

introduction of her meticulously placed argument. The maxim could be: *The knowledge of the world is complementary, but the approaches onto that are often contradictory, or at least they are in dissent even if the form is in consensus.* This maxim would postulate that it ultimately comes down to the 'approach' one chooses to apply in dealing with one's subject. *Approach* in the classical sense of the term means the path laid down by our forefathers. Hence it always appears to be safest if one walks the laid down path without deviating or questioning it. In this context Busch's argument lays bare that the scientific approach of the West is markedly different from what comprises a scientific approach in the East, at least in India. Contrary to the Greek objectivity, Indian thought subscribes to subjectivity. Objectivity believes in 'the' truth, and not 'your' or 'my' truth, whereas subjectivity helps accommodate different attitudes and imaginations.

Busch, who teaches Hindi and Indian Literature at Columbia University, has written and published extensively on Hindi literary culture of the Mughal period, which she has often referred to as early modern Hindi literature and intellectual history, concentrating thereby on the literary and intellectual life of seventeenth-century sub-imperial Indian courts. The literary-philosophical thought that was being formed during the period covered by *Poetry of Kings*, though greatly influenced by both the Hindu and Islamic lore, was neither purely Hindu nor purely Islamic. It gave rise to a number of analogously developing religio-intellectual social movements, whose main aim was to provide solace to the common man and promote tolerance. The movement with predominantly mystic Islamic elements came to be known as Sufism, and that with more devotional, Hindu-reformist elements, came to be known as Bhakti movement in Indian literatures. But Braj writings, often patronised by the local royal courts, were also employed to celebrate victory, as Busch's many examples illustrate. The first chapter of the book deals with Braj Poet Keshavdas's poetry in relation to the Bhakti literature which is more or less prevalent in all parts of India, but is predominantly a northern movement. There were other lesser known, though not less important, religious motivations emanating in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir, which are brought to light in *Poetry of Kings*.

The author further progresses like a careful traveller in an unknown country and tries to figure out how to give form to a literary epoch, rooted deeply both in devotion and indigenous literary craft. A compact discussion of the aesthetic background of Riti poetry, such as Alankarshastra, sets the pace. Her detailed

deliberations of Braj historiography, Riti literature at the Mughal Court, Riti literature at the Rajput Courts, logically pave way for the concluding chapter on the Fate of Riti Literature in Colonial India. The manner, in which she pursues her passion, while letting the literary works arise from a virtual oblivion, is phenomenal. In a span of six chapters Busch has discovered defining tools of a literary culture and shaped them into a persuasive work of art which is bound to go a long way to draw the attention of the English reading intelligentsia for greater engagement with India's literary wealth, the study of which is now gathering momentum.

Historically the book is organized around the complex literary socialization of India's pre-modern society, which was often referred to as feudal. However, there are a few problems with the terminology used in the book. The use of the term "classical" pertaining to a period literature, for example, is not without problems. The use of the term *Classical Hindi* in relation to Riti or Braj poses more serious problems. As we all know, every language has regional variations. So Busch has chosen to tread a path which is full of thorns. She has to deal with the subject matter of a period in India which is so complex that many a scholar would prefer to simply seal it in the way the ill-fated reactors in Chernobyl were sealed, once and for all. But, then, art isn't a static thing. Let the debate and discussion go on.

RAJVINDER SINGH
National Fellow
IIAS, Shimla

Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom And Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture*, New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2012, pp. 212, price not mentioned.

The present collection of seven essays explores the making of modernity in Bengali culture through the examination of a variety of examples – some unusual, some domestic, some taken from 19th century daily urban life, and some from today's literary criticism looked at through an unconventional prism. The author, who is a fellow with the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, has traversed a wide area ranging from Bengali eating habits under the impact of colonial culture to Bengali poetry's changing response to that culture, from Bengali drawing room style to the Bengali interaction with the Anglo-Indian community (otherwise known as Eurasian, in the 19th century).

The initial search for modernity among the 19th century young educated Bengalis was, curiously enough, marked

by the choice of a particular cuisine – roast beef ! In a peculiar intermeshing, beef became the symbol of Western superiority over Indians, the consumption of which was supposed to make Indians both modern and acquire physical prowess, which in its turn would equip their nationalist ideology with enough strength to drive out the British from their soil. Chaudhuri deals with this interesting logic (which inspires the title of her book) in her first essay – ‘Young India: A Bengal Eclogue’; or Meat-eating, Race, and Reform in a Colonial Poem.’ The poem referred to above was composed by an Englishman in 19th century Calcutta, Henry Meredith Parker, lampooning the group called ‘Young Bengal’, who were students of his friend, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, another young European who taught at the city’s Hindu College. Under his tutelage, these Bengali students discovered the new ideological concepts of freedom and nationalism that were sweeping contemporary Europe, and were inspired to launch an onslaught, often aggressive, on the symbols of their own conservative and restrictive Hindu religious order. Along with serious polemical articles in their English and Bengali journals, challenging the orthodoxy of the prevalent Hindu society, they also indulged in provocative acts to express their defiance of the norms of that society. Most of them came from upper caste Hindu society. While some openly denied the holy sanctity of the Ganga, others flung away the Brahminical thread (required to be carried around their shoulders) as a superstitious practice. The most extreme form of such defiance was the public demonstration of eating beef in Gol Dighee (known as College Square today) in the centre of Calcutta, bang opposite the Calcutta University. Beef was held repugnant by conservative Hindu society which worshipped the cow as a mother – *gau-mata*. The Young Bengal radicals thus chose the most vulnerable spot of the orthodox Hindus to attack their beliefs. Parker in his poem poked fun at such excessive demonstrations of these young Bengalis whom he caricatured as aping the English in their dress and behavior. But while Parker resorted to good humoured ridicule, half a century later his countryman Rudyard Kipling indulged in a vicious campaign against the educated Bengali class depicting them as an inferior species. Chaudhuri finds in this difference, “the deterioration of race relations between the coloniser and the colonised subject” that had taken place over the years.

A common character who walks through most of these essays is the young teacher Derozio, who had been celebrated by historians of nineteenth century Bengal as a revolutionary poet. Chaudhuri throws light on two

hitherto neglected sides of his thinking – first, his opposition to the ban on widow-burning “as he felt it hurt the strongly felt prejudices of the Hindu,” and secondly, his communal construction of the Muslim stereotype as the distrustful ‘other.’ In one essay, ‘An Ideology of Indianness,’ she points out that like many contemporary Bengali Hindu nationalist writers, Derozio also shared the belief that the pre-British period of Muslim rule in India was one of unmitigated tyranny. Chaudhuri takes up two of his poems – *The Ruins of Rajmahal* and *The Fakeer of Jungheera* – to illustrate the point, situating them in the framework of the well-known argument that “nationalism in India created a Hindu identity that constructed as its opposite, the Muslim as other.” Derozio reappears in the next essay – ‘The Politics of Naming’ – this time as a European citizen of Calcutta identifying himself with its native residents. Here the writer examines the various dimensions of a controversy that broke out in the Calcutta press in 1825 over some derogatory remarks made by a newspaper about the mixed race community that called itself by various appellations: Eurasian, Anglo-Indo-Briton, etc. Derozio preferred to call himself East Indian, thereby claiming to be a native of India due to his birth on its soil, and extending the claim to his identification with Indian nationalism (all the more striking since Derozio came from European parentage, his father being a Portuguese and his mother an Englishwoman). Following him, several liberal-minded Europeans born in India took up the appellation East Indian, trying to eradicate their differences from the mixed race Eurasians.

In another interesting essay (‘Three Poets in Search of History’), Chaudhuri situates Derozio (who wrote in English) in the company of two contemporary poets in Bengali – Ishwar Gupta and Anthony Firingi. But while Gupta was a thorough-bred Bengali writing in his own language, Anthony Firingi was a Portuguese who settled down in Bengal, learnt to speak Bengali and emerged as a famous *kobial* (composer and singer) in Bengali oral culture. Chaudhuri while examining the different notions of historicity that co-existed in the early part of 19th century Bengal, locates Derozio as a representative of the European romantic understanding of time and history as played out in memory (in his poems about ancient ruins); Ishwar Gupta as rooted to the indigenous tradition of a poetry of everyday life re-constructed in an urban modern environment; and Anthony Firingi as occupying a “space that questioned previously held beliefs and practices”, and representing a new public culture of the lower orders that was to be looked down upon both by the Derozians and the upper class Hindu

bhadraloks.

The essay 'Modernity at Home' is yet another attempt to explore modernity in another area of Bengali living - the emergence of the modern drawing room in upper class Bengali homes (with particular reference to the Tagore household) with the adoption Western décor and furniture, but indigenized by the use of native motifs and designs in curtains and cushions. What is missing in her essay however, is the domesticated modernity in the cramped one or two-roomed rented Bengali middle class households in apartments (known as *flat-baris*) that had emerged in Calcutta by the 1930s. In these households, the bedroom was turned into a drawing room in the evenings, with the newly introduced modern gadgets like the radio and gramophone entertaining both the residents and their guests, who shared the beds and a few skeletal wooden chairs that adorned those households - with of course the ubiquitous tea (which Chaudhuri mentions as another sign of westernized modernity) being served at every odd hour!

In the next essay 'Refashioning Milton', Chaudhuri juxtaposes the modernist reading of Milton with that of the 19th century Bengali poet Madhusudan Dutta in the present day, when comparisons are often sought to be made between Milton's tendency to use Latinate neologisms and Madhusudan's import of Sanskrit words in his poetry as a desire to return to the indigenous classical. Chaudhuri however appears to ignore Madhusudan's simultaneous forays in Bengali dramatic literature with his farces (*Ekei ki boley Sabhyata* and *Buro Shaliker Ghare Rmo*) where he lets loose a delightful flood of raw colloquial Bengali dialogue, as distinct from the artificial and heavily Sanskritized poetry of his *Meghnadbadh Kavya*. In fact, modern critics should explore this creative side of Madhusudan's as a social satirist (also expressed in his numerous letters), and the incomplete possibilities of his development as a modern playwright of contemporary Bengal. Another minor point. Madhusudan was not always "feted by educated Bengalis across the spectrum" as assumed by the author. One of his contemporaries, a minor poetaster, lampooned his epic poem by bringing out a full-fledged parody called *Chhuchhundar-badh Kavya* (meaning - an epic on the assassination of the mole), which was a popular hit in Calcutta in those days!

But it is the last essay ('The Flute, Gerontion, and Subalternist Misreadings of Tagore'), where Chaudhuri raises the more fundamental question of the controversial relationship between history and literature in both modern history writing and literary output. She picks up a particular text - Rabindranath's essay *Sahitye Aitihāsikata* (written in 1941) - and the numerous debates,

additions and alterations that surrounded it during his lifetime, followed by (mis)interpretations by the modern group of subaltern historians. She crosses swords with the doyen of this group, Ranajit Guha, expressing misgivings with his reading (in his 'History at the Limit of World History' - 2002) of Tagore's original thesis. Guha, she argues, misinterprets what was Tagore's main thrust against literary critics whom the poet accused of "preoccupation with history and realism," as a wholesale attack on academic historians in general. Taking a cue from this mistaken understanding of Tagore's viewpoint, Guha according to Chaudhuri, blurs "the line separating history writing from literary creativity, demanding that history be written in literary terms." Chaudhuri, on the contrary, feels that Tagore was "not really bothered about historians or the discipline of history and how it deals with facts; he is concerned, rather, about the business of creative writing and how that should deal with facts." Chaudhuri thus harks back to the old arguments about authenticity in the representation of past historical facts as well as the contemporary surrounding reality in literature - an issue that boggles the minds of both historians and creative writers.

An extremely well-researched book, sparkled by light-hearted narrations, Chaudhuri's work raises major issues relating to the tensions between modernity (derived from the West) and indigenous traditions in colonial Bengal. At the end of it, those searching for an authentic pure native culture will be disappointed. Whether you call it 'contaminated' (in a pejorative sense), or 'cosmopolitanized' (in an appreciative sense) by the West, modern Bengali language and literature had been a product of traditional acculturation of various streams - ancient tribal animist, later Buddhist and Sanskrit, followed by Persian-Arabic-Urdu influences, to end with the entry of the modern European. Modernity in Bengal thus drew its inspiration from both a hoary indigenous past and a complex corpus of European history.

SUMANTA BANERJEE
Fellow
IIAS, Shimla

Rizwan Qaiser, *Resisting Colonialism and Communal Politics: Maulana Azad and the Making of the Indian Nation*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2011, pp. 374. ₹ 950.00.

From time to time nationalist political processes and the individuals in its centre have interested historians, scholars and writers into interpreting and analysing the significance of their historicity. Nonetheless, it is