

Exchanging words and things: Vernacularisation of political economy in nineteenth-century Bengal

Iman Mitra

Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India

There have been quite a few significant studies on the relationship between political economy as a discipline and the modes of colonial governmentality in India, emphasising the contradictions that were perceived to exist between the universality of the discipline and the irreducible concreteness of local conditions. In this article, I shall try to argue that a nuanced study of these contradictions would require exploring the modalities of vernacularisation of the economic discipline in the colony. The central focus of this article will be at three Bengali textbooks of political economy, mostly inspired by the famous Irish educationist Richard Whately's textbook for children. A close reading of these books will demonstrate how a modality of translation was operative in the second half of the nineteenth century where the equivalence between 'illustrations' from the original and translated texts produced curious displacements and defined the vernacular domain on the basis of an exchange-based sociality grounded in the notion of the family.

Keywords: Colonial pedagogy, translation, political economy, textbooks, vernacularisation

On 27 January 1902, by a resolution in the Home Department, the Government of India decided to appoint a commission for making enquiry into the condition and prospects of the universities established in British India.¹ Apart from preparing an official history of university education in India and laying down its constitutional structure, the seven-member commission headed by Thomas Raleigh, member of the

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose comments and suggestions have improved the article to a great extent. This article is a part of my PhD thesis and I thank the Indian Council for Social Science Research for their support and encouragement. I am greatly indebted to my supervisors Bodhisattva Kar and Vivekananda Mukherjee for their guidance. The faculty and the staff at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Jadavpur University have been extremely generous in their support. I thank Debarati Bagchi, Ritajyoti Bandyopadhyay, Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Shubhasree Bhattacharya, Swati Chatterjee, Priyanka Dey, Rupsa Ray, Ranabir Samaddar and Ankur Tamuliphukan for their valuable comments and help.

¹ *Report of the Indian Universities Commission*, p. 1.

***The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 53, 4 (2016): 501–531**
SAGE Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC/Melbourne
DOI: 10.1177/0019464616662143

Executive Council of the Governor General Lord Curzon, was tasked to probe into the standard of teaching and practical relevance of the courses taught in different arts and science departments. Speaking of the courses in history at various levels of education, it observed that the ‘opportunities for an intelligent study of History are frequently absent’.² It suggested introducing a coursework involving exposure to original documents in place of rote learning. Even though there were grumbles among the students about the courses being needlessly congested, the commission did not renounce the standard practice of teaching political economy as part of the history course and approved its continuation. One particular criticism, however, did not escape its attention. ‘Some teachers complain’, the report observed, ‘that they are restricted to the abstract doctrines of certain European and American economists and that the students learn the subject matter of the books without grasping the theories or comprehending the illustrations.’³ To bridge the ever-widening gap between theory and illustration, a simple solution was recommended:

The study might be made more interesting and more instructive if attention were directed to the economic conditions with which the students are familiar, and if they were encouraged to investigate in a scientific manner the economic conditions of India.⁴

This proposal was significant, primarily because of its insinuation that the method of imbibing the doctrinal truth of political economy must be hereafter grounded in the domain of familiarity and experience. Familiarity itself was taken to be an evidence of the concrete. The basic assumption was that the economic conditions of India were self-evident and immediate to the Indian students, even before the investigations in a ‘scientific manner’ could begin to organise them.

The disillusionment with the discipline was not exactly unanticipated in the history of colonialism in India. Although classical political economy and British colonial policies shared a candidly proximate relationship, the latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed decline in the faith in the usefulness of textbook wisdom. The principal appeal of the tenets of political economy to the British policymakers lay in their capacity to provide an ‘ideal’ impetus for administrative reform.⁵ But soon some of the more perceptive administrators ‘began to show awareness of the folly of trying to use English theories to design Indian economic policies without any modification’.⁶ Perhaps the distrust of the discipline derived

² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269. In 1853, Henry Green of Bombay Education Service told his students to remember that often the analysis of economic actions begged consideration of theories other than those found in the tracts of political economy (*ibid.*, p. 270).

its inspiration from a similar attitude already being manifested in the minds of the British public about its speculative nature. The nineteenth-century publicists of political economy like J.R. McCulloch tried to dissipate this climate of suspicion by connecting the discipline with an overtly empiricist tradition and stating that the certainty in its conclusions was founded on careful observation.⁷

However, the situation in the colonies was markedly distinct for one specific reason: the matter of popularisation of the discipline in the multilingual context of South Asia was not only one of dissemination, but also of translation. Hence, the negotiations by both the government and native citizens for coming in terms with political economy were supposed to address the problematic of translation quite seriously.

The influential literature on connections between political economy and British policy does not quite take up the issue of translation,⁸ but there are few histories of translation and vernacular education in India which explain the workings of colonial power effectively. According to Gyan Prakash, '[t]ranslation in the colonial context meant trafficking between the alien and the indigenous, forcing negotiations between modernity and tradition, and rearranging power relations between the colonial and the colonized.'⁹ In a particular context of translation of 'Western sciences' into 'indigenous languages', Prakash wants to draw attention to the 'realignments of power, a renegotiation of the unequal relationship', which existed between the two languages and how this process gave birth to hybridisation of the sciences.¹⁰ There remains, however, a chance of treating all forms of hybridity as similar, failing to make distinctions between different hybrids produced in course of various sporadic and non-linear histories, some connected and some disconnected, and finally succumbing to the logic of singularity. An attempt, therefore, should be made to recognise and explore the differences in manifold forms of hybridity which resulted from these acts of translation, and to trace various levels of hierarchy—textual, intellectual and political—that abounded consequently. Veena Naregal, in her study of the 'hierarchical relationship between English and

⁷ 'By patient induction, by carefully observing the circumstances attending the operation of particular principles, [the economist] discovers the effects of which they are really productive, and how far they are liable to be modified by the operation of their principle' (McCulloch cited in Freedgood, *Victorian Writing about Risk*, p. 22).

⁸ Guha, in his seminal *Rule of property for Bengal*, emphasises on the location of political economy within the intellectual tradition of Scottish Enlightenment and explores its critical career in the late-eighteenth-century East India Company policies. Stokes, in *The English Utilitarians and India*, describes the importance of the College at Haileybury for the future Company officials under the influence of Thomas Malthus and other noted political economists of that period. These studies, significant as they are in bringing forth various moments of negotiation between 'western concepts' and 'local conditions', do not engage with the problematic of translation; neither do they explore the moments of discontent with the discipline itself.

⁹ Prakash, *Another Reason*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

vernacular spheres in the Bombay-Pune region between 1830 and 1881', makes such an attempt to connect the colonial education policy of bilingualism with emergence of an elite vernacular public sphere, which was aestheticised, institutionalised and politicised through pedagogical and linguistic reforms along with developments in print capitalism, and shows how it contributed to the construction and sustenance of colonial modernity.¹¹

In a similar vein, I shall try to explore in this article the specificity of a vernacular domain which came about with translation of political economy in nineteenth-century Bengal. Through a study of colonial vernacular education policies and three Bengali textbooks of political economy published in the second half of the nineteenth century, I shall argue that this domain was quite distinct in its engagement with the question of 'colonial difference'¹² from an apparently self-evident perspective of familiarity and experience. Apart from facilitating fitting replacement of unfamiliar terms, concepts and illustrations with familiar ones, it also secured a rationale for such replacements from the discipline itself by envisioning the material practice of translation as an enactment of the principle of exchange implanted at the core of classical political economy. This entails an analogy between translation as transfer of meaning and exchange as transaction of values or commodities which has its own pertinence in reflections on making of the vernacular domain.

'The problem of translation has become increasingly central to critical reflections on modernity,' Lydia Liu comments in the introduction of *Tokens of Exchange*, a collection of essays by different authors exploring how the universalising tendencies of modernity translate and absorb difference 'into its own orbit of antithesis and dialectic'.¹³ In so doing, Liu and other contributors select an interdisciplinary approach which concerns itself

with the production and circulation of *meaning as value* across the realms of language, law, history, religion, media, and pedagogy and, in particular, with significant moments of translation of *meaning-value* from language to language and culture to culture.¹⁴

¹¹ Naregal, *Language Politics, Elites, and the Public Sphere*, p. 5.

¹² Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*. By 'colonial difference', Chatterjee means 'the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group': 'As the institutions of the modern state were elaborated in the colony, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, the ruling European groups found it necessary to lay down—in lawmaking, in the bureaucracy, in the administration of justice, and in the recognition by the state of a legitimate domain of public opinion—the precise difference between the ruler and the ruled' (*ibid.*, p. 10). He calls this phenomenon the 'rule of colonial difference' (*ibid.*, Chapter 2, pp. 14–34).

¹³ Liu, 'Introduction', p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2. Author's emphases.

The advantage of treating meaning as value is that it allows us to view translation as an exchange practice inscribed in the ‘political economy of the sign’.¹⁵ Thus, the question of translatability—the attainment (or its failure) of equivalence between languages—becomes analogous with that of exchangeability, seeking equivalence between commodities. The comparison between linguistic and economic exchanges has a history of its own, which chronicles the various attempts over time to situate a correlation between language and money.¹⁶ However, it was Karl Marx who chose to use the analogy with some caution and incorporated translation as a more appropriate link between the two domains:

Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign [*fremde*] language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in language, but in the foreign quality [*Fremdheit*] of language.¹⁷

‘The foreign quality (*Fremdheit*) of language’, Liu notices in her essay, ‘describes a shared process of circulation in translation and in economic transactions, which produces meaning as it produces value when a verbal sign or a commodity is exchanged with something foreign to itself.’¹⁸ The act of translation, thus, involves realisation of the same foreign quality in the other language which motivates replacements of the original words by the ones from the language of translation.

This observation can be used to explore ‘vernacularisation’ in terms of recognition of foreignness in another social context which calls for staging equivalence between that and the one of the translator’s own—the metropole and the colony, respectively—with varied registers of familiarity and experience, informed and sustained by political, cultural and moral hierarchies. That the notion of familiarity was self-evident and readily available to the readers of the translated texts indicates that the socials in question were already prefigured in some ways to accommodate

¹⁵ Liu, ‘The Question of Meaning-value in the Political Economy of the Sign’, p. 13.

¹⁶ The analogy was embraced by a great number of poets and philosophers, including Quintilian, Ovid, Nietzsche and Saussure. ‘The metaphorical field circumscribing analogies between language and money is undoubtedly one of the most productive in all of Western culture’ [Grey, ‘Buying into Signs’, p. 95]. Grey narrates how Friedrich Gedike, one of the leading thinkers of Enlightenment in Germany, published an article in 1789 to propose a fascinating analogy between money and language (*ibid.*, p. 96).

¹⁷ Karl Marx cited in Shell, *Money, Language, and Thought*, p. 106. Marx’s insistence on the foreign quality of language rather than language itself points to his intent of breaking away from the paradigm of representation characteristic of mercantilism. In mercantile thinking, the analogy between language and money was endorsed by the fact that they both capacitated representation. If language represented thought, money represented accumulation of wealth. Marx, on the other hand, drew attention to the material conditions of circulation where any form of exchange took place due to the foreignness of the other object—an intrinsic quality of the words or things to be exchanged—and not for the capacity of its representation.

¹⁸ Liu, ‘The Question of Meaning-value in the Political Economy of the Sign’, p. 22.

the norms of this recognition and enactment of the principle of exchange in the act of translation. This renders the particular instance of translation of political economy unique in comparison with the other instances of production of scientific and literary vernacular knowledge: in the latter cases, the interaction between acts of translation and logics of social formation takes place by way of institutional networks delineating a structure of such interactions and intervening in it from the outside. In the case of political economy, however, the logic of prefiguration of the social was drawn from the act of translation itself and the act also internalised an understanding of the social implicated in political economy as a science of exchange. In the nineteenth century, as we shall discover shortly, the enactment of the principle of exchange in translation of political economy involved conceptualisation of two sets of equivalence—linguistic equivalence and equivalence of illustration. In the former case, the strategies of translation refused to recognise the possibility of exchange of words in terms of their ‘meaning-value’ within a hierarchical framework of sociocultural ordering. In the latter, the hierarchical framework was redefined by imagining forms of sociality projected as pre-given contexts to all exchanges (of words and things) that might take place within a limit. The urge to domesticate the ‘foreignness’ of the discipline often resulted curious deflections from the ‘original’ texts, almost always laid out in the illustrative interpretations of the basic principles, most poignantly and distinctively articulated in the domain of the household or family. I shall argue that the protocols of these deflections, the meanderings that sieved local contexts from universal perspectives, were also part of these modalities of equivalence where the faith in the irreducible truth of the doctrine permitted and permeated the enactment of exchange in translation.

The article is further divided into four sections. The first section provides a short outline of the history of vernacular education in colonial India. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, education in the vernaculars was unwarranted by the logic that ‘native tongues’ were incapable to assimilate and espouse the richness and complexity of Western knowledge. Training in political economy had been a contentious issue even then: different government officials and educationists debated on the effectiveness of teaching it to native students as failure to grasp the basic principles and inability to apply them in local conditions were cited as common occurrence. However, a number of textbooks of political economy appeared during the middle of the nineteenth century in Marathi and Bengali. These textbooks mentioned both canonical texts by Adam Smith, David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill and primers by relatively more obscure authors as their inspirations. In the following two sections, I shall engage in close reading of three Bengali textbooks of political economy where the issues of inspiration, familiarity, experience and translation were addressed in terms of situating equivalence between illustrations from different—and often conflicting—social contexts staging the necessary

linguistic and economic exchanges.¹⁹ In the concluding section, I shall try to show how a concept of socialisation based on definition of political economy as a ‘science of exchange’ contributed to the making of the vernacular as a site of reimagining of and negotiation between abstract principles and concrete experience.

A Brief History of Vernacular Education

In the beginning, there was no political economy in the colony. In the Charter Act of 1813 by which the ‘scientific’ education of the natives was encouraged, political economy was not included in the definition of the sciences.²⁰ In 1828, William Bentinck who was known for his utilitarian predilections became the Governor General of the East India Company. With Bentinck’s description in 1829 of ‘the British language’ as ‘the key of all improvements’, the focus in education policy shifted from the earlier system of orientalist vernacular education to a more consolidated regime of instructions in English.²¹ It was further substantiated by Thomas Macaulay’s *Minute on Education* in 1835 which dismissed any positive value of the vernacular languages and declared emphatically that, unless they were ‘enriched from some other quarter, it [would] not be easy to translate any valuable work into them’.²² As Bentinck endorsed Macaulay’s *Minute* in the same year, the perception of the vernacular languages as lacking the strength, richness and precision to disseminate scientific knowledge got official recognition.

¹⁹ Apart from the practical difficulty in finding vernacular textbooks on political economy surviving in our time from that era, there is a reason why these texts are chosen. The author-translators of all the three texts, as it should be clear from the following pages, adhered to a particular genre of economic thought culminating in their shared assertion of their inspirations. This paper does not claim to present a ‘definitive’ history of vernacularisation of political economy on the basis of these texts. The main purpose is to open a space of discussion with an initial survey of the instances of vernacularisation which took a unique form in Bengal in the nineteenth century. Though this is an attempt to provide a snippet view at best, it will hopefully indicate a larger trend in practices of translation of economic texts during this period.

²⁰ Ghosh, *History of Modern Education 1757–2012*, p. 20.

²¹ William Bentinck cited in *ibid.*, p. 35. ‘His Lordship in Council is of opinion that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and Science amongst the natives of India, and that all the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone’ [Lord Bentinck’s Resolution, dated 7 March, 1835, cited in Kerr, *Review of Public Instruction in the Bengal Presidency*, p. 7]. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century the colonial rulers were in the opinion to retain the ‘Orientalist character’ of instruction: ‘During this period, Government-sponsored initiatives in education, such as the establishment of the Calcutta Madrasa and the Sanskrit College, were exclusively concerned with the promotion of Oriental learning in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian’ (Evans, ‘Macaulay’s *Minute* Revisited’, p. 262). The administrative reasoning that went into founding of such institutions was that ‘Britain’s mission in India was to reinvigorate rather than replace Indian civilisation, and ... education policy should be directed towards the improvement of Oriental studies for the influential classes in society’ (*ibid.*).

²² Thomas Macaulay cited in Ghosh, *History of Modern Education*, p. 31.

However, another concern about ‘translation’ in a broader sense was palpable in the metropole around the same time. A tension was brewing among the British themselves about the applicability of the principles of political economy as a discipline in foreign conditions. In the *Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, 1832*, the importance was placed on ‘Hindoo and Mahomedan codes’ in terms of administering justice, but also a tempering of these codes was suggested whenever the native laws seemed ‘barbarous and cruel, by the mildness of British sentiments’.²³ The *Report* also emphasised the need to ‘improve’ these codes when dealing with ‘objects of political economy’.²⁴ The rationale of this suggestion was explained by Charles Grant, the President of the Board of Directors of the Company, when he pointed out that the Hindoo code was ‘very defective’ with respect to ‘subjects of political economy, such as cultivation of the soil, revenue, and commerce’ and the Company should consider enacting ‘new regulations’ in these contexts.²⁵ The specificity of the discipline in relation to colonial rule was acknowledged by the Company in 1806 when they established a college at Haileybury to train civil servants who were about to be sent to India with administrative duties, and introduced a course on the subject under the supervision of Thomas Malthus. But the effectiveness of this course was already under suspicion.

In his evidence to the Select Committee, James Mill commented that, even after a training in political economy, the prospective administrators of justice would not obtain any knowledge on the ‘peculiar nature of the unspeakably important, most peculiar, and difficult duties they [would] have to discharge’.²⁶ There were other opinions as well. John Sullivan, for example, when asked about the necessity of acquiring scientific knowledge in comparison with learning oriental languages, insisted on training in political economy and dismissed the proposal of a deeper knowledge of the native tongues.²⁷ The most ingenious critique of instructions in political economy for the civil servants came from Turner Macan who diagnosed the problem with the administrative service in India in its ‘mania for writing’.²⁸ He identified the source of this mania in the preoccupation with ‘trifles or trite axioms on political economy or jurisprudence, either inapplicable or so well understood as not to require illustration’.²⁹ Macan suspected that the preoccupation resulted from the opinion popular among the civil servants that one needed to produce each and every detail in writing to attract attention from the government. However, according to J.H. Batten, the future principal of the college at Haileybury, the study of political economy was mandatory for one practical reason: ‘In the universities themselves,

²³ *Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company*, p. 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁶ Mill cited in *ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁷ Sullivan cited in *ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁸ Macan cited in *ibid.*, p. 166.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

the regular course of studies before the first degree did not embrace political economy, history and law.³⁰ The civil servants, he believed, should be trained in those subjects whose proper education was available only in England. The training in native languages could wait for later when they would reach the native country itself.³¹ The urgency, with which these defences of political economy were made, referred to the faith in liberalism as the destiny of colonial rule in India.³² As part of the same destiny, a suggestion was made to include political economy in native educational institutions, although the 'greatest difficulty' in imparting education in most of the subjects in native schools was described to be 'the rarity of proper elementary books in Oriental languages'.³³

The observation about the 'rarity of proper elementary books' presumes a modality of linguistic equivalence. The idea that the vernacular languages were not fit for translating scientific or theoretical texts in proper detail indicates that the insistence at that time was on a word-to-word translation. The Board of Education in the Bombay Presidency clearly expressed this idea in their 1840–41 report: 'In a word, knowledge must be drawn from the stores of the English language, the vernaculars must be employed as the media of communicating it, and Sanskrit must be largely used to improve the vernaculars and make them suitable for the purpose.'³⁴ But there were other opinions as well. Although education through English was the officially accepted position, there were always advocates for education in the vernacular, particularly in Madras and Bombay Presidencies. No one campaigned more energetically in favour of vernacular education than the Baptist missionary William Adam who prepared three large reports consecutively in 1835, 1836 and 1838, and submitted an elaborate scheme for improving vernacular education in the Bengal Presidency. But it was rejected on grounds of impracticality and expense. However, in Madras and Bombay presidencies, and subsequently in the North Western Provinces, there was considerable resistance, even within the official circuits, to Macaulay's scheme. Adam's report, quite ingeniously recommended a novel way of approaching the topic of vernacular education and the associated issues of translatability or the lack thereof. According to him, the aim of vernacular education should not be 'to translate the words and idioms of the native languages but so to combine the substance of European knowledge with native forms of thought and sentiment as to render the school books useful and attractive'.³⁵ It was perhaps the first time when someone tried to resolve the issue of translation, not in

³⁰ Batten cited in *ibid.*, p. 232.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Edminstone said in his evidence to the Committee that it '[had] appeared to [him] that the institution of the college [at Haileybury] afforded a security for their all being more or less qualified by a liberal education for the situations they were destined to fill' (Edminstone cited in *ibid.*, p. 204).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

³⁴ Cited in Ghosh, *History of Modern Education*, p. 55.

³⁵ Long (ed.), *Adam's Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar*, pp. 271–72.

terms of linguistic equivalence, but as an opportunity to achieve a combination of 'western' and 'native forms' of thought and recognised the potential of a useful and attractive means of imparting education through translation. Here the role of the vernacular was not relegated as subordinate to English as the official language of the colonial government, but imagined in a productive way to 'bridge' 'European theory to Indian experience'.³⁶

The missionaries in colonial India were always involved in the projects of spreading education and initiating practices of translation to transmit Christianity among the natives. But they showed a consistent reservation against the godless discipline of political economy in their school syllabi. One notable exception in this regard was Horace William Clift who published a monograph on political economy from the Baptist Mission Church in Calcutta in 1835. It was clear even from the title of his book—*Elements of Political Economy: Designed as a Manual for Education*—that he believed quite firmly in the educational value of the discipline. Clift's confidence in the centrality of the postulates of political economy in human life was unparalleled among his contemporary evangelists. He asserted in the preface to his book, 'Every young man will be controlled by its principles, whether he learns them or not.'³⁷ He was also convinced of the capacity of liberal education to redeem the people of India from the clutches of Hinduism. His equation was simple. 'Christianity', he wrote, 'is essentially the religion of freedom; the only religion which secures freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, freedom of communication to all without distinction.'³⁸ In contrast, Hinduism was characterised by discrimination of one group of people against another: 'Hinduism maintains, [*sic*] that all the fruits of the earth are patrimony of the Brahmins.'³⁹

Clift emphasised that the Hindus themselves should come forward to achieve the ideals of 'freedom' contained in the seminaries of Western education including the teachings of political economy.⁴⁰ Subsequently, his text was translated into Marathi in 1854 along with Jane Marcet's textbook by Gopal Hari Deshmukh.⁴¹ But, already in 1840, in an official letter dated 24 March, the Secretary of the Hindoo College, Luckynarain Mookherjee, mentioned a 300-page long elementary vernacular book of 'Political Economy' along with 25 other textbooks.⁴² In 1848, with Lord Dalhousie's appointment as the Governor General and his decision to extend Thomason's Scheme of Vernacular Education to Bengal and the Punjab, the

³⁶ Hodgson, Resident in Nepal, said in the *Adam's Report*, 'in the result [of the combinational mode of vernacular education] there might exist for the people at large the easy and obvious bridge of the vulgar tongue leading from exotic principles to local practices, from European theory to Indian experience' [Hodgson cited in Long (ed.), *Adam's Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar*, pp. 270–71].

³⁷ Clift, *Elements of Political Economy*, p. iv.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

⁴¹ Hatekar, 'Empire and the Economist', p. 470.

⁴² Basak, *History of Vernacular Education in Bengal (1800–1854)*, p. 172.

campaigns for vernacular education got stronger.⁴³ Three years later was established the Vernacular Literature Society which, within seven years from its foundation, published 22 different treatise in vernacular languages, including 17 translations.⁴⁴

The Education Despatch of 1854 brought about fundamental reforms in colonial education policy. Driven by an impetus of spreading education over a wider social field through the grants-in-aid system and replacing the provincial boards and councils of education with new Departments of Public Instruction in each of the five provinces of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, the North Western Provinces, and the Punjab, it consolidated the governmental education system within a structure of hierarchy with clearly defined and closely monitored networks extended unilaterally from the district schools through the central colleges to the provincial universities. Particular attention was paid to preparing school textbooks and appointing trained teachers based on the model of the Normal Schools in England. The Despatch emphasised that vernaculars should be cultivated in the Anglo-vernacular colleges and English in the vernacular and oriental institutions.⁴⁵

By 1856, education in political economy in native languages was made part of the governmental policy.⁴⁶ Even textbooks to be followed in these languages were prescribed in the Scheme of Studies for the Oordoo and Hindee departments in government schools.⁴⁷ H.S. Reid, the Director of Public Instruction for the North Western Provinces, had already recommended appointment of a professor of political economy in 1855 for the colleges to be instituted in the presidency.⁴⁸ These professors were also entrusted with the responsibility of teaching history and geography with the subject. The decision to include instructions in political economy in college curriculum was influenced by the popularity of vernacular textbooks and commendable performance by the young students in examinations on the subject: 'Their answers in political economy were concise and well expressed, and free from the verbiage with which the native students too frequently attempt to conceal poverty of information.'⁴⁹ The scrutiny of the papers in political economy and

⁴³ Ghosh, *History of Modern Education*, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Basak, *History of Vernacular Education in Bengal*, p. 326.

⁴⁵ Ghosh, *History of Modern Education*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ 'Instruction in arithmetic, mensuration, algebra, and geometry, as also in geography, history, and the elements of political economy, will be imparted through the medium of Oordoo or of Hindee' [Reid cited in *1859 Session 2 (186) East India (education)*, SOAS, University of London, p. 706. Return to an address of the Honourable the House of Commons, dated 10 February 1859; for, reply showing the total amount disbursed upon education in each presidency, with its percentage upon the revenue, in 1856–1857; and, copy of correspondence with the Indian government, showing the progress of the measures adopted for carrying out the education despatch of the 19th day of July 1854 (in continuation of Parliamentary Paper, no. 72, of session 1858)].

⁴⁷ In the Oordoo departments, for the 2nd and 3rd classes, the name of the textbook was *Dastoorool-Mash*: for the same classes in the Hindee departments, the prescribed textbook was *Jivikā Paripāti* (*ibid.*, p. 711).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

performance of the native students in acquiring the principles of canonical doctrines were taken quite seriously at this time, as it was evident from a fierce debate among the professors of the Presidency College, Madras. It was elicited by a report of the examiner of the paper on political economy on the poor performance by most of the students in the college. W. Holloway, the said examiner, wrote in a letter in 1857 to A.J. Arbuthnot, the Director of Public Instructions for the Madras Presidency:

No real knowledge of the subject matter has been obtained [by the students]. The slightest departure of the question from the language and order of the text book, [*sic*] suffices to elicit the strangest collection of crude notions and economic fallacies. A definition will be given in the language of the book, and the answer to a question requiring the simplest deduction, will deliver a doctrine, not only not derived from that definition, but in direct opposition to it. Every one defines capital with more or less accuracy, because Mrs. Marcet has defined it, but a glance over these answers will show that not a glimmering of the real import of that definition has been acquired. The same may be said of the doctrine of values.⁵⁰

Holloway's indignation had one practice as its target—the practice of memorising the principles of political economy without having any sense of its application in real contexts. Frustrated and angry, he added in his letter, 'The memory will be better exercised on words more intrinsically beautiful than those of treatise on political economy.'⁵¹ In response to this allegation, a professor of history from the college complained to the principal that Holloway's report was 'utterly worthless, for it is not based upon facts, and it deals in groundless conjecture'.⁵² He assured that the students had 'a very fair knowledge of the science' and Holloway's methods of correcting the answers were replete with mistakes: 'He assigns marks for answers which were not attempted, and he omits to award marks for answers which are in themselves good, and very much to the point.'⁵³ Notwithstanding the merit of Holloway's appraisal, his reaction to the existing practice of teaching political economy suggests that already there was a campaign to evaluate economic knowledge in terms of its practical usage and the method of its instruction was to be judged according to its realisation in a domain of experience. It becomes clear from a report by H. Reeves, Revenue Commissioner of the Southern Division in 1855 that the onus of economic rationality would now fall on the experience of

⁵⁰ Holloway in *ibid.*, p. 332. The 'Mrs. Marcet' mentioned in the quote is in all probability Jane Marcet, author of *Conversations on Political Economy: In Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained* (first published in 1826).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

‘real men of practice’.⁵⁴ Commenting on the state of education in the Bombay Presidency, he submitted,

Meanwhile, although not well read in political economy, history, or law, the mamlutdars, mahalkurries, and carcoons of the districts are eminently practical men; their duties give them a knowledge of the details and machinery of revenue and magisterial duties, which is the more appreciated as it becomes better known to European officers.⁵⁵

Holloway’s letter mentioned Jane Marcet’s *Conversations on Political Economy* as one of the textbooks that were followed in the colleges. It was included in the syllabus for the Normal Class in the Bangalore Head Institution and the Cantonment Branch Schools.⁵⁶ The text was translated in Marathi by Hari Keshvaji and Vishwanath Narayan Mandlik who also borrowed materials from John Stuart Mill’s *Principles of Political Economy*.⁵⁷ Assimilating ideas and concepts from different sources—canonical and non-canonical—and arranging them in a structure and language more conducive to the understanding of young students was a practice common among most of the translators of that time. And in the following years, it became a useful strategy to impart knowledge in the vernacular and create a space of interaction between global principles and local experience. In the following sections, I shall discuss three Bengali vernacular textbooks of political economy appearing in the 1860s and 1870s in detail and examine how the vernacular pedagogy in colonial India intersected with various concerns regarding dissemination of economic knowledge.

‘Money Matters’—Even in the Colony

Gopaul Chunder Dutt’s *Dhanabidhan*, a text prepared exclusively to introduce Bengali children to the science of wealth, described the enduring relationship between wealth and the world in a remarkably precise language:

In this world (*sangsar*), wealth is a matter of great importance. No family person can be truly happy without it. When it becomes scarce, the whole world goes dark before his eyes. It is the chief source of earthly happiness.⁵⁸

Published in 1862, Dutt claimed that this book was the first of its kind. Having felt himself the absence of such a text for children in Bengali, and at the request of

⁵⁴ Reeves cited in *ibid.*, p. 31.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 655.

⁵⁷ Hatekar, ‘Empire and the Economist’, p. 471.

⁵⁸ Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. i. All the following translations of Bengali texts, if not mentioned otherwise, are mine.

some of his ‘reputed friends’, he undertook translation of an English primer called *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*. But, as he clarified immediately, the Bengali text was not an identical translation of the original. ‘Some of the sections are omitted and some are added upon, when required. Especially, for better comprehension by the children, the examples are altered according to their familiar conditions.’⁵⁹

Jane Marcet, in the ‘Preface’ to her *Conversations on Political Economy*, wrote:

It will immediately be perceived by those to whom the subject is not new, that a few of the most abstruse questions and controversies in Political Economy have been entirely omitted, and that others have been stated and discussed without any positive conclusion being deduced. This is a defect unavoidably attached not only to the author’s limited knowledge, but also to the real difficulty of the science. In general, however, when the soundness of a doctrine has appeared well established, it has been stated conscientiously, without any excess of caution or reserve, and with the sole object of diffusing useful truths.⁶⁰

In her ‘Preface’, Marcet did not give any reason for omitting or avoiding definite conclusions. But, the subtitle of her textbook—‘In Which the Elements of that Science are Familiarly Explained’—demonstrated the objective of her book clearly: it was to explain to her readers, who were mostly school students, the principles of political economy in a ‘familiar’ way. This drive to familiarise the wisdom of political economy was shared by another Bengali author with the same intention of popularising political economy among native children. Rajkrishna Roychaudhury, in a brief preface written in English to his *Artha Byabahaar* (1875, 12th edition), presented his work as a translation of Dr Whately’s *Money Matters*.⁶¹ ‘As it stands,’ Roychaudhury repeated after Dutt in his English preface, ‘the book has been wholly rewritten, and the entire subject, while adapted to the requirements of this country, has been kept within the capacity of the students of our Middle English and Vernacular Schools.’⁶² The treatise was considerably different from Dutt’s work in its ambition to be selected as a textbook in Middle English and Vernacular schools, where a scope of studying political economy in Bengali was available.⁶³ In an extended Bengali version of the same preface, Roychaudhury complained that the government did not have a coherent policy regarding education in political economy. The frustration was reasonable. Lieutenant Governor Richard Temple had

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. ii.

⁶⁰ Marcet, *Conversations on Political Economy*, p. v.

⁶¹ Roychaudhury, *Artha Byabahaar*, p. i.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Between 1854 and 1882, secondary education was imparted in (i) High Schools up to the Matriculation standard and (ii) Middle schools up to the Middle School Examination standard or slightly higher. There were two types of middle schools, English and vernacular, distinct from each other on the basis of whether they offered a course in the English language. Roychaudhury’s book was aimed at both types of the Middle Schools [Thomas, *The History and Prospects of British Education in India*, p. 73].

recently withdrawn Roychaudhury's textbook from the list of authorised books for the governmental schools.⁶⁴ The new circular, Roychaudhury pointed out, did not name a single text of political economy to be followed for the Vernacular and Minor Scholarship Examinations. He insisted that studying the principles of the discipline from an early age was almost a moral obligation for the Indians. 'Moreover,' he explained, 'looking at the condition of our country, it is not illogical to say that every school should necessarily teach and discuss the science at least in parts.'⁶⁵

Unlike Dutt, Roychaudhury stuffed his book with the names of eminent political economists, whose works, he wrote, had influenced his own. In the English preface, he mentioned John Stuart Mill and Millicent Fawcett as his inspirations.⁶⁶ The third writer consulted was John Cairns of London University, who was no less famous for having admitted women to his classes on political economy than for having popularised Mill's and Ricardo's propositions in a series of influential essays. Roychaudhury was not alone in his studied assertion of influence. In 1875, Nrisinha Chandra Mukhurji, a professor of Presidency College and a member of the Board of Examiners at the University of Calcutta, brought out the second edition of his own textbook on political economy, *Arthaniti o Arthavyavahara*. In his preface, Mukhurji clarified that the goal of the discipline was to determine the definitions of wealth and money and to elaborate on the laws of production, distribution and exchange of wealth. Dearth of proper textbooks hindered an accurate study of these principles. 'To overcome this obstacle,' he assured, 'I have prepared this small book based on the texts of Whatley, Mill, Fawcett, Adam Smith, and other famous English and French authors.'⁶⁷

Although not as candidly as Roychaudhury and Mukhurji, Dutt acknowledged at least one unnamed author whose *Easy Lessons on Money Matters* was the chief inspiration of his own book on wealth. On the other hand, Roychaudhury too spoke of Whatley's *Money Matters* as the primary text, of which his book was an inspired translation. It is reasonable to assume that both Dutt and Roychaudhury were talking about a book by Richard Whatley, the Drummond Professor of Political Economy at Oxford University in the 1830s, who later became the archbishop of Dublin and took an effort to popularise political economy

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. i. In his preface, Roychaudhury mentioned only the surnames of his idols. One cannot rule out the possibility of James Mill being the author mentioned as 'Mill', but from the content and organisation of the book, it may be presumed that it was his son John Stuart who was referred to in Roychaudhury's preface. Similarly, it is only a hypothesis that the 'Fawcett' mentioned in the same preface was Millicent Fawcett, and not her husband Henry, the blind author from Cambridge. Both Henry and Millicent brought out their works within a span of seven years—the husband's *Manual of Political Economy* was published in 1863, and the wife's *Political Economy for Beginners* in 1870. However, the latter work gained more popularity as a school textbook in English academic circles, and was closer to Roychaudhury's work in treatment of the subject matter.

⁶⁷ Mukhurji, *Arthaniti o Arthavyavahara*, pp. i–ii.

among the poor and children in Victorian England. The complete title of his book specifically written for this purpose was *Easy Lessons on Money Matters for the Use of Young People*. First published in 1833, it became one of the most popular textbooks on political economy, and was included in school syllabi, first in his native Ireland, and then in England and many of its colonies.⁶⁸ The book happened to be a simplified version of his more academic *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy* (1831) which was, in its own right, a strange and unorthodox text on the subject.

Richard Whately was born in 1787. He was the youngest of the nine children of Reverend Joseph Whately, the vicar of Widford.⁶⁹ In 1830, Richard was appointed as the Drummond Professor of Political Economy at the Oxford University, and the next year, he took over as the archbishop of Dublin. In the same year, he published a monograph containing his class lectures at Oxford, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, 'in compliance with the requisition of the Statute relative to the Professorship of Political-Economy, that one Lecture at least shall be published every year'.⁷⁰ In 1833, Whately, now a commissioner of national education in Ireland, wished to write a book for children to disseminate the theories of political economy, which, for him, held a sacred position as a true doctrine of human emancipation.⁷¹ The book that came out of this desire was called *Easy Lessons on Money Matters for the Use of Young People* and became a vehicle of spreading simplified economic truth among the children, the colonised and the colonised children. In the preface of the third edition of his textbook (1836), Whately explained that the lessons 'were designed and have, on trial, been found adapted, for the instruction of young persons from about eight years of age, and upwards'.⁷² The training in political economy from such a tender age was absolutely essential, as

[m]any, even of what are called the educated classes, grow up with indistinct, or erroneous, and practically mischievous views on these subjects; and the prejudices any one may have casually imbibed, are often hard to be removed, at a time of life when he imagines his education to be completed.⁷³

Undoubtedly, Whately's motto of 'catch them young' was enthusiastically shared by the authors of the Bengali textbooks, perhaps with different intellectual motivations and contrary political agendas. It is important, therefore, to locate the marks of these displacements that might have informed the translations of Whately's

⁶⁸ Goldstrom, 'Richard Whately and Political Economy in Schoolbooks, 1833–80', pp. 131–46.

⁶⁹ Whately, *Life and Correspondence of Richard Whately*, p. 1. Ironically fitting for the author of a popular textbook, his was not a very happy childhood, as the memoir written by his daughter discloses: 'In disposition he was shy, timid, and retiring; he knew little of the high spirits and playfulness of early childhood, and the society of children of his own age was actually distasteful for him' (*ibid.*, p. 4).

⁷⁰ Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, p. v.

⁷¹ Goldstrom, 'Richard Whately and Political Economy in Schoolbooks', p. 133.

⁷² Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, p. v.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. vi.

textbook. In the rest of this section, we shall delve into detailed reading of the works that claimed to have been inspired by *Easy Lessons on Money Matters* and see how the ‘indistinct, or erroneous, and practically mischievous views’ on political economy were sought out and corrected in the context of nineteenth-century Bengal.

Dhanabidhan, the self-professedly original attempt at popularising the science of political economy among Bengali children started with a proclamation of the importance of *dhan* in every aspect of life.⁷⁴ For its author, Gopaul Chunder Dutt, the Bengali word *dhan* simply referred to the accumulated stock of currency money that facilitated exchange and relieved people from the complications of barter. In the same breath, he also propagated the advantages of social division of labour, which was an indicator of progress for him. Had everybody started to produce everything they needed on their own, Dutt conjectured, they would have to incur great hardship. The only people who still practiced the vintage custom of barter were the savages, and they lived in dire poverty and distress:

For that, their condition is even worse than the poorest of the poor. They dress in animal-skin or bark. They live in tiny, ugly huts. Their empty boats are made of tree-trunks. Useless bows and arrows are their means of hunting.⁷⁵

Dutt’s description of the hapless savages came from Whately’s account of the same; there was also a hint of similarity with James Mill’s theory of progress as articulated in his *Elements of Political Economy*, which might have left a lasting influence on Whately. In Mill’s account, labour could not be conceived in isolation; it was always in conjunction with capital in real life. The ‘naked powers’ of labour—the category in its state of nature—could only be traced back to the speculations about the origin of the society.⁷⁶ Dutt’s chapter on wealth contained a ‘weakness’ in the mercantile confusion between wealth (*dhan*) and money (*artha*). Rajkrishna Roychaudhury, in his *Artha Byabahaar*, took great care to allay the same confusion by employing a more formal language of analysis: ‘Generally, people confuse between money and wealth. Wealth does not comprise only money. Rice, flour, bed, chair, paper, book, rope, gold, jute, clothes, etc., whatever can be exchanged for another object is wealth.’⁷⁷ Exchangeability, according to Roychaudhury, was the most essential determinant of wealth. But this, he clarified, was a relative concept. There were things in this world which might not be described as wealth, since they were available in abundance to be consumed by everybody. But in certain situations,

⁷⁴ Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁶ ‘When the savage climbs a tree, and gathers the fruit; when he ensnares a wild beast, or beats it down with a club, he may be considered as operating with his naked powers, and without the aid of anything, to which the name of Capital can properly be annexed’ [Mill in Winch (ed.), *James Mill: Selected Economic Writings*, p. 213].

⁷⁷ Roychaudhury, *Artha Byabahaar*, p. 1.

when they were short in supply, they would turn into wealth by being inducted in the mechanism of voluntary exchange.⁷⁸

The sections on *mulya* or value in both Dutt's and Roychaudhury's textbooks exhibited a remarkable innovation. They started their discussions with the paradox of value: why some objects, quite useless in our everyday life, like the precious metals gold and silver, were perceived to be more valuable than the quintessentially useful objects like water. None of the authors addressed this question directly, or attempted to deduce a stable source of value in a commodity. Dutt explained that metals like gold or silver were more expensive than others, because, first of all, they were scarce in nature, and second, they were desired by us for their aesthetic appeal.⁷⁹ Few pages later, he worked out a set of questions to elaborate on the subject. One of these questions read: 'Why is a silver plate more valuable than a spade?'⁸⁰ Dutt's response to this apparently ordinary enquiry contained an ingenious example which was shared by Roychaudhury in his own chapter on value. While critiquing labour theory of value (without mentioning Ricardo's name) based on the presumption that people worked harder knowing in advance that the produce of that labour would be compensated more liberally, Roychaudhury came up with an atypical explanation:

The fishermen take on a lot of trouble and hard work to catch fish; but, if working all night, a fisherman is able to catch only one fish, and somebody else, with same labour, catches a thousand of them, the first person's one fish cannot be sold at the price of the second person's whole catch. In this case, both of them worked equally hard, but their fishes were not sold at the same price.⁸¹

'Therefore, it is settled,' he assured his readers, 'that no object derives value because it is produced by labour. People work hard to produce it only because they know it is valuable.'⁸² The same principle was reiterated with a different example in Nrisinha Mukhurji's *Arthaniti o Arthavyavahara*. Describing scarcity and desirability as the chief determinants of value, Mukhurji went on to correct the 'inaccurate' view that 'value in a commodity is an outcome of labour'.⁸³ But to prove his point, unlike Roychaudhury and Dutt, Mukhurji invoked the popular illustration of a pin factory managed by the principle of division of labour:

⁷⁸ 'Those, who dive under water to collect pearls, have to rise up from time to time to take breath; if, by any means, they are provided with air under water, so that they can breathe even there, they will happily pay for it, no doubt' [*ibid.*, p. 2].

⁷⁹ Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. 18.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸¹ Roychaudhury, *Artha Byabaha*, p. 17. Both Dutt and Roychaudhury use almost identical language; it is evident that they have picked up the example from the same book.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸³ Mukhurji, *Arthaniti o Arthavyavahara*, p. 152.

We have earlier determined what are the advantages of the division of labour; as a result of division of labour, in a pin factory, 500/600 pins are produced by a whole day's labour of only one person. If somebody keeps on producing pins without taking anybody's help, he will make only 10 pins by a whole day's work. One person in the factory can produce 500/600 pins a day, and if he works without taking help, only 10 pins can be produced by a whole day's labour. Equal labour is applied in both cases, but the value of 500 pins is never equal to the value of 10 pins.⁸⁴

'If labour was a determinant of value, equal labour would have generated equal value in a commodity,' Mukhurji concluded.⁸⁵ Both examples had an interesting implication. All the texts held pricing of the output of labour prior to the act of labour itself. By value, the three writers referred to exchange value, since, in their definitions of wealth, exchange was the only condition required for its existence. What was novel in Mukhurji's illustration was the way the principle of social division of labour was invoked and connected to the question of determination of value in a commodity. What was implicit in Dutt and Roychaudhury surfaced in Mukhurji—the relation between the economic practice of exchange and the idea of the social generated through the division of labour: if pricing of a commodity was prior to its production, the coherence of the economic system depended on a fully formed theory of the social that would envelop the working of the system and ensure its internal stability. A significant point of departure from Dutt and Roychaudhury was that the example of the pin factory implied an industrial society where the division of the workforce led to socialisation of both labour and capital—a point missing in the example of the fishermen. The comparison, in that example, was between two individuals, each of whom had equal chance of catching more fish than the other. In case of the pin factory, a single worker could never match the productivity of a member of the workforce governed by the principle of division of labour. In correspondence, accumulation of capital as a precondition of industrial development would also be accelerated as compared to the attempts by the solitary worker outside the workforce, however earnest be those attempts. Whereas Dutt and Roychaudhury rested their faith in the definitive role played by division of labour in social progress, Mukhurji took one step ahead by forging a determinate relation between the two: unlike in the earlier accounts, the guarantee of progress would not be compromised by the uncertainty of labour in its state of nature. The savage, alone in his hunting, rowing and climbing of trees, had to join the workforce in the pin factory and work hand in hand with others to manufacture as many pins as possible for the sake of civilisation.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Both Dutt and Roychaudhury claimed to have translated the treatise for children written by Richard Whately. The example of the competing fishermen was also taken from the same source.⁸⁶ Whately's chapter in *Easy Lessons* also pointed to desirability and scarcity as the two determinants of value in an exchangeable commodity.⁸⁷ Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley argue in their work on the reception of political economy in colonial Ireland, 'Whately did not subscribe to the conventional classical theories of value either in the "cost-of-production" tradition of Adam Smith or in the "labour theory of value" tradition of David Ricardo.'⁸⁸ His view resembled the one 'held by Whately's friend and predecessor at Oxford, Nassau Senior', who wanted to resolve the paradox of value in terms of the relationship between supply and demand.⁸⁹ Whately's theoretical predilections seem to be consistent with this argument. His lectures at the Oxford University, which were compiled and published as a monograph, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy* (1831), were unique in many ways. In the very first of them, Whately expressed, with genuine intensity, a desire for changing the name of the discipline from Political Economy to Catallactics, or the Science of Exchanges.⁹⁰ In defence of this extraordinary demand, he advanced his definition of man:

'An animal that makes *Exchanges*:' no other, even of those animals which in other points make the nearest approach to rationality, having, to all appearance, the latest notion of bartering, or in any way exchanging one thing for another.⁹¹

'And it is in this point of view alone that man is contemplated by Political-Economy', he asserted at the end.⁹² It was not unusual to delineate the scope of the discipline around the notion of exchange. Millicent Fawcett's *Political Economy for Beginners*, another influence for the nineteenth-century Bengali textbooks, defined political economy as 'the science which investigates the nature of wealth, and the laws which govern its production, exchange and distribution'.⁹³ Right away, in the next passage, she defined wealth as 'anything which has an exchange value'.⁹⁴

⁸⁶ Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, p. 32. In fact, in Whately's *Introductory Lectures*, a similar example was given to explain the difference between essential and accidental circumstances of an economic entity. 'Now it is true,' he wrote, '*it so happens*, by the appointment of Providence, that valuable articles are, in almost all instances, obtained by Labour; but still this is an accidental, not an essential circumstance' (Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, p. 252; author's emphases). He tried to justify his argument by giving an example: 'It is not that pearls fetch a high price because men have dived for them; but on the contrary, men dive for them because they fetch a high price' (*ibid.*, p. 253; author's emphasis).

⁸⁷ Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, p. 29.

⁸⁸ Boylan and Foley, *Political Economy and Colonial Ireland*, p. 82.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁹⁰ Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7. Author's emphasis.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Fawcett, *Political Economy for Beginners*, p. 1.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

The distinctiveness of Whately's appeal, however, could be sought in his conviction that, from the perspective of political economy, the core of humanity should be postulated on the act of exchange alone. He believed that humanity without this aptitude was rather dispensable from the universe of political economy. Had there existed any other species in the absence of humans with an aptitude for exchange, Whately would not have hesitated to accept it as the most suitable protagonist of the economic discourse. But that species too must never live alone in an island. A lonely soul was not good enough to receive political economy's attention. 'A man, for instance, in a desert island,' Whately wrote, 'like Alex Selkirke, or the personage his adventures are supposed to have suggested, Robinson Crusoe, is in a situation of which Political-Economy takes no cognizance.'⁹⁵ Even if he was endowed with a lot of resources necessary for his own survival, until and unless there arrived more settlers with whom he could engage in exchange activities, he should not be treated as a real subject of political economy. As a discipline that studied and analysed the beings of exchange, political economy needed to locate those beings, human or nonhuman, within a social conglomerate. But a mere collective of people, without having any connection or association premised on exchange, did not constitute the society; it had to presuppose a properly structured mechanism of exchange.

The only question remained was what would happen to economic policy—the principles of taxation and governmental responsibilities of providing public goods, which were held to operate beyond the jurisdiction of exchange. Whately's response was once again unique:

I had not thought it necessary to observe that, in speaking of exchanges, I did not mean to limit myself to *voluntary* exchanges; – those in which the whole transaction takes place with the full consent of both parties to all the terms of it. Most exchanges, indeed, are of this character; but the case of taxation, – the revenue levied from the subject in return for the protection afforded by the sovereign, constitutes a remarkable exception; the payment being compulsory, and not adjusted by agreement with the payer. Still, whether in any case it be *fairly* and reasonably adjusted, or the contrary, it is not the less an exchange. And it is worth remarking, that it is just so far forth as it is an exchange, – so far forth as protection, whether adequate or not, is afforded in exchange for this payment, – that the payment itself comes under the cognizance of this science.⁹⁶

The chapter on taxes in *Easy Lessons* captured the essence of the same argument in a brief sentence: 'Taxes are the price people pay to be governed and protected.'⁹⁷ By appropriating the taxes levied by the government—the revenue that it collected

⁹⁵ Whately, *Introductory Lectures on Political Economy*, p. 8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10n–11n. Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁷ Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, p. 66.

by offering protection for life and property of the citizens—within the fold of an exchange regime governed by the mechanism of pricing, Whatley left no rational outside to his analytic system of mutually beneficial reciprocation. The government could no longer impose a sovereign claim on the life or the wealth of its citizens; it had to provide a service in exchange. It was bound to be responsible for the benefit of the public by the same logic of exchange practices operating in the other parts of the economic domain. As a result, the question of political representation was incorporated within the domain of economic rationality. Roychaudhury's *Artha Byabahar* took a clue from this argument to propose its own rationale of taxation:

The taxes we pay to the king can be considered a special type of wage. Like the worker helps with the production of wealth, the king sustains it by protecting our life and property. Taxes are paid as the wage or value [*betan ba mulya*] of that service [*sahayata*].⁹⁸

However, the discourse on socialisation premised on exchangeability took a curious turn in the same chapter on taxation in *Artha Byabahar*. As we have seen earlier, in the textbooks inspired by Whately, the Bengali writers adopted a theory of value which would presume that pricing of a commodity (or a service) took place before its production. If taxes were integrated within the same mechanism, the value of protection offered by the government should be known in advance to its citizens. As in the former context, here also the valuation of the service would follow the logic of socialisation, which was a necessary condition for any sort of exchange to take place. As we shall see now, the Bengali writers also tried to internalise this logic and came up with various strategies to the effect of imagining a world of systemic interventions.

Familiar Illustrations, Familial Illustrations

Roychaudhury divided his *Artha Byabahar* into two separate sections: the first explored the principles of production, and the second clarified the laws of distribution. Most probably, he was following the dictum by John Stuart Mill, who in his *Principles of Political Economy*, argued for a dissociation between the natural principles of production and the institutional laws of distribution. The first chapter in the second section in *Artha Byabahar*, which narrated the general principles of distribution or *dhanabistruti*, recapitulated the same rule of separation:

The laws of distribution of wealth are considerably different in nature from those of its production. The laws of production depends on the natural [*naisargik*] mutual relationship between land, labour, and capital; if the relation remains constant, no change in the results can be observed. The laws of distribution are

⁹⁸ Roychaudhury, *Artha Byabahār*, p. 113.

not governed by any natural relationship as such; it is established by the will of people.⁹⁹

How the will was turned into practice was determined by human nature, the state of knowledge, and social bindings. 'But how that will is controlled', Roychaudhury wrote with some caution, 'does not fall under the purview of political economy; the task of the discipline is to explore the consequences of this will.'¹⁰⁰ He concluded by proposing a distinction between practices governed by local customs (*deshachar*), and those by the spirit of competition (*pratijogita*). He added further, 'If rent, wages, and profit are determined by customs, no general law of distribution can be obtained. Only competition induces general law.'¹⁰¹ In the following pages, he promised, only those practices that were governed by the spirit of competition would be considered.

But he could not keep his promise. In the section on wages, his focus remained on its determination within a competitive structure. Thus, he proposed to deduce the average rate of wage by dividing the portion of capital kept aside for payments to workers by the number of people seeking employment. The advantage of competition was described enthusiastically: 'Suppose, the wage for a particular job is fixed at fifty rupees; when the number of workers suitable for the job increases, the competition among them enhances the chance of finding the best person.'¹⁰² It might bring down the rate of wage as well, Roychaudhury pointed out, as more people would now fight with each other for the same number of jobs. At this point, Roychaudhury, quite unexpectedly, filed a caveat. Faced by competition for acquiring a particular job, he observed, some people offered to work at a wage lower than the competitive rate. The employer might have profited from this, but the prestige of the occupation suffered and the quality of the workers went down. 'Thus the teaching job has become disgraceful at many aided English and Vernacular schools,' he lamented with some concern.¹⁰³ 'For one, the teachers of these schools work at a very low wage,' he continued, 'and then, the chances of getting a better job elsewhere are quite negligible. Hence, they lack all the qualities for which one is supposed to enjoy occupational prestige.'¹⁰⁴ In a footnote, he elaborated on the qualities that one should possess to enjoy such prestige:

In the past, the teachers of this country used to teach free of cost. Knowledge was the indicator of prestige then. That time is gone now; now the high-low of wages is the only mark of honour. Even if a thousand rupee earning

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

professor is less erudite than a vegetables eating teacher, he will be considered more honourable.¹⁰⁵

Although he assured his readers that he would concentrate on the naturally determined principles of distribution, Roychaudhury had to deviate from his original plan. But he did not actually criticise the law of competitive wage; it was rather the tendency of abusing the spirit of competition by accepting a wage lower than the natural rate which lessened the social prestige of the Bengali schoolteachers.

For Roychaudhury, therefore, the relation between the universal principles of political economy and the local illustrations was one of contestation, but the premise of that contest was decided in the mediations between the ‘natural’ determination of the equilibrium wage and its ‘social’ application (aberration or assimilation, depending on the specific context) in the world of everyday transactions. The apparent anomaly in the system also arose from the discursive contradiction between Whatley’s insistence on defining political economy as a science of exchange and Mill’s advice on the separation between the principles of production and distribution. The specificity of Roychaudhury’s illustration, hence, must be sought in the anxieties of influence—the contradictory impulses and meandering, non-linear trajectories of the history of political economy in the colony—that facilitated these moments of mediations and translations.

In Roychaudhury’s appraisal of the law of competitive wage, we see an attempt to raise the question of discontent with the universal principles. Apart from the apparent inequality between erudite teachers and rich professors, he found out an instance of the same discontent in the private space of familial responsibility. In his chapter on taxes, Roychaudhury criticised income tax as a flawed and unjust means of extracting money from the poor citizens.¹⁰⁶ He reported that, normally, citizens with an annual income of ₹500 and more were taxed 4 per cent of their total income. ‘But an annual income of five hundred rupees is not enough for our families,’¹⁰⁷ Roychaudhury claimed in another footnote to his chapter:

In our country, a family does not merely consist of husband and wife with their little son and daughter. Father, mother, brother, sister, nephew, and their children, aunt, her husband and children, uncle and his children, and many more live with each other in the same family; and generally, they depend on the income of a single man. Hence, with only five hundred rupees, they spend their days in utter distress.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Roychaudhury, *Artha Byabahār*, pp. 121–23.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

The same example of an Indian family, larger in size than its English counterpart and burdened with the obligation to provide sustenance to distant relations, appeared in Nrisinha Mukhurji's chapter on taxes as well.¹⁰⁹ Mukhurji offered a practical solution to this crisis: 'It seems rational to exempt from taxes the average income with which all families can make their necessary expenditures, and to impose them on the rest of it.'¹¹⁰

The entity of the family constituted a sign of difference from the British conditions, on the basis of which, the authors suspected, such obtuse policies were designed. The familiar reality of the illustration was contrasted with the received wisdom of political economy, but not as radically as to reject the theory or to abdicate it from the domain of regular transactions. What was, however, apparent from Mukhurji's argument in his chapter was that the intervention by the government must follow the logic of equilibrium in the goods market to its perfection: first, the average expenditure of an Indian family was calculated, and then it was equated with the average income of a family person. The equilibrium of demand (expressed in expenditure) and supply (supported by average income) had to be linked with the law of progressive taxation where the rate of income-tax would be determined in course of several voluntary and involuntary exchanges between the citizens and the state. The mechanism of exchange was the omnipresent foundation of all economic activities. It extended its control to envelop the system in two ways: one, by encapsulating the logic of average income and expenditure, and two, by suggesting a true apparatus of governmental intervention in the form of an appropriate income tax. It provided a context of socialisation which was embroiled in the notion of appropriateness of the taxes: the structure of taxation in India was supposed to be different from the one in England, as the social institution of family was construed differently in the two countries. The appropriate tax policy would have to incorporate the exchange mechanism and the sign of difference simultaneously, opening up the possibility of a translation. The translation was imperative—and was a political project as well—which sought to address and assuage the asymmetries between the languages of abstraction and dissemination.

Incidentally, the simultaneity of the attempts to acknowledge and resolve the moments of difference was well accounted in Gopaul Chunder Dutt's textbook. He also invoked the quintessential figure of the householder whose happiness in life would depend on his acquisition and management of wealth by receiving proper education in the principles of political economy. 'Since all the children of today will be more or less caught up in family (*sangsar*) matters tomorrow,' Dutt repeated after Whately, 'they must start learning the subject of such great importance from the very childhood.'¹¹¹ At the same time, he introduced the term *jagat-sangsar*

¹⁰⁹ Mukhurji, *Arthanūti o Arthavyavahara*, p. 219.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

¹¹¹ Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. i.

(the universe) as the abstract universal space, where the principles of political economy would hold true in each instance of its application: ‘This universe can very well be described as an entity enmeshed in wealth.’¹¹² The alternate use of the word ‘sangsar’ in both senses of the family and the universe permitted Dutt to shuttle back and forth between the concrete and the abstract, and to avail a sort of openness in the text. In Roychaudhury, the two domains were indeed spatially distributed across the page between the main text and the footnote: both the illustrations of the wise but poor teacher and the overpopulated family were placed in the footnotes, while the more stringent definitions and principles were laid out and discussed in the main text. Mukhurji’s textbook had the illustrations printed in a smaller font than the one used to narrate the abstract principles. All three of them, as we can see, adopted a range of textual and visual techniques to demarcate and flex the boundary between abstract principles and concrete illustrations, between natural laws and social exceptions. Mediations between these two domains produced a manual of socialisation in the colony; the translation of the universal into the vernacular contributed to its complex designs. In the next section, therefore, we shall see how the resourceful deployment of translation delineated the socialisation of political economy in the late decades of the nineteenth century.

Exchanging Words and Things

Gopaul Dutt’s *Dhanabidhan* contained one exclusive feature in relation to the other texts. It was the only book that did not claim to have assembled materials from more than one source, and identified Whately’s *Easy Lessons on Money Matters* as the sole inspiration. We have found in the last section that he took the problematic of translation quite seriously. He came up with a non-identical translation of Whately’s book and thought of including local illustrations for easy comprehension by children. Some of these illustrations reveal quite successfully the anxieties of influence that was shared by the other translators as well. At the end of the first chapter in his *Easy Lessons*, Whately explained the advantage of dispensing money over specific goods in charitable enterprises:

for a poor man may chance to be in want of something which I may not have to spare. But if I give him money, he can get just what he wants for that: whether bread, or cloths, or coals, or books.¹¹³

To emphasise this point with an example, he referred to the scriptures and pointed out that it would have been quite difficult for the Greek Christians to help the saints in Judea during the great famine, if they had not decided to send money

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, p. 15.

instead of corn.¹¹⁴ The same argument was repeated in Dutt's translation, although accompanied with a different illustration. After explaining the advantage of sparing money instead of material goods to help the poor, Dutt got rid of the scriptural reference and replaced it with a recent incident in the history of his own country:

After the mutiny of the sepoy, in the year 1267 [1860], when there was a great famine in the north-western part of India, our countrymen and people from Britain collected money from the public and sent it to the affected people for relief. Had they sent wheat instead of money, there would have been unnecessary difficulties. Apart from that, the people of Britain and we might have had to incur great trouble for scarcity of wheat. But sending money instead of wheat relieved them from all this pain and we too did not have to suffer from any trouble.¹¹⁵

It was not the only instance of replacement. In the first lines of the same book, a similar replacement occurred when certain goods familiar in the British conditions like bread, meat and beer were traded for those which were held to be more recognisable by the Indian readers—wheat, wood and salt.¹¹⁶ As it were, the specific passage and the household items in Whately were untranslatable and had to be substituted by another passage describing a more familiar event from recent time and more easily identifiable objects respectively. By Dutt's own admission, it was a strategy to familiarise the Bengali students with obscure principles of the discipline, to help them comprehend the true implications of the laws of political economy. Dutt imagined a positively direct relationship between familiarity and comprehension—a relationship that would be later cultivated in the textbooks by Roychaudhury and Mukhurji more candidly as well as confidently. Translation, the replacement of one word by another, equivalent and equally befitting the purpose of making meaning, was, in this story, a useful means to conceive and conduct this relationship.

In his famous essay 'The Task of the Translator', Walter Benjamin contemplates on the impossibility of translation in a mournful language.¹¹⁷ 'The traditional concepts in any discussion of translations', Benjamin explains, 'are fidelity and license.'¹¹⁸ To be in complete fidelity with the original, a work of translation needs to reproduce the same text word by word, leaving the syntax intact, only replacing the original words with equivalent words in the language of translation. However, Benjamin submits, 'A literal rendering of the syntax completely demolishes the theory of reproduction of meaning and is a direct threat to comprehensibility.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

¹¹⁵ Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ Whately, *Easy Lessons on Money Matters*, pp. 13–14; Dutt, *Dhanabidhan*, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', pp. 69–82.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

If circulation of meaning happens to be the chief intention of the translator, she fails every time by being in fidelity with the original. On the other hand, a good translation will be that which is by definition a bad translation—a wilful disregard of the principle of syntactic equivalence.¹²⁰ In reality, no translator prefers fidelity over meaning; nobody will jeopardise the chain of thought that is supposed to be conveyed by adhering to the spirit of literalness. Instead, they try to maintain a balance—a state of equilibrium—between fidelity and meaning, a compromise that leans towards comprehensive understanding rather than literal perfection. In all this, the notion of meaning goes unnoticed, untroubled and unexplored. What is the standard of meaning? What are the rules which dictate that one set of meaning is more suitable or justified than the others? What is the economy of meaning? More importantly, what is its political economy? I suspect that without asking these questions one cannot possibly theorise the authorial impetus of ‘bad translation’—the licence to change the original, to exchange it for something better, something more suited to the need of an interpretive cause.

In the introductory section, I have invoked Lydia Liu’s concept of translation as exchange of meaning-value and indicated that, in colonial Bengal, the act of translation of economic principles presumed an analogy between translation and exchange of commodities. In the previous sections, we have seen how the Bengali textbooks in the nineteenth century, following Richard Whately’s footsteps, conceived a form of socialisation of political economy where the society itself was nothing but a collection of beings of exchange. The drive to familiarise the discipline brought with it the uncomfortable dissonance between universal principles and local illustrations, but this conflict could be resolved within the paradigm of an exchange-based sociality. For this to happen, one needed to identify some sort of ‘foreignness’—a non-use-value, so to speak—in the illustrations from the other, foreign context and exchange those illustrations with those from her own familiar circumstances, nonetheless without challenging the foundational principle of exchange as that allowed such transfers in the first place. A theory of translation, in this case, calls for a theory of the social as well.

If we turn to the acts of translation in Dutt, we shall see that the issue at stake was the realisation of foreignness of illustrations from the original text, but more importantly, it was also a question of socialisation of political economy which allowed such realisations. As we know, in Whately, and subsequently in Dutt and other translator-writers of Bengali textbooks, the exchange practices had to presuppose an already instituted social structure which would decide the price of an object prior to its production. Hence, the social emerged as a domain of pre-valuation—a site where the equilibrium received its stability. It was the same site which actualised

¹²⁰ ‘[N]o case for literalness can be based on a desire to retain the meaning,’ Benjamin explicates. ‘Meaning is served far better—and literalness and language far worse—by the unrestrained license of bad translators’ (*ibid.*).

the norms of equivalence, both economic and linguistic, and reinstated the shared faith in the universality of political economy.

This point needs elaboration. The cultural specificity and the moral stigma attached to beer and meat prompted Dutt to replace them with salt and wood (*laban* and *kashtha*, respectively, in Bengali). Going by the typical logic of semantic equivalence, this was a disastrously bad translation—a blatant misuse of the so-called unrestrained licence. But if we agree to consider the analogy between translation and exchange, the equivalence between these radically incommensurable words seemed to be established within the same framework of socialisation that brought together a lot of people in one place and facilitated exchange of things among them. Hence, like in the cases of economic production, where the price of the commodity was already known to the producer, the meaning-value produced during translation was determined prior to the act of translation itself. The equivalence between beer and salt, whether in the economic or in the linguistic domain, was socially constituted, and the social in question was the network of individuals, objects and relationships that the universally valid science of wealth deemed fit for its own sustenance. In this framework, the idea of familiarity did not have a conceptual autonomy; it depended on myriad negotiations and overlaps between the simultaneous processes of economic and linguistic transactions which sought to realise the ‘foreignness’ in the other. It was the coincidence of translation and exchange, conceptually and in practice, which inaugurated the material dynamics of the vernacularisation of political economy by staging a framework of equivalence of illustrations.

In the other translations by Roychaudhury and Mukhurji, we witness an extension of this framework being used to introduce a theory of ‘vernacular’ intervention. The agency of intervention rested on the government, but the norms of these interventions were spelt out in the language of the trusted science. In Gopaul Dutt’s textbook, the encounter we had with the colonial government was short-lived, explaining the advantage of charity in money instead of material goods. There we sense a hint of a concept of governance based on the knowledge of political economy. In the original illustration from the New Testament, Whately tried to translate the wisdom of the church in the idioms of his science of exchange. In Dutt’s version, the spirit to reinterpret the events from the past in new light of an emerging discipline was retained, but the past itself had gone through an act of translation where the authority of the church was substituted by that of the government. The equivalence between the church and the government would not have happened if there was no theory of the social which could empower Dutt to replace the Biblical fable with a factual, lived narrative of a recent political upheaval. In the later works, it became a common practice to follow up a principle of political economy with an example from the lived space of everyday transactions—sometimes to substantiate the principles, but often to suggest a few modifications as well. After Dutt, the family space became an increasingly common example where such recommendations were expected to come alive. It was the same space where negotiations between the abstract and the

concrete presaged numerous intimate encounters between the *sangsar* governed by the logic of exchange and the *jagat-sangsar* enmeshed in wealth.

Riding on these observations, we can now come back to the question of ‘familiarity’ in the University Commission’s Report cited in the beginning of this paper. It was a precise moment of interaction between the colonial state and the pedagogical sites of political economy. The urge to delimit and reform these sites was informed by the urgency to incorporate the logic of familiarity and comprehensibility so that a proper training in the economic discipline could be mastered. One needs to situate this urgency in its historical context, given the contours of the vernacular intervention as discussed above. In a sense, this intervention was also in the field of experience, distributed over the longitude and the latitude of discursive contestations realised in terms of the distinctions between the concrete and the abstract. The vernacularisation of political economy, thus, deserves our attention, not only to identify the voices of dissent, but also to frame and analyse the co-occurrence of translation and exchange as a historical context of colonial power in the nineteenth century.

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