

Hemendrakumar Ray and the birth of adventure kalpabigyan

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In this paper, I will explore three novels by Hemendrakumar Ray (1888-1963) serialised in *Mouchak* from 1925-1927, *Meghduter Marte Agaman* (The Arrival of the Messengers on Earth) and *Maynamatir Mayakanan* (The Magical Forest of Maynamati), and the later novel, *Amaanushik Maanush* (Inhuman Man, 1935). Written during the last decades of the colonial rule, I argue that in these three novels, Ray systematically adopts and dismantles the tropes of British science fiction, thus setting the stage for more daring postcolonial experiments in kalpabigyan.

Hemendrakumar Ray (the pseudonym of Prasad Ray) can be regarded as the father of adventure fiction in Bangla. In his fiction Ray drew extensively upon writers of similar fiction in English and other languages, but his uniqueness lay in creating the prototype of the Bengali hero as adventurer. Unlike the characters created by his fellow Bengali author such as Premendra Mitra (1904-1988), Ray's heroes are seldom the object of satire in his adventure novels. The author Dhirendralal Dhar recalls a 1933 meeting with the senior author in which Ray advised him about the formula for adventure novels:

"In your first book, you have taken us to the jungles of Africa. That is fine for the British. Their rule extends all over the Earth, but you do not have that luxury. You will have to look for adventure in your own land. That way, our children will get to know the rest of the country, and be able to recognize familiar places. Thus they will develop a love for their country, and it will make them feel proud to be Indians. Whether good or not, your writing will help develop their character. That is the aim of the adventure novel – to build courageous and resolute character in our boys and girls." (*Rachanabali* 5, introduction, unnumbered)

The above quote gives us the template for almost all of Ray's works, as well as his ideological positioning and the key to his editorial policies. The goal of adventure fiction identified by Ray was a common theme amongst several critics in the early twentieth century, articulated best in Andrew Lang's essay "Realism and Romance" (1887) in which Lang spoke of the wholesomeness of romance or the adventure novel over realist fiction, but it is also a theme found in the editorial policies of similar early magazines in Bangla such as *Mouchak* and *Rangmashal*, edited by Ray himself. What makes Ray's position different, as Satadru Sen (2004) has argued, is that Ray was interested in creating a romance of the familiar where possible, and of other worlds if necessary, but he was not interested in creating a romance featuring places such as Africa that children could not identify with. Nationalistic pride was as much a necessary component for Ray's fiction as the adventure itself. Ray believed English education and Western fiction had had a detrimental effect on the development of an Indian identity, particularly, Bengali identity. Pointing out an editorial by Ray in *Rangmashal*, in which Ray proposes an inculcation of Bengali culture in children, Sen writes:

"Hemen Ray then quotes Cecil Sharp, the collector of English folk songs, on the dangers of a cosmopolitan education that was producing 'citizens of the world rather than Englishmen and it is Englishmen, English citizens that we want.' Sharp had also said, nearly thirty years before Ray, that this was best achieved by 'taking care that every child born of English parents is in its earliest years placed in possession of all those things which are distinctive products of its race.' To that, Ray adds: 'The same applies to us. To make Bengal great we must become natural (*prakrito*) Bengalis.' (qtd. Satadru Sen 2004)

This *prakrito* Bengali, even if we ignore the paradox, is also a very specific kind of Bengali for Ray, virile, 'Aryan', adventurous and masculine, an older idea to be found in the works of writers such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Aurobindo Ghose, and circulated in the historical conditions of the Swadeshi movement. We see a shift of perspective in his later fiction, but it nonetheless holds true that Ray's adventures had a distinct agenda; any resemblances between his fiction and that of his British counterparts is channelled through this nationalist filter. In terms of genre, it is also important that for Ray the basic plot structure of the genre allows it to be location independent – an adventure can just as easily be set in Africa as in Bengal; location needs to be introduced for specific purposes, in Ray's case, creating the sense of a nation and building national identity, although Ray himself sometimes does not adhere to this dictum.

All three novels share some common preoccupations of the science fiction of the period, but while the first two, although they follow each other, represent two different kinds of science fiction, the last represents Ray's interest in bringing together all the themes of contemporary science fiction in one place. There is also a significant change in the tone of the three works; the early works are marked by a seriousness in developing the adventure novel motif, while the third one is a satire. Also, while the first two feature recurring characters that Ray established as hero archetypes in Bangla adventure fiction, the last is a standalone work featuring an unnamed narrator, and chaotic in form. In the earlier novels, we meet the adventure duo Bimal-Kumar who made their first appearance in the earlier novel *Jaker Dhan* ("The Riches of Yaksha", 1923-24), but the protagonist of both novels is not Bimal, but the scientist Binaybabu (Binay Majumdar), and his friend Kamal. Binaybabu is the narrator in half of the first novel (recounted through his diary), and all of the second (again from his diary).

The two novels are however completely different; the first is a futuristic alien invasion tale describing a Martian survey as well as a trip to Mars, while the second, which begins exactly at the point the first ends, is a prehistoric tale.

Meghduter Marte Agaman is Ray's take on H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898), but in Ray's novel, the Martians arrive in a village rather than the metropolis, Kolkata. The language of the journalistic reports about alien visitation uses a vocabulary of the supernatural: "*aloukik*" (unearthly), "*vismaykar*" (wonderous), "*aschorjo*" (surprising). But, these are dismissed as the belief of the local populace, while the scientist Binaybabu himself is sceptical about any supernatural cause. There is a vocabulary shift towards the natural yet non-terrestrial extrapolation of the scientist, for whom, everything may be explained as the machinations of superior technology:

"This is neither the work of ghost nor human. This is the work of an unknown force whose like you will not find on this Earth. That power which scientists all over the world have been seeking has made its very first appearance here, in this Bengal! Oh Kamal, you cannot imagine how happy I am!" (*Rachanabali* 1 113-114)

The first pages of the novel thereafter build up a gradual picture of rural Bengal. The village of Bilaspur, the site of the mysterious happening, although quite large, is shown as mired in superstition, where any possibility of a rational natural explanation is impossible. Moreover, while Binaybabu, as the Metropolitan scientist¹ is the only one initially with a hypothesis about the nature of the mysterious incidents, Ramhari, the illiterate servant, never has a problem associating the events with the supernatural; even after the happenings have been explained, Ramhari continues to associate happenings with a higher power. For him, whether the cause is gods, ghosts, or aliens, does not actually matter as all are equally placed at the realm of a higher power. This is an attitude demonstrated in both the early novels; whereas scientific theories are a means to elide or outgrow the supernatural, those theories are not a substitute for the supernatural explanation for Ramhari, but rather, their extension. The source of value in these novels is unarguably, science. Binaybabu as the scientist and the narrator channelizes a particular reading of the texts in which a scientific explanation of events is the only possible one. Beyond its explanatory power moreover, science allows a means for control over events. Noticeably, the source for all knowledge comes from 'Western' scientists. In the footnote to Binaybabu's fantastic descriptions of Mars, the author catalogues his sources:

"The description of Mars by Binaybabu is far more entertaining than our attempt to paraphrase it, hence from now onwards we will use his diary entries directly. Much of what Binaybabu describes is indeed scientifically proven. Those who do not believe it, are encouraged to refer to the views of Schiaparelli, Lowell, Gunn, Stanley Williams, Flammarion and other *Western* scientists. – Author's note" (*Rachanabali* 1 227; emphasis mine)

While the research itself is all authenticated by reference to Western science, the claims that Binaybabu makes are completely his own. That knowledge allows him to freely speculate and develop the framework for explanation. While this seems to be a rather straightforward case where Basalla's filtration or diffusion theory (1967) seems to hold, a distinction continues to be made between the science itself and the nationalities involved in particular research. The second thing immediately noticeable about the scientific explanations is the way technologies are directly adopted and adapted to suit the futuristic context. When Binaybabu initially speaks of an 'unearthly power' in the first novel, his narrative seems to resemble more generic borderline cases. In science fiction, the element of horror needs to be expunged through rational explanation, and technology, imaginary or extrapolated real, serves to counter the impact of the inexplicable. The natural explanation performs a second, more important purpose, that is which is natural may be understood and therefore controlled. Once a mode of explanation through extrapolation has been conceived within the novel, the Martian superiority diminishes. There is a gradual shift in the tone of the novel in terms of its attitude towards science, the superlative, then the gradual comprehension, and subsequent devaluation, followed by awareness and adoption of the futuristic tech, leading to freedom. The colonial parallels are evident in the attitude, as Binaybabu draws a distinction between civilisation and scientific development, and the two are not seen as co-forming; technological development is seen as stemming from need rather than as an inevitable process:

"Yes, it does seem so [that the Martians do not know the use of firearms]. That does not prove however that they are less advanced creatures than us. Things are invented when there is a need for them, that is the rule of civilisation. The Martians have not felt such a need, so they have not bothered to develop such technology. But I must warn you in advance, Bimal and Kumar; just because you have firearms does not mean you should misuse them." (*Rachanabali* 1218)

Ray's perspective on scientific knowledge is also evident in his imagery. Ray provides detailed descriptions of the village of Bilaspur, but appears not to be interested in providing a visual description of the landscape of Mars. In the case of Mars, any physical description of Mars in terms of imagery is substituted by scientific description. Initially, Binaybabu, as the scientist, has to respond to all the various questions that the others seem to have regarding Mars, including the presence of an atmosphere; soon however, Binaybabu switches to a long description of Mars, its speed of rotation and revolution, its moons and other characteristics. While the question-answer format has the virtue of containing the novel in the boundary of a story, the long infodump, contained within a diary, serves no such purpose; for not only is a diary meant to be private, hence making it unnecessary for anyone familiar with a subject to write as if providing an explanation, a description of Mars's moons has absolutely no other function than the didactic. When describing the familiar such as Bilaspur, Ray has recourse to physical description, but the unfamiliar seems to belong to two different categories, those considered by Western science and hence can be used to create an abstract sense of an alien world, and those almost entirely

constructed from the imagination, such as the forest in the second novel. To Ray, Mars serves as a form of lost world in the opening quote: that which is studied by Western science can best be understood in and through a certain distance. In the later novel, although he begins with a premise of there being a scientific basis for his vision, Ray has ample scope for an imaginary landscape:

"No birds, no butterflies, no humans, just wild jungles and mountains and the sea. It felt as if we had reached the infancy of our Earth as described by the scientists, when no one had even heard of humans, when all that existed on the earth were gigantic and fantastic weird looking creatures." (*Rachanabali* 5 145)

Later, when describing the conditions of prehistoric Earth, Ray is only interested in the creatures that inhabit this place, and the adventure is centred on the various creatures that attack the protagonists and their successful escapes from such peril, Ray is not interested in describing the specificities of the landscape of prehistoric Earth. Ray is only interested in working with the specific knowledge available to him and he attempts to not stray into realms where such depiction may be countered by actual scientific research. Thus he bases his Mars on the scientific knowledge of his time and footnotes his sources, but in the second adventure he only works with creatures whose existence has been described by scientists instead of working with the landscape.

In Ray's novel, however, there is an added dimension of myth, whether as an object of satire or as a structure re-examined in within the scientific worldview. The mythic serves two purposes in Ray; first, it allows the intervention of an indigenous framework which thus indigenises the science fiction, and second, by reinvention of the mythic as scientific, it enables a form of the fantastic that can work with science. In the second novel, the mysterious island and forest, which are placed outside the recognised spaces of Earth and hence, as location beyond science, is first presented as '*Maynamatir mayakanan*', or the enchanted forest of Maynamati, the immortal queen of the mythical king of Bengal, Manikchandra, who was skilled in witchcraft and had an enchanted. Faced with the dangers of the place, moreover, analogies and comparisons become commonplace in the description, and reality and fantasy seem to come together even for the scientist: "Sindbad had once been trapped in the land of giants. Gulliver sahib's travels also mention the land of the giants. Are these then not mere stories? Have we indeed reached the land of the giants?" (*Rachanabali* 5 145)

The patterning of the first novel on Wells' *War of the Worlds* is quite evident. In both the Wellsian fable of Martian invasion and Ray's novel, Martians dissect in order to learn about humans, and the fact that they perform such surgery becomes explicit proof of their difference in terms of physical characteristics. In the Wells novel, the Martians, who are physically and technologically superior, succumb to Earth bacteria when they feast on humans, thus making explicit the aspect of degeneration where less evolved creatures end up triumphing in the evolutionary battle. In Wells' other Social Darwinist fable, *The Time Machine*, it is the Morlocks who feast on the frail Eloi. In the Ray novel, the equivalent of both the bacteria and the Morlock are humans, as they are the ones who triumph over the Martians. The Martians are also similarly frail compared to humans, and closely resemble Wells' "men of the year million":

"Their head is huge, particularly their forehead and above. Their faces are triangular. Their eyes are like red furnaces, perfectly circular and within them two red stars... Their bodies and limbs although similar to humans, do not seem to be much bigger altogether than their gigantic head and face. Their limbs and body is also abnormally thin. They were about three feet high, and their head and face alone must have been about one and half foot... Binaybabu said "...According to scientists, after thousands of years humans will also evolve similarly; their limbs will become smaller and the size of their head will grow. Whatever we use most tends to develop the most. Since our mental activity is ever increasing in comparison to physical activity, their heads will grow bigger as a matter of course." (*Rachanabali* 1 214)

However, the status of these tropes in Ray is the inverse of what Wells conceived. The Martians are, metonymically, colonisers, as conceived by Wells, and the humans are "primitive" and "savage" in comparison, technologically as well as civilisationally, but unlike Wells, Ray's primitive savages are heroic. For Ray, belonging to a colonised nation, it was necessary to depict the superiority of the relatively 'primitive', who, despite the technological handicap, is shown to be scientifically capable, and, despite superstition, able to overcome both superstition and cultural differences in times of crisis. Moreover, the Martian failure in Wells' novel is the failure of science, in Ray's novel the Martians fail due to the superior physical strength and courage of the humans. Ray was interested in heroic Bengali characters, and the novels give an ample illustration of their heroism. While the scientist protagonist is indeed the hero, he is also shown as somewhat foolhardy, as his scientific curiosity and love of knowledge clouds his judgement when it comes to a perception of the threat posed by the Martians. He feels "overjoyed" at the prospect of going to Mars and fortunate, as he has had a lifelong interest in the planet, which irks his companions, particularly Bimal, who goes so far as to imply that he is "crazy". (*Rachanabali* 1 224) While Binaybabu's scientific knowledge allows them to understand the nature of their experiences, for instance, his explanation for Martian gravity enables them to understand the reason behind their ability to jump, and he is also often the one who devises the plans that enable them to survive, the survival itself always depends on the superior physical strength and courage of the others, particularly Bimal. When Binaybabu first meets Bimal in the novel, the latter proclaims: "Binaybabu, I love danger, I seek danger, and we have come to Bilaspur today for the same reason, to search for some new danger." (*Rachanabali* 1197). It is Bimal who is able to fight off the Martians on the spaceship, and it is his gun that ensures the Martian submission. While science works as an important factor of comparison, the ultimate test is dependent on physical superiority. It is also his skill with firearms that enables them to survive in the forests in the second

adventure, and eventually allows them to attain their freedom, and freedom is the subtext of any colonial adventure:

"Farewell, Binaybabu, I will die, but I will not be enslaved." (*Rachanabali* 1 219)

The second novel however, distinctly borrows from different prehistoric tales such as Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1912). Typical of any lost world and prehistoric adventure is the existence of an hitherto undiscovered place where the conditions are typically Jurassic and the place inhabited with all manner of dinosaurs, and, almost inevitably, a tyrannosaurus rex. The description of such a place is also quite typical, and Ray does not disappoint:

"There are still many places on earth of which humans have no knowledge. Who can say what exists or does not exist in those places? We sometimes come across accounts where travellers speak of having seen prehistoric creatures in some places. Though many do not believe such accounts, there is also no proof that these stories are untrue. That creature we saw today for instance cannot be passed off as merely an optical illusion." (149)

A second aspect of the prehistoric adventure is that at the end of the story the character(s) would face scepticism from the wider world regarding the existence of such creatures. Here too, Ray sticks to the genre formula; we have the captain of the ship that rescues the protagonist and others disbelieve their tale. However, Ray echoes Conan Doyle's adventure by having a triceratops and later two pterodactyls appear over the ship fighting with each other, which convinces the captain of Binaybabu's claims.

Amaanushik Maanush (the title could be translated as Inhuman Human, Superman or Overman) published in 1935 stands as a prime example of a tendency in Bangla science fiction in the first half of the twentieth century, which is a systematic dismantling of the predominantly Eurocentric narrative of science and scientific development through humour even as the notion of science in its ostensibly non-narrative ahistorical universal-transcendental form is salvaged. Examples of this trait may be found in the works of science popularisers such as Sukumar Roy, Jagadananda Ray, Kshitindranarayan Bhattacharya and Premendra Mitra. What makes *Amaanushik Maanush* special is the sophistication and complexity of its project. In a novel, unlike the short stories of these other writers, Ray finds the space for a multilayered intertextual critique of adventure fiction and lost race science fiction.

Amaanushik Maanush is a narrative in two main parts, and in each part Ray targets specific conventions of adventure and lost race fiction in order to question or deflate the assumptions behind them. I argue that this critique of the tropes of adventure fiction is not merely to engage in a postcolonial rewriting and reversal of the narrative of Anglo-American adventure fiction, the so-called 'empire writes back' strategy, but that it is a reshaping of the conventions of kalpabigyan originating in a need to articulate a post-independence nationalist programme through a self-reflexive critique of the attitudes of the complacent neocolonial Bengali intellectual. Such self-reflexivity in science fiction is only possible in those cases where the genre authors have accepted the conventions and begun to test its limits. The text thus bears a general relation to antecedent texts, some of which are actually named in the book in this self-reflexive manner, and that these intertextual references are arranged to throw light upon the central theme, a critique of the idea of the Overman. Among other texts, one must include Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* (1884) (which is invoked in a very specific reference in the book), H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quartermain adventures, particularly *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *Allan Quatermain* (1887), Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894), Arthur Conan Doyle's Professor Challenger story, *The Lost World* (1912), Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan and John Carter stories, and other texts such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), as well as certain texts in Bangla, in which Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay's novel *Chander Pahad* (1937, translated as *The Moon Mountain*), Sukumar Roy's "Heshoram Hushiyarer'r Diary," and Jagadananda Ray's "Shukra Bhraman" are prominent. To identify the specific generic imprint on *Amaanushik Maanush*, we have to consider its three levels – time, space, and history – and the ways in which each level works with and transforms generic conventions. These three levels are based on the discourse of degeneration, which in its particular manifestation here needs to be explored as a science fiction convention. The three levels are kept separate only for the purposes of analysis and to facilitate transcultural comparison, rather than to propose any inherent distinctions between the three. There are two basic ways in which degeneration intersected with science fiction futurism. One was to lend it a logic by which the present could be interpreted in terms of an imagined future (in which degeneration had either been controlled or become realised). The second was by interpreting the present in the continuum of the past and the future. Either option could be used to depict utopian and dystopian possibilities. Texts that seem to be utopian in distinct ways bear shades of the discourse of degeneration, for instance Albert Robida's satire *Le Vingtieme Siecle* (1883), in which the future signifies technological progress, with flying cars, suffrage, television and other technological wonders, but at the same time all works of art have been reduced to either grotesque simplified versions or become afternoon entertainment. Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890), similarly, shows a world in which common people are deprived of rights and abused by the upper classes, and yet Donnelly's response to the revolt of the masses is deeply ambivalent and his vision of their rise is anything but positive. Socialism or science were not cure-alls, and the vision of scientific positivism and unqualified progress did not materialise in actual terms as the century entered its later half. We have already mentioned H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, but it is not merely *The Time Machine*, but much of all Wells' novels are permeated with the theme of degeneration, including *The War of the Worlds* and *The Island of Dr Moreau*, works which exerted great influence on Bangla kalpabigyan.

Degeneration and eugenics were allied discourses; where one predicted decay, the other posited solutions to counter that decay. The mega-text of degeneration, eugenics and the concept of the superhuman was crafted by Olaf Stapledon in the *Last and First Men*. The novel uses one of the deepest timelines in the whole genre from its beginning to the present, spanning over two billion years of the future of humanity. In Stapledon's novel, each of the eighteen human species described goes through a period of growth and maturity and then eventually declines and dies out, while another

human species replaces it. It is however Stapledon's use of eugenics that is the most interesting parallel to Ray. The novel constantly engages with the production of artificial human species by the members of an anterior species. The Great Brains (the fourth men) are produced by the third men for instance to be pure rationality and thus prevent any instances of war and enable man to discover his reason for existence. This production of new species is meant to overcome limitations of the parent species. The new species therefore, even if it often exists alongside an older species, gradually comes to replace it. In a thesis that has been somewhat controversial, Stapledon also seems to ratify the colonial encounter and destruction of native species as a result of this encounter. The human species that travels to Venus destroys the native aquatic life in create its own space on Venus. From one aspect this is a presentation of the Darwinian struggle for survival, yet the dangerous combination of eugenics and colonialism makes one wonder about Stapledon's adherence to theories of racial and colonial superiority, evident in the work of Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton's eugenics programme. As Stapledon's biographer Robert Crossley has noted, Stapledon's engagement with eugenics was a long standing one; as early as 1908 he was interested in race improvement through eugenics, succinctly contained in his 1908 essay "The Splendid Race" which begins as an eulogy to Galton, "Columbus found a new world, but Francis Galton found a new humanity" (Stapledon 1997: 145); and he also defended eugenics in public debates (Crossley 81-82, 101, 169). In other later essays, such as "Interplanetary Man" (1948) and "The Remaking of Man," (1931) Stapledon continued to engage with eugenics:

"The perfected men and women who are to come will probably regard us as quaint prehistoric monkeys, dignified by a mere spark of humanity. They will perhaps have changed so much that we shall scarcely recognise them as men and women at all. Possibly their bodies will have passed as far beyond the present human form as ours beyond the reptile." (Stapledon 1997: 163).

Yet what is significant is that even these efforts are shown to be unsuccessful in providing a lasting solution to counter degeneration. Indeed the pathos of the eighteenth species, the species of the last men is felt most keenly in the recurrence of degeneration in a species built as the "flower of humanity", who experience spiritual degradation from the physiological manifestation of degeneration:

Degeneration of the higher neural centres has also brought about in us a far more serious and deep-seated trouble, namely a general spiritual degradation... We had almost forgotten that it has a physiological basis, and that if that basis were undermined, we might no longer be capable of rational conduct. (243)

Ray takes up the themes of degeneration, eugenics, superman, primitivism, myth and history in one sweep as they relate to the Bengali context. In Ray's novel, the theme of degeneration is mapped onto the particular mutations in the Bengali context, and while these themes were used by writers such as Spencer and Stapledon to justify the nature of colonialism, in Ray this spectacle is reversed as a self-reflexive discourse, using the theme of Aryanism. The first thing that one notices in the novel is the exaggerated Bengaliness of the two protagonists, particularly the diegetic narrator. As he moves about this landscape the first thing he points out to the reader is the lack of Bengalis in Africa, although there are other Indian communities, which he claims is due to the self-respect of the Bengali who is unwilling to take up small jobs or menial labour in a foreign shore unlike the other communities of India. While this seems to be somewhat of a boast at the moment it is presented, it turns out eventually that this 'self-respect' is an ironic self-critical comment on the Bengali and Bengali culture. Moreover, the narrator's façade of proud Bengaliana (after all he has come to hunt, not to be a "shopkeeper or a coolie" as he says) contradicts his simultaneous awareness of his difference from other Bengalis (who are described as "*kuno*" – or introverted and stuck to their corner of the world, lacking both the adventure spirit and also the ability to use situations for self-advancement). His initial expectation on finding the diary is that it must belong to some "white skinned man". Finding the words in Bangla however, he is doubly surprised, and his identification with the unknown former hunter is hardly a point of celebration, split as he is between the two spaces of the colonised mindset (one of adventure, the domain of the "white man" – in which he places himself, and the others, the "*kuno*" or the introverted and stay at home Bengali). The former adventurer also being a Bengali does not sit well with this self-appointed pioneer and representative of assertive Bengali masculinity. This doubling is a part of the strategy of 'decolonising the mind' that this novel adopts, so while this sets up a pattern of expectation regarding radical rewriting of lost race fiction, with the 'others' of lost race fiction becoming its protagonists, I argue that it is not quite a rewriting of the white colonising 'other', but the rewriting of the white colonising 'other' in the self, a decentring of the Bengali intellectual from his colonial mindset. The racism of the Indian towards the African, something that is also found in the early Ghanada adventures of Premendra Mitra, and even of the Bengali towards the other communities of India, which is retained in the constant use of the ignorant native trope, is a self-critical gesture revealing the silliness of such narratives of superiority.

We have so far seen three models of temporal distribution, time travel into the future, and future history, and lost race narratives. The third model posits a collapsed civilisation, representing a degenerate version of its own past, or the decline of the species towards animal like forms. To introduce this model, Ray utilises the trope of the wild child, a figure often romanticised in lost race fiction and adventure fiction, who provides a contrast to the technologically advanced superhumans in the other part. Setting it within Africa, and using the tropes of the wild child, channels the specific narrative convention of the frontiersman and white colonial explorer / hunter discovering the wilderness of Africa. Tana's story is typical:

"Tana is a human child. When she was one, she was stolen by the gorillas. This was fifteen years ago. Since then she has lived with the gorillas, and although human her behaviour is like them. I had heard this story a long time ago, but this is the first time I saw here. I pray to Allah I do not have to see her again." (*Rachanabali* 12 39)

In other similar narratives, the wild child, that is, a child raised by and amongst animals, assumes a heroic, 'human' counterpoint to the animals. Their superiority amongst animals is perceived as an inevitable aspect of their status as human children, mirroring a perceived superiority of humanity over the animal kingdom as homo sapiens. Mowgli, from Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* (1894), raised by wolves, and Tarzan, from the Edgar Rice Burroughs' books, raised by gorillas like Tana and who becomes their king, are both examples of such children, humans who demonstrate exceptional ability and stand out amongst their animal peers. Ray on the other hand does not glorify the wild child. The wild child Tana is truly 'wild', a specimen of the species that she has grown up with; she is not "human" and cannot be. She is however, a weakling amongst the animals, and the gorillas have to come to rescue her when she is threatened. The superiority of humans is technological, as homo faber, rather than a physical fact, and Tana, who has not displayed that evolutionary trait, cannot be physically superior to her gorilla peers. There is no 'human' redemption for the wild child.

If Tana represents one extreme of inhuman, the superhumans, called "*amaanushik maanush*" by the narrator, appear as the other extreme. Between the two, Ray is able to demonstrate both kind of degeneration, towards origin (ape) and futurity (superman). So while the wild child and the superhumans are counterposed, one being the 'retrograde' specimen of lost race adventure fiction and the other the "futuristic" beings of 'coming race' science fiction, the narrative dismantles the romantic image of both.

When the diarist of Ray's novel meets these superhumans, they also turn out to be originally Bengali and they also speak the Bangla language (the king uses classical Bangla). The Master Scholar describes the history of the superhumans in this fashion:

"The king Biryasingh who captured the kingdom of Sinhala, our ancestors came from his army. While travelling back to India, one ship got separated in a sea cyclone and landed in Africa after many days. The chief of this ship, Chandrasena, was highly skilled in the different shastras and was particularly interested in scientific mysteries (*baigyanik rahasya*). He was aware of secrets which even today's scientists don't know. He invented a technique by which human body and mind could be made supremely beautiful. No one of your kind would be able to understand these techniques. If you are interested, you can get a glimpse of it in the museum. Chandrasen experimented on his shipmates. So originally we were exactly like you – Bengalis and primitives. But now we are not weak or incomplete. Our mind is not a slave to the body but its master. We do not have a single bone in our body, because bones are unnecessary. We can do whatever we wish to do with our bodies... We can make as many hands or legs as we like. We can walk slowly like you, and we can also outrun a motorcar if we wish to. Ravana lived in Lanka, that is Sinhala. He had 10 heads and twenty hands. And he could also assume the shape of an ordinary man. His brother Kumbhakarna was taller than a palm tree. All these are examples of man's control of his body. You are ordinary men. So you think these are tall tales written under the influence of hashish. But this is your stupidity. The creators of Ramayana and Mahabharata are not known to have written under the influence.... It is possible that Chandrasen learnt the secret of how to create the body because of his visit to the land of Ravana. Perhaps the Sinhalese scientists were working on these secret techniques. Now only we know this technique." (*Rachanabali* 12 69-70)

This creation of a parallel development scenario of a new 'race' of Bengalis, typical of lost race fiction, is another self-critical gesture. The use of myth as history, particularly of the stories from epics such as Mahabharat and Ramayan is a constant presence in the anti-colonial rhetoric of Bengali and Hindu nationalist intellectuals from the late nineteenth century onwards, in part based upon Orientalist philological researches which created this quasi-mythical idea of an ur-race of the Aryans which connected the histories of India and Europe. In anti-colonial rhetoric this was reflected in the appropriation and utilisation of historical and mythical figures of ancient India in order to bolster the self-confidence of the Indian intellectual in the field of science and technology, as the lack of development of science and technology took the blame for colonial conquest of the land of the original 'Aryans'. In other fields, the Indians (certainly the upper class Bengali intellectuals for the most part) considered their own systems, of religion, philosophy and morality superior; colonisation was blamed on the lack of development of science (Prakash 1999; Raina and Habib 2004) Connection to an ancient history of superior sciences gave both a coherence to the self-image of the colonised intellectual divested of supreme political authority as well as self-confidence in learning about the new "western" sciences whose origins belong to neither the west nor the east, but to the "Aryan" race, whose Hindu past is considered indubitable. This position is particularly prominent in Bangla journals that advocated a study of the new sciences as a means of liberation, such as *Aryadarshan* and *Rahasya Sandarbha*, and turn of the century texts such as Praphulla Chandra Roy's *Treatise of Hindu Chemistry* also illustrate this need, and so does the political resurrection of figures such as Aryabhata, Charaka and Shusruta as the elder gods of universal science.

One particular form of the discourse of degeneration and scientific racism took shape is through the Aryan discourse. The myth was created in its specific 'Aryan' form much after the British Orientalists such as William James or Henry Colebrook, in the work of Orientalists such as Max Muller, but its origins and the creation of this template of historical and racial overlap undoubtedly began with them. The research created the myth of an original super-race or master-race known as the Aryans with a distinct line of evolutionary development and with shared philosophical heritage, who have always been the ruling race of the world, and particularly distinguished in their scientific abilities. It is particularly the notion of racial purity and origins that structured the understanding of degeneration and its link to colonial conquest. If there was a

purser race, then that race had degenerated in the East, even though they were members of the same original race. The 'purer' race now survived only in the European countries, particularly northern Europe, which explained their conquest over their degenerate Aryan kin, that is, the Indiansⁱⁱ. This double structure, of appropriation of a concept of civilisation from Eastern texts and the colonised mapped onto a notion of racial purity, and the simultaneous repression of the colonised as the degenerate other, centrally informs the cluster of texts that create the Aryan mythosⁱⁱⁱ. It is this double structure that we find in the controlling logic of works such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), a key influence on Ray's *Amaanushik Maanush*. Aryanism is a major component of the evolutionary pattern in *The Coming Race*, on which is modelled the evolutionary pattern in *Amaanushik Maanush*.

The Coming Race is a hollow-earth story, that is, a story based on a civilisation that lives inside the earth. The narrator, who accidentally falls down a cave, discovers a race of super-beings called the Vril-ya. These beings control a powerful fluid, an energy-force called Vril, and use it to do everything in this subterranean world: from lighting street lamps to getting rid of diseases, as weapons to destroy barbarian cities, to put people to sleep, to fly, and to hunt crocodiles. The ability to use Vril is hereditary; the Vril-ya use vril-wands to channel the fluid. Much of Bulwer-Lytton's language directly represent Social Darwinist concerns; he believes the superior race of the Vril-ya, once they ascend to the upper side of the Earth, will easily overtake the superterrestrial races (159), in language used by social Darwinists such as Francis Galton. The part of this utopian (or dystopian from the perspective of the "superterrestrial races") that I wish to highlight is the origins of the Vril-ya, who are, the narrator discovers, descended from the Aryans:

"This people – though originally not only of our human race, but, as seems to me clear by the roots of their language, descended from the same ancestors as the Great Aryan family, from which in varied streams has flowed the dominant civilisation of the world; and having according to their myths and their history, passed through phases of society familiar to ourselves – had yet now developed into a distinct species with which it was impossible that any community in the upper world could amalgamate: and that if they ever emerged from these nether recesses into the light of day, they would, according to their own traditional persuasions of their ultimate destiny, destroy and replace our existent varieties of man." (158-159)

I have already discussed how Wells echoes this Social Darwinist theme in the context of Martian invasion, for Bulwer-Lytton, this "elbow[ing] out," does not require extraterrestrials, but superior breed of evolved Aryans, and he, like Spencer and Galton, continues his discussion of such extermination by ruling out the possibility of survival through racial mixing. Bulwer-Lytton cites Orientalist research, such as that of Max Muller (the work is dedicated to him), and other philological concepts to emphasise his understanding of the origins of the Vril-Ya. The fact that Bulwer Lytton himself was a secretary of state for the colonies of the British Empire simply reinforces the connection I have tried to highlight here.

In *Amaanushik Maanush*, Ray discusses Aryan myths only to debunk them. *The Coming Race* narrative is carefully utilised by Hemendrakumar Ray, including the visit to the museum which is a copy of the Bulwer-Lytton scene, but the necessity of doing so is not shared with the intellectuals such as Praphulla Chandra Ray but is aligned closer to scientists such as Mahendralal Sircar and Meghnad Saha, who viewed this strategy of using Hindu myth as history with deep suspicion. To the latter, it seemed that resurrecting this narrative only served to reinforce colonial conquest through superior arms, and the apologetics of Aryanism with its theme of meeting of brothers (British-European and the Indian) as a covert justification for colonial rule. Ray utilises the trope just as he has throughout utilised the tropes of adventure fiction, and then as before he subverts it with a second strategy, by demonstrating the ultimate puerility of these intellectually ill developed overmen; the king being a fool and a madman, and his advisors even more so. But so confident they are of their own superiority and their particular ancestry and subsequent history, they have lost the ability to be self-critical, which is ultimately also the reason why they fail to understand the hunter's false logic and let him escape.

The use of the trope of the Overman, and the implicit/explicit identification of the Indo-Aryan as superior is a target of subversive critique through the narrative, and this critique is self-critical because it is the narrative of the Indian as the forerunner and precursor of the other races, including in science, that becomes targeted. When we examine Ray's debunking of the Aryan myth, we also come to realise the nature of his nationalism; unlike many other nationalist writers for whom the Aryan myth was a means to assert Bengali Hindu identity, Ray was in sync with the notion of a secular India. Closely connected to the idea of heroism and character building is this nationalist imperative. Nowhere is this felt more directly than in *Maynamatir Mayakanan*. In *Meghduter Marte Agaman*, the sailors are introduced as 'lower class Muslims', and both the class and the religion are issues for Ramhari, but these issues are treated at length only in the second novel. Ramhari is reluctant to both eat and stay at the same place as the Muslims, and he is constantly chided for his beliefs by Bimal and Binaybabu. Even the Muslims themselves, aware of the differences, are surprised at Binaybabu eating food cooked by them:

"But babuji, we are Muslims!"

'Bhai Senaulla, we are living in God's own kingdom, where we may have to live the rest of our lives. Here, there is no Hindu, no Muslim – there is only one race, and that is human race. Humans have created so many differences amongst themselves, we will not follow such rules here. Go, Senaulla, let us first eat the food prepared by you, and then we will listen to your story.'" (*Rachanabali* 5 169)

If science fiction has utopian possibilities, then it lies in that it may serve to demonstrate such unity of humanity as a species, and Ray, writing in post-partition, secular, India, sees in it the perfect way to reflect on the need to grow out of the differences produced by religion, caste and class.

Amaanushik Maanush becomes science fiction by incorporating both science and science fiction, particularly lost race narratives and subverting their positions internally. *Amaanushik Maanush* can be recognised as science fiction not only because of what it claims as science within the text, but more specifically because it is framed within a cluster of science fiction tales that allows us to identify it as part of a genre. It is in its handling of myth that *Amaanushik Maanush* can be identified more distinctly as kalpabigyan. The idea of using mythic frameworks together with modern science is also to be found in the two Ray novels, but they take the reader on two different kinds of voyages. While *Meghduter Marte Agaman* takes off from the premise of Wells's *War of the Worlds* and features a Martian invasion, its sequel *Maynamatir Mayakanan* takes off from the premises of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. Both novels, however, feature Ray's adventure duo Bimal and Kumar, as well as their pet dog Bagha and their manservant Ramhari, as well as the scientist Binaybabu (Binay Majumdar) and his friend Kamal. The duo of Bimal-Kumar represent the first attempt to create a uniquely Bengali hero for Bangla 'shishu-kishor sahitya' (children and young adult literature), first appearing in the adventure novel *Jaker Dhan* (serialised in *Mouchak*, 1923-24), and they appear in many other works by Ray. Thus, while *Meghduter Marte Agaman* and *Maynamatir Mayakanan* are kalpabigyan, like their successor, they are also distinctly adventure novels aimed at a young audience with very little science except that which can be understood by the target audience. For Ray, the response to science is indirect; in terms of the kalpabigyan tradition, the nationality of the character itself should be read as a proof of engaging with colonial science.

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ⁱ I use "metropolitan" in the sense used by Roy MacLeod, as the location of metropolitan science. See MacLeod, "On Visiting the 'Moving Metropolis: Reflections on the Architecture of Imperial Science.'" *Scientific Colonialism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison*. Eds. Nathan Reingold and Marc Rothenberg. Washington, D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987. 217-249.

ⁱⁱ A good recent study of these connections may be found in Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science*, Translated by Sonia Wichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Thomas Trautmann's older study, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) still remains the best reference on this topic. Tony Ballantyne's *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) has a much broader scope. See also Prakash (1999)

ⁱⁱⁱ Thus tracts against miscegenation are directed towards preventing racial mixing with the lower races that would lead to degeneration, for instance, Herbert Spencer's *First Principles (of a New System of Philosophy)* (1867) and Francis Galton's *Essays in Eugenics* (1909)