

Tales of a Distant War: The First World War and Coexisting Worldviews in Ramananda Chattopadhyay's *Prabasi*

Aryama Ghosh and Sujit Majhi

[Editorial Note: The paper enlightens us on the synergy of seemingly opposing ideas of the Sub-National, National, and Internationalistic ideas through the editorial pieces of periodicals like *Prabasi* in the time of the First World War. The authors have explored primary sources quite extensively while interpreted by using various historical discourses on the issue. D.A.]

Abstract: *With the First World War, colonial peripheries like India experienced superfluity of news contents and general interest among the newsreaders regarding wars and world politics. The reportage style of various periodicals like the Prabasi started to base on that newfound cultural consumption market with their shift of focus towards the events and interpretation related to war. This article argues that the prior growth of cosmopolitanism in the Bengali cultural public sphere found a boost in this process. The war acted as a catalyst and started producing editorial pieces substantiating sub-nationalism. These nationalist and internationalist ideals, despite their innate contradiction, coexisted and furthered the future expansion of the Bengali worldview.*

Keywords: *Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the Prabasi, the First World War, Nationalism, Sub-Nationalism, Internationalism*

Introduction:

Marc Ferro made an intriguing statement in his book *The Great War* which stated that the war 'liberated men's energies' with the outbreak of the First World War (Ferro 1973: 8). While Europe had direct encounters with violence and an outpouring of socio-political forces, faraway colonies encountered effects on a marginal level. Colonies suffered indirect financial losses, but events of battlegrounds were a long-distance affair. However, this distant attention and influence had some beneficial effects on colonial cultures, as the brief eruption of knowledge about global events pushed the Bengali intelligentsia's embryonic exploratory inclinations toward internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Internationalism had developed a variety of conceptual categories in the early decades of the twentieth century, but its infancy enabled cohabitation. The conflict acted as a stimulus but seldom caused internal rift. Innumerable materialistic, spiritual expectations, possibilities, started travelling beyond the boundaries of internationalist arrangements. The many ideas floating at the time were not seen as exclusive or in competition with one another, but as congregating and matching paths aiming at changing humankind's future and, indeed, humanity itself (Raza et al. 2015: xii). During the conflict, the *Prabasi* editorials exemplified this synergic cohabitation of seemingly opposing ideas.

Ramananda Chattopadhyay's Popular Miscellany in the *Prabasi*

Founded in Allahabad in 1905, the *Prabasi* was edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyay, a close friend of Rabindranath Tagore. He served as the magazine's editor until he died in 1943. In 1907 he also started editing the *Modern Review*, which could be presented as the English alternative to the *Prabasi*. In national level he started editing another magazine in Hindi named the *Visal Bharat*, which came out two decades after the *Modern Review* (Chatterjee 2016: 240). These three periodicals were distinct from each other with an underlying agenda of creating a nationalistic spirit. Thus, he was in favour of constricting 'Bengali, Indian, and Asian' levels of identity. The era is noteworthy because the Bengali cultural environment was undergoing some drastic changes, with demonstrable consequences. The acceleration of transportation and the expansion of print made it possible for a colonized man to comprehend or taste the universal exposure standardized on a western scale. Economic advantages were, of course, essential, and individuals like Ramananda had the requisite socioeconomic and cultural capital to enjoy it. Since the Swadeshi Movement had established the ranks of young Bengalis in the cultural arena based on Calcutta, they were urged to create an impact of their own, inspired by the century's new ideals. The anti-partition movement 'fractured by the slogans and icons that were chosen by the Bengali Hindu Politicians' had already characterised itself as an 'exclusivist Hindu dominated concept of nationalism' (Banerjee 2020: 23-5). Due to this, Rabindranath along with his followers dissociated themselves. After the anti-partition movement new issues started to form, creating tremors among Bengal and central India as well as western India based Congress leadership. The sub-nationalist trend would be clearer when the Non-Cooperation movement would start. Chittaranjan Das' council entry plan in the provinces would be revoked by Gandhi-led majority which in consequence would lead to the making of the Swarajya Party in 1923. But with the revocation of the Bengal Pact (1923) Chittaranjan's plan to form Hindu-Muslim unity based on the sub-national identity of Bengali would fail (Banerjee 2020: 25-7). On the other hand, nationalist imaginings before the war were Hindu-biased from which emergent and radical leaders had been trying to move away. While confident Chittaranjan along with Birendranath Sashmal, Subhas Chandra Bose planned for the Bengal Pact and ultimately failed, disheartened men like Rabindranath moved away from the overtly Hindu-biased politics. Rabindranath started writing '*Gare-Bayre*', a novel severely criticizing fanatic nationalism and revolutionary terrorism which became rampant during this time.

Ramananda was one of those men who had followed Rabindranth's departure from the anti-partition movement. He started the *Prabasi* in between Tagore's *Rakhibandhan* and Chittaranjan's the Bengal Pact, two failed projects of reviving Bengali sub-nationalism. His periodicals started to profess a very curious mixture of ideas ultimately performing a new type. He did not suggest for a total denial to West but opined that the British rule in India had 'stultified Indian minds' and therefore, he asked for getting rid of that hegemony which continued to suppress their 'genius' (Chatterjee 2016: 239). Now, the creation of the

Prabasi, a monthly illustrated magazine, was not just the work of one individual, as Samarpita Mitra argued. It can be rather considered as a medium of response to the contemporary demand of commercialization (Mitra 2013: 216). Before the outbreak of the First World War, the *Prabasi* had developed a 'cosmopolitan Bengali aesthetic' that could be distinguished from the blue-collar middle-class examples like the *Bharatvarsa*, 'the staunchly non-Rabindric journals', most notably Sureshchandra Samajpati's the *Sahitya* and the more conventional nationalist periodical like the *Narayan* (1914), edited by Chittaranjan Das (Mitra 2013: 227). Just like the *Prabasi*, the *Modern Review* was one of the few nationalist English magazines available then. Mitra argued that the leisure-reading manifested by the *Prabasi*'s illustrated production of cultural pieces of consumption had imposed new meanings to the concept of news. However, with the coming of the war, this new meaning got amplified. After the start of the war, the distinctness of these periodicals became more visible. While the Great War destroyed the beliefs, social permanency, and hierarchies of the old imperial world in Europe and others, it opened the door to developing a new global consciousness. This growth of global consciousness was also evident in Asia. The conflict shattered a previously constrained set of understandings among Indian elites and people regarding the world and India's position in the world (Ali Raza et al. 2015: xix). According to Francesca Orsini's thesis *The Hindi Public Sphere: 1920-1940*, the Hindi press advanced beyond the general circle of well-educated and properly schooled community; through periodicals and print language, it reached a more diverse reader circle with a shared culture and political consciousness (Orsini 1996: 63). It seems likely that the war had a larger effect on the print sector in Bengal than it did in other places. Resistance by oppressed peoples throughout the world was linked together by 'the spirit of internationalism' during this period. Emily S. Rosenberg, who is known for her contribution to pre-war groups of 'internationalists', shows how 'internationalism' was conceived in many circles as an idea that sought to bind nation-states in peaceful coexistence through a parallel attempt of strengthening national and imperial borders. Throughout the First World War, Indians in New York started becoming members of both the 'Hindusthan Club' and the 'Cosmopolitan Club'. (Ali Raza et al. 2015: xx-xxi). This harmony of internationalism without stepping away from nationalist needs could be seen in the *Modern Review* and the *Prabasi*. Ramananda Chattopadhyay, like Rabindranath, attempted to interweave nationalism with internationalism in such a way that internationalism might develop into a universal nationalism. *Gora*, one of Rabindranath's literary masterpieces, has been serially published in the *Prabasi* since 1907 and expressed the contrast between aggressive and liberal nationalisms. War provided a perfect stage for Ramananda to interplay his ideals into journalistic practice. With a perfect assimilation of his idealism and subtlety in handling global politics, nationalistic zeal, and cultural issues, his work reflected both nationalism and internationalism. That is why Sir Jadunath Sarkar described him as 'India's ambassador to the nations' and his magazines as entirely Indian while being cosmopolitan at the same time (Chaudhuri 2004: 19-20). The years 1917-1939 were not without precedence in terms of making connections with the world, and the

meeting of south Asians with European had been quite common even prior to that period. The Russo-Japanese and Balkan Wars had adorned the first pages of Bengali newspapers (Ali Reza et al. 2015: xii). However, in comparison to its predecessors, the Great War had a greater impact. This unprecedented event has resulted in the *Prabasi's* worldview being more expansive since 1917. It provided the editor with a few outstanding emerging issues to demonstrate intricate patterns of nationalism-cosmopolitanism interplay.

Bengali Martial Question: The *Prabasi* on Bengali Soldiers at War

For both the Bengali intellectuals and political leaders, war became an opportunity even in the time of crisis. As members of an ‘alienated cohort, poorly integrated into the Calcutta social order’, Bengalis saw the global powers clashing interests as a ‘sign of promise’. (Manjapra: 2011: 337). Bengali perspective was preoccupied with two distinct issues. Firstly, the so-called ‘wrong impression of the world’ needs to be rectified, and magazines such as the *Prabasi* played an important role in that. Macaulay’s image of Bengalis as cowards persisted, despite the attempt of publications such as the *Prabasi* to change the situation. Secondly, some colonial bureaucratic levels expressed qualms about arming Bengalis after some of them were led by ‘misguided ideas of patriotism to commit cold-blooded murders and crimes’. The general view of the newspapers and periodicals like the *Prabasi* was that the community should ‘not be misjudged by the misdeeds of a few’ and these ‘few’ means the revolutionary youths who have been causing violent resistance to authorities. (Bhargava 1919: 225). Although the *Prabasi* was a fervent nationalist publication, it never strayed from its original standpoint of propagating broad Bengali interest. The beginning of the British war effort in India unleashed a kind of media consumption that led to a public consensus of integrating Indians in the colonial administrative and military system. Japan’s rising strength as an Asiatic nation both threatened and encouraged the intellectuals for self-government and demand for positions in the army was a partial expression of that greater demand. The *Prabasi's* opinionated articles were replete with such observations:

“দেশী লোককে শিক্ষা ও সুযোগ দিয়া দেশীয় শিল্প বলিষ্ঠ ও উন্নত করিয়া তোলা গভর্ণমেণ্টের
কর্তব্য। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে দেশীয় সকল প্রদেশের লোককে সৈন্যবিভাগে গ্রহণ করিয়া ও সেনাপতি
পর্যন্ত হইবার অধিকার দিয়া দেশের আন্তরিক বল বৃদ্ধি করিয়া তোলা উচিত।” (*Prabasi*
Kartika 1322: 6)

Later, the *Prabasi* raised three specific demands relating to the security of Indian Territory: i) the creation of a militia of males aged between 18 and 41, ii) the need for students to participate in military training, and iii) the collection of war debts from the indigenous market. As a result, we can observe how wartime pressures altered the fundamental nature of the public debate. Bengalis were previously not recruited in the British-Indian Army because of Martial Race Theory-based recruiting procedures. However, with the increase of demand during the war, it became clear that the recruitment pool needed to be extended, which provided an opportunity for Bengali youngsters. The war was critical in obliterating

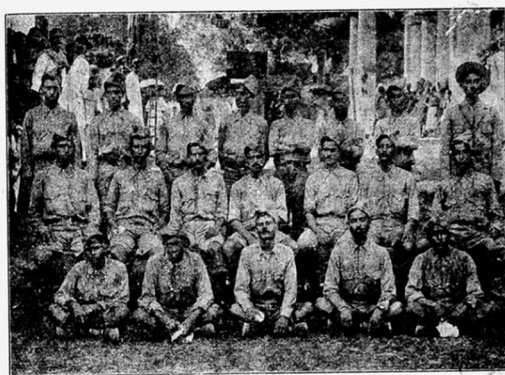
the old world of imperialist dominance and forming the desires and promises for a new world (Ali Raza et al. 2015: xviii). Demanding enlistment in an unprecedented war on a global scale was thought to be an opportunity for the Bengali identity for freeing it from the old world's stereotype of femininity towards a new world of recognition. *Prabasi's* treatment of the subject is intriguing since the journal believed that the Bengali race had to show their worth in conformity with ancient martial races like Rajputs, Sikhs, and others. It started constantly harping on Bengali heroism as a sub-national musing. It was initially a countermelody to the nationalist song.

The *Prabasi* not only championed the recruitment of Bengalis in the Ambulance Corps but also demanded direct involvement of Bengalis in the war activity. The primary reason for such rapporteur-like excitement was the idea that the 'angel of vision has changed'; the bravery of Indian soldiers and in this case the Bengali soldiers would convince the British of the colony's significance, thus materializing the collective desire for dominion status (*Prabasi* Shrabon 1323: 388). So, the sub-national urge not only coexisted but also reciprocated with the national interest. Later, the *Prabasi's* pages were often found adorned with the reports of Bengali heroism in the world's battlefields. The sub-national tendency was, however, only to assist the larger nationalist goal. As the Bengal Ambulance Corps showed heroism at Tesiphon, near Bagdad, removing injured from the firing line while being shelled, the *Prabasi* editorial noted,

“অস্ত্র হাতে করিয়া যুদ্ধ করায় একটা উত্তেজনা আছে; তাহাতে সাহস বাড়ে বই কমে না... কিন্তু কাহারও শরীরে শত্রুর গোলাগুলি শেল লাগিতে পারে, অথচ তাহাকে তাহা না ভাবিয়া ধীর ভাবে আহতদের সরাইয়া লইয়া যাইতে ব্যস্ত থাকিতে হইবে, ইহা যুদ্ধে নিরত সৈন্যদের চেয়ে কম সাহসের কাজ নয়, বরং বেশী। সব রকম সাহসের কাজ করিতে বাঙ্গালী সমর্থ, এ বিশ্বাস আমাদের ছিল। যাহারা প্রমানের অপেক্ষা রাখেন, তাহাদের জন্য এই একটি প্রমাণ উপস্থিত” (*Prabasi* Chaitra 1322: 542)

Throughout the battle, the *Prabasi* had been engaged in celebrating the alternative bravery of the Bengalis. A *Prabasi* editorial compared these Bengal Ambulance Corps soldiers to England's pacifist Quakers, who were staunch pacifists but showed exemplary bravery in battlefields as stretcher-bearers. The concerned editorial expressed deep resentment as the government failed to mention their compensation after the war (*Prabasi* Boisakh 1323: 15-6). However, it does not mean that the usual valour of martial qualities remained unappreciated. The recruitment of Bengali troops in the Chandannagar's French government as warriors, found its deserving place in an illustrated editorial titled 'Chandannagarer Bangali Soinya' (Bengali Troops of Chandannagar). It also severely condemned the British administration for not paying Bengali soldiers equally, which was an issue of upholding racial inequity (*Prabasi* Joishtho 1323: 107-8). When the case of Bengali volunteers being incorporated into the French army originally came to light, it received little notice. However, after being persuaded by a few individuals, including

Siddheswar Ghosal, Hardhan Bakshi and Narendranath Sarkar, and others, the *Prabasi* editorial took up the issue for raising awareness among Bengali readers. Motilal Ray quoted the words of Lieutenant Zile of Pondicherry in an article titled ‘*Pratham Bangali Soinya*’ (First Bengali Soldiers). The latter stated that the Bengali volunteers were obedient and honest and made positive comments about their abilities (*Prabasi* Joistha 1323: 184). The *Prabasi*’s nationalist columnists had used the example of the French volunteers to draw British attention to their stereotypical notion that Bengalis were non-martial. Furthermore, they started highlighting Bengali intellect as an asset in modern warfare.



বৃষ্টিসৈন্য
সিদ্ধেশ্বর মল্লিক, মনোজ্ঞান দাস, স্বর্গীজন্যন বসু, আশুতোষ বোস, স্বয়ংসেনার বোস, সন্দেহবন্ধুর সহকারী
সাহায্যকারী সৈন্য, হাতধার বর্মা।
সেতার বর্মা। শ্যামকান্তি বোস, সত্যেন্দ্রনাথ বসু, মনোজ্ঞান বসু, সন্দেহবন্ধুর সহকারী, অতিরিক্তবৃদ্ধ বোস,
ব্রজমোহন বসু, বিশিষ্ট বোস।
মল্লিক বর্মা। বসুসৈন্য দাস, স্বয়ংসেনার বসু, সন্দেহবন্ধুর সহকারী, সন্দেহবন্ধুর সহকারী।



Members of the Bengal Ambulance Corps (Prabasi: Sharabon, 1323, 387)

Members of the Bengali Troops in the French Army (Prabasi: Joistho, 1323, 107)

Meanwhile, the Bengal Ambulance Corps was disbanded on 30th June 1916 because its members did not wish to work in menial chores of non-combatants. The editorial in the *Prabasi* newspaper expressed its scepticism about the announcement and stated that the members would be returning to their posts shortly after (*Prabasi* Shrabon 1323: 313-4). The image of Bengali troops recruited as combatants in the French colony of Chandannagar and that of members of the Bengal Ambulance Corps treating soldiers are just the two of many that became part of the *Prabasi*’s visual display of Bengali pride. Finally, when the British government enlisted 228 Bengalis as combatants, the *Prabasi* editorial applauded the action, stating that new age warfare requires intelligence rather than physical power and communities such as Bengalis should be fully integrated in the system (*Prabasi* Bhadra 1323: 426). Although he reluctantly accepted the reputation of Bengalis as physically weak, he also gave another stereotype to the non-Bengali populations as being intellectually inferior. Sub-nationalist tendencies created minor breaches in the nationalist tune of the periodical but otherwise well-integrated ideals of the *Prabasi*’s cosmopolitanism remained intact. As early as January 1917, Punjab’s Lieutenant Governor proclaimed that well-educated young men were better suited for military service. The *Prabasi* editorials had spent more pages to write about the adequate work record of the

Bengali recruits (*Prabasi* Magh 1323: 318). Captain Jyotilal Sen and Captain Kalyankumar Mukhopadhyay were among the recruits who received the military cross, the British Empire's second-highest military decoration (*Prabasi* Poush 1323: 218). Many people following the *Prabasi* continued the colonial tradition of hero-worshipping but only within its colonial ambit. Satyendranath Dutta, a famous Bengali poet who used to publish in the *Prabasi*, wrote a song called 'Bangali Paltaner Gan' (Song of the Bengali Paltan) that echoed the periodical's overall trend of venerating Bengali bravery.

“শরীর শুধুই পিছিয়ে মোদের, এগিয়ে গেছে মন—

মানস-লোকে মার্চ করে যায় বাঙালী পল্টন!”

“মন আমাদের খাকী পরে সেজেছে সোলজার,

এমন সময় হুকুম এলো—পরোয়ানা রাজার!”

“ফাসে তোরা অস্ত্র ধরিস ভীষণ বিপ্লবে,

ব্রেজিলেতে সৈন্য চালাস অমর গৌরবে;

নামজাদা লাল পল্টনে ,ভাই ,তোরাই ছিলি ,শোন,

এম্পায়ারের ভিৎ গেড়েছে বাঙালী পল্টন।”) (*Prabasi* Bhadra 1324: 534-5)

Following Satyendranath's poetry, we can observe how the *Prabasi*'s cosmopolitanism was frequently accelerated by a sub-nationalist undercurrent, but never dogmatized. The present splendour of Bengal was inseparable from the earlier majesty of the imperial realm, as often expressed in the *Prabasi* articles and Satyendranath's poem supports that mentality. The Bengali paltan should be motivated, according to the poet, because they built the British Empire centuries ago. It is a contradictory reality in which ideological conflicts coexist in the same narrative. This poem is a microcosmic image of the *Prabasi*'s position regarding the issues like Bengali emotional resistance to the imperial narrative of perpetual femininity. Though Bengal has always been the 'locus classicus' for such type of ideological resistance against the dominant imperial narrative regarding martial or non-martial races, the issue of enlistment in the army had been an all-India phenomenon by the time of war. Robert P. Upton in his article concerning extraordinary advocacy of military enlistment by political leaders of the Bombay Presidency shows that political leaders of different ideological positions staunchly advocated for the enlistment drive. Gandhi, a staunch critique of violence, supported this enlistment drive in the 'hope that the military action would be a preparation for *satyagraha*' (Upton 2018: 1982). The same essence has been echoed in Ramananda Chattopadhyay's writings. Questions of manliness, non-violence, anti-imperialism everything intermingled in the time of enlistment drive and despite the apparent contradictions coexisted in the narrative.

***Prabasi's* War Trivias and Changing Bengali Worldview**

It was well known to the editors and authors of the *Prabasi* that its trivia-related column titled *Panchashashya* often reported on interesting trivia material that was purportedly appealing to readers. According to a short piece titled '*Yuddher Siksha*', statesmen and the general public were more aware of the political-economic systems of major world powers as a result of the World War. It goes on to say that:

“স্কুলের শিক্ষক ছাত্র পর্যন্ত বিশ্বব্যাপার, যুদ্ধের রীতিনীতি, ফলাফল, ঔচিত্য, অনৌচিত্য লইয়া বিচার করিতেছে; চাষাভূসারা পর্যন্ত খবর রাখিতেছে; সুতরাং দেশের নিম্নস্তর পর্যন্ত বিশ্বের বোধ ছড়াইয়া পড়িতেছে।” (*Prabasi* Ashar 1322: 375).

The *Prabasi's* pages soon became crammed with information about the conflict in Europe. However, according to Samarpita Mitra, the *Prabasi* editor also ‘justified it on grounds of an increase of quantity by introducing more features’ which were mainly centered on concerns like war and wartime politics. The post-war price rise was required to cover the growing printing costs. In order to include observations on international news the '*Deshar Katha*' (i.e., News of the Nation) section was being extended to '*Deshbideser Katha*' (Mitra 2020: 101). Similarly, a piece on anti-Zeplin guns appeared in the same issue, and it argued that war-related inventions and counter-inventions were causing an endless arm race. While, on one hand, the editor of the *Prabasi* took pleasure in disseminating information about the war to the Bengali readership, he did so with a tone of melancholy reflecting the *Prabasi's* pacifism on the other. Such pacifist tendency led to another development. News in ‘trench newspapers’ named ‘The War Cry’, ‘The Cave Man’, ‘The Trench Gazette’, and others which expressed the utter disgust for war by the soldiers, were published with visual illustrations in the same *Panchashashya* section (*Prabasi* Shrabon 1322: 508-9).

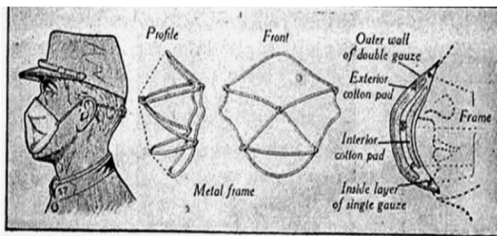


Illustration of French Gas mask (*Prabasi*: Ashwin, 1322, 793)



কোম্পার উপর সকল কাঠামো ও পুতুল টেলর আসাছিল। পক্ষের সৈন্যের আঙুল হস্তে গোলাবর্ষণ করছিল। তাহাৎসকল ঠকছিল।



Illustrations of Camouflage (*Prabasi*: Boisakh, 1323, 61)

When the French had engaged a soldier-poet named Theodor Bottrel to urge their troops in the trenches or when an American sculpture convention sponsored a contest to express

the symbolic imagery of war via art, the *Prabasi* joyfully published those events in its sections devoted to general trivia news (*Prabasi* Ashwin 1322: 792-3). Besides, ‘*Bibidha Prasanga*’, a regular column, had also covered war-related political and economic issues. These reports contain information about Austria’s rising birth-rate (*Prabasi* Bhadra 1322: 552). This general trivia also included information about new weapons utilized in war. The news of the use of lethal weapons causing mass devastation had naturally received public attention. There were in fact, fascinating details from artillerymen’s earplugs to trench combat in the *Prabasi*’s ‘*Panchashashya*’, accommodating in small informative paragraphs to long, comprehensive ones (*Prabasi* Aghrayan 1322: 187-8).

To say that World War One had a significant impact on the newspaper industry would be an understatement. However, while most artists in Europe went to the front to capture fresh evidence of events, the general public in India was quite satisfied with the illustrated monthly magazines such as the *Prabasi*. Along with images, armament and battle cartoons had also found their places in those magazines. Because of publications like the *Prabasi*, military-related titbits like ‘camouflage’, ‘flamethrower’, ‘gas and chemical warfare’, and other such terms became commonplace catchphrases. This piece was more opinionated, than that appeared in the ‘*Panchashashya*’.

Since journals like *Prabasi* have filled up the lacunae remained in newspaper dailies by giving trivia on wartime world politics, an economic demand also appeared in the printing business. Such demand served as the motor for rising interest in journalism. It was intellectually reinforced by Rabindric’s synergy of nationalism and internationalism. Increasing curiosity in Japan has become one of the budding factors of such journalism. Although Japan was an inspiration, its aggressive imperialism threatened India’s national interests, as the *Prabasi* frequently emphasized. The *Prabasi* editorials freely swung between various ideologies while reporting and analyzing issues. India’s trade was threatened by Japan, according to a *Prabasi* assessment. It stated,

“শুধু ভারতবর্ষের শিল্পবাণিজ্য নষ্ট হইলে ইংরেজ বণিকেরা গবর্ণমেন্টকে উহার জীবনরক্ষার জন্য কিছু করিতে বলিবে বা করিতে দিবে, এরূপ আশা খুব বেকুব ভারতবাসীও করে না। ভারতবাসী ও গবর্ণমেন্ট উভয়ের একাগ্র চেষ্টা থাকিলে বিপদ কাটিয়া যাইতে পারে। জাপানের গবর্ণমেন্ট জাপানের শিল্পবাণিজ্যের জন্য যাহা করিতেছেন, আমাদের গবর্ণমেন্ট সেরূপ চেষ্টা করিলে জাপান কখনই আমাদের শিল্পবাণিজ্য নষ্ট করিতে পারে না।” (*Prabasi* Bhadra 1322: 554).

It was also said in an essay called ‘*Japaner Matlab*’ (The Japanese Motive) that Japan’s continued rise and expansion in trade and military may weaken India’s position. It stated,

“আমাদের স্বল্পবশিষ্ট শিল্প জাপানের অত্যাচারে ও প্রতিযোগিতায় একেবারে নষ্ট হইয়া গেলে দেশে অধিকতর অন্নের অভাব ঘটবে। ইহারই মধ্যে বোম্বাইএর

কাপড়ের কলগুলি ক্ষতিগ্রস্ত হইতে আরম্ভ করিয়াছে। জাপানী সস্তা গেঞ্জি, চিরুণী, সাবান, আয়না, বুরুশ, এসেস, কাচের বাসন, আলো প্রভৃতিতে দেশ একেবারে ছাইয়া ফেলিয়াছে; আর অল্পদিনে ভারতবাসীর সকলপ্রকার আবশ্যিকদ্রব্য জাপানীরা প্রস্তুত করিয়া আনিয়া ফেলিবো।” (*Prabasi* Kartika 1322: 5).

Since the Russo-Japanese War, Japan had been the focus of *Prabasi*, but with the outbreak of World War One, periodicals like the *Prabasi* were increasingly concerned with the issues of international relation. A group of scholars known as the Pan-Asianists, including Ramananda Chattopadhyay were introducing the concept of ‘Greater India’. Ramananda saw it as a ‘global territory that flourished in ancient times, against which the imperialist ‘misdeeds’ of empires in the modern West were held in negative contempt’ (Manjapra 2012: 59). This change in perception boosted Japan’s importance as part of a multinational civilisational entity. But at the same time the *Prabasi*’s own ideals regarding ‘Greater India’ distanced itself from the aggressiveness of the Japanese pan-Asiatic imperialism. This sudden interest initially demonstrated how the imagined notion of a transnational body found a more practical reality when journals discovered a market for international issues. Throughout the time of First and Second World War, Japan was both respected and circumspectly observed. *Bibidha Prasanga*, for example said,

“নিজেদের মধ্যে দুর্বলতার কারণ যাহা দেখিয়াছে, জাপানীরা তাহা নির্মমভাবে পরিত্যাগ করিয়াছে ও করিতেছে, সবলতার কারণ বিদেশে যাহা দেখিয়াছে ও দেখিতেছে, তাহা সর্বদা গ্রহণ করিতে উন্মুখ হইয়া রহিয়াছে। স্বদেশের কোন প্রথা, কুসংস্কার বা বিশ্বাস তাহাদিগকে অন্ধ করিয়া রাখিতে পারিতেছে না।” (*Prabasi* Bhadra 1322: 561)

Furthermore, The *Prabasi*’s short study on ‘Japan Rushiyar Shikkhok’ (Japan as Russia’s Teacher) indicating Japan’s contribution in transferring technological knowledge to a western state like Russia is quite unfathomable during that time. It was an existing idea that the east could only contribute spiritual, philosophical wisdom to the West, but not materialist information. As a result, Japan was breaking out the conventional east-west relationship.

Along with reporting on local issues like jute’s declining price and war-related hunger, the *Prabasi* also wrote about the rising tide of yellow journalism in the West in the wake of this conflict (*Prabasi* Kartika 1322: 45). Gopal Haldar, for example stated that the very essence of Ramananda’s ‘*Bibidha Prasanga*’, which was brimming with flaming nationalist spirit and anti-imperialist fervour, caused the colonial administrators to outlaw this periodical from circulation in jail (Haldar 1965: 9).

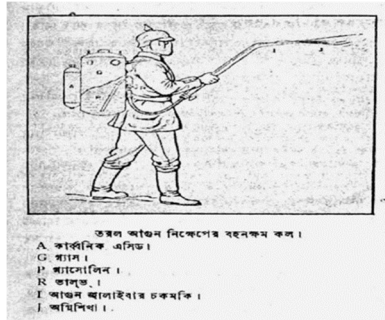


Illustration of Flamethrower Illustration of the Spanish cartoon
(Prabasi: Kartika, 1323, 59) (Prabasi: Poush, 1322, 224)

With the advent of war, Bengali magazines also had dealt with more progressive issues like the question of women representation in war. ‘*Narir Sainik Hawa Uchit Kina*’ (Can Women Be Soldiers?) was one of such articles addressing the concerned issue published in the *Prabasi*. Khirod Kumar Ray, the author of the piece, said that women had participated in World War I, both directly and indirectly and such examples should serve as an inspiration for women living in colonies. He stated this in his letter:

“আমাদের দেশেও বীরনারীর অভাব নাই। রাণী সংযুক্তা, রিজিয়া, অহল্যাবাই, দুর্গাবতী, লক্ষ্মীবাই, বেগম সমরু প্রভৃতি অনেকের নাম করা যাইতে পারে। ইহা হইতে ইহাই প্রমাণ হয় যে কোনো জাতি বা সম্প্রদায় একেবারেই কোনো-একটা কাজের যোগ্য নয়, এমন হইতেই পারে না। সকলের মধ্যেই সকল কাজ করিবার মতন যোগ্যতা আছেই”। (*Prabasi Bhadra* 1322: 580)

Since the outbreak of the First World War, many newspapers, and journals such as *Grihalaksmi* and *Stri-darpan* have begun to publish articles about women’s accomplishments in various contexts (Orsini 1996: 174-5). The *Prabasi* followed the same pattern of publishing on empowerment of women. Though Ferro argued that the Great War unleashed men’s energies, it also contributed partially to the breaking of indestructible glass barrier of societal standards, shackling the so-called weaker gender at home. Michael Adams believed that Victorian Britain’s gender role discrimination encouraged male violence, fuelling the initial phase of war’s martial excitement (Adams 1990). However, war at the same time reduces gender inequity and reconfigures gender roles. In his recent book *The Great Leveller*, Walter Scheidel opined that human civilization achieves a relatively equitable state during times of crisis. He further stated that the ‘world wars spawned the second major levelling force, transformative revolution’ like the previous mass mobilization warfare during the period of the Napoleonic War or the American Civil War (Scheidel 2018: 7). Various editorial pieces of the *Prabasi* started expressing the vibe of woman empowerment, which was not as expressive as Europe but was utterly unprecedented.

The Conjuncture of Sub-National, National, and International Interests in the *Prabasi*

Ultimately, as interest in the war and global politics grew on multiple levels, so did the desire for national self-government and concern over India's post-war diplomatic standing in the country. These issues shaped people's collective understanding of a generalized notion of national interest. The *Prabasi* papers acted as a catalyst in this case, and their ideas were frequently outlandish. '*Samrajya Sabhay Bharater Sthan*', the author said in an article.

“প্রবাসী ইংরেজরা একটা ধুয়া তুলিয়াছে যে, এই যুদ্ধের সময় ভারতবর্ষ আপনার দাবী করিয়া ইংলন্ডকে বিরত করিয়া তুলিলে অন্যায় করিবে, যুদ্ধশেষের প্রতীক্ষা করিয়া থাকুক, খুদ-কুঁড়া কিছু বকশিশ মিলিয়া যাইবে। ...সকলেই আপন আপন দাবী পেশ করিয়া রাখিতেছে। কেবল ভারতবর্ষই কি চুপ করিয়া থাকিবে?... সেইজন্য আবশ্যিক হইয়াছে আমরা স্পষ্ট করিয়া বলিব —আমরা যখন ব্রিটিশ সাম্রাজ্যের অঙ্গ, আমরা সুস্থ সবল স্বায়ত্ত থাকিতে চাই;”)*Prabasi* Kartika 1322: 11).

Such desire for obtaining dominion status was prevalent throughout the conflict because Ramananda and his associates of the *Prabasi*, like many of their contemporaries, felt that the Indian colonies would gain administrative autonomy under the empire's auspices. Though negative comments from Anglo-Indian bureaucracy frequently eroded their belief, the concept of India's self-government received a collective boost during World War II. Furthermore, the light of promise soon began to dim into despair, as British colonial interests continually pressed down Indian hopes for dominion status, in contrast to Indian top leadership. The *Prabasi* was the first to write about these matters. When the Canadian government extended the prohibition on Indian labour until March 1916, the *Prabasi* editorial criticized the notice, claiming that despite Indians' all-around assistance to the imperial war effort, the innate racism of the country will continue to look down on its Indian people. The editorial did not end there; it further requested that no Canadian subject be admitted to the Indian Territory (*Prabasi* Aghrayan 1322: 124-5). Due to their outspokenness, the *Prabasi* frequently engaged in journalistic disputes with pro-British journals such as the *Statesman*. It even chastised other newspapers and magazines for maintaining silence under the disguise of impartiality. Ramananda sarcastically stated in an editorial article titled '*Nirapekkha Sampadok*' (Impartial Editor), which included a reprint of a cartoon named 'perfect editor' from Spanish daily.

“মনে হইতেছে, ছবিটি ছাপিয়া ভাল করিলাম না। হয়ত পাইয়োনিয়ার, স্টেটসম্যান, ইংলিশম্যান, প্রভৃতির সম্পাদকেরা ভারতবর্ষীয় দেশী সম্পাদকদিগের জন্যও এইরূপ ব্যবস্থা করিতে বলিতে পারেন। কারণ, আমরা এখনও 'আদর্শ সম্পাদকে' পরিণত হই নাই।” (*Prabasi* Poush 1322: 224)

These fearless editorials avoided anti-racial mudslinging at all costs. The post-war period saw a shift of thought from a ‘romantic and optimistic’ ‘utopia of peace’ persisted before the war to a ‘darker and more dystopian undercurrent to visions and ideologies’ (Ali Raza et al 2015: xvii). However, as the British authorities began to backtrack on their previous promises of significant administrative reform favouring the natives, the *Prabasi* editorials became more critical of Ramananda’s previous utopian vision.

The *Prabasi*, took an idealist stance against the war while preserving India’s interests. Ramananda Chattopadhyay has long been a pacifist. In 1907 he wrote a letter to William T. Stead, famous pacifist journalist and editor of a London-based newspaper the *Review of Reviews* in which he expressed his views on the fact that there is a need of international brotherhood based on justice and national freedom (Chatterjee 2016: 244-5). In many of his editorials, Ramananda stressed the need for pacifism and prayed for an end to war. However, he remained a realist and backed war if nations felt the need to defend them. The *Prabasi* praised Belgium’s stand against Germany because of this. Eventually, Ramananda’s quandary would become a critique of the West. *Savyatar Sopan* (The Steps of Civilization) is an editorial piece in which the author quoted a Japanese writer sarcastically commenting that Japan was not civilized until it defeated Russia on the battlefield despite its rich ancient art, culture, and heritage. In terms of civilization’s size, he was critical of Western thinking (*Prabasi* Falgun 1322: 436-7). His cosmopolitan pacifism and nationalist realism went hand in hand. When it comes to war expenditure, he criticized the government for spending much money on it while neglecting its colonial subjects. The latter, according to him, continued to die because of inadequate medical care. His such editorial has been titled ‘Battle for Ages in India’ (*Prabasi* Falgun 1322: 443-4). Despite Germany’s appearance as a menace, malaria has continued as a more significant threat, according to an editorial titled “*Yuddha Ebong Piranibarontha Bayer Hras*” (On War and the Reduction of Disease-Related Expenditure) (*Prabasi* Aghryan 1323: 115).

The next target of Ramananda’s ire was Britain. He argued that their principal motive was to take over the world, albeit claiming their war has been morally righteous. According to Ramananda’s writings [*Shantir Sharrta* (Condition of Peace)], both sides used different justifications to excuse their actions, but both sides’ principal motor of interest was either extending or keeping dominance. He stated that the outcome of the war became increasingly obvious and peace discussions must begin to circulate in the halls of international politics,

“... (১) যুদ্ধের সময় যেসব স্বাধীন জাতিদের দেশ অধিকৃত হইয়াছে; যুদ্ধান্তে তাহা তাহাদিগকে ফিরাইয়া দিতে হইবে, এবং তাহাদের স্বাধীন অবস্থা অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখিতে হইবে; (২) যুদ্ধের সময় বা তৎপূর্বে যে-সব স্বাধীন জাতিদের দেশের কোন অংশ কেহ দখল করিয়াছে, তাহা তাহাদিগকে ফিরাইয়া দিতে হইবে; (৩) যুদ্ধের আগে হইতে এখন পর্যন্ত যাহারা পরাধীন আছে তাহাদিগকে স্বীয় স্বীয় দেশের আভ্যন্তরীণ

ব্যবস্থা করিবার অধিকার দিতে হইবে। ইহা না করিলে সংগ্রামে যে পক্ষই জয়ী হউন, কাহারও সত্যবাদিতায় মানুষের আস্থা থাকিবে না। ...সুতরাং আমরা বলিতে পারি যে মহত্তম অধীনতাপাশ-মোচনের আভাসের প্রতি ইংলন্ডের প্রধানমন্ত্রী জগতের দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করিয়াছেন, এশিয়া আফ্রিকা মুক্তি না পাইলে, ভারতবর্ষ স্বরাজ (Home Rule) না পাইলে, তাহা অসম্পূর্ণ থাকিয়া যাইবে। ”)Prabasi Boisakh 1324:

4)

The *Prabasi* group clarified its position on its nationalist tendencies and its editor, Ramananda Chattopadhyay had sympathies for revolutionary terrorists. However, he explicitly clarified his opinion while discussing the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, that the scenario and social reality of India had nothing in common with either Russia or China and so it's not a perfect place to experiment with armed revolution (*Prabasi* Boisakh 1324: 11). So, Ramananda's *Prabasi*, like many of his contemporary liberal nationalists, believed in incremental administrative reforms, but this does not diminish his condemnation of imperial control. In her unpublished doctoral thesis 'Profile of a Nationalist: Ramananda Chattopadhyay through the Modern Review and the *Prabasi* (1905-1920)', Chaitali Chaudhuri pointed out that it was mostly due to Rabindranath's influence, as he never tolerated political violence but was sympathetic to revolutionaries' self-sacrifices (Chaudhuri 2004: 22). However, it would be too generalised argument if we put forward Ramananda's ideal simply as nationalism. Ashis Nandy said he belonged to a group who were 'dissenters among dissenters', and who 'regarded nationalism as a by-product of the western nation-state system and the forces of homogenization let loose by the western world view' (Nandy 1994: x-xi). However, when the issue of India's home rule became obsolete, the *Prabasi* began to self-criticize by highlighting India's incapacity to explain its problem to the world. In an editorial essay titled '*Jogote Varoter Songbad Prachar*', he argued that the world, including the British Empire, was sympathetic to Ireland's aspirations, but despite all of the assistance in the war effort, the Indian matter of 'home rule' was ignored. So, in his perspective, it was the responsibility of Indian journals to aid in disseminating Indian news to the rest of the globe.

Conclusion:

As we can see, the *Prabasi*'s more significant motive of cosmopolitan nationalism received an increased readership as the First World War approached. Ideals were still in the fledgling stage; therefore, apparent conflicts coexisted with ease. In order to meet nationalist needs, nationalists are fed minute details as well as global instances; discourses on world diplomacy conceal and interpret the ideal existence of freedom and pacifism, or we should say right to national integrity and international coexistence. The question of enlistment and discourse of Bengali manliness became a burning issue while matters regarding Japan's emerging economy or day to day details of war attracted popular readership. War had created these opportunities. All of this mass-scale interest, as well as ideological

innovation, were fuelled by conflict. Though post-war despondency discouraged many, this communal motivating push was vital for future political consciousness, and the *Prabasi* played a vital role in this process. So, while scholars like Ali Raza describes this phenomenon as the international moment it becomes clear that the wartime journalism was an important catalyst to this.

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