



Research article

“This is the story of my sad lot, I shall tell everyone!”: Discourse as Resistance in Madhusudan Dutt in Nineteenth Century Bengal

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Abstract

The main objective of the paper is to present how colonial discourses prevented a native from flourishing in his literary career as an English writer in nineteenth-century Bengal. With the introduction of English as a medium of instruction in school, after Macaulay's Minutes in 1835, many Indians went beyond the English design of becoming the mediators between the rulers and the ruled and tried to build their literary career in English falling genuinely in love with the language. One such Indian was Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824 - 73), remembered mostly for bringing a "renaissance" in Bengali literature of the time. Deeply influenced by the Westernized curriculum of the Hindu College and his teacher David Lester Richardson, Madhusudan wrote, at the early phase of his literary career, many poems in English but failed to publish them in *Blackwood's Magazine* or *Bentley's Miscellany*. "The Captive Ladie", published in 1849, was also not accepted seriously by Western readers. To become accepted into European culture, he even embraced Christianity ignoring the repeated advice of his parents and relatives. This paper intends to investigate why Madhusudhan's works were not accepted by English readers despite having literary merits. The first part of the paper discusses the operations of colonial discourses with the help of the theories by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said. The second part engages itself with the literary contribution of Madhusudan Dutt. The paper concludes by criticizing the attitudes of metropolitan universities of the West toward the literature and cultures of the "Third World."

Keywords: Discourse, Resistance, Bengal Renaissance, Macaulay's Minutes, Postcolonialism.



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"A single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia".

- T. B. Macaulay, "Macaulay's Minute on Education, 2 February 1835".

The famous contemporary Indian English novelist Amitav Ghosh, in an interview with Sayam Bandyopadhyay recently in Kolkata, agrees that he got recognition and success as an English novelist despite his Bengali origin mostly because of the process of decolonization. He remembers that in the prevalent discourse of the nineteenth century, not a single author from the colonized space found recognition of writing in English. He strongly declares that "the colonizers were very contemptuous of them." Even forty years ago, Ghosh recalls, when he first wrote his novels, they were also criticized by the Western reviewers in a very "dismissive tone"ⁱ. A mentality of discarding or throwing away or not recognizing them as "writers at all" predominated the discourse of the time.

With the mask of civilizing the "savage" East which they called "the White man's burden"ⁱⁱ, the colonial rulers looted the wealth, established their system of administration, disrupted the existing harmonious social fabric, and dominated the colonized culturally as well as intellectually. They presented colonialism as the only means through which the "barbaric" natives could be developed by replacing their indigenous traditions, culture, lifestyle, and even religions with Western ones. In addition to physical force and coercion, colonialism requires a system of beliefs that support the taking and ongoing occupation of other people's territories. The language that colonizers speak and that colonized peoples must learn is infused with these beliefs. As a result, a range of widely held beliefs regarding the relative disparities between individuals from purportedly distinct cultures spread. Thus, colonialism is essentially "an operation of discourse" that "interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation" (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p.3).

The Francophone Afro-Caribbean theorist Frantz Fanon deals with the psychological effects of colonialism in such works as *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) where he argues that colonialism pushed the colonized to madness rejecting all individual claims. The colonizers captured the world in a way that the colonized, because of the colour of their skin, were rendered as peculiar. His identity was brought into question - from a human subject, he began to consider himself as an object. The first-hand experience of Fanon (when in France a White stranger called him "look, a Negro") as expressed in *Black Skin, White Masks* aptly elucidates the fact:

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to go abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood? (Fanon, 2008, p.112).

A native's perceived worth is revealed when he is called by others. This is a clear illustration of how interpellation works. He is given a role and identity that he is forced to accept as

his own. Besides highlighting the anguish of being represented by others, interpellation operates through pleasure, too, encouraging people to see themselves in a positive light. Making someone feel special or important instead of worthless or disdainful tends to help them behave in a way that best suits one's needs since it boosts their self-esteem and allows them to embrace the identity that has been crafted just for them. The reason colonial discourses have succeeded is that they provide the colonizers with a sense of importance, value, and superiority over others. It also gains the cooperation of colonized people by giving them a newfound sense of self-worth from their involvement in advancing civilization. Thus, the foundation of the theories of colonial discourses is the reciprocal relationship that must exist between the tangible practices of colonialism and the representations it creates for it to function.

Edward Said in his polemical *Orientalism* (1978) argues that by repeatedly misrepresenting the East as "inferior" or the "other" to the "superior" West through academic discipline, the colonial discourses internalize the inferiority of the colonized even to the colonized. Negative adjectives are often used to characterize the Orient to reinforce the idea that the West is stronger and superior. East and West are placed through the construction of an imbalance duality. Said writes,

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies, and colonial styles. (Said, 1979, pp.2-3)

Said further demonstrates how European culture strengthened and became more distinct by opposing the Orient and acting as a kind of underground, even surrogate, self. Thus, emphasizing the psychic differences, the colonized subject is forced into the internalization of the self as an "Other." The savage colonized remain an "other" to all the positive qualities of the colonizers. This is how the colonizers exercised their cultural hegemony upon the colonized and the trauma created by this discourse, in a way, compelled the colonized to embrace the "civilized" ideals of the colonizers. They considered the culture of the colonizers superior and imitated them in their daily lives. Overlooking the exploitation of the colonizers, they considered the colonial rule as a boon for them.

However, at the turn of the twentieth century, the British control of its colonized nations faced a challenge as many of them began to rebel against the dominating power of the European nations claiming their independence. The "operation of the colonial discourse"ⁱⁱⁱ created a space for a counter-discourse known as postcolonialism where the colonized

tried to resist the arguments of the colonizers by unlearning their worldview and producing new modes of representation by looking into their indigenous domains of knowledge. Former colonies began to produce literary works in the language of the colonizers redefining their identities - a challenge to the colonial center from the colonized periphery- a gesture that can be termed, after three critics of Australia: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, "writing back to the center." In sharp contrast to commonwealth literature, postcolonial literature was immediately seen as politically radical and locally located rather than globally relevant. They were seen as directly challenging the colonial ideology, proposing fresh perspectives that both subverted the prevailing paradigm and offered voice and expression to the people who were colonized or had previously been colonized. The three critics demonstrated how authors in colonial nations were expressing their own sense of self by reshaping English to make it more receptive to their experiences. They argued that "the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place" (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p.37). And these literatures have proven as significant as any work written in England. Nowadays, we more often refer to literature in English than English literature.

However, the formal ceremony of independence- the lowering of one flag and the raising of another - does not mean that the former colonies have completely recovered from the defects of colonialism. The political independence and postcolonial reawakening are not enough to provide adequate cultural and ideological independence. One of the major reasons, as put by the India-born cultural theorist Leela Gandhi (2007), is the "historically imbalanced" relationship between the East and the West. Homi Bhabha (1996) in his *Location of Culture*, argues that in addition to the reiteration of stereotypes and ambivalence- the two key elements of the colonial discourse, there is another contradiction- the colonizer simultaneously attempts to domesticate and westernize the colonized and continues to define it as "other". He states that "like the mirror phase, the 'fullness' of the stereotype - its image as identity - is always threatened by 'lack'" (Bhabha, 1996, p.76). According to him, "mimicry" (the imitation of the coloniser by the colonized) emerges as a process that produces colonized individuals who are "almost the same but not quite" (ibid, p. 86). They are a kind of "hybrid," and to use a direct quotation from Macaulay (1835), - "a class of people Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in moral and intellect" (para- 29).

If we look into the scenario of nineteenth-century Bengal, we find that the newly introduced English education to create "a class of interpreters" between the rulers and the ruled, created a class of English-educated intelligentsia popularly known as "babus" who praised the law and order of the British administration. It was the same class that tried to make a reform in the narrow circle of their society which they claimed as the Bengal Renaissance. They began to learn the English language to easily get jobs in government offices. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824 - 1873) - the famous Bengali poet

and playwright was a member of this society. This native Bengali poet dreamt of being a famous poet in English, adopted Christianity, and went to England but ultimately failed to find himself assimilated into English society. His attempt to be an English poet and then his journey from “Michael” to “Madhusudan” is an apt example of the application of the theory discussed so far.

The establishment of the Hindu College in 1817 is considered a milestone in the introduction of Western education in the then Calcutta. The students were attracted to English education neglecting their mother tongue. Ramkamol Sen, the Bengali teacher commented on being dissatisfied with the Bengali marks of the students in 1841 when Madhusudan was a student,

The students of senior classes were only giving stress to English subjects. They have stopped reading Bengali. It seems that they understand English much more than their mother tongue. They give little or no importance at all to learning their own language than English. (qt. in Murshid, 2018, p. 35).

As a student of the Hindu College, Michael was greatly influenced by his teacher Captain David Lester Richardson^{iv}. Richardson’s poems were published from London and his edited anthology of English poems broadened the horizons of thought among the students. Going through the English curriculum of the college, Michael became an ardent admirer of the famous English poet Lord Byron. William Radice showed in his thesis that Madhusudhan even imitated Byron’s way of writing letters^v. The ideals of Derozio and the Young Bengal also influenced him though he arrived six years after Derozio departed from it. However, Madhusudan was influenced more by the literary spirit of Richardson than the philosophical and reformist ideas of Derozio. He was attracted more to history and mythology but less to philosophy. Unlike the students of the Hindu College in the 1830s who were keen on social reform, Madhusudan was completely devoid of that kind of attitude. It was because of Richardson who loved lyrics more than narrative poetry, Madhusudan wrote, at the initial phase in his career, lyric poems of short length. Ghulam Murshid (2024), the famous Bangladeshi scholar writes that he dreamt of being a poet from his boyhood and started writing poetry in English at the age of sixteen (“The Birth and Re-birth of Michael”, p. 17). His deep desire to be an English poet is clear from the oft-quoted poem written by him in 1841:

I sigh for Albion’s distant shore,
Its valleys green, its mountains high;
Tho’ friends, relations, I have none
In that far clime, yet, oh! I sigh
To cross the vast Atlantic wave
For glory, or a nameless grave!

My father, mother, sister, all
Do love me and I love them too,

Yet oft the tear-drops rush and fall
 From my sad eyes like winter's dew.
 And, oh! I sigh for Albion's stand
 As if she were my native land. (Murshid, 2018, p. 45).

Madhusudan was willing to make any kind of sacrifice to travel to England. He was deeply influenced by Alexander Pope who said that to follow Poetry "one must leave father and mother" (ibid, p. 51). Madhusudan acknowledged this as an unchanging reality. In November 1842, Madhusudan wrote to his friend Gour Das Bysack that poetry had given him the courage to leave his parents if necessary. Going to England to be a renowned English poet became his only goal. He wrote on November 27, 1842, to Gourdas Basak: "You know my desire for leaving this country is too firmly rooted to be removed. The sun may forget to rise, but I cannot remove it from my heart. Depending upon it—in a year or two more— I must either be in England or cease to be at all; one of these must be done!" (ibid, p. 33).

Many of his English poems written during the initial phase of his career were published in famous English magazines in India like *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, *Literary Gleaner*, *Bengal Herald*, *Oriental Magazine*, *Comte*, etc. He became ambitious to become published in English magazines in England and sent his poems to *Blackwood Magazine* and *Bentley's Miscellany*. But none of them were published. The attitude of the native Indian is very clear in the letter to editor of the *Bentley's Miscellany* that accompanied his poems:

I firmly believe that the English people who are great and benevolent never discourage the endeavor of a native. I am a Hindu, a person of Bengal and presently reading English in the Hindu College in Calcutta. I am eighteen years old - and in the language of a poet of your country, Cowley- "Though not in age, in respect of knowledge a boy only." (ibid, p. 49).

He became impatient to go to England. In a poem written in 1842, he wrote:

Oft like a sad imprisoned bird I sigh
 To leave this land; though mine own land it be; (ibid, p.49).

On 9 November 1842, Madhu became "Michael" embracing the religion of the English. He was attracted to Christianity so much that he wrote a hymn to be sung at the time of the ceremony of his conversion. The hymn opens with the following lines:

Long sunk in superstition's night,
 By sin and Satan driven,
 I saw not, cared not for the light
 That leads the blind to Heaven. (ibid, p. 66)

It is evident that Madhusudan had the firm belief that Christianity would lead him to the heaven of light. He was rusticated from the Hindu College and after remaining 1 year 9 months outside any educational institution he was admitted to Bishop's College in November 1844. In heart and soul, Michael became an Englishman. In Madras and afterward, in Calcutta, he moved predominantly to Anglo-Indian society. A brilliant

student of his time, Madhusudan knew 14 languages. He read Homer's great epics in original Greek. He wrote a sonnet on Dante and presented it to the Italian king Victor Emmanuel. His knowledge of Ancient Indian mythology and history was without any question. *The Captive Ladie*, Madhusudan's first poetry book in English, published in 1849, deals with Oriental history in English. Amitrasudan Bhattacharya thinks that history could never avoid Madhusudan. The first books of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (famously known as "Sahitya Samrat") and Rabindranath Tagore (known as "Viswakobi" or World poet) were rotted in the shelves of Almirah, but the first book of Madhusudan could not avert the attention of readers. The reflection of his talent was very much present in the book. It was published when he was in Madras and the book was famous both in Calcutta and Madras. Madhusudan's letter, written to Gour Das Bysack, confirms the fact that *Captive Ladie* created a good response in Madras^{vi}. Written in less than three weeks, the book was dedicated to the advocate General of Madras Presidency George Norton who after reading the whole manuscript allowed the poet to dedicate the book. He felt honoured and found in the book the "sign of promise and power" (Bhattacharya, 2024, p.21). The book was also read and praised by English educator and mathematician John Drinkwater Bethune in Calcutta. The book was also praised by Kaliprasad Ghosh, a contemporary poet known for his English poems and prose. In his English weekly magazine *Hindu Intelligencer*, Ghosh writes about the potentiality of Madhusudan,

It will appear that our author is not devoid of those characteristics which constitute a true poet; and if he continues to take proper advantage of that turn of mind with which he has been gifted by Nature, we do not entertain the least doubt of his being able to raise himself to a higher rank in the poetical world, for which our best wishes are in his favour." (ibid, p. 21)

"The Anglo Saxon and the Hindus," written when he was living in Madras uses the Adamic parable of Christian mythology. It clearly reflects that he considered Christianity and European culture much more superior than Hinduism and Indian culture. Still in his writings, he took characters from Indian history and Purana. But his treatment of those characters is different. He interpreted them in the light of European thought. Sisir Kumar Das (1966) described him as "the first Indian to respond wholeheartedly to the spirit of European poetry" (p.102).

The socio-economic and cultural life of Bengal, which was upended by British control, was given an unparalleled literary stimulant by Madhusudan Dutt. The Bengali literature of the time did not satisfy his taste. The popular Bengali poet of the era, Ishwar Chandra Gupta (1812–1859), did not win over Madhusudan, who had read Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Byron. The prose-writings of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutta were yet to come. Writing poetry in Bengali was beyond his imagination. He was the first to formulate novel European concepts in the content, ideology, and style of his writings. The influence of Homer, Milton, Tasso, and Dante is evident in Madhusudan. He followed the footsteps of Ovid in writing heroic poetry. The signs of nationalism, individualism, and

humanism were evident in his writings. However, the Western influences do not mean that he altogether ignored the Oriental ideas. The Vaisnava poets are echoed in his *Brajangana Kavya*. His innovations in language, thought and subject matter provided the Bengali intellect with a new consciousness.

Michael was born in the wrong time, in the wrong place, and also writing to the wrong people. His desperate attempt to be an English poet failed and in the English poems in the latter part of his career, he was no longer writing to the English people. The medium was English but, in spirit, they were very much Indian. Possibly, by then Madhusudan realized that the English would never accept a native as an English poet. He began learning not only Sanskrit, Bengali, Tamil, and other Indian languages, but also Hebrew, Latin, etc. The sole purpose was to serve his mother tongue after practicing languages of different continents. In the letter, written to his dear childhood friend Gour Das Bysack at this time, there was a clear indication of that decision:

My life is more busy than that of a schoolboy. Here is my routine: 6 - 8: Hebrew, 8-12: school, 12 - 2: Greek, 2 – 5: Telugu and Sanskrit, 5 -7: Latin, 7 – 10: English. Am I not preparing for the great object of embellishing the tongue of my fathers? (Basu, 1925, p. 63)

However, it is interesting to note that it was not Gour Das Bysack, not Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, not Rajnarayan Basu, and not any Indian intelligentsia of the time, but Drinkwater Bethune - an Englishman who gave him the advice to write in his mother-tongue after reading his English works. Finally, he returned to his mother tongue with a new attitude. Between 1859 and 1862, Madhusudhan wrote at least ten works in Bengali which include *Sharmistha* (1859), his greatest work *Meghnad Badh Kavya* (1861), and *Birangana Kavya* (1862). These three years are considered as the golden period in his literary career. According to Amitrasudan Bhattacharya (2024), "It is a great wonder that within a brief span of three years, a poet raised Bengali poetry and drama from foot to the top" (p.20). The variety that is found in his works was a result of his English education. He fused the Indian Puranic deities with the European mythological characters. Not content with presenting the old gods and goddesses in new garb, he transformed the ancient religious stories into human stories following the footsteps of the humanist scholars of the Renaissance. The names and structures of the stories remained the same, but he remastered the old stories, characters, and dialogues in a completely new way.

In his retelling of Indian mythology, Madhusudan inverted the popular narrative upside down. In *Meghnad Badh Kavya*, Ravana - the Rakshas king who abducted Sita becomes a patriotic tragic hero and Rama- the ideal man and the embodiment of Dharma becomes a "beggar". Another bold inversion of the ancient mythology is his *Birangana Kavya*, the first letter-poetry in Bengali literature, an eleven-chapter epic poem describing the heroic activities of women characters from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Of the eleven letters, the most controversial is "From Tara to Som", where Tara - the wife of *guru* falls in love with Som, the *shisya* of Tara's husband Brispati. In his usual nature, Madhusudan

reinterpreted the popular Som-Tara episode *Brahmaboi bartapuran* in an altogether different way^{vii}. The candid expression of love of a motherly figure towards a son-like shisya was not even accepted favourably by the English-educated "developed" society of nineteenth-century Bengal. They found it problematic how Madhusudan called a lustful sinner "*birangana*" (a heroic woman). Jogindranath Basu, the first biographer of Madhusudan, comments in this regard, "I cannot help criticizing the way he gave expression of his ugly taste" (qt. in Ghosal, 2024, p. 27).

In 1859, two years after the "Great Indian Revolt" that officially ended the Company rule in India, he wrote two plays- *Is this Called Civilization?* and *New Feathers on an Old Bird*, in which he equally criticized the English-educated *bhadraloks* for their blind and humorous imitation of the West in the name of Westernization as well as the Conservatives of the Hindu society who were used to be hypocritical in the name of religion. There was no positive change in the Indian social system during the Company rule. They only gave importance to commercial interest. Besides giving expression to the ugliest and sordid aspects of social life, these two satires also make us acquainted with Madhusudan's ideas about the Indian social system and the nature of human psychology. *Is this Called Civilization?* provides a snapshot of the changing social life of English-influenced Calcutta. Madhusudan unmasks those who tried to destroy the basic structure of society in the name of social development. The play very aptly ends with Harokamini, the wife of Nabokumar questioning the "developed" society of the time:

Now-a-days, who come to Calcutta for education, many of them acquired this knowledge (drinking and licentiousness) very much. Now, does it make any difference whether there is such a husband or not? Sister! I can say it freely to you that looking at all these, I want to die with a rope around my neck. (A long sigh). Shame, shame, shame! (After thinking) These shameless people say that they are civilized like the rulers! Oh, my unfortunate lot! Is it drinking and licentiousness that make one civilized? Is this called civilization? (Dutt, 1862, p. 67)^{viii}

In *New Feathers on an Old Bird*, Madhusudan attacks the immorality of the conservative Hindu leaders of the society. Hanif Gazi, the poor farmer, appeals to Bhaktababu, the zamindar to reduce the tax as there was drought in that year causing a considerable loss in cultivation. Initially, Bhaktababu refuses on the pretense of the Company but agrees when Gadadhar lures him with the wife of Hanif Gazi. The story of the drama revolves around the immorality and licentiousness of Bhaktababu. Through these two satires, Madhusudan comes out as a responsible artist to his society. However, these two plays were not staged at the Belgachia theatre as many gentlemen who frequented the Paikpara Raja's house "had disliked the satirical slashes the author had conveyed through the plays at the alcoholic habits of contemporary Young Bengal society and at the hypocrisy and licentiousness of people in the higher rungs of rural society" (Bose, 1981, p.41-42). Although the satire in *New Feathers on an Old Bird* is sharp and hurtful to the traditional segment of society, it is nevertheless true that Bengali literature had not yet discovered

the potent combination of satire and comic humor. Madhusudan wrote to Rajnarayan Bose,

As a scribbler, I am of course proud to think that you like my Farces but to tell you the candid truth, I half regret having published those two things we ought not to have farces. (ibid, p. 42)

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1871), however, praises these two satires, "His farces, however, are good. One of them, entitled *Is this Civilization?* is the best in the language. This little work deserves notice independently of its own really great merit" (para- 37).

Through the triumph of man against the divine power in *Meghnadh Vadh Kavya*, he emphasized the humanistic ideals of the Renaissance. Rama became the invader and Ravana became the hero- the protector of his land and his people. It can be interpreted as having a hidden postcolonial agenda - a message to the people to rise from their slumber and protect their "Lanka" from the British. He is reinventing the text in accordance with the time. And here, we are reminded of another Bengali literary giant- Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who also wrote his first novel- *Rajmohon's Wife* in English and then returned to Bengali. And many critics argue that he wrote *Anandamath* (1882)- the first political novel of India to camouflage the British. Criticizing the decadence of Muslim rule, Bankim's main intention was to raise the nationalistic consciousness among Indians by moulding the novel in the wrapper of historical fiction.

Bankim was impressed so much by the works of Madhusudhan that he urged his countrymen to inscribe the name of Madhusudan in the national flag of the country. He considered him one of the greatest poets of the time as evident from his quoting the lines of Madhusudhan, along with Shakespeare, Kalidasa, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, Shelley, and Vidyapati, at the top of the chapters in *Kapalkundala* (1866). Madhusudhan was quoted five times in the novel- at chapter 4 of Part-1 from *Meghnadvadh*, chapter 3 of Part 2 from *Meghnadvadh*, chapter 4 of Part- 2 from *Meghnadvadh*, chapter 4 of Part 3 from *Birangana Kavya*, and chapter 1 of part-4 from *Brajangana Kavya* - next to Shakespeare. It was not easy to be quoted by a novelist of such stature as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and from the texts that were written a few years before. It clearly shows Madhusudan's impact on the literary circle of the time.

In the interview of Amitava Ghosh, with whom I began my Paper, in the same interview, Ghosh argues that his *The Nutmeggers Curse* which became a classic within a very short time after its publication, was found by a Western reviewer "nothing new". Ghosh argues that it has become an accepted truth that Indian and African writers will get recognition by writing only fiction and stories. *The Nutmeggers Curse* is a non-fictional work on climate change - a very much "colonial" topic. Ninety percent of the writings on it came from Western metropolitan universities and the former colonizers do not care about anyone's opinion except their own. It confirms that Western domination in academia is still very much prevalent even after the long destruction of the mighty edifice of British colonialism. Famous contemporary Marxist philosopher and literary critic Aijaz Ahmad

(2008) argues that a new field of literature known as "Third World Literature" has emerged, mostly in metropolitan universities in England and North America (p. 43). This field is responding to very specific types of pressures by appropriating specific types of texts and by creating new categories within the broader conceptual category of literature. The Indian university's relationship—and dependence—with its American and British counterparts is so essential and even genetic that the information generated there has an instant impact here, in an imperial domination relationship that even shapes our self-perception. Furthermore, this dependence usually increases at the higher, more elite levels of English instruction in India: at the more affluent universities, the select few elite colleges, and among university faculty members who are most lavishly endowed with degrees, international experience, publications lists, and academic aspirations. Ahmed believes that by claiming that nationalism is the primary political imperative of our time, the theoretical stances of "Colonial Discourse Analysis" and "Third World Literature" would tend to undermine, whether intentionally or not, the rich legacy of our radical and oppositional cultural productions, which have, for the most part, emerged from within a political culture strongly influenced by Marxism and communist political practice (ibid, p.44). Building a far greater understanding of the foundation of that legacy is what is required; going back to the Marxist critique of class, colony, and empire and substituting it for the void of Third World nationalism would be a theoretical and political step backward. It would undoubtedly be beneficial to include some writers from the "Third World" in our current curricula, but it would be relatively insignificant if done in an eclectic manner without acknowledging the implications of the fact that "literature" from other third-world regions comes to us via networks of accumulation, interpretation, and relocation that are controlled from the metropolitan nations rather than directly or automatically. Ahmad proposes that even in our era, it is nearly impossible to reach a 'Third World' literary work without the control and interpretations of metropolitan cultures: "It is in the metropolitan country, in any case, that a literary text is first designated a Third World text, leveled into an archive of other such texts, and then globally redistributed with that aura attached to it" (p.45). The metropolitan academics focus exclusively on generalizations about the literature and cultures of the "Third World." In the varied and prolific atmosphere of these 'other' literatures, western scholars try hard to find a single voice and melt these differences in a single pot. He also points out that these metropolitan scholars do not know any of the local languages of the 'Third World.' Therefore, much of the works of literature that are not translated into English in these fields remain unknown, and Oriental studies in Western universities only deal with a small fraction of the whole. We need theories and notions that oppose colonial discourses and imperialism.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

I, Laki Molla, declare no conflicts of interest.

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Notes

ⁱ The interview was published in the 20th Number of 90 years, dated 17 August 2023 of the famous Bengali bi-monthly magazine *Desh*.

ⁱⁱ "The White Man's Burden", a 1899 poem by Rudyard Kipling, expresses the aggressive nationalism of the West. Kipling, as an imperialist poet, encourages the enterprise of colonialism, but at the same time warns the Western readers about the costs of empire-building. However, the phrase is interpreted largely as an attempt to justify imperialist expansion in the name of a civilizing mission.

ⁱⁱⁱ The phrase is used by Bill Ashcroft in his famous book *The Empire Write Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* co-authored with Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin.

^{iv} Captain David Laster Richardson (1801 – 65) first came to India in 1819 as a soldier in the Bengal army. He proved his efficiency and was promoted as a Major. But he was more in love with the pen than the gun. His first collection of poetry *Miscellaneous Poems* was published in 1822 from Calcutta. His other notable works are *Sonnets and Other Poems* (1825) and *Literary Leaves* (1836). On the merits of his poetry and literary essays, he was one of the major writers in India. He was even admired by Macaulay and it was because of his recommendation that he came as a professor of literature in Hindu College after the retirement of Dr. Titalar.

^v In the thesis titled "Tremendous Literary Rabel: the Life and Works of Michael Madhusudan Datta", submitted in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford, Radice showed that Madhusudhan wrote letter to Gour Das Bysack following a letter of Byron. p.151.

^{vi} In his letter to Gour Das Bysack in Calcutta, the poet of *The Captive Ladie* informs, "Here (in Madras) Captive received a good response".

^{vii} In *Purana*, Chandra (Som) forcefully united with wet-dressed Tara. The disapproval of the wife of Guru was paid no heed. Even curses had no effect on Som. Madhusudan's narrative is a protest against this Puranic compulsion.

^{viii} The text is originally written in Bengali. The English translation of the original Bengali text is of mine.

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