Rupkatha Journal

On Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

ISSN 0975-2935

www.rupkatha.com

Volume VII, Number 2, 2015

Themed Issue on

"Desire and Deceit: India in the Europeans' Gaze"

In collaboration with

Imagology Centre, University of Alba-Iulia, Romania

Guest Editors

Diana Câmpan, Gabriela Chiciudean, Rodica Chira, Sonia Elvireanu, Maria-Ana Tupan

Indexing and abstracting

Rupkatha Journal is an international journal recognized by a number of organizations and institutions. It is archived permanently by www.archive-it.org and indexed by EBSCO, Elsevier, MLA International Directory, Ulrichs Web, DOAJ, Google Scholar and other organizations and included in many university libraries.

SNIP, IPP and SJR Factors

Nr.	Source ID	Title	SNIP 2012	IPP 2012	SJR 2012	SNIP 2013	IPP 2013	SJR 2013	SNIP 2014	IPP 2014	SJR 2014
1	21100201709	Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities	0.313	0.034	0.1	0.271	0.038	0.116	0.061	0.007	0.101

Additional services and information can be found at:
About Us: www.rupkatha.com/about.php
Editorial Board: www.rupkatha.com/editorialboard.php
Archive: www.rupkatha.com/archive.php
Submission Guidelines: www.rupkatha.com/submissionguidelines.php
Call for Papers: www.rupkatha.com/callforpapers.php

This Open Access article is distributed freely online under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/). This allows an individual user non-commercial re-use, distribution, sharing and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited with links. For commercial re-use, please contact editor@rupkatha.com.

© Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities

"I am black, but my soul is white": the Christian Neophyte and his Alienation in 19th Century Anti-conversion Anglo-Indian novels

Ayusman Chakraborty
Jadavpur University, India

Abstract

This article studies how the Christian convert is represented in three nineteenth century Anglo-Indian novels. On the basis of their attitude towards conversion, Anglo-Indian novels can be classified as pro-conversion or anti-conversion. In pro-conversion novels, conversion to Christianity is presented as a smooth transition. Anti-conversion novels, in contrast, portray conversion as a harrowing experience that shatters the mental stability of the convert. Alienation and isolation inevitably follow conversion. The three texts discussed here show how the authors highlight the alienation of the Christian neophyte to discourage proselytization. The alienation of the convert is thus strategically articulated in these texts.

[**Keywords:** Christianity, Conversion, alienation, Hinduism, Caste, *The Missionary*, Sydney Owenson, *Seeta*, Philip Meadows Taylor, *The Old Missionary*, William Wilson Hunter.]

The issue of conversion became very important in nineteenth century Anglo-Indian[1] literature. This was not an isolated occurrence, unrelated to mainstream English literature. As Gauri Viswanathan shows, conversion became a popular subject of discussion in nineteenth century Britain. The nineteenth century witnessed progressive secularization and liberalization of British society and state. This was not a smooth passage. There was a heated debate on whether to incorporate the religious minorities like the Jews, the Catholics and the Nonconformists into the wider concept of nation. The orthodox groups like the Evangelicals insisted on the conversion of the minorities to Anglican faith before they could be incorporated. At the same time, they also called for the Christianization of the colonies. On the other side, there were those who wished to preserve religious differences. Their goal was to Anglicize the minority groups without tampering with their religious identities – to convert a Jew to a non-Jewish Jew, in the words of Viswanathan. In such an atmosphere of conflicting ideas, novels on conversion acquired added importance. Viswanathan states, "It is no accident that novels about the conversion of Hindus and Muslims to Christianity had wide popular appeal in nineteenth century England, not merely as wishful testimony to the efficacy of

[1]The word 'Anglo-Indian' is used here in its nineteenth century sense to mean Englishmen and Englishwomen living in India. Anglo-Indian literature refers to British writings on India. Such works reflected colonial power relations, projecting the British as masters and the Indians as subjects.

Kolkata, India. Copyrighted material. www.rupkatha.com

missionary ideology but more compellingly as exotic displacements of the pressing and often explosive issue of whether to admit Jews, Catholics, and Nonconformists into the English nation state" (Viswanathan 27).

The Novel, as Viswanathan's study suggests, became a battleground where the pro-conversion and anti-conversion ideologies confronted each other. Indeed, on the basis of their attitudes towards conversion, novels can be classified as pro-conversion or anti-conversion. In the pro-conversion Anglo-Indian novels, conversion generally becomes, to quote Viswanathan again, "a straightforward, overdetermined spiritual movement to Christianity" (Viswanathan 28). That is, in such novels conversion to Christianity is portrayed as smooth and unproblematic. In contrast, anti-conversion novels problematize conversion. Such novels focus on the alienation of the neophyte to tacitly discourage conversion to Christianity.

This article aims to examine how three anti-conversion Anglo-Indian novels strategically describe the alienation of the Christian neophytes. In such novels a neophyte always appears as a tragic figure. Rejected by the Hindu society, he does not find place among his new co-religionists. His attempts to mingle with the Europeans always meet with rebuff. The anti-conversionist authors do not portray conversion as a joyous rebirth. Rather they portray it as a painful experience involving isolation and separation.

It is necessary to understand at the very outset why some colonial authors were so much against conversion. The stated aims of colonialism were the three 'Gs' – God, Gold and Glory – or the three "Cs' – Christianity, Civilization, and Commerce. However, the conversion of the natives always induced an anxiety in the colonizers. In so far as the neophyte proclaimed the triumph of Christianity, he or she was seen as the "reformed, recognizable Other", to use a phrase by Bhabha (Bhabha 122). However, much like Bhabha's 'mimic man', the neophyte also acted as a menacing presence. This is because, united to the colonizers by a common religion (Christianity), he/she claimed like Blake's "little Black Boy" – "And I am black, but O! my soul is white" (Blake 45). This claim challenged the colonial signifying practice by partly obliterating the barrier between the self and the other. The only way colonial authors could render the neophytes innocuous was by presenting them as failed converts. Their attitude towards the neophyte was therefore ambivalent; it oscillated between compassion and contempt. This in turn influenced the way they portrayed the neophyte and his alienation.

A few words on the concept of alienation is necessary here. The word 'alienation' has become so much saturated with meanings that it is difficult to arrive at a concrete definition. At best, one can provide only a working definition of the term. For the purpose of this study, we will accept the very basic definition of alienation. As Irving Louis Horowitz points out, "At its source the word 'alienation' implies an intense separation first from objects in a world, second from other people, third from ideas about the world held by other people. It might be said that the synonym of alienation is separation, while the precise antonym of the word alienation is integration" (Horowitz 231). Alienation, as Horowitz shows, can have both positive and negative effects – that is, can be "constructive as well as destructive" (Horowitz 233). However, as long as it is imposed from without, it generally has a destructive effect on individuals. It produces only negative feelings–the feelings of "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement" as recognized by Seeman (Seeman 783).

The ostensible object of colonial authors in portraying the alienation of the Christian neophyte was to condemn the Hindu caste system. In this the pro-conversionist and the anti-conversionist authors were in agreement.

It is interesting that the nineteenth century Anglo-Indian writers portrayed mainly Hindu converts in their novels. Despite the fact that the Muslims formed a substantial portion of the Indian population, the novelists rarely portrayed their conversion to Christianity. Now, as polytheists, the Hindus were felt to be more in need of 'truth' than the Muslims. After all, the Muslims also worshipped the one true god, while the Hindus were just 'idolaters'. Islam was certainly an 'errant faith'; but it was a monotheistic one, sometimes more rigidly monotheistic than Christianity. As T. R. Metcalf argues, "Islam in the end was a religion which commanded respect, even a covert envy, among the British in India" (Metcalf 144). But more importantly, the British were afraid of the Muslims. Unlike the pliant Hindus, the Muslims were 'zealous' and 'fanatical' in their eyes. The British feared that they had already earned the animosity of the Muslims by ousting them from a position of power. They were not ready to try their patience further. Hence, the British writers put more emphasis on the conversion of the Hindus than the Muslims.

In order to understand why the neophyte necessarily becomes alienated from the Hindu society after conversion, one must have some idea about the Hindu social system. From time immemorial, Hindu society has been organized on the basis of *Varna* or colour. The *Rig-Veda*, the oldest religious text of the Hindus, mentions four *varnas*or social groups – the *Brahmana*, the *Kshatriya* (or *Rajanya*), the *Vaisya*,and the *Sudras*. It is important to note that these distinctions were not rigidly imposed on the people in the early Vedic age. Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, and Datta points out:

> [...] in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* there is little trace of the rigid restrictions typical of caste in its mature form. There was hardly any taboo on intermarriage, change of occupation or commensality. We have instances of marriages of *Brahmanas* with *Rajanya* women, and of the union of *Arya*and *Sudra* ... There was no ban on the taking of food cooked by the *Sudras*, and there is no evidence that impurity was communicated by the touch or contact of the inferior castes (Majumdar, Raychaudhuri, and Datta 31-32).

According to a section of modern historians, caste system, as we have it today, was a later development born out of the contact of the Aryans[2]with the Proto-Australoid and the Austro-Asiatic tribes. The magic rituals of these tribes, which prohibited contact with strangers, were simply adopted by the Aryans. Whatever the case might be, it is certain that with the passage of time caste system became increasingly rigid. The upper castes, especially the *Brahmanas*, arrogated to themselves a position of superiority. The lower castes and the indigenous tribes were branded as untouchables. Contact with these people, it was believed, demanded ritual purification. Close intimacy with them resulted in excommunication and expulsion from one's own caste. Loss of caste entailed boycott and social ostracism. Naturally people were afraid of violating caste norms.

Like all major religions, Hinduism is not appreciative of anyone who renounces his faith. Apostasy is automatically punished by loss of caste privileges. This is of course natural, since the convert himself renounces caste by leaving the fold. In past, segregation and social ostracism followed conversion. Under the rigid caste rules, even the closest relatives of the convert could not maintain contact with him. Anyone associating with the convert was sure to bring down the same punishments upon him. The harsh laws practically turned the convert into a pariah. Till the mid nineteenth century, a convert from Hinduism could not inherit the property of his ancestors. It was the British who finally removed this restriction by promulgating the

[2] The colonial historians believed that Hinduism was brought into India by the Aryan invaders who migrated from Central Asia. This is, however, a contentious issue.

Caste Disabilities Removal Act in 1850. The British authors thus well knew what the expulsion from caste meant. They believed that it is this fear of expulsion from caste which prevented a Hindu from converting to more 'enlightened' religions. As Captain Meadows Taylor observes in *Seeta*:

> Seeta is only a type of thousands and thousands of her own countrymen and women, who feel the truth, and who, until some unforeseen crisis in their lives arises, dare not make the final plunge which not only severs them from all they love, honour, and respect in life, but makes them social outcasts – utterly despised and rejected by their people, even to the refusal of a cup of cold water (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. III, 207).

This view is shared by most of the authors we study.

While both pro-conversion and anti-conversion authors criticized Hindu society for driving out the Christian convert, they differed in their accounts of the treatment the neophyte received from the European society in India. The pro-conversion writers generally chose to remain silent about this, thereby avoiding the thorny question about the neophyte's integration. The anti-conversion authors however show that the neophyte is rarely accepted with open arms. Some writers like Philip Meadows Taylor even criticize the Anglo-Indian society for rejecting the neophyte. But most authors tacitly blame the neophytes themselves for their alienation. They allege that, though converted, the neophytes retained traces of their former belief. This made it impossible for them to merge successfully with the mainstream.

It is necessary to understand at the very outset why some colonial authors were so much against conversion. The stated aims of colonialism were the three 'Gs' – God, Gold and Christian community. In short, they tend to argue that the alienation of the neophytes is their own making. In this way, these authors absolve the European Christians from the charge of not embracing their Indian brethren. At the same time they could also establish the futility of the missionary enterprises. This sort of argument can be found in novels like *The Missionary* and *Seeta*, to which we now turn.

Sydney Owenson's (Lady Morgan) *The Missionary: An Indian Tale* (1811) was probably the first Anglo-Indian novel that had conversion as its main theme. The novel turns on the conversion of the Hindu priestess or "Brahmachira" Luxima. The novel may be briefly summarized. The protagonist of the novel, Hilarion Count d' Acugna, is the descendant of an influential Portuguese family. He becomes a Franciscan monk and travels to India to spread the message of Christ. He achieves little success at first. The natives, though gentle and tolerant, resist him with the argument, "God has appointed to each tribe its own faith, and to each sect its own religion: let each obey the appointment of God, and live in peace with his neighbour" (Owenson 53). Hilarion, however, is too orthodox to appreciate such pluralistic arguments. During a religious debate with the Brahmanas, Hilarion meets the beautiful Hindu priestess Luxima, and is immediately drawn to her. He plans to convert her to Christianity, thereby setting her as an example for others to follow. With this intention, he travels to "Cashmire" (Kashmir). There he meets and preaches to Luxima. Gradually, the Christian missionary and the Hindu priestess fall in love. When their intimacy is discovered, Luxima is excommunicated by her own grandfather who is a *guru* or teacher of the *Vedanti* sect. With nowhere left to go Luxima follows Hilarion who baptizes her and takes her to Goa. His intention is to place her in a convent there. In the road, Hilarion is arrested by Jesuit priests who bear a grudge against the Franciscan Hilarion. Luxima is sent to a convent while Hilarion is charged with sexually exploiting the neophyte. He is condemned to death by the Inquisition. Luxima escapes from the convent with the

help of a Brahmana. She reappears before Hilarion could be executed and thrust herself between him and the executioners. In the process, she receives a mortal wound. Seeing this, the oppressed Hindus rise up in rebellion. Taking advantage of the confusion that ensues, Hilarion flies with Luxima who dies soon after. Hilarion returns to Kashmir and spends the rest of his days meditating on Luxima.

The theme of conversion in the novel has drawn a fair share of critical attention. However many scholars, including Nigel Leask, tend to misread the novel when they claim that Luxima did not convert to Christianity (Leask 116). Owenson graphically shows Luxima receiving baptism:

> The Missionary led her forward, in silence, to the edge of the spring, and blessing the living waters as they flowed, he raised his consecrated hands, and shed the dew of salvation upon the head of the proselyte, pronouncing, in a voice of inspiration, the *solemn sacrament of baptism*. All around harmonized with the holy act, Nature stood sole sponsor, the incense which filled the air arose from the bosom of the Earth; and the light which illuminated the ceremony was light from heaven (Owenson: 179).

This description proves beyond doubt that Luxima was converted to Christianity, even if informally.

According to modern scholars, the novel opposes Christian missionary enterprises. Nigel Leask mentions, "In Morgan's novel, Hinduism as embodied in the doctrine and example of Luxima is preferred to the intolerant asceticism of the Catholic missionary Hilarion" (Leask 102). He further states, "The polemical thrust of Morgan's novel is to show that evangelical policies of cultural assimilation cannot succeed; rather than 'making a Christian' Hilarion only succeeds in 'destroying a Hindu' …" (Leask128). Nancy L Paxton has provided an even more unconventional reading of the novel. She believes that Luxima's worship of "Camdeo" (Kamdev) or the Hindu god of sexual love is psychologically more liberating than the rigid Christianity of Hilarion. In her eyes, Hilarion is nothing other than a "self-deluding, rigid and intolerant Catholic zealot" (Paxton 91). These scholars thus claim that Owenson herself was against conversion. The study of this novel does make it obvious that the author criticized the aggressive zeal of the Jesuit priests. She sees them as "cruel and inexorable bigots" who pervert the teachings of Christ – "substituting malevolence for mercy, and the horrors of a fanatical superstition for the blessed peace and loving kindness of true religion" (Owenson 258). They are no better than, and perhaps even inferior to, the fanatical Brahmanas who persecute an individual for his apostasy. But it is not enough to claim that Owenson condemned conversion. Rather than blandly stating her opinions, Owenson shows us both the positive and negative sides of conversion. She points out that conversion is as much capable of alleviating alienation as in enforcing it.

In *The Missionary* Owenson vividly portrays the mental conflict in Luxima after she converts to Christianity. What most scholars fail to note is the fact that it is the Hindus, and not Hilarion, who finally drive Luxima to Christianity. She changes her religion only after she is excommunicated and is left with no other options. Luxima clearly states that she has no future under Hinduism, "For me, my days are numbered – sad and few, they will wear away in some trackless desert, […] lost to my cast (sic), my country, and my fame […]" (Owenson 175). Owenson here clearly criticizes the rigid Hindu caste norms. Once excommunicated, it is only Christianity that offers her relief. It promises to unite her once again with common humanity. If Luxima fails to takes this chance, the fault lies with her and not with her new faith.

As a matter of fact, despite her obvious sympathy for Luxima, Owenson shows that her alienation is self-imposed to a large extent. She is unable to embrace Christianity wholeheartedly. This increases her feeling of isolation. She tells Hilarion, "it was *thou* I followed, and not thy doctrines" (Owenson 233) Even after she is excommunicated, her former caste prejudices do not abandon her. Herself an outcast, she rejects the hospitality of another outcast. Owenson shows that this is a flaw in her character. Given that the novel preaches liberal humanism, Luxima's orthodoxy appears as obnoxious as Hilarion's.

Luxima's conversion to Christianity is thus only superficial. Owenson suggests that inwardly she retains her belief in Hinduism. While travelling through the wastelands during her journey to Goa, Luxima cannot prevent herself from bowing down before the alters of the local gods. Though Hilarion rebukes her severely for "the perpetual vacillation of her undecided faith", Luxima repeats the 'mistakes' again and again (Owenson: 201). She declares that old ties are difficult to severe, and the author agrees with her. Ultimately at the moment of crisis, Luxima completely reverts back to Hinduism. She thrusts herself between Hilarion and the executioners, crying out, "Brahma receive and eternally unite our spirits!" (Owenson 260).Gauri Viswanathan points out that here Luxima symbolically attempts a *sati* or self-immolation at the pyre of her lover. This symbolic act of *sati* shows her renunciation of Christianity and return to Hinduism. She dies declaring "now I *die* as Brahmin women *die*, a *Hindu* in my feelings and my faith – dying for him I loved, and believing as my fathers have believed" (Owenson 273). Luxima thereby becomes a renegade convert who highlights the inefficacy of missionary enterprises.

Our reading suggests that Owenson did oppose conversion, but on entirely different grounds. She never felt that Hinduism was superior to Christianity. Though calling it a 'poetic faith', she also describes it as an 'error' - "bright, wild and illusory; captivating to the senses, fatal to reason, and powerful and tyrannic to both" (Owenson 111). In contrast, Christianity is described as simple and sublime. What really made Owneson criticize Luxima's conversion was the feeling that it was premature. She felt that Christianity demanded a certain maturity on the part of the neophyte. Without the light of reason guiding him, the neophyte was sure to go astray. Even Hilarion understands that Luxima's prejudices "could only be perfectly eradicated by the slow operation of expanding reason, by the strengthening efforts of moral perception…" (Owenson 181). Unfortunately circumstances forced the religion upon Luxima. It is not surprising that she becomes a renegade proselyte in the end.

Like Owenson's *The Missionary*, Philip Meadows Taylor's *Seeta* (1873) highlights the alienation of the convert. Seeta certainly does not convert to Christianity. Though married to the Englishman Cyril Brandon, she remains a Hindu throughout the novel. Nevertheless, the novel does contain a discourse on conversion. As David Finkelstein observes "In *Seeta* … there is much emphasis on Seeta's potential for conversion to Christianity" (Finkelstein 183). *Seeta*is a 'Mutiny novel' – that is a novel which has the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 as its main theme. The protagonist Seeta is widowed when her husband Huree. Das is killed by the dacoit leader Azrael Pande. Azrael is later caught by the British police and brought to trial. When Seeta appears before the British magistrate to give her testimony, Cyril Brandon, the officer, becomes impressed by her courage. This gradually develops into love and finally to marriage. The couple live happily till the arrival of the English girl Grace Mostyn. Cyril finds himself falling in love with Grace. This becomes a severe trial for him, but he manages to maintain his fidelity to Seeta. Things were beginning to look good for Seeta, when the Mutiny suddenly breaks out. Azrael, who had escaped from prison, returns as a leader of the mutineers. Determined to violate

Seeta, he attacks the couple again and again. During a raid on the British settlement, Azrael accidentally wounds Seeta when the latter receives the blow meant for her husband. The British officers kill Azrael. Seeta succumbs to her injuries soon after. Cyril returns to England to marry Grace and inherit his ancestral property. The novel ends with Cyril and Grace paying their respect to Seeta.

Unlike *The Missionary*, conversion is not a major theme in *Seeta*. This is to be expected, for *Seeta* is a Mutiny novel. It was believed in Britain that the Sepoys (soldiers) had rebelled out of fear. They felt that the British were trying to demolish their religions.[3] There is some grain of truth in this. The foremost historian of the Mutiny, John William Kaye, describes how in the years preceding the Mutiny, Christian missionaries struck with a ruthless force at "the great Baal of Hindooism". (Kaye: 181 – 185) Taylor himself believed that the Mutiny was nothing but an attempt of declining Hinduism to reassert itself. In a letter to his father dated 21 June 1857, he observes:

> Civilisation is pressing hard on Hindooism, perhaps also on Mohammedanism: I do not say Christianity, for that as yet is far off; but that amount of civilisation which has proved progression of knowledge to be incompatible with Hindooism, and to be sapping its very existence. This may have led to conspiracy among Brahmins, and by them the Rajpoots or Kshattriya classes have been aroused to action (Taylor, *The Story of My Life*, 340).

[3] The immediate cause of the Mutiny was the introduction of the new greased cartridges for the Enfield rifles. The Sepoys were required to bite the cartridges before loading them. It was rumoured that the cartridges were greased with the fats of cows and pigs, taboo to both the Hindus and the Muslims. The Sepoys felt that the British were deliberately hurting their religious sentiments.

Such observation shows that the fear of the Sepoys was not completely groundless. However, after the Mutiny, the British began to disavow their involvement in proselytization. When Taylor was writing his novel in the 1870s, the people of England were not ready to acknowledge that the British ever tried to impose their religion on the natives. This accounts for the cautious way with which Taylor approached the topic.

Though Taylor does not depict actual conversion, he leaves enough hints to suggest that had Seeta lived she would have changed her religion. For instance, at one place she compares the *Bible* to the *Bhagavad Gita*, finding the former to be "so tender, so simple, that a child could understand it" while the latter to be difficult and obscure (Taylor, *Seeta* vol .II, 294). Again, after attending a Christian service, she finds Hindu prayers to be "cold and comfortless" (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. III, 144). Observing her mental transformations Mrs Pratt the missionary's wife remarks, "there is good seed sown and it must germinate and grow" (Taylor, *Seeta* vol.II, 291). Seeta, therefore, faces the same dilemmas that a neophyte faces in the course of his existence.

What makes Seeta's alienation more acute is the fact that she is rejected by both communities. While the Hindus shun her because of religious prejudice, the European Christians do not accept her out of racial prejudice. Immediately after her marriage with Cyril, Seeta is excommunicated by the "Gooroo" (Guru) of her caste. Her guardians - grandfather Narendra and his sister Aunt Ella – are also forced to undergo purification ceremonies. Though they continue to love Seeta, they thenceforth start avoiding her. Particularly Aunt Ella, who becomes a "Bhugut" or devotee, rejects her company altogether. Even her childhood friends refuse to mingle with her anymore. Thus ostracized, Seeta begins doubting herself. She cannot help feeling "that her husband's caresses were poison; that she was polluted by them …" (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. II, 90). Seeta here suffers

from feelings of isolation and estrangement. Like other writers of that time, Taylor criticizes the Hindu society for its rigid caste norms.

To Taylor's credit, he did not spare the prejudices of his own countrymen either. Theoretically Christianity preaches universal brotherhood; as Cyril states, "Our churches are open to all; and where prayers are publicly read, the place is God's temple, for the time" (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. III, 139). But in practice, the European Christians maintained their distance from the native Christians. Taylor does not hide this fact. When Seeta visits the local church, the Europeans are scandalized; Taylor states:

> [...] we may well believe that the presence of Seeta attracted no little attention: and there was a good deal of indignant sniffing on the part of some ladies present, at the unwarrantable intrusion, as they expressed it, of a 'black woman', a heathen, into a place of Christian worship (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. III, 141).

Though some English ladies like Mrs Pratt and Grace Mostyn welcome her, the majority stays aloof. These ladies further try to separate Cyril and Seeta, believing it their duty "to save that fine young fellow from the scheming natives" (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. II, 164). Even Cyril's family members in England oppose their marriage; his brother writes:

> She could *never* take her place as your wife here, and the idea of recognizing such a person as Seeta, as a member of our old family, is as you must see yourself on reflection, perfectly absurd and impossible (Taylor, *Seeta* vol. II, 219).

Taylor does not show what would have happened had Seeta converted to Christianity and went to England as Brandon's wife. Instead, he chooses the easy way out by having her killed. The reviewer of the novel for the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Review* complains, "This ... strikes us as akin to the action of the player who upsets the chess-board because he can see no way of winning ..." (Gregg 224). The reviewer does not understand that Taylor had little options. He was well aware that the prejudice of the British society was too deep rooted to accommodate Seeta into the fold.

Despite his misgivings about the behaviour of his countrymen, Meadows Taylor is more positive about conversion than Owenson. Conversion does not promise any material benefit to Luxima. All it proposes is a dreary life in a convent. In contrast, conversion is more alluring to Seeta as it promises to make her union with Cyril more complete. Taylor mentions:

> Yet towards becoming a Christian, the advantages in a worldly point of view, appeared far more decided than in continuing as she was ... As a Christian, he would marry her by Christian rites. No one could then deny her right to social rank and position ... If she bore children to her husband, they would no longer have a stigma of illegitimacy according to English law (Taylor, *Seeta* Vol. III, 208).

However, even these considerations do not decide the question irrevocably for Seeta. Taylor very realistically shows that it is difficult to accept a new faith which requires the renunciation of old ties.

There is one curious similarity between Luxima and Seeta which requires some consideration. Luxima dies with the name of Brahma in her lips, showing her relapse to Hinduism. Interestingly, at her deathbed Seeta recites Sanskrit prayers mingled with lines of Christian hymns (Taylor, *Seeta* Vol. III, 104). This shows that like Luxima her acceptance of Christianity is not wholehearted. Further her mixing of Christian and Hindu prayers resembles an imperfect mimicry. Such an act, with its potential for subverting the dominant discourse, always filled the colonizers with anxiety. It is likely that Taylor's ambivalence towards conversion becomes manifested here.

Both *The Missionary* and *Seeta* depict the conversion of the feminine other. While these

novels are not very sure about the final efficacy of conversion, they nevertheless present conversion as something desirable. In both works, conversion becomes a metonymy of the romantic possession of the feminine other. In contrast, anti-conversion novels which depict the conversion of the masculine other appear more bluntly hostile to conversion. Vying for equality in the religious sphere, the native males are depicted in such works as the threatening other. The colonial novels often villainize the male converts. Example of this can be found in William Wilson Hunter's tale *The Old Missionary* (1897).

The plot of *The Old Missionary* is rather simple. The novel describes the idealistic efforts of the old missionary Father Douglas to compose a dictionary of the hill-languages. Fate, however, works against him. He becomes blind and dies leaving his work unfinished. There is no complication in the novel. The only crisis one comes across is a religious debate between the old missionary and his disciple the Brahmana convert. This Brahmana preacher tries to outdo his preceptor in religious zeal. As a result they become engaged in a confrontation which causes suffering to both.

The Brahmana convert, who becomes a rival of the old missionary, is the main antagonist in the novel. He is shown to be well-meaning, but rigid and uncompromising in his outlook. Though a disciple of the missionary, he tries to outdo his master in piety. What leads them to confrontation is the debate over the recitation of the Athanasian creed. Father Douglas omits this out of mercy, reasoning, "the church in which I have preached Christ's message of mercy shall never be profaned by man's dogma of damnation" (Hunter 105. The Brahmana convert, however, sees this as a heresy. Hunter suggests that the dogma of this neophyte is characteristically Oriental -". The truth seems to be that the younger of the catechists had for some time desired a warmer ritual and a more tropical form of faith than the calm theology of their aged pastor" (Hunter 104). According to the author, therefore, the conversion of this Brahmana has been imperfect. Eager to be accepted into the fold, he understands the letter but not the spirit of Christianity. Hunter shows that this breeds a feeling of isolation in him. Interestingly, at the moment of spiritual crisis, he turns to another Brahmana Pandit for solace, instead of seeking the advice of his new co-religionists. Hunter seems to suggest that Christianity as practiced in the West is unsuitable for Indian minds. His anti-conversion sentiments thus become manifested in the novel.

The study of these three anti-conversion novels reveals a similar strategy of representation. In all three, as well as in other nineteenth century anti-conversion Anglo-Indian literature, the neophyte is not accepted into the fold with open arms. Rather, he or she is treated as a transgressor whose conversion is only skin-deep. Belonging neither to the ingroup nor to the outgroup, the neophyte's is an unenviable fate. The Anglo-Indian authors, as we have seen, often focus on his sense of isolation and alienation. This is not done out of sympathy. Instead, the writer tries to show the English readers the futility of conversion. The neophyte's alienation is thus strategically articulated in certain colonial texts to counter missionary enterprises in India.

References:

Bhabha, Homi K. 2004. *Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge Classics. Print.

Blake, William. 2000. "The Little Black Boy".*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Vol. II. ed. M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. Print.

Datta, Kalinkar, R. C. Majumdar, H. C. Raychaudhuri. 1978. *An Advanced History of*

India. Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India Limited. Print.

Gregg, Hilda. 1897. "The Indian Mutiny in Fiction". *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (February 1897): 218 – 232. Print.

Horowitz, Irving Louis. 2015. "On Alienation and the Social Order". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 27, no. 2 (December 1966): 230 – 237. Web. 13 March 2015.

Hunter, William Wilson. 1897. *The Old Missionary*. London: Henry Frowde. Print.

Kaye, John William. 1977. *A History of the Great Revolt* vol. I. Delhi: Gyan Publishing House. Print.

Leask, Nigel. 1992. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of the Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Print.

Owenson, Sydney. 1811. *The Missionary, An Indian Tale*. New York: Franklin Company and Butler and White. Print.

Paxton, Nancy L. 1999. *Writing under the Raj: Gender, Race, and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830 – 1947*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. Print.

Seeman, Melvin. 1959. "On the Meaning of Alienation"*American Sociological Review* vol. 24, no. 6 (December 1959): 783 – 791. Web. 13 March 2015.

Taylor, Philip Meadows. 1872. *Seeta*vol.I – III. London: Henry S. King &Co.. Print.

Viswanathan, Gauri. 1998. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Print.

Ayusman Chakraborty is a registered PhD student of Jadavpur University. For his doctoral degree, he is researching on the life and works of the nineteenth century colonial administrator Captain Philip Meadows Taylor.