

The Calcutta Review

The Calcutta Review was established in May, 1844, by Sir John Kaye, who was attached to the Corps of Bengal Artillery and was also the Editor of the notable Calcutta daily, Bengal Hurkaru. The first number contained 250 pages of articles, six pages of miscellaneous notices, and the Editor's statement of purpose for what he hoped would become "a first class English periodical in India" – "The object of the work is simply to bring together such useful information, and propagate such sound opinions, relating to Indian affairs, as will, it is hoped, conduce, in some small measure, directly or indirectly, to the amelioration of the condition of the people." The target audience clearly was the emerging English-educated Bengali middle class. The First Series, which was published without a break from 1844 to 1912, had four issues every year, and featured informative articles on a variety of local and regional topics, discussions on religion and culture, book reviews, poetry, and advertisements.

John Kaye retired on account of his health after bringing out just four issues. He was succeeded as Editor by prominent intellectuals from the Free Church of Scotland fraternity - Alexander Duff (June 1845 - December 1848), Rev. W.S. Mackay (from January 1849), Rev. Thomas Smith (from January 1852), and George Smith who took over from September 1855. These early Editors maintained a pronounced Christian, though not parochial, orientation: indeed, the Bengali contributors were all either Christian converts or students and followers of Duff. We have contributions from Rev. Krishna Mohan Banerjea, Rev. Lal Behari Dey, Peary Chand Mitra and his brother Kissory Chand Mitra, among many others. The only lady contributor in this first phase was Lady Lawrence, wife of Sir Henry Lawrence, a major in the Imperial Armed Forces and one of the earliest writers for The Calcutta Review.

John Kaye remained the proprietor of The Calcutta Review till its fiftieth issue in 1855. During this entire period, the journal was printed by Messrs. Sanders and Cowes, Calcutta. In 1856 it was purchased and edited by Meredith Townsend, who sought to make it a liberal mouthpiece. In 1857 Townsend sold it to Messrs. Thacker Spink and Co. Once again Rev. Thomas Smith became the Editor, followed by George Smith (by now co-editor of Friend of India, presently The Statesman, Calcutta) who took the periodical to the famed Serampore Press. It stayed there under the next Editor, Sir Richard Temple, but under the editorship of Rev. T. Ridsdale the journal changed hands. The new publisher was R.C. Lepage and Co., Calcutta.

1912 saw a break in the continuous publication of the journal. During its Second Series from 1913-1920, the format changed from four issues to two a year. After another brief hiatus in the first half of 1921, The Calcutta Review was acquired in 1921 by the University of Calcutta. It was now published monthly, and became one of the crucial voices of the new nationalist discourse. The period from 1921 to the early 1940s is significant for the quality and tenor of the articles in the context of the momentous political developments in the country. The post-Independence phase saw a certain fading in its glory and influence. The Calcutta Review is now published biannually by the University of Calcutta Press and features scholarly articles from a variety of disciplines.