Erothanatos
A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Journal on Literature
Vol. 4 Issue 1, April 2020.
URL: https://www.erothanatos.com/vol4issue1
E-ISSN 2457-0265

A Highway through the Wood: Translation as a Colonial Venture in Nineteenth-Century Bengal

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the role of the missionaries and the East India Company in the inauguration of Bengali translation and argues that translation served as an epistemological tool for conquering an alien reality and exercising discursive control over the subject people.

Keywords: Bengali, translation, Colonialism, Fort William College, William Carey, Srirampur Mission.

The beginnings of Bengali translation and Bengali prose are more or less coeval. Both effectively emerged in the heyday of British colonialism in India and it was primarily the Empire's need for efficient governance that inaugurated the process. The Baptist missionaries, eager to spread the Gospel amidst the 'heathen', readily helped the colonial rulers in the execution of the project. Bengali translation, in its early stages, was a joint venture undertaken by the East India Company officials and the Protestant missionaries.

The early translations done mostly by the missionaries and scholars in the pay of the East India Company were functional in nature. They were executed either for administrative purposes or evangelization or to train would-be officials in the language of the ruled.

Translations from English were done in a word-for-word manner, allowing no major deviation from the SL texts. The choice of the texts, even when not Biblical, was didactic, meant to improve minds steeped in a supposedly inferior culture.

An anecdote related by George Smith in his biography of William Carey makes explicit the way early translations replicated both in purpose and in methodology the hierarchy inherent in the colonial civilizing mission. Carey was reading out from his Bengali translation of the Old Testament to two pundits from Nadia. He wrote in his journal that the pundits seemed pleased with what they heard about the Creation but raised one objection. They thought the mention of *Patal*, the kingdom of Yam beneath the earth, was necessary to make the account of creation complete. Afterwards, Carey wrote in his journal:

> There is a necessity of explaining to them several circumstances relative to geography and chronology, as they have many superstitious opinions on those subjects which are closely connected with their systems of idolatry. (189)

What is at issue here is two conflicting views of reality, mediated through two different languages. The anecdote demonstrates that language is not a simple nomenclature but is constitutive of reality, as Edward Sapir tells us:

> No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (Bassnett-McGuire 13)

Carey, however, saw the Nadia pundits' view of reality as flawed, stemming from their ignorance of 'geography and chronology', which in turn tethered them to habits of idolatry, as if a proper knowledge of geography condoned the existence of a Christian heaven or the truth of the account of the Creation described in the Old Testament is self-evident in the light of 'chronology'. What *is* evident here is that the project of educating Indians or making available

to them the Word of the Saviour was driven by the colonialist pursuit of reducing an alien reality into a familiar one, of exercising discursive control over the subject population.

It is this pursuit which makes translation the single most important tool both for the rulers and the evangelizers. For the missionaries, translation was a tool to win the Indians over for Christ, and for the East India Company, for the colonial regime. Bernard S. Cohn speaks of the pivotal role translation played in the colonizers' attempt at taming an alien and often hostile reality and of the ensuing clash of words and worlds.

> To the educated Englishman of the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries, the world was knowable through the senses, which could record the experiences of a natural world. This world was generally believed to be divinely created, knowable in an empirical fashion, and constitutive of the sciences through which will be revealed the laws of Nature that governed the world and all that was in it. In coming to India, they unknowingly and unwittingly invaded and conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well. The facts of this space did not exactly correspond to those of the invaders. Nevertheless, the British believed that they could explore and conquer this space through translation: establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable. (4)

The first step towards conquering that alien space was to learn the languages which constituted it. But that too, proved to be no easy job. The British linguists divided Indian languages into two broad categories—the 'classical' Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and the 'vernacular' languages. Most of the vernacular languages had no standard forms and the absence of codified laws of grammar made learning such languages inordinately difficult for the European student. This explains the proliferation of grammars, dictionaries and vocabularies written by British scholars in the early-nineteenth century. The Fort William College, where the academic staff

consisted mostly of missionaries, was set up by Lord Wellesley primarily to teach the Indian languages to young civilians. 'The knowledge of languages were necessary', Cohn writes, 'to issue commands, collect taxes, maintain law and order—and to create other forms of knowledge about the people they were ruling.'(4) Translating from English to Bengali and vice versa was one of the most important coursework the students were assigned by their Bengali teacher William Carey at the college of Fort William.

Not that the process of establishing a correspondence between the worlds of the ruler and the ruled was carried out solely by the British; they needed the help of indigenous scholars to grope their way through the labyrinths of obscure grammatical rules which they thought were kept secret by the Brahmins to maintain monopoly over the classical languages, especially Sanskrit, and to make sense of the vernacular languages which had no codified grammar to guide the learner. These indigenous scholars, *munshis* and *pundits*, were employed as aids and teachers at the Fort William College. Often they were held in high esteem by their British counterparts. Nevertheless, they were mere instruments for transforming Indian forms of knowledge into European objects.

A War in Words: Missionary Adventure in Heathen Lands

William Carey—born in a village in Northamptonshire on 17 August, 1761—was not the first missionary to India, but he is perhaps the most significant figure in the history of Bengali translation, and of Protestant missions in India.

There is an interesting anecdote about him in Marshman's history of the Serampore Mission. Carey was a cobbler in his early life. While mending shoes in a small workshop, from time to time he would gaze up at a map of the world on the wall. He had marked on that map 'heathen' territories where the 'light' of the gospel was still to reach. Those dark continents out there in Asia and Africa beckoned to him like unavoidable destiny. It was the fallen, wretched

peoples, his biographers tell us, who enkindled the missionary zeal in him. But there is another turn to this interesting story.

> It was from the perusal of "Cook's Voyages round the World", and while employed in giving instructions to his pupils at Moulton in geography, that Mr. Carey was led to contemplate the moral and spiritual degradation of the heathen and to form the noble design of communicating the Gospel to them. When he was subsequently restrained to relinquish the school and return to manual occupation, the same thoughts were still uppermost. The idea of establishing a mission to the heathen had taken such complete possession of his mind as to absorb his thoughts and his affections. He could talk of little else. Mr. Fuller has related that on going to his little workshop, he saw a large map suspended on the wall, composed of several sheets pasted together in which he had entered every particular he had been able to glean relative to the natural characteristics, the population, and the religion of every country, as then known to us. While engaged in making or mending shoes, his eyes were often raised from the last to the map, and his mind was employed in traversing the different regions of the globe, and musing on the condition of the various heathen tribes, and devising the means of evangelizing them. (Marshman 9)

F. Deaville Walker, too, mentions young Carey's fascination for travel narratives. He says Carey was nicknamed Columbus by his classmates for his avid interest in *The Life of Columbus*. Walker even quotes Carey as saying: 'My attention to Missions was first awakened after I was at Moulton, by reading *The Last Voyage of Captain Cook*'. Carey, like his countrymen, came to know about the exploits of Captain Cook through *The Northampton Mercury*, which was published every Monday and in 1792, claimed to be 'the largest paper in

the kingdom.' 'Cook's *Journal* became, in Carey's hands,' Walker writes, 'a call to missionary effort.' (24, 56-7, 22)

The missionary zeal then, had something in common with the enthusiasm of an explorer to step on unconquered/uncharted territories, of facing the darkness that defines the contours of light, or its bearer. And as we shall see later, the only weapon Carey wielded in his noble war against the 'heathen' darkness was that of translation. He did not venture into that darkness with armies. Rather, he waged a war in words. Colonial expansion, as Ranajit Guha puts it, had always been 'a joint operation of wars and words' (8). He mastered, with an amazing fury, the regional languages of India. He studied with zeal the 'fountainhead' from which he thought those languages had originated, made dictionaries and vocabularies, and formulated grammars so that those who would follow in his footsteps would find themselves better-equipped for the war he had started against the ignorance of a 'heathen' people.

The whole missionary project in Bengal hinged on Carey's grand schemes for translating the Bible into the vernacular. Wilberforce, goading the House of Commons into allowing missionary work in India, said: 'a sublimer thought cannot be conceived than when a poor cobbler formed the resolution to give to the millions of Hindoos the Bible in their own language.' (Marshman 1: 9-10)

The sermon Carey preached in May 1792 at Nottingham is regarded to have heralded the era of the Baptist Mission in India. The passage he took from *Isaiah* is replete with metaphors of expansion and impregnation:

> Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtain of thy habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. (Marshman 1: 15)

Carey set sail for Calcutta on board the ship *Kron Princesse Marie* on 13 June 1793. (Das: 69) But Calcutta was no desolate city, and the seeds Carey would sow there were to bare strange fruits.

Bible Translation and the Beginning of the Bengali Book

The first Baptist missionary to have attempted Bengali translation of the Bible is John Thomas. He first came to India in 1783 and again in 1786. He met Ram Ram Basu, who would later become his *munshi*, in 1787. Together they set about translating portions of the Bible. Thomas wrote in a letter to his father on 9 February 1790 that he had completed the Bengali translation of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. He even went to William Jones seeking his help in getting government funding for his translation project in 1790. (Das 66) In 1792, on his third voyage to India, he was accompanied by William Carey, who would soon take up the baton of Bible translation from his sagging hands. By that time, however, Thomas had translated the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, James and portions of Genesis, psalms and parts of the Prophesies. These translations were later incorporated in the Bengali edition of the Gospel of Matthew, which came out from Srirampur in August 1800.

The abiding objective of Carey's missionary efforts in India was to translate the Bible into the vernaculars. Soon after his arrival in India, he appointed Ram Ram Basu as his *munshi* (Marshman 61) and started learning Bengali with a view to revising the rough translation of the Bible done by Thomas. Carey's project needed a constant supply of funds. In his early years as a missionary in Madnabati, Carey found an unlikely patron in one George Udny, an indigo manufacturer, who appointed him as an assistant to superintendent two of his factories in Malda (Marshman 67). His comrades back home were unhappy about his taking up the job. To placate their misgivings, Carey wrote in a letter to the Society that his salary went into the printing of the Bengali translation of the New Testament:

> I am indeed poor, and shall always be so until the Bible is published in Bengalee and Hindoostanee, and the people want no further instruction…I can only say that after my family's obtaining a bare allowance, my whole income—and some months, much more—goes for the purposes of the Gospel, in supporting persons to assist in the translation of the Bible, in writing out copies of it […]. (Marshman 68)

Carey gave up his plan for bringing a fount of types from England when he learned it was available in the country. The first Bengali types were used to print Halhed's *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* in 1778 at a press in Hooghly. The punches for the fount were prepared by Charles Wilkins. Wilkins was a member of the civil service of the East India Company. He cut the Bengali punches with his own hands. The next example of Bengali printing is a translation of the code of *Regulations* drawn up by Sir Elijah Impey. Jonathan Duncan translated it into Bengali. It was printed from the Company Press in 1785. The Cornwallis Code of 1793 was translated into Bengali by Foster, the most eminent Bengali scholar before Carey. It was also printed at the government press, but from an improved fount. This was regarded to be the standard fount—and it was useful to Carey—until a smaller and better fount was prepared at Serampore.

At first, Carey was planning to order punches from Caslon, the eminent letter-founder in London. He wrote to the society requesting them to send a press and paper. He wrote that if 'a serious printer could be found willing to engage in the Mission, he would be a great blessing […].' (Marshman 80) Carey would later find in William Ward the man he was looking for but the Society could not arrange for the press and Carey had to wait until December 1798 when there was an advertisement in the papers that a letter-foundry had been established in Kolkata for the country languages (Das 82). It is here that Carey met Panchanan Karmakar, a blacksmith

whom Wilkins had trained in the art of punch cutting. His services would be instrumental in making the grand projects of the Serampore Mission come true.

Soon after, a wooden printing press was advertised for sale in Calcutta. Carey immediately purchased it for forty pounds. Udny, the indigo planter who had appointed Carey earlier, paid for the press (Marshman 80). This press was brought to Srirampur when the Mission was set up there in 1800 and the Bengali translation of the Gospel of Matthew was printed with this wooden press in the month of August that year. Carey also translated *Letter to the Laskars* by Samuel Pearce and published it in that month (Das 88).

The printing of the Bengali *New Testament* was finished on 7 February 1801. Its second edition was published in 1806. By the year 1832, it had gone through seven editions. A short while before his death Carey published the revised edition of the Bengali translation of the whole Bible that included the eighth edition of the Bengali *New Testament*. (Das 88-9) The revision took him twelve years.

Besides Bengali, Carey translated the whole Bible into Oriya, Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit and Assamese, and portions of the Bible into many other Indian languages, with the help of his pundits and colleagues. The evanescence of the vernacular languages, which had no standardized forms and no established grammatical rules to contain them, was a daunting hurdle Carey had to overcome in order to acquire mastery over them. Initially, Carey was baffled by the profusion of dialects in Bengali. As a translator, he was also troubled by what seemed to him to be the inadequacy of the language to express ideas of Christian theology. Carey wrote on 2 October 1795:

> One of my great difficulties arises from the common people being so extremely ignorant of their own language and the various dialects which prevail in different parts of the country. Though I can preach an hour with tolerable freedom, so that all who speak the language well, or can read or write, can

> perfectly understand me; yet the labouring people can understand me little. …the poor people…have scarce a word in use about religion. (Das 79)

In terms of translation, it was a problem of equivalence. To say that the people had 'scarce a word in use about religion' was a gross misstatement on part of Carey. What he *meant* perhaps is that there were no exact equivalents in the TL culture for theological precepts his own culture had taken for granted. That year on 31 December, he wrote to Pearce from Madnabati:

> I much question whether the Moonshee can translate the Bible so as to be understood by the common people, and less so as there is an alteration in their dialect every ten or twelve miles; and if he could I am persuaded that he would be ashamed of writing language so completely ungrammatical. (Das 80)

Carey's indignation at the absence of 'grammar' in the dialects of Bengali is symptomatic of the colonizer's desire to comprehend an alien world using his own forms of knowing and thinking. The joint efforts of the missionaries and the colonizers to codify the vernacular languages marked the beginning of an epistemological onslaught that would devalue indigenous forms of authority and signification. (Cohn: 21)

Command over the Indian languages was a prerequisite for establishing control over the people. Bernard Cohn writes:

> This knowledge [of languages] was to enable the British to classify, categorize, and bound the vast social world that was India so that it could be controlled. These imperatives, elements in the larger colonial project, shaped the "investigative modalities" devised by the British to collect the facts. (5)

Carey's plan for a polyglot dictionary was motivated by the search for an origin that would give coherence to the disorderly Indian languages and act as a yardstick by which to classify them. He wrote about his plan in a letter to Ryland on 10 December 1811:

> I have of late been impressed by the vast importance of laying a foundation of Biblical criticism in the east, by preparing grammars of the different languages into which we have translated or may translate the Bible. Without some such step, they who follow us will have to evade through the same labour that I have, in order to stand merely upon the same ground that I now stand upon [. …] the necessity which lies upon me of acquiring so many languages, obliges me to study and write out the grammar of each of them and to attend closely to their irregularities and peculiarities…
>
> …to secure the gradual perfection of the translations, I have also in mind, and indeed have been long collecting materials for an Universal Dictionary of the Oriental Languages Derived from the Sanskrit. I mean to take Sanskrit as the ground work, and to give the different acceptations of every word, with examples of their application, in the manner of Johnson, and then to give the synonyms of the different languages derived from the Sanskrit, with the Hebrew and Greek terms answering thereto; always putting the word derived from the Sanskrit term first, and then those derived from other sources. I intend always to give the etymology of the Sanskrit term, so that that of the terms deduced from it in the cognate languages will be evident. (Smith 84-5)

In other words, the polyglot dictionary was to become a key that would give the European unhindered access to yet unconquered spaces within the alien culture. Carey's understanding of the Indian languages was based on his assumption that all Indian languages directly descended from Sanskrit and whatever other influences—such as Arbi or Farsi—there might be in a vernacular were 'impurities' in need of being purged. He wrote in the preface to his Sanskrit Grammar that it was like a key to the other Indian languages:

> The peculiar grammar of any one of these [vernacular languages] may be acquired in a couple of months, and then the language is open to the student. The knowledge of four words in five enables him to read with pleasure, and renders the acquisition of the few new words, as well as the idiomatic expressions, a matter of delight rather than of labour. (Smith 180)

But what exactly was the agency of those who were intended to be the objects of this new discursive formation? Perhaps we should look towards Panchanan's apprentice Manohar, who succeeded him at the Mission and worked there for almost forty years, for an answer. Reverend James Kennedy saw him cutting the matrices or casting the types for the Bible, always squatting under his favourite idol. (De: 120)

Translation as an Administrative Tool

The Fort William College was set up by Lord Wellesley to train young civilians in their business of governing an alien country. In no other institution did the manifold functions of Bengali translation in the colonial era become as evident as in this college, which, after the Serampore Mission, was a second home to Carey.

Though the college came into operation on 4 May 1800, it was formally established on 18 August by a Minute in Council in which Lord Wellesley furnished in detail the reasons for setting up the college (De 120). The Minute said:

> The civil servants of the English East India Company can no longer be considered as the agents of a commercial concern; they are in fact the ministers and officials of a powerful sovereign: they must now be viewed in that capacity with a reference, not to their nominal, but to their real occupation. (De 121)

In an earlier letter—dated 10 July 1800—addressed to the Court of Directors, Wellesley had chalked out a plan for the college. His letter makes explicit the relation between colonial expansion and the growing need for acquiring knowledge about the colonized, their languages and customs. He wrote:

> [T]he British possession in India now constitutes one of the most expansive and popular empires of the world […] the duty and policy of the British Government in India, therefore, require that the system of confiding the immediate exercise of every branch and departments to Europeans, educated in its own service and subject to its own direct control, should be diffused as widely as possible as well as a view to the stability of our own interest, as to happiness and welfare to our own subject. (Das 4)

Wellesley initially planned to establish the college at Garden Reach, near the Ganges, but finally, it was housed in the Writers' Building. (Das 6)

Soon after the establishment of the college, notices were issued throughout India inviting applications for posts of professors and tutors. More than fifty replied. One of the most important chairs was that of Bengali. David Brown and Claudius Buchanan, who had been appointed provost and vice-provost respectively, chose Carey for the post. (Walker 233)

After much deliberation, Carey decided to accept the job. In a letter to Sutcliff, he elaborated the benefits of a close association with the new-founded college:

> They thought it would much contribute to our original plan, and that it would eventually serve the Mission. It would immediately introduce the Bengali New Testament into the College, and any other books also which I might recommend, and eventually would spread them into all parts of the country […] it would open a way to preach to the Hindus in Calcutta and its environs, and

> would put a number of respectable Hindus under my direction as Munshis. (Walker 234)

That Carey was right in surmising that the Mission and the Fort William College would serve mutual interests is borne out by Section II of the Statutes entitled 'Admission of the Superior Officers and Professors…':

> In as much as the College of Fort William is founded on the principles of the Christian religion, and is intended not only to promote the study of Oriental literature, to instruct the students in the duties of the several stations to which they may be destined in the government of the British empire in India, and to strengthen and confirm, within these possessions the attachment of the civil servants of the East India Company to the wise laws and constitutions of Great Britain, but also to maintain and uphold the Christian religion in this quarter of the globe […]. (Das 7)

Carey, however, was well-aware of the colonial government's need for instituting a centre for the learning of Indian languages and customs as is evident from the speech he delivered in Sanskrit at the public disputation on 20 September, 1804 in the presence of Lord Wellesley, the Supreme Court judges, the Supreme Council, an envoy from Baghdad, and the city's literati:

> The institution of this college will help to break down the barrier of ignorance of India's languages, which has long opposed the influence of our principles and laws and has despoiled our Administration of its energy and effect. "Sanskrit learning," say the Brahmins, "is an extensive forest abounding in varied and beautiful foliage, in flowers and delicate fruits." But it has hitherto been surrounded by a thick and thorny fence. This college, by the wisdom of Lord Wellesley, will make a highway through the wood (Carey 208).

Sisir Kumar Das says that during the few decades of its existence, the Fort William College played a pivotal role in shaping British attitudes towards Indian languages as 'effective instruments of the administration of British India'. (Das: ix) He, however, denies that the college was a centre of Orientalism. He argues:

> While orientalism is an outcome of the Western man's intellectual curiosity about the Orient, the College of Fort William was but a means to meet the demands of the administrative necessities of the British rulers in India. (Das xi)

Das' seminal work on the Fort William College was first published in 1978, the same year when Edward Said's canonical book *Orientalism*, too, was first published. Said showed how 'Western Man's intellectual curiosity about the Orient' was inseparably linked with 'the administrative necessities' of ruling the Orient: "Orientalism, then, is knowledge of the Orient, that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing" (Said 41).

Carey delivered his first lecture at the college of Fort William in May, 1801. (Carey 207) As a teacher of Bengali his biggest challenge was to find textbooks and primers in that language. Halhed's *Grammar*, by this time, was almost out of print and Forster's *Vocabulary* was from English to Bengali. In his first year as a Fort William professor, Carey wrote a Bengali *Grammar* based on Halhed's and *Colloquies.* Mrityunjay Bidyālankār and Goloknāth Śarmmā, two of his pundits, translated texts from the Sanskrit and Ram Ram Basu wrote what many have hailed as the first instance of modern Bengali historiography, *Pratapaditya Caritra*.

The curriculum at the Fort William College was an extensive one which included the modern languages of Europe, the Greek, Latin and English classics; geography and mathematics, ancient and modern history, botany, chemistry and astronomy, ethics and jurisprudence, the laws of India and England. However, the Fort William College was primarily an institute for learning Indian languages such as Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali,

Telegu, Marathi, Tamil and Cannad. (Marshman 144) Translation, consequently, was the foremost coursework Carey set for his students.

There is a brief description in George Smith's biography of how Carey taught his students translation. He set pieces from his own *Colloquies* or *Stories*, from Ram Ram Basu's *Pratapaditya Caritra* or Mrityunjay Bidyālankār's *Fables*, or from Kashiram Das's Bengali verse-translation of the *Mahabharata*, which the Srirampur Mission had printed in pocket volumes in 1802, for his students to translate into English. As soon as Bengali newspapers began to be published he made good use of them in the classroom bringing an air of immediacy into the work. Junior students were assigned English to Bengali translation as homework while the seniors had to do it on the spot with occasional help from Carey himself. The pieces that were set for translation were either some story from the *Arabian Nights*, or a passage from Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws*, 'chosen for its short and well-defined sentences, its appeal to their understanding, and because most of them were looking towards the judicial branch of the Service.' (Carey 212)

Carey had thirteen students in his first lecture as the Bengali teacher (Walker 236). Most of them were fresh from Eton and in their later teens. Carey's translation workshops were meant to train them as would-be administrators who would rule an alien country. Of his first forty-five students, twenty-one became judges, with nine of the court of appeal. Charles Metcalf and Butterworth Bayley became provisional governors general, Plowden secretary to the board of trade, Morton deputy accountant general, Barwell comptroller of the treasury, Frases and others commissioners of the revenue, Pakenham secretary to the governor general (Carey 207).

The minutes and correspondence of the college council enumerate the day-to-day affairs of the college in vivid detail. Carey's young students were often lazy, insubordinate, and played pranks on the college pundits. Carey, however, kept them busy as much as he could. One of his students, Henry Sargent, translated four books of the *Aeneid* into Bengali. Two other

students, Claude Monckton and Lewin Anderson, respectively translated into Bengali the *Tempest* and *Telemachus* (Carey 210-11).

The Fort William College became a centre where the Bengali literati collaborated with the British to shape modern Bengali prose. Carey drew around himself a constellation of pundits and engaged them in fervid literary activity. Having joined the office, the first thing he did was to enlist the help of indigenous scholars. He engaged a chief pundit at a salary of Rs. 200 a month, a second at Rs100, and six others at Rs 40. (Carey 206) They were Mrityunjay Bidyālankār (Chief Munshi), Ramnath Vachaspati (Second Munshi), Sripati Ray, Anada Chandra, Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay, Kashinath Mukhopadhyay, Padmalochan Churamani and Ramram Basu. Das points out that all of them, except Ramram Basu, were 'typical representatives of the Bengali Hindu academic community of the 18th century' (Das 19).

Ramram Basu worked with Carey until his death in 1813. He was succeeded by Naruttam Basu, his son. Mrityunjay was replaced in 1818, when he was appointed pundit of the Supreme Court, by Golak Nath and Mrityunjay's son, Ramjay, became Carey's second chief. Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay was there all through the twenty-nine years of Carey's service. The four other pundits worked until they were pensioned a year or two before Carey (Carey 212).

The college professors were the government's literary advisers in the languages they taught. Thus, nothing was published with their patronage, during thirty years, in Bengali, Marathi, and Sanskrit without Carey's approval. His pundits published Sixteen works, most of them Bengali translation from the Sanskrit or the Persian—stories, fables, the *Hitopadesa*, works on jurisprudence, illustrative essays and the first Bengali prose rendering of the *Gita*. But three of the sixteen works were original—Ram Ram Basu's *Raja Pratapaditya Caritra*; Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay's *Maharaja Krishna Chandra Charitra* (from whom he himself

claimed descent); and Mrityunjay'a *Chronicles of India's Kings* or *Rājābali* (1808). (Carey 214)

Translation was a tool for smoother administrative operations in the hands of colonial rulers because it was the means of bringing their subjects under an all-pervading surveillance, of exercising control over those potentially subversive spaces that lay beyond their knowledge—shadowy, undefined and uncategorized. It was done, however, in the name of the Empire's civilizing mission and there was no better person for the job than the Bengali professor of the Fort William College.

Within nine months of Carey's joining the college, Lord Wellesley ordered an enquiry into the sacrificial murder of infants at the Island of Sagar. Carey wrote to fuller early in 1802:

> As teacher in Bengali, I have received an order from the Vice-President to make every possible inquiry into the number, nature and reasons of these murders, and to make a full report to Government. You may be sure I shall do it with great readiness.

A short while after Carey made the report, the rite was declared illegal. An exception, however, was made for the *Sutti*, much to the dismay of Carey and his missionary colleagues. He carried out a similar kind of investigation into the performance of this rite by sending out men to every village within a periphery of thirty miles around Kolkata who would collect data regarding the number of widows burnt in the previous year, their age and the number of children they left. The investigation revealed the number of widows immolated was four hundred and thirty eight. The mission published the findings of Carey's investigation and continued its protest against the rite (Carey 209).

Around 1824, Carey was appointed the government's Bengali translator for a monthly salary of Rs 300. On 4 December, 1829, William Bentinck passed a regulation in council declaring the practice of *sutti* both illegal and criminal. Sir Charles Metcalf and Butterworth

Bayley—both taught by Carey at the Fort William, and by then presidents respectively of the Boards of Revenue and Trade—were eager for the reform (Carey 361-62).

When the edict arrived at the Fort William, Carey translated the document with the help of a pundit as the government's official translator. It was a Sunday morning and he was preparing for the pulpit. The translation kept them busy throughout the day, as it required attention to critical nuances, 'every sentence and phrase having been weighed with the most anxious deliberation' (Carey 362). The regulation was dealing with a religious practice of the Hindus. The extra care needed to translate the document was proof enough of the highly precarious nature of the activity, treading as it did, a tightrope between the ruler and the ruled.

Perhaps Carey himself best described in his speech before Wellesley at the disputation the reasons why he, a missionary with the sole aim of translating the Bible into the vernacular, was so precious to the colonial rulers for whom preaching Christianity was never a primary concern:

> I have been in the habit of preaching to multitudes daily, of discoursing with the Brahmins upon every subject, and superintending schools for the instruction of Hindu youth. Their language is almost as familiar to me as my own. *This close intercourse with the natives for so long a period…has afforded me opportunities of information not inferior to those which have hitherto been presented to any other person.* I may say, indeed, that their manners, customs, habits, and sentiments, are as obvious to me as if I were myself a native. (Walker 240-41) [emphasis mine]

An act of translation within the colonial apparatus is akin to an act of espionage. It entails probing deep into the recesses of an alien culture and making its secrets intelligible for exercising greater control over the subject population. Carey's insights into and his empathy with the subject race made him suitable for such an enterprise. Around 1806, he wrote to his

sisters, 'I shall never more see either of you on earth […]. I do not know, indeed, how I could bear an English winter' (Carey 246). Carey exemplified the translator's predicament by residing the space between two cultures, a predicament that also made him into a prized go-between for the colonial state.

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