

# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

## Revisiting *Bat- talā*: An Attempt of Understanding its Curious Case

Saswata Kusari

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sarada Ma Girls' College, India

Ph.D Student, Department of English, Kalyani University, India

### Abstract:

*Bat-talā*, now referring to a massive collection of books published from the presses situated in and around North Calcutta, flourished during the nineteenth century. However, the history of Bengali literature and culture does not amply recognize the massive popularity that these books enjoyed. This paper, hence, is an examination of the various factors that might have contributed to the extinction of this massively popular sub-culture. While doing so, the paper will, I hope, throw a glimpse into the cultural ethos of Nineteenth century Calcutta, as well.

**Keywords:** *Bat-talā*, Sub-culture, Printing, Subversion, Colonialism.

### 1. Introduction

Literally, the Bengali word *Bat-talā* means the peripheral area under a Banyan tree usually meant for social and cultural congregations- it is under these Banyan trees that *addas*<sup>1</sup> were (and still are) constituted. Therefore, in Bengal, the word is steeped in enormous cultural connotation. If one searches throughout Bengal, innumerable *Bat-talās* carrying such cultural weight will be encountered. But, in this paper, I am not concerned with the etymology and epistemology of the word *Bat-talā*. Rather, I would be interrogating the (sub) cultural importance of a specific *Bat-talā* situated near Chitpur region of Calcutta, surrounding which, a huge literary phenomenon, with the fabrication of innumerable books from the printing presses, developed during the second half of the nineteenth century.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, a new occurrence started to seize the imagination of Bengalis all across Calcutta and its surrounding areas: Books. Assortments of texts were published from the printing houses situated in and around the vicinity of Chitpur and Shobhabazar. However, after a while, *Bat-talā* started to spread its wings and moved all across North Calcutta. Sripantha (2010), one of the pioneering scholars on *Bat-talā* literature, has suggested that in its range and variety, *Bat-talā* was like an 'open university' of nineteenth century Bengal. Every sweltering issue was accommodated within the jackets of these 'cheap'<sup>2</sup> literary productions; and it is the 'cheapness' of these books that undoubtedly contributed in stirring the imagination of the middle class and lower middle class Bengalis who possibly could neither afford to buy nor had the intellect to appreciate the 'serious'<sup>3</sup> literary masterpieces. In this respect, *Bat-talā* refers to an enormous amount of such 'cheap' books, generally lost in the course of history today.

### 2. Aim and Methodology

The paper is an exploration of the nineteenth century Bengali cultural spectrum using the theoretical model popularised by the scholars related to Cultural Studies. As I try to interrogate the role of the Imperialists behind the extinction of such a massively popular culture, I would have to resort back to the theoretical premise of Postcolonial criticism as well. By using such theoretical tools, I would possibly be able to show that the fossilization of *Bat-talā* had a lot to do with Eurocentric values and principles. The moral assumptions of an overtly Puritanical society manufactured by the Colonial masters paved the way of its extermination. The aim of this paper, hence, would be to explore the inherent politics of the social and cultural spectrum of Colonial Bengal.

### 3. Discussion

Before starting to embark upon a literary and cultural analysis of *Bat-talā*, I must try and present some historical facts to the readers. *Bat-talā*, as I have already mentioned, started off initially surrounding a specific (or *jora Bat-talā* - twin banyan trees)

<sup>1</sup> *Adda* is a form of conversation between or among people who belong to the same socio-economic regions. It is a very popular pastime in Bengal, especially for the young. Some *addas*, however, attain the stature of intellectual conversation. There is a tendency to romanticize the notion of *adda* in Bengal.

<sup>2</sup> I have used the word cheap keeping in mind the allegation of immorality that was brought against these books by the Imperial masters and the so-called educated and elite natives.

<sup>3</sup> By the word serious, I mean the much acclaimed literary productions of famous writers such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and so on.

banyan tree somewhere around Chitpur, a place situated in North Kolkata. While understanding the exact locale from where *Bat-talā* flourished, I must also inform my readers the tentative dates of publication of these books. James Long's account of the 'Publications in the Bengali Language' published in 1859 remains perhaps the most reliable historical source regarding the publication of *Bat-talā* books. Bengali scholars of great eminence have also researched a great deal in unearthing the exact dates of publication of these books. While doing so, more often or not, they refer to Long's account that provides us with a rather cryptic view regarding their publication history. Then again, from Graham Shaw's path breaking work *Printing in Calcutta*, we come to know that the European community of Bengal felt an urge to establish a printing press during the second half of the eighteenth century. This urge might be linked with their desire of creating a recognizable 'other'. In his book, Sripantha (2010) has mentioned that the first printed material in Bengali was seen in the year 1778. The printing houses established in Serampore in the French colony were possibly the earliest instances of printing press in Bengal. According to Sripantha (2010), the first press established by a Bengali was in the year 1807 known as the 'The Press of Baburam'. He is also of the opinion that the first press established in the *Bat-talā* region was in the year 1816. It was the 'Bangali Press' of Harachandra Ray situated on Arpuli Lane (pp.17). However, the exact date of the first published book might be genuinely contested. That Chitpur remained the cornerstone of *Bat-talā* publishing industry for a long time is evident from a book published by Molabi Abdal Ali in the year 1864; where the address of the printer is mentioned as 'Kolkata, Horihor Press, Chitpur Road Battala, house no. 118' (Bhadra, 2011). Though I understand that for the sake of this paper the issue of the popularity of these books is more important than identifying the date of publications, the dates are invariably important in determining the socio-cultural importance of this sub-cultural phenomenon. James Long, though made an important contribution by making such a catalogue of Bengali works, failed to recognize the huge socio-political and economic influence that these books had on Bengali cultural ethos. In fact, he (perhaps consciously) undermined the tremendous impact of these books by revealing his prejudice against them (quoted later). However, as the books published from these presses started to gain popularity; new printing houses started to grow like fungi all across North Calcutta. Books were being sold like hot cakes; and hence, innumerable small presses started to sprout their heads. In this age of Social Media and Hyper-reality (Yes, I am speaking in terms Baudrillard) it will be next to impossible to recount the hoopla that these books generated. Common people were involved in this 'business' as they saw in it a prospect of a huge financial benefit. Hence, literary works crossed the threshold of intellectual territory and became an integral part of the Bengali culture by moving inside the doorsteps of common people. As stated earlier, even those, who could not read properly, bought books at a cheap rate as most of them contained materials, especially pictures, which would satisfy their desire. Starting from Chitpur, Battala gradually spread all across North Kolkata, and then, moved to south as well. New presses developed everywhere: Kumortuli, Sobhabazar, Balakhana, Ahiritola, Darjipara, Garanhata, Simle, Jorabagan, Jorasanko, Chorbagan, Sealdah and so on. Such a huge territorial expansion testifies the immense success that the books published from *Bat-talā* enjoyed. More importantly, *Bat-talā* became a medium of expressing social anguish for the authors. These authors, mostly lost in the course of History today, perhaps took it upon themselves to make the common people aware about the social and cultural ethos of the contemporary age. All contemporary issues such as sex scandals, alcoholism, prostitution, widow marriage, child marriage, the brutal governance of the British and various other scorching issues found its way into the pages of these books: as if they emerged to suit the taste of the Contemporary mass.

Keeping in mind the massive popularity that *Bat-talā* enjoyed during its lifetime, it would be intriguing to note how (and why) such a massively popular culture of reading and selling books has gone into oblivion. Being a Bengali and growing up in the outskirts of Kolkata (not far away from Chitpur itself, where *Bat-talā* book industry initially flourished), I, staggeringly enough, never heard of *Bat-talā*. Though it may point to my short-sightedness, I have asked a lot of other people (some of them students of Bengali literature) and they seem to be equally unaware of this cultural phenomenon that has now been fossilized. Students reading Bengali in school are taught about the critical bent of mind of Bankimchandra and rebellious and subverting tendencies of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, whereas, the history of *Bat-talā* has remained a closely guarded secret. It is after moving into the serious academia that I have encountered books and articles on *Bat-talā*. It seems highly ironical to me that the books which were meant for the mass in that period; now concern none but an 'elite' intellectual community. Hence, the lack of facts regarding *Bat-talā* provokes me to ask questions regarding the cause of its suppression.

The first problem that comes to my mind is the lack of specific Historical documentation on *Bat-talā*. The books on the History of Bengali Literature never seem to recognize the presence of this culture. In this respect, One immediate parallel of *Bat-talā* that literary historians have found is with the Grub Street of London, from where the 'mighty lewd books'<sup>4</sup> were published during the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. The English literary historians also safely neglect the history of books published from Grub Street. I am of the opinion that the Bengali literary historians followed their suit (albeit unconsciously). One has to doge a maze of archival documents in order to get some scattered pieces of information regarding the books published from the presses of *Bat-talā*. Two major scholars on *Bat-talā*, Goutam Bhadra and Adrish Biswas, have mentioned British Library in their respective works, where manuscripts of some of these books are encountered. Major literary historians have fallen back on literary productions and journalistic writings found in the archives of various libraries to gather some information on these books. As I will show later, many of the books published from both Grub Street and *Bat-talā* were eroticas. In order to appreciate a more coherent similarity between our *Bat-talā* and their Grub Street, I would like to quote Julia Peakman (2003) to show how the erotic book trade became a sensation in England:

The extent of the growth of the book trade can, to some extent, be gleaned from Plomer's *Dictionary of Printers*, although not all those involved in the book trade would have been registered; 1,700 firms are listed for the period 1668–1725, double the number that had existed twenty-five years previously. Between 1725 and 1775, 2,500 firms were producing reading material, the market now having expanded to include the provinces. By the 1790s, there was four times the number of printers as there

<sup>4</sup> I have borrowed this phrase from the title of Julia Peakman's wonderful book on Erotic Literature in England.

had been at the beginning of the century. 33 A rise in demand for printed material was stimulated by increased educational opportunities, the growth of the middling classes, a growing periodical press, the increase of circulating libraries, reading clubs and private subscription libraries.

Unfortunately enough, *Bat-talā* does neither have anything like *The Grub Street Journal*<sup>5</sup> nor did have anything like *Dictionary of Printers* to measure its growth and huge success. Adding to its misery, it did not even produce a writer of great importance like Pope or Swift, who published some of their books from Grub Street printing houses and then went on to become literary superstars. Sripantha (2010) mentions that some of the major literary artists wrote some books which were published from these presses but they did so under pseudonym. Perhaps they were ashamed of being identified as *Bat-talā* writers. Why they were ashamed is something that I would go on to analyze in the next section of this article. However, coming back to the present argument, I would like to conclude that the books on and about *Bat-talā*, now, rest in peace; either in the cold rooms of the libraries, or, in the personal collection of some scholarly personalities; and that is the reason why the knowledge about these books eludes the mass today.

I have mentioned in the previous paragraph that these books were a cause of shame for the 'cultured' Bengali society; and this brings me to the second and possibly more important factor that contributed to the fossilization of these books. Previously in this paper, I have mentioned that *Bat-talā* books covered all sorts of topic. However, for the purpose of my present analysis, I would rather limit myself to the several eroticas and fictionalized social scandals that were published during this time. The so-called elite Bengali middle class was petrified by the 'obnoxious' content found in these books which was in direct collision with the overtly moralizing society. When *Bat-talā* was enjoying immense popularity in Kolkata; it was the Puritanical Victorian morality that ran riot. All forms of social and sexual behaviours that did not fall under the purview of monogamous, reproductive domain were censored, subjugated and reformulated. In this respect Andrew Sanders's (1994) opinion regarding Victorian morals becomes handy:

Mid-Victorian Society was still held together by the cement of Christian moral teaching and constricted by the triumph of Puritan sexual mores. It laid a particular stress on the virtues of monogamy and family life, but it was also publicly aware of flagrant and moral anomalies throughout the social system. Although the supposed blessings of ordered family life were generally proclaimed to be paramount, many individual Victorians saw the family as an agent of oppression and as the chief vehicle of encompassing conformity.

Such social set-up, which was more or less to be found in nineteenth century Calcutta as well, was threatened by *Bat-talā*'s overt projection of sexual profligacy under the rubric of erotic book trade. Many of the social scandals were eroticized to a large extent and that was enough in concerning an overtly didactic society where the moral sermon was blowing vehemently. In his book Sripantha (2010) notes:

Nineteenth century Kolkata is the pride of Bengal. Rammohan, Bidyasagar, Derozio, Akshay Kumar Dutta, Radhakanta Deb. Debendranath, Keshabchandra, Ramkrishna-Vivekananda, Michael, Bankimchandra, Rabindranath. A plenty of Bright stars on the sky of Kolkata. Protest against *Sutte*. Protest against widow marriage. Protest against Child marriage. Wave after wave. The wind of modernism. Industries, Science, Press, English education, Newspapers, Women's education...New poetry. New songs. New literature of the New period. Amidst all these, which Calcutta is revealed when the hawker who, saying 'this is new', sells these books? *This Calcutta is the other side of the moon. There is an utter darkness which surrounds this Kolkata. This Calcutta is immersed in silt.* (My Translation) (Emphasis mine).

The same questions can be raised about England as well. England, under Queen Victoria, became an emblem of rationalism and progress. People like Dickens, Tennyson, Arnold, Carlyle, and Darwin were intent on spreading the glory of the land by projecting the purified British culture as an emblem of progress. The missionary educators and the Imperial masters projected themselves as epitome of honesty and good taste, especially when they travelled to foreign lands. Inspired by this kind of a superiority complex, there was a sustained effort of curbing down and reformulating all forms of pagan behaviours. In his book, *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1.*, Michel Foucault argues that the new order of scientific and religious thought chastised the old order. Much in the same vein, the overt moralists of Victorian England were hell-bent on subjugating all forms of sexual dissidence and promiscuity considered to be anti-Christian immorality. Hence, frank and open projection of and discussion on sexuality was never sanctioned. Therefore, a huge amount of erotic texts that prevailed in England was suppressed and obliterated from the canon by the moral police. Julia Peakman (2003) observes that the conventionally moral society often fails to distinguish the difference between erotica and pornography. She argues, "One man's smut is other man's sensuality." It is the 'smut' of the dominant (or 'high') culture that has suppressed all forms of sensual behaviours projected in *Bat-talā* books. Peakman also argues, "The most explicit material was subject to prosecution and therefore was purposely kept 'hidden'. It had to be more carefully sold and was aimed at a specific audience" (Peakman, 2003). The sex scandals that these books tried to embellish in their earnest productions gave them an erstwhile reputation of being pornographic; and hence censored. Such suppressing mentality of a society can be supplemented with the arguments of Foucault, who has extensively criticized this heteropatriarhal and Puritanical model of sexual desire in the chapter entitled 'We Other Victorians' of his epoch making book *The History of Sexuality. Vol.1.* Like Foucault, Researchers like Steven Macuse have also pointed out that this gloss of morality was nothing but a hypocritical representation of a society which was 'corrupted' to its core. Perhaps, in order to hide 'the sick rose'<sup>6</sup>, it became necessary to reconstruct the garden by positing a naturalistic gloss of purity in front of the outer world. Some scholarly books must be taken into consideration in this matter: *The Other Victorians* by Steven Marcuse; *Warm in the Bud* by Ronald Peerless; *London's Under World* by Henry Mehew; *Popular Literature* by Victor Newberg. All these books, written in the second half of the twentieth

<sup>5</sup> Edited by Richard Russell and John Martyn, *The Grub Street Journal* was on print from 1730 to 1738. It was a journal on hack-writing and a parody of the contemporary 'high' literature of the age. Though he disclaimed it later on, it is commonly believed that Alexander Pope was a major contributor of this journal.

<sup>6</sup> In order to describe the sexual corruption of London of the late eighteenth century William Blake wrote a poem of this name.

century, throw a fresh light on the Victorian society which always wore a veil of honesty and morality. Sripantha (2010) notes that the Victorian middle class was sucked into this idea of stability popularized during the Victorian period. The clergy were able to convince the middle class about the great values derived from a disciplined lifestyle. However, the higher and the lower class had a darker side of the life as well. Representation of the notorious world which was consciously camouflaged is easily palpable in the novels of Dickens, as well. His works throw a mirror to the dark underground of London. The parallel can obviously be drawn with Calcutta as well. In this respect, I may argue that it is because of its 'heathen'<sup>7</sup> nature that *Bat-talā* was neglected and bitterly criticized by the English-educated Bengali class.

While talking about the explosion of pornographic material published during the early period of the eighteenth century, Julia Peakman (2003) observes:

Publishers responded to public demand for more suggestive and explicit sexual material and increased production to incorporate a wide range of tastes and to suit all pockets. They expanded the market by circulating more widely, and changed the format to reduce costs for the readers in order to reach a larger audience. The price of the material varied from penny sheets and sixpenny chapbooks to expensive, leather-bound books costing up to six guineas, the majority of them falling somewhere between one shilling and three shillings. Similar stories and poems could be found in chapbooks, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets. This provides compelling evidence on how accessible erotica had become to different economic groups. From the number of reprints and editions a book or pamphlet went through, we can ascertain a book's popularity. (14)

Peakman's observation regarding the erotic book trade can be appropriated in our understanding of *Bat-talā* as well. Responding to the popular taste, many of the books, which were published from *Bat-talā*, were eroticas. They also understood that a lot of their target readers are uneducated; and hence, they filled their books with highly eroticized portraits of men and women. Though they catered to the public imagination, many intellectuals, both Bengalis and British, were flabbergasted by the 'obscurity' present in these books. It is possible that such 'obscurity' was the root behind the frenzy regarding these books. What the morally obsessive intellectuals did not understand is the 'jouissance'<sup>8</sup> that the readers encountered while reading these books. Hence, it is not surprising that these pleasurable books were condemned by the proselytized society. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century there was a radical reconfiguration of the Christian piety (following the leadership of William Wilberforce) which envisioned human life as an arena of "constant moral struggle, resisting temptation and mastering desire" (Adams, 2009). Evangelicals, who emerged as a predominant religious group, were notoriously suspicious of pleasure. Hence, there emerged a clear polarization between the *Ars Erotica* and *Scintia Sexualis*. Following the Evangelical model popularized by Christianity, the colonizers made an erroneous judgement of the Cultural ethos of Bengal by trying to eradicate the essentially oriental sexual values and practices which they considered as 'dissidence'. However, in order to understand the polarization of the cultures; one must dig deep into the social, cultural and religious ideologies of these respective cultures.

In order to understand the conflicting view regarding sexuality that these cultures represent, we must understand the idea of *Ars Erotica* first. It represents a culture where a frank and honest discourse on sexuality prevails. India was certainly such a land of *Ars Erotica* as it produced the texts like *Kamasutra* as well as erotic architectural emblems, found in the ancient temples of Khajuraho and Konarak. It was during the sixteenth and the seventeenth century that an increasing discourse on sexuality-as-science started to ensue in the west. This included knowledge on reproductive sex—a preferred form of sexual behaviour within the heterosexual matrix<sup>9</sup>. Such knowledge, however, has nothing but emboldened the conventional moral understanding regarding sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality: 1* Foucault (1998) argues:

The seventeenth century, then, was the beginning of an age of repression emblematic of what we call the bourgeois societies, an age which perhaps we still have not completely left behind. Calling sex by its name thereafter became more difficult and more costly. As if in order to gain mastery over it in reality, it had first been necessary to subjugate it at the level of language, control its free circulation in speech, expunge it from the things that were said, and extinguish that rendered it too visibly present...Modern prudishness was able to ensure that one did not speak of sex, merely through the interplay of prohibitions that referred back to one another: instances of muteness which, by dint of saying nothing, imposed silence, censorship.

The arguments made by Foucault become an important proposition in recognizing the prejudice against the books of *Bat-talā*, a lot of which were focused against its erotic representation. James Long, whose name was previously mentioned, had a major role in identifying and censoring these works. Sripantha in his work has mentioned that James Long, in his list of 1400 books, identified at least 13 erotic books. Showing his prejudice against such works, he commented 'These works are beastly, equal to the worst of the French School' (Sripantha, 2010). His survey reminds me of what Said argues in *Orientalism*: "It is natural for men in power to survey from time to time the world with which they must deal". James Long's attempt, therefore, can be summarized as a (powerful) European's attempt for charting not only a model of creating a system of knowledge but also an attempt of purging the barbaric society of its evils. Along with the British, the proselytized Bengalis were also motivated by this matrix of purity and they also played their role in eliminating the obnoxious obscenity represented in these books. Sripantha (2010) is also of the opinion that some of us who have seen these books would readily argue that they are, in no sense of the term, pornographic. It is, in fact, the didactic society which was not sensitive enough to recognize them as a kind of a continuation of the long drawn tradition of *Ars Erotica*. Endorsing Sripantha's view, I would like to argue that these books, as mentioned by Long, are variants of erotic literature. It will not be wrong to claim that, while formulating his book, Long might have had the French decadent movement in mind; and hence his barbed attack against these books comparing them with the 'worst of the French school'. Long's prejudice was so much imbibed within the Indian cultural ethos during that time that an Obscenity Law

<sup>7</sup> There is a tendency of the West to project Orient as a heathen- a dark world resembling hell.

<sup>8</sup> The French word 'jouissance' means pleasure and enjoyment- especially sexual pleasure. The poststructuralists and the Lacanian psychoanalysts use the word for the sake of propounding their theoretical principles.

<sup>9</sup> It refers to a society where Heterosexuality is celebrated as the only mode of sexual desire. The term was used by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble*.

was passed by the Governor General of India in the year 1856. Some of the Bengali reformers, perhaps motivated by the British and with their vision of radically reformed society (the vision itself being a product of European education), also took it upon themselves to eradicate 'obscenity' from their motherland as they went on to establish 'The Society for the Suppression of obscenity in India.' Unfortunately, that paved the way for the extinction of a culture that, in spite of all its cheapness, was essentially indigenous in tone and style.

In order to avoid the trap of being judgmental, I do not wish, in this paper, to indulge in the argument of what is obscene and what is not. I just want to assert, in no uncertain terms, that the notion of obscenity is relative as I have already mentioned that the 'obscene' behaviour of men and women of these books was a part and parcel of the Indian cultural ethos of the ancient and the medieval times. The temples of Khajuraho and Konarak were devoted to the art of lovemaking. If one carefully looks at the architectural brilliance of these temples, one might see that these are extremely erotic images that would be undoubtedly deemed as obnoxious by any proselytized society. However, the fact of the matter is that this was the very essence of Indian culture during the ancient and medieval period (more specifically, before the Christianization of the Indian culture) where orgiastic love and same sex desire were not condemned. By referring to these ancient Indian cultures, I am trying to suggest that *Bat-talā*'s predominant emphasis on publishing erotic texts is a continuation of this long-drawn cultural ethos of the east in general and India in specific. I have already argued that the east is often recognized as a space perpetuating the notions of *Ars Erotica*. It is natural that an erotophobic<sup>10</sup> society would never approve of any kind of erotic behaviour. The British, with their overtly moralizing erotophobic principles, obviously did not endorse this erotic nature of the orient. However, this is one side of the picture. The west was polarized on the question of sex and sexuality. While some condemned the erotic nature of the oriental others, repressed may be in their own respective countries, saw this place as an ideal space of gratifying their urge. However, the dominant fluid of the western culture projected themselves as rational and masculine creatures trying to subjugate and control the sensual, irrational and feminine east. Hence the west found in the east an inferior 'other'.

I use the word 'orient' and the word 'other' consciously keeping in mind what Said has to say regarding the system of political representation of the east. In the introduction of his epoch making book *Orientalism*, Said argues that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self"(3). It is not surprising that such a scathing attack, as made by Long in 1859, would be garnered against the 'obnoxious' texts produced in the *Bat-talā* printing houses. Adrish Biswas has referred to Rabindranath Tagore's *Jibansmriti* (The Memoirs of Life) where Tagore suggested that his literary pursuit had started by reading the books that were to be found in the servants' room. It is needless to say that these books must have been published in Battala. The elite Bengalis often denounced these books projecting them as servants' books. The influence of *Bat-talā* was so deeply rooted in Bengali cultural ethos that it was enough to polarize the culture in two groups – high and low. Such stringent polarization was undoubtedly an off-shoot of the cultural hegemony of purity and overt puritanical morality that were imposed upon the westernized elite Bengalis by British.

Another factor that must be taken into consideration while perpetuating any discussion on *Bat-talā* is its use of language which, I believe, contributed to its massive popularity. The writers often used colloquial language to express their feelings about the cultural phenomena. The gap would be clearly visible if we compare books of *Bat-talā* with the books written by the dominant literary artists of the period, i.e., Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. *Battala*'s target group was undoubtedly the semi-educated or uneducated natives. Hence by resorting to a rather 'low' linguistic and cultural identity, *Bat-talā* seems to recreate a space for people who did not come under the purview Missionary education system. The missionary educators were motivated by a desire to create a rather proselytized space where European values could be ratified. I have already mentioned how the cultural hegemony was imposed upon the native elites who, like their British counterparts, believed in the derogatory potential of the books published from the presses of *Bat-talā*. In her book Parna Dasgupta writes, "late nineteenth century pedagogic institutions and theories informed the development of broader religious and social norms in colonial India" (5). When *Bat-talā* flourished, Missionary education was in vogue and the educators framed a syllabus filled with canonical texts based on humanistic values. However, we may put into question the colonizers idea of humanity itself. The humanism propagated by the British, needless to say, was essentially lopsided and steeped in colonial prejudice. Therefore, it does not require the brain of a rocket-scientist to understand why *Bat-talā* was snubbed by a culture that believed in retaining its purity by an overt emphasis on European cultural ethics. It became necessary to eliminate this culture which had immense subverting potential in various ways during the period which a lot of historians claim as Bengali Renaissance; and when we look at the history of *Battala* today we must that the job was very well done by the moral police.

#### 4. Conclusion

Within the limited scope of this article, I have tried to identify some of the major elements of *Bat-talā* that made it one of the most prominent subcultures of Bengal during the nineteenth century. I hope this analysis would be able to foment a keen interest among scholars and, more importantly, translators who can make these texts reach a wider reading public through their effort.

#### 5. References

1. Adams, James Eli. (2009). *A History of Victorian Literature*. Malden: Wiley- Blackwell.
2. Bhadra, Goutam. (2011). *Nyara Bat-talā y jay kawbar?*. Kolkata: Chatim.
3. Biswas. Adrish. (2011) *Bat-talār Boi (The Books of Bat-tala)*. Kolkata: Gangchil.
4. Dasgupta, Parna. (2011). *Pedagogy for Religion: Missionary Education and the Fashioning of Hindus and Muslims in Bengal*. California: University of California Press.
5. Foucault, Michel. (1998). *The History of Sexuality: 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin
6. Said. Edward. W.(1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

<sup>10</sup> Erotophobia refers to hatred against all forms of erotic representation.

7. Peakman, Julia. (2003). *Mighty Lewd Books: The Development of Pornography in Eighteenth Century England*. New York: Palgrave
8. Sripantha. (2010). *Bat-talā*. Kolkata: Ananda Publishers.