

## Book Review

**Parna Sengupta. *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Self-Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, California*: University of California Press, 2011. 222 pp. (ISBN 052026813).**

This study identifies some of the educational techniques and institutions that were exported to India by Protestant missionaries and the methods used by Hindu and Muslim leaders to reformulate their community identity on the basis of religious education. Sengupta argues that native leaders and missionaries used vernacular education instead of English to develop the idea of a modern society. The author discusses the role of upper caste Hindu and Muslim leaders in the sphere of education, and argues that for Bengali Muslims religious education helped to solidify their identity as a religious and political community.

The study starts with the Wood's Despatch of 1854, an important landmark in the history of colonial education, which envisaged extension of vernacular education to the masses. Increase in literacy helped missionaries to Christianize the natives, and for the *bhadralok* (respectable Hindus) reformers this was an opportunity to popularize upper caste ideas on family, gender, and religious conduct among Bengali Hindus. Bhadrakok reformers modernized ordinary Hindus by introducing new forms of religious education in vernacular schools to counteract the effects of missionaries' efforts.

Sengupta next turns to the debate between Protestant missionaries and *bhadralok* reformers over language primers, in particular Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's *Barnoporichoy* (An Introduction to Letters). Missionaries used *Barnoporichoy* because it was "authentic," and the examples used in the book instilled moral and ethical virtues such as being a good student and respecting one's

elders. Still, some missionaries like John Murdoch, the founder of the Christian Vernacular Education Society, opposed the use of the book. According to Murdoch this book's Sanskritized version of Bengali did not spread mass vernacular literacy. By the late nineteenth century Muslim leaders also opposed the use of *Barnoporichoy* in *pathsalas* (indigenous schools) attended by Muslim children because it produced "Hinduized Muslim subjects" (43). Sengupta's discussion of the impact of *Barnoporichoy* on non-Hindu educators provides a different dimension to the history of education in colonial Bengal. In particular the author explains how the development of a pluralistic society in colonial Bengal intensified conflicts between missionaries and Hindu leaders, and later on between Hindu and Muslim leaders.

Sengupta explores a unique aspect of colonial education: the role of *bhadralok* and missionary educators in developing new forms of masculinity through teacher training institutions. As an example she uses the teacher training model formulated by David Stow, the Principal of Glasgow Seminary and Normal School in 1837, and advocated for Bengal by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay in *Sikha Vidhyak Pustav* published in 1856. Stow believed that a male teacher should guide his students through sympathy and affection rather than coercion. But Stow's idea of training teachers completely changed under missionaries, local headmasters, and upper caste reformers. Missionaries had greater control over the lives of students, and native reformers believed that a highly trained village teacher should be respected as a strict masculine patriarch. Mukhopadhyay, a school inspector, applied Stow's ideas of love and affection to the Hindu concept of gender and family practice. He believed that the *guru* (native village teacher) was like an evangelical missionary committed to the idea of reforming society. But Bengali fathers were bad role model for "affect based teaching" (93), since they maintained distance from their children. Mukhopadhyay suggested a model of teaching and family that was modern but not western and hoped that this model would shape a modern Bengali family.

What makes Chapter Four particularly interesting is the emphasis on civilizing teachers among the *adivasis* (tribal peoples), such as the *Santhals*. Missionary schools in *Santhal* areas served as civilizing institutions, but missionaries feared that trained *Santhali*

teachers would begin to see themselves as *bhadraloks*. The tribal teachers were perceived by the colonial government and *bhadraloks* as civilized products of missionary influence, and their presence threatened the respectability of the teaching profession. Sengupta's analysis of the development of a modern pluralistic society shows that colonial authorities, missionaries, and *bhadralok* reformers refused to recognize the presence of tribal teachers in normal schools and thus reinforced discrimination against the marginal groups with rigorous measures.

In sharp contrast to the development of a modern masculine school teacher, Sengupta observes that upper caste reformers strongly discouraged the training of women teachers. They condemned the *bairagis* (lower caste *vaishnavis*, served as tutors to women) and were unwilling to send their daughters to school. Like native reformers, missionaries also insisted that education would help women to become good wives and conduct their domestic service with respectability. The author compares the role of *bairagis* and native Christian teachers who were able to secure some form of employment. Yet, native Christian teachers were never completely accepted by upper caste Hindu reformers. Thus, despite several efforts, female education improved little and the whole project of modernization was fundamentally unequal.

In the second part of the book Sengupta examines how the colonial state and the *ashrafs* (elite Muslim leaders) expanded basic education for the Muslim masses in their effort to develop a modern Muslim community. The author argues that by the late nineteenth century the colonial state was eager to expand religious education so as to maintain Muslim loyalty. The state converted *maktabs* (indigenous schools) to primary schools and proposed an imaginative system to fund these schools. This system balanced the power of the upper caste Hindus and helped poor Muslims attend school. The Director of Public Instruction also supported Quran schools, which like missionary schools aimed to solidify religious identity. *Ashraf* leaders were sure that religious education would benefit poor Muslims. Sengupta explains how religious education was essential for the attainment of modern identity and that this identity helped Muslims to survive in a pluralistic society.

*Pedagogy for Religion* provides a valuable top-down analysis of parallel missionary, bhadralok, and ashraf efforts to modernize Indian education using religion. However, the study overlooks the complexities surrounding the development of bourgeois ideologies and the methods used by bhadralok reformers to control the spread of mass education so as to consolidate their position in society and thus develop an extremely elite identity. Sengupta provides little information on the role of the colonial state and the ashrafs in the sphere of Muslim education. The author fails to address the role of Bengali female reformers like Prasannamoyi Devi and Girindramohini Dasi in the field of marginal groups, and uses few sources published in Bengali journals and newspapers of the period. Yet the book adds to historiography by arguing that for India's colonial subjects, Hindus and Muslims alike, modern identity was achieved in part through religious education.

Reviewed by

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