# Becoming Sahibs: Bengali Bhadralok Travel Cultures and a Colony in *Paschim*, c. 1850–1911

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**Abstract |** From around the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bengali Bhadralok were no longer travelling only for the purposes of pilgrimage. By this time secular travel cultures were emerging, and the Bengali Bhadralok who had come into close contact with the discourses of colonial modernity began to travel extensively. Many of these Bhadralok travellers were converging on what was known as *Paschim*—a set of sites on the western end of undivided Bengal, and currently falling within the post-independence Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand. By situating this travel culture in relation to the history of precolonial travel as it was prevalent in the region, the paper proposes to understand the reasons for which the journeys to *Paschim* might be said to have constituted a new modality of travel—constituted by the Bhadralok's discursive adaptation of the colonial gaze, which in turn, as the paper will argue, made it possible for such travellers to establish a Bengali colonial centre there. In this context, the paper analyzes to what extent travel narratives as cultural texts shaped such expeditions into the region. Three of the earliest instances of the new Bhadralok travellers' documentation of their travels to the region—Bholanath Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau*, and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur"—will be studied to trace the development of a discourse on the region which proved to be both textually and materially influential. In connection with this, the paper also proposes to attend to a predominant strand of this history: the practice of vacationing in the "west," i.e., *Paschim*, as health tourists, which became an integral part of the leisure and recreational repertoire of the upper and upper middle class Bengali Bhadralok. Attending to this aspect of Bhadralok's involvement with *Paschim*, the paper will attempt to investigate its particular role in furthering their emerging colonial ambitions.

**Keywords** | Colonial traveller's gaze, *Paschim*, Colonial ambitions, Utopia, Bengali Bhadralok Culture, South Asian Travel Writing, Nineteenth Century Health Tourism, Bholanath Chunder, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay, Rabindranath Tagore

As the Bengali writer, poet, and journalist, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay alights from his *daak* (mail carts)[1] on the banks of the Barakar river,[2] he is surrounded by a group of children who call, "Sahib, one paisa, Sahib, one paisa" (Chattopadhyay 24). Try as he might to explain to this group of excited children that he is not a Sahib[3] but, merely, an "unexceptionable Bengali," the children refuse to believe him, and keep insisting that he is in fact one (24). They believe that, as Sanjibchandra[4] explains, anyone who is riding a car is a Sahib. On the banks of Barakar, close to the western margins of the contemporary province of Bengal, an "unexceptionable Bengali" could be and was in fact being confused with one. With this anecdote in *Palamau*,[5] Sanjibchandra—as the paper will try to show—manages to hint at the intentions of the Bengali Bhadralok,[6] many of whom in the mid-nineteenth century had begun to turn their gaze upon the region, and the nature of their commerce with it. In the following sections, this paper, studying the journeys to "*Paschim*"[7] as an organized set of practices, will try to explore three interrelated issues in relation to it. By situating the journeys to *Paschim* within a history of contemporary travel cultures, the paper shows the reasons for which these journeys need to be set apart from other modalities of travel. Further, it examines the ways in which the textual production of the site in Bhadralok writing of the period—in Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*, Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau*, and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur," for instance—

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[1]Before the establishment of extensive railway networks, carts pulled by horses would transport mail. These carts would also often transport passenger over long distances. In this case, Sanjibchandra had availed such a cart from the Inland Transit Company to carry him from Ranigunge to Barakar.

[2]The Barakar river is the main tributary of the Damodar river and flows through the northern parts of what is now the state of Jharkhand in India.

[3]The word "Sahib" in Arabic meant friend or companion. Passing as a loan word into Urdu, "Sahib" meant Lord or master. In colonial India, the term began to be used to as an honorific for white, European males and contained a reference to their position of power in the region.

[4]*Editor's Note*: The use of the first name for the author Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay has been has been retained in the main text of the paper to set him apart, given that Chattopadhyay is a very common surname, and he is better known through his first name. However, to follow the conventions of academic writing, the references still use his last name.

[5]After being serialized in the periodical *Bangadarshan* between 1880 and 1882, *Palamau* was published as a standalone text. However, in 2007, the publishing house, Writi, published it as a part of an anthology of Bengali travel writing titled *Chirantan*. All citations from *Palamau* in the present article are from the text as it was included in *Chirantan.*

[6]The word "Bhadralok" denotes a social class, predominantly made up of Bengali, Hindu, upper caste individuals. Although internal distinctions existed, they could be distinguished as a social whole by the way in which they took enthusiastically to English education, availed of the employment opportunities that became available under colonial rule and engaged with the institutions of colonial modernity.

[7]The Bengali word "*Paschim*" means "west." In nineteenth century travel writing, this word signified the set off sites located in the western margins of the undivided province of Bengal—sites which are now part of the post-independence Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand.

persistently facilitated such an exceptional modality of travel. Finally, the paper wishes to explore the way in which these journeys, and their representations, were utilized by the Bengali Bhadralok for developing themselves as regional elite, in competition with their colonial masters.

Apart from benefiting from colonial economic arrangements like the Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793),[8] the group collectively called the "Bhadralok" was produced, in many ways, also out of contact with various institutions of colonial modernity. As Tithi Bhattacharya notes in her article, "what distinguished [the Bhadralok] […] was education of a certain kind" (162). While English education led this group in terms of employment opportunities that were becoming available, the growing proximity to colonial institutions that this implied, led them—irrespective of "whether they were attracted or repelled by European values"—to "reexamine the philosophic basis of their culture" (Broomfield 10). Such grappling with "intellectual issues introduced to their society by European cultural intrusion" led them to interrogate the tenets of Hinduism and reform the religion, and "forms and techniques" were "freely borrowed" from English to express these ideas in a form of Bangla which was sought to be gradually desanskritized. Journals and newspapers were also established, and began flourishing, as a result (7–9). The spirit of reform also did not remain limited to the sphere of religion but spilled over into the sphere of leisure and health as well.

No longer travelling only for the purposes of pilgrimage, the Bengali Bhadralok, from around the second half of the nineteenth century, had begun to leave home in search of adventure, for emulating the 'Grand Tour,' for work tours, or to flee the polluted air and waters of Calcutta. Their aims, often influenced by their new familiarity with western travel narratives and spirits emboldened by their new found reformist zeal, led them to question "caste taboos that forbade upper-caste Hindus from crossing 'black water'"[9] (Chaudhuri 165); to question "Brahmanical authoritative opinion" which also held that "travel meant being exposed to the unwholesome auras of alien people and influences, drinking impure water, eating food from unrighteous lands" (qtd. in S. Sen, *Travels to Europe* 3). Many among the new Bhadralok travellers travelled to Europe, and more particularly to England, "consumed by an intense anxiety to make the most of their time in the metropolis": As Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay explains, these tourists, armed with "the 'image repertoire' of the 'great city' acquired from fiction, guide books and tourist brochure," attempted to read and map the city according to these codes, to discover the space they had hitherto read of (298).[10] It was not only to England, however, that

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[8]The Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793), put in place by Cornwallis, was the fixing of the revenue of land. The administration hoped that assuring landlords that their profits would not be taxed would incentivize them to make improvements to the land. Inability to pay the fixed rate would lead to transfer of landholding. What happened as a result was what Ratnalekha Ray has called "a great circulation of titles" with "most of the ten great landholding families [getting] badly mauled" and smaller zamindars, their administrators, government officials, and new merchants based in Calcutta buying up agricultural land (73).

[9]The term "black water" is a literal translation of the word *Kala-pani* which was used to refer to the seas, the crossing of which was proscribed in Hindu law. It was stated that such voyages would lead to a loss of caste. See, *The Dharmasutras: The Law Codes of Ancient India* 168.

[10]For contemporary travel writing in this vein, i.e., of "reading" England in terms of what the Bengali Bhadralok had already read, see Shibnath Shastri's *Englander Diary* (1888) and Troilakyanath Mukherjee's *A Visit to Europe* (1902). Rakhal Das Halder, who "regar[ded] British rule as a God-send" in

members of the Bhadralok travelled: Tagore, for instance, visited Russia after the Russian Revolution while Swami Vivekananda, en route to Chicago, travelled extensively to Japan. Both Tagore and Vivekananda wrote approvingly of what they saw, seeing these societies as ones fit to be emulated.[11] Domestic travel, too, received a fillip under these circumstances: Baradakanta Sengupta's *Bharat Bhraman* (1877) and Prasannamayee Devi's *Aryavarta* (1888) contain accounts of such journeys undertaken within the country.[12] These travellers often turned their gaze towards a set of sites, collectively known as "*Paschim.*" These sites, as has been mentioned before, loosely formed the western margins of the Bengal Presidency until 1911, when Assam, Bihar, and Orissa were separated from Bengal and *Paschim* was bordered out cartographically as a distinct space. As the sites constituting *Paschim* became part of the separate province of Bihar with its new capital in Patna, it could no longer be perceived as a peripheral "frontier" region to the urban centre of Calcutta—linked, but separate.

Till 1911, however, the sites making up *Paschim* remained as a peripheral region of the Bengal Presidency, only ideologically bordered out as a distinct space. That space is not only material, but is also ideologized, is an idea that by now has a long critical history. Henri Lefebvre, utilizing Gramsci's notion of "hegemony" has explained the necessity of moving from a "strictly geometrical meaning" of space (1), from the practice of thinking of space as the "passive locus of social relations," and instead, argues that "space serves" and "hegemony makes use of it" (11). As De Certeau explains, although not encompassing, there are dominant "discourses that ideologize" space and seek to determine its "proper meaning" (95, 101). Such ideologization, moreover, as Arnold explains, has not, historically, remained materially irrelevant. While explaining that "ideologized space" is a "cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings," Arnold emphasizes, that landscapes do not thereby become "immaterial" (Arnold 5). Going further, Arnold makes the connection between ideology and materiality of space explicit, and explains that even though terms like 'vision' and 'gaze' seem to "imply appraisal but inaction, aesthetic taste rather than material transformation," often 'seeing' or 'reading' a landscape, "was commonly the prelude to, or necessary precondition for, […] physical transformation" (6). During this period, *Paschim*, with its sites not yet cartographically distinguished from the Bengal province, was, thus, more emphatically such an ideological space. Through its production according to a "shared set of codes"—recurring across cultural texts produced in and around the second half of the nineteenth century—the Bhadralok ideologically set apart, constituted and apprehended the site. As Parimal Bhattacharya explains, its

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his diary (xxiii), which was later published as a book, titled *The English Diary of an Indian Student, 1861–62*, wrote of his visiting Stoke Poges to avoid committing the "unpardonable folly" of not visiting the gravesite of Thomas Gray, whose "immortal" "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" he had read (75).

[11]Swami Vivekananda praises the technological advances made by the Japanese who, as such, seemed to him "to have fully awakened themselves to the necessity of the present times" (Vivekananda). Tagore, again, wishes that members of the Indian working class would benefit from being trained in post-Revolution Russia (*Russiar Chithi* 3).

[12]Simonti Sen's article, "Emergence of Secular Travel in Bengali Cultural Universe: Some Passing Thoughts," and Kumkum Chatterjee's article, "Discovering India: Travel, History and Identity in Late Nineteenth Century and Early Twentieth Century India," trace the history of the emergence of secular travel among the Bengali Bhadralok in greater detail.

cartographically marginal character ensured that the space of *Paschim* would provide "necessary context and depth" to the "centre of urban Bengalihood" (7).

Tracing the history of the Bhadralok's journeys to *Paschim* through their representation in cultural texts that predictably proliferated around the practice of travelling to these sites, the paper will investigate the set of codes in terms of which the geographically contiguous but heterogenous sites came to be produced as the unified unit of *Paschim*. In attempting critical and historical readings of Bangla travel writing produced between 1850 and 1911, specifically, Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India* (1869), Sanjibchandra Chattopadhyay's *Palamau* (serialized in the periodical *Bangadarshan* between 1880 and 1882), and Rabindranath Tagore's "Chotanagpur" (1906), the paper will attempt to identify the components of the shared discursive code through which the Bengali Bhadralok both imaginatively grasped and constructed *Paschim*, and subsequently the ways in which that might have impacted how the Bhadralok accessed and remodelled it, as they came to be entangled, in the process, in a history of disruptive socioeconomic transformation in the region.

## Of Pilgrims and Traders: Early Modern Cultures of Travel

In her survey of Indian travel writing, Supriya Chaudhuri writes that for a long time in the Indian subcontinent, it was mostly pilgrims, traders, and rulers who had had reasons to travel (159). If we look closely, the travels of all three categories of persons mentioned, arguably, contain something in common. Surviving narratives produced in Bengal of traders and pilgrims detailing their journeys show that the journeys to *Paschim* undertaken by Bhadralok travellers were unique with respect to not only other contemporary travel cultures but also travel cultures which were already extant in the region. *Paschim* was taken and remained out of time in sharp contrast to the historical situatedness of the other destinations through and to which the travellers went. The protagonists of Bijayram Sen's *Tirthamangal* and the *Mangalkavya* literature—texts that have been cited as early modern precursors to this new brand of travel writing being practiced by the Bengali Bhadralok travellers to *Paschim* (Chaudhuri 161; Mukhopadhyay 316)—do not, unlike the later Bhadralok travellers, seem to navigate historically or socially unmarked spaces. Highlighting the way in which the historical situatedness of the sites that appear in *Tirthamangal* or the *Mangalkavya* literature are conveyed and comparing it with the way in which *Paschim* came to be represented, it will become possible to draw attention to the contrasting effects produced by such differential modes of textualization. As such, it would also become possible to illustrate the extent of the departure that the new mode of travel writing, employed in textualizing *Paschim*, presented to the historical modes of travel writing prevalent in the region.

Bijayram Sen, a physician, is known for having been a part of Raja Krishnachandra Ghoshal's[13] entourage when the latter had been on pilgrimage. Sen would later go on to compose a long poem titled *Tirthamangal* (1770) about their travels.

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[13]Raja Krishnachandra Ghoshal was the son of Gokulchandra Ghoshal, a mid-eighteenth century figure who amassed wealth in becoming a *bania* (i.e., a procurer of goods) for East India Company's Governor Harry Verelst. The pilgrimage, the account of which is found in *Tirthamangal*, was undertaken sometime around the second half of the 1760s (Curley 78).

In one of the initial sections of the poem, we learn that Krishnachandra, his son, and one of his ministers are pondering upon the amount of money that they will have to spend if they are to visit the "*triad* of holy sites" (16; emphasis added). Sen feels no need to expand further what constituted this triad. From Sen's twentieth century editor, we find out why that is the case: the 'triad' in contemporary travel discourse had referred to a set of three holy sites in northern India, namely, Kashi, Gaya, and Prayag, and contemporary readers of Sen were expected to know this without needing further elaboration (16–17). What the 'triad' should be and was, had been determined by the textual tradition which included material like *Tristhali Setu*, a sixteenth-century text by the famed Vaishnava saint and pilgrim Narayan Bhatta Goswami, and *Tirtha Prakasa*, a seventeenth century text by Mitra Mishra (Aiyangar lix). However, the elision in Sen's text, then, cannot be said to be entirely innocent. The assumption of knowledge on his readers' parts is utilized to signify that he would be travelling a well-trodden path. In this, their journey—and its textual production—is inserted within an existing tradition, which in allowing the text to be generified, provides it with a readership.

Arguably, this also has certain effects upon the sites that it textualizes. Many such texts, apart from prescribing routes and pitstops, also contained guides on the tasks pilgrims were supposed to undertake once they were at these sites. The sections on *tirtha-niyamas* (pilgrimage rules)[14] that are included in most of these texts, specified, for instance, the numbers and types of ritual baths that were to be undertaken, or repeatedly harped upon the "genius loci" of Gaya, and its suitability for performing the *sraddha*, or propitiatory rites (Aiyangar lxxxiii). The allusion to such prescriptions in *Tirthamangal*, then, sets up expectations, not only about the route he will be following and the sites he will be visiting, but also the activities he will most probably engage in, expectations he will have to fulfil by the end of his narrative. Thus, to make the journey legible and legitimate as a pilgrimage, it was almost imperative that each new traveller only do as others before him had done. In this, then, the discourse of pilgrimage produces a site which is accessible only in limited ways, available to be used only in fixed and predetermined modes.

From the stipulations on routes and the order to be followed while visiting these sites, it also becomes possible to see that each individual site usually formed a part of a circuit. Pilgrims would usually stop at each point on that circuit and were also expected to complete the circuit. This led to an itenerization of the journey, which significantly limited the amount of time a pilgrim could spend at each individual site. In Bijayram Sen's narrative too, one comes across numerous references to Krishnachandra and his retinue alighting from and boarding their boats, thus emphasizing the limited time they are able to spend in each site, before they move on to the next (B. Sen 18–19, 24, 25, 46–49). The entanglement of the pilgrimage with various sacred schedules also posed temporal limits on this mode of travelling. For instance, while almanacs laid out the auspicious times for starting out on such journeys, the *melas* (fairs) held at regular

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[14]Bhattalakshmidhara's *Krtyakalpataru* is a work in fourteen *Kandas* (volumes) and is a digest of Hindu scriptural texts. It mainly details the duties incumbent upon the practitioner of the religion. The eighth *kanda*, titled *Tirthavivechanakanda*, deals with the necessity of undertaking pilgrimage and the duties of pilgrims. *Tirtha-Niyamas* (Pilgrimage Rules) and *Tirtha Mahatyas* (The Glories of Pilgrimage Sites) are sections in scriptural texts that contain guidelines on the pilgrimage sites to be visited, the rites to be performed there, and the benefits accruing to the devotee as a result.

intervals at these sites of worship also often determined when most pilgrims would visit these places (Aiyangar xxvii).

Traders were also bound by similar spatiotemporal constraints. In the introduction to the "Tirtha-Kanda" of *Krtyakalpataru*, K. V. Rangasamy Aiyangar explains that traders too would frequent sites of pilgrimage, especially at the time that large *mela*s were held (xxvii). Like pilgrims, it was imperative for traders, looking for a market for their goods, to situate themselves within existing networks. Thus, early modern genres of religious poetry, like the *Mangalkavyas*,[15] which bear testament to the flourishing mercantile culture in contemporary Bengal, contain descriptions of the thriving trade at the various *ghaats* (docks) where the merchants embarked. In Ketakadas Kshemananda's seventeenth century version of the *Manasamangal Kavya*, for instance, the merchant, Chand Saudagar, arriving at Patan, "gets busy with trading, and has no leisure" (K. Das 7).[16] As the text says, he is able to buy diverse commodities like camphor, clove, scented sandalwood, gold, silver, cloth, spices, arms, and cosmetics (7). Twelve years later, Chand seeks leave from the king to return to his native land. As such, the site that Chand finds himself in is represented as one marked by abundance, prosperous enough to trade in diverse luxury commodities, and possibly with regulatory mechanisms enforced by an established political authority, towards whom Chand can be seen making his overtures (8). In similar vein, the many *ghaats* through which *Chandimangal*'s merchant Dhanapati passes are seen to be densely populated, with "hundreds and thousands of people bathing in the river at the same time," and the ones at which he stops to trade on the way to his destination has enough to fill his boats with "many treasures" (Chakravarti 202–203). That Dhanapati too, like Chand, is on his way to Sinhala, probably suggests that this was an established trade route, popular among contemporary merchants, perhaps because it provided them access to particularly conducive markets where there was a demand for Bengal's exports, and from where merchants like Dhanapati and Chand could import high priced luxury items. Dhanapati, thus, hopes before he sets out on his journey that he will be able to:

> trade deer for horses, coconuts for conch shells, medicinal herbs for cloves, dried ginger root for weapons, frogs for elephants, pigeons for parrots, fruits for nutmeg, vermilion for cinnabar, crotalaria fibre for white yak tails, glass for sapphires, sugar for camphor, lac for bonduc nuts, bedspreads for woollen cloth and blankets, turmeric for yellow dye made from cow bile, uncured tobacco for

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[15]*Mangalkavyas* are Early Modern genres of Bengali religious poetry composed between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly in praise of folk deities. They were sung and recited before particular versions of them came to be written down. Among the *Mangalkavyas*, *Manasamangal*, *Chandimangal*, and *Dharmamangal* are the most well-known.

[16]The critical consensus is that Ketakadas Kshemananda wrote the *Manasamangal Kavya*. Earlier, it was believed Ketakadas and Kshemananda referred to two different poets who together had written the Kavya. This is no longer held to be true. However, since the paper refers to different versions of Ketakadas Kshemananda's text—as it was rendered by various twentieth century editors—I will be following the respective editors' decisions while citing from these. Bijanbihari Bhattacharya refers to the author as Ketakadas Kshemananda, hence the in-text citation to his version of the text gives the author's surname as Kshemananda. Basanta Ranjan Ray, however, renders the name of the author as Kshemananda Das, and in instances where this article is referring to his version of the text the in-text citation renders the author's surname as K. Das.

cumin seeds, madar plants for mangoes, and yellow orpiment for diamonds. (Chakravarti 199–200)

It is perhaps because of this that we see Dhanapati trying to woo the ruler of Patan with lavish gifts (209). In his study of the trading cultures of the Bay of Bengal region of the Indian Ocean, Kenneth Hall writes that although urban port centres were often somewhat autonomous entities, "networking with multiple coastal centres" rather than being completely integrated with the "region's centre of political power […] in the port-of-trade's agricultural hinterland," it would usually be controlled by strong local authorities (113). Sinhala's ports of Kalanbu and Dondra, for instance, if Ibn Battuta's account and another contemporary inscription are taken into account, were controlled by local merchant lords with "five hundred Abyssinians" in his employ, or administered by a "Mahapandita officer" who collected duties from arriving merchants in return for protecting them from illegal market practices (Hall 134). Later in the fifteenth century, especially in Sinhala, the coastal market centres were brought under stronger control of a centralized political authority (134). The picture that emerges, then, is that of a land marked by existing structures of authority with which new arrivals to the land had to negotiate with in order to gain various kinds of privileges.

Moreover, while on their journey to distant lands, Chand and Dhanapati have to pay homage not only to earthly authorities but to heavenly powers as well. In another version of Ketakadas Kshemananda's text, Chand is seen to be waylaid on his way to Sinhala. The port in Kalidaha, at which Chand is forced to stop, is under Manasa's zone of influence, a deity who is revered by the local people, as Chand finds out to his peril when he disrespects her (Kshemananda 2–5, 11). In the *Mangalkavya* text, the deity appears not only as a disembodied presence, but also as a flesh and blood figure, keeping tabs on all new arrivals to her territories' shores through a number of her mortal informants, insisting on being adequately worshipped (5). To refuse worship to the deity is to invoke her deadly wrath. The merchants, as Dhanapati is soon made to realize, are not travelling through abstract space—which is to say, not through an empty, homogenous extension, but that which is shot through with the presence of various levels of deities. The waters near Mogra, on which Dhanapati sails, for instance, while being a neutral medium for boats to sail, can also turn into a malicious death trap created between Chandi and Lord Indra (who controls the weather) to drown the recalcitrant merchant ardent only on worshipping Shiva; just as Hanumana, intervening on Manasa's request, can turn the calm waters near Kalidaha stormy, drowning Chand's wares and killing his six sons (Chakravarti 203–204; Kshemananda 4, 9).

As a result, the pilgrimage and travel narratives convey the historical situatedness of the sites they travel through. The land in such narratives emerges thoroughly marked by existing patterns of land-use, with which travellers have to negotiate. Thus, the sites that appear within texts—depicting pilgrimages or trading—seemed to be accessible only in limited ways. However, this practice of emphasizing the historicity of space, that is to say, of representing space as entwined with its sociocultural history, is absent in the nineteenth century narratives of travel emanating from the Bengali Bhadralok milieu, especially insofar as the travelogue modality was brought to bear upon the *Paschim*. In what follows, the paper argues that the travelogue modality as it was used to textualize journeys to the *Paschim* may justifiably be isolated and studied as an organized set of

practices that remained implicated in the development of the colonial centre which the Bengali Bhadralok, in competition and collaboration with the British colonial administrators, managed to set up in the region over the years.

## *Paschim* in the Eyes of the Nineteenth Century Bengali Bhadralok

Unlike texts in which the existing travelogue modality is utilized through various textual strategies, wherein the landscape is sought to be rendered recognizable, as illustrated above, the strategies adopted to textualize the *Paschim* served to emphasize the 'newness' and the 'emptiness' of the landscape. Sanjibchandra's *Palamau* repeatedly refers to the changing of modes of conveyance that was necessary for the speaker to reach his destination. He muses, "Thinking that I would have to go via Hazaribagh, I rented a daak from the Inland Transit Company, and started from Ranigunge at one thirty in the night. In the morning it stopped on the east bank of Barakar […] it would have to be pushed across the river" (Chattopadhyay 24). Rabindranath Tagore, writing in his essay "Chotanagpur" four years after *Palamau* was published in *Bangadarshan*, describes the journey thus, "The jerking of the train rocked me so that my slumber was all mixed up. Waking and sleeping, dreaming and waking together formed a mish-mash, as if […] with strange sounds the names of stations were called […] everything disappeared, everything was dark, everything was silent, only the wheels, making their incessant way through the dimly starlit night, could be heard" (720). Instead of describing the landscape as it gradually transforms until he arrives at Madhupur, Tagore writes of his travelling through 'darkness' and 'silence.' This descriptive strategy conceals on the one hand his whereabouts from the text, and on the other hand, makes the transport and communication infrastructure connecting Calcutta and Madhupur disappear, like the railways on which in fact he was then being currently transported.

Unlike the *Mangalkavyas* where the narration proceeds through citing the names of various places that the merchants pass on their way to the Sinhala kingdom (Dhanapati, for instance, notes their passing Kaladhautapur, Chandrasiddha Island, and Jhonkadaha) (Chakravarti 206), in Tagore's case, the names of the intervening stations are described as 'strange' and are elided, and as such the geographical distance between the two sites is occluded. What is effected, as a result, is an exoticization of the landscape. References to availing multiple modes of conveyance abound in Tagore's text as well: Tagore, like Sanjibchandra, has to travel by train till Giridih, and by *daak* from Giridih to the banks of Barakar, where he has to spend a night "somehow, restlessly, in between waking and sleeping," before the *daak* proceeds to Hazaribagh in the morning ("Chotanagpur" 722). The question, of course, is not whether Sanjibchandra or Tagore actually had to avail these various modes of conveyance to reach their destinations in the *Paschim*, but the discourse on the site that such a mode of textualization inevitably produced, and in turn, the ways in which it allowed such travellers to position themselves with respect to the landscape.

Both *Palamau* and "Chotanagpur" contain references to the 'pulling and pushing' that would be required to take the *daak* to the opposite bank from where the journey will continue, representing it as a difficult landscape putting up multiple barriers and hence demanding strenuous labour to be scaled ("Chotanagpur" 721; Chattopadhyay 24). The reference to frequent changes in modes of transportation needed in order to reach their

destination serves to exaggerate the distance, both geographical and social, of the site from the city. In many ways, these texts were reproducing a discourse that was being popularized through contemporary colonial travel writing on the subcontinental region.[17] Nitin Sinha, in his book on colonialism and its impact on the development of communications infrastructure in Eastern India, writes that the 'interior' was "as much a constructed category as an encountered one," constructed to address the overlapping political, social, and economic imperatives of the British colonial authorities (xix). To legitimize the 'civilizing mission' and public works initiatives of the colonial administration, it became necessary to reconstruct the already open world of the *Mangalkavyas* and to, as Sinha puts it, 'interiorize' the subcontinental region, to produce it as a space which requires progressive and continuous 'opening' up (xix). These travelogues arguably, thus, served to produce the space as a 'new' site—as if hitherto untraversed. In thus constructing the "newness" of the space of *Paschim*, the texts served to construct it as a space that had not been claimed by and did not belong to anyone else. Such "fictions" of *terra nullius*,[18] of "no one's land," as Sven Lindqvist argues, had historically been used to "justify the European occupation of large parts of the global land surface" along with its "accompanying acts of dispossession and destruction of indigenous society" (3–4). To textualize a site as *terra nullius* is also to simultaneously construct and posit the colonizing self of the traveller arriving upon it.

In *Palamau*, for instance, the colonizing self which a traveller could textually develop while accessing such a 'new' site, can be found out. In *Palamau*, we find the speaker musing to himself, "The hills have raised a wall, as if the world ends there […] I can see smoke rising from one or two villages in the forest […] my tent is on the other side […] looking at this unmindfully, I think that this is my 'world'" (Chattopadhyay 35). The one accessing a 'new' site, could always claim it as "[his] world," always arriving, as it were, 'first' on the site. Corollary to this, the text also seems loath to note all markers of existing patterns of land-use. Right in the middle of *Palamau*, Sanjibchandra becomes stumped for words, lamenting that he "cannot find a subject to write about" (38). Although seemingly an innocuous statement, it can also be seen as a useful articulation of descriptive non-plenitude. Intermittent references to the 'excessive cleanness' of the Latehar hills, the "tiny village […] after a wide expanse," or the "one or two villages inside a jungle" produce it as an empty expanse waiting to be filled (31, 35). Sanjibchandra, in fact, insistently negates the reports that threaten to dismantle his

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[17]Elizabeth Fenton, who came to India along with her husband, Captain Neil Campbell, and after his death married Captain Michael Fenton, with whom she later emigrated to Australia, wrote in her journal, which was later published, of her first view of the countryside near Calcutta thus: "With what eager interests you watch the first objects which denote your arrival on new soil, from the moment you see the Island of Sagur like a small cloud in the horizon! then you perceive it thick with mighty forests" (8). Fenton was not the only one to employ such an interiorizing gaze, to insert visual obstacles to a view of the land in her text, which would be progressively removed. David Arnold in *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze* writes extensively of the politics of narrativizing, as opposed to simply depicting, Indian landscape to "signified progression (or regression) from the familiar into the exotic and from the civilized to the heathen," as the project of empire had to be justified among the metropolitan at the discursive level (25).
[18]The term '*terra nullius*' is a Latin term meaning 'land belonging to no one' or 'unowned land' and what the term signified was commented upon in the course of the history of colonization to determine the kind of rights that European powers had to the lands which it had 'discovered.' Therefore, the term was used in the context of determining the status of land in the New World before the colonial encounter, and the term was used more particularly in case of Australia (Banner 96).

construction of the region. He criticizes a report published in the English newspaper *The Bengal Hurkaru and Chronicle* on the various military parades and activities of the military band in the region because, as he explains, it had led him to think of Palamau as a "boisterous city" (29). Instead, he has found out, as he tells the readers, that Palamau is "no city," that there is not even a "remote village"; the place as he sees it is "filled with hills and jungles" (29). Naturalized thus, the space is sought to be divested of existing markers and histories of human habitation.

However, it is not as though travellers like Sanjibchandra did not encounter the existing inhabitants of the site. In fact, a significant amount of textual effort has to be spent in *emptying* out the space, as marks of the materiality of its existing inhabitants constantly threaten to rise to the surface. Training his gaze upon the men and women of the Kol community, he describes them thus:

> The adult males among them have drying skin, flies hover around their eyes, they do not smile, as if all of them are losing their vitality. I think the Kol tribe is decaying. Just as the vitality of particular individuals is reduced, so the vitality of particular tribes also starts decaying; gradually it disappears altogether. People die, tribes disappear. In representing a 'decaying' population, the text is simultaneously able to represent a space that will be left empty imminently. (32)

Sanjibchandra was by no means the first or the only traveller to write about the region thus. In fact, in *Palamau*, he was reproducing very closely the description of the site available in Bholanauth Chunder's *The Travels of a Hindoo to Various Parts of Bengal and Upper India*,[19] published close to thirty years before Sanjibchandra's text began to be serialized. Like Sanjibchandra, Bholanath too comes upon a village on the banks of Barakar which he says, "abounds with many men, women and children of the [Santhal] race" (177). The route on which it is, is said to pass through "wastes, heaths and forests" (180), while the Barakar itself is described as a river which "possesses no history — no antecedents — no name in the annals of mankind […] a desert river [flowing] through desert solitudes" (177). Immediately after, the Santhal residents of the village are also described in similar terms: "[He has] neither any alphabet nor any arithmetic; no architecture, [and] none of the useful or ornamental arts; no monument, no laws, no literature, to record the past existence of his nation" (183). Therefore, according to Chunder, they can be "swept" away (183). The apophatic exertions—the repeated denial of any history of social, cultural, and economic practices to the communities he encounters—show the textual effort that was necessary and that was being invested to empty out the site.

The contrast produced in reading *Travels of a Hindu* alongside *Tirthamangal*—Bijayram Sen had passed the same sites on his way to Benares—clarifies the enormity of the task which was at hand for this emerging travel discourse. Around fifty years before Bholanauth Chunder, Bijayram Sen on his way from Rajmahal to Munger, too, seems to have encountered the members of the indigenous communities settled in the region. Travelling possibly through sites currently falling within the Santhal Parganas division in the northern part of the modern Indian state of Jharkhand, Raja Krishnachandra and

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[19]Bholanauth Chunder's 1869 publication *Travels of a Hindoo* in two volumes is an account of Chunder's journey through the northwestern parts of the Indian subcontinent.

his retinue, of which Bijayram Sen was a part, fear that they are moving through hostile territory, surrounded as they are by hills on which they believe "all the 'Chuar' homes are" (44).[20] Krishnachandra's party does imminently come face to face with them, and Sen describes their state thus, "Seeing the figure of the Chuars, the passengers are scared/they fall silent and tremble in fear" (44). It is only after a ritual exchange of gifts and pleasantries between the two groups that the party of travellers is able to pass through the site (44). Even though at the time of Bijayram Sen the various indigenous communities settled in the region were already seen as 'uncivilized,' it appears from the prevailing discourse that the sites have to be accessed very much in negotiation with the systems of authority that are put in place by the indigenous communities that reside there—remaining resistant, as such, to being appropriated as *terra nullius*.

Hence, it appears that the politics of the travel discourse emerging around the second half of the nineteenth century, especially insofar as it concerned the 'west,' cannot be examined, as Prathama Banerjee does in *Politics of Time*, only in terms of the elite Bengali's varied attempts to exorcise and distinguish himself from the "primitive within" (3). It was perhaps not, as Banerjee suggests in her book, limited to negotiating the Bhadralok self, committed to the "pursuit of knowledge, abstraction and morality" in opposition to the "bodily, the sensuous, the valorous and the practical" self of the 'primitive' (113). Instead, contesting Banerjee's Bhadralok/'primitive' binary, these accounts, as the paper will attempt to argue in the following section, often evince a more violent obliterating politics.

In the preface to *Travels of a Hindoo*, Bholanauth Chunder is praised thus by his British presenter, J. Talboys Wheeler:

> But so far as he delineates pictures of Indian life and manners, and familiarizes his readers with the peculiar tone of Hindoo thought and sentiment, his Travels are far superior to those of any writer with which we have hitherto become acquainted. Even the observant old travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who went peeping and prying everywhere, mingling freely with Natives, and living like Natives, never furnished a tithe of the stock of local traditions, gossiping stories, and exhaustive descriptions which are here presented to English and Indian readers. (Chunder xiii)

After having approved Chunder's gaze, he reveals what it resembles, and in that also the reasons for which he approves of the account and recommends it. Wheeler commends Chunder for imbibing, along with his fellow "bunniahs,"[21] "a tincture of European refinement" (Chunder xx), and for that being able to, among other things, overcome "the strongest possible prejudice against travelling [which] existed in the minds of the

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[20]The Adivasi communities residing in Chotanagpur, in the south-western part of what would later constitute the Bengal Presidency, were referred to as "Chuars" in medieval Bengali texts. Sri Chaitanya, the 15th century Vaishnava saint, travelling through the region wrote of their being employed as *paik*s or militiamen by local kings and chieftains, and of their being granted land in return for their service (Sarkar 3685–3686). E. T. Dalton, in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) wrote of Chotanagpur being "regarded by Hindoos as being outside the pale of Hindustan" (qtd. in Chandra 143). Used to refer to the various indigenous communities of this region collectively, the term 'Chuar' is derogatory.

[21]The word "*bunniah*" or "*bania*" is derived from the Sanskrit word "*vanik*" which means 'merchant.' In Bengali, the term was used specifically to denote moneylenders and indigenous bankers.

Bengalees" (xv). Having undertaken this veritably European project—which, as he explains, was quite unlike the journeys undertaken by "only the old men and old widows who left their homes to go on pilgrimages to Benares and Brindabun"—Chunder, according to Wheeler, had followed in the footsteps and cultivated the gaze of the "observant old travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who went peeping and prying everywhere," but had turned out to be "far superior" than the Europeans (xiii, xx). Sanjibchandra, while commenting on the Kol and Asur communities, records his observations in the words of A. C. Geekie, who in 1871 had published a book titled *Christian Missions: To Wrong Places, Among Wrong Races, and in Wrong Hands* on the difficulties associated with preaching the word of God among the various 'uncivilized' peoples of the colonies. Quite literally reproducing the colonizer's gaze in his own text, and leaving to the audience the task of recontextualizing the comment in the present milieu, Sanjibchandra inserts the following quote from Geekie's book into his own text: "In Canada for the last fifty years the Indians have been treated with paternal kindness but the wasting never stops […] the result is only this that their extinction goes on more slowly than it otherwise would" (33). In this, Sanjibchandra ends up implicitly indicating the fate he speculates for the indigenous communities he encounters in the region.[22] Thus, in recasting his positionality with respect to the indigenous communities in the Santhal Parganas region in terms of the one between the Anglo-Saxon invaders of North America and its indigenous inhabitants, Sanjibchandra perhaps implicitly reveals the aspirations underlying Bengali travel practices to the region. The willingness to share and participate in a common colonizer's discourse is also typographically conveyed as the materiality of the roman script is made to share textual space with the Bengali script. It appears that in this discourse, the indigenous inhabitants of these sites do not adequately emerge as an 'other,' in opposition to whom the Bhadralok seek to define themselves. Incorporating the colonizers words within its typographic space, it seems that the Bhadralok, away from the urban colonial centre, were perhaps intent on remodelling *Paschim* as a site for expressing an elite Bengalihood, not so much in opposition to the 'primitive' other, as in competition with the colonizers.

The textual strategy of articulating colonial aspirations, however, did not remain limited to emptying out these sites and representing the Bhadralok traveller's encounter with its indigenous inhabitants as analogues of other colonial encounters. In these same texts, detailed visions for what might be done in these sites which had been emptied were also being proposed. In *Palamau*, for instance, listening to a 'wild bird' calling in the "*mandakranta* rhyme,"[23] Sanjibchandra mistakes it for one of the 'educated' talking birds

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[22]The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of political turmoil in the region. As Sanjukta Das Gupta explains, the colonial state had by the second quarter of the nineteenth century "penetrated into such regions, provoking widespread local resistance" (276). The Kol Rebellion (1832), the Chuar Rebellion, and the Santhal Rebellion of 1855 are notable examples. Members of indigenous communities residing in the region were also often coerced into migrating as labourers to the tea plantations in Assam and elsewhere (LaFavre 23–24). With the members of their own social class involved in such administrative, political, and commercial systems, Bhadralok travellers, however, seldom documented or commented upon such conditions existing in the region.

[23]*Mandrakranta chhand* is a rhyme scheme used in classical Sanskrit poetry, believed to have been used for the first time by Kalidasa in the epic, *Meghadutam*.

of Vrindavan's "*Radhakunja*"[24] that advocate for Krishna (36). That Sanjibchandra mistakes the space of Palamau for Vrindavan and is "disillusioned" moments later serves to emphasize what the site could potentially be—what could be but is not yet. Like Sanjibchandra, Bholanauth Chunder also explicitly emphasizes the *potential* of *Paschim* to become a utopia. While acknowledging that Barakar "*now* [is] a solitary outpost of civilization in a region of barbarians," Chunder lists the possibilities that nonetheless lie germane in it (179; emphasis added). Chunder's vision for the future of the region bears quoting at length:

> [T]he place bids fair to be a mart of great trading activity — to be a considerable outlet for the products of the hill-regions. The local advantages of its situation, to be heightened the more by the extension of the Railway, would attract here large numbers of men for business. The spot is particularly suited for manufactories of lac-dye and shell-lac […] Hides, horns, and beeswax can be had here in abundance. Timber, which has become a valuable commodity in the Indian market, can be largely procured from these districts. There are fine pasture lands, and cattle might be reared with great success. The mineral wealth of the region is inexhaustible. Scarcely any land-owner now appreciate the ores of iron or the veins of copper lying in his estate, and takes them into the account in estimating the value of his property. But time shall give to the Indians their own Birmingham and their own Sheffield […] In a region of twenty miles in circumference, there are seen now a few straggling huts of reeds and thatches. The traveller in the twentieth century would find all this space covered with neat bungalows, pleasant country-seats, warehouses, and shops. (179–180)

That Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar would go on to name the house he built in Karmatanr—where the term "*tanrbhumi*" signifies 'uncultured land'—"Nandankanan" ["The Garden of Heaven"] clarifies not only a spatial division between the 'uncultured' wilderness and the 'cultured' gardens of the Bengali Bhadralok, to maintain a demographic distinction, but also hints at a temporal project. The site, thus, hovering between being an 'uncultured,' 'fallen' land and the heavenly garden of Nandankanan, between being a 'wilderness' and the pastoral space of Vrindavan, between being a "solitary outpost of civilization" and a "mart of great trading activity" is produced as a *prospective* utopia.

### Unhealthy Cities, Exclusive Hill Stations: Health Tourism in the "Plains of Bihar"

The utilities and impacts of such textual dreaming, by early travellers to the region, begin to emerge when these narratives are situated in the context of the development of Bhadralok culture particularly in the urban centre of Calcutta. As travel practices of the Bengali Bhadralok were morphing to accommodate non-religious travel, and as a result of which health and wellness tourism was added to their expanding leisure and recreation repertoire, one of the reasons for which the Bengali Bhadralok started travelling to *Paschim* was in order to develop it as a healthful site, one capable of rivalling Darjeeling. Heightened impetus for such travel practices to emerge was provided with the production

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[24]*Radhakunja* or "The Bower of Radha" is in Vrindavana, a site which is part of the sacred geography of Vaishnavism for being the site of the amorous exploits of the two Hindu deities, Radha and Krishna. Situated on the banks of the Yamuna river, it is currently part of the post-Independence Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

of Calcutta as an unhealthy city. The representation of Calcutta was "chang[ing] dramatically" as the colonial state—visualizing itself as needed for and given over to "improvement"—sought to fashion itself out of the mercantilist power it had hitherto been (Datta 15–16). Opportunity for it also presented itself: repeated outbreaks of epidemics in Calcutta, with a particularly serious outbreak of cholera in 1865, were beginning to be linked by municipal authorities with the poor quality of air and water supply in the city, and especially in its "native" quarters. As a result, "Victorian sanitarian regimes" for which water was a "secular commodity," clashed, in particular, with Hindu notions of the ritual purity of the water of river Hooghly[25] (Chakrabarti 178). While municipal authorities were quick to blame the dumping of excreta in the river water and using the same for the purpose of drinking as the cause for the outbreak of cholera epidemics in the city, many orthodox Hindus resented the emptying of septic tanks in the holy waters, and additionally believed that the piped water that began to be delivered, after the first pumping station was built at Pulta, to be less pure than the river water which they had hitherto been drinking (178, 194). The then contemporary Bengali Bhadralok remained intensely involved in these debates. Rajendralal Mitra, for instance, intervened regularly in support of David Waldie, a Scottish chemist, who believed that the impurity of the Hooghly's waters was a result of siltation, and artificial salination could make it fit for drinking (Neogi). The latter had remained embroiled in continuing debate with Prof. MacNamara, a chemistry professor in Calcutta University, who was of the opinion that the water of Hooghly was inherently impure and recommended that latest filtration technologies be imported from England to purify the water, and his opinion was finally heeded by the municipal authorities when the pumping station was put up in Pulta (Neogi).

It was not only water, however, which occupied the attention of public authorities. The Fever Hospital Committee[26] reports—which dwelt on matters extending beyond and in greater detail than required by its stated aim—represented the city as being poorly built. The slums inhabited by the labouring poor particularly came under scrutiny with the committee recommending that the slum dwellers be "obliged to build their habitation with regularity," "to have streets and squares" in order to permit "free circulation of air" (Datta 108). Pradip Sinha, in his inventory of the estates of some of the "opulent families of Calcutta," has shown that most of the land on which such poorly planned slums came up was rented out by the *abhijaat* Bhadralok[27] of the city (P. Sinha 140–159; Datta 108).

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[25]The river Hooghly flows through what is now the state of West Bengal in India. It is a distributary of the Ganges, and because of its connection with the Ganges, the Hooghly is considered to be holy by the Hindus of the region.

[26]The Fever Hospital Committee was set up primarily to deliberate on the need for a new hospital in the city for Indians apart from the Native Hospital and Police Hospital. Ranald Martin had deemed the Police Hospital suitable for dealing with the "destitute…lying about the streets" (qtd. in Datta 100). The Native Hospital on the other hand was proving to be inadequate for "tackling epidemics or disease that had a 'public' dimension" (Datta 100).

[27]Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay in *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (1823) offers what is probably the first definition of the term Bhadralok. Bandyopadhyay described them as an internally differentiated group that could be broadly classified into the (a) *Abhijat/Vishayi* (b) *Madhyabitta* (c) *Daridra athacha bhadra* (15–17). The Bhadralok, thus, came to be defined as an internally divided "social class" with "*abhijaats*"—"new men" who had moved into the city during the second half of the eighteenth century on the backs of the wealth they made as junior partners of English traders—at the top of the internal hierarchy.

While remaining implicated in the development and maintenance of such slum dwellings, members of the same class would also often serve as members of colonial civic improvement bodies like the Fever Hospital Committee, becoming party to both the material and discursive production of the "unhealthy" city. Members of the *abhijaat* Bhadralok class like Ramcomul Sen, Motilal Seal, Russomoy Dutt, and Dwarkanath Tagore, after being nominated by the Fever Hospital Committee to demur on solutions, all provided evidence to the committee regarding "slum owning landlords," and the insanitary living practices and urban conflagrations they were enabling, despite their belonging to such a category of landlord themselves. (Datta 106–108). The Bhadralok, along with the colonial administration, were able to position themselves as actors in relation to the city and its population rather than as targets of reform. In fact, when a subcommittee was created to be in charge of the "Subscription Books for the donations and subscriptions" for the new Fever hospital, it "solicited the liberal aid of all native gentlemen" for their "poorer fellow countrymen" (*Report of the Committee appointed by the Right Hon'ble the Governor of Bengal for the Establishment of a Fever Hospital and for Inquiring into Local Management and Taxation in Calcutta*, qtd. in Datta 102). Although Motilal Seal donated the land on which the Fever Hospital—later renamed the Medical College Hospital—was built, this new hospital and its services were not intended to cater to the medical needs of the Bhadralok.

Through a battery of reports which documented and reported on sanitary interventions, the city of Calcutta[28]—in complete contrast to the way in which it had come to be viewed in the last decades of the eighteenth century[29]—was being produced as an unhealthy site; one which needed to be subjected to extensive 'improvement' to be made liveable. Produced as such as an unhealthy site, the urban centre of Calcutta began to be seen less as a coveted colonial possession and more as a site to be escaped from. Along with the colonial administrators, the Bhadralok, who also played a significant role in municipal governance, on the one hand, became familiar with the aspects of urban environment that was criticized for being insanitary, while, on the other hand, they were keen to differentiate themselves from their "poorer fellow countrymen" whose living practices these reports often criticized[30] and sought to correct through the proposed

[28]Wellesley's Municipal Minute of 1803 was the first in a long line of reports that documented the environment of the city and the measures required to 'improve' it. The proceedings of the Lottery Committee (which had been set the task of proposing spatial improvements after the epidemic outbreak of cholera in 1817), Ranald Martin's *Notes on the Medical Topography of Calcutta* (which Martin finished writing in 1834), the reports of the Fever Hospital Committee (set up in 1835), and the reports of the Building Commission (published in 1897) are other notable examples.

[29]With the decline of erstwhile centres of power like Murshidabad, Calcutta had emerged as the region's foremost city. The *East India Gazetteer* (1828), described Calcutta as a "new city"; its "splendor" produced out of the new wealth of the "native gentry [and] its European population" (323). Such glowing reports were not only found in the chronicles of European writers, but Bengali poets and singers also seem to attest to them. Kuluichandra Sen, for instance, an uncle of the more famous Ramnidhi Gupta, patronized by Nabakrishna Deb, testified to Calcutta's power in luring settlers in a somewhat ironic vein, "Praise be to Kolkata, O praise be, Of all that is new, you the birthplace be / […] To make a quick buck, to become rich overnight/ they leave home and on Calcutta, they set their sight" (qtd. in Chakraborty 7).

[30]The Fever Hospital Committee report states that a "Native gentleman" reported that "few wells or tanks are […] kept clean" by "the generality of natives" who nonetheless use this water for cooking and cleaning. Another "Hindoo gentleman" reported that such "filthy pools […] supply the poorer classes with water for culinary and other purposes" (Committee upon the Fever Hospital and Municipal Improvements 11).

spatial and public health reforms. Instead of being seen as colonized subjects of reform, incorporating health and wellness tourism in their leisure and recreation repertoire would allow them to represent themselves as an indigenous elite by aligning themselves with the colonial administrator's view of the unhealthy city from which, like the British, they too sought to periodically escape.

Alongside the aforementioned debates that were taking place on public health and hygiene, in a related development, there was a proliferation of narratives both from public authorities and individual authors that stressed the "curative benefits" of hill stations.[31] The Bhadralok who remained closely associated with the debates on health and hygiene too came to be familiar with the discourse which, in intending to 'acclimatize' the Europeans arriving in India in climates that "most resembled those of Britain," recommended journeys to the hill stations (Harrison 74). Such sectoring led on the one hand to the "differentiation of India into 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' zones," and, on the other, to the representation and development of the hill stations as mini versions of the metropolitan 'home' (Harrison 74). A section of the Bhadralok, too, seemingly came to be influenced by this view, and histories of leisure especially as it pertains to nineteenth century Bengal[32] have dealt extensively with the way in which the "Indian elite – native princes as well as the middle classes – staked a claim to the hill stations" and especially to Darjeeling (Bhattacharya-Panda 11). However, as Bhattacharya-Panda shows while tracing this history, there was considerable opposition to this 'incursion' into what was seen as an "ostentatiously European social space" (51). By 1906, Governor Sir Andrew Fraser and the Civil Surgeon of Darjeeling Colonel Crofts, for instance, were vetoing a proposal to build a phthisis[33] ward in the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium, the 'native' counterpart to the Eden sanatorium, and suggested the building of such a ward in Ranchi instead (Bhattacharya-Panda 86). Although the building of the proposed phthisis ward was finally sanctioned, the health tourism of the Bengali Bhadralok, and especially of the middle class among them, to Darjeeling was, nonetheless, sought to be discouraged. Various members of the regional royalty and the *zamindars* were also keen on keeping the Bhadralok out, with the Maharaja of Burdwan recommending that a project be drawn up for a sanatorium "somewhere in the plains of Bihar" for the "poorer classes, such as the low paid clerical staff employed under the government or elsewhere" (Bhattacharya-Panda 90). As Darjeeling came to be gradually shut off to the "ordinary native,"[34] the

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[31]The initial consensus on the beneficial climate of the "hill stations" was developed as statistics for mortality rates in the military for the hills and plains were compared. Two studies conducted in the 1840s showed that the mortality rate of soldiers stationed at the three presidencies were more than twice that among those convalescing in "highland sanitaria" (Kennedy 25). Almost a decade earlier, the Deputy Surveyor General had been first sent to Darjeeling to assess its suitability as a possible site for a sanatorium for European troops posted in Northern India. Joseph Dalton Hooker, visiting Darjeeling in 1848, writes of its "rapid increase" by "temporary visitors in search of health, or the luxury of a cool climate and active exercise" (Hooker Chapter IV).

[32]See Dane Keith Kennedy's *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* and Nandini Bhattacharya-Panda's *Contagion and Enclaves: Tropical Medicine in Colonial India*.

[33]The disease, which is known as tuberculosis at present, was in the nineteenth century referred to variously as consumption, wasting disease, and phthisis.

[34]With the proposal for the phthisis ward in the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium being vetoed and the members of the regional royalty and zamindars coming together with the colonial administration to keep the Bhadralok out of the exclusive social space of Darjeeling, a hue and cry was raised in the contemporary periodicals. *The Bengalee* published editorials repeatedly attacking what it perceived to be a racially

development of another such complex had become desirable, and it is in this context that the *Paschim*, arguably, was sought to be constructed as a rival location.

Contrary to what Bhattacharya-Panda suggests in her study, it was not only the "poorer classes" among the Bengali Bhadralok who had enthusiastically taken to the project of seeing *Paschim* as a site for potential health resorts. From the interactions that Rajnarayan Basu writes of in his memoir, *Atmacharit*, it becomes clear that, by the 1870s, a bustling Bhadralok community had come up in *Paschim*—the community counting among its members prominent public figures like Ramgopal Ghosh, Ramtanu Lahiri, Debendranath Tagore, and Basu himself—thinking it a suitable site for building their health homes (Basu 105–106, 114). In his description of Hazaribagh, Rabindranath Tagore provided a list of reasons for which he considered it a healthful site: Hazaribag, Tagore writes, "is not very urbanized. Alleys, lanes, garbage, drains, crowds, noise, cars, dirt, dust, mosquitoes, flies, all of these are not too common here. Situated among fields, the mountains and the greenery, the town is neat and clean" ("Chotanagpur" 722). Placing his list alongside a report that Lord Wellesley prepared on the state of Calcutta's urban environment proves to be illuminating. Wellesley wrote: "In the quarters of the town occupied principally by the native inhabitants, the houses have been built without order or regularity, and the *streets and lanes have been formed without attention to the health, convenience or safety* of the inhabitants" (qtd. in Goode 237; emphasis added). Further, from S. W. Goode's study of municipal Calcutta in which Wellesley's assessment is quoted, the ways in which the city was being constructed as an "unhealthy" site can be seen, with "dust and rubbish and all kinds of dirt thrown into [the streets], ad libitum, from every house" (147); one which, moreover, was represented to be unamenable to sanitarian interventions as the "densely populated Indian quarters" and the "narrow streets of northern Calcutta" fail to provide an "unobjectionable site for public dustbins" (167). Tagore, with his description of Hazaribagh was viewing and constructing the site almost as an exact opposite of such an "unhealthy" city.

Thus, in this "neat and clean city" would come up the rest homes of the Bengali Bhadralok. Juxtaposed with the textually emptied landscape are the lavish built environments of the Bengali Bhadralok's "*kuthis*,"[35] like the one to which Sanjibchandra

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motivated decision. Berating the veto, an editorial of *The Bengalee* on 27 November 1906 stated, "Are we to understand that what is good for the Eden Sanitarium, to which only Europeans are admitted, is not good for the Lowis Jubilee Sanatorium which is resorted to by 'natives' only?" (qtd. in Bhattacharya-Panda, 86). The "quest for exclusivity" led to attempts to discourage Indians' health tourism to Darjeeling by constructing alternative destinations. While on the one hand the colonial administration was keen on maintaining the exclusivity of Darjeeling and finding alternative sites which were supposedly "better adapted than Darjeeling to […] constitutions of […] Indian gentlemen" (Bhattacharya-Panda 89) (Kurseong, another "hill station" near Darjeeling was suggested as such an alternative, for instance), elite Indians like the Maharaja of Burdwan, B. C. Mahtab, and Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar, apprehensive about the prospect of "racial humiliation," attempted to "resist the influx of middle-class Bengalis into Darjeeling itself" (90). To prevent "overcrowding" in Darjeeling, the Maharaja of Burdwan, for instance, wrote to the Sanitary Commissioner of Bengal proposing alternative locations in *Paschim*, namely Madhupur, Simultola, and Deoghar (91).

[35]*Kuthis* are spacious houses, usually belonging to businessmen, high-ranking government officials, or other eminent men, which could be used as both places of work and living. The term *kuthi* would probably be reminiscent of the related term *Nilkuthi* which was a shortened form of the phrase "Nil Saheber Kuthi" (literally, "the houses of the Indigo planters"). The Indigo planters, who were usually white Europeans, worked and lived out of such spaces close to the fields that they had leased where Indian farmers were

pays a visit and tellingly describes to be of a kind "which is rarely seen even among Sahibs" (Chattopadhyay 28). It is not unusual that Sanjibchandra comes across such a household belonging to a Bengali in these parts as many contemporary illustrious Bhadralok families had come to own property in the region. In Shambhuchandra Vidyaratna's biography of his older brother, he writes of Vidyasagar being inundated with visitors making various demands of him. To escape the 'excessive people,' and on his doctor's suggestion, Shambhuchandra mentions, Vidyasagar "[bought] a bungalow very close to the Karmatanr railway station" (Vidyaratna 226). One of Sukumar Ray's poems, "Kolikata Kotha re," contains a reference to a "comfort-house" in Giridih, where the speaker, freed from the necessity of responding to the calls of clock-time which seems to govern the lives of those who had invited him to attend a tea-party in the Kolkata, and also, more generally, the lives of the Bengali Bhadralok who had availed most of the employment opportunities that had become available under the colonial government, is able to live by the maxim, "When you're hungry, eat your fill, when you're sleepy, sleep" (S. Ray 89). From Nalini Das's memoir of the Ray family, *Saat Rajar Dhan Ek Manik*, it seems the 'comfort-house' of Sukumar's poem was a reference to a property that the family had owned in Giridih. After Ray's death, Das writes, "Mamima [Ray's wife] decided that for some days she would go somewhere healthful outside Kolkata" (21). They opt for Giridih, where, just like Sanjibchandra's Bengali host, within a huge garden, the Ray family, too, has a great house, "Rose Villa" (N. Das 21). These structures, in turn, seem to have been built in imitation of the ones that the British built in the 'hill stations,' wherein, abandoning the "grid patterns of the civil and military stations," they had "constructed […] along the crests of ridges and around the shores of lakes, without apparent premeditation or planning," and "cultivated English fruit orchards and vegetable gardens in their backyards" (Kennedy 3). The Bengali household in Hazaribagh to which Sanjibchandra pays a visit, for instance, seems to have been built keeping such tenets in mind. Sanjibchandra describes it as a 'mansion' with a garden wide enough for an evening stroll, a pond, and finally an orchard in the backyard, where its resident has managed to grow bananas—a feat, if Sanjibchandra is to be believed, hitherto unheard of in that region (27). It is, then, not incidental that Sanjibchandra "mistakes the house as belonging to some wealthy Britisher," but actually hints at the possibility that English architectural forms—especially from the hill stations—were being imported to *Paschim* (26).

It is in this context that the utilities of constructing the sites of *Paschim* as *terra nullius* and articulating a descriptive non-plenitude need to be analyzed. In *Palamau*, the articulation of descriptive non-plenitude—more effective since it comes in the wake of Sanjibchandra's narrator repeatedly admitting to his volubility "even if no one is listening," and to his 'pleasure' in speaking (23)—transmitted the perceived material dearth through a textual lack. A perceived topographical lack had been viscerally conveyed typographically, so that the dearth was experienced not only by the traveller moving through the region but, also, analogously by the "three-four humble Bhadralok […] who [would] have read of [his] tour through Palamau in the pages of *Bangadarshan*" (34). Confronted with Sanjibchandra's lament for the dearth of "capital" (34) with which

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often forced to cultivate Indigo. Dinabandhu Mitra's play *Nil Darpan* [*The Indigo-Planting Mirror*] bore witness to this exploitative practice and was written in 1858–59.

to narrate the site on the one hand, and the imagery of utopian spaces on the other, the Bhadralok readership of such travel narratives about *Paschim* was being encouraged to *invest* in an empty, as yet unmarked world, now textually prepared to be ripe for the 'making.' A motive underlying such textual preparation perhaps begins to become apparent when one looks at the almost contemporaneous emergence of the Bhadralok health tourist. Contributing to and facilitated by its discursive production as *terra nullius*, the Bhadralok health tourist in the second half of the nineteenth century, was well-placed to envision its production as a healthful utopia; to wish, on the one hand, to construct and maintain *Paschim* as a utopian contrast to the "unhealthy" city of Calcutta, and on the other, to develop it according to the architectural models provided by the British in the hill stations. It can be argued, then, that the Bhadralok, aided discursively, accessed *Paschim* in terms of these two imperatives, and as such, it was turned into a rival space on which the Bengali Bhadralok could enact their 'English' desires—engaging in health tourism and building health resorts—away, however, from resentful English eyes.

**Conclusion**

It is in this context that the reasons for the children confusing an "unexceptionable Bengali" like Sanjibchandra with a Sahib become clearer. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Bengali Bhadralok were transitioning to newer modes of travelling. Travel cultures in the precolonial period, as has been noted earlier, had mostly stemmed from religious or trading practices, with most ordinary people travelling almost exclusively for the purpose of pilgrimage. As historians of the regional travel cultures have noted, before the advent of colonialism, for Hindus—a religious group with which most Bengali Bhadralok were, at least nominally, affiliated with—very few forms of travel apart from pilgrimage had sanction. Such journeys, and also journeys undertaken for the purposes of trade, had a few features in common. Early Modern pilgrims and traders—as the paper has tried to illustrate—travelled to sites that seem to have been socially, economically, and culturally marked; to sites that evinced rich histories of land use. Moreover, in these sites, they were non-descript as individual travellers, and would only be admitted (or read about) insofar as they reproduced the expected gestures—the gestures of those who had come as travellers to these sites before them. Therefore, these sites seem to have appeared before such travellers as places rather than as spaces—that is to say, as sites with a past. It was only in negotiation with such pasts that travellers could access and operate within these sites.

However, the encounter with colonial modernity led to the emergence of multiple forms of secular travel with the Bengali Bhadralok, who had come to become most familiar with the education, public health, and cultural regimes of colonial modernity, beginning to travel extensively, and also, to write extensively about it. It was in this context that the heterogenous but organized and sustained practice of journeying to *Paschim* began to be undertaken by the Bengali Bhadralok. Unlike the previous modes, discourses surrounding the Bengali Bhadralok's journeys to *Paschim* produced the site through the language of interiorization and discovery, so that each successive traveller to the region was able to appropriate it as *terra nullius*. 'Prepared' in this way—as an empty 'world' ripe for the making—*Paschim* could emerge as the ideal destination for the Bhadralok health tourist, who desired a site which could prove, on the one hand, to be a contrast to the "unhealthy" city of Calcutta, and could, on the other hand, be modelled to

be a replica of the British settlements in the hill stations. That *Paschim*, especially in its cultural representations, remained hovering among the various visions that the Bengali Bhadralok (often imitating the colonial traveller's gaze) sought to impose upon it, ensured, to a large extent, that it was continuously produced as space rather than as place: as an empty expanse awaiting the utopian touch. In these ways, this practice—both in its intentions and effects—thus turned out to constitute something completely new, playing a role in shaping the identity of the Bengali Bhadralok.

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