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ILLUSIONS OF PROGRESS AND DECLINE IN COLONIAL INDIA: EVOLUTION AND
DEGENERATION IN THE WORKS OF PRAMATHA NATH BOSE, C. 1910-1930

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ILLUSIONS OF PROGRESS AND DECLINE IN COLONIAL INDIA: EVOLUTION AND
DEGENERATION IN THE WORKS OF PRAMATHA NATH BOSE, C. 1910-1930

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Abstract

In this thesis, I consider the views of Pramatha Nath Bose (1855-1934) as an example of Hindu revivalist appropriations of evolutionary ideas and degeneration to advance anticolonial, socially conservative politics in early twentieth century colonial India. I show that Bose drew from metropolitan evolutionary thinkers such as Thomas Henry Huxley, Herbert Spencer, and Alfred Russel Wallace, amongst others, to present a model of social evolution that proclaimed the superiority of Hindu civilization and thus challenged the racial and civilizational hierarchy underpinning colonial rule. I further contextualize his views in relation to contemporary debates about social reform to argue that the evolutionary discourse equipped him to defend Hindu customs, practices, and institutions from reformist criticisms. Similarly, I examine his appropriation of the trope of evolutionary degeneration to present degeneration as a condition inherent to the contemporary West and in India only as a result of colonial rule and the deviation of middle-class Indians from the organically evolved Hindu way of life. Additionally, I argue that Bose's organicist conception of society and Lamarckian explanation of degeneration enabled him to defend aspects of Hindu society that were increasingly coming under attack from progressive sections of the nationalist movement such as the practice of early marriage and the caste system. Therefore, I show that evolutionary and degeneracy theories were put to work to perform a dual function in the Hindu revivalist movement by presenting both the inferiority of Western civilization and the futility and dangers of Western-oriented social reforms — thus, combining ideas of natural evolutionary processes with anticolonialism and social conservatism.

Introduction

Evolutionary ideas and fears of degeneration deeply influenced late nineteenth century intellectual and social culture. These ideas were used by many European commentators to rationalize the hierarchies of race, class, and gender, and legitimize colonial domination over “inferior” races and nations. Degeneracy theories in particular expressed the establishment fears of the rising threat of working-class radicalism, the pervasive disillusionment with the idea of progress, and the contemporary perceptions of increased criminality, insanity, and destitution. These ideas and arguments soon spread across the world through colonial networks, and were particularly notable in India. The colonial discourse in India focused on the degeneracy and inferiority of the native races and naturalized colonial domination, racial hierarchy, and the civilizing mission in the language and rationale of science. At the same time, though, these colonial characterizations and arguments did not go unchallenged. Many Indian nationalists from the late-nineteenth century onwards appropriated these tropes both to challenge colonial rule and to assert the superiority of their religion, culture, and civilization. Apart from criticizing colonial domination, the Indian commentators on evolution and degeneracy often used these discourses to advance their own visions of social progress, civilizational future, and ideological positions as well. Therefore, similar to the metropolitan social Darwinist discourses of degeneracy, which were used by a wide range of actors in support of their position — from conservatives to liberals, and from reactionaries to radicals — these Indian appropriations of evolutionary and degenerative discourse also served diverse and often conflicting political visions. In this thesis, I examine the conservative, Hindu revivalist appropriation of the tropes of degeneracy and social evolution through the works of Pramatha Nath Bose.

Pramatha Nath Bose (1855-1934) was a prominent geologist, author, and nationalist who wrote extensively on Indian history, social reform, and Hindu civilization. Bose was a

well-known figure within the nationalist circles and he rose to prominence initially as a champion of technical education and industrialization. Bose's writings received widespread recognition and his *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule* series (1894-1896) was especially well-received. His later writings that dealt with the questions of social reform, civilizational progress, and nationalism also garnered significant attention and provoked substantial debate.¹ Therefore, Bose was an influential figure in the Hindu revivalist stream of the nationalist movement in the decades during which the notions about Hindu identity and Hindu nationalism were forged. Even though his ideas ultimately lost out to other dominant strands of Hindu nationalist thought, they belonged to an influential branch of Indian nationalism and played a significant role in shaping the later Hindu nationalist ideologies. In this thesis, I examine Bose's appropriation of the ideas of evolutionary thinkers including Herbert Spencer, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Alfred Russel Wallace as well as contemporary commentators who wrote explicitly on degeneration, to critique colonial domination, assert the inferiority of Western civilization, and frame the degeneration of Indians as a product of the colonial condition as well as the adoption of Western lifestyle by the middle-classes. Before proceeding, it will therefore be useful to provide a sense of exactly how I intend to carve out this argument across the four chapters that follow.

In chapter one of the thesis, I provide a brief introduction to the social Darwinist and degeneration discourses in the metropole and colony through a survey of the relevant historiography. While the discussion of the metropolitan discourse reveals the malleability, influence, and impact of the evolutionary and degeneracy theories in the Western social and

¹ For example, his works were reviewed in multiple contemporary journals. The reviews include: A Bengali Brahmin, "The Vitality of Hindu Civilisation," *The Modern Review* (Calcutta) 14, no. 5 (1913): 435–46.; A. B., review of *Epochs of Civilization*, by Pramatha Nath Bose, *The Theosophist* 35 (1913): 295–97.; Politicus, review of *The Illusions of New India*, by Pramatha Nath Bose, *The Modern Review* (Calcutta) 20 (1916): 72–81.; Asoka Dutt, review of *The Root Cause of the Great War*, by Pramatha Nath Bose, *The Hindustan Review* 34, no. 204 (1916): 181–87.; Bhikku Silachara, review of *The Illusions of New India*, by Pramatha Nath Bose, *The Hindustan Review* 34, no. 203 (1916): 254–61.; K. S. Ramaswami Sastri, "Hindu Culture: Ancient & Modern," *The Indian Review* 23 (1922): 102–4.

intellectual culture, the colonial narratives were mainly focused on presenting Indians as a degenerate, effeminate, and inferior race. This discussion of the Indian appropriations of these ideas reveals how they were used by Indian nationalists to present the superiority of their civilization, criticize colonial rule, and to advance their visions of social reform and progress. Through this chapter, I contextualize the works of Bose by providing an overview of the dominant themes that permeated the intellectual space of late nineteenth and early twentieth century India that influenced his views as well as the questions that he responded to through his writings.

In chapter two, I go on to provide a brief biographical sketch of Bose and an introduction to his views. In this chapter, I aim to highlight the significance of Bose's transformation from a well-known champion of technical education and indigenous industrialization into an outspoken critic of Western civilization and its influence on contemporary Indian society. The transformation in his outlook can be traced through his works to 1910, following the failure of the Swadeshi movement.

This provides the grounding for what follows in chapter three. Here I consider Bose's conception of social evolution and how he used these ideas to comment on social and political questions as well as to reject mainstream nationalist politics. At the beginning of the chapter, I lay out Bose's views on human evolution and social progress that presented civilizational progress as the mitigation of natural selection leading to the eventual replacement of competition with cooperation and altruism. Through the examination of his three-stage model of social evolution that framed the materialist West as belonging to a lower stage than the spiritual Hindu civilization, I present Bose as an example of the Indian appropriation of evolutionary thought that affirmed their civilizational superiority and thus undermined the foundational logic of colonial domination. It is notable, though, that Bose's framing of these issues was distinct from other Hindu articulations of evolutionary

development. This was particularly the case both in terms of the language he employed as well as in the implications of his theory for the broader politics and development of the nationalist movement. Furthermore, by contextualizing Bose's views within contemporary Indian debates surrounding the move towards women's emancipation and the rise of anti-caste movements, and framing them as responses to these questions, I argue that evolutionary ideas provided a powerful framework for Hindu revivalists like Bose to defend the customs, practices, and institutions of Hindu society using the language of Western science, history, and sociology.

This leads me then to chapter four, in which I explore Bose's views on degeneration both in the West and in contemporary Indian society. In the first section of the chapter, I show that Bose built on both the Western commentators of degeneration and critics of Western civilization to present degeneration as a condition inherent to contemporary Western society that was marked by capitalism, militarism, anarchy, moral decay and "Mammonism." In the Indian context, Bose considered degeneration primarily a problem concerning the class of "neo-Indians"—the Western-educated, Western-oriented Indians who deviated from the organically evolved culture and lifestyle of the country. This organicism became central to Bose's conception of society and culture. Through a close examination of his writings, I argue that Bose combined the tropes of degeneration and organicism to criticize the colonial condition by presenting the degeneration of Indians as a result of the colonial corruption of the Hindu self that encompassed ideas and experiences of the landscape, culture, and lifestyle. Additionally, I show that these notions of degeneration and organicism, similar to his conception of social evolution, enabled him to reject the calls for social reform and argue for a return to a pre-colonial Hindu past. Furthermore, I show that Bose's focus on lifestyle and culture as the primary reasons behind degeneration rather than marriage or reproduction enabled him to avoid confronting the caste system or the practice of child marriage which

were increasingly coming under attack as dysgenic influences on the Indian race. By doing so I show just how deeply — and effectively — Bose's Lamarckian, organicist explanation of Hindu degeneration enabled him to indirectly defend these Hindu practices and institutions.

Through the examination of Bose's appropriation of the ideas of evolution and degeneration, I show that these discourses enabled the Hindu revivalists to combine anticolonialism with social conservatism and thus advance a reactionary political program that rejected the claims of Western superiority as well as the calls for social reform from the progressive sections of the nationalist movement.

Chapter 1. Intellectual Context: Evolution, Degeneration, and Social Darwinism

This chapter looks at some of the important themes that marked the social Darwinist and degeneration discourses in the metropole and the colony during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Following a brief examination of the metropolitan discourse, I then turn to look at how the Indian interlocutors appropriated these narratives through a survey of the relevant historiography. Thus, the chapter contextualizes the works of Pramatha Nath Bose by introducing the intellectual tropes, ideas, and arguments that he drew from, responded to, and appropriated in his works.

Evolution and Degeneration in the Metropole

Late-nineteenth century notions of progress and empire were deeply influenced by the Darwinian ideas of progressive development and the fear of degeneration. Although many philosophers including Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer drew upon biology and used biological analogies in explaining society and social processes before Darwin,² Darwinian ideas of natural selection and the struggle for existence provided a new set of concepts, discourse, and a world-view that was readily harnessed by a diverse set of actors to suit their ideologies and political positions which can broadly be categorized as social Darwinism. As Greta Jones has now long ago shown in her *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, commentators across the ideological spectrum ranging from the conservatives and apologists of racial and class hierarchies to the liberals, progressives, and radicals drew from this discourse.³ Similarly, Mike Hawkins's examination of social Darwinism in *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought* as a network of ideas about time, nature, human nature, and social reality, rather than a discrete ideology, illustrated the myriad ways in which

² Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction Between Biological and Social Theory* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), 1–9.

³ Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*.

evolutionary ideas were interpreted to serve diverse and often mutually contradictory positions.⁴

As Hawkins has noted, the flexibility that Darwinian ideas provided implied that in the social Darwinist discourse, nature “could appear both as a model to be emulated by social practices and institutions and as a threat whose processes and laws were to be feared and counteracted by the appropriate actions.”⁵ Therefore, while classical liberals like Herbert Spencer used social Darwinist discourse to defend competitive individualism and laissez-faire capitalism as the equivalent of natural selection in social evolution and opposed state intervention and excessive philanthropy for thwarting the action of the evolutionary forces, many socialists and the “new liberals” adopted the Lamarckian ideas of inheritance of acquired characteristics in support of social reforms, collectivism, and state intervention. Social Darwinist ideas were also incorporated into the discourses around race and empire. As Rutledge M. Dennis has shown, many including the American sociologist William Graham Sumner adopted evolutionary ideas, especially the Spencerian advocacy of non-interventionism, individualism, and ruthless struggle for existence to uphold racial hierarchy and legitimize draconian social systems such as slavery.⁶ The social Darwinist discourse on imperialism accommodated diverging opinions as well: while Spencer maintained an anti-imperialist position by arguing that imperialism led to militancy, regimentation, and a strengthening of the state in the metropole resulting in “re-barbarization,”⁷ others like Karl Pearson and Benjamin Kidd supported imperialism as a natural expression of the Darwinist principles and considered it important for both Britain’s political and economic survival, as

⁴ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860–1945: Nature as Model and Nature as Threat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

⁵ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, 18.

⁶ Rutledge M. Dennis, “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 64, no. 3 (1995): 244–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2967206>; See also, Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought*, 108–18.

⁷ Herbert Spencer, *Facts and Comments* (New York: D. Appleton, 1902), 157–200.

well as for introducing civilization to the unenlightened races.⁸ Historian James Sturgis has argued that along with ideas of European capitalism, social class, and national rivalries, social Darwinist notions were often employed to justify the imposition of rule over the “child” races during the “new imperialism”—the phase of intensified imperial expansion in the last three decades of the nineteenth century.⁹ H. W. Koch’s “Social Darwinism in the ‘New Imperialism’” further reveals the use and popular appeal of social Darwinist language in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the pre-war period of the twentieth century to legitimize and further imperialism.¹⁰ Therefore, social Darwinist ideas permeated the metropolitan political discourse in a number of different ways.

Similar to progressive evolutionary ideas, degeneration was another trope that marked the late nineteenth century intellectual culture. Daniel Pick has noted in *Faces of Degeneration* that while the broader fears of civilizational decay and degeneration have a longer history in Western philosophy and theology, the *fin de siècle* degeneration discourse was fundamentally distinct from the earlier articulations since it relocated degeneracy from a religious or philosophical problem to an empirically demonstrable medical, biological, or anthropological one.¹¹ The language of evolution was integral to this late nineteenth century reconfiguration of degeneration. Along with Pick’s comparative analysis of the degeneration discourse in France, Italy, and England, Robert Nye’s detailed examination of the nineteenth century French narratives in *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France* further reveals the pervasiveness of the trope of degeneracy in nineteenth century Europe.¹² Nye

⁸ Dennis, “Social Darwinism, Scientific Racism, and the Metaphysics of Race,” 245.

⁹ James Sturgis, “Britain and the New Imperialism,” in *British Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. C. C. Eldridge (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1984), 102, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-17655-7_5.

¹⁰ H. W. Koch, “Social Darwinism as a Factor in the ‘New Imperialism,’” in *The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims*, ed. H. W. Koch (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1984), 319–42, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-07437-2_9.

¹¹ Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848–1918*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 20, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511558573>.

¹² Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

contextualized the French medical discourse around social deviance in the context of the contemporary political climate, concerns about the health of the population, and the perception of a national decline—both in terms of quantity and quality of its populace.¹³

Similarly, G. R. Searle’s analysis in *The Quest for National Efficiency* of the rise of the slogan of “national efficiency” in the early twentieth century England against the backdrop of a widespread feeling of national inadequacy, loss of confidence in constitutional politics, and the sense of Britain losing its military, industrial, and commercial preeminence point to the impact and influence of the discourse.¹⁴

As Gareth Stedman Jones has noted in *Outcast London*, the fear of “the Residuum” — the supposedly degenerate casual poor who threatened to undermine civilized society of the city of London, featured prominently in the English middle-class narratives of degeneration.¹⁵ Similarly, the social changes that marked the late-nineteenth century that Judith R. Walkowitz explored in the *City of Dreadful Delight*, such as the breakdown of traditional social hierarchies, the increasing visibility and self-assertion of marginalized groups like the working-class and women in public spaces, and the perceptions of moral decline and sexual danger that pervaded the popular culture of the period also contributed to the fears about class, gender, and sex in the degeneration narrative.¹⁶ Furthermore, in *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter has described the incorporation of the ideas of degeneration and biological determinism in English psychiatry, resulting in what she calls a period of “psychiatric Darwinism.” This, she argued, reconfigured the distinction between sanity and insanity, and biologized traditional gender roles.¹⁷ All these instances illustrate the use of degeneracy

¹³ Nye, *Crime, Madness and Politics in Modern France*, xii-xiii.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Russell Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).

¹⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 281-314.

¹⁶ Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London, Women in Culture and Society* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 101–20.

discourse in defence of the sociopolitical status quo and to articulate the concerns about the rapidly transforming society.

However, it is important to recognize that the appropriation of degeneracy was not limited to serving conservative or establishment political positions either. As George Robb has argued, the trope of degeneration was an equally powerful weapon in the hands of another group of intellectuals including H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, and Grant Allen who used it to attack traditional morality, bourgeois customs, sexuality, and framing of the institution of marriage itself.¹⁸ For them, it was the Victorian values and pervasive middle class morality that was the root cause of racial and national decline. Only “free love,”—sexuality freed from the constraints of capitalism—would arrest the decline and rejuvenate the society. In this scenario, degeneration became a tool to argue for social transformation and sexual liberation. Therefore, degeneration, similar to more teleological or progressive evolutionary ideas, provided a set of ideas and a language flexible enough to be appropriated by a diverse range of actors.

Evolution and Degeneration in the Colony

Degeneration in colonial India

The colonial discourse of degeneration was intimately connected with the British colonial project in India. Theories of degeneracy on the one hand attempted to legitimize and rationalize the colonial domination over the “degenerate,” “inferior” natives, while on the other, expressed the colonizer’s deep anxieties about the degeneration of their own race in the colony. At the same time, many Indian nationalists appropriated the trope of degeneration to critique colonial domination and advocate their visions of national regeneration.

¹⁸ George Robb, “The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics, and the Gospel of Free Love,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 4 (1996): 589–603.

The degenerate Indians

The Aryan theory of race was an important part of the British discourse that affirmed the inferiority of the Indians and legitimized the colonial rule over them. The Aryan theory, initially based on the affinities noted by comparative philologists such as Friedrich Schlegel, Franz Bopp, and Friedrich Max Müller between Sanskrit and European languages in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, proposed a common racial origin for Europeans and Hindus, thus presenting the two as branches of the same race. While this supposed racial unity upset the colonial hierarchy at one level, as historian Joan Leopold has argued, the concept was modified with “proofs of India’s historical inferiority in order to justify British Indian imperialism, urge it to be more conciliatory and convince the natives not to reject it,” especially after the changed circumstances and the British approach towards the native society following the Revolt of 1857.¹⁹ According to this theory, the original Aryans who came to the Indian subcontinent underwent racial decay over the course of history either due to the contamination of the Aryan character by the reproductive and cultural intermixing with the pre-Aryan inhabitants or as an effect of the environment.²⁰ It pointed to the hot humid climate, lack of cold winters, and the fertility of the land which enabled easy existence that shielded the Indian branch of the Aryan race from the necessities of physical exertion, as possible factors that enervated the race physically, culturally, and intellectually. Therefore, the theory of Aryan degeneration conveniently accounted for the achievements of the ancient Hindu civilization and at the same time, affirmed the superiority of the British over the contemporary degenerate Indians. As Thomas R. Metcalf has noted in the *Ideologies of the Raj*, the language of racial degeneration implied a sense of permanent difference — “India’s peoples, even though Aryan in origin, had now to remain forever distinct, different, and

¹⁹ Joan Leopold, “British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India, 1850-1870.” *The English Historical Review* 89, no. 352 (1974): 580.

²⁰ Leopold, “British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race to India,” 594-596.

inevitably inferior' and it "provided powerful theoretical underpinning for the larger post-Mutiny disillusionment with liberal idealism."²¹

Closely tied to the argument of Aryan degeneration in India was the trope of the Indo-Aryan effeminacy which postulated that this branch of the Aryan race became effete and effeminate due to the environmental conditions. Although the charge of effeminacy was often directed at the whole of the Indian subcontinent, it was primarily aimed at the inhabitants of the Bengal province.²² The climate of Bengal, the regional culture, customs and practices, and the devotion to female deities which was more prominent there than in other regions, all fitted well with the British characterizations of the effeminacy of the Bengalis, and as Metcalf noted, "[t]he experience of Bengal, the area which they conquered first and knew best, powerfully shaped British views of Indian effeminacy."²³ Thus, along with the trope of racial degeneration, the supposed effeminacy of the Indians legitimized the British colonial domination as an inevitable outcome of the feebleness of the Indo-Aryan race. However, there was a significant transformation in the scope and usage of the trope of Bengali effeminacy in the altered circumstances after the Revolt of 1857. As historian Mrinalini Sinha has argued in *Colonial Masculinity*, towards the late nineteenth century, the effeminacy charge became associated with the Western-educated upper-caste Hindus from Bengal or the Bengali *babus*.²⁴ Sinha contextualized this transformation as a response to the rising political consciousness among the educated middle-classes, their demands for fairer representation in the colonial administrative and political system, and the "shift in British colonial attitudes towards Western-educated Indians, from mediators between the colonial administration and

²¹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, The New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90.

²² Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 14–17; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 92–112.

²³ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 105.

²⁴ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 16.

the rest of the Indian population to an unrepresentative and artificial minority.”²⁵ Thus, the trope of Bengali effeminacy became a tool to discredit and reject the claims of the educated Indian elite and defend the racially discriminatory practices of the Raj by reconfiguring them in the language of gender and masculinity.

Degeneration of Europeans in the colony

Along with rationalizing the inferiority of the native races, the colonial degeneration discourse focused on the implications of the colonial project on the European body as well. The environmental explanation of the Indo-Aryan racial degeneration implied that the very same forces could bring about the eventual degeneration of the British in the colony. Thus, the fear of degeneration loomed large in the British plans of settler colonialism in India. Apart from the detrimental effects of the native environment, the arguments against settler colonialism included claims that the miscegenation of European men with native women would produce racially inferior offspring and that cohabitation would make the British men more “Indian.”²⁶ These fears of degeneration marked the perceptions of the racial characteristics of the Europeans settled in India as well. As historian Satoshi Mizutani argued in *The Meaning of White*, there was ambiguity in the British attitude towards the “whiteness” of the colony’s domiciled European community.²⁷ Mizutani framed this ambiguity within the British concerns over whether the domiciled Europeans and the Eurasians would be able to perform their imperial responsibility by acting as the embodiments of Enlightenment values and civilization when they themselves were corrupted by the degenerative physical and cultural environment of the colony. This was especially the case regarding the lower classes

²⁵ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 16-17.

²⁶ Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the “Domiciled Community” in British India 1858-1930* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27-37.

²⁷ Mizutani, *The Meaning of White*.

who could not afford to keep their connections intact with the metropole to overcome the effects.²⁸

Apart from the degenerative effects on Europeans in general, the natural and cultural environment of the colony was considered particularly detrimental to the physical and moral development of the European child, and thus the theme occupied a prominent place in the colonial degeneration discourse.²⁹ Indrani Sen's examination of the colonial medical writings for the *Memsahibs* or the European women in India that dealt with the themes of pregnancy and child-rearing further reveal the centrality of the fears of degeneration, especially the perception of a greater vulnerability of women and children to the deleterious effects of the tropical climate, in the discussions about settler colonialism.³⁰ Apart from the environmental factors, the presence of native domestic servants — the wetnurses and the nursemaids, in particular, was seen as a corruptive influence in the mental, moral, and cultural development of the white infant. Therefore, the dimensions of race, class, and gender were central to the colonial degeneration discourse.

The threat of tropical diseases, especially malaria, was another theme that marked the British fears of degeneration. As David Arnold argued in his essay “An Ancient Race Outworn,” malaria — a civilizational danger that had possibly enervated and emasculated the Indian branch of the Aryan race — was also perceived to pose a significant threat to the British presence in the colony.³¹ Apart from sapping the vitality out of the British soldiers and civilians, malaria also made the native laborers underproductive, especially in the vast tea plantations which were located predominantly in the malarious regions of the subcontinent.³²

²⁸ Mizutani, *The Meaning of White*, 41-47.

²⁹ Mizutani, *The Meaning of White*, 39-41.

³⁰ Indrani Sen, “Memsahibs and Health in Colonial Medical Writings, c. 1840 to c. 1930,” *South Asia Research* 30, no. 3 (2010): 253–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272801003000303>.

³¹ David Arnold, “‘An Ancient Race Outworn’: Malaria and Race in Colonial India, 1860–1930,” in *Race, Science and Medicine, 1700-1960*, ed. Bernard Harris and Waltraud Ernst (London, New York: Routledge, 1999), 123–43.

³² David Arnold, “‘An Ancient Race Outworn,’” 126-34.

Therefore, malaria was a threat to European racial superiority, and a significant challenge to the economic and military interests of the empire. As Arnold noted, “liberating” the native races from the clutches of malaria through Western medical and sanitary sciences and regenerating the native population, was often framed as an imperial destiny and an ideological justification for the colonial project.³³

Evolution in colonial India

The Hindu responses to evolutionary theory from the late nineteenth century onward often attempted to reinterpret Darwinian evolution within the idioms of traditional Hindu philosophy and subsume the theory of biological evolution to the broader, universal process of cosmic evolution envisaged by the ancient Hindu sages. As C. Mackenzie Brown has argued, this reinterpretation of evolution in the Hindu encounter with Darwin that took place within the context of colonial domination and hierarchy, proclaimed the compatibility of Hindu religious ideas with Western science.³⁴ Furthermore, the hierarchization involved in this process—the comparison of Darwin’s theory of evolution and the Hindu ideas of cosmic evolution as corresponding to the lower science dealing with the material and empirical world and the higher science concerned with spirit, soul, and Brahman—God, respectively, asserted the superiority of Hindu spirituality over Western materialism and empiricism.³⁵ Similarly, Dermot Killingley has also noted that many Hindu commentators during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century pointed to certain characteristics of Hindu theology such as the vast periods of time envisaged by Hindu chronology, the conception of universe as evolving out of a cosmic egg, and the idea of rebirth which placed humans as part of the community of

³³ Arnold, ““An Ancient Race Outworn,”” 123-24.

³⁴ C. Mackenzie Brown, “Karmic Versus Organic Evolution: The Hindu Encounter with Modern Evolutionary Science,” in *Asian Religious Responses to Darwinism: Evolutionary Theories in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian Cultural Contexts*, ed. C. Mackenzie Brown (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 119–32, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37340-5_5.

³⁵ Brown, “Karmic Versus Organic Evolution,” 131.

animal forms as resembling or even anticipating the Darwinian ideas of evolution.³⁶

Additionally, Killingley argued that in this discourse, the differences such as the primacy of man and the idea of conscious self (*atman*) in the Hindu accounts were pointed out as indicative of the spiritual dimension that the Western science lacked and the morally objectionable aspects of Darwinian's theory such as competition, indifference to suffering, and the lack of telos were attributed to its inherent materialism.³⁷

An important and highly influential figure in the Hindu appropriations of evolutionary thought was the monk Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902).³⁸ Many of the characteristic features of the Hindu responses mentioned above can be noted in Vivekananda's view of evolution. Apart from framing Darwin's theory of evolution as an inferior and incomplete version of the Hindu account of cosmic evolution, Vivekananda added that the process of evolution was preceded by "involution" which represented the descent of Spirit/ Brahman/ Consciousness into the unconscious matter and thus presented the subsequent evolution as transmigration of the soul back to the Brahman.³⁹ Therefore, this modification provided the telos and the spiritual dimension that was lacking in the Darwinian account without resorting to the design argument which Vivekananda considered to be of a lower spiritual understanding.⁴⁰ These ideas of involution and spiritual evolution were further developed by nationalist-turned-spiritual leader Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). As historian Peter Heehs has explained, Ghose's scheme of spiritual evolution began with the process of involution, followed by the evolution of consciousness in life and mind, parallel evolution of the soul

³⁶ Dermot Killingley, "The Hindu Evolutionary Heritage and Hindu Criticism of Darwinism," in *Asian Religious Responses to Darwinism: Evolutionary Theories in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian Cultural Contexts*, ed. C. Mackenzie Brown (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 137, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37340-5_6; Dermot Killingley, "Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India," in *Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, by David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 186–90.

³⁷ Killingley, "The Hindu Evolutionary Heritage," 161-62.

³⁸ C. Mackenzie Brown, *Hindu Perspectives on Evolution: Darwin, Dharma, and Design* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), 131–54.

³⁹ Brown, "Karmic Versus Organic Evolution," 123; Killingley, "Hinduism, Darwinism, and Evolution," 192-93.

⁴⁰ Brown, *Hindu Perspectives on Evolution*, 136-39.

through the process of rebirth leading to the emergence of spiritual and supramental consciousness and ultimately, the divinization of life.⁴¹ Therefore, for Ghose, the perfect self-expression of the spirit and the establishment of a “divine life” was the purpose and culmination of spiritual evolution. As historian Meera Nanda has argued, this Hindu reconfiguration of evolutionism, especially the ideas of involution, and the reconstitution of the classical Hindu concepts of rebirth and the doctrine of karma that became the mechanism driving spiritual evolution, was deeply influenced by the works of Theosophists including Madame Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott.⁴²

Apart from asserting the superiority of Hindu philosophy over Western science, the Hindu appropriations of evolutionary theory often extended anticolonial arguments as well. The contemporary reformulation of the concept of karma that underpinned the ideas of many Hindu commentators including Vivekananda, as Brown has argued, presented it as an opportunity to shape one’s own future by deemphasizing the retributive aspect that was more prominent in the classical interpretation.⁴³ Thus, desireless action “not only frees one from karmic retribution, but also helps to create India’s future and realization of its spiritual ideals.”⁴⁴ The political message was even clearer in the works of Aurobindo Ghose. As Inder S. Marwah has argued, for Ghose who considered the fundamental goal of evolutionary progress to be altruism, cosmopolitanism, and the “divinization of man,” Indian decolonization was an important step in the global movement towards spirituality and altruism.⁴⁵ For him, a resurgent India had to lead humanity to a stage marked by concert and

⁴¹ Peter Heehs, “Sri Aurobindo’s Theory of Spiritual Evolution,” in *Asian Religious Responses to Darwinism: Evolutionary Theories in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian Cultural Contexts*, ed. C. Mackenzie Brown, Sophia Studies in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Traditions and Cultures (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 168–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-37340-5_7.

⁴² Meera Nanda, “Madame Blavatsky’s Children: Modern Hindu Encounters with Darwinism,” in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. Jim R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2010), 279–344.

⁴³ Brown, “Karmic Versus Organic Evolution,” 124–25.

⁴⁴ Brown, “Karmic Versus Organic Evolution,” 124–25.

⁴⁵ Inder S. Marwah, “The View from the Future: Aurobindo Ghose’s Anticolonial Darwinism,” *American Political Science Review* 118, no. 2 (2024): 883–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000576>.

cooperation rather than antagonism. Thus ethics, spirituality, and anticolonialism merged in these appropriations of evolutionary thought. At the same time, not all Indian articulations of evolutionism were rooted in spirituality or religious idioms either. As Marwah has shown in his article “Darwin in India,” many Indian nationalists appropriated the language of evolution to advance an anticolonial agenda, especially in their criticisms of the imperial ideas of progress and development which were often utilized to resist and deny the Indian claims to self-rule and sovereignty.⁴⁶ As Marwah has shown, these Indian interlocutors questioned the European claims of racial superiority and the universality of the Western developmental trajectory by dissociating progress from adaptation and foregrounding the role of contingency in Darwinian evolution.⁴⁷ Similarly, many built on organicist notions of society to argue that social and political evolution could only be achieved through internal transformation, rather than external brute force—thus discrediting the justifications of the so-called colonial civilizing mission in favor of self-driven progress and reform.⁴⁸

Despite their nationalist rhetoric, these organicist visions of Indian society, which considered it to be an organic unity, often conflated Indianness with Hinduness.⁴⁹ These schemas elevated upper-caste Hinduness as the true “organic” culture, privileged the Hindu body, customs, and social institutions as having an organic relationship with the nation, and thereby considered the “foreign” presence—both the recent British colonizers as well as the non-Hindu populace of the country, especially the Muslims—as polluting the organic unity of the nation. That is, as historian Manu Goswami has argued, these territorial nativist visions envisaged the Hindu as the true national, the core of the nation to “preserve it against contamination from both the colonial present and the particularistic foreign body of the

⁴⁶ Inder S. Marwah, “Darwin in India: Anticolonial Evolutionism at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century,” *Perspectives on Politics* 21, no. 3 (2023): 880-95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722004133>.

⁴⁷ Marwah, “Darwin in India,” 885-86.

⁴⁸ Marwah, “Darwin in India,” 887-89.

⁴⁹ Marwah, “Darwin in India,” 886.

Muslim.”⁵⁰ Therefore, evolutionary ideas were potent tools for the emerging Hindu nationalists as well. The social Darwinist language found even more explicit usage in the Hindu communal writings that posited Hindus and Muslims as two communities engaged in an evolutionary struggle for existence. A notable example of this genre is U. N. Mukerji’s hugely popular work *A Dying Race* (1909) which portrayed the Hindus as a dying race at the hands of the socially, economically, and physically superior Muslims.⁵¹ As Pradip Kumar Datta pointed out in his analysis of the Hindu communal discourse in colonial Bengal, Mukerji built on a variety of themes to explain the demographic catastrophe before the Hindus including the supposed hypermasculinity of the Muslims, the difference in their respective fertility rates, the deteriorating economic condition of the Hindu peasants, the recent religious revival and moral uplift of the Muslims, and most importantly, the realization that Hindus were hopelessly divided by the caste system.⁵² Ultimately for Mukerji, what he saw as the very real possibility of the extinction of the Hindu race was “a case of the survival of the fittest.”⁵³

These examples show the diverse ways in which the Indian interlocutors appropriated the evolutionary and social Darwinist discourse to advance their own visions and political program ranging from a Hindu religious revival to anticolonial nationalism to Hindu communalism. Thus, as with the metropolitan discourse, the flexibility that the language and the cluster of ideas around evolution provided is visible in the colony as well. These examples also attest to the importance and influence of this discourse in the intellectual space

⁵⁰ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 167.

⁵¹ U. N. Mukerji, *A Dying Race* (Calcutta: Bhaskar Mukerjee, 1909), <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100868139>.

⁵² Pradip Kumar Datta, “‘Dying Hindus’: Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 25 (1993): 1305–19.

⁵³ Marwah, “Darwin in India,” 884.

of late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonial India. This was the case in Bengal especially, and Pramatha Nath Bose was a significant part of it.

Degeneration: Indian appropriations and responses

The sorts of theories of degeneration that were put forward by the colonizers to establish their own superiority over the people they had colonized were often appropriated by the Indian interlocutors both to undermine the colonial narrative and to advance their own arguments, agendas, and political ideas. While the colonial discourse focused particularly on the province of Bengal and the Western-educated middle-class there, it was the same Bengali middle-class who primarily took up the language of degeneration to challenge the colonial narrative from the late nineteenth century onward. However, the Indian commentators did not always challenge the colonial characterizations of effeminacy but rather appropriated the trope to critique the colonial condition. As historian Tanika Sarkar has argued, the “vulnerability and degeneration of the body of the Hindu male babu” became a symbol of the detrimental effects of colonial rule in general.⁵⁴ Additionally, Sarkar suggested that this internalization of the effeminacy trope itself was an expression of the hegemonic aspirations of the Bengali middle-class over the rest of the native population “through ascribing itself all the ills and deprivations that marked nineteenth century Bengali society as a whole.”⁵⁵ The socioeconomic and cultural changes brought about by the colonial rule were pointed out as the primary reason behind the degeneration of Indians. The decline in agricultural productivity, a general decline in health, and the spread of diseases, especially malaria, which worsened significantly with the construction of railway embankments in the mid-nineteenth century in the Bengal countryside, produced a pervasive perception of illness, destitution, and decay. David Arnold has pointed out the strong impact of the “Burdwan fever” epidemic of

⁵⁴ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 32.

⁵⁵ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 32.

the 1850s and 1860s which devastated the rural areas of the province upon the Bengali middle-class psyche as marking the decline of the countryside from its pristine, precolonial golden age to that of poverty, hunger and disease.⁵⁶ Therefore, such imageries of drastic destruction and corruption of the native society over a few generations under the colonial rule occupied a prominent place in the Bengali writings on degeneration, including that of Pramatha Nath Bose.

In addition to the effects of climate, diseases, and colonial policies, the Indian degeneration discourse also focused on the question of early marriage and its relation to racial decay and effeminacy. The potentially degenerative effects of early marriage emerged as an important topic of discussion in colonial Bengal following the outcry over the death of the eleven-year-old child-wife Phulmoni as a result of marital rape in 1889 and the subsequent controversy regarding the Age of Consent Bill of 1891 which raised the age of consent for sexual intercourse for girls from ten to twelve. While the most intense opposition to the bill was premised on the promise of colonial non-interference with native social and religious affairs and appealed to the ideas and ideals of patriarchy and masculinity, as historian Ishita Pande has shown in *Medicine, Race, and Liberalism in British Bengal*, there were many who resorted to medical and racial health discourses to voice their opinion about the age of consent controversy.⁵⁷ If the supporters of the bill saw a direct correlation between early consummation and the effeminacy of the Bengalis among whom the practice was most common in the colony, the detractors denied any such links and pointed to other causes for the degeneration of the Bengalis. Among those who opposed the bill, some defended the Hindu practice of early marriage by arguing that the tropical climate induced early puberty in Indian girls, others like Dr. Juggobandhu Bose of Calcutta University argued that there was

⁵⁶ Arnold, ““An Ancient Race Outworn,”” 135-36.

⁵⁷ Ishita Pande, *Medicine, Race and Liberalism in British Bengal: Symptoms of Empire* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 160-70; See also Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 155-160.

no medical evidence to prove that early motherhood caused any adverse effect on either the mother or the child, and branded the connections made between racial deterioration and early consummation “pseudo-scientific.”⁵⁸ For Juggobandhu Bose, the racial weakness of the Bengalis was a result of malaria, lack of exercise, unsanitary condition of the household, and “the improper management of the puerperal state.”⁵⁹ Despite the conflicting and contradictory use of the questions of degeneration, effeminacy, and marriage in the Age of Consent debate, it reveals the importance of these themes in the intellectual space of late nineteenth century colonial Bengal which continued to the first few decades of the twentieth century.

The Bengali internalization of the trope of effeminacy also led to many attempts by nationalists and spiritual leaders to correct these effects and rejuvenate the race. The physical culture movement in Bengal that flourished from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1930s represented one such effort to regenerate the Bengali race.⁶⁰ As historian John Rosselli has argued, the proponents of the physical culture movement—who mostly belonged to the Hindu elite classes, considered the effeminate of the Bengali Hindus to be primarily a product of historical and cultural circumstances, and therefore, correctable through active physical exercise, especially through traditional forms of physical exertion.⁶¹ Apart from the setting numerous of *akhiras* (gymnasias), promotion of traditional exercises, and organization of Hindu Mela (fairs) that featured cultural and sporting events, the physical culture movement was also marked by the attempts to rediscover and popularize the military prowess of the ancient Bengalis. Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta’s essay “The Effeminate and the Masculine” also looked at the attempts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal to present a pre-history of military valor and celebrate contemporary Bengali military heroes to

⁵⁸ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 159-160; 170-72.

⁵⁹ Pande, *Medicine, Race and Liberalism in British Bengal*, 173.

⁶⁰ John Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeminate: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” *Past & Present*, no. 86 (1980): 121.

⁶¹ Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeminate,” 124-25.

refute the charges of effeminacy and the characterization as a non-martial race.⁶² The efforts to regenerate the Bengali race reflected in the spiritual realm as well. As Abhik Roy and Michele L. Hammers have argued, Swami Vivekananda's influential reformulation of Hindu masculinity combined the Western ideas of manliness such physical fitness, strength, and assertiveness with the Hindu notions of spiritual strength and moral courage to regenerate the Hindus and reclaim national pride and independence.⁶³ Similarly, Amitava Chatterjee and Souvik Naha have contextualized Vivekananda's conception of masculinity and advocacy of sports and physical exertion as being influenced by and as a response to the colonial discourse around masculinity and Bengali effeminacy.⁶⁴ As Mark Singleton has argued, the Yoga renaissance of the early twentieth century was another movement that was highly influenced by the ideas of regeneration, racial improvement, eugenics, and social Darwinism.⁶⁵ Many proponents of Yoga including Swami Vivekananda, Annie Beasant, Aurobindo Ghose, and Swami Yogendra considered the practice as a way to speed up the slow process of evolution, weed out undesirable characters, and reach a higher state of physical, mental, and spiritual development.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The above discussion indicates the importance and influence of the narratives around evolution, degeneration, and regeneration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal. As evident from the discussion, these ideas were appropriated and transformed by the Indian commentators in diverse ways to advance their agendas and arguments. Many of these

⁶² Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta, "The Effeminate and the Masculine: Nationalism and the Concept of Race in Colonial Bengal," in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, ed. Peter Robb, SOAS Studies on South Asia (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 282–303.

⁶³ Abhik Roy and Michele L. Hammers, "Swami Vivekananda's Rhetoric of Spiritual Masculinity: Transforming Effeminate Bengalis into Virile Men," *Western Journal of Communication* 78, no. 4 (2014): 550–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2014.914567>.

⁶⁴ Amitava Chatterjee and Souvik Naha, "The Muscular Monk: Vivekananda, Sports and Physical Culture in Colonial Bengal," *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 11 (2014): 25–29.

⁶⁵ Mark Singleton, "Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 11, no. 2 (2007): 125–46, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-007-9043-7>.

⁶⁶ Singleton, "Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism," 130–38.

themes were reflected in Bose's works as well. Thus, even when not explicitly addressed in his writings, these ideas provided the context for Bose's arguments and the vision of Indian society that he presented through his works.

Chapter 2. Pramatha Nath Bose and His Views: An Overview

P. N. Bose: A brief biography

Pramatha Nath Bose (1855-1934) was born in an upper-caste *kayastha* family in rural Bengal. After his preliminary education in Krishnagar and later Calcutta, he won the prestigious Gilchrist scholarship exam in 1874 to pursue higher education in England where he graduated from London University in 1877. He later enrolled in a course of science study at the Royal School of Mines, where he studied under T. H. Huxley.⁶⁷ Huxley profoundly influenced his conception of both social and biological evolution, both in terms of possible progress and degeneration. It is notable too, and although his published biography makes no mention of this fact, the comparative anatomist and theorist of evolutionary degeneration E. Ray Lankester worked alongside Huxley for some years before taking up the appointment of Jodrell Professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy at University College, London in 1876.

During his six years in England, Bose also became involved in nationalist political activities and lectured on Indian history and culture at various institutions.⁶⁸ He returned to India in 1880 to join the Geological Survey of India (GSI) as the first Indian graded officer in its history. He rose through the ranks of GSI till his resignation in 1903 after his promotion to Director was denied due to the discriminatory policy of the colonial state against Indians. Even during his tenure at the GSI, Bose was involved in nationalist circles and was particularly noted for his advocacy of technical education for Indians and indigenous industrial entrepreneurship. Bose also wrote a number of books and articles that dealt with these themes as well as with Indian history and culture during this period. He actively participated in the Swadeshi movement, which was launched in 1905 to boycott foreign

⁶⁷ Jogesh Chandra Bagal, *Pramatha Nath Bose*, (Calcutta: P. N. Bose Centenary Committee, 1955), 26-27, <http://archive.org/details/PramathaNathBose>.

⁶⁸ Bagal, *Pramatha Nath Bose*, 29-33.

goods and encourage indigenous production, and played an important role in the nationalist education movement.⁶⁹ However, Bose's views changed significantly around 1910, and he transformed himself from being a champion of technical education and industrialization to a vociferous critic of Western civilization and values, this included a passionate rejection of capitalism, industrialism, and militarism. In his criticism of the West and the "neo-Indian" (the English-educated Indian) obsession with Western culture, Bose employed many aspects of the Western intellectual discourses about progress and degeneration to make his case. In doing so he not only appropriated but often reversed the ways in which ideas of social evolution, progress, and degeneration had been employed in British colonial discourse. Until his death in 1934, Bose wrote extensively on these themes, through which he consistently articulated an organicist vision of India and argued for a return to a pre-colonial past.

Before moving on to Bose's use of evolutionary and degeneracy discourses in affirming the superiority of Hindu civilization and opposing the adoption of Western values and lifestyle by Indians, I provide a brief overview of his views in this chapter—especially the transformation following the failure of the Swadeshi movement.

The Transformation of Pramatha Nath Bose

Early views

Pramatha Nath Bose rose to prominence in the late 1880s and early 1890s, as a vocal advocate of technical education and indigenous industrialization.⁷⁰ As one of the very few Indians of his time to obtain higher education from England, and as an eminent scientist and in his new position as the first Indian graded officer in the Geological Survey of India, Bose

⁶⁹ Bagal, *Pramatha Nath Bose*, 100-13. Bose became a member of the Society for the Promotion of Technical Education and was appointed as the Honorary Principal of its newly established Bengal Technical Institute in 1906. For an analysis of the national education movement from the Swadeshi period, see Dhruv Raina and S. Irfan Habib, "Bhadralok Perceptions of Science, Technology and Cultural Nationalism," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 32, no. 1 (1995): 95–117, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946469503200104>.

⁷⁰ For an account of Bose's views on technical education and industrialization and his efforts in implementing them, see Aja B. Tolman, "Geologists and the British Raj, 1870-1910" (M.A., United States -- Utah, Utah State University), 52–67, accessed December 11, 2023, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1823574619/abstract/2BF7F7161DCF4053PQ/1>.

was acutely aware of the need for scientific and technical education for India to industrialize and progress. As the historian Suvobrata Sarkar has noted, the Bengali middle-class intelligentsia had been vocal about the entrepreneurial backwardness of their community and sought ways to stimulate commercial and industrial enterprise from early in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ However, the hostile attitude of the colonial state towards native entrepreneurship and the formal and informal privilege European businessmen enjoyed in the colony were major hindrances to the Bengali entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the lack of adequately trained technicians was another important challenge hampering the development of native industries. Therefore, Bengali intellectuals repeatedly raised the demand to establish more technical schools and colleges to impart technical education and training among the native populations.⁷²

Bose's pamphlet *Technical and Scientific Education in Bengal* (1886)⁷³ was one of the most notable articulations of the demand for technical education and it received significant public attention.⁷⁴ In this pamphlet, Bose attacked the literary focus of college education in India and argued for a greater emphasis on scientific subjects and practical learning. The pamphlet proposed significant changes in the university system, closer collaboration with the industries through apprenticeships, technical training programs, scholarships, and the establishment of a "[C]entral Science and Technological Institute" under Calcutta University to implement these reforms.⁷⁵ Although the campaign did not yield any immediate results, Bose continued his advocacy for the development of technical education. In his writings from the period, Bose argued that what the country needed at that moment was not the revival of

⁷¹ Suvobrata Sarkar, "Technical Content and Colonial Context: Situating Technical Knowledge in Nineteenth Century Bengal," *Social Scientist* 38, no. 1/2 (2010): 41-42.

⁷² Sarkar, "Technical Content and Colonial Context," 42.

⁷³ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Essays and Lectures on the Industrial Development of India, and Other Indian Subjects* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1906), 59-78, <http://archive.org/details/essaysandlectur00bosegoog>.

⁷⁴ Sarkar, "Technical Content and Colonial Context," 45.

⁷⁵ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 75-77.

traditional industries or the expansion of small-scale industries, but the development of large industries that involved the large-scale applications of scientific methods and appliances.⁷⁶

However, he stressed that the development of large industries depended upon the availability of skilled labor which could only be attained through scientific and technical education.

Therefore, the development of technical education was unavoidable in the industrialization of India, a path that he felt at this time, was fundamentally necessary if the country was to progress and develop into a modern nation.

Bose framed the need to industrialize as an imperative of civilizational survival. He noted that as the flood of cheap manufactured goods from England destroyed India's traditional industries, the impoverished artisans had to turn to agriculture, thus saturating the cultivable land and increasing the "pressure upon land."⁷⁷ With the productivity of the land stagnating or even deteriorating, the large influx of artisans to agricultural classes intensified what he called the "struggle for existence" amongst them. This only led to further impoverishment and the deterioration of the physical condition of the masses.⁷⁸ This degradation was not something that was limited to those in the artisan class, but also afflicted the middle class as well. As he noted, (and later experienced first-hand), the educated middle class was excluded from the higher grades of bureaucracy and, at the same time, was burdened by the rising cost of living. This forced them to work harder when even the basic nutritious diet had become unaffordable. Therefore, the middle class, much like the artisanal and agricultural classes, had, he said, "sunk in the lowest depths of poverty," growing weak in both body and mind.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ For example, Pramatha Nath Bose, "Educational Reform in Bengal," *Calcutta Review* 86, no. 171, (1888): 67-76.

⁷⁷ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 1-3.

⁷⁸ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 4-5.

⁷⁹ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 5-7.

While Bose's diagnosis of the social decay and physical degeneration of the Bengalis under colonialism here is similar to that of his writings of the later period in which he directly addressed the theme of degeneration, the underlying causes that he identified as the causes of degeneration were different.⁸⁰ If Bose pointed towards the adoption of Western lifestyle and values, which were inherently alien and unsuitable to the environment and culture of the country as the root cause of degeneration in his later writings, his works on industrialization from the pre-1910 period suggested that it was rather an incomplete adoption of Western values that was the root cause of the problem. As he remarked in 1891 in one of his addresses, the educated Indian middle class had to "work like Englishmen, but without an Englishman's food, without an Englishman's habits. And without an Englishman's reward."⁸¹ That is, it was this unnatural state of in-betweenness that wrecked the middle-class body and mind more than the Western culture itself. Whatever the reason, Bose asserted that "[a] nation of half-starved clerks and coolies and cultivators will never make any sound progress,"⁸² and the only remedy was the development of industries. A large-scale industrialization would open up lower-level employment for the masses of people, lightening the "pressure upon land," and provide higher-level employment opportunities for the educated middle class other than clerkship.⁸³ Bose held industrial reform to be more valuable than, and a pre-condition for social and political reforms.⁸⁴ In fact, Bose held industrialism to be the root cause of Western imperialism and indigenous industrialization its remedy. As he argued in one of his lectures in 1906:

The aggressive imperialism of modern Europe is based upon industrialism. It is chiefly in the interests of their industries, that the greater powers of the [W]est are

⁸⁰ For example, see Bose's *Survival of Hindu civilization: Physical degeneration - its causes and remedies* (1921).

⁸¹ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 6.

⁸² Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 19.

⁸³ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 6-7.

⁸⁴ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 19.

anxious to dominate the peoples of the East. If these peoples made a vigorous, well concerted effort to develop their resources on western methods, and supply their own wants, their markets would cease to be exploited in the way they now are by western manufactures, and their lands would cease to be the happy hunting ground of western enterprise. Western imperialism, would thus die a natural and peaceful death, at least in its present highly objectionable militant form.⁸⁵

However, as the historian Pratik Chakrabarti has noted, for all his enthusiastic support for large-scale industrialization in India, Bose did not embrace industrialism and capitalism.⁸⁶ For Bose, capitalism, which led to Mammonism, was the greatest curse of modern civilization and yet, since capitalism was rapidly expanding, there was no choice left for India but to industrialize in order to survive. As Bose reiterated, Indians have to “move on with the times or perish, even though such ‘progress’ may clash with our long and fondly cherished moral ideals.”⁸⁷ Thus, even when Bose conveyed his disapproval of the evils of industrialism and capitalism in his early writings, industrialization was framed as an unavoidable necessity in the country’s struggle for existence, and the focus was on the latter rather than the former aspect.⁸⁸

Bose combined his critique of colonial rule, the need for social reform and industrialization in his acclaimed three volume series *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule* (1894-1896). Apart from voicing the economic critique of colonial rule that focused on the “drain of wealth” from India to Britain, Bose pointed out the unfairness inherent to the *laissez-faire* system that brought the Hindus who were “vastly poorer than the

⁸⁵ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 31.

⁸⁶ Pratik Chakrabarti, *Western Science in Modern India: Metropolitan Methods, Colonial Practices* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2004), 258-64.

⁸⁷ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 37-39.

⁸⁸ For an analysis of the inherent tensions and contradictions that marked Bose’s views see Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 191–92.

poorest in Europe” in competition with the richest people in the world.⁸⁹ For him, the colonial free trade system made the Hindus “run a race with one of the swiftest peoples of the modern world, on paths hitherto unknown to them but familiar to their foreign competitors, without the requisite equipment.”⁹⁰ Therefore, the effect of the colonial rule was a further impoverishment of the Indians. Furthermore, Bose remarked that the colonial state that did not identify with the people that it ruled over was destined for failure.⁹¹

However, Bose did not consider colonial subjugation to be the root cause of the stagnation and decay of the Hindu civilization since it “carried the germs of its decay within it.”⁹² It was the caste system that arrested the intellectual and industrial development in India centuries before the British came through its obstruction of the conditions required for material progress. According to Bose, the caste system hampered industrial development by protecting “the different classes of Hindu society from the stress and strain of strenuous competition,” artificially limiting the action of the law of natural selection—“a law as supreme in the case of intellectual as in that of physical development,” and isolating the intellectual classes from the manufacturing process.⁹³ The caste system restricted the diffusion of knowledge beyond a small hereditary class and thus prevented the development of physical sciences essential to industrial progress since it rested upon “the unrestricted diffusion of knowledge.”⁹⁴ Therefore, Bose squarely placed the blame for the Hindu backwardness in industries and physical sciences on the caste system. Additionally, he noted the “anti-caste influence” of colonial rule had a positive effect on the Hindu civilization since

⁸⁹ Pramatha Nath Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule: Intellectual Condition* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1896), xxi-xxii.

⁹⁰ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, xxii.

⁹¹ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, xxxix.

⁹² Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, ii.

⁹³ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, iv-viii

⁹⁴ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, vi.

it relaxed the extreme restrictions of the caste system and thus promoted intellectual development.⁹⁵

This stringent critique of the caste system stood in contrast to his later views which characterized it as a superior form of social organization — which I shall examine in the following chapters. If Bose pointed to the caste system’s suppression of competition as the root cause of the Hindu intellectual stagnation leading to their civilizational decay, it was precisely this restriction of competition and the limiting of the “struggle for existence” that he praised in his later writings arguing that these aspects maintained order and stability and thus ensured the survival of Hindu civilization. At the same time, he did not condemn the caste system entirely in his early writings either. He noted that the caste system was conducive to the promotion of spirituality and quietism and argued that “it was probably the best solution possible, at the time it was formed” to the question of distributing “the good things of the world so as to liberate the lower classes from the vices and miseries of destitution.”⁹⁶ For Bose, the caste system was a “system of organized inequality, but of inequality so adjusted as not to press severely upon the classes affected by it.”⁹⁷ Therefore, similar to his views on industrialization, a tension between the two opposing aspects—here, the caste system as a hindrance to material progress and as a system conducive to spiritual and ethical progress marked his pre-1910 views. However, what he chose to emphasize among these changed over the years. While Bose’s earlier writings focused on the need for industrial progress that required the relaxation if not the destruction of caste restrictions, his later writings sidelined the stagnation of material and industrial development as an unfortunate, yet not so significant consequence of the caste system which enabled the preservation of the spiritual and ethical

⁹⁵ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, viii.

⁹⁶ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, ii.

⁹⁷ Bose, *A History of Hindu Civilisation during British Rule*, iii.

culture of the Hindu civilization despite the hostile political climate following the Mahomedan invasion in the late twelfth-century and later the British colonial rule.

Given his involvement in the industrialization and technical education movement, it is unsurprising that Bose emerged as one of the prominent figures during the Swadeshi movement in the early twentieth century.⁹⁸ The Swadeshi movement, which was launched in 1905 following the government's controversial partition of the Bengal province, was the earliest instance of a nationalist mass movement in colonial India and it urged Indians to boycott foreign-made commodities and instead to use only domestic products.⁹⁹ It encouraged native entrepreneurship and envisioned attaining self-sufficiency and self-dependence through domestic production and regulated consumption. However, Swadeshi was not limited to the aspects of production and consumption. As historian Manu Goswami has argued, "as an encompassing 'ideology of pure materials,' [Swadeshi] logic extended beyond the valorization of coarse homespun cloth and indigenous commodities"—"[it] was a paradigmatic instance of a territorial nativist vision of nationhood."¹⁰⁰ That is, an organicist understanding of the nation and a "quixotic quest for authenticity and purity" was the underlying theme of Swadeshi ideology.¹⁰¹ However, despite the initial popular enthusiasm and support, by 1908 the Swadeshi movement had collapsed. While the failure of the movement led many of its leaders to pursue alternate forms of politics and ideologies,¹⁰² historian Andrew Sartori has suggested that for Bose, these disappointments pushed him "ever deeper into the idiom of Swadeshi nationalism at the very moment when the Swadeshi movement was collapsing."¹⁰³ Thus, by the early 1910s, Bose transformed himself from a

⁹⁸ B. P. Radhakrishna, "Pranath Nath Bose (1855-1934)," *Current Science* 72, no. 3 (1997): 223.

⁹⁹ For a comprehensive account of the Swadeshi movement, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973).

¹⁰⁰ Goswami, *Producing India*, 269.

¹⁰¹ Goswami, *Producing India*, 266.

¹⁰² Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 175-229.

¹⁰³ Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 193.

champion of technical education and industrialization to an outspoken critic of Western civilization and the colonial corruption of the Indian way of life.

Later views

If Bose framed industrialization and social reforms as imperatives of civilizational survival earlier, his later writings were preoccupied with the theme of preserving civilizational identity. This in turn, translated to a rejection of Western civilization and its influence on Indians—especially the Western-educated middle-class or the “neo-Indians,” the calls for social reform, and the mainstream nationalist politics itself. While Bose occasionally resorted to biological metaphors and the language of evolution in his earlier writings as well, evolutionary ideas, degeneracy theories, and organicism were central to his post-1910 views.

For example, in his later writings on the question of indigenous industrialization, Bose argued that apart from the contemporary economic and political conditions, the very nature of Hindu civilization made it averse to industrialization.¹⁰⁴ The industrial transformation of the West was powered by their imperial conquests, and India could never adopt these methods of exploitation as they were fundamentally opposed to the essence of Hindu civilization.¹⁰⁵ Based on his view of social evolution that he fully elaborated in his 1913 book *Epochs of Civilization*, Bose argued that, unlike the West, which was still dominated by the forces of material development and militarism, Hindu civilization had attained the highest stage of altruistic and ethical culture and therefore, it discouraged greed—one of the chief motivating factor driving industrialism.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the Hindu mind was not inclined towards industries, militarism, and other characteristics of the lower stage of civilization.

Bose also relied on Aryan Race Theory to explain the Hindu aversion to industrialization. However, his use of the Aryan Theory presented a peculiar inversion of the

¹⁰⁴ Pramatha Nath Bose, *The Illusions of New India* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1916), 105–41, <http://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.39394>.

¹⁰⁵ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 115–16.

¹⁰⁶ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 121–22.

colonial trope. If the colonial discourse pointed to the environmental conditions of India as the cause of the Indo-Aryan degeneration and effeminacy, Bose framed it as the reason behind their evolutionary superiority. He argued that since the European branch of the Aryan race faced an unfavorable climate and scarcity of resources, their “energies were exhausted in overcoming natural obstacles.”¹⁰⁷ This process molded their national character and made the Europeans more active, energetic, enterprising, and resolute.¹⁰⁸ The Indian branch, on the other hand, was blessed with ideal environmental conditions and an abundance of resources, enabling them not to be bothered too much by the struggle against nature and instead to turn to introspection, contemplation, and develop a spiritual culture.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, when industrialism emerged as the characteristic feature of Western civilization, both peacefulness and quietism marked the Hindu culture. Thus, Bose felt that the specifically Western form of industrialism was inherently alien to the Hindus, and remarked that “there is not the remotest chance of India ever becoming an industrial country in the modern sense. Nor is it desirable.”¹¹⁰ Instead of trying to imitate a Western lifestyle and attempting to produce those commodities in India, Bose urged his fellow Indians to return to the traditional way of living. That is, “...to go back to the days of *gur* and coarse sugar, and of slipper and sandals than to start large sugar factories and tanneries: to be satisfied with our metal plates and vessels than to develop China and glass works...All that is needed is, that we should be guided by the ideals of our ancient culture.”¹¹¹ These kinds of organicist notions provided the foundational logic to Bose’s revivalism. Similarly, the brief comparisons provided in the preceding section on his views on the questions of degeneration and the caste system further testify to the significant shift in his outlook.

¹⁰⁷ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 122.

¹⁰⁸ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 122-23.

¹⁰⁹ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 123-24.

¹¹⁰ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 134.

¹¹¹ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 140.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a broad overview of Bose's life and views, with a particular focus on the themes of technical education and industrialization which dominated his early views, and most important, on a significant transformation in his views and political outlook around 1910 following the failure of the Swadeshi movement. This is important to keep in mind and provides necessary background in my further exploration of Bose's views across the following chapters. In these I investigate in closer detail Bose's writings from the latter phase, in which evolutionary and degeneracy discourses played a central role.

Chapter 3. Bose on Social Evolution

In this chapter, I explore Bose's appropriation of evolutionary ideas and his model of social evolution. Through an examination of his view of social evolution and his accounts of the progress of Hindu and Western civilizations, I show that these ideas enabled him to proclaim the superiority of Hindu civilization over the West and oppose the nationalist arguments for social reform.

Social Evolution

Reflections on the evolution of humans

For Bose, like for many commentators, the question of social evolution was fundamentally linked to that of human nature and the applicability of the laws of evolution to the realm of human history and civilization. Even among evolutionists, these questions remained contentious. While many important figures like Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley considered human nature, including both intelligence and morality, to be products of the natural evolutionary process, as historians of science have shown, many others including the co-discoverer of natural selection, Alfred Russel Wallace held that the emergence of moral and mental qualities of man could not be explained through natural selection alone, and that a supernatural intervention had been necessary to effect such a significant development.¹¹²

In his 1864 paper, “The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of Natural Selection,” Wallace had suggested that across the evolution of humans, once mankind had become sufficiently social, sympathetic, and intelligent, that

¹¹² Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, 10–34, 54–77; see also Paul Lawrence Farber, *The Temptations of Evolutionary Ethics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 22–37, 58–78; also, Piers J. Hale, *Political Descent: Malthus, Mutualism, and the Politics of Evolution in Victorian England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 61–65. For a different interpretation of Wallace’s turn to the supernatural see Martin Finchman, *An Elusive Victorian. The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 194–5. For an account of Wallace’s spiritualist interpretation of evolutionary theory in his book *Darwinism* (1889), see Ian Hesketh, “The First Darwinian: Alfred Russel Wallace and the Meaning of Darwinism,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 25, no. 2 (2020): 171–84, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jvcult/vcz042>.

natural selection had ceased to act upon his morphology, but rather on his mental and moral capacities.¹¹³ It was in light of this, he argued, that such a mental and moral gap had opened up between man and the other primates, while they shared very similar morphologies.

However, by 1869 Wallace had veered away from a naturalistic account of the evolution of mind and morality, suggesting instead that a supernatural intervention was needed to account for this distinction, as he stated in his 1869 review of the latest editions of Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and *Elements of Geology* in the *Quarterly Review* that just as humans have directed the laws of variation, multiplication, and survival in domesticated plants and animals for their own purposes, "...we must admit the possibility, that in the development of the human race, a Higher Intelligence has guided the same laws for nobler ends."¹¹⁴

Although Bose had studied under Huxley, on this point, his views on the applicability of the evolutionary process to mankind were more similar to those of Wallace. While Bose accepted the natural evolution of man from the lower orders of the animal kingdom, he too held that man differed from even the most developed species among the animals in some important aspects that could not be accounted for by natural processes. Echoing Wallace, Bose argued that intellect was "incomparably more developed in man than in animals" and that such a wide gulf between the two in terms of intellectual capacity could not be explained through natural selection.¹¹⁵ Further, man was also distinguished from even the most developed animals by two features that did not appear in the latter even in a rudimentary state: the spiritual faculty which inspired a belief in the supernatural and the moral faculty which enabled him to perceive "moral good and evil independently of any consideration of

¹¹³ Alfred Russel Wallace, "The Origin of the Human Races and the Antiquity of Man deduced from the Theory of Natural Selection," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London*, no.2 (1864), clviii-clxxxvii.

¹¹⁴ Alfred Russel Wallace, review of *Principles of Geology and Elements of Geology*, by Charles Lyell, *Quarterly Review* (1869): 393-94.

¹¹⁵ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Epochs of Civilization* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1913), 2, <http://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.3217>.

utility, of physical welfare or suffering.”¹¹⁶ He added that the moral and spiritual faculties which separated man from animals were developed through processes which while not fully understood were clearly distinct from the laws of natural selection.¹¹⁷ Bose’s conception of a morality that went beyond its mere utility in the process of human survival and was thus framed in opposition to the account of mind and morality that Darwin had offered in *Descent of Man* in which he had described the development of morality as having been driven by its functional advantages in the struggle for existence.¹¹⁸ Instead Bose followed Wallace’s argument that humans had an innate moral sense “antecedent to and independent of experiences of utility.”¹¹⁹

Social evolution

Similar to Huxley who considered social evolution to be a process that mitigated the action of natural selection rather than its expression,¹²⁰ Bose viewed the advancement of civilization as a progressive curtailment of natural selection culminating in the replacement of competition by altruism.¹²¹ Drawing from Huxley’s 1888 essay, “The Struggle for Existence,” Bose argued that the ethical process that drove social evolution acted in opposition to the “cosmic process” of the struggle for existence and the balance between the two determined the place of society in the path of civilizational progress.¹²² Based on this balance between these antagonistic forces, Bose categorized the progress of every civilization as being composed of three developmental stages: the earliest phase in which man was primarily occupied with the struggle for animal existence, the second or the intermediate

¹¹⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Some Present-Day Superstitions* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1927), 26.

¹¹⁸ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, vol. 1 (New York: D Appleton & Company, 1871), 67–102.; Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, 22.

¹¹⁹ Alfred Russel Wallace, "The Limits of Natural Selection as Applied to Man," *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (1870): 354.

¹²⁰ Thomas Henry Huxley, "The Struggle for Existence in Human Society," *Collected Essays: Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, vol. IX (New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 195–206.

¹²¹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 8-9.

¹²² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 5-6, 33-34.; *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 26-27.

stage in which the struggle for existence was no longer man's primary preoccupation and which witnessed intellectual development through the emergence of science and philosophy, and the final ethical stage, which was characterized by altruism, benevolence, and cooperation.¹²³ That is, the progress of civilization entailed the triumph of the ethical process over the cosmic process. This division of civilizational progress into three stages echoed Auguste Comte's law of three stages, and since Positivist philosophy was influential in the Bengali intellectual circle of the period,¹²⁴ it is highly probable that Comte's ideas played an important role in shaping Bose's views. Apart from dividing the progress of each society into three stages, in his major study, *Epochs of Civilisation*, Bose also divided the whole timeline of human civilization into three epochs.¹²⁵ The first epoch of human progress ranged from around 6000 BC to 2000 BC and was marked by the rise and culmination of the early civilizations of Egypt, Babilonia, and China. The second epoch that stretched from 2000 BC to AD 700 comprised of the later civilizations of Egypt and China and the civilizations of India, Greece, Rome, Assyria, Phoenicia, and Persia. Finally, the ongoing third epoch began around AD 700 and was characterized by the rise of Western civilization.¹²⁶

The progress of civilization through the three stages, for Bose, meant a journey from materialism to spirituality, from militarism to altruism, from self-indulgence to self-denial, and from a focus on the "outer life" to the "inner life" of man. To explain his view of social evolution, Bose resorted to an analogy which was an extension of the recapitulation theory. He noted that just as the development of a human embryo resembled the stages in the evolutionary history of man from the lower animal forms, the unfolding of his later life

¹²³ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 6-8.

¹²⁴ Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology* (Columbia, MO: South Asia Books, 1975); Jasodhara Bagchi, "Order and Progress: The Reception of Comteian Positivism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," in *Literature East and West: Essays Presented to R. K. Dasgupta*, ed. G. R. Taneja and Vinod Sena (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1995), 150-62.

¹²⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 9-11.

¹²⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 9.

probably resembled the evolution of human society.¹²⁷ Bose saw a similarity between the evolution of societies from the earliest stage of animal existence to the intermediate stage of intellectual development to the final ethical stage and the states of human life: emotions and instincts having their fullest influence during childhood and adolescence, intellectual developments taking place in adulthood, and the unfolding of moral and spiritual life in old age. Therefore, similar to ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, life stages resembled if not recapitulated social evolution or vice versa.

However, for all his exaltation of altruism as the noblest ideal and the true goal of social evolution, Bose did not consider altruism as being ingrained in nature—rather it was the pinnacle of humanness, the ultimate factor that distinguished man from animals. This characterization of altruism as a uniquely human character contradicted the views of the anarchist and naturalist Peter Kropotkin—one of the most prominent contemporary proponents of the primacy of cooperation in evolution. As the historian Piers Hale has shown, Kropotkin argued that cooperation and mutual aid were more important in evolution than competition and he fiercely contested Huxley’s characterization of society and nature as being in opposition.¹²⁸ According to Kropotkin, social evolution was primarily driven by mutual aid, and the ultimate anarchist-socialist society represented only a return to the natural state from the historically recent corruptions of the laws of private property and individualistic social institutions.¹²⁹ Thus, Bose was closer to Huxley than Kropotkin in his conception of society and the nature of social evolution.

Progress of civilization

For Bose, it was what he called the “desire for the superfluous”—a uniquely human instinct—that drove civilizational progress.¹³⁰ Unlike animals which did not care about

¹²⁷ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 5.

¹²⁸ Hale, *Political Descent*, 225–51.

¹²⁹ Hale, *Political Descent*, 242.

¹³⁰ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 25–28.

anything other than their physical wants for survival which in turn remained constant if the environment did not change, Bose argued that the wants varied and increased incessantly for man from the earliest times. Bose divided this desire for the superfluous into two: one related to the physical wants or the “wants of the outer life” and the other corresponding to the mental and the spiritual— the “wants of the inner life.” The former led to industrial and commercial expansion and the intellectual development needed for this process whereas the latter led to the development of higher artistic, intellectual, and ethical culture.¹³¹ These two impulses together drove society forward. The desire for physical superfluity led to material advances, the development of tools and technology, the accumulation of wealth, and a perpetual rise in the standard of comfort and luxuries.¹³² More importantly, these activities pertaining to the “physical” or “animal” side of man were marked by strife and competition, and governed by the same cosmic process that ruled the animal realm—“the survival of the fittest.”¹³³ This process of material development was most influential in the earliest stage of civilization. At the same time, the “cultural progress” that led to the development of the highest products of civilization including artistic, intellectual, and ethical culture, according to Bose, was driven by a process different from and “partly antagonistic” to that of material development. The antithesis between the two processes was most marked in the highest stage of civilization which was marked by ethical and spiritual development and in which “the weak and the helpless are protected against the strong and the powerful.”¹³⁴

According to Bose, the progress of a civilization depended on the balance between the two opposing forces.¹³⁵ Man in the earliest stage of civilization was preoccupied with material concerns whereas the highest stage of civilization represented a triumph of

¹³¹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 26.

¹³² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 27.

¹³³ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 27-28.

¹³⁴ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 28.

¹³⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 21-22.

spirituality over physical wants and desires. For Bose, the two values were embodied in two classes of society.¹³⁶ In each society, there was a minority of an enlightened few who preached and pursued the highest ethical ideals and a majority who still belonged to the earlier and lower stages of civilization. Social progress occurred when the enlightened class exerted sufficient influence over the ignorant majority to reform their perception and lifestyle and inculcate an ethical culture amongst them. Bose pointed to Socrates and Gautama Buddha as two examples of such enlightened men who had uplifted their civilizations to the third and the highest stage. The appearance of such pioneering figures seems to happen at random in Bose's conception. He noted that although there may be "exceptionally endowed individuals, intellectual or moral geniuses...[who were] far in advance of their age" even in a "society immersed in Barbarism," they usually failed to influence the rest of society.¹³⁷ Therefore, a sufficient influence of the enlightened minority over the rest of the society was essential for progress. However, this control was not to be achieved through coercion, but rather through a "reverence for the good and the wise" and a moral influence that became increasingly ingrained in society as it progressed.¹³⁸

This characterization of social evolution both resembled and diverged from Huxley's views in important ways. While Bose's conception of the antagonistic forces of ethical and material development mirrored the conflict between natural instincts and ethical practices inculcated through culture and civilization that had been central to Huxley's conception,¹³⁹ the identification of these forces exclusively with certain classes within society was unique to Bose. Additionally, both Huxley's and Bose's seemingly optimistic visions of social evolution which ultimately led to the triumph of man over nature, culture over instinct, and ethics, there

¹³⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 20.

¹³⁷ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 20.

¹³⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstition*, 117.

¹³⁹ Farber, *The Temptations of Evolutionary Ethics*, 66-69.

lied a strong gloomy side as well.¹⁴⁰ If for Huxley, as Hale has noted, morality and civilization were just a thin veneer over man's deeper natural amoral propensities and "the polite conventions of civilizations masked the deep-seated self-interest that...was the essence of humanity,"¹⁴¹ Bose feared of the possibility of uncivilized classes overtaking and bringing the society down to the levels of savagery. He argued that even if a community reached the highest stage of ethical culture, the majority of the populace would still be representatives of the lower stages, including men who were "little removed from the savage level" who pulled the society in the direction opposite to that the individuals belonging to the higher stages led their community to. That is, a "civilized society is thus always acted upon by opposing forces."¹⁴² Therefore, the threat of the uncivilized class taking over and bringing down the society—the threat of degeneration was always present, even in the societies belonging to the highest stage.

Bose's biologization of sociology was not restricted to the applicability (or non-applicability) of the evolutionary process in the case of civilizational progress either. For example, Bose argued that the "distribution of civilized man [was] subject to the same law that governs the distribution of all organisms—namely, the higher the organisation the more restricted is the habitat."¹⁴³ He pointed out that while the palaeolithic man was distributed all over the world, the distribution of neolithic man who had acquired the skills of agriculture, use of weapons, and animal husbandry was more limited. The range of civilized man was even more restricted—the civilizations of antiquity were confined to a narrow range of latitudes in the northern hemisphere.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, Bose noted that a civilization at a particular stage of an epoch was of "higher order" and embraced more people than that of the

¹⁴⁰ Hale, *Political Descent*, 214-22.

¹⁴¹ Hale, *Political Descent*, 208-09.

¹⁴² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 22.

¹⁴³ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 18-19.

same stage in the previous epoch.¹⁴⁵ That is, while civilizations tended to get more and more restricted as they progressed through the stages of social evolution, the reach, influence, and the “quality” of civilizations increased from one epoch to another. Therefore, similar to the antagonistic cosmic and ethical processes that pulled civilization in opposite directions, the seemingly contradictory tendencies across stages and epochs shaped the geographic and cultural influence of civilizations. Either way, these discussions reveal a conception of society as a cohesive unit — a social organism that was ruled by similar if not the same laws of nature that governed the animal realm and resembled the parallelisms that Spencer had drawn between biological and social organisms — both in their composition and evolution.¹⁴⁶

Although the analogies that Bose made regarding geographic distribution did not go into the more fundamental aspects of organicist ideas such as the interconnectedness and interdependence of the parts, the unity of the whole, and the organic relationship between the community and the environment,¹⁴⁷ as we shall see, these featured prominently in his later works, especially on the question of degeneration.

After explaining the general arguments on human evolution, civilizational progress, and the factors affecting the process in the first few chapters, Bose spent the rest of *Epochs of Civilization* looking at the evolutionary history of different civilizations with each chapter dedicated to a particular epoch. While the broader discussions of human nature, and social evolution reveal how Bose interpreted and appropriated the ideas of major evolutionary thinkers to present his own views, the immediate political objective of the whole narrative is most evident in his discussion of the evolution of Hindu and Western civilizations. Therefore, I will be focusing on his views and comments on these two civilizations in the next sections.

¹⁴⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 23.

¹⁴⁶ Herbert Spencer, “The Social Organism,” *The Westminster Review*, 73, no. 143 (1860): 90–121.

¹⁴⁷ D. C. Phillips, “Organicism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 31, no. 3 (1970): 413–32, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2708514>.; Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought*, 40–42.

Hindu civilization

Morality, social reform, and civilizational progress

According to Bose, the earliest stage of Hindu civilization which stretched from around 2000 BC to 1000 BC was marked by materialism, and the Aryans indulged in sensory gratification through drinking, feasting, meat consumption, gambling, and other vices.¹⁴⁸ He added that during this period, women also enjoyed considerable freedom: they did not have to lead secluded lives like their descendants in later times, had some choice in their marriage, widow remarriage was allowed, the custom of *sati* was unknown, and girls were not married off at a very early age.¹⁴⁹ That is, early Hindu society was free of many of the contemporary practices which had come increasingly under attack from both the British colonists and reform-oriented Indians such as *sati*, early marriage, and prohibition of widow remarriage.

However, Bose argued that the lax morality that characterized the first stage was antithetical to ethical development and the Hindu sages had had to enforce stricter and more conservative views on morality, freedom of females, chastity, and marriage as part of the reform movement which elevated the Hindu civilization to the third stage of progress.¹⁵⁰ To point out the necessity of establishing stricter moral codes, Bose referred to the circumstances that led to the collapse of Roman Empire.¹⁵¹ Apart from the gross extravagance and debauchery that arose from the excessive concentration of wealth, Bose pointed to the dilution of sexual morality and chastity, especially with respect to women as the major reasons behind the extinction of their culture. “For breeding true to race as well as to the best,” Bose argued, “it is imperative that the female stock should have a higher standard of chastity than the male” and this standard was not kept up in ancient Rome.¹⁵² Therefore,

¹⁴⁸ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 114-16.

¹⁴⁹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 126-27.

¹⁵⁰ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 183-84.; *The Illusions of New India*, 181-87.

¹⁵¹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 60-64.; *The Illusions of New India*, 187-88.

¹⁵² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 60.

maintaining high chastity and morality were an imperative of civilizational survival, and the strict Hindu customs ensured this. However, Bose did not provide a clear account of how the specific practices such as prohibition of widow remarriage and early marriage enhanced morality or social stability unlike many commentators on the question, including the polymath Rabindranath Tagore. While conceding that these practices outlived their original purpose, as scholar Rovel Sequeira has noted, Tagore rationalized the emergence of early marriage as being based on the early Aryan concern for preserving racial purity and superiority by regulating the marriage according to the social will before sexual attraction and activity reached its peak in puberty.¹⁵³ Either way, this view enabled Bose to voice his opposition to the contemporary campaign against such customs and practices, as he argued that even though some of these practices were abused and carried out to extremes, these issues “cannot be invested with the importance which is usually claimed for them.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the reforms that many Western-oriented Indians were arguing for, if carried too far, would take the Hindu society back to the conditions it emerged from more than two thousand years ago.¹⁵⁵

Caste system and Hindu society

Another important feature that Bose noted about the early Aryan civilization was the absence of any caste distinctions.¹⁵⁶ According to him, anyone with a talent to compose hymns and offer sacrifices was honored as *Brahman* whereas any who possessed exemplary military skills was eulogized as *Kshatriya*, the title used for the warrior class, during this period. These classifications were not hereditary nor were these classes separated from the rest of the society. However, he noted that there was a clear division during the Vedic period

¹⁵³ Rovel Sequeira, “The Sciences of Love: Intimate ‘Democracy’ and the Eugenic Development of the Marathi Couple in Colonial India,” *History of the Human Sciences* 36, no. 5 (2022): 76-77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09526951221134469>.

¹⁵⁴ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 184-85.

¹⁵⁵ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 185.

¹⁵⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 127-29.

between the Aryans and the non-Aryan aborigines who inhabited the land before the Aryans migrated there. These aborigines were held in contempt by the Aryans and they were ultimately defeated and subjugated by them. However, Bose wrote that instead of exterminating or reducing the conquered tribes into slavery, the Aryans “followed a policy characterized by comparative mercy and humanity” and incorporated them into the Aryan society by allotting them the lowest position in it as the *Shudra* class.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the social division in the early Indo-Aryan society was that of *varna* or color—between the fair-skinned Aryans and the black-skinned aborigines, and there were no caste distinctions within these broader classes.

According to Bose, the later-day caste system was developed only towards the end of the second stage of Hindu civilization.¹⁵⁸ As the Aryan territories expanded, the population increased, progress was made in arts and manufacture, and wealth accumulated, more complicated social divisions became necessary. Bose noted that because the Vedic hymns were still central to the Aryan rituals, those who were able to master them and officiate the rituals were held in high esteem. Although every Aryan was expected to be proficient in the Vedic hymns, he described how those who were engaged in ordinary occupations had not been able to “afford room in their brains” to memorize and master the complicated hymns and officiate rituals.¹⁵⁹ These circumstances, according to Bose, facilitated the rise of a class of men devoted to intellectual and religious pursuits—the Brahmins. The developments in industry and commerce furthered the division of labor amongst the Aryans, and accordingly, the society became divided into four distinct classes. The priestly class was composed of brahmins, the princes and warriors came under the *Kshatriya* class, and the majority of the Aryans belonged to the *Vaisya* class who engaged in agriculture, trade, and other businesses.

¹⁵⁷ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 160.

¹⁵⁸ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 160-62.

¹⁵⁹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 161-62.

However, Bose noted that the fourth and the lowest class *Shudra*—the servile class composed of non-Aryan aborigines were excluded from all the privileges enjoyed by the first three classes who belonged to the Aryan race.¹⁶⁰ However, this explanation of the caste system, especially that of the three upper-caste groups based on a division of labor did not account for the emergence of its hereditary nature and the practice of caste endogamy. In any case, Bose wrote that while the separation between the Aryans and the *Shudra* was stark initially, the latter's position was “gradually improved in a variety of ways.”¹⁶¹ Most important among them was the inter-marriage between the classes—the “intermixture of Aryan and non-Aryan blood” that “tended to bridge over the gulf that had once interposed between the original pure Aryan castes and the aboriginal Sudras” and produced various “mixed castes.”¹⁶² Although these developments diluted the distinction between the conqueror and the conquered races, Bose noted that the condition of the *Shudras* and the mixed castes were still “hard enough.” Nonetheless, Bose's description of the intermixture of blood through marriage suggests that for him, even though the caste system had a biological and racial basis (at least for the division between the three upper-classes and the lower class) originally, a unified Hindu race emerged as early as the last phase of the second stage of the development of civilized society—more than two thousand years ago. The importance of this argument needs to be understood in the context of the contemporary ethnographic debates in colonial India and its political implications.

The question of caste was central to the colonial ethnographic accounts of Indian society because, as the historian Thomas R. Metcalf has argued, the discourse attempted to emphasize the characteristics that would reveal the differences between the Indian and British society rather than the similarities which would undermine the colonial hierarchies.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 163.

¹⁶¹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 163.

¹⁶² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 164.

¹⁶³ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 113-14.

Further, as Susan Bayly has shown, the focus on caste and community also appealed to the proponents of race science and anthropometry that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁴ One such important proponent of the racial understanding of caste was the colonial administrator, ethnographer, and the Commissioner of the 1901 Census Herbert Hope Risley. Risley advocated a racial theory of caste arguing that the Hindu caste system was fundamentally based on the racial difference primarily between the Aryans and the indigenous Dravidians in contrast to the then dominant interpretation of castes as occupational groups.¹⁶⁵ Additionally, these racial features, according to Risley, were preserved across generations by the “inexorable social law” of caste endogamy that made the Hindu society merely a collection of an “infinite number of mutually exclusive aggregates.”¹⁶⁶ The political significance of this stance in the context of burgeoning Indian nationalism was lost on none¹⁶⁷ as Risley himself made clear, there was “no national type and no nation or even nationality in the ordinary sense of these words” in India.¹⁶⁸ Apart from his racial theory, Risley’s attempt to include “social precedence” or the hierarchical ranking of castes in the 1901 Census of India was another move that created great political controversy.¹⁶⁹ As historian Sumit Sarkar has noted, these attempts to record caste status created or intensified the lower-caste political mobilizations, claims to social superiority by various caste-groups, and greatly irked the high-caste proponents of Hindu unity who perceived the lower caste self-assertions as a fundamental threat on par with the then

¹⁶⁴ Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 130–40.

¹⁶⁵ C. J. Fuller, “Colonial Anthropology and the Decline of the Raj: Caste, Religion and Political Change in India in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26, no. 3 (2016): 466, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186315000486>.

¹⁶⁶ Herbert Hope Risley, *The People of India*, ed. William Crooke, 2nd ed. (Calcutta & Simla: Thacker, Spink & co., 1915), 25, <http://archive.org/details/cu31924024114773>.

¹⁶⁷ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 376-80.

¹⁶⁸ Risley, *The People of India*, 26.

¹⁶⁹ Sumit Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 376-80; C. J. Fuller, “Anthropologists and Viceroy: Colonial Knowledge and Policy Making in India, 1871–1911,” *Modern Asian Studies* 50, no. 1 (2016): 233–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X15000037>.

prominent “Muslim separatism.”¹⁷⁰ Therefore, upholding the unity of the Hindus was an immediate and important concern for many high-caste Hindu nationalists which took many forms including the consolidation of Hindu identity through anti-Muslim animosity as evident in U. N. Mukerji’s *A Dying Race* (1909).¹⁷¹ Similarly, Bose’s conception of a unified Hindu race that emerged through intermixing millenniums ago can be considered a rejection of Risley’s racial theory of caste and his claims of preservation of distinct racial features through endogamy.

The Hindu civilization entered the third and the highest stage, according to Bose, by around 500 BC through the socio-religious reforms initiated by the “wise and the good” among the higher classes to rectify the deplorable conditions of the lower classes.¹⁷² The most important among these attempts was that of Buddha who preached the ideals of love, compassion, and humanity. Buddha disregarded caste distinctions, challenged Brahmin supremacy of religious knowledge by preaching in the common language Pali, and confronted the ritualism and superstition in the Vedic religion.¹⁷³ Thus, Bose argued, Buddhism had spread the ideals of altruism to the masses and reformed the higher classes. Under the influence of Buddhism and other puritanic movements of the period, the Indo-Aryan society, according to Bose, had undergone radical transformations: drinking was forbidden, consumption of meat greatly discouraged, gambling and betting were outlawed, a predatory and militaristic spirit was suppressed, and a higher standard of chastity was established.¹⁷⁴ With the spread of altruistic ideals to the masses, society as a whole entered the ethical and spiritual stage of civilization.

¹⁷⁰ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 376.

¹⁷¹ Mukerji, *A Dying Race*.

¹⁷² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 165.

¹⁷³ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 170.

¹⁷⁴ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 183-85.

While he praised Buddha for taking spiritual and ethical knowledge to the lower classes by disregarding caste distinctions, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Bose did not reject the caste system altogether. The caste system, for Bose, was fundamentally based on one of the immutable laws of nature—that of inequality, and represented one of the better models of addressing this fact, especially when compared to the Western doctrines of equality that he believed had resulted in anarchy and bloodshed.¹⁷⁵ The hereditary division of labor and the lack of social mobility ensured that there was no class discord by restricting the competition within well-defined limits, thereby, limiting the “evils of excessively hard struggle for existence.”¹⁷⁶ That is, the caste system, according to Bose, was a form of social organization that mitigated the action of the cosmic process that was inevitable in the material development and thereby abetting the ethical development. Additionally, he argued that the explanations of caste system through the hypotheses of transmigration of the soul or the cycle of rebirth and the theory of *karma*—that the fate in one life was determined by the deeds done and virtue acquired in the previous lives — consoled the downtrodden, encouraged the upper-classes to live a virtuous life and thus maintained social order, morality, and stability.¹⁷⁷ Even though the exceptionally enlightened among the higher classes from the earlier stages of Hindu society including Buddha disregarded caste boundaries to take spiritual wisdom to the masses, Bose argued, that none of them had ever denounced caste as such or assumed a “hostile, iconoclastic attitude” that characterized the contemporary anti-caste crusaders.¹⁷⁸ What the ancient reformers pursued as equality was not in the narrow material and political sense like the modern-day Western-oriented reformers which fostered dissension and discord, but rather on the spiritual and ethical plane promoting amity and concord.¹⁷⁹ This insistence

¹⁷⁵ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 37-50.

¹⁷⁶ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 93.

¹⁷⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 34.

¹⁷⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 77.

¹⁷⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 35.

on social order and stability evident in his discussion further reveals the Positivist influence on Bose's views. In fact, in his defense of the caste system, Bose pointed to the similarities between the ideas of Auguste Comte on religion, duty, and philosophical priesthood with the Hindu caste system, and remarked that Comte himself was "inclined strongly towards the principle of caste."¹⁸⁰ Neither was Bose alone in drawing from Positivism to defend and assert the caste hierarchy that was increasingly coming under attack in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁸¹

Politics and civilization

The Hindu society, which Bose believed to be of the highest stage of ethical development, was well-balanced and harmonious unlike the much-vaunted ancient Greek society which, despite its brief foray into the highest stage of civilized development, had been brought down by a lack of harmony between the spiritual and material elements in the society. He argued that the natural tendency inherent to mankind towards excessive materialism was kept down in Hindu society by the ethical and spiritual advances that placed benevolence above other virtues and the religious system that taught that the true salvation lay in the liberation of the spirit from the bondage of physical existence.¹⁸² While the brahmins set a high ethical standard for themselves and the society by leading a renunciatory life and isolating themselves from commerce and industries, Bose argued that the dissociation of the intellectual class from material production resulted in an intellectual stagnation and a lack of innovation.¹⁸³ That is, the Hindu civilization which attained its peak at the end of the third stage, which it reached a condition of harmony it also lost "mobility."¹⁸⁴ This stagnation had also made it vulnerable to foreign attacks initially by the Greeks, the Huns, and finally by

¹⁸⁰ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 188.

¹⁸¹ Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, 73-97, 137-40; Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 378-81.

¹⁸² Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 207.

¹⁸³ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 210.

¹⁸⁴ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 211.

the Muslims who had invaded the country and firmly established themselves as the rulers.¹⁸⁵ Yet, and despite this stagnation, the Hindu civilization had survived the loss of political independence, a fact that Bose attributed to the strength of their moral and spiritual culture which had enabled them to withstand both the coercion and allurements to convert and abandon their culture.¹⁸⁶ Thus, the Hindus maintained the level of culture they attained during the third stage even under such a hostile climate.

This discussion of how Hindu society survived and thrived under political subjugation reveals that for Bose, the loss of civilizational identity was graver and more irreparable than the loss of political freedom. When read in the context of the Indian nationalist movement, this was a criticism of mainstream nationalist politics, and more importantly, of the Western-oriented social reforms that were being advocated by the nationalists. Indeed, as far as Bose was concerned, the existential threat to Hindu civilization did not come from colonial domination but rather from the attempts to undermine its own identity and culture by the Western-educated “neo-Indians” through their notions of progress and reform. “If Hindu civilization is to survive at all,” Bose emphasized, “it should survive as a distinct entity.”¹⁸⁷ However, it was not just the Western-oriented social reform that suffered Bose’s criticism, but the prevailing strategies and policies of nationalist politics in general. While Bose noted that a strong affection towards one’s own nation was as natural as familial love, the true objective of civilization was not to strengthen or glorify nationalism and patriotism, but rather to mitigate and subordinate it to altruism and internationalism which taught everyone to consider the whole world as a family.¹⁸⁸ For Bose, patriotism was a lower virtue than cosmopolitanism and he commented in the context of contemporary Europe that the exaltation of nationalism above altruism and internationalism was proving to be a curse to

¹⁸⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 73-74.

¹⁸⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 258.

¹⁸⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 108.

humanity that fostered enmity and hatred.¹⁸⁹ This rejection of nationalism and nationalist politics set Bose apart from many other Indian commentators of evolutionary thought and social evolution. For example, Aurobindo Ghose considered that even when the fundamental goal of evolutionary progress was altruism, cosmopolitanism, and the “divinization of man,” Indian decolonization was an important step in the global movement towards spiritualism and altruism, and the resurgent India would lead the humanity to a stage marked by concert and cooperation rather than antagonism.¹⁹⁰ This sense of a broader civilizational purpose for Hinduism and India with respect to the rest of humanity that was evident in the views of thinkers like Aurobindo Ghose and Swami Vivekananda was missing in Bose.

However, although he was skeptical of nationalism, Bose did not reject the idea entirely. What he objected to was what he referred to as the “new idea of nationality” that was “entirely Western,” rested “solely upon politics,” and was antagonistic to cosmopolitanism.¹⁹¹ According to him, the Hindus had always been a nation, not in the narrow Western sense, but in a spiritual and cultural sense. It was the bonds of religion and culture that held the numerous castes, tribes, communities, and villages together to form the Hindu nation, not political institutions, and especially not the state. Bose believed that the new nationalism and the Western style of politics that was so enthusiastically espoused by the neo-Indians inculcated an over-reliance on the state, caused the increasing “invertebracy” of the neo-Indians, and cultivated discord, dissension, and enmity in the society as evidenced by the demands of communal representation, the strengthening of inter-caste rivalry, and the rising communal conflicts.¹⁹² The influence of Herbert Spencer’s anti-statism is evident in these arguments. In contrast to this politics of division and enmity, Bose put forward the model of

¹⁸⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 109-10.

¹⁹⁰ Marwah, “The View from the Future,” 883-84.; K. D. Verma, “The Social and Political Vision of Sri Aurobindo,” *World Literature Written in English* 30, no. 1 (1990): 56–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449859008589119>.

¹⁹¹ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 9-10.

¹⁹² Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 227-29; *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 81-87.

the traditional Indian village community system that fostered self-reliance and maintained social order. However, instead of pursuing and preserving real self-governance through the village *panchayat* system, the neo-Indians had run after the illusory goal of self-governance through politics.¹⁹³ For Bose, the imperatives of preserving the civilizational identity, the rejection of state-centered politics, and the pursuit of the ethical and altruistic process came together in the Hindu village communities. Therefore, his appeal towards the villages, as historian Andrew Sartori has argued, “represented a fundamental retreat from the realm of ‘national’ politics in a juxtaposition of the authenticity of ‘cultural swaraj’ (village self-determination) to the inauthenticity of ‘political swaraj’ (nationalist politics).”¹⁹⁴

Western civilization

Inferiority of Western civilization

The first stage of Western civilization, according to Bose, began only in the third epoch that is, around AD 700. Similar to all civilizations in the first stage, the early Western civilization was marked by pervasive militarism and a predatory spirit, although its material condition was better than the same stage of other major civilizations due to it being in the most advanced epoch.¹⁹⁵ While the whole of Europe was transformed into a vast military camp in the early part of the first stage, Bose argued that the attainment of political stability in the early sixteenth century only meant that the militarism and predatory spirit of the West found an outlet outside the continent, especially in the Americas. Similarly, the slave trade presented another evidence of the depravity of Europeans for Bose. He argued that even though the Europeans had converted to Christianity—“one of the grandest products of the last stage of Oriental culture during the second epoch,” the intellectual and ethical development of the Europeans was not advanced enough to assimilate the noble ideals of Christian

¹⁹³ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 204-41.

¹⁹⁴ Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 196-97.

¹⁹⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 257-66.

altruism, and thus its presence remained an anomaly in the first stage Western civilization.¹⁹⁶ Rather than elevating themselves through spirituality, he claimed that the Europeans brought down Christianity to their level, as evidenced by the inhumane persecution of heretics, witch trials, and the torture and oppression that scientists and philosophers had had to endure. Here, Bose referred to and frequently cited the work of the American author and scientist John William Draper who had arguably done more than anyone to popularize the “conflict thesis” that presented religion and science as inherently hostile to one another.¹⁹⁷ However, for Bose, the conflict was not between science and religion *per se*, but between science and Christianity as it had been interpreted and practiced in Europe. This, he argued, was evidence of the inferiority of Western intellectual and spiritual development.¹⁹⁸

This discussion of the development of Western civilization projected the superiority of Hindu civilization over that of the West in two ways. First, there was the obvious inferiority of the materialist culture of the West when compared to the Hindu civilization that belonged to the highest stage. Second, Bose's account also prominently conveyed the infancy of Western civilization. While the Hindu civilization attained the highest stage by around 500 BC, the Western civilization had entered the first stage only by the early eighth century, and its elevation to the second stage had been as little as three to four centuries ago. That is, in the grand timescale of human civilizations, the rise and prominence of the West was both relatively insignificant and remarkably recent. Political scientist Inder S. Marwah has also noted a similar emphasis on the brevity of Western ascendancy in the works of Aurobindo Ghose who contrasted the “long-lived” Asia with the “brief and ephemeral” Europe.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 268-70.

¹⁹⁷ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 271-73; John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874).

¹⁹⁸ M. Alper Yalcinkaya has shown a similar appropriation of the conflict thesis in Ottoman Turkey where Draper's arguments were interpreted as proving the superiority of Islam over Christianity. M. Alper Yalcinkaya, “Science as an Ally of Religion: A Muslim Appropriation of ‘the Conflict Thesis,’” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 44, no. 2 (2011): 161–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087410000749>.

¹⁹⁹ Marwah, “The View from the Future,” 878-79.

Science, industrialism, and civilizational progress

According to Bose, Western civilization entered the second stage of intellectual development only in the early seventeenth century. However, he argued that even though the entry of Western civilization into the second stage—that of intellectual development — was very recent, it managed to produce a number of impressive achievements, especially in the natural sciences. Bose noted a fundamental difference between the intellectual culture developed in the second stage of Hindu and Western civilization: while the former focused on philosophy and spirituality, the latter was engrossed in studying the external, physical world through natural science.²⁰⁰ Bose's explanation for this difference was, as discussed in the previous chapter, a modified version of the Aryan Race Theory—the climatic conditions and resourcefulness of the land enabled the Indo-Aryans to develop a philosophical culture whereas the incessant struggle for existence that the European branch had to undergo resulted in an intellectual culture focused on the objective world.²⁰¹

However, he did not consider the rise of natural science itself as antagonistic to ethical development. In fact, Bose observed that the development of science in West from the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century was highly conducive to moral progress since it removed the restrictive clutches of the church and eradicated gross superstitions such as belief in witchcraft and inhumane persecution of heretics.²⁰² However, for all that science removed superstitions from religion, it gave rise to a number of superstitions by itself which were, Bose argued, more prejudicial than the ones that they replaced.²⁰³ For him, it was the unrestrained application of science to industry that began in the nineteenth century that presented the major obstacle to ethical development in the West. Rather than enabling the development of ethical culture through the development of inner life and suppressing

²⁰⁰ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 275-77.

²⁰¹ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 275-76.

²⁰² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 27.

²⁰³ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 29.

physical wants, industrialism promoted the “cult of Mammon worship,” and encouraged sensory gratification and indulgence through the multiplication of wants and desires. Furthermore, he noted that industrialism led to the growth and spread of capitalism.²⁰⁴ Since the concentration of capital was one of the essential preconditions for modern industries and the margin of profit was directly proportional to the initial investment, Bose argued that industrialism led to the concentration of capital within a minuscule section of the population.²⁰⁵ These inequalities inhibited ethical development, he argued, since it bred jealousy, discord, and enmity displacing the virtues of amity, cooperation, and harmony. Additionally, he argued that industrialism led to physical, social, and moral degeneration in the West (which I shall examine in the next chapter).

Another feature that Bose considered inherent to modern industrialism was overproduction.²⁰⁶ Since the application of science to industry increased productive capacity enormously, the West always produced more than it could consume. This, according to Bose, led to the “scramble for markets” in Asia and Africa through colonial domination and the development of “spheres of influence,” which apart from exploiting the peoples of the rest of the world, made the power struggle, jealousies, and rivalries between the imperial powers more acute and keener, and thus led to an enormous increase in militarism across the world. The result of this imperial rivalry, Bose argued, and here again citing Herbert Spencer, was the “rebarbarization” of Europe.²⁰⁷ Thus, the Great War was only a manifestation of the deeper problems inherent to the contemporary Western civilization.²⁰⁸

Democracy, ethical progress, and the survival of Western civilization

²⁰⁴ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 15.

²⁰⁵ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 301-03.

²⁰⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 305-06.

²⁰⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 15. For Spencer’s account of “re-barbarization,” see *Facts and Comments*, 172-88.

²⁰⁸ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Root Cause of the Great War* (Calcutta: Newman & Co., 1915).

Apart from industrialism, the rise of democracy was another development that Bose considered to have “greatly weakened” the process of ethical development in the West and inhibited its progress to the highest stage of civilization.²⁰⁹ As discussed earlier, for Bose, the ethical progress of a community occurred when the influence of the enlightened minority belonging to the higher stage withstand the downward pull of the majority who belonged to the lower stages. However, the “excessive democratic influence” weakened the “reverence for the good and wise,” undermined the process of ethical progress, and brought the society as a whole down to the level of the lower classes, Bose argued a position that resembled the critiques and fear of mass democracy in the metropole.²¹⁰ For him, the “tyranny of a more or less ignorant majority, numerically all powerful and ruling by the sanction of patriotism is the worst of all tyrannies.”²¹¹ Democracy, according to Bose, was fundamentally based on the wrong principle, he stated citing J. S. Mill, that the opinion and judgment of the higher intellectual and moral being was equal to that of the inferior.²¹² For him, inequality and restriction of freedom was natural to and unavoidable in social progress. While he conceded that the primitive societies might have been democratic and egalitarian, the “right of equality” had to be sacrificed in the path towards social progress. Therefore, the idea of equality that underpinned democracy, and the far more dangerous socialism, meant a regression back to the earliest stages of civilization.

While Bose characterized inequality as being inevitable in social progress, he did not consider egalitarianism to be the natural, original state of humanity as Kropotkin had done.²¹³ Rather, for Bose, inequality was “one of the fundamental laws of nature,” and was one that became more and more pronounced with the progress of civilization.²¹⁴ Although

²⁰⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 110-15.

²¹⁰ Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 212-16.

²¹¹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 111.

²¹² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 110.

²¹³ Hale, *Political Descent*, 240-42.

²¹⁴ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 33-4.

inequality was therefore unavoidable, he argued, many belonging to the enlightened classes attempted to ameliorate the condition of lower classes throughout history, not by challenging the fundamental laws of nature, but by attempting to promote equality in the spiritual and ethical plane. As I have shown already, for Bose, the Hindu caste system was the ultimate example of such an attempt. While the problem of inequality was solved by sages and philosophers in India, it was done by demagogues in the West, and for Bose, their solution bore “the stamp of the Western proletariat upon it.”²¹⁵ He pointed to the bloodshed, violence, and horrors that accompanied the Western attempts at equality in contrast to the spiritual caste system that maintained stability, order, and morality. Bose added that even when the class tensions did not lead to revolutions, the ever-rising ill-feeling and animosity between the “haves” and “have-nots” resulted in the growth of military spirit and was highly detrimental to peace, progress, and altruism. Therefore, Bose’s account of contemporary Western politics rejected mass democracy, socialism, and the doctrines of equality, to uphold the Hindu social order, especially the caste system as a superior form of social organization.

One of the questions that Bose raised towards the end of *Epochs of Civilization* was whether Western civilization would be able to enter the ethical stage and achieve harmony or encounter the same fate as that of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations—turning the “sociological” gaze back on the West.²¹⁶ He pointed to the rising military spirit, ever-expanding industrialism and capitalism and the predatory spirit that came along, the gross materialism, and the conflicts and ill-feeling between nations, classes, and sexes as detrimental to the inculcation of altruism that was necessary for the advancement to the ethical stage. However, Bose was not entirely dismissive of the prospect either. He saw much evidence of enhanced moral consciousness as well.²¹⁷ The increase in philanthropy, the more

²¹⁵ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 37.

²¹⁶ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 317-28.

²¹⁷ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 320-26.

humane treatment of criminals, and the extension of humanitarian concern to animals as evidenced by the anti-vivisection campaigns and the growth of vegetarianism, all indicated the growth of altruism in the West. Additionally, the rise of psychical research, Bose argued, represented the expansion of natural science from its narrow focus on the physical world to the higher realm of mind and spirituality. For him, the increasing acceptance of investigations into psychical phenomena such as hypnotism, spiritualism, and clairvoyance carried out by eminent scientists like Alfred Russel Wallace, Oliver Lodge, and William Crookes was an indication of this trend.²¹⁸ However, Bose noted that the forces against ethical culture and altruism was still prevalent and strong in the contemporary Western society and as a result he found it hard to say whether Western civilization would enter the highest stage of culture.

Conclusion

This discussion shows how Bose used the language of evolution, sociology, and history to challenge the claims of Western superiority and defend Hindu institutions and practices from the criticisms of social reformers. These ideas enabled him to present a different form of anticolonialism that was based on sociology and civilizational identity in contrast to the economic critique from his earlier phase and articulate a revivalist political program that emphasized cultural *swaraj* over political independence.

²¹⁸ Bose, *Epochs of Civilization*, 320.

Chapter 4. Bose on Degeneration

Bose's conception of degeneration was primarily based on his understanding of social evolution. In the first section of the chapter, I explore how Bose used evolutionary and degeneracy discourses to present degeneration as a condition inherent to contemporary Western civilization. In the second section, I look at Bose's views on degeneration in India which combined the trope of degeneration with the Swadeshi organicism that had become central to his views. Through this chapter, I argue that along with social evolution, degeneracy discourse provided a language and a framework for the Hindu revivalists to combine anticolonialism with social conservatism and thus reject both colonial domination and Western-oriented social reforms.

Degeneration: A world problem

Building on the ideas of Western commentators on degeneration and degeneracy, Bose attributed the supposed physical, social, and moral degeneration to the materialism, industrialism, and militarism of contemporary Western civilization. Degeneracy was thus both inherent and inevitable in the industrialized West. To Bose's mind, western civilization itself was the root cause of the social pathology—a characterization that was not inconsistent with at least one major branch of the Western discourse about degeneration.

Similar to E. Ray Lankester in *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880),²¹⁹ Bose argued that evolution can be progressive or regressive and characterized the belief that all evolution implied progression a superstition.²²⁰ However, unlike Lankester who considered the degeneration of humans a product of the same evolutionary process that produced degeneration in parasitic life forms and other simpler animals (the relaxation of the struggle for existence),²²¹ Bose's conception of degeneration was premised upon the

²¹⁹ Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1880).

²²⁰ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 22-23.

²²¹ Lankester, *Degeneration*, 58-62.

unsuitability of the laws that govern evolution in the animal kingdom namely the “struggle for existence” and the “survival of the fittest” for ethical development and civilizational progress. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Bose argued that the progress of civilization could only be achieved through the inculcating righteousness and benevolence over military and predatory spirit, strengthening psychical rather than physical strength and fostering the “religion of amity” over the “religion of enmity.”²²² Therefore, degeneration in the West was a result of its prioritization of materialism over spirituality and the predominance of military spirit, enmity, and competition in society. For Bose, the contemporary West displaced the altruistic and spiritual message of religion with the “worship of such ungraven images as Industry, Wealth, Pleasure, and War,” filling the world with destitution, disease, vice and malevolence.²²³ The degeneration was further reflected in the increasing number of crimes, divorces, and suicides. Therefore, degeneration in the West was a fact that was readily apparent and was a product of the fundamental nature of its civilization.

Civilization, health and education

According to Bose, the multiplicity and complexity of factors influencing the health of an individual increased with the progress of civilization.²²⁴ Therefore, people living under primitive conditions often enjoyed better health than those in civilized communities. To substantiate this claim, Bose referred to many Western commentators including Captain Cook who wrote that the indigenous communities of New Zealand “enjoyed perfect and uninterrupted health” and the surgeon William Renner who claimed that there were no cases of cancer among the natives of Sierra Leone while the disease was prevalent among the Creoles and descendants of liberated Africans who had adopted European lifestyle.²²⁵ If the

²²² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 26-27.

²²³ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 29-30.

²²⁴ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 134-36.

²²⁵ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 135.

simple living of the tribal communities represented the healthy ideal, the contemporary Western civilization belonged to the other extreme. Here, Bose quoted the social critic and author Max Nordau's words about the condition of the contemporary West. Nordau pointed to the constant increase in crime, madness, and suicide, the emergence of new diseases, the increasing severity of the existing pathologies, and premature aging and death as all products of civilization itself.²²⁶ Therefore, for Bose, the excessive material development, artificiality, strenuousness of living, and the intensification of the struggle for animal existence in the West led to physical and moral degeneration.²²⁷

Another feature of the Western civilization that Bose considered to be important in causing physical degeneration was the “rapidity and multiplicity of inventions” which made tremendous demand upon the nervous system.²²⁸ Although Bose did not explicitly refer to the condition by its name, he was building on the well-established discourse around neurasthenia—an ailment that supposedly resulted from nervous exhaustion through sensory overload. As historian Charles E. Rosenberg has shown, neurasthenia was considered to be a product of the technologically based and rapidly changing modern society.²²⁹ According to George Beard, the neurologist who is often credited as the discoverer of neurasthenia, five characteristics of modern society made massive demands on nervous energy: steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, women’s education, and science; and since the human body could not process this overload of stimuli, it led to nervous breakdowns.²³⁰ While the Western commentators on neurasthenia including Beard considered the condition to be a product of Western civilization, Rosenberg argued, they did not propose a return to a pre-

²²⁶ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 227.

²²⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 230.

²²⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 18-19.

²²⁹ Charles E. Rosenberg, “Pathologies of Progress: The Idea of Civilization as Risk,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 72, no. 4 (1998): 721.

²³⁰ Rosenberg, “Pathologies of Progress,” 721.

industrial past and were optimistic about the future.²³¹ However, for Bose, neurasthenia was not just an undesirable side-effect of technological progress that would be taken care of in the future, it represented the fundamental unnaturalness and unsuitability of Western civilization.

Bose detested the “education superstition” of the West and considered it one of the major reasons behind the moral degeneration in society.²³² According to Bose, the education system failed in its main purpose—the formation of character and instead, inculcated the culture of “Mammon worship,” led to an “appalling enhancement of crimes of a Machiavellian character,” and made society a “veritable paradise of blood-sucking parasites.”²³³ Bose’s criticism was aimed at both the elementary and university education systems. For him, the system of free and compulsory education was based on wrong principles and assumptions. Here, Bose referred to a social experiment apparently conducted in Glasgow in the late nineteenth century in which a group of pauper children from the city was transported to an island with excellent scenery and climate and inhabited by “honest, hard working men” where they were educated till the age of fourteen. However, the result of the experiment, according to G. P. Mudge, an extremist eugenicist whom Bose quoted, was that a new slum area was created in the island by the “inherent slum instincts of the...denizens of Glasgow’s slums.”²³⁴ Similarly, Bose referred to the words of the biologist and eugenicist E. W. MacBride²³⁵ who, as historian Peter J. Bowler has shown, used the Lamarckian theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics to advance extreme conservative political ideas including the permanent inferiority of some races, the degeneracy of the slum dwellers and restrictions on the reproduction of the unfit.²³⁶ Although Bose did not clearly

²³¹ Rosenberg, “Pathologies of Progress,” 722.

²³² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 171

²³³ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 172-74.

²³⁴ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 176-77.

²³⁵ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 177.

²³⁶ Peter J. Bowler, “E. W. MacBride’s Lamarckian Eugenics and Its Implications for the Social Construction of Scientific Knowledge,” *Annals of Science* 41, no. 3 (1984): 245–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00033798400200251>.

articulate what the wrong foundational principles of modern education system were, his reference to people like Mudge and MacBride suggests that he shared their rejection of the reform potential of education to a large extent if not completely. Bose also criticized the “exaggerated” importance of book-education and its undue prioritization over education from nature, life, and tradition.²³⁷ While this criticism of book-education conveys a rejection of the formal education system, his endorsement of learning from life and tradition over schooling can also be an expression of the reactionary motive of conserving the social order and the resentment over the social mobility that formal education offered. Such a sentiment is even more pronounced in his criticism of the colonial education system in India which I will examine in the next section.

Similarly, Bose criticized the disappearing demarcation between higher education with culture as its primary aim and elementary education oriented towards livelihood. He lamented that all education had become focused on livelihood, detracting from its ideal aim of ethical and spiritual development.²³⁸ According to Bose, the technological or the vocational side of the modern university dominated over the cultural, and he pointed to Germany as an extreme example of this trend where universities entirely devoted to technical education were being established.²³⁹ Apart from conveying his disapproval of the Western model, this statement is also indicative of the radical shift in his views on technical education: independent institutions solely aimed towards technical education, which became the example of the errancy of Western education system, was precisely the solution that he proposed for the industrial development of India in his early writings.²⁴⁰ In any case, the role of modern higher education became limited to preparing students to take part in the “frenzied race for wealth and luxury,” pushing them to the realm of money-making occupations which

²³⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 178.

²³⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 179-81.

²³⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 180.

²⁴⁰ Bose, *Essays and Lectures*, 75-77.

the ancient sages of both the East and West considered fit for the lower orders of society, and reducing scientific men into “glorified mechanics and tradesmen” rather than philosophers.²⁴¹ According to Bose, these educated men, especially the ones who received scientific and technical education ended up serving the capitalists—thereby abetted the worship of Mammon, spread its associated evils, and contributed to the moral degeneration of the society.

Industrialism

Apart from his criticism of science, industrialism, and capitalism as the chief driving force behind imperialism resulting in the “rebarbarization” of Europe and the growth of militarism that I have examined in the previous chapter, Bose decried that industrialism has led to the expansion of the urban at the expense of the physically and morally healthier rural life.²⁴² In this instance as well, Bose was building on the long-standing criticisms against urban life in the Western degeneration discourse. As historian Peter C. Gould has argued, the city, capitalism, and industrialism were recognized as problems by many ranging from the conservative to radical elements in late nineteenth century Britain.²⁴³ They argued for a “return to a natural life as the remedy for many of the physical and mental afflictions of urban people” and “Back to Nature” represented the antithesis of the progress of civilization which was characterized by the ills of industrialization, city life, and general decadence.²⁴⁴ This ruralism and the advocacy of a return to nature was not restricted to Britain either. As John Alexander Williams has shown in the case of early twentieth century Germany, there was a similar perception that urbanization and industrialization were giving rise to deep cultural and social crises in German society and the ideology of “naturism” that emerged as a response

²⁴¹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 182-84.

²⁴² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 15-16.

²⁴³ Peter C. Gould, *Early Green Politics: Back to Nature, Back to the Land, and Socialism in Britain, 1880-1900* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1988), 156–57. See also, Pick, *Faces of Degeneration*, 213-14.

²⁴⁴ Gould, *Early Green Politics*, 24-25.

advocated bringing German people closer to nature as an “antidote to the problems of urban-industrial modernity.”²⁴⁵ In his criticism of the urban condition, Bose quoted Thomas Huxley’s description of the slums of the industrial as places where “men, women, and children are forced to crowd into dens where decency is abolished, and the most ordinary conditions of healthful existence are impossible of attainment.”²⁴⁶ For Huxley, these slums were marked by starvation, disease, stunted development, and moral degradation. As evident from Huxley’s words, the fear was not just about urban life, but about the unhygienic and overcrowded housing conditions of the working classes. The overcrowding in the working-class quarters in London and the fear of the “degenerate” casual poor, as historian Gareth Stedman Jones has shown, occupied a prominent place in the middle-class discourse in the late nineteenth century.²⁴⁷

The ill effects of industrialism on the workers were not just limited to the issue of overcrowded or unhygienic housing in the slums. For Bose, the very nature of industrial labor made it detrimental to the workers. Here, he relied on John Ruskin’s argument that industrialism led to the degradation of the operative into a machine.²⁴⁸ He endorsed Ruskin’s view that the root cause of the discontent among the working class was the “degrading” labor which “[made] them less than men,” rather than poverty or destitution.²⁴⁹ As the scholar Joseph Bizup has argued, for Ruskin, while the “medieval worker possessed a positive ‘freedom of thought’ in labor that compensated for his subjection to an absolute political authority, the nineteenth century operative is denied such independence by the rigid discipline of the factory and is therefore driven to seek a wholly negative political liberty.”²⁵⁰ Therefore,

²⁴⁵ John Alexander Williams, *Turning to Nature in Germany: Hiking, Nudism, and Conservation, 1900-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2–3.

²⁴⁶ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 15-16.

²⁴⁷ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, 159–230.

²⁴⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 16-17.

²⁴⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 16-17.

²⁵⁰ Joseph Bizup, *Manufacturing Culture: Vindications of Early Victorian Industry* (Charlottesville, London: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 184.

for Ruskin (and Bose), the discontent among the workers and the radical political activity that came with it was inherent to the industrial labor. Furthermore, Bose held the labor-saving machinery responsible for creating the problem of unemployment which, according to him, was one of the principal factors behind the sociopolitical unrest that was engulfing Europe. Thus, Bose asserted that the “root cause of the troubles and tribulations of the lower classes [was] the modern system of machine-industry.”²⁵¹ Industrialism fostered discord, ill-feeling, and hatred in society which were highly detrimental to ethical development and civilizational progress.²⁵²

The woman question

As historian Judith R. Walkowitz has shown, the late Victorian period witnessed the emergence of the “New Woman” who challenged the traditional gender roles and social boundaries with their demand for education, work, active civic participation, and the advocacy of personal freedom.²⁵³ As I have discussed earlier, this threat to the traditional order featured prominently in the middle-class degeneration discourse along with the fear of the working-class. This was a particular concern to the psychiatrists of the period, as Elaine Showalter has illustrated, who biologized the gender roles and presented nervous breakdowns and other mental disorders as a result of these transgressions.²⁵⁴ Bose included these debates and narratives around the woman question in his account of Western degeneracy.

For Bose, the cry for women’s emancipation was a result of the combination of the “superstitions” of education and equality and had emerged as a “veritable social menace” detrimental to the well-being of humanity.²⁵⁵ According to him, the introduction of education suited to man to woman meant “unsexing” her and leading her away from the realm of life

²⁵¹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 52.

²⁵² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 19.

²⁵³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 41–80.

²⁵⁴ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, 121–64.

²⁵⁵ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 184–85.

“to which she [was] fitted by Nature.” Bose quoted the words of the British physician and surgeon William Arbuthnot Lane who argued that the most important reason behind the spread of cancer was the degeneration of women in society.²⁵⁶ According to Lane, the female brain was over-stimulated by education, unsuitable foods, and drugs, and the resulting malnourishment and health problems did not just affect themselves but were also passed down to their children as well.²⁵⁷ As evident from these discussions, Bose subscribed to a “biological” understanding of gender roles and held its breakdown responsible for the physical degeneration and declining health in the West. Similarly, Bose referred to Ruskin who argued that woman’s intellect was not suited “for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision” and at the same time, since all tasks were of equal importance—it was nonsensical to speak of the superiority of one sex over the other.²⁵⁸ Thus, hierarchy and discrimination were sugarcoated with an apparent parity. However, Bose’s opposition to the ideals of female emancipation and equality was not just based on “scientific” arguments either—for Bose, it was a question of morality as much as of biology. He argued that with the craze for equality, quoting the author Frederic Harrison, family as a moral institution—which was the foundation of civilized society, was being sacrificed and marriages came to be reduced to temporary partnerships.²⁵⁹ The result was the enormous increase in divorces, venereal diseases, and a moral breakdown.

Motherhood was another important theme in the Western degeneration discourse. As historian Anna Davin has argued, motherhood acquired immense political significance in early twentieth century Britain in the context of perceived national inadequacy, the fear of losing out in the international economic competition and the apprehensions of declining

²⁵⁶ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 186.

²⁵⁷ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 186.

²⁵⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 187.

²⁵⁹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 185.

imperial dominance.²⁶⁰ The quality and quantity of population became matters of imperial importance and thus child-rearing became a duty of the mother towards the nation. However, in this reframing of motherhood, Davin argued, the responsibility of raising the ideal future citizens rested solely on the mothers, and socioeconomic factors such as poverty or living conditions were either ignored or considered to be of secondary significance.²⁶¹ A similar approach is visible in Bose's writings as well. In his discussion of the theme of motherhood, Bose referred to the findings by the British physician and medical officer Harold Scurfield who argued that the infant mortality rate was much lower among the Irish than the English despite their ignorance and poverty, even among their populations in the Liverpool slums.²⁶² Scurfield attributed this difference to the tendency of Irish mothers to look after their children by staying at home rather than going to work. Therefore, it was the behavior of the mother that determined the health of the infant, not poverty or the environment. Apart from concealing the need to address the socioeconomic realities and other structural aspects of the problem, the focus on childrearing as the responsibility of the mother also became a tool for the conservative voices including Bose to reify the traditional gender roles and expectations.

Degeneration of Indians

Echoing his diagnosis of the causes and consequences of degeneration in the West, Bose attributed the physical, cultural, and moral degeneration of contemporary Indians, especially that of the "neo-Indians," to the deleterious effects of Western civilization. This included both the lifestyle and cultural changes that they had either voluntarily adopted, or which had been thrust upon them by their colonial rulers.

Bose began his book *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration—Its Causes and Remedies* (1921) by acknowledging the degeneration of contemporary Indians,

²⁶⁰ Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop*, no. 5 (1978): 9–65.

²⁶¹ Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," 28–32.

²⁶² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 137.

something that British colonizers had long maintained, as a fact. He pointed to the decreased vitality of the people and the “enormous growth in the number, malignity, and destructiveness of diseases” as the proofs of degeneration and he presented the degenerative condition of contemporary Indians as both a readily observable fact and conventional wisdom.²⁶³ In the absence of the kind of comprehensive statistics that Charles Booth had included in his social surveys of “outcast London,” which documented the extent and depravity of the Residuum—the supposedly degenerate casual poor, who Booth characterized as a crisis lurking in the city of London,²⁶⁴ Indian authors, including Bose, primarily relied on the census reports to provide empirical grounding to their arguments. However, where Booth and other English authors had pointed to the seething mass of the urban underclass as a degenerate force that would swamp the industrious middle classes, Bose pointed to the declining birthrate of Hindus as an indicator of the diminishing vitality across the nation.²⁶⁵ Similar to U. N. Mukerji in his 1909 book *A Dying Race*,²⁶⁶ Bose compared the declining population growth rate of Hindu and Muslim communities and noted that the fall in Hindu growth rate was greater than that of the Muslims. However, where Mukerji had cited the difference in the rate of population growth between the two communities as evidence that the two were engaged in an antagonistic “struggle for existence” in which the Hindus were losing out to the Muslims, Bose saw both communities as going through the same process of declining vitality, with the issue simply being more alarming in the case of the Hindu community.²⁶⁷

Although Bose did not adopt the discourse that placed Hindus and Muslims in religious opposition to each other that had been so prominent by the first two decades of the twentieth century, his views were not entirely secular either. As is evident from his appeal to

²⁶³ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration- Its Causes and Remedies* (Calcutta: W. Newman, 1921), 1–8, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001867305>.

²⁶⁴ Jones, *Outcast London*, 281-314.

²⁶⁵ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 6-11.

²⁶⁶ Mukerji, *A Dying Race*, 2-11.

²⁶⁷ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 6.

both social and biological evolutionary ideas and organicist notions of social organization, Bose framed Hindu culture and identity as the true national identity and relegated Muslims to very much a secondary position. In Bose's account, they were a foreign element within the national self, even though he considered the Indian Muslims to have become "Hinduized" to a large extent through their centuries of residence in the country and cultural intermixing.²⁶⁸ Therefore, Bose still clearly belonged to the broader ideological group within the nationalist movement that privileged the claim of Hindus to true Indianness notwithstanding the differences within the dominant discourse of Hindu nationalism of the period. In this regard, historian Satadru Sen's characterization of the views of the Bengali essayist Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827-1894) might well be applied to Bose as well: they "represent[ed] what in India became an aborted conservatism...[which] regarded Hindu identity as basic to...Indianness, but did not subscribe to what became the key signifier of Hindu nationalism: anti-Muslim animus."²⁶⁹ In any case, for Bose, the declining population growth rate was an indicator of the diminishing vitality, and thus, the degeneration of all of his countrymen.

Degeneration was not just observable between different religious groups however, but within them, and while Bose observed physical degeneration across all classes of society, he noted that it was the middle classes that had been most affected, and this was a matter of serious concern for the whole society, he thought, because they constituted "the brain of the community."²⁷⁰ To explain the deplorable conditions of the educated middle-class, he quoted other commentators of degeneration such as Kanta Prasad who had lamented that the educated youth in India had "[broken] down far too early and does not enjoy life even to that extent which an ordinary illiterate workman does."²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 125-27.

²⁶⁹ Satadru Sen, "The Conservative Animal: Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay and Colonial Bengal," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 2 (2017): 364, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911816002059>.

²⁷⁰ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 9.

²⁷¹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 11.

We should note, therefore, that where Bose began with a stated concern about national degeneration, he very quickly narrowed this down first from a concern with Indians in general to Hindus in particular, and then from Hindus as a community to a more particular concern for the educated middle-class Hindus—that is, the Western-educated, upper caste sections of the Hindu community, of which he himself was a member. Similarly, even though Bose framed his degeneration treatise as being concerned with the whole of India, the observations, arguments, and suggestions in the work were primarily focused on Bengal. Therefore, it was the western-educated Bengali middle-class or the *bhadralok*²⁷² experiences and anxieties that informed Bose's views on degeneration and that he addressed in his writings.

Reasons for the physical degeneration of Indians

Bose identified three main reasons behind the degeneration of Indians—impoverishment, obstructed drainage, and the loss of mental harmony. Apart from these primary causes, he pointed to wrong diet, wrong hygiene, and Western medicine as other significant factors that led to the degeneration of Indians.

Impoverishment and wrong diet

Among all the causes, Bose characterized impoverishment of the masses as the most potent.²⁷³ For him, the most telling sign of the impoverishment of the country was the unprecedented increase in the number and severity of famines since the beginning of British rule.²⁷⁴ With deteriorating economic conditions, the nutritional intake and sanitary condition of the people worsened, making them more vulnerable to disease. Therefore, fevers, tuberculosis, and plague ravaged the country, sapping the health and vitality of the populace,

²⁷² *Bhadralok* refers to the English-educated social groups that emerged in nineteenth-century Bengal who were primarily employed in clerical or other professional jobs in Calcutta. They were mostly drawn from the three major upper caste groups of Bengal--brahmin, kayastha and vaidya.

²⁷³ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 15.

²⁷⁴ Pramatha Nath Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: The Impoverishment of India and Its Remedy* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1918), 38-40.

and leading to further degeneration of the masses.²⁷⁵ While the state of the peasantry was bleak, Bose lamented that the condition of the Western-educated Indians was “probably harder than that of the multitude.” For them,

[the] struggle for existence [was] keener, and the worry and anxiety incidental to it more intense than ever, and they [had] to work harder than ever, but under conditions ill suited to the country, and not unoften upon diet much less wholesome and in urban surroundings far less salubrious than what their forefathers were used to of yore.²⁷⁶

Thus, the deleterious work environment and the deplorable living conditions made the “neo-Indian” or *bhadralok* life miserable and detrimental to their health. This negative characterization of office work and city life in general had a longer history and remained a dominant theme in the *bhadralok* self-perceptions from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. As historian Sumit Sarkar has noted, the governmental or the mercantile office, where the educated *bhadralok* were primarily employed, was a space in which they were subjected to foreign authority in a direct, everyday sense, and encountered racist insults and the disciplining of the clock time.²⁷⁷ Even the highly successful members of the middle-class often encountered racists insult and discrimination, and, as had been the case in Bose’s own experience, were deliberately excluded from the higher levels of bureaucracy. Below them on the social scale was the world of genteel clerical poverty to which the majority of the *bhadralok* belonged. Therefore, the clerical life “came to signify everything that was demeaning and oppressive in colonial *bhadralok* life” and this negative perception was extended to cover the whole city of Calcutta more broadly.²⁷⁸ Thus, it is not surprising that the pitiable conditions of the *bhadralok* life featured prominently in the Bengali articulations of degeneration anxieties, including those of Bose. In these accounts, the bleak realities of

²⁷⁵ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: The Impoverishment of India*, 42-46.

²⁷⁶ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: The Impoverishment of India*, 70-71.

²⁷⁷ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 176.

²⁷⁸ Sarkar, *Writing Social History*, 176-77.

city life—poverty, discord, and decay were contrasted with an imagined and idealized rural past that was characterized by prosperity, abundance, health, and vitality.

If the lack of nutritious food depleted the health of the rural masses and a large section of the educated middle-classes, according to Bose, the consumption of unsuitable Western food was the major threat to the health of the prosperous sections of the educated middle class.²⁷⁹ He argued that the traditional diet of the upper caste Hindus which consisted of fresh vegetables, fruits, milk, and cereals, and marked by abstinence from meat consumption was the “result of untold centuries of experiment.” Its suitability for the Indian constitution was proved by the “splendid physique and the mental vigour of those who still adhere[d] to it.”²⁸⁰ For Bose, the environment played the most important role in molding gastronomic culture. A vegetarian diet was best suited for the tropical and subtropical climates, whereas temperate and cold climates favored the consumption of meat.²⁸¹ Apart from the moral and economic considerations, he added, meat was also liable to be a source of disease in the tropical climate.²⁸² Therefore, the Hindu rejection of meat consumption was a thoroughly logical, environmentally necessitated choice. Here, Bose was building on the well-established Bengali discourse linking climate and food choice in defense of the “traditional” Hindu dietary practice.²⁸³ He bemoaned the “well marked tendency in new India” to reform the diet along the English lines by introducing various courses of meat and argued that this practice has had a disastrous impact on the Indian body.

However, Bose’s “construction” of a pure vegetarian Indian diet was achieved through certain omissions and exclusions. In his framing of a vegetarian Indian dietary tradition as the product of the environment, Bose overlooked the food habits of the majority

²⁷⁹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 48.

²⁸⁰ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 48-49.

²⁸¹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 51.

²⁸² Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 57.

²⁸³ Utsa Ray, “The Body and Its Purity: Dietary Politics in Colonial Bengal,” *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 4 (2013): 403–8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019464613502413>.

of Indians including lower caste groups and non-Hindu communities which included meat consumption as well as the presence of meat in the traditional food of the Bengali upper caste groups. While completely ignoring the dietary tradition of the lower caste and non-Hindu groups, Bose attempted to accommodate the anomalous presence of meat in the Bengali upper-caste platter by downplaying its significance—for Bose, meat was only “occasionally partaken of” in Bengal.²⁸⁴ Similarly, he shifted the focus of critique to the “excess” meat intake rather than the consumption of meat per se.²⁸⁵ The inconsistencies and ambiguities notwithstanding, Bose argued that since the food appropriate for the English climate and constitution would be ill-suited for the Indians, the distortion of the traditional diet—a practice more prevalent among the privileged sections of society, had contributed to the physical degeneration of those classes.

Adulteration

The emergence of the spaces of food preparation and consumption outside household such as hotels and the shift from subsistence agriculture to commercial economy had a profound impact upon Bengali middle-class perceptions of city life. As the historian Srirupa Prasad has shown, the anxieties around these developments were primarily voiced through the fear of adulteration. Adulteration had emerged as a major concern for both the educated middle-classes and the colonial state by the late nineteenth century in Bengal, and it initiated widespread public discussion about adulteration and its consequences for the health and vitality of the Bengali population and prompted the state to enact a series of legislations to curb the menace.²⁸⁶ Therefore, when Bose pointed to adulteration as a potent cause behind the declining health of the middle classes, he was building on this already existing discourse

²⁸⁴ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 48.

²⁸⁵ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 54.

²⁸⁶ Srirupa Prasad, *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890-1940: Contagions of Feeling* (New York: Springer, 2015), 29-33.

in Bengal.²⁸⁷ The debates that surrounded the adulteration of the food in the city also frequently invoked the same kind of romanticized and imagined ideal of the rural, agrarian past. The homemade, homegrown, traditional food of rural India was contrasted with the “new” food from the public eateries or the food prepared using the adulterated raw materials obtained from the market.²⁸⁸ For example, Bose commented that “[the] chops and cutlets which are so freely partaken of now-a-days...are prepared out of nobody knows what sort of meat and cooked with nobody knows what sort of ingredient” and lamented the displacement of traditional food items such as *muri*, *chira*, and *sandesh* which were palatable, nutritious and, most importantly, free from adulteration, by bread, biscuits, and pastry even in the villages.²⁸⁹

As the historian Utsa Ray has argued, the middle-class fears of adulteration were not just about physical contamination either—the language of nutrition, hygiene and purity had a clear social connotation and it expressed concerns regarding the potential contamination of class, caste, and community.²⁹⁰ For example, the deterioration in the quantity and quality of milk and dairy products featured prominently in the adulteration discourse due to their religious and ritual significance. Here, the beef-eating British and Muslims were routinely blamed for the scarcity of milk, whereas the lower caste, lower class milkmen (*gowala*) were held responsible for the deteriorating quality of the product.²⁹¹ A similar attitude informed Bose’s writings as well. He lamented the “extreme difficulty” in procuring unadulterated ghee and commented that now “even men rolling in wealth have generally to depend upon the *gowala* for milk-supply, which, even under the best of conditions, can never be so satisfactory as milk from one’s own cow.”²⁹² Similarly the fear of adulteration from the

²⁸⁷ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 59.

²⁸⁸ Ray, “The Body and Its Purity,” 407-08.

²⁸⁹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 55.

²⁹⁰ Ray, “The Body and Its Purity,” 413-17.

²⁹¹ Ray, “The Body and Its Purity,” 415.

²⁹² Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 59.

dissociation of production and consumption in the market economy and the involvement of multiple actors in the process which opened up the possibility of contamination and pollution at physical, religious, and cultural levels, is evident when Bose contrasted the flour procured from the bazaar—prepared in power mills, which was seldom available unadulterated, with the fresh and wholesome flour which used to be prepared using their own hand mills within the household.²⁹³ Thus, the concerns of purity, pollution, health, social and economic changes all came together in the degeneration discourse.

Corruption of traditional lifestyle and institutions

The deleterious effects of wrong diet were compounded by the adoption of wrong hygiene and lifestyle.²⁹⁴ Bose rejected the British and neo-Indian narratives that attributed the increased ill health of the Indians to their supposed ignorance of hygiene. He argued that ill health was rather a product of the “progress” in hygiene than that of the lack of it. The culprit was wrong hygiene, not the lack of hygiene. For Bose, the hygiene practices of society were determined by the climate, much like its diet and lifestyle.²⁹⁵ Therefore, the British standards of hygiene were unsuitable and even detrimental to the health of Indians. Bose decried the neo-Indian imitation of the British aversion to cold water which dissuaded them from taking baths in the water streams and out in the open, and the covering up of themselves from head to foot which cut them off from the fresh air and other beneficial factors of the local climate.²⁹⁶ Similarly, Bose attributed the spread of tuberculosis to the replacement of “*catcha*” houses (made of mud, palm leaves, straw and other natural materials) which enabled free ventilation with the “*pucca*” houses with glazed doors and windows.²⁹⁷

²⁹³ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 59.

²⁹⁴ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 60-69.

²⁹⁵ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 60.

²⁹⁶ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 61-62.

²⁹⁷ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 63.

As is evident from these examples, the fundamental problem that Bose had with the imitation of British lifestyle and practices was that it inhibited the organic relationship between the Hindu body and the natural environment which he believed was essential for health and vitality. However, it is worthwhile to note that despite his relentless critique of the Western lifestyle and Western civilization in general, a sense of relativism marked his views. The environmental determinism and organicism fundamental to Bose's ideas implied that the Western culture was a "natural" product of its own environment as much as Hindu civilization was of India. Therefore, he was lenient towards most aspects of the Western lifestyle which seemed to have "organically evolved" within their own historical context and could be subsumed under environmental explanations such as the food habits, style of dress, architecture, and hygiene practices. Thus, the problem was not the Western lifestyle per se, but the adoption of the Western lifestyle by Indians which suited neither their constitution nor their environmental conditions.

Bose rejected the English system of elementary education that had been introduced by the colonial state.²⁹⁸ For him, the colonial educational system, which had been present in India for more than three generations by that time, had failed to make a productive contribution to society. Rather than making cultivators better cultivators or the artisans better artisans, for instance, he argued that the education system had inculcated a distaste towards the traditional and hereditary professions and developed a strong affinity towards occupations of "more or less parasitic nature"—the bureaucratic and the legal professions.²⁹⁹ That is, the possibility of social mobility that English education offered, and which had attracted so many of the lower castes and lower classes, was precisely what Bose detested. He perceived this mobility to be a disruption and threat to the organic unity and organization of traditional

²⁹⁸ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 131-33.; *The Illusions of New India*, 46-75.; *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 204-17.

²⁹⁹ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 56, 58.

Hindu society. Furthermore, he believed that the colonial education system also instilled in the students a taste for luxuries, inappropriate and harmful Western ideas of decency and cleanliness, and Western values.³⁰⁰ Each of these aspects took the educated Indians away from the Hindu way of life best suited to the country, leading to their physical, cultural and moral degeneration.

Obstructed drainage, malaria, and Western medicine

The second primary cause of degeneration that Bose identified—obstructed drainage was a result of the colonial incursions into the Hindu-Indian landscape: the alterations made to the natural topography of the villages of Bengal by the colonial infrastructure projects, especially the railway.³⁰¹ While Bose conceded that there was a longer history of malaria in Bengal, he claimed that the earlier outbreaks were confined to a few isolated regions whereas with the construction of the railway lines in the 1850s, the fever became prevalent across the countryside and the disease itself had become much more virulent.³⁰² As I have already pointed out in relation to British health concerns about both the British soldiers and civilians living in India, from the early-nineteenth century malaria had a prominent place in the colonial and Bengali medical discourse as the signifier of degeneration and racial decay.³⁰³ Beyond the mortality it caused, malaria was seen as an emasculating disease that sapped the vitality from those it effected, produced sickly and weak individuals, and threatened the reproductive vitality not only of the individual, but of the nation. Malaria was thus framed as one of the major existential threats to the “Bengali race.”³⁰⁴

Indeed, Bose was not the first to connect the spread of malaria with the construction of the railway embankments. Rather, as Arabinda Samanta has shown, the embankment

³⁰⁰ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 61-63.

³⁰¹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 21-29.

³⁰² Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 23-24.

³⁰³ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 282-85.

³⁰⁴ Arnold, “An Ancient Race Outworn,” 134-35.

theory of disease first came to prominence in the 1860s when the worsening malaria epidemics began to attract widespread attention and was upheld by people like Raja Digambar Mitra, who was a member of the 1863 committee set up by the government to inquire about the causes of the epidemic.³⁰⁵ While a section of the colonial administrators and medical practitioners attempted to shift the blame elsewhere, the embankment theory found wide acceptance among the native community due to its implied criticism of the colonial state.³⁰⁶ By the late nineteenth century, the connection between railway embankments and malarial epidemics was entrenched in the public mind, and thus Bose's views reflected and appealed to these long-standing narrative criticisms of British colonial rule.

Bose held the colonial state responsible for the ravages of the malarial epidemic at multiple levels. If it was the railway embankments that were the reason behind the increased prevalence of the disease, the catastrophic effect that the fever had on the populace was blamed on the impoverishment caused by the colonial economic policies.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, he extended his criticism to the Western medical treatments for the malarial fever as well—especially the use of the drug quinine.³⁰⁸ By the late 1900s, quinine was widely publicized and promoted by the colonial state as the cure for malaria through enforced consumptions in prisons and barracks, through inclusion in the school curriculum, through extensive outreach and anti-malarial campaigns, through persuasion and even threat of.³⁰⁹ Therefore, Bose's focus on quinine was a response to this aggressive promotion of the drug by the state and sections of the Bengali middle-class intelligentsia as the anti-dote to malaria. For him, quinine was neither the only cure for malaria nor was it superior to the various indigenous

³⁰⁵ Arabinda Samanta, *Malarial Fever in Colonial Bengal, 1820-1939: Social History of an Epidemic* (Kolkata: Firma KLM, 2002), 33.

³⁰⁶ Samanta, *Malarial Fever in Colonial Bengal*, 34.

³⁰⁷ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: The Impoverishment of India*, xlii.

³⁰⁸ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration, 90-97: Some Present-day Superstitions*, 152-66.

³⁰⁹ Rohan Deb Roy, "Quinine, Mosquitoes and Empire: Reassembling Malaria in British India, 1890–1910," *South Asian History and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2013): 75–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2012.750457>.

remedies available. He argued that it was the efficacy of the indigenous cures, perfected through “thousands of years of experiments,” that kept the spread and virulence of the disease low in many parts of Bengal before the 1860s when malaria became endemic.³¹⁰ Bose maintained that since all conclusions regarding the efficacy of quinine were drawn from experiments on Europeans, the effects of the drug on the Indian constitution, which he argued, was “markedly different” from the European one, was not fully understood and the large doses required for effective treatment could produce deleterious effects on the Indian body, producing multiple harmful side-effects ranging from convulsions, headache to deafness and dyspepsia.³¹¹ For Indians, quinine was, he said, a “remedy...worse than the poison.”³¹²

Bose’s criticism of quinine was also consistent with his overall rejection of Western medicine. He questioned the veneration and unchallenged authority that medical science received among the general public and administration and argued that almost all the developments in medical science were disputed and frequently, many of its “truths” had had to be “relegated to the scrap heap of half truths or falsehood.”³¹³ Here, Bose cited a few Western practitioners of medical sciences including Thomas J. Mays who had argued that the modern methods of treating consumption resulted in increased mortality; J. M. Carson who opined that the physicians were never sure whether the medicines cured the patients or if it was nature; and Alonzo Clark who remarked that physicians have “hurried thousands to the grave who would have recovered if left to nature.”³¹⁴ Bose thus tried to question the authority and superiority of Western medicine. Similarly, he held what he called the “drug superstition” to be one of the major reasons behind the physical degeneration in the West as well as in

³¹⁰ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 159-60.

³¹¹ Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 157-58.

³¹² Bose, *Some Present-day Superstitions*, 162.

³¹³ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 79.

³¹⁴ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 81-84.

India, but emphasized that the deleterious effects were more pronounced in the latter case due to various factors such as excessive poverty and constitutional and environmental differences.³¹⁵ However, when it came to his attacks on western medicine, Bose's major focus was on vaccination—"one of the greatest triumphs of allopathy" according to the admirers.³¹⁶ In support of his anti-vaccination stance, Bose primarily relied on Alfred Russel Wallace who had been a vocal opponent of vaccination.³¹⁷ Bose quoted Wallace's argument that not only was vaccination useless in preventing small-pox but that it had actually increased susceptibility to the disease. Similarly, he quoted Herbert Spencer's claim of a "general relative debility" since the introduction of vaccination, his observation that measles had become more severe and deadly than it used to be, and the warning against the unforeseen consequences of the interferences with the order of Nature.³¹⁸ In the Indian context, Bose relied on government statistics to argue that despite the increase in the number of vaccinated persons, there was no corresponding decrease in the mortality rate of smallpox.

It is worthwhile to note here that Bose did not base his criticisms of vaccination on the religious, cultural, or social dimensions that could have easily fitted his organicist conceptions, but rather on the opinions of its practitioners and other prominent Western intellectuals. That is, vaccination was bad not just for Indians, but for everyone. Therefore, the relativism that marked his opinion about Western lifestyle, fashion, and food habits was more or less absent in his characterization of Western medicine. Thus, medical science was closer to the components of contemporary Western civilization such as industrialism, militarism, and capitalism which were deleterious to both the West and the rest of the world, than to the "organically evolved" aspects that posed a danger only when adopted by or forced upon the non-West.

³¹⁵ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 86-87.

³¹⁶ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 74-79.

³¹⁷ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 74-75.

³¹⁸ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 75.

Loss of mental harmony

The third primary cause that Bose identified was the loss of mental harmony.³¹⁹ If the first two primary causes were products of colonial corruption of the Hindu landscape, and the domestic space—that of culture and lifestyle, the loss of mental harmony was a result of the colonial intrusion into the most intimate realm—the mind. For Bose, a well-balanced and peaceful state of mind was as “essential for health as wholesome food, . . . fresh air, good water and free drainage.”³²⁰ He argued that the ancient Hindu sages recognized the “immense hygienic value” of good emotions—especially that of benevolence, and structured the Hindu way of life based on the principle of altruism so that even the ordinary people could lead a hygienic life. However, with the advance of “modern civilization,” these practices were being forgotten and emotions such as greed, selfishness, jealousy, and worry were becoming more prominent, and thus adversely affecting mental harmony and health. According to Bose, it was the middle and upper classes who were primarily affected by this. The intensified “struggle for existence” that marked the city life made the lives of the middle-classes “endless round[s] of trouble and anxiety,” leaving them “mental and physical wrecks.”³²¹ In contrast to this stood the tranquil state of mind that characterized the ideal (upper-caste) Hindu way of life. Therefore, Bose urged the city dwellers to return to the traditional way as much as possible. He encouraged the incorporation of yogic practices, recitation of *mantras*, meditation, and ordering of the daily routine according to the Hindu ideals to counteract the deleterious effects of city life and establish harmony within the inner self.³²² When this harmony was achieved, Bose remarked, “half the battle of health and of life would be won.”

Marriage, heredity, and masculinity

³¹⁹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 29-38.

³²⁰ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 29.

³²¹ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 33.

³²² Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 150-52.

As I have already shown, the questions of sex and marriage had emerged as contentious issues in the Indian degeneration discourse, especially following the Age of Consent Act controversy in the late nineteenth century. While the colonial and the Indian reformist narratives linked the Hindu practice of child marriage to racial decay and native effeminacy, the defenders of the practice attempted to deny any such correlations and rationalize the customs with climatic, scientific, and medical explanations apart from cultural and religious arguments. Keeping in line with his organicist conception of society and social practices, Bose rejected the arguments that held child marriage to be the primary reason behind the physical decline of the Hindus.³²³ Yet, Bose's approach toward the custom of child marriage was more ambivalent than the earlier defenders of the practice. For Bose, the effects of "early marriage" were "partly good and partly bad," but "the fact that though early marriages [had] been prevalent in India for good many centuries, it is only recently that physical degeneration has been noticeable shows that some other causes have come into operation of late to bring it about."³²⁴ Since a complete "rational" defense of the practice similar to the ones offered during the Age of Consent Act debates had become more and more untenable by that time, Bose presented child marriage as a practice introduced out of historic necessities which I have examined in the previous chapter.³²⁵

Even when Bose considered child marriage to be inconsequential in the physical degeneration of the Hindus, he did address the issue in his writings albeit briefly. However, Bose completely ignored another widely debated topic related to Hindu marriage practice—caste endogamy. As mentioned before, the caste system and the endogamous marriage practice central to it had come increasingly under attack from the early twentieth century. While a few upper-caste commentators attempted to confront the challenges using the

³²³ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, vii.

³²⁴ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, ix.

³²⁵ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 183-87.

language of eugenics to rationalize and secularize caste,³²⁶ Bose seemed to have chosen to ignore the questions of endogamy and intermarriage altogether by pointing to lifestyle, culture, and environment as determinants of health and vitality of the individual and society, rather than marriage practices. In fact, Bose barely touched upon the theme of heredity in his writings on degeneration. That is, the Lamarckian, organicist understanding of degeneration enabled Bose to relegate heredity to a secondary role, and thus avoid confronting the questions of endogamy and intermarriage. This in turn, allowed him to indirectly defend the caste system— an institution fundamental to the “Hindu way of life” and the “organic unity” of the Hindu society from arguments that characterized it as a dysgenic institution that caused the decay and degeneration of the Hindus.

As I have shown earlier, masculinity was another theme that permeated the Bengali narratives of degeneracy. However, the question of masculinity and effeminacy did not feature prominently in Bose’s writings. He did contrast the effete middle-class Bengali male with an idealized, imagined figure of the farmer, to hold the Western values and institutions, especially the education system, responsible for converting the “sons of strong, sturdy, simple husbandmen” into “fashionably draped, effeminate, spruce ‘gentlemen.’”³²⁷ However, except this brief mention as part of his criticism of the elementary education system, Bose did not address the question of masculinity explicitly in his writings at all. There was a lack of engagement with the theme similar to his reluctance to address the debates around marriage practices.

However, the question of physical exercise received a little more attention in his writings. While Bose considered physical exercises to be beneficial for health, he urged the adoption of practices suited to the Indian constitution and climate such as yoga, walking,

³²⁶ For example, Sequeira, “The Science of Love,” 73-77.

³²⁷ Bose, *The Illusions of New India*, 62-63.

gardening, and swimming, instead of the Western athletic pastimes of football and gymnastics. Since the main objective of physical exertion for him was “chest expansion and inhalation of fresh air,” there were “hardly any situation conceivable situations where one could not have some exercise or other that would serve these purposes,” making activities exclusively aimed at physical exertion superfluous.³²⁸ While this characterization of almost all everyday activities as physical exercise fitted well with Bose’s ideas of the organic relationship between the body and the environment, it diverged from the more overtly masculine conceptions around body-building and physical strength. Therefore, Bose’s views on masculinity and national regeneration did not conform with the ideals of the physical culture movement that flourished in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³²⁹ Neither did his ideas fit with the contemporaneous attempts to challenge the charges of effeminacy and characterizations of Bengalis as a non-martial race by presenting a pre-history of military valor and conquest,³³⁰ nor with Swami Vivekananda’s influential reformulation of a more masculine Hindu spirituality.³³¹ However, Bose’s reluctance to put forward an overtly masculine ideal in his writings can be understood in light of his views on social evolution and civilizational values. His exaltation of the pacifism, quietism, and spirituality of the Hindu civilization while contrasting with the militarism of the West meant that there was little room for the valorization of the warrior ideals or masculine aggressiveness in his conception of Hindu values. Therefore, while Bose built his degeneration thesis on the same underlying assumption of Bengali effeminacy, he presented a less masculine ideal of manliness for the Hindu male and even though his conception of

³²⁸ Bose, *Survival of Hindu Civilization: Physical Degeneration*, 168-70.

³²⁹ Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness,” 121–48.

³³⁰ Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta “The Effeminate and the Masculine,” 282-303.

³³¹ Chatterjee and Naha, “The Muscular Monk,” 25–29.; Roy and Hammer, “Swami Vivekananda’s Rhetoric of Spiritual Masculinity,” 550-54.

masculinity did not break radically with the dominant Bengali middle-class discourse, it diverged considerably.

Conclusion

Similar to his view of social evolution, Bose's writings on degeneracy in the West which presented degeneration as inherent to contemporary Western civilization underscored its inferiority and challenged the racial and civilizational hierarchy foundational to the colonial logic. Furthermore, Bose's attribution of the degeneration of Indians to the colonial corruption of the Hindu self added another dimension to his anticolonialism. As I have shown in this chapter, Bose's organicist account of Indian degeneration provided a powerful critique of the "neo-Indian" obsession with the West and at the same time, expressed the upper-caste Hindu anxieties about a rapidly transforming society. Additionally, the Lamarckian, organicist explanation of degeneration that downplayed the significance of heredity enabled Bose to indirectly defend Hindu practices and institutions such as child marriage and the caste system. Thus, Bose's appropriation of degeneracy, similar to social evolution, combined anticolonialism with social conservatism.

Conclusion

The historiography of evolution has paid considerable attention to the global export, popularization, and appropriations of Darwinism and evolutionary ideas, especially in the non-West.³³² However, the history of evolutionary ideas in India has not received adequate historiographic attention, especially from the perspective of the history of science.³³³

Similarly, the degeneration discourse in India has not received a comprehensive scholarly treatment either: while the colonial degeneracy discourse that attempted to rationalize racial hierarchy and colonial domination has been explored,³³⁴ the Indian appropriations of the trope remain understudied. Most scholarly treatments of degeneracy discourse in India explored it as part of histories of sexuality and gender,³³⁵ or in contextualizing the histories of eugenics, sexology, or racial improvement discourses in the subcontinent.³³⁶ Furthermore, the

³³² For example, Bernard Lightman, ed., *Global Spencerism: The Communication and Appropriation of a British Evolutionist*, Lam edition (Leiden, Boston: Brill Academic Pub, 2015).; Bernard Lightman and Sarah Qidwai, *Evolutionary Theories and Religious Traditions: National, Transnational, and Global Perspectives, 1800-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2023).; C. Mackenzie Brown, *Asian Religious Responses to Darwinism: Evolutionary Theories in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and East Asian Cultural Contexts* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020). For an account of the Marxist translations of Darwin in Turkey in the second half of the 20th century, see Nesrin Conker, “Darwin Translated into Turkish with a Marxist Agenda: A Sociological Inquiry into the Agents of Translation,” *Perspectives* 31, no. 3 (2023): 548–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2022.2152353>.

³³³ However, this is not to suggest a dearth of scholarly works on the topic. Apart from the works mentioned in Chapter 1, some relevant works in the topic include: Irfan Habib and Dhruv Raina’s account of *bhadralok* reflections on evolutionary theory in the early twentieth century as a process cultural legitimation of Western science by interpreting and integrating it with the idioms of Hindu religion in “The Moral Legitimation of Modern Science: Bhadraklok Reflections on Theories of Evolution,” *Social Studies of Science* 26, no. 1 (1996): 9–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030631296026001003>.; C. A. Bayly’s overview of the Indian appropriations of social Darwinism in *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 252–56; and Sarah A. Qidwai’s examination of the views of Sayyid Ahmad Khan offer insights into Islamic responses to Darwin in colonial India: Sarah A. Qidwai, “Darwin or Design? Examining Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Views on Human Evolution,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, ed. M. Raisur Rahman and Yasmin Saikia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 214–32, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108594196.013>. Nonetheless, the historiography of evolution still lacks a comprehensive account and there remains many underexplored dimensions.

³³⁴ For example, Joan Leopold’s “British Applications of the Aryan Theory of Race,” Thomas Metcalf’s *Ideologies of the Raj*, Satoshi Mizutani’s *The Meaning of White*, and Indrani Sen’s “Memsahibs and Health” discussed in Chapter 1.

³³⁵ See the discussion of Mrinalini Sinha’s *Colonial Masculinity* and Ishita Pande’s *Medicine, Race, and Liberalism in British Bengal* in Chapter 1.

³³⁶ Rovel Sequeira’s analysis of eugenicist N. S. Phadke’s views in “The Science of Love,” Mark Singleton’s “Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism” and John Rosselli’s “Self-image of Effeteness” discussed in Chapter 1, Luzia Savary’s account of the vernacular discourse around racial improvement in colonial North India in *Evolution, Race and Public Spheres in India: Vernacular Concepts and Sciences (1860-1930)* (London, New

political appropriations of degeneracy theories in India have received even less attention.³³⁷

Therefore, it is this lacuna in the historiography that I attempted to address through this thesis.

I have examined the views of Pramatha Nath Bose as an example of the Hindu revivalist appropriation of evolutionary thought and degeneracy theories that advanced a political program that was anticolonial as well as politically conservative. As I have shown in Chapter 3, Bose built on the ideas of evolutionary thinkers including Huxley, Wallace, and Spencer to formulate his view of social evolution that proclaimed the superiority of Hindu civilization over the West and thus challenged the colonial hierarchies. I have also shown that despite their overall similarities, Bose's views diverged from other prominent Hindu commentators in the absence of any special civilizational purpose for the Hindus with respect to the rest of the world. Additionally, the contextualization of Bose's views in the contemporary questions of female emancipation, anti-caste movements, and nationalist politics revealed that his views on social evolution and civilizational progress enabled him to oppose the calls for reform, present caste system as an exemplary model of social organization, and reject the mainstream nationalist politics by emphasizing the need of preserving civilizational identity through cultural *swaraj*.

Similarly, I have shown in Chapter 4 that Bose built on his idea of social evolution and the Western discourse of degeneration to present degeneration as a condition inherent to the contemporary Western civilization and as a result of the deviation from the ideal Hindu way of life in India, especially by the Western-oriented middle-classes. I have shown that

York: Routledge, 2019) all reveal a self-acceptance of degeneration by the Indian actors which they attempted to rectify through various methods.

³³⁷ Some of the relevant works in this topic include Dorothy M. Figueira's account of the appropriation of the trope of Aryan degeneracy in the views of late nineteenth century social reformers in "remasculinizing" the contemporary degenerate Indian male in *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 120–43.; and Dilip M. Menon's examination of the influence of Western degeneration discourse, especially the views of Max Nordau, in M. K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in "An Eminent Victorian: Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy in the Nineteenth Century," *History of the Present* 7, no. 1 (2017): 33–58, <https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.7.1.0033>.

Bose's organicist understanding of society and degeneracy also enabled him to defend the customs, practices, and institutions associated with the Hindu religion against reformist criticisms as being organically evolved, and thus, its destruction detrimental to the vitality of the civilization. Therefore, I have argued that for Bose degeneration of Indians was primarily a product of the colonial corruption of the Hindu self — either thrust upon the Indians by the colonial rule or voluntarily adopted by the Westernized middle-classes or the Western-oriented social reformers. Additionally, I have argued that his organicist account of degeneration enabled him to relegate heredity to a secondary role and thus, defend the Hindu marriage practices such as caste endogamy and early marriage from reformist criticisms. Thus, similar to social evolution, Bose's appropriation of degeneration also performed the dual function of undermining the foundational logic of colonial rule by pointing out the inferiority of the West and providing a rationale to reject the calls for social reform that was becoming increasingly prominent in contemporary Indian society.

I thus hope to have shown the extent to which, in Bose's hands, evolutionary ideas and degeneracy theories were used in colonial India to advance an anticolonial, Hindu revivalist narrative. Therefore, I see this work as a contribution to the existing historiographies on the history of evolution, and to the historiography of degeneration in particular; but also, as breaking some useful ground in the historiography of Indian nationalism. Of course, what is particularly interesting and provocative here is the recognition and opportunity to explore the ways in which these two broad literatures speak to each other on this topic and during this period.

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