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Honorary Editor Dr. Akhilesh Shukla

Honored with Prestigious Pt. G.B. Pant Award
and Bhartendu Harishchand Award, Government of India
Professor, Department of Sociology & Social Work
Institute for Excellence in Higher Education
Government T. R. S. College, Rewa (M.P.)
akhileshtrscollge@gmail.com

Dr. Sandhya Shukla

Professor and Head
Department of Political Science
Institute for Excellence in Higher Education
Government T. R. S. College, Rewa (M.P.)
drsandhyatrs@gmail.com

Dr. Gayatri Shukla

Additional Director, Center for Research Studies
shuklagayatri@gmail.com

Dr. R. N. Sharma

Retired Professor, Rewa (M.P.)
rnsharmanehru@gmail.com



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kannanmonika@gmail.com
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Assistant Professor, Department of Oral Medicine and Radiology, School of
Dental Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida
doctorricha86@gmail.com, richa.mishra@sharda.ac.in
21. ***Shikha Tiwari***
Head, Department of Paramedical, Unique College of Paramedical,
Amarpatan, Satna (M.P.)
shikhatiwari5135@gmail.com

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Mob- 7974781746

E-mail- researchjournal97@gmail.com
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Editorial

The basic and most important unit of the society has been the family from the beginning. For the empowerment and development of the country, first of all it is necessary to pay attention to the moral, social, economic and cultural dimensions of basic institutions like family. Balanced development of the family is very important for the development of the society. Therefore, if we want to have a complete and balanced development of the country, then we need to lay maximum emphasis on the basic institution called family. It is necessary that we should not make any discrimination between son and daughter in the family and we must explain this to our sons and get them involved in their activities. Even today, those who belong to the old belief believe that a woman cannot get any freedom, she cannot go anywhere alone, she cannot roam anywhere alone, but today's youth refuse to accept these values.

Some people also say that the importance of the walls in the house, the same importance is given to the education of the boys in the society. But how is a house made? Who are in the base of the house? The base of the house is our daughters, our girls, that means they are related to the roots. If our root becomes weak in the society, then our house or house cannot be strong at all. There is a need to understand this social context in reality.

The extent of favoritism is reached when we see discrimination in small tasks. Some people think that a girl is someone else's wealth, what job she should do. That's why some parents discriminate between boys and girls and this discrimination is visible somewhere in our behavior, in feeding and dressing. This is sheer injustice. God has given the same brain to boys and girls and today girls are proving it by bringing better results.

Girls stay at their parents' house for only a few days, so it is our duty to pay deep attention to their education, upbringing, only then we can fulfill the concept of a strong society. God has made us the trustee of our children so it is our duty to treat all members equally with full justice because both boys and girls have same power, same soul. So we should give them equal opportunities for development.

The basic objective of women empowerment is the development of women and communication of self-confidence in them. Women empowerment is important for the overall development of the society. Empowerment of women is the most important social phenomenon because they are the creators. If you empower them, make them strong, encourage them, it is better for the society. Women and men are the basis of creation and human society. Both complement each other. These are the wheels of the chariot of life by which the journey of life runs

smoothly. The role of both has been equally important for stability in family and society. The basis of change and development in a society depends on the mutual interaction of men and women, walking step by step and equal mobility of both. A chaotic situation is created in social life when any one side lags behind. The history of mankind is witness to this that where women have been neglected, the development of the society has been stunted. The role of women in creation of creation, education of children, upbringing of family is much more important than that of men, thus her position becomes central in the society. Therefore, without the progress of women, there can be no upliftment of mankind and society. As far as India is concerned "Yatra Naryastu Pujayante Ramante Tatra Devta" means where women are worshipped. The deities reside there. With this ideal any Indian woman can feel pride in comparison to the western woman. The ideal of learning in Saraswati, the ideal of wealth in Lakshmi, the ideal of valor in Durga, the ideal of purity in Ganga, even the ideal of creation in the form of Jagad Janani we find only in India.



Professor Akhilesh Shukla
Chief Editor

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***Give to All an Equal Liberty:
A Study of Abolitionist Sentiments and Anti-Slavery
Historiography in the Anti-Slavery Alphabet (1847)***

• Anirban Guha Thakurta

Abstract- *Campaigns for abolition of slavery were regular in 19th century America. However, such regularity was in no way a proof of the abolitionists' campaigns being viewed with wide-spread admiration, especially in the Southern states where the cotton-based fertile economy was heavily dependent on slavery. Abolitionists were often viewed as anarchists, and racist prejudices against the blacks, normalized by academic, civil and often religious institutions remained as pivotal impediments before the adequate fruition of abolitionist sentiments. The abolitionist movement needed to have mass support and in forms that were sometimes organized and sometimes scattered, several attempts were made to extract that mass support. Several societies, members of which were mostly whites, came to be established that campaigned against racial discrimination and slavery, and unique forms of protests against slave-holding traditions were exhibited by these societies. The Anti-Slavery Alphabet was one such unique alphabet book published by the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1847 meant to be sold at the Anti-Slavery Fair, 1847. The present paper is a study of the Anti-Slavery Alphabet and its way of blending language acquisition methodology, abolitionist propaganda, anti-racist and anti-slavery dogma and alternative historiography of slavery in America.*

Keywords- *Alphabet book, Slavery, Abolitionism, Racism, Historiography.*

Introduction- The present paper is a study of the politics and poetics of an alphabet book published by Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Officially designed with the intention of helping children at language acquisition, the alphabet book also offers a look into the recesses of language and power. Language and power work hand in hand to normalize ideas, institutions, hierarchies and discourses of a socio-political locale. Thereby language and discourse produce and organize power relations and with the same are often expected to validate the hegemonic code of order and hierarchy based on coercion. The mechanism of the introduction of ideas and discourses through alphabet books usually alters as per alterations in religious, political, socio-economic and cultural priorities. The introduction to alphabets thus is primarily meant to be a tool of socialization by virtue of transforming the infant psychological *tabula-rasa* into an accommodative echo of the dominant narratives of contemporary times and regulating the infant subject to pursue conformity. The ever-shifting and yet continuously contemporarized

and naturalized pattern of the alphabet books finds a unique reversal of the accepted and traditional mainstream in *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* composed by Mary and Hannah Townsend.

Even before we identify the *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* as a text meant for children education and aiding language acquisition, we must recognize the same as a political dogma and abolitionist propaganda. Recognition of the text as anti-slavery propaganda exhibited at the stalls of Anti-Slavery fair naturally leads us to unveil what surroundings inspired its production. In this regard we must first acknowledge the fact that the need to produce propaganda of this sort was perhaps pressed by a discursive stereotyping of the abolitionist persona as anarchist and the wide-spread misinformation about abolitionist and anti-slavery ideologues. Thus, a historical survey of the immediate circumstances involving pro-slavery and anti-slavery sects and their ideologues in the contemporary American society would serve our purpose of historicising the politics and aesthetics of anti-slavery sentiments and historiography in the text.

Discussing the 'Slavery and the Slave' in the 19th Century Southern States, Samuel Eliot Morison writes that:

On the one hand (as stated by Jefferson Davis in his reply to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation) these "several millions of human beings of an inferior race" [the slaves] were "peaceful and contented labourers in their sphere.... On the other hand, it is the fashion for Negro intellectuals to describe their forebears as the most oppressed and exploited labour force in modern history, held down by fear and force, constantly striving for escape from slavery. (505)

With the economy of the Southern states deeply dependant on slavery, pro-slavery sentiments were popular and were further legitimised by even labelling slavery as an institution beneficial towards the blacks. While even Morison unequivocally presents the sites of whipping posts and flogging, instruments of exploitation and dehumanization associated with the institution of slavery in the southern states, he also maintains, echoing the pro-slavery thinkers that:

It should not be forgotten that the African slave trade began among the Negroes themselves in Africa; that to be reduced to slavery was a common expectation in the Dark Continent, and that victims of the system who were shipped to America, provided they survived the passage, were better off than those who remained in bondage in Africa. (505)

It should be noted that here the historian's emplotment of the slavery narrative is a mixture of sympathetic engagement with the slaves' plight and a justification of slavery as a more humanitarian one compared to their supposed denigration in his 'Dark Continent'. If such partially-racist historical documentation is available in Morison's book in 1965, it is not at all hard to imagine the way the slaves and the antislavery campaigners or abolitionists were discursively stereotyped during the times that shaped *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet* as a counter-discourse and an alternative anti-slavery historiography.

If on one hand the pro-slavery campaigners justified slavery for economic reasons, social stability, racial hierarchy and legitimised the institution by branding it beneficial towards slaves themselves, on the other hand it served to silence anti-slavery and abolitionist view-points. An image about this lack of information regarding the abolitionists is gained in the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, himself an ex-slave and anti-slavery campaigner. As Douglass writes about his first encounter with the word 'abolitionists' he mentions how he, as a slave, was kept ignorant about who were referred to by the term and what their philosophy was (108), and though the dictionary offered him not much help in understanding the term and the figures it alluded to, when he knew much about the term through newspapers he found 'HOPE' in the word (109). At the same time he highlights how he 'saw that there was fear as well as rage in the manner of speaking of the abolitionists' (110). This mixture of fear and rage about the abolitionists reflected in popular psyche was naturally stirred by the fact that the group's militarism was beginning to unite slaves and white anti-slavery campaigners and that was identified as a potential catalyst capable of overhauling the exiting slavery-fed economy. Threatened and enraged by such developments that may fracture the exiting social hierarchy the pro-slavery campaigners often branded abolitionists as anarchists and potential threats and thereby many abolitionists as well as their campaigns were attacked ideologically as well as by brute physical force. For example, On September 17, 1838, John Bennington Mahan was arrested in Sardinia, Ohio, on the charge of "aiding and assisting certain slaves, the property of William Greenhouse, to make their escape from the possession of said William Greenhouse..." (Rivington 45)

We, in fact in Morison himself, get some pictures of how the abolitionists were seen and how violence was often inflicted on them. As Morison mentions:

Advocates of Negro emancipation were attacked furiously in the free states. Whether in city or country, New England, New York or the Middle West, devoted men and women addressing an abolition meeting were assailed by rotten eggs and stones, and their voices were drowned by tin horns, drums, and sleighbells....

Philadelphia was far from unique in violence. On 21 October, 1935 William Lloyd Garrison was paraded around Boston with a rope around his neck, by what was called a "broadcloth mob"; and on the same day delegates who met at Utica to organize an antislavery society were dispersed by a mob of "very respectable gentlemen" led by a congressman and a judge. (518)

Resisting lack of awareness about the abolitionist idealism, fighting misinformation and negative stereotyping of the abolitionists and also the fact that 'as the abolitionist movement grew in the North, some openly challenged the church's tolerance of slavery- but Southern churches, largely dependent on the support of white slave owners, almost never questioned the morality of owning human beings' ('Slavery in America' 14), Hannah and Mary Townsend's *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* advocated in favour of abolitionism and in the process defamiliarized the usual English alphabet

book available in contemporary times. It intended to encourage abolitionist sentiments in the mind of the children first, while the same could also impress and inform the minds of the adult audience. In a preface written in the form of a nursery rhyme-like poetic ejaculation, Hannah and Mary write:

Listen, little children, all,
Listen to our earnest call:
You are very young, 'tis true,
But there's much that you can do.
Even you can plead with men
That they buy not slaves again,
And that those they have may be

Quickly set at liberty. (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*)

Quite significantly, the cultural militarism involved in the production of this alphabet book utilises the sphere of children's literature for both instruction and entertainment of the infant, and yet the advocacy of anti-slavery discourse is prominently evident. The abolition of slavery definitely required an illegalization of slavery, and it could only have been arbitrated by a legal apparatus. However, developing a mass consciousness that could act as the backbone of such an illegalization could only have been achieved if a sense of oneness between the members of the slave-holding race and the slaves could be forged. In this regard it is important to highlight the choice of the form of an alphabet book as a medium of political pamphleteering. While the book in its form appears to be an alphabet book that is usually regarded as one meant for children's language acquisition, it must be taken into account that the words/terms that it often introduces and defines while introducing the individual alphabet are necessarily part of adult experience. In this way the alphabet book naturally defamiliarizes the regular idiom and attributes of regular alphabet books. Additionally, though irregular and unusual in the domain of normative historiography and political philosophy, the Townsend sisters recognized the possible and probable agency of the children in shaping the political climate and order of the society. Their choice, apparently playful, was perhaps a result of in-depth political scrutiny and psychoanalysis. In this regard it is useful to focus on two significant issues. First, the alphabet-book must necessarily be viewed as a medium of socialization or introduction to the system of social contract. Two, since the addressees of the alphabet book were white children and children, in general, were expected to remain outside (or at least removed from) the effects of dominant pro-slavery discourses or racist prejudices that were mostly available voluminously in the world of the adult, propagation of abolitionist sentiment to children still remaining unaffected by the mechanisms that normalize slavery through the alphabet book could positively alter the existing social contract to get itself removed from racial discrimination and slavery. On the other hand, the alphabet book design also probably enabled the abolitionist propaganda to find easy entry into white households because of its surface innocence and playfulness associated with the child and children's literature.

While describing the slave-holding master Captain Anthony, Douglass writes:

he [Captain Anthony] was not by nature worse than other men. Had he been brought up in a free state, surrounded by the full restraints of civilized society --- restraints which are necessary to the freedom of all its members, alike and equally, Capt. Anthony might have been as humane a man as are members of such society generally. A man's character always takes its hue, more or less, from the form and color of things about him. The slaveholder, as well as the slave, was the victim of the slave system. (50)

Townsend sisters' attitude towards slavery system, the white slaveholders and the institutional advocacy in favour of slavery was perhaps reflecting the position of Douglass, since they, in their bid to eradicate slavery, did not choose to identify the slave-holding class as necessarily 'evil' but as victims of a long-lasting system of slavery that blinded them with racist prejudices to the extent that they failed to recognize the inhumanity and immorality of the slavery system. The *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was thus designed to be a vaccine against slavery system for the children and a medication to cure the racial prejudices and pro-slavery syndrome in the adults. And in this way, *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* naturally blends history, morality, political propaganda and religious dogma.

Attempting to delegitimize the normative identification of the Abolitionists as anarchists, the Townsend sisters introduced the alphabet 'A' with the word 'Abolitionist' and placed 'B' to carry 'Brother' to identify the black slaves:

A is an Abolitionist—
 A man who wants to free
 The wretched slave—and give to all
 An equal liberty.
 B is a Brother with a skin
 Of somewhat darker hue,
 But in our Heavenly Father's sight,
 He is as dear as you. (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*)

In *Anti-Slavery Alphabet*, the moralistic tone is ever-evident. There is a tendency to invalidate slavery as anti-Christian. Douglass wrote about his childhood and how he was 'told' 'that “*God up in the sky*” had made all things, and had made black people to be slaves and white people to be masters' (56). Children's literature most naturally conflates ethical teaching and knowledge mediation. This attribute is best utilized by Townsend sisters who reiterate the fact that God did not mandate in favour of slavery and the blacks are as dear as the whites. The identification of the slave as 'brother' naturally places the blacks as human, antithetical to slavery-driven prejudices that objectified, subhumanized and dehumanized them. In this connection, it is important to allude to John Milton whose rewriting of the Christian account of creation of Man naturally places the human being as superior to other living beings. Milton writes:

Let us make now Man in our own image, Man
 In our similitude, and let them rule
 Over the Fish and Fowl of Sea and Air,
 Beast of the field, and over all the Earth,

And every creeping thing that creeps the ground. (Quoted in Borlik 1).

Though to Borlik, Milton's rewriting of Genesis 'exposes the invidious axis between Christianity, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism' and justifies 'the stature and lowly status of beasts, whose posture constitutes proof of their ontological inferiority' (2), in our case we can refrain from the eco-critical reimagining of the Christian myth of Creation for the time-being and identify the existing order of anthropocene wherein the non-human is indeed, though unjustifiably, identified as lowly and ontologically inferior. That disturbing understanding is important in the context of slavery system. The strategic stereotypification of the blacks as non-human or not-fully-human or as beasts of burden played an important role in the justification of slavery as their status as ontologically inferior to man /the white man could normalize slavery as the Man's 'rule Over the Fish and Fowl of Sea and Air,/ Beast of the field' as an institution pre-ordained by the almighty and the Creator. However, with identification of the blacks as Brothers in distress there is a potential attempt at rehumanizing the blacks in popular psyche and thus there is in the process of introducing the alphabet 'I' a similar condemnation of dehumanization of the blacks.

I is the Infant, from the arms
 Of its fond mother torn,
 And, at a public auction, sold

With horses, cows, and corn. (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*)

On the other hand, while the Townsend sisters introduce the alphabets 'Y' with Youth and 'Z' with 'Zeal' respectively, they use the terms like 'Sin', 'Just', 'True' that are overtly reflect a moralist dogma. They identify the slavery as 'sin', condemning the un-Christian agency of dehumanizing the Blacks and abolitionists as truly 'zealous', 'true' and 'just' Christian crusaders against 'sin'.

While critically analysing *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* we must always recognize how it presents an alternative historiography of slavery and visualizes the sites of historical injustice and oppression. 'COTTON WAS KING in the South from 1815 to 1861; and the principal bulwark of his throne was Negro slavery' (Morison 500). *Anti-Slavery Alphabet*, while it introduces the alphabet 'C', alludes to 'Cotton-field, to which/ This injured brother's driven,/ When, as the white-man's *slave*, he toils,/ From early morn till even' (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*). Similarly, 'Flogging with a rawhide or blacksnake whip was the usual method of punishing slaves. Imprisonment lost the master their time, and short rations impaired their health. Most Southern towns had a public flogger with a regular tariff for laying on the number of lashes prescribed by the culprit's owner' (Morison 507). And while introducing alphabets like 'W', 'L', 'M', 'K' and others *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* clearly outlines how the slaves were exposed to 'lashes' at the 'whipping post', how they were forced to be bought and sold as lifeless

objects or subhuman creatures by 'Merchants', abused by 'Kidnapers', how they were transported like beasts of burden in ships, how only being a 'Fugitive' (while introducing alphabet 'F') the slave could escape his dehumanization and how the master's trained 'Hound' (while introducing alphabet 'H') could always bring back the fugitive slave trembling. At the same time, the alphabet book refers to 'Sugar' and 'Tobacco' (while introducing alphabets 'S' and 'T') plantations wherefrom the luxuries such as candy for children, 'pie and tea,/ Your candy, and your cake' (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*) and tobacco for 'Gentlemen' who ignorantly 'chew' the fruits of slavery. These images clearly radicalized the anti-slavery propaganda in the alphabet book and they also critiqued the passivity of those white gentlemen who chose to remain unaffected by the inhumanity, immorality and obscenity associated with slavery. Such alternative historiography pushed into white households through the children must have had played its part in eradicating racial prejudices and developing a consensus for the abolition of slavery.

Anti-Slavery Alphabet may not qualify for a trustworthy alphabet book if we take into account the fact that the terms that it uses to introduce the individual English alphabets are often far more complex compared to simple monosyllabic or disyllabic words that are found in regular alphabet books which are primarily devoted to the sole purpose of helping language acquisition. It must be reiterated that *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was never meant to be a simple teaching-tool of language-acquisition. The purpose was political, and it was aimed at attacking slavery and forging a counter-discourse. Language-acquisition is the entry-point wherefrom the infant who is the future citizen enters the world of normalized discourses. The book's packaging as an alphabet book must thus naturally be viewed as a way of pamphleteering in a camouflaged form that invites others to rethink about the power of language in popularising and validating discourses as well as the power of discourses that validate slavery. And through the counter-discursive initiation to language-acquisition that the book proposes such discourses that validated slavery for generations could have been countered. The Townsend sisters were after all members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS) established in 1833 and article 1 of its constitution states that:

The object of this Society shall be to collect and disseminate correct information of the character of slavery, and of the actual conditions of the slaves and free people of color for the purpose of including the community to adopt such measures as may be in their power to dispel the prejudice against the people of color, to improve their condition and to bring about the speedy abolition of slavery. (Quoted in Cain 4)

Anti-Slavery Alphabet conforms to the sentiments and strategies of PFASS in its advocacy in favour abolitionism, racial equality and harmony. Its uniqueness lay in its form which transcended the identifying marks of an ordinary alphabet book and defamiliarised it to subvert pre-existing and normalized pro-slavery advocacies. Utilizing the playfulness of verses meant to be consumed by white infants, *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* managed to

blend abolitionist sentimentalism, ethical education and an alternative subaltern, often unspoken and unspeakable, historical exposition. However, when we fully recognize *Anti-Slavery Alphabet's* respectful recognition of the probable agency of white children in uplifting abolitionist sentiments and eradicating slavery, we must also identify dispassionately that in its act of addressing the white child, *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* prioritised the agency of the whites only in its program of abolishing slavery. It was designed to arouse pity for the blacks in the minds of whites and to stimulate whites to abolish slavery. *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* was meant to be thus an educative potion for the whites that may have benefitted the blacks indirectly, but effectively. There is inevitably a dismissive attitude towards blacks' agency to eradicate their own slavery and self-empowerment through education³. However, this must also be taken into account that literacy among slaves were almost non-existent in contemporary America and the first step towards emancipation of the slaves was always to find a peaceful consensus in favour of abolition of slavery, which in the contemporary historical, social, economic and cultural context certainly demanded an unfailing agency of the whites' prerogative. Thus, in its attempt at pushing anti-slavery propaganda into white-households in the guise of an alphabet book that mediates a knowledge far different from the one aimed at simple language-acquisition, uplifting a moralistic campaign in favour of abolitionists and their cause and in sensitizing the whites to arrive at a consensus that may benefit blacks and a inclusive race-neutral society *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* naturally played its part in the long struggle of abolitionist politics and poetics.

Notes:

¹ The quoted section is from *Anti-Slavery Alphabet*. It is used by the Townsend sisters as they introduce the alphabet 'A'.

² The 1847 version of *Anti-Slavery Alphabet* that this paper uses as primary material bears no evidence of the text being written by Hannah and Mary Townsend. The text, as it appears in the same version, was printed for the Anti-Slavery Fair in 1847 and Project Gutenberg describes it anonymous (*The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*). However, De Rosa concludes after referring to his own *Domestic Abolitionism and Juvenile Literature, 1830-1865* and Doris O'Keefe and other materials, that the same was composed by Hannah and Mary Townsend (De Rosa 71). The paper therefore refers to Hannah and Mary Townsend as the authors of the text.

³ It is significant here to refer to the cover illustration of Number VIII of *The Slave's Friend*, produced by the American Anti-Slavery Society that presents the portrait of a white man educating black children.

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