

# **Asian Studies**

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Ideological Transformation among Bengali Revolutionaries**



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## Calcutta As The Focal Point Of Re-Discovery Of Buddhism In Colonial India

Sarvani Gooptu<sup>1</sup>

The discovery that a religion and a philosophy called Buddhism had originated in India and then spread to various parts of Asia, fired the imagination of many intellectuals from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as archaeological and philological discoveries from various parts of India and her neighbouring countries began to be pieced together. The universality of its values, as was gradually recovered from translation of the main texts, profoundly impacted the world. The claimants to it now were not only those nations where the belief system, albeit with localised variations, had been preserved for centuries, but also by India where it had been lost and the West where it provided an alternative to the disillusionment of materialism. Scholarship about Buddhism spread world-wide as Pali and Sanskrit translations and analysis of the life and teaching of its founder Gautama Buddha proliferated in books and journals in European and Asian languages. Along with scholarship came the notion of pilgrimage to important Buddhist sites (and its preservation) as an important part of homage to the revered value system. Thus from the beginning of the rediscovery of Buddhism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an intellectual following of the Buddha went hand in hand with the religious. That intellectual pilgrimage continues to this day by innumerable writers, travellers and scholars of different parts of the world, who may or may not be converted to Buddhism by religion but are Buddhists at heart.

Calcutta, which was the heart of the British colonisation of the East in this period, was also the focus of this movement, mission even, of understanding and spreading of the ideas of Buddha and was also the site where an East- West interaction took place with Buddhism as the locus. It is interesting that as and when the discoveries of the various sites of Buddhist architecture were being discussed in Western media and books, they are also being reported in Bengali books and periodicals for local consumption. The undeniable interest that these discussions aroused was in part because of the cosmopolitan interest of the western educated Bengali elite and in part because Calcutta was the place where the Buddhist rejuvenation movement was going on. On one hand Anagarika Dharmapala from Sri Lanka, set up the Maha Bodhi Society in College Square in 1891, with the hope of finding an anchor to launch his mission to recover the sites of Bodh Gaya and Sarnath for the Buddhists while at the same time

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Kripasaran Mahathera, a Buddhist from Chittagong came to Calcutta with a vision of reforming and reviving Theravada Buddhism and established the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association in 1892, in Bow Barracks.

The more famous and internationally known Buddhist Association, i.e. The Maha Bodhi Society was set up by Ceylonese Buddhist leader, Anagarika Dharmapala, for the purpose of resuscitating Buddhism in India and of preserving Buddhist relics, texts and shrines in Bodh Gaya, and Sarnath. The *Maha Bodhi Journal* was started in 1892 and followed faithfully the activities of the founder around the world. The restoration of Bodh Gaya to the Buddhists by the strenuous efforts of Dharmapala, Colonel Olcott and Edwin Arnold following the efforts of the Burmese mission of King Mindon for repair of portions of the temple and Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, has been faithfully documented by the *Maha Bodhi Journal* as is the court proceedings between Dharmapala and the Mahant in detail. The support given to Dharmapala by many non-Buddhists was crucial for his campaign and also for building up the Buddhist movement. The initial phase of printing of the Journal was hampered by lack of funds, a printing press (since Baptist Mission Press where the first issue was printed denied to do so a second time) and good articles. It was W. W. Hunter, who was then writing on Indian Buddhism who forwarded the Journal copy to the President of the Committee of World's Parliament of Religion, Chicago who then invited Anagarika to the historic conference in 1893.<sup>2</sup> The rest was historic and the Mahabodhi movement henceforth found great supporters in all countries. In Burma the support of Maung Hpo, Moung Shway Oh and Maung Ohm Ghine and the Mandalay Mahabodhi Society, started by Maung Bah Thaw of Mandalay raised 13,000 rupees for the purchase of land in Bodh Gaya. In Arakan too there were sympathetic friends of Maha Bodhi Society and when Colonel Olcott visited Akyab in October 1892, he was successful in raising thousands of rupees. Dharmapala's presence at Chicago brought many western supporters for Buddhism through their intellectual and spiritual quest. Even in Japan, Dharmapala's dedication was appreciated and a beautiful image of Buddha was gifted to him for Bodhgaya. This image led to a chain of events when the Buddhist bhikshus were not allowed to enter the temple and the government ordered that the image be removed from the temple to the Burmese rest house.<sup>3</sup> 'The temple case as it was called', quoted the Journal, 'was a big affair and all over India people came to know of the Buddhist revival and of the Maha

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<sup>2</sup> Anagarika Dharmapala ed., A Retrospect, The Maha- Bodhi and the United Buddhist World, *The Journal of Maha Bodhi Society*, vol XIV, no 1, January, 1906, pp 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Trevithick, *The revival of Buddhist pilgrimage at Bodh Gaya (1811-1949)*, Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass, 2006,

Bodhi society and the High Court decided that the Temple was never converted into a Hindu shrine and that it was a Buddhist temple. This was a great gain to the Buddhists.<sup>4</sup> The relation of the Maha Bodhi society with the British government in Bengal was complicated by the fact that the Chief Secretary Cotton' son was the legal advisor of the Mahant. But his successors were more favourable to the MBS- Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Sir John Woodburn, Mr Buckland, Bourdillon, Macpherson and Oldham 'showed a spirit of sympathy' to their efforts'. Local intellectuals like Narendra Nath Sen, Neel Comal Mookerjee, Nanda Kishore Lall, Mahesh Narayan, Sachhidananda Sinha, Hari Das Chatterjee, Durga Shankar Bhattacharya, CC Bose, Raj Bahadur Sarat Chandra Das and J D Mazumdar remained close to Maha Bodhi Society for a long time.

Bauddhya Dharmankur Sabha (Bengali Buddhist Association) was started by a Buddhist from Chittagong where a few hundred Buddhists habitually crossing over from Arakan and back, clung on to their beliefs against the challenge of Hinduism and Islam. It is believed that the Baruas of Chittagong came from Magadha, South Bihar and settled there under the leadership of Shaleswar Barua/Baidya, a child specialist. He established viharas - Chowdhury and Baidyani (physician) vihara. Another famous physician of that region called Baidyani Durga adopted two children- a Barua and a Muslim boy and divided the land equally to them on her death. Their descendant Nabaraj, a pious and learned man in Bengali and Pali wrote a book of verses called Buddha Parichay (Introducing Buddha). Another Buddhist preacher of the region, Radhacharan Thakur around 1853, had brought a branch of the Bodhi tree from Bodh Gaya and planted it in Baidyapara. Tripura Thakur, another renowned Buddhist preacher lived only three months in the vihara and rest of the year he roamed around the jungles of Keraldenga hills.<sup>5</sup> From that background, a young man Kripasaran Mahathera came to Calcutta with a vision of reforming and reviving Theravada Buddhism and established the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha or Bengal Buddhist Association in 1892.<sup>6</sup> Nabin Vihara was set up in Bow Bazar and then in Bow Barracks. This association drew attention of all the leading intellectuals of Calcutta and many leading men like Surendranah Banerjee, R. C. Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Charuchandra Bose wrote books and articles and others like Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee were associated with it, to whom goes the credit of introduction of Pali

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<sup>4</sup>Anagarika Dharmapala ed., A Retrospect, The Maha- Bodhi and the United Buddhist World, *The Journal of Maha Bodhi Society*, opcit.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., Chittagram shombondhe koyekti Prachin kotha ( A description of ancient Chittagong), *Suprabhat*, 7(3), 1913, pp. 97-98.

<sup>6</sup> Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha at a glance*, Calcutta: BAuddha Dharmankur Sabha, 2005, p. 8

among the courses of Calcutta University and grant of scholarships to Buddhist students. From the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, aspiring students of Chittagong were able to come to Calcutta for higher studies as well as travel abroad. The Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha had by this time achieved a high status among those who favoured the revival of Buddhism through scholarship and knowledge and who acknowledged the importance of Pali studies. *Jagajjyoti*, its mouthpiece was started in 1908.

The Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha's aims were not only to revive Buddhism in the hearts of the Bengali people but also maintain an ongoing spirit of brotherhood with the local society and government as well as Buddhists of all countries. In 1914, the editorial claimed that the Society had been able to fulfil its purpose to spread the religion in places like Sikkim, which was a stronghold of Mahayana sect for 2000 years. Assistant Secretary Kalikumar Mahasthavira was able to win over the King by his 'spirituality, dedication and genuineness.' Kalikumar visited many villages and was able to send a few men to Ceylon for acquiring knowledge as well as 'inspire many high ranking royal officials and other gentlemen to follow his religious principles.'<sup>7</sup> Even earlier in 1901, Kripasaran had discovered Jetavan Vihara amidst the dense forests near Balarampur bordering Nepal. *Jagajjyoti* claimed that the society spread religious education through setting up of free primary schools for boys and girls in Chittagong, the Kripasaran school in Calcutta as well as set up a printing press so that Buddhist texts could be published.

From the beginning the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha wanted the Bengali Buddhists to obtain BA degrees from Calcutta University as well as travel abroad for further studies in Pali. A list provided in *Jagatjyoti* in 1914, shows the pride in those students who obtained MA and BA degrees and the jobs they got as a result. Their greatest pride of course was for Benimadhab Barua who went abroad on a government scholarship and was the first Asian to receive the degree of Doctor of Literature from the University of London(1917). He served as Pali Lecturer in Calcutta University, and as General Secretary of BDS(1911-1924) and Editor of *Jagajjyoti*.(1917-1921). Others like Mahimaranjan Barua who served as Lecturer in Pali in Chittagong College, Rebatiraman Barua who was the sub deputy collector, and Abinash Chandra Barua who passed engineering from Roorki college. That there was stress on Pali language and translation of Pali texts into Bengali through the aegis of *Jagajjyoti* is evident in every issue. The stress on Pali studies and Pali works in the study of Buddhism by the Bengal

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<sup>7</sup> *Jagajjyoti*, v,7, 1914, pp. 1-4

association as well as by Dharmapala may have been a means of distinguishing themselves from some western scholars as well as East Asian propounders of Mahayana Buddhism. Later however this stress on Pali studies from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century probably in unconscious response to Swadeshi movement and national education may have become a nationalist project, as well.

Most importantly Bauddhya Dharmankur Sabha provided a platform for discussion on Buddhism and its values during important festivals and also as a safe haven for many Buddhist pilgrims from various countries. The Tashi Lama of Tibet was received by Kripasaran at Dharmankur vihara in 1905 and the 12<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in 1910 when he was passing through Calcutta as government of India guest. Kripasaran also visited many places in northern India setting up viharas in Lucknow. Branches of the BDS was set up in Darjeeling (with Gandhamadan vihara-1910), Shillong(1918) and visits made to Ceylon (1915) and Rangoon (1916).The crowning glory of the Sabha was holding the Convention of all India Buddhist Conference in Calcutta under the Presidentship of U Chandramala Mahathera of Arakan with Dharmavamsa Mahasthavira of Chittagong as Chairman of the Reception Committee.

Both the Buddhist associations drew attention of all the leading intellectuals of Calcutta who became their patrons and who contributed to making the life and ideas of Buddha accessible to all through their books and articles in many leading literary and Buddhist journals like *Maha Bodhi*, *Jagajjyoti*, *Buddhist Review*, *The Maha Bodhi and the United Buddhist World*, *the Eastern Buddhist*, *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society of India*, *Buddhist Annual* and others.

For most of 19<sup>th</sup> and at least first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Calcutta was a hub of cultural interaction between East and West and Buddhism was often the medium, since even to travel to the Buddhist pilgrim spots one had to pass through the city. It was in this intellectual traffic that the Bengali intellectuals intervened. Buddhism was for them a new area of pride, intangible yet strong- pride since the Eastern world outside India had paid homage to the ‘Indian’ Buddha for centuries while the Western world had recently been taken by storm and intangible because for most Indians Buddhism was not a reality in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and so could not become a source of weakness being out of reach of all hegemonic control. The recovery of lost memories of Buddha and Buddhism was a unique trajectory and Indians eagerly and strategically joined with the British in this journey of rediscovery as a means to discover their own history and philosophy. A large amount of writing exists in Bengali on Buddha and

Buddhism like Sadhu Aghorenath's *Sakyamuni Charita* (1882), Krishna Kumar Mitra's *Buddhadev Charita* (1887), Ramdas Sen's *Buddhadeva* (1891), Upendra Kumar Ghosh's *Buddhacharita* (1894), Satyendranath Tagore's *Bouddhyadharma* (1901), Acharya Satishchandra's *Buddhadev* (1904), Narendranath Bhattacharya's *Buddha* (1910), Baradakanta Bandopadhyay's *Buddha* (1910), Atulchandra Mukhopadhyay's *Sakyasingha* (1911), Sarat Kumar Ray, *Buddher Jibon o Bani* (1914), Adyanath Ray, *Chhleder Buddhadev* (1923), Pramathanath Dasgupta's *Gautam Buddha* (1927), Hirentranath Dutta, *Buddhadever Nastikata* (1936), Haraprasad Sastri's *Bauddhyadharma* (1948), and many more published in the 1950s and 60s. Rabindranath Tagore along with many others wrote articles on Buddha's life and philosophy in the various journals in Bengali which were later collated into books. As Satyendranath Dutta points out in his 1901 book, Buddhism (*Bouddhyadharma*), there were some specific reasons for people embracing Buddhism in large numbers. First of all was the universal broadmindedness of the religion. A religion whose main spirit was universal brotherhood would obviously be welcomed all over the world. Secondly, the form in which and the way in which the religion was spread was also significant. Use of simple, unsophisticated language, discussion of relevant issues logically and comprehensibly and in a heart touching and sweet manner was the forte of the religion. Whatever was preached was accepted very willingly by the masses. Thirdly, what was most effective in the proselytizing was his own life, its simplicity and the deeply attractive powers of his character as revealed in the biographies.<sup>8</sup> It was thus the focus of all writers exploring Buddhism to look at both the life of the Buddha as well as the ideals he was propagating. Buddhism became the new possession of pride and taking pride in the ownership of Buddhism, especially since archaeological discoveries uncovered its splendours outside the territorial limits of India where the religion seemed to have survived so strongly as well as within where only the memory survived, was now linked to an academic enterprise of 'pilgrimage'.

In popular literary journals articles described Buddhist pilgrimage to India in the past,<sup>9</sup> the different pilgrimage spots, their identification in the Buddhist texts and discovery by the archaeologists<sup>10</sup>, a list detailing the geography in the age of the Buddha<sup>11</sup> but the great majority are about the Gautama Buddha- biographical details, his teachings and its spread and on the

<sup>8</sup> Satyendranath Tagore, *Bouddhyadharma*, Kolkata: Mahabodhi Book Agency, 2010(1901), pp. 3-4

<sup>9</sup> Among others, Rabindra Kumar Basu, Gautama Buddha, *Bangalakshmi*, 6 (11), 1931, pp.850-874; S.P.G, Fa Hien er Tirthjatra (Pilgrimage of Fa Hien), *Bharati*, 6(12), 1882, pp. 561-565, 7(2), pp.65-70, 7(3), pp. 112.

<sup>10</sup> One example is Bireswar Goswami, Kushinagar, *Sahitya*, 9(4), 1898, pp. 227-232

<sup>11</sup> Among others, Bimalacharan Laha, Boudhhyajuger Bhugol (Geography in the Age of Buddha, *Bharatvarsha*, 20 (1)(6), 1932, pp. 955-963.

decline of Buddhism in India.<sup>12</sup> I have discussed this in another context in a book *Knowing Asia Being Asian*<sup>13</sup> and also in an article in *Asian Studies* on “new” pilgrimages.<sup>14</sup>

Buddhist linkages in Asia were often probed in the journals as a means of considering a long lasting unity. Many, including Rabindranath Tagore, considered the study and practice of Buddhism in Japan important in providing mental strength to the race and worth emulating. Prabodh Chandra Bagchi in *The Cosmopolitan* in 1926, describes the study of Buddhism in Japan as being impartial, comprehensive and of the highest quality, pursued in nine universities where out of 10 journals and 30 monthly magazines of the different Buddhist sects only a few are in English like Young East and East Buddhist, the rest are in Japanese.<sup>15</sup> An allegorical story by Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay speaks of how the faith of nonviolence preached by Buddha reached into the heart of the most violent blood thirsty Japanese hunter through the sacrifice of his flowerlike two daughters who inspired by Buddhas’s teachings wanted to save their father and make him realise his wrongdoing.<sup>16</sup> Phanindra Nath Bose in an article in *Prabashi* traces the linkages that Buddhism has created in Asia through translation and re-translation of Buddhist texts. ‘Buddhism connected Indians, Chinese, Tibetans, Mongolians, Koreans and Japanese in a single bond.’<sup>17</sup> Ramesh Chandra Majumdar too in *Prabashi* draws similar linkages through descriptions of travels of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. ‘In those days the journey between India and China was not easy. Overcoming a lot of constraints and difficulties hardly twenty five pilgrims managed to reach their destination and the rest succumbed to the hazards of the travel. That these men ignored physical discomfort in the burning desire for spiritual knowledge makes important for posterity to honour the memories of these intrepid travellers. Unlike Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, and I-Tsing some of them did not gain fame, but their efforts are memorable nonetheless.’<sup>18</sup> In this context he discusses the lives and contributions of Prakashmati (Yuen chao), Sri Dev (Tou Hi), Chang Min, Mahayan Pradip (Tang Cheng Teng), Sanghavarma, Tang Kwang, Song chi, Pragyadev (U Hing) among others.

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<sup>12</sup> Swami Surananda, Bouddha Dharmamot Utpatti O parinoti (The emergence of Buddhism and its outcome), *Bharatvarsha*, 22 (1)(6), 1934 pp. 938-939

<sup>13</sup> Sarvani Gooptu, *Knowing Asia, Being Asian: cosmopolitanism and nationalism in Bengali periodicals 1860-1940*, New Delhi: Routledge, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Sarvani Gooptu, *New Pilgrimage: Asian Connectivity through Tourism and Awakening of National Pride*, *Asian Studies*, Vols XXXX (1&2), Jan 2022-Dec 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Probodh Chandra Bagchi, The Study of Buddhism in Japan, *The Cosmopolitan*, Vol 1, January, 1928, pp. 44-46

<sup>16</sup> Nripendra Krishna Chattopadhyay, Japaner Duti Meye, Chatushpatti ,*Bangasree*, Vol 2, Kartick, 1340 (1933), p. 528

<sup>17</sup> Phanindranath Bose, Budhhadharmer Itihasher Digdarshan, *Prabashi*, 25(2)(3)

<sup>18</sup> Ramesh Chandra Majumdar, Chindeshiya Bouddha Paribrajak, Kashti Pathar, *Prabashi*, 24(1)(6), 1924, pp. 792-795

Most of the articles are written in late 1920s and 1930s when the interest aroused by the academic writings of the Greater India Society on Buddhist connections in South East and East Asia was at its peak. However even as early as the 1890s the intellectual interest was piqued regarding certain pilgrim sites as is evident from some articles in *Bharati* which discussed the claims of the Buddhists in Mathura, long considered to be a religious pilgrimage site of the Vaishnava Hindus.<sup>19</sup> This article and others<sup>20</sup> discuss how the Buddhist links were rediscovered when the texts by the Chinese pilgrims Huien Tsang (Xuanzang) and Fa hien (Faxian) were discovered and translated by the European scholars. In discovering linkages the Bengali or Bengal element was always in the forefront. Appreciation of art and architecture was also connected with this enterprise as was discovery of Buddhist literary texts in different parts of Asia and writing about the journeys to the different Buddhist sites. Jadunath Chakraborty's description of the Sarnath Stupa<sup>21</sup> in *Suprabhat* is a rare detailed description where one finds a scientific appreciation of the process of setting up of an archaeological site combined with knowledgeable investigation of the artefacts and minute inspection of the museum being set up by the British government. Before embarking on his travel of the site he discussed the importance of the site, (the old name of which was Mrigadava), as the first place of sermon by Buddha. The ruins were discovered when the visible mounds were excavated. He mentions that this knowledge was gained by him from the books by Vogel<sup>22</sup>, Venis, Vincent Smith<sup>23</sup> and Senart<sup>24</sup>. The author travelled with two friends from Benaras (Kashi) to Sarnath and described in detail the excavated site. While describing the ruins he not only referred to the balconies but also described the kitchen which probably provided food for the monks (he calls them bhikshus), guests, students or disciples. In fact the food was distributed from the main monastery and necessary items of daily use were stored there. The author became lost in a dream where he visualised the huge cauldrons of food, and heard the loud chatter of the cooks

<sup>19</sup> Harisadhan Mukhopadhyay, Mathuray Bauddhyadikar (Buddhist claims on Mathura), *Bharati*, 16(2), 1892, pp. 119-123

<sup>20</sup> Bireshwar Goswami, Kushinagar, op. cit, p. 229

<sup>21</sup> Jadunath Chakraborty, Sarnath Stupa, *Suprabhat*, 3(5), 1909, pp. 224-227

<sup>22</sup> Jean Philippe Vogel, popularly known by his initials J. Ph. Vogel, was a Dutch [Sanskritist](#) and [epigraphist](#) who worked with the [Archaeological Survey of India](#) from 1901 to 1914. As archaeologist, Vogel participated in excavations in Gandhara, the [Punjab Hill States](#), Kusinagara and [Mathura](#). Along with John Hutchison, Vogel authored the two-volume *History of the Punjab Hill States* (1933).

<sup>23</sup> Vincent Arthur Smith, was an Irish Indologist, historian, member of the [Indian Civil Service](#), and curator. He was one of the prominent figures in Indian historiography during the [British Raj](#) and wrote several monographs on Indian history. In the 1890s, he was key to exposing the forgeries of [Alois Anton Führer](#), then working for the [Archaeological Survey of India](#), who Smith caught in the act of making fake inscriptions.

<sup>24</sup> Émile Charles Marie Senart was a French [Indologist](#). Besides numerous [epigraphic](#) works, he made several translations in French of [Buddhist](#) and [Hindu](#) texts, including several [Upanisads](#).

and attendants as well as the sound of hungry pilgrims saying “diyatang bhujyatang” (give me food). He ends his trip with description of the museum building being constructed there by the British government for the preservation of artefacts dug out of the region. The museum building he says was not yet completed but it promised to be grand. The author considered the British policy of preservation a very good one whereas while Indians are proud of their heritage, they have no idea how to nor do they work hard enough to preserve it, which was a matter of shame according to the writer.<sup>25</sup> The author described the decorated pillars and railings around a stupa in cylinder and half cylinder shapes with a marvellous glaze polish and the beautiful enamelling of the ancient artists. Nationalistic pride shines through when he writes, ‘we now praise and admire the Chinese enamelled crockery and other imported pottery but it is amazing that thousands of years ago such beautiful enamelling existed here which would put the foreign polish to shame. Which God’s curse has led to the destruction of the process of this craft? Will we ever be able to recover the expertise?...’<sup>26</sup> He further makes a plea to ‘...all native artists that they incorporate these traditional designs in drawing text books for art students. The respected Sri Abanindranth Tagore holds a high position in the Govt art school and if he wishes he would be the best person for such an endeavour.’<sup>27</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore like many intellectuals of his time (including his family) and beyond was fascinated by the Buddha and Buddhism. He not only wrote essays,<sup>28</sup> in which he discussed various aspects of Buddha’s teachings and philosophy but he also creatively incorporated them in his poems, dramas and songs which are immensely popular today like poems *Borobudur*, *Siam*, *Sheshtha Bhikkha*, *Pujarini*, *Abhisar*, *Parishodh*, *Samanya Kshati*, *Mulyaprapti*, *Nagarlakshmi*, *Mastakbikroy*, *Buddhabhakti*, and plays like *Natir Puja*, *Chandalika*<sup>29</sup> Having made a comparative study of the various religions prevailing in Asia, Tagore came to the conclusion that the ‘popular concept in Asia of *Guruship* i.e. raising a man to the level of a God ...and the practice of repeated chanting of His name for salvation, started from Buddhism.’<sup>30</sup> ‘It is Tagore who also pointed out that during his visits to China and Japan he felt a connection with the people which was spiritual beyond the physical differences. He regretted that this connection with truth which still flourished in those countries of East Asia

<sup>25</sup> Bireshwar Goswami, *Kushinagar*, opcit, p. 227.

<sup>26</sup> Jadunath Chakraborty, *Sarnath Stupa*, *Suprabhat*, 3(6) 1909, pp. 276-278.

<sup>27</sup> Jadunath Chakraborty, *Sarnath Stupa*, *Suprabhat*, 3(7) 1909, pp. 298

<sup>28</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Buddhadev*, Calcutta: Vishwabharati Pub., 1956 (2012 reprint).

<sup>29</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Rabindranath Buddhadev O Bouddhasamskriti* (Rabindranath, Lord Buddha and Buddhist culture), Calcutta: Vishwabharati Pub., 2003 (2012 reprt)

<sup>30</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *Bouddhyadharne Bhaktibad* (The Bhakti ideology in Buddhism), *Rabindranath Buddhadev O Bouddhasamskriti*, opcit., pp. 30-31

was no longer present in India. ‘That is why’, he wrote, ‘these countries are the pilgrimage centres for modern Indians. The eternal identity of Indians is present there.’<sup>31</sup> Others were closely associated with the movement for the spread of Buddhism as supporters and patrons of the two associations. Both Maha Bodhi and Bengal Buddhists Association worked in tandem in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to spread the message of the Buddha in the land of his birth. In 1915, at a landmark occasion Anagarika Dharmapala was given a mass reception in Chittagong and Karmayogi Kripasaran was given a welcome at Colombo. In the same year, while unveiling a marble statue of Kripasaran at the premises of Bengal Buddhist Association in 1915 Sir Asutosh Mukherjee, VC of Calcutta University, jurist, barrister and mathematician said in his speech as President that given the high ideals of Buddhism, ‘if text books (were) written for the students in the light of Buddhist idealism, it would do good’, and asserted that Buddhism being a ‘generous religion’, its rules and conduct should be obeyed by all.<sup>32</sup>

Buddhism became the focus of attention in England and Ireland and conversations and movements were taking place through Calcutta where Bengalis are playing an important role. In the early years of discovery these connections brought western adulation, lyrical as in Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia* or scholarly as in the Rhys Davieses which greatly impacted and engaged Indians. Edwin Arnold’s *Light of Asia* and its 100 editions led to an upsurge in awareness and interest in Buddhism in late Victorian England. Despite its undoubted significance on literary and religious works, it also led to adverse reactions among many, like Christmas Humphries, the historian of Buddhism in England and Ireland and Reverend Richard Collins who was a missionary to India and Ceylon. Collin and W.H Robinson asserted by invoking the historical Buddha that Arnold’s Buddha was not genuine. It was these polarities in fact that made Arnold such a success in the 1850s.<sup>33</sup> Both these aspects are discussed in the Indian newspapers like *Indian World* and were also followed closely in *Maha Bodhi* journal. The impact on Bengali Buddhists may be easily seen in the naming of the Journal of the Bengali Buddhist Association as *Jagajjyoti* (Light of the World) as the monograph *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha: At a glance* shows. The Buddhist poet, Sarbananda Barua translated ‘Light of Asia’ in *Bauddha Bandhu* (a journal of Chittagong) as “Jagajjyoti” and that name was adopted for the Journal of the Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha under the editorship of

<sup>31</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, Buddhadev Prasanga (On Lord Buddha), *Rabindranath Buddhadev O Bouddhasamskriti*, opcit., p. 46

<sup>32</sup> Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha (Bengal Budhist Association): at a glance*, Kolkata: Bengal Buddhist Association, 2005, pp. 10-11

<sup>33</sup> Philip C. Almond, *The British Discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p0. 3.

Gunalankar Mahasthavira, a noted Buddhist scholar and Samana Punnananda, lecturer of Pali in Calcutta University.<sup>34</sup>

Buddhist scholarship in the west was eagerly followed not only in the few Buddhist journals and periodicals but in the main stream vernacular media as well like *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *The Indian World*, *The Indian Mirror*, *Maha Bodhi*, *Jagajjyoti* etc. As early as 1878, Professor T. W. Rhys Davids became well known to all who were interested in the study of Indian religions with the publication of *Buddhism* on the life of the Buddha, for London Society for the Promotion of Christian knowledge. In 1881, he delivered the Hibbert lectures on 'The Origin and growth of Religion as illustrated by some points in the History of Indian Buddhism'<sup>35</sup>. He had many more publications on various aspects of Buddhism along with six lectures he delivered at Cornell University, Lowell institute, Brown University, Brooklyn Institute, Columbia College and four lectures at Peabody Institute for the American Committee for Lectures on the History of Religions.<sup>36</sup> The eagerness of Bengalis to be a part of the west-east converge where western homage to the eastern religious values were unsullied by colonial race discrimination was evident and led to the rallying of Bengali intellectuals behind the two pronged Buddhism religious revival missionary movement being launched from Bengal. Anagarika Dharmapala's success at the World's Parliament of Religion at Chicago in 1893 brought many admirers and spiritual converts to Calcutta in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Maha Bodhi Society which was able to establish a great reach in the west as well as in India. The other smaller effort of the Bengali Buddhists was also provided with more or less the same patronage and support which was also indebted to the modern Buddhism of the West.

Calcutta was the nodal point for those English and Irish people who were inspired by Buddhism to travel to India to serve Buddhist monasteries and missions like Sangharakshita or Dennis Lingwood<sup>37</sup> who was the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society of Kalimpong Branch and who also was guest editor of Visakha issue of the *Maha Bodhi* Journal and Khantipalo<sup>38</sup> or Lawrence Mills who spent three years in India and 11 years in Thailand and then accompanied in 1973, a senior Thai monk Phra Pariyattikavee to Australia and established Wat

<sup>34</sup> Hemendu Bikash Chowdhury, *Bauddha Dharmankur Sabha(Bengal Buddhist Association): at a glance*, opcit., pp. 14-15

<sup>35</sup> T.W.Rhys Davids, *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion: as illustrated by some points in the history of Indian Buddhism*, New York: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1882.

<sup>36</sup> T.W.Rhys Davids, *Buddhism: its history and literature*, Kaveri Books, 2021 (1896).

<sup>37</sup> Sangharakshita, *In the sign of the Golden wheel: Indian memoirs of an English Buddhist*, Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Khantipalo, *Noble Friendship: Travels of a Buddhist monk*, Birmingham: Windhorse Publications, 2002

Buddharangsee in Sydney. Others worked for Buddhist organisations and documentation like Christmas Humphries who was historian of Buddhist movement in London and provinces<sup>39</sup> and A.J Edmunds who compiled *Buddhist Bibliography* while Buddhist pilgrims and tourists like James Bisset Pratt who wrote imaginatively in 1928 on Buddhism as the pilgrim travelling from country to county, continually changing and adapting with local conditions.<sup>40</sup>

Buddhist associations were not only set up in Calcutta and other parts of India where Buddhism needed to be revived since it had been lost but also in those countries where Buddhism never been lost and where Buddha was venerated albeit with local variations like Society for Promoting Buddhism in Foreign Countries, Buddhist Research Society, Buddhist Tract Society, Shewbo Buddhist Association, Young Men's Buddhist Association, International Buddhist Society, Burma Society for promoting Buddhism, Eastern Buddhist Society of Kyoto, Japan etc. In the West the associations like the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland, International Buddhist Union, Bund fur buddhistisches Leben, Buddhistisk Samfund i Danmark etc, had both an academic as well as a spiritual slant. Bengal Buddhist Association too was instrumental in convening conferences of Young men's Buddhist Association (1910), Buddhist Women's Conference, setting up of Night school (1912) for adult literacy and convening the World Buddhist Conference (Dec 1924). The association of many people with the Bengal Buddhist Association like Satish Chandra Vidyabhushan, Justice Sarada Charan Mitra, Maharaja Manindra Chandra Nandy of Kasimbazar, Maharaja Bijay Chand Mahtab, Abdus Sobhahan Chowdhury, Nawb of Bagura, Lord Ronaldshay, Lord Carmichael, Sir Hercourt Butler, Hirendranath Dutta, and later Dr Beni Madhab Barua, the first Asian D. Litt from the University of London for his research on Pali and editor of *Jagajjyoti* from 1917, Maung Khe Zari was representative of the missionary movement occurring in Calcutta in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Very little work has yet been done to bring out the nuances of encounters and interactions between various transnational actors of the movement for revival of Buddhism in India with the focus on Calcutta as a nodal point between different parts of Asia and the West. Not only is it fascinating to see how large and varied number of individuals were sympathetic and actively involved in the project but also how nationality, religious and communitarian affinities were often transcended by them in their united support for "high values of humanity".

<sup>39</sup> Christmas Humphreys, Christmas, *Buddhism*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1981 and *The development of Buddhism in England*, London: The Buddhist Lodge, 1937.

<sup>40</sup> James Bissett Pratt, *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism and A Buddhist Pilgrimage*, New York: The Macmillan company, 1928.

Though for Indians, particularly the Bengalis, nationalism always remained in their subconscious when they advocated the cause of Buddhism, yet in some way cosmopolitan and universal ideas predominated when Buddhist ideals and humanistic values were highlighted as they participated in the movement to spread Buddhism.

# Russo-Ukrainian War and the Emerging World Order

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**Key Words:** Russia, Ukraine, US, NATO, refugee crisis, energy, food, Putin, Zelensky

The Russian aggression on Ukraine started in February 2022 and has been going on for one year and four months till date. One also does not see any sign of its final cessation. This war has seen the tacit involvement and active reaction of major global powers like US, European Union, UK, and China. It has also encountered some grave humanitarian crises in different arenas. For instance, one has noticed the catastrophic refugee crisis, a severe energy crisis and a more serious global food crisis.

The proposed article highlights the intricacies of the Russo- Ukrainian war and their impact on the gradual reshaping of the impending world order. By revisiting the post-cold war international order, and the period before the Russo-Ukrainian war, the discussion highlights major milestones such as President Putin's gradual isolation from the world community after Russia's ouster from G-8 and the determination of the Russian leadership to teach a lesson to the western powers. It also unfolds the global repercussions to Russo- Ukrainian war and critically examines the serious refugee crisis, an unprecedented energy crisis and a grave global food crisis.

## 0.1. The post-cold war world order

The post-Cold War era is a period of history that follows the end of the Cold War, which represents the world history after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. This period saw many former Soviet Republics becoming sovereign nation states. This period was also marked by the emergence of United States as the world's sole superpower. The former Eastern Bloc became democratic and was integrated into world economy. Most of former Soviet satellites and three former Baltic Republics were integrated into the European Union and NATO. In the first two decades of the period, NATO underwent a series of enlargement.

After the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union, one of its successor states the Russian federation dissolved the Warsaw Pact. It also established new strategic partnership with China and several other countries. It also joined as a member of some non-military organizations like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). It was also a time when China was fast rising as a major global power. Reacting on the rise of China, the Obama administration in the US played a balancing act by rebuilding some strategic forces to the Asia-Pacific region.

This phase can be earmarked from the point of view of facing a number of crises in different global regions. For instance, one could notice the Gulf war of 1991 after Iraq's sudden occupation of Kuwait and US's subsequent involvement in the war and bombarding Iraq and freeing Kuwait, then NATO bombing of erstwhile Yugoslavia and its subsequent disintegration leading to the Bosnian crisis and genocide there, Kosovo liberation from Serbia, East Timorese liberation from Indonesian occupation. By the beginning of the new millennium, the World Trade Centre attack in New York in Sep 11, 2001 by Al qaeda terrorists popularly termed 9/11, US war in Afghanistan in Oct. 2001 and its subsequent involvement in the region till 2021 after Taliban group's attack and capturing the nation under their illegal rule, the US military aggression over Iraq in 2003 and capturing exiled dictator Saddam Hussein, the world economic depression since 2008 after crashing of banks and financial sector in the US and UK and now the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. One could also notice a large-scale Arab Spring since 2011 followed by the Syrian Civil War and humanitarian crisis since 2012, Yemen crisis which is still not completely over.

During the Cold War, much of the policy and the infrastructure of the Western world and the Eastern Bloc had revolved around the capitalist and communist ideologies, respectively, and the possibility of a nuclear warfare. The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union caused profound changes in nearly every society in the world. It enabled renewed attention to be paid to matters that were ignored during the Cold War and has paved the way for greater international cooperation, international organizations and nationalist movements.<sup>41</sup> During this phase, one could also observe some nationalist movements in the former Yugoslavia which has subsequently broken up into six independent states, Czechoslovakia broke into republics of Czech and Slovakia.

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<sup>41</sup> . Mohapatra, J. K., & Panigrahi, P. K. (1998). "The Post–Cold War Period: New Configurations". India Quarterly. 54 (1–2): 129–140. doi:10.1177/097492849805400111. S2CID 157453375.

This phase also symbolized a victory of democracy and capitalism. Communism met its downfall also in Mongolia, Congo, Albania, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Angola. As of 2023, only five countries like China, Cuba, North Korea, Laos, and Vietnam are still recognised as communist states: China.

The onset of globalization and liberalization of the world economy were promoted by the western nations and the leadership was provided by the US. The multinational companies (MNCs) based in these nations penetrated into every sphere of human life in the rest of the world specially the developing nations.

In the post-Cold War period, new groupings have emerged on the global stage representing new forms of alliances. In some cases, these groupings have strong representation from earlier First World countries, but increasingly countries which were previously in the Second or Third Worlds are making their mark and challenging the First World economically and politically.

It was soon clear that the post-Cold War security system did not work to the satisfaction of all parties. As early as December 1994 at a security conference in Budapest, the-then Russian president, Boris Yeltsin, talked of a ‘cold peace’.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter, sense of isolation only intensified, with the-then American president, Bill Clinton, announcing an era of NATO enlargement. This opportunity was eagerly seized by most of the former communist countries in Eastern Europe and even some former Soviet states. NATO activism in the various struggles in the former Yugoslavia only intensified the growing popular and elite alienation between Russia and the Atlantic security system. After Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, he tried to find a way of overcoming the growing confrontation between Russia and western nations. However, a series of events – America’s unilateral abrogation of the ABM treaty, the invasion of Iraq, continued NATO enlargement up to Russia’s borders and the promise of ultimate membership to Georgia and Ukraine, plans to deploy a ballistic missile defence (BMD) in Eastern Europe, and what was perceived to be a revisionist programme of regime change – turned the gulf between Russia and the Atlantic system into a chasm<sup>43</sup>. After the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union, when Boris Yeltsin took over power in Russian Federation, he termed the post cold war situation in the world as cold peace.

Four key processes determined the onset of the cold peace and its subsequent evolution into the Little Cold War. The first development was the Malta Summit of Dec.1989 which brought

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<sup>42</sup> . Richard Sakwa, Reflections on the post cold war order, Jadavpur Journal of International Relations, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> . Ibid.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and President George H. W. Bush were together on two ships to decide the fate of Europe. The absence of a European leader is indicative of the way that Europe failed to gain a substantive independent political subjectivity in the post-Cold War. Second, the Malta agreements built on the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975, and these were codified in November 1990 in the 'Charter of Paris for a New Europe'. The third determining factor maintaining cold peace and its ultimate degeneration into the Little Cold War is the failure of Europe to assume an independent political subjectivity. Addressing the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989, Gorbachev outlined his idea for a 'Common European political community. The fourth factor is the failure to find an appropriate way for Russia and its neighbours to interact with a deeper sense of cordiality.

## **0.2 Motivations behind Russia's aggression on Ukraine**

Russia right from 2014 was determined to protect the people of eastern parts of Ukraine from bullying and genocide by the Ukrainian government. Putin since the beginning of his second tenure often spoke of preventing NATO to gain a foothold in Ukraine. Once Kyiv became a member of NATO then its forces would always be a security threat to Moscow by arriving at the very borders of Russia. Moscow naturally wanted to ensure Ukraine's neutral status. As told by Paul Kirby in the BBC News dated 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2022, it was high on the agenda of Putin to topple the government of Ukraine's elected president Volodymyr Zelensky. Russian troops made two attempts to storm the presidential compound in Kiev.

Russian claims of Ukrainian Nazis committing genocide never added up, but Russian state-run news agency Ria Novosti explained that "denazification is inevitably also de-Ukrainisation" - in effect, erasing the modern state of Ukraine.

For many past decades, the Russia has denied Ukraine its own statehood on this basic pretext that Ukrainians and Russians were the same people right from the late 9th Century.

The main goal of President Putin soon after the launch of the attack on Ukraine was the "liberation of Donbas" - broadly referring to Ukraine's two industrial regions in the east of Luhansk and Donetsk. Forced into further retreats from Kharkiv in the north-east and Kherson in the south, that aim remains unchanged, but it has shown little success in achieving it. With some reverses on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine, Putin wanted to annex four Ukrainian provinces by September 2022. To bolster his depleted forces the Russian leader announced Russia's first mobilization of 300,000 reservists. A war of attrition is now taking

place along an active front line of 850km (530 miles) and Russian victories are small and rare. What was meant to be a quick operation is now a protracted war that Western leaders are determined that Ukraine should win. Another reason Putin repeatedly emphasizes in Moscow's aggression over Kyiv is that Russia is fighting to defend its "historical frontiers" and "rebuild peaceful life in Donbas region and Novorossiya in Eastern Ukraine.

A clear analysis should also be made concerning the progress of events during the year-long war. To its advantage, Russia has made some strategic gains such as a land bridge has been established from Russia's border to Crimea which was annexed by Moscow illegally in 2014. He has spoken of the capture of this territory, which includes the cities of Mariupol and Melitopol. The Sea of Azov, inside the Kerch Strait, "has now become Russia's internal sea". Putin watchers believe that he would seek to extend control of the four regions that he has already declared to be part of Russia, not just in Donbas, but the key Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia. Moscow could extend mobilisation and drag out the war. Russia is a nuclear power and he has indicated that he would be prepared, if necessary, to use nuclear weapons to protect Russia and cling on to occupied Ukrainian land.

On the darker side, beyond seizing a territorial corridor to Crimea, Russia's bloody, unprovoked war has been a disaster for itself. So far, it has achieved little more than exposing the brutality and inadequacy of the Russian military. While cities such as Mariupol and Kharkiv have been ravaged, details of unimaginable war crimes have happened against civilians in Bucha, near Kyiv and Russian forces has been accused of committing genocide there and burying the corpses. Mass graves were dug out later by Ukrainian forces when they managed to reach there and rescue the town.

Kyiv believes Russia is also seeking to depose the pro-European government in Moldova, where Russian troops are based in the breakaway region of Transnistria bordering Ukraine. Regarding damage to Putin's morale, he has sought to distance himself from military failures, but his authority, at least outside Russia, has been kept a top secret.

At home, Russia's economy on the surface appears to have tarnished badly after a series of Western sanctions have been waged. Its budget deficit has soared and oil and gas revenue has fallen dramatically. Any attempt to gauge Putin's popularity is fraught with difficulty.

Dissent in Russia is highly risky, with jail sentences handed out for anyone spreading "fake news" about the Russian military. Those opposing Russia's leadership have either fled or, as with main opposition figure Alexei Navalny, been thrown into prison.

Ukraine's shift to the west has been an underlying stimulating factor behind the Russian aggression. It is seen in the way that the seeds of this war were sown in 2013, when Moscow persuaded Ukraine's pro-Russian leader to scrap a planned pact with the European Union, prompting protests that ultimately brought him down and led to Russia seizing Crimea and staging a land-grab in the east. After four months into Russia's 2022 invasion, the EU granted Ukraine candidate status to the regional grouping and now Kyiv has been continuously pushing to be accepted as a full member as soon as it can.

Ukraine also wants to enter NATO's orbit which Putin is desperately trying to prevent. Ukraine even reportedly agreed before the war to sign a provisional deal with Russia to stay out of NATO. President Zelensky has also offered to maintain Ukraine as a non-aligned, non-nuclear state.

There is no possibility of the end of the war with Russia. President Zelensky and his forces are still determined to fight back the Russian troops and save their land. Ukraine's position is that before any negotiation of peace with Moscow, the Russian troops must pull back beyond Ukraine's internationally recognised borders. It is backed by two UN resolutions, passed inspite of abstentions by some major emerging powers like China, India and Saudi Arabia. China is looking for a role in securing a political settlement, but its position is probably more leaning towards Russia which is a steep challenge to a sincere effort by Beijing.

Regarding the questions on NATO's involvement in the war, its member states have increasingly sent Ukraine air defence systems to protect its cities, as well as missile systems, artillery and drones that helped turn the tide against Russia's invasion. Hence it still has no direct involvement in the war and has no troops on the ground. Nato's expansion comes as a response to the Russian threat - Sweden and Finland had applied to join because of the invasion and Helsinki has got a formal entry to NATO now.

There is a strong likelihood of President Putin to extend mobilisation and drag out the war. Russia is a nuclear power and he has indicated he would be prepared, if necessary, to use nuclear weapons to protect Russia and cling on to occupied Ukrainian land.

Blaming NATO's expansion eastwards is a Russian narrative that has gained some ground in Europe. Before the war, President Putin has demanded that NATO turn the clock back to 1997 and remove its forces and military infrastructure from Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Even the erstwhile Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev more or less supported Putin's stand on preventing any eastward expansion of NATO. The military organisation maintains it never intended to deploy combat troops on its eastern flank, until it was forced to bolster its military readiness when Russia annexed Crimea illegally in 2014.

### **0.3 Ukrainian refugee crisis and its adverse impact on small neighbouring states of Europe:**

An ongoing refugee crisis began in Europe in late February 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Over 8.1 million refugees fleeing Ukraine have been recorded across Europe,<sup>44</sup> while an estimated 8 million others had been displaced within the country by late May 2022.<sup>45</sup>

Access to housing is a major challenge, but so is finding employment and child care. Some organizations also say donations and support are way down. Some volunteers, stressed by energy bills and unprepared for the length of the war, are unable to keep housing Ukrainian guests.<sup>46</sup>

According to the UNHCR, dated Oct 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, in October 2022 the U.N. listed 7.6 million Ukrainian refugees across Europe, including 2.85 million in Russia—many of the latter were sent there by Russian occupiers and were subjected to a “filtration” process with credible reports of war crimes emerging, including evidence of executions and torture. Some 4.2 million Ukrainian refugees have registered for the EU's temporary protection scheme or other national programs. A further 3.1 million had returned to Ukraine as of June 2022 when the U.N. also noted 6.9 million internally displaced peoples.<sup>1</sup> In all, nearly one-third of Ukrainians have been displaced. A further 13 million are stranded within Ukraine due to fighting, impassable routes, or lack of resources to move. According to Partner - Strategies for Stability most refugees are now in wealthier EU countries after first crossing into neighboring Poland (5.4 million), Hungary (1.2 million), Romania (1 million), Slovakia (690,000), and Moldova (573,000). They

<sup>44</sup> "[Refugees fleeing Ukraine \(since 24 February 2022\)](#)". UNHCR. 2022. [Archived](#) from the original on 10 March 2022. Retrieved 3 October 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Humanitarian impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Wikipedia

<sup>46</sup> Report in the Guardian, dated. 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2023.

are constrained to do useful and necessary work but at low wages. Refugees face the problem of shelter, food and lack of employment. Refugees are exempted from the rights that are given by the state to its people like enjoying the right of minimum standard of living and security.

Approximately one-quarter of the country's total population had left their homes in Ukraine by 20 March.<sup>47</sup> 90% of Ukrainian refugees are women and children, while most Ukrainian men age 18 to 60 are banned from leaving the country.<sup>48</sup> By 24th March, more than half of all children in Ukraine had left their homes, of whom a quarter had left the country.<sup>49</sup> The invasion caused Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II and its aftermath, is the first of its kind in Europe since the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, as well as the fourth largest refugee crisis in history<sup>50</sup>, and is the largest refugee crisis of the 21st century, with the highest refugee flight rate globally..<sup>51</sup>

The vast majority of refugees initially entered neighbouring countries to the west of Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova). Around 3 million people then moved further west to other European countries.<sup>52</sup> As of 18 October 2022, according to UNHCR data, the countries receiving the largest numbers of Ukrainians were Russia (2.77 million), Poland (1.5 million), Germany (1 million) and the Czech Republic (0.5 million),<sup>53</sup> As of September 2022, Human Rights Watch documented that Ukrainian civilians were being forcibly transferred to Russia.<sup>54</sup> The UN Human Rights Office stated.

The United States Department of State estimated that at least 900,000 Ukrainian citizens have been forcibly relocated to Russia. More than 4.5 million Ukrainians have returned to Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion. European Union (EU) countries bordering Ukraine have allowed entry to all Ukrainian refugees,<sup>55</sup> and the EU has invoked the Temporary Protection

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<sup>47</sup> Ramsay, George (21 March 2022). "[A quarter of Ukrainians have fled their homes. Here's where they've gone](#)". CNN. Archived from the original on 21 March 2022. Retrieved 21 March 2022.

<sup>48</sup> . "[More than 4.4m Ukrainians flee war, UN says](#)". The Guardian. 9 April 2022. Retrieved 12 April 2022.

<sup>49</sup> "[UNICEF: more than half of children in Ukraine were forced to leave their homes](#)". Meduza (in Russian). 24 March 2022. Retrieved 3 April 2022.

<sup>50</sup> . "[Protecting Ukrainian refugees: What can we learn from the response to Kosovo in the 90s?](#)". 7 March 2022. Archived from the original on 7 March 2022. Retrieved 9 March 2022.

<sup>51</sup> . Beaumont, Peter (6 March 2022). "[Ukraine has fastest-growing refugee crisis since second world war, says UN](#)". The Guardian. Archived from the original on 9 March 2022. Retrieved 8 March 2022.

<sup>52</sup> "[Waves of Ukrainian Refugees Overwhelm Poland](#)". BusinessHala. 10 March 2022. Archived from the original on 9 March 2022. Retrieved 15 March 2022.

<sup>53</sup> "[Refugees fleeing Ukraine \(since 24 February 2022\)](#)". UNHCR. 2022. Archived from the original on 10 March 2022. Retrieved 3 October 2022.

<sup>54</sup> "[Forcible Transfer of Ukrainians to Russia](#)". Human Rights Watch. 1 September 2022. Retrieved 11 September 2022.

<sup>55</sup> "[Information for people fleeing the war in Ukraine](#)". European Commission. Archived from the original on 17 March 2022. Retrieved 18 March 2022.

Directive which grants Ukrainians the right to stay, work, and study in any European Union member state for an initial period of one year.<sup>56</sup> Some non-European and Romani people have reported ethnic discrimination at the border. A year after Russia's invasion, Ukraine is suffering a catastrophic humanitarian crisis with a voley of challenges connected to their safe living and basic requirements. The outflow of millions of refugees has placed a strain on neighboring countries.

Since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than eight million people have fled the country, triggering Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Nearby countries have taken in millions of displaced people, while international organizations have sent tens of billions of dollars in aid. But as the conflict enters its second year with no end in sight, experts worry that host countries are growing fatigued.

#### **0.4 Energy Crisis in Ukraine:-**

The economic disruption caused by the war in Ukraine has amplified calls for an accelerated energy transition. A shift that would move countries away from highly polluting fuels, often supplied by only a handful of major producers, to sources of low carbon energy such as renewable energy like solar and even nuclear. The Russia–Ukraine war has exacerbated an energy crisis that directly affects the costs of heating, cooling, lighting and mobility, and indirectly pushed up the costs of other goods and services throughout global supply chains. The price of fuels in the EU has risen as a consequence of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine, which has also led to concerns related to the security of energy supply. Russia's decision to suspend gas deliveries to several EU member states has further impacted the situation.

There was a staggering impact of the Ukraine war on global energy prices. Immediately following the invasion, energy prices shot up worldwide, reaching a 20% increase for five months straight.

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<sup>56</sup> ["Ukraine: Council unanimously introduces temporary protection for persons fleeing the war".](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/Archived/2022/03/18/Ukraine-Council-unanimously-introduces-temporary-protection-for-persons-fleeing-the-war/) [www.consilium.europa.eu. Archived](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/Archived/2022/03/18/Ukraine-Council-unanimously-introduces-temporary-protection-for-persons-fleeing-the-war/) from the original on 19 March 2022. Retrieved 18 March 2022.

The primary cause of energy crisis in Ukraine and its ripple effects in Europe and the world over has been that Russia has choked off the supplies of cheap natural gas that the continent depended on for years to run factories, generate electricity and heat homes. The war between Russia and Ukraine led to alteration in the trade equations between almost all the countries as the European Union and the West imposed sanctions on oil exports from Russia, the second-largest exporter of crude oil. Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine has roiled the markets and geopolitics of energy, driving oil and gas prices to their highest levels in nearly a decade and forcing many countries to reconsider their energy supplies. Together, Russia and Ukraine export nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley, more than 70% of its sunflower oil and are big suppliers of corn. Russia is the top global fertilizer producer.<sup>57</sup>

## **0.5 Global Food Crisis due to the Russian Aggression:-**

Together, Russia and Ukraine export nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley, more than 70% of its sunflower oil and are big suppliers of corn. Russia is the top global fertilizer producer. Disruptions in food shipments after the Russian invasion of Ukraine are pushing up prices of food staples in Africa.

Locals used to wait in line for bread, candles and food provided by aid workers as there was no electricity in Balakliia, liberated by Ukrainian Armed Forces, amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in Kharkiv region, Ukraine September 21, 2022.

According to Reuters report dated Sep 30, 2022, the Ukraine war's disruptions to grain and fertilizer flows have prompted the worst food security crisis since at least the one following the 2007-2008 global financial meltdown, with some 345 million people now facing life-threatening shortages, the International Monetary Fund said on Friday.

A new IMF research paper estimates that the 48 countries most exposed to food shortages face a combined increase in their import bills of \$9 billion in 2022 and 2023 due to the sudden jump in food and fertilizer prices caused by Russia's invasion. This will erode reserves for many

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<sup>57</sup> . Together, Russia and Ukraine export nearly a third of the world's wheat and barley, more than 70% of its sunflower oil and are big suppliers of corn. Russia is the top global fertilizer producer.

fragile and conflict-affected states that already face balance-of-payments problems after a grinding pandemic and rising energy costs, the IMF said.

The highly exposed countries need as much as \$7 billion to help the poorest households cope," said the IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva and other IMF officials said in a blog posting. The war has worsened a food crisis that has been growing since 2018, due partly to the increasing frequency and severity of climate shocks and regional conflicts. The Fund called for a rapid increase in humanitarian assistance through the World Food Programme and other organizations as well as targeted fiscal measures in affected countries to aid the poor. But it said governments needed to prioritize fighting inflation. The war has worsened a food crisis that has been growing since 2018, due partly to the increasing frequency and severity of climate shocks and regional conflicts, they said. The Fund called for a rapid increase in humanitarian assistance through the World Food Programme and other organizations as well as targeted fiscal measures in affected countries to aid the poor. But it said governments needed to prioritize fighting inflation. The Fund also called for eliminating food export bans and other protectionist measures, citing World Bank research that these account for as much as 9% of the world wheat price increase. Improved crop production and distribution, including through increased trade finance, is also vital to addressing the current food price shock, the Fund said. It added that investments in climate-resilient agriculture, water management and crop insurance are also needed to cope with drought and other unpredictable climate events.

The new research and recommendations were released as the IMF's Executive Board approved increased year-long emergency financing access through a new food shock window for the most vulnerable countries. Global food prices broke a record last year. The Food Price Index from the United Nations rose above its previous high in 2011 as Russia's war in Ukraine, the pandemic and extreme weather pushed up the price of agricultural products. The disruption to exports of cereals and vegetable oils from war in Ukraine finished off the spike in 2022, according to the report. Remains of a rocket lies in field of sunflowers, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, near the village of Dolyna in Kharkiv region. While Ukraine is guaranteed to have sufficient grain reserves for the domestic market, the decreased export will add uncertainty to the global markets and put pressure on global food availability, leading to rising prices and food inflation globally and significantly decreasing food availability and access in many countries of the world. The Food Price Index declined during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, which reflected uncertainties faced by commodity markets, according

to the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organization's 2022 World Food and Agriculture Report. However, between May 2020 and March 2022, the index surged to its highest-ever value at 159.7 points.

However, Joseph Glauber, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute at Washington DC pointed out that only about 25% of the food prices at the grocery store are directly attributable to the underlying commodity price, meaning that if the price of corn goes up, then so will the cost of feeding the chickens and pigs that are later slaughtered for meat or the cows that produce milk that is later sent to the grocery store.

The surge was sparked more by the pandemic's effect on the supply chains before rising in conjunction with the rebound in activity and demand experienced in 2021, according to the report. The disruption to exports of cereals and vegetable oils from war in Ukraine finished off the spike in 2022, according to the report.

## **0.6. Conclusion:**

Based on the analysis of the emerging world order in the backdrop and consequences of the Russo- Ukrainian war, following scenario can be considered:-

First, some external world powers have played a larger than life role in reshaping the international situation despite the conflict between two nations. These are the US, European Union, NATO, Britain, France, Germany and even China. The western nations and NATO are supporting the cause of Ukraine and containing Russian aggression while China directly supports Russia's aggression and voting in support of it in the United Nations Security Council resolutions. Besides it has tried to play the role of a mediator between the two warring nations. However by suggesting certain conditions to Ukraine for agreeing to part with the areas captured by Russia during 2014 and in 2022.

Second, the international system is witnessing a reemergence of a balance of power approach in a new format which was though prevalent in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries but had disappeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The balance of power has emerged in the international system now between the western world led by the US as a leading power of NATO and Russia on the other side. It

seems to be a proxy war between these two forces rather than Ukraine and Russia where the former has become a strategic pawn in the game of this balance of power model.

Third, in the new world order the global actors are clearly going to take positions on a gamut of other new issues such as climate change, global terror, food security, refugee problem, conflicts over energy and water. These are mainly environmental imbalance and disasters in various parts of the world due to global warming by earthquakes, excess rainfall and untimely flooding, forest fires and loss of biodiversity in the Amazon belt and large parts of the world. energy crisis though aggravated by the conflict but affecting every continent of the world now, food crisis affecting Europe and equally other continents such as the West Asian region like Yemen and many African nations. Also seen is the refugee crisis which has massively spread throughout Europe. It has become a big pressure for several European nations in accommodating and saving the lives of more than 6 million of humanity from Ukraine.

Fourth, there is an emergence of China as a dominant global power by throwing new challenges to the American dominance. It has been making serious efforts to annex Taiwan over frequent air incursions across the sea over Taiwan's air space through its combat aircrafts and even naval incursions in the Taiwanese waters.

Fifth, in the present world order in order to tackle the major global issues like climate change, food security, energy crisis, refugee problems, multilateralism should be the order of the day. It is a known fact that the lone superpower ie the US is not in a position to substantially manage these new challenges which could spearhead the nations of the world towards a global disorder.

Sixth, the QUAD is in a crisis mainly found due to India's reluctance and gradual distancing from openly voicing protest against the Russian aggression on Ukraine due to apprehensions and some fear of a Russian strategic boycott in case of outright support to Ukraine which would be inimical to India's interests in many ways. Many multilateral institutions created for managing trans- regional issues have not been very effective in the recent period and even after the war like G-7, BRICS, SCO have not played any effective role to tackle these trans regional issues facing humankind.

Seventh, three leaders have been the cynosure of attention and popularity, whether positively or negatively, in the midst of the world order after the global conundrum and economic turmoil created by the war. They are Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, US President Joe Biden

and the Russian President Vladimir Putin. The first one is clinging on and bravely facing with his army all odds to defend his nation and garnering international support in the process mainly from European nations throughout the continent. The second one as the leader of the strategically most powerful nation of the world is spearheading the NATO'S efforts of standing behind Ukraine and helping it with military weapons and sophisticated arsenal to defend against Russian military might. The third as the main person behind the aggression on Ukraine is seen in the wrong side of humanity now being branded as a war criminal by many scholars and citizens all over the world. He is said to be devastating the economy and happiness of his own country Russia and he is being strongly deplored by most of his own countrymen due to rampant squander of the country's wealth in this aggression leading the way towards Russia's economic devastation and international boycott specially by the EU.

Eighth, there have been stark possibilities of a nuclear disaster in Ukraine due to blasts on major nuclear power plants in the nation specially the Zapporrhizia plant and some others in central and northern Ukraine which could lead to severe danger to human lives and likely to distort the world order.

Last Putin's dream of rebuilding former Soviet empire and annexation of former Soviet republics is a pipe dream which is not feasible in the present context criticized heavily as antithetical to international law, world peace and global norms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world order.

## **Exploring the Politics of Sexualities and Pink Migrations among Gorkhas in North-Eastern India**

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Social imaginaries about the ‘Bir Gorkha’ have been strongly linked to the Gorkha’s ascent in Nepal under King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769. These social imaginaries have also been shaped by colonial military ideas that permeated post-colonial India. The Militarised Masculinities of Gorkha refer to ‘Bir Gorkha’ and ‘Gorkha Cheli Beti’, but never a Queer Gorkha. The ‘Gorkha’ makes queerness or sexual ambivalence an oxymoron. This article unravels the many strands of a Militarised Masculine Gorkha identity and questions masculinity and queerness. It seeks to reveal Gorkha sexual ambiguity circumventions, constrictions, and contortions after the Supreme Court of India’s decriminalization of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The paper weaves ethno-narratives of military and other services among sexually ambiguous Nepali/Gorkha males in India’s Northeast. Sexually ambivalent Gorkhas live at the intersections of subjectivities and worry about identifying, defending, and negotiating their sexuality and belonging. ‘Pink Migration’ inside India to metropolitan centres sheds light on the practice of ‘leaving ‘Home’ for a newer ‘Home’. The ambivalent Gorkha negotiates these spaces/places through livelihood prospects, a Pink economy/Pink market for skills, and anonymity to express choices and desires. Urban spaces support a visible queer movement and foster community and networking. Sexually ambivalent people constantly seek escapes from family and region.

**Keywords:** Social Imaginaries, Military sensibilities, Ambiguous Sexualities, Pink Migration, Queerness, Masculinities, Gorkhas, Northeast India

## I

### **Social Imaginaries, Military Sensibilities and Bir Gorkha**

The social imaginaries surrounding the ‘Bir Gorkha’ have been closely intertwined with the rise of the Gorkha in Nepal during the reign of King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769. These imaginaries have also been influenced by the military sensibilities that were inherited from the colonial era and carried over into the post-colonial state in India as ‘shared heritages’ (Chakraborty 2017a, 2017b). As a result, there has been a strong focus on regimentation and control of military masculinities among the Gorkha in South Asia and other regions. The Gorkha community has been consistently favoured in terms of recruitment in the Indian Army, a practice that has persisted from colonial times to the present day. This pattern of outmigration has been extensively documented by various scholars (Shakespear, 1927 (1977); Tyagi, 1974; Sen, 1977; English, 1983; Palit, 1984; Pradhan, 1991; Muktan, 2003; Sinha & Subba, (Ed) 2003). The social imaginaries surrounding the mercenaries known as ‘Mughlan’ and ‘Lahurey’ still influence the perception of the fearless and unbeatable warrior. For example, the Gorkhas have a rich history of serving in various armies, including the Mughal Army, Ranjit Singh’s forces, and the British armies stationed in and around Lahore. Throughout history, the Gorkhas and other Nepali-speaking people in South Asia have been associated with the image of a “martial race.” This perception has shaped their own understanding of themselves as a people with a strong military tradition, both in terms of their history and their social and cultural identity (Chakraborty, 2017a, 2017b). It is worth noting that the concept of the sepoy and the idea of security are intricately intertwined with the social imaginaries in motion (Chakraborty, 2018). One of my respondents Rajiv Khambu humorously said, ‘Those who fail to become *seploys* (an army job) seek solace in becoming security guards (security personnel)’.<sup>58</sup>

## II

### **Methodological and Conceptual Moorings**

A hybrid methodology (Caracelli & Greene [Ed.] 1997; Teddlie & Tashakkori in Tashakkori & Teddlie [Ed.], 2003, 3-50; Brannen [Ed.], 1992; Creswell, 2003; Malhotra & Shapiro, 1998) or ‘scavenger methodology’(Halberstam, 1998, 2005; Sedgwick, 1990, 1993, 2003) was

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<sup>58</sup> *Informal interview and discussion*, Rajiv Khambu (former security guard at a mall in Dubai), Mirik. 8 November, 2013.

adopted keeping in mind the messiness of social life, and the place of the research in (re)creating it. Snowball sampling was used to contact sixty different informants, and the study is based on the ethnographic accounts of those individuals. The sample comprised a range of native Nepali-speaking men (sexually ambivalent, sexually ambiguous [top, versatile, bottom<sup>59</sup>], polyamorous, single, never married, married, and divorced) in the 15-55 age group who have migrated from different regions of northeast India and are residing in major cities and urban centres (within India and also abroad) for work or studies. The individuals who provided the information were employed in a variety of professions, including the military, the police, the teaching profession, the fashion industry, photography, the beauty industry, the hotel industry, including spas, the banking and corporate sector, and students. Alterations have been made to the initial names of those who responded. Although the second names were maintained in a few instances, this was not done in order to “out” the respondent but rather to demonstrate the complex caste, ethnic, religious, and regional representations that were present in the sample.

In the course of the research, there were a number of personal interviews and lengthy conversations that were carried out in stages to accommodate the interviewer’s and interviewee’s schedules and requirements between the years 2011 and 2021. The information was obtained in a piecemeal fashion throughout the course of the decade. As a study on queer issues, a “queer methodology” was adopted without the compulsions of academic or disciplinary coherence (Halberstam, 1998) to weave the discourses in this study. This methodology combines methodologies that are frequently portrayed as being in opposition to each other.

I refer to sexual behaviour as ‘sexuality’, focusing on the actions individuals engage in. Sexual desire encompasses the thoughts and fantasies that individuals have about their desires and actions. There is a distinction between the term ‘sexual’ and the concept of gender. ‘Sexual’ refers to the anatomical and reproductive differences that individuals are born with or develop later on. In addition, the concept of ‘gender’ pertains to the cultural interpretations, social and psychological roles, and personality characteristics linked to distinctions in biological sex. For an extended period, the law in India has perpetuated and mandated the creation of a binary classification of sexes as male and female, along with corresponding gender roles as masculine and feminine. I share Serena Nanda’s perspective that understanding Hijras solely through the

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<sup>59</sup> These are the different stylization of self based on role play during sexual encounters. Top= the penetrator, more masculine. Bottom= the penetrated, less masculine, more feminine/female-like. Versatile= able to flip between the former two categories.

lens of sex/gender binaries oversimplifies the complexities of their identities. The Hijras, often referred to as the ‘third sex’ or ‘neither men nor women,’ challenge societal notions of sex and gender by establishing their own unique binary division, as observed by Nanda (1990, 13-23). For this study, I refer to LGBTQIA as the ambivalent sexualities. They are marked by ambivalence precisely because of the coexistence of opposing contradictory emotions at play. This ambivalence is both internal and external. For instance, the non-agreeability of the *hijra* across South Asia to be bracketed and boxed into the square cage of ‘transgender’, ‘transsexual’, and other imported nomenclatures from the West can be treated as external ambivalence in the context of South Asia. While the non-acceptance of binaries such as ‘top-bottom’ in the context of male-male sexual preferences/inclinations can be treated as internal ambivalence. These conceptual and theoretical non-agreements exemplify the ambivalence of sexualities as performed in the lifeworld across South Asia.

I refer to the internal ambivalence and non-acceptance of defining sexual roles among the MIM (men interested in men) as ambiguous sexualities. Several individuals within the MIM were hesitant to label themselves as gay, queer, or homosexual. However, they openly discussed their involvement in sexual activities as the ‘top’, taking on dominant or heterosexual roles. Sexual orientations that were not easily identifiable were often concealed by individuals in their daily routines, presenting themselves as males who conform to traditional gender norms. In my discussions in this paper, I prefer to use MIM instead of the widely accepted MSM (men having sex with men). Through my experiences with individuals in this particular group, I noticed their preference for being referred to as MIM. The discomfort was particularly felt by men who only engaged in activities such as kissing, touching, licking, sucking nipples, mutual body massage, mutual masturbation, and oral sex. These men also sought solace in the company of other men, even if it did not involve physical intimacy. Curiously, a majority of the individuals I interviewed expressed the view that activities involving non-anal penetrative sex did not qualify as “sex.” Thus, the understanding of ‘sex’ within this particular group differed from the theoretical and socially constructed definitions influenced by Western ideas (specifically European/North American/global North) and the officially/legally recognised definitions in India.

### III

#### **Queerness and Military Masculinities: Post-decriminalisation of Section 377**

The military sensibilities passed down from the colonial era to the post-colonial state in India have strongly focused on regimentation and control. The visibility of queerness has been

obscured by the influence of masculinities. Traditional notions of the self are deeply ingrained in the community's beliefs about what is sacred and what is profane. Within the framework of Gorkha's militarised masculinities, it is a common occurrence to encounter references to the 'Bir Gorkha' (courageous Gorkha men) and the 'Gorkha Cheli Beti' (Gorkha daughters), yet the presence of a 'queer Gorkha' is noticeably absent from these discussions. The military sensibilities passed down from the colonial era to the post-colonial state in India have strongly focused on regimentation and control. The visibility of queerness has been obscured by the dominance of masculinities. In the communities' cosmological ideas of sacred and profane, patriarchal-driven images of the 'self' are deeply ingrained. Within the framework of Gorkha's militarised masculinities, it is a common occurrence to encounter references to the 'Bir Gorkha' (courageous Gorkha men) and 'Gorkha Cheli Beti' (Gorkha daughters), yet the presence of a 'queer Gorkha' is noticeably absent from these discussions. In the context of the Gorkha community, the concept of queerness or ambivalence in sexualities may be seen as contradictory- an oxymoron.<sup>60</sup> Few respondents opined that one could be a brave Gorkha, one could be a singing Gorkha, one could be a dancing Gorkha, one could be an intellectual Gorkha but to be a homosexual Gorkha and proudly display one's sexual preference was inviting social ostracisation, ridicule and mockery.<sup>61</sup> Respondents agreed that queerness in any degree was seen as unbecoming in a community that constructs its social imageries on military masculinities.<sup>62</sup>

Military Masculinities evolved in the cantonment barrack lives of the sepoys during the colonial raj (Wald, 2014) and continues to linger and shape masculinities in the military and occlude queerness. In this section I attempt to unravel the circumvents, constrictions and contortions of sexual ambiguity among the Gorkha by taking in consideration the post decriminalisation of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) by the Supreme Court of India.<sup>63</sup> A soldier's sexual orientation would not hinder, nor would it mean a guaranteed free

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<sup>60</sup>Lokesh Sharma. (36 years, M, versatile (hereafter versa.); Airlines based in Abu Dhabi, UAE; Home Town: Darjeeling West Bengal) *Personal Interview*, 17 October, 2013.

<sup>61</sup>*Personal Interview(s)*. Sandeep Limbu. (28 years, M, Top; Call-Centre based in Bangalore; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram) 4 April, 2011; Sanskar Chettri. (29 years, M, bottom (hereafter bot.); Airlines based in Bagdogra; Home Town: Mirik, West Bengal) 3 June, 2013; James Magar. (32 years, M, bot.; School teacher based in Siliguri; Home Town: Kurseong, West Bengal) 21 March, 2011.

<sup>62</sup>*Personal Interview(s)*. Mandeep Pakhrin. (28 years, M, versa.; Assistant Professor based in Kolkata; Home Town: Darjeeling (West Bengal) 8 November, 2019; Victor BK. (30 years, M, bisexual (hereafter bi.)-top; School teacher based in Guwahati; Home Town: Dibrugarh, Assam) 10 March, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> 6 September, 2018 was a memorable day in Indian history. It was the day when Section 377 of the IPC was declared unconstitutional, in so far as it criminalised homosexual acts between two consenting adults. While delivering the verdict, the Supreme Court had said that Section 377 was a marred blot upon a homosexual person's right to equality, guaranteed under Article 14 of the constitution. It also said that sexual orientation could well be considered an element of privacy, and thus Section 377 was an invasion of the right to privacy of homosexuals.

pass to indulge in gay sex in the Army. Respondents shared that though the military lives in the barracks of the cantonments were extremely militarized spaces it was not uncommon to see or hear of homo-emotional bonding among the men in these cantonments.<sup>64</sup> Respondents also said that such bonding would often be labeled as ‘yaar’ (lit., buddy), ‘jodidaar’ (lit., partner) and at times also showcased as examples of bromance to be emulated among ranks and file in the military or the civilian police.<sup>65</sup>

I locate the gender turn (GT)<sup>66</sup> in India more to the ripples of the NALSA judgement. The Supreme Court of India in *National Legal Services Authority vs Union of India* on 15 April, 2014 passed a progressive judgement recognising the fundamental and civil rights of the transgender person. The court ruled that transgender people should be treated as a third category of gender or as a socially and economically “backward” class (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020).

On 10 January, 2019, General Bipin Rawat, Chief of the Indian Army, was asked questions regarding the Supreme Court’s verdict on the Indian Army. His words echoed sentiments of the top brass in armies across the world.<sup>67</sup> Although the Army is not above the Supreme Court, a person enrolling in it would not be entitled to the same privileges as the general public.<sup>68</sup> The presence of homosexuals may bolster homophobic tensions amongst soldiers, thereby impacting the Army’s unity.<sup>69</sup>

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Privacy was declared an intrinsic element of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 of the constitution (*Justice K.S.Puttaswamy(Retd) vs Union Of India*).

<sup>64</sup>Personal Interview(s). Mahesh Rai. (34 years, M, bi-versa.; Assam Rifles; Home Town: Silchar, Assam) 11 March, 2020; Manoj Subba. (35 years, M, bi-versa.; Assam Rifles; Home Town: Churachanpur, Manipur) 11 March, 2020; Pankaj Lama. (30 years, M, bi-top; BSF; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) 16 December, 2020; Rajesh Chettri. (40 years, M, bi-top; BSF; Home Town: Kalimpong, West Bengal) 16 December, 2020.

<sup>65</sup>Personal Interview(s). Pirtam Lama. (29 years, M, bi-versa.; Indian Army; Home Town: Kathmandu, Nepal) 29 July, 2019; Manoj Bhatt. (28 years, M, bi-versa.; Indian Army; Home Town: Kathmandu, Nepal) 29 July, 2019.

<sup>66</sup>By ‘gender turn (GT)’ I mean the vocality and visibility demanded by the ambivalent sexualities across an array of urban spaces and the public spheres (both real and virtual) in India from the university campuses to public transport, sites of bonding and leisure, parks, museums, art galleries, art itself, fashion, memes, cinema, the creative realms and also institutional spaces which until 2014 were neatly hemmed and barricaded for those suffering from ‘gender discriminations’.

<sup>67</sup><https://www.dailyo.in/variety/general-rawat-doesnt-want-homosexuality-in-the-army-he-should-look-at-other-nations-that-have-allowed-it/story/1/28916.html> Accessed on 15 January, 2021

<sup>68</sup><https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/army-to-make-homosexuality-adultery-punishable-a-year-after-sc-judgment-1614536-2019-10-31> Accessed on 15 January, 2021

<sup>69</sup>Major General Nilendra Kumar, former Army Judge Advocate General (JAG), said, ‘The Army Act is a separate act altogether and homosexuality is an offence under Section 46, which deals with unbecoming conduct. The Supreme Court did not have the occasion to examine Section 46 of the Army Act or similar Sections in the Air Force and Navy Acts. Therefore, law is very much on the book and has not been tempered or amended by the Supreme Court.’ <https://www.theweek.in/theweek/cover/2018/09/14/army-act-anxiety.html> Accessed on 31 March 2022

I found myself pondering a thought-provoking question: in the wake of the decriminalisation of Section 377, would the sepoy now have the freedom to openly express their sexuality and sexual preferences? Is the coexistence of being Gorkha, being a sepoy, and being sexually ambivalent a paradox or a possibility? The ethnography of the sepoys geospatial locations conjured ambiguities and everyday interactions that could question and redefine the existing notions of stereotypes of gender and sexualities. Barrack lives were vibrant and oozing with life *yariyan* (lit., buddies), *laundebazi* (lit., seeking gay bonding, seeking male partners for sodomy), holding hands went side by side with controlled masculinities, and the evolution of an intensely homophobic/transphobic sepoy vocabulary.<sup>70</sup> For instance, the sexually ambiguous, much like the sexually ambivalent, were subject to effeminate slur in cantonments and nicknamed within their barracks as darling, *rani* (queen), *chamiya* (playful girl).<sup>71</sup> Respondents mentioned that one could observe accommodation and acceptance of ambivalence in the practice of young male sepoys dressing in women's attire and performing dances during festivals.<sup>72</sup> The everyday vocabulary in these militarised spaces also strongly conveyed the regulation of the male bodies and stereotypes of sexualities. For instance, the abuses from the seniors, or the JCOs during the morning parades/drill practices: '*Seedhe khade raho, ladkiyo ki tarah mat hilo*' ('Stand straight, do not sway like girls'), '*Matak matak ke kya chal rehe ho*' ('Why are you swaying your hips?'), '*Gand mar denge*' (I'll fuck your ass), '*Gandmarwana hai*' ('Want to get ass fucked?').<sup>73</sup>

Parkash Subba<sup>74</sup> from Ilam, Nepal and was serving in the Gorkha Rifles and posted in the north-east town of Dimapur, Nagaland, in October 2014, said that men in the cantonments had to navigate their sexualities carefully. Another respondent, Dinesh Rai of Kathmandu, Nepal, served the Indian Army and was posted in Coochbehar, West Bengal, in October 2014, said similar experiences of regimented sexualities.<sup>75</sup> Similar to Prakash and Dinesh, numerous young men from Nepal, whether single or married, are enlisted in the Indian Army. The longstanding friendly relationship between Nepal and India was established through the Indo-

<sup>70</sup>Personal Interview(s). Mahesh Subba. (34 years, M, bi-versa.; Indian Army; Home Town: Kathmandu, Nepal) 30 July, 2019; Rikesh Rana. (36 years, M, bi-versa.; Assam Rifles; Home Town: Kathmandu, Nepal) 30 July, 2019.

<sup>71</sup>Personal Interview(s). Trinath Kafley. (37 years, M, bi-versa.; BRTF; Home Town: Shillong, Meghalaya) 20 February, 2020; Yadav Jaisi. (41 years, M, bi-versa.; BRTF; Home Town: Shillong, Meghalaya) 20 February, 2020.

<sup>72</sup>Trinath Kafley. *Ibid.*; Yadav Jaisi. *Ibid.*; Mahesh Subba. *Op.cit.*

<sup>73</sup>Personal Interview(s). Dhondup Bhutia. (40 years, M, bi-top; West Bengal Police; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) 5 March, 2021; Shedup Tamang. (30 years, M, bi-top; West Bengal Police; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) 5 March, 2021.

<sup>74</sup>Informal Interview. Parkash Subba. New Jalpaiguri Railway Station, West Bengal, India. 17 October, 2014.

<sup>75</sup>Informal Interview. Dinesh Rai. New Jalpaiguri Railway Station, West Bengal, India. 17 October, 2014.

Nepal Treaty of 1950. The recruitment trend in the civilian police in north-eastern Indian states like Mizoram was still ongoing until the 1990s.<sup>76</sup> The ethnography of the narratives of the sepoys shed light on the ongoing control of sexualities, social imaginaries, and vernacular slurs within their ranks.

## IV

### **Being Gorkha in the North-east India: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow**

The northeast of India is characterised by apparent similarities amidst diverse differences. Alongside the various ethno-religio-linguistic differences within its population, there are notable disparities in rural-urban areas, social inequalities, and uneven human development across the states in the region (Chakraborty in Sharma, 2021). The common perceptions held by mainland Indians about the region are often centred around the tribes who have embraced Christianity. This has led to a sense of uniqueness and separation from mainland India among the people. The tribes of the region developed a sense of trust in the Christian missionaries. The Khasis were the pioneers among the tribes of the region, embracing Christianity as early as 1812–1813. Missionary activities began in the Naga Hills in the 1840s and later expanded to the Zo/Mizo/Lushai Hills in 1894–1895 (Fuchs 1973). During this period, the Zos/Mizos were a relatively late addition to the evangelical missions. Nevertheless, the Zo Hills have achieved the highest success rate in terms of mass proselytization. Recognising a fresh understanding of their own identity, heightened political awareness, early forms of nationalism, and the strengthening of ethnic ties within larger familial units, tribal communities aimed to distinguish themselves from the emerging powers held by the heartlanders.

The Nepali presence in the northeast has a rich historical background, and their contribution to the development of the region has been of utmost importance (Chakraborty and Chakraborty in Banerjee et. al, 2016). The politics of northeast India has been significantly shaped by the migration of individuals from different parts of the country. The establishment of the Gorkha community in Mizoram dates back to 1891. Nevertheless, they played a significant role in the region during the early interactions between the British and the ‘Kuki-Chin-Lushai tribes’. The territorial expansion of the Kuki and Chin-Lushais towards the south and southwest from Hakka, as well as their movement towards eastern Mizoram from the Tiddim Falam region of

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<sup>76</sup>Personal Interview(s): A.S. Chakraborty. Kolkata, West Bengal, India, 2009; L.B Chhetri. Aizawl, Mizoram, India, 2010; P. B. Chhetri. Siliguri, West Bengal, India, 2012; M. B. Subba. Siliguri, West Bengal, India, 2015.

Burma (Myanmar) in the early 19th century, resulted in a clash between these “wild tribes” and the colonial powers due to the gradual extension of British frontiers towards the northeast. The British devised a clever strategy to safeguard the frontier by creating fortified posts in the hills. Such a move would require the import of human resources, and the experience in Darjeeling and other areas led to Gorkhas being selected as the preferred workforce. In 1912, T. H. Lewin provided an explanation for the migrations of Gorkhas into the Zo Hills. He expressed admiration for the Gorkhas, who had played a crucial role in the expedition under Col. Macpherson. With permission, Lewin sought immigrants from Nepal to settle the undeveloped areas of his frontier. The British utilised comparable strategies even in the Zo Hills. The *Gallawalabs* portrayed the Zo hills as a place of abundant opportunities and appealing incentives, promising the Gorkha community the finest prospects (Chakraborty, 2008).

The expansion work at Aizawl and Lunglei in Mizoram, along with the establishment of administrative machinery, necessitated an increase in the number of immigrants. These immigrants, referred to as ‘the trusted Gorkhas’ by O. A. Chambers ([1899] 2005) and Col E. B. Elly ([1893] 1978), played a crucial role in the development process. The colonial administration system relied heavily on individuals to fulfil various roles such as dak-runners, chowkidars, peons, cart drivers, traders, masons, and more. Given the unfamiliarity of the local people with this type of work, it was deemed necessary to bring in migrant labour. The migrant Gorkhas bore some resemblance to the natives. Despite restrictions on settling outside designated areas, numerous Lushai chiefs were enthusiastic about welcoming the Gorkhas into their villages. They requested the Superintendent of Lushai Hills to allow the Gorkhas to live in their villages (Shakespear 1923; Pachuau 1990, cited in Sunar et al. 2000).

It is worth noting that Gorkhas have managed to integrate themselves into the local culture to some degree, as evidenced by their adoption of local customs and practices (Bareh 2001; Singh et al. 1995). However, it is important to recognise that they have also maintained their unique cultural identity. The Gorkhas in Mizoram have surpassed the barriers that others, such as the Vai (Indians) and the Burma mi (Poi, Burmese), have had to endure. The acknowledgment of Gorkhas as residents in Mizoram and their integration into the Zo/Mizo community is evident in the everyday expressions such as *sap hunlai* (from the colonial times), *Mizo angchiah* (just like the Mizo), *Zorilru a pu* (they think and feel like the Mizo) (Chakraborty, 2013). However, the host societies started to view the settler communities as a potential threat starting from the 1970s, leading to a questioning of their position in the region (Chakraborty and Chakraborty in Banerjee et. al, 2016).

Respondents of this study said that operative community structures and religiosity in these borderlands are intensely conservative though superficially marked by western overtones. So apparently the communities in these borderlands are intensely homophobic/transphobic and engage in regulating individual lives through community policing.<sup>77</sup> The queer has always been expurgated from the realms of ethnic constructions, nationalist discourses, and the like. All this geared strongly to make the queer ‘invisible’, and drive forward patriarchally driven images of the ‘self’, and inject images of ‘sacred and profane’ into the proselytised Zo/Mizo cosmology. Colonial encounters and the wave of proselytisation threw open the process ‘localisation of the Gospel’. The assimilation and retention of the chauvinistic traditional Zo practices and the Judeo-Christian notions of original sin and sexuality went hand in hand. Homosexuality was criminalised in 1909 through a statute (Order No. 3 of 1909. 10) issued by H.W.G. Cole, the then Lushai Hills superintendent.

In their zeal to build an ideal Zo Christian state, the churches and the nexus of patriarchy engage vociferously in controlling sexualities, especially ‘homosexuality’.<sup>78</sup> The overarching notion of ‘sin’ and sinful act inherited from the Biblical narratives of Sodom and Gomorrah continues to regulate the social imaginaries (Castoriadis, 1987; Zizek, 1991; Anderson, 1991; Shotter, 1993; Appadurai, 1996; Taylor, 2004) and vernacular slur among the *Zohnahthlak*. The abominable sin of sodomy (anal penetration) began to define the homosexual man (*tuai*) as *mawngkuahur* (Insatiable rectum).<sup>79</sup> Post decriminalising Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code by the Supreme Court of India, the churches and the nexus of patriarchy fisted began their policing regime in the ‘this worldly’ (or *khawvel*) activities through prohibition (*thiang lo*) in both the real and the digitally configured virtual spaces. Cyberspace opens the possibility of disengaging the constrictions in the physical spaces and setting free the Zo queer towards a *khawvel* (world) to way find survival, anonymity, and collective solidarity hinged on personal experiences of discrimination.<sup>80</sup> Similar are experiences in Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya,

<sup>77</sup>Personal Interview(s). RiteshGolay. (28 years, M, gay-versa.; Showroom based in Delhi; Home Town: Tezpur, Assam) 10 February, 2020; James Gurung. (28 years, M, gay-bot.; Hospitality service based in Gurgaon, Uttar Pradesh; Home Town: Shillong, Meghalaya) 10 February, 2020; James Rai. (44 years, M, bi-top.; Hospitality service based in Mumbai; Home Town: Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh) 10 February, 2020; Ruben Lepcha. (25 years, M, gay-bot.; Saloon/Hairstylist based in Siliguri, West Bengal; Home Town: Kalimpong, West Bengal) 25 August, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Rajesh Gurung (40 years, M, cot.; Call centre in Kolkata; Home Town: Lunglei, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 4 April, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel Ghatraj (25 years, M, top; Car Showroom in Kolkata; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 9 May, 2019.

<sup>80</sup>Bhupen Sharma (51 years, M, versa.; Doctor in Siliguri; Home Town: Aizawl, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 24February, 2014.

Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Sikkim.<sup>81</sup> The region is markedly rigidified in practices that silence the amplification of questions concerning sexualities and gender and codified homophobia and transphobia in the name of ethno-national aspirations hinged on religiosity.<sup>82</sup>

The ethno-narratives of the Nepali-speaking/Gorkha men in the military and other services in India's northeast shed light on the various challenges they faced. The body is transformed from being objectified as exotic or erotic to being derogatorily labelled as 'chinky'. It becomes a battleground for political struggle, reclamation, and resistance. Living at the crossroads of various subjectivities, the Gorkha individual grapples with ongoing uncertainties surrounding their sexuality and sense of belonging, leading to a constant state of anxiety. 'Leaving home' in search of a new 'home' becomes the indelible feature of the sexually ambivalent.<sup>83</sup>

## V

### **Finding *Gulabi Asmaan* (Pink Sky): *Chal Ghar Chale* (Let's Go Home)**

Leaving the region and seeking refuge in safer environments has become the everyday experience of the area. The concept of 'moving out' can be understood by examining the phenomenon known as *taan-neh* in the Nepali language. *Taan-neh* refers to the act of pulling someone with a magnetic effect, symbolising upward social mobility. 'Moving out' is often perceived as a form of rescue, where individuals are placed in a socially elevated position. 'Moving out' is a multifaceted endeavour that is often compared to 'coming out' in the realm of sexual identity politics. As previously mentioned, the region has experienced both push and pull factors for several decades. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of people moving to megacities in search of employment opportunities did not gain momentum until the rise of globalisation. 'Pink migration'<sup>84</sup> within India to the metropolitan centres provides interesting insights into the trend of 'leaving home' searching for a new 'home'. Cities become a gateway to survival,

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<sup>81</sup>Personal Interview(s). Manoj Sharma. (37 years, M, gay-top.; Airlines based in Delhi; Home Town: Shillong, Meghalaya) 20December, 2012; James Gurung. *Op.cit*

<sup>82</sup> James Rai. *Op.cit*; Ruben Lepcha. *Op.cit*.

<sup>83</sup> James Rai. *Op.cit*; Ruben Lepcha. *Op.cit*.

<sup>84</sup> Pink migration refers to the flight/migration of ambivalent sexualities from their traditional home settings where prejudice against sexual minority is high to elsewhere that is marginally safer. The relationship between sexuality and the decision to migrate is a severely understudied aspect of migration often assumed to be exclusively driven by income gaps between origin and destination countries. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/pink-migration-rising-tide-lgbt-migrants>. Accessed on 1 January 2021.

anonymity and a collective narrative of discrimination.<sup>85</sup> The queer Gorkha negotiates its space through livelihood opportunities—a pink economy/ market<sup>86</sup> for any acquired skills and a chance to freely express choices and desires under the garb of anonymity. Exploring the three key issues in the Pink economy/market - gender perspectives on the urban labour market, the role of cities in promoting social inclusivity, and the challenges of public policy with gender implications - this part of the discussion delves into the urban labour market with a focus on gender. With the rapid urbanisation happening across Asia, it's clear that gender roles are being significantly impacted. This has led to the emergence of new risks as people migrate in search of employment opportunities. In the context of inclusive growth, segmented labour markets (both regulated and unregulated) in Asia are driven by the necessity of providing decent work and productive employment opportunities for all individuals.

The Nepali-speaking (just like other ethnic communities) workforce from the northeastern borderlands has to negotiate numerous structural and socio-cultural hurdles in urban spaces.<sup>87</sup> Most of these men lived in joint families and the property was in the name of the father or the oldest male; others lacked property rights. They were not salaried or qualified to be financially independent. In their aspirations to move out of their traditional family settings they had to rely on sponsorships or loans for their travels without collateral from banks. This often resulted in being snared in the debt-trap of high interest rates from local moneylenders. Rural indebtedness in this case began before the take-off journey to find a pink sky.<sup>88</sup> Few respondents also recounted of being sexually exploited by male relatives or men who hosted them in the urban spaces or at different turns of their migration network. For instance, Ritesh Pradhan said that when he was studying in grades 11 and 12, his parents made him stay at the house of a known male person in Shivmandir, Siliguri, as hostels and paying guests were too expensive. The person entrusted to be his local guardian sexually exploited him for two years. The financial problems of Ritesh's family forced him to be silent. <sup>89</sup> Another respondent, Sashi Sarthak,

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<sup>85</sup>Pankaj Rai (28 years, M, versa. Hotel in Kolkata; Home Town: Mirik, West Bengal). *Personal Interview*. 19 March, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Pink economy/money/Market or Rainbow Capitalism refers to the targeted inclusion of the LGBTQIA community which has acquired sufficient purchasing power to generate a market focused specifically on them.

<sup>87</sup> Sanjay Tamang (15 years, M, bot.; Hotel in Guwahati; Home Town: Churachanpur, Manipur). *Personal Interview*. 20 May, 2017.

<sup>88</sup>*Personal Interview(s)*. Prajwal BK. (31 years, M, top; Banker based in Delhi; Home Town: Silchar, Assam) 18 January, 2011; Bikash Rai. (24 years, M, bot; works in a cruise company in Florida; Home Town: Mirik, West Bengal) 2 February, 2013; Bijay Chhetri (25 years, M, Versa; Saloon based in Dubai. Home Town: Gangtok, Sikkim) 10 May, 2013.

<sup>89</sup>Ritesh Pradhan. (18 years, M, gay-top; College student based in Delhi; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) *Personal Interview*, 7 May, 2015.

narrated how his uncle sexually exploited him all through his school days when he lived with his uncle's family in Guwahati, Assam.<sup>90</sup>

Lower levels of education and work experience limit their opportunities in metropolitan centres.<sup>91</sup> The centralised nature of most institutions compels them to fall back on support networks in urban settings and as such they are forced to rely on intermediaries for fulfilling their requirements and for information, for a cost reductions.<sup>92</sup> Many of these men choose to move to urban centres to work in challenging and exploitative conditions before earning enough money for their international journeys seeking job opportunities.<sup>93</sup> These ethnographic accounts highlight not only the issues of increased 'invisibility' of migrants (Wilson, 2011), and the lack of data on them but also the same sex exploitations underneath. The sexually ambivalent Gorkha is someone living at intersections of subjectivities experiences constant anxieties about defining, defending, and negotiating their sexuality and belonging. 'Leaving home' in search of a new 'home' becomes the indelible feature of the sexually ambivalent.

## VI

### **Our Sky: Dreams, Hopes and Exasperations**

The pursuit of a sense of belonging and identity among individuals with diverse sexual orientations is evident in urban settings, as they strive to create liveable and ecologically compatible urban spaces (Park and Burgess 1925; Wirth 1938, 1956). Urban spaces offer a sense of unity within the visible queer movement and opportunities for fostering community connections and collaboration. The Pride Parade has become a significant symbol of solidarity, capturing the attention of urban spaces in India. Simply put, those who are sexually ambivalent are always searching for environments that offer a respite from their family and local surroundings.

Recent studies on cities have begun to examine the city by focusing on the various processes and experiences that occur within different spaces and times. This approach highlights the importance of understanding individual experiences within a broader social context (Robinson,

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<sup>90</sup>Sashi Sarthak. (17 years, M, top; College student based in Delhi: Home Town: Goalpara, Assam) *Personal Interview*, 8May, 2015.

<sup>91</sup>Dheeraj Karki (35 years, M, top; Hotel in Guwahati; Home Town: Dimapur, Nagaland). *Personal Interview*. 20 May, 2017.

<sup>92</sup>Ritesh Pradhan. *Op.cit*.

<sup>93</sup>*Personal Interview(s)*. Ritesh Pradhan. *Ibid.*;Janak Kumai. (28 years, top; Security in Dubai, UAE. Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) 3 January, 2011.

2006; Srivastava, 2015). The increasing focus on comprehending urban areas as vibrant and ever-changing social environments has revealed novel patterns of social engagement, power dynamics, and divisions, resulting in the emergence of unique spatial structures. An interesting connection was highlighted by examining the relationship between space and gender. It was found that city spaces can be seen as gendered spaces, which unfortunately restrict access to certain locations and contribute to the emergence of new forms of gender inequality (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020). The promises of neo-liberal economic policies for a better future through newly available employment opportunities, financial independence, autonomy/freedom and anonymity (including concealment of one's sexual orientation) accelerated migrations to cities from peripheral spaces and heightened the emotional exasperations of the ambivalent persons.<sup>94</sup>

## VII

### ***Indrajaal: Exploring the Interconnectedness of the Real and Virtual Worlds***

In this section, I draw a parallel between the intricate structure of the world wide web and the concept of Indrajaal (Indra's net) in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Indrajaal is a shared mythic belief that symbolises the interconnectedness of the universe. In Buddhism, Indra is known as Sakra or Sakka or Devanam Indra, and he is regarded as the ruler of the Trayastrimsa heaven. Indra wields the powerful Vajra, which has led to the emergence of the Vajrayana sect within Buddhism. Using virtual ethnography, this segment of the paper examines the use of language to challenge traditional patriarchal norms in families, societies, and politics within a specific geopolitical context. The research focuses on interactions on social media platforms such as Facebook, Tik-Tok, Grinder, Blued, Ohmojo, and gay online dating platforms, with individuals who identify as sexually ambivalent or have ambiguous sexualities.<sup>95</sup> The discussion explores various oppressive cultural norms, such as misogyny, effemimania, and hyper-masculinity. It also delves into the ways in which these norms are challenged, alternative approaches are developed, and resistance is fostered.

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<sup>94</sup>Personal Interview(s): Tashi. (42 years, M, top; Government service, Kolkata; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal) 20 June 2014; Robert C (35 years, M, bot.; Fashion photographer in Mumbai; Home Town: Gangtok, Sikkim) 22 November, 2011.

<sup>95</sup>Nirmal Karkidoli (26 years, M, bot.; Spa, Mahabalipuram; Home Town: Birpara, West Bengal). Personal Interview. 15January, 2020.

The rise of the pink economy/ market and the world wide web has provided the queer the opportunity to acquire skills and a chance to express choices and seek/display e-love<sup>96</sup> without inhibitions. My respondents mentioned that they created a ‘pubvate’ space (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard [Ed.]2020) when meeting their online friends/dates in offline spaces. Urban spaces provide avenues for virtual community building and bonding through digital networks.<sup>97</sup> The digitally enhanced virtual space limits the purpose of regulation and control of sexualities. The effect of gating and community policing becomes intensely ineffective, though not impossible.<sup>98</sup>

A few MIMs mentioned that they had negotiated the restricting of ‘queer spaces’ by cruising online and opted for the virtual spaces to seek out like-minded ‘friends’. However, they also showed concerns that ‘the urban overdrive and the restricting of ‘queer spaces’ have compelled the sexually ambivalent to seek physical intimacies rather than emotional bonding (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020). Such practices have evolved precisely because of the restrictive social settings of the city and the governments which snips any chance for a genuine ‘queer bonding’ and the evolution of a ‘queer emotional space’ (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020). The digitally enhanced virtual world and the fast evolving gay dating apps were also the sites/spaces that made the sexually ambivalent and the ambiguous vulnerable to being trapped, duped and risking their lives. These gadget-based digital spaces are addictive, and charged the adrenal instincts of the persons involved. These gay dating apps, and these websites expose and are thus the mythical *Indrajaal*, according to a few respondents.

For the sexually ambivalent cruising in the urban spaces and dating apps become potential spaces to pick/choose/swipe dates, friends or partners. These are also spaces (physical and virtual) where they can be themselves without worrying about anything else but at the same time these are also the problem areas where the sexually ambivalent are most open to vulnerabilities (physical, emotional or health wise) (Chakraborty in Upadhyaya Joshi, & Brassard (Ed.) 2020).

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<sup>96</sup> E-love or electronic love (also virtual love) refers to the digitally enhanced love/romance/infatuation that evolves over the internet between individuals through email exchanges, or sharing of photographs or through other digital/electronic medium like the smart phones.

<sup>97</sup> Mohan Bharail (26 years, M, top; Shopping mall, Delhi; Home Town: Tura, Meghalaya). *Personal Interview*. 16 May, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Amos Blon (25 years, M, Versa.; Mobile phone service, Siliguri; Home Town: Darjeeling, West Bengal). *Personal Interview*. 4 February, 2015.

The virtualisation of the ‘queer public sphere’ is strongly marked by the predominance of bilingualism and gadget exclusion. Those not in tune with the wave of the gadgets remain tucked in the peripheries of the ‘digital divide’. My study indicates that this section of the sexually ambivalent and the sexually ambiguous churn ‘queer spaces’ in real-time and space. The ‘queer space’ provides the necessary visibility and vocality space for the sexually ambivalent and ambiguous to cushion the emotional bonding that has been stretched and exasperated by heteronormativity.<sup>99</sup> Reclaiming the right to a ‘queer space’—in real time and space—is urgent for a more democratic, queer-friendly society where people from various walks of life can come into a conversation with each other. These virtual spaces and gadgets enable the ethnically disparate sexually ambivalent persons to negotiate the slippery and knotty realms of the politics of sexualities, regimentation and control operating in the northeast Indian states.

### ***Some closing comments***

The study has explored the ethno-narratives obtained from in-depth interviews with native Nepali speaking/Gorkha men in/from India’s northeast who identify as sexually ambivalent or sexually ambiguous. The region’s limited growth prospects, imbalanced infrastructure projects, and prevailing homophobia have led to a natural trend of pink migration. People are seeking better job opportunities, the chance to fulfil their aspirations, and political stability in other destinations. The study highlights the significant connections between pink migrations, space, and gender, shedding light on the emergence of new gender inequalities within the context of traditional norms. In addition, it emphasises the frustrations that come with the expectations of comprehensive neo-liberal economic strategies, which promise new job prospects, financial options, personal independence, and the ability to keep one’s sexual orientation and preferences private. The queer Gorkha navigates its environment by exploring various livelihood opportunities, such as participating in a vibrant economy that caters to diverse skills. This provides a platform to freely express personal choices and desires while maintaining anonymity. Urban spaces offer a platform for the visibility of the queer movement and opportunities for community building and networking. Simply put, individuals who are sexually ambivalent are always searching for places that offer a way to break free from their family and local surroundings.

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<sup>99</sup>Sangam Chhetry (28 years, M, Bot.; Saloon Gurgaon; Home Town: Kolasib, Mizoram). *Personal Interview*. 5th July 2014.

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# From Sanatan Dharma to Communism: Tracing the Ideological Transformation among Bengali Revolutionaries

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The first phase of the anti-imperialist movement in Bengal was essentially led by the Hindu bhadralok class. The Bengal renaissance acted as a catalyst by bringing to fore the lost glory of Bharat and inspired the youth to be proud of their nation again. Literature had a great influence on the young revolutionaries. Copies of several patriotic books were found in their homes by the police during their arrest besides the Anushilan Samiti housing a good collection of these books. These included literature like the *Bhagwat Gita* and *Shikher Balidan*. The most popular book, however, and one around which several secret societies were modelled was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*. "It is easy to see how the course of reading contained in the books...would lead a young man by easy and direct stages from the study of religion and philosophy to the use of the revolver and the bomb", writes J C Ker in *Political Trouble in India 1907-17*<sup>100</sup>. *Anandamath* is a historical fiction centred around the sanyasi-fakir rebellion of 1772-74. The novel describes the resistance of the *santan dal* (children) who fought to free their Motherland. The headquarters was in a temple called Ananda Math. Those who were initiated into the movement had to renounce their homes and family, all kinds of pleasure, donate all their earnings to the Society and live as brothers by giving up caste distinctions. What really struck a chord with the revolutionaries, however, was the song *Bande Mataram* which later became a clarion call during the independence struggle. However, in the novel, the enemy of the *santan dal* was not the British but Muslim rulers. It departs from known historical chronicles by eliminating the role of Muslim fakirs and frames the events "within an overarching agenda of Hindu nationhood".<sup>101</sup> "We do not want power for ourselves. We want

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<sup>1</sup> Ker, J. C. (1917). *Political Trouble in India 1907-17*. New Delhi: Oriental Publishers. p. 35

<sup>101</sup> Sarkar, T. (2006). *Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', "Ananda Math" and Hindu*

Nationhood. *Economic & Political Weekly*, p. 3959-3969

to exterminate all the Muslims on this land as they are enemies of God”, claims the fictional leader Satyananda in the novel <sup>102</sup>.

For Bankim, subjection of Indians was more in terms of ‘culture’. In *Theory of Religion* (1888), he wrote that *anusilan* was a ‘system of culture’. Unlike the Western concept that was agnostic and hence incomplete, *anusilan* was based on the concept of *bhakti* which in turn implied the unity of knowledge and duty<sup>103</sup>. The idea of looking at the nation as Mother had existed for long. Aurobindo Ghosh commented in 1907 that it was only when the Mother had revealed herself that the patriotism worked miracles and saved a doomed nation <sup>104</sup> Talking of Bande Mataram (he interestingly edited a newspaper of the same name) Ghosh wrote, “It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and someone sang Bande Mataram. The mantra had been given...”<sup>105</sup> The last verse of Bande Mataram, however, conflated Mother country to Mother Goddess leaving many Muslims cold:

“*Twang hi Durga dashapraharanadharinee,  
Kamalaa kamala-dala-biharinee,  
Banee bidyadayinee, namaami twaam*”

“You are Durga bearing ten weapons of war,  
Kamala at play in the lotuses  
Goddess of learning, giver of knowledge,  
I bow to you.”<sup>106</sup>

Bankim mocked the politics of petitions that his contemporary middle-class politicians engaged in since he found it to be lacking in heroic masculine quality. “A more militant nationalist politics of violence and self-sacrifice - that of 20th century revolutionary terrorism - had not yet emerged in his times. This reinforced the necessity of an imagined history. A novel, then, had to carry the entire burden of a politics that was yet to be born. AM, therefore, was not really a representation, it was more a performance, an iteration, making something

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<sup>102</sup> Chattopadhyay, B. (1953). *Bankim Rachanabali*. Kolkata: Sahitya Sansad. p. 750

<sup>103</sup> Chatterjee, P. (1986). *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. Avon: The Bath Press. p. 65

<sup>104</sup> Bose, S. (2017). *The Nation as Mother*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House India. p. 3

<sup>105</sup> Ghosh, A. (1907, April 16). *Rishi Bankim Chandra. Bande Mataram*. Pondicherry: Shabda. p. 96

<sup>106</sup> Bose, S. (2017). *The Nation as Mother*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House India. p. 15

happen with words”, writes Sarkar<sup>107</sup> Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* refers to the correlation between the printed word and the formation of a national identity where individuals inhabiting a particular territory who had never met before develop a sense of community based on reading a common print material. Similarly, Bankimchandra wrote of ‘jaati-pratishtha’ (the establishment of national consciousness) and turned to history and culture in his writings to reignite the ‘Bengali’ identity<sup>108</sup>

Bankim left a deep impact on Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, the first female revolutionary of the 20th century. Due to his influence, she even became vocal in support of polygamy among Hindus<sup>109</sup>. She emphasized on the celebration of festivals celebrating the valor of Indians, especially Bengalis. She introduced the Pratapaditya festival in Bengal in the memory of the 16<sup>th</sup> century king Pratapaditya who created the first independent empire in Bengal going against the Mughal rulers. The day was celebrated through the demonstration of various athletic feats by young boys such as boxing, sword fighting, wrestling, etc. As Sarala Devi handed over medals to the best performers of the day, newspapers referred to her as “Devi Dashabhuja” (Durga/Goddess with ten hands) herself coming down to earth to hand over weapons to the men of Bengal<sup>110</sup>. She also introduced the celebration of the Udayaditya Festival and the ‘Birashtami Broto’ in Bengal where the ritual consisted of treating the sword as deity and hailing courage as the ultimate trait in man. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani played a significant role in aiding ‘shaktipuja’(worship of strength) and connecting it with the nationalist movement in India.

When tracing the intellectual roots of revolutionary terrorism in India, religion plays a major role. One of the first names that come to mind to have inspired generations of freedom fighters is *sanyasi-yoddha* (warrior monk) Swami Vivekananda. As Swami Chaitanyananda of the Ramkrishna Mission very cautiously claims, Vivekananda was not actively involved in any terrorist actions. But his words that spoke of self-reliance, strength, confidence, etc. inspired generations of youth to break the shackle of imperialism<sup>111</sup> Ker’s report mentions Vivekananda

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<sup>107</sup> Sarkar, T. (2006). Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', "Ananda Math" and Hindu Nationhood. New Delhi: Economic & Political Weekly, p. 3962

<sup>108</sup> Sanyal, S. (2023). Revolutionaries. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p.18

<sup>109</sup> Bhattacharya, S. (2007). Bhumika. In S. D. Chaudhurani, Jiboner Jhora Pata. Kolkata: Dey's Publishing. p.12

<sup>110</sup> Chaudhurani, S. D. (1879). Jiboner Jhora Pata. Kolkata: Shishu Sahitya Sansad. p.122

<sup>111</sup> Chaitanyananda, S. (2022, July 17). (Author, Interviewer)

and the Ramkrishna Mission's activities in great detail. "...the teachings of the Vedanta Society tend towards Nationalism in politics. Swami Vivekananda himself generally avoided that side of the case, but by many Hindu Nationalists he is regarded as the guru (religious preceptor) of the movement", the report states<sup>112</sup>. While Vivekananda never actively participated in politics, the state of affairs in the country did move him to a large extent. In a letter to Mary Hale on October 30, 1899, he wrote of the massacre perpetrated by the British in 1857-58 and the famines that followed their rule. He also lamented about the lack of freedom of press and how people were being punished severely at the display of the slightest of dissent. In 1897, during the Jubilee Celebration of Queen Victoria, while he consented to sending an Address of Honour on behalf of Ramakrishna Mission, he cautioned Swami Brahmananda, "It must be free from exaggeration like, 'Oh Queen. You rule by God's command' etc. Such nonsense, as is common to us, natives should be avoided." An anecdote documents that annoyed with the pacifism of Congress, Vivekananda referred to it as a platform for empty speeches only. "Let them declare themselves as independent and send the declaration of the independent government to all sovereign nations...One has to be desperate. If this results in bullets, the first bullet should hit my chest. America, Europe will be shaken"<sup>113</sup>, he stated during his stay in London. Few months after returning to India, on hearing of the assassinations carried out by Damodar Hari Chapekar and Madhav Vinayak Ranade, he commented that golden statues of them should be built and installed in Bombay Port<sup>114</sup>. He also suggested that India should start worshipping Gita's warrior Sri Krishna and not the Vrindavanbihari. "Playing flute will not help the country. We need tanks now", Vivekananda said<sup>115</sup>

Referring to Vivekananda's contribution to the revolutionary movement in India, Romain Rolland observed, "The Indian nationalist movement smouldered for a long time until Vivekananda's breath blew the ashes into flame, and erupted violently three years after his death in 1905." Aurobindo Ghosh, while speaking of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda's contribution to the freedom struggle, stated that the influence of the master and the disciple

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<sup>112</sup> Ker, J. C. (1917). Political Trouble in India 1907-17. New Delhi: Oriental Publishers. p. 253

<sup>113</sup> Dutt, M. (1956). London e Swami Vivekananda. Kolkata: Mahendra Publishing Committee. p. 190-191

<sup>114</sup> Raychaudhuri, G. (1960). Bhagini Nivedita o Banglay Biplabbaad. Kolkata: Jigyasa. p. 50

<sup>115</sup> Purnatmananda, S. (2019). Swami Vivekananda Ebong Bharater Swadhinota Sangram. Kolkata: Udbodhon Karyalay. p. 13

were so strong on the secret society that in any other country with a political past, it would have resulted in something like the French Revolution.<sup>116</sup>

Vivekananda's speeches focusing on *atmashakti*, collective strength of the masses, advice to dedicate one's life to the service of the country and get rid of decades of slavery inspired many revolutionaries. He filled the young with confidence and pride in their country and self. While he never took part in any political activity, Ramakrishna Mission and several of his disciples were under the radar of the British Police for quite some time. A work of Swami Abhedananda, a disciple of Vivekananda and a high priest of the Vedanta Society, titled *India and Her People*, was found to be of seditious nature by the British and was proscribed under the Press Act of 1910 by the Government of Bombay. An IB report also notes Vivekananda's brother, the revolutionary Bhupendranath Dutta's connections with the Mission. In a confidential letter dated 22 April 1914, Charles Tegart produced a list of names of 'dangerous revolutionaries' who frequented Belur Math or other branches of RKM. He noted with caution that many passages of Vivekananda's writings are "pregnant with insurrection, that their potential for harm had reached a climax"<sup>117</sup>. According to Sealy's report, Jatindranath Mukherjee, popularly known as Bagha Jatin, frequently visited RKM's Puri branch and was determined to establish a building near the Jagannath Temple called Srikshetra Ashram Sevashram, which under the garb of philanthropy, would be used for the education and training of 'political missionaries'<sup>118</sup>. In 'A Note on Ramakrishna Mission', Charles Tegart stated that "flood relief in 1913 in the districts of Burdwan, Hooghly, and Midnapore 'was eagerly seized upon by the revolutionary parties, both the Eastern and Western Bengal, who utilized the opportunity thus afforded to map out their future plans'. Describing Amarendra as an 'exceedingly active and dangerous conspirator' Tegart proved that the Mission financed him for these relief operations."<sup>119</sup>

Interestingly, one of those whom Vivekananda managed to inspire and one who quietly played an active role in aiding the extremist movement was Swami Vivekananda's greatest disciple

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<sup>116</sup> Ganguly, A. (2017, January 11). *Swami and nationalists. Stories of inspiration*. Retrieved from Daily Pioneer: <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2017/columnists/swami-and-nationalists-stories-of-inspiration.html>

<sup>117</sup> Mukherjee, P. (2018). The Intellectual Roots of India's Freedom Struggle (1893-1918). New York: Routledge. p. 194

<sup>118</sup> Mukherjee, P. (2018). The Intellectual Roots of India's Freedom Struggle (1893-1918). New York: Routledge. p. 250

<sup>119</sup> Mukherjee, P. (2018). The Intellectual Roots of India's Freedom Struggle (1893-1918). New York: Routledge. p. 254-255

Sister Nivedita, an Irish woman, who had come and made India her own after being attracted to her guru. Nivedita met Bipin Chandra Pal in London during her lecture tours. She had to face the vile propaganda of British imperialists and Christian missionaries when in England due to her pro-India stance. In 1902, after the death of her Master, Nivedita had to cut ties with Ramakrishna Mission due to her contact with Indian revolutionaries. The British Government blacklisted her name and deputed CID officials to shadow her and censor her letters. Nivedita introduced the nationalist newspaper *Bande Mataram* in the girls' school she ran in Kolkata at a time when the song was banned in British India. She also refused government aid for her school. Her home was a meeting place for intellectuals and revolutionaries alike. In late 1902, she went to Baroda to meet Aurobindo Ghosh who was working under the Maharaja of Baroda then and insisted that he return to Bengal to take charge of the growing nationalist upsurge. According to biographer Lizelle Raymond, Nivedita was one of the few people who knew of Aurobindo's secret role in the nationalist movement despite his physical absence. When Aurobindo reached Bengal, she was part of a five-member revolutionary committee including Aurobindo Ghosh, C R Das, Surendranath Banerjee and Yateendra Bannerjee. Later, this committee merged with the secret revolutionary society *Anushilan Samiti* and Nivedita became a source of inspiration for many young revolutionaries in the society. During the anti-Partition Movement in Bengal in 1905, she addressed several gatherings supporting the resolution moved by the famous revolutionary, Anand Mohan Bose, condemning the unwise move of the British Government. In 1907, when Vivekananda's brother Bhupendranath Dutta was arrested in charge of being the editor of *Yugantar*, Nivedita paid the fine of Rs 10,000 to help him and his comrades. The same year, Nivedita left for England to build a favourable atmosphere for Indian revolutionaries by speaking to British parliamentarians and campaigning for India's cause. The following year, she went to America and met Bhupendranath Dutta, Tarak Nath Dutta and other revolutionaries in exile and collected money to support them <sup>120</sup>The royalty of her extremely popular book *Kali The Mother* funded many revolutionary activities in Bengal including the Alipore Trials of 1908-10. Historian Peter Heehs referred to her as a 'networker' who had many connections in all quarters and which she used to assist the revolutionary movement. It was she who got to know from close quarters in the government that the British

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<sup>120</sup> Anonymous. (2011, March 21). *Sister Nivedita- A Beacon for Freedom Fighters*. Retrieved from Arise Bharat: <https://arisebharat.com/2011/03/21/sister-nivedita-a-beacon-for-freedom-fighters/>

were planning to re-arrest Aurobindo in 1911 and arranged for his move to Chandernagore and then Pondicherry<sup>121</sup>

On 19 July 1905, Lord Curzon declared the partition of Bengal stating administrative reasons leading to huge protests which would go on to change the game for anti-imperialist struggle in the country. The anti-partition movement in Bengal soon moved beyond its initial objective of restoring an undivided Bengal and began to challenge the British claim to rule Bengal. It resulted in the initiation of a new generation of leaders like Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipin Chandra Pal, etc. who rejected the policy of prayers and petition<sup>122</sup>. It also led to the establishment of already brewing secret societies in Bengal under the watchful eyes of Aurobindo Ghosh.

It was the same year that Jatin Banerjee, one of the founding members of Anushilan Samiti, “put on the robes of the sanyasin” and left for the Himalayas on a pilgrimage after a major clash with Barin Ghosh and his “disgust and despair” at how things had turned out in Kolkata. In Nainital, Jatin became the disciple of Soham Swami, ‘pioneer of the cult of physical strength and courage in Bengal’, and was christened Niralamba Swami. Jatin then moved to the North-West frontier where he preached his socio-political doctrines and inspired people like Ajit Singh and Kisan Singh who further helped spread revolutionary ideas in the North. Within a year of meeting Niralamba, Ajit became an extremist politician. Kisan Singh was responsible for transmitting these ideas to Lala Hardayal who organized Sikh revolutionaries in North America and finally his son Bhagat Singh, the most famous Indian revolutionary of the 1920s<sup>123</sup>.

“It certainly is true that writers in *Bande Mataram*, *Jugantar* and other extremist organs made use of Hindu terminology and symbolism”, wrote historian Peter Heehs<sup>124</sup>. In 1905, Aurobindo published a pamphlet titled Bhawani Mandir, taking inspiration from *Anandamath*, which would be a blueprint for training facilities for young boys to turn them into revolutionaries. The Maniktala Secret Society was carved out of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti in 1905 and would perform terrorist activities between 1906-8 under the leadership of Aurobindo’s younger brother Barin Ghosh. This society, located in Ghosh’s empty garden house in Maniktala, was

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<sup>121</sup> Heehs, P. (2022, October 7). (Author, Interviewer)

<sup>122</sup> Sarkar, S. (2010). The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-8. Ranikhet: Permanent Black. p. 215-285

<sup>123</sup> Heehs, P. (1993). The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India 1900-1910. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 61-62

<sup>124</sup> Heehs, P. (1998). Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 18

“modern India’s first organized terrorist group with a clear political aim”<sup>125</sup> First hand accounts by revolutionaries reveal that the initiation into the society would happen by swearing on the Gita. Kali puja would also be performed. There is enough evidence to conclude that there was a large amount of ritualism associated with this society. “We have lost the faculty of religious fervour in Bengal and are now trying to recover it through the passion for the country, by self-sacrifice, by labour for our fellow-countrymen, by absorption in the idea of the country...The perfect sense of self-abandonment which Chaitanya felt for Hari, must be felt by Bengal for the Mother. Then only will Bengal be herself and able to fulfil the destiny to which after so many centuries of preparation she has been called”, wrote Aurobindo Ghosh <sup>126</sup>“We strongly protest against the brand of suspicion that has been sought to be placed in many quarters on the teaching and possession of the Gita —our chief national heritage, our hope for the future, our great force for the purification of the moral weaknesses that stain and hamper our people”, Ghosh wrote in another editorial for *Karmayogin*<sup>127</sup>.

At the same time, there were also dissenters in the Society who were wary of such practices. Bhupendranath Dutta, younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, who was an atheist and socialist by practice, swore by both the Gita as well as Quran while taking oath <sup>128</sup>Another revolutionary who was extremely critical of ritualist practices and the direction of the movement and its leaders in general was Hemchandra Das Kanungo. Kanungo was the first bombmaker of India. He had gone to Paris by mortgaging his house and returned only after learning the art of bombmaking from Nihilists. An atheist himself who refused to swear by the Gita, Kanungo wrote, “If religion is seen as the only way to save the country, then there are two major problems which none of the leaders took note of- the Hindu-Muslim issue and the caste problem”<sup>129</sup>. He further states that trying to free India through Hinduism will make it seem like India is being freed for Hindus. This will not only deter Muslims from joining the movement but also make them look at Hindus as even greater enemies than the British<sup>130</sup>. That Kanungo’s fear was proven right can be observed from the lack of Muslim participation in the

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<sup>125</sup> Heehs, P. (1993). *The Bomb in Bengal: The Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in India 1900-1910*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p.24

<sup>126</sup> Ghosh, A. (1908, April 11). *The Demand of the Mother*. Bande Mataram. Pondicherry: Shabda. p. 2

<sup>127</sup> Ghosh, A. (1910, February 12). *The Gita and Terrorism*. Karmayogin. Pondicherry: Shabda. p. 8

<sup>128</sup> Mukhopadhyay, A. (2022, July 7). (Author, Interviewer)

<sup>129</sup> Kanungo, H. (1928). *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*. Kolkata: Kamala Book Depot Ltd. p. 85

<sup>130</sup> Kanungo, H. (1928). *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*. Kolkata: Kamala Book Depot Ltd. p. 86

first phase of the anti-imperialist revolution in Bengal. He suggests that nationalism should occupy the place of religion and religion should be sent off to the ‘andarmahal’ (indoors). Both Hindus and Muslims should give priority to rationality. “But our so-called elite leaders think their elitism is conserved by religion. Thus, they will not hear sense”, he wrote<sup>131</sup>. As one of the first socialist thinkers of modern India, Kanungo also critiqued the caste system. He advocated the abolition of caste. Hemchandra Das Kanungo became Hem Kanungo by dropping the ‘Chandra’ and ‘Das’ from his name. At the same time, he is one of the only fellow comrades to have ridiculed Aurobindo Ghosh for his spiritual practices. Hem thought he was fickle-minded and responsible for the failure of the organization to an extent for handing over complete charge to his younger brother Barin Ghosh, despite the fact that it was his presence that inspired most of these young men to join the movement.

The first wave of revolutionary movement waned with the arrest of almost all important members of the Anushilan Samiti, followed by the assassination attempt of Kingsford by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. Forty-two men, including Aurobindo Ghosh who was the main suspect, was arrested in what is famously known as the Muzaffarpore Conspiracy or the Alipore Bomb Trial. Ghosh writes in *Karajiboni* that the Gita was the resort of many of these boys in jail. It is here that he attained spiritual heights and had a vision of Vasudev Sri Krishna. One year later, when Aurobindo was acquitted of all charges, he was a changed man. He was completely absorbed in his spiritual pursuits and later moved to Pondicherry where a completely new phase in his life began.

With Aurobindo gone and most of the important leaders having been deported to the Cellular Jail, the baton of the Jugantar Party passed on to Jatindranath Mukherjee, more popularly known as Bagha Jatin. A disciple of Swami Vivekananda, Jatin had worked hand in hand with Sister Nivedita during the recurrence of the epidemic in 1898. Nivedita, the Swami’s Irish disciple, described Jatin as: ‘A young man came to see me, who aspires to raise the youth of India in the name of the Swami. Full of admiration for the Master, himself, he is all strength. He is independent and, over all, a Brahman!’<sup>132</sup> It was Vivekananda, who on recognizing Jatin’s potential to commit himself to the cause of freedom, sent him to the gymnasium of Amba Guha where the Swami himself once practiced wrestling. It was here that he came in touch with other nationalist leaders. A deeply religious person, Jatin Mukherjee and his wife Indubala were the

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<sup>131</sup> Kanungo, H. (1928). *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*. Kolkata: Kamala Book Depot Ltd. p. 88

<sup>132</sup> Mukherjee, P. (2018). *The Intellectual Roots of India's Freedom Struggle (1893-1918)*. New York: Routledge. p.136

disciples of Bholananda Giri, After the martyrdom of Bagha Jatin in the Battle of Balasore on 10 September, 1915, Indubala Devi refused to believe the news of her husband's death and died in 1936 wearing *sakha-sindur*(signs of marriage carried in the hope of the wellbeing of one's husband) since Bholananda Giri had told her "*Baccha abhi zinda hai*"(Jatin is still alive).

There was a brief hiatus in the anti-British revolutionary activities in Bengal following the failure of the Ghadar Movement and the Indo-German Conspiracy. In 1918, Surjya Sen, Ambika Chakrabarti and Charu Bikash Datta organised a revolutionary group in Chittagong, where the idea of using violence to overthrow British domination was already prevalent, especially among the Hindu *bhadralok* youths. The initiation of the movement can be traced to three factors- the establishment of physical training club with 'purely revolutionary objective', the passing of the Bengal Criminal law Amendment Act which bestowed upon the Bengal government, the power of detention without trial for a period of five years and the lull in the Congress-led movements after the sudden suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident in 1922. The lull in the Congress activities till 1928 had led to thousands of volunteers becoming inactive birthing the twin phenomenon of - nascent awakening and mobilisation of communist groups all across the country and revival of revolutionary terrorism in Bengal and northern India. In the year 1925, when the BCLA Act was nearing expiration, there was a suggestion among local administrative officers in Bengal that 'revolutionary terrorism was a permanent condition of unrest in Bengal, rather than a movement bought about by continued colonial occupation'. The lack of Indian representatives in the Simon Commission of 1930, Gandhi's civil disobedience movement with the Salt March and the 1920s conspiracy cases led to the revival of revolutionary groups in the East. The Chittagong Armoury Raid took place days after the Civil Disobedience Movement began, in fact with the British police hoping that Surjya Sen and his followers were preparing to take part in the same. "The Bengal terrorists took an active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930...When this movement was wanning, they considered it was time for them to give effect to their policy of violence", a secret British police report revealed <sup>133</sup>

In the first phase of the anti-colonial movement followed by the Bengal Partition in 1905, extremist leaders weaponized mass festivals which were majorly Hindu, to draw participation of people. Even apparently secular nationalist newspapers like *Bande Mataram* would have religious symbols in them. Autobiographical accounts by revolutionaries of the Maniktala

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<sup>133</sup> Singh, A. (1960). *Agnigarbha* Chattogram Vol. 2. Kolkata: Radical Publishers. p.261

Secret Society carved out of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti in 1906 which led by Aurobindo's younger brother Barin Ghosh reveals the initiation into the society would happen by swearing on the Gita. Kali puja would also be performed. There is enough evidence to conclude that there was a large amount of ritualism associated with this society. This society was "modern India's first organized terrorist group with a clear political aim"<sup>134</sup>.

In contrast to the first phase of the movement, the Chittagong Uprising demonstrated a rare example of communal harmony where though all the rebels were upper caste Hindus, they were given shelter in Muslim homes in times of need<sup>135</sup>. At the same time, as per a front ranking leader Ananta Lal Singh's account, Surjya Sen never encouraged grand religious ritualism in the party. Ganesh Ghosh had written that "Without the support, sympathy and love of the Muslim villagers, Masterda and his comrades would never have been able to survive in the limited area of Chittagong for so long" <sup>136</sup> Looking into the Census of 1931, Muslims accounted for 73.80% of the population and Hindus comprised 21.84% of the total population of the district with the IRA being most active in Patiya and Boalkhali which had a Muslim population of 66.61% and 59.64% of the total population (Census of 1931). This can be empirically verified as there were multiple instances of sheltering absconders in the 'andarmahal' or inner chambers of Muslim households and refusing to provide information to the British police. This 'spontaneous relationship' was reflected in instances of Makaleshwar Rahman's restaurant being one of the principal hideouts of the IRA and one of the chosen few beyond the six leaders who was aware of the 18th April action<sup>137</sup>. Ananta Singh was escorted by Maulvi Eradulla in Comilla and Ambika Chakravarti who was turned away by his own aunt after the Battle of Jalalabad was sheltered by Amjad Chacha in the Potiya village <sup>138</sup> During the guerrilla battle in Julda-Kalarpole which had resulted in the death of Rajat Sen, Swadesh Roy, Debaprasad Gupta and Manoranjan Sen, they were sheltered and provided with food and water for their last meal by Muslim peasants<sup>139</sup>. In 1931, there were British attempts to engineer a communal riot

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<sup>134</sup> Heehs, P. (1998). Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. p. 26

<sup>135</sup> Dasgupta, S., & Ganguly, O. (2023). "The School Children's Anti-Colonial Rebellion: Looking Back at the Chittagong Armoury Raid of 1930. *Itihasology Journal*. p. 26-39

<sup>136</sup> Chatterjee, M. (2010). Do and Die: The Chittagong Uprising 1930-34. New Delhi: Picador. p. 250

<sup>137</sup> Bhattacharya, M. (2012). Chittagong: Summer of 1930. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p. 213

<sup>138</sup> Bhattacharya, M. (2014). Eye of the Tiger. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p.150

<sup>139</sup> Ghosh, G. (2001). Chattogram Jubobidroho 1930-34 Alekhyomala. Kolkata: Biplab Teertha Chattogram Smriti Sangstha Prakashan. p. 108

following the assassination of CID officer Khan Bahadur Ahsanulla, by instigating mobs to loot Hindu shops, which did not lead to much success. Rather, the Non-Official Inquiry Committee included two Muslim citizens who supplied a unanimous official report condemning the British administration<sup>140</sup>. Kalpana Dutta had written that “Almost the whole of Muslim area was a fort for us”<sup>141</sup> Kamluddin had assisted Surjya Sen in the Kanungopara village in 1931 by providing him with shelter in his own house in 1931, the police had encircled the entire village by then however, they didn’t entertain the possibility of Sen being hidden in a Muslim household and left without being able to trace Sen”<sup>142</sup>. Abdul Sattar was another prominent revolutionary in the IRA who had organised for the revolutionaries to hide in Muslim villages and worked as the means of coordination and communication in the village network. Mir Mohammad Maulvi, an IRA revolutionary had requested Surjya Sen to ‘grant him permission’ to sacrifice his life in a frontal battle against the British and was granted the ‘permission’. Maulvi had also engaged his mother to shelter the revolutionaries during the period when he himself was imprisoned by the British administration. One of Masterda’s dreams was to use Muslim men in ‘action’ to prove that they were no less when it came patriotism. Thus, it was planned that a fellow revolutionary Mir Ahamed, while in Chittagong Jail, would execute the murder of the cruel Jailer, famous for torturing freedom fighters and attaining a perverse sense of joy out of the same. However, the action had to be aborted since Ahamed was soon shifted to another jail<sup>143</sup>. Kalpana Dutta had written in her memoir Chittagong Armoury Raiders: Reminiscences (1946) that a Muslim peasant had told her in the same village where Surjya Sen had been arrested, betrayed by his own uncle Netra Sen belonging to the same caste as Surjya Sen, “It is those *dendas* (local Muslim peasants would use this term of contempt referring to Hindus) that betrayed Surjya Sen.”

The second phase of the movement, though continuing to majorly comprise of upper caste Hindu revolutionaries as participants, was a lot more secular in nature. Influence of Western ideas such as those of socialism and communism besides the impact of the Russian and Irish revolutions, helped develop a socialist mindset among the rebels. It is revealed from the memoirs of many rebels incarcerated in the prisons of Andaman that classes on Communism

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<sup>140</sup> Bhattacharya, M. (2012). Chittagong: Summer of 1930. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p. 215

<sup>141</sup> Dutta, K. (2013). Smritikotha. Kolkata: Radical Impression. p. 57

<sup>142</sup> Ghosh, G. (2001). Chattogram Jubobidroho 1930-34 Alekhyomala. Kolkata: Biplab Teertha Chattogram Smriti Sangstha Prakashan. p. 123

<sup>143</sup> Ghosh, S. (2012). Masterda Surjya Sen. Kolkata: Prometheus Publishing House. p. 96-97

were conducted by Dr Narain Chandra De<sup>144</sup> in jail. Ganesh Ghosh, in his memoir, states that an understanding of Communism helped them see the movement in a new light and this is the path many of them finally chose. Many of the arrested boys were teenagers and of an impressionable age. These classes and later access to communist literature in jail provided them with a direction. Sanjeev Sanyal claims in his recently launched book *Revolutionaries: The Other Story of How India Won its Freedom* that the British Communists as well as jail authorities encouraged this conversion since this would help deviate them from the main goal, i.e., fighting for the independence of India<sup>145</sup>. Subodh Roy, who was jailed at the age of 16, wrote in his autobiography, “Readers would be surprised to know that we also got books on socialism at government cost. The government thought that they would be able to divert the minds of political prisoners by making them interested in socialist ideas, which they thought were a lesser evil than ‘terrorist’ actions such as the murder of oppressive British officials. Thus, the government had some hand in making political prisoners in the Andamans interested in socialism. They had unknowingly sowed the seeds of communism among political prisoners detained in other jails as well”<sup>146</sup> In the essay *Kamon Kore Communist Holam* (How I Became a Communist), Kalpana Dutta mentions of initially reading religious books sent from her home in jail believing that it would help her become resilient to the hardships of prison life. However, reading communist literature, especially books on the Russian Revolution transformed her. It was after reading Romain Rolland’s *I Will Not Rest* that she began worshipping Lenin<sup>147</sup>. Later, she married P C Joshi, a founding member and first general secretary of the Communist Party of India.

During the Second World War, the communists, many of whom were former revolutionaries, demonstrated against Subhas Chandra Bose’s Indian National Army by calling him a Fascist collaborator. The role of the Chittagong revolutionaries become especially significant here since the initial plan of the Azad Hind Fauj was to enter India through Chittagong which they failed to do due to mobilization of the local people and a very strong anti-Japanese sentiment that was present among them. In the southern half of Chittagong, in the Kutudia and Maheshkhali areas, the population was mostly Muslim. When the Japanese attack was imminent, the locals told Communist workers, “Let Kalpana Dutta give us the order once and we shall plunge into fight and lay down our lives in battle.” They had never seen Kalpana

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<sup>144</sup> Bhattacharya, M. (2014). *Eye of the Tiger*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p. 124

<sup>145</sup> Sanyal, S. (2023). *Revolutionaries*. New Delhi: HarperCollins India. p. 225

<sup>146</sup> Roy, S. (2015). *Chittagong Armoury Raid: A Memoir*. New Delhi: LeftWord. p. 97

<sup>147</sup> Dutta, K. (2013). *Smritikotha*. Kolkata: Radical Impression. p. 99-100

Dutta, nor did they know her personally. But they knew of her as one of the comrades of Surjya Sen.<sup>148</sup>.

Later, many leaders were also key in organizing the Tebhaga Movement in Bengal, a peasant uprising between 1946-49, which acted as a catalyst in the British finally being forced to leave India. After being released from jail, freedom fighters like Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Kalpana Dutt, Ambika Chakraborty, Subodh Roy, and several others joined various factions of the Left, mainly the Communist Party of India. Barring Ananta Singh who got involved in the Naxal Movement and was later imprisoned on charges of bank robbery, most of them remained lifelong dedicated party workers of the Communist Party after independence.

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<sup>148</sup> Chakravarty, G. (2023, February 27). (Author, Interviewer)

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