Reclaiming Science : A.P.C. Roy and Hindu Chemistry

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In a letter to the wife of C.R. Das in December 1921, A.P.C. Roy wrote

> I can assure you dear sister, that in serving my favourite science, I have only one idea in my mind, namely that through her should serve my country. Our aspirations are the same, God knows I have no other object in my life. (*Life*, 233)

This paper takes a close look at the way in which science became a site of colonial contestation and nation building and the strategic positions of postcoloniality it threw up. I intend to argue that P.C. Roy's *Hindu Chemistry* (1902 and 1909) sought to reclaim a past history of a vibrant scientific culture thereby challenging the claims of western hegemony over rationality and science. At the same time Ray's analysis of the demise of this scientific tradition posit a critical envisioning of a hybridized post colonial nation that uses the strategies of western scientific discourse.

It is noteworthy to add that Ray's research interests at this point of time (he was a teacher at Presidency College) combined a pure experimentation in Western Chemistry as well as application in a purely Indian scenario. Ray had made a name for himself at Edinburgh University (for his brilliant performance to earn a DSC as well as his stinging critique of British imperialism in an essay "India Before and After the Mutiny".(1886) At this point he had already published his landmark discovery of mercurous nitrite in the Journal of the Asiatic Society, 1894 (that was later printed in the *Nature* magazine). He was therefore already considered a 'savant' in the brotherhood of chemistry. However Ray's project also involved Ray drawing upon European sources as well a painstaking three year research on the adulteration of edible oils in India where he was seeking to apply his acumen in a purely Indian context. Ray had also embarked on his Bengal Chemicals Project (1892) with his mission statement being

> How to utilize the thousand one raw products, which nature in her bounty has scattered broadest in Bengal? How to