim *julah* too proclaimed that the time had come.[50] There was nothing otherworldly or divine about this inspiration. God was certainly invoked but he was called the *subah*, the tax-collecting sovereign as termed in Hindustani political vocabulary. The *subah-*

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[43] Ward to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 13 October 1855, BJP, vol. 300(I), no. 18.
[44] *Sambad Prabhakar*, no. 5300, 12 *sravan*, 1855.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Commissioner of Circuit, Bhagalpur to Special Commissioner, (day illegible) Oct 1855, DRR.
[47] Special Commissioner to Pontet, Superintendent of Damin, 1 Sept 1855, DRR.
[48] Commissioner of Circuit to Special Commissioner, 11 October 1855, DRR.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Commissioner, Burdwan to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 28 July 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 4.

thakur ruled that fair revenue was never imposed on land, but only on cattle and ploughs;[51] that a tax of five rupees should be put on every Bengali in Santal land;[52] that the houses of moneylenders should be burnt but those of the ordinary peasants spared;[53] that no creditor was to be repaid, and for any debts thereon only one pice per rupee should be given in interest.[54] Often local *manjhis* verified with the *subahs* if individual acts of attack had prior ratification so that they might not turn indiscriminate.[55] A Santal order of 9 *sravan* from Durgacharan Manjhi to Jagannath Manjhi clearly stated that 'plundered' property must be made public or else 'thakur would search the house'.[56] These clearly indicate the this-worldly nature of the temporal imperative. Time was invoked not as a divine intent, but as an articulation of the changed nature of the present, such that judgements could no longer be made by past parameters. Thus, when the magistrate asked Bullea Santal – since how long were Santals collecting guns and poisoned arrows[57] – he replied, 'on account of [sic]' time's arrival, 'we all had swords'.[58] Kanu Santal was arrested for 'plunder' of a brass-encased mirror, Lieut. Toulman's waist-plate, three pocket books, an old book on locomotives, a few visiting cards of the engineer Brown, pieces of English paper, a few silver ornaments, a few rupees and one gold *muhur*. When asked why, Kanu replied 'that every Santal was to share land equally, mahajuns were to be expelled from the country and zamindars were to be deprived of all authority and land, except that on which their houses stood.'[59] It was not so much that the interrogator and the depositor were speaking at cross-purposes, as that they were living in different times.

Sidhu testified that Santals were sitting on his veranda for months, wondering about the bad times, when half a paper fell from the skies and when the other half fell too, *thakur* descended in the form of a cartwheel. Though Sidhu could not read, an outcast Dom told him that the *thakur* had written asking him to fight the moneylenders. When the impatient official asked Sidhu to decide, once and for all, if it was god's order that caused him to rebel or if it was his complain that superintendent Pontet did nothing about his grievances, i.e. decide between a religious and a secular cause – he could only say, 'the thacoor would also come to the Bengallis. And they will fight with one another. The Sahibs will also fight forever together. The time will come. I cannot say when ...'.[60] Kanu Santal's *parwana* said:

> The reign of truth has begun. ...He who does not speak the truth will not be allowed to remain on earth. The mahajuns have committed great sin. Sahibs and amlahs have made everything bad. In this Sahibs have sinned greatly. ... On this account the Thacoor has ordered me saying that the country is not the Sahibs'.[61]

Santals thus attributed their *hul* not to god but to something god-like – to inexorable time, impossible to master and predict like a rational cause. A cause by definition has a kind of repeatability – wherever and whenever a specific cause is found, a similar event is bound to follow. To the Santal,

[51] Magistrate, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 24 July 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 221.
[52] Commissioner of Circuit, Bhagalpur to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 10 July 1855, BJP, vol. 291(II), no.45.
[53] Asst. Magistrate, Monghyr to Special Commissioner, 13 Sept 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 16.
[54] Magistrate, Murshidabad to Commissioner of Circuit, Nuddea, July 25, 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 306.
[55] Petition of Bhagea Manjhi to Sidhu and Kanu, BJP, vol. 294, no.130.
[56] Enclosure, vol. 294, no. 130.
[57] Magistrate, Murshidabad to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 13 July 1855, BJP, vol. 291(II), no. 46.
[58] Deposition of Bullea Santal,14 July 1855, BJP, vol. 291(II), no. 67.
[59] Statement of Kanu Manjhi, BJP, vol. 304, no. 83.
[60] Copy of Deposition of Sidhu, 5 Oct 1855, BJP, vol. 298, no. 28.
[61] *Parwana* from Sidhu and Kanu to residents of Rajmahal, BJP, vol. 298, no.20.

however, the rebellious imperative was epochal, and not characterised by this generality, this recurrence which causality must possess as a law of history. Read for instance the following version of the beginning of the Santal *hul*

> A bit of paper fell on Seedoo's head and suddenly the Thakur appeared before the astonished gaze of Seedoo and Kanhoo; he was like a white man though dressed in the native's style; on each hand he had ten fingers; he held a white book and wrote therein; the book and with it 20 pieces of paper, in 5 batches, four in each batch, he presented to the brother ... then came two men with six fingers on each hand ... at one time it was in a flame of fire, with a book, some white paper and a knife ... a solid cart wheel. In the silvery pages of the book and upon the white leaves of the single scrap of paper, were words written.[62]

These apparently supernatural signs which announced the *hul* were not arbitrary. When the Santal put the fire and the wheel in association with the coming of the book, he was, not unlike the Bengali middle classes, making a statement about a new epoch. All through the rebellion the idea of the written word, the marker of this new time, fired the imagination of the Santals. The god, dreamt by Sidhu and Kanu, was white, demonstrating the invincibility of colonial authority, dispensing the book amongst the poverty-stricken Santals, the increased number of fingers on his hands, signifying the enhanced power given by wielding the written word. One of the Santal leaders arrested had on him pieces of the New Testament translated in Hindi, which he used in worship.[63] At Bhagnadihi, where the infamous policeman Mahesh Dutt was killed, Santals showed Sheikh Sunno 'a written paper stating that the thacoor gave them that paper and told them that there has been much sin in the country ... on which I told that it was a paper not given by any god but by some Europeans.[64] Such was the perceived importance of the written word that the Santals captured local literates and forced them to work as writers for them.[65]

What was singular then was not the event of rebellion itself, but this exceptional imperative of time which brought the *hul* about. There was no determining necessity – except perhaps an ethical one – no predictability associated with the rebellion, as a causal explanation would have it. Yet the temporal imperative was more overdetermining, if less predictable, than a causal law could ever be. It possessed a sanctity, which went beyond the conceptual purity of a neatly rational, and successful, calculation of cause and effect. It signified an imperative to act beyond precisely such calculations of probability and success, giving the Santals the unflinching mood of rebellion,

> that no one could stand before them, that none of their own people should be killed, and if killed that they would be restored to life, that the soldiers' musket balls would turn to water, that a small knife should have a miraculous power to sweep away a mass of opponents [66]

And this imperative lay not in the recognition of a sufficient cause – the circumstances of oppression were reasons enough to act, but were too constant and too present in the everyday to explain the rebellious conjuncture. The structural spacing between poverty as cause and rebellion as event, required a retrospective position that was available only to the historian, just as chronological continuity beyond revolution was available only to the self-consciously historical being. To the rebel, however, what was available was only the possibility of repossessing and reshaping temporality itself.

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[62] Anon., 'Santal Rebellion', *Calcutta Review*, XXVI: 51, 1856, pp. 243-44.

[63] Richardson to Special Commissioner, 13 August 1855, BJP, vol. 295, no. 90.

[64] Deposition of Sheikh Sunno. before Asst. Magistrate, Aurangabad, 9 July 1855, BJP, vol. 291(II), no. 21.

[65] Eden, in charge of Aurangabad to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 9 July 1855, BJP, vol.291(II), no. 2.

[66] Commissioner, Burdwan to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 9 Aug 1855, BJP, vol. 294, no. 118.

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As the Santals exclaimed, 'in twelve days will be the thacoor's fight. ... *Two days will be made into one, and two nights into one*[67][emphasis mine]. By rebelling, the Santal accepted that, whatever the consequence, it was only immediate practice, which could stretch and shorten time, to take hold of time as it were.

If the rebel tried to keep alive this overdetermining temporal imperative, the authorities tried to fix a single antecedent cause which, once administratively taken care of, could be firmly put in the past. Bengali historians, who used colonial papers as historical 'evidence', foregrounded the question of causality in a similar juridical fashion – as we shall see in the next chapter, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay in fact defined history as causality itself. Like the administrator, the purpose of the historian was, in principle, to stabilise the past by reducing the generative time of practice, and its many eventualities, into a single, authorised event. James Cox describes this historical emphasis on causality, which makes 'beginnings more important than endings', as a transformation of the present, from 'a point from which to renew the past' to 'a point of vantage from which to stabilise it.'[68] Unlike the Bengali middle classes, for whom the present was educative if unfree, the Santal had few stakes in the indebted present. Hence the destabilising temporality of rebellion. Some historians have dispensed with this destabilising temporality by calling it millenarianism.[69] This is the effect not only of modernity's imposition of the Christian calendar world-wide, but also of modernity's claim to causally predict, manage and limit all futures – which has removed from imagination all senses of revolutionary change, except apocalyptic ones like nuclear conflagration or environmental disaster, where human agency is finally forsaken in favour of cosmic ones. The *hul* on the other hand did not mark this suspension of history, by final judgement as it were. It was not a millenarian hope so much as a practical claim to repossess time itself.

Pierre Bourdieu enunciates the logic of practice in these very terms, when he says that practice is temporal not just because it plays out in time, but 'because it plays with time'.[70] Juridical discourse in colonial Bengal sought to neutralise this logic of Santal temporal practice, by reconstituting acts into events, by putting acts in succession despite their temporal incommensurabilities, and by explaining acts retrospectively through the synchronic spacing of cause-event-consequence. This chronologising move nullified the fundamental nature of practice, its *irreversibility*, by replacing it with the cause-event-consequence series, a series which could be read both ways by the logic of deduction. How far history itself shares in this juridical logic of detection and deduction is demonstrated by Carlo Ginzburg, in his analysis of the 'evidential paradigm' and 'retrospective forecast' of historicisation.[71] He distinguishes the retrospective historical method from archaic methods of invocation and divination. Like the police detective, the colonial magistrate in our case, the historian, along with the archaeologist, palaeontologist, geologist and philologist, detects

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[67] Magistrate, Purnea to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 19 July 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 219.
[68] Quoted in Elizabeth Tonkin, *Narrating our Pasts*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 56.
[69] Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets*, London, 1965; Michael Adas, *Prophets of Rebellion*, Cambridge, 1979.
[70] *Logic of Practice*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 82.
[71] 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm' in Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, Baltimore, 1986.

indelible clues of the past from spatial traces in the present.[72] Significantly, Ginzburg's originality lies in his creative use of 'primordial' and folk tales. In this context, when Ginzburg says, with appropriate caveats of course, that the historian must align his/her position with the inquisitor and the anthropologist – in the hope that the accused speaks up, even at his/her own peril – the politics of historical authorship is exposed.[73] In seeing time as a clue-like precipitation on space rather than as created in practice, disciplinary history of events, falls into the juridical-inquisitorial position – ruling not only knowledge, but legislating practice and sentencing rebels as well.

By making detective-hindsight the most accurate mode of knowing, history refuses to validate the urgency and the unpredictability of practice, the temporal imperative that gives up distance, detachment and pondering pauses to identify with the imminent future. Theory refuses to admit practice because practice refuses to admit the theoretical but real possibility of sudden reduction to the present, of, to quote Bourdieu again, 'the abrupt severing of relation to future, which like death, casts the anticipations of interrupted practice into the absurdity of the unfinished'.[74] That is, history advises against practice by reminding us that after all it might fail. And this retrospective mode disguises the primary limits of knowledge – by denying that the time and the significance of practice lay beyond the extent to which it allows itself to be captured by history and in terms of precedents. No wonder, then, juridical discourse, in its search for clues, motives and causes, overlooked the temporal imperative of Santal rebellious practice. However, it is not enough for us to say in Bourdieu-ian terms, that by positing the act as the event, historiography sought to hide the distinction between theory and practice. Practice is not itself an undifferentiated category, it is in fact a category reinvented by modern knowledge to counterpoise itself. In fact, the specificity of the colonised condition, as we shall discuss in the next chapter, was the formulation of history not just as consciousness and knowledge, but also as the only valid mode of practice. This chapter will demonstrate how historical discourses tried to not only nullify rebellion as a practice, but also to discipline the remembering of the rebellion. Narration as a practice too was sought to be monopolised by history.

Uses of the past: history, narration and time

If the authorities failed to detect 'rational' causes for rebellion in Santal testimonies, it was also because it was risky to admit that 'primitives' could rebel in full consciousness. The official said: 'To those who have seen the disciplined conduct of tribal councils, the dignified administration of tribal justice, the anarchy of revolt must seem the very antithesis of all that is truly tribal'.[75] Even at the height of the *hul*, the army was kept subordinate to civil administration, as authorities could not quite

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[72] Ibid., p.117.
[73] 'The Inquisitor as Anthropologist' in Ginzburg, *Clues*, p.164.
[74] Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, p. 82.
[75] W. G. Archer, 'Introductory Comments', *Man in India*, XXV: 4, 1945, p. 206.

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believe that 'primitives' could actually rebel.[76] While opinion in England urgently campaigned for all Santals to be exiled to Pegu,[77] the colonial state issued a general pardon.[78] It was argued that Santals did not rebel, they were merely provoked into uncharacteristic action by Hindu lower-castes like Gwalas, Telis and Kamars, who were seen 'taking milk and dhye to Sonthals and striking drums to announce our progress'.[79] As if to admit that the 'primitive' could rebel, was akin to saying that the embodied past could rise against the present. Santals could not rebel, because they were not historical. They could not rationally mobilise a past for a future – '[t]raditions of their ancient migrations are rendered obscure by the succession of dissolving views to which this nomadic habit introduces us'.[80] Nor could they imagine a rational future –'having no education to guide or strong intellect to direct [them, their] ... ideas of a future state coalesce into an insane fancy'.[81] They were merely *in* history by spatially co-existing with the modern. It then was a conceptual impossibility to attribute rebellion to the tribe's own 'consciousness'. Santal narrations of the *hul* were therefore useless except as confessions, which placed them in the judicial purview of the state.

Middle-class Bengalis shared in this official incredulity about 'primitive' rebellion. Digambar Chakravarty, a lawyer in Birbhum, believed that low-caste Hindus like Manglu Julah and Jagannath Sikdar incited Santals. For Santals were otherwise a 'lively and extravagant people, if they could sustain themselves for the present, they were never restrained by thoughts of the future – the flow of time seemed their only possession'.[82] To the local Bengali *bhadrolok*, the 'primitive' thus represented the rather loveable, though alien, tendency of living for the moment, in spontaneous and joyous abundance – a presentism which could not become a political programme unless led from outside. In fact, a Bengali newspaper of 1855 referred to contemporary speculations about the possibility of a disguised Russian agent amongst the Santals.[83] The same 'primitiveness' explained why, once provoked, Santals would turn indescribably violent: 'the sight of the Santals is horrific, they wear only a loincloth, red garlands around their neck, their bodies massive and black, they eat all animals, a few days ago they cut up and ate a tiger, they are greatly united and never move except in large crowds, their agents are prowling over the hills.'[84] The *hul* therefore was merely an instance of the unthinking and unwieldy bodily excess of the 'primitive'. As an event, it was fundamentally different from say the uprising of 1857, which, though as 'unsuccessful' as the Santal rebellion, did demonstrate a sense of political succession, the rulers of Mughal times leading soldiers in a war for recovery of the throne. Though Bengalis in Calcutta supported the colonial state during 1857,[85] by late nineteenth-century they had owned up the 'sepoy mutiny' as their own history.[86] The Santal rebellion on the other hand

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[76] General Instruction to Civil Officers, Dispatch no.1786, Govt. of Bengal, 30 July 1855, Home Political Files,1855, National Archives, Delhi.

[77] 'Editorial', *Friends of India*, July-Dec, 1855.

[78] 'Proclamation of Pardon', Govt. of India, 17 August 1855, Home Political Files,1855, National Archives, Delhi.

[79] Private letter, Capt. W. S. Sherwill to Commissioner, Bhagalpur, 20 July 1855, BJP, vol. 293, no. 303.

[80] E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, p. 209.

[81] E. G. Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, Calcutta, 1861, p. 26-7.

[82] *History of the Santal Hool*, Suri, 1895-6, translated and reprinted in *Paschimbanga*, XXIX: 2-6, 1995, pp. 7-18.

[83] *Samachar Sudhavarshan*, no. 459, 22 September 1855.

[84] *Sambad Prabhakar*, 3 August 1855.

[85] Anon., *The Mutinies and the People Or Statement of Native Fidelity Exhibited during the Outbreak of 1857-58, by a Hindu*, Calcutta, 1859.

[86] Rajanikanta Gupta, *Sipahi Yuddher Itihas*, Calcutta, 1876.

could not trace such a political-historical genealogy and, therefore, could not acquire the emblematic status of Rajput and Maratha battles, so as to be able to represent the unitary time of the nation. Nationalist histories therefore textualised the *hul* in two ways. Either it was included in a medley of discrete, 'proto-historical' events, pre-dating the 'first freedom struggle of 1857'. In these texts, authored by historians like K. K. Datta and P. C. Roychoudhury, Santal Pargana was included in the nation through the activities of Bengali settlers, of Aurobindo's revolutionary-terrorism, Sahajananda's Kisan Sabha movement and Gandhi's anti-liquor campaigns. Santals were rarely mentioned, except as part of the 1942 movement, when they participated in large-scale arson and destruction of telegraphic communications, acts which conformed to the Bengali image of sporadic, violent 'primitive' outbursts.[87] Or the *hul* was included as part of nationalism, but 'tribes' were thematised as Hindus themselves. Subodh Ghosh, well known for his short stories about Munda and Santal rebellions, rejected the categories 'aborigine' and 'animist', criticised the 'negative utopia' of Verrier Elwin and claimed that the Santals were actually 'tribal Hindus'.[88]

If Bengali narratives of the *hul* were written at all, they were written as local rather than national histories. The locality signified a time different in nature from the time of the nation. It was a spatialised time, which accumulated traces of all that passed over it. The authenticity of local history lay, not in chronological succession, but by virtue of the past and the present having the same location on the ground. The local historian knew the past because he lived in spatial proximity and intimacy to it. He often qualified the simple past of history-writing with past-continuous, use of dialogues, visual metaphors, intimate landscaping – as if he himself was present when the past happened at the same spot:

> 'Come on', Sidhu called, 'you are the sons of the great Chando Bonga – cross the river. See much of the water I have already drunk up, I have left just enough for bathing the buffaloes'. ...The day was unnaturally hot, clouds were crowding the western corner of the sky.[89]

Local historians loosely wove broken narratives of first-hand testimonies, personal memories, proverbs and tales, descriptions of the land and of ruins of monuments. The 'facticity' of these scraps rested on the fact that the historian did not select, streamline or summarise them into a smooth, uninterrupted narrative, nor dated nor remedied the ambiguous memories and presentist opinions of his 'sources'. He gathered them all exactly as they were, in a state of 'natural' temporal entanglement. It was the task of national history to resolve these temporal knots into the unitary time and narrative of the nation. In other words, if the nation was history, the locality was its archive.

In 1862, *Tattobodhini Patrika* invited 'collections' of local histories and geographies for national history to draw upon.[90] In this mode of 'collection', the magazine *Birbhumi* thematised the Santal rebellion, as part of the local history of district Birbhum. Birbhum was a forested and variegated locale, flanked by hills, from beyond which 'primitives' attacked Bengali peasants. To survive these 'primitive' raids, people of Birbhum became so brave and enduring that, as

[87] K. K. Datta, *History of the Freedom Movement in Bihar*, Patna, 1958; P. C. Roychoudhury, *1857 in Bihar*, Patna, 1959.
[88] Subodh Ghosh, *Bharater Adivasi*, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 31, 195.
[89] Digambar Chakravarty, *History*, p. 16.
[90] 'Itihas Samgraha', *Tattvabodhini Patrika*, bhadra, 1862.

grandmothers recalled, even the geese of this land could defeat hawks from elsewhere. Hence the name Virbhumi, land of the valiant. The same author also admitted that the name Birbhum could have derived from the Santali word *bir* or forest.[91] These alternative versions about the district name were not resolved. They were in fact unified by virtue of the contiguous location of these memories and counter-memories. It was only thus that the Santal rebellion could be narrated, through a long poem written by Rai Krishna Das of Kulkuri village. For local history was like a painting, where shades and contrasts were present synchronically, unlike in time where the present could be represented only by clearing the space of the past. Poems about the *hul* were thus textualised in *Birbhumi* in a visual, integrationist mode: 'just as in painting mobile brush-strokes bring life to a vision, the unhindered, rhythmic moves of verses describe a vision in totality and in mobility.'[92]

These local memories however, appeared in the texts of disciplinary history as attachments and appendices, leaving the narrative of the historical subject-author untouched. The style and the mood of the 'source' were kept distinct from the style and mood of history. In the rigorous two-volume history of Birbhum by Gaurihar Mitra, son of the same Sibratan who had collected local verses of the *hul* for *Birbhumi*, the account of the rebellion was constructed using government files, Hunter's *Annals* and Bradley-Birt's *The Story of an Indian Upland*. The main body of the history of the *hul* was a narrative of tested and proven facts, i.e. facts produced out of colonial, juridical trials, which Mitra presented not as a narrative but as reality itself. In a separate section, he attached eyewitness testimonies and poems by villagers.[93] The temporal principle that distinguished this history from adjacent local narratives was not only that of retrospection. It was the temporal principle by which history represented the future of the past as fully foreclosed. After all, when the disciplinary historian prescribes that the present must not distort the vision of the past, what he means is that the past is ended, totalised and bracketed, and can no longer redo and change the present. It can only be from such an assured and stabilised present that 'sources' could be used, without fear of their internal narrative-times tainting the continuous temporality of the nation's history.

In 'local' testimonies, however, the future seemed still attached to the past, as people continued to ponder over alternate directions that reality might have taken. Hill-Ranger Chand Paharia remembered explaining to the rebels the dangers of attacking Pathrul *zamindari* – if they had listened, he lamented, they would not have faced the *saheb* directly.[94] Nabin Das of Lahati expressed the same urgency, when he recalled that 'the Santals ran like arrows' and he could himself have been killed had a Santal *parganite* not helped him run.[95] An old Santal said that he did not remember the causes of the *hul*, but one night Sidhu and Kanu became gods, 'because men rise and fall precisely in nights, some become judges, some magistrates, even though it is the same man'.[96] Old Brahman Banawari Sahu said, 'the brahman is the issue of the sun, and the sun is the god of Santals. ... They

[91] Sibratan Mitra, 'The History of Birbhum: the Name and Borders of the District', *Birbhumi*, I: 3, *poush*, 1899, pp. 83-5.
[92] Sibratan Mitra, 'Collection of Historical Verses', *Birbhumi*, II: 4, *magh*, 1900-1, p. 99.
[93] *Birbhumer Itihas*, Suri, 1936.
[94] Ibid., p. 149.
[95] Ibid., p. 152.
[96] Ibid., p. 153.

used to slice up the moneylender from the leg up... returning parts of the loan with each severed limb. ... Those days the rails had not been put, then the railways began to be built'.[97] The sense of alternative realities and multiple possibilities is unmistakable in these local versions, which suggested that the future would have been different but for minor contingencies. Local witnesses translated the centrality of the *hul* by drawing personal significance from it, counting the age of children by reference to it, narrating it in its continued immediacy, even as it became past. In the locality, the *hul* was never far past, even when it was over.

Historiography had to replace these provisional and expectant memories with historicised pasts – no longer open but indefinitely re-presentable, in principle unchanged whatever the present and the future might be. Just as inequivalent presents could be translated in the market through money prices, incommensurable pasts could be transcribed into historical continuity through numerical dates. In this paradigm, the only temporal entities that could not be dated, enumerated and exchanged were futures. Once historiography captivated the future within the causal/anticipatory logic of the (re)presentable past, futures, the unenumerable time beyond the limits of thought, were repeatedly deferred before the colonial ideology of improvement and development. It was this necessary deferral of the future for the sake of modernisation (of the present), which had to be compensated by the deployment of the novellic time in colonial Bengal. The subject-author who had to see the past as fully foreclosed and who had to defer difference itself for the sake of being disciplined as modern and historical, could play with the past only in the ideal time of fiction – creating sought after endings and leaving ends open such that the past could be resumed for the desired future. This narrative time could even simulate the time of practice, as the protagonist of the novel acted out, freely, the imagined future of the nation. The centrality of the literary text in nineteenth-century Bengal was therefore not only because it allowed the free play of imagination in developing the counter-factual to empirical history – the estranged temporality of the ought-to-be and the would-have-been – but also because novellic time was posited as a surrogate of practical time itself.

We therefore find the Santal rebellion and its local memories being repeatedly invoked in Bengali novels. Tarashankar Bandopadhyay admitted that to him the *hul* had always seemed an event of 'primitive' excess, until he took 'local' and oral testimonies seriously. Nayan Pal, descendant of the potter who had sculpted the goddess Durga for the Santals in 1855, told Tarashankar: though 'people say that sahebs have left all this written', one can never grasp the *ras* or mood/essence of the *hul* unless one is able to sense the limits of time. Like the Santal rebels almost a hundred years ago, Nayan Pal claimed: when time can no longer hold the excess of sin/*adhamma*, gods must act.[98] Nayan reminded the novelist that he too was related to the *hul*, because Tribhuban Bhattacharya, who supported and conducted worship for the Santals, was actually Tarashankar's kinsman. Nayan showed the author a collection of *pats*, paintings illustrating the events and stages of the *hul* on terracotta plates – as he recounted his memories in a song. The narration began: 'Kenaram, the

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[97] Ibid.
[98] Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, *Aranyabanhi*, reprint, Calcutta, 1966, p. 22.

moneylender is not one, he sits over every village/ through the country is the same condition/ brahman, kayasth, vaidya all those of wealth and deference/ all of the same *kal* [time]'. In those times of indebtedness, the men of the white-island were trampling the earth, shackling the landscape with iron (railways), bringing down mountains, filling rivers, whipping people, building palaces, the poor were heard weeping endlessly.[99] And then, when the railway *sahibs* raped three Santal women, the gods arrived on earth in thunder and in rain. The Santal acted on the signs of the god – god alighted as first a low, pregnant cloud, then as the fire of lightning and then as the widowed daughter of the Brahman Tribhuban Bhattacharya. To Nayan, the rebel Santal was the incarnation of Kali, the goddess of force and destruction. He was the hunter Kalketu of Mukundaram's epic-poem *Chandimangal.*[100]

> Ten heads, twenty hands   Ravan the brave
> Hands in pairs tremble
> Before the army of human-apes
> By the wish of the goddess   the weak triumph
> The Santal arrow wins over gunpowder[101]

Thus as historiography pushed these memories into the realm of the fictional and the 'primitive', the local Bengali villager placed the Santal rebellion in the time of the so-called Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Chandimangalkavya*, disrupting the original antagonism between the civilised and the 'primordial'.

If history needed to retain the originary contradistinction between the fair *arya* and the 'dark' *anarya*, the novelist could make a metaphor out of darkness – slipping from the 'dark of the night' to the dark of dreamless amnesia to the dark skin of the 'primitive'.[102] Navigating though the darkness of the forest, the unconscious and the forgotten, Tarashankar claimed to write across the text of history, with the help of the song and the *pats* of the local villager.[103] In much the same manner in 1923, Loknath Dutta wrote a long poem about the 'brave of the forests' fighting the evil (*dushta mahajan*) moneylenders and the illusory weights and measures of the market (*mithya taula bat*). Datta did not call this an adaptation of history, but a Walter Scottish effort at aestheticising the 'highlanders' – as if 'primitive' rebellion could be acknowledged only through a stroke of poetic justice, by disowning history for the sake of the literary.[104] Fictional time could make the end appear contingent, such that contradictory possibilities and suspense could be maintained till the final resolution. In novels, the future was not foreclosed. Historical narrative on the other hand, making retrospection the principle of truth, inscribed the end on the very beginning of the historical question. Practice, the negotiation of contesting possibilities, appeared in history either as an evolutionary or as a logical progression towards the known end, the given present. This was more than teleology. This was a redeployment of temporality such that the present refigured itself as the origin. What could have been a valid description of contemporary hierarchical Bengali society – the contradistinction between the Santal and the upper-caste, educated Bengali – was historicised as the original condition of historical consciousness, as the war between the Vedic-Aryan and the Dasa-'aborigine'. The Hindu, male,

[99] Ibid., pp. 25-6.
[100] Ibid., p. 114.
[101] Ibid., p. 142.
[102] Ibid., p. 126.
[103] Ibid., p. 110.
[104] Loknath Dutta, *Banabir-gatha*, Calcutta, 1923.

upper-caste / middle class moral collectivity, which was aspiring to represent the nation in the nineteenth century, was historicised as the 'originary' spirit of civilisation. In other words, historical narrative began from the end, and called its narrative register 'objective' time. And instead of being acknowledged, as fiction was, as a construction, this history was presented as a positive description of reality itself. As history performed this necessary slippage between narrative and the world, all other ways of narrating the past were displaced as fictional.

Telling pasts: narration as practice

The rest of the chapter sets off this disciplinary move by Bengali historiography against Santal memories of the rebellion. Santali narratives were documented in late nineteenth century by missionaries who believed that 'primitives' were easier to educate and convert, because, being body-centric and thoughtless, they were yet to imagine a future for themselves. They were, in other words, still waiting to be guided into a historical trajectory. Santals not only reminded Reverend Knockaert of St Ignatius' description of mankind drinking and dancing, rushing into hell,[105] they reminded Reverend C. D. Snell that 'primitives' had no sense of life after death and of temporality.[106] Therefore, conversion meant not only the lesson of moral restraint, but also the temporal lesson of distinguishing death from time. While on conversion most Santals merely added Jesus to their repertoire of dead-spirits, the real 'primitive' convert had to learn the lesson that spirits and dead-ancestors were past and obsolete. On conversion, Surja Santal went 'mad', burning down the village deities. When the *sardar* reminded him that the *manjhithan* was the mark of the fathers, Surja screamed: 'My father is dead more than twelve years'. [107] Kolean Haram, who narrated the ancestors-story to Reverend Skrefsrud, resisted conversion till the very end when, as Chotrae Desmanjhi remembered, in old age he succumbed to the dark horrors of hell. And Singrai died screaming that the dead-spirits refused to leave him even as he was going to hell.[108] In other words, making the Santals literate enough to be able to document their narratives, was also the process of converting Santals into a new temporality. The Santal narrators, whose stories the missionaries recorded, were converts. But unlike Surja and Singrai, these were the converts who resisted falling apart as time was forcibly rationalised for them, and who appeared more contemporary than other 'primitives'. For it was no longer enough to have the memory and the capacity to tell, the Santal narrator had to be a mediator and a translator as well, with access to the contesting worlds of the 'book' and the 'myth', and to the contesting times of the ancestors and progress. The storyteller thus turned 'informer', as the past of the *bongas* became obsolete in the time of history.

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[105] *Further Progress among the Santals, Fifth Mission Tour*, Purnea, 1917, p. 60.
[106] *The Hill Tribes of India, an Account of the Church Missionary Society's Work amongst the Santals, Paharias etc*, London, 1891, pp. 6-8.
[107] Snell, *The Hill Tribes*, p. 16.
[108] *Chotrae*, pp. 174-75.

Sagram Murmu, 'informer' to Reverend Bodding, was anxious about this newly 'rationalised' time in which stories and memories, despite their truth-value, became extinct. He acknowledged that only when printed, did pasts and stories seem to acquire permanence: 'We Santals do not know how to read or write ...still somehow or other we have these stories, as it is seen, they have not been lost to us'.[109] And once permanent, stories acquired the authenticity of historical evidence. Sagram realised that once printed, Santal stories would become true and thus defeat the missionary effort at replacing Santal customs with Christian habits.

> But along with writing I have also been thinking that this actually belongs to the heathen, and if this should be prepared into a book and printed, they will at once buy it with great joy and when they have been reading it, they will get up against us...they will say: 'Look here, ours is correct. If we were not correct, it would not have been printed.' By this argument we will be defeated.[110]

An old Santal headman who had lost his village to his creditor and spent his time visiting the courts, proudly showed the missionary his most precious possessions – a bundle of papers, English advertisements, circulars and even a tattered copy of the Queen's Proclamation – 'our papers, your papers, papers of the ancients and papers of the present day'.[111] As the courts had taught this Santal obsessed with papers, truth no longer rested in truthfulness of the narrator, but in the permanence of inscription, in proof as deed and signature, which the moneylenders could produce before the judge and which the Santals could not. From that which truly was, truth had become that which survived.[112] Time became the test of truth, and truth became historical evidence, accessible to the present as spatial traces and residues of the past.

In Santal narrations, however, time was the test of truth in quite the opposite way. If the ancestors were to be believed, it was not because their words survived the vicissitudes of time as evidence, but because their words were lost – for these words were too true to exist in the colonial present.

> From ancient times upto near the present day we Santals did not know false statements ... After the Europeans have come, a few Santals have been judged to be hanged, because they have spoken the truth. There were no witnesses of their crime, if they had lied and denied it, they would have been set free. In our councils we did not bring witnesses one by one, we put all witnesses forward at once; still they did not tell falsehoods. Nowadays they have learnt deceit from the Dekos and like them, they sell their soul and honour for one brass cup of beer.[113]

Therefore, ancestral truth was proven precisely by its extinction in the compromised and contemporary times. The leit motifs – 'people tell', 'it is said', 'they were saying', 'who knows why' – in Santali narrations of the past signified not hearsay, but the uncertain and lost words transmitted from a true but extinguished past. Temporal uncertainties were part of this narrative time – thus when the ancestors changed the customs,

> Whether they were discussing the matter for twelve days or for twelve months or for twelve years, they do not know. They were sitting till the grass had become dirt and they had finished all the water in the river and ponds. ..[then they moved until Sikhar] from Sikhar country to this land everybody knows and can tell.[114]

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[109] P. O. Bodding, Santhal Folk Tales I, 1925-9, reprint, New Delhi, 1990, p. 3.

[110] Sagram Murmu to 'guru' Bodding, possibly sometime in 1907, quoted in Johannes Gausdal, The Santal Khuts: Contribution to Animistic Research, Oslo, 1960, p. 101.

[111] J. A. MacPhail, Three Months in a Camp, being the Daily Journal of a Medical Missionary on Tour among the Santals, Pakur, 1893, p. 147.

[112] Joseph Miller ed., The African Past Speaks, Dawson and Archon, 1980.

[113] Horkoren , p.129.

[114] Sagram Murmu in Gausdal, Santal Khuts, pp. 22-3.

That exact dates and durations could not be recalled was proof that the past was indeed lost. The narrator could not simulate the passage of time day by day, as historical chronology did. Narrative time did not represent real time. Grass passing into dust and rivers drying up were not literary representations of the depth of change, they stood in for the temporality of ancestral acts, a temporality whose duration, measure and date could not be recalled in contemporary times.

If the past appeared to the Santals as a lost time and a time of losses, what did it mean to say, as colonial historiography did, that Santals were 'primitive', past-minded and future-less? It meant that the past of the Santals was not the past of history-writing – i.e., not a completed past that stopped at a date, common to the nation, beyond which time became contemporary and present across all generations. To Santals, the passing of time between generations was substantive, qualitative change; at every birth therefore the ancestor's story had to be renewed, as *binti* was recited for the new-born and the older generations represented themselves as past ancestors to the child. This constantly renewable ancestors-story began with the creation of the earth and ran unmediated into the immediate and personally experienced present of the narrator. While the creation, the good days of Cai Campa, the *diku*-outsiders first entering the Sikhar country – that is, the far past – would be more or less common to all narrators, the story gradually diverged as it moved towards the present generation. The particular travels and memories of one village added on to the general narrative, the story with a common beginning ended differently. E. G. Man's 'informer' thus ended his story with the birth of the custom amongst Santals of his village by which, even when paid a single man's wage, no less than four Santals carried government packages – because once upon a time a police-*darogah* had forced an old Santal to carry the collector's luggage for fourteen miles and he had died on the road.[115] Dalton's 'informer', Kangail Parganait, ended his story with the arrival of *Lal-lathi*, the white man with a red stick, accompanied by followers with brass plates on their chests and two curious dogs. He tied up the headman of Sonabadi, took land for himself, set up smelters and 'made quantities of iron ore and sent them all out of the country'.[116] Skrefsrud's 'informer', Kolean Haram, ended his story thus: '[f]rom Sikhar some of us came to Tundi [Manbhum]. ... And someday we shall again go somewhere who knows where'.[117] This open-endedness of the narration, which exposed the past to present experiences at every act of narration, was what distinguished the Santal's past from history's autonomous and finalised past, beyond which all was contemporary. As Jonathan Smith puts it, this was not a pure, pristine past, a time 'other' than the present.[118] It was a past that could be invoked precisely in simultaneity with the present.

This Santal past, which remained open to its own future, i.e. to changing presents, defies the image of the 'primitive' as essentially past-minded. It also defies the stereotype that 'primitives' hold their pasts to be too sacred to be transcended by a future. Ancestors were, of course, deferred to as guardian-spirits. But the authenticity of this ancestral past was not the authenticity of the stereotypical

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[115] Man, *Sonthalia*, p. 92-3.
[116] Dalton, *Descriptive*, p. 211.
[117] *Horkoren*, pp. 13-4.
[118] *To Take Place: Towards Theory in Ritual*, Chicago, 1987, pp. 109-10.

'origin myth', a category of non-historical past-consciousness constructed to gloss over not only the complexities of non-modern narratives, but also history's own dependence on the idea of the 'origin'. Nineteenth-century Bengali history, following the European model of dark ages preceding the Renaissance, tried to circumvent mediating times and reach the 'original' condition of *arya* superiority over the 'aborigine' and the 'original' truth of the Vedas. This significance of the 'origin' can be read in European historical thought as well – in Hegel's realisation and 'return' of the Spirit to itself, in Heideggar's claim to 'original' parentage by Greek antiquity, in the theoretical return by both rationalists and romantics to nature as the source of laws and of aesthetic solidarities respectively. Perhaps because they were not 'historicised' in this modernist sense, Santals did not ascribe too much to the notion of 'origin'. The creation was merely the story of creation of the earth – it did not posit any 'original' difference or contradiction out of which Santal identity was constructed. 'Towards the east, where the sun rises, is the birth of mankind' – it began.[119] In those times there was no earth, only water. God summoned the turtle and the earthworm to dig up earth from under the ocean. First the *sal* tree was born, then the *mahua*, and the first man and woman were born out of a pair of birds. The birds did not know where to place the humans, their nest was too small – 'oh, oh, in the sea of sorrows/these little human ones/ oh, oh where could we place them.' So they flew towards the sunset and found the island of Hihri Pipri. There the first human pair grew feeding on the seeds of *shyama* grass. Soon introduced to the intoxicating drink they learnt of sexuality and bore children. Then they travelled to Khoj Kaman – where they became bad, like buffaloes, without 'concern for anybody' and god rained fire, which destroyed all but Pilcu Budhi and Pilcu Haram.[120]

At the time of origins, then, humans were not differentiated from the world around them, not even from animals; Santals in fact descended from them. If they became different from other humans, that happened in course of time. The point of the ancestors-story was to indicate this progressive differentiation of peoples through time, not to foreground the 'origin' of Santals, nor to call upon a 'golden past' as nationalist historiography would have it. In fact, the Santal past was as sad a time as the present, a time of forced wanderings, when ancestors lost all the lands that they had cleared. This past could not become a contrastive metaphor or a dream past to the present. Much of this past was irrevocably lost, like the lands from which the ancestors were displaced. What remained were memories of the moments when these irrevocable changes occurred, displacing and estranging peoples from each other. Thus, at Cai Champa, Santals were living peacefully, until a clever but cruel son of mixed-marriage, Madho Singh became king and tried capturing Santal women. But even the happy days of Champa was not glorious, for fights had already begun:

Get up, get up, do get up my friend,
Be watchful, be watchful, my friend

...
For the sake of boundary they are killing each other
For the sake of a landmark they are cutting each other...[121]

Then at Tore Pokhori Baha Bandela

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[119] This I quote from Baidyanath Hansdah's Bengali translation of *Horkoren*.
[120] *Horkoren*, pp. 1-9.
[121] Ibid., p. 12.

The country people came together at the foot of a tope sarjom, labar atnak, the bent Mahua trees having spread lotus leaves and drinking water of the Kere spring, they whether for twelve days or twelve years legislated and ruled; namely, from this day when we have ceremonies in connection with birth, death [etc.] ... we shall act and follow such and such customs. There our ancestors, who knows for what reason, upset the rules of the ancient ancestors. Much was mixed up for us with what the Dekos have.[122]

This was the time when Santal and *diku* customs became mixed. Despite mixing, however, Santals ruled well – when they crossed the river stepping on lotus leaves, their feet did not get wet a, nor did the leaves break. Those days Ramraja was living, the Santals had helped him defeat Ravana and were friendly with the *diku-s*.[123] Bhuiyas and MarMundas gave out land and took little rent from Santals. But 'day by day' as the *dikus* began moneylending, even the Munda kings lost land against money and cloth loans. Mark the emphasis on the conjunctural nature of Santal enmity with the moneylender-outsider – the *diku* was not constructed as an 'original' Other, who 'contaminated' Santals. In fact, once upon a time, Birhors, Kurmis and Santals lived together as Kharwars. Then 'who knows why', Birhors ate a monkey and were thrown out of their lands, and Kurmis became *dikus*, trying to marry out of the group and own land. The Santals thus became lonely and 'who knows why' lost the name Kharwar. In fact, one version ascribed the beginning of the *hul* not to a Santal but to a low-caste Dom, who touched a golden boat in the Ganga and made it sink. The *dikus* came to 'hack Doms to death' – 'the Doms began to move like stags in a forest. They dressed as Santals and lived in Santal houses.'[124] The Muslim Julahs too seemed one with the Santals, such that in worship a Santal prayed: 'when we speak, it stops in our throat, we are choked in our words, ... in the house of jolhas, in the house of dhunias, stuck thread, stuck cotton is caught up, ... like thread stretched out make a way, make a road, lord Father, my thacoor'.[125]

The story of the Santal past was thus a story of separation and scattering of a people, who called themselves *hor* or simply 'men'. Unlike events, these differentiating occasions were not dated but themselves served as 'dates' or marks, reminding Santals of the moments which led to the present as it was. Time was perpetuated by these separations and encounters. As the Santals travelled in search of land, these moments of irreversible change and differentiation were remembered by the name of the country they were passing through at that time. Significantly, unlike the formalisation of time as numbers, which affixed 'historical' events, this mode of remembering via landmarks did not reduce time itself to a permanent trace over space. These moments of differentiation were not autonomous events, serialisable by virtue of the mere fact that they happened. Every moment could not be serialised (in) every time. Thus, the colonial present could not be inserted into the narrative time of the ancestors-story. As Skrefsrud noted, in the second half of the nineteenth century, memories of the immediate past could not longer be added onto the story of creation and ancestral travel.[126] As the ancestors-story stopped growing, the present became a dislocated and condemned 'bad time'. Why and when this happened is a separate project – but the entrenchment of the printed/written word and the forcible prevention of Santals from collectively travelling over

[122] Ibid., pp. 12-3.
[123] Ibid., p. 10.
[124] Ibid., Juggi-Haram's version, pp. 189-90.
[125] Ibid., p. 103.
[126] *Annual Report of Santhal Mission*, Benagaria, 1887-88.

land/time-marks, except as indentured labour, probably disallowed the possibility of everyday renewal of the past. Earlier, as Kolean Haram remembered, stories emerged out of collective conversations – 'If a person suddenly speaks and reveals this or that, then others, thinking that this is good and fitting, will also speak the same, and thus it is spread.' But then, making stories was no longer possible for everyone and in the everyday: 'Folk tales and fairy stories are not composed nowadays, only old ones are in vogue, learnt one after the other. Riddles we have also only old ones.'[127] In other words, the Santal narrators admitted that the present could not partake in the same practice of narration, which enunciated the time of the past.

If every time was not serialisable in every temporal sequence, the particular time and occasion of remembering determined the critical 'event' of each narrative. It could be Madho Singh's becoming king, which ended the good days at Campa. It could be the first arrival of the *diku*-moneylenders in Shikar country. It could be the *hul*, which forced many Santals to leave their homes and start afresh as indentured labour in Assam tea-plantations. Or it could be the crossing of the Ajay river into the defiled country where, the ancestors had said, 'even the child in the womb' must be nipped before entering. Though there was hardly any mention of Muslims in this narrative, perhaps the context of speaking to a missionary required that the coming of Muslims be spoken of as one such time-marker as well – Kolean thus mentioned the event of war with Muslims, when the sun was shadowed by Santal arrows.[128] Critical 'events' could also differ across the *paris* or sub-groups of Santals. When the *hor* became too many, a massive hunt was organised by the gods, and Marang Buru or the great-mountain-god divided the people according to what they were doing at that particular moment of differentiation. The Santal surnames thus signified not essential identities, or fixed lineages, but acts that groups were performing at the moment of naming. Baijal of Koa-Am remembered, that they became different from other Santals, while fighting the *dikus* in Pandra. The land flowed with blood and even the waters of Damodar could not wash the blood-marks off the back of the ancestors' hands, who thus became forever marked as Khanda Sorens.[129] The Laher-Tudu remembered making vessels and great drums in the smithy – 'they danced in twelve villages in one night' and by virtue of this specific propensity became different from others.[130] These critical 'acts', which made one Santal different from another, were summoned in order to identify strangers as kin, to remind each other that though 'we get lost and become strangers', it was 'from one people [that] we have been spreading far and wide just so when the seed of mustard and sesame are scattered, we have filled the world'.[131] Unlike in Santal narratives, in which critical 'events' differed according to the critical moment of remembering, nationalist historiography tried once and for all to hyphenate the past and the present by a single event – the event of English triumph at Palasi, or the event of Muslim conquest. In fact, the one was often the metaphor of the other. Colonialism itself was thus constituted into an event – before which times were happy, and after which time was troubled – as if,

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[127] *Horkoren*, pp. 126-27.
[128] *Horkoren*, pp. 2-15.
[129] Gausdal, *Santal Khuts*, pp. 128-29.
[130] Ibid., p. 151.
[131] Ibid., p. 157.

if freedom could be lost at one stroke, the glorious past and a modern future too could reclaimed with a single event as well. Freedom became an event itself in nationalism, with Nehru's metaphor of the stroke at midnight. Bengali historiography therefore presumed that when Santals summoned their past, the *hul* would appear as the singular event distinguishing the past from the beginning of the present, especially since the 'tribe' entered history's vision only by virtue of the rebellion.

In Santal narrations, however, neither was the rebellion the only critical event, nor was it an 'event' in the episodic sense of the term. In other words, the event of rebellion did not by itself place the year 1855 in continuity with the Santal past, nor was it the only moment dividing the past from the present. Narrations had to thematise temporal dislocation itself. For Juggi Haram, rebellion was thus the epilogue and the closure to his father's narration of the ancestor's story. For Chotrae Desmanjhi, it was the explanation, which framed stories of missionary activity and migration to Assam. Santal accounts thus always seemed somewhat displaced from the line of historical interrogation, which presumed rebellion to be an autonomous and episodic event and time to be continuous, despite it. No wonder colonial officials found it difficult to pinpoint the 'cause' of the rebellion. When Sagram Murmu asked the wise old Jhagru Haram about the *hul*, 'his answers had no connections with my questions'. Jhagru said that he 'made red' the lands across the Ajay and then 'he started to tremble and did not reply at all ...his eyes became very red'.[132] Santal memories of rebellion thus passed, not into a historical continuum, the specialised site of knowledge of the past, but in the common and fragmented repertoire of present utterances. This inheritance, this debt to the past, was different from historical succession. When Santals sang songs of the *hul*, it was not only because memories of the rebellion were a crucial inheritance, but also because the rebellion was not yet completely past. As we have seen in the first section of the chapter, rebellion remained a compelling and contemporary condition for the Santals even in the early twentieth century. When Santals sang in Bankura, a district to which they later migrated,

> On this side Santbhui, on that side Sikarbhui, babu Nilu Singh
> O babu Nadu Singh, Jadu Jamadar
> We will not let you pass ... [133]

they remembered the rebellion by relocating it from the *hul*-country of Damin to the old lands of the old times. The rebellion, in other words, was extended, through songs, beyond the event and its historical site, into the present as well as into an earlier past. For those socialised in the historical mode of remembrance, it might seem as if there is only one use of memory – the genealogical. However, it is possible to write a history of memory itself – which would demonstrate 'historical' changes in uses and modes of memory and thereby 'historical' changes in deployment of time in everyday life.[134] Once we remember that memory itself is not a historical or a psychological constant, Santal memories of rebellion can be read as an implicit critique of the historical mode of nineteenth-century Bengal.

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[132] Gausdal, *Santal Khuts*, p. 43.
[133] Quoted by Culshaw, 'Santal Rebellion', *Man in India*, XXV: 4, 1945, p. 221.
[134] James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory*, Oxford, 1994.

Santal memories were not the representation of an-other time in self-enclosed knowledge, but the making present of the past in everyday practice. Stories of Santal life and travels were recited as *binti* at births and marriages, and rebellious songs were occasioned at times seemingly odd and irrelevant, as when a sad song about deaths in rebellion would be sung during a festive dance. Through songs and verses thus, the Santal past let itself out of one single narrative. It can even be said that the past seemed possible without the narrative form of linear time. Songs often referred back to stories, stories had songs sung in course of their telling. But episodes and references from the past also existed as relatively free-floating images, lending themselves to different interrelationships, configurations and modes of remembering. The past, in other words, lent itself to practice. In songs and dances, the Santal past was spoken in rhythm and in tune. The past in this case could not only be danced to, but its enunciation, for example in harvest songs, often provided the pace and tempo of work. All senses, the body itself, could be placed in this mode of remembering. Narrative time generally was short, where critical acts like rebellion were enunciated almost laconically, in the form of a fragment of memory. This narrative economy was required because in practice, there was no time for elaborate pauses and detached explications. As Italo Calvino says, where time must be made for storytelling as part of work, where songs might be sung in work without feeling thriftless about time, long durations may be crossed in a flash.[135] In remembering through practice, time was not represented merely as duration as textualised in narrative. Time was perpetuated by differentiated use of tonality and metaphor, by the swiftness of passing over and beginning new stories, by the rhythm of the song, by repetitions, and above all by the temporality of the practice which summoned this remembering in the first place. This mode of practising the past was necessarily collective, songs to which the entire village danced, songs, even when sung in solitude, were known to be known by others. All observers noticed that song and dance were not the specialised vocations of some Santals, but were common to all 'primitives'. In fact, it was in the commonness of this past, rather than in the authority of its knowledge, that time was articulated. The temporal economy of practice required that a person's acts be read, the logic of his/her practice be understood, the song joined in, without pausing and making-time for elaborate discourses and explanations.

It is necessary to understand the use of tenses in this practice of remembering. The entire ancestors-story was narrated by Kolean Haram in the past continuous – 'we were living in Champa', 'having left there' etc. – signifying, not a relationship of succession between past and present, but a continuance of the past in its present re-enactments. In songs, the rebellion was spoken of in present and future tenses:

> Sidhu why are you bathed in blood?
> Kanhu why do you cry 'hul, hul'?
> For our people we have bathed in blood,
> Since the trader-thieves have robbed us
> Of our land.

Or

> Saheb rule is trouble full

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[135] Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium*, London, 1992, p. 37.

Tense, it may be said, not only positions the 'subject' in temporal-relation to its 'object' (the past in this case), but being a form of the verb predicates the 'subject' practically in relation to time itself. Enunciating the past in present and future tenses thus put the Santal in a practical relation to time – such that the past could be figured only when it was also enacted. In contrast, the subject-author of history could grasp the past only in knowledge because the past was unequivocally past and ancient. The only relation that practice could have to such a historical past was a moral relation, taking lessons and inspiration from the past but unable to act upon it. In fact nineteenth-century Bengali history can be read as an agonistic exercise in knowledge, which admitted that the factual past could not be changed while resisting with all its might the past, of decline and defeat, that was empirically on offer.

It may be argued, therefore, that the Santal modes of telling the past were also attempts at redeploying time through practice, through practices of rebellion, work, dance and narration. In practice, time appeared neither as a pre-existing, calibrated straight-line, nor as a space-like duration, formalised into chronology and succession.[137] Instead, time thematised the limits of present imagination, the limits beyond which knowledge failed and practice was summoned. Time appeared as that imperative, beyond knowledge and inheritance, which could change reality beyond *belief.*

> the word of the Ancestors of old is not to be doubted; that will come to pass. ... presently who can say, after how long a time, we human-beings shall use a hook to reach egg-plant fruit; whether the eggplant will grow, or we human beings shall become stunted, this we are unable to say.[138]

Incredible possibilities lay in time, which neither the inherited past nor the imaginable future could apprehend and anticipate. Just as the temporal imperative of *hul* augured changes which could not be rationally expected, Santal *bongas* or ghost-spirits suggested inconceivable realities, which the present could neither rationally explain nor contain.

What seemed 'primitive' supernaturalism to the rational subject of history, was in fact the articulation of a present that was neither fully explicable, nor entirely inherited or deserved by the people. As Santals knew very well, ghost-spirits did not always co-habit with the Santals. Only when Santals were displaced from their pasts and their lands, without any fault of theirs, did *bonga*-s appear as necessary clues to survival. Ramu of Bisunpur remembered that when the Santals were forced to leave cropped lands and enter dark forests, a spirit arrived in the form of a Brahman and asked for worship, promising to save Santals from wild animals.[139] Lachu Haram remembered that, after the wars between Koenda Gar and Badoli Gar, 'it is said, they started to find and invoke Bongas in stumps and roots, and on this side of the Nai river they have found more and more Bongas. Thus, the Bongas have become very many.'[140] *Kisar bonga* incited men to get rich quickly.[141] In fact, by the

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[136] W. G. Archer and Soren, *Hor Seren*, Dumka, 1943, no. 1489.
[137] George Gurvitch critiques the historical method by saying that history attempts to make reality conform to the collective subject/nation, by ignoring ruptures, hiding hierarchies, and pretending that time is a continuous chronology; *The Spectrum of Social Time*, Dordrecht, 1964, pp. 34-5.
[138] Bodding, *Santhal Folk Tales II*, 1925-29, reprint, Calcutta, 1990, p. 95.
[139] Gausdal, *Santal Khuts*, p. 23-4.
[140] Ibid.
[141] W. G. Archer, *The Hill of Flutes: Love, Life and Poetry in Tribal India*, London, 1974, pp. 26-7. The Santal customs mentioned in this text were collected by Archer between 1942-6.

early twentieth century Santals had even acquired a *chuprasi bonga* – the spirit of the court peon, without whose benevolence the debtor could never triumph over the *diku*-moneylenders. Jugi Murmu said

> [when] Muti Sin increased the land rent, he claimed from them double and treble ...our fathers ran away leaving behind everything they possessed and they came to this country with only their courage and a few hens tied to a wooden pestle. ... the Abge bonga appeared [and said] ' How many countries are you to run away from, make a promise to Desdana [one who grants a country] bonga and they will give you very much.'[142]

Local non-Santal deities, whom Santals came in contact with in their travels, also became *bonga*-s, as did headmen and ancestors who died and yet who continued to remain active in village affairs.[143] The boundary or *sima-bonga*, the *bir* or forest-*bonga*, the mountain-*bonga* and the *khuntut* or tree-stump *bongs* – all resided in the Santal village like inconceivable glimpses of time, signifying realms neither of the dead nor of the living. Authors like Marquez, Isabelle Allende, Ben Okri etc have helped us understand this fabulous presentism of unmastered reality – in which nothing is absurd, but for the absurdity of the present itself. And Derrida has hinted at the non-chronological future to which an unacquittable debt is owed and which appears as a spectre, which is neither past, nor present.[144]

Conclusion

Nineteenth-century historiography ethnologised these Santal narratives as 'myths', just as twentieth-century historiography ethnologised them as 'oral' traditions. It is however not enough to deconstruct the arbitrary nature of these distinctions, by showing that myth and history or orality and literacy do not appear in neat succession in the time of progress but that they confront and counterpoise each other as contemporaries, in the course of the political mobilisation of pasts.[145] This chapter has tried to show that disguised under these conceptual binaries, proposed and problematised by modern disciplinary knowledge-forms, lay the foundational confrontation of knowledge with practice. My reading of Santal memories of the rebellion, and of historiographical attempts to textualise them, was geared to demonstrate that there was nothing 'oral' or 'magical' or 'pre-modern' in Santal narrative practices, which a Bengali or a Hindu did not partake in, in everyday time. Historically reconstructing the *hul* as a purely 'primitive' exercise had, therefore, a purpose other than what seems evident. On the one hand, by relegating bodily, violent and portentous acts to the 'primitive', historiography tried to remove temporally disruptive practices from the 'historical' present of Bengali / Hindu society. On the other hand, by denying rebellious agency to the Santals and by blaming low-caste Hindus for provoking 'primitives' into uncharacteristic political practice, historiography tried to neutralise the impossible moment of a past rebelling against the present. As the 'primitive' was paradoxically textualised as both inherently rebellious and intrinsically non-rebellious, the point was not so much a

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[142] Ibid., pp. 64-5.
[143] P. O. Bodding, *A Santal Dictionary I*, Oslo,1929, see entry for 'Bonga'.
[144] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, New York, 1994

definition of the 'primitive' as a category. The point was rather to make temporally discontinuous practice itself appear as the 'primitive' Other to historical knowledge. As knowledge sought to study modes and manners, like rebellion and rebellious memories, which could not be uprooted from practice, it turned the time of practice into an ethnological ground, untouched by causal rationality and unable to touch rational thought, where the author-subject entered like an anthropologist and then returned uncontaminated to the 'objective' present, having collected evidence about both archaic and extant pasts, about both the past and the present 'primitive'.

This is what Michel de Certeau calls the 'ethnologising effect' of knowledge.[146] In order to make itself 'objective' and absolute, historical knowledge in colonial Bengal not only 'ethnologised' the past as 'another country', untainted by colonialism.[147] It also ethnologised practice itself. In Bengali historical discourses, this Othering of practice was done by rejecting some practices like rebellion as futile and irrational, and elevating others – like trade, education, self-improvement, art and travel – into 'historical' acts. This was also done by historiographically reconstructing acts of rebellion into events of rebellion – by renarrativising the verb as the noun, as it were. When colonial and Bengali historical discourse thematised rebellion as an event to be put in chronological succession, when it sought to structure the rebellious imperative into a synchronic cause-event-consequence series, when it made 'local' history into an encyclopaedic existence overdetermined by national historical time, when it separated yet harnessed 'fictional' to 'factual' recollections of the past, when it made the 'magical' and the 'supernatural' into the 'primitive' Other of rational pedagogic and monetary practice – historical discourse was not only seeking to subordinate antagonistic practical-times, it was also seeking to monopolise the practice of narration itself. In this historicised narrative, incommensurable and antagonistic acts were sought to be serialised as successive events, and time was conducted through causal rather than futural imperatives. It was only through such narrative strategies that the rebellion of Santals against moneylending, i.e. against the abstraction of time into money, could be placed in that very abstract time which the rebels tried to question.

In other words, historicisation sought to create a split between consequences of acts and consequences of events. To view the present as a consequence of past acts was to admit the present as actively created, rather than passively received. To view the present as a consequence of finished events, however, was to make present actors relatively free from the presence of the past, a need deeply felt by the Bengali middle classes in the face of unfavourable colonial-empirical histories of India. As the next chapter tries to show, Bengali historiography tried to define historical practice as *karma* and *anusilan*, so as to ensure that the past was passively received in practice and actively restructured in knowledge – thus preventing the present from rebelling against or jeopardising the progressive time of history, in spite of the acknowledged incommensurability of past / tradition /'

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[145] In context of Indian history, this demystification of the oral-literary divide can be seen at its best in Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Delhi, 1983; Gautam Bhadra, *Iman o Nishan*, Calcutta, 1994; Shahid Amin, *Event, Memory, Metaphor*, Delhi, 1995.
[146] *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley, 1984, p.65.
[147] David Lowenthal, *The Past is Another Country*, Cambridge, 1985.

spiritualism and present / modernity / materialism. Articulation of historical time then became a theoretical exercise, an act of knowledge – historicising Rajput wars as the emblem of national pride did not therefore logically call the Bengali to battle. The nation needed to assert only a 'spiritual' rather than a practical continuity with the past. As the Bengali upper-caste, middle-class male author of history experienced the unbridgeable chasm between his so-called modern-liberal education and his aggressively 'traditional' everyday life, this schizophrenic modernity was itself textualised into history as the acceptable and unavoidable difference between knowledge and practice. Only by virtue of such a split could the history and the 'spirit' of the nation be distilled and de-temporalised out of the practical and the pragmatic. And only by virtue of such a split, could rebellious practices, including that of narration, be reconstituted as immoral, violent, illiterate, thriftless, irrational and in the last instance 'primitive'.

Neutralising Time: Knowledge and the Disciplining of Practice

> In time, today is always yesterday. But every today is also
> the offer of the chance to 'space time' and to decide how it
> will no longer just be time, but our time.
>
> — Jean Luc Nancy[1]

Bengali history-writing not only sought to textualise rebellions, rebellious memories and narrative times into a proper historical order, it also sought to formulate practice itself as an appropriately historical category. This did not merely imply a historical judgement on whether a certain social or political practice was relevant, anachronistic, consistent and continuous with past practices etc. This was also an attempt to epistemologically structure practice – i.e. render to practice the nature of knowledge itself. This chapter will try to demonstrate that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali historical imagination was founded on the construction of an 'idea' of practice, of practice as a subordinate category of *gnyan* or knowledge and of practice as the opposite of, the Other to knowledge.

Like European intellectuals, Bengali intellectuals too claimed historicity as the central attribute of the nation. Unlike in European modernity, however, this history appeared as both as the consciousness of consciousness á la Hegel and as the consciousness of subordination. The colonised could therefore not merely 'be' history like the Hegelian *Geist*, s/he had to reconfigure history as it was on offer – in order to escape historical subordination – through an alternative and self-conscious historical practice. It is in

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[1] *The Birth to Presence*, Stanford, 1993, p.166.

this sense, one may say, that the Bengali historical sensibility tried to conceive of the historical, not just as a mode of awareness of the nation, but as a mode of acting. Needless to say, all knowledge-forms tend to do this to an extent. Even purely classificatory and neatly numerical knowledges try to project a certain kind of social practice as legitimate and/or possible. However, modernity emerged on the principle that knowledge was a specialised and autonomous site, which lay beyond the reach of everyday practices of life. If the totalising intent of non-modern knowledge-forms lay in their claim to explain life and death, the sacred and the profane, the human and the cosmic in one single move, the universal claim of modern knowledge-forms lay their indifference to everyday, local and practical contexts, i.e. in their universal and scientific applicability. As the Foucauldian version of European history has taught us, beyond modern, disciplined knowledge, thus, seemed to lie a surplus reality – an excess that returned before the rational mind as the regime of the unconscious, as the realm of desires, as the world of insanity and as the time of the primordial. Modern knowledge faced the task of explication, disciplining and/or abolition of such realms of practices as these, which seemed to thrive outside, beneath and irrespective of reason.

The colonised had to lay claim to this detached realm of *theoria*, beyond everyday practices. Yet it also had to define itself as national or indigenous in the strong sense of the term, in order to refute the universality claimed by the discourses of the rulers. The idea of historical practice emerged in an attempt to resolve this paradox. Edmund Husserl accused Indian and Chinese philosophies of 'thematising' the world merely 'in a practical way', while Greek philosophy thematised 'universal life-interests in the essentially new form of a purely "theoretical" attitude ... bringing about *theoria* and nothing but *theoria*.'[2] Placed in this paradoxical double bind of lacks – between the absence of 'free' practice of 'Indian' values and the absence of 'pure' theory – the colonised saw 'history' as the solution. This chapter intends to demonstrate how this happened and what the implications of this history were with regard to the idea of political practice itself. As I shall argue, historical knowledge of this kind sought to impose upon practice the temporal structure of knowledge – i.e. formulate practice in a synchronic and causal manner, rather than admit to the irreversibility and inherent unpredictability of practical time. Historical practice was made to appear as a conquest and rebuttal of everyday time, rather than as an alternative redeployment of the everyday life of the colonised and the subaltern. It was this neutralisation of the politics of the everyday, which allowed the articulation of Brahmanical philosophies of *karma, abhivyakti/vivartana*, and *itihas/purana* with theories of scientific evolution and causal prediction, rendering to Hindu principles a 'rational' universality of the Western kind, at the cost of other past systems of thought.

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[2] *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston, 1970, pp. 280-83.

The conquest of time: the epistemological structure of practice

In colonial Bengal, historical practice was defined as *anusilan* and *karma*. *Anusilan* was 'culture', the regular and repeated practice of 'natural' and 'harmonious' human tendencies. This culture, in the verb-form as in plant-culture, constituted what Bankim called the 'substance of religion'.[3] Education itself was subsumed under this practice – the term *anusilan* literally stood for the practice-exercises given after each lesson in school manuals. Practice in this sense, was repetition *ad infinitum*, ensuring that an identity-in-formation was materialised into existence by the sheer disciplined repetition of the identical through time. For Bankim history was just such a repeated nation-effect. The *jatiya-bhav* or the spirit of the nation was seen to recur at different moments in the past – when the *aryas* defeated the *anaryas* at the very beginning of history, when Prithviraj Chauhan fought Muhammad Ghori in the eleventh century or when the Marathas fought the Mughals in the seventeenth and the eighteenth. The same nation-effect could be made to recur in the colonial times, through *anusilan* – the repetition and relearning, in the present, of what was already present in the past but which seemed to have been forgotten. Seemingly dissociated from conceptual thought, which every individual could not be expected to cultivate, *anusilan* was pure practice – the bringing to the surface of dormant national traits, the habituation of the masses to these traits, all this through sheer reiteration. *Anusilan samities* or local club-committees where Bengali youth 'cultured' their bodies, sang patriotic songs, and even organised revolutionary terrorism, were locations of this exercise of repetition. It was said that nationality and historicity were *abhyasgata gun*, that is qualities which one could make a habit of, through practice and repetition. Thus, war, which signified historical practice in many of Bankim's novels, was the practice or *anusilan* of national unity.[4] Such was the power of disciplined repetition, Bankim argued, that it could habituate even a 'primitive' Hottentot to practices of civilisation.[5] True, a 'primitive' possessed no culture except that of the body.[6] Yet, if properly modulated, 'primordial' bodily propensities could be overdetermined by the *anusilan* of mental and aesthetic faculties. Clearly, the 'mental' was the precondition to all practice, even the religious. Without knowledge, even devotion, worship and faith were ineffective – as Bankim exclaimed, 'the fool has no god'.[7]

Karma, the other concept of historical agency, was non-teleological practice, which was socially necessary and morally valid irrespective of its end-results. Its telos might act as a heuristic tool but it did

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[3] Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay 'Dharmatattva;, 1888, *Bankim Rachanavali II*, (hereafter *BR*), Calcutta, 1954, p. 591.
[4] 'Aikya', *Bangadarshan, magh*, 1872.
[5] 'Dharmatattva', p. 590.
[6] Ibid., p. 658.
[7] Ibid., p. 612.

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not invest the practice with value. Value was inspired by the act itself that defied the need and desire for its fruits. Interpreting Krishna's utterances in the *Bhagavat Gita*, Bankim said that the impact of *nishkama* or desireless *karma*, even when undertaken by a lonely individual like Arjuna, continued beyond the life-time of the individual. In this sense, *karma* was social practice, because its fruits were not claimed or consumed by the agent him or herself. The consequences of such acts were invested in society and in god.[8] Such practice was therefore 'historical' even prior to the constitution of the collective historical subject, like the nation, and even before the arrival of the promethean time of epochal transformation. Even when a nation or a people did not exist as a self-conscious collectivity, in and for itself, *karma* ensured that each individual's actions produced collective intentionalities. Professional, domestic, middle-class Bengali individuals thus formed a nation, not because they possessed a 'primordial' unity like the 'tribes', but because they constituted a moral group, wherein each could consent to sacrifice individual ends in *nishkama karma*, even though each acted as a solitary individual. If James Mill accused Comte, and the Hindus, of subordinating the individual to the community, he failed to comprehend this nature of *karma* – that it was precisely a theory of individual practice, though the results of such practice were common to society. In this, it was not as if the individual had no value. It was just that the individual or the individual goal was not the end. The individual was the 'witness consciousness', the precondition rather than the goal of conceptual knowledge. Practice as *karma* thus not only pre-existed the actualisation of the nation. it also pre-existed the arrival of the suitable time and context for action. For it was collective practice which had to await the right and relevant context. Individual *karma* did not – it could engender social reform even though it might seem ahead of time.[9] Evidently posited against simplistic historicism – that societies could change only when the right time comes – *karma* asserted that 'time does not arrive by itself', 'whatever must happen by the end of *kaliyuga* must happen. We shall do our work. The autonomy of the subject is not to be abdicated. Ought never be relinquished in favour of time and destiny.[10] *Karma* must conquer time itself, which in the paradigm of colonial modernity, appeared as the constitutive lag of the colonised.

Nineteenth-century Bengali authors relentlessly contested the allegation that *karma* led to renunciation rather than to practice. Giving up the fruits of labour was not so much a renunciation as a transference of the lessons of one's own practice to future successors. It was the final triumph of history over finite human life, over evolutionary disadvantages, over anachronistic efforts by the 'backward' to progress. It was not incidental that in this period, numerous books on death and the after-life were published, with explicit historiographical intentions. Death represented that ultimate denial of collectivity, that ultimate individuation of a human being who dies alone and in doing so realises that, in a way, the world ceases to be with the end of an individual life. Everyday time, lived in the shadow of imminent and inevitable death and of colonial unfreedom, seemed logically to disrupt and cut across historical

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[8] 'Krishnacharitra', *BR II*, pp. 560-84.
[9] 'Samaj Sanskar', *Bangadarshan, kartik*, 1878.
[10] 'Abisranta Bairagya', *Bangadarshan, ashar*, 1882.

continuity. Death and slavery in this sense emptied future-oriented practices of their significance. Hence the argument that practice must be understood as *karma*, transcending its own end and its possible failure, transcending its own agent and transcending the spectre of the unfinished and the meaningless. On the one hand, Bengali texts harnessed scientific principles, like the law of conservation of matter and energy, to prove that time was continuous despite the everyday experiences of death, defeat and finitude.[11] On the other hand, they argued that the nation must practise history precisely because death and decline were final. Not surprisingly then, Nagendranath Gupta, who wrote numerous historical novels and plays, also wrote:

> We can only claim consciousness. Eternal consciousness is our blessing. The destruction of amnesia is in this sense our immortality. I shall always recognise myself, I shall reject my own body at my discretion, but my memory shall never cease. Let me never be conquered by the terrible forgetfulness that is death.[12]

Bankim too sought to extricate history from this discontinuous temporality of the colonial everyday by relocating *karma* in the site of consciousness; for to see practice as embodied and therefore imprisoned in 'reality' and in the 'everyday', would, in other words, be to deny god, that ultimate agent sans materiality, the power of creative practice.[13] Only when practice became *karma*, could consciousness defy death and defeat: 'in the real world there is no death and no dead. Everything is life ... where is the split between the past and the future? Where is the fragmentation of the great life of the world? How can there be discontinuity ever?'[14]

It was thus *karma*, and not historicism per se, which made the present continuous with the past and the future. It detached the actor from the prison of the present and reconfigured the present as the past of the future. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay argued that practice as *karma* activated the present in a way in which European historical consciousness never did.[15] Despite knowledge of evolutionary time, the West based practice and ethics on the individual. The West failed to grasp that individual acts, invested in society, had common consequences for the species and the epoch. Western presentism, therefore, failed to engage with collective destiny, as *karma*:

> Epochs are immanent in Hindu destiny; the elements, stars, animals and the entire universe are inherent in this. This destiny has no form, no image – but the destiny has an intent (*dhyan*). That destiny is not a person, but a subject, a thematic (*vishay*). That destiny is named the eternal, the absolute – History without origin.

This was evident in the difference between Greek and Hindu senses of destiny. Greek destiny was tragic, because it unfolded *despite* the protagonist's knowledge of the awaiting fate. Hindu destiny was blissful because it *was* the knowledge itself.[16] Bhudev admitted that history as a practice existed in a minimalist sense amongst all peoples – even 'illiterate primitives' memorised their pasts in 'long poems' (and 'Tartars and Muslims' chronicled regnal chronology accurately). However, unlike Hindus, others

[11] 'Ihalok o Porolok', *Bangadarshan, agrahayan*, 1882.
[12] 'Jivan o Mrityu', 1900, *Nagendra Granthavali II*, Calcutta, 1925, p. 361.
[13] 'Dharmatattva', p. 605.
[14] 'Jivan o Porolok', *Bangadarshan, poush*, 1882.
[15] 'Samajik Prabandha', 1892, *Bhudev Rachanasambhar* (hereafter *BHR*), Calcutta, 1957, p. 33.
[16] 'Adrishta', *Bangadarshan, sravan*, 1882.

failed to grasp the profound causality of historical practice. To grasp the causal imperative, Graeco-Roman antiquity imposed the human form on nature, god and nation. And Christians invoked the indecipherable will and discretion of God.

Hindus however did not need to personify causal forces as either human or godly will, in order to understand history. This was because they understood practice as *karma*, and thus could place the most arbitrary of events in temporal continuum. They could find causes behind causes, thus reaching time and subjectivity – *kal* and *atman* – as the ultimate a priori. They could invoke the past and the future simultaneously, and through causal prediction and predication, imagine practice even in the most debilitating and contingent present.[17] It must be remembered, however, that though *karma* as a system of causality was part of the pre-colonial *darshan* tradition, it underwent a crucial displacement in colonial modernity. In *darshan*, causality was not invoked to explain *necessary* events – the 'ever present', i.e. the essential or the eternal, or the 'never present', i.e. the ficitional or the imaginary, could not be caused. Causality was invoked to explain only the *contingent*.[18] Faced with the logic of modernity and history, however, Bhudev had to narrate the nation as necessary. Though Bhudev described the defining feature of the *jati* as causal consciousness, he had to stop short of admitting the constructedness and contingency of this causal identity. Therefore, instead of foregrounding the contingency of *karma* as causal practice, as in pre-colonial theory, Bhudev had to imagine his and his nation's difference with the coloniser well within the domain of the necessary, of progress, essentialism and historicism. Though Bhudev did articulate the insight that the ideology of *karma* differed from Western historicism precisely because the former recognised the contingent effects and nature of practice, he had to essentialise this difference as a necessary difference between two kinds of knowledge-imperatives, the Western and the Hindu. His insight into the nature of practice was cancelled out as it became sublimated into a certain static knowledge-form, in authorial possession, that is in the possession of the educated male Hindu.

Thus, the Bengali intelligentsia could epistemologise the practice of *karma* to the extent of saying that *karma* foregrounded causality so as to make divine intentions identical to natural laws. This conflation of the ultimate agency with the ultimate structure, it was argued, generated the ultimate civilisational stage. This highest civilisational state was in absolute contrast to 'primitive animism', where every object, animate or inanimate, was attributed an autonomous will and agency.[19] This apparently was the lesson of Auguste Comte's 'positive philosophy'. Since 'primitives' did not understand natural laws, they lacked the patience and the foreknowledge to await the working out of causalities. They therefore showed a futile restlessness of desire and will, in acts like *bidhroha* or rebellion. *Karma* on the other hand, was fundamentally patient, and able to harness the certainty of determinate futures and

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[17] Bhudev, 'Samajik', pp. 36, 146.
[18] Anindita Balslev, *A Study of Time in Indian Philosophy*, Wiesbaden, 1983, p. 21.

[19] 'Can There be an Exception to Natural Laws?', *Bangadarshan*, *jaishtha*, 1873.

natural laws.[20] The 'Indian Positivist Society' of Jogen Ghosh et al, with whom even Bankim and R. C. Dutt were associated, thus invoked natural laws for purposes of causally informed and future-oriented *karma*, while explicitly asserting a Brahmanical or 'intellectual' privilege to leadership.[21] In this 'positive' paradigm, 'primitive' superstitions were interpreted as nothing other than erroneous causal connections between the present and its irrelevant antecedents.[22] An 1872 essay criticised those who saw the 'innocence and truthfulness' of 'primitives' as proof of their practical or ethical superiority. Allegedly drawing evidence from Darwin, Burton, Robert Lallemont, Paul Duchaillu and Herbert Spencer's work, this essay argued that 'primitives' practised violence, sex and other 'practices of the night', saw death as the end of time, failed to see the relationship of 'mortal man's practices with general society', failed to causally predict the future because they failed to see similarities between superficially dissimilar empirical objects.[23] 'Primitives' thus not only lacked knowledge, they also lacked valid life practices. Or rather, 'primitives' were incapable of historical practice, precisely because they were incapable of knowledge as causal and deductive explication. After all, the primary 'primitive' error was to confuse time with practice. Since in the 'primitive' condition, *unnati* or development was inordinately slow, the 'primitive' confused change with the 'natural' movement of time itself, instead of ascribing change to historical practice and laws of nature. It was this 'primitive' reduction of time to practice which disabled peoples like the Santals, Kols, Bhils etc from harnessing the certainty and confidence of historical causation.[24]

An 1878 essay on causality argued that there were two kinds of relationships between acts – *samakalvrittitva*, co-evalness or simultaneity in time, and *anantarvrittitva*, succession in time. Acting-at-the-same-time as a concept was cryptically dismissed by the essayist by saying it was 'a matter of numerical sciences' etc, though it is difficult to understand what he means when he says this. Significantly however, he says that in the case of social action, it was succession or *anantarvrittitva* which was relevant.[25] Another essay of the same year said that a sense of time as succession generated patience and mercifulness in historical practice, and prevented unnecessary confrontations, impulsiveness, anger, desire and violence in society. Because time as succession apprehended each act as a future cause, such practice emphasised forethought rather than a leap into the future for the sake of change.[26] Evidently, this denial of simultaneity or coevalness in favour of succession, was an attempt at defusing potential temporal confrontations between the present, and what were seen as its antecendents. Such *karma*, though it saw the present as the antecedent to the future, took the past as given and uncontestable. It could not transform the past, though it could grasp it as causally fully explicated. From a site of contest and contradiction, the past was transformed into a conceptual a priori, into a cause of the

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[20] 'Comte Darshan', **Bangadarshan, poush,**1874.
[21] Guiseppe Flora, *The Evolution of Positivism in Bengal,* Naples, 1993, p. 1. Also see Jogen Ghosh, *The Political Side of Brahmanism,* Calcutta, 1896 and **Brahmanism and the Sudra or the Hindu Labour Problem**, Calcutta, 1902.
[22] 'Karya Karan Sambandha', *Bangadarshan, poush,* 1873.
[23] 'Gnyan o Niti', *Bangadarshan, ashvin,* 1872.
[24] 'Katakal Manushya', *Bangadarshan, phalgun,* 1873.
[25] 'Tarka Samgraha: Karya-karan Sambandha', *Bangadarshan, shravan,* 1878.
[26] 'Karanbad o Adrishtabad', *Bangadarshan, ashvin,* 1878.

present – on the principle that 'that which is past is presently factual' (rather than the reverse, that facts are past and thus presently non-factual).[27] In this vision, like all pasts, the 'primitives' too were received as a given fact, along with his or her primordial timelessness.

Despite its apparent foundation in the pre-colonial ideal of *karma*, this version of the past was very different from the pasts of earlier traditions of *purana-itihas*. The latter too excluded 'barbarians' like Nisadas from mainstream polity. However, as Romilla Thapar has shown, the very point of the *puranas* was to rewrite the past when erstwhile 'barbarians' successfully pushed for political incorporation into the structure of power. *Puranas* were written retrospectively like modern histories, but they were textualised as predictions and prophecies of the future so as to project the present changes as always already foreknown and therefore unsurprising and acceptable. These new futures were made to appear as admissible into the past. Unlike the paradigm of modernity, which conceptualised the 'primitive' as factually given and always already past, this tradition reworked the past and its history every time the 'barbarian' effected a political triumph.[28]

Once *karma* was defined as identical to (causal) succession, there remained no social act or event which could not be put in *anantarvrittitva* or causal continuity. Historical practice in this mode accepted discontinuous acts (like 'primitive' rebellions), non-convergent narratives (like caste-histories), incommensurable worlds (like the 'spiritual' East and the 'material' West) and even oppositional histories (like traditions and counter-traditions invoked in course of, say, widow-remarriage reform). What it could not admit was the impossibility of placing certain practices and counter-practices in a single time of succession. In other words, the chain of *karma*, though a theory of praxis, became reified into a formal structure of causation, without reference to the intrinsic time of particular practices. The notion of *karma* was not new to Bengal, but once it was formalised as historical causality in the nineteenth century, it acquired the status and the form of explicatory knowledge – shorn of the problematic of ontological liberation or *moksha* and shorn of the *puranic* divination of the future. This formal *karmic* succession now coincided with the empty chronology of capitalist modernity. Bhudev Mukhopadhyay distinguished Western evolutionism from his own *bhavishya vichar* or analysis of the future. Based on the profound causality of *karma* and on the renunciation of interest, desire, anger, and guilt, he announced that neither inequality nor war could be abolished in the future. Scarcity of resources was permanent, as were ethnological contrasts – therefore both conflicts and 'primitives' were eternal and factual.[29] Western historiography deluded itself that 'primitive' and violent conditions would in time be given over to 'civilisation'. However, Hindu history recognised that, though 'primitives' may try to Hinduise, 'what was not foundational but contingent will not remain ... In Hindu texts, though there is faith on evolutionary

[27] See C. F Von Weizsacker's definition of 'facts', quoted in Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*, New York, 1983, pp. 88-9.
[28] Romilla Thapar, 'The Image of the Barbarian in Early India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XIII: 4, 1971, p. 436.
[29] 'Samajik', pp. 145, 150-51, 191.

improvement in personal matters, social development is not envisioned as limitless.[30] For it was time, not practice and change, which was constant. Thus, if *anusilan* effected the conquest over 'primitive' conditions of body-centricity and evolutionary lags, and if *karma* enabled the conquest over everyday time of death, defeat and amnesia – these historical practices were defined in opposition to contingent, thoughtless and limitied everyday social practice, including that of Hinduisation. This was because historical practice had to stabilise time and smoothen succession, a capacity which everyday or 'primitive' practices did not possess.

Gnyan and *karma*: articulation of the nation in time

By invoking disciplined repetition (*anusilan*) and desireless work (*karma*), the Bengali intelligentsia sought to undo their evolutionary temporal lag. These types of historical practices in turn were distinguished from 'primitive' practices on the ground that the former were founded in knowledge and causality. In some theoreticians like Bhudev, this developed into a full critique of evolutionary time, which, according to Bhudev, was teleological or end-oriented. In place of evolution *in* time, Bhudev proposed what he called *abhivyakti* or articulation *of* time. This was conceptualised not as an inexorable movement towards the future, but as an originary imperative – which articulated not only progress, but also the acts of creation, destruction and rest. This time was not necessarily evolutionary, though it might articulate gradual developmental change in particular contexts.[31] It, on the other hand, might remain *avyakta* or immanent. This *avyakta kal* or immanent time acted as the centre of the universe and perpetuated evolution only when it chose to articulate itself. Evolution was the limiting form of time, while the self-evident, immanent time was the limitless – both were the same *kal* or temporality, for 'the limit is attached to both the limited and the limitless beyond'.[32] When this originary time confronted a limit, it turned away from itself and engaged in practice – creating the world and the worldly in a negation of its own limitlessness and immateriality. When an impassable schism or barrier threatened to obstruct the flow of time – as when the *arya* and the *sudra* became completely irreconcilable in Indian society – a mediator was born, to arbitrate and clear the path of time.[33] Krishna was one such mediator, who told Arjuna, on occasion of the great war of Mahabharata that 'I am Time'. And Arjuna took the practical decision of war, despite his own personal misgivings, because he realised through *karma* and history, that the self and the Other were the 'inner and the outer extensions of the same self as time'.[34]

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[30] Ibid., p. 147.
[31] Ibid., pp. 74-5.
[32] Krishnachandra Sarasvati, *Mahamanaber Kramabikash ba Dharmatattver Kramaprakash*, Pabna, 1924, preface.
[33] Ibid., pp. 38, 60-1.
[34] Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, *Itihas o Abhivyakti*, Jadavpur, 1929, p. 29.

To understand this notion of articulation, we must briefly refer to its uses in pre-colonial philosophies of India and their redeployment in the colonial context. As Jitendranath Mohanty shows, almost all Indian philosophies conceived of knowing as articulating, revealing or illuminating the object of knowledge. Even when cognition was inferential or propositional, it was formulated as a manifestation and not as a representation of reality. Of course, the knowing subject was manifest both as the transcendental telos knowledge and as the concrete person, for whom knowledge generated the affective-volitional structure of desire and action. However, unlike in Europe, in *darshan* there was no natural conflation of the subject with the person/ego. A pure, monadic person, despite the highly individualistic theory of *karma*, did not emerge as the automatic referent of subjectivity. Even where the concept of person was most likely to be autonomous, as in the theory of action, the 'subject' dominated the 'person'. In the ethics of non-attached *karma*, the agent ceased to be a person, and became a pure subject, empty of all contents and interests. Western philosophy on the other hand, was not about the pure subject, but about the person, stripped of his corporeality, in the interior of his reflective thinking. In Western modernity, this extrication of the mind from the concrete individual produced senses of disjuncture between form and content, word and meaning, sign and signified. In *darshan*, however, the idea of a purely formal validity contra material truth or the notion of reality as a mental 'construct' never emerged. Here meaning was an act of cognition – illuminating without representing, inner and outer, known and unknown objects. Meaning was not a theory *reconciling* sign, meaning and reference.[35] Even time was not formalised into a pure chronology or concept – in Sankha-Yoga time was the concrete becoming of matter, in Nyaya time was an eternal substance with qualities, in Buddhism time was the instantaneity of being. In this time, there were no 'bare possibilities'. Counterfactuals constituted 'motivated possibilities', which played out a political contest.[36] In fact, universal skepticism and empty chronological time were ruled out because they contradicted practical life. If Western modernity proposed a disinterest in knowledge and competitive interest in life-practices, *darshan* proposed disinterest as much in practice as in knowledge. Knowledge and practice did not appear here as oppositional domains.

In the colonial context, however, science appeared as an alien yet universal knowledge, posited against local practices and wisdoms. For the first time, it seemed that (rational) knowledge and (indigenous) practices were opposed. The colonised, therefore, became anxious not only about the status of their knowledge, but also about the practical implications of their knowledge-systems. If Husserl accused Indians of not being adequately theoretical, missionaries accused Hinduism of inability to generate ethics and practice. Devendranath Thakur and Dayananda Sarasvati saw non-dualism as non-conducive to practice, Rammohan Roy believed that it needed a dose of Christian ethics, and Kesav Sen debated the possibilities of the 'applicability' of Vedanta thought.[37] In pre-colonial Advaita-Vedanta

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[35] Jitendranath Mohanty, *Reason and Tradition in Indian Thought*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 197-99.
[36] Ibid., p. 20.
[37] Wilhem Halbfass, 'Practical Vedanta', in *Representing Hinduism*, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and H. von Stietencron, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 218-22.

traditions, though the world was denied a transcendental reality, it was accepted to have an epistemic and empirical status.[38] In the nineteenth century, however, this tradition was reinterpreted as a renunciatory philosophy, which refused the world a place in knowledge and therefore was unable to generate practice. Placed in the colonial-modern problematic of knowledge versus practice, the colonised felt compelled to reclaim temporality as a domain of knowledge, thus removing it from ontology, where it seemed to have hitherto belonged and wherefore it articulated *both* knowledge and practice. An 1872 essay conceptualised practice categorically as a necessity, only when knowledge was incomplete.[39] This displacement of time from the domain of ontology and life-practice into the field of epistemology can be demonstrated by a reading of Ramendrasundar Trivedi – who replaced the notion of evolutionary time by the concept of articulation of time, and who, to do so, had to reconceptualise time as the 'mental construct' of the knowledgeable subject.

Ramendrasundar defined the articulation of time thus: 'in the process of continual transformation, what was unexpressed, formless, inarticulate and ambiguous becomes manifest and articulate. This is called scientific *abhivyakti*.'[40] This articulation demonstrated, among other forms, the progressive evolution of an entity to higher states. But unlike Western evolutionism, it did not elevate the imaginary far future to the highest level. Articulation admitted the 'originary' moment as the ultimate. This *adi kal* or originary time remained stable through all historical changes and thus allowed a self-conscious 'return' to it in a final realisation of identity – the identity of the nationalist consciousness with the nation-subject. Though this might sound Hegelian, Ramendrasundar's return to originary time was not the end of history. Return was possible at any historical moment, through *pragnya*, a compound of memory, knowledge and *upalabdhi* or realisation. It was the *pragnya* of the originary which produced identity across infinite practical changes. Thus, though successive thinkers appeared in history as separate agents, they could be realised as identical when they themselves realised their succession to a common and singular past.[41] This identity however, was the equation of the knowable-subject grasped across time, not the unity of the knowing subject.[42] The knowing-subject demonstrated a unity of a different order. It was self-evident – being its own proof and its own articulation. It was timeless in itself, presiding over the 'practices of the knowable, object-I dispersed over *yuga-kalpa* or epochs'.[43]

Time, in other words, was the fragmentation and distribution of the knowing-subject across past, present and future:

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[38] Anindita Balslev, *Time*, pp. 60-2.
[39] 'Swabhavik o Abhyastha Punyakarma', *Bangadarshan, kartik*, 1872.
[40] 'Pratityasamutpad', in 'Jignyasa', 1904, *Ramendra Rachanavali II* (hereafter RR), Calcutta, 1950, p. 320.
[41] 'Mukti', *RR I*, p. 418.
[42] Ibid, pp. 410-11.
[43] 'Ek na Dui', *RR I*, p. 276. Ramendrasundar also mentions that others like Dwijendranath Thakur agreed to this formulation of time by him.

> The entire world is imagined by me; with me my imagination will also end. If I do not remain how will time? Empty, eventless time? It is a lie. If there is no origin, there cannot be time. It is I who throws myself into time; it is I who defers myself in three, who sees the self scattered in three. It is my play, my illusion.[44]

To critique the idea of an empty,chronological time that appeared to flow even when no event or act occurs in it, Ramendrasundar defined time as the fragmentation of the self — as the arrangement of the self in the form of a syntax. This formulation, which could have had a very different ontological implication, was however reduced by Ramendrasundar himself to an epistemological proposition. He interpreted his own formulation of originary time and articulation of time to say that temporality was the 'mental construction' of the knowledgeable subject. He clearly stated that that the knowing-mind articulated itself as time, while the empirical world appeared as space. In the world of practice, he argued, time was secondary. Here, time merely functioned as the appearance of motion, only because, as Newtonian physics showed, two objects could not occupy the same space at the same time. The mind however was purely temporal — it had presence and absence, but no position.[45] Though this particular theorisation was exclusively Ramendrasundar's own, the multiplication of analogies that this propounded was common to late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali intelligentsia. As mind and matter were reproduced as the domains of time and space, time and space were reproduced as the domains of knowledge and practice on the one hand, and as the domains of the 'historical' and the 'primitive' on the other. In other words, the 'historical' and the 'primitive' came to represent the principles of knowledge and practice respectively. Time, the mental construct of the knowing-subject, appeared as duration only in practice.[46] As Ramendrasundar said in a telling aphorism: 'succession is popular practice (lokvyavahar).'[47] History was therefore not time itself, but the articulation of time in practice:

> As if the world of practice is a drama — it has a plot, an end, it begins with a design — act after act brings a purpose, nothing comes which is not relevant. And the world of perceptions seems to be an epic, eventful, chaotic, a crisis at every moment, a revolutionary potential. One is amazed to see it, one has to laugh, to cry, to be overwhelmed, to be excited, but to what end it moves no one can say.[48]

This world of practice and of narratives was the regime of the popular, the 'ordinary'. This world was a detour from the originary. Only knowledge could transcend this regime.[49]

In thinkers like Ramendrasundar, thus, it was knowledge that sought to overdetermine both time and practice. The subject who was conscious of his own identity had to demonstrate this foundational epistemological intent. In this paradigm, Hindus could be identified neither by a 'commonality of doctrine' nor by 'social practices', for both 'varied across times and lands'. They could only be identified by their 'veneration of cows'. This was no mere practice or custom. Nor was it a survival of some 'primitive' totemism — for as Ramendrasundar reminded his readers, Hindus used to eat beef in earlier times. This was actually a veneration of the go, a term which etymologically signified the word or logos.

[44] 'Atmar Abinashita', *RR I*, p. 237.
[45] 'Ek na Dui', *RR I*, p. 266.
[46] 'Mukti', *RR I*, p. 393.
[47] Ibid., p. 419.
[48] 'Vyavaharik o Pratibhasik Jagat', *Bharatbarsha, phalgun*, 1914.
[49] 'Vichitra Prasanga', 1914, *RR II*, p. 417.

Ramendrasundar argued that the world was perpetuated through 'naming': 'from the time of the Vedas till today, all the philosophical schools of India have acknowledged the world as *namrup*, as the form of the name, even the atheist Buddhist has had to admit this.'[50] These name-concepts – imperceptible, formless and beyond bodily touch – were produced by *pragnya*, knowledge and memory, and by the knowing-subject as a 'free agent'.[51] Herein lay the fundamental difference between Hinduism and Christianity. Since Christianity opposed time to eternity, salvation was imagined as the result of virtuous practice in empirical time. In Hinduism however, time and eternity were continuous, in an unending cycle of *karma* or practice. Liberation therefore could only be the result of the transcendence of practice.[52] It was only knowledge, beyond practice, which could negate death and conduct itself across generations into the future.[53] The West-East difference was thus less a difference between materialism and spiritualism, more a difference between their respective knowledge-imperatives. Like Ramendrasundar, another essay in 1872 argued that in the West, 'knowledge was power', which provoked practice. In India, 'knowledge was *mukti* (liberation)', which transcended practice. In the Vedic times, practice was oriented towards *gnyan* or knowledge. But in the colonial present, knowledge had become 'slave to practices or *kriyakarma*'. The purpose of the nation should therefore be the release of knowledge from the immediacy and thoughtlessness of practice.[54]

According to Ramendrasundar, *anarya* or 'primitive' *jatis* were excluded from Hindu society, not because they were immoral as pre-colonial Brahmanical paradigms claimed, but because they were not 'educated' in this knowledge. He accused anthropology of producing 'confusion through its national and temporal comparisons'.[55] What anthropology missed was the crucial distinction between the 'civilised' and the 'primitive' – the distinction which explained why the African and Pacific 'tribes' survived for so long, while 'civilisations' rose and fell rapidly. This was essentially because the 'primitive' restricted himself to mere survival practices, which allowed him to perpetuate himself and his society.[56] But civilisations often pursued higher and transcendent purposes – 'science, arts, philosophy and politics' – often at the cost of practices of self-preservation.[57] This was because the 'civilised' realised that creation was 'the projection of knowledge of the knowing subject from within to without'.[58] They knew that 'death [was] not the necessary end of life, but the norm of articulation of individual life for the purpose of expansion of national life'.[59] Vedic Hindu sacrifice embodied the principle that human consciousness took leave of itself in this primary civilisational sacrifice or *yagnya*. 'Primitives' misinterpreted this lesson of creative self-sacrifice in crude practical terms. They therefore practiced cannibalism, human sacrifice,

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[50] Ibid., pp. 362-77.
[51] 'Bangmay Jagat', *Bharatbarsha, poush*, 1914.
[52] 'Vichitra Prasanga', *RR II*, pp. 334-36.
[53] 'Pragnyar Joy', *Bharatbarsha, sravan*, 1917.
[54] 'Sankhya Darshan', *Bangadarshan, magh*, 1872.
[55] 'Yagnya Agnyadhyan o Agnihotra', in *Sahitya, phalgun*, 1917.
[56] 'Achar', *Bharati, sravan*, 1898.
[57] 'Vichitra Prasanga', 1920, 2nd series, *RR II*, p. 474.
[58] 'Mukti', *RR I*, p. 401.
[59] 'The Limit to Knowledge', in 'Prakriti', 1896, *RR I*, p. 30.

and took intoxicating drinks in order to simulate a release from self-consciousness.[60] That is, 'primitives' reduced sacrifice to practice, while the Vedic Aryans knew it to be nothing other than the conscious self-alienation of the knowing subject for the sake of the creation of the world and the worldly. Ramendrasundar thus, literally constructed the 'primitive' as the practical and the 'historical' as the knowledgeable. Explaining the Brahmanical ceremony of second-birth (the sacred thread ceremony), he categorically defined the Hindu society as a society which 'did not give the uneducated the right to family or to religion; the uneducated remained fallen in this society'.[61]

Ramendrasundar was not alone in this attempt to define the nation in terms of pure knowledge – irrespective of practice. Brahmamadhab Upadhyay, an educationist and Rabindranath's associate in Shantiniketan, said in so many words:

> Having learnt European sciences, we think these days that the purpose of life is work. But the Hindu ideal is to give up work and be instituted in the site of the self. Being is rest. Practice and will are needed to remove existential obstacles, only when rest and foundation are absent. Practice is indicative of a lack, an incompleteness. Where there is self-possession, practice cannot last.[62]

Like Ramendrasundar, Brahmamadhab also argued that self-knowledge 'invents' time and space in order to articulate its contingent locations. Western science, unable to distinguish knowledge from these constructed dimensions of existence, believed time and concomitantly the subject-object opposition to be transcendentally real.[63] A Hindu however was one who knew that 'only in practice [was] the world an Other', argued Mahendrachandra Majumdar. While the Greek philosopher mistook time for motion, the Hindu philosopher knew time to be *akarya* or non-active.[64] As another essay of 1875 argued, the Hindu knew knowledge to be articulation of the originary – and not the uncertain attempt at predicting a practical future – for him, there was 'nothing that was unknowable in principle'. While the Hindu understood originary time as cognisable, though 'unthinkable by language', theorists like Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte imagined the originary as the unknowable and inscrutable god. Knowledge therefore appeared in the West in the evolutionary mode, tending towards but never reaching completion, in the form of progressive accumulation through time, rather than in the form of articulation of the originary.[65] Rabindranath, who dominates the cultural sensibility of the Bengali middle classes even today, made this non-practical nature of the nation's time very clear. In a 1902 speech, on occasion of the Bengali New Year, he said:

> If one sits amidst the silent landscape of the *ashram*, one clearly realises inside, that being is the highest ideal of the world, not doing. In nature there is no limit to work, but nature keeps practice in the background and manifests itself in its being. ...Nature's work is felt to be play, its movement is known to be a dance, the efforts as indifference. Hiding the cycles of time under the surface, foregrounding rest over motion, nature keeps herself as eternally manifest/articulate – she has not blurred herself in the breathless velocity of practice, or buried herself in hoards of practical consequences.[66]

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[60] 'Yagnya', *RR II*, pp. 171-72.
[61] 'Yagnya Agnyadhyan o Agnihotra', *Sahitya, phalgun*, 1917.
[62] 'Varnashramdharma', *Bangadarshan, phalgun*, 1901.
[63] 'Vedanter Pratham Katha', *Bangadarshan, ashar*, 1904.
[64] Mahendra Chandra Majumdar, *Darshan o Vignyan*, Bagura, 1901, pp, 2, 17, 37, 81.
[65] 'Mill, Darwin o Hindudharma', *Bangadarshan, baisakh*, 1875.
[66] 'Nababarsha', 1902, *Rabindra Rachanabali IV*, Calcutta, 1940, p. 367.

To Rabindranath, this silence and stillness was the natural *bhav* or mood of the Indian nation, a mood which was only recently 'disturbed' by colonial intrusion. To him, *karma* was the foundational national practice. Here, non-attachment to the consequences of action made *practice into a mere pretext* of 'being'. This national time of *karma* was not characterised by the rhythm of everyday work, but by the 'firm strength of poverty, the rigid peace of dutiful engagement and the generous solemnity of one without desires'.[67] Away from the tumult of the everyday and from the perpetual struggle of evolution, this solitude and timelessness have been 'granted us by our ancestors. Like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, this silent loneliness in also our national resource'.[68]

The return of time: poetics and anthropology

This theoretical privilege of *knowing* over *doing* transformed, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the historical project of the educated Bengali middle classes. In 1914, Akshay Kumar Maitra, the first self-consciously disciplinary historian, explicitly announced that Bankim's time was over. Instead of encouraging every Bengali to write history, history should now be disciplined as 'correct and worthy'.[69] Even when late nineteenth-century authors textualised history as a practice for and by all, they tried to scientifically 'eliminate' all 'imaginary' and 'aesthetic' elements from older texts, to glean out the objective 'facts' about the past.[70] Despite this, Mitra complained in his speech to the seventh Bangiya Sahitya Parishat conference, no 'consensus' had emerged on the discipline and methodology of history. He advised that historical education must henceforth train students in 'discovering, collecting, preserving and assessing classes of evidence' and in the 'hardship' of fieldwork and archaeology. Historical practice was no longer a collective effort in the societal sense, an effort at recovering national pride, but a rigorous and scholarly discipline. Historians must, from now on, specialise in 'suspending community or national interests', for 'truth was a greater ideal than patriotism and the ethics of practice'.[71] It was only such a disciplined history, which could cause 'the present to lose its autonomy and, like the uninterrupted river of time, flow as the extended from of the past towards the future.'[72]

The journal *Itihas o Alochona*, published since 1921 in association with the Thakurs of Shantiniketan, classified 'types of history' and clearly laid out historiographical rules. By these parameters, 'local' histories appeared amateurish, ill-written and unfounded.[73] The nation appeared in the pages of this journal as a 'readership' rather than as the author of history – to interest the 'lay

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[67] Ibid., pp. 368-69.
[68] Ibid., p. 370.
[69] 'Aitihasik Rachana Koutuk', *Sahitya*, XXV: 7, 1914.
[70] Nalinikanta Majumdar, *Veder Aitihasikata*, Calcutta, 1929, pp. 2-3.
[71] Reprinted in *Sahitya*, XXV: 1, 1914, pp. 42-54.
[72] Ibid., pp. 58-9.
[73] Pramathanath Sarkar 'Bange Itihas Charcha II', *Itihas o Alochona* (hereafter *IA*), I: 2, 1921, p. 30.

audience', it was suggested that historians write more often about modern rather than ancient times.[74] Ramendrasundar, Rabindranath and Benoy Sarkar (whom we shall discuss shortly) appeared as the 'only' philosophers of history.[75] From practice, history had become a lesson – since India was large and internally variegated, a 'study' of national history was sufficient for a 'cultural and liberal education'. This education involved the study of eminent and scholarly texts, of 'source-methods', of inductive reasoning, of the comparative method and of the deduction of practical lessons from historical knowledge.[76]

Once history was transformed from a national practice to a genre of knowledge, senses of time and imagination returned through the backdoor as it were, by way of aesthetics and anthropology, and by as slippage of one into the other. Thus, Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay's 'philosophy of history' critiqued the historical discipline on the ground that 'no inductive science [could] take us to the interior of any concept'. If based on mere 'empirical facts', even large scale 'comparisons across epochs and nations' would not yield much. It would merely frustrate the 'desire for history'. This desire for history could be satisfied only through an 'introspective', an 'a priori' method, which grasped the world as always already in potentia. This 'immanent' or avyakta temporality was still operative in colonial modern times, the author assured, 'sometimes as absence, sometimes as non-being, sometimes even as death'.[77] Empirically, time was constraining, because it partitioned the present from the future. But when the time of articulation 'consciously intersect[ed] with the time of practice', pragnya or 'intuition' was generated, which conducted the present and the past in simultaneity to the future.[78] And it was this pragnaya which could truly historicise epochs – epochs not of knowledge-paradigms but of different knowledge-practices. In these terms, national history began with the ancient epoch of 'intuition' by the sages. This was followed by the smritiyuga or the epoch of memories. The present was an epoch of forgetting, and therefore of 'scientific discovery, classification and collection'.[79] Each of these epochs of knowledge-practices was founded upon a certain 'desire' – 'it is this that is the rasa of history'.[80] This historical time, rooted in rasa or desire/mood, was closer to Henri Bergson's notion of creative temporality and elan vital than to Hegel or Kant. In fact, many Bengali intellectuals chose Bergson's theory consciously over that of Kant's.[81]

Pramatha Choudhury, critiquing Akshay Mitra's speech on scientific history, argued that the exile of aesthetics from history necessarily disabled practical creativity: 'Science is the knowledge of pre-given substances. The account of new creations is not to be found in the book of science.'[82] Even Pramatha Sarkar, who, as we have seen above, wrote historiographies for Itihas o Alochona, admitted that, contrary

[74] Sarkar, 'Bange Itihas Charcha', IA, I: 1, 1921, p. 8.
[75] Sarkar, 'Bange Itihas Charcha III', IA, I: 3, 1921, p. 54.
[76] Sarkar, 'Bange Itihas Chacha IV', IA, I: 4, 1921, pp. 76-8.
[77] Itihas o Abhivyakti, p. 19.
[78] Ibid., pp. 39, 299.
[79] Ibid., p. 305.
[80] Ibid., p, 63.
[81] Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, 'Nature of our Aesthetic Faculty', Calcutta Review, October 1938, pp. 42-50.
[82] 'Review of Sahityasammelan', 1914, Prabandhasamgraha, Calcutta, 1952, p. 55.

to history, literature was the associate of *karmajivan* or practical life. Whether the *karma* of Rama, subsuming the 'primitives' to southward Aryan progress, or the *karma* of daring sea-merchants like Chand Saudagar, practices had always been textualised in *kavya* or literature.[83] The time of practice thus returned to the Bengali middle classes as the time of poetics.[84] It was this poetics, rather than the historical discipline, which tried to defy the reduction of time to evolution and progress. Pramathanath Mukhopadhyay, who formulated historical epochs as articulations of *rasa* or aesthetic moods, vehemently disagreed with Darwin on the ground that the crucial insight of history was not that 'primitives' pre-existed the 'civilised', but that the 'primitives' and the 'civilised' coexisted. *Unnati* or improvement would otherwise be impossible. If 'primitives' were made to disappear from the face of the earth, the history of even the most 'civilised' *jati* would have to be rethought.[85] Whatever physical anthropology might claim, Pramathanath argued, the 'origin' of all the constituents of the nation was founded in the same *rasa*. In India, even *arya* civilisation prescribed the experience of forest and nomadism to the householder in the later stages of his life. After all, since creative time was necessarily non-linear, modernity would be lost without the 'primitive' as its simultaneous counter-existence.[86]

In early twentieth-century Bengal, therefore, anthropology was invited as a necessary supplement to the nation's history. In *Itihas o Alochona*, Sisirkumar Har argued that history's primary lesson was that everything, 'animate or inanimate', could be and must be historicised. Yet the 'history of man' was yet to be written. Therefore, in order to complete the historicisation of the world, 'to know the origin and the qualities of the *jatis* who make history through their practices and movements, history must always take the help of anthropology'.[87] The history of man however could not be thematised as a deductive, inductive science, because any 'theoretical priniciple' functioning as the axiom would anyway be a human assumption, therefore a part of the object of study rather than a deductive ground for it. The only ground for a history of man could therefore be the contemporary and 'extant' 'primitives', who seemed to offer the only instance of the 'originary causes of *dharma*, society and history'. In the colonial context, therefore, anthropology was often invoked as history's desire for an augmentation, rather than as history's desire for an opposite. Though the 'historical' retained its contrast to the 'primordial', the Bengali middle-classes now admitted their need of the 'primitive' as an ethnologised and poetic figure.

Accusing Bankim of 'over-historicism', Benoy Sarkar stated that 'primitives' were ignored by history, at its own peril, because 'historicism' then failed to harness the 'creative intelligence of man'.[88] By contrasting itself with the 'primitive' condition, scientific historicism abdicated what was crucial in human

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[83] 'Literature and National Life', *IA*, I: 5, 1921, pp. 106, 108.
[84] I use the term 'poetics' deliberately, because this imperative which was supposed to found the creative temporality of national practice and of which poetry and literature were not only instances but metaphors, was an alternative politics that sought to go beyond the application of scientific and rational, and therefore, predictive knowledge.
[85] *Itihas o Abhivyakti*, pp. 154-82.
[86] Ibid., pp. 398, 455-60.
[87] 'The Role of Anthropology', *IA*, 1: 6, 1921, pp121, 125.
[88] 'The Acceptable and the Unacceptable in Bankim's Social Philosophy', *Calcutta Review*, August 1938, p.123.

development – the working of creative imagination – in favour of the 'irrational' and 'myth-oriented' 'primitive'. The historical nation must reclaim this power to imagine from what it had othered as primitive and archaic, by banishing the 'poetic' from historical texts like the epics and the *puranas*. For it was '[not] demonstrable anthropologically or psychologically that imagination belong[ed] to the primitive mind and preceded ratiocination and concrete experience'.[89] Only by incorporating imagination, creative temporality and the 'primitive', could the nation achieve 'totality' – for history was 'incomplete and quite unable to guess the future destiny of mankind ... so long as it [did] not concern itself with the whole of human life and its thousand and one manifestations'.[90] Benoy Sarkar taught philosophy at the Calcutta University, chaired the Malda education council from 1907, ran an institute of economic study from 1927, and one of sociology from 1931 and published the monthly journal *Arthik Unnati* (Economic Development). He also proposed the popularisation of Vivekananda's philosophy of *karma* and the introduction of manual labour amongst the Bengali youth.[91] He emphasised that national unity was possible only through the study of 'folk culture' via 'anthropology, sociology, ethnology and philosophical history'. He suggested the works of his mentor Brajendranath Seal as constitutive of this philosophy of history. Seal had not only written about the poetic epochs of the Indian civilisation, and about the 'positive sciences' of the Hindus, he had also attended the 1911 Race Congress in London University. In his address to the Mythic Society, Seal had rejected the conventional ethnological techniques of static comparisons and analogical induction, and proposed a 'historical-genetive' method which could uncover the originary and the creative temporality of a nation.[92]

Pramatha Choudhury mocked Western anthropology, because it feared to admit the 'primordial' or the *adim* to its own time. The West pushed the 'primitive' to distant lands and then 'discovered' them, with guns in one hand and clothes in the other – as if violence and embarrassment were actually not signs of 'barbarism' in modernity.[93] At the same time, he showed up the limits of *karma* as historical practice – for, he said, *karma* identified only the self and failed to identify with the world or the nation. To him, the nation called not for the past, but for the future – the 'playground of imagination'. In this future, unity could appear not as an exclusive Aryan unity, but as the unity of popular *dharma*. Even the past demonstrated that the only imperial unities that India could boast of were not Hindu but Buddhist (Asoka) and *sudra* (Chandragupta Maurya) phenomena.[94] Pramatha Choudhury saw the practice of poetics rather than the practice of *karma* as the ideal historical practice. He formulated the poetic as the metonymn of civilisation. In this time of poetics, Greece appeared as dramatic, Rome as epic, Italy as sonnet, and the Jews as lyric. The Indian civilisation appeared as the fairy tale, with a bold and

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[89] Benoy Sarkar, *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*, quoted in Flora, *The Evolution of Positivism*, p. 46.
[90] Benoy Sarkar, *The Science of History and the Hope of Mankind*, London, 1912, pp. 12, 17-8.
[91] Ida Sarkar, *My Life with Professor Benoykumar Sarkar*, Calcutta, 1977.
[92] 'Definition of Race, Tribe and Nation: paper presented at Universal Race Congress, London University, July 1911', reprinted in *Modern Review*, XXXVI, 1924, pp. 696-97.
[93] 'Primordial Man', in *Sabuj Patra*, *sravan*, 1920, pp. 246-67.
[94] 'The Unity of India', 1914, *Prabandhasamgraha II*, pp. 5-7.

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unrestrained imagination, 'which conceptual and scientific knowledge [could] never discover, because it [was] the postulate of active life, not a passive axiom of knowledge'.[95] Choudhury argued that Hegelian history was limited to the 'restful' times of growth, progress and realisation. Hegel shied away from creative and destructive temporalities of the Spirit. *Unnati* however was hardly ever restful, it occurred only through critical disjunctures. Continuity disabled practice. Therefore, what the Bengali needed was not 'to synthesise the old and the new, but to snap the two apart in his mind' and take a risky but poetic leap into the future.[96]

In 1872, *Aitihasik Nabanyas* – a collection of historical tales to be 'shared after a hard days work' – was criticised for trivialising history as fiction.[97] By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the poetic and the imaginative were recalled as the practical need of the nation. 'Tribal' and 'folk' tales had become a necessary part of the national education of middle class Bengali children. Shyamacharan Dey compiled Bengali folktales, Kashmiri folktales, and Bhil, Kuki, Chakma, Paharia and Santal creation stories.[98] Encouraged by Rabindranath, Asit Halder wrote, in simple Bengali without conjoined letters, Santal tales of how in the olden days, rabbits could scare tigers. The famous painter of Shantiniketan, Nandalal Basu, illustrated these Santal stories.[99] The Sishutosh Series of texts for children included Santal stories too, presented through the voice of the old Santal Udol, who spent every evening chatting with young boys and girls. The author called upon every Bengali parent to let this Santal into his or her home. For though Santals were apparently uncivilised, they were a people who 'lived in amazingly clean houses', 'lived in the open and grew in the sun like wild trees', 'were handsome and tough', 'never feared hard work' and 'were self-sufficient, conducting themselves in their own village councils'. These Santal traits were ones which every Bengali child must learn.[100] The same Sishutosh Series also published the book *Arya o Anarya*, which taught children that the 'next door' presence of the 'primitive' was proof of the ancientness of Indian civilisation. Neither the Vedas nor the 'aborigines' could be dated; they were older than the oldest ancestor a child could imagine.[101]

If nineteenth-century Bengali discourse had claimed a philological sameness between Sanskritic Hindus and their modern colonisers, early twentieth century Bengali linguists asserted that historical Sanskrit, Prakrit and modern 'vernaculars' were structurally different from Indo-Aryan Sanskrit. They rejected the 'replacement theory', that with Aryan invasion, Sanskrit replaced earlier Dravidian and 'tribal', Mundari languages. They argued that Sanskrit and 'aboriginal' languages not only borrowed vocabulary and phonemes from each other, but their exchange of words also mutually restructured their grammar

[95] 'Is India Civilised?', 1918, *Prabandhasamgraha I*, pp. 19-20.
[96] 'The Old and the New', 1914, *Prabandhasamgraha I*, pp. 114-15, 119.
[97] 'Prapta Granther Sankshipta Samalochona', *Bangadarshan*, *phalgun*, 1872.
[98] *Anaryer Upakatha*, Calcutta, 1914-15.
[99] *Buno Gappo [Wild Tales]*, Allahabad, 1922.
[100] Nagendranath Gangopadhyay, *Udol Buror Saontali Gappo*, Calcutta, 1921, preface, pp. 4-5.
[101] Calcutta, 1920, pp. 3-5.

and syntax. It was this mutual restructuring, this 'aboriginal' influence on Indo-Aryan Sanskrit, which made Indian languages and cultures so different from the European.[102] The 'primitive' was thus invoked as the reason and the sign of the nation's difference with the coloniser. The anthropologist, Saratchandra Roy, proved that there was a regular law of reciprocity of consonants, between Sanskrit and Mundari, and that the genetive suffix *ra* and the locative suffix *te* were shared by Bengali and 'tribal' languages.[103] Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay argued that in structure and in syntax, Bengali was closer to Tamil and to Telegu than to ancient Sanskrit, of which only some roots and some words remained in modern Bengali. Words indicating time in Bengali and in the Kol languages like Santali were constructed similarly. And Bengali and Santali were similar in their differences to Sanskrit, both depended on suffixes rather than on prefixes, as Sanskrit did, and both were founded on *asamapika* or auxilliary verbs.[104] Though Ramaprasad Chanda, the author of *Indo-Aryan Races*, strongly differed from this linguistic, and thereby cultural, conclusion (arguing instead for an internally differentiated Aryan identity to explain the Bengali-Sanskrit mismatch), Sunitikumar asserted that most village names of Bengal were in *anarya* languages. Agreeing with Rabindranath and Ramendrasundar, Sunitikumar argued that the Indian nation was not just an Aryan identity in the way that the Anglo-Saxons were. It was much more. It was a civilisation where many worlds met, where the most 'primordial' and the most 'modern' blended to produce a third entity.[105] The use of betel nut, of vermillion on married women, of turmeric as a necessary colouring to food, the technology of rice cultivation, the custom of charms to ward off evil, even the idea of the transmigration of souls which placed humans in a temporal continuum with plants and animals – all these 'Indian' practices were actually borrowed from the proto-Australoid 'animists' and 'aborigines':

> The mysticism of the Austric and Dravidian worked hand in hand with the imagination and the practical common sense of the Aryan in evolving that attitude of balance between the unseen world and the seen, which is one of the most noteworthy things in the Hindu vision of life, as it has struck disinterested observers.[106]

The nation was thus different, because it epitomised 'difference' itself, and therefore a spirit of capaciousness and diversity.

India appeared to display the entire world in itself, its continental proportions were not just geographical but cultural. This was the cultural, if not aesthetic, lesson that anthropology offered to the nation's history. H. C. Chakladar, an anthropologist at Calcutta University, enunciated India as a 'cultural complex', where the 'tribal' areas displayed the 'ancient formation of Gondwana stretching from south America through India to Malaysia and Australia'.[107] Panchanan Mitra, another anthropologist from Calcutta University, argued that Polynesians computed time and the lunar month in the same way as the

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[102] Sylvian Levi, Jean Przyluski, Jules Bloch, *Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India*, Calcutta, 1929. Sylvian Levi had spent a long time with Rabindranath in Shantiniketan.
[103] 'A Possible Ethnic Basis for the Sanskritic Element in the Munda Languages', *Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, X, 1923, pp. 383-84.
[104] 'Bangla Bhashar Kulaji', *Sabuj Patra, kartik-agrahayan*, 1918.
[105] 'Arya-anarya', *Sabuj Patra, baisakh*, 1920.
[106] Sunitikumar Chattopadhyay, *India and Polynesia; Austric Bases of Indian Civilisation and Thought*, Allahabad, 1945, pp. 201-02.
[107] 'Pre-historic Culture of Bengal', *Man in India* (hereafter *MI*), XXI: 4, 1941, pp. 208-36.

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Hindus.[108] The Indian nation was thus the critical instance which demonstrated, via anthropology, that the world was not made of races and nations, rather it was the nation which was itself the microcosm of the entire world. If Max Muller sought to historicise the variegated world in terms of races and linguistic groups, India proved that 'mankind is above all made of mixing'.[109] Mitra, therefore, formulated a concept of large temporal cycles, which could show that cultures, apparently distant in space and time, actually constituted a common 'culture drift'. This was the anthropological time, the time of the history of mankind, which addressed the 'origin' and informed large scale processes and changes, which, 'attaching themselves to forms persistent from the past to the present, march[ed] to the common meeting ground'. This time, Mitra clearly stated, proceeded in a direction opposite to that of 'historical inference'.[110] In his presidential address to the anthropology section of the Indian Science Congress, Panchanan Mitra said, 'the comparative study of culture over intercontinental regions is likely to reveal the important role of India as a primary or secondary stage of her culture complex in the march of time.'[111] Thus like Rabindranath's poetry, like Pramatha Choudhury's imaginative leap, like Pramatha Mukhopadhyay's creative articulation of the 'primordial' time, and like Benoy Sarkar's criticism of over-historicism, anthropology too sought out difference in the poetic imagination of an-other, non-historical, originary time.

Symbols and time: poetics and politics in colonial Bengal

In early twentieth century Bengal, therefore, a certain poetics emerged as the surrogate of historical practice. This poetics, which drew its lessons not only from literary imagination but also from linguistics and anthropology, enunciated itself against the idea of 'objective' and 'scientific' historical knowledge that appeared as a knowledge of pre-given things rather than as an indication of the imaginary future. This poetics self-consciously founded itself on a non-chronological time, on a 'primordial' time of originary acts like creation and destruction. These were acts which were not *caused* in the historical or genealogical sense, but were *effected* in imagination and realised through poetic practice. It is not easy to unpack the implications of this poetic critique/use of anthropology in Bengal. On the surface, it might seem a repetition of the romantic tradition of Europe, of Rousseau on the one hand, and Wordsworth and Coleridge on the other. This was a tradition which announced a poetic return to nature and to the 'primordial', in a reaction against industrial and urban alienation. However, in the colonial context, the position which disallowed a distancing of the 'primitive' to another land, also disallowed a 'retreat' into nature in a Rousseau-like fashion. The colonised appeared to be already located there. Thus, in the 'backward' and forested district of Birbhum, the Bengali seemed caught between the need to invoke and the need to escape nature, caught between the imperative of temporality and the imperative of the nation,

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[108] 'A Vedic Night of the Moon from Polynesia', *Calcutta Oriental Journal*, I, July 1934, p. 208.
[109] Panchanan Mitra, *Pre-historic India: Its Place in the World's Culture*, Calcutta, 1923, p. 6.
[110] Ibid., p. 16.
[111] 'Research Leads in Anthropology in India', *MI*, XII: 1, 1933, pp. 9-10.

as it were. Addressing nature, the poet wondered: 'are you one or many, finite or infinite ... what appears as truth now, soon is no longer – having passed into the evolutionary stream ... how would I know if you are formed or formless?'[112] Nature seemed to be an 'infinite process of articulation of forms', yet it was also contaminating, 'however unerring and free, I the truth-like being, am still ... a shadow of consciousness because of your touch'.[113] If Rousseau and Wordsworth could invite nature's metatemporality into the discontinuous, estranged and finite everyday,[114] such allegories could only reinforce the image of the Bengali as technologically powerless and as besieged by nature. The option of recovering temporality from nature was thus unavailable to the colonised.

Bengali poetic practice of early twentieth century however did appeal to the 'primordial' and the 'primitive', not as a Romantic ideal, but as the only inappropriable sign and site of difference for the colonised. If the West defined itself by othering the 'primitive' to another land, Bengali poetics, and anthropology, presented itself as the realisation of the 'primitive' within. If the modern West seemed to throw its shadow over the entire world, the 'primitive' – and the poet – remained its last free location, the perpetual excess beyond the homogenising effect of modernity, in opposition to which the 'modern' could imagine itself as modern in the first place. Thus Jamini Kanta Sen said: 'upto the time of Rousseau's deification of Nature in a wild protest against culture, tradition and society, [t]he West never knew Nature as she is, – as part or phase of a larger existence where it has no conflict with Man'. Even Rousseau could see nature only as a moral asset. Herein lay the foundational difference of the colonised with the coloniser – for while the West displayed an antithetical relationship with nature (or inverted it like Rousseau in an attempt at moral recovery), Jamini Sen argued, India had always grasped nature as a proximate aesthetic presence.[115] Yet, despite this effecting of difference, the paradox remained. Bengali discourse continued to imagine the nation's civilisational character in opposition to the 'primordial', yet tried to re-invoke the natural and the 'primordial' as the final sign of difference and identity. It is by explicating this paradox – between the need for the 'primitive' and the refusal of the 'primitive' – that alternative poetics emerged in Bengal, which was able to subsume even anthropology. And as we shall see in this section, the logical culmination of this alternative was the possibility, though abandoned, of a critique of not only colonialism, but of nationalism itself.

It is true that early Indian anthropology did not particularly contest the colonial nature of the discipline. It traced its lineage to the Asiatic Society, to William Jones and to the linguistic and ethnological surveys of colonial officials. The first Indian to be accepted as a 'scholar' of the discipline was Saratchandra Ray, a lawyer from Ranchi, Chota Nagpur, who became interested in Munda customary law in course of his legal practice. Funded by the colonial state and awarded the Rai Bahadur

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[112] Ashutosh Bandopadhyay, 'You and I', *Birbhumi, poush*, I: 3, 1899, pp. 76-7.
[113] Ibid., pp. 78-9.
[114] Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', *Blindness and Insight*, London, 1993, pp. 198, 206.
[115] 'The Orientation of Art: Eastern and Western', *Visvabharati Quarterly* (hereafter *VQ*), V, 1927, p. 124.

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title in 1938, he began the journal *Man in India* in 1921.[116] Roy was clear about the anthropological objective – to allow greater business and administrative success by producing 'sympathy' towards the 'habits and mentality of the tribes and castes that an officer or even a businessman has to deal with'. His nationalism was limited to encouraging more Indians to study anthropology and correcting what appeared as a merely empirical imbalance, which made most anthropologists 'foreign'.[117] However, early Indian anthropology did produce an image of the nation as a 'tangled skein of diverse race elements and culture elements', the sheer complexity of which made classificatory work like that of Herbert Risley's seem incorrect.[118] The eighth annual meeting of the Indian Science Congress, which revived anthropology as a separate section of science in India, saw papers which emphasised this complexity of the Indian civilisation, where 'aboriginal' and Hindu symbols seemed to be functioning inextricably together. This anthropological agenda seemed common to almost all the participants in the Congress – H. C. Chakladar and Panchanan Mitra who enunciated India as a culture complex, Prabodh Bagchi who aligned with Sylvain Levi et al. in tracing the Bengali language to Australoid linguistics, even P. C. Mahalanobis, who would become the architect of the Nehruvian mixed economy and who rejected Risley's anthropometry because it failed to evolve any measure of homogeneity, and drew racial conclusions from measurements of individuals.[119] A survey of the book-review sections in *Man in India* reveals that the most celebrated authors amongst Bengali anthropologists were James Frazer, Robert Lowie and Franz Boas – who proved that 'cultures' where not unitary and mechanically evolved, but a 'planless hodge-podge, a thing of shreds and patches'.[120] S. C. Roy himself advised students to follow Lowie and Boas, instead of evolutionary and functionalist anthropologists.[121] If anthropology simulated scientific empiricism – by narrating the minutae and details of a culture – this very mode of, what later came to be called, 'thick description' was used by Bengali anthropologists to give society a texture like that of painting, with many colours, shades and lines, which made sense only when viewed as a complex whole. Thus:

> As the architect creates an edifice out of stones of many kinds and colours, as a picture is embellished with many paints, as the merchant presents his repertoire of variegated goods, as an exhibition sets up a collection of many flora and fauna, in the same way, many *jatis*, languages, religions, trades and natures constitute the Santal Parganas.[122]

While history opposed the 'primitive' for the sake of total knowledge and unitary time, anthropological 'thick description' aestheticised the nation as a complex artwork. Radhakamal Mukherjee, who described Indian society as 'permeated by the aboriginal element from top to bottom',[123] also claimed that the *symbol* was the most useful figure that could be used to narrate the nation. A symbol could stand for multiple referents – i.e. capture 'infinity in a concrete form' – and at the same time

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[116] L. P. Vidyarthi, *Rise of Anthropology in India*, 2 vols., Delhi, 1978.
[117] S. C. Roy, 'Anthropological Research in India: Editorial for the first issue', *MI*, I: 1, 1921, p. 52.
[118] Ibid., p. 47.
[119] 'Report', *MI*, I: 1, 1921, pp. 73-84.
[120] 'Review of Robert Lowie, *Primitive Society* (1920)', *MI*, I: 4, 1921, pp. 325-26.
[121] 'Types of Cultural Theory: Lecture Delivered to Students of Patna University', *MI*, I: 3, 1921, pp. 240-61.
[122] Prabhas Chandra Ray, *Parvatya Kahini*, Calcutta, 1907, p. 66.
[123] 'Race Elements in the Indian Village Constitution', *MI*, III: 1-2, 1923, p.1.

a concrete symbol could be unpacked to reveal a many layered reality.[124] Significantly, the symbol was formulated as a kind of narrative device useful both for anthropology and for aesthetics. A crucial figure who represented this double-edged use of the symbol was W. G. Archer. A typical figure of the administrator-ethnologist who spent a long time in the Santal Parganas, in order to collect and codify Santal customary law, Archer went on to become a historian of Indian art. Archer's favoured status amongst Bengali intellectuals did not derive from his well-known sympathy for the marginalised 'aborigine' – after all Verrier Elwin was strongly criticised by Bengalis for protecting and preserving 'primitives' as anthropological specimens. Archer was liked because he invoked the 'primitive' in context of a certain aesthetic discourse. Archer's personal notes show his alliance with Bengali authors like Rabindranath, Sudhin Ghosh, Rathin Mitra, Gopal Ghosh, Tarashankar, Bishnu Dey, and with painters like Nandalal Basu and Jamini Roy – who according to Archer, showed a 'warm appreciation' of this conflation of poetic and anthropological thinking.[125]

A reference to Archer and to the aesthetics of symbolism is necessary to foreground the problem of temporality involved in this poetic use of anthropology. Archer aestheticised the Santals as free, sensuous, natural and 'original'.[126] He agreed with Verrier Elwin that it was this very 'originary' nature which made the 'primordial' into a poetic ideal of the future – 'a hundred years ahead of the modern world' (in this the 'primitive' was not archaic in the way many historical antiquities were seen to be).[127] Yet Archer strongly disagreed with Elwin's interpretation that Santal symbolism was a representation and a reification of everyday acts and objects. To Archer, Santals practised a certain poetics precisely in transcendence of the everyday – for them 'the symbolism of poetry is poetry'. Their symbols were neither a matter of the everyday, nor a matter of leisure and escape from the everyday.[128] Santal songs, paintings and poetry symbolised a 'natural' and originary life-condition, where the idea of holiday and entertainment were meaningless. Despite their low productivity in a material sense, they in themselves were 'a technique of alternative to the peasant's life of mechanical labour'.[129] Santal poetic practice even made the modernist and evolutionary accusation – that 'primitives' were incapable of abstract thought – meaningless. To Archer, Santal wall paintings were proof that geometric shapes and formal relationships constituted a 'primitive' poetic insight – for Santals pressed even figurative paintings into a geometrical form. The Santal world of spirits, neither dead nor alive, was proof that what was currently known in Europe as surrealism also constituted a 'primitive' aesthetic insight. Thus, the avant-garde 'abstract movement in Europe was not a mere sophistication ... [but] returning to a natural need'.[130] However, the economy and geometry of Santal symbolism was not merely 'abstract' art, because the 'vital geometry' of

[124] 'Symbols of Religion', VQ, VII, 1929-30, p. 269.
[125] Archer Private Papers, MssEur F 236 (hereafter AP) / 73.
[126] 'Notes on Christianity in Bihar', 1935, AP/1.
[127] Verrier Elwin, The Aboriginals, London, 1943, pp. 18-9.
[128] AP/168.
[129] AP/1.
[130] W. G. and M. Archer, 'Santhal Painting', Axis, autumn, 1934, pp. 18-9.

'primitives' associated multiple images with every single abstract shape gleaned from nature, leading to an infinite reproduction of meanings through a unitary sign.[131] Precisely owing to this possibility of multiple meanings, Santal symbolism could never be, according to Archer, irrelevant or anachronistic.

Archer explicitly stated that the 'subject matter of anthropology is material for poetry'.[132] So did Reverend MacPhail when he wrote that '[among] the Santals, a spade is called anything but a spade, and a man is almost never addressed by a [proper] name. Relationship is universally assumed to avoid the necessity of doing so.'[133] The Santal world-view was thus seen as that of symbolic plenitude and cross-references – articulated not in a structural mode like knowledge, but in the work and slippage of metaphors, by which seemingly far-fetched things insinuated each other. In a manner almost reminiscent of Umberto Eco's fascinating character Padre Emanuele – who said 'Metaphor, setting our mind flying betwixt one Genus and another, allows us to discern in a single Word more than one Object'[134] – Archer made copious notes of Santal dreams, riddles and poetry in search of unthinkable and outrageous analogies.[135] In this, the realm of dreams, poetry and anthropology were coterminous to Archer.[136] If Freud saw dreams as clues to an individual's most hidden private world, Archer claimed that the symbols of 'primitive' dreams were clues to society's most 'originary', hidden – often inarticulate – thoughts. Interpreting of 'primitive' dreams was therefore the most radical act of anamnesis. Unlike the romanticised 'savage', produced by the European imagination to fit the desires of European poets, the anthropologist's very real 'tribe' offered 'the shock of new images'. The wholly unfamiliar world that the 'primitives' brought to attention liberated the mind from the prison of the present. Eliot's *Waste Land* was founded on this very principle and demonstrated a galaxy of rich metaphors, as did the Santal, in articulating the 'disjointedness' of a world made up of real confronting modes of being.[137]

> In a poem two images which are normally separate may become connected and the poem works through the 'charge' which this connection generates. In a similar way a tribal system brings together objects and actions which are alien to a civilised consciousness and these actual connections in tribal life induce an excitement which is parallel to the charge in a poem.[138]

The anthropologist created a similar charge and excitement by bringing two irreconcilable times together – the time of the 'primordial', originary yet never past, and the time of imagination, not yet present yet not far in the future. The articulation of these two times exploded the constraining and contextualising presence of the historical and the empirical and simulated an escape from the prison of representation.

The symbol – the figure common to poetry and anthropology – was thus invoked by Archer and Radhakamal Mukherjee, both claiming to be anthropologists and aesthetes in one. It must be kept in mind that the figure of the symbol itself has had a very specific history in European thought. Hegel had

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[131] W. G. Archer, *The Vertical Man: A Study of Primitive Indian Sculpture*, London, 1947, p. 18.
[132] AP/169.
[133] *The Story of the Santal*, Calcutta, 1922, p. 10.
[134] *The Island of the Day Before*, London, 1996, p. 90.
[135] AP/181.
[136] AP/72.
[137] Ibid.

argued *On Aesthetics* that symbolism represented 'primitive' art, where form and content were irreducible and accidental to each other, where there was no unity of origin and expression, where the spectator could only remain doubtful about the 'meaning' and intent of art. Modern art, on the other hand, expressed the inner unity of form and content.[139] A century later, Georg Simmel similarly invoked the symbol to distinguish modern from 'primitive' minds. To Simmel, 'primitive' symbolism was 'nebulous' and represented the lack of the mind's 'direct' access to reality. If the modern mind used symbols at all, they were highly developed abstract signs, like money, which could mediate complex exchanges and processes. As Simmel said, '[s]ymbolism, which at a lower cultural stage often means detours and waste of energy, is expedient and saves energy at the higher stages'.[140] In a mirror-inversion of these progressivist mentions of the symbol, Archer and Mukherjee conceptualised the symbol as the originary and fundamental capacity of the human mind to effect a multiplicity of meanings in one single gesture. As Mukherjee said, symbolisation was 'the process of substituting relatively simple and concrete images for far more complex and abstract ones'.[141] Suniti Chattopadhyay invoked symbolisation as the originary act of art, where nature was manifested through emblems and icons rather than through mimesis and representation.[142] The symbol was a unit with multiple meanings, the perfect trope for a nation of 'unity in diversity'. Jamini Sen quoted Nietzsche against the Socratic tradition of pure intellectualism, to show that India began its culture not in mimesis but in an aesthetic/symbolic mode, i.e. through the first deification of life. This *achintya bhedabheda* implied that 'in the unity of our vision is involved a diversity of outlook [which] makes us, at every moment of our life, players in an expressional drama that never denies the multiplanar being of man'.[143] The West must borrow from India a dose of this originary expressionism, if it had to recover from the trap of defining itself negatively, in terms of what it was *not* (the Other) and what it was *no longer* (after the original Fall).[144]

Western literary theory has distinguished the symbol from figures like irony and allegory, in terms of its temporal significance. Gadamer, for instance, argues in his *Truth and Method*, that the symbol historically emerged in Europe as literally an identity – where no deferral or disjuncture seemed to appear between perception, representation and enunciation of the world. If the world was represented through a symbol, the image or the emblem and the reality of the world appeared coterminous and identical, appearing to resolve the problem of representation itself.[145] In contrast to allegory (which referred to another purely anterior sign), irony (which admitted a temporal disjuncture between the authorial allusion and the authorial representation of reality), simile, metaphor (where the act of comparison between the figure and the object to be represented remained apparent), in symbolism the subject-author and the

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[138] ibid.
[139] Fabian, *Time and the Other*, pp. 126-31.
[140] *The Philosophy of Money*, 1900, London, 1990, p. 149.
[141] 'Symbols of Religion', p. 263.
[142] 'Some Problems in the Origin of Art and Culture in India', *VQ*, VIII, 1930-31, p. 275.
[143] 'The Philosophic Background of Eastern and Western Culture', *VQ*, V, 1928, p. 350.
[144] Ibid., pp. 353-56.
[145] 2nd ed., London, 1989, pp. 72-4.

world appeared as simultaneous. This simultaneity, as Paul de Man says, was of almost of the nature of a spatial congruence, where temporality (the lapse between the world and its representation) seemed 'merely a matter of contingency'.[146] If the symbol was a figure which undid the problem of the 'intervention of time', to use de Man's phrase, it is not surprising that in talking of 'primitive' symbolism, Archer predominantly used the image of painting. After all, an appearance of the simultaneous presence of multiple images was more easily painted than textualised, i.e. more easily spatialised than temporalised. Even though Archer collected and published numerous Santal poems, his imagination of 'primitive' life was more in the nature of a 'depiction' than an enunciation. And when he wanted to convert his field notes from the Santal Parganas into a book about Santal love and poetry – he called his book a 'portrait' of the 'primitives'. [147]

Even though Bengali authors shared Archer's emphasis on the symbol, imagining the nation as a portrait or a painting could pose obvious problems. It was too close to the colonial version of the indigenous society as a static collection or museum of races. A portrait or a collection, even as it painted shades and classified difference, could not engage with temporality. As Rabindranath explicitly said, if painting gave *form* to the Idea, it was only the temporal phenomenon of music which could give *life* and *animation* to it.[148] Bengali poetics therefore had to make use of the symbol somewhat differently from Archer's and the European tradition's use of it. If the latter posited the symbol as a spatial/synecdochic embodiment, literally, of a complex whole, the Bengali needed the symbol to delineate and mediate time, and history. Thus, Dhurjati Prasad Mukhopadhyay said, the symbol was the form in which the past appeared in the present. The past lent itself to reuse and reinstation in contemporary times as a symbol. The time of history was therefore clearly non-linear.[149] In fact, in early twentieth-century Bengal, the debate about art often took the form of a debate on the nature of the time of history. Abanindranath Thakur criticised Orientalist schools of painting because they formulated the nation's temporality in the archaeological mode, as static and synchronically structured. Historians like Akshay Maitra and Rakhaldas Banerjee in turn criticised Abanindranath's aesthetics for its historical 'inauthenticity'.[150] In a remarkable essay on Aryan and non-Aryan art, Abanindranath Thakur made the technique of chiaroscuro, the play of light and dark, into a symbol of known and unknown, far and near epochs blending into each other.[151] When Abanindranath wrote historical short stories for children in his *Rajkahini*, the 'primitive' Bhil often appeared as a character in the Rajasthan polity. And when he wrote about art, the 'primitive' *anarya* appeared as the 'seed in the fruit', 'which even though rejected while

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[146] 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', pp. 206-08.
[147] *The Hill of Flutes, Life, Love and Poetry in Tribal India: A Portrait of the Santals*, London, 1974. These field notes were taken during the period between 1942-46.
[148] 'The Function of Literature', *VQ*, I: 1, new series, 1935, p. 77.
[149] 'Progress and Personality', *VQ*, VIII, 1930-31, p. 65.
[150] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art, c. 1850-1920*, Cambridge, 1992, p. 220.
[151] 'Arya o Anarya Shilpa', *Bageshwari Shilpa Prabandhabalil*, 1941, Calcutta, 1988, pp. 284-85.

tasting the flesh, was the precondition of the fruit in the first place'.[152] Sunitikumar described the contemporary art scene in Bengal as frequently using 'primitive' symbols:

> The poetry underlying much of the life of the Kols, where they have not been spoiled, has been felt and appreciated by people of culture in Bengal. The Kol already figures in Bengali fiction, in a number of short stories, full of pathos and sympathy ... The neo-Bengal school of painting has given us some beautiful paintings of Kol life – Santal girls, Santal couples, and above all, the glorious picture by Nandalal Bose, *Dance in the Forest*, a group of Kol girls dancing to the sound of the drum in the flowering forest – a vision of colour and throbbing life.[153]

As evident, the Santals were a symbol of the temporality of life – the rhythm of music and dance centrally defined the Bengali impression of 'primitive' existence – even in traditions of painting.

Rabindranath Thakur was the most complex theoriser of this poetic engagement with time. In his works, we see the symbol being displaced from the domain of figuration to that of articulation. Of course, Rabindranath's version of the nation's history was not particularly different from say that of Bankim's. Both saw history as emerging out of the originary *arya-anarya* counterpoise. Both saw the *Ramayana* as the story of Aryan conquest and subsumption of totemistic 'tribes' by Aryan progress. Both saw the 'fall' of Hinduism in the Buddhist era causing indiscriminate mixing of social groups.[154] However, while Bankim sought to resolve the antagonistic times of the 'primitive' and the 'historical' into a unitary historical time, Rabindranath believed that contradiction was itself the source of creative temporality: 'it is through the clash of nationalities, through the Other, that man awakens fully within the self ...[Thus] at the very rising of the curtain we see the extreme encounter between the *arya* and the *anarya*.' Precisely because history emerged out of this creative and generative contradiction, time proved itself to be non-linear:

> The unendingness of the straight line, the keen extremity and the sharp thinness of the straight line are not that of the world; it is the beautiful, full self-enclosure of the circular form which is natural to it. Creation does not happen by a unilinear intent, such force can only sever, it cannot hold anything, cannot contain anything, it is entirely empty, it is the line of destruction.[155]

The creative spirit of the nation, though historicised in opposition to the 'primitive', accepted 'even the *anarya*' in practice – thus achieving an unprecedented totality where the fundamentally different and the purely antagonistic could be configured into a single whole.[156]

In this creative temporality, the 'primitive' was a necessary figure. Rabindranath figured poetic freedom as the freedom of the forest-people. He wished to create 'free verse forests which implod[ed] all limits'.[157] He wished to 'liberate creation from the prison of the unending, unmoving present / the endless arrivals of the not-yets'.[158] Living in Birbhum, Rabindranath recognised in his 'tribal' *palki*-bearer, the 'god carved of black stone', 'the beauty of the farthest of times and distance'.[159] In the Santal youngster

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[152] Ibid., p. 289.
[153] 'Our Elder Brothers, the Kol people', *VQ*, II: 1, 1924, p. 30.
[154] 'Bharatvarsher Itihaser Dhara', 1911, in *Rabindra Rachanavali XVIII*, pp. 422-24.
[155] Ibid., p. 424.
[156] 'Bharatvarsher Itihas', 1902, *Rabindra Rachanavali IV*, pp. 382-83.
[157] Poem 39, *Sesh Saptak*, 1935, reprint, Calcutta, 1989, p. 137.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Poem 15-1, *Sesh Saptak*, p. 55.

playing the flute he recognised 'the call of time'.[160] In the Santali young woman, working on a construction site, he marked the 'black bird, made of cloud and lightning, wings hidden within'.[161] Inaugurating a Santal co-operative society in village near Bolpur, Rabindranath said that he loved Santals because they were 'free' and 'self sufficient' and never begged for aid.[162] In a remarkable prose-poem, Rabindranath figured the river Kopai that ran through Birbhum, as a Santal woman. It is worth quoting at length, because it demonstrates the poet's faith in a creative temporality, which made dignity and liberty possible even in subordination, poverty and colonial unfreedom.

> She lacks the distinction of ancient lineage. The primitive name of hers is mixed up with the loud laughing prattle of the Santal woman of countless ages. ...
> Slender is her body that glides in curves across shadows and lights, clapping hands in a tripping measure.
> In the rains her limbs become wild like those of the village girls drunk with *mahua* wine, yet never in wantonness breaks or drowns her neighbouring lands ... [when she dries up in autumn] her destitution does not shame her, for her wealth is not arrogant, nor her poverty mean.
> Kopai in her pulsation finds its semblance in the rhythm of my poet's verse, the rhythm that has formed its comradeship with the language rich in music and that, which is crowded with the jarring trivialities of the work-a-day hours.[163]

In the Santal woman, Rabindranath sought a language like music, which did not make itself redundant by reducing itself to a transparent mirror of reality. In fact, this language did not claim to represent reality at all. Rather , it sought to poetically transform the otherwise trivialised reality of congested and colonised everyday time.

In one of his late poems, where Rabindranath presented temporality as the attempt to search for the 'unspeakable', this critique of representation becomes all the more evident:

> Across the limitless sky, moves the ship of time
> Bearing strokes and lines
> Prefaced by the dark, it is a dance of forms
> A dance to the wordless utterance of the unlimited
> To the unformulated language of limits, to the signs of the limitless.[164]

Against the ideology of progress and of hierarchical times – which sought infinity 'in the domain of quantity through an endlessly progressing process of measurement' and 'which was neither moral nor immoral' – Rabindranath invoked the creative time of the limitless and the unrepresentable.[165] This was a temporality which worked beyond knowledge, and beyond the apprehensible idea of 'duration', as the 'vehicle of creative energy':

> In the Hindu Pantheon, the deity of time not merely measures but it works. We do not know ... why the mind should at all depend on time for the assimilation of thoughts. In fact, we never shall solve the mystery why there should at all be a process of creation, which is a process in time.[166]

This particular formulation by Rabindranath is significant. On the one hand, he articulated time as the indeterminate, the surplus which forever remained beyond representation and comprehension. On the

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[160] 'Ogo Saontali Chhele', *Rabindra Rachanavali IV*, p. 367.
[161] 'Saontali Meye', *Rabindra Rachavali III*, pp. 294-96.
[162] K. R. Kripalani, 'Notes: Co-operative Movement among Santals', *VQ*, I: 1, new series, 1935, pp. 113-14.
[163] 'The Kopai', *VQ*, I: 1, new series, 1935, pp. 31-3.
[164] Poem 15-3, *Sesh Saptak*, p. 58.
[165] 'The Philosophy of Leisure', *VQ*, VII, 1929-30, p. 7.
[166] Ibid., p. 8.

other hand, however, he named this very insight as a Hindu insight, named this temporality as a Hindu deity. In doing so, he abandoned the critical alterity of this creative time and attributed it incontrovertibly to the nation. It is clear that one strand of Rabindranath's thought – where he admitted creative time – was strongly critical of nationalism as an essential and singular identity. He urged painters like Abanindranath to deny their obligation to 'label' their art as 'Indian', for as he said, 'art is not a gorgeous sepulchre, immovably brooding over a lonely eternity', but an exploration of 'unknown realities' and a move towards a 'future which is as different from the past as the tree is from the seed'.[167] Yet another strand in Rabindranath's thought was trapped in chronology, history and nationhood. Here he went to the extent of labelling the unrepresentable time as a Hindu icon. And here, in an acknowledgement of the modern, capitalist bifurcation of time into work and leisure, he named the location of poetic practice the 'width of leisure', thus wishing it away from the everyday and the ordinary.[168]

Rabindranath critiqued representational knowledge as unable to 'think' time and he critiqued the nation as unable to define all dimensions of existence, especially the aesthetic and the creative. Yet in his withdrawal into what he called 'leisure', he left the everyday time of colonial experience untouched by his poetics. Precisely because he conceptualised the nation, and its history, as opposed to the 'primitive' was he compelled to reach for the 'primordial' in his search for creative temporality. But precisely because he attributed the non-practical calm of knowledge to the nation – as we saw in the second section of this chapter – was he forced to make his poetics 'leisurely'. This poetics stopped short of becoming a political strategy of resistance to colonial and universal forms of knowledge and representation. Poetic time did not inform practical time, it remained its surrogate as the historical nation subsumed creative time itself as one its many essential traits. Rabindranath's invocation of the 'primitive' thus became in practice, a way of evading the colonial present of lost leisure. This paradigm of leisure could not quite grasp the logic of what it identified as 'primitive' symbolism or Santal poetry. In Santal usages theoretically distant things and acts appeared as practically proximate and confrontational. Thus, the Santals referred to excretion as 'paying the moneylender', to eating watered rice during their annual 'hunger period' as 'looking at the stars', to the coconut as the 'brown sahib of Calcutta with hair on his bones'.[169] These operated as riddles which every Santal was supposed to know how to crack, if s/he was aware of his or her socially marginal and subordinate position. If there was nothing common between faeces and the moneylender, the Santal's life demonstrated that whatever the Santal had to pay to the *mahajun* was as useless and foregone as human excreta. Bengali poetics missed the everyday and concrete nature of these creative and political associations, of apparently far-fetched but actually proximate experiences.

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[167] 'Art and Tradition', *VQ*, I: 1, new series, 1935, pp. 7-10.
[168] 'Philosophy of Leisure', p. 8.
[169] AP/ 181.

In terms of political practice, therefore, proponents of 'progress' like R. C. Dutt and proponents of 'unity in diversity' like H. C. Chakladar seemed to agree with each other – across half a century – that 'primitives' must be 'Hinduised'. Thus, while poetry and anthropology aestheticised difference and variegation, the nation continued to be ovrdetermined and mobilised in practice as an essential Hindu identity. To prove unity in diversity, Sitalchandra Chakravarty textualised the Kols as 'historical' remnants of the Hindu Cholas.[170] And Sashibhushan Ray believed that Santals were already Hinduised. If the Baidyanath shrine at Deoghar was claimed both by Santals and by Hindus alike, it did not become a ground for solidarity, or even for face-to-face contention. It merely became historical 'evidence' of an overdetermining Hinduism – 'in almost every sub-division [of Santal Parganas] places of worship are present as proofs of indestructible Hinduism'.[171] Apparently in 1925, Gandhi instructed the Hindus of Santal Parganas to show a spirit of patience, sacrifice and satyagraha in order to resist the colonial attempts at privileging the 'primitive'.[172] When Gandhi called for a boycott of all that was white, the Santals killed all their white poultry and thereby 'proved' their Hinduism and vegetarianism! Even the Christian missionary P. O. Bodding reluctantly admitted that the Kharwar Santals seemed to be combining the Hindu god Ram with the Santal sun-god Chando.[173] Instead of seeing these 'facts' as 'proof' that at the local level, frontiers between Hindus and 'animists', as between Hindus and Muslims were most often blurred, these became proofs of the indelible Hindu-ness of all communities within the nation. Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar argued that by counting some Hindus as 'aboriginals', the colonial state was conspiring to deplete the number of Hindu Bengalis and make Muslims the majority population of Bengal.[174] And even Rabindranath accepted that however tolerant India was, society must in the last instance 'improve' and to do so, refuse to 'preserve the grotesque just for the anarya'. After all, 'tamasikata [indulgence of dark and immoral vices of the flesh] could never be a truly Indian substance'.[175]

At every census, therefore, nationalists campaigned for 'tribes' to be returned as Hindus. In 1941, the deputy commissioner of Betul found local Congressmen rewarding Gonds, if they counted themselves as believers in the Hindu religion. When the Bihar Commissioner for Census ordered that 'tribeness' must be determined on the basis of the festivals an individual celebrated, the test had to be altered because of a major newspaper campaign and deputations by local nationalists.[176] In numerous civil cases, primarily involving property and inheritance, the courts were pressurised to see 'tribals' as Hindus, and in one such case, the anthropologist S. C. Roy was summoned to testify upon an Oraon's 'tribeness', though he refused to appear in court.[177] Nationalists also campaign for Santali to be written in

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[170] Aryetar o Anaryajatir Itihaser Rahasya, Birbhum, 1928, p. 48.
[171] Santal Parganas: Past and Present, Deoghar, 1926, p. 3.
[172] Ibid., 93-4.
[173] 'The Kharwar Movement among the Santals', MI, I: 3, 1921, p. 223.
[174] Bangiya Jati ki Damsonmukh?, Calcutta, 1910.
[175] 'Bharatbarsher Itihaser Dhara', pp. 450-51.
[176] Verrier Elwin, Loss of Nerve, London, pp. 35-6.
[177] Appeal no. 68, Ranchi, 21 Nov 1940, Manu Oraon vs Abraham Oraon, AP/51.

Devnagri script, and one educated Santal wrote that his community was being split into two by the struggle between Hindi and English.[178] That in course of the Tana Bhagat movement, the 'tribes' had reinterpreted the practice of writing in strong political terms was never considered. Writing, the Bhagats said, was scratching with a golden plough on the golden land, the deeds of title/authorship were the 'spade, the axe and the plough', the text was the land on which all was marked and which could not be rolled up and carried away like a mat or a piece of paper by the landlords.[179] This metaphorical association that the 'tribe' made between land and the text, was a strongly political association, neutralised by Archer as 'poetry'. For in the discourse of modernity, writing remained a matter of knowledge, not a practice generated by social and political confrontations. Nationalists recognised that the Santals seemed to be in a constant state of rebelliousness, or readiness to be mobilised. But this did not mean much, for 'since they are not educated, no great did can be performed by them'.[180] The defining image of historical practice, despite the invocation of poetic temporality, thus remained that of 'knowledge prior to action'. Nationalists complained that in non-regulation districts, Hindus had trouble in securing tenancies, because colonialism gave special status to the 'original' or 'primitive' cultivators of land. These privileges made the 'tribe' unlike itself – i.e. made them 'sly and untruthful'. In 1924, the self-conscious Hindus of the Santal Parganas ran a signature campaign amongst Santals, to persuade them that land-alienation was a profitable opportunity. Many meetings were held to that effect with the help of Marwari traders and of the local Congress committee.[181]

Thus, despite the poetic insight – that 'primitives' were the last inappropriable location in colonial modernity – Bengali discourse failed to generate an alternative politics of time, which, as Rabindranath thought possible, would free the nation from the debilitating linearity of progress. Even Rabindranath, in the last instance, imagined the nation, not through a politicisation of temporal difference – temporal difference between the coloniser and the colonised, between the 'primitive' and the 'civilised' – but through the hope that while India would assert the principle of difference in confronting colonialism, it would relinquish difference itself in its own mobilisation. This was because, while poetics invoked creative temporalisation against the limits of representation, it did not interrogate representation's own status as the only principle of knowledge. It did not demystify representation as a way of absenting peoples from the present and then re-presenting them in the author's own terms and in the author's own time. It did not critique representation as a practice of making peoples non-contemporary and thus of undoing both confrontations and solidarities. Even as poetics critiqued the historical construction of the past as given, final and factual, even as it interrogated the ethnologisation and spatialisation of temporalities – poetics shared with representational knowledge the Othering of the everyday time of practice. And having abdicated to knowledge its practical and strategic significance, poetics dared not

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[178] AP/53.
[179] Recorded by Archer, AP/1.
[180] Sashibhushan Ray, *Santal Pargana*, p. 22.
[181] Ibid., pp. 3, 18-22, 60-1.

venture into the uncertain future that it had imagined – a future, which saw, in Rabindranath's imagination, even the nation as contingent and the national as merely contextual. In other words, poetics made difference – between its internal constituents, between creative time and progressional time, between the coloniser and the colonised – into a *metaphor* of the nation. It failed to make difference into a *ground* for practical negotiations. It neither sought to make the 'primitive' contemporary to the 'historical', nor tried to inspire competing futures through potent temporal antagonisms. Because it did not lend difference to strategic and political use, poetics' own difference to historical practice remained neutralised. In practical terms, like the farthest outpost of the nation, the rebellious poet and the sensuous and free 'primordial' of his imagination awaited their mobilisation by mainstream nationalist politics, without being able to intervene in it.

Conclusion

As we had argued in the first chapter, in colonial Bengal historical knowledge was founded upon the counterpoise of the 'historical' and the 'primitive' – the latter signifying all that was absent and anachronistic in the present and therefore in need of re-presentation by the historically-conscious author-subject. Counterpoising – i.e. enunciating something by contrasting it with something else – is in itself a valid strategy and not specifically 'modern' at that. The temporal politics of colonial modernity, therefore, lay not so much in the act of counterpoising, as in its attempt to *conflate this practice of knowledge to knowledge itself*. Modernity sought to hide the contingency and the temporality of its knowledge practices. In colonial modernity, this was done not only through the economies and technologies of power, which forced the Other to conform to the author-subject's knowledge of it. This was also done through that particular *mode* of Othering, by which practice itself was made into the subordinate Other of knowledge, which we tried to demonstrate in this last chapter.

Whether it was W. W. Hunter arguing that the 'primitive' represented the absence of abstract thought, or it was Rabindranath arguing that the laughing Santal woman represented all that was free from the subordination of everyday time and practice – practice seemed to be banished in this discourse to that lesser realm of the easily compromised, the contaminated and the contingent. If poetics opposed 'objective' knowledge, they shared with each other this disdain for the practical, the uncertain and the everyday. By thus subordinating, in fact, by Othering practice, discourses of colonial modernity hid the fact that time and knowledge emerged out of the encounter *between* antagonistic practical positions and the fact that time could not be the sole possession *of* any one identity, including the nation. In this context, it seems meaningful to end by counterpoising to this practice of colonial representation and Othering, the othering practices of the 'primitives' themselves. This demonstration will perhaps help us to

remember that social practice and temporal politics need not necessarily generate Others in any *epistemological* sense. That it did so was the contingency of colonial practice.

My chapter on money and credit argued that the Santals did not imagine an *absolute* Other until they confronted Bengalis as moneylenders. The chapter on rebellion argued that Santals did not posit an 'original' difference between themselves and the *diku*-outsider. In fact, Santals enunciated time itself as perpetuated through encounters and scattering of peoples, as 'men' travelled in search of a country. Here, the Santal practice of *bitlaha* may be mentioned. This was a practical mode of othering, an act of collective gesturing and defilement, of a transgressor who had committed an unacceptable act and refused to make amends for it. The decision to perform this act was taken collectively by all Santals of the *pargana*, whereupon a *sal* branch was circulated in all the villages, with the leaves indicating the number of days until *bitlaha*. On the day of the act, large groups collected near the house of the person to be expelled, danced to the drum and to *bir seren* or forest songs, and recited the reasons why the individual must be ousted from the solidarity. Then the house was defiled by throwing soiled plates, and other such things into the courtyard. This act of other-ing was not so much a punishment, nor a permanent exclusion of the Other. It was a publicisation of the event of alienation, generally open to later rapprochements through fines and feasts. The colonial state outlawed this Santal practice by terming it 'criminal' and 'violent', because sometimes the Santals performed this act on non-Santals, including on moneylenders.[182] I mention this Santal practice to emphasise the practical nature of othering in non-colonial societies, which was fundamentally different from the representation of the Other as always already so, in the time of knowledge.

Santal songs themselves articulated this difference between ontological and practical others. Santals pointed out that 'some say Hindu and some say Mussalman, was alas the disaster of *kaliyuga*.' That is, these estrangements were contingent to the present bad times:

> *Ke bole Hindu, ke bole Mussalman*
> *Ke bole hoilo sarbanas*
> *Kilike jo samaelore... nayan*
> *Kuli yuge hoilo sarbanas.*
>
> Some say Hindu, some say Mussalman
> Some say what a catastrophe
> Take care of your eyes [?]
> Kaliyug has brought catastrophe.[183]

A recent Santal author, despite thematising history in terms of the dominant *arya-anarya* split, has reiterated this provisional and open-ended nature of Santal identity 'through the ages'. Their *bintis* or recitations of the past, N. Hembrom says, 'were tested time and again' as to their truths. The journey of the ancestors and their collection of stories and experiences constituted the *sari-panja* or the 'expedition' to truth. One of the Santal festivals, *Dasain*, thus not only celebrated *raska* or pleasure, it also

[182] W. G. Archer, *Tribal Law and Justice: A Report on the Santal*, New Delhi, reprint, 1984, pp. 559-64.
[183] W. Archer & G. G. Soren (eds.), *Hor Seren*, Benagaria, 1943, p. 372.

commemorated and 'verified' the words of the 'oldest of the old generations who had suffered for the cause of *desh* and *dishom*, land and country'.[184] The Santals thus saw their body of knowledge as the product of the practice of journeying, which was reassessed along the way, along changing positions and practices. The *Karam* festival of the Santals therefore invoked *karam gosain*, the deity of hard and honest work, in the twin brances of the *karam* tree. The story goes that once upon a time, *dharam* – roughly translated as normative knowledge or truth – had committed the sin of mocking *karam* or work/practice. Hurt by his brother's contempt, *karam* deserted *dharam*. Since then, *dharam* suffered endlessly, because there was no work to accompany him. So he had finally to undertake great pains to woo *karam* back.[185]

If we take this Santal lesson seriously, that even knowledge is an act of expedition, which must be accompanied by practice at every step, proper names, and language itself, come across as a temporal and contingent entity. Suhridkumar Bhoumik reminds us how nationalised languages like Bengali were actually produced through a forgetting of the shared temporality of utterance between Bengali and 'primitive' Kharwar languages. He shows how the pauses, the rhythms and syllabic emphases of Bengali folk-poetry and *vratakatha* matched, not to Sanskrit poetic metres, but to the temporalisation in Santal songs and musical *matras*.[186] Debes Roy's path breaking work, on the other hand, shows how written Bengali in the nineteenth century was produced through an imitation of English syntax and verb-forms, thus making 'nationalised' and literary Bengali almost intranslatable into spoken and 'popular' Bengali.[187] It is appropriate therefore, to end with a Santal lesson. Ramdas Manjhi Tudu's *Kharwal Bamsak Dharmputhi* says that naming is an act simultaneous to the clearing of the forest – that there cannot be a name, a word, without a work or a practice.

> The sound came from / Where the sun sets / Then the great storm / And the reckless rain / The earth softened, the rivers / Flooded / The great mountain said in Cai Campa, Chirunaghar / We shall clear the forest / Then they cleared the forest / And sowed hari erba / Then the man and woman / Had a daughter / The eldest / On the ninth day they named her first.[188]

This narration of the Santal creation-story, in which the first child was named on the day of sowing, could only be significant, not as a historical knowledge of the past which remained true irrespective of the present, but as a reminder that naming must occur in association with everyday practice, and that the name must be recited at every naming ceremony of every new-born, as the Santal *binti*-s were. This is a reminder that the name, like language, too is a contingent and temporal act. And this name holds true only in the necessary presence of Others to whom a Santal is a Santal – in the absence of the Other, who calls a Santal a Santal, the Santal is only a *hor*, a human.

[184] *Austric Civilisation of India*, Calcutta, 1982, preface, pp. 35, 41.
[185] Ibid., p. 42-3.
[186] *Adibashider Bhasa o Bangla*, Mecheda, 1991, pp. 4-5.
[187] *Upanibeser Samaj o Bangla Sangbadik Gadya*, Calcutta, 1990.
[188] Probably composed in 1897-98, quoted in S. Bhoumik, ed., *Saontali Gan o Kabita Samkalan*, Calcutta, 1996, p. 91.

Conclusion

> As such, fed up by a philosophy that it no longer admits, our historiography, remarks Emmanuel Levinas, conceives in turn 'the relation with others as if it were at play within the destiny of sedentary populations, owners and builders of land.' According to this *logos* of a revelation of being, transformed into a comprehension of 'historical facts,' 'possession is the form par excellence by which the Other becomes the same by becoming mine.'
>
> – Michel de Certeau[1]

It is not easy to 'conclude' a thesis, which has been trying to interrogate and politicise the temporal resolutions taught us by modern historiography. As a work which has had to refer to the 1780s as well as to the 1930s, it cannot claim to have a single temporal bracket. Undeniably, this long period of a hundred and fifty years saw many changes, contingencies and unresolved processes – in the structure and institutions of colonial power, in the politics of nationalism, in modes of collectivity and mobilisation, in social alignments and in distribution of power. If the thesis seems to view this long century and half from a single vantage point, it is not to impose a unilinearity on it. It is rather to highlight different moments from across the century – the moments of history-writing, travel, money, rebellion, aesthetics and representation – which came to constitute the dominant politics of time, defining colonial modernity and marking the predicament of post-colonial practice. I argue that this temporal politics, though developed through multiple and multi-centred negotiations, seems to offer a single, radical clue, making sense of the complexities of the colonial condition and anti-colonial politics. If the last chapter tends towards a reading of texts written as late as the 1930s, it does not intend the 1930s to appear as the only valid closure to our story. After all, temporal politics of (colonial) modernity, progress, development, identity and history, remain active and hegemonic even today – especially now that the militant nationalism of the Bharatiya Janata Party kind has reinvented politics through the polemics of 'avenging' the 'historical' past of 'foreign' rule and 'desecration'. This nationalism, deprived of its practical link to the politics of liberation, has finalised the splitting of time between the cultural and the monetary. As this nation seeks to 'liberalise' its economy and mirror the trajectory of global capital, it claims the purity, autarchy and righteousness of cultural conservatism. As if culture remains both 'originary' and 'final', in the absurd presentism of profit and competition. In any case, temporal politics cannot 'conclude' – conclusion is the domain of the narrative, which itself

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[1] *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, New York, 1988, pp. 342-43.

is part of the politics of time and not its 'form'. Temporal politics can only be confronted and superseded by another mode of temporalisation, another beginning and another trajectory of time itself. So, instead of *concluding* the thesis through a historical 'periodisation' or a temporal bracket, I shall try to suggest three possible 'beginnings' that seemed imminent in 1930s colonial Bengal. Perhaps, these possible beginnings can be resumed in practice, precisely because they remain as yet unresolved.

The 1930s is a suggestive, though arbitrary, date. The last chapter shows how by this time history had acquired its 'objective' and disciplined form in Bengal, as opposed to the 'subjective' and 'polemical' uses of history in the second half of the nineteenth century. By this time, anthropology, too, had become a domain beyond its administrative use by colonial officials – it seemed to become a knowledge which the colonised could re-deploy for the sake of the self. It was also by the 1930s, that aesthetics was reclaimed in colonial Bengal – in a reaction against the late nineteenth-century attempts at eliminating the poetic and the imaginative from 'objective' knowledge. But the 1930s must not be historicised as a time when the colonised finalised their claim to modern disciplines – indicating an end to the colonisers' monopoly over universal and rational knowledge-forms. To say this, would be to partake in the temporality of modernisation and progress and to deny the unremitting post-colonial anxiety that, in the race towards the 'end of history', the colonised, the late-starter, could never overtake the forerunner. After all, the point of progress was precisely to substantively homogenise yet temporally hierarchise nations – and this realisation never left the colonised, even when s/he felt fully capable of knowledge, reason and history. It is therefore more fruitful to say that in the 1930s, the colonised, by way of reclaiming 'modern' knowledge from the coloniser, hinted at his/her own marginality and lateness in the present. While this irreversible delay that the modern educated Bengali confronted was generally a matter of regret, it was also a possibility seized by some Bengali theorisers. Rabindranath Thakur was one such thinker, who saw through the idea of the nation, the idea which had already been played out as Western history and which had exposed its own limits and its own violence. To Rabindranath, who made an advantage out of his late entry into the world of self-conscious modernity, the nation was not the 'natural' culmination of a people's destiny, as the West would have him believe. History had to move, both ethically and logically, beyond the narrow confines of this territorialised and imprisoned subjectivity. The nation had to give way, not to a homogenised globalism and modernity, but to an embrace that admitted, loved and wondered at difference. Not only because India itself demonstrated that it was possible to embody difference, wonderment and openness as the defining characteristic of a society, but also because there was no other way. Rabindranath proposed the nation as *mahamanaber sagar-tir* – the coast outlining the sea of humanity – distinct from yet inviting endless waves of strangers, 'foreigners' and novelties, who engulfed and caressed the nation from without and seeped into and blended with the soil of the nation. If Rabindranath felt isolated and superfluous at the end of his life, when he lamented that he had failed to reach the people, it was because this hint of collective life beyond and irrespective of the nation became, paradoxically and perhaps more so with 'independence', an

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abandoned possibility. Though Rabindranath did not live to see 1947, he would perhaps have perceived independence not as the end of a story but as the inauguration of a history of a larger scale and of an as yet unimagined world-time.

Apart from Rabindranath's critique of nationalism, the 1920s and the 1930s saw another possible new beginning. This was the beginning of an alternative political space that could have reconfigured the conventional territoriality of Bengal. As Ranabir Samaddar has shown, if one sees the apparently disparate and discrete 'tribal' movements of early twentieth-century Bengal in terms of a single political narrative, nationalism would seem to have quite a different location and centre than that conventionalised by the Bengali *swadeshi* and civil disobedience traditions. The rebellions of Kurmis, Mahatos, Santals etc. stretched over all of Jungle Mahals, from Mayurbhanj in Orissa through Midnapur, Bankura and Birbhum in Bengal to the Rajmahals in Bihar, stretching across Barabhum, Manbhum etc all the way to Chota Nagpur. They stretched even to the north, into Malda and Dinajpur. Whether it was the 1917 Santal rebellion in Orissa against the recruitment of 'tribes' as labour-corps, whether it was the central part played by Santals of Midnapur in the 1942 Quit India movement, or whether it was the role of Jangal Santal and his comrades in the late 1960s Naxalbari movement in Darjeeling – 'primitives' seemed to signify a history of anti-colonialism, different from and marginal to mainstream nationalism.[2] The very point of this thesis has been to show that it was not accidental that this alternative and rebellious time of liberation was the practice of 'primitives' and 'tribes' – for they existed in colonial modernity as that alterity, against which the 'modern' appeared as modern in the first place.

A third potential beginning can be seen hinted in works of economic historians like Sugata Bose. As Bose persuasively shows, by early twentieth century, debt had replaced rent as the central mode of surplus extraction in colonial Bengal.[3] And Ranajit Guha shows, in this period, 'tribes' like Kols and other peasants reinterpreted even the internal relations between gods and deities as relations of indebtedness and interest.[4] As the chapter on money and credit has argued, there was more to this 'economic fact' than a history of increasing commercialisation, marketisation and global integration. For debt reconfigured temporality itself, as the past/debt began to control and possess the future, in a denial of modernity's claim to be futuristic and progressive. The temporal mode of debt and interest, thus, irrevocably changed the nature of political practice and possibilities. It is not accidental that today, debt represents the foundational mode of social relationships across the world. While indebtedness has become a 'normalised' mode of everyday existence for individuals in 'advanced' societies, what with credit cards and personal consumption banking, indebtedness has

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[2] Ranabir Samaddar, 'Territory and People: The Disciplining of Historical Memory', in *Texts of Power*, ed. Partha Chatterjee, Calcutta, 1996, pp. 167-99; Ashim Adhikary and Ranajit Bhattacharya, 'The Extremist Movement: an Appraisal of the Naxalite Movement with Special Reference to its Repercussions among Tribes', in *Tribal Movements in India II*, ed. K. S. Singh, Delhi, 1983, pp. 119-27.
[3] 'The Peasantry in Debt: the Working and Rupture of Systems of Rural Credit Relations', in *Credit, Markets and the Agrarian Economy of Colonial India*, ed. Sugata Bose, Delhi, 1994, p. 248.
[4] 'The Career of an Anti-God in Heaven and on Earth', in *Credit, Markets and the Agrarian Economy*, ed. Sugata Bose, pp. 301-28.

also become the way in which governments of 'backward' countries approach governments of 'advanced' ones. It is a telling commentary on the temporal politics of modernity that, as the state and industrial houses in India debated the budgetary implications of international and domestic loans and deficit financing, peasants in Andhra and Karnataka in 1997-98 committed mass suicides under the burden of unacquittable loans.[5] The early twentieth century indicated the beginning of this time of universal indebtedness and futurelessness – in which the history of subject-hood could no longer be written in terms of identity of one with his/her own self. After all, debt meant that the subject had to clear what s/he owed to another, before s/he could fully repossess and identify with his or her own being. This was not the unrepayable debt to ancestors, teachers and gods – the *rin* in the traditional form – but the debt that was given precisely for purposes of repayment, with interest. If the history of progress has been written as a history of the emergence of the rational and 'possessive' individual, a history of indebtedness and repayments underlay its temporality and teleology.

In a way, then, the conclusion of this thesis is to highlight these potential beginnings – of a critique of nationalism, of an alternative political geography, of a recognition and historicisation of the time of the debt – which seem like possibilities abandoned in the 1930s in colonial Bengal. These new beginnings become evident, however, only if modernity is reconfigured as primarily a problematic of time. This thesis therefore defines modernity, a category admittedly of multiple significations, as fundamentally a decision to judge peoples and worlds as if they are, though formally at the same time, really non-contemporaneous. By making peoples into non-contemporary beings, modernity seeks to reduce knowledge (and politics) to the re-presentation of non-modern, the absent and the anachronistic in the time of the present and the 'modern' subject. By this overdetermination of time by re-presentation, modernity disallows the coming together of different worlds and peoples as co-eval, in and at the same time. Re-presentation thus, is a very specific political act of temporalisation, which prohibits the coming face-to-face, in modernity, of the 'primitive' and the 'progressive', the 'historical' and the contemporary, the archaic and the prophetic, and the present and the past. The temporality of *re-presentation* neutralises the temporality of *encounter*, and therefore the temporality of collective practice. In the place of practice and politics, representation offers predictive knowledge, and in the place of contradiction and/or solidarity, it offers an appearance of identity and historicity.

Modernity, however, cannot be problematised in terms of temporality unless one accepts colonialism to be its central event – that is, unless one acknowledges that Europe imagined its own modernity through colonial encounters, through the imagination of the colonised as an Other without history and time, as a primitive or backward entity essentially non-contemporary with the modern Self. To see colonialism as only one of many dimensions of Western modernity is to gloss over modernity's own perception of itself as fundamentally a temporal concept. This thesis therefore has tried to foreground the colonial condition as the ground for rethinking temporality itself. For the purpose of problematising time, however, it is not enough to assess the 'significance' of colonialism in terms of

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[5] 'Harvest of Death: Report by Samar Halarnkar', in *India Today*, XXIII: 23, 1998, pp. 32-7.

colonial 'constructions' of the Other, the 'primitive' and the 'backward'. Nor is it enough, for the purpose of building a paradigm of post-colonial practice, to invoke the hybridisation, subversion and re-deployment of metropolitan concepts of progress, history and modernity by the colonised. Both these theoretical steps are imperative, but they do not adequately unpack the temporal politics of colonial modernity. Colonial construction and subversive hybridisation were common strategies which targetted all categories and orders of society – caste, tribe, gender, colour, history, territory, religion, education, culture, knowledge, science, state, truth, self, law, violence, right, duty and sentiment. The problematic of time however cannot be understood simply in terms of either colonial construction or subversive hybridisation, not only because there seems to be an undeniable calendrical consensus across the world, but also because time appears in rational discourse and in common sense as that which is never fully thematisable. It is neither a subjectivity nor an object, neither a pure conceptual a priori nor merely a culture-specific 'perception', lending itself to construction or appropriation in the way that categories of thought are supposed to. Even as time became critical in modernity's imagination of the Other and of difference, temporality itself appeared as an unmasterable alterity, not only within the colonised reality but also within European philosophy itself. It appeared as that which must be presumed, invoked and suggested, but which could not be fully thematised without it losing its temporalising function – i.e. its function of admitting the contingent, the uncertain, the unimagined, the deferred and the irreversible. In other words, temporality functioned in modernity simultaneously as that which must be conquered, and as that which, being temporality, repeatedly slipped through discourse and knowledge into the realm of unmanageable practice and the uncontrollable Other.

To understand this alterity of time, the thesis uses the insight of Emmanuel Levinas, who conceptualises time, though in a very different context and for a very different purpose, as 'the very relationship of the subject with the Other'.[6] According to Levinas, since Augustine, time has been 'thought' in the West in terms of an anxious, and later ironic, elaboration of the paradox of the present by the speaking and thinking, solitary subject. This was the paradox of the 'now', the 'now' which seems to pass at the very moment of its utterance, while both past and future remain pure negativities, inconceivable without reference to the subject's un-graspable present itself. It was this irresoluble paradox which resulted in the West in the abdication of time in favour of the always-already present subject or self, whose presence appeared in European philosophy as non-temporal and quasi-theological. Levinas rejects this tradition on the ground that it is an error to posit time as something which appears by virtue of the self/soul/subject, or of death of the self as Heidegger would have it. To Levinas, time is that which we grasp in the form of the realisation that the Other retains a future (and a past), despite the death (and amnesia) of the subject-self. In other words, Levinas shows, persuasively, that time cannot be the possession of the self and therefore cannot be adequately thought without thinking the Other. That time appears precisely because the world and the Other do not cease to be with the subject's cessation. The question however remains about what or who this Other is, about how to recognise and specify this Other – question which Levinas does not

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[6] *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard Coen, Pittsburgh, 1987, p. 39.

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quite answer. In fact, because Levinas reduces his own insight to a question of a very particular ethics – he says that time can be understood only when one chooses the ethics of placing the other prior to the self[7] - Levinas fails to ask the crucial question, why *modern* philosophy denies and disguises this need for the Other. When he places Augustine's problematic of time in the same tradition as Hegelian metaphysics, he misses the difference between the two. If Augustine was able to explicitly 'confess' his inability to thematise temporality, Hegel claimed the ability to totalise time as world-history, wherein the Self was self-consciously modern and European, and the Other incontrovertibly colonised. The Other which foregrounded the subject-self as temporally advanced and modern, was not just any Other, but precisely the non-contemporary, backward or primitive, spatially configured, fixed and fully explicated. Modernity was this imperative to make time into the possession of the (Western) subject, time which was no longer available to the object and to the now politically subordinated Other. Instead of time being evident as the ungraspable Other, as Augustine seemed to suggest, or as the subject's (ethical) relation with the Other, as Levinas would have it, time became that which the Other lacked. In this sense, it is neither accidental nor merely a philosophical or logical error, that Western metaphysics, and Levinas himself, fail to name colonialism.

This thesis proceeds by using Levinas's insight about time and the Other, but by making colonialism as the critical condition of its enunciation. This might seem to be the wrong context for Levinas, but he does remind us of the sensibility that modernity must deny in order to present itself as universal yet temporally ahead of all others – the sensibility that thought and knowledge necessarily face a limit in temporality, and in the Other. In other words, as the Santals reminded us in course of their rebellion, time appears as something in which the unanticipated and inconceivable may occur. Rational or modern knowledge, despite its all-explanatory and predictive intention, can never fully apprehend what may be possible in time. In the last instance, then, one has to engage with time in risky and irreversible practice, precisely because knowledge may not fully equip us to deal with the unimaginable future, which may 'befall' us, to use Levinas' term. This characteristic of time is perhaps also the characteristic of the Other, which never appears as a self-contained and self-evident idea or object, though Levinas seems to hope that the Other can be as easily identified and owned up by the self, as the idea of the Self itself. By definition the Other does not claim an absolute and proper position, fully graspable and appropriable, but becomes threateningly potent beyond the limits of the familiar, beyond the limits of all conceivable difference. Time and the Other thus appear as beyond knowledge-concepts and beyond the knowing subject. In other words, time and the Other begin to be critical precisely where knowledge stumbles – where practice, including that of conceptualisation, becomes urgent and imperative.

Capitalist modernity made an unprecedented claim for knowledge. This was the claim of science and reason to be able to explain everything, including the Other, and logically predict and

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[7] Levinas: 'Goodness consists in taking up a position in being such that the Other counts more than myself. Goodness thus involves the possibility for the I that is exposed to the alienation of its powers by death to not be for death', *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburgh, 1979, p. 247.

capture the future. As the coloniser encountered unknown worlds and unanticipated destinies amongst strangers, this became a necessary ordering device. By claiming to possess time and history, and by claiming to subordinate the Other, the modern European self sought to neutralise the alterity of both. In order to conquer and exploit the world, as imperialism sought to do, both the Other and temporality had to be nullified – hence the spatialisation of time and the essentialisation of the Other. And hence, the forgetting of the Augustinian insight that time is never fully graspable by the subject-self alone. As the universal claim of capital coincided with the universal claim of science and natural history in Europe, the world was reproduced as fully chartable, as the Other and temporality itself appeared to yield before money and reason. The Other and other times became particular derivative cases of universal and pre-given stages of history, even as they remained always backward and primitive in relation to the modern subject. In other words, while the colonised Other was represented as another time, the coloniser could claim a foreknowledge of it. In colonialism thus, time and the Other appeared to be always already captured in knowledge, and then, only secondarily, negotiated in practice. If this knowledge-claim of capitalist modernity often fell through in practice, this was attributed to errors in strategy rather than to the limits that knowledge faced before temporality and before the different and the unfamiliar.

This thesis has tried to show that behind this effecting of colonial sameness and difference, behind the de-contemporanisation of peoples, behind the subsumption of temporal incommensurabilities to universal progress, lay this foundational subordination of practice by knowledge. In order to demonstrate this, the thesis has had to proceed at three levels. At one level, it has had to argue that colonialism was not a local event in colonised societies. In both its intent and its effect, it was a world event. The colonial condition was central not only to the experience of the colonised, but to the experience of the coloniser as well. In other words, the thesis tries to remember that the colonial condition informed and constituted even the most self-sustaining of metropolitan philosophies. Not only Hegel but thinkers like Martin Heidegger and Georg Simmel depended for their own philosophical radicalism on affects and lessons drawn from direct, or indirect, colonial encounters. After all, both of them had to centrally engage with ethnology and anthropology in order to formulate their thoughts. This is by no means to say that modern Western thinkers were all Orientalist in the Said-ian sense of the term. That would make the Edward Said's concept of Orientalism too general to retain its critical value. This is rather to say that modernity as a temporal category and as a temporal experience was possible necessarily through the invocation of the ethnologised - often disguisedly so - categories of the 'primitive' and the 'primordial'.

At the second level, the thesis has argued that the continuing power of ideologies of progress and development in post-colonial societies cannot be adequately explained by either naming nationalist thought as a derivative discourse or by referring to the sheer coercive power of colonial rule. Neither the externality of colonial discourse nor the coerciveness of the colonial state-apparatus can be in question, nor can the hybridisation and subversion of colonial discourses by the colonised be underestimated. However, it must be remembered that so long as nationalism appeared as the

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only possible answer to colonialism, the colonised continued to try sharing the same temporality as that of the coloniser, to its own disadvantage. This shared temporality was not only that of progress, where the colonised forever lagged behind the coloniser. It was also the temporality of chronological and state-centric history to which the colonised had to conform, at the cost of rejecting other ways of imagining the past and the future. In order to historicise itself, i.e. in order claim a smooth succession to its own past in a simulation of what the West claimed as its own historical continuum right from Greek antiquity to the modern day, the colonised actually understated the interruption that colonialism represented in indigenous history. It also abdicated in favour of historicism, the temporality of practice, which, like the Santal rebellious practices, sought to imagine a future beyond the rational and the plausible. This thesis has tried to show how the temporal politics sought to be shared by the coloniser and the colonised became the ground for the effecting of difference by the latter. The argument proceeds by teasing out the pervasive presence of the 'primitive' in the discourses of the colonial Bengali intelligentsia, in order to show that Bengali discourse depended upon the invocation of the 'primitive' not only in its claim to a relatively advanced position, but also in its articulation of difference with the colonial ruler. The 'primitives' could be invoked as the reason why Bengal was defeated by Muslims. They could also be invoked as the reason for India's uniqueness as a nation – a nation which represented not only an identity, but represented internal difference itself as an intrinsic and special trait. In other words, difference, and perhaps hybridisation itself, was founded on the assurance of a continuous temporality which performed the non-temporal function of allowing differences to exist in the same time. This was the strategic spacing of time, such that differences could be re-presented in the present without their developing into full-blown contradictions, into judgemental impossibilities, or into antagonistic practices of life and labour. This spacing of time required temporality to be imagined as an abstract series, i.e. as chronology, which pre-existed and remained indifferent to temporal practice itself. That is, this required time to become analogous to space and to the series of accumulating numbers and money.

At a third level, therefore the thesis has had to configure itself in terms of the uneasy triangle made by the colonial state, the Bengali middle classes and the so-called real-life, extant 'primitives', the Santals. This triangle creates complexities and discontinuities of narrative. As the coloniser seeks to circumvent the educated Bengali in order to 'privilege' the 'tribal', the nation is temporally bifurcated. As the Bengali *bhadrolok* defines history and market by counterpoising the 'primitive' to himself, the nation appears schizophrenic in its own perception. As the Santal becomes indebted to the Bengali moneylender under the 'protection' of the *sahib,* s/he is asked to choose the enemy from between the English and the Bengali. As the Santals get invited as the most 'authentic primitive' in the Damin, other 'tribes' like Paharias get displaced by them and lose their privileged 'primitive' status. As Bengali poetics invokes the sensuous and free Santal body in a critique of disciplinary history, s/he gets transported as the *jungli coolie* to tea-gardens in Assam. And as re-presentative politics takes hold, the Santal becomes the site of contestation in Hindu-Muslim communal politics, as Hindus insist that 'tribes' must be enumerated as castes and therefore as part of the Hindu majority of Bengal. Out

of this complex process, emerges the double-edged temporal resolution of colonial difference. On the one hand, the 'primitive' emerges as synonymous to the 'practical' and the 'sensual', desired by middle-class men yet negated as threateningly incompetent in financial and historical negotiations. On the other hand, the 'primitive' emerges as the only inappropriable site in colonial modernity, which the marginal Bengali poet seeks out in his critique not only of colonialism but of the limits of nationalism itself.

It can be concluded, therefore, that peoples like the Santals became 'primitive' in colonial modernity not only because of colonial construction and colonial strategies of othering. They became 'primitive' also because the colonised themselves tried to assume the necessary theoretical and historical position for knowledge, by making the 'primitive' into the 'practical', and by relegating the time of practice to a position subordinate to causality and history. In other words, the Santal acts as a radical clue to the unpacking of the temporal politics of difference and identity of the nation. However, the danger always remains that – by appealing to the critical position of the excluded, the exploited and above all, the non-contemporary – a historical thesis of this kind might fall into the trap of imagining an authentic and autonomous subaltern voice, which serves no other purpose than that of a therapy for the post-colonial authorial predicament. In order to avoid this temptation, this thesis has tried to accept at the very beginning the impossibility of recovering 'uncontaminated' Santal voices from historical 'evidence'. The thesis began on the premise that since history in colonial Bengal was founded in opposition to the imagination of the 'primitive' non-Aryan, one cannot hope to find Santal notions of time and practice in 'facts' and 'sources'. Therefore, instead of trying to glean instances of an 'original' or 'primordial' voice from colonial or middle-class Bengali documents, the thesis has sought to demonstrate the limits of historical sources themselves. For history could not have been imagined, without the loss of 'facts' about the Santal and without the constitution of the Santal as anti-historical. In this thesis, therefore, the Santal does not appear as an authentic indigene – mirror to the anxiously modernising educated Bengali – the cultural site which remained innocently uncolonised even in colonial times. Rather, s/he appears as a contemporary critique of the nationalist reduction of time to history. This 'primitive' position is no more 'authentic' than the 'nationalist' position, but it returns today as the unmanageable excess to the nation, in south Bihar, in the north-east, in Chattisgarh, confronting modernity precisely at the moment when the nation abdicates confrontation in favour of succession to colonialism. (After all, the most recalcitrant elements in contemporary India, who refuse to be displaced by large dams, firing ranges and other industrial projects, are 'tribes'.) If both the coloniser and the Bengali *bhadrolok* incessantly repeated the 'fact' that 'primitives' had no sense of time and future, it only suggests that the so-called 'primitive' seemed to be a threatening alterity – an alterity, like that of time itself, which could not be synchronised to the universal presence of the modern subject and to the generalised telos of progress and nationalism. In a paradoxical manner, this thesis shows, temporality itself became the domain of the 'primitive', as the 'primitive' was identified with practice, and colonial modern subject sought to monopolise knowledge as totally and exclusively his own.

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