

one of redemption—or even resurrection—of one woman and her family, and less an analytical and reflective history of the complicated legacy of colonialism in Indigenous communities: indeed there is limited reflection on the “politics of memory” mentioned in the book’s title. While writing (or rewriting) history towards reconciliation and “hope” is needed in our (somewhat) post-colonial context, just as important are histories and stories that tell us about the broad patterns created by church, colonialism and patriarchy; those tensions in which Jane Cook and her family found themselves. It is in revealing these tensions—how and why they existed in the past and in present memories—that we can more honestly create understandings about colonialism and how, perhaps, to lead to reconciliation or true decolonization. It is in revealing these tensions, and the multiple memories of these tensions, that histories of colonialism employing community-based approaches will find long-term value.

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SANYAL, Shukla – *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. 211.

Which sentiments and values motivate a colonized society to take up arms against its European master? Shukla Sanyal’s research on revolutionary pamphlets in early twentieth-century Bengal unpacks the subversive power of the printed word. Sanyal, Professor and Department Head at Presidency University, Calcutta, offers a focused study of Bengali revolutionary pamphlets to examine national identity formation and political mobilization. *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal* is a discourse analysis of cultural symbols, identities, and language embedded in a wide range of pamphlets and newspapers located primarily in the West Bengal State Archives. Drawing inspiration from critical scholars including Dipesh Chakrabarty, Jürgen Habermas, and Benedict Anderson, Sanyal argues that revolutionary pamphlets provide unique insight into the “ideas, value systems, hopes and aspirations” (p. 2) of an anti-colonial society straddling tradition and modernity. Consequently, Sanyal is adamant that hers is not a study of politics or revolutionary action. It is an interpretation of ephemeral print media sources as cultural artefacts, rebellious acts, educational tools, and barometers of public opinion (p. 12). The Bengali nation as social construct rests at the intersection of these themes.

The first two chapters outline the origins and themes of the nationalist revolutionary movement in the context of Bengali politics and society in the early 1900s. The dialectic between local resistance and colonial oppression is a dominant theme throughout the monograph. Frustrated by their lack of agency, Bengal’s western-educated, middle-class intellectuals—the *bhadralok* (gentlefolk)—turned toward revolutionary means to achieve political independence. Newspapers,

including *Jugantar*, *Sandhya*, and *Bande Mataram*, were literary vehicles for challenging the British Raj's legitimacy and creating a Bengal nation. Political pamphlets were the direct descendants of the nationalist newspaper press, in which anti-colonial messages reacted against repressive legislation and policing by British authorities. Public events, such as the Partition of Bengal (1905), the arrest of radical editor Bhupendranath Dutt (1907) and the Alipore Bomb Case (1908-1910), united moderates and extreme nationalists within a mass *swadeshi* (indigenous) movement and led to the production of propaganda that legitimated violence.

Police investigations of seditious plots and terror networks revealed the types of print media exchanged by nationalist groups. Nation-building literatures featured traditional Hindu images ranging from ritual sacrifice (*Janga*) to the "mother-goddess" (p. 61). Just as British officials characterized the South Asian 'Other' as uneducated, uncivilized and unprepared for political independence, Sanyal convincingly describes how pamphlets transformed colonial masters into the Bengali nation's antithesis. Revolutionary discourse fused race, religion and nationality to create a Bengali identity that transcended "internal divisions of wealth, status and caste" (p. 67). Sanyal meticulously explains that propaganda targeted *bhadralok* men, while boys and young teenagers disseminated it. Otherwise, she provides little evidence to demonstrate that revolutionary pamphlets successfully bridged the wide social cleavages that divided Indian society for centuries.

Once Sanyal establishes the intellectual and political context of the revolutionary "nation," she shifts focus onto how pamphlets legitimated violence, and what the British response to seditious materials was. The idea of revolutionary violence was a novel concept to Bengal nationalists; she argues that *Jugantar* spearheaded the discursive shift that encouraged violence against colonial rulers. Its editor was arrested and prosecuted in 1907 for attempting "to excite disaffection toward the government of India" (pp. 91-92). The emphasis on legitimate violence demonstrates that nationalists lost faith in British assurances of eventual self-government. *Jugantar*'s editors considered revolutionary violence a means to an end. To them, British rule was illegitimate and this legitimated the revolutionary's use of violent means to secure its removal. In these pamphlets, revolutionaries harnessed martial and religious imagery drawn from the Gita, including the "all knowing and all powerful" Sri Krishna (p. 102). Sanyal argues that pamphleteers successfully justified violence by forging emotional bonds with readers through language. However, provocations to violence drew the natural suspicion of British officials who prosecuted radical presses and writers to the fullest extent of the law.

"The Battle for Domination," the book's fourth and strongest chapter, argues that British repression of seditious print media was a means of justifying the Raj's violence against nationalist Bengalis. It illustrates how British police and administrators cultivated fears of "sedition" built on false assumptions about the corrupting effects of revolutionary propaganda among uneducated youths. The appearance of new propaganda efforts convinced colonial rulers to move from "persuasion to repression and prosecution" from 1908 to 1918 (p. 129). New laws and amendments designed to restrict seditious materials show that colonized and

colonizer inhabited the same political space, even if their cultures and identities remained mutually exclusive. Engaging descriptions of investigations and arrests in this chapter enliven what is otherwise dense prose. Linking seditious texts to censorship legislation and policing practices, this section provides tangible evidence confirming the study's overall significance. The final chapter, awkwardly titled "Summing Up," does not review the book's main arguments; instead, it offers new evidence about Bengal's revolutionary identities that fails to advance its core argument.

Overall, Sanyal's book is a vivid analysis of the ideas and images of Bengal's revolutionary presses leading up to the First World War's end. It is clearly written and the Hindi-English translations are well-presented. Scholars of South Asian nationalism and independence movements will benefit from her detailed discussions of individual pamphlets. Those interested in the literary and cultural worlds of Bengali radicals will also find the work useful. The primary source material is masterfully presented and documented. Non-specialists can easily make use of these interesting, if obscure, propaganda sources.

However, the monograph falls short in a few key respects. First, despite the introduction's reference to cultural theory heavyweights, her argument does not critically engage these concepts. Nor does it challenge the reader's conventional understanding in any notable form. Rather, Sanyal appears more intent on demonstrating how the Bengali revolutionary experience fits within established readings of Anderson, Habermas and others than using this case study to reveal new critical insights. Similar comments could be made about her less-than-rigorous treatment of print media as a revolutionary or nation-building tool. She includes only scant figures for media circulation and literacy rates. While she argues that revolutionary propaganda united various social classes, the reader is left wondering how widespread and effective these pamphlets truly were. If print propaganda successfully built a Bengal nation and undermined British rule, how and why did the Raj continue for another generation?

Sanyal's pages are filled with strong and evocative writing, yet the book's leading subjects and their emotions rarely come alive. With the exception of her fourth chapter, her emphasis on discourse analysis detracts from the lived experiences of the revolutionary nationalists. No images or illustrations are offered to give visual representation to the book's many themes. Its thematic organization and lack of subheadings also obscures any narrative arc that might have tied it together. Long and dense paragraphs and the repeated use of bloc quotations (particularly in Chapter 5) sometimes diminish the reading experience. Readers unfamiliar with Bengal's colonial history may wish to consult Peter Heeh's *The Bomb in Bengal* (Oxford, 1993) or Sumit Sarkar's classic surveys for background information before engaging with this text.

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