Historical Papers
Communications historiques

The Colonial Encounter: The Ideas of Auguste Comte in Nineteenth Century Bengal

G. Forbes

Volume 10, Number 1, 1975

Edmonton 1975

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030794ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/030794ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0068-8878 (print)
1712-9109 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Forbes, G. (1975). The Colonial Encounter: The Ideas of Auguste Comte in Nineteenth Century Bengal. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, *10*(1), 147–166. https://doi.org/10.7202/030794ar

G. FORBES
STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,
OSWEGO, NEW YORK

The Colonial Encounter: The Ideas of Auguste Comte in Nineteenth Century Bengal

Western ideas were brought to India by the colonial administration and in the setting of nineteenth century Bengal generated what historians have termed the "Indian Renaissance." These ideas, "compelled thinking men to examine afresh what they had long taken for granted."[1] Indians studied English and a whole new world of philosophy, literature and science became part of their world. Rational ideas led to a desire for social reform, exposure to Western liberalism encouraged the venting of political demands, and new literary styles yielded ambitious efforts to write epics and odes with Indian themes. At the same time, the work of the "Orientalists" played an important part in the intellectual rediscovery of the past. Ancient books were translated, printed and made available while further study and scholarship were encouraged by members of the literary societies, the literary periodicals and the universities. By the end of the century,

> each individual philosopher, writer, religious or political leader in Asia was able to select and combine from two main sources — the diverse traditions and models within his own heritage, and the multiplicity of ideas and modes of action available for importation from Europe and North America.[2]

The heyday of colonial encounter — for the exchange of ideas — has been designated the early part of the nineteenth century. "The whole transformation of the English mind and society, as it expressed itself in liberalism, was brought to bear on the Indian connexion."[3] English administrators believed in the possibility of reforming Indian society and set about the task of introducing social reform, encouraging missionaries and providing monies for education. While Professor Kopf argues that the most fruitful exchange of ideas went on in Fort William College, before the Anglicists won the field from the Orientalists, the first three decades of the century are generally seen as favorable for the transmission of Western liberalism. In contrast, the second half of the century is invariably portrayed as a period of worsening relations between the British and educated Indians, of growing nationalism and of revivalism in religious thought. Whereas Renaissance activity is consistently related to the import of Western ideas, most historians are silent on the influence of Western ideas on revivalism and

conservatism in social thought. More frequently, revivalism and the beginnings of militant nationalism are seen as growing out of interest in the past sparked by the work of the Orientalists;[4] the legacy of the Mutiny — in terms of British abandonment of reform and worsening relations between Indians and the British;[5] and Indian frustration with British conservatism combined with severe competition for limited positions.[6] Only a few historians have made the connection between ideas popular in late nineteenth century England and the intellectual mood in late nineteenth century India.[7]

It is this connection which needs to be carefully examined. Eric Stokes has charted the impact of conservative ideas on English thought about India and the final victory of the paternalistic school over the liberal. But his is a study of the impact of English ideas on the English administration of India. Were Indians also influenced by the ideas which influenced the late Victorians — the ideas of Darwin, Comte, Spencer, Marx and John Stuart Mill? If so, how did they utilize these ideas? How similar were they to the British in their reasons for cleaving to ideas which stressed 'evolution' — of social systems as well as organisms, of inter-relationships between institutions, and of the need for social engineering?

In this paper I will explore the fate of one Western philosophy — the Positivism of Auguste Comte — as it made its way from England to India. The setting is India in the second half of the nineteenth century, the men who 'transport' the ideology are members of the Indian Civil Service and their contacts are members of the Bengali intelligentsia. The elements of the philosophy transmitted and the elements of it accepted were determined by the needs of the individuals involved — needs, in turn, determined by individual psychological make-up and the socio-political environment. While the needs were somewhat different, both the colonizers and the colonized found in this philosophy answers to their questions about the necessity of radical social change as concomitant with progress.

The English Positivists in India

Positivism, the philosophical system elaborated by the Frenchman, Auguste Comte (1798-1857), was a highly complex scheme for the organization of human society according to scientific principles. Belonging to the nineteenth century philosophical reaction against the attempts of metaphysicians to discover the ultimate nature of reality, Comte argued that scientific investigation could lead to universally valid laws and eventually, to control of the physical environment. The ability to understand and harness nature would be followed by the ability to understand and direct social behavior and relationships. Henceforth, societies would be able to progress

without disruption such as that introduced by the French Revolution. The details of this theory were worked out in a number of books and articles which included a theory of knowledge, a philosophy of history, a methodology for scientific investigation, a plan for a regenerated social system, and a religion which included all the trappings of medieval Catholicism.[8]

It was a British variety of Positivism exported to India in the nineteenth century. English Positivism was unmistakably Victorian in its emphasis on a moral code based on duty and self-restraint. The members of the Positivist Society, converts from middle-class evangelical Christianity, had had their faith in both traditional theology and conventional social institutions shaken by the new scientific discoveries. But they retained the desire to live moral lives devoted to some higher cause. While some of these intellectuals favored building a new society based on scientific discoveries, their suggestions were ". . . always within the limits imposed by sound learning and the social sense."[9]

The London Positivist Society had been formally organized under the presidency of Richard Congreve (1819-1899) in 1867.[10] In the later years of his life, Comte had decided that disciples should concentrate on the *Systeme de politique positive* and ignore all but the last three chapters of *Cours de philosophie positive* on social physics. Since Congreve considered himself a devout and obedient disciple, he instructed members of the London Church of Humanity to read only what Comte had sanctioned. The earlier writings had stressed the importance of studying science and of developing expertise in using the scientific method, but these elements were minimized under Congreve's leadership.[11]

However, British foreign policy did interest Congreve's group. Generally, they supported greater concern with internal problems; specifically, they suggested Great Britain re-evaluate its Indian policy. Congreve maintained that India yielded neither commercial gain, nor political strength, nor converts to Christianity.[12] Only members of the industrial and ruling class were gaining from the Indian connection, British women and the British working class were losing. Congreve ended his essay, "India", by calling on women and workers, "exploited yet morally superior", to demand an end to the aggressive and bullying foreign policy of the British. But the British were not asked to abandon India nor were Indians encouraged to revolt. Neither England nor India could be regenerated until Positivism became the accepted doctrine. Thus the imperial connection, although it was to be severed in the final analysis, was of value in facilitating the spread of this philosophy.[13]

Thirteen years would be sufficient time to convert the polytheistic nations of the world to Positivism, Comte wrote in *Positive Polity*. But he knew little about India other than the existence of a caste system and of an hereditary priesthood. Positivism's popularity would rest, he wrote, on what it could offer the "Brahmin class." Believing that all Brahmins were religious priests, he claimed that Positivism could lead to the re-organization of the Brahminical body and freedom from foreign domination.[14]

Congreve elaborated only slightly on these pronouncements. When the three English Positivists went to India as members of the Indian Civil Service, they had little guidance as to the role they should play. They were employed in different branches of the Civil Service — Samuel Lobb (1833-1876) as a teacher, James Cruickshank Geddes (1837-1880) as a magistrate, and Henry J.S. Cotton (1845-1915) as an administrator. Positivist theory was a determining factor in their interpretation of Indian problems. While in India they were responsible for encouraging an interest in Positivism, gaining converts to the Religion of Humanity, launching a Positivist organization, and establishing Richard Congreve as the sole living authority on this philosophy.

Samuel Lobb, arriving in India in 1862, completely ignored Comte's remarks about regenerating Indian Brahmins and concentrated on what he considered the major problem in Indian society — the social and moral anarchy. Lobb argued that unsystematic and careless teaching of science, philosophy and English had resulted in a society plagued by dissatisfaction, social experimentation, skepticism, the breakdown of old traditions, dissension between "modernizers" and "traditionalists", obvious economic problems and even epidemics and plagues. Of the Hindu mind he wrote, "Scientific modes of thought were not in consonance with its most marked characteristics." It was still in the polytheistic stage and was unequipped to deal with "disruptive doctrines" from the West.[15]

Lobb described Indian society as deeply confused. Men whose minds were not yet ready for scientific principles had received an inadequate scientific education and had subsequently begun to regard intellect as superior to morals. Education had led them to doubt traditional Hindu theology and demand social reforms which were unsuitable for the society.[16]

What India needed was a system which would meet the "needs and special idiosyncracy of the Hindoo, which dispensing with the old Vedic idea of revelation, shall rest upon a logical basis, and yet be such as to satisfy the moral requirements of man's nature."[17] In other words, Positivism. Positivism could, Lobb wrote, give to men "emancipated from old beliefs a resting place." But it was not to be introduced to the masses or any whose

minds were still undisturbed by Western education. The Hindu mind would not be "depolytheized" through the efforts of an alien and unsympathetic government but by voluntary missionaries, partly indigenous and partly foreign, propagating a Western doctrine that had been molded into appropriate forms by Eastern intellectuals.[18] Lobb visualized himself as one of the pioneers in this great task and hoped to "convert" Indian intellectuals so that they would be able to carry on his work.

James Geddes' association with the English Positivists had led him to deliver a lecture, on "Modern Industry", to the Positivist group in 1871. Published as *The Month Gutemberg*, this lecture became the most controversial pamphlet associated with the London Positivists. In the same year Geddes published *The Logic of Indian Deficit*. In these two publications he blamed the poverty of both the Indian peasant and the British working class on the manufacturers and traders — the only people who gained from imperialism and wars. The solution would come from Positivism; the problems of world peace and pauperism, Geddes wrote, could be solved only through religion administered by a universal spiritual power.[19]

In his pamphlets and articles, Geddes explained the inter-relationship between Indians and the British working class. While the governing class in England benefited, the Indian peasantry was crushed by an unfair system of taxation, an administrative system too expensive for a poor country, absentee plantation owners, and expensive irrigation and railway projects. The Government believed that India was becoming more prosperous. Geddes argued that the only gains were on paper: peasants were forced to turn to cash crops so that they could pay their taxes; cash crops meant less area devoted to food crops so the peasants had less to eat; and taxation was spent on public works projects such as railways which helped the British more systematically exploit the people. Economic decline affected the social institutions, Geddes believed, blaming the British for the deterioration of Indian social and religious life.

The British working class already supplied the military manpower to control India for the wealthy ruling class. Geddes predicted they would also have to bear the financial burden of the British government in India. Year after year money had to be borrowed to meet the deficit resulting from foolish spending. This would eventually become so large that the burden of paying it would fall on the British working class. Putting Indian problems into a world context, Geddes urged the workers of the world to unite in trade unions to repudiate nationalism and imperialism, and demand that profits be put to social use. But these workers would not be inspired by a materialistic or revolutionary philosophy, they would be inspired by the Religion of

Humanity. Its universal adoption, Geddes optimistically concluded, would solve all problems by inspiring morality in politics.[20]

Henry Cotton assumed that pre-British India was socially harmonious and economically prosperous and that the British, through the introduction of new institutions — educational, legal, and economic — had upset this equilibrium. British law had disturbed traditional social relationships and institutions, and the extravagance of the administration had impoverished the people. According to Cotton, this haphazard introduction of new ideas and institutions had worked almost irreparable damage in India.[21]

The problem of chaos in India could only be solved through political action, consequently Cotton argued the British government to create a federation of Indian states on an equal footing with other British colonies. The states within the Federation would be administered by Indians who were leaders in the caste hierarchy. But this was seen as a goal for the future. However, there were things the Government could do: set up local government boards, reorganize the civil service to include more Indians, enroll more Indians in the judiciary, make the legislative council representative, and listen carefully and respectfully to the opinions of educated Indians. If the British did not hand over some of their power to the educated class, Cotton predicted a violent upheaval.[22]

This was not a radical policy; Cotton's aim was to prevent a revolution. The only change he proposed for Indian society itself was the substitution of one elite class by another. He viewed the Western-educated class as innately loyal to the British and their nationalism as a natural response to unsympathetic policies. Cotton believed that a federation of native states would ultimately satisfy the aspirations of the young and educated. But he had no desire to involve the masses in the political process. "I have always recognized that the lower orders in India stand in urgent need of an aristocracy above them," he wrote, "that their ignorance and characteristic docility and want of firmness demand the guidance and protection of more powerful superiors."[23] The British were not always aware of who composed this natural aristocracy because many Indians avoided contact with the British. Given an opportunity these men would emerge to lead the country. Cotton believed they would rule in accordance with the Positivist principle that a primary duty of those in power is to protect the weak.[24]

These three men acted as "missionaries" of Positivism. They brought to India a belief that the Positivist system contained the solutions to all contemporary problems. As members of the I.C.S. they made contacts and formed friendships with members of the Indian intelligentsia and it was

through these informal channels that the doctrine was propagated. Indians who had learned of Positivism on their own — through one of the many channels which existed in the second half of the century to transmit Western ideas to India — sought out these "missionaries" to borrow books or discuss complicated concepts.

Because these men called British rule in India "exploitive" and blamed it for breaking down a natural order which had existed, they were seen by their contemporaries as renegades. As members of the I.C.S., all three were criticized by their superiors and mistrusted because of their sympathy with the Indian cause. Lobb tried to avoid conflict, Geddes' loyalty to the Empire was challenged in the House of Commons and Cotton was overlooked for promotion. To criticize the Indian Empire when imperialism was in full-bloom and even the "anti-imperialists" could see reasons for retaining India, was little short of heresy. But sympathy for these men must not obscure our look at their actual view of Indians and the British-Indian connection. They condemned the British for introducing new ideas, laws and institutions which promoted social change, and hence caused disruption. Words such as "destruction", "break-down", "decay", and "chaos" abound in their writings. The mythical Indian past idealized was, in contrast, "peaceful", "stable", and "harmonious." Their basic concern was with order. Progress was accepted as inevitable, but it would be accomplished through evolutionary change and according to the Comtian scheme.

The ideal Indian society they promoted was stable and ordered — ruled by patricians (*bhadralok*) and priests (*Brahmans*), kept running by the proletariate (*chotolok*) and morally dominated by the women. Socially conservative, it supported caste, hierarchy, the joint family, the established position of women and the *status quo* in terms of land ownership and inheritance. The British were morally wrong for being in India and deserved criticism for interference in the Indian social system, but Indians had a duty to accept this rule. Comte had been clear about this. Deeply disturbed by the French Revolution, he insisted it was the duty of every citizen to accept and cooperate with his government even if he did not accept it as morally right. Revolution would destroy the natural evolutionary process towards an ordered, stable Positive government and society. The English Positivists in India offered no new programs — they only suggested that the government stop interfering in Indian religions, customs and social life. What they did, however, was bring a philosophy which — in the name of "evolutionary progress" — promoted social conservativism, political compliance and economic subsistence. It was not a progressive, innovative program urging further change in the Hindu system, but one which encouraged the

re-establishment of a system dominated by Brahmins and landlords, temporarily under the benevolent suzerainty of the British Raj.

The Indian Positivists

The first public mention of Comte's philosophy occurred during a lecture delivered by Hurish Chunder Mookerjee at the Bhowanipore Brahmo Samaj in 1856. This was only three years after Harriet Martineau's translation had been published and before English intellectuals had become enthusiastic about the Positive Philosophy. In this lecture Hurrish Chunder asserted that Comte's phrenological discovery — that man had an "affective" faculty — confirmed man's basic need for religion. This proved, Hurrish Chunder concluded, that the Brahmo Samaj (a theistic organization) was a "positive" religion, based both on conviction and the findings of modern science.[25]

Positivism soon became a much discussed philosophy in Calcutta's intellectual circles. It was debated in the literary societies, discussed in periodicals, and formed the basis for weekly discussion sessions attended by a few individuals. The men attracted to the philosophy were urban, educated, and employed in jobs associated with the 'new system' introduced by the British Raj. Their reasons for finding Positivism attractive were similar to those of Englishmen of the same period: "Positivism offered not only intellectual but also spiritual and emotional nourishment."[26]

Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya (1840-1932), Professor of Sanskrit at Presidency College and the author of a number of books on Law, had rejected traditional religion as incapable of meeting the needs of modern society and the challenges of modern science. Science had proved the assumptions of ancient religion false, and the retention of these religions only led to confusion and promoted disrespect for morality. Yet, Krishna Kamal could not envision a world without religion to regulate the lives of individuals and to bind men together in societies. He regarded the Comtian Religion of Humanity as perfect because it was based on reason and good judgment and included all that was advanced and progressive.[27]

Attracted by Comte's assurance that even the disadvantaged peoples of the world would progress, Krishna Kamal expressed his desire to see material progress in India. When he wrote about the value of Positivism for the world, he talked about a future world which knew neither war nor slavery, but when he wrote about India, he was more specific. He believed that the Indian people needed new attitudes: the ability to work together, courage of mind and body, skills to develop industry and international trade, and the knowledge to carry on scientific and philosophical studies. In other words, Hindus needed a new

orientation towards life and its problems — they needed to be optimistic about progress and work actively to attain it.[28]

Krishna Kamal had become one of Auguste Comte's disciples because of a personal need — he had lost faith in traditional Hinduism — yet felt he needed a religious doctrine which was based on new scientific discoveries, respected the past, gave man a higher goal to serve, and aimed at social progress. The Religion of Humanity suited him very well; it met all his requirements for a modern, scientific religion and he was able to gain solace and inspiration from it. Though uncertain as to when it would become popular in India, he was certain that this philosophy contained the blueprint for Indian and world progress.

Through his newspaper, *The Bengalee,* and participation in various associations, Grish Chunder Ghosh (1829-1869) publicized his views on riots, women's education, social reform, and Positivism. Considered a social reformer by his contemporaries, Grish's enthusiasm for social change was tempered by a fear that the valuable elements of Hinduism would also be lost. He blamed Western education for causing men to lose faith in their old beliefs and leaving society confused and discouraged. Instead of discarding the Hindu social system along with old religious dogmas, Grish urged his countrymen to carefully study each institution to determine its effects and how these could be remedied. According to Grish, the most valuable elements in the Hindu social system were the absence of a poor law or any real need for one, the protection of the weaker elements by the stronger, and the absence of crime and drunkeness. Grish wanted reform of social institutions but feared Westernization. Thus he urged his countrymen to moderate their criticism of the social system least they encourage the British to further interfere with the social system.[29]

In his portrayal of Ram Doolal Day, a Bengali millionaire, Grish pictured the ideal man as one who learned much from the West but retained respect for the valuable elements of Hinduism. Ram Doolal had become a successful business man by using Western techniques of business management and through his willingness to gamble on a business venture. But he never became Westernized. He continued to believe in the social value of caste, the hierarchical arrangement of Hindu society, and the position of the Brahmins. Personally he considered it his duty to give charity to holy men, scholars, and the poor. This essay was a good example of the kind of Indian Grish admired — one who could learn from Western commerce and science but was concerned with preserving Hindu social institutions.[30]

Before he had begun to admire the Positive Philosophy, Dwarkananth Mitra (1833-1874), the second Indian to become a High Court Judge, had little respect for Hinduism and the customs it imposed. Although he never regained his adolescent faith in traditional theology, he came to see the value of showing respect for Hindu social institutions. He was disturbed by the competition among monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam and the Brahmo Samaj, for the young Hindu sceptics. Fearful that Indian culture would be lost if these young people lost their faith, he championed the Religion of Humanity as both scientific and compatible with the Brahminical religion.[31]

Western rule and Western ideas presented Dwarkanath with a paradox. He recognized the dual nature of British influence in law and education — on the one hand it was enlightening, on the other disruptive. Indian progress and development would be impossible without borrowing from the West, but how far were they to go in their borrowing?

He focused on law as a key issue. Erroneously convinced that Indians in the pre-British period had followed the laws of Manu, Dwarkanath blamed the British for destroying this "stable system." At the same time, he urged Indian lawyers and judges to work diligently to preserve its remains. Law was the key to both order and progress; Dwarkanath accepted Comte's dictum that law was invaluable in preserving a country's traditions that would provide the basis for the volving Positive system. In his own practice of law, Dwarkanath sought to uphold what he considered "ancient principles"[32] and to integrate the principles of ancient Hindu law with the structure of modern European law.[33]

But Dwarkanath did not call for an end to British rule. He only asked the British to give Indians a greater chance to participate in decisions affecting law, education and finance and to exhibit greater sympathy with the needs and aspirations of their Indian subjects. The Positivists, Dwarkanath thought, could obviate the revolutionary tendencies of scientific education by providing educated Indians with information about Comte's social, religious, and historical ideas. In addition, a study of Comte's system, by law students, would be particularly important in developing their powers of analysis and reasoning.[34]

These were men who were disilusioned with certain aspects of their own religion and yet unwilling to embrace Christianity and unable to imagine a world without religion. They wanted science — the hallmark of English

progress — and yet feared that disruption and chaos might follow the introduction of Western science and ideas. The social order, they agreed, must be retained. Comtian Positivism seemed to offer the solution. In this system the promise of inevitable, evolutionary progress was combined with justification for maintaining the social system as it existed.

Jogendro Chandra Ghosh (1842-1902), a wealthy *zamindar*, became the leading proponent of the Positivist philosophy in India. He began the "Society for the Study of Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy", working on an adaptation of Positivism for India, (ie. "Hindu-Positivism,") and wrote articles explaining the functional nature of Indian institutions. Jogendro moved one step further than Grish, Krishna Kamal and Dwarkanath in his acceptance of the religious aspects of the Comtian system.

Comte's study of science and social institutions had led him to assert that man did not need theistic religion, but he needed a humanistic religion. The Religion of Humanity had no god, but it had priests, sacraments, icons, prayers and temples. It was this religion that Jogendro decided must be imported into India, along with Comte's view of history and theory of the integrated nature of social institutions.

Jogendro's study of Positivism led him to conclude that it was this philosophy which could save India from perpetual "backwardness." Like many others of his generation, he expressed a fear that India would be thrown "under the wheels of the Western Juggernaut." Orthodox "exclusiveness" was equally harmful to India's development; Indians must learn about Western science and technology. What India needed, was a "unifying principle" which would unite the orthodox and "young Bengal" to defend the social system and select the type of knowledge that they wanted to borrow from the West. "We have to steer our way between two rocks," he wrote, "one of Western revolution and anarchy, and the other of Oriental exclusiveness and obliteration."[35]

Jogendro decided that Positivism contained the necessary unifying principle in the concept of "Brahmanism." The concept of Brahmanism was his own development from Comte's brief mention of Brahmins as the Indian "priests of Humanity." Comte wrote that in India, Positivism would first appeal to the Brahmins because it promised them the end of foreign dominance, the restoration of their social position, and the perfection of India as a moral nation.[36] "Brahmanism" meant to Jogendro the revival of the position of the Brahmin priesthood and a new Brahmin class educated in the Positive Philosophy. The masses could only learn about Positivism through the priests and the priests could only learn about Positivism from intellectuals

like himself. According to Jogendro, the moral and intellectual condition of Hindus was too backward to allow them to appreciate the entire Positive Philosophy. However, they would be able to appreciate certain Positivist elements — the four-class system, religious marriage, the sacraments, festivals and the importance of the family. It was these elements which he chose to emphasize in his adaptation of Comte's philosophy — Hindu-Positivism.[37]

Jogendro remained the leader of the Positivist organization and was responsible for the direction this philosophy took in India. As leader, he directed and arranged meetings, maintained contact with Congreve, acted as the "High Priest" to the Indian congregation and developed the theory of Brahmanism. Central to the whole scheme was the recognition of the Brahmin pundit as the spiritual power in the society, the advisor to the political and industrial leaders, the counsellor and protector of the masses and women, and the example of morality and benevolence for the society. The Positive Society which Jogendro envisioned for India was not radically different from what already existed. It was characterized by three classes derived from the *varna* system — priests, patricians and workers; the joint family; the caste system; the village community; and the separation of church and state. The whole system, including the industrial sector which supported it, would be controlled by Brahmin pundits.[38]

Law was a vital subject for study since it could prevent a breach between the principles of ancient Hinduism and of modern developing society. Jogendro agreed with Dwarkanath Mitra that British-made laws had been both good and bad. Harmony had prevailed in the days of Warren Hastings when pundits and British judges cooperated, but when this cooperation ceased the British began to make laws that were disruptive. Jogendro believed that *smriti* contained the legal roots of the new society, it simply had to be interpreted by pundits educated in jurisprudence, Western science and methods of collecting evidence.[39] He did not advocate a return to ancient law but to a blend of Hindu and English law to suit the needs of a changing society.

Re-establishing the Brahmins as the moral leaders of society was intimately related to maintaining the hierarchical status quo. Jogendro saw the relationship between the Brahmin pundit and the *Sudra* as on the verge of change. Supporters of the Indian National Congress were trying to "feudalize" the proletariate by introducing contracts into the *zamindar-ryot* relationship. These groups were using the masses for their own ends, Jogendro declared, but the Positivists had the interests of the masses at heart. Constant manipulation of the masses had made them dissatisfied and disorganized and to Jogendro it appeared as if India were on the verge of a

social revolution. This revolution could be avoided only if a sincere effort were made to revive the influence of the one class capable of disciplining the masses — the Brahmins.[40]

Also conductive to the maintenance of social order were the two institutions Jogendro regarded as the basis of the hindu system — caste and joint family. Influenced by Comte's sociology, he attempted to study these institutions to determine their essential elements and to make recommendations for reconstruction. Jogendro was not opposed to social change or social reform, but he believed that India should wait until the West had been regenerated and would be able to provide some guidance. When India was ready, the actual changes would be decided on by Brahmin pundits trained both in the scientific method of collecting evidence and in *smriti* law.[41]

Jogendro analyzed caste in a number of articles for *Bangadarshan* and the *Calcutta Review*. Caste deserved special consideration as the "core" of Brahmanism and the institution that would adapt most easily to the Positivist system. From his study of caste, Jogendro concluded that it differed from class only in its supernatural justification. Otherwise, caste, like class, was hierarchical and industrial, bringing unity and discipline to people engaged in different occupations.[42] The class conflict that had plagued the West could be avoided in the East by returning to a social system based on reformed caste. The key to harmony in the system was the Brahmin pundit, he protected the Sudra and counselled the patrician. If Indian people were materially poor, and Jogendro referred to the conditions of the Bengali peasant, it was because British law encouraged competition which led to exploitation.[43]

When Jogendro wrote on the joint family, he emphasized the ability of this ancient institution to deal with the problems of a modern industrial society. In the West the differences between the rich and the poor had led to revolution; in India these problems were successfully dealt with by the joint family which pooled incomes and distributed the money according to need. The joint family took the place of social insurance by providing help for the old and the sick, extending protection to the widow, and supporting the unemployed. Even though his own experience had been a bitter one, Jogendro agreed with Comte that the family and particularly the joint family could discipline the individual and train him for the ultimate development of patriotic sentiments.[44]

In addition to defending the social system against irresponsible efforts to reform it, Jogendro thought the Positivists had to concern themselves with declining morality. The old system of morality, regulated by Hindu theology, had been undermined by Western education. Other Western doctrines were

incapable of giving Hindus a new morality because they were considered inferior. However, Positivism brought the authority of Western science to a system of morals that bore a strong resemblance to those of Hinduism. Jogendro urged the Positivists to do all they could to preserve those worthwhile moral virtues which still existed in Hindu society — duty, veneration and obedience.[45]

Jogendro's plan to regenerate India through Hindu-Positivism made the regeneration of Brahmanism the first step. Closely related to this was the study, reform and defence of the social institutions and the plan to develop a Hindu-Positivist man-centered morality. It was only after the questions of morality and society had been dealt with that Jogendro thought Positivists could concern themselves with the economic and political system, both subject to Brahmanic morality.

The Positivists regarded politics and economics as servants of the social system rather than fundamental elements. This list of priorities accurately represented Comte's philosophy, Jogendro's social conservativism and a realistic appraisal of what institutions Indians could change while ruled by a foreign power.

Jogendro wanted no part of a democratic political system. Western politics provided no answers for Indian political questions, he insisted, condemning the Indian National Congress for trying to introduce democracy and the parliamentary system. The ancient Indian political system had been able to deal successfully with questions such as separation of church and state which had been plaguing the West for centuries.[46] Hindus would be better off looking at their own past than assuming that all Western forms and institutions were superior.

A prominent *Zamindar*, Jogendro began to equate his class with Comte's patricians and pronounced them the natural leaders of the society's political and economic systems. They were prevented from attaining their rightful position by the British who were aided by a class of Indian collaborators. The British and the Collaborators both hoped to destroy this class of natural leaders. To thwart their plans, Jogendro became an active member of the British Indian Association in 1876 and served it faithfully until his death in 1902.[47] As a member of the British Indian Association, Jogendro condemned the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 (declaring all land-holding *ryots*, "settled *ryots*") for making serious inroads on the rights of property guaranteed by the permanent settlement and for introducing changes in the existing laws and ancient customs of the country.[48] Jogendro never mentioned Positivism when speaking as a member of the B.I.A. but it is clear that it had helped him justify

his position vis à vis the *ryots*. According to Positivist theory, the patricians deserved power and wealth because they were the men who knew how to run the affairs of the country; Jogendro thought the *zamindar*-patrician deserved power and wealth because he was destined to become the leader in the new Indian society.

Most of Jogendro's Positivist ideas, like his ideas on the peasantry, were consistent with his social position. He died a respected member of Hindu society, his reputation undamaged by membership in the Positive society. There was no other Indian Positivist who would take over his position and so his death in 1902 marked the end for the Positivist Society in India.[49]

The most important of the Positivists, in terms of his writings and the direction of the Positive Philosophy in Indian, Jogendro supported a system which was basically conservative. Change was seen as necessary but the degree of change was to be controlled. Yet, there was much about Jogendro's doctrine that was innovative. The emphasis on regeneration of roles with new values, the analysis of social institutions, and the concern with humanitarianism above all other principles. But the hierarchiacal relationships were to be preserved, British government supported even though disliked, and there was no hint of some future re-distribution of wealth. For members of Jogendro's class, this philosophy seemed very practical.

Many of the individuals who joined Jogendro's society were school teachers, professors and clerks in the Civil Service. Few of them made their mark on society, yet many of them were haunted by personal and social problems similar to those encountered by Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya, Grish Chunder Ghosh, Dwarkanath Mitra and Jogendro Chandra Ghosh. By becoming Positivists, they found a philosophy which answered their spiritual questions and which allowed them to be both "socially conservative" and "modern" at the same time.[50]

Conclusions

If the transmission of Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy can be regarded as a case study, then it would appear that Indian revivalism and social conservativism, in the later half of the nineteenth century, was not simply a reaction to strained relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Just as Indian intellectuals earlier in the century had been influenced by the ideas popular in England, intellectuals in the later half of the century learned about evolution, social engineering, and the duties of man in a democratic state. In both periods selection was there, but it is important to bear in mind that the channels established, early in the nineteenth century, for

the export of European ideas to India remained open throughout the century. English education produced a class which demanded books and periodicals in this language and the booksellers of Calcutta were only too happy to comply with copies of the latest works. The city itself soon had its own publishers, its own periodicals and its own societies devoted to the discussion of ideas.

The I.C.S. officers who were considered radicals by their own society were well received by the educated class. At last members of the ruling group recognized that British rule was unjust and that administrators did not listen carefully enough to their educated subjects. The message of the Positivist "missionaries" was bound to be approved by members of the educated elite. It condemned British interference in Indian life, promised the eventual progress of India, and suggested that the "old order" be preserved as far as possible. But no one seemed very clear about the old order and the remarks of the Positivist "missionaries" seemed to suggest more power for the educated class and the landlords. They were, after all, members of the British bureacracy in India and they shared many of the accepted notions about the "spiritual" inclination of the Indian people, the simplicity of the peasant, and the inability of the masses of Indian people to rule themselves. While their message may have been more palatable because it was in the guise of a French philosophy, it sounded remarkably similar to that voiced by the Reformers in the 1830's. The Reformers also had great faith in religion and in education and in the possibility of Indians one day ruling themselves. Only they wanted the Indians to learn the "British system", the Positivist "missionaries" insisted that Indians first imbibe Comte's philosophy. But in a period increasingly unsympathetic to Indian aspirations, these members of the I.C.S. stand out because they took a genuine interest in Indian problems, proposed solutions and were unwilling to withstand criticism because of their concern with these problems.

There are two important questions to ask about the Indians who became interested in this philosophy and adopted it for their own: What did they see as the greatness of the West? and What problem did they want to solve? While the first question seems easier to answer, the second is more elusive. The West appeared strong, powerful, capable of crushing all before it. Although Indian intellectuals seldom explained how the West might crush the rest of the world, metaphors of strength frequently appear in their writings. This strength was seen as related to scientific advancement rather than Western political or social structure, hence it would be science that one would have to learn. While all the individuals who studied Positivism seemed attracted to the philosophy because it was "scientific" few pursued this element to its logical conclusion. Dwarkanath Mitra built a laboratory and worked out scientific problems, and others concentrated their energies on Comte's philosophy of history, analysis

of society and Religion of Humanity. This leads us back to the question, what did they want to solve?

While the men who studied Positivism were indeed a limited sample, their letters and writings are filled with expressed fear of social disruption. The changes brought to India by colonial rule — in land tenure, trade, transportation, education, urbanization, social customs — were most noticeable in the urban centers. Novelists of the late nineteenth century paint a picture of society much different from what had existed only half a century before. It was true that much of the change was welcome and that it had made possible the growth of a new class which included the men who studied positivism, but it did not keep these men from being afraid. One source of fear arose from their loss of faith in Hinduism. There seemed no substitute, yet few individuals wanted to break ties with their families and declare themselves out and out unbelievers. The social fabric remained and to be part of it one had to perform certain religious ceremonies. There was fear then, or discomfort, caused by skepticism. But there was also a social fear. If reform of the Hindu social system continued, where would it end? Would Indians lose their identity and become mere parodies of the English? In the political realm, there seemed a real fear of democracy. The Indian masses would surely engulf this educated class and few seemed hopeful that they and the masses would vote alike. Economically, they feared losing their privileged position. While few of these men articulated all these fears, they were circulating as ideas in their speeches and in their writings. Progress was desired, but only if it could be directed so that elites remained elites and the world did not become topsy-turvy.

The motto of Comte's Positive system was "Love, Order, and Progress." For men who were already touched by the West, who admired the West, and believed in progress, this system was ideal. It promised modernization as an evolutionary process and asked men only to wait and to preserve their traditional social systems. However, the Positive system was used by intellectuals in other countries to achieve different goals. In Mexico, for example, Positivism was the pet philosophy of the *scientificos* "who advocated a complete departure from the traditional culture in exchange for western models."[51] In India we find that the men who espoused Positivism appeared to be Philip Curtin's "Neo-traditionalists", those "who wanted a modern society with industrial technology and high levels of consumption, while continuing to preserve some part of the traditional values." But, a close look at their writings and behavior places them much closer to the "Defensive Modernizers", those "who wanted to preserve as much as possible of the traditional way of life, though realizing that the cost of defense was some form of modernization."[52] What one has to remember is that what was

"modern" in the first half of the century, had become "traditional" for these men. Thus Jogendro accused the British of violating tradition when they passed an act which he regarded as going against the Permanent Settlement of 1793 and Dwarkanath Mitra used his position in the High Court to set precedents which he thought helped maintain "tradition."

Generally what I hope this paper points out is the complexity of the colonial connection in terms of the transmission of ideas. English education began the transfer and it has continued until the present day. Indians did not merely react to the ideas they came in contact with, they responded in terms of their own needs and the problems they sought to solve. In the case of the Positive Philosophy, both the colonizers who carried it and the colonized who studied it seemed attracted by the promise of progress with order. It was this message, rather than the importance of science and of the scientific method which made an impact and affected a generation of educated Indians.

NOTES

[1] Sir Percival Griffiths, *The British Impact on India*, (London, 1952), p. 251.

[2] Stephen H. Hay, *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China, and India*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), p. 10.

[3] Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and England*, (Oxford, 1959), p. xiv.

[4] Griffiths, p. 253.

[5] Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964), p. 289.

[6] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1971); Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, (Princeton, New Jersey, 1964), p. 320.

[7] N.S. Bose, *The Indian Awakening and Bengal*, (Calcutta, 1969); Pradip Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History*, (Calcutta, 1965).

[8] Comte's works include *Opuscules primitifs sur la philosophie sociale*, 1819-1828; *Cours de philosophie positive*, 6 v., 1830-1842; *Traité elementaire de geometrie analytique*, 1843; *Traité philosophique d'astronomie populaire*, 1844; *Discours sur l'ensemble du positivism*, 1848; *Système de politique positive*, 4 v., 1851-1854; *Catechisme positiviste*, 1852; *Appel aux conservateurs*, 1855; *Synthese subjective*, v. I, 1856.

[9] G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After, 1872-1919*, (London, 1966), p. 342.

[10] For more detail on the English positivists see: Walter M. Simon, "Auguste Comte's English Disciples," *Victorian Studies*, VIII, December, 1964, pp. 161-172; Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century: An Essay in Intellectual History*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1963).

[11] Richard Congreve, "Questions of the Study of Philosophie positive," Serial No. 3, *Essays: Political, Social and Religious*, II, (London, 1884), pp. 100-104.

[12] R. Congreve, "India", (London, nd.), pp. 1-37.

[13] R. Congreve, "Ciculars" #91, #100, #104, *Essays*, II.

[14] A. Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, IV, (New York, 1968), pp. 439-448.

[15] "Influence of the West on East," *Indian Observer*, (Jan. 6, 1872), pp. 1-2, *Ms. English Letters*, Richard Congreve Papers, Bodleian Library, hereafter *M.E.L.*, 487.

[16] "Miss Carpenter's Six Months in India," *Calcutta Review*, v. 47, (1868), pp. 2, 20-21; "The English Raj in India," *Bengalee*, (May 31, 1873), p. 171.

[17] "Miss Carpenter's Six Months", p. 22.

[18] "Letter to the Editor," *Indian Observer*, (Jan. 6, 1872), pp. 11-12.

[19] James Geddes, *The Logic of Indian Deficit*, (London, 1871); Geddes, *The Month Gutemberg; or Modern Industry*, (London, 1871); R. Congreve to S. Lobb, Nov. 3, 1871, *Positivist Papers*, hereafter *P.P.*, Ms. 45233.

[20] For Geddes ideas on English and Indian problems see Geddes, "Our Commercial Exploitation of the Indian People," I, II, and III, *Calcutta Review*, 1873; *Indian Deficit* and *The Month Gutemberg*.

[21] Henry J.S. Cotton, *Indian and Home Memories*, (London, 1911, p. 211; *India: A Policy and A Prospect*, (London, nd.), pp. 1-6; *New India or India in Transition*, (London, 1885), pp. 4-44, 46-68, 132-145; "Has India Food for Its People," *Fortnightly Review*, XXII, (1877); *An Address on the Problem of India*, (London, 1905), p. 2; *England and India* (London, 1883), p. 38;

[22] Cotton, *New India*, pp. 108-119; *Indian and Home Memories*, p. 212; *India: A Policy and a Prospect*, pp. 5-11; "Sir Henry Cotton's Memories," *The Friend of India*, (Dec. 8, 1911.)

[23] "Preceedings in the Town Hall in Honour of Mr. Cotton," *Indian Nation*, (May 12, 1902), p. 223.

[24] *Indian Nation*, p. 223; Cotton, *India: A Policy*, p. 11.

[25] Hurrish Chunder Mookerjee, *Lectures on Religious Topics*, (Calcutta, 1887), pp. 30-46.

[26] Simon, "Comte's English Disciples", p. 162.

[27] B.B. Gupta, *Puratan Prasanga*, (Calcutta, 1373 B.S.), pp. 33-39; K.K. Bhattacharaya, "Drubabad," *Bharati*, (Sraban, 1292, B.S.), pp. 160, 165, 168.

[28] Bhattacharya, "Drubabad," *Bharati*, (Aswin, 1292 B.S.), p. 298.

[29] Grish Chunder Ghose, "The Hindoo Social System," *Hindoo Patriot*, (July 27, 1854), *Selections from the Writings of Grish Chunder Ghose*, ed. Manmathanath Ghosh, (Calcutta, 1912), pp. 177-181; M.N. Ghosh, *Life of Grish Chunder Ghose*, (Calcutta, 1911), pp. 130, 153, 163.

[30] G.C. Ghose, "Life of Ram Doolal Day — the Bengalee Millionaire," *Writings*, pp. 1-43.

[31] D. Sanyal, *Life of the Hon'ble Justice Dwarkanath Mitter: One of the Judges of Her Majesty's High Court of Calcutta*, (Calcutta, 1883), p. 85; B.B. Gupta, p. 37.

[32] *Bengalee*, (March 14, 1874), p. 82.

[33] Sanyal, pp. 94-95; Gupta, p. 36.

[34] R. Congreve to D. Mitter, Apr. 22, 1879, D. Mitter to R. Congreve, n.d. in Sanayal, pp. 87-90; 94-98; Nirmal Sinha, *Freedom Movement in Bengal, 1818-1904*, (Calcutta, 1968), p. 221.

[35] J.C. Ghosh, "Commemoration of Comte's Death," *M.E.L.*, e. 70; J.C. Ghosh to R. Congreve, Sept. 15, 1878, Dec. 8, 1878, Mar. 2, 1879, Apr. 22, 1880, Apr. 28, 1880, June 2, 1880, July 8, 1881, Nov. 21, 1881, Nov. 21, 1881, Nov. 28, 1882, *M.E.L.* e. 70.

[36] Comte, *Positive Polity*, IV. pp. 171-176, 446-449.

[37] J.C. Ghosh to R. Congreve, Dec. 8, 1878, Mar. 2, 1879, Nov. 8, 1879, April 28, 1880, Aug. 22, 1880, *M.E.L.*, e. 70.

[38] J.C. Ghosh, *The Political Side of Brahmanism*, (Calcutta, 1896), p. 9; J.C. Ghosh to R. Congreve, Jan. 5, 1882, *M.E.L.* e. 70.

[39] J.C. Ghosh, *Brahmanism and the Sudra: or the Hindu Labour Problem*, (Calcutta, nd.), pp. 12-15.

[40] Ghosh, *Brahmanism*, pp. 29-75; *Political Side*, pp. 28-29.

[41] Ghosh, *Brahman the Priest,* (Calcutta, nd.), p. 1; "Caste in India; From a Native Point of View," *Calcutta Review,* 71 (1880) p. 274.

[42] Ghosh, "Jatived," *Bangadarshan,* II (Sraban, 1280 B.S.), pp. 158-174.

[43] Ghosh, "Caste in India", pp. 274-286; *Brahmanism,* pp. 26-78; "Jatived", *Bangadarshan,* 5 articles from 1280-1281 B.S. in v. II and III.

[44] Ghosh, "Our Joint Family Organization," *Calcutta Review,* CXLVI, (October, 1881), pp. 275, 196; *Brahmanism,* p. 111.

[45] Ghosh, *Brahmanism,* pp. 24-25.

[46] Ghosh, *Political Side,* pp. 16-27; *Brahmanism,* pp. 29, 93; *The Hindu Theocracy: How to Further Its Ends,* (Calcutta, 1897), p. 14. *The East and the West,* (Calcutta, 1893), p. 5; "The Village Community of Bengal and Upper India," *Calcutta Review,* LXXIV, (1882), p. 270; "Commemoration of Comte's Death," 1895, *M.E.L.,* e. 70; J. Ghosh to R. Congreve, Dec. 28, 1885, *M.E.L.,* e. 70.

[47] Quarterly meeting of the B.I.A., Oct. 1, 1880, *Publication of the B.I.A.,* LV.

[48] "Meeting of the Landholders of Bengal and Behar on the Bengal Tenancy Act," Calcutta, Apr. 20, 1885, *British Indian Association Publications.*

[49] "Mr. Cotton on Babu Jogendro Chandra Ghosh," *India,* (Jun. 20, 1902), p. 295; "Occasional Notes," *Indian Nation,* (Mar. 10, 1902), p. 111.

[50] For a complete list of an bio-data on the members of the Positivist organization see Chapter VI, "Organized Positivism in India", in G. Forbes, "Comtian Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Illinois, 1972).

[51] Philip D. Curtin, *Africa and the West: Intellectual Responses to European Culture,* (Madison, Wis., 1972), pp. 234-235.

[52] Curtin, pp. 235-237.