

Invited Article

Politics of Providence: Reformist Discourses in Colonial India

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Abstract

As a rational and ethical system of God and a grand teleology, Providence has evinced robust faith in both Pagan and Christian cultures over the centuries in the Platonist, Neo-Platonist, Stoic, Epicurean, Catholic and Protestant traditions. Serving as a template for Humanism to align human will and enterprise with the divine moral purpose, necessities of nature and chance, providentialism was eventually played into history. All the large projects of evangelism, imperialism, messianism and apocalypse etc. were variously conceptualized in history, and these justified Providence in its teleological variations. This paper focuses on the iconic colonial figures like Raja Rammohun Roy, Bankimchandra Chatterji, and Rabindranath Tagore who invoked providence as the *raison de être* for British rule. Raja Rammohun Roy and Bankimchandra saw the positive benefits of European culture and modernity through British colonial rule. Tagore, for his part, thought that it was providential for India to be colonized by the British within the grand allegorical scheme of the civilizational eugenics of East meeting West.

Keywords: providence, fortune, teleology, paganism, humanism

'Providence' is all too familiar in its common usage in the Christian context to provide hope to humans in a hopeless state and despair. It offers consolation to people in the moments of suffering. The idea of providence contains an element of reassurance which human beings need that they are being cared for by God. In lieu of what it offers, it demands faith in a just, benevolent cosmic order and assent of the soul to belong to this ethical order, and accept its justice. As a moral and ethical mechanism, it rationalizes the negotiations of fate with necessity, and it works into the quotidian order of reality divine purpose and design. How this idea with affective qualities and ethical values becomes politically expedient in the colonial cultural discourse is what I wish to explore in Indian colonial discourse. The scope of the study is too vast for a brief essay such as the present one which would at most act as prolegomenon to a more elaborately sustained study.

Political expediency, as one surmises, involves the deployment, withdrawal, intensification, mollification and modification of some key ideas through figurative

modes in discourses as demanded by the contingent situation in the power structure. Furthermore, it is also manifested by who uses the discourse and for what purpose and to what effect, and how *providence* as a trope has been variously used from various subject positions in political discourses in the 19th and early 20th century in the historical context of British Empire. The subject positions¹ being not just those of the missionaries, imperialists, colonial officials, traders, but native colonial subjects and Indian nationalists, what will be apparent are the curious shifts from one such position to another, signifying in each case disavowal of human responsibility and agency for a state of affairs or order likely to bring benefits for oneself or a group, and justifying the selfsame state of affairs or order as inevitable and willed by God. Indeed, God's justice overrides the secular sense of right, wrong and ethical considerations of karma by the humans.²

Providentialist claims based on theodetic calculus served to promote grand concepts and schematized projects such as imperialism, evangelism, messianism and apocalypse, but these did not seem to be amenable to small-scale, secular contingencies of brute facts and occurrences caused by myriad human efforts for self-aggrandizement, domination, freedom, survival etc. For brute facts to acquire larger meaning, contingencies to appear as teleological and the stray actants to emerge as subjects and agencies, and to be invested with will force, sense of responsibility and the notions of collective destiny, justice and freedom, and also shared memory, historiography was called into play. Providence is played into history as a force. On the premise that "a Creator God, who is also the Lord of man's doings, that is, of history, and a God who may on occasion be responsive to man's importunity" (387), M.A. Fitzsimons cites many instances of providence being invoked and deployed to explain the happy and progressive turns of the events in history, notwithstanding humanist, existentialist, Nietzschean and Marxist animadversions.

The idea of Providence has a long and exceedingly complex genealogy from the Pagan to the Christian times in the western tradition. By saying so I delimit its provenance as Abrahamic faiths, since it is not germane to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Taoism². Since etymologically, providence is in Latin *providentia* or foreknowledge of God and in Greek *pronoia* or forethought, it guarantees the supreme wisdom of God as regards what is going to happen; it also means the inevitable signified by the statement "*Bidhira bidhāna ke kariba āna*" often made in our Odia and Bangla cultural context. But it seems usage of bidhi in our languages is a later day entry from European culture. But before we turn to the use of Providence as a trope in the colonial discourse, I wish to take a quick look at its use in the Pagan, Greek context, to understand not how it has evolved historically, but to understand why it is invoked by humans and to what effect before we move on to the political and cultural contexts of the colonial times.

In the pagan times, the Platonists, Neo-Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans had their respective ideas of providence, especially to explain to humans the nature of humans, the mysteries of their world and alleviate the sense of fear and uncertainty they had being subjected to the lust, deceitfulness, and vengefulness of the Pagan Gods. In *Timaeus*, Plato held that God is Supreme, perfect in Wisdom and Knowledge. He exercises over all things a Providence that orders and governs everything for the good of the universe. But how about the sub-divinities or the Olympian gods like Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Athena etc.? Plato does not seem to believe in the stories written about them by Homer or

Hesiod, nor does he believe in the existence of them, except in the last book. But he did believe that they are perfect beings in mind and body, who work for the well-being of humans. In *Phaedrus*, Plato offers the theory that humans have their character traits according to the types of the visions of realities their souls had while these were in the company of gods (Dyson 307). So, in Plato's scheme humans have a derivative relation with the gods, and are with the gods in perfect harmony.

Aristotle is, however, a little problematic in that he holds in *Metaphysics* that God is the Supreme Agent, final and efficient cause of the Universe, and therefore creator of Providence. And yet chance plays a role in the providential order³. In both *Metaphysics* and *De Anima* he says that God's science is perfect and comprehends everything about the affairs of the celestial beings, humans and beasts; God takes pleasure in intellect, and favours those humans who are intellectual, and these humans know how to hold on to their virtues even when buffeted by chance. Aristotle's idea of Providence is such that it only orders the natural world and regulates its changes. It looks after the species and, not the individuals.

Of the others, the Stoics of the 300 B.C. need special mention as they are believed to have shaped the Christian notion of providence. For their part, they believed the cosmos to be a rational order, permeated with providential purpose, manifested in the course of nature. In his *On Providence* Chryssipus presented providence as a chain of determining causes in the natural world and fate as an inexorable process of one set of events leading to another in a vast chain of interconnections governed by a living rational intelligence. It is not a morally blind force, but one that is operative in a unified world unlike as the Epicureans would have it. It is ethical and involves assent to the truth of a moral purpose inherent in the working of providence.⁴

Challenging Aristotle and the Peripatetic philosophers that Providence as conceptualized by them does not care about the individuals, refuting the idea of determinism in the Sophist concept and atheism in the philosophy of the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists, namely Plotinus, Proclus, Boethius, Dionysus systematized the Platonic ideas and emphasized that Providence extends to every individual, operates in each kind of being, adapted to each being's mode through its inherent teleology. In their conceptualization Providence is all just, and perfect. They also emphasized human freedom and choice against determinism and also divine perfection against debasement.

This very brief survey of Pagan philosophy brings to fore unresolved debates about freedom and choice of man against the predeterminism of Providence and Fate, between Chance and Providence, between an impersonal order of justice and fate of the individual and so on. The philosophizing of the rise and fall, unmerited suffering and imponderables of human destiny and fear of safety becomes the natural reaction of humans to the murky power play of the Olympians.

To most people, Stoicism and Christianity are polar opposites, and yet the former anticipates the latter in many ways, but not altogether without problems because Stoicism, first of all, is a philosophy and hence speculative, while Christianity is a faith with doctrinal certainty. Stoics did not believe in a material God, whereas Christianity believes in Jesus as the Son of God assuming human forms, a personal God. And yet Stoic providentialism could be absorbed into Christianity because both believe in the immanence of reason and supreme Knowledge. For the stoics, Logos is as important as

reason is the most important element in man's intuitive understanding of Providence as a rational natural order. Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius both underscored the rational mode of human response to the working of nature that reflect the rational principle of Providence, and believed that reason is the source of virtue and happiness.

For the Christians, Providence is the immanence of God's sovereignty over the natural world, and Catholics, Reformed and Lutheran theological systems subscribe to it. Providence is usually divided in three divine acts, Preservation, Co-operation and Government. 1. By preservation is signified the causing of existence to continue. 2. Co-operation is the act of God which causes the powers of created things to remain in being. It is not pretended that the existence of the powers of the things are ever separated, but only that they are distinguishable in mental analysis. Co-operation varies with the nature of the objects towards which it is exercised. 3. Government, as a branch of Providence, is God's controlling all created things so as to promote the highest good of the whole. To this end every species of being is acted upon in a way confirmable to its nature; for instance, inanimate things by the laws of physical influence; brutes according to the laws of instinct; and free agents according to the laws of free agency. Moreover, as Providence has respect to the nature which God has been pleased to design to each various object, so, in common with every other divine act, it is characterized by divine perfections.

Chance coincides with Providence to facilitate its working and its good fortune, although, at times, it interferes with it causing Misfortune. In the medieval times, Fortune has been represented as a Wheel (*Rota Fortunae*) interfering with the lives of the Kings and illustrious personages. One recalls Philosophy consoling an ailing and disconsolate Boethius that Fortune is capricious and a seductive monster and inexorable in her turns: "Would you presume to stop that wheel of hers from turning? If you could do that, it would no longer be the Wheel of Fortune, would it" (30)? in *The Consolation of Philosophy*. However, Providence is antithetical to fortune, and also quite incongruous to free will. Lloyd Genevieve insightfully shows how Humanism believed in the innate capacity of the individual to overcome the vagaries of fortune. He says:

Certainly, tensions exist in the syntheses of classical philosophical and literary sources with Christian theology in medieval and Renaissance thought. Many of those tensions are played out across the intersecting fault lines of distinctions between divine intellect and will, on the one hand, and between human freedom and the necessities of Nature, on the other. The Christian God's transcendence of the world he creates is mirrored in the belief in human capacity to overcome whatever natural forces cannot be accommodated into the purposes of benign providence. Christian theology is here reinforced by Renaissance humanism's celebration of human capacities to transcend passivity and take control of our own destinies (157).

In the late 17th Century and 18th century, it is the theological concept of Providence with regard to government becomes our focus in colonial discourse. It is a broad swath of writings both by the natives and the colonial officials about the contemporary society, culture, economy and politics that either justified colonial rule or offered arguments for strengthening, reforming and improving such rule. Above all providentialism in colonial discourse worked out different utopian projections. But before I begin to come to this subject I wish to state citing one instance how the colonialist expansion leading to

establishing vast empires was also impelled by a providential belief and zeal. The rhetoric and logic of Providence were employed in the tracts of the colonial settlers in the Americas and Australia to justify their rapacity. It was much more than a coincidence that a merchant ship built in 1807 in Calcutta named Providence sailed across the seas for British East India Company. In many tracts, journals and letters also providentialism was the standard rhetorical device for colonial expansion. In December 1807, one Thomas Twining, a religionist British merchant, wrote a letter to the Chairman of East India Company, which I quote:

Providence hath been pleased to grant us with this great Empire, on a continent where a few years ago we had not a foot of land. From it we export an immense wealth to enrich our country. What do we give in return? It is said that we give protection to the inhabitants, and administer equal laws? This is necessary for obtaining our wealth. But what do we give in return? What acknowledgement or Providence for its goodness has our nation ever made? What benefit hath the Englishman ever conferred on the Hindoo, as on a brother? Every argument in support of the policy of not instructing the natives our subjects, when traced to its source, will be found to flow from Deism or from Atheism, or of Polytheism, and not from the principle of the Christian religion (20).

It is common knowledge that the British Empire discursively justified in the 19th century its civilizing mission as the white man's burden by portraying the natives as benighted people, who needed to be redeemed from superstition, social evils, idolatry, and false beliefs and so on. We know how evangelism in the early phase of colonialism which spread education and Christianity deepened the idea of God's redemptive purpose. A host of other phenomena such as scientific and technological progress after the Industrial Revolution, the theories of evolution, both Darwinian as well as social, political and economic liberalism, and utilitarian model of social development reinforced the idea of the unfolding of God's plan for humankind and a teleology of progress. The Whig political belief in the industrial progress and imperial expansion of England was quite providentialist in nature. Thomas Babington Macaulay's popularity among the non-conformist Christians rested on his adroit translation of the idea of Divine Providence into its secular supplement such as perfection, "success and prosperity" (Knickerbocker 246). Despite his difference with him, Gladstone also invoked the idea of Divine Providence, and for him, "political economy had a captivating appeal as a mode by which to express and enact policies in harmony with the natural laws of providence..." (Dickens 57). All this was suitably imbibed and also reciprocated by the Western educated colonial natives in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who looked upon British rule as a moral and hierarchically stable dispensation of God. They themselves invoked Providence in their own writings for justifying and legitimating colonial rule. Synonymous with God's will, Providence was used for a teleology of moral progress. Within this paradigm of the redemptive and rational rule of the British, mild protests were occasionally articulated together with petition and prayer by the early leaders of the Congress, who believed that British rule was a great boon to India and that the British providentially redeemed Indians from anarchy and misrule into which this country had plunged after the fall of the Mughal Empire. Even though Dadabhai Naroji⁵ and Romesh Chunder Dutt⁶ made an analysis of British economic policy between 1870 and 1905 to state that Imperial policy of the British was detrimental to the local economy, this criticism was very constructive and ameliorative in purpose. Western

mode of administration, education, freedom of press, local units of self-government were the distinctive benefits of British rule, to strengthen which the colonial bourgeoisie sought to work with the administration.

In fact, the nature and purpose of British rule was never seriously questioned until Gandhi emerged on the political scene with his *Hind Swaraj* (1909), which was implacably critical of Western civilization, culture, technology and politics. But prior to it, providentialism perhaps was the *raison de être* of colonial rule. It is against this background that I situate Raja Rammohun Roy and Bankim Chandra. As for Tagore, a different trajectory will be needed to understand the significance of his idea of British providentialism.

Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), an exceptionally brilliant scholar of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit, a modern proponent of the Vedanta and Upanishads, great reformer of social and religious beliefs, a radical Unitarian dissenter, founder of the Brahmo Samaj, believer of monotheism, free press, intellectual liberty, diffusion of scientific knowledge, was above all an apologist of British rule in India. All these aspects of Rammohun present him as an enlightened colonial subject with a distinctly modern sense of thought, who would therefore endorse the British imperial rule as liberal and emancipatory. It is common knowledge This teleological view of imperial rule and the mantra of progressivism as well as redemptive power of Western civilization lasted until as early as 1909 when Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* came out, critiquing in most trenchant manner the civilization of the west. Until then the engagement of the colonial feudal classes and the bourgeoisie were not to oppose but to improve and reform of the colonial system of administration in respect of judiciary, the police and the revenue department. What they wanted was good governance, in which the English educated natives could participate, and above all they wished to promote the consciousness of good citizenry among the colonial subjects.

Rammohun's reformist zeal of traditional Hindu religion and culture which he defined as *Sanatan* is predicated upon his hope that English education and Western scientific knowledge for proper edification of the natives. But when the Sanskrit college was set up in 1824 to teach Sanskrit, he was terribly disappointed, and he wrote a "Letter on English Education" to Lord Amherst in 1826 saying:

The establishment of a new Sanskrit School Calcutta evinces the laudable desire of Government to improve the natives of India by education; a blessing, for which they must ever be grateful ... When this seminary of learning was proposed, we were filled with sanguine hopes that it would employ European gentlemen of talent and education to instruct the natives of India in Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy, and other useful sciences, which the natives of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised: them above the inhabitants of other parts of the world ... Our hearts were filled with mingled feelings of delight and gratitude; we already offered thanks to Providence for inspiring the most generous and enlightened nations of the West with the glorious ambition of planting in Asia the arts and sciences of Modern Europe... (324-325)

Here the Rammohun's mention of Providence carries the semantic burden of the benevolent rationality of God and the divine scheme of intellectual progress, which has

been set aside in favour of teaching of Sanskrit that is “best calculated to keep this country in darkness”.

Mention may also be made of Raja Rammohu’ns petition to The King in the Privy Council for freedom of press which ought to be maintained to ensure civil rights so that the bonds of allegiance between the Bengalis and the British could be kept intact. In that letter he adulated the British for having delivered them from Muslim tyranny and misrule and held that

[the] Natives of Bengal wanting vigour of body, and adverse to active exertion, remained during the whole period of the Mahumuddan conquest, faithful to the existing Government, although their property was often plundered, their religion insulted, and their blood wantonly shed. Divine Providence at last, in its abundant mercy, stirred up the English nation to break the yoke of those tyrants, and to receive the oppressed Natives of Bengal under its protection (288).

He further added that “the dutiful subjects consequently have not viewed the English as a body of conquerors, but rather as deliverers, and look up to your Majesty not only as a Ruler, but also as a father and protector” (289).

What catches our critical imagination is how the trope of providence that conjures up both the quotidian and the transcendent, belief and power in a relationship of interplay and produces semantic effects of the justification of what has not happened yet but should have happened, or should happen.

We should remember that Providence as a trope was used in the theological discourse to explain what happened or should happen in fixed and well-determined temporalities. The position of enunciation was also sanctified. The moral authority of the sequence of events was attributed to God alone in a context theodicy inhabited by evil. However, in a political context, where evil and good are relativized across a contested moral terrain, with opposite camps vying with each other to appropriate Providence on their side, the concept becomes dubious. In an insightful essay ‘Providence and Politics in Cromwellian England’, Blair Worden argues that the assumption of absolute power by Oliver Cromwell was vindicated by the idea of the providential workings of God, but it involved ideological manipulation:

It can hardly need to be emphasized that providentialism afforded infinite scope for self-deception; that the social interests and the constitutional assumptions of Puritans may have figured more prominently in their interpretations of providence than they recognized; or that politicians, consciously or unconsciously, will have played up or played down the doctrine of providence, and pulled it in different directions, as it suited them (97).

Indeed, the lines from Shakespeare’s *Henry II* illustrate how ethical action as well as moral guilt can be avoided, and self-delusion can be justified by providentialism. John of Gaunt refuses to avenge the death of his brother Thomas Woodstock because of the wrong belief that the King is the regent of God:

Alas, the part I had in Woodstock’s blood
Doth more solicit me than your exclams,
To stir against the butchers of his life!
But since correction lieth in those hands

Which made the fault that we cannot correct,
Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven;
Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth,
Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads.

(Act 1, Scene 2)

Literature offers many examples that providentialism can be politicized to settle score against an enemy of the chosen people in a dispensation no less than that of God. In the colonial context, the British assumed the sacral authority of a redemptive teleology, facilitating a desirable progress of history towards a point of transcendence. Definitely, Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* (1882) is a case in point for his providentialist politics as a colonial native.

Like Rammohun, Bankim also believed that the arrival of the British as providential. In the notice to the second edition of the novel, he explained his authorial intention thus:

The leading idea of the plot is this—should the national mind feel justified in harbouring violent thoughts against the British Government? Or to present the question in another form, is the establishment of English supremacy *providential* in any sense? Or to put it in a still more final and conclusive form, with what purpose and with what immediate end in view did Providence send the British to this country? The immediate object is thus briefly described in the preface—To put an end to Moslem tyranny and anarchy in Bengal, and the mission is thus strikingly pictured in the last chapter: “The Physician said, ‘Satyanand, be not crest-fallen. Whatever is, is for the best. It is so written that the English should first rule over the country before there could be a revival of the Aryan faith. Harken unto the counsels of providence. The faith of the Aryans consisteth not in the worship of three hundred and thirty millions of gods and goddesses; as a matter of fact that is a popular degradation of religion—that which has brought about the death of the true Aryan faith, the so called Hinduism of the Mlechhas. True Hinduism is grounded in knowledge, and not in works. Knowledge is of two kinds—external and internal. The internal knowledge constitutes the chief part of Hinduism. But internal knowledge cannot grow unless there is a development of the external knowledge...English education will give our men a knowledge of physical science, and this will enable them to grapple with the problems of their inner nature. Thus the chief obstacles to the dissemination of the Arya faith will be removed, and true religion will sparkle into life spontaneously and of its own accord. The British Government shall remain indestructible so long as the Hindus do not once more become great in knowledge, virtue and power (128).

As is apparent, Bankim followed very closely the selfsame providential telos chosen by Rammohun Roy. Like his predecessor, he grounded what he called ‘true Hinduism’ in the ideals of monotheism and a rational order of faith which will culminate as the Eternal Code that has been lost. In the concluding chapter the Healer tells Satyanada:

To worship three hundred and thirty million gods is not the Eternal Code. That’s a worldly, inferior code. Through its influence the real Eternal Code—what the foreigners call the Hindu rule of life—has been lost. The true Hindu rule of life is based on knowledge, not on action. And this knowledge is of two kinds—

outward and inward. The inward knowledge is the chief part of the Eternal Code, but unless the outward knowledge arises first, the inward cannot arise. Unless one knows the gross, one cannot know the subtle...The English are very knowledgeable in the outward knowledge, and they're very good at instructing people. Therefore, we'll make them king. And when by this teaching our people are well instructed about external things, they'll be ready to understand the inner. Then no longer will there be any obstacles to spreading the Eternal Code, and the true Code will shine forth by itself again (229).

Interestingly, in Bankim's providential schema, the Eternal Code is the apotheosis of the Hindu-Aryan/nation-state as mediated by the external/scientific knowledge of the English. This involved a trajectory for the nation-state to veer away from the materiality of history and political governance towards transcendence and wisdom. In Bankim's nationalist imaginary, the immanence of the Mother is possible from a temple in the Himalayas as the Great man suggests to Satyananda. It is a moment of prophetic transcendence at the end of the novel warranted by Providence. At this moment, political power gets absorbed into the power of prophetic wisdom. Therefore, the quotidian realities of history are transcended, and the unlawful activities of the Sanyasis and their armed insurrection against the British forces and the effrontery of Shanti towards Captain Thomas and Major Edwards have been condoned and absorbed into the larger providential schema of Providence (*providentia* or *pronoia*) which alone knew what the rebel Sanyasis and the British themselves did not know: that the armed rebellion was a necessity to bring on direct British rule over India in order to end the misrule of the Muslims in pursuance of the higher purpose of the establishment of Eternal Code that demands Sacrifice and Honour, both adjuncts for renunciation from struggle. The English are a providential necessity for the great awakening of Virtue, Knowledge and Power in a futurist moral utopia.

Both Rammohun and Bankim invoked providentialism to justify British rule. Rammohun worked out the trajectory for British colonial rule for its stable existence in the present, together with reforms in order to ensure the colonial native's participation in it as modern citizenry in India as a modern, democratic, liberal polity. For his part, Bankim envisioned a futuristic, utopian Hindu nation-state. Bankim's mode of providential temporality was retroactive (from 1770s to a point in foreseeable time), hence more complex than that of the former.

As for Rabindranath Tagore, he also believed in the working of Providence to work out the trajectory for a futurist utopia. However, he took Bankim's providentialism a step further by visualizing for its goal a cultural cosmopolitanism by breaking away from the rigid and somewhat parochial model of enlightened Hindu-nation state. He debunked nationalism as an ideology of the self-aggrandizing, rapacious, imperialistic European nation-state, with its apparatus of power, surveillance and ruthless control. He regretted that "the abstract being, the Nation" was ruling India ("Nationalism in the West" 17). Hence, he never wanted India to grow into a modern nation-state in the European model. On the contrary, he wanted India to embody the spirit of the unity of East and West, and that utopian possibility was providential. He looked upon the British as a race with great respect and admiration for their civilization rather than imperialist ruler. He used the civilizational template West to represent them. He said in his essay "Nationalism in India" (1917):

We must recognize that it is providential that the West has come to India. And yet someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the east has to make her contribution to the history of civilization. India is no beggar of the West. Even though the West may think she is. I am not thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association. If Providence wants England to be the channel of that communication, I am willing to accept it with humility (109-110).

He went on to add that each nation must be conscious of its mission, and India's mission is not political, but racial and cultural unity "as has been set before us by our providence" ('Nationalism in India' 98). India's freedom was to be not political, not to a nation-state, but to be a utopian topos of cultural cosmopolitanism, without "narrow domestic walls", where freedom of knowledge would allow all cultures, faiths, literatures, customs to inter-weave in the spirit of love and harmony. India's providentialism, from Tagore's point of view, disavows politics and nationalist historiography. Like Bankimchandra, he also transcendentalizes the trajectory of nation that emerges from a particular historical moment of great crisis within their respective providential paradigms.

From the somewhat fragmentary but insightful observations on the use of Providence, we can infer that this idea was called upon in theological philosophy to rationalize the relation between humans and the larger external forces of the natural world which became complicated owing to the inscrutable factors like fortune. Also, it aligned necessity with fortune. From the brief survey of Greek and Christian philosophical traditions, we learn that the postulation of divine sovereignty's rule over the natural world as a rational order was imperative. It was believed to have real explanatory power for the seeming imponderables. The contingencies designated as chance were accommodated into the scheme of Providence to be emptied of any sense of uncertainty. Providentialism was the most potent belief humans could arm themselves with against fear and despondency on account of the presence of evil and what Hamlet would call "slings and arrows of an outrageous fortune."

While in the secular and political context, providentialism offered justification for self-deluding projects of colonialism and imperialism, it was also invoked when the oppressive, overbearing authority of an imperial force loomed large as an inexorable presence before the powerless colonial natives they had no option but to providentialize their fate and to rationalize it. Some began to see, like Raja Rammohun Roy and Bankimchandra, the positive benefits of European culture and modernity through British colonial rule. Tagore, for his part, thought that it was providential for India to be colonized by the British within the grand allegorical scheme of the civilizational eugenics of East meeting West. It is quite another matter that the allegorical narrative itself was a derivative discourse of the Orientalist master discourse that had spiritualized and orientalized East.

Notes

¹I use the term 'subject position' in the Foucaudian sense as one that the point of enunciation in a discourse attributed to a subject is produced within discourse, subjected to discourse. See "The Order of Discourse" (1970) and *The Discourse on Language in The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on language* (1972). I also subscribe

to the idea of subject position as formulated in the positioning theory by Davies and Harré (1990) who theorize how the construction of sense of self and the interpretation of the world is made possible through a structure of not just power relations but rights in order for subjects to create self-identity (from among a host of many others) depending on the necessities of the present contexts.

²In the context of ‘being of accident’, Aristotle differentiates at length in *Metaphysics* between necessity and chance in these words: “We say that everything either is always and of necessity (necessity not in the sense of violence, but that which we appeal to in demonstrations), or is for the most part, or is neither for the most part, nor always and of necessity, but merely as it chances; e.g. there might be cold in the dogdays, but this occurs neither always and of necessity, nor for the most part, though it might happen sometimes(123).”

³The concept of *karma* and *prārabdha* as found in Hindu and Buddhist ethics as principles for the reward of good fortune and happiness or misfortune and suffering could be a reason for the absence of Providence in these systems of faith.

⁴For an insightful discussion of rational and ethical dimensions of Providence from Stoic perspective and their nearness to the Protestant Christian version of Providence, see Elizabeth Agnew Cochran’s essay “Faith, Love, and Stoic Assent: Reconsidering Virtue in the Reformed Tradition” (2014).

⁵See Dadabhai Naroji’s paper “The Poverty of India” read at the Bombay Branch of the East India Association in April and July 1878, and his *Poverty and Un-British Rule* (1901) in which he expounds the drain theory.

⁶For his part, in *The Economic History of India* in two volumes, Dutt praised British colonial rule for ushering in a tome of modern thoughts, rule of law, peace, good administration, but attacked the economic policies and land revenue rules, tariff monopolies pursued in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to make an otherwise self-sufficient and prosperous India impoverished.

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