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Imagining Bharat: Romance, Heroism, And Hindu Nationalism In The Bengali Novel, 1880-1920

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Abstract

Although the Republic of India was founded as a secular democracy, the country has long been plagued by sectarian violence between its Hindu majority and Muslim minority. Scholars have examined how the 1940s Indian nationalist movement and the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent laid the foundation for communal tensions, but the long-standing conception of India as a fundamentally Hindu nation has received less attention. This dissertation examines colonial Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century in order to trace the longer history behind the widespread belief that India is a fundamentally Hindu nation—the animating tenet of contemporary Hindutva ideology. Reading works composed in Bengali and English, I demonstrate how the Bengali novel played a central role in perpetuating and, at times, contesting this Hindu cultural imagining by strategically exploiting elements of indigenous oral and literary traditions alongside key themes of British Orientalist discourse. The dissertation argues that turn-of-the-century Bengali writers were paramount in politicizing the emerging understanding of India as the mythic Hindu utopia “Bharat,” a term lifted from ancient religious texts that, for many Hindus today, represents not just India’s true identity but also its only acceptable future.

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IN THE BENGALI NOVEL, 1880-1920

Monika R. Bhagat-Kennedy

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NOVEL, 1880-1920

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For Tim

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ABSTRACT

IMAGINING BHARAT: ROMANCE, HEROISM, AND HINDU NATIONALISM
IN THE BENGALI NOVEL, 1880-1920

Monika R. Bhagat-Kennedy

Ania Loomba

Although the Republic of India was founded as a secular democracy, the country has long been plagued by sectarian violence between its Hindu majority and Muslim minority. Scholars have examined how the 1940s Indian nationalist movement and the 1947 Partition of the subcontinent laid the foundation for communal tensions, but the long-standing conception of India as a fundamentally Hindu nation has received less attention. This dissertation examines colonial Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century in order to trace the longer history behind the widespread belief that India is a fundamentally Hindu nation—the animating tenet of contemporary Hindutva ideology. Reading works composed in Bengali and English, I demonstrate how the Bengali novel played a central role in perpetuating and, at times, contesting this Hindu cultural imagining by strategically exploiting elements of indigenous oral and literary traditions alongside key themes of British Orientalist discourse. The dissertation argues that turn-of-the-century Bengali writers were paramount in politicizing the emerging understanding of India as the mythic Hindu utopia “Bharat,” a term lifted from ancient religious texts that, for many Hindus today, represents not just India’s true identity but also its only acceptable future.

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INTRODUCTION IMAGINING INDIA AS A HINDU NATION

In 1884, Sir John Strachey, an esteemed and long-serving official of the British Raj, delivered twelve lectures on India at the University of Cambridge. Strachey covered a range of topics including the army, tax policy, education, and the administration of justice. Of particular interest is Strachey's introductory address, which begins with a reflection on a peculiar quandary that confronted British officials when discussing India with those who were unfamiliar with it. Concurring with the observations of his eminent colleague Henry Sumner Maine, Strachey stated that there was indeed a certain "ignorance regarding India...even among educated men in England," such that there was a need to establish even basic matters of fact.¹ To this end, Strachey made no apology for posing two rudimentary questions to his audience at the outset of his lecture: "What is India? What does this name really signify?"²

The answer, Strachey declared, was seemingly paradoxical yet true: "There is no such country, and this is the first and most essential fact about India that can be learned."³ Later in his address he repeated that indeed the "first and most essential thing to learn about India" is that

*...there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social, or religious; no Indian nation, no 'people of India' of which we hear so much...*⁴

It must not be supposed that [governmental] bonds of union can in any way lead towards the growth of a single Indian nationality. However long may be the duration of our dominion, however powerful may be the centralizing attraction of our Government, or the influence of the common interests which grow up, no such

¹ John Strachey, *India*, 1. Henry Sumner Maine (1822-1888) was a renowned British jurist and historian; his most well-known work on India was *Village-Communities in the East and West* (1871).

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5. Emphasis added.

issue can follow. It is conceivable that national sympathies may arise in particular Indian countries; but *that they should ever extend to India generally, that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North-Western Provinces, and Madras, should ever feel that they belong to one great Indian nation, is impossible.* You might with as much reason and probability look forward to a time when a single nation will have taken the place of the various nations of Europe.⁵

In the lecture Strachey posited an extended analogy between India and Europe—like Europe, India is “a name which we give to a great region including a multitude of different countries,” or, as he states elsewhere, a “continent.”⁶ The official made his case on the basis of what he called the “great,” “extreme,” and “immense” diversity of India and its inhabitants.⁷ While on the one hand India’s disparate “countries” remain isolated from one another due to factors such as differing climates and a vast geographic terrain, Indians themselves are fragmented along the lines of language, religion, and race.⁸ As Strachey clarified elsewhere in his address, his use of the word “country” was deliberate, a means of emphasizing the exceedingly decentralized, isolated nature of India’s constituent parts. Yet this analogy between Europe and India only went so far, for while Europe boasted nations, the “continent” of India did not: “I have spoken of the different countries of India, but they are not countries in the ordinary European sense. A European country is usually a separate entity, occupied by a nation more or less socially and politically distinct. But in India...there are no nations of the modern European type.”⁹ In Strachey’s highly qualified schema, India was not a “country” but a “continent,” one that itself contained only “countries,” and not

⁵ Ibid., 8. Emphasis added.

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid., 3, 7, 8.

⁸ Ibid., 2-3.

⁹ Ibid., 4.

nations: “India is a name which we give to a great region including a multitude of different countries. There is no general Indian term that corresponds to it.”¹⁰

Strachey’s many qualified assertions betray his convoluted logic. His deployment of the term “country” is striking, used to refer to what were more conventionally known as provinces, or, in the case of those areas surrounding the three major British administrative strongholds of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, “presidencies.”¹¹ Yet Strachey avows that even though the term “presidency” was rampant in British parlance, it was actually devoid of meaning: “British India is now divided not into the three presidencies of Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, but into provinces, eight of which are extensive countries under separate Governments.”¹²

If the political landscape of India was indeed as fractured as Strachey describes, what had been the purpose and role of the Raj? Although the colonial state performed a number of centralizing and organizing operations such as “regulat[ing] and harmonis[ing] the Governments of the British provinces, control[ing] the Native States and our relations with foreign powers...mak[ing] war and peace, and manag[ing] those branches of the administration which directly concern the general interests of the empire,” Strachey argues that such activities could never produce the conditions necessary for nation-making in India.¹³ Not only does the sheer diversity of peoples and places in the “continent” make nationalism an impossibility, there also lay the more fundamental problem that Indians were

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 47.

¹² Strachey, 10.

¹³ Ibid., 8.

unfamiliar with “political citizenship” and related concepts such as fatherland, mother country, patriotism, and the like.¹⁴

Significant cultural developments across India and in Bengal in particular belied Strachey’s claims. Less than a decade before his lectures at the University of Cambridge, a prominent Bengali man named Nundolal Dey published a series of articles on the supremacy of ancient Indian culture in *Bengal Magazine* under a pseudonym. Encouraged by the favorable attention his work had received, Dey republished the articles as a book entitled *Civilization in Ancient India* under his own name in approximately 1902.¹⁵ In the preface, Dey stated that his purpose was to

...deal with some of the subjects in which the ancient Hindus attained a high degree of excellence and to trace some of the causes of their decline. If this little book can excite in the mind of my reader any interest for India, past or present, I shall consider it not written in vain.

As foretold by *Civilization’s* opening claim, “All authorities agree that India is one of the earliest civilized countries in the world,” the text was teeming with provocative propositions about the excellence of the ancient Hindus in arbitrary cultural categories including the “Arts,” “Science,” “Literature,” “Philosophy and Religion,” and “Manners and Customs.”¹⁶ Voicing popular ideas of the moment, Dey asserts that the progenitors of India’s Hindus were *not* aborigines but rather the descendants of mythical Aryans who had migrated from Central Asia at some point in the distant past.¹⁷ Also referring to this group as the “Aryan

¹⁴ Here Strachey cites Alfred Lyall’s *Asiatic Studies*, which he praises highly and urges his audience to read in order to “understand what India really is.” In his footnote Strachey notably concedes that he was taking liberties with Lyall’s observations: “Sir Alfred Lyall was specially referring to Central in this passage, but it is equally true of India generally.”

¹⁵ Dey’s preface is dated October 14, 1902; *Civilization in Ancient India* was likely published around this time. As noted on the title page, Dey had been employed by the Bengal Judicial Service and was a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He was also the author of *The Geographical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval India*, published in Calcutta in 1899.

¹⁶ Dey, *Civilization in Ancient India*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* See also 75.

Hindus,” Dey proclaims that the ancient Hindus were a mighty people who boasted a highly advanced culture though they lacked historical records documenting their many achievements: “There is no systematic history of India before the Mahomedan conquest: the facts are meagre and scattered. The *Rajatarangini* is the annals only of a single province. The antiquarian must grope his way through the gloom of ancient India by long and laborious researches.”¹⁸

Whether and to what extent Dey had performed such inquiries is questionable given that the majority of his claims stand as mere declarations while the remaining are supported by reference to either Hindu texts such as the *Ramayana* and the *Manusmriti* or the work of various British Orientalists and historians on India including William Jones (1746-1794), Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837), and Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859). While the historical quotient of nearly all of Dey’s pronouncements is more than dubious, the writer’s comments about the present state of Indian historiography are enlightening:

The knowledge of the ancient history of a country gives an impetus to the intellectual movement and accelerates the progress of its nation. *The past must teach the present, and the present should elucidate the past. India, though poor at present, has an heirloom in its ancient glory; her sons have the prestige only of a line of illustrious ancestors. Nothing has now been left to them except to chant the praise of the adventurous heroes of the past.* Yet when the incubus of inactivity shall pass away, this spirit of admiration shall contribute much to the regeneration of India...The facts and information which [the antiquarian] would glean, should *not only serve to unravel the skein of the past history of India, but also to inspire the people with noble aspirations when they would think upon the condition of their once glorious country: the past should be ransacked not for mere curiosity but for the present.*¹⁹

Dey’s observations reveal the Bengali elite’s growing concern about the deficit of Indian histories and historiography at the turn of the twentieth century. Contrary to Strachey’s assertions that India was neither a country nor a nation, for Dey India was very clearly both,

¹⁸ Ibid., 5-6. See also 138.

¹⁹ Ibid., 5-6. Emphasis added.

hence the pressing need for histories that would animate its nationals, who are explicitly and righteously Hindu. For Dey, history exists not just for its own sake, that is, to illuminate the past or to satisfy curiosity about bygone incidents in a particular place, but also to inspire its people in the contemporary moment. Both past and present ought to have a mutually sustaining relationship: the past “must teach” the present, which should in turn interpret and honor its connection to the past. As Dey indicated in his prefatory remarks, *Civilization in Ancient India* was itself part of this endeavor to recount the glory of Indian antiquity for the sake of the present and the future. Such knowledge would not only serve as a balm for present wounds but would also help Hindus promote similar kinds of positive affiliations and collectivities into the future.

As Dey’s laudatory treatise about ancient India suggests, Strachey’s arguments that India was not a country but a continent, one in which affective bonds could never manifest beyond the provincial level, were mistaken. Obvious political agendas aside, how might we reconcile both men’s respective views of India? Why does Strachey go to such lengths to establish and emphasize the ostensibly “elementary” fact that the only nationality that could ever exist in India was within its various “countries”? And if Strachey was right that there was no such thing as an Indian “nation” and only “countries,” why does Dey use precisely these terms to refer to a Hindu India? If not a sense of “political citizenship,” what was motivating Dey to write *Civilization in Ancient India*, and why were Bengali (Hindu) authors more broadly becoming so preoccupied with India’s past just as Britain had consolidated its power over this vast dominion?

“Imagining Bharat: Romance, Heroism, and Hindu Nationalism in the Bengali Novel, 1880-1920” explores such questions, examining how and why Bengali writers from

Bankim Chattopadhyay to Rabindranath Tagore both mythologized and critiqued the idea of a Hindu India.²⁰ Though India was founded as a secular democracy in 1947, its avowed secularism continues to remain insecure as a result of a religiously charged and often violent nationalist ideology that has long privileged India's Hindu majority. This ideology was nurtured, sharpened, and occasionally criticized by the Bengali novels explored in this dissertation. The divisive politics emerging from this particular cultural imagining has had profound effects, contributing to the cataclysmic Partition of the subcontinent and the recent ascendance of the Hindu Right in Indian society and government.

Examining a number of literary works published in Bengal and Britain, and composed in both Bengali and English, this dissertation argues that the turn of the twentieth century was a foundational moment for contemporary Indian nationhood. It was at this time that Hindu intelligentsia across the colonial state—and the British imperial web more broadly—increasingly reified the emerging understanding that India was a righteously Hindu nation.²¹ Such ideas were put forth in a variety of highly intergeneric novels and narratives that incorporated features of histories, epics, and romances from both the Indian and British traditions. “Imagining Bharat” argues that Bengali authors were central to the politicization of the burgeoning pan-regional imagining of India as a mythic Hindu space known as “Bharat,” a term appropriated from ancient Hindu religious texts that, ironically, was later

²⁰ Following the Bengali convention as well as the practice within literary scholarship on the author, I will refer to Bankim by his first name in subsequent references. The other Bengali writers I examine, e.g., Sarath Kumar Ghosh, Siddha Mohana Mitra, and Rabindranath Tagore, are more commonly referenced by their last names in scholarship and I will refer to them accordingly.

²¹ Here I borrow Arnold Toynbee's definition of intelligentsia, which arises “in any community that is attempting to solve the problem of adapting its life to the rhythm of an exotic civilization to which it has been forcibly annexed or freely converted.” In order to preserve their culture, the intelligentsia acts as “a class of liaison officers who have learnt the tricks of an intrusive civilization's trade.” See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 2.

proclaimed in the Indian Constitution to be the genuine name of the ostensibly secular republic (see Figure 1).²²

“Imagining Bharat” argues that the emerging genre of the Bengali novel played a central role in perpetuating, and, at times, contesting, the evolving idea of India as Bharat. Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Bengal was a region obsessed with history. English-educated Bengali (Hindu) elites were indispensable to the mythologization of Bharat through a variety of cultural and literary works that celebrated India’s supposed grand Hindu past. It was during this period that Bengali writers penned fictional and non-fictional histories, romances, epics, and other such works in a concerted effort to refute dominant visions of a degenerate Indian/Hindu era put forth by British Orientalists and reified by the colonial state. As a seemingly fixed past transformed into a fluid and underdetermined space, Bengali writers projected strategic anachronisms onto it, such as a unified Hindu polity or virile Hindu men who would serve as exemplars for the present.

Within these highly intricate and often unwieldy literary works Bengali writers portrayed the wondrous feats, and at times failures, of Hindu heroes and heroines in order to rally the Hindu community in particular ways. Portrayals of Hindu/Indian agency and bravery alongside the clear message that alternative outcomes were, in fact, quite close to materializing helped assuage present humiliations. In addition to exploring how turn-of-the-century Bengali (Hindu) authors incorporated elements of indigenous oral and literary traditions in their fictions, I highlight their strategic appropriation of particular ideas of British Orientalist discourse advanced by figures such as William Jones and James Mill.

²² See Part I, Section I, Point I of the Constitution of the Republic of India: “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.” As the first Indian region to come under Britain’s sway, Bengal had long held a prominent place in the British occupation of India beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and through approximately 1910, when the British shifted the capital of the colonial government from Calcutta to New Delhi.

Paralleling Dey's *Civilization in Ancient India*, the majority of the narratives examined here proffered rousing visions of India as a righteously Hindu space; whether this majestic stature existed in the distant past or lay dormant in the present, this literature promised that in time and under the right circumstances, Bharat could be readily revived and reclaimed. While Bengali-language novels by Bankim and Tagore primarily addressed Bengali and non-Bengali Hindus, English-language works by migrant authors Sarath Kumar Ghosh and Siddha Mohana Mitra were directed to British readers in the metropole. Despite such differences, these works evinced the same overall message to their respective audiences. Hindus were encouraged to celebrate India's authentic identity as Bharat and to understand British rule as a period of temporary tutelage, one that was far superior to the tyranny of the previous Mughal (Muslim) regime, and Britons were admonished to appreciate India as a prized colonial possession deserving of respect.

Reading these works together gives us a nuanced understanding of the different possibilities for Indian nationhood that existed long before the idea of, and the push for, India as a sovereign nation-state was a foregone conclusion. Though they were growing increasingly troubled by the detrimental effects of India's colonization, the majority of the authors I examine were not straightforwardly anticolonial rather than they were hopeful for certain kinds of solidarities between Indians (Hindus) and Britons. Despite the freedom of historical romances and novels to imagine and project alternate pasts, presents, and futures, none of the works examined here portray a British departure or ejection from India or the establishment of an independent Indian nation. Even as the idea of Bharat was steadily becoming concretized among Hindu elites, conceptions of India, Indian belonging, and the colonial relationship on the whole remained fluid during this period. It is only by resisting a

prevailing tendency within contemporary scholarship to fetishize nations and nation-states that we can begin to perceive the truly dynamic and complex ideas surrounding nationhood, group belonging, and cross-cultural affiliation flourishing at this time.

“Imagining Bharat” intervenes in South Asian literary and historical studies by questioning the widespread understanding that the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries constituted the so-called “moderate” phase of Indian politics, and by troubling the category of “anticolonial nationalism” more broadly. As Sudipta Kaviraj, Sanjay Seth, Mrinalini Sinha, and other scholars have argued, the ideological agenda of Indian elites at this time has for too long been understood through the prism of the Indian nationalist movement of the 1930s and 1940s and its culmination in Independence and Partition.²³ Rather than dismissing or reducing this period as a necessarily “moderate” phase in what eventually became a widespread campaign for a fully independent nation-state, literature from this period registers the ambivalences evinced by Bengali (Hindu) elites, who were far more patriotic towards particular imaginings of a Hindu Bharat than they were desirous of establishing *either* an autonomous India (i.e., having Dominion status within the British Empire and the right to Home Rule) *or* a sovereign Indian nation-state.²⁴ It was precisely at this generative moment at the turn of the twentieth century that elite Hindus across the

²³ Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India* (1995); Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905” (1999); Sinha, “The Strange Death of an Imperial Ideal: The Case of *Civis Britannicus*” (2011).

²⁴ Here it is important to stress Kaviraj’s caveat that, particularly in the context of mid-to-late nineteenth-century Bengal, anticolonialism must be distinguished from nationalism and that the two concepts must not be conflated or confused. As Kaviraj explains, Bankim and other Bengali intellectual elites manifested an anticolonial consciousness before they chose their nation: “Nationalist ideas are directed *against* a foreign occupying power, but in order to be fully nationalist they must also have a more positive directedness *towards* a conception of what the nation is. Would it not be strange to characterize ‘nationalist’ a form of consciousness which has yet to decide what it is to be its nation? The worship of a nation, its semi-religious ardour, cannot be produced by an entirely negative critique of imperialism’s political economy.” See Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 106. Emphasis in original. See also 148-149 and 176-177.

colonial state and the British imperial web more broadly could evince an ardent patriotic love for a Hindu India while professing faith in the Raj and its pledges of benevolent governance. Though the imagining of India as Bharat would become increasingly axiomatic and divisive as the twentieth century progressed—especially in the hands of nationalist leader M.K. Gandhi who often heralded independent India as a glorious “Ram Rajya” [Reign of Ram]—the literature examined in “Imagining Bharat” reveals the fluidity of ideas about nationhood at this time, inviting us to speculate on how India’s trajectory from colonial state to nation-state may well have materialized quite differently or, perhaps, not at all.²⁵

* * *

The first chapter, “British Orientalism and Hindu India,” provides the historical and theoretical background to my argument by examining how British Orientalist discourse contributed to the emerging understanding of Bharat as the authentic identity of India among Hindu elites. British Orientalist ideology enabled, issued, and sustained numerous positivist essentialisms about the Indian past and its people that informed both British and Bengali (Hindu) thought during the colonial period. Foremost among these was a highly reductive chronology that divided Indian history into three fundamental epochs: Hindu, Muslim, and British. Consonant with Hindu religious thought about the role of *dharma* [righteous action] and the cyclical nature of time, British Orientalists advanced a teleological view of Indian history: India had been an exclusively Hindu space in antiquity, the Mughal Empire was the rule of tyrannical, marauding Muslims, and enlightened British governance was the key to India’s future progress. Building on the arguments of South Asian historians, I suggest that the evolving understanding that the Hindu Puranic concept “Bharat” was

²⁵ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, 207.

coterminous with the British colonial state demonstrates the attempt of many English-educated Hindu elites across India to exploit, and often subvert, crucial animating ideas of British Orientalist doctrine. In so doing, these particular cadre of intellectuals, who may be termed Macaulay's Children, helped provide a coveted yet contrived history of a cohesive Hindu *samaj* [community] that would prove useful in the face of colonial domination.²⁶

The second chapter, "Bankim Chattopadhyay's Challenge to British Historiography in *Anandamath*," examines the most potent and enduring novelistic depiction of Bharat to date. Written during the height of British power in the region, *Anandamath* (1882) strategically turns to a sketchy moment in late eighteenth-century Bengali history to portray a militant ascetic Hindu brotherhood that attempts to liberate the homeland—anthropomorphized and gendered as an enslaved "Mother"—from the local Mughal ruler. I depart from the usual critical focus on Bankim's vilification of Muslims to show that *Anandamath's* generic form as a historical novel, one in which fact and fiction are virtually indistinguishable from one another, was indispensable to conveying its message that India was a righteously Hindu nation. In so doing, I extend contemporary understandings of the rise of Bengali historiography in the early nineteenth century, arguing that *Anandamath* has a crucial place within this potent body of historical writing.²⁷ By recasting India's colonization as a strategic and willful decision on the part of Hindus in the recent past to obtain valuable material knowledge from the British, Bankim encouraged his Hindu readers to champion a

²⁶ This cadre of Indian elites was in large part the outcome of Thomas Macaulay's famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education, which successfully advocated English-medium schools in India's urban areas. As Macaulay had envisioned, this class would serve as "interpreters" between the British rulers and Indian commoners. Beginning in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, this group's privilege and education enabled them to pursue opportunities with the colonial state or in the law, politics, arts, among other fields.

²⁷ See for example Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietenchron (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995).

specific vision of India for the future, one in which they could readily challenge the British and recover their country's prior majesty as Bharat.

Gender was critical to British Orientalism and emerging Hindu nationalism, partly because of the colonial construction of Hindus as an inherently effete people who had been historically incapable of warding off foreign domination, an insult leveled against Bengali men in particular. My third chapter, "Hindu Heroism in *Indian Nights' Entertainment: The Trials of Narayan Lal*" demonstrates how itinerant Bengali author Sarath Kumar Ghosh's portrayal of a valiant Hindu hero questing for love challenged the widespread stereotype that Bengali men were fundamentally effeminate. Published in *Pearson's Magazine* in 1902 to a diverse, transnational readership, *Indian Nights' Entertainment*, I suggest, responded to prevailing British perceptions of the inherent effeminacy of Hindu men that helped justify colonialism. In my readings of the original serialization and two subsequent book-length expansions, I argue that the work is most fittingly characterized as a contemporary romantic epic. Not only did it address the needs of Ghosh's native Bengali milieu by portraying the stirring exploits of Hindu heroes and heroines against the backdrop of Bharat, it catered to Western audiences' fascination with the Oriental exotic by providing a story styled after *Arabian Nights* romances.

The fourth chapter, "'A Grand Asiatic Empire': The Expanse of Bharat in *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest: An Anglo-Indian Romance* and *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*," examines how these two novels set in the colonial present negotiated the complex politics of the contemporary *swadeshi* movement. In these English-language novels published in London in 1909, Sarath Kumar Ghosh and S.M. Mitra evince a guarded, ambiguous posture towards Britain, one that advocates increased amity between colonizer and colonized

yet warns of violent retaliation should India continue to suffer under British rule. Engaging Jacques Derrida's theories on hospitality and cosmopolitanism, I show how Ghosh and Mitra's portrayals of idealized, cross-cultural encounters between travelling Hindu heroes and their foreign hosts exemplify the benevolence with which the British ought to regard both India and Hinduism. While critics have examined how both novels function as "informative romances" that attempt to counter British prejudice, less attention has been paid to a highly overdetermined conception of Hinduism that emerges as both the perceived cause of India's mistreatment as well as its remedy. Both Ghosh and Mitra lay claim to the recent "Eastern" triumph in the Russo-Japanese War by advancing a common religious heritage with Japan such that Hinduism and Buddhism have been rendered tantamount to each other. I argue that both writers ultimately moderate their depictions of increased Indian-British amity by concluding their novels with a profound warning: Britain's domination of Bharat is tenuous and the latter's rise as a major world power alongside Japan is inevitable.

My conclusion, "Containing Bharat: Tagore's Warning," examines Rabindranath Tagore's prescient views on the dangers latent within the evolving understanding of India as Bharat, a cautionary stance reflecting his overall suspicion of any kind of national attachment or idealization of nationhood more broadly. Though a proponent of more conservative ideas in his youth, Tagore eventually came to condemn Hindu-infused nationalist rhetoric and embraced instead more cosmopolitan notions of belonging that eschewed the inevitable exclusions and violence intrinsic to nation-making. Here I briefly explore Tagore's condemnation of the political expediency of a religiously-charged nationalism that increasingly favored Hindus and marginalized Muslims and other minorities. Considering the

figure of the tragic Hindu hero in *Gora* (1910), I argue that this novel evidences Tagore's resistance to any one projection of India or Indian belonging, particularly the limited (and limiting) conception of Bharat.

The overall aim of "Imagining Bharat" is to historicize a complex and overdetermined category, one that resists any easy conceptualization because it is at once too narrow and too diffuse. Today popular imaginings of Bharat are vibrant throughout India and its diaspora, uniting and dividing communities across religious, gender, class, caste, and other social markers. In recent years Hindu nationalists have capitalized upon and reworked this myth for their own ends; for many Indian politicians and government officials today, Bharat exists not only as a mythic Hindu utopia that preceded the tyrannical Mughal "Muslim" era and the oppressive British Raj, but also as an aspirational status for India to reclaim for the future, one in which the nation will assume its rightful place among world powers. This privileging of India's Hindu majority continues to undermine the republic's avowed commitment to secularism and democracy, endangering the civil liberties of Muslims, Dalits, and other minorities. "Imagining Bharat" endeavors to elucidate such phenomena by tracing their longer histories and the central role of the Bengali novel in this mythologization.

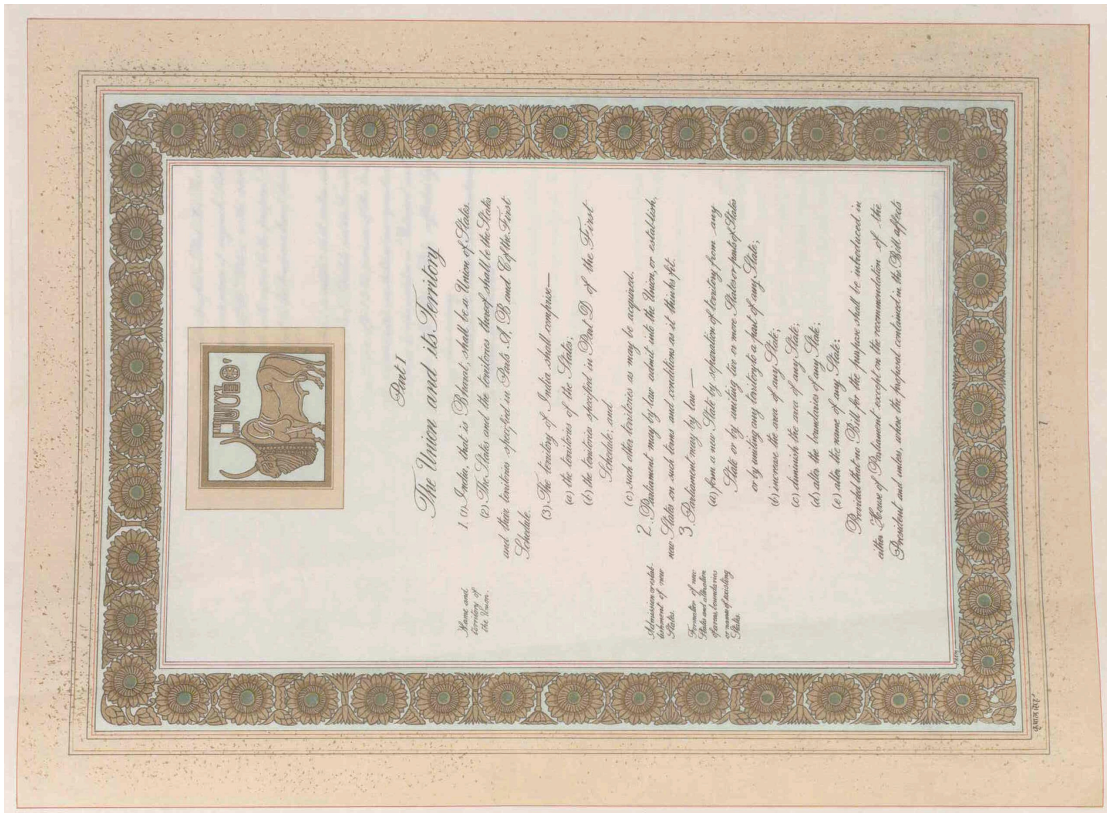
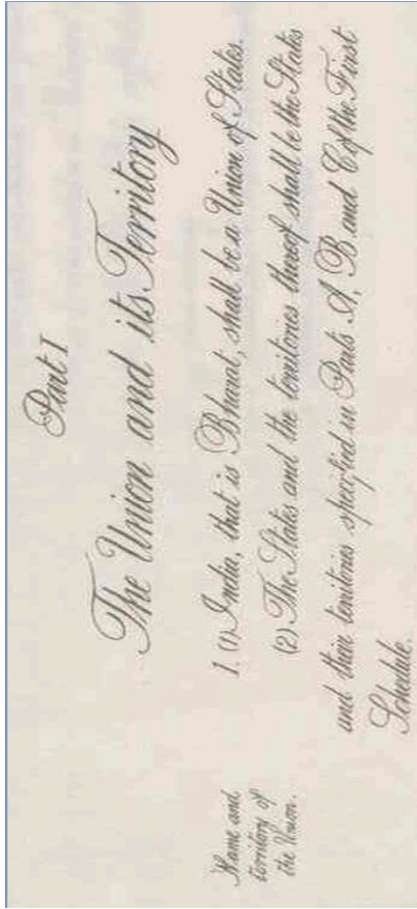


Figure 1: The Constitution of the Republic of India: Part I, Section I, Point I

CHAPTER 1
BRITISH ORIENTALISM AND HINDU INDIA

“To give itself a history is the most fundamental act of self-identification of a community.”
—Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*¹

In March of 1866, Henry Sumner Maine, the vice-chancellor of the University of Calcutta, addressed the University Senate with a matter of growing concern. As he made the case for a more positivist education for the “Native mind,” Maine admitted that if he had “any complaint to make of the most highly educated class of Natives—the class...which has received the highest European education,” it would be neither the mode of the acquisition of that knowledge, its quality, nor even “any evil effects it may have on their character, or manners, or habits.” Rather, he wanted

...to express disappointment at the use to which they sometimes put it. It seems to me that not seldom they employ it for what I can best describe as *irrationally reactionary purposes*. It is not to be concealed, and I see plainly that educated Natives do not conceal from themselves, that they have, *by the fact of their education, broken for ever with much in their history, much in their customs, much in their creed*. Yet I constantly read, and sometimes hear, elaborate attempts on their part to persuade themselves and others, that there is a sense in which these *rejected portions of Native history, and usage and belief, are perfectly in harmony with the modern knowledge which the educated class has acquired, and with the modern civilization to which it aspires...*

But unquestionably the tendency has its chief root in this—that the Natives of India have caught from us Europeans our *modern trick of constructing, by means of works of fiction, an imaginary Past out of the Present, taking from the Past its externals, its outward furniture, but building in the sympathies, the susceptibilities, and even (for it sometimes comes to that), the knowledge of the present time*. Now this is all very well for us Europeans [...] But, here, the effect of such fictions, and of theories built from such fictions, is *unmixedly deleterious*. On the educated Native of India, the Past presses with too awful and terrible a power for it to be safe for him to play or palter with it...²

Though elsewhere in his address Maine sympathized with the urge to write such fictions—

“It is very difficult for any people to feel self-respect, if they have no pride in their own

¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 183.

² Henry Sumner Maine, “Address to University of Calcutta, III,” 288-291. Emphasis added.

annals”—he adduced a sharp difference between Europeans and Indians engaging in this practice.³ According to Maine, the state of contemporary Europe was such that its inhabitants had no psychological need to distract themselves with ancient exploits. Moreover, Europeans had no incentive to do so, for they understood that their present was certainly a great improvement over their past: “There is no one in this room to whom the life of a hundred years since would not be acute suffering, if it could be lived over again.”⁴ But for Indian elites, pride in their country’s past had been pushed to such an “extravagant length” that it had become a “destructive mistake” and “unmixedly deleterious” for them to continue to produce such writing.

How are we to understand the expression of such anxiety in a period in which the British had consolidated their power in India?⁵ How could a colonial official become so unnerved by the rise of Indian historical fiction or the practice of “constructing, by means of works of fiction, an imaginary Past out of the Present [along with] the sympathies, the susceptibilities, and even...the knowledge of the present time”? Maine’s edgy rhetoric in this address stands out among the three published speeches he delivered to the University Senate during this period.⁶ His unease can be traced to the widespread success of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay’s first historical novel *Durgeshbandini*, which had been published a year earlier, as well as the growing preoccupation of Bengalis with questions of history and historiography.⁷ What Maine found most disconcerting was the implicit message of these works. They were dangerous precisely because they portrayed the pre-colonial era so

³ Ibid., 289.

⁴ Ibid., 290.

⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 123. The historians point out that “The decades that spanned the turn of the twentieth century marked the apogee of the British imperial system, whose institutional framework had been set after 1857.”

⁶ Alex Padamsee, “A ‘Well-Traveled’ Theory,” 208.

⁷ Ibid., 208-211.

positively that they compromised the most fundamental assumption of the Raj—that the British were executing an honorable “civilizing mission” to uplift India from a degenerate and corrupt past to which it was still shackled.⁸ Through government, education, and the import of Western technologies, the British imperial project in India had been able to rationalize itself, in the words of John Stuart Mill, as a “parental despotism” or “[a] government of leading-strings...required to carry such a people the most rapidly through the next necessary step in social progress.”⁹ Through their depictions of a glorious pre-colonial period, both fictional and nonfictional histories enabled Indian elites to belie the telos of improvement inherent in British rule and insinuate that a future without them would be desirable. No wonder Maine balked at the escalating phenomenon: “The Past cannot be coloured by [the educated native] in this way, without his misreading the Present and endangering the Future.”¹⁰

Maine’s address to the Senate of the University of Calcutta was significant not just for its concern about natives using historical fiction for subversive purposes, but also because he identified two fundamentally incompatible views of India’s pre-colonial past. While for Britons the Raj was naturally superior to any previous political regime in India, Maine was puzzled by the existence of “educated native gentlemen” who

seem to have persuaded themselves, that there was once a time in India in which learning was more honored and respected, and when the career of a learned man was more brilliant, than in British India and under British rule. *They seem to believe, or they try to believe, that it was better to be a Brahmin or a scribe attached to the Court of some half*

⁸ Carey A. Watt, “The Relevance and Complexity of Civilizing Missions,” 1. Watt explains that “For the British Raj in India the civilizing mission meant many things, including bringing the benefits of British culture to the subcontinent in the form of free of free trade and capitalism as well as law, order and good government. British rule was supposed to end a supposed condition of chronic warfare, violence, disorder and despotic rule in India, and it would institute peace and order in the form of Pax Britannica. At its core, the civilizing mission was about morally and materially ‘uplifting’, ‘improving’ and later ‘developing’ the supposedly ‘backward’ or ‘rude’ people of India to make them more civilized and more modern.”

⁹ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 49-50.

¹⁰ Maine, “Address to University of Calcutta, III,” 291.

mythical Hindu king, than to follow one of the prosaic learned professions which the English have created...

It is impossible even to imagine the condition of an educated Native, with some of the knowledge and many of the susceptibilities of the nineteenth century—indeed, perhaps, with too many of them—if he could recross the immense gulf which separates him from *the India of Hindu poetry, if indeed it ever existed. The only India, in fact, to which he could hope to return—and that retrogression is not beyond the range of conceivable possibilities—is the India of Mabratta robbery and Mahomedan rule.*¹¹

Here Maine describes a troubling situation in which English-educated Indian elites have taken to romanticizing the past in ways that belie their Western liberal education. Contrary to prevailing British thought that the Raj was necessarily a progressive stage for India, this particular class held that their country's past as a glorious Hindu nation was both superior and preferable to the colonial regime. For Maine such thinking was profoundly delusional—no prior condition of India could ever be worth celebrating. Far from any wondrous Hindu utopia (an “India of Hindu poetry”), the polity had always been dark and degenerate, marked not by Hindu splendor but Muslim tyranny.

These two conflicting perspectives on Indian antiquity are crucial to understanding the growing preoccupation of turn-of-the-century Bengali writers with questions of history and historiography. While Britons maintained a teleological view of Indian history in which colonial rule was a necessarily progressive turn of events, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century increasing numbers of Indian elites began to challenge this bedrock assumption of the Raj. This clash in narrative generated a whole host of questions regarding India's past, present, and future. What did India really look like in pre-colonial times? What truth, if any, was there behind the prevalent British ideology that India had always been in a fundamentally degenerate state, and how might this view have accorded or collided with the existing beliefs of Hindus and Muslims? How did this conflict over India's past emerge, and

¹¹ Maine, “Address to University of Calcutta, III,” 289-290. Emphasis added.

what were the respective roles of the British and the Indians in their development? Were these two disparate interpretations of ancient Indian history necessarily mutually exclusive of one another? Was it indeed the case, as Maine had argued, that those “rejected portions of Native history, usage, and belief” were fundamentally incompatible with English-educated elites’ newly acquired “modern knowledge” and desire for “modern civilization”?

To begin to understand these questions, it is necessary to examine the historical and theoretical foundations of British Orientalism, an ideology that animated not just Britain’s occupation of India, but also the indigenous elite’s developing ideas about the colonial relationship and the future of the country.¹² Edward Said’s seminal argument in *Orientalism* about the mutual imbrication of knowledge and power in both defining and subordinating the Other identifies how British Orientalism enabled, issued, and sustained numerous positivist essentialisms about India—such as its supposed lack of history and fundamental religiosity—that informed both British and Indian thought at this time.¹³ In the Indian context, David Ludden has observed how “...political discourse on both sides of the colonial encounter entailed the other. The colonial divide evolved as each side defined itself in relation to its ‘other’...”¹⁴ In other words, British Orientalism not only justified the colonization of India, but also crucially informed ensuing anticolonial and nationalist

¹² It is well established that imperialism was significantly enabled and sustained by particular epistemologies in addition to the use of brute force, violence, and economic exploitation. As Antonio Gramsci observes, “...the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.” See Gramsci, “The Problem of Political Leadership,” 57-58.

¹³ Building upon the arguments of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci, Said asserts that, among other things, Orientalism is “a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics...), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).” See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

¹⁴ David Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism,” 269.

movements. As Uma Chakravarti, Lata Mani, and others have well established, British Orientalism and its attendant colonial policies consolidated amorphous “Hindu” practices and beliefs in conservative ways, devaluing local departures and emphasizing a textual tradition.¹⁵ Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, a newly constructed artificial Hindu majority was instrumental in reifying select ideas of British Orientalism that were consonant with Hindu ideology, in particular the belief that India has once enjoyed a culturally ascendant Golden Age in antiquity.

In this chapter I argue that the emerging perception that the mythic location indexed by the Hindu Puranic category “Bharat” was coterminous with the British colonial state evidences the attempt on the part of many Hindu elites across India to exploit, and often subvert, crucial animating ideas of British Orientalist doctrine. The growing identification of India as Bharat is crucial to understanding the so-called “moderate” phase of Indian politics at the turn of the twentieth century, a moment in which native elites expressed varying levels of dissatisfaction with the British regime but continued to believe in its overall beneficence and pledges of goodwill towards India. While the moderate period has been characterized by the apparently modest goals of the newly formed Indian National Congress and the rather measured way in which they were expressed and pursued, it was at precisely this moment that potent ideas of India as a fundamentally Hindu nation were being circulated within fictional and non-fictional writing across the country.

From Bankim to Tagore, turn-of-the-century Bengali writers played a foundational role in this endeavor as they strategically appropriated British Orientalism’s essentialisms about the Indian past and people, which they then reworked and recuperated to their own ends in literature. The burgeoning genre of late nineteenth-century Bengali historical novels

¹⁵ See Uma Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” and Lata Mani, “Contentious Traditions.”

and romances, I suggest, was part and parcel of this larger endeavor to offer uplifting narratives about a glorious Hindu homeland that would undermine demeaning British accounts and galvanize Hindus across the colonial state. Through their deployment of the “modern trick,” these authors not only defended and united the Hindu community, they also combatted discursive underpinnings of colonial rule as a “civilizing mission” as well as the perceived iniquities of “Muslim” Mughal rule. But this project of *samajik* [societal] rejuvenation came at a cost. By appropriating the British Orientalist idiom that privileged religious belonging as a core facet of personal identity, such efforts at cultural regeneration furthered the ongoing politicization of religion in India.

The British Pursuit of Colonial Knowledge

British Orientalism was enabled by institutional apparatuses of emergent colonial power. While many scholars cite William Jones as the first British Orientalist, his work would not have been possible were it not for the first governor-general of India, Warren Hastings, who believed that India and its inhabitants could be readily managed and controlled. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, the new governing responsibilities of the East India Company at the Bengal Presidency spurred a strong desire for what David Ludden has called colonial knowledge—the information necessary to sustain technologies of rule.¹⁶ Though Hastings’s tenure was marked by instability and culminated in a lengthy

¹⁶ Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism,” 253. In the seventeenth century the East India Company had established three main centers for their activity at Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta that were termed “presidencies.” The fertile province of Bengal made it rich in natural resources and conducive to the production of material goods. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Company’s trade at Bengal had become highly profitable and accounted for 75 percent of the Company’s Indian goods. Bengal was the first region of India that the East India Company subdued after its victories at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar in 1764. Calcutta subsequently became the capital of the East India Company’s operations on the subcontinent, and, after 1858, the colonial government, until the early twentieth century. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 47-56.

impeachment trial on charges of corruption, he made a number of decisions that profoundly transformed Indian society as he pursued this knowledge. Among the most significant of these was his 1773 commission of the production of separate law texts for Hindus and Muslims to which British judges could refer in their adjudication over civil matters: “the Laws of the Koran with respect to Mahomedans, and those of the Shaster with respect to the Gentoos [Hindus] shall be invariably adhered to.”¹⁷ Brahmin pundits were called upon to assist in this endeavor as they were considered the natural ecclesiastical leaders of the Hindu religion; their newfound status as native informants helped them solidify their authority and continue their ongoing practice of privileging various non-brahmanical practices as legitimate.¹⁸ As Richard King explains, “Brahmanization—the process whereby the Sanskrit, ‘high’ culture of the Brahmins absorbed non-brahmanical... religious forms—was an effective means of assimilating diverse cultural strands within one’s own locality, and of maintaining social and political authority.”¹⁹ It also inevitably resulted in slippages of meaning as texts were haphazardly chosen and at times repeatedly translated from one language to another. Nathaniel Halhed’s *A Code of Gentoo Laws* (1776) was an early example of this arbitrary and highly mediated practice, as its source material was first chosen and translated from Sanskrit into Persian by a panel of selected Brahmins, and then from Persian into English by Halhed himself.²⁰

Hastings’s promulgation of separate written legal codes for Hindus and Muslims was problematic on several counts. Not only was the underlying process rather indiscriminate, it ossified what were relatively fluid customs and traditions particular to certain groups and

¹⁷ Qtd. in Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 58.

¹⁸ Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 103-104.

¹⁹ Ibid., 103. Elsewhere King defines Brahmanization as “the general process whereby non-brahmanical forms of Indian religion are colonized and transformed by hegemonic brahmanical discourses” (233, fn. 23).

²⁰ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 58. See also van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 113.

contexts. For example, while the British considered the *Dharmasastras* classical “ur-texts” of religious law applicable to all Hindus, they were in fact representative of only Brahmins. These texts contained no notion of a unified Hindu community and even acknowledged the many varied contexts in which different rules or customs could apply.²¹ This pursuit of native regulatory texts demonstrated a Eurocentric belief that Western conceptual frameworks were universal, or if they were not, they could be readily imposed. In this case, the British applied a Judeo-Christian notion that all religions necessarily have some kind of written “scripture.”²² Such conceptual paradigms did not attend to the importance of orality within Hindu praxis, namely, the belief that certain texts attained their sacrality through the dual activities of speaking and listening.²³ Moreover, Hastings’s arbitrary determination of two primary religions—Hinduism and Islam—totalized numerous other religions, sects, and communities such as Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, and tribal peoples.²⁴ The colonial government considered all these groups Hindu, resulting in the gross reduction of disparate religious traditions into one amorphous category and the construction of a false majority.²⁵ The identification of a single “Hindu” religion also entailed the awkward assemblage of smaller religious sects including Vaishnavas (worshippers of Vishnu), Shaivas (worshippers of the deity Shiva) and Shaktas (worshippers of the deity Shakti).²⁶ The modern conception of

²¹ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 102. See also Romila Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities?” 220. In addition, see Rosane Rocher, “British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century,” 242-243.

²² King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 101.

²³ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 120.

²⁴ Rocher, “British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century,” 221-222.

²⁵ The monolithic conception of Hinduism persists to this day as Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of India includes Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs within its definition of term “Hindu.” Such a rendering gives primacy to those Indians whose religions claim an origin within the country and thus excludes Muslims, Christians, Parsees, and Jews. See Dalmia and von Stietencron, “Introduction,” 20, fn.1. Certain groups, such as the Sikhs, have a long history of resisting such problematic interpellations.

²⁶ The term “Hindu” does not have religious origins. Among its first uses was to describe the inhabitants of the land across the Indus or Sindu River, or the Indian subcontinent. As Thapar explains, “It was only gradually and over time that it was used not only for those who were inhabitants of India but also for those who professed a religion other than Islam or Christianity” (1989, 222). During the eighteenth century, the term

Hinduism as a monolithic religion only came into existence in the nineteenth century as a result of such arbitrary yoking of these and other communities into one broad, artificial category. Over time these small constituent groups internalized this construction as they recognized the advantages in mobilizing a sizeable “Hindu” majority to secure economic resources and political representation.²⁷

In 1784, Hastings formalized the pursuit of colonial knowledge—information that was both acceptable to British epistemologies and enabled its governance—with the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal under William Jones. A Supreme Court judge, Jones had learned Sanskrit and went on to translate a number of Indian legal, religious, and cosmological texts into English.²⁸ Jones’s endeavors were not guided purely by intellectualism or fascination with Indian antiquity as is sometimes believed. Rather, he translated these works himself because he did not wish to rely on Brahmins or other native experts for information.²⁹ Jones specifically sought ancient Hindu ur-texts, which he believed would provide the most authoritative and authentic guidance.³⁰ In this pursuit for pure origins, Jones compared Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin and issued a groundbreaking theory in a lecture he delivered at the Asiatic Society on February 2, 1786:

...how degenerate and abased so ever the Hindus may now appear, that in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge...

The Sanscrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, *than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed,*

continued to function negatively as it eventually replaced the category of “heathens,” or those who were not Christian, Jewish, or Muslim; see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 99-100.

²⁷ Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities?” 229. See also Dalmia and von Stietencron, “Introduction,” 20.

²⁸ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 62. King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 102.

²⁹ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

*that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists...*³¹

Jones's postulation of a common root language between European and Indian languages—what eventually came to be known as Proto-Indo-European—was momentous. Based on his conjecture of “some common source” of Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek, Jones concluded that India had once boasted a glorious classical civilization comparable to that of the ancient Romans and Greeks. In other words, India had enjoyed a magnificent “Golden Age” in antiquity from which it had declined. Critical assumptions of this theory were that Hindus were the original inhabitants of India and that the deterioration of their ascendant culture had been caused by the advent of the Mughal Empire, ideas that would later foment educated Hindu elites and ideologues (and, eventually, the Hindu Right) in critical ways. Research journals such as the *Asiatic Researches* (1788), the *Quarterly Journal* (1821), and the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (1832) disseminated these views throughout Europe, spurring great discussion and debate.³²

Early British Orientalists operated on the critical presumption that they were the righteous interpreters and custodians of Hindu India's ancient treasures. In 1800, Lord Wellesley founded Fort William College as a site for training British officers in Indian languages, an endeavor that required the translation and publication of numerous indigenous texts.³³ In addition to the Asiatic Society, the College was a key site where Jones and other British Orientalists understood their mission to be, in the words of Uma Chakravarti, the recovery and “reintroduc[tion] [of] the Hindu elite to the ‘impenetrable mystery’ of its

³¹ William Jones, “On the Hindus,” 94. Emphasis added.

³² Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World,” 385. See also Rocher, “British Orientalism in the Eighteenth Century,” 216.

³³ King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 130.

ancient lore.”³⁴ A lithograph that adorned British cartographer James Rennell’s 1782 compendium *Map of Hindoostan* captures this dynamic (see Figure 2).³⁵ As David Ludden observes, the image is remarkable for the ambiguity as to whether Britannia is accepting a book labeled “Shastas” from the Brahmins or returning it to them.³⁶ Yet the overall message was inescapable—the British were the righteous keepers of Hindu India’s ancient knowledge. The idea that India had boasted a resplendent culture in antiquity received additional support through various archaeological discoveries in the first decades of the nineteenth century as well as from the German Indologist Max Müller, who in 1847 famously advanced that light-skinned “Aryan” peoples were the original speakers of the “common [linguistic] source” that Jones had postulated.³⁷

British Orientalism transformed at the turn of the nineteenth century as Britain required a new narrative to justify its ongoing entanglement with India. Eschewing early Orientalists’ animating premise that India had once enjoyed a culturally ascendant Golden Age, British political leaders and intellectuals increasingly subscribed to the idea that the polity had been degenerate from its very origins and, as such, required the civilizing hand of the British. Warren Hastings’s impeachment trial forced Britons to confront their country’s role in what Nicholas Dirks has termed the “scandal” of empire. These included the immoral activities of the Company in India as well as the unscrupulous behavior of those who had returned to Britain wealthy and corrupt from their exploits abroad and came to be called

³⁴ Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” 31.

³⁵ James Rennell (1742-1830) was the first British geographer and cartographer to survey India. See Kapil Raj, “Circulation and the Emergence of Modern Mapping,” 38.

³⁶ Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism,” 254.

³⁷ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 63; Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” 39-40; van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 140-141. Müller’s ideas contributed significantly to emerging racial discourse by suggesting that both Europeans and Indians were the common descendants of the ancient Aryans and that, as such, they were necessarily superior to the Semitic and Turanian races (Chakravarti 40).

“nabobs.”³⁸ Dirks argues that the iniquity that came to light from Hastings’s trial contributed to a fundamental recasting of British activity in India as the disgrace of the Company was transferred to the native Indian population.³⁹ The recent loss of the American colonies—as well as the riches that poured into Britain as a result of the Company’s unethical yet profitable dealings—further heightened the need for a new rationale for the British presence in India. Since Britain could no longer turn a blind eye towards the Company, the convenient idea of a “civilizing mission” arose.⁴⁰ The newfound reformist bent is evident in the Charter Act of 1813, which renewed the East India Company’s charter for twenty years and officially opened the country to missionary activity.⁴¹ Hindus in particular were deemed to be in dire need of British intervention, as noted in William Wilberforce’s remarks before Parliament in June 1813: “The Hindu divinities were absolute monsters of lust, injustice, wickedness, and cruelty. In short, their religious system is one grand abomination.”⁴² Such comments signal the reorientation of British Orientalism in the early nineteenth century. As Britons increasingly repudiated late eighteenth-century suggestions of a glorious Indian/Hindu Golden Age put forth by Jones and his colleagues, they grew all the more convinced of their inherent superiority over Indians on all fronts.

³⁸ This term is a corruption of the term “nawab,” the title of Mughal rulers. See Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, 9.

³⁹ Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, 125-131, 207, 311.

⁴⁰ Though anti-slavery and abolition movements were also important factors in the development of the British civilizing mission, such influences are beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁴¹ Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 23-38. As Viswanathan points out, a section of the Charter Act also empowered the Governor-General-in-Council to direct funds to the “revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India” (38). See also van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 6.

⁴² Qtd. in Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 142.

James Mill's Authorizing History

The landmark publication of James Mill's voluminous *The History of British India* in 1817 provided the emergent colonial state with substantial ideological support for its imperialist agenda.⁴³ Mill found Jones in particular to be anathema because the latter's theory of a common Indo-European linguistic origin and ancient Golden Age destabilized British notions of their inherent difference from Indians.⁴⁴ Jones's theory was considered demeaning to the classical heritage of Greece and Rome to which Britons had strategically laid claim. In order to keep India separate from Europe, the former had to be cast as fundamentally different and inferior, a task that Mill accomplishes with great rhetorical flourish. Mill's prodigious treatise was based entirely on the secondary information produced by earlier British Orientalists—even those, like Jones, whom he despised. Mill, in fact, had never been to India himself and knew none of its languages.⁴⁵ In his preface Mill preemptively addresses his lack of firsthand knowledge by explaining that such information was in fact not necessary: "Whatever is worth seeing or hearing in India, can be expressed in writing. As soon as every thing of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may attain more knowledge of India, in one year, in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and his ears in India."⁴⁶ Insinuating a British claim to Greco-Roman culture, Mill rationalizes his method by citing Roman historian Tacitus's *De Origine et situ Germanorum* [*Germania*] which had been composed in a similar fashion: "Tacitus, though he never was in Germany, and was certainly

⁴³ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 114.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Jenny Sharpe, "The Violence in the Land of Desire: Or, How William Jones Discovered India," 31.

⁴⁶ James Mill, "Preface," *The History of British India*, vol. 1, xv.

not acquainted with the language of *our uncultivated ancestors*, wrote the exquisite account of the manners of the Germans.”⁴⁷

The secondary sources on which Mill relied proved highly generative, as the 1817 edition of *History* spanned three massive volumes. Certainly the most significant feature of *History* was its overdetermined periodization of Indian history based on its ostensible governing authority: “Of the Hindus”, “The Mahomedans”, and “one exclusive company” (see Figure 3). The importance of the Millian chronology cannot be overstated as it provided generations of Britons and Indians with a simple yet highly distorted perspective of India’s past.⁴⁸ The understanding that Indian history as such only truly began with the advent of British colonialism is evident in Mill’s analyses of three successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs. While the discussions of the Hindu and Muslim eras reside neatly within the first volume, the second and third volumes together are dedicated to less than one hundred years of East India Company activity from 1708-1805. The chapter headings of Volume I further demonstrate Mill’s teleological view of Indian history as they become lengthier and more detailed as control of the polity transfers from the Hindus to the Muslims and finally to the British. Reflecting Mill’s belief that Hindus were devoid of an authentic history, the initial chapters contain merely descriptive information about the community: “Laws,” “Religion,” “Manners,” “The Arts,” “Literature,” and so on.

Though Muslims are accorded greater historicity than Hindus, the intervening epoch—“The Mahomedans”—is also addressed summarily. In a volume that is over six hundred pages long, Mill covers several centuries of medieval Indian history in about one hundred and fifty pages. The chapter heading in which “The Mahomedans” first appear as

⁴⁷ Ibid., xiii. Emphasis added. Mill’s reference to the Germans as “*our uncultivated ancestors*” is consistent with his teleological view of history.

⁴⁸ Thapar, “Interpretations of Ancient Indian History,” 320.

major players in India reified prevalent views about inherent Hindu effeteness and Muslim tyranny: “From the first Invasion of India by the Nations in the North, till the Expulsion of the Gaznevide Dynasty.”⁴⁹ As Mill states on the opening page of the chapter, “It appears that the people of Hindustan have at all times been subject to incursions and conquest, by the nations contiguous to them on the north-west...” Yet in Mill’s account, such invasions nevertheless proved beneficial for India: “...human nature in India gained, and gained very considerably, by passing from a Hindu to a Mahomedan government...The defects of Mahomedan rule, enormous as they justly deserve to be held, can by no means be regarded as equal to those which universally distinguish the government of Hindus.”⁵⁰ In this teleological account, Hindus were necessarily inferior to Muslims, whose rule then naturally gave way to the superior British. By portraying both Hindus and Muslims in such a simple and cursory manner, Mill primes his readers to view the Raj as a warranted force of progress.

Alongside a teleological view of history with “Homo Euro-Americanus” as its necessary culmination, Mill evaluated Indian culture and society using emerging liberal ideas on rationality and utility.⁵¹ Among the many things that Mill criticized were Hindu religious belief and practice, the people’s supposed lack of historical consciousness, and their apparent political disorganization:

To the monstrous period of years, which the legends of the Hindus involve, they ascribe events the most extravagant and unnatural. Even these are not connected in chronological series; but are a number of independent and incredible fictions. This people, indeed, are perfectly destitute of historical records. Their ancient literature affords not a single production to which the historical character belongs. The works in which the miraculous transactions of former times are described, are poems. Most of them are books of a religious character, in which the exploits of the gods, and their commands to mortals, are repeated or revealed. In all, the actions of men and those of deities are mixed together in a set of legends more absurd and extravagant, more transcending the bounds of nature and of reason, less

⁴⁹ Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1, bk. 3, 481.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 628.

⁵¹ Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India,” 416.

grateful to the imagination and taste of a cultivated and rational people, than those which the fabulous history of any other nation presents to us. The Brahmens [sic] are the most audacious, and perhaps the most unskillful fabricators, with whom the annals of fable have yet made us acquainted.⁵²

*Of all the results of civilization, that of forming a combination of different states, and directing their powers to one common object, seems to be one of the least consistent with the mental habits and attainments of the Hindus. It is the want of this power of combination which has rendered India so easy a conquest to all invaders; and enables us to retain, so easily, that dominion over it which we have acquired. Where is there any vestige in India of that deliberative assembly of princes, which in Germany was known by the name of the Diet? Where is there any memorial of that curious constitution by which the union of the German princes was preserved; or of those elections by which they chose whom among themselves should be placed at their head. That nominal homage which the Mahratta chiefs at present pay to the throne of Sevagee, is a temporary circumstance, entirely of a different nature. These chiefs are not subordinate princes, but revolted subjects, in a dismembered empire. There is among them no confederacy.*⁵³

Ronald Inden's theorization of three separate aspects of Indological accounts—the “descriptive,” “commentative,” and “explanatory”—are useful when examining Mill's assessments.⁵⁴ A self-appointed representative of Western civilization, Mill considers European superiority a universal axiom and, with this yardstick in hand, he ascertains numerous Indian deficiencies. As foretold by the overdetermined chapter titles of the “Hindu” section, Mill's remarks are mostly descriptive and commentative, and very rarely explanatory. For example, in the first excerpt Mill refers to Brahmanical notions of time [yugas] and dismisses them on two counts. These narratives do not constitute a proper history for they describe events “most extravagant and unnatural” and are not arranged in chronological order. They contain no historical value whatsoever because of absurd content that “transcend[s] the bounds of nature and of reason.” In his concluding remarks to the volume Mill again avers that when it comes to history, “of this most important branch of

⁵² Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1, bk. 2, 99. Emphasis added.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 460. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Inden, “Orientalist Constructions of India,” 403.

literature the Hindus were totally destitute.”⁵⁵ Since they do not accord with his Eurocentric views, he dismisses Hindu narratives without considering whether they may have been both historical and religious, which was indeed the case for Puranic chronicles.⁵⁶ For Mill, History and Religion necessarily require separate discussions, leading to the summary dismissal of works such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.⁵⁷

In the second excerpt, Mill cites India’s conquerability as an essential quality, a function of Hindus’ irrationality and deficient “mental habits and attainments.” Mill cites the German Diet as an example of European political unity against which he contrasts Indians’ fragmentation.⁵⁸ For Mill, Indians are especially backward because they do not have a representative or unified institutional body to reach consensus. He naturally does not pause to consider whether aspects of the Mughal Empire might have fulfilled this arbitrary marker of civilization. Assuming a unitary view of truth, Mill also does not reflect on whether the Company’s presence may have caused or exacerbated the fragmentation of Maratha princes that he cites as indicative of Indians’ fundamental disorder. Likewise, he dismisses any evidence that would undermine his argument, such as Maratha reverence of their expired leader Shivaji. As C.H. Philips observes, “Once committed to [the] view that Indian society was barbarous, Mill was highly selective in his use of evidence.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1, bk. 3, 648.

⁵⁶ Partha Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 104.

⁵⁷ Mill goes on to compare Hindu epic literature with that of the Persians: “Compare the Mahabharat, the great narrative poem of the Hindus, with the Shah Namah, the great narrative poem of the Persians; the departure from nature and probability is less wild and extravagant; the incidents are less foolish; the fictions are more ingenious; all to a great degree, in the work of the Mahomedan author, than in that of the Hindu” (vol. 1, bk. 3, 648).

⁵⁸ Here Mill is likely referring to the Perpetual Diet of Regensburg, a representative body of German states confederated under the Holy Roman Empire that had a long history of meeting regularly to discuss and reach consensus on matters of concern. Beginning in 1594 the Diet met exclusively in Regensburg; its last significant act was the 1803 resolution to reorganize and secularize the Empire. The Diet dissolved alongside the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, and it was only in 1847 that a central representative Diet of German states was formed.

⁵⁹ C.H. Philips, “James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India,” 221. Philips notes further that Mill “commonly attached the greatest weight to the writers who [were] least entitled to confidence.” These

Despite Mill's admission that any worthy history of India must necessarily be a "critical" or "judging" account—or precisely *because of* such assertions—*History* became an overwhelmingly influential (inter)text on India by providing an authoritative basis for Britons' ever-increasing hostility and condescension towards the colony and its inhabitants.⁶⁰ Hailed as the first comprehensive account on India, *History* became required reading for the Company's civil servants and was reissued in several subsequent editions in 1820, 1826, and 1840, the last of which was posthumous.⁶¹ In 1848, Horace Hayman Wilson (1786-1860), Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford, published an abridged version of Mill's *History* in which he added critical notes and advanced its account from 1805 to the 1834.⁶² Wilson's stature as a respected Indologist legitimized *History* and ensured that it would remain dominant for much time to come. Yet Wilson was actually quite critical of Mill's account as noted in the following statements he made in 1844:

In the effects which Mill's *History* is likely to exercise upon the connection between the people of England and the people of India ... its tendency is evil: it is calculated to destroy all sympathy between the ruler and the ruled; to preoccupy the minds of those who issue annually from Great Britain to monopolise the posts of honour and power in Hindustan, with an unfounded aversion towards those over whom they exercise that power. . . . There is reason to fear that these consequences are not imaginary, and that a harsh and illiberal spirit has of late years prevailed in the conduct and councils of the rising service in India which owes its origin to impressions imbibed in early life from the *History* of Mr. Mill.⁶³

were individuals prejudiced against Indians or who perceived India from limited, biased, or superficial perspectives. Likewise, Mill overlooked instances in which these and other accounts may have been favorable to Indians.

⁶⁰ Mill, "Preface," *The History of British India*, vol. 1, x. As Inden notes, a hegemonic text in the Gramscian sense is "a text [that] is not concerned with narrow and internalist issues of the discipline itself but with the broader questions of India's place in the world and in history, issues in which those outside of the discipline, the active subjects of the world—business and government leaders—and the more passive subjects of the world's history, the populace at large, are interested. It is, furthermore, an account that is seen, during the period of its predominance to exercise leadership of a field actively and positively and not one that is merely imposed on it. A hegemonic text is also totalizing—it provides an account of every aspect of Indian life. It accounts for all the elements that the relevant knowing public wants to know about" (417).

⁶¹ Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," 418. See also Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 226.

⁶² Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 221.

⁶³ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 225-226.

Considering these views, it is indeed surprising that Wilson chose to publish an abridged edition of Mill's text and not to have issued a historical account of his own. Although Wilson provided extensive corrective footnotes to Mill's text, his edition nevertheless certified the latter as a significant work on India.⁶⁴ Wilson's acknowledgement that Mill's tome was "the most valuable work upon the subject which has yet been published" may explain why he chose to provide critical commentary, for its status as the first comprehensive "historical" treatise of India rendered it an ur-text that demanded attention and analysis.⁶⁵

British historian Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859) furthered Mill's influence within nineteenth-century British historiography on India with *The History of India*, published in 1841. Ironically, Elphinstone had intended to offer a more sympathetic account of India than his predecessor and was certainly in a better position to do so given his background as Governor of Bombay from 1819-1827. Lamenting Mill's caustic denigrations, Elphinstone desired to produce a history that would prove to be "more full in facts and free from disputes and dissertations."⁶⁶ However laudable his intention may have been, the following excerpt from *The History of India* demonstrates Elphinstone's overall failure to escape Mill's influence:

What we do see we judge by our own standard. We conclude that a man who cries like a child on slight occasions, must always be incapable of acting or suffering with dignity; and that one who allows himself to be called a liar would not be ashamed of any baseness. Our writers also confound the distinctions of time and place; they combine in one character the Maratta and the Bengalese; and tax the present generation with the crimes of the heroes of the "Maha Bharat." It might be argued, in opposition to many unfavourable testimonies, that those who have known the Indians longest have always the best opinion of them; but this is rather a compliment to human nature than to them, since it is true of every other people. It is more in point, that all persons who have retired from India think better of the people they

⁶⁴ Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," 418.

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 219.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

have left after comparing them with others even of the most justly admired nations. *These considerations should make us distrust our own impressions, when unfavorable, but cannot blind us to the fact that the Hindus have, in reality, some great defects of character.*⁶⁷

Though he is not named directly, Mill is foremost among those “writers [who] confound the distinctions of time and place” and engage in other such objectionable totalizations and comparisons of Indians. In his oblique critique, Elphinstone indicts Mill’s lack of distinction and glaring omission of context when making his grandiose claims. Likely shielding himself from allegations of bias, Elphinstone argues that one should not accept the laudatory opinions of those who have firsthand experience with Indians because it is within “human nature” to be partial to those with whom one is familiar. For Elphinstone, British readers should instead consider that those who have left India continue to praise its people even after comparing them with those of “the most justly admired nations.”

But Elphinstone’s final observation eviscerates such arguments. Though the historian criticizes the Millian tendency to issue totalizing opinions and urges readers to “distrust our own impressions when unfavorable,” he does precisely this. No matter how open-minded Britons may try to be, they cannot escape the “fact that the Hindus have, in reality, some great defects of character.” Elphinstone further perpetuates the understanding that Indian history was composed of successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs. Though he discusses only the first two eras and does not include an analysis of the East India Company—hence the title *The History of India*—the British succession of the Mughal Empire is obvious. Like his predecessor, Elphinstone also uses simple descriptions that suggest Hindus’ relative lack of historicity, e.g., “Division and Employment of Classes,”

⁶⁷ Mountstuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, vol. 1, bk. 3, 369-370. Emphasis added.

“Geography,” and “Chronology.”⁶⁸ The title of the final book in the Hindu unit is particularly telling: “History of the Hindus up to the Mahometan Invasion.”⁶⁹ Notions of Muslims as marauding conquerors are further reinforced in the title of the subsequent book, “From the Commencement of the Arab Conquests to the Establishment of a Mahometan Government in India.” Here Elphinstone begins his discussion with an analysis of Arabs, Islam, and the aggressive ideology of “Mahomet” [Muhammad]: “...the Hindus might have long remained undisturbed by foreign intrusion, if a new spirit had not been kindled in a nation till now as sequestered as their own.”⁷⁰ That Elphinstone begins the story of the “Muslim” epoch outside of India further reinforced the prevalent belief that Muslims were alien to the polity, yet another idea that would go on to galvanize educated Hindus across India.

Though Elphinstone’s *History of India* was relatively richer in historical depth and informed by firsthand knowledge, it failed to compete with Mill’s treatise because, as C.H. Philips puts it, “Elphinstone was too diffident, too cautious; his criticism of Mill was implied, never open, his attack always oblique.”⁷¹ As noted in the above excerpt, by issuing a totalizing criticism about Hindus himself Elphinstone strangely undermines his own argument in favor of a historical methodology attentive to local specificities. Presumably, Elphinstone took this approach in order to establish his credibility with British readers by affirming popular notions about India that Mill had advanced earlier. Elphinstone’s *History* was adopted as a textbook at Haileybury College where East India Civil Service cadets were

⁶⁸ For example, Books 1 and 2 are respectively entitled “State of the Hindus at the Time of Menu’s Code” and “Changes Since Menu, and State of the Hindus in Later Times.” Chapters within Books 1-4 include “Division and Employment of Classes,” “Changes in the Law,” “Manners and Character,” and “On the Age of Menu and of the Vedas.”

⁶⁹ Volume 1 of Elphinstone’s *History* is divided into two units “Hindus” and “Mahometans,” which are subdivided into books.

⁷⁰ Elphinstone, *The History of India*, vol. 1, bk. 5, 489.

⁷¹ Philips, “James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India,” 225.

trained, but it was soon overshadowed by Wilson's 1848 edition of Mill's tome.⁷² British bewilderment over the cataclysmic rebellion of 1857 further cemented the authority of Mill's sensational account over Elphinstone's more restrained treatise.⁷³ Nevertheless, Elphinstone's monograph enjoyed circulation through the early twentieth century. New editions of *History of India* were published in 1905 and 1911, intended for Indian university students who understandably preferred it to Mill's volumes.⁷⁴

Irishman Vincent Smith advanced the Millian historical legacy still further into the twentieth century. Like Elphinstone, Smith had a lengthy career with the Indian Civil Service, from 1869-1900, before turning to historical writing after retirement.⁷⁵ In 1904, he published *The Early History of India: From 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan Conquest including the Invasion of Alexander the Great*, the title of which evidences his naturalization of the Millian chronology.⁷⁶ Smith's text differed from those of his predecessors due to its consideration of newly discovered archaeological and cultural materials. In the manner of the late eighteenth-century British Orientalists, Smith described these findings as marking "immense progress in the recovery of the lost history of India."⁷⁷ While on the whole Smith granted far greater historicity to Hindus that did Mill and Elphinstone, he still reified the overarching presumption of successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs:

The history of [India over] this long period is, on the whole, a melancholy record of degradation and decadence in government, literature, religion, and art, with the exception of temple architecture. The

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 227. The Indian historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar confirms that both Mill and Elphinstone's histories were used as textbooks when he was in college in the early twentieth century. See R.C. Majumdar, "Nationalist Historians," 419.

⁷⁵ A.L. Basham, "Modern Historians of Ancient India," 266. See also Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 227.

⁷⁶ Smith continued to revise *Early History* meticulously and released two subsequent editions in 1908 and 1914; see Basham, "Modern Historians of Ancient India," 266.

⁷⁷ Vincent Smith, *The Early History of India* (1904), 1. Emphasis added. See also Basham, "Modern Historians of Ancient India," 266.

three following chapters, which attempt to give an outline of the salient features in the bewildering annals of Indian petty states when left to their own devices for several centuries, may perhaps serve to give the reader a notion of what India always has been when released from the control of a supreme authority, and *what she would be again, if the hand of benevolent despotism which now holds her in its iron grasp should be withdrawn.*⁷⁸

[This] volume deals with the *political history of Hindu India, the land of the Brahmins, which is the real India—a land the fascination of which is largely due to the unique character of its civilization.* That quality of strangeness makes the history of Hindu India less attractive to the European or American general reader than the more easily intelligible story of the Muslim and British conquerors, but anybody who desires to understand modern India must be content to spend some labour on the study of ancient India during the long ages of autonomy.⁷⁹

In the first excerpt, Smith references an approximate five-hundred-year period—from 528 A.D. to the beginning of the eleventh century—when India was, in his words, “free to work out her destiny in her own fashion.”⁸⁰ In a passage reminiscent of Mill’s *History*, Smith argues that the “degradation and decadence” of this period evidence India’s natural proclivity towards chaos and a fundamental inability to maintain its sovereignty. And echoing the younger Mill’s observations about the need for more advanced countries to exert a “parental despotism” over others, Smith argues that the “benevolent despotism” and “iron grasp” of Britain over India must be maintained lest the latter’s stability be lost. The second passage, taken from Smith’s 1914 edition, similarly establishes a Millian chronology through its matter-of-fact declaration that “Hindu India, the land of the Brahmins...is the real India.” Muslims are necessarily outsiders, or as Smith states, “conquerors.” For Smith, any knowledge of “the real India” necessarily requires an understanding of its long lost Hindu past.

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Early History of India* (1904), 301-302.

⁷⁹ Smith, *The Early History of India* (1914), 477.

⁸⁰ Smith, *The Early History of India* (1904), 301.

That Mill's *History of British India*—a text that relied exclusively on secondary sources and whose author had never been to the country about which he wrote—exerted such influence in British historiography deserves pause. Rather than providing any substantive information about India and its people, the treatise only further entrenched notions of British superiority and a right to occupation. *History* shaped the thinking of not only Britons but also prominent continental philosophers such as Georg Hegel, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. Prejudiced by Mill's account, these European thinkers also perceived India as an inert object without a proper history, civilization, or religion to speak of.⁸¹ Mill's *History* reified notions of Europe as the dominant agent and mover of a universal history by periodizing the Indian past as comprised of increasingly progressive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs.⁸² That Mill does not identify the British as “Christian” rulers indexes his thinking that religious belonging was the primary determinant of personal identity in India and that its inhabitants had not developed any other worthwhile categories of group designation.⁸³ Yet despite all his aspersions, Mill deemed Indians capable enough to benefit from British rule. Believing the mind to be a *tabula rasa*, Mill held that reformist legislation and English education would be able to yield desired changes. As David Ludden remarks, “...[Mill's] work marshaled what he believed to be all necessary facts to show the necessity of British rule as a remedy for Indian's traditional tyranny and chaos...”⁸⁴

⁸¹ The intertextuality of Mill's account is particularly striking in the European context. Influenced by Mill, Hegel denigrated Indian history in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (see “The Hindu Religion” and “Hindu Religion, the Religion of Abstract Unity”). Hegel's thinking on India, in turn, informed Marx's famous postulation of Asiatic mode of production (Inden 421-422). See also Max Weber's *The Religion of India*, in which he observes that for ancient Indians, “Historical science...was altogether lacking.” Qtd. in Perrett, “History, Time, and Knowledge in Ancient India,” 310.

⁸² Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History,” 2.

⁸³ Thapar, “Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History,” 4.

⁸⁴ Ludden, “Orientalist Empiricism,” 263.

Policy

Supported by Mill's *History*, the British were increasingly empowered to enact a number of policies intended to reform the perceived degeneracy of Indian culture with a particular focus on Hindu belief and praxis. Such measures reflected a growing sense of a British "civilizing mission," a myth that attempted to obscure the harsher ideas and realities behind their domination of the country. Ideas about gender in particular played a major role in this endeavor because the treatment of Hindu women by Hindu men was considered irrefutable evidence of the fundamental depravity of the latter, substantiating the British right to rule.⁸⁵

The abolition of sati in 1829 is a crucial case in point, the rite being categorically denounced in the official legislation as "[a] practice...revolting to the feelings of human nature."⁸⁶ The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, which permitted the remarriage of Hindu widows, was another instance of the emergent colonial state attempting to regulate Hindu practices according to what were regarded as universal liberal ideals.⁸⁷ Yet another example of British legislation targeting Hindus was the 1891 passage of the Age of Consent Act, which raised the age at which girls could legally have sexual intercourse, usually in the confines of marriage, from ten to twelve years.⁸⁸ This last issue had long been a matter of controversy, with Hindu opinion split over the right of the British to legislate on this intimate matter.⁸⁹ While some supported the measure, others objected to British interference within the domestic sphere as well as the derogatory insinuations about Hindu masculinity.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" 34. See also Mani, "Contentious Traditions" and Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

⁸⁶ Qtd. in Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing*, 10.

⁸⁷ Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 233.

⁸⁸ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 96.

⁸⁹ Kumar, *A History of Doing*, 24. Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 150.

⁹⁰ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 18. See also van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 96-97.

Although the Act was never implemented, it actually helped strengthen Hindu patriarchal control on such practices due to a desire to maintain a sphere exempt from unwanted intervention by the colonial state.⁹¹ These examples demonstrate how feminist concerns were often abstracted into symbolic points of contention in which Hindu and British men sought to establish their respective authority. Thus instead of helping the women at the center of these issues, such debates often strengthened the patriarchal shackles that bound them and relegated their concerns even further to the periphery.

Alongside reformist legislation that both prohibited and permitted certain activities, the emerging colonial government sought to mold Indian behavior by example. The most significant of such measures was the institution of English education and literary studies in India. In 1835, Thomas Macaulay issued his famous “Minute on Indian Education” in which James Mill’s influence is unmistakable:

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalist themselves. *I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the western literature is indeed fully admitted by those Members of the Committee who support the Oriental plan of education...*⁹²

*We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of this Country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.*⁹³

Like Mill, Macaulay distanced himself from the views of the eighteenth-century British Orientalists and advanced reductive essentialisms about India based on second-hand

⁹¹ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 96.

⁹² Macaulay, “Minute recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, law member of the governor-general’s council, dated 2 February 1835,” 165.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

information. Nevertheless, Macaulay's Minute became the basis for official British policy, formalizing and expanding a practice that had already been in effect in Calcutta for several decades.⁹⁴ As Gauri Viswanathan has pointed out, Macaulay's advocacy led to the swift passage of the 1835 English Education Act and the establishment of numerous English-medium government schools in India's urban areas.⁹⁵ Swayed by both Mill and Macaulay, Governor-General William Bentinck—who had only recently promulgated legislation to abolish sati in 1829—ceased patronage of the Asiatic Society, Fort William College, and related institutions, many of which were based in Bengal. Revealing Mill's tremendous influence, before leaving for India Bentinck reportedly told him, "I am going to British India, but I shall not be Governor-General. It is you that will be Governor-General."⁹⁶

Yet by this point, late eighteenth-century British Orientalist ideas about a Hindu Golden Age had already taken on a life of their own. This was particularly the case among the Bengali *bhadralok*, a term that was used to refer to the new middle and upper classes of Bengalis, usually high-caste Hindus, who had flourished under the British regime; their elite status and education had enabled them to become teachers, merchants, clerks, rentiers, and government employees.⁹⁷ Dubbed the "Father of Modern India," Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) is perhaps the most well-known of these figures. A highly educated and wealthy Bengali Brahmin, Roy was learned in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and English and had worked for the Company at the turn of the nineteenth century. He was a vocal advocate of William

⁹⁴ Several institutions for teaching English had been established well before Macaulay's 1835 Minute and the subsequent English Education Act. In the late eighteenth century, a number of private academies for teaching English had been established. In 1817, a joint British-Bengali initiative led to the founding of Hindu College, which offered not only English-language courses but also courses in English literature, western political and social thought, and sciences such as physics and chemistry. Approximately three thousand Bengali youths were studying English in Calcutta by the early 1830s. See P.J. Marshall, *The New Cambridge History of India*, 174.

⁹⁵ Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest*, 45. See also Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 83.

⁹⁶ Qtd. in Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 241.

⁹⁷ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 88.

Bentinck's reformist policies, such as the abolition of sati and an English academic curriculum that Roy had described as "a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences..."⁹⁸ Demonstrating the dialectical nature of British Orientalism, Macaulay had in fact adopted some of Roy's arguments in his own push for an English-based, Westernized educational program in India.⁹⁹

A precursor of Macaulay's Children, Roy was among the first English-educated Indian elites to take up the religious episteme for the purpose of reforming Hinduism.¹⁰⁰ Like the British Orientalists of the late eighteenth century, he had translated a number of ancient Hindu texts such as the Upanishads and the Vedas into English and Bengali in the effort to craft from them a coherent vision of a rational, monotheistic Hinduism.¹⁰¹ Appropriating the idiom of a long-lost Hindu Golden Age, Roy believed that Hinduism as it existed in the present was a corruption of a previously ennobled form and he eschewed idol worship and sati as illegitimate practices. In the following excerpt, Roy describes how he came to appreciate British rule as a way of improving the Hindu community and India at large:

When about the age of sixteen, I composed a manuscript, calling in question the validity of the idolatrous system of the Hindus. This, together with my known sentiments on the subject, having produced a coolness between me and my immediate kindred, I proceeded on my travels, and passed through different countries, chiefly within, but some beyond the bounds of Hindustan, with a feeling of great aversion to the establishment of the British power in India. When I had reached the age of twenty, my father recalled me and restored me to his favour; after which, I first saw, and began to associate with Europeans, and soon after made myself tolerably acquainted with their laws and form of government. Finding them generally more intelligent, more steady and moderate in their conduct, I gave up my prejudice against them and became inclined in their favour, feeling persuaded

⁹⁸ Roy, "A Letter on Education," 33.

⁹⁹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ Stephen Hay, "Rammohun Roy: 'Father of Modern India,'" 17.

¹⁰¹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 86.

*that their rule, through a foreign yoke, would lead more speedily and surely to the amelioration of the native inhabitants...*¹⁰²

Here Roy presents himself as having come to accept colonial rule through the British demonstration of what Antonio Gramsci calls “intellectual and moral leadership”—because he believed it would “speedily and surely [lead] to the amelioration of the native inhabitants.”¹⁰³ In 1828, Roy institutionalized his reformist ideas on Hinduism and founded the Brahmo Samaj, among the earliest indigenous organizations that encouraged reflection about existing religious practices and group belonging.¹⁰⁴ Alongside a rich oral tradition, a burgeoning print culture played a key role in disseminating new ideas about religion among the middle and upper classes in Bengal and other regions.¹⁰⁵

Rebellion and the Raj

Following the publication of Mill’s *History of British India*, the event that exerted the most impact on British Orientalist discourse was the rebellion of 1857-1858, an uprising of Indian soldiers employed by the East India Company against their British commanders that led to the colonial state temporarily losing control over large swathes of northeast and central India. The rebellion was critical because the mass violence and widespread chaos that it unleashed concretized for the British their perceptions of a fundamentally degenerate Hindu India, leading to the formalization of Crown Rule in 1858.

¹⁰² Ram Mohan Roy, “Autobiographical Remarks,” 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁰³ See Gramsci, “The Problem of Political Leadership,” 57-58.

¹⁰⁴ The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875, was another important Hindu reformist organization. Peter van der Veer notes that the Arya Samaj was instrumental in the creation of a new Hindu consciousness because it spurred debate about Hinduism among the masses in a direct and confrontational manner (52). Yet it is crucial to emphasize that Hindus were not the only ones engaging in such reflection and reform. Similar endeavors by Muslims and Sikhs included the Deoband movement and the Singh Sabha respectively. See Barbara Daly Metcalf, “Imagining Community,” 229-240.

¹⁰⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 89.

The question of what to call this event has been contentious from the start and has varied widely depending on one's perspective. The British have commonly referred to the episode as the "Sepoy Mutiny" in an attempt to localize its origin and minimize its impact, while Indian patriots and nationalists, most famously V.D. Savarkar, hailed it the first "Indian War of Independence."¹⁰⁶ Neither of these labels is accurate. Though the uprising originated in the army, labeling the episode a "mutiny" is far too reductive and does not adequately account for the disparate motives of the many actors involved, its appeal to those outside of the army, or its considerable geographic scope.¹⁰⁷ Reasons to participate in the rebellion were variable, thus challenging Indian perceptions that this was a conflict driven by a clear ideology or platform. While feelings of regional patriotism and discontent with British rule were certainly—but not exclusively—at play, there was no coherent plan or strategy to eject the British from India.¹⁰⁸ Though these varying interpretations persist, modern historians have largely settled on the terms "rebellion" or "revolt" to describe the episode.¹⁰⁹

The rebellion was markedly different from previous military and civilian uprisings due its expanded scope, increased intensity, and convergence of both long- and short-term grievances against the colonial regime.¹¹⁰ Growing dissatisfaction among native soldiers against their British commanders reached a breaking point when it was rumored that the cartridges of the new Enfield rifle were greased with the fat of cows and pigs—offensive to the religious sensibilities of Hindus and Muslims respectively—as a part of a nefarious

¹⁰⁶ "Sepoy" is the Anglicized form of the Hindi/Urdu word for soldier, *sipahi*. See [V.D. Savarkar], *The Indian War of Independence of 1857 By An Indian Nationalist*. See also Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 127, and Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 92.

¹⁰⁷ See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 100-107.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Metcalf and Metcalf's *A Concise History of Modern India* and Bose and Jalal's *Modern South Asia*.

¹¹⁰ See Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 70-72. See also Hugh Tinker, "1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India," (1958) and Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 234-236.

scheme to force their conversion to Christianity.¹¹¹ In the spring of 1857, many soldiers across northeastern India refused to load the rifles and were imprisoned for insubordination or expelled. The actual revolt began in May 1857 when soldiers in the Meerut regiment liberated their imprisoned peers and attacked the British officials who tried to stop them. As the sepoys proceeded southwest towards Delhi, they urged others to join them with the rallying cry “*Chalo Delhi!*” [“Let’s go to Delhi!”]. There they united behind the titular Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in a symbolic act of defiance against the British. News of the rebellion incited other Indians to join for a variety of reasons; the cities of Delhi, Lucknow, and Kanpur in particular witnessed horrific violence on both sides. While the British had lost control over large parts of north and central India, other regions such as Bengal and the newly annexed Punjab remained passive.

The rebellion led to a complete reappraisal of the British presence in India. The British were wholly taken aback by the revolt and in many locations it took them up to a year to reestablish their authority.¹¹² The rebellion resulted in the formal dissolution of the East India Company and the transfer of governing authority to the British Crown per the Government of India Act of 1858. Queen Victoria’s Proclamation in November 1858 suggests that the uprising had resulted primarily from an affront to Indians’ religious beliefs:

Firmly relying Ourselves on the truth of Christianity, and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of Religion, *We disclaim alike the Right and the Desire to impose our Convictions on any of Our Subjects. We declare it to be Our Royal Will and Pleasure that none be in any wise favored, none molested or disquieted, by reason of their Religious Faith or Observances; but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the Law: and We do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under Us, that they abstain from all interference with the Religious Belief or Worship of any of Our Subjects, on pain of Our highest Displeasure.*

And it is Our further Will that, so far as may be, Our Subjects, of whatever Race or Creed, be freely and impartially admitted to Offices in Our Service, the Duties of

¹¹¹ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 72. See also Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 127.

¹¹² Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 103.

which they may be qualified, by their education, ability, and integrity, duly to discharge...

*We deeply lament the evils and misery which have been brought upon India by the acts of ambitious Men, who have deceived their Countrymen, by false reports, and led them into open Rebellion. Our Power has been shewn by the Suppression of that Rebellion in the field; We desire to shew Our Mercy, by pardoning the Offenses of those who have been thus misled, but who desire to return to the path of Duty....*¹¹³

While it was certainly true that the alleged coating of the new Enfield rifle cartridges formed the express cause of the rebellion, several long-standing secular grievances were also factors.¹¹⁴ These included dissatisfaction with pay and new recruitment policies, the recent annexation of the princely state of Awadh, and exorbitant land revenue assessments.¹¹⁵ Once the rebellion was underway, the decision to join or not was also often guided by material concerns or that which seemed most advantageous at the time.¹¹⁶ Though some sepoys revolted out of confusion or pressure from peers, others remained passive due to hostility towards their comrades.¹¹⁷ In other cases, the British issued bribes to individuals or groups not to revolt: “I will give Mubarak Shah four hundred Horse [sic]...If he is not on our side, he will be against us.”¹¹⁸ The Bengali *bhadralok* and many princely rulers remained passive; such “loyalty” is best understood as a calculated decision to protect beneficial ties with the British regime.¹¹⁹ As these cases suggest, ostensible acts of allegiance or disaffection during the rebellion often arose from a variety of factors and must not be taken at face value.

¹¹³ Queen Victoria, “Proclamation by the Queen in Council to the Princes, Chiefs, and People of India,” 2-3. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 100-101.

¹¹⁵ Yet another example was the General Service Enlistment Act of 1856 that required Company soldiers to serve outside of India if necessary. According to Hindu beliefs, travelling across the *kala pani* [black waters] caused one to lose caste or respect within the community (Bose and Jalal 70).

¹¹⁶ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 72. See also Tinker, “1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India,” 61.

¹¹⁷ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 102.

¹¹⁸ Qtd. in Tinker, “1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India,” 61.

¹¹⁹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 103.

The heavy-handed response to the rebellion belied the complexity of the episode and its underlying causes. Queen Victoria's patronizing declaration itself stands as a significant node within nineteenth-century British Orientalist discourse by furthering the idea that religious belonging was the overriding determinant of Indians' identity and behavior. Not surprisingly, British officials in India did not readily consider their own hand in the rebellion or how secular motivations may have been at play. Rather, the event was attributed to natives' volatile religious sensibilities that could be easily stoked by "...ambitious Men...who have deceived their Countrymen [with] false reports." For Queen Victoria the British were faultless as "ambitious" Indian soldiers had wrongly roused their peers to revolt on the basis of misinformation about the Enfield rifle. Her assurances that the British had no "Right [or] Desire to impose [their] Convictions" on Indians and that the former were to "abstain from all interference with the Religious Belief or Worship of any of Our Subjects" further reified the sense that Indians were exceedingly sensitive about religious matters. Critical for the "moderate" phase of turn-of-the-century Indian politics, the Proclamation concluded with the affirmation that Britain desired the wellbeing of India and its people and made numerous promises of benevolent governance: "...it is Our earnest Desire to stimulate the peaceful Industry of India, to promote Works of Public Utility and Improvement, and to administer its Government for the benefit of all Our Subjects resident therein. In their Prosperity will be Our Strength; in their Contentment Our Security; and in their Gratitude Our best Reward..."¹²⁰

Yet such lofty rhetoric and pledges proved hollow. In what was termed the British "reconquest" of India, Britons reestablished their authority with a forceful hand.¹²¹ The

¹²⁰ Queen Victoria, "Proclamation by the Queen in Council to the Princes, Chiefs, and People of India," 3.

¹²¹ Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 225.

rebellion was put down with a great amount of violence—what Queen Victoria obliquely calls “Power” in her Proclamation.¹²² In addition to ushering in Crown Rule, the rebellion hardened British prejudice and racism towards Indians.¹²³ While the British had always been attentive to positivist explanations of Indians’ essential difference from Europeans, they had nevertheless made claims to an enlightened agenda dedicated to the uplift of the native population.¹²⁴ Even James Mill, despite his hostile views about nearly everything associated with India and especially Hindus, had suggested that Indians could (be compelled to) change given appropriate legislative action and the introduction of Western education.¹²⁵

The rebellion was momentous precisely because it ruptured the British narrative of positive change and progress and instead concretized their perceptions of indelible racial difference between themselves and Indians.¹²⁶ The Utilitarian and Anglicist pretense that present reforms would one day “qualify” or enable India to be freed of its (J.S.) Millian “leading-strings” had been eviscerated with the perceived evidence that Indians were fundamentally deprived. With Britain now firmly convinced of the righteous necessity of their rule, the rationale of a progressive civilizing mission abandoned its liberal bent and became increasingly racist in character. The coeval rise of Social Darwinism—ideology that attempted to apply Charles Darwin’s ideas of natural selection to the apparent “progress” of

¹²² Suspected Indian soldiers were brutally executed by cannon; British troops and civilians went on vicious rampages and killed arbitrarily; Bahadur Shah was exiled to Burma and his sons were killed. Muslims in particular were targeted due to assumptions that they were necessarily disloyal and desired to return to power, though this belief would erode in subsequent decades. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 103-106.

¹²³ Ibid., 92 and 104-107.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹²⁵ As noted earlier, the treatment of Hindu women was often the subject of reformist legislation. By the time of the rebellion, the most recent of such measures was the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 (Wolpert 233).

¹²⁶ Frances Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence*, 79-83.

human societies—further substantiated such thinking.¹²⁷ Rather than maintain the pretext that colonial rule promoted India's advancement, Britons now believed all the more strongly that their occupation could very well endure indefinitely as Indians' patent inferiority and backwardness necessitated their guiding hand.

Once the British regained full control in 1858, they implemented blatantly authoritarian and racist policies in order to secure their authority. Like the British Orientalists of the late eighteenth century, positivist colonial knowledge was aggressively pursued but this time with a greater emphasis on ostensibly "scientific" reasoning and methodology reflective of the current moment. The goals were not just to better understand or constellate native groups into particular categories for the ease of ruling, but also to help *predict* native behavior to avoid potential unrest. Within the army, the proportion of British officers to Indian soldiers was increased and those Indians deemed inherently loyal or belonging to the "martial races"—such as Punjabis—were targeted for recruitment.¹²⁸ The understanding of caste as another concrete marker of Indian identity drove the publication of an encyclopedic, eight-volume series called *The Peoples of India* issued by the Government of India in 1868.¹²⁹ These books contained ethnographical descriptions of the chief characteristics and traits of various Indian castes and communities, followed by images of "representative" members of that group. For example, the "Rajpoots of Bareilly" were said to "usually affect martial habits and professions only, especially when they leave home. Our regular native army, and the police, contain large proportions of them...Almost as a rule,

¹²⁷ As Ludden explains, "Social Darwinism made poverty, weakness, and technological backwardness characteristic of all nonwhite peoples, who became degraded in the eyes of Europe." See Ludden, "Orientalist Empiricism," 270.

¹²⁸ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 105-106.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

they despise high class education, and, for the most part, are apparently more indifferent to intellectual aims and exertion than other Aryan Hindoos...”¹³⁰

Yet another way in which the colonial government increasingly began to read and enforce various kinds of distinctions among the native population was the long overdue enactment of the separate law codes for Hindus and Muslims that were developed under Warren Hastings.¹³¹ Other initiatives included the Census of India, first taken in 1872, and then on a decennial basis beginning in 1881.¹³² The colonial state also began to require the registration of journals and newspapers; printed materials such as books and pamphlets were increasingly scrutinized.¹³³ Such policies evidence the desperation of the colonial government to “fix” what was naturally changeable and fluid in the attempt to harness greater control over Indian bodies and minds.

Social Reform and the Idea of Bharat

Colonial subjugation instantiated a rupture with familiar ways of being in the world, requiring new categories of thought—or new understandings of extant ones—in order to grapple with such transformations.¹³⁴ In an article entitled “A Conceptual History of the Social: Some Reflections out of Colonial Bengal,” Rochona Majumdar analyzes the way in which the Bengali intellectual elite sought to rehabilitate their community and rethink their engagement with the colonial state in an ever-changing sociopolitical milieu. Though this

¹³⁰ Watson and Kaye, *The People of India: A Series of Photographic Illustrations, With Descriptive Letterpress, of The Races and Tribes of Hindustan, Originally Prepared under the Authority of The Government of India, and Reproduced by Order of the Secretary of State for India in Council*, unmarked pages in original, 103-109 in Hathi Trust Digital Library.

¹³¹ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 112.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Rochona Majumdar, “A Conceptual History of the Social: Some Reflections out of Colonial Bengal,” 165. Majumdar suggests that the 1857 rebellion instantiated the first such rupture that prompted reflection on *samaj*, a cultural discourse which later “climax[ed] in some ways” and “became most clearly articulated” during the controversial partition of Bengal in 1905 and the subsequent *swadeshi* movement (166, 179).

introspective turn had already been underway to a certain extent under the leadership of Ram Mohan Roy and others, Majumdar suggests that a shift occurred after 1857. In the wake of the rebellion and the formal advent of Crown Rule, the glaringly illiberal policies and practices of the British regime caused the Bengali elite to become increasingly wary of the mass social changes wrought by colonialism. While they remained irreversibly affected by their Western education, Bengali intellectuals began to rework their understanding of European ideas and ideals as they theorized the essential character of native society, or that which “would establish India’s history of difference with Europe.”¹³⁵

The concepts *samaj* and *samajik*—loosely translated as “society” and “the social” respectively—were integral in this regard as they steadily came to index the essence or “organic unity” of India.¹³⁶ Substantially different from a nation-state or civil society, *samaj* was understood to be that which “made up the being of India.”¹³⁷ As Majumdar argues, “It was through the development of concepts such as *samaj* and other related categories over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that ideas about nationalism, modernity, and a variety of new futures came to be imagined.”¹³⁸ In marked contrast to European notions of society, which, as theorized by Charles Taylor and Keith Baker, were profoundly secular and evidenced a radical break with the past, Majumdar argues that

...Indian ideas about the social were about resurrecting, or indeed crafting, a new history out of the past. The social was the ground on which Indians could distinguish themselves from the colonizer by establishing their long lineage in the past. The present was degenerate and this was a crisis brought upon by colonial conditions of life—political servitude, exposure to a new set of values, economic crisis, new professional structures, the pressures and lures of urban life, and new codes of familial behavior. The writers under consideration here sought to resolve these crises by looking to the past (real or imagined), upon which they posited the ideal of an

¹³⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 184.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 165.

Indian civilization. To think about the concept of the social in India meant first to write *a history of samaj* out of this civilizational heritage. The next step was to seek ways of remodeling the present through an active dialogue with the past as part of an anti-colonial political ethics.¹³⁹

Here Majumdar suggests that for Bengali writers such as Bankim Chattopadhyay, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, and Rabindranath Tagore, the present condition of society was undesirable and reform was badly needed. Though the present was degenerate, one could “remodel” it such that the glory of the past could be recaptured. Integral to this pursuit of cultural regeneration was the celebration of what was unique about native society, for which the past provided an inviting blank canvass for “posit[ing] the ideal of an Indian civilization” and writing histories of *samaj*. It is thus not surprising that in this period the terms *samaj* and *samajik* began to appear in a variety of Bengali texts such as newspaper articles, histories, essays, and fiction as the Bengali elite increasingly scrutinized their relationship to the colonial state.¹⁴⁰ Necessarily capacious and overdetermined, the categories *samaj* and *samajik* varied in meaning in the corpus of these writers but shared a fundamentally Hindu core: “...*samaj*, as it was theorized in late colonial India, remained distinctly Hindu.”¹⁴¹

Though helpful in elucidating colonial Bengali intellectuals’ reflection on the social and the pressing need for *samajik* reformation, these arguments suffer from certain limitations. The critical point that these elites conceived of *samaj* as necessarily Hindu remains at best a subtext throughout the analysis and warrants, I argue, further elaboration and emphasis. As is often the case with scholarship on colonial Bengal, there is also a persistent slippage between the regional and the extra-regional or national. The growing understanding that the essence of India’s social fabric was necessarily Hindu was not limited

¹³⁹ Ibid., 169-170. Majumdar specifically draws upon Keith Baker’s essay, “Enlightenment and the Institution of Society: Notes for a Conceptual History” (2001).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 166.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 184.

to Bengali intellectuals; commentary along these lines would have better supported the conflation of “Bengali” and “Indian” notions of *samaj*. The utility of religious belonging in particular in enabling a conceptual leap from what may have otherwise been exclusively Bengali notions of *samaj* and *samajik* (undergirded by language, for instance) to broader extra-regional notions is of crucial importance, warranting additional explanation.

I further suggest caution in labeling the collective endeavor of Bankim, Bhudev, Tagore, and other turn-of-the-century Bengali intellectuals as necessarily evincing an “anti-colonial political ethics,” a loaded description that does not attend to the complexities of the “moderate” period of Indian political thought.¹⁴² Though the impetus to reflect upon the Bengali/Indian *samaj* may have been prompted by increasing doubt about the beneficence of British domination, characterizing this effort as necessarily arising from an “anti-colonial political ethics” problematically overlooks the growing belief among many Hindu elites that their *samaj* urgently required reform before either an anticolonial *or* a nationalist agenda could be readily debated, assumed, or espoused. Though the colonial relationship was increasingly scrutinized at this time, they continued to regard British rule as an overall positive development for the country, a “divine dispensation” that would ideally enable India and its people to flourish. Attention to the highly nuanced politics of this period reveals that even though these elites were becoming increasingly dismayed by colonial domination, they maintained that the internal improvement and revitalization of the Hindu *samaj* could only meaningfully occur within and under the auspices of the British Raj.¹⁴³

¹⁴² See Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905,” on the misleading historiographical tendency to label the period from 1870-1905 of Indian politics as “moderate,” or in other words to approach it from the standpoint of a “built-in teleology in which all roads lead inexorably to the climax of 1947” (98). Moderate nationalism is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

¹⁴³ Following Sudipta Kaviraj and other scholars, I urge the importance of nuancing the rather unwieldy concept of “anticolonial nationalism.” See Kaviraj’s essay, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” in which he theorizes the existence of “a form of consciousness/discourse which is genetically related to mature

Manu Goswami's observations about the emergence of the cultural imagining of India as the specifically Hindu space "Bharat" help broaden Majumdar's more recent arguments. In her monograph *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Goswami traces how the cultural imagining of India came to be mapped onto the colonial state, and as a part of this endeavor explains the increasingly common association of the Puranic term "Bharat" as the authentic identity of the polity.¹⁴⁴ She explains that the conception of Bharat as a distinct national space that existed prior to the British colonial state—and yet was coterminous with it—emerged in north India in the 1860s and proliferated in numerous cultural works including popular histories and geographies, pedagogical texts, newspapers, pamphlets, literature, and songs.¹⁴⁵ By the turn of the century, such understanding had attained a "self-evident givenness" among upper-caste, middle-class Hindus in north India, Bengal, and other areas.¹⁴⁶ Goswami's theorization of Bharat as a Bakhtinian "chronotope" elucidates its highly overdetermined nature:

The category *chronotope*—which literally means time-space—refers to the dialectical co-constitution of spatial and temporal categories. Chronotopes are historically constituted and socially embedded space-time categories that have an exemplary, normative status. The doubled character of chronotopes as both social and

nationalism, but is distinctly different from it... though not nationalist in a strict sense, this consciousness is anti-colonial because there is hardly any doubt about its dark and anguished opposition to colonial domination, and the destiny it had imposed on Indian society" (178). My use of the term "anticolonial" accords with this sense of broad dissatisfaction and disenchantment with colonial rule.

¹⁴⁴ As Goswami explains, Bharat or Bharatvarsha were common Puranic terms, "deriv[ing] either from the mythical King Bharata, who was descendant of the first Manu (the androgynous first being of Puranic myths), or from the 'tribe' of Bharata, which figures centrally in Vedic and epic traditions" (156). The Puranas themselves were ancient Hindu texts consisting of "various Brahminical schemas about the origins of the world, its topographical ordering, sacred geography, and genealogies of gods, sages, and kings" (155). See *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁵ In her sixth chapter, "India as *Bharat*: A Territorial Nativist Vision of Nationhood, 1860-1880," Goswami examines numerous cultural works from the last third of the nineteenth century, including popular histories, geography texts, newspaper accounts, pedagogical works, native historiography, songs, and other cultural artifacts, that propagated the idea of India as Bharat. She locates the emergence of this potent cultural imagining specifically within the North-Western Provinces and Awadh, which were later designated as the United Provinces in 1935 and roughly correspond to the present-day Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (165-166). She also observes the coeval imagining of "Bharat Mata" arising in these areas as well as in Bengal.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

normative and their representational importance for ‘materializing time in space’ provide a useful optic for understanding the emergent conception of India as Bharat. The notion of Bharat was at once a historically specific formation and the locus of a normatively saturated emergent nationalist discourse. It was discursively forged by the self-conscious appropriation and transposition of at once British-colonial historical, geographical, and ethnological discourse as well as received Puranic chronotopes.¹⁴⁷

The explanation of Bharat as a chronotope reveals how it simultaneously indexed idealized perceptions of the past in both time (the Vedic era) and space (the geographic borders of the colonial state).¹⁴⁸ Using a popular Hindi history textbook first published in 1864 as a case-in-point, Goswami notes that the seemingly organic identification of India as Bharat resulted from a highly contrived process as Hindu writers appropriated the Puranic term in order to subvert dominant British historiography and vivify a subjugated people. While the sequence of Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs intrinsic to British Orientalist historiography was kept intact, the postulation of Bharat as a utopic, originary national space enabled, to borrow Goswami’s words, “the inversion of the enlightenment theme of progress into a narrative of decline from the pure wonders of an ancient space-time to the degradation and fragmentation constitutive of the present.”¹⁴⁹ Crucial to this reversal were the attribution of Bharat’s deterioration to the regrettable “invasion” of malevolent Muslim rulers as well as the suggestion that the polity remained unjustly subjugated under the British. Much as Henry Maine had feared, the insinuation that India’s originary condition as Bharat was in fact superior to—and more desirable than—both the intervening “Muslim” period and extant British rule in particular contested the progressive ethos intrinsic to the Raj’s trumpeted

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 171-172.

¹⁴⁸ See also R.C. Majumdar’s essay, “Nationalist Historians,” regarding the emphasis that English-educated Hindus placed on the Vedas and the Vedic period (420-422).

¹⁴⁹ Goswami, *Producing India*, 182.

civilizing mission.¹⁵⁰ As Goswami observes, “*Bharat* came to represent at once a geohistorically delimited national entity, a utopia realized in the ancient past, the exemplar for present political and social projects, and the object of national desire...The very capacity of the notion of *Bharat* to shuttle between a utopian and sociohistorical register endowed it with a robust and troubling endurance.”¹⁵¹

Both Majumdar and Goswami observe parallel processes by which extant cultural terms assumed new meanings for the purpose of rejuvenating a people that increasingly privileged religious belonging as the key determinant of personal identity.¹⁵² Goswami’s theorization about the rise of *Bharat* helpfully extends Majumdar’s arguments on the evolution of *samaj* in the Bengali sociocultural milieu by illustrating that the overall contemplative turn taken by the Bengali intellectual elite during the last third of the nineteenth century was not unique. Rather, Bengali elites’ quest for the quintessence of India’s social fabric—and the majoritarian determination that it was fundamentally Hindu—was part and parcel of a widespread phenomenon occurring throughout colonial India.¹⁵³ Goswami’s observations sharpen our understanding of Bengali notions of a transcendent Hindu *samaj* by identifying it by name, as “*Bharat*” and the coeval deification of the goddess

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 187-188.

¹⁵² As Romila Thapar and others have explained, Indian elites’ growing emphasis on religious belonging paralleled that of the colonial state, evincing the internalization of British Orientalist beliefs such as Indian history consisting of successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs. For Hindus, the formation of communities on these grounds would prove advantageous for lobbying the colonial government in terms it readily understood as well as for mobilizing a (false and inflated) majority of the population for particular political goals. See Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities?” 229.

¹⁵³ Goswami remarks that there was indeed a “remarkable convergence and robustness of emergent discourse on history, territory, and nation” across India (166). In addition to her close reading of Raja Shiva Prasad’s 1846 *Itihās Timirnasak* [*A History of India*], published in the United Provinces, Goswami examines geography texts, plays, songs, and other cultural works—many of which were produced in Bengal—that similarly evince the understanding that the various regions of India were part and parcel of the more transcendent entity of *Bharat* (190-193).

“Bharat Mata” [Mother India].¹⁵⁴ The lost “ideal of *Indian* civilization” that Majumdar identifies the Bengali literati projecting onto the past was, precisely, the utopia of a *Hindu* “Bharat” mapped onto the present-day contours of the British colonial state. The imagining of India as Bharat in different regions during this period, as Goswami shows, indexes a pervasive understanding among Hindus far and wide that the essence of the Indian social—its *samaj*—was inalienably Hindu in nature. This *samaj* urgently required rejuvenation in the present moment; such reform would occur not only through the Hindu community’s reflection about its past, present, and future, but also by means of positive reforms and developments promised by the colonial state.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the key figures, events, and ideas of British Orientalism from approximately the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries in order to elucidate why questions of history and historiography became crucial to English-educated Indian elites at the turn of the twentieth century. The ideology was enabled and sustained by a number of interlinked Eurocentric assumptions about positivist knowledge, European superiority, and a teleological view of history. Over time, British Orientalism had produced two very different pictures of the Indian past that informed the rise of the cultural imagining of Bharat starting in the mid-nineteenth century. The late eighteenth-century vision of Jones and his colleagues contended that India had once boasted a glorious Golden Age from which it had declined into a state of degeneracy; in the mid-nineteenth century German Indologist Max Müller affirmed that a mythic Aryan race was the progenitor of Europeans and Indians alike. In contrast, Mill, Macaulay, and Bentinck held that India was degenerate from its very origins;

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 198-203.

Mill's *History of British India* (1817) was critical in substantiating the British narrative that their occupation of India was dedicated to the improvement of the country and its people, with a special focus on the depraved Hindus. Most importantly, Mill introduced an influential chronology of Indian history as comprised of successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs that furthered the totalization of Hindu and Muslim communities and reified the British perception that their rule was necessary for India's development.

The rebellion of 1857 was pivotal node in British Orientalist discourse because it challenged the theoretical possibility that the British civilizing mission would one day conclude and India's "leading-strings" could be cut. Instead, the rebellion indurated both latent and overt racist beliefs among the British towards Indians. Blind to their own culpability and the complex material factors that contributed to the uprising, Britons became all the more certain of their superiority and right to rule indefinitely. In order to do so it was paramount to discern and emphasize difference (i.e., racial, religious, cultural) not only among the various Indian communities but also between themselves and their subjects. Crown Rule had established the institutional framework of the British imperial system in India, which by the turn of century had reached its apogee.¹⁵⁵

It was just as British Orientalism ossified in this manner that the Indian intelligentsia realized its generative possibilities. While Mill and Macaulay had sought to eviscerate the romantic notions of the early British Orientalists, such ideas endured within precisely those Indian elites whom they had been envisioned as Anglophilic "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." And now these interpreters increasingly began to appropriate select ideas for their own purposes—Ram Mohan Roy's praise of a Hindu

¹⁵⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 123.

Golden Age to motivate religious reform stands as an early example of English-educated Bengali writers taking up their pens for political and ideologically-driven endeavors. As I will show in subsequent chapters, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century nonfictional histories and historical romances became increasingly popular vehicles for the advancement of patriotic and proto-nationalist ideas centered on the emerging understanding of India as an originary Hindu space. Henry Maine's alarm about the rise of such writing in 1866 was indeed quite perceptive, as he had discerned very early on the palpable challenge to British rule being put forth.



Figure 2:
Lithograph that accompanied James Rennell's *Map of Hindoostan* (1782)

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CHAPTER 2
BANKIM CHATTOPADHYAY'S CHALLENGE TO BRITISH HISTORIOGRAPHY
IN *ANANDAMATH*

In the early 1880s, the writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay issued a clarion call to his fellow Bengalis. Much like Henry Maine's address to the University of Calcutta Senate in 1866, Bankim described a dire situation that required immediate redress:

A history of Bengal is needed, otherwise Bengalees would not become complete beings. A person who keeps thinking that his ancestors have not achieved anything of value will not achieve anything himself. He thinks that this defect in his blood has been inherited... Don't you think that there must be some true substance in the history of Bengal?

But from where can we get the true substance? Is there any history of Bengal? The British wrote plenty of books on the history of Bengal—Mr. Stewart's book is so voluminous and heavy that a strong, young man might be killed if it is thrown at him! Marshman and Lothbridge even earned a lot of money by writing the history of Bengal in a 'gossipy' style. But do these books contain any historical facts about Bengal? In our opinion, none of these books written by British authors contain a true history of Bengal. These books contain only the history of those Muslims who gave themselves worthless titles such as 'Bengali Badshah', 'Subedar of Bengal', etc.... But this is not the true history of Bengal—it is not even a partial history of Bengal... *A Bengalee who accepts this account as being Bengal's history is not a true Bengalee. A Bengalee who is ready to accept without question the validity of facts laid down by Muslims, who are not only blinded by self-pride, but are also liars and full of hatred for the Hindus, is himself not a Bengalee. [...]*

There is no history of Bengal. What goes by the name of it—that is no history. It is fiction—partly the account of the lives of a few worthless oppressors who were foreigners and belonged to a different religion. We need a history of Bengal otherwise there is no hope for Bengal. But who will write it? You will write it, I will write it, everyone will write this history. Whosoever is a Bengalee will write it. When the mother dies, there is so much joy in reminiscing about her! And this Bengal—the mother of all, the land of our birth—don't we find pleasure in talking about her?

Come, let us search for the history of Bengal. Whatever little is possible, let every individual do it... This is not to be done by one individual—it has to be done through collective effort...

How long has Europe been civilized? 400 years back in the fifteenth century Europe was even more uncivilised than us... The Mughals after conquering Bengal tightened their rule, but how far was their rule extended? They expanded their kingdom, but how far did they come? [...] When did the half of the indigenous population become Muslims? Why did they leave

*their religion? Why did they convert to Islam? Which castes converted to Islam? This is the most important information in the history of Bengal.*¹

This essay, “A Few Words about the History of Bengal,” was among several tracts that Bankim published in his journal *Bangadarshan* [“Glimpses of Bengal”] in which he expressed an urgent need for histories of Bengal authored by Bengalis that would contravene biased British accounts.² While Bankim subscribes to the Millian chronology of successive Hindu, Muslim, and British epochs, he rejects the notion that the Muslim and British eras were necessarily more enlightened and advanced than the earlier Hindu ones. Advancing the position that had so alarmed Henry Maine over a decade earlier, Bankim suggests the existence of a once-resplendent Bengal—now a frail and vulnerable “mother”—whose story has been neglected or otherwise distorted. For Bankim, what is now regarded as the history of Bengal is nothing more than a malevolent fiction that has done a profound disservice to its people; it is thus imperative that Bengalis join together to narrate the full and righteous story of their motherland. Bankim’s appeal is laden with pathos as he claims that their community stands to lose a great deal if they do not take up this project—their very identity and self-worth as a people hang in the balance. It is only by proudly claiming Bengali heritage and writing empowering stories about the “true substance” of Bengal, “the mother of all, the land of our birth,” that Bengalis will achieve true personhood and “become complete beings.”

Bankim’s plea is neither inclusive nor democratic. While at first glance he seems to suggest that *all* Bengalis are obliged to undertake this project, he subtly distinguishes those

¹ Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, “A Few Words about the History of Bengal (1882-3),” 142-143. Emphasis added. Ranajit Guha gives 1880 as the year of publication; see *Dominance without Hegemony*, 153.

² Bankim’s other essays about history published in *Bangadarshan* include “Bharat-kalamka” [“India Slandered”], “Bangalar Itihas” [“Bengal’s History”], “Bangalar Itihaser Bhagnangsha” [“A History of Bengal in Parts”], and “Bangalar Kalamka” [“Bengal Slandered”]. These essays were published in 1874, 1876, 1882, and 1884 respectively.

who are actually qualified and worthy of doing so. For Bankim, “true Bengalee[s]” are Hindus, a community that has been gravely injured by the derisive histories now in circulation. Such texts included Charles Stewart’s *The History of Bengal from the First Mohammedan Invasion until the Virtual Conquest of that Country by the English A.D. 1757* (1813) and John Clark Marshman’s *Outline of the History of Bengal Compiled for the Use of Youths in India* (1839). Yet Bankim does not denounce these British authors and instead directs his vitriol at the Mughal chroniclers whom, he claims, provided the basis for their false accounts. He further indicts not only the Muslims who “conquered” Bengal, but also those Hindus who converted to Islam and became likely collaborators with the Mughal regime. The author’s insistent questions about their conversion reflect his view that Bengal was an inherently Hindu space. For Bankim, an understanding of how the arrival of Muslims led to the deterioration of Hindu Bengal and why half of the indigenous population left the Hindu fold are among the key concerns that ought to drive this new historiography.

Bankim’s entreaty for histories of the “true substance” of Bengal reflects the steady alienation Bengali Hindus felt towards the British and their simultaneous scapegoating of Muslims as the root cause of India’s lamentable condition. While the Bengali *bhadralok* had historically supported the British regime, in recent decades they had become increasingly aggrieved by the racism directed against them as well as the overall exploitation of India.³ In

³ Bengalis’ reevaluation of their loyalty to the colonial regime is especially interesting considering that Bengal, and Calcutta in particular, had long been centers for British-Indian interaction. Bengal had remained passive during the rebellion, an ostensible demonstration of loyalty, but one that was also guided by a great degree of self-interest. Having internalized British Orientalism’s tenet of the degenerate nature of India, many Bengalis in the vein of Ram Mohan Roy believed that, on the whole, colonial rule was beneficial for Bengal. Well before Macaulay’s Minute of 1835 recommended English-medium schools in India’s urban areas, a contingent of elite Bengalis had helped establish Hindu College in 1817, the first English-language institution of higher learning in India. In addition, by the mid-nineteenth century, many *zamindars* [landholders] had profited considerably from the organizational schema established by the Bengal Permanent Settlement of 1793, which had endowed this group with the right to collect taxes on land that they now owned. See van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 83, and Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, 4.

addition to the ongoing British encroachment into the sacrosanct domestic space through legislation on women, Queen Victoria's pledge to her Indian subjects in her 1858 Proclamation that they would be "freely and impartially admitted to Offices in Our Service" had not been kept.⁴ Desirable jobs were scarce and difficult to attain. A famous example involved the brilliant Bengali Brahmin Surendranath Banerjea, who qualified for a coveted position with the Indian Civil Service (ICS) in the 1870s. Banerjea encountered several obstacles to assuming the post he had fairly earned, and ultimately served only three years in the ICS before being dismissed for a negligible infraction. Perceiving the true reason behind his discharge, Banerjea made the following observation: "I had suffered because I was an Indian. The personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people."⁵ British racism manifested on a wider scale in 1883 as a result of bitter controversy surrounding the Ilbert Bill, a proposed legislative measure that would have enabled Indian judges to preside over cases with British defendants.⁶ Colonial officials protested this proposal vehemently because, as described by one of them, "it [was] intensely distasteful and humiliating to all Europeans."⁷ A modified version of the bill that catered to the racist objections was ultimately passed in 1884, a striking blow to the *bhadralok* as well as Indian elites outside of the province. The furor over the Ilbert Bill was an important catalyst for the formation of the Indian National Congress two years later.⁸

Having risen to prominence in the early 1870s, Bankim played a central role in rehabilitating the Bengali sense of self in this tense environment. The son of a civil servant, Bankim was from a respectable Brahmin family and had enjoyed a top-notch education,

⁴ Queen Victoria, "Proclamation by the Queen in Council to the Princes, Chiefs, and People of India," 2.

⁵ Qtd. in Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 251-252.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁷ Qtd. in Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 120.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

having graduated from Presidency College and the newly established University of Calcutta.⁹ He was familiar with several schools of Western philosophy such as Comtean Positivism, French Socialism, and Benthamite Utilitarianism and regarded John Stuart Mill's writings on liberalism very highly.¹⁰ Bankim served the colonial government for over thirty years as a deputy collector and deputy magistrate, positions that provided him with first-hand experience with British mistreatment of Indians. In his early work he often satirized the Bengali "Babu," the sycophantic civil servant who unflinchingly accepted his supposed inferiority and tried to curry favor with his British superiors at every turn. In sharp contrast, Bankim was quite proud, even arrogant, and readily protested British abuse and prejudice. A particularly well-known incident occurred in 1873 when a British official, Lt. Colonel Duffin, assaulted Bankim because the writer had inadvertently interrupted his cricket game.¹¹ Bankim brought a civil suit against Duffin and won the case.

Though he readily protested objectionable British behavior, Bankim tolerated colonial rule because he was convinced of a net benefit to India, a view that he expressed throughout his oeuvre. Critics have argued that Bankim's literary career may be divided into two main periods due to an ideological shift the writer experienced in the early 1880s. In the early phase he championed British views about the underdeveloped state of India and the need for reform. He supported colonial intervention on the condition of Hindu women and the poor, and even supported certain draconian measures such as the all-India Vernacular Press Act of 1878.¹² Bankim also wrote a number of domestic novels about the travails of

⁹ Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 137.

¹⁰ Notably, J.S. Mill had called his father's *History of British India* "one of the most instructive histories ever written." Qtd. in C.H. Philips, "James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the History of India," 219. For Mill's own views on India and the necessity for Britain's "leading-strings," see his *Considerations of Representative Government* (1861).

¹¹ Lipner, "Introduction," 26.

¹² Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 157.

Bengali Hindu women who endured loveless marriages, philandering husbands, and other problems within their natal and marital homes. In his well-known 1879 essay “Samya” [Equality], the author addressed several long-standing, systemic inequalities within Bengali (Hindu) society. Influenced by J.S. Mill’s *Subjection of Women* (1869), Bankim indicted patriarchal Hindu thinking for the lifelong suffering of women, supporting their right to an education, inheritance, and just treatment in marriage.¹³ He additionally criticized Brahmins for abusing their position of authority within the Hindu fold. In what becomes a repeated theme in his work, he denounced the mistreatment of the poor and peasants by rapacious landlords stemming from the Bengal Permanent Settlement of 1793. An early example of Thomas Macaulay’s envisioned cohort of elite Indian “interpreters,” Bankim maintained that the Raj was both essential and justified as the introduction of certain technologies and political infrastructure could help in alleviating many sociocultural problems.

In the early 1880s, however, Bankim began to pursue his reformist goals in another manner. As suggested by his fervent appeal for authentic Bengali histories, Bankim increasingly began to stress the importance of reforming the Bengali (Hindu) community from within. Bankim’s ideological shift is usually traced to the year 1882, when he became embroiled in a contentious debate with a British clergyman, William Hastie, about the merits of Hinduism. Hastie had written an intensely vitriolic tract against the religion and Bankim prepared an equally incisive defense, what Tapan Raychaudhuri describes as the author’s “first uncompromising avowal of faith in Hinduism.”¹⁴ What might have been otherwise dismissed as yet another instance of British prejudice affected Bankim greatly.¹⁵ At this time

¹³ Majumdar, “A Conceptual History of the Social,” 173.

¹⁴ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 146.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145. As Raychaudhuri remarks, “The year 1882 marks a climacteric in Bankim’s literary career. Everything he wrote then on had a strong didactic overtone. His chosen task in this phase was to construct a

the writer repudiated “Samya” and distanced himself from the social concerns therein:

“‘Samya’ was all wrong and I will not re-publish it.”¹⁶ This disaffection may be attributed to Bankim’s realization of the utility of religion as a powerful tool with which to unify and rehabilitate the Bengali Hindu community. Tanika Sarkar explains this shift as follows:

As class, caste, and gender issues abruptly disappear from [Bankim’s] work, their relative absence is filled up in the eighties by a new and coherent problematic: What constitutes authentic Hinduism? What possibilities exist within the Hinduism of the past, and in the reauthenticated Hinduism of the future, for nation building? What precisely is the culpability of the Muslim in Indian history, and how and why had Hindu power capitulated to it? It is not that these problems were not reflected on in his earlier prose, but there they had locked horns with an equally powerful set of social concerns. Their centrality now becomes absolute and uncontested.¹⁷

As suggested by “A Few Words about the History of Bengal,” a new historiography about Bengal—one written by Bengali Hindus that would serve as a corrective to British accounts—was critical to this endeavor of strengthening the Hindu fold.

Although the goal of reforming the Bengali community *through* religion compelled Bankim to moderate his support for the colonial regime and its liberal reforms, it is important to note that he did not abandon these views entirely.¹⁸ Rather, from this point forward Bankim refracted his Westernized beliefs about the benefits of colonial rule through the prism of a reformed Hinduism to which he would contribute substantially. In this more solemn period of his career, in both his fiction and nonfiction, Bankim urged solidarity among Bengali Hindus, reifying the growing emphasis on religious affiliation as the primary determinant of personal identity and group belonging. Alongside other Bengali intellectuals who were increasingly reflecting on the nature, purpose, and future of the Hindu *samaj* at this

philosophy of life, a system of discipline which could be the basis of national regeneration. He projected this new ideology as essential Hinduism, the ultimate in man’s religious experience.”

¹⁶ Qtd. in Majumdar, “A Conceptual History of the Social,” 173.

¹⁷ Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 172.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139. See also Majumdar, “A Conceptual History of the Social,” 174.

moment, Bankim believed that the primary way in which the Hindu community of late nineteenth-century Bengal could be mobilized was through a shared understanding of an inspiring past, one in which Hindus contributed significantly to the development of major political events. To this end, Bankim used the emerging genre of the historical novel as his instrument of choice to mythologize and propagate ideas of past Hindu grandeur. Of the fourteen novels he produced over his career, half can be considered historical novels, most of which were situated in the somewhat-familiar-yet-no-so-recent past of the mid-to-late eighteenth century when the authority of the Mughal Empire was waning and the British East India Company was assuming matters of state.¹⁹ During Bankim's lifetime his association with the historical novel was so strong that he was even hailed the "Scott of Bengal."²⁰

Anandamath [*The Abbey of Bliss*] was Bankim's most famous historical novel and a powerful contribution to his call for rousing historical narratives about Bengal. The text appeared serially from 1881-1882 in his journal *Bangadarshan* and was met with instant popular acclaim and commercial success. But for Bankim the novel was by no means final—he continued to revise it over the next decade and published it in book form a total of five times.²¹ Turning to the mid-to-late eighteenth century, Bankim fictionalizes the British assumption of power in Bengal in a way that allows him to portray Hindu heroes and

¹⁹ T.W. Clark, "Bengali Prose Fiction Up to Bankimcandra," 66.

²⁰ Priya Joshi, *In Another Country*, 147.

²¹ I rely on Julius Lipner's 2005 translation of the fifth edition of *Anandamath*, which is considered the standard edition. This version was published in November 1892, about fifteen months before Bankim died in April 1894. Lipner has done a tremendous service to scholarship on *Anandamath* by providing an extremely thorough and insightful Introduction and Critical Apparatus alongside his translation. He admirably undertook the painstaking task of determining the various changes that Bankim made to the novel from 1882-1892, and mentions the important variants of the novel in the Critical Apparatus. There were a total of six versions of *Anandamath* released during Bankim's lifetime: the initial serial version published in *Bangadarshan* from 1881-1882; the first edition (December 1882); the second edition (July 1883); the third edition (April 1886); the fourth edition (December 1886); and the fifth and final edition (November 1892). By the beginning of the twentieth century, *Anandamath* had been translated into the major Indian languages; see Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Anandamath: A Political Myth," 903.

heroines having agency in the formal launch of British rule in the province. In Bankim's account, the East India Company did not assume authority over Bengal after the battles of Plassey and Buxar but rather functioned as a mere tool of a corrupt Mughal regime. The plot focuses on the efforts of an underground brotherhood of Hindu ascetics who engage in banditry and violence in the service of a "Mother" goddess that symbolizes Bengal. They direct their aggression against the local Mughal *nawab* whom they hold responsible for the enslavement of the Mother and the concomitant misery of Bengal, a microcosm of the Hindu nation at large.

Although the brotherhood ultimately succeeds in routing the local Mughal power, a mysterious divine sage instructs them to sanction the establishment of temporary British rule. Doing so, the sage prophesizes, will enable Hindus to learn the worldly skills that they lack and rehabilitate their religion, which has become degenerate. In time, the godlike figure promises, Hindus will become qualified to assume their own governance. By portraying the British rise to power as a contingent event that occurred with the consent of Hindus, Bankim achieves two paramount goals. One, he empowers his readers to perceive British rule strategically, as a regime that ought to be both amicable and beneficial to India. Two, Bankim subtly cautions the British to heed their promises and pretenses of benevolent governance lest Hindus decide to withdraw their willful "acceptance" of foreign rule and rise to contest their authority.

Critics have identified *Anandamatl's* vilification of Muslims of all ranks, the portrayal of valiant Hindu men and women who contest Mughal rule, and the anthem "Bande Mataram" as significant contributions to the emergent discourses of Indian anticolonialism and nationalism. Likewise, they have explored the political import of the ascetics' begrudging acceptance of temporary British rule that marks the story's anticlimactic ending. However,

less attention has been paid to *Anandamath* as a *historical* novel and the way in which genre contributed to its efficacy as a foundational text of Indian patriotism and communalism. According to Georg Lukács, who attended exclusively to European historical novels, the genre should portray ordinary characters as authentically as possible in order for the reader to better understand ostensibly stable events of the past and their impact upon the present without unnecessary bias.²² In stark contrast, Bankim's *Anandamath* demonstrates the capacity of the historical novel to turn to the past as a blank and inviting canvas, an underdetermined space in which heroes could be created and key incidents reconfigured. With such a potent tool in hand, Bankim not only undermined the supposedly providential nature of British colonialism, he also galvanized Bengali Hindus to work towards a specific vision of the future, one in which their homeland would reclaim its past majesty as Bharat.

The Rise of Bengali Historiography

The evolution of Bengali historical discourse over the nineteenth century elucidates the popularity of historical novels and romances for writers such as Bankim and the effectiveness of this kind of writing in propagating the concept of Bharat. The first three works of high-quality narrative prose in Bengali were histories commissioned by Fort William College for the training of Company officials.²³ Partha Chatterjee has made the

²² See Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, 40.

²³ Scholars of Bengali literature have explained that while the language boasted a considerable tradition in verse, the same was not true for prose. At the end of the eighteenth century, Bengali was actually only one of seven languages spoken in Calcutta; the other six were Arabic, English, Hindustani, Portuguese, Persian, and Sanskrit; see Clark, "Bengali Prose Fiction," 23. While Bengali was the mother tongue of the majority of Calcutta's inhabitants, it was not spoken widely outside of the domestic setting. Government, commerce, and the law required knowledge of Persian and English; religious matters were conducted in Sanskrit and Arabic. In the late eighteenth century, a number of institutes had been established in Calcutta for teaching English, the knowledge of which promised prestige, social advancement, and desirable employment. It would not be until the middle of nineteenth century that Bengali was readily recognized as a language apt for literary expression in prose. By this point, the Bengali vocabulary had expanded considerably, its form and spelling were standardized, and

crucial point that while the Brahmins who authored these texts were employees of the Company and their work helped expand colonial knowledge, their “historiographical allegiances [were] entirely pre-colonial.”²⁴ These histories were composed in the Puranic mode, which focused on the activities of gods and kings and posited that a ruler’s adherence to *dharma* [righteous thought and action] determined his success or failure. If a ruler was *dharmic*, he (most rulers discussed in the Puranic mode were men) would be rewarded with a long reign, and if he was not, the god(s) would ensure his removal from power.²⁵ It was precisely the Puranic mode’s inclusion of what Ranajit Guha identifies as “mythic genealogies, sacred geographies, and...divine intervention[s]” that James Mill had so intensely derided, prompting his summary dismissal of India as a polity without history, both in the sense of a lack of records as well as incidents worth documenting.²⁶

Mrityunjay Vidyalankar’s *Rajabali* (1808) is the most well-known of these early Puranic histories.²⁷ *Rajabali* begins with chronological and geographical descriptions of the ancient past according to Hindu mythology. Vidyalankar comments that the present period is that of the *Kaliyuga*, loosely defined as the era of bad times or vice, and proceeds to tell the history of *Bharatvarsa*, located on a continent-like island called *Jambudvīpa*. He juxtaposes mythical figures such as King Yudhisthira from the epic *Mahabharata* alongside actual historic personages such as “Sekander Shah” [Alexander the Great] and the Mughal Emperor

punctuation introduced; see Clark, “Bengali Prose Fiction,” 60. A burgeoning public sphere with numerous presses, newspapers, and periodicals further aided in the development of Bengali prose literature by providing a forum for up-and-coming writers to test their abilities and talents and find receptive audiences for their work. Bankim’s literary journal *Bangadarshan*, founded in 1872, was a particularly important vehicle for the development of Bengali prose; see Clark, “The Role of Bankimcandra in the Development of Nationalism,” 429-430.

²⁴ Partha Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 107.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁶ Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 181.

²⁷ The other two histories were Ramram Basu’s *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra* (1801) and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyay’s *Maharaj Krishnachandra Rayasya Charitram* (1805). See Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 177.

Akbar.²⁸ Vidyalkar even tells his readers the names of future rulers, the duration of their reigns, and where they will reside. As Partha Chatterjee observes, “Myth, history and the contemporary—all become part of the same chronological sequence; one is not distinguished from another; the passage from one to another, consequently, is entirely unproblematical.”²⁹ In this grand schema, political reigns begin and conclude depending on a particular ruler’s adherence to *dharma*. Brahmins were responsible for helping guide kings towards *dharmic* action and their absence or failure to perform this duty bore great consequences. According to Vidyalkar, the advent of the Mughal Empire came about due to the lack of such advisors in India: “Now there were no more such [dharmic] Brahmins and, bereft of their advice, the kings of this country lost divine grace and were all defeated by the Yavanas.”³⁰ Although Vidyasagar perceives the Mughal Empire as foreign [“Yavanas”], and occasionally refers to its rulers as “Musalmans,” the Mughals have not yet been rendered into the overdetermined category of evil, invasive “Muslims.”

If the Mughal Empire advanced because of Hindu rulers’ failures, British rule comes about due to the iniquity of the last Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. Here *Rajabali* is particularly striking because such thinking intersected with the extant British perception that its occupation of India was a matter-of-fact, desirable, and even providential event. As Richard King and Peter van der Veer have pointed out, during the turn of the century, British rhetoric about the previous glory of India and the need for contemporary reform did in fact reconcile with the Brahmanical belief that the present era was that of the *Kaliyuga*.³¹ Likewise, though Vidyalkar relays the history of Bharatvarsa, the term has not yet been mapped

²⁸ Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 106, 109.

²⁹ Ibid., 107.

³⁰ Qtd. in Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 108. “Yavanas” can be loosely defined as “foreigners.”

³¹ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 7. See also King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 101-103.

onto the colonial state or imbued with patriotic fervor. As Chatterjee explains, “*Rajabali* is not a national history because its protagonists are gods and kings, not peoples. The bonds of ‘nation-ness’ which would justify the identification of the historian with the consciousness of a solidarity that is supposed to act itself out in history have not yet been imagined.”³²

While Bengali histories written in the early nineteenth century largely reconciled with the British assumption that India’s historical advance was necessarily teleological and ameliorative, there was a marked shift in the post-rebellion era when the new Indian literati increasingly began to challenge the supposedly providential introduction of British rule.³³ Eschewing Puranic histories’ sacral temporal framework, Indian writers began to adopt the modern rational historiographical method and plotted events in desacralized “homogenous empty time.”³⁴ But despite demonstrating such features, these histories continued to editorialize and attend to contingencies and the conditions of possibility for certain pivotal events. Not surprisingly, the circumstances surrounding the East India Company’s gradual political takeover in the late eighteenth century was of particular concern because it

³² Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 110. While Chatterjee’s point is well-taken from the standpoint of Vidyalkar’s position as a Brahmin scholar employed by East India Company officials to write a history of India, the Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* occupy a similar national-mythical realm.

³³ Other examples of the Bengali literati presenting British rule as pre-ordained include essays written by Hindu College students in 1828 in response to the question, “Has Europe or Asia benefited most by the discovery of the passage round the Cape of Good Hope to India?” One such essay claimed that “...the Natives suffered the most mortifying proofs of [Mohammedan tyrants’] cruelties, until Providence, to avert the evil, brought them under the illustrious sway of the English, who not only freed this country from their hands, but have adopted all possible measures for its amelioration, introducing arts, sciences, schools, academies and colleges for the dissemination of knowledge.” Qtd. in Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 170. In addition, an 1859 Bengali translation of a British history on India includes a eulogy to Providence for arrival of the East India Company and its cessation of extant anarchy and corruption; see Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 111.

³⁴ Drawing on Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson characterizes homogenous, empty time as having a new emphasis on simultaneity which is “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.” Homogenous empty time is critical for nation-making due to its placement of all individuals along a uniform temporal axis that is linear and forward-moving. Though many individuals will never meet or interact, the knowledge that others are collectively and simultaneously experiencing both time and space in the same manner helps equalize and bind disparate individuals as one collectivity. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24-25.

eventually led to Crown Rule.³⁵ Later Bengali historians exploited the relatively underdetermined nature of this episode by equivocating on those responsible for this event, at times faulting solely the Mughal Empire or the Company, and sometimes both. For example, a history published in 1869 states outright that if Mir Jafar had not deceived the Nawab of Bengal, Colonel Robert Clive would not have won the battle of Plassey so easily.³⁶ A text published three years later similarly asserted, “If this battle had continued for some time, then Clive would surely have lost. But fortune favoured the English, and weakened by the betrayal of Mir Jafar, the Nawab was defeated and Clive was victorious.”³⁷ Similarly, a popular textbook written by Krishnachandra Ray highlighted the federal nature of the Mughal Empire, whose imperial center in Delhi had become too feeble to defend its borders properly:

Most people criticise Clive for these heinous acts, but according to him there is nothing wrong in committing villainy when dealing with villains...

‘The land belongs to him who has force on his side.’ It is from this time that the Company stopped being a revenue collector and really became the ruler. *If the*

³⁵ A quick sketch of how the East India Company assumed power in Bengal will help one appreciate the innovative departures of these Bengali histories. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Company was one of several European entities that conducted commercial activity in India under the auspices of the Mughal authorities. The Company enjoyed considerable profits by creating markets in Britain for Indian goods such as spices, saltpeter, and especially textiles. Trade in Bengal was particularly lucrative and by 1750, 75 percent of the Company’s stores came from the region. After the death of the last effective Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the Company began to expand its trading privileges and amassed power through calculated dealings with local Indian rulers. As the battle at Plassey in 1757, Colonel Robert Clive defeated the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula, and installed the puppet ruler Mir Jafar who had defected from the Mughal regime. Three years later, the British replaced Mir Jafar with his son-in-law Mir Kasim, who soon sought to revive the authority of the Nawab over the Company. At the battle of Buxar, Clive defeated an alliance comprised of Mir Kasim, the Nawab of Awadh, and the Mughal Emperor himself. The British victory at Buxar in 1764 was decisive because the Company was empowered to demand the “diwani,” or tax-collecting rights, for the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa in 1765. The Company’s increase in available capital resulting from the diwani was such that it no longer needed to import bullion from Britain for trade. In the late eighteenth century, Hastings formalized the importance of Bengal when he established Calcutta as the capital of the Company. As it continued to annex Indian princely states until the mid-nineteenth century, the Company maintained the pretense of acting in the name of the defunct Mughal Emperor. In 1858 Queen Victoria initiated Crown Rule, formalizing British authority over the polity in the wake of the cataclysmic Rebellion of 1857. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 47-56 and Colley, *Captives*, 246-249.

³⁶ Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 111.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Emperor [in Delhi] had been strong, there would have been a huge incident over this. But there was nothing left [to the Empire]. Whatever Hastings decided, happened...

*If this country had been under the dominion of one powerful ruler, or if the different rulers had been united and friendly towards one another, then the English would never have become so powerful here and this country would have remained under the Musalman kings. Perhaps no one in this country would have ever heard of the English.*³⁸

Ray's history, published in 1870 but written shortly after the rebellion, mentions several conditions that made the Company's seizure of power possible in the eighteenth century: the British transgressed their rights as traders; the Mughal center was weak; and local rulers lacked solidarity. Ray urges his readers to speculate that if perhaps just one of these circumstances had not been at play, the current political landscape might have been vastly different. Not coincidentally, Ray's history is entitled *Bharatbarser Itibas* [*A History of India*], one of the earliest Bengali works to advance the idea of India as the righteously Hindu space Bharat. But despite its national title and accusation that the Company achieved power illegitimately, *Bharatbarser Itibas* concludes by acknowledging the benefits of British rule: "In any case, whatever the means by which the English have come to acquire this sprawling kingdom, it must be admitted that infinite benefits have been effected by them to this country."³⁹ Thus while Ray's history sought to inculcate patriotism and pride in India as Bharat, his text was *not* nationalist in the sense of promoting either the ejection of the British or the establishment of indigenous governance.

Bharatbarser Itibas was among several nonfictional works during this period that advanced seemingly irreconcilable ideas: the portrayal of India as Bharat, the illegitimacy of the British, and the need to embrace colonial rule. These scenarios could only coexist if the Mughal Empire became an overdetermined social category, that of invading "Muslims," such

³⁸ Qtd. in Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism," 111-112. Emphasis added.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 112.

that it would become possible to compare them with the British. During this period the burgeoning conception of India as Bharat and ongoing dialogue about reforming Hinduism led to the convenient scapegoating of Muslims as the culprit of India's decline from its previously ascendant state. The present condition of Hindu women was primary in indexing this descent. Rather than restrictive patriarchal beliefs endemic to the community, it was suggested that the need to protect Hindu women from the noxious influence of Islam had caused their gradual retreat into domestic spaces from roles of greater influence and prestige outside. For example, in his influential history, also entitled *Bharatbarser Itibas* [*The History of India*] (1858), Bengali historian Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay asserted that, "Today we find Hindu women treated like slaves, enclosed like prisoners and as ignorant as beasts. But if we look a millennium and a quarter earlier, we will find that women were respected, educated and largely unconstrained. Where was child marriage then? No one married before the age of twenty-four."⁴⁰

Tarinicharan's discussion demonstrates the ongoing abstraction of women as symbols of Hindu cultural identity during this period. Like many other Hindu literati at this moment, he insinuates that Muslims are ultimately responsible for objectionable Hindu practices concerning women.⁴¹ Tarinicharan encourages his readers to compare the depravities that resulted from the arrival of the "Muslims" with those of the British, who are then instantly rendered the lesser of two evils. The present humiliation experienced under

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism," 118.

⁴¹ For another example of a Hindu scapegoating Muslims for Hindu traditions concerning women, see Raja Shiva Prasad's history *Itibas Timirnasak* [*A History of India*], which was originally composed in Hindi and published in Allahabad in 1864. Prasad states the following: "The expansion of the Muslim religion and rule did not just inaugurate an unprecedented era of massacres, robberies, the razing of temples and new forms of slavery [gulami], but led to a profound transformation of the customs and way of life of Hindus. The cruelty, coercive force, and decadence of Muslims drowned us. It marked the beginning of such practices as female infanticide, the imprisonment of young girls within their homes, and the use of *purdah* [veil] among women." Qtd. in Goswami, *Producing India*, 183.

the British thus becomes a small price to pay for the supposed cessation of the depravity that would have persisted had the Mughals remained in power. Some Bengalis even lavished effusive praise on the British for ending tyrannical “Muslim” rule and providing a path for Bharat to develop as a modern nation and reclaim its latent ascendancy.⁴²

Late nineteenth-century Bengali historians’ emphasis upon the particular contingencies and circumstances surrounding pivotal events betrays an evolving understanding of historiography as a profoundly political act, one that was as biased as it was empowering. The ability to turn to crucial events of the past and stress the factors that led to certain outcomes allowed them to moderate—and at times contest—the many essentialisms that justified India’s colonization such as the innate depravity of Hindus and the inevitability of British rule. The burgeoning genre of late nineteenth-century Bengali historical novels and romances, I suggest, was part and parcel of this larger endeavor to offer uplifting narratives about a glorious Hindu homeland that would undermine demeaning British accounts and unite Hindus across the colonial state. As a seemingly fixed past transformed into a fluid and underdetermined space, Bengali writers were emboldened to project strategic anachronisms onto it, such as a unified Hindu polity or strong and virile Hindu men, that would serve as exemplars for the present. Portrayals of Indian agency and bravery alongside the clear

⁴² In 1876 Bholanath Chakravarti delivered a lecture at the Brahma Samaj in which he held Muslims fully responsible for India’s deplorable state and praised the British for ending their rule: “The misfortunes and decline of this country began on the day the Yavana flag entered the territory of Bengal. The cruelty of the Yavana rule turned this land to waste...The resumption of good fortune was initiated on the day the British flag was first planted on this land. Tell me, if Yavana rule had continued, what would the condition of this country have been today? It must be loudly declared that it is to bless us that *Isvara* [God] has brought the English to this country. British rule has ended the atrocities of the Yavanas...There can be no comparison between Yavana rule and British rule: the difference seems greater than that between darkness and light or between misery and bliss.” Like Tarinicharan, Bholanath finds Muslims responsible for the repression of Hindu women: “In order to protect women from the attacks of Yavanas, they were locked up inside their homes.” Qtd. in Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism,” 114.

message that alternative outcomes were, in fact, quite close to materializing helped assuage present humiliations.

Anandamath's Alternate History

In the ensuing analysis of *Anandamath* I build upon Ranajit Guha's claim that the process of "historicization" in colonial Bengal was analogous to the process of "novelization" in the European context. In *Dominance without Hegemony*, Guha draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of the differences between the epic and the novel and the tendency of the novel, when it becomes preeminent, to "novelize" other genres. For Bakhtin, "novelization" entails the present as the narrative point of departure; a new focus on individuals as those with complex subjectivities; and the introduction of "an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the opened present)."⁴³ Developing Bakhtin's ideas, Guha argues:

In our culture the demolition of the absolute past of the Purāna began with historicization rather than with novelization (although the two were soon to join forces and deliver a *coup de grace*). The first three historical works in Bangla are all witness to that beginning. Although interlarded with Puranic elements, they all have the present as their point of departure.⁴⁴

While Guha is correct that historicization in colonial Bengal corresponds to novelization in Europe, it would be premature to date the inception of historicization to the three histories commissioned by Fort William College.⁴⁵ Using Vidyalkar's *Rajabali* as a representative

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," 7.

⁴⁴ Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 182.

⁴⁵ Relevant to the development of the Bengali novel, there is a bit of ambiguity regarding whether these three works, which were indeed the first three works of history in the Bengali language, were also the first works of narrative prose in the language. Ranajit Guha quotes William Carey, professor Bengali and Sanskrit at Fort William College, who claims the following: "When [my] appointment was made, I saw that I had a very important charge committed to me, and no books or helps of any kind to assist me. I therefore set about compiling a grammar, which is not half printed. I got Ram Boshu to compose a history of one of their kings, *the first prose book ever written in the Bengali language*; which we are also printing." See Guha, *Dominance without*

case, Guha, I suggest, overemphasizes the presumption of the present in these works. Far more than being merely “interlarded” with Puranic elements, the historiographical allegiances of these early histories are wholly Puranic in nature. Resonant with Bakhtin’s theorization on the epic, these Puranic histories focus on the “absolute past”—the present moment is neither germane nor apparent. Manu Goswami similarly observes that *Rajabali* demonstrates Puranic conceptions of space as “absolute, concentric, and open” and that of time as “divinely ordained and fundamentally qualitative.”⁴⁶ A more accurate marker of the beginning of historicization in colonial Bengal, I suggest, was the emerging understanding of India as Bharat in the post-1857 period because such texts necessarily approached the past from the standpoint of the present as a moment of rupture.

Though he does not elaborate on this point, Guha is correct that in colonial Bengal historicization and novelization united to deliver a *coup de grace* to the Puranic mode. I detect this partnership emerging, again, within post-1857 Bengali histories, which posited India as a righteously Hindu space and stressed the circumstances surrounding particular events. By doing so these texts addressed the need to reject the “absolute past” of the Puranic mode and focus on the present as a moment of crisis.⁴⁷ As can be expected, Bengali historical novels and romances were especially successful in this endeavor due to fiction’s ability to defy fact or that which has been presented as Truth. These emerging genres readily

Hegemony, 182. Emphasis added. T.W. Clark’s observation that these three texts were the first works of fluid, high-quality prose seems more accurate: “What they wrote was prose, the first prose with literary promise ever written in Bengali; and as such what they did is historically important, as all first things are important.” See Clark, “Bengali Prose Fiction,” 26.

⁴⁶ Goswami, *Producing India*, 161.

⁴⁷ Bakhtin observes that the fictive worlds of epics, contrary to novels, occurred in the “epic past” or “absolute past”: “The epic past is called the ‘absolute past’ for good reason: it is both monochronic and valorized (hierarchical); it lacks any relativity, that is, any gradual, purely temporal progressions that might connect it with the present. It is walled off absolutely from all subsequent times, and above all from those times in which the singer and his listeners are located. This boundary, consequently, is immanent in the form of the epic itself and is felt and heard in its every word.” See Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” 15-16.

incorporated elements of Puranic histories, Hindu epics, contemporary British histories, and other literary forms for strategic political purposes. The result was a highly intergeneric, hybrid fictional text that contested the Millian historiographical chronology and persuasively forged the collective imagining of India as Bharat.

The most famous historical novel of colonial Bengal, Bankim's *Anandamath* is the premier example of this trend. The portrayal of a band of militant Hindu ascetics fighting for an enslaved Mother not only offered a seductive vision of Bharat, it provided inspiring Hindu heroes and heroines for Bankim's readers to admire and emulate. The writer's success in conveying these messages was a function of his shrewd use of the historical romance as a fluid and adaptable medium for conveying compelling visions of the past that spoke to the crises of the present. Bankim skillfully expresses the need for a robust Hinduism—in which patriotism is rendered a key tenet—by situating exemplars of this creed in the past. By being thus “weighted” by time, the ascetics' service to the Mother elicits great reverence and becomes a parable for Bengali Hindus to heed in the current moment. Though they reluctantly “permit” British rule for the time being, their brief taste of victory over the inept Mughal regime inspires Bankim's readers to similarly protect the Hindu *samaj* from peril. Perhaps most important, the novel empowers Bengali Hindus to regard British rule strategically. Since their forebears consented to British governance, Bengali Hindus may determine when their rule is no longer beneficial and withdraw their blessings accordingly.

Bankim wastes no time in conveying his brand of Hindu religiosity imbued with patriotism. Both the extradiegetic Dedication and Prologue stress the necessity of devotion and perseverance, the first of several confluences of the religious and political in *Anandamath*. The Dedication includes a passage from the *Bhagavad Gita* in which Krishna speaks to his disciple Arjun about the deliverance that an individual realizes when he or she becomes fully

transfixed upon him: “I soon become their Deliverer, Partha—those whose minds abide in Me—From the ocean of repeated death.”⁴⁸ Krishna’s instruction to “Fix your senses only on Me, set your mind on Me” foreshadows the intense dedication with which the ascetics pursue the Mother’s cause, particularly their willingness to renounce their roles as husbands and fathers in order to fully embrace their duties as *santans* [children of the Mother].

The foregrounding of Krishna in the Dedication reflects the deity’s overall prominence in the novel. Though the ascetics fight on behalf of the Mother, they actually belong to the Vaishnava sect of Hinduism and revere Krishna.⁴⁹ Their veneration of this particular god reflects Bankim’s careful emphasis and embellishment of certain aspects of an amorphous Hindu tradition for self-serving ends. Having been drawn to Krishna since he was a child, Bankim reconfigured the deity to provide a role model for subjugated Bengalis.⁵⁰ Eschewing popular folk tales about the mischievous boy who would steal butter and harass milkmaids, Bankim emphasized Krishna’s qualities as the dignified hero and divine counselor of the *Mahabharata* who helped Arjun realize that his *dharma* lay in fighting his kin to reclaim his kingdom. In *Anandamath*, the ascetics similarly educate Mahendra Simha, a

⁴⁸ Bankimcandra Chattopadhyay, *Anandamath, or The Sacred Brotherhood*, 127. “Partha” is one of the twelve names of Arjun, the hero of the Hindu epic the *Mahabharata*. Krishna is one of the ten avatars of the supreme Lord Vishnu who manifests himself in the world in times of darkness, i.e., when dharma has disappeared and “adharmā” [iniquity, corruption] has become rampant.

⁴⁹ Gavin Flood explains that in early Vaishnava traditions, devotees tended to cluster either around Vishnu or Vishnu’s eighth incarnation, Krishna. There was in fact a “Krsnaism” tradition in which Krishna was considered far more than a mere incarnation of Vishnu but the actual Transcendent Being or Godhead. The brotherhood appears to occupy a middle ground; while they revere worship both Vishnu and Krishna, they find the latter especially significant. See Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 117.

⁵⁰ Bankim developed his critiques on Hinduism in his religious commentaries *Krsnacaritra* (1886), *Dharmatattva* (1888), and the posthumously published *Srimadbhagavadgita*. In *Dharmatattva*, Bankim critiques the abstract dictums of Vedantism, positing a basic human need for inspiring anthropomorphized deities: “Religion in its fullness cannot be found in the quality-less god of the Vedanta, because he who is without qualities cannot be an example to us... There can be no complete religion in the worship of a philosophical or scientific deity. The basis of religion is a God with qualities, such as in mentioned in our Puranas and in the Christian Bible, because He and He only can be our model. The worship of an impersonal god is sterile; only the worship of a personal God has meaning to man.” Qtd. in Clark, “The Role of Bankimcandra in the Development of Nationalism,” 432.

figure who stands in for the ideal (or representative) Bengali man; they teach him the lessons of a revitalized, muscular Hinduism in which love of the homeland is a primary tenet. Corresponding to Krishna's role in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the ascetics urge Mahendra to recognize that his *dharma* resided in joining their campaign to liberate the Mother. Thus despite his depiction of a specific Hindu sect, Bankim strives to unify the Hindu community as a whole behind the political cause of defending the homeland with Krishna serving as both guide and conduit. As Bankim wrote later in life, "We are Hindus; we are not members of a particular sect. I did not say this in support of a particular sect, I said this in support of the Hindu race."⁵¹

While the Dedication conveys the necessity of sacral devotion by referencing a well-known passage of the *Gita*, the Prologue uses pathos. The narrator describes a vast, dark, and eerie forest bereft of the usual sylvan activities. But from within this silence, "a voice was heard: 'Will my heart's desire never be fulfilled?'" This question is repeated before an answer, from an equally mysterious source, is offered:

Then, an answer came: "What will you pledge in return?"⁵²
 "The pledge is my life, my all," was the reply.
 "Life is trifling; anyone can give up their life."
 "What else is there? What else can I offer?"
 And the answer came: "Dedication."⁵³

Like Krishna, this enigmatic entity demands devotion. The cryptic nature of this exchange, with unidentified agents addressing one another in a dark forest, lends to a dramatic and foreboding scene evocative of the supernatural. Yet Julius Lipner's translation of *bhakti* in the original as "dedication" belies the intense religiosity manifest in this exchange and the

⁵¹ Bankim made these remarks in his 1873 review of Rajnarain Basu's well-known treatise *Hindudharmer Sresthata* [*The Superiority of the Hindu Religion*]. Qtd. in Lipner, "Introduction," 22.

⁵² This particular line is admittedly quite confusing in context. The speaker is presumably the Mother, but the statement is not an answer but a question. The exchange only makes sense if this line is ignored or modified to this effect: "Then, a new question came: 'What will you pledge to me?'"

⁵³ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 129-130.

Prologue as a whole. Though not yet apparent to the reader, this reply comes from the enslaved Mother goddess who demands liberation. Here Bankim had used the Bengali/Hindi word *bhakti* [devotion], which provides a better sense of the type of intense religious devotion being summoned.⁵⁴ For the Mother whose “heart’s desire” is blighted, the sacrifice of one’s life is negligible compared to wholehearted devotion to her cause on a mass level. The juxtaposition of the Dedication and Prologue is telling because the Mother’s demand for *bhakti* suggests that, like Krishna, she is similarly divine. Consequently even before the novel opens Bankim intimates that the Hindu homeland is not an object but a subject deserving of *bhakti*, whether construed locally as Bengal or broadly as Bharat. The purpose of *Anandamath* may thus be considered analogous to those of holy texts such as the *Gita* or the Bible due to its didactic aims of inculcating proper religious beliefs and providing models for righteous, *dharmic* behavior.

Alongside Hindu religious doctrine, Bankim freely manipulated elements of the mid-to-late eighteenth-century historical record to promote patriotism. Similar to the post-1857 histories discussed earlier, *Anandamath* turns to a relatively underdetermined yet pivotal period in Bengali history, when the Mughal Empire’s authority was waning and the Company began assuming matters of governance. In addition to stressing the contingencies of particular episodes, Bankim retells key incidents by mixing fact and fiction liberally. Among the events that Bankim reimagines are the British assumption of the *divani*, the catastrophic Bengali famine of 1770, and the Sannyasi Rebellion. Historical figures both well-known and obscure—e.g., Warren Hastings and Captain Thomas—become fictional

⁵⁴ In his prodigious *Critical Apparatus* Lipner explains that at the time Bankim was writing *Anandamath* his understanding of *bhakti* was changing to encompass worldly objects and concerns as part and parcel of one’s love of God: “Love of self, of family, of society, of country, and of all sentient beings was to be incorporated in one’s love of God. . . . Thus service of and love for one’s country (itself a complex idea) is a necessary and superior facet of *bhakti*, and it partakes of the all-consuming nature of *bhakti per se*” (235).

characters on the pages of *Anandamath*, entirely subservient to the whims of their creator.

The Mughal defector Mir Jafar and General Robert Clive are also mentioned, further lending to the air of historicity. Bankim additionally enhances the novel's ostensible veracity by including the names of actual geographic locations and landmarks in Bengal, such as Birbhum, Bhairabipur, Barendrabhumi, and the Ajay River.⁵⁵ While it is unclear how familiar Bankim's Bengali readers may have been with these individuals and events, the references to extant locations in Bengal certainly heightened the suspense of the novel if not its verisimilitude. The result was a highly persuasive and compelling account that, while it gestured to actual historical incidents, remained completely and utterly fictional.

The intergeneric hybridity of *Anandamath* helps explain its popularity and commercial success. In addition to references to Hindu beliefs on the one hand and significant historical personages and events on the other, Bankim incorporates many features of the Indian epic tradition that were likely to have been familiar with his readers, including symbolic settings, idealized characters, an episodic structure, and miraculous occurrences. The location of the ascetics' monastery within an enigmatic forest, for instance, alludes to the significance of sylvan areas as mysterious spaces of transformation and spiritual awareness. After inadvertently stumbling into this numinous space, Mahendra and his wife Kalyani come to learn of the Mother and the brotherhood's fight for her liberation. Representing the ideal Hindu man and woman, Mahendra and Kalyani diligently perform their familial duties

⁵⁵ Lipner notes that the serial version and first four editions of the novel explicitly referenced the West Bengali district of Birbhum as the setting of the novel (36). While the references to Birbhum were excised from the fifth edition, it is still obvious that the narrative action takes place in north and west Bengal. For example, "Bhairabipur," the location of Nimai's marital home, is most likely a reference to the town of Bhairabpur in West Bengal (174). There is an odd reference to "Barendrabhumi" in Part III after the santans have won a battle (212). Also known as "Barind" and "Varendra," Barendrabhumi was apparently a region in East Bengal. Suggestive of a possible link with Barendrabhumi, the city of Rajshahi in present-day west Bangladesh is the home of the Varendra Research Society, an institution established in 1910 for the study and research of ancient and medieval Bengali history and culture <http://www.ru.ac.bd/?page_id=146>. The Ajay River flows through the Indian states of Jharkhand and West Bengal.

towards one another and their infant daughter. In line with Bankim's praise of companionate marriage, Mahendra is markedly kind and gentle with Kalyani, who, of course, is a paradigm of *pativrata*, or wifely devotion. After their respective encounters with the Mother, their ideality culminates with their willingness to sacrifice everything, including one another, in order to aid in her liberation. Kalyani appropriately modifies her *pativrata* after a dream in which the Mother directs her to leave Mahendra so that he can serve her. Overcome by the vision, Kalyani ingests poison so that Mahendra may join the brotherhood unfettered from his obligations to her as husband and provider: "I've done the right thing, so that you don't neglect God's work for the sake of a useless woman."⁵⁶ The heroine Shanti is similarly a model of *pativrata*, though in a unique way. Like Kalyani, Shanti enables her husband Jibananda to serve the Mother but does so by cross-dressing and assuming the identity of the male ascetic "Nabinananda" in order to join the brotherhood herself and fight alongside him.⁵⁷

Orality is a crucial element of *Anandamath* as the narrator recounts his story actively, making clear to the readers his thoughts and opinions on the proceedings he describes. The narrator reminds the reader of what has been mentioned previously, surmises the cause of certain events, and apostrophizes.⁵⁸ But though the narrator recounts past occurrences, he is fixed squarely in the present. Functioning as Bankim's mouthpiece, the narrator paints a stark picture of late eighteenth-century Bengal in which lawlessness and disorder are rampant: "Today we live in a time of order; at that time there was no order. Compare the

⁵⁶ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 155.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁸ In one notable example, the narrator, overcome by grief, apostrophizes the Mother: "Alas, Mother, will they ever return? Will you ever again bear in your womb a son like Jibananda and a daughter like Shanti?" (228).

times of order and disorder.”⁵⁹ Through such remarks, the narrator directs his audience to reach a foregone conclusion: “Muslims” remain entirely liable for Bengal’s woes, both past and present, and that, in comparison, British rule is a boon.

Bankim initiates this evaluation by opening his story with a poetic description of the misery of Padacinha, a representative Bengali village:

It is summer one day in 1770 in the village of Padacinha, and the sun beats down fiercely. The village is full of homes, but there is no one about. There are rows of shops in the bazaar and lines of makeshift stalls in the marketplace, there are hundreds of mud houses in every quarter, with brick buildings of varying sizes in between, yet today everything is silent. The shops are closed, and no one knows where the shopkeepers have fled. It’s the day for the local market, but the place is empty. The beggars are supposed to come out today, but none are about.

The weaver has shut his loom and lies weeping in a corner, the trader has forgotten his trading and sobs with infant [sic] in his lap, the givers have stopped their giving, the teachers have closed their *tolis* [traditional schools for boys], and even babies, it seems, lack the will to cry. No folk on the main roads, no bathers in the large ponds, no people at their doors, no birds in the trees, no cattle in the pastures—only jackals and dogs in the cremation ground.⁶⁰

The staccato phrasing and anaphora in these sentences emphasize the dramatic upending of normalcy in Padacinha. The reader soon learns that a “massive famine” is the cause. The region is almost entirely vacant because the inhabitants have either fled or perished from starvation or disease.⁶¹ People have even resorted to cannibalism out of desperation.⁶² The narrator remarks that the king’s revenue officer, Muhammad Reza Khan, continues to tax the villagers at high rates despite the famine, thus exacerbating its effects.⁶³ While here the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 131.

⁶¹ Ibid., 132.

⁶² Ibid., 135.

⁶³ Ibid., 132. Lipner notes that in both the serial version and the first edition of the novel, the narrator went on to state outright that the revenue officer was a Bengali Muslim. Thus in these two iterations, the attack on Muslims begins right away due to the suggestion that even Muslims who were native to Bengal were callous to the suffering of the (Hindu) masses, a dehumanizing depiction that renders the community perpetual outsiders to Bengal.

narrator only hints that the Mughal king and his administration are ineffective, blame is soon cast upon them directly:

In 1770 Bengal had not yet fallen under British sway. The British at the time were Bengal's tax collectors. All they did was collect the revenue; they took no responsibility for overseeing the lives and property of Bengalis. Their task was to collect the money, while the responsibility for life and property belonged to the evil Mir Jafar, a vile, treacherous blot on the human race. He was unable to look after himself, so how could he look after Bengal? Mir Jafar took opium and slept, the British took in the money and issued receipts, and the Bengali wept and went to ruin. So the Bengal's revenue belonged to the British, the burden of government fell on the nawab.⁶⁴

Bankim skillfully mixes fact and fiction in this passage. Since Mir Jafar was “responsibl[e] for overseeing the lives and property of Bengalis,” the narrator suggests that he could have forbidden the Company from collecting exorbitant taxes but failed to do so. This was not at all the case. Due to Clive's victory at Plassey, Mughal rulers in Bengal had not exerted authority over the region in earnest since approximately 1757. It was at this time that the Company became the de facto governing authority of Bengal; the assumption of the *divani* in 1765 further entrenched its growing power.⁶⁵ Consequently, any Mughal revenue collector at this time would have been a British lackey. A catastrophic famine did occur in 1770, but it was the Company's malfeasance that exacerbated its effects.⁶⁶ Mir Jafar could not have been so despised in 1770 because he had died in 1765.⁶⁷ Here Bankim takes an already-reviled Mughal figure and blames him for acts for which he could not have possibly been

⁶⁴ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 53.

⁶⁶ Historians have explained that after secured the *divani* [tax-collecting rights] for Bengal in 1765, British officials were ignorant of how the Mughal revenue management system worked. Warren Hastings initiated a series of ill-conceived experiments that involved the leasing and auctioning of the right to collect taxes in Bengal's districts. The resultant mishandling of land revenue exacerbated the effects of the famine. Estimates of the death toll vary from one-quarter to one-third of Bengal's population. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 77-78; Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 43.

⁶⁷ As noted earlier, many Bengali historians writing in the 1860s and 1870s had viewed Mir Jafar negatively due his disaffection from the Nawab of Bengal, an act which, these scholars submitted, led to Clive's success at Plassey.

responsible. This excerpt demonstrates the author's manipulation of certain facts that were likely to be familiar to segments of his readers—the British assumption of the *divani*, a devastating famine, the perceived perfidy of Mir Jafar—which were then cleverly inserted into an alternate history of mid-to-late eighteenth century Bengal. The result was a highly persuasive document that substantiated Bengali Hindus' perception of long-standing Muslim tyranny.

The brotherhood's conviction that the Mughal regime is liable for the dismal conditions of Bengal fuels their revolution. Convinced that serving the Mother is *dharmic*, the ascetics freely engage in criminal acts that they consider warranted and just. For example, when a group of sepoys arrests Mahendra in the forest, the *santans* do not hesitate to engage in violence to free him. In a dramatic, suspenseful, yet highly fantastic scene, Jibananda arrives with a group of two hundred fellow *santans* in tow.⁶⁸ He shoots the *havildar* [sergeant] as his followers surround the sepoys while “shouting the name of Hari.”⁶⁹ Bhabananda intrepidly decapitates the commander with his own sword, a death that oddly incapacitates the sepoys (who surely have pistols and muskets) and renders them vulnerable to attack.⁷⁰ After the ascetics kill and injure many of the sepoys, they seize the collected revenue that the latter had been transporting. When Mahendra protests that this act constitutes theft since the money belongs to the Mughal king, Bhabananda offers a *dharmic* explanation that the confiscation is justified: “A king who doesn't look after his kingdom is no king.”⁷¹ For Bhabananda, a ruler is entitled to tribute not by his title but by his deeds. Mahendra remains

⁶⁸ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 142-143.

⁶⁹ The *havildar* is most likely a Mughal official. As Lipner notes in an explanatory footnote, this was a “noncommissioned Indian officer of the rank of sergeant” (142, fn. 22); Lipner's spelling of the word as *havildar*—rather than *havalidar*—reflects an antiquated British variation of the term.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 146. Notably, in the first edition, Bankim originally had the following rhetorical question instead: “Should there be a Muslim king in a Hindu kingdom?”

skeptical, and the ascetic then offers a more compelling explanation for the brotherhood's deeds:

Mahendra Simha, I thought you might be a real man, but I see now that you're like the rest of them—a devourer only of fine things! Look, the snake crawls about flat on the ground, the lowliest creature around, but step on it and even the snake rears its hood! Aren't you even a little fed up with the way things are? Look at all the other places—Magadha, Mithila, Kashi, Kanci, Delhi, Kashmir—where else is in such a mess? Where else do people have to eat grass for lack of food? Or thorns, or anthills, or creepers from the forest? Where else do they eat dogs and jackals and dead bodies? Where else can't folk have peace of mind even when they've locked away their money, or installed the *shalogram* at home, or kept their wife and daughter indoors, or when their womenfolk are expecting? Here they cut open the womb and tear out the child! Everywhere else there's a pact with the king for protection, but does our Muslim king protect us?⁷² We've lost our religious way of life, our caste status, our self-respect, our family connections—and now we're about to lose our lives! If we don't get rid of these bearded degenerates will anything be left of our Hindu identity?⁷³

Likely composed in 1881, this passage contains several key ideas that became prominent in the ensuing Indian nationalist movement. Here Bankim totalizes the particularity of Mughal rule into the contrived category of invading, illegitimate Muslims who threaten “Hindu identity.” Bhabananda begins his appeal by again offering a *dharmic* explanation of the brotherhood's crimes—the Mughal king does not govern effectively and the people suffer under his rule. That conditions in other regions are apparently adequate heightens the malfeasance of the local Mughal regime.⁷⁴ But this is only part of a larger problem.

Bhabananda reveals that an urgent need to safeguard “Hindu identity” also forms the basis

⁷² Lipner notices that in the first three editions, the adjective “Muslim” was not present in this rhetorical question (241). Nevertheless, it was still obvious that the Bhabananda was referencing Muslims due to the inclusion of the insulting phrase “bearded degenerates” (Muslim men typically grew beards).

⁷³ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 146-147. My emphasis is underlined. The italics of *shalogram* is in the original; this is a spherical fossil, usually black, that is worshipped as a representation of Vishnu.

⁷⁴ Lipner, “Critical Apparatus,” 245. While Lipner is correct to point out that some of the places referenced have Muslim rulers, I disagree with his assessment that their inclusion suggests that Muslim rule itself is not being criticized. Considering the virulent tone of the passage, I do not see how such an interpretation is possible. I propose that the passage evidences the indiscriminate nature of Mughal rule; the fact that certain places have a pact with the king for protection suggests that such safeguards are required in order to protect Hindus from tyrannical Muslim rulers who cannot be trusted to adhere to dharma. Moreover, the reference to locations as far away as Kashmir demonstrates the relevance of the extra-regional to Bengal, suggestive of the understanding of India as Bharat.

for their revolutionary activities. The ascetics contend that “these bearded degenerates” endanger, apparently, not just Hindu lives, but something far more precious: “our religious way of life, our caste status, our self-respect, our family connections.” Such formulations of a “Hindu identity” and way of life reflect Bankim’s belief that promoting and maintaining a cohesive Hindu *samaj* in the present moment was critical. This portrayal of such a fervent understanding of *samaj* existing in the late eighteenth century —let alone an endangered Hinduism—is of course anachronistic, a strategic move on Bankim’s part to portray Muslims as a long-standing enemy of Hindus. To this end, Muslims are repeatedly vilified in the text not only as “bearded degenerates,” but as “baldies,” “Muslim foreigners,” and “swine.”⁷⁵ Compounding this profound overdetermination of Mughal rule is the fact that there is not one individualized character of Muslim belonging in the text, i.e., a man or woman that acts or speaks in his or her own right. The narrator only mentions Muhammad Reza Khan in passing; the “Muslim king” is not named.⁷⁶ In this text that liberally expresses hostility against Muslims, the latter predominantly appears only as frantic mobs trying to escape the *santans*, who do not hesitate to commit murder, arson, and other acts of aggression against them.⁷⁷ The violence reaches such proportions that many Muslims try to pass as Hindu in order to save themselves: “...many Muslims got rid of their beards, smeared clay on their bodies and began to call on Hari; when questioned they would say, awkwardly, ‘I’m a Hindu.’”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 167, 169.

⁷⁶ The only possible exception to this observation is the *jamadar* Nazir-uddin who finds Mahendra and Satyananda weeping after Kalyani has presumably died after ingesting poison. Nazir-uddin is likely the “he” who seizes Satyananda and exclaims: “This scoundrel’s an ascetic!” (157). The omission of the name of the reigning “Muslim king” is specific only to the fifth edition of *Anandamath*, a deliberate excision on Bankim’s part in order for the novel to be less like history and more like a fictionalized account. Such omissions had the effect of furthering the overdetermined characterization of evil “Muslims.”

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

Bhabhananda's accusation that Mahendra was not a "real man" further alludes to disparaging views about Bengali masculinity. That Bengalis were an inherently effete people was a belief widely held by the British and other Indian communities and had long been internalized by many Bengalis themselves. Bhabhananda's charge that Mahendra is among the many Bengali men who merely wish to enjoy "fine things" echoes derogatory opinions about their overall passivity and lack of valor. The ascetic continues his tirade by appealing to Mahendra's responsibilities as a husband and father, arguing that Hindu men must protect their wives and daughters from the harmful influence of Muslims.⁷⁹ He finally concludes his appeal by suggesting that Hindu men have no excuse not to fight Muslims, because, unlike the British, they are a vulnerable and cowardly adversary:

"Listen" said Bhabhananda, "an Englishman won't flee even to save his life, whereas the Muslim will run off when he begins to sweat; he'll slope off in search of a cool drink! Again, the English hang on, they'll finish what they've begun. But the Muslim plays fast and loose. The sepoy's risk their lives for money, even then they don't get paid. And finally, it's a question of courage. The cannonball can fall only in one place not in ten, so there's no need for two hundred to run when they see a single cannonball. Yet when they see a single cannonball a whole tribe of Muslims will flee, whereas a tribe of cannonballs can't make a single Englishman run!"⁸⁰

In this excerpt Bankim transfers to Muslims the widespread British stereotype about the effeminate Bengali. Much as the British had often portrayed Bengali Hindus, here Muslims are cast as lazy, uncommitted, and cowardly. The reader will notice discrepant views being advanced in the text. In the previous battle the narrator had remarked that the death of the (likely British) commander had unsettled the sepoy's serving under him, thus enabling the *santans* to rob them:

Suddenly seeing that their commander was headless and that there was no one to give orders to protect them, the frightened sepoy's were briefly at a loss to know

⁷⁹ As I have discussed earlier, Muslims were often considered liable for the fallen state of Hindu women, a critique that was part and parcel of their overall vilification as culprits of Bharat's decline into degeneracy.

⁸⁰ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 147-148.

what to do. Taking advantage of this, the daring bandits killed and wounded many of them, and reaching the carts captured the money chests. At this, the defeated sepoys lost heart and fled.⁸¹

The only way in which Bhabananda's observations can reconcile with the cowardice of these sepoys is if the regiment was composed entirely of Muslims, but the narrator had suggested earlier that they were British.⁸² As I mentioned in Chapter One, sepoy regiments were actually composed of Indians from a variety of backgrounds that were led by a small contingent of British officers. Adding to the confusion is the later suggestion that the Muslims who had conquered the Hindu homeland long ago were, in fact, a formidable enemy. As the leader of the brotherhood Satyananda informs Mahendra: "We were defeated because we lacked proper weapons. What can staves, cudgels and spears do against guns, shot and cannon? Because our efforts were inadequate we were overcome."⁸³ Such a statement contradicts Bhabananda's earlier comments, for cowardly Muslims would certainly not use such armaments in battle.

These are just two of several instances in which Bankim sacrifices realism, logic, and accuracy for the sake of a politically advantageous portrayal of valiant Hindus and their weak, scheming Muslim foes. Rather than inquire into how a group of Hindu ascetics could defeat armed British soldiers, the reader is encouraged to understand that the *santans'* success verifies the righteousness of their *dharmic* battle against an evil enemy. Likewise, Satyananda's statement that Muslim conquerors had superior weapons reinforces extant perceptions of their villainy and foreignness to the Hindu homeland—they are intruders who unhesitatingly

⁸¹ Ibid., 143.

⁸² As described in the following passage, the sepoys appear to be British: "As the sepoys waited for their commanding officer to come up, the latter thinking that bandits were upon them, rushed up to the carts and gave the order to form a square, *for in times of danger the English overcome their addictions?*" (142; emphasis added). It indeed makes sense that the sepoys would be British because, as the narrator mentioned earlier, the defunct Mughal ruler Mir Jafar relied on them to collect taxes (140).

⁸³ Ibid., 176.

exploited their advantage over a weaker adversary in order to seize territory. Within *Anandamath's* fantastic world, such simplifications and inconsistencies help posit a stark Manichean struggle between noble Hindus and evil Muslims. In this novel where the narrative action moves rapidly and the plot centers around several grandiose events, close and attentive reading practices are neither encouraged nor rewarded. The resulting queries, and their deflating answers, would most certainly undermine the goal of portraying Hindu heroics.⁸⁴ Due to its incorporation of several different genres as well as its lofty political goals to portray Hindu heroism, *Anandamath* was quite cumbersome and awkward in form; as a literary work it was mediocre at best.

Restoring the Motherland

This *casus belli* against the oppressive Mughal regime is also cast positively as a quest to restore the Mother. Like the overdetermined Muslim, the Mother is similarly an abstract figure, capable of bearing multiple significances. Given that the action of *Anandamath* takes place in Bengal and that the novel itself was originally composed in Bengali, it has been tempting for critics to construe Bankim's project as insular. In her 1982 essay "*Anandamath: A Political Myth*," Meenakshi Mukherjee suggests that even though the novel resonated across India, Bankim's goals were likely provincial: "It is doubtful if Bankim's vision of the regenerated Hindu ethos included the whole of India....he was concerned more with the identity of the Bengali people and recovering their forgotten glory, than with the national identity of India."⁸⁵ This interpretation overlooks the fact that many Indian writers in this period, Bankim included, were steadily identifying events outside of their particular local or

⁸⁴ My thinking on melodrama and speed is informed by Jeffrey Cox, who puts it succinctly, "Melodrama is built for speed." See Cox, "The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama," 170.

⁸⁵ Mukherjee, "*Anandamath: A Political Myth*," 903.

regional milieus as relevant to themselves.⁸⁶ Moreover, as I have already noted, the evolving conception of India as the inherently Hindu space Bharat further suggested an imagined link between the local, regional, and national that did not exist before in the mid-nineteenth century.

Like Bharat, the figure of “Bharat Mata” [Mother India] also became common during the 1860s and 1870s both within and outside of Bengal.⁸⁷ In 1867, Satyendranath Tagore composed his famous patriotic song “Mile Sab Bharat Santan” [With All of India’s Children United], which likely informed Bankim’s own momentous contribution, “Bande Mataram” [“Hail to the Motherland”].⁸⁸ Bankim’s hymn—the majority of which was written in Sanskrit—stood apart from other iterations of the moment due to its yoking of Bharat Mata with the goddess Shakti, representative of the feminine power and energy of the universe. In so doing, Bankim persuasively transformed Bharat Mata, a figure that was predominantly portrayed as conquered and broken to one that was eternally resplendent. In *Anandamath*, the reader’s first introduction to the Mother occurs when Bhabananda sings “Bande Mataram” after the *santans* defeated the sepoys in the unlikely victory discussed earlier:

⁸⁶ See for example Ramya Sreenivasan’s monograph, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Past in India, c. 1500-1900* (2007), which discusses how the legend of the medieval Rajput queen Padmini travelled throughout colonial India.

⁸⁷ For an example of a portrayal of Bharat Mata outside of Bengal, see Goswami’s discussion of a Hindi play that explores the historical destiny of Bharat Mata that was published in 1876 in *Kavi Vachan Sudha*, one of the oldest Hindi newspapers in the United Provinces (200).

⁸⁸ Satyendranath Tagore, older brother of Rabindranath, was notably the first Indian to be admitted to the Indian Civil Service in 1863. “Mile Sab Bharat Santan” was among his many patriotic songs. In 1873, Bankim effusively praised the hymn: “May this Great Song be sung everywhere in India! May it echo from the Himalayas to the valleys...” (Lipner 33, fn. 58). It seems quite likely that Satyendranath’s song informed the creation of “Bande Mataram,” which Bankim composed in approximately 1874-1875 (Lipner 91, fn. 139).

- [1] I revere the Mother! The Mother
Rich in waters, rich in fruit,
Cooled by the southern airs,
Verdant with the harvest fair.
- [2] The Mother—with nights that thrill
in the light of the moon,
Radiant with foliage and flowers in bloom,
Smiling sweetly, speaking gently,
Giving joy and gifts in plenty.
- [3] Powerless? How so, Mother,
With the strength of voices fell,
Seventy millions in their swell!
And with sharpened swords
By twice as many hands upheld!
- [4] To the Mother I bow low,
To her who wields so great a force,
To her who saves,
And drives away the hostile hordes!
- [5] You our wisdom, you our law,
You our heart, you our core,
In our bodies the living force is thine!
- [6] Mother, you're our strength of arm,
And in our hearts [*bhakti*]⁸⁹,
Yours the form we shape in every shrine!
- [7] For you are Durga, bearer of the tenfold
power,
And wealth's Goddess, dallying on the
lotus flower,
You are Speech, to you I bow,
To us wisdom you endow.
- [8] I bow to the Goddess Fair,
Rich in waters, rich in fruit,
To the Mother,
Spotless—and beyond compare!
- [9] I revere the Mother! the Mother
Darkly green and also true,
Richly dressed, of joyous face,
This ever-plenteous land of grace.⁹⁰

In this patriotic hymn, Bankim deifies the Hindu homeland as various incarnations of Shakti, including Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Here the author tapped into Bengal's prevalent Shakta tradition, which revered Shakti and her multiple manifestations as a divine "Mother."⁹¹ The first two stanzas glorify the generous fertility and bounty of the homeland that sustain all life, such as abundant water, clear air, and plentiful harvests. The third and fourth stanzas evoke Kali (the fearsome goddess associated with destruction and empowerment) as the speaker contemplates the Mother's subjugation and the destruction that would necessarily ensue as "seventy million" rise to restore her. The figure of seventy

⁸⁹ Here I have retained the Hindi/Bengali word used originally, *bhakti*. See Lipner, "Critical Apparatus," 245.

⁹⁰ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 145-146.

⁹¹ Due to the prevalence of the Shakta tradition in Bengal, Bankim had at his disposal a rich devotional tradition in praise of the female Godhead as Mother, including, for instance, the well-known hymns in praise of Kali by the famous eighteenth-century Shakta poet Ram Prasad Sen; see Clark, "The Role of Bankimcandra in the Development of Nationalism," 438. See also Jasodhara Bagchi, "Representing Nationalism," 66, and Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 175-178.

million accurately reflected the population of Bengal in the early 1880s, thus apparently including Muslims among the Mother's "Children."⁹² The fifth and sixth stanzas indicate that the Children's pledge to fight for the motherland arises not out of obligation, but rather an affective bond of ever-flowing strength and power between the two: "In our bodies the living force is thine!" When the Mother is weak, the Children are enfeebled, and when she is strong, they are empowered. Thus any subjection the Mother may experience can only be temporary, for triumph is assured provided her Children remain united in her cause.

Though Muslims are ostensibly among the Mother's "seventy million," an important shift occurs midway through the song that challenges their inclusion within a homeland that is repeatedly being envisioned as Hindu. In the seventh stanza, the speaker expressly identifies the Mother as Durga ("bearer of the tenfold power"), Lakshmi ("wealth's Goddess"), and Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge), three well-known forms of Shakti. The praise of the Mother in these terms helped Bankim cast this new goddess as comparable to these familiar divinities. Having given proper obeisance to the Mother by recognizing her celebrated (Hindu) forms, the speaker ends the hymn as he began, by lavishing praise on the motherland as a glorious provider and sustainer of life.

The predominant composition of "Bande Mataram" in Sanskrit further conveyed its Hindu character and pan-Indian appeal. Considered the language of the gods [*devavani*], Sanskrit was esteemed as a sacred tongue in Hinduism.⁹³ The novel's departure from prose Bengali (in the style of *calit bhasa*) to Sanskrit marked a transition from the profane to the

⁹² The figure of seventy million is important to mark here as it accurately reflected the population of Bengal in the early 1880s. In the first census taken in 1872, Bengal's population was determined to be 62,705,718; the census of 1881 determined that the population had risen to 69,536,861. As a civil servant, Bankim was likely able to view these documents. See "Census of Bengal, 1881," 680.

⁹³ On the sacred nature of Sanskrit, see Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 227, 249. Sanskrit remains a liturgical language among Hindus; holy rites and rituals are almost exclusively conducted in the language.

(Hindu) sacred.⁹⁴ Lipner explains that out of the nine stanzas of the hymn, only three were not in a “Bengalified” Sanskrit. For those Bengali Hindus who were not adept with Sanskrit, this hybridization likely assisted in their grasping, at the very least, the gist of the song.⁹⁵ While the hymn’s composition in Sanskrit legitimized the deification of the Mother for both Bengali- and non-Bengali speaking Hindus alike, it simultaneously excluded Bengali Muslims from the nation being envisioned. Through both its form and content, the hymn was expressly marked for and addressed to Bengali Hindus. The only portion of “Bande Mataram” that was wholly in Bengali and thus linguistically available to Muslim readers, stanza six, was still exclusionary because it unreservedly praised concepts alien to Islam like worshipping the divine through a form or image.

Bankim’s anthropomorphism of the Hindu homeland as a magnificent maternal divinity in “Bande Mataram” provided an alluring symbol for contemporary *samajik* debates regarding who could stake an authentic claim to the Indian nation. As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, the determination of which communities were essential to the nation, and thus what the nascent nation could (or should) look like, necessarily preceded the push for independence or sovereignty.⁹⁶ Like Bharat, the *samajik* figuration of Bharat Mata advanced this project of imagining the nation by naturalizing two recent tautological ideas: one, that India was (and always had been) a Hindu homeland; and two, that Hinduism involved an affective attachment with India. The poignant and emotive icon of a resplendent “Mother”

⁹⁴ Clark explains that as Bengali prose developed over the nineteenth century, two styles emerged, that of *calit bhasa* and *sadhu bhasa*: “*Sadhu bhasa* implied a preference for the Sanskritic elements in the vocabulary and the use of the longer verbal and pronominal forms; *calit bhasa* implied a preference for the more colloquial elements and the use of the shorter verbal and pronominal forms, which as written corresponded fairly closely with those current in the spoken language.” See Clark, “Bengali Prose Fiction,” 60.

⁹⁵ Lipner appears to suggest that at least the first three stanzas of “Bande Mataram” demonstrate a “Bengalified” Sanskrit, which I take to mean a Sanskrit that could be intelligible to the patient and educated Bengali reader, one who would more likely than not be Hindu (94, 244).

⁹⁶ Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 106.

symbolized such nationalist desire, a longing to regenerate and (re)experience a utopic organic unity of Hindus.⁹⁷ Bankim's refusal to identify the Mother explicitly as either "Banga Mata" [Mother Bengal] or "Bharat Mata" thus constituted a productive ambiguity that facilitated the song's detachment from *Anandamath* and its subsequent deployment in a variety of contexts, such as the *swadeshi* movement of the early twentieth century.⁹⁸ As Tanika Sarkar has observed, "...it has never been firmly established...whether *Anandamath's* Motherland encompasses only Bengal or all of India."⁹⁹

Within Bankim's narrative "Bande Mataram" plays a crucial role in facilitating Mahendra's embrace of the Mother's cause.¹⁰⁰ While he is initially wary of the militant ascetics, it is precisely after hearing Bhabananda sing the anthem that Mahendra finds himself drawn to them. Similar to Bhabananda who had "wept as he sang," Mahendra too experiences a powerful visceral reaction when he sings the hymn: "As he sang, he noticed that tears came to his eyes."¹⁰¹ Mahendra's conversion is assured when he beholds several stirring images of the Mother within the brotherhood's temple, experiences representative of the Hindu belief in the power of *darshan*.¹⁰² Like a child, Mahendra is escorted through the sanctuary and reintroduced to well-known deities in the Hindu pantheon as interpreted by the brotherhood. Upon entering he sees a visually imposing display of prominent Hindu

⁹⁷ See Goswami on this point: "Bharat Mata was conceived as at once a place of originary plenitude, an object of affective identification and collective desire, as well as the territorial-economic whole within which [Hindu] nationals were organically bound" (199).

⁹⁸ Notably, even before the first serial installment of *Anandamath* had concluded in 1882, "Bande Mataram" had been performed in both public and private meetings convened by the Bengali literati. See Lipner, "Introduction," 74. The *swadeshi* movement, spurred by George Curzon's decision to partition Bengal in 1905, is addressed in Chapter Four.

⁹⁹ Tanika Sarkar, *Rebels, Wives, Saints*, 230.

¹⁰⁰ Lipner correctly suggests that "Bande Mataram" helped further the patriotic message of *Anandamath*: "It seems clear that the original context [of the song], the novel *Anandamath*, was intended to use the Bengal of the time as a symbol of a wider India (Bharatbarsa) as the motherland for patriots." See Lipner, "Introduction," 72.

¹⁰¹ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 146-148.

¹⁰² *Darshan* may be defined as the Hindu belief that a viewing the divine constitutes an ominous, propitious event. As Flood states, "To witness the icon is to have the auspicious 'vision' [*darsana*] of the deity and so to receive its blessing" (211).

deities; Vishnu, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, with the Mother seated on Vishnu's lap: "On Vishnu's lap sat an enchanting image, more beautiful and glorious than Lakshmi and Saraswati. Gandharvas, kinnaras, gods, yakshas, and sprites paid her homage."¹⁰³ The physical placement of the Mother among these revered male and female deities naturalizes her as a goddess in her own right. The particular configuration of the gods and goddesses reflects the Mother's importance as she is seated in the protective embrace of Vishnu and flanked by Lakshmi and Saraswati on either side, making explicit Bankim's claim that the Hindu homeland is a goddess deserving of reverence. While in "Bande Mataram" the Mother was apostrophized as Lakshmi or Saraswati, here she is suggested to be more precious than these two goddesses. The proximity of the Mother to Vishnu in particular demonstrates the interconnection of the two deities for the brotherhood. While the ascetics primarily invoke Krishna (and Vishnu to a lesser extent), they direct all of their energies towards the Mother's liberation.

As in "Bande Mataram," three specific manifestations of the Hindu goddess Shakti symbolize the Mother's past, present, and future states. While in the anthem these goddesses were Durga, Kali, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, here they are Jagaddhatri, Kali, and Durga respectively. After viewing the initial deities, Mahendra is escorted into another chamber where he is introduced to the Mother in her past state. She is Jagaddhatri, who was "happy and beautiful, adorned with every ornament, radiant as the risen sun and full of majesty."¹⁰⁴ While this image of the "Mother-as-she-was" is prominently positioned in the temple, Mahendra must descend into a dark tunnel in order to view the "Mother-as-she-is." Tropes

¹⁰³ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 149. Lipner explains that "gandharvas," "kinnaras," and "yakshas" are various non-human mythical beings (*ibid.*, fn. 33).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 150. Similar to Kali, worship of Jagaddhatri was very common in West Bengal. See Rachel McDermott, *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal*, 21.

of darkness and light are prominent as Mahendra gradually discerns the image of Kali in dim lighting:

“Kali!” said Mahendra fearfully.

“Yes, Kali,” said the monk. “Blackened and shrouded in darkness. She has been robbed of everything; that is why she is naked. And because the whole land is a burning-ground, she is garlanded with skulls. And she’s crushing her own gracious Lord [Shiva] underfoot. Alas, dear Mother!”

The tears streamed down the monk’s face. Mahendra asked, “Why has she a club and begging-bowl in her hands?”

“We’re her Children, and that’s all we could put in her hands as weapons,” said the monk. “Now say, *Bande Mataram*.”¹⁰⁵

Bankim’s advancement of Kali as representative of the present condition of the Mother is telling because the goddess had a very arresting appearance.¹⁰⁶ As Flood observes, within Shakta traditions Kali was typically visualized as “‘black’ or ‘blue’, garlanded with severed heads, girdled with severed arms, with rolling, intoxicated eyes and a lolling tongue [who] dances on the corpse of her husband Siva.”¹⁰⁷ Due to the popularity of Kali in Bengal, Bankim’s readers would likely have been able to conjure a visual image of this fearsome goddess. In a significant move, Bankim fetishizes the natural appearance of Kali as a function of the motherland’s decline. While in her previous state she was the splendid Jagaddhatri, the Mother has degenerated to a grotesque degree, becoming “blackened and shrouded in darkness,” “robbed of everything,” and “naked.” Likewise, the Mother-as-she-is/Kali is no longer fierce and powerful; like the Hindu homeland she personifies, the goddess is pathetic and weak. For example, instead of bearing her usual weapons, Kali too has suffered from Bengal’s poverty and now possesses only a “club and begging-bowl.”

¹⁰⁵ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 150.

¹⁰⁶ “Kali” is the feminine form of the Hindi and Bengali word for the color black.

¹⁰⁷ Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 178.

This heavy-handed figuration of Hindu goddesses as the Hindu homeland culminates in the unveiling of the Mother-as-she-will-be, Durga. Continuing the imagery of darkness and light, the narrator notes that Mahendra beholds this vision of the Mother in the morning sunlight:

Mahendra saw a golden ten-armed image of the Goddess in a large marble shrine glistening and smiling in the early morning rays.

Prostrating himself, the monk said, “And this is the Mother-as-she-will-be. Her ten arms reach out in ten directions, adorned with various powers in the form of the different weapons she holds, the enemy crushed at her feet, while the mighty lion who has taken refuge there is engaged in destroying the foe. Behold her whose arms are the directions”—here Satyananda’s voice broke down and he began to weep—“whose arms are the directions, who holds various weapons and crushes the enemy and roams on the lordly lion’s back, who has Lakshmi personifying good fortune on her right, and the goddess of speech who bestows wisdom and learning on her left, with Kartikeya signifying strength and Ganesh good success, in attendance! Come, let us prostrate ourselves before the Mother.”¹⁰⁸

The striking personage of Durga as the ten-armed goddess who was found seated on or attended by a lion or tiger suggests the commanding, imposing character of the future Hindu India. In contrast to the darkness surrounding Kali, the profusion of sunlight and “morning rays” that attend Durga herald her arrival like the morning dawn, symbolic of a desirable new beginning for India. As with Kali, Bankim takes liberties with common understandings of Durga for narrative purposes. For example, rather than merely carrying weapons, the goddess’s ten extended arms may be construed as staking a claim to all of India’s territories, suggesting that she stands ready to defend the homeland from any and all adversaries that may threaten. Durga was also not typically attended by other deities. The addition of Saraswati, Lakshmi, Kartikeya, and Ganesh alongside the goddess portends that her arrival will necessarily be a fortuitous and blessed event. This bookending of depictions of the Mother surrounded by other deities—i.e., in her form as the Mother-as-she-was and as the

¹⁰⁸ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 150.

Mother-as-she-will-be—serves to reaffirm and naturalize the goddess as equivalent to these more familiar divinities.

Embedded within Bankim's conflation of Hindu goddesses with India in past, present, and future states is a powerful challenge to British historiographical understandings of India and the colonial project that it sanctioned. The author's tri-pronged argument that India was once glorious, is now degenerate, and will one day become powerful constituted a fundamental challenge to the prevailing British apprehension of the Raj as a just, warranted, and necessary intervention in a backward society. As Henry Maine's anxieties had demonstrated, Britain could not imagine a future in which India would not require its guiding hand. While Bankim certainly agreed with prevailing British views that India's present condition was deplorable, with *Anandamath* he not only provided the *reason*—the iniquities and malfeasance intrinsic to past Mughal rule—but also the *promise* that the Hindu homeland would one day reclaim its former majesty. Indeed what was most ingenious about Bankim's depiction about the "Mother-as-she-will-be" is not so much that Durga is taken to be the embodiment of this state, but rather that her eventual materialization is foretold as prophecy. This future version of the Mother/homeland *will* appear, though it is unclear *when* exactly.

It is precisely this alluring promise of the Mother's appearance in her future potent state that pushes Mahendra to join the brotherhood. While he was initially quite skeptical of the *santans*, his repeated *darshan* of the Mother in her different forms has overwhelmed him. Like Arjun who was similarly transformed upon his perception of Krishna in his beatific state, Mahendra's desire to join the brotherhood becomes inevitable after beholding familiar Hindu goddesses in persuasively reconfigured forms that explain current realities. Overcome by the sublime vision of Durga as the Mother-as-she-will-be, Mahendra changes dramatically

upon learning that this form of the Mother will only materialize, when, as Satyananda explains, “all [of the] Mother’s children recognize her as the Mother, she will be gracious to us.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, Bengali Hindu men like Mahendra must prove themselves worthy of this commanding vision of the Mother in order for her to manifest. As the exemplary Hindu man, Mahendra now becomes willing to commit fully to the cause, encouraging Bengali Hindu men to take similar action in the contemporary moment.

Most important, Mahendra exemplifies the fact that acceptance of this muscular Hinduism required far more than just the passive belief in its tenets, but the actual labor of *bhakti* and sacrifice in order to realize its goals. As required by the brotherhood, Mahendra decides to renounce his householder roles as husband and father and take the required vow of celibacy in order to dedicate himself fully to the cause of the Mother.¹¹⁰ While it was the case that orthodox Hindu doctrine required *sannyasis* [renouncers] to abandon familial ties towards the end of life and embrace a state of celibacy, the brotherhood’s adherence to such teachings stops here.¹¹¹ Though the Children are renouncers, their *dharma* resides not in passive spiritual acts such as meditation, but rather the active cultivation of hardy skills required of warriors fighting for cherished beliefs.¹¹²

The brotherhood’s militant approach forms yet another instance of Bankim manipulating aspects of Hinduism to make it address the needs of the Bengali Hindu *samaj*.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁰ The brotherhood’s requirement of celibacy, or *brahmacharya*, references the Hindu belief that sexual energy can be harnessed and sublimated for a spiritual purpose, in this case, for the cause of the Mother (Flood, 63). In 1906 M.K. Gandhi began to experiment with *brahmacharya*, a practice he had long admired. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man, His People and the Empire*, 108-109.

¹¹¹ It should also be stressed that the actual Sannyasi Rebellion of the late eighteenth century was a movement comprised of ascetics belonging to *both* the Hindu and Muslim faiths who protested the Company’s growing authority in Bengal.

¹¹² As put forth in the *Manu Smriti* [the Laws of Manu], a Hindu man’s *dharma* entailed his renunciation of householder roles towards the end of life in order to achieve total detachment from the material world and the attendant ability to devote oneself entirely to spiritual pursuits. To this end, the *sannyasi* [renouncer] would engage in meditation and other such contemplative acts of the divine in order to achieve *moksha*, release from the cycles of birth and rebirth; see Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 64.

Should readers have any lingering doubts as to the virtues of these new teachings, the author portrays a discussion between the leader Satyananda and the disciple Mahendra comparable to Krishna's instruction to Arjun about fighting to reclaim his kingdom. In reply to Mahendra's confusion regarding how the ascetics can sanction aggression and militancy when Vaishnava practice conventionally espouses nonviolence, Satyananda distinguishes between "false" and "authentic" Vaishnavism. The god Vishnu, who repeatedly incarnated himself to rid the world of demons, is the Children's "chosen" deity; following his example, the brotherhood understands "authentic" Vaishnavism to consist in "subduing the evildoer and rescuing the world."¹¹³ In response to Mahendra's skepticism that he espouses a "newfangled teaching," Satyananda asserts that his views are correct because they were espoused by their Hindu forebears: "I'm saying exactly the sort of thing our ancestors have believed for generations."¹¹⁴ Violence for the purpose of vanquishing evildoers is thus cast as intrinsic to and sanctioned by Hindu doctrine. Just as Vishnu and Krishna conquered demons, the *santans*' aggression against Muslims is permissible because "they are the enemies of our Lord."¹¹⁵

Heroes and Heroines: Gender Roles and the Nation

While it proved relatively easy for the brotherhood to take up arms against the Mughal rulers and their British allies, Bankim demonstrates the difficulty for even the most resolute of heroes to forsake worldly attachments, namely sexual desire, for the sake of the nation. The vow of celibacy was not a matter to take lightly, and the brotherhood recognized the enormity of this sacrifice by instituting a hierarchy. Only those Hindu men able and

¹¹³ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 179.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 180.

willing to abandon familial ties and embrace celibacy could enter the intimate circle of fully “initiated” *santans*. These select men received names ending in *ananda* to match their newfound identities, thus forming the *anandamath* [monastery of *anandas*].¹¹⁶ It is this small contingent that leads a much larger mass of “uninitiated” men who remain tethered to their worldly existence as householders, beggars, and the like.¹¹⁷ By making such a distinction Bankim suggests that only those men capable of this enormous sacrifice possessed the discipline and fortitude necessary to guide others in the Mother’s divine cause.

The immense difficulty of renouncing worldly ties and sexual desire in particular is demonstrated in the respective “falls” of Bhabananda and Jibananda. Both men are willing to renege on their sworn vows and renounce the brotherhood in order to be with Kalyani and Shanti respectively. During a forbidden visit to his home, Jibananda expresses to Shanti the difficulty of complying with the brotherhood’s austere demands:

...now that I’ve seen you, I can’t tear myself away. That’s why I told Nimai it would do no good to see you again. Now that I’ve seen you, I just can’t go back. On the one side there’s duty, wealth, pleasure, salvation, the concerns of this world, my vow and its religious rites. All this on one side—and on the other, there’s you—you alone! And I can never work out which is the weightier! *Shanti, you are my country! What use is it to me without you?* Give me a small piece of land, and with you I could turn it into heaven. What would I do with it otherwise? The sorrows of our people? Is there anyone sorer in the land than he who’s had you for a wife and then left you? And who’s more needy in the land than he who’s had you for a wife and then left you? And who’s more needy in the land than he who’s seen you in these tattered clothes? You’re the prop of everything that I can call duty...¹¹⁸

In this passage Bankim complicates the depiction of the ascetics as dutiful soldiers and emphasizes the immense effort and discipline required to dedicate oneself fully to the nation. Deeply in love with his wife, Jibananda is torn between his desire to stay with her and his duty to the Mother. Departing from the simple characterization of the ascetics given thus far,

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 185.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 178-179.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 166. Emphasis added.

the writer endows Jibananda with a considerable degree of verisimilitude as the latter reflects on the challenge of leaving Shanti yet again in order to fight for the motherland. In contrast to the rather simple-minded ascetics seen so far, Jibanananda emerges as a sympathetic figure with familiar attachments and struggles.

Yet such grandeur of the Hindu hero often comes at the cost of a woman's personhood. For every man who wishes to resign from the national cause, there is a woman parroting the ideals of this new patriotic Hinduism who urges him to persist. Paragons of virtue, both Kalyani and Shanti refuse Bhabananda and Jibananda's respective advances and denounce their willingness to abandon their sworn oaths so easily. Though she is seemingly free to marry, Kalyani rejects Bhabananda's proposal of marriage and remains loyal to Mahendra, even though he believes that she has died. The highly religious space in which Kalyani rebuffs Bhabananda—a room filled with images of Krishna—emphasizes her ideality as the pious and pure Hindu wife.¹¹⁹ Ever the devoted companion to Mahendra and daughter of the Mother, Kalyani shames Bhabananda as a “sinner who has broken his vow.”¹²⁰ Similarly, Shanti urges Jibananda to return to the brotherhood so that she can continue to be a hero's wife: “Shame! You are a hero! The great joy of my world is that I'm a hero's wife! How can you abandon a hero's duty for the sake of a lowly woman? Do not love me. I don't want that happiness. But never abandon your duty as a hero.”¹²¹ Such statements indicate that Hindu women should not only embody the nation as an idea worth fighting (and dying) for, but also facilitate men's performance of these noble duties. While Kalyani encourages both Mahendra and Bhabananda respectively to join and return to the

¹¹⁹ Having rescued Kalyani from her self-inflicted poisoning, Bhabananda deposited her in a home ostensibly for widowed or forsaken Hindu women. The narrator tells the reader that Kalyani's room contains religious manuscripts, a rosary, and numerous images of Krishna (195).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

brotherhood, Shanti cross-dresses and poses as a man in order to enter the brotherhood herself and fight alongside Jibananda. Her alternate identity as the monk “Nabinananda” ensures that she does not “tempt” the men into breaking their vows. However, Shanti’s apparently daring acts should not be misinterpreted as markers of Bankim’s feminism but rather reflections of his belief that women ought to assist men in performing patriotic duties as their circumstances will allow.

Rather than the seasoned warriors of the brotherhood, it is actually Mahendra who emerges as the hero of the novel. In the final chaotic battle scene, Mahendra’s full conversion to the cause of the Mother is complete when he incites a group of uninitiated *santans* to attack the joint British and Muslim forces. As a matter of course, only the Muslims are vilified:

“*Santans!*” [Mahendra] cried out to the Children, “Look, our Master, Satyananda Goswami’s banner can be seen at the top! Today the Lord himself, Mura’s Foe, Slayer of Madhu and Kaitabha, Destroyer of Kamsa and Keshi, has entered the battle. There are a hundred thousand *santans* on the hillside! Shout *Hare Murare! Hare Murare! Rise up! Crush the Muslims and kill them!* [...]”¹²²

Mahendra’s battle cry, rife with allusions to Krishna’s slayings of demons and vitriol against Muslims, renews the *santans*’ desire to fight. His appeal is persuasive because, like elsewhere in the narrative, attacking Muslims has been cast as a religious duty for Hindus. Romantic melodrama is at its height in this scene because the Children’s eventual victory defies all logic. Though the British had been overpowering them, the *santans* experience an inexplicable surge of renewed vigor and rout the joint forces: “And even as a tiny fly is crushed by the collision of two massive blocks of stone, so the rulers’ huge army was crushed by the two *santan* armies. And none remained to carry the news to Warren Hastings.”¹²³

¹²² Ibid., 225. Italics in original; my emphasis is underlined.

¹²³ Ibid.

In *Anandamath*'s bold rewriting of key moments in Bengali history, the Children's highly improbable victory is understood as the merited outcome of their *dharmic* struggle. Due to the profusion of elements of epic and romance in the narrative, any attempt to provide a plausible explanation for this fantastic turn of events is futile. As Bankim had indicated in his impassioned plea for histories about Bengali written by Bengalis, what the community desperately needed was not realism and reason, but heroism and honor, stories that would rejuvenate the people's demoralized sense of self and unite them for a common purpose. Through *Anandamath* he offered precisely such an account as acts of courage and sacrifice were rewarded and those of wrongdoing and malfeasance were punished. For example, Mahendra's bravery and heroism is rewarded with the Children's victory in the battle.¹²⁴ Likewise, since Kalyani's apparent death prompted Mahendra to join the brotherhood in the first place, she too is blessed with the return of her daughter and what is ostensibly a brief reunion with Mahendra.¹²⁵ Both Bhabananda and Jibananda die in battle not because they suffered fatal wounds, but because they violated the sworn oaths.¹²⁶ Their deaths demonstrate the gravity of the *santans'* code, which is exacting precisely because it amounts to a covenant with the divine. Even though Bhabananda and Jibananda technically remained celibate—there is no sex in *Anandamath*—their mere desire of Kalyani and Shanti warranted severe punishment. But in yet another quixotic twist, Jibananda is again saved by Shanti. Jibananda's miraculous resuscitation by a mysterious divine-like Healer constitutes her prize for numerous acts of sacrifice and valor both in and out of battle.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 216-217.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 211, 225-226.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 226-228.

Under Mahendra's leadership the *santans* emerge victorious over the joint Mughal-British forces; their unlikely success informs *Anandamath's* pivotal concluding scene. After reviving Jibananda, the enigmatic Healer appears before Satyananda and instructs him to desist from fighting and to sanction the emergence of British rule. Instead of Hindu rule, a British regime needs to be established. While the narrator has repeatedly cited the benefits of extant British governance for the reader, Satyananda is dumbstruck by the Healer's pronouncement. Their exchange is highly significant and worth quoting at length:

"Muslim rule has been destroyed," said Satyananda, "but Hindu rule has not been established. Even now the English remain powerful in Kolkata."

The other said, "Hindu rule will not be established at this time. If you remain, people will die needlessly. So, come away."

When he heard this, a sharp pang of anguish pierced Satyananda. "Master," he said, "if Hindu rule will not be established then who will be king? Will the Muslims rule again?"

"No," replied the other. "*Now the English will rule.*"

Satyananda's eyes streamed with tears. Turning to the image of his birthland in the form of the Mother mounted on high, he joined his hands together and said in a voice choked with tears, "Oh Mother, I've not been able to set you free. *Once more you will fall into the hands of unworthy foreigners.* Do not be offended with your Child. Alas, Mother! Why did I not die on the battlefield today?"

The Healer said, "Satyananda, do not grieve. *It was mistakenly, by means of banditry, that you gathered wealth and won your victory. Wrongdoing can never produce holy fruit. So you will not be able to free the land. What will happen will happen for the good. Unless the English rule, it will not be possible for the Eternal Code to be reinstated.* Listen carefully, I'll explain it to you according to the mind of the Great Ones."

"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.

"*For a long time now the outward knowledge has been lost in this land, and so the true Eternal Code has been lost too. If one wishes to reinstate this Code, one must make known the outward*

knowledge first. The outward knowledge no longer exists in this land, and there's no one to teach it; we ourselves are not good at teaching people such things. So we must bring in the outward knowledge from another country. 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. And till that day comes—so long as the Hindu is not wise and virtuous and strong once more—English rule will remain intact. Their subjects will be happy under the English, and they will be free to follow their religion. Therefore wise one, refrain from fighting the English, and follow me.”

Satyananda said, “O Great One! If English rule was your aim, and if it is good for the land to be under English rule at this time, then why did you engage us in this cruel war?”

The Great Man replied, “*At present the English are traders. They're intent on amassing wealth and do not wish to take on the burden of ruling a kingdom. But because of the Children's rebellion, they'll be forced to take on the burden of ruling, for without this they cannot collect wealth. The rebellion came about to usher in English rule. Now come—as you acquire knowledge, you yourself will be able to understand everything.”*

Satyananda said, “O Great One, I do not yearn to acquire knowledge. I have no use for knowledge. All I want is to keep the vow I have taken. Bless me so that my love for the Mother remains steadfast.”

“*You have kept your vow,”* returned the other, “*and you've ensured the Mother's well-being, for you have brought in English rule. Now give up warfare, let people cultivate the land, may the earth abound in crops and let the people grow in prosperity.”*

Satyananda's eyes sparked fire as he said, “I'll make the Mother abound in crops by drenching her in the blood of her enemies!”

“Who is the enemy?” asked the Great Man. “The enemy's no more. *The English will rule as friends. Besides, no one has the power to fight the English and win.*”¹²⁸ [...]

The arrival of this enigmatic sage functions as a divine intervention, which was very common in Indian epics and mythological ballads called *mangalkavya*.¹²⁹ While Bankim's insertion of a *deus ex machina* figure is frustrating in a novel that already contains a surplus of improbable plot twists, the need for a narrative exit plan of this sort was understandable. In order for *Anandamath* to remain a historical novel and not transform into a heroic epic,

¹²⁸ Ibid., 228-230. Emphasis added.

¹²⁹ Clark, “Bengali Prose Fiction,” 71.

Bankim needed to reconcile his portrayal of Hindu unity and valor with the inescapable fact of British rule. The sage's final pronouncements explain how the British came to assume power despite the *santans'* victory in the concluding battle. This extraordinary personage is truly god-like as he delivers a momentous revelation that modifies several key assumptions of the brotherhood and commands a very specific view of Britain's occupation of India. The far-reaching import of the sage's message further evidences the romantic melodrama of *Anandamath*, which, as discussed, all too often defies reason and logic. With this divine Healer as his mouthpiece, Bankim gives a final lesson in his revisionary Hinduism, specifically how the late nineteenth-century Hindu *samaj* ought to understand British colonialism as an opportunity to rejuvenate itself and lay the groundwork for future autonomy. It is only under such conditions that an independent motherland will (re)emerge.

Through the figure of the sage, Bankim extrapolates the consequences of the brotherhood's militant activities in Bengal for the wider Hindu polity. The Healer indicates that the Children's defeat of the Muslim regime is profoundly consequential because it has led to the advent of "English rule." While Satyananda takes this to mean the continued subjugation of the Mother under another regime of "unworthy foreigners," the sage explains that this is not the case. Furthering the novel's comparison between the respective Muslim and British regimes, the sage divines that the latter's rule will prove beneficial for the Hindus. This deific personage clarifies that it is precisely by routing the Muslims that the Children have, in fact, performed their duty to the Mother because the British will now take over. Consistent with the anti-Islamic theme of *Anandamath*, the sage criticizes only the Children's "banditry" and not their violence against Muslims. Since the Healer has been likened to a divine figure, such failure to censure the brotherhood reinforces the troubling idea that aggression against Muslims was indeed a religious and patriotic duty for Hindus.

Considering the profound importance Bankim placed on religious belonging in *Anandamath*, it is not surprising that this welcoming of British rule is parsed in terms of the benefits and improvements that the Hindu community will receive. The ideal state of Hinduism envisioned by the sage is notably laced with several paradigmatic ideas of British Orientalism. Hindus are to understand that colonial rule has not only saved them from a depraved Muslim regime, it provides an opportunity for reform and improvement. Evocative of British Orientalist ideas regarding the decline of Hindus from a magnificent Golden Age, the sage explains that the “Eternal Code” of the Hindus has degenerated and requires restoration.¹³⁰ The absurdity of “worship[ing] three hundred and thirty million gods” indexes the erosion of the Eternal Code, which requires a certain level of “outward knowledge” in order to apprehend inner, spiritual truths. In a crucial move, Bankim yokes into a causal relationship two key indicators of European modernity that Hindus were deemed to lack—worldly technical knowledge and a suitable religious tradition. The Healer suggests that as Hindus learn material skills from the British (outward knowledge), a proper understanding of matters of faith (inner knowledge) will emerge once again. This connection was critical, for it enabled Bankim to reconcile a seemingly incompatible message about the latent promise of Hinduism alongside the considerable ways in which Hindus stood to gain from the advancements and knowledge of their colonial rulers.¹³¹

There is a critical subtext to the Healer’s words because the demonization of Muslims is essential for this counterfactual postulation to work. Far more than just being ineffective administrators of Bengal, Muslims are implicated in the corrosion of the Hindus’

¹³⁰ This formulation of an “Eternal Code” was specific only to the fifth edition of the novel; earlier editions had “Aryan Code.” See Lipner, “Critical Apparatus,” 279. Bankim’s characterization of the code as “Aryan” suggests his belief in Max Müller’s postulation that Aryans were the originary inhabitants of India.

¹³¹ Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 155, 196.

Eternal Code. The Healer's observation that the loss of outward knowledge contributed to the Eternal Code's deterioration substantiates the *santans'* perception that Muslims have substantially compromised a "Hindu identity" and a "Hindu rule of life."¹³² As with his failure to criticize the *santans'* violence, the sage's implicit confirmation that Muslims were involved in the waning of the Eternal Code is highly prejudicial. Due to their false implication in this consequential sequence of events, "Muslims" are ultimately liable for the *santans'* inability to establish Hindu rule. The sage's comments establish a series of counterfactual conditionals as follows: If Muslims had not invaded the motherland and corrupted it, then Hindus would have been able to retain outward knowledge. If Hindus had been able to retain outward knowledge, then the Eternal Code would not have waned. If the Eternal Code had not waned, then the Hindus would have kept the balance of inner and outer knowledge necessary to assume governance immediately, instead of having to summon the British to "step in" magnanimously. Especially given that the *santans* were victorious in the ultimate battle, this narrative outcome was rather damaging to Indian Muslims because it promoted Hindu hatred towards them on yet another level. It is precisely through such insinuations that Bankim contributed powerfully to the ongoing politicization of religious identity in India.

This portrayal of an age-old conflict between Hindus and Muslims further explains why the Children perceive the British to be nothing more than an annoying nuisance in their revolution:

¹³² Reminiscent of Bhabananda's earlier diatribe against Muslims, the narrator explains the continuing incompetence of the Muslim ruler as well as the deterioration of the Hindu samaj steadily increased the ranks of the Children: "In particular everyone was angry with the Muslims for the anarchy and lawlessness of their reign. Because the Hindu rule of life had disappeared, many Hindus were keen to establish a Hindu identity. Thus, day by day the number of Children began to increase." See Bankim, *Anandamath*, 189.

“Let me ask you something. Why do you people interfere in a fight between Hindu and Muslim? Go back to your own home.”¹³³

“Captain Sir, I shan’t kill you, the English are not our enemies. But why are you here to help the Muslims? Here, I spare your life, for the time being you are my prisoner. Victory to the English! We wish you well!”¹³⁴

Spoken respectively by Shanti and Bhabananda, these passages demonstrate the *santans*’ confusion as to why the honorable and valiant British have allied with the corrupt Mughal rulers. In the context of the Children’s *dharmic* struggle, the British alliance with the depraved Muslim authorities is inexplicable. But for the narrator and the Healer, who are able to divine past and future respectively, the presence of the British is a godsend. Situated firmly in the present moment, the narrator explains the Children’s ignorance: “Of course, the *santans* didn’t know then that the English had come to rescue India. How could they? Even Captain Thomas’s English contemporaries didn’t know. At the time it was known to Providence alone.”¹³⁵

The Healer enlightens Satyananda as to why Hindus are not yet qualified to rule, but what about the exceptional, heroic *santans*? Bankim again evinces British Orientalist ideas as he explains away this narrative possibility. As noted in the sage’s observation that “The true Hindu rule of life is based on knowledge, not on action,” the *santans* do not yet possess the requisite “outward” knowledge to govern their homeland. Even though the Children had altered Hinduism productively—i.e., by worshipping primarily one deity—the Healer insinuates that their efficacy ends at popular leadership. While the *santans* may be valiant warriors and inspiring leaders, they do not have the skills necessary to be actual rulers or administrators. Hindus’ deficiency in technical knowledge, the sage states, is precisely why

¹³³ Ibid., 192.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 207-208.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 191.

British rule is warranted and desirable in the present. Enriched by the outward knowledge that the British will provide, the Hindu *samaj* is certain to regain the wisdom, virtue, and strength in which they have been deficient for so long, leading to “the true Code...shin[ing] forth by itself again.”

This is a stunning rewriting of history as Bankim recasts the British assumption of power as a desirable event, and one that Hindus were wholly responsible for orchestrating. The Healer’s matter-of-fact tone about the need for British rule encourages Bankim’s readers to understand the present situation in a similarly pragmatic manner. Rather than the British unilaterally exploiting India, Bankim upends the entire colonial enterprise as an opportunistic endeavor on the part of Hindus to learn outward knowledge from those who were experts: “... we must bring in the outward knowledge from another country. The English are very knowledgeable in the outward knowledge, and they’re very good at instructing people. *Therefore we’ll make them king.*” Quite strikingly, British agency has been taken out of the equation; they did not assume power out of their own accord but rather because they were “summoned” to do so. Through such compelling propositions, Bankim empowers his readers to evaluate colonial rule selfishly. Just as the British exploit India, Hindus should similarly seize what is advantageous from them. The actual reality of the matter, that “no one has the power to fight the English and win,” is a moot point, an inconsequential afterthought precisely because colonial rule has been made desirable.

Essential to Hindus’ initiating British governance is their ability to set its terms. Perhaps the most critical implication of the unilateral “contract” the Healer advances is that British rule constitutes *a temporary period of tutelage for Hindus*. Under no circumstances can British authority be indefinite, because its introduction necessarily entails Hindus’ development of outward knowledge and the resultant capacity to assume their own

governance at some point in the future. The sage's comments that Hindus will be "happy subjects" and that the British will rule as "friends" encourage the view that the latter has been permitted to govern India in what Edmund Burke had famously termed a "trust" just over one hundred years earlier, and will graciously cede authority in due time.¹³⁶ Moreover, unlike the Muslim regime that had so endangered the Hindu *samaj*, the sage declares that Hindus will be "free to follow their religion." As discussed earlier, it was indeed the case that Queen Victoria had pledged religious freedom in her 1858 Proclamation: "In [Our Subjects'] Prosperity will be Our Strength; in their Contentment Our Security; and in their Gratitude Our best Reward." Through this portrayal of Hindus' having consented to temporary, amicable British governance, Bankim's readers are positioned to criticize extant British antagonism not only as a failure to adhere to a mutually beneficial agreement, but also as a betrayal between "friends."

Embedded within the idea that Britain would govern India in trust resided a latent warning to the colonial state. The Healer's directive to Satyananda to sanction temporary British rule empowers readers to question extant British rhetoric about colonialism as inevitable and necessary. By suggesting that the advent of British rule arose from various contingencies, Bankim encourages his readers to understand their authority as provisional. Just as the Children had shown with the worthless Mughal regime, if rulers prove unsatisfactory they can be removed. Should the British not govern benevolently and with due respect to the Hindu people, the latter would be obliged to follow the example of their

¹³⁶ See Edmund Burke's famous speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill delivered to the House of Commons in December 1783 in which he claimed that the various rights or privileges attendant with "...every species of political dominion and every description of commercial privilege, none of which can be original, self-derived rights, or grants for the mere private benefit of the holders....are all in the strictest sense a *trust*: and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered *accountable*—and even totally to *cease*, when it substantially varies from the purposes for which alone it could have a lawful existence." See Edmund Burke, "Speech on Mr. Fox's East India Bill," 366. Emphasis in original.

heroic forebears and agitate to remove their *adharmic* rulers. Perhaps then Hindus would decide to install another teacher of outward knowledge or assume India's governance themselves? Certainly the answer mattered far less than the question itself as Hindus were now determining agents instead of helpless subjects.

Questions of Censorship and Authorial Intent

The fact that Bankim composed *Anandamath* under the watchful eyes of a colonial regime has understandably led critics to question whether his portrayal of Hindus' accepting British authority amounted to a genuine endorsement. Could Muslims have functioned as a proxy for the British such that the venom directed towards them was really intended for colonial officials? In his 1984 study of Bankim, Sisir Kumar Das argues along these lines. He submits that Bankim's patriotism was "free from racial hatred" and *Anandamath* was "directed against the British."¹³⁷ In an apology entitled "A Muslim Baiter?," Das elaborates that *Anandamath* "was not intended against the Muslims...The main target of the *santans* in the novel was the British army, not the Muslims."¹³⁸ Likewise, in *Europe Reconsidered* Tapan Raychaudhuri makes a more measured yet similar claim that the sanction of British rule in the concluding scene of *Anandamath* is "nowhere echoed in [Bankim's] serious essays" and speculates that it may have been a part of an overall attempt to compensate for the novel's "seditious undertone."¹³⁹ More recently, Priya Joshi has argued that "...the celebration of the

¹³⁷ See Sisir Kumar Das, *The Artist in Chains*, 130, 141. Das goes on to argue: "There is enough evidence to show that *Ananda Math* was designed to arouse patriotism and that it was directed against the British. But for reasons best known to him, Bankim never made that intention explicit, rather made several changes in the subsequent editions of the novel to camouflage it" (141).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹³⁹ Raychaudhuri's full remarks are as follows: "The advent of the British is [in *Anandamath* and *Debichaudburani*] described as ordained by God for India's regeneration. Such sentiments are nowhere echoed in the serious essays and one wonders if these are to be taken at their face value or as devices to counterbalance the seditious undertone of the novels in question. Official sensitivity to seditious intent in literary works was well known at

British as adept teachers and masters of knowledge remains problematic and unconvincing and runs against the passionate patriotism Bankim had already developed, in which the only real enemy of importance was the British.”¹⁴⁰

It was indeed the case that as a civil servant Bankim was especially susceptible to colonial scrutiny. In January 1882, shortly before the final serial installment of *Anandamath*, Bankim was inexplicably demoted from the position of assistant secretary to the Government of Bengal, a post that he had just attained four months earlier.¹⁴¹ Analysis of the six editions of the novel released during Bankim’s lifetime shows several revisions in which inflammatory passages about the British were subsequently tempered or absorbed into the characterization of Muslims.¹⁴² Many of these changes occur in the battle scenes towards the end of the novel in which the Children fight the joint Mughal-British forces. The first edition’s references of the “English” subsequently become the “Enemy,” “Gunners,” “the Foreigner’s Army,” “Baldies,” and the “Forces of Unbelief.”¹⁴³ In another example, the narrator observes that Captain Thomas was a lascivious admirer of “Santal girls, for the English in India at that time were not as virtuous as the English of today.”¹⁴⁴ These remarks are later dropped and instead the narrator makes the innocuous observation that Captain Thomas was enthralled by his “bearded cook [who] was a second Draupadi.”¹⁴⁵ Bankim also mocks British officials’ ineptitude in Bengali, making them the butt of a few jokes along

the time when Bankim wrote these novels. The later editions of *Anandamath* had to be censored by the author to excise passages which were considered anti-British.” (183)

¹⁴⁰ Joshi, *In Another Country*, 164. See also 288, fn. 41.

¹⁴¹ Lipner, “Introduction,” 47.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 204-211. Lipner notes that these references to the “English” occurred within the first edition of the novel. See “Critical Apparatus,” 272-273.

¹⁴⁴ Lipner, “Critical Apparatus,” 261. The Santals are a tribal community that live predominantly in west India.

¹⁴⁵ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 191. In the footnote Lipner indicates that Draupadi, the wife of the five Pandava brothers, was reputed to be an excellent cook.

these lines.¹⁴⁶ In marked contrast, whether as incompetent administrators of the homeland or long-standing adversaries of the Hindus, Muslims are excoriated across all editions of the novel.

Bankim's consistent characterization of Muslims in all versions of the *Anandamath* as well as his overall ideological aims in producing the text suggests that Das, Raychaudhuri, and Joshi's arguments on its so-called "contradictory ending" are profoundly misguided if not absolutely wrong.¹⁴⁷ The negative characterization of Muslims was indispensable to the plot of *Anandamath*, for in order for Hindus to emerge as triumphant heroes, ineffective and effete Muslims had to be their foil. Considering the profound importance that Bankim endowed to history in galvanizing a people, it makes sense that he would cast the Mughal regime as that of alien, malevolent Muslims against which a Hindu *samaj* could be posited and fostered. *Anandamath* additionally evinces his admiration of the perceived benefits of British rule, such as physical infrastructure ("roads"), positivist system of governance ("order"), as well as the idea of patriotism itself (love of the "Mother"). The Notices to the First and Second Editions of the novel invite the reader to reach such conclusions: "The English have freed Bengal from misrule"; "The British Government shall remain indestructible so long as the Hindus do not once more become great in knowledge, virtue and power."¹⁴⁸ Even if one were to grant that Bankim may have been at least partially motivated to place these Notices to curry favor with his British superiors and to ward off censure (and censorship), similar ideas are to be found throughout Bankim's fictional and

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 141, 191. Notably, in earlier editions of the novel Captain Thomas spoke proper Bengali (191, fn. 5).

¹⁴⁷ Joshi, *In Another Country*, 288, fn. 41.

¹⁴⁸ Bankim, *Anandamath*, 127-128.

nonfictional oeuvre as well as within contemporary Bengali historical discourse more broadly.¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

Anandamath endures as perhaps the most significant and potent articulation of India as Bharat to date. Bankim's success in this endeavor relied on his deployment of the evolving form of the Bengali historical novel in which authors exploited the underdetermined landscape of the past to portray pressing concerns of the present. By strategically blending fact and fiction as he saw fit, Bankim offered a powerful story of patriotism and love for a homeland that was increasingly being cast as fundamentally and righteously Hindu. Through this seductive reimagining of key historical events, Bankim's Hindu readers were empowered to regard British rule as a period of tutelage in which they had agency and control. Rather than promoting nationalist sentiment against the British as has been suggested in the scholarship, Bankim's novel was only "anti-colonial" in the sense that it challenged suggestions that the Raj was an inevitable and indefinite enterprise; by learning valuable skills and knowledge in the present, Hindus were to ready themselves for a British-free future. Yet unifying the Hindu *samaj* in this manner required the scapegoating and relegation of Indian Muslims, who were increasingly being cast as outsiders with no claim to the nation being imagined. *Anandamath* was significant not only for reifying the emerging conception that Hindus were India's righteous nationals, but also for establishing the expectation that they

¹⁴⁹ Raychaudhuri's comment that Bankim's sanction of British rule is "nowhere echoed in the serious essays" is short-sighted in suggesting that Bankim's nonfictional works may have been more indicative of the author's views (183). Tanika Sarkar has made the important point that such assumptions are misguided and that Bankim's fictional and nonfictional works must be read together as an "interlinked formation." See Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 164. *Anandamath*'s endorsement of British rule may be read as part and parcel of Bankim's overarching admiration and internalization of numerous Western ideas throughout his career, from earlier works such as "Samya" and his call for authentic Bengali histories in 1860, as well as later works such as *Krsnacaritra* [*The Life of Krishna*] (1886) and *Dharmatattva* [*Principles of Religion*] (1888).

were owed amicable treatment and due respect from the British. The next chapters explore how Bengali authors in the twentieth century steadily began to direct this message to the British themselves.

CHAPTER 3
HINDU HEROISM IN *INDIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENT*:
THE TRIALS OF NARAYAN LAL

In a now oft-cited example of British perceptions of Bengali effeminacy, in the early 1840s Thomas Macaulay characterized Bengali men as follows:

The race by whom this rich tract was peopled, enervated by a soft climate and accustomed to peaceful avocations, bore the same relation to other Asiatics which the Asiatics generally bear to the bold and energetic children of Europe. . . Whatever the Bengalee does he does languidly. His favourite pursuits are sedentary. He shrinks from bodily exercise; and, though voluble in dispute and singularly pertinacious in the war of chicane, he seldom engages in a personal conflict, and scarcely ever enlists as a soldier. We doubt whether there be a hundred genuine Bengalees in the whole army of the East India Company. There never, perhaps, existed a people so thoroughly fitted by nature and by habit for a foreign yoke.¹

The physical organization of the Bengalee is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he has been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity, are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable. His mind bears a singular analogy to his body. It is weak to helplessness, for purposes of manly resistance; but its suppleness and its tact move the children of sterner climates to admiration not unmingled with contempt.²

In this stinging, racist appraisal, Macaulay characterizes the “Bengalee” man as a fundamentally pathetic figure, one who was extraordinarily weak in both character and physicality. Though “voluble in dispute,” the Bengali remained a coward, incapable of backing up his bombast with action. Prone to deceit and physically feeble, Bengalis deserved their domination by the hardier British. Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828-1835, maintained a similar view; for him Bengalis were “a mere flock of sheep good only for their valuable fleeces, and having no political or military character whatever.”³

¹ T. Babington Macaulay, “Sir John Malcolm’s Life of Lord Clive,” 325.

² T. Babington Macaulay, “Warren Hastings,” 465.

³ Qtd. in John Rosselli, *Lord William Bentinck*, 193. See also Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness,” 123.

Macaulay's scornful pronouncements were ironic given that they came less than ten years after his famous 1835 Minute on Indian Education, which had successfully advocated the colonial state's sponsorship of English-medium education for the native population. Integral to Britain's mission in India, Macaulay had argued, was the creation of a servile "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" who would serve as "interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern."⁴ But now the Western-educated effete Bengali "babu" envisioned in his Minute was the target of blistering ridicule.⁵ The cataclysmic Rebellion of 1857 further entrenched British assessments of Bengali effeteness as their passivity stood in marked contrast to the vigor of the newly designated "martial races."⁶

Efforts of the Bengali community to combat the stereotype over the last third of the nineteenth century were futile.⁷ Nearly fifty years after Macaulay's indictment, British official John Strachey confirmed his predecessor's views. Though Strachey acknowledged certain changes since Macaulay's time, such as the Bengali elite's newfound interest in gymnastics and the "development of a taste for athletic sports among the educated classes," he nevertheless affirmed the long-held stereotype of their innate effeminacy: "This, however, is true of a small section only of the population, and the general character of the people

⁴ Macaulay, "Minute recorded in the General Department by Thomas Babington Macaulay, law member of the governor-general's council, dated 2 February 1835," 171.

⁵ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 95.

⁶ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 105-106.

⁷ See Rosselli's essay, "The Self-Image of Effeteness" (1980), for the various ways in which Bengalis attempted to counter the stereotype of effeminacy by embracing a campaign of physical culture, which included organized exercise, gymnastics, sports such as *latbi*-play, and the like. See also Sumit Sarkar's seminal monograph *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* regarding how physical culture had become something of a "craze" among the educated young men of Calcutta by the turn of the century (398).

throughout the greater part of the province remains as Lord Macaulay represented it.”⁸ As scholars such as John Rosselli and Mrinalini Sinha have documented, for the Bengalis who were on the receiving end of such derision, by the turn of the twentieth century, concern over masculinity had become nothing short of a cultural crisis.⁹

It was within this cultural milieu that Sarath Kumar Ghosh (1883-1920) emerged as a Macaulian interpreter of a different sort. Rather than mediating between colonial administrators and the local population within India, Ghosh relocated to England, where he engaged metropolitan distortions of India as an exotic, otherworldly land full of magic and mystery. Feeding a fascination with India and the Orient, Ghosh published a few short stories in British periodicals before issuing *Indian Nights' Entertainment: The Trials of Narayan Lal*, a six-part serialization that ran in *Pearson's Magazine* in 1902 and reached audiences in both Britain and America.¹⁰ Set in the mythic landscape of an alluring, romantic India, it tells the suspenseful story of a lowly court juggler named Narayan Lal who, in order to marry a beautiful Hindu princess with whom he has fallen in love, must prove his claim that he belongs to the *kshatriya* caste [that of the military and ruling elite] by undergoing a series of physically demanding deadly challenges. The princess's father, a ruthless tyrant, arranges these Herculean “trials” to prevent Lal from marrying his daughter. Aided by both a mysterious pundit and the princess herself, Narayan Lal ultimately triumphs, thereby proving

⁸ Having served in India from 1842-1880, Strachey reflected on his tenure in a series of lectures given at the University of Cambridge in 1884. See Strachey, *India: Its Administration & Progress*, 412.

⁹ Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effeteness,” 135. See also Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity* (1995).

¹⁰ The title of the serialization as it appeared in *Pearson's Magazine* was *Indian Nights' Entertainment*, a direct reference to *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, the title of the first English translation of French Orientalist Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et une nuits, contes arabes [Thousand and One Nights, Arabian Tales]*, published in twelve volumes between 1704-1717. A search in the digitized British Newspaper Archive indicates that Ghosh authored at least two short stories before this serialization. One was entitled “A Battle Royal with a Tiger” and was published in April 1898 in *The Wide World Magazine*; the other, “The Serpent-Charmer,” was published in *The Strand Magazine* in November 1900. See “Something New in Magazines” in the March 22, 1898 edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (3) and “Literary Notes” in the November 8, 1900 edition of the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* respectively (6).

his *kshatriya* identity and worthiness to marry her. Bolstering his merit even further is the *deus ex machina* revelation at the end of the final test that he is in fact a prince himself. The strange “pundit-philosopher,” Rama Krishna, who has been helping Narayan survive the trials, makes this melodramatic pronouncement and further reveals that he has been serving as Narayan’s guardian and ally ever since the prince had been abandoned by his mother as an infant. Ghosh later fleshed out the *Pearson’s* serialization and published the episodes in 1904 as *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal*; beginning in 1905 it was also distributed under the title *The Verdict of the Gods*.

At face value the 1902 serialization of *Indian Nights’ Entertainment* and its subsequent narrative expansions may appear to be nothing more than the cheap attempt of a self-promoting Indian author to capitalize upon the contemporary British fascination with the *Arabian Nights* and the Oriental exotic. That literary scholarship on all versions of Ghosh’s text is practically nonexistent likely stems from this view as well as an understandable desire among critics to examine Ghosh’s more well-known and thoughtful work, *The Prince of Destiny* (1909).¹¹ While it may be tempting to dismiss *Indian Nights’ Entertainment* as a mediocre “Indianized” imitation of the *Arabian Nights*, this chapter suggests that doing so would be shortsighted. Though Ghosh exploited the British appetite for the Oriental exotic by appropriating both formal and thematic elements from popular circulating translations of the *Arabian Nights*—most likely Richard Burton’s 1885 edition—he did so for strategic purposes. Ghosh’s shrewd appropriation of the tried-and-true platform of the *Arabian Nights*

¹¹ The sparse critical references on *Indian Nights’ Entertainment/1001 Indian Nights/The Verdict of the Gods* that do exist characterize it pithily, giving it not more than a few paragraphs at most. In 1934, Bhupal Singh noted that the text “recounts in the manner of an oriental story-teller the super-normal deeds of Narayan-lal” (306), while in 1987 K.S. Ramamurti asserted that the work was “cast in the fashion of *The Arabian Nights*” (139). In 1978 Harish Raizada made the astute observation that the spectators of Narayan’s trials “form a pool of common wisdom,” but on the whole his assessment remains wanting (35-36). See Singh, *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction*; Ramamurti, *Rise of the Indian Novel in English*; Raizada, *The Lotus and the Rose: Indian Fiction in English*.

enabled him to offer a seductive portrayal of Hindu heroism and triumphant masculinity for both metropolitan audiences and his own Bengali community.

Indian Nights' Entertainment is, I suggest, what Vinay Dharwadker theorizes as a “countertext” in Indian English literature, deserving of critical attention on two counts. First, in the British milieu in which Ghosh was circulating, the story challenged prevalent negative opinions regarding India, its people, and Hinduism. Hailed in *Pearson's* as “the only Hindu writer of English fiction,” Ghosh was conspicuously promoted as one who could describe “Indian life” with authority, a characterization that undoubtedly facilitated his attempts to mitigate the hostile and degrading depictions of India and Indians by British writers such as Flora Annie Steel and Rudyard Kipling, presently obsessed with portraying the macabre violence of the 1857 Rebellion and the bumbling Bengali “babu” figure respectively.¹² But even more importantly, Ghosh’s rousing story about Narayan Lal’s exploits may be regarded as a response to the cultural crisis over masculinity afflicting Hindu men and Ghosh’s native Bengali community in particular. By providing a stirring account of a Hindu *kshatriya* who repeatedly overcomes almost certain death, Ghosh provided a hero for Hindus at a time they needed it most, a model of masculinity who embodied numerous desirable traits thought to be missing from the community at large. Valorous, strong, and intelligent, Narayan Lal also proves to be a paragon of loyalty, dignity, and piety, a supreme champion in all senses. Far more than an unremarkable “Indian” imitation of the *Arabian Nights*, then, Ghosh’s text is a contemporary Indian epic, one that pointedly draws upon the pervasive myth of India as Bharat and presents exemplars of Hindu masculinity and femininity for both Indian and British readers to admire. Through such a lens, Ghosh appears less as a cavalier self-

¹² Flora Annie Steel’s novel *On the Face of the Waters* (1896) was a popular novel about the rebellion; see Benita Parry, *Delusions and Discoveries*, 104-105. See also Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 160-214.

promoter and more so like an influential Scheherazade, who, like the mythically enchanting raconteur, attempts to instruct, challenge, and win the sympathies of his many audiences.

The Pursuit of Heroes

Derogatory characterizations of Hindu masculinity were not new for the British in India. As discussed in Chapter One, the belief that India's originary Hindu inhabitants had either degenerated from a once-glorious state or had always been in a pitiable condition had long informed Britons' racist, positivist assessments about the community. In 1793 William Jones asserted that the natives of India were a "placid and submissive people" whose "religion, manners, and laws...preclude even the idea of political freedom."¹³ In a similar vein, Jones's contemporary, the historian Robert Orme, cited factors such as Hindu pacifism, a largely vegetarian diet, and an inhospitable climate as responsible for "render[ing] the Indian the most enervated inhabitant of the globe," one whose "manners are gentle" and whose "happiness consists in the solaces of a domestic life..."¹⁴ As such assessments indicate, whether attributed to external conditions such as diet, climate, lack of physical activity, or simply innate bodily constitution, the idea that India's "Hindu" natives—and Bengalis in particular—were highly effete and effeminate had long been axiomatic among the British. Indian Muslims were necessarily outside of this narrative given their apparent status as foreigners to the polity; as those who had conquered and ruled India prior to the British, Muslims were a demonstrably hardier and robust community.

¹³ Jones, "The Tenth Anniversary Discourse, delivered 28 February, 1793, By The President on Asiatick History, Civil and Natural," 150.

¹⁴ Orme, *A History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, 5-6.

The cataclysmic rebellion of 1857 compelled the British to revise their understanding of the masculinity of particular Hindu groups, but their view of Bengali effeminacy remained fixed. The passivity of Bengalis during the uprising was interpreted less as “loyalty” to the Raj and more so as confirmation of their constitutional weakness in both body and character.¹⁵ For British officials like Macaulay, passive Bengalis who had largely acted out of self-interest—and whose revolt would likely have been unimpressive if it were even attempted—stood in dramatic contrast to the insurrection of other communities, such as the Marathas in central India. In the aftermath of the Rebellion, docile Bengalis proved an easy foil to Sikhs, Jats, Rajputs, and other groups whom the British strategically categorized as “martial races” and targeted for military service due to the belief that they possessed “innate physical and moral characteristics which made them the best fighters.”¹⁶ As Thomas Metcalf observes, “...one might argue [that] the ‘extraordinary effeminacy’ of the Bengali, whom ‘no necessity would induce to fight’, alone gave meaning to the notion of ‘martial races’. They were what the Bengali was not.”¹⁷

The emerging conception that India’s genuine identity was the glorious Hindu space Bharat—and the suggestion that its past majesty could be reclaimed—was an important resource in challenging the broader charge of Hindu male effeminacy among upper-caste and upper-class Hindu communities not just in Bengal but across India. While imaginings of

¹⁵ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 103-106. Bengal remained quiet during the Rebellion while regions of north and central India erupted in violence. As discussed in Chapter One, the rationale behind revolting against the British was often complex and very rarely straightforward as individuals could be persuaded to rebel or remain passive due to bribery or other incentives. For the Western-educated Bengali *bhadralok*, the decision to remain “loyal” stemmed in large part from their understanding that their prosperity was bound up with British rule and beneficial policies such as the Permanent Settlement.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105-106. This classification was indeed ironic considering that many of these groups had not revolted during the Rebellion.

¹⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 127. Here Metcalf cites the observations of British general and scholar George MacMunn (1869-1952), who in 1911 published an influential study of the Indian army, *The Armies of India*.

Bharat endowed Hindus with a wondrous past, contemporary ideas about the mythical Aryan race offered them heroes to emulate. This theory had its roots in William Jones's famous pronouncement regarding a common linguistic origin of modern Indian and European languages.¹⁸ A diffusionist, Jones speculated that the speakers of this ur-language must have shared a common geographical origin but importantly he made no attempt to cast them in racial terms.¹⁹ It was only in the mid-nineteenth century through the influence of the German Indologist Max Müller that the term "Aryan" gained traction as a racial and ethnic category.²⁰ Appropriating the word from the Rg-Veda, Müller claimed that "Aryans" were sophisticated tribes of light-skinned warriors hailing from southern Russia who had conquered broad swathes of land from northern India to western Europe.²¹ For Müller, the Aryans were the speakers of Jones's ur-language, and, as such, the indisputable ancestors of both Europeans *and* Indians.²² As Joan Leopold writes, "Müller used [the Aryan theory of race] to praise the literature and philosophy of ancient India, to emphasize 'the common descent and...legitimate relationship between Hindu, Greek, and Teuton' and the blood tie between the Englishman and Bengali, and to reveal the providential nature of British rule in India."²³

¹⁸ Ibid., 82.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. See also Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" 40.

²¹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 82. See also van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 142. The Rg-Veda is a Hindu religious text composed between 1500-1000 B.C. As van der Veer points out, as described in the Rg-Veda, the Aryans were tribes of "horse-mounted fighters who worshipped sky-gods..." (142). The word "Arya" itself denotes nobility in Sanskrit and is found in many Hindu religious texts.

²² Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" 40. See also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 82 and van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 142.

²³ Leopold, "The Aryan Theory of Race," 272.

Not surprisingly, for many Britons the claim that they were racially identical to their Indian subjects was anathema.²⁴ In order to convince his European colleagues of this shared racial heritage Müller was compelled to emphasize the prodigious achievements of the Aryans as well as the relevance of India to Europe more broadly:

India is not, as you may imagine, a distant, strange, or, at the very utmost, a curious country. India for the future belongs to Europe, it has its place in the Indo-European world, it has its place in our own history, and in what is the very life of history, the history of the human mind...

And while thus trying to explain to those whose lot will soon be cast in India the true position which that wonderful country holds or ought to hold in universal history, I may perhaps be able at the same time to appeal to the sympathies of other members of this University, by showing them how imperfect our knowledge of universal history, our insight into the development of the human intellect, must always remain, *if we...leave out of sight our nearest intellectual relatives, the Aryas of India, the framers of the most wonderful language, the Sanskrit, the fellow-workers in the construction of our fundamental concepts, the fathers of the most natural of natural religions, the makers of the most transparent of mythologies, the inventors of the most subtle philosophy, and the givers of the most elaborate laws.*²⁵

Müller's hyperbolic language and use of superlatives is remarkable as he mythologizes the hypothesized Aryan people and their advanced civilization in highly romantic, quixotic terms. Since many of his European interlocutors considered themselves the cultural heirs of ancient Greece and Rome, such a grand portrayal of Aryan accomplishments helped render the claim of a common racial origin with Indians more palatable. Contemporary evolutionary discourse and Social Darwinist thought further helped reconcile the perceived differences between Europe and India by allowing for the supposition that only certain descendants of the Aryans had been able to flourish while others had suffered from racial degeneration.²⁶

²⁴ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 82. See also Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" 40.

²⁵ Müller, *India, What Can It Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before the University of Cambridge*, 14-15. See also Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?" 40-41.

²⁶ In the European context, the Aryans were distinguished from the Semitic and Turanian races in particular (Chakravarti 40). In India, British Orientalists identified the Turanian as well as the Dravidian peoples as foils to the triumphant Aryan conquerors of north India (Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 83-84). While Turanian

Not surprisingly, the British put themselves in the former category and Indians in the latter, their “pure” Aryan ancestry having waned due to factors such as a brutal climate and miscegenation with the autochthonous inhabitants.²⁷

Such ideas were momentous for subjugated Hindu elites across India as they made available a desirable category of identity to which to lay claim. As indicated in Müller’s description, far more than a mere racial identity, the overdetermined category “Aryan” was also a cultural signifier, a marker of supreme civilizational triumph. Like the idea of Bharat, it offered educated Hindus in Bengal, Maharashtra, and other parts of India a critical intellectual tool with which to rally the community and to combat British charges of inferiority. The suggestion of a racial equivalence between colonizer and colonized in particular allowed the possibility that Hindus—as one cohesive community—could overcome the various factors that had led to their ostensible decline; reclaim the glory of their ancient Aryan ancestors; and come to rival the apparent superiority of their British rulers. This reclamation could be undertaken through numerous methods: learning from their superior, technologically advanced English “brothers”; emulating native exemplars of Hindu valor and vigor; and, crucially, shunning any and all aspects of ostensible “Muslim” influence upon the Hindu *samaj*.²⁸ As with the term Bharat, Hindus across India gravitated towards “Aryavarta” and “Aryans” as apposite identifiers of the polity and their progenitors respectively. In contrast to the labels “India” and “Hindus” which were problematic because

encompassed speakers of non-Aryan and non-Semitic languages, Dravidian referred to the speakers of south Indian languages (Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 83).

²⁷ As van der Veer notes, the theory that ancient Aryan conquerors had subjugated the autochthonous inhabitants of (mostly south) India still retains political valence. While proponents of the theory claim that their Aryan heritage renders them superior to the Dravidian speakers of south India and native tribal groups, the latter posits their ascendance precisely on the basis of their autochthony. See *Imperial Encounters*, 142.

²⁸ Leopold, “The Aryan Theory of Race,” 273. Leopold quotes from Krishna Bihar Sen’s 1876 essay, “The Romance of Languages,” in which the comparative philologist proudly proclaims “Hindu” and “English” fraternity and encourages England to help its “elder” Aryan brother progress.

of their haphazard origin as geographical referents issued by foreigners, the term “Arya” in all of its manifestations was embraced precisely because it was a “supranational” category, one thought to more fittingly signify the essence of India and its legitimate Hindu nationals.²⁹ As Goswami explains, “...the category *Arya* signified the transcendental ground of collective identity, and it signaled a self-same original and pure originary space.”³⁰ Alongside Bharat, the nationalization of such terms in newspapers, novels, songs, and other cultural works helped strengthen the imagining of a timeless, unified community among elite, educated Hindus across India.³¹

For Bengalis in particular an Aryan identity held special import due to their ongoing struggle against charges of innate weakness.³² Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta has argued that in late nineteenth-century Bengal the term *jatiya*, which conventionally denoted race, tribe, or caste identity, increasingly assumed a new, broader meaning: an exclusive Hindu “nationality” that proudly claimed the revered Aryans as its progenitors.³³ Having thoroughly internalized the stereotype of effeminess, Bengalis themselves participated in the broader production of cultural works that praised Aryan qualities exemplified by other Indians, such as the Rajputs, Sikhs, and Marathas. While the British hailed these groups as “martial races,” Bengalis and other Indians celebrated them as models of virility because they were thought

²⁹ “Supranational” is Goswami’s term (180). As Thapar has explained, the label “Hindu” was indeed geographic in origin, referring to the inhabitants of the land across the Sindhu or Indus River (1989, 222-223).

³⁰ Goswami, *Producing India*, 180.

³¹ Goswami observes that these terms were rife in public discourse in this period, remarking on the titles of many leading newspapers (i.e. *Bharat Bandhu*, *Bharat Jivan*, *Arya Darpan*, *Bharat-Dipak*, and *Arya Patrika*) as well as novels such as Bharatendu Harischandra’s *Bharat Durdarsa* and *Bharat Janani* (197-198).

³² As Sinha has explained, accusations about inherent Bengali effeminacy formed the basis of several famous controversies between British and Bengali men in the late nineteenth century, most famously, reformist legislation that proposed raising the age of consent of Hindu girls. The three other British-Indian disputes in which the discriminatory logic of colonial masculinity was apparent included the British backlash against the passage of the Ilbert Bill in 1883; the colonial state’s response to the Native Volunteer Movement in 1885; and the proposals of the Public Service Commission of 1886. See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 1.

³³ Chowdhury-Sengupta, “The Effeminate and the Masculine,” 288.

to have retained critical aspects of a revered Aryan lineage as evidenced in their courage in resisting foreign (Muslim) Mughal invaders long ago.

As discussed in Chapters One and Two, histories and historical romances were especially popular in this period as they enabled Indian literati across the colonial state to project acts of heroism and valor onto what many early nineteenth-century British Orientalists had posited as a stagnant, degenerate Hindu era.³⁴ Whether fictional, nonfictional, or, as was often the case, a highly calculated hybrid of the two, these works suggested that the magnificent legacy of the ancient Aryans remained extant to varying degrees within certain Hindu communities and could be harnessed for the present. A particularly well-known history was R.K. Gupta's *Arya-Kirti* [*The Glorious Deeds of the Aryans*] (1879), which was published in fifteen editions and served as a textbook as late as 1919.³⁵ This work juxtaposed admiring portrayals of the Rajputs, Sikhs, and Marathas with commentary about the relative lack of Bengali patriotism.³⁶ The superlative nature of a Hindu/Aryan identity was a pervasive theme, as seen in Gupta's parsing of ancient Aryan courage in terms of both physical strength as well as adherence to sacred Hindu principles.³⁷ Other such Bengali histories were H. Mukherjee's *Rajasthanar Itibas* (1884), G.C. Mukherjee's *Rajasthan* (1885), and B.K. Maitra's *Sikh-Yuddher Itibasa O Maharaja Dilip Sinha* (1893).³⁸ Fictional works included Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnad Kavya* [*The Saga of Meghnad's*

³⁴ A.R. Mallick has broadly characterized the period from 1875-1925 as that of "inquiry" for Bengali historiography, a time when writers diverged from mostly imitating British histories of India to actively critiquing them. See A.R. Mallick, "Modern Historical Writing in Bengali," 448.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 449. Mallick notes that Calcutta University put out this textbook for "schools" but does not indicate the precise nature of these institutions, i.e., primary, secondary, etc.

³⁶ Chowdhury-Sengupta, "The Effeminate and the Masculine," 290.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 291. These two principles were *nyaya* [justice/ethics] and *dharma* [one's specific moral duty]. Notably, Gupta had explored such ideas earlier in a voluminous treatise on the Rebellion—over seven hundred pages long—which condemned British aggression and celebrated the bravery of figures like the Rani of Jhansi and Nana Sahib (Mallick 449).

³⁸ Mallick, "Modern Historical Writing in Bengali," 451.

Killing] (1861) and Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Rajput Jivan Sandhya* [*Pratap Singh: The Last of the Rajputs*] (1879).³⁹ In a similar vein, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's meditation on the deity Krishna, *Krishnacharitra* [*The Biography of Krishna*] (1892), upheld the god as a paragon of martial valor, just governance, and morality, dismissing popular notions of his mischievous and prurient nature as patently false.⁴⁰

The widespread commemoration of past instances of valor and virility contributed to the developing idea that authentic Indianness was the exclusive purview of Hindus, who were now additionally understood to be the descendants of the highly esteemed and culturally sophisticated Aryans. The new understanding of revered Aryan belonging relied crucially on the Hindu *kshatriya* caste which was composed of rulers and soldiers; individuals belonging to this caste were thus thought to bear the closest and most direct connection to India's Aryan forebears.⁴¹ In his *Arya Kirti*, for example, R.K. Gupta claimed that modern Rajputs—many of whom belonged to the *kshatriya* caste—were the true inheritors of esteemed Aryan qualities.⁴² Similarly, in his *History of Civilization in Ancient India* (1889), Romesh Chunder Dutt linked modern Rajputs with legendary *kshatriya* dynasties, kingdoms which were themselves the progeny of the mythical Aryan “settlers” to India.⁴³ Dutt's

³⁹ M.M. Dutt's *Meghnad Kavya* was a striking reinterpretation of the traditional *Ramayana* story in which the writer glorified the virility and courage of the demon king Ravana and decried the cowardice of the traditional heroes, the Hindu deities Rama and Laksmana. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 19-21.

⁴⁰ As Bankim writes, “To ascertain what has been the actual account of Sri Krsna's character narrated in the Puranas and the epics, I have researched, to the best of my ability, the ancient records. The fruit of it is that I have found out that all the sinful tales about Krsna current among people are baseless: and that on eliminating the romantic fiction about Krsna created by the romancers what remains is utterly unalloyed, wholly pure, exceedingly sublime. I have realized that such an ideal character filled with all qualities, free from the touch of all sin, exists nowhere else: not in the history of any country, not in any nation's literature.” See Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, 21-22.

⁴¹ As Nandy writes, “Many nineteenth-century Indian movements of social, religious and political reform—and many literary and art movements as well—tried to make Ksatriyahood the ‘true’ interface between the rulers and ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of authentic Indianness” (7).

⁴² Chowdhury-Sengupta, “The Effeminate and the Masculine,” 291.

⁴³ Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” 48-49.

exuberant praise of *kshatriya* culture during what he calls the “Epic Period” lasting from 1400-1200 B.C. is worth quoting at length:

...centuries had elapsed since the Aryans had first settled on the banks of the Indus, and the centuries had done their work in progress and civilization. The Kurus and the Panchalas were no longer like the warrior-cultivators who battled against the black aborigines and won the banks of the Indus and its tributaries. Manners had changed, society had become more refined and polished, learning and arts had made considerable progress. Kings invited wise men in their polished courts, held learned controversies with their priests, performed elaborate sacrifices according to the dictates of religion, led respectable and trained armies to the field, appointed duly qualified men to collect taxes and to administer justice, and performed all the duties of civilized administrators. The relations and friends of the king and all the warriors of the nation learnt archery and riding and driving the war chariot from their early youth, and also learned the Vedas and all the holy learning that was handed down from generation to generation...Women had their legitimate influence in society, and moved without restriction or restraint. *Society in India, fourteen hundred years before Christ, was more polished and refined than that of the preceding Vedic Age, and had more of healthy life and vigour than Hindu society has had in succeeding ages.*⁴⁴

Dutt’s romanticization of ancient Aryan culture during the Epic Period very strikingly evokes the singularity of Bharat—never before had “Hindu society” been so “polished” and “refined” nor would it ever again exude such health and “vigour.” Though Dutt does not go so far as to claim that Hindu society was superior to that of the West, he makes overtures in this direction as noted in the reference to the Epic Period having occurred “fourteen hundred years before Christ.” According to Dutt, the Aryans’ impact upon the native “warrior-cultivators” in north India led to a flourishing Hindu civilization, one in which the men were enlightened, disciplined, and hardy warriors while women were appropriately liberated and able to exert “legitimate influence” outside of domestic spaces. Although Dutt later avers that the heroes of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* “are myths, pure and

⁴⁴ Romesh Chunder Dutt, *A History of Civilization in Ancient India, Based on Sanscrit Literature*, 182-183. Emphasis added. Likewise, glorifying the Rajputs, Dutt acclaimed: “In India, too, the power of ancient races and dynasties was silently swept away during the period of darkness; and when light breaks in again, we see a new race of Hindu Feudal barons as the masters of India—the modern Rajputs!” (29).

simple,” his mythologizing of the “Kuru” and “Panchala” kingdoms in this particular passage is unmistakable.⁴⁵ Here *kshatriya* culture as demonstrated by and through these well-known Hindu dynasties functions as a synecdoche for an amorphous “Hindu society,” the very core of India/Bharat/Aryavarta itself.

Dutt’s comments here and elsewhere signal a wider belief on the part of Bengali intellectuals that members of the *kshatriya* caste—as the righteous descendants of the Aryans—encapsulated the very best of a profoundly overdetermined Indian/Hindu/Aryan identity. As Chakravarti and others have explained, the newfound preoccupation with a perceived bygone Hindu/Aryan era contributed to the formation of new gender roles for Hindu men and women modeled after their mythical counterparts.⁴⁶ In this schema, Hindu/Aryan men were considered to be “free, brave, vigorous, fearless, themselves civilized and civilizing others, noble, and deeply spiritual,” while Hindu/Aryan women were likewise “learned, free, and highly cultured.”⁴⁷ Perfect counterparts, together they were properly religious and “represented the best examples of conjugal love, offering the supreme sacrifice of their lives as a demonstration of their feeling for their partners in the brief journey of life.”⁴⁸ Though there were certainly other gender roles available to Hindu men and women in late nineteenth-century Bengal and elsewhere in India, the twin images of the triumphant *kshatriya* and *kshatriyani* were particularly powerful as the celebration of such

⁴⁵ Ibid., 211. The feuding protagonists of the *Mahabharata* belonged to the Kuru dynasty.

⁴⁶ Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic Dasi?” 28, 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

courageous figures could help vivify what was understood to be a once splendid but now dishonored Hindu *samaj*.⁴⁹

Seeking Indian Interpreters to the West

In July 1904, *The Mabratta*, an English-language newspaper founded by the provocative Hindu ideologue and nationalist leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak, published a provocative, unsigned editorial entitled “What Our Literary Men Should Do.”⁵⁰ Reflecting Tilak’s belief in the urgent need for a Hindu cultural revival, the writer of the *Mabratta* article lamented the tendency of recent Indian university graduates to resign themselves to banal careers, inciting them to pursue instead opportunities in which they could further Hindu interests while earning a better living. Sympathizing somewhat with the majority of graduates who “condescend[ed] to accept...unattractive jobs” with the colonial state for the sake of long-term stability and financial security, the *Mabratta* author specifically chides those educated elites who took up professions for which they were indeed qualified but who practiced them with no inspiration or ingenuity whatsoever.⁵¹ He complains that these individuals were solely concerned with “...somehow ek[ing] out a decent living and...leav[ing] all ambitious and original work to be done by Europeans.”⁵² For example,

⁴⁹ Other gender roles promoted during this period included the pure, sacrificing mother for women and the celibate, abstemious ascetic for men. See Jasodhara Bagchi, “Representing Nationalism” (1990) and Chandrima Chakraborty, *Masculinity, Asceticism, Hinduism* (2011) respectively. Chakraborty makes the important point that the dominance of the *ksbatriya* model for emasculated Hindus was at least partially informed and enhanced by “brahmanical ascetic practices” (24).

⁵⁰ Tilak famously began two festivals that rallied Hindus on a grand scale in Maharashtra, actions that reflected his stated belief that “hero worship” was integral to “nationality, social order, and religion.” Qtd. in Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 260. In 1893, Tilak turned what were primarily familial and private celebrations of the Hindu deity Ganesha into a large public spectacle in an effort to promote Hindu unity. In 1895 Tilak launched another festival celebrating Shivaji, the seventeenth-century Maratha ruler who famously defied Mughal rule. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 151-152 and Bhatt, *Hindu Nationalism*, 32.

⁵¹ *Mabratta*, “What Our Literary Men Should Do,” 337.

⁵² *Ibid.*

rather than importing “the commonest drugs and even the crudest and simplest preparations” from Europe and America, Indian physicians should consider producing pharmaceuticals domestically.⁵³ Likewise, Indian lawyers should pursue advanced study in their field instead of foolishly competing for poorly paying positions in a crowded profession. The resulting legal scholarship, the *Mabratta* author argued, could helpfully challenge the denigrating assessments of Hindu law issued by the likes of eminent British jurist Henry Maine: “...nobody makes the attempt to assail and subvert the specious fabric of plausible theories on which Mr. Mayne bases his outspoken criticism of many Hindu customs and usages which though repugnant to the foreigner are always dear to the Hindu heart.”⁵⁴ Echoing Macaulay’s disgust with the effete Bengali “babu” who was incapable of backing up his bombast with action, the *Mabratta* author makes a similar condemnation: “But our eminent lawyers will be voluble social reformers and faddists and with all their tall talk of moral courage, will not have the temerity to break a lance in defence of our cherished ideals which are often openly questioned and sometimes traduced by foreign writers and foreign critics who pretend to do so under a thin garb of impartiality and outspokenness.”⁵⁵

After pummeling Indian doctors and lawyers, the *Mabratta* writer turns to Indian graduates with a “purely literary training” whom he censures as “equal sinners in the utter want of originality, imagination and creative genius.”⁵⁶ Like their passive counterparts, such “literary men” were content to sit idly by as British authors like Philip Meadows Taylor and Rudyard Kipling published degrading works about India. The *Mabratta*’s commentary about the present state of literature on India is worth quoting at length:

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 337-338.

English readers still gather their ideas of Indian life from Meadows [sic] Taylor's *Tara* and *Seeta*. There is no Indian writer who has yet tried to interpret the East to Western people and recently Englishmen have come to regard Mr. Rudyard Kipling's fantastic yarns as truly representing the inexplicable character of all oriental life. With Mr. Kipling's special qualifications to become a self-constituted interpreter between the East and West we are as yet unacquainted. He may have minutely observed the life of the British soldier in India. *But judging from the dubious worthies he is fond of depicting in his weired [sic] stories, we entertain a shrewd suspicion that the author perhaps never went a mile beyond the slums of English cantonments in search of really Indian character.*

In his novels women with questionable characters and men with questionable antecedents and missions jostle one another promiscuously and *if these caricatures drawn by Rudy Kipling are to pass for genuine studies of Eastern characters all we have to say is that literature in England must have recently fallen on very evil times indeed. If the slang of the barrack room is to take the place of wit and humour, it is time we should cease to read newly published novels altogether.* Writers in English periodicals went into hysterics over the merits of Kipling's 'Kim.' We once tried to read that supposed epoch-making tale of Indian life. *Imagine our horror and disgust when we stumbled on representatives of the Indian proletariat [sic], the very riffraff of our bazars and bathing ghats, doing the duty of heroes and heroines. The woman from Amritsar and the sepoy from Mooltan or somewhere else may be very good people in their own proper spheres, but when they are marshalled forth as being the typical characters which are to enlighten the blissful Englishmen about the reality of Indian or Oriental Society, it is certainly time that somebody should call out 'halt.'*

All the Indian characters figuring in Mr. Kipling's novels are quite unreal and are mere figments of his fertile imagination. It is not people who move in the wake of regiments and armies who will really care to have tales of Indian life [;] these will be furnished to them not by Kiplings and Taylors but they will have to come direct from the pen of Indian writers. And here at least the Indians have before them an almost unbounded and very promising field of literary endeavour. Some capable and ambitious writers have only to make the attempt and in no time they will be in the unchallenged occupation of the whole field.⁵⁷

According to this article, British writers like Taylor and Kipling were inflicting great harm to India through their derogatory, misleading portrayals of the polity and its people. Focusing on Kipling as a case-in-point, the *Mahratta* writer denounces the recently published *Kim*, in which "the very riffraff of our bazars and bathing ghats [were] doing the duty of heroes and heroines." Such lowly characters, while sympathetic to a degree, were fundamentally unworthy of literary representation and best confined to "their own proper spheres." The

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 338. Emphasis and paragraph breaks added.

danger of Taylor and Kipling's works, the writer argued, was that naïve Western readers perceived such characters as truly representative of the "inexplicable character of all oriental life" when in fact their portrayals only heightened extant distortions about India. Rather than privileging members of the hoi polloi as protagonists, the author suggests, fiction about India needed heroes and heroines who were Hindu, upper-caste, and well-born. Literature depicting such characters would counter the prevailing misrepresentations issued by British writers with positive images of India and Indians for Western readers. These stories would additionally boast greater verisimilitude since they would be created by Indians themselves, who were naturally more familiar with, and knowledgeable of, the breadth of Indian society beyond "the slums of [Kipling's] English cantonments."⁵⁸ Eschewing Kipling's Indian characters as "quite unreal and...mere figments of his fertile imagination," the writer argues that truly meaningful literature about India could only "come direct from the pen of Indian writers," thus opening "an almost bounded and very promising field of literary endeavor" in which success was all but assured.

Despite alleging that there existed "no Indian writer who has yet tried to interpret the East to Western people," the author of the *Mabratta* piece did, in fact, identify two individuals producing precisely the kind of literature about India that he prescribed. Not surprisingly, both were Bengali and one was Sarath Kumar Ghosh.⁵⁹ Alongside the famous historian, poet, and novelist Romesh Chunder Dutt (whose superlative praise of Hindu society during the Epic Period I have already discussed), the *Mabratta* praised Ghosh's recent

⁵⁸ The author of the *Mabratta* editorial notably makes a very similar point when addressing the problems of British historiography about India: "[Englishmen] are not fitted by traditions, and education to deal sympathetically with Indian events. They cannot appreciate the true significance of the historical evidence which they assiduously accumulate. This province of literary work ought also to be pre-eminently a close preserve of the Indian intellect."

⁵⁹ Both Dutt and Ghosh are cited as the only two Indian authors of which the *Mabratta* author knew to "have written tales of Indian life in English."

publication of romantic stories about Indian princes and princesses in British periodicals:

“...Mr. Sarat Kumar Ghose...has made his name famous by writing sensational and thrilling tales of Indian romance in various monthly periodicals in England.”⁶⁰ The author argued that it was imperative for other Indian literati to take up their pens and join Dutt and Ghosh’s endeavor so that the prevalent negative perceptions Western readers held about India and Indians might begin to abate. Not only would such works help rejuvenate Hindu cultural identity, their creation also promised financial reward and fame as demonstrated by Ghosh’s success abroad.

Entitled “Wanted: An Interpreter,” a responding editorial in *The Times of India*, almost certainly penned by a British writer, begged to differ.⁶¹ While the author admitted that the recommendation advanced in the *Mabratta* article was theoretically “not without its merits,” and even conceded that “no doubt much of [Kipling’s] Indian colouring must appear untrue to the native eye,” he balked at the proposed “canons of romantic literature” that the *Mabratta* advocated in its stead. After describing the kind of sensational melodrama typical of Ghosh’s romances—a male lover miraculously appears to rescue his beloved from a lusty kidnapper whereupon he kisses her in “one passionate outburst of love”—the *Times* editorialist lambasts the *Mabratta*’s approval of such work:

This, we are told, is the way to interpret the East to the West, these are true native characters! We are much mistaken if we have not often met them before in the pages of the *Family Herald* and the penny novelette. *With Mr. Ghose we have no quarrel. His story is no better and no worse than much of the cheap trash which floods our railway book-stalls, and when it brought in its guinea its object was no doubt accomplished.* But even in the materialised West we have higher literary ideals than this. In such a story there is no

⁶⁰ Ibid. “Ghose” was a common variation of the author’s last name.

⁶¹ See “Wanted: An Interpreter,” *Times of India* 67, no. 210 (September 2, 1904): 4. While the editorial itself was unsigned, it was very likely written by a British individual considering its references to “we Englishmen” and “our great English novelists.” In addition, the primary shareholders of the *Times of India* at this time were of British origin, Thomas Bennett and Frank Morris Coleman.

question of literature, no question of interpreting anything to anybody. No: the novel of character is very different from this; and he who would be worthy to touch the hem of the garments of our great English novelists must follow very different models...⁶²

Here the *Times* author argues that the kinds of Indian characters that Ghosh proffers are by no means aesthetically superior to, or more desirable than, those created by British writers. Rather than providing valuable renderings of Indians, Ghosh offers nothing beyond the mindless “cheap trash” already widely available for mass consumption. A self-serving opportunist, Ghosh was merely a savvy exploiter of the Western appetite for the Orient. Though the editorialist goes on to avow that he has “no wish to recommend realism in preference to idealism,” this is exactly the kind of incisive and informative “interpretation” of the East that he desired, one that would be provided by an “Indian Dickens” who does not yet exist. Positing a polarity between Dickensian social realism and high-quality historical fiction in the vein of Walter Scott, the *Times* makes clear that Ghosh fails to provide either.⁶³ Instead of following Ghosh’s example as the *Mabratta* urges, the *Times* editorialist invites novice Indian writers to explore the “vast field...in between these two extremes” and, above all, urges them not to shy away from portraying commoners like the “simply pious” Lama of Kipling’s *Kim* or the obscure yet noble Mrs. Todgers of Dickens’s *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

The debate between the two authors of these papers betrays key issues confronting the Hindu literati at the turn of the twentieth century. What did it mean to be an “Indian” or “Hindu” writer at this moment and what were his or her responsibilities? Who was worth representing in fiction? What constituted the ideal “interpretation” of Indian life—one that

⁶² Ibid. Emphasis added.

⁶³ The precise insult leveled at Ghosh in the *Times* is worth noting. While it is clear that Ghosh is no social realist in the vein of Dickens, the editorialist emphasizes that Ghosh’s attempted foray in historical romance leaves much to be desired: “...the efforts of Mr. Sarat Ghose do not lead us to anticipate the early advent of an Indian Sir Walter Scott.”

was rooted in realism or laced with romance? And according to whose standards? Although the *Times* editorialist attributes the “horror and disgust” felt by the *Mahratta* author to high-caste Hindu prejudice against members of the “Indian proletariat,” there was certainly far more to the latter’s argument regarding the type of characters urgently needed in Indian fiction. Much like the historical romances and histories popular in Bengal in this period, the *Mahratta*’s advocacy of stirring portrayals of Hindu heroes and heroines spoke to the needs of its sociocultural milieu, one in which Hindus far and wide were chafing from allegations of effeminacy and cowardice. As I noted in relation to *Anandamath* in Chapter Two, it was not realism but romance that provided the apposite literary register for the kinds of melodramatic, predictable depictions of stock characters accomplishing noble feats for which the Hindu community was so desperate.

Ghosh himself intervened in this debate taking place in the pages of the *Mahratta* and the *Times*. In a shrewd letter to the editor of the *Times*, he took the position expressed in the *Mahratta* one step further. Not only were Indian writers necessarily better positioned than foreigners to represent Indian life, he further suggested that only Indian opinions about such literature mattered. While he does not attempt to rival Dickens or Scott, Kipling—a fellow writer of India—was fair game:

With regard to Mr. Kipling, however, the case is essentially different. India is vast enough for Mr. Kipling and I not to clash with, or poach upon, each other. Our true mission is to supplement, not neutralize, each other. But if accidentally, without malice aforethought, the question is raised as to which of us gives a truer representation of Indian life, permit me to point out, Sir, with due deference, that the final decision must lie, not with you, but with those most intimately concerned—namely, my countrymen themselves, among others, your contemporary, the ‘Mahratta.’ *And if that decision is, as you imply, more favourable to me than to Mr. Kipling, you may indeed question its literary taste, but scarcely its justice.*⁶⁴

⁶⁴ A. Sarath Kumar Ghosh, “An Indian Novelist: To the Editor of *The Times of India*,” *Times of India* (October 10, 1904): 7. Emphasis added.

In this falsely deferential and insincere reply, Ghosh defends his fiction by appealing to the “justice” of Indians’ preference for flattering, positive portrayals over disparaging ones and a perceived advantage of Indian writers held in crafting such “truer” depictions. Despite charitable and gracious references to a shared “mission” between himself and Kipling, Ghosh in fact regards the latter as a competing “interpreter” of India whose denigration in the *Mahratta* was warranted. His fellow Indians’ preference for his romances was a matter of “justice” in that Indian readers would naturally favor positive portrayals of themselves over the denigrating depictions offered by Kipling. Echoing the *Mahratta* writer, Ghosh suggests that as a (Hindu) Indian his illustrations of Indian life were necessarily richer, fuller, and more genuine than what foreign writers could offer. Negative opinions such as those of the Englishmen at the *Times* are ultimately immaterial compared to what his fellow “countrymen” think, since they—as both the portrayed subjects *and* targeted audience of such literature—were the “most intimately concerned” with such work.

Ghosh’s claim that he was mainly “interpreting” India for Indians was disingenuous to say the least. A Bengali author based in London whose literature was published in periodicals with broad readerships, Ghosh was well aware that non-Indians formed a significant part, if not the majority, of his readers. It was none other than his fantastic representations of the East for naïve Western audiences that so annoyed the *Times*, a critique that he cleverly evades in his reply. Such prevarication is consistent with Ghosh’s apparent tendency to present himself in a very calculated manner to non-Indians. As Meenakshi Mukherjee and Alex Tickell have pointed out, reliable biographical information on Ghosh is rather scarce and what little is known about him must be pieced together from various

articles and pamphlets issued in Britain and America in the early twentieth century.⁶⁵ While it seems likely that Ghosh invented much of what he claimed about himself, his ostentatious self-presentation as an emblematic Oriental/Eastern/Indian to receptive and perhaps naïve Western audiences remains undeniable.⁶⁶ This projection is evidenced not just in his fantastic fiction about India and his frequent donning of ceremonial Indian garb at public events, but also in the various lectures he delivered about his homeland, the titles of which ranged from “The Marvels of India,” “The Romance of India,” “Hindu Occultism,” “Hindu Women From the Inside,” and “Hindu Ideals of Happiness.”⁶⁷

Though his response to the *Times* would suggest otherwise, Ghosh mediated between an intrigued West and highly overdetermined notions of an Indian/Hindu culture. Yet, importantly, he did so to a large extent on his own terms, as the “India” that he represented—in his very persona as well as his fictional and nonfictional works—frequently

⁶⁵ See Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire*, 63, and Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830-1947*, 170. The basic facts about Ghosh appear to be that he was born in 1883, hailed from Bengal, and left for Britain sometime in the 1890s, never to return to India. In Britain he began publishing fiction about India, ranging from the sensational short stories that so annoyed the *Times of India* to the more thoughtful bildungsroman *The Prince of Destiny* published in 1909. Oddly enough, in 1898 he also, apparently, filed a patent with the European Patent Office for a new kind of boot. In 1912, Ghosh came to America, where he began giving a series of lectures about various “Indian” topics, posing as a veritable expert on all things Indian/Hindu. He died of influenza in Manhattan in 1920, most likely a victim of the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic.

⁶⁶ Interestingly enough, the most insightful piece about Ghosh’s extremely sketchy life that I have encountered thus far is a blog post from August 2012 by a pulp fiction aficionado, Sai Shankar, who rightly suggests that much of what Ghosh said about himself was likely apocryphal. Ghosh’s more incredulous claims stem from his central assertion that he was an Indian prince, the nephew of the raja of Ghoshpara, an area northwest of Kolkata. At various moments Ghosh claimed that he desired to escape parental pressure to marry a princess back in India; that it was at his suggestion that King George and Queen Mary attended the Delhi Durbar in 1911; and that his purpose for coming to America in 1912 was to gain ideas for development for India and to marry an American woman of his choosing. As Shankar remarks, “at the time, newspaper reporters seem to have believed his stories, or at least printed them without looking too deeply into the matter. What did it matter what they believed as long as people were interested enough to pick up and read the paper?” See Sai Shankar, “Prince Sarath Kumar Ghosh,” <http://pulpflakes.blogspot.com/2012/08/prince-sarath-kumar-ghosh-indian-writer.html>. The striking resonances between Ghosh’s biographical claims and the story of Prince Barath, the hero of *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*, will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

⁶⁷ See undated pamphlet, “Sarath Kumar Ghosh (Prince Sarath Ghosh of Ghoshpara).” I surmise that the year of publication was approximately 1919.

attempted to counter the disparaging perceptions prevalent among Britons and Americans.⁶⁸

Ghosh's calculated participation in the project of orientalizing India typifies the strategies of "culturally ambidextrous" Indian literati during the colonial period. As Vinay Dharwadker has explained, a culturally ambidextrous individual was one who

is likely to be ambivalent about each of the cultures he inhabits, but his ambivalence is subsumed by his *cultural ambidexterity*, an equal or commensurate facility in two or more cultural systems concurrently. If the resister acts out of a subaltern culture against a dominant other culture, and the collaborator acts in a subaltern culture for a dominant culture, then the ambidextrous subject acts simultaneously in two or more cultures without making unmixed, unilateral choices or commitments...if the resisting subject sacrifices a dominant culture in favor of a subaltern one, and the complicitous subject sacrifices a subaltern culture in favor of a dominant one, then the ambidextrous subject tries to maintain a critical distance toward two cultures so that he can act in both without sacrificing either.⁶⁹

Dharwadker's culturally ambidextrous subject-position is one of four postures that Indian intellectuals assumed in order to challenge—either directly or subtly—unilateral, positivist derisions of India frequently issued by the British.⁷⁰ Unlike the resister or the collaborator whose loyalties are usually more straightforward, the culturally ambidextrous subject's dual entrenchment within his native subaltern culture and oppressing foreign culture yields fraught feelings towards both. Most often manifesting as the "bilateral cosmopolitan," the culturally ambidextrous subject endeavors to "translate Indian and Western cultures into

⁶⁸ See Amit Chaudhuri, "The East as a Career" (2006): "...the Orient, in modernity, is not only a European invention but also an Oriental one, an invention that has arguably created and occupied an intellectual, cultural and political space far larger and more important than its European counterpart" (117).

⁶⁹ Vinay Dharwadker, "Print Culture and Literary Markets in Colonial India," 123-124. This essay provides a fuller elaboration of the culturally ambidextrous subject-position than does Dharwadker's later piece on Indian literature in English, "The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature" (2003).

⁷⁰ Dharwadker identifies three other subject-positions: those of resistance, collaboration, and revivalism; see "Print Culture and Literary Markets in Colonial India," 114-124. In "The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature," Dharwadker retains the four but recharacterizes "resistance" as "nationalism or proto-nationalism" (2003, 241-242). While he notes that these subject-positions focused on the "mutually constitutive, conflictual interpretations between *empire*, *nation*, *village*, and *city*," Dharwadker rightly affirms that India itself nevertheless "remained a constant master referent" (2003, 241).

each other, reforming and modernizing both.”⁷¹ As Dharwadker explains with reference to Indian Anglophone writers, the culturally ambidextrous persona was integral to a “comprehensive counterdiscourse in English on the Indian understanding of India, which attempt[ed] to share, deny, diffuse, arrogate, or redistribute” the British power to represent the polity and its people.⁷² Certainly the *Mahratta*’s praise of Ghosh arose in no small part from his Hindu princes and princesses’ butting heads with Kipling’s lowly Lama and other such middling characters within a perceived “Indian” literary arena—a hallowed cultural space wherein only respectable, well-born characters were welcome.

Ghosh’s serialization of the adventures of Narayan Lal in *Pearson’s Magazine* in 1902 was a particularly significant countertext in this vein.⁷³ Billed as *Indian Nights’ Entertainment* it tells the story of a disguised Hindu *kshatriya* named Narayan Lal who is compelled to undergo six mortal challenges in order to prove his caste identity and worthiness to marry a beautiful Hindu princess.⁷⁴ In both content and form Ghosh very plainly imitated the style and structure of the *Arabian Nights* in the apparent attempt to capitalize upon the contemporary European fascination with the exotic Orient that this text came to

⁷¹ Certainly this phenomenon was not peculiar to colonial India as it had much older histories across the world (e.g., the sixteenth-century adventurer and scholar Leo Africanus) and persists to this day. For a relatively recent discussion about how contemporary diasporic South Asian women writers engage in this practice, see Lisa Lau, “Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals” (2009).

⁷² Dharwadker, “The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature,” 206. These subject-positions are of course not exclusive to Indian authors writing in English.

⁷³ Ibid., 205. As suggested by Dharwadker, countertexts were works by Indian authors that were driven by “the desire to question, correct, or displace British representations of India.” Here Dharwadker fleshes out a term posited by A.K. Ramanujan in his 1989 essay, “Where Mirrors are Windows,” 189.

⁷⁴ On the beginning page of each monthly episode, the heading *Indian Nights’ Entertainment* appeared in large, exaggerated font, after which followed a brief synopsis of the current/previous episode for readers. The subtitle of the serialization was *The Trials of Narayan Lal*, followed by the name of the specific adventure at hand: “I. On the Tower of Victory” (January); “II. The Well of Ten Thousand Sighs” (February); “III. Tongues of Fire” (March); “IV. The Temple of the Manik” (April); V. The Poisoned Cup” (May); VI. The Verdict of Parameshwar” (June). In 1904, Ghosh revised the *Pearson’s* serialization as *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal*, which kept the same number of adventures but expanded the number of “nights” over which they were told from six to twenty-one. In 1905 it was released as *The Verdict of the Gods*. All versions included various illustrations of the depicted events, with the 1902 edition containing the most.

symbolize.⁷⁵ The editors of *Pearson's* were complicit in this endeavor as they trumpeted Ghosh as a singularly Hindu/Indian writer in the magazine's paratextual material. In a biographical sketch that preceded the first installment of the series, Ghosh is pointedly introduced as the "only Hindu writer of English fiction," an Indian Scheherazade who "is confident that he has material for 2002 stories."⁷⁶ As if to prove Ghosh's identity as an Indian, the editors even included a picture of the author wearing regal Indian attire.⁷⁷ In addition to such pointed references to the *Arabian Nights*, Ghosh's serialization appropriated elements of the Indian epic tradition, thereby manifesting a remarkable and highly incestuous intertextuality when considering the likely influence of Indian epics on the *Arabian Nights* itself.⁷⁸ Notwithstanding (and to a limited extent, because of) its connection

⁷⁵ As well-documented in the scholarship, the collection of stories that formed the core of the *Arabian Nights* derived from an oral folkloric tradition predominant in India, Persia, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt (Kabbani 48). These stories circulated throughout these regions and likely reached Europe as early as the fifteenth century (Makdisi and Nussbaum 2; Kabbani 50). In the early eighteenth century, French Orientalist Antoine Galland's edition *Les Mille et une nuits* provided some stability to what was an inherently dynamic and constantly evolving corpus of oral folklore. Paralleling the work of British Orientalists in India, Galland's endeavor was marked by profound bias. As Rana Kabbani remarks, Galland was no mere conveyer or translator but rather the "inventor of a Western phenomenon," a Scheherazade himself who captivated Europe with seductive tales about an exotic Other, stories which in turn inspired numerous emulative accounts about the East by other writers (49). Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum helpfully point out that the *Arabian Nights* might best be considered a palimpsest due its existence within and across numerous editions, translations, amendments, rewritings, and overwritings in both oral and written form over the centuries, and against a backdrop of global imperialism (3).

⁷⁶ "Sarath Kumar Ghosh: An Introduction," 75.

⁷⁷ Ibid. Anticipating the future debate between the *Maratha* and the *Times of India* regarding the nature and purpose of "Indian" literature, *Pearson's* editors notably evince a distorted critical perspective wherein the literature of Indian authors are held to be necessarily superior to that of non-Indians and Kipling in particular is advanced as Ghosh's foil: "Kumar Ghosh keenly appreciates the genius of Rudyard Kipling. That he does not lack confidence in his own skill (though the most modest of men) is clear from his ambition to rival Kipling in the field of Indian stories; and that he has succeeded in catching the full spirit of Indian in a way that no English-born author could attempt, these stories bear forcible witness." While non-Indian writers could only "write of Indian life as they have studied it" the editors argue that Ghosh's stories are more authentic because their creator was "Indian to the core, was brought up in India, and can write of Indian life as he has lived it." Relatedly, the editors suggest that "purely Indian" stories are those in which "no Westerns figure."

⁷⁸ The extent to which the Indian epic tradition influenced the *Arabian Nights* is a highly complex matter and beyond the scope of this chapter, but nevertheless a few key points are worth mentioning. Based on John Brockington's claim that the literary technique of framing (what he calls "emboxing") cannot be traced further back than the *Mahabharata* (18), it appears to be the case that the *Nights'* deployment of the frame narrative very likely derived from the Indian oral storytelling tradition. This supposition is further supported by Brockington's observation that "it is in all probability as a result of the influence from the [*Mahabharata*] that [this hierarchical

with the *Arabian Nights*, I suggest that Ghosh's *Indian Nights' Entertainment* is most usefully characterized as a romantic epic that addressed the concerns of Ghosh's native Bengali milieu while simultaneously catering to Western appetites for a fantastic East.⁷⁹

My argument rests on an understanding of the epic as a dynamic genre that fulfills particular social functions within cultures in addition to (often arbitrary and variable) strictures of literary form. As Paul Innes suggests, "If we think of epic as function, in addition to its existence as form, then we begin to glimpse its multiple potentialities."⁸⁰

Despite seeming unfamiliar and perhaps even defunct, and varying widely across the world in its features, the epic continues to mark a rich and capacious "generic space" for communities to establish or promote desired cultural memories and conceptions of self.⁸¹ In the Indian context, Edward Dimock, Stuart Blackburn, Joyce Flueckiger, and others advance similar postulations of the epic, a form that variously evidences, depending on the period and context, what a particular community or culture thinks about itself.⁸² In addition to

emboxing of one narrative within another] became such a regular technique not only in the Puranas but also in storytelling literature, most famously, the *Panchatantra*, from which it may well have spread worldwide" (ibid). See John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (1998). The *Panchatantra*, an ancient collection of moral fables featuring animal characters, is critical here considering that its frame narrative and that of the *Nights* are quite similar and that both contain multiple layers of emboxing: characters within stories narrate stories to others and so on. If the *Mahabharata's* use of the frame tale influenced the *Panchatantra*, which in turn bears striking structural similarities to the *Nights*, then it stands to reason that the *Nights's* deployment of this narrative technique likely derived from the Indian epic tradition. Though Sadhana Naithani notes that the supposed influence of the *Panchatantra* upon the *Nights* is not clear, she does confirm that their frame narratives are "strikingly similar" (119, 122). Both are highly didactic in nature as two outsiders, Scheherazade and the Brahmin Vishnu Sharma, embrace the challenging task of educating wayward rulers in dire need of moral instruction and ultimately triumph in their endeavor. Through their instruction, both the murderous King Shahriyar of the *Nights* and the three young foolish princes of the *Panchatantra* are successfully transformed into wise and just kings. See Sadhana Naithani, "The Teacher and the Taught," 119-133.

⁷⁹ Most famously epitomized in the *Ramayana*, this particular brand of Indian epic demonstrates a primary structuring conflict of a quest for romantic love. See Blackburn and Flueckiger, "Introduction," 5.

⁸⁰ Innes, *Epic*, 108, 7-8. See also Martin, "Epic as Genre," 9-11.

⁸¹ "Generic space" is Innes's term, 108.

⁸² See Dimock et al., "The Indian Epic," 79. Likewise, Blackburn and Flueckiger observe that "Epics stand apart from other 'songs' and 'stories' in the extent and intensity of a folklore community's identification with them; they help to shape a community's self-identity" (6).

existing as textual or performative works, then, Indian epics stand as cultural artifacts that reflect particular groups' sociocultural beliefs or aspirations.⁸³

Much like the historical romances and novels about Hindu valor that were popular in India in this period, the romantic epic occupied a middle ground between fantasy and fact in and through which authors could reify the myth of India as Bharat, a Hindu utopia rich with inspiring heroes and heroines. In the Indian context, Blackburn and Flueckiger identify three main types of epic: martial, sacrificial, and romantic.⁸⁴ Though *Indian Nights' Entertainment* certainly demonstrates aspects of martial and sacrificial epics, such as a concern with power, social obligation, the restoration of lost rights, and group solidarity, I suggest the text may be best considered a romantic epic, in which the main structuring conflict is that of a quest for love. Ghosh's deft appropriation of the mutually imbricated legacies of the Indian epic and *Arabian Nights'* romances allowed for a rousing account of Hindu heroism for his multiple audiences. While his Hindu readers likely relished in the familiar and recognizable features of the Indian epic tradition—not to mention allusions to the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*—Britons and Americans delighted in this “Indian” rendering of the classic romance paradigm of parted lovers overcoming obstacles such as tyrannical fathers, cryptic riddles, and ferocious serpents.⁸⁵ I offer the following description of the romantic epic as it manifests in Ghosh's serialization of Narayan Lal's adventures: the heroic pursuit of honor as balanced

⁸³ Blackburn and Flueckiger, “Introduction,” 11. See also Dimock, et al., 79-80.

⁸⁴ Blackburn and Flueckiger, “Introduction,” 4-5.

⁸⁵ In its review of the first installment, a Scottish newspaper, *The Arbroath Herald*, cited Ghosh as a “strong rival to Kipling [who] furnishes a wonderful tale of Eastern life, on the lines of the ‘Arabian Nights,’ which is full of insight and literary ability.” Likewise, *The Bucks Herald* of Aylesbury, England noted that Ghosh “has certainly caught the full spirit of Indian life.” See also the *New York Times* review, “The Orient: Sarath Kumar Ghosh's Lively Tale of Love and Adventure in the East,” in praise of Ghosh's *Verdict of the Gods*.

between the demands of love and social propriety, all within the context of a divinely ordained Destiny or *daiva*.⁸⁶

Adhering to the formal conventions of epic, a frame narrative structures *Indian Nights' Entertainment* and shapes readers' interpretation of the emboxed story.⁸⁷ Like the *Arabian Nights*, a powerful monarch stands in dire need of transformation: here an unnamed "Great King" of divine Hindu lineage has fallen gravely ill and requires inspiration to marshal his will to live. The royal physician summons an old storyteller who, it is hoped, will be able to enchant the king with "a tale of human danger" that might invigorate him.⁸⁸ The narrator of *Indian Nights' Entertainment*, however, is not the storyteller but the Great King's chronicler who overhears the tale. Like the frame narrative, the setting of the emboxed story evokes the myth of Bharat as it transpires in a Hindu kingdom located at "the thrice-blessed land that lies between the sacred waters of the Jumna and the Ganges."⁸⁹ The ruler of this kingdom is not given a name but is referred to simply as "the king," suggestive of the frequently flat nature of characters in the epic genre.

The emboxed tale of "human danger" the storyteller relates is that of Narayan Lal's repeated triumphs over death in order to prove his worthiness to marry the beautiful Princess Devala, the daughter of the unnamed king. The storyteller reveals that he witnessed

⁸⁶ My description here is heavily indebted to Peter Heath's incisive discussion of romance in many *Arabian Nights* stories in his essay, "Romance as Genre in *The Thousand and One Nights*" (1987). Using Tzvetan Todorov's theorization of literary analysis into the semantic, the syntactic, and the verbal, Heath posits the following definition of romance as it appears in the *Nights*: "On the semantic level, the primary theme of romance, a fundamental aspect of the genre's 'informing drive,' *investigates the concerns of honor as balanced between the demands of love and social propriety, within the context of Fate...*" (178; emphasis in original). For an excellent discussion of the role of *daiva* in Indian epics see John Smith's 1989 essay, "Scapegoats of the Gods: The Ideology of the Indian Epics."

⁸⁷ Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, 18.

⁸⁸ Ghosh, "On the Tower of Victory," *Pearson's Magazine*, January 1902, 76. In the 1904 edition, a story of "human peril" is requested, 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* In the 1904 edition, see 3.

this saga unfold as a young man; each episode of the six-part serial constitutes one “night” and his telling of one particular challenge.⁹⁰ The question of Narayan’s *kshatriya* identity emerges quickly as the king catches Narayan staring at his daughter, whom the king had secluded precisely out of the fear that unworthy men would desire her. Evoking the balcony scene of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, both Narayan Lal and Princess Devala become entranced with one another at first sight, a fortuitous meeting that drips with melodrama:

[The king] looked up and saw. There stood Princess Devala at her unbarred window—alone—unveiled. There was a smile upon her lips and a love-light in her eyes.

Beneath the window stood a young man, his eyes uplifted, his hands upon his breast. Eyes calling to eyes, heart yearning for heart. Enough!

The cry of anguish that broke from the king made the princess turn. She threw up her hands suddenly, as if to avert some impending doom—then fell back fainting.

The young man came and knelt by the king. He thrust out his neck and awaited the blow. But the king still played with the hilt of his sword.⁹¹

Narayan’s act constitutes a grave infraction: as the court juggler and ostensibly a man of low caste he is profoundly unworthy of demonstrating romantic interest in the princess.

However, like other epic heroes—and as his name itself insinuates—Narayan is an exceptional human being, one who straddles the boundary between human and divine.⁹²

After miraculously warding off the royal guards’ attacks by means of a mysterious “charm,” Narayan announces himself as a *kshatriya* to the king and demands the opportunity to prove this claim: “Put me to the ordeal...it is a Rajput’s right. If I die, I have lied. If I escape

⁹⁰ Ibid. In the 1904 edition, Ghosh increases the number of “nights” to twenty-one, interspersing them throughout the narrative in random places (i.e. “The First Night,” “The Second Night,” and so on).

⁹¹ Ibid., 77. In the 1904 edition, see 4.

⁹² In its proper form, “Narayan” is the name of the supreme godhead in Hinduism; it can also function as a more generic referent, meaning deity or god. For more on the demagogic nature of Indian epic heroes, see Smith (1989, 183-185) and Blackburn and Flueckiger: “Epic heroism in India, as elsewhere, touches on both the human and the supernatural, and on gradations in between. Since any sharp division between the human and the divine is alien to Hinduism and to Indian culture generally, a major theme of many Indian oral epics is precisely this relation between gods and humans” (4).

unscathed, I am innocent of thy charge. And may *Parameshwar* decide between me and my king.”⁹³ Further enhancing Narayan’s stature as an epic hero is his very pointed resemblance to the hero Karna of the *Mahabharata*, who was similarly thought to be of low caste though he was actually a *kshatriya*.⁹⁴ Narayan’s goading of the king evokes a pivotal scene of the *Mahabharata* in which Karna demands an opportunity to best Arjuna in a public demonstration showcasing the martial skills of the royal Kuru princes: “Son of Kunti, whatever you have done, I shall outdo it before the eyes of all these men; so do not indulge in self-admiration!”⁹⁵

Narayan’s invocation of *Parameshwar* [Supreme or Highest God] signals the primacy of *daiva* in *Indian Nights’ Entertainment*. Though no Hindu deities materialize or appear, they are nevertheless represented through this terrific supra-human force, which, much as Peter Heath observes about Fate in *Arabian Nights* romances, may in some sense be considered the “real hero” of such works: “It is Fate that leads characters on, tests them, and, depending on their performance, rewards or punishes them.”⁹⁶ As in other Indian epics, the gods are powerful agents operating in the background who have predetermined the course of events for all and for whom human beings largely function as scapegoats or pawns within a much larger celestial drama.⁹⁷ Not only do characters constantly invoke “Bhugwan” or “Parameshwar,” any and all events are (correctly) interpreted as manifesting divine will.

⁹³ Ghosh, “On the Tower of Victory,” January 1902, 77-78. In the 1904 edition, see 5-7.

⁹⁴ See John Smith’s 2009 edition of *The Mahabharata*, in which he remarks that it is unclear as to when exactly Karna first discovers his *kshatriya* identity. Although it appears as though Karna first learns this truth from his birth mother Kunti right before the monumental war between the Kuru and Pandava dynasties, his flat reaction in an earlier scene with Krishna suggests that he already knew that he was her son and thus the eldest of the Pandava brothers (339, see fn). However, as Smith notes, precisely when Karna realizes this fact is ultimately immaterial because “even before discovering who he truly is, he is clearly aware that he is no ordinary man” (xxviii, see fn).

⁹⁵ *The Mahabharata*, 55.

⁹⁶ Heath, “Romance as Genre,” 196-197.

⁹⁷ Smith, “Scapegoats of the Gods,” 176-194.

Although it would seem that the king has the power to deny Narayan's demand, and that the outcome of the trials could go either way, this is not the case. The king's begrudging acceptance of Narayan's call for an "ordeal"—as well as the outcome of the ensuing trials themselves—are all revelatory of a predetermined divine plan. As the chronicler relates to the reader, the king must grant Narayan's request because divine will trumps even the designs of monarchs: "The laws of caste were above royal caprice. They were the hall-mark of fate, the destiny of the gods."⁹⁸ Much like the nature of curses in the Indian epic tradition, which, once uttered, cannot be rescinded but only modified, Narayan's request for an "ordeal" represents a pronouncement of *daiva* that must be allowed to unfold.⁹⁹ The best the king can do to enact his malice towards Narayan is to add conditions to the trials by increasing its number from one to six and placing exceedingly dangerous and even impossible tasks before him, both of which conveniently heighten narrative suspense. As the storyteller later explains to the Great King in the frame narrative, the number and nature of the challenges that Narayan is compelled to undergo stages a confrontation of sorts between the king and *daiva*:

In an ordeal dependent upon divine judgment, we mortals may make any stipulation we choose. If *Parameshwar* accepts the terms, he will fulfill them in their entirety. So, if five times Narayan Lal escaped, but at the sixth succumbed, then indeed would the verdict of the Deity have been against him from the beginning. The race is at the finish, not at the start.¹⁰⁰

According to such logic, the king can impose any conditions he desires on the trials but in the end "the verdict of the Deity" will necessarily be revealed. If Narayan's claim regarding

⁹⁸ Ghosh, "On the Tower of Victory," *Pearson's Magazine*, January 1902, 78. In the 1904 edition, see 7.

⁹⁹ As Smith explains, "The uttering of a *curse* or *vow* and the granting of a *wish* (in the conventional jargon of Sanskritists, a 'boon') require a certain personal stature and a certain deliberate commitment; but, granted these conditions, they preordain the future with absolute certainty." Qtd. in Smith, "Old Indian (The Two Sanskrit Epics)," 70.

¹⁰⁰ Ghosh, "The Temple of the Manik," *Pearson's Magazine*, April 1902, 368. In the 1904 edition, see 181-182.

his *kshatriya* birth is true, he will naturally succeed and fulfill his preordained destiny determined by the gods.¹⁰¹ For the purposes of the romantic epic, he will also have proven his worthiness to marry Princess Devala. If Narayan fails, he will have been proven a liar and deserving of the death meted to him. As a matter of course, this defeat would also manifest *daiva* because it would have preserved the integrity of the caste system (only “true” *kshatriyas* could survive repeated confrontations with death). Consequently, no matter if Narayan succeeds or fails, *daiva*—and the implicit primacy of Hinduism itself—remains central to *Indian Nights’ Entertainment*. The very nature of *daiva* as portrayed here intersects fittingly with the story’s setting in the utopia of Bharat: both are highly overdetermined in nature and approximate mythic forces that defy any sense of logic. As Northrop Frye observes with regard to myth, “The world of mythical imagery is usually represented by the conception of heaven or Paradise in religion, and it is apocalyptic, in the sense of that word already explained, a world of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body.”¹⁰²

With such fluid parameters in place, Ghosh stages a triumphant celebration of Hindu masculinity as Narayan overcomes one mortal challenge after another. From a narratological perspective, the trials demonstrate an adherence to the basic plot structure of ‘safety—challenge—return to safety’ typical of both the Indian epic tradition and *Arabian Nights* romances.¹⁰³ *Daiva* continues to play a significant role in this second stage—what Joseph

¹⁰¹ Along these lines, Narayan’s jubilant cry after surviving the first trial is telling: “The will of *Parameshwar* is done!” See Ghosh, “On the Tower of Victory,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, January 1902, 83. In the 1904 edition, see 39.

¹⁰² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 136.

¹⁰³ Diverging from Northrop Frye’s theorization of character development in romance as a simple progression from innocence—experience—return to innocence, Heath observes that in *Arabian Nights* romances, the characters undergo a significant developmental progression: “They move from innocence, to experience, to a renewed state of innocence that encompasses experience” (185). In the case of *Indian Nights’ Entertainment*,

Campbell terms the “call to adventure”—because Narayan survives these trials as an unparalleled champion deserving of success.¹⁰⁴ No matter the circumstances or how impossible the trial, *Daiya*/Fate/Destiny favors Narayan and assists him, often by means of sympathetic allies. However, these interventions—whether in the form of helpful “coincidences” or the willful assistance of other individuals—do not diminish Narayan’s overall heroic stature. He notably embodies both the “immense and impetuous” and the “warrior prince” heroic personas prevalent in the Indian epic tradition: it is precisely due to his great passion or *tejas* [ardor] that Narayan falls in love with Princess Devala and demands the opportunity to showcase his talents and establish himself as her rightful suitor.¹⁰⁵

The various mortal challenges that Narayan undergoes allow him to demonstrate traits considered intrinsic to Aryan/Hindu heroes: intelligence, religiosity, strength, courage, and the like. A review of the trials and his manner of survival illustrates Ghosh’s ready deployment of magical, fantastic elements that frequently defy logic or reason. While for Indians these aspects likely underscored the singular nature of Bharat, for Western audiences they helped render India an alluring land worthy of awe and respect:

First Trial: The king demands that Narayan climb a leaning tower with the hope that his ascent would cause it to topple, thus killing him. Narayan survives by means of a secret tunnel discovered by the mysterious “pundit-philosopher” Rama Krishna. Narayan distracts the crowd of spectators as if by magic as he escapes through the tunnel.

Frye’s schema holds more for the emboxed narrative and Heath’s schema for the frame narrative. The only character that undergoes any significant transformation is the Great King, who emerges revitalized after hearing the story of Narayan’s repeated triumphs over death.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ See Smith 1980 for a discussion of three different types of Indian epic heroic personas (56-67). He identifies the monkey deity Hanuman from the *Ramayana* as an example of the “immense and impetuous”; Arjuna, the hero of the *Mababharata*, as a “warrior prince”; and the dignified, passive Yudhisthira of the *Mababharata* as the third heroic type, the “quiescent king.” See also Kevin McGrath on *tejas* as the defining characteristic of epic *kshatriya* heroes in his monograph *The Sanskrit Hero*, 6.

Second Trial: Narayan survives entombment in an abandoned well for nine days without food or water. This is made possible through the miraculous intervention of a group of Hindu *sannyasis* [ascetics] who secretly lull him into a trance beforehand. In later editions, Ghosh additionally portrays the *sannyasis*' joining forces to cause Narayan's entranced body to levitate in mid-air. The chronicler directly addresses Western readers in his explanation of this feat, citing India's possession of advanced scientific knowledge that the West has only recently realized, i.e., x-rays.

Third Trial: The king demands that Narayan literally perform acts of magic: "Make us see and feel something that is not before us now...but not all alike. Some of us to see one thing, some another, others a third..." It is implied that if Narayan is unable to do so he will be put to death. Though the king himself admits that this trial is "beyond human power," Narayan successfully transmutes various items into others as if by magic. The king then orders Narayan to place burning straw on his head. He survives by surreptitiously applying an anti-inflammatory balm on his head beforehand. In the later editions, the king further demands that Narayan walk across fire.

Fourth Trial: Narayan is sent on a dangerous quest to recover a rare and precious gem, the *manik*, which lies deep in a secluded cave in a distant forest; it is the embedded jeweled eye of a large idol. This lengthy and arduous challenge not only showcases Narayan's courage, strength, and quick thinking, but also his superior moral character, because the *manik* is protected by a curse such that only a truly gracious and worthy individual would be able to dislodge it. Rama Krishna provides information as to when would be the optimal time to recover the jewel and avoid certain death. Narayan succeeds in attaining the *manik*, slaying the enormous serpent that guards it.¹⁰⁶ Later editions increase the dangers Narayan faces and enhance the role of Rama Krishna and others who help Narayan survive.

Fifth Trial: The king again demands that Narayan transmute objects; again it is implied that he will be put to death if he proves incapable. After Narayan successfully transforms the objects as commanded, the king orders that he ingest poison. Narayan survives by means of furtively swallowing a countervailing substance, which has been covertly brought to him in a scheme concocted by Rama Krishna. In the later editions the king gives Narayan the option of choosing between the poison and being crushed by an elephant.

Sixth Trial: Narayan is tied to a pole in a crowded arena and left as bait for an angry tigress to devour. Princess Devala arrives in the nick of time and boldly unties him,

¹⁰⁶ Narayan's slaying of a giant serpent that guards the *manik* is demonstrative of a widespread motif in many literary and poetic traditions. As Calvert Watkins observes in *How to Kill a Dragon*: "The 'signature' formula for the myth of the divine hero who slays the serpent recurs *in the same linguistic form*...in texts from the Rig Veda...through Old and Middle Iranian holy books, Hittite myth, Greek epic and lyric, Celtic and Germanic epic and saga down to Armenian oral folk epic of the last century. This formula shapes the narration of 'heroic' killing or overcoming of adversaries over the Indo-European world for millennia" (viii; italics in original).

facing certain death herself. The tigress mistakes the pair for her recently deceased cubs and suddenly becomes docile.

These trials are notably of three distinct types: ones in which death is *not* certain but Narayan's survival relies on the paranormal (first, third); ones in which death *is* certain and his survival relies on the paranormal (second, fifth); and ones in which death is probable but externalities that are not necessarily paranormal (i.e., coincidence) lead to his survival (fourth, sixth). Tzvetan Todorov's theorization of the "fantastic" is helpful when examining the paranormal elements of Narayan's mortal tests:

The fantastic requires the fulfillment of three conditions. First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work—in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as 'poetic' interpretations.¹⁰⁷

Occupying a critical middle ground between the uncanny and the marvelous, Todorov's fantastic elucidates those texts in which events occur that cannot be explained by rational causes. The reader must express doubt as to whether such events have natural, logical explanations (the uncanny) or result from supernatural forces lurking in the world (the marvelous).¹⁰⁸ The hesitation or confusion of the reader, the key criterion of the fantastic, must be represented in the text, either directly—such as through *epos*—or indirectly through a character's puzzlement about the strange events.¹⁰⁹ *Indian Nights' Entertainment* very pointedly evinces the fantastic not just in Narayan's astonishing survival of the six trials but

¹⁰⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 33. Todorov goes on to note that the first and third criteria "actually constitute" the genre while the second may not always be fulfilled.

¹⁰⁸ See Roberta Reeder's extremely helpful review of Todorov's work, 187.

¹⁰⁹ See Frye on *epos*, direct address between storyteller/poet and audience (250). See also Heath, "Romance as Genre," 179-180.

also in the strikingly bizarre explanations advanced regarding *how* he survives them. These accounts are put forth on multiple levels as the emboxed spectators of Narayan's trials frequently exchange theories about what they have just witnessed; the Great King of the frame narrative demands explanations of the storyteller; and the chronicler himself glosses over these elucidations for the reader, verifying some and eschewing others. Perhaps the most striking of these is that which follows Narayan Lal's second trial in the 1904 edition. Evoking the wondrous nature of Bharat, the chronicler suggests that certain fantastic elements of the trial—such as the *sannyasis*' causing Narayan's body to levitate off the ground—were due to the existence of advanced scientific knowledge that the West had only recently discovered, but which “in India [had been] known to sages a thousand years ago...”¹¹⁰

Indian Nights' Entertainment met with success in Britain and America because it provided audiences in those milieus what they desired and expected: an entertaining, escapist tale about India. In 1904, Ghosh revised and expanded the *Pearson's* serialization as *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal*, an edition that evidences his effort to enhance the suspense and melodrama of the original. In addition to heightening the danger of certain trials, Ghosh introduced a mysterious assassin who attempts to kill Narayan, thus endangering the hero's life on another level. He also included a subplot in which Princess Devala recruits her maidservant Leila to assist Narayan; Leila in turn often enlists the help of her lover Harnam Das, the captain of the king's guards.¹¹¹ The added development of Princess Devala's character in the later editions is particularly noteworthy as it enhances the romantic register of the epic, proffering an admirable Hindu heroine for audiences. Much

¹¹⁰ Ghosh, *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16, 20-21.

like the coeval histories and historical romances showcasing legendary instances of Hindu bravery, Princess Devala is the perfect feminine counterpart to Narayan. She is similarly exceptional, described as a “wondrous beauty, a houri of paradise, a peri of Indra’s court” who had been blessed by the Hindu goddesses Parvati, Saraswati, and Lakshmi at her birth.¹¹² As the chronicler relates to the reader, the princess herself is being tested as much as Narayan because she had dared to reciprocate his amorous attention. Even though he was all but a stranger to her, Princess Devala devotes herself to him entirely:

Who he was by the right of his birth she knew not—yet felt with dumb instinct that there was something within him, something that had revealed itself outwardly in response to her love, that must needs be of royal heritage. Was he but a juggler to the world? Verily to her he was a prince. Was he not a prince? Who but a prince would have sought death when he had seen the hopelessness of his love—and death from the hand of the king himself?¹¹³

Princess Devala’s intuition about Narayan is of course correct, keeping with Indian epics’ portrayal of *kshatriyani* women as the perfect balance between delicacy and strength, extraordinarily noble beings who merited similarly exceptional male partners. For Princess Devala, Narayan has proven himself worthy of her love not only through his courageous invitation of death at her father’s hand, but also by his promise to fulfill her own destiny:

Her *destiny*? What was that? For three long years had she prayed to Lakshmi to reveal to her that destiny; for three long years since the dawn of her womanhood had she prayed the benign goddess to tell her what joy, what glory, awaited her on this earth. At her birth had she not been promised a life of perpetual happiness with her heart’s beloved? ... But instead what was in store for her? What was to be the end of all her hopes and fears? ... Was it to be—death? Death for her love? Death for having dared to love? ... But lo, that would also be Fate. It would, at least, be death with her loved one. (She made that vow within her heart at that moment.) Then so let it be. Mingling their hearts’ blood together, they would die. What finer death could she have than that? ...¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ghosh, “On the Tower of Victory,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, January 1902, 76. In the 1904 edition, see 3.

¹¹³ Ghosh, *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal* (1904), 12.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15. Ellipses in original.

For three long years since the dawn of her womanhood—the years that had seemed to her the sweetest part of her life—she too had rocked herself to sleep each night, *dreaming of a hero that would dare all things for the love of her; would imperil his life, would fight the world in arms—yea, brave the anger of the gods themselves—for the love of her. Thus in that hour her heart was full of joy. For she had found her hero at last!*¹¹⁵

*Would he fulfill her promise—the promise that she had vowed within her own heart? Would he dare these things, to prove his love—or die in the strife? (Less than that she would not have; more than that was beyond human ambition.) She doubted not he would; doubted not that if ever man could prove his love for woman, heaven and earth not withstanding, her beloved would. And thus in her own heart she vowed to aid him, succour him, comfort him—or die with him.*¹¹⁶

These excerpts illustrate the ways in which Ghosh portrays heroic Hindu masculinity and femininity as complementary. It is not only Narayan who is being tested but also Princess Devala as both struggle to fulfill their mutually intertwined fortunes. While Narayan publicly confronts Herculean challenges in order to prove his *kshatriya* birth, Princess Devala privately supports his endeavors and strives to prove herself worthy of his quest.

Like other Hindu heroines, Princess Devala's virtue relies heavily upon her chastity and devotion to her hero. Ghosh revealingly describes her as a "belted" woman, defined as a "maiden whose duty it was to wear a belt from her childhood in symbol alike of her birth and her virtue; a girdle that no man might touch, save her wedded spouse."¹¹⁷ In keeping with the Indian epic tradition, Ghosh's portrayal of sexually modest women signals the patriarchal belief that female sexuality was a powerful force to be contained because it posed a "direct threat to men's source of strength."¹¹⁸ In a similar vein, Indian epic heroines are liable to become dangerous, unpredictable figures if they are denied their marital rights or

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 11. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 11-12. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 17-18, 122. Princess Devala's servant Leila is similarly characterized as a "belted woman."

¹¹⁸ Smith, "Scapegoats of the Gods," 188. Additional examples of the attempted limitations on female sexuality are the king's seclusion of his daughter during her childhood out of the belief that "no prince was yet born worthy to mate with her" (January 1902, 76) and placing her under house arrest during Narayan's trials. In the 1904 edition, see 13-14.

choice of spouse, which is exactly what happens with Princess Devala. Much like her “noble ancestress that had done battle for her lover with sword and lance,” Princess Devala’s desire for Narayan functions as a potent weapon in his favor, as demonstrated in her persistent efforts to help him no matter the cost to herself.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, even though her father has forbidden her union with Narayan and has even confined her during the trials, she still manages to support him. Princess Devala bids her maidservant Leila to act as her proxy and, in classic melodramatic fashion, she somehow escapes her confinement during the final challenge, steals into the arena where Narayan is bound, and frees him. If this were not enough, Princess Devala further welcomes death alongside him, declaring, “Let this be my *suttee*.”¹²⁰

Such grand portrayals of gender relations constitute inspirational and prescriptive norms to Hindu men and women as they are invited to match the example put forth by the hero and heroine. While women are inculcated in “proper” femininity and sacrifice through Princess Devala’s example, men are invited to emulate the brave and virile Narayan in order to merit such fine womanly devotion. *Daiya*/Fate naturally rewards these proffered models of masculinity and femininity at the conclusion of the epic. As a result of Princess Devala’s intervention, Narayan survives the sixth trial, thus proving his *kshatriya* caste and satisfying her father’s conditions. In a climactic ending that demonstrates what A.T. Hatto terms an “epic moment,” the eerie Rama Krishna—who has been helping Narayan throughout the trials—ceremoniously confirms Narayan’s *kshatriya* identity by revealing that he had been

¹¹⁹ Ghosh, *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal* (1904), 17-18.

¹²⁰ Ghosh, “The Verdict of Parameshwar,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, June 1902, 637. In the 1904 edition, see 236.

born a prince named Pertab Sinhji.¹²¹ Bringing Narayan's resemblance to Karna full circle, Rama Krishna divulges that Narayan's birth mother had set him afloat on the Ganges as an infant out of fear for his life, circumstances that evoke Kunti's abandonment of Karna.¹²² He goes on to explain that he had been the *devan* [Prime Minister] of Narayan's deceased royal father and had assumed the disguise of a pundit in order to watch over the abandoned child. Despite his earlier antagonism towards Narayan, the king easily accepts Rama Krishna's revelation, proclaims Narayan a prince, and sanctions his marriage to his daughter; the subsequent editions additionally portray the marriage of Leila and Harnam Das to make for a "double bridal."¹²³ The king's averred "adoption" of Narayan further evokes the story of Karna, for just as the king's pronouncement of Narayan as "Yuvoraj Kumar Prithiraj" dissolves his past identity as the low-caste court juggler, in the *Mahabharata*, Duryodhana's bestowal of the kingdom of Anga to Karna mitigated his ostensible low-caste status, enabling him to challenge Arjuna as more of an equal. The location of this trial in a revered amphitheater that had witnessed such sacred events of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* "five-and-twenty centuries ago" further underscores the majesty and wonder of these momentous proceedings.¹²⁴ Joyous events continue as the Great King of the frame narrative recovers from his deadly illness as a result of hearing Narayan's inspiring story, the romantic epic having succeeded in its aim of reviving him.¹²⁵

¹²¹ See A.T. Hatto's introductory essay to his edited collection *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry*: "Epic poetry is apt to condense long-drawn tensions into brief scenes of dramatic power enhanced by visual magnificence, that is, 'epic moments'" (4).

¹²² While it suggested that Narayan's birth mother abandoned him for his own sake, one could argue that in the *Mahabharata* Kunti abandoned Karna primarily for selfish reasons. The similarity of Narayan's birth story to that of Moses is also remarkable and would likely have resonated with Western audiences. See Ghosh, "The Verdict of Parameshwar," *Pearson's Magazine*, June 1902, 639. In the 1904 edition, see 246.

¹²³ Ghosh, *1001 Indian Nights: The Trials of Narayan Lal* (1904), 248.

¹²⁴ Ghosh, "The Verdict of Parameshwar," *Pearson's Magazine*, June 1902, 629. In the 1904 edition, see 216.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 639. In the 1904 edition, see 248.

Conclusion

Like his protagonist Narayan Lal, Sarath Kumar Ghosh can in many senses be considered a juggler, a culturally ambidextrous “interpreter” balancing competing and seemingly inconsistent demands. I have argued that in its various iterations Ghosh’s *Indian Nights’ Entertainment* is best characterized as a modern romantic epic, a provocative countertext that disrupted unilateral, disparaging perceptions held by the British towards the Indian colony and its people. At the same time, from his unique vantage point in the metropole, Ghosh provided a rousing portrayal of Hindu valor for Indian (Hindu) readers located both at home and in the diaspora. Reminiscent of Scheherazade herself who cleverly transformed her murderous husband by regaling him with her enchanting stories, Ghosh was didactic in his storytelling efforts, attempting to influence both his metropolitan and Hindu readers while entertaining them in the manner they desired.

Narayan Lal’s ultimate triumph in the six deadly challenges demonstrated his possession of many superlative qualities intrinsic to the Hindu heroes that populated the histories and historical romances of the day, including great physical stamina and strength, intelligence and quick-thinking, and moral righteousness and piety. But most important for any romantic lead, he demonstrates fidelity and passion in love. Adhering to the conventions of the Indian epic tradition, Narayan does not succeed in his call to adventure single-handedly, as the help he receives facilitated the complementary depictions of a splendid Hindu heroine who merited the existence of such a champion, Princess Devala, as well as a pious Brahmin figure who serves as his guru, well-wisher, and advocate, Rama Krishna. As the *Mabratta’s* enthusiasm for Ghosh’s stories suggests, the popularity of his sensational fiction among Hindu readers in India was due in no small part to its colorful contribution to

the evolving idea of India as a righteously Hindu space filled with marvelous men and women.

It was precisely in its reification of this particular cultural imagining that *Indian Nights'* *Entertainment* reflected a broader desire on the part of Hindu elites for greater understanding and regard from their rulers at the turn of the century. While many continued to perceive the Raj as a necessary stage of development for India—and especially as a welcome bulwark against the evils of the previous “Muslim” era—others were becoming increasingly unsettled by the British regime’s growing arrogance and contempt for its subjects. As will be discussed in Chapter Four, the colonial government’s plans to partition the province of Bengal—a grievous injustice directed at the Bengali *bhadralok* that in turn launched a widespread movement for *swadeshi*—were already in the making. Unlike Shahriyar who becomes a gracious and enlightened sovereign as a result of hearing Scheherazade’s enchanting tales, British colonial rulers continued to remain aloof, if not outrightly disdainful, of the mounting concerns of educated Hindu elites about the nature and direction of India’s relationship with Britain.

CHAPTER 4

“A GRAND ASIATIC EMPIRE”: THE EXPANSE OF BHARAT IN *HINDUPORE: A PEEP BEHIND THE INDIAN UNREST: AN ANGLO-INDIAN ROMANCE* AND *THE PRINCE OF DESTINY: THE NEW KRISHNA*

“...I am a child of Asia; her sorrows are my sorrows, her joys are my joys...As an Asiatic, representing a vast constituency, I feel as I never did feel, never can feel as a mere Indian. From one end of Asia to the other, I boast of a vast home, a wide nationality, an extended kinship. Nay, I not only stand upon higher and larger ground, but I stand upon sacred ground...To me the dust of Asia is far more precious than gold and silver.”

– Keshab Chandra Sen¹

“You cannot awaken and appeal to the spirit of nationality in India and at the same time profess loyal acceptance of British rule.” – George Nathaniel Curzon²

In September 1890, a short story called “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.” appeared in *The Contemporary Review*. It was written by the up-and-coming British author, Rudyard Kipling, whose imperialist literature would eventually earn him the moniker “Bard of Empire.”³ Kipling, born in India and having returned to London just a year before the story’s publication, exploited his position as an insider of the Raj to address British curiosity about the recent emergence of the Indian National Congress in 1885. As suggested by its title, “Enlightenments” centers on the many lessons learned by a British member of Parliament named Pagett who, weary from several years of empty politicking and paper-pushing at the seat of colonial power, travels to India in order to “address himself to the problems of Imperial administration with a firmer hand.”⁴ This is his first trip outside of England and Pagett visits his old schoolmate Orde, a Deputy Commissioner with the Raj, who is stationed in north India. The narrator suggests that while Orde and Pagett may have once been close friends, all that they have in common now is a shared past. While the

¹ Keshab Chandra Sen, “Asia’s Message to Europe,” 52-53. See also Birendra Prasad, “Keshab Chandra Sen: Prophet of Pan-Asianism,” 123.

² Qtd. in Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900*, 188.

³ Robert Thurston Hopkins, *Rudyard Kipling: A Literary Appreciation*, 8.

⁴ Rudyard Kipling, “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.,” *Contemporary Review* 58 (September): 334.

wealthier Pagett had the good fortune to become an M.P. at home, Orde had quit college in order to “become a cog-wheel in the machinery of the great Indian Government.”⁵ Though the men are approximately the same age, Orde’s lengthy residence in India has clearly taken a toll on him, as his appearance is “harder and more square” and his face is “worn and wrinkled about the eyes.”⁶ The disparate paths of the two are affirmed as the narrator remarks that Orde looks “with something like envy at the comfortable outlines of Pagett’s blandly receptive countenance, the clear skin, the untroubled eye, and the mobile, clean-shaven lips.”⁷

“Enlightenments” contains little action but plenty of discussion as Pagett asks Orde and numerous other individuals, Indians and Britons alike, for their thoughts on India and the Indian National Congress in particular. Over the course of a morning, Pagett is steadily disabused of his many erroneous impressions about the state of affairs in the British Crown Jewel. The primary exchange between Pagett and Orde regarding “what popular feeling in India is really like y’know, now that it has wakened into political life” is interspersed with several short yet equally pointed conversations that Pagett strikes up with the various people who come to see the Deputy Commissioner.⁸ The native Indians Pagett encounters include Bishen Singh (a carpenter), Rasul Ali Khan (a Muslim landowner), “old Jelloo” (a respected villager and farmer), and Dina Nath (a young English-educated college student). Pagett also has the opportunity to speak with fellow Britons including Mr. Edwards (a mechanic and master of the Orde’s lodge), Reginald Burke (a manager of a local bank), and Dr. Eva McCreery Lathrop (the chief of a new women’s hospital). As a result of his exchanges with

⁵ Ibid., 333.

⁶ Ibid., 334.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 335.

all of these figures, most importantly Orde himself, Pagett is steadily “enlightened” that the rise of the Indian National Congress, despite what he may have heard or surmised back in London, has not been a positive development. Not only does the organization overlook the wishes and desires of the vast majority of Indians, it stymies the progressive operations of the colonial government.⁹

Through both direct conversation and translation, Pagett’s exchanges with the Indians substantiate Orde’s assertion that the Congress has in no way inspired any “great excitement among the masses.”¹⁰ The M.P. is dismayed to learn that Singh, Khan, and Jelloo have never heard of the Congress, and even when they come to learn about it from the conversation at hand, they are unmoved. Only the English-educated student Dina Nath is aware of the organization but Pagett’s encounter with him also proves disappointing. Despite his education, Nath is unable to articulate clearly the Congress platform or explain satisfactorily the few examples of its goals that he is able to muster, such as repealing the Arms Act or shrinking the Indian Army. A gross caricature of the privileged Indian members of the Congress, Nath comes across as woefully naïve if not presumptuous in his parroting of its lofty aims: “...we should *at once* gain the same position [as England] in scale of nations. Sir, we wish to have the sciences, the arts, the manufactures, the industrial factories, with steam engines, and other motive powers, and public meetings, and debates....”¹¹ When pressed by Pagett, Nath awkwardly confirms what the M.P. himself has only recently learned: the Congress is indeed an exclusive organization composed solely of Indian elites, one that is directed to “the educated young-man” and in which Muslims, Christians, the

⁹ Ibid., 347, 351.

¹⁰ Ibid., 335.

¹¹ Ibid., 346. Emphasis in original.

working classes, peasants, and the poor have no place.¹² After Nath leaves, Pagett admits to Orde that he is disenchanted with the youth's "crudity of views," finding the blind ambition of this particular cadre to be "curious, very curious—and callow."¹³ In a story in which all "natives" come across in an unflattering light, it is no irony that once Pagett finally meets an English-educated, worldly Indian who is familiar with the Congress—and with whom he can speak directly without a translator—the youth succeeds only in confirming negative opinions about the body and its leaders.

If Pagett's encounters with ignorant, unsophisticated Indians reveal that the Congress has in no way inspired a spontaneous groundswell among the masses, his interactions with Orde and the other Britons illuminate why. Orde explains that the vast majority of the Indian population is illiterate and poor, a people whose primary concern is eking out a "mere existence," which is only then followed by "a series of interests, pleasures, rituals, superstitions, and the like, based on centuries of tradition and usage."¹⁴ As Singh and Jelloo had indicated, as poor men, they had never heard of the Congress and have no concern with politics whatsoever.¹⁵ Above all, Pagett learns, the ill-conceived venture that is the Congress is doomed to fail since there is no Indian nation that it could ever hope to represent or lead. As Orde impresses upon his guest, "pride of race, which also means race-hatred, is the plague and curse of India and it spreads far," an assessment that is substantiated by the Punjabi Singh's scorn of Bengali Babus, Jelloo's feud with his neighboring village, and Khan's disenchantment with politics after the election of "a menial

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 347.

¹⁴ Ibid., 342.

¹⁵ Ibid., 339, 344.

servant, an orderly” to a local post.¹⁶ Kipling further reinforces the widespread belief of a deep-seated animosity between Hindus and Muslims when he explains to Pagett that Khan’s hatred of “the elective system” is rational given his position as a Muslim.¹⁷ Belonging to “the most masterful and powerful minority in the country,” Khan is understandably loath to participate in a process that is sure to marginalize him.¹⁸

As the story draws to a close, it seems that Pagett has been successfully disabused of his starting assumption that the rise of the Congress is a notable or positive development for India. Through the naïve M.P.’s many “enlightenments” about the real state of affairs in the country, Kipling recommends that Britons at home moderate any optimistic impressions they might have of the Congress because such views rely upon mistaken beliefs.¹⁹ Despite all of its bombast and the word “National” in its title, Pagett and the reader discover that the Congress is fundamentally misguided because its lofty initiatives centered on equity and representation could never take root in a land whose peoples are so ignorant, so backward, and so divided. As Orde tells Pagett, “...if, in short, India were a Utopia of the debating-room, and not a real land, this kind of talk might be worth listening to, but it is all based on false analogy and ignorance of the facts.”²⁰ Kipling adds insult to injury by indicating that the Indian men of the Congress are, moreover, not even worthy of the liberal ideals that they champion given the deplorable condition of Indian women. For Dr. Eva Lathrop, the last person whom Pagett encounters and the only woman in the story, the very idea of the Congress is ridiculous when considering that India is plagued by “an all round entanglement

¹⁶ Ibid., 339, 344, 341.

¹⁷ Ibid., 341.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Among several other damning revelations, Orde informs Pagett that Congress leaders are not Indian at all but Britons like Allan Octavian Hume and Charles Bradlaugh. For Orde, Congress supporters like Hume and Bradlaugh are arrogant and foolish men who are incapable of distinguishing between “the ambitions of a new oligarchy and the real wants of the people of whom [they] know nothing” (354).

²⁰ Ibid., 347.

of physical, social, and moral evils and corruptions, all more or less due to the unnatural treatment of women.”²¹ Far more than frivolous elections, India is in dire need of medical services for women, basic infrastructure such as hospitals, and numerous social reforms to uplift a population of which half is “morally dead.”²² Turning the inquisition upon Pagett himself, Dr. Lathrop poses the following question in a manner that is at once accusatory and exasperated: “You are a member of the English Parliament. Can you do nothing?”²³

Published at a moment in which the colonial government had solidified its base of power in India but whose officials were becoming increasingly aggravated by the grievance-filled petitions and pleas from the actual Indian National Congress, Kipling’s “didactic fable” is illustrative on a number of fronts.²⁴ A long-time resident of India, Kipling’s father, John Lockwood Kipling, had collaborated with his son on “Enlightenments,” a story that reflected the views of the broader “Anglo-Indian” community of which they were a part.²⁵ As indicated by Kipling’s unfavorable portrayal of the simple Pagett who presumes a great deal about the Congress and India but in truth knows absolutely nothing, Anglo-Indians were scornful of meddlesome “instant experts” whose overconfident inquiries and veiled critiques of the Raj were neither welcome nor appreciated.²⁶ Such disdain resulted from the community’s perception that Britain’s ostensibly “honorable” endeavors in India—not to mention the overarching mission of the colonial regime—were being questioned by those least qualified to level judgment. As Steven Patterson observes, this defensive, contemptuous posture towards outsiders betrayed “an ideological blindness on the part of the Anglo-Indian

²¹ Ibid., 352.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 353.

²⁴ “Didactic fable” is Peter Havholm’s term; see *Politics and Awe in Rudyard Kipling’s Fiction*, 84.

²⁵ Kipling would remark later in life that “[the story] has a certain amount of perfectly good fact in it,” though, of course, the difference between “fact and “belief” is key here. See Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 127.

²⁶ Steven Patterson, *The Cult of Imperial Honor in British India*, 123.

community... an unwillingness to face up to the consequences of imperial exploitation.”²⁷

Such purposeful blindness was, of course, part and parcel of British imperialism, which justified its existence in India and elsewhere as a laudable “civilizing mission” that necessarily benefitted the lives of its subject populations. Kipling’s propaganda piece about a presumptuous M.P.’s endless epiphanies about the true nature of India—over and against the emergence of the first indigenous political body that claimed to represent all Indians—was among many works in this period that reified the perception of a providential, beneficial British Empire for all.

Yet this falsehood would not be sustained for much longer as those of the “literary caste” that Kipling so derided began to respond to these one-sided, disparaging portrayals about India and its inhabitants.²⁸ This chapter examines how Siddha Mohana Mitra and Sarath Kumar Ghosh punctured the myth of benevolent British rule and offered their own perspectives on the relationship between Britain and India in their novels *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest: An Anglo-Indian Romance* and *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*, both of which were published in London in 1909. Writing at the heart of empire towards the end of a tumultuous decade that witnessed profound upheavals not just in India but in broader geopolitics, both Mitra and Ghosh proffered diagnoses, explanations, and recommendations regarding the ever-worsening state of “unrest” in India. The cultural imagining of India as Bharat, I will demonstrate, was central to their highly nuanced, complex advocacy for increased “sympathy” between colonizer and colonized at a moment in which the connection between the two polities was being scrutinized on all sides.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kipling, “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.,” 348.

Both *Hindupore* and *Prince* are set in the fictional Indian princely states Hindupore and Barathpur, microcosms of a fundamentally Hindu India. In these highly autonomous, otherworldly Hindu kingdoms, idealized British (and Irish) characters learn meaningful lessons from their equally romanticized Indian counterparts, misconceptions about Hinduism and its practices are clarified, and numerous cross-cultural bonds and alliances (e.g., kinship, friendship, and marriage) are forged or fortified. Jacques Derrida's theories on hospitality and cosmopolitanism, I will suggest, elucidate the way in which these excessively saccharine exchanges between travelling Hindu heroes and their gracious foreign hosts epitomize the benevolence with which these authors thought that Britain ought to treat India. A clear riposte to Kipling's "Enlightenments," Mitra's *Hindupore* centers on the all-too-pleasant experiences of the gracious Irish M.P. Lord Tara in the eponymous Hindu kingdom and its surrounding regions. Through his various interactions with his Indian hosts and his metropolitan peers, Lord Tara comes away with a deep understanding of the "true" causes of the Indian unrest. In my reading, I will emphasize the way in which Lord Tara's instant affinity and appreciation for all things Indian/Hindu culminate in his quite literal transformation into a *bona fide* Hindu hero and symbolic marriage with the equally splendid princess of Hindupore, Kamala. In Ghosh's more solemn text, the singular Prince Barath—prophesized from birth to be the divine liberator of Barathpur from the colonial yoke—ultimately decides *not* to lead a major armed revolution against the British authorities in his kingdom. This decision results from his immense respect for his surrogate British parents, his passion for a British woman, and, most importantly, his ardent love of Britannia herself. As Britain's professed "sincerest friend" and champion of its cause in India, Barath is shocked to discover an imminent revolt against the British brewing in Barathpur and adamantly refuses to serve as its leader; this apparent rejection of his "destiny" is deemed a

profound betrayal and results in his banishment from the kingdom.²⁹ The prince's decision to side with Britain rather than Barathpur/India at the critical moment is cast as a significant sacrifice, an incredibly generous gift to Britain that enables colonial rule to continue.

Building upon recent scholarship about *civis Britannicus* [British subjecthood] or imperial citizenship, I will argue that Mitra and Ghosh's advocacy of greater understanding and amity between colonizer and colonized reflected a much broader desire on the part of Indian elites that Britain fulfill its promises of liberal governance towards the country.³⁰

Hindupore and *Prince's* portrayal of exemplary affective ties between colonizer and colonized has led critics to view these works as indicative of the early Indian English novel's treatment of the "East-West" encounter.³¹ Though this is certainly the case, I seek to complicate the rather summary manner in which these two texts have been categorized and discussed in Indian, British, and American literary scholarship. Mitra and Ghosh's appropriation of the idea of India as Bharat, I argue, resulted in a persuasive if not somewhat ironic case for greater "sympathy" to a targeted readership made up of Britons and their fellow Indian elites. In my reading, I point out how Mitra and Ghosh's overarching appeals for greater harmony between colonizer and colonized coexist uneasily alongside a provocative concluding message in both novels: not only is improving relations with India a morally appropriate action for Britain, it is also a strategically wise move. As I will show at greater length, while on one level Mitra and Ghosh's depiction of transcendent Hindu kingdoms and their remarkable inhabitants suggested that India's earlier condition as Bharat

²⁹ Sarath Kumar Ghosh, *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna* (London: Rebman), 538.

³⁰ *Civis Britannicus* may be described as the emerging ideal at the turn of the twentieth century that all subjects of the British Crown, no matter their birth, color, or creed, were both entitled to, and deserved, equal recognition and treatment. See Mrinalini Sinha, "The Strange Death of an Imperial Ideal: The Case of *Civis Britannicus*," (2011) and Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (2010).

³¹ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Twice-Born Fiction*, 64.

warranted British respect, the authors also departed from this logic in a striking way. Laying claim to the stunning victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, both *Hindupore* and *Prince* posit the existence of a potent Pan-Asian bloc of countries composed of India, Japan, and sometimes China that stands ready to overtake Western hegemony. The idea of India as a fundamentally Hindu space powerfully informs this geopolitical configuration as its member nations are united by a shared “Hindu” cultural heritage and India/Bharat is celebrated as the source of its animating energies. The nuanced message of both texts, I argue, may therefore be characterized as one of cautious conciliation, in which improved alliances and relationships between colonizer and colonized are prioritized but remain highly guarded and provisional. Powerfully countering the pathetic image of India circulating in works like Kipling’s “Enlightenments,” *Hindupore* and *Prince* offer visions of a nation that is united, strong, and deserving of the utmost respect not just because of its past history but also, more importantly, because of its present potential.

“Unrest” in India and the Desire for Civis Britannicus

What was the Indian “unrest”? And how could the idea of Bharat, typically understood to be coextensive with the borders and boundaries of the British colonial state, lay claim to Japan and China as well? Mitra and Ghosh’s provocative meditations on the nature of the colonial relationship in *Hindupore* and *Prince* provide compelling answers to these questions. The works are revelatory of a precarious moment at the turn of the twentieth century in which the ever-increasing fault lines of colonial rule were giving rise to different compelling visions about India’s essence, its “true” belonging and place in the global landscape, and what its future might hold. While Ghosh and Mitra’s overt appeals for greater harmony between Britain and India have been analyzed primarily with reference to

the contemporaneous *swadeshi* movement that embroiled the subcontinent after 1905, insufficient attention has been paid to the way in which their highly guarded message of friendship both intersected with, and was informed by, important geopolitical developments and debates occurring outside of the immediate colonizer-colonized dyad. That both Mitra and Ghosh were migrant authors located in London who used literature to grapple with the state of “unrest” back at home obliges us to consider the ways in which disparate ideas about *how* best to agitate against the Raj—and just *who* might really have India’s true interests at heart—were uniting and dividing Indian elites across a vast imperial web. The next section provides an overview of the material historical events and discussions that characterized the dynamic first decade of the twentieth century, an atmosphere in which Indian writers and thinkers could readily imagine an expansive, all-encompassing Bharat extending well beyond the contours of the colonial state.

“Moderate” Nationalism and the Indian National Congress

The emerging ideal of *civis Britannicus* is crucially bound up with what is commonly known in Indian nationalist historiography as the period of “moderate” nationalism. An ostensible “stage” or “phase” spanning from approximately 1870-1905, moderate nationalism is characterized by the apparently modest goals of the newly formed Indian National Congress and the rather measured way in which they were expressed and pursued.³² Highly deferential and often cloying declarations of loyalty to the Crown alongside avowals of the British regime’s innumerable benefits to India are regarded as typical features of the “moderate” approach. Sanjay Seth has rightly suggested that the frequent dismissal of the early Congress along these lines betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Indian politics at

³² Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: The Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905,” 98.

the turn of the century. This error arises in large part from a tendency in Indian nationalist historiography to begin the story of Indian nationalism proper with the establishment of the Congress in 1885 given its eventual importance in the movement led by M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Seth astutely argues that narrativizing the early Congress with an eye towards 1947 prompts a misreading of its initial activities as necessarily constituting a preliminary, immature, or deficient first “act” of a much larger drama.³³ In this way, instead of approaching the early Congress on its own terms and within its own sociopolitical context, we adopt a skewed teleological perspective, one in which knowledge of later events informs understandings of the past. Through such a lens, the Congress’s so-called “moderation”—epitomized by the absence of the demand of complete Indian sovereignty—has often been misinterpreted as a defect or lack.

But if the early Congress is situated within a larger late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century global landscape of Empire, its seemingly restrained or “moderate” vision and approach look quite different. As suggested by the recent scholarship of Mrinalini Sinha and Sukanya Banerjee, far from considering themselves “Indians” in the nationalist sense—an understanding that would arise most powerfully under the direction of M.K. Gandhi much later—early Congress leaders agitated for change on the basis of their ostensible status as *British* subjects who were theoretically entitled to all accompanying rights and privileges therein.³⁴ These individuals viewed themselves as enlightened citizens of Europe, rather than of India. Contrary to Kipling’s portrayal of a stagnant India in which genuine politics was not only absent but unnecessary, the establishment of the Indian National Congress in December 1885 was in fact an outgrowth of the dynamic environment that was late

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sinha, “The Strange Death of an Imperial Ideal,” 30. See also Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 28-29.

nineteenth-century India.³⁵ The very fact that an elite cadre of Indian men from Bengal, Bombay, and Madras purposefully came together to form the first all-India political body—over and above several smaller local organizations that had surfaced in previous years—testifies to the growing connections between the regions as well as the burgeoning cultural imagining of a cohesive Indian “nation” that such affiliation and interaction implied.³⁶ Much as the young Dina Nath had relayed to Pagett, the Congress desired, among other changes, increased Indian participation in the legislative councils and local administration, reforms to the qualifying procedures for the Indian Civil Service, less expenditure on the military, and far greater material and financial investment within the polity.³⁷ Resolutions and petitions were extremely measured in tone as leaders would “regret” (not “condemn”), “suggest” (not “demand”) and, at most, “urge” Britain to adopt one course of action or another.³⁸ As historians have observed, a frequent strategy was to pepper petitions, resolutions, and speeches with direct quotes from formal decrees such as the Queen’s Proclamation of 1858 and statements by prominent British officials. Doing so not only substantiated the Congress’s arguments but also tacitly rebuked the colonial government for neglecting its

³⁵ In “Enlightenments,” the assertion of the mechanic and Master of the Lodge, Mr. Edwards, is particularly striking: “There are no politics, in a manner of speaking, in India. It’s all work” (337).

³⁶ As Bose and Jalal observe, “What was novel...about the late nineteenth century was the inter-connectedness, though not necessarily convergence, of social and political developments across regions on an unprecedented scale. In that general sense it was during this period that the idioms, and even the irascible idiosyncrasies, of communitarian identities and national ideologies were sought to be given a semblance of coherence and structure” (86). Relatedly, the proliferation of voluntary political and social associations across India, a surge in vernacular and English-language newspapers, growing cultural and artistic production, not to mention the connective infrastructure of the colonial state, all contributed to new levels of public life and engagement in this period, particularly among the middle- and upper- classes (Metcalf and Metcalf 123, Banerjee-Dube 204). Examples of such provincial organizations include the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (PSS) founded by Mahadev Govind Ranade in Pune in 1870 and the Indian Association founded by Surendranath Banerjea in Calcutta in 1876 (Wolpert 253, Metcalf and Metcalf 136).

³⁷ Kipling, “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.,” 346.

³⁸ Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 102.

enumerated duties and responsibilities towards India.³⁹ Though Congress leaders expressed their “prayers” in a markedly deferential manner, the implicit suggestion that they were well within their rights to press for certain changes as worthy subjects of the British Empire was unmistakable. For example, in 1886 Congress president W.C. Bonnerjee proclaimed that Indians desired to be “governed according to the ideals of governments prevalent in Europe” and that in calling for certain changes the Congress was simply following the example set by John Bright and Richard Cobden, the two co-founders of the Anti-Corn Law League.⁴⁰ Likewise, in his presidential address of 1895, Surendranath Banerjea reminded the Crown that “In this Congress from year to year we ask England to accomplish her glorious work.”⁴¹

The unfulfilled promise that weighed most heavily on the Congress was the colonial government’s failure to develop India to the level enjoyed by European countries and Britain in particular.⁴² In Kipling’s “Enlightenments,” Dina Nath’s mention of the organization’s desire for “the manufactures, and industrial factories, with steam engines” was accurate in so far as Congress leaders believed that India’s path forward depended crucially on its technological and industrial advancement.⁴³ This expectation was reinforced by British assurances and insinuations that the colonial state was indeed “preparing” Indians for eventual self-government and would thus prioritize investing within the country.⁴⁴ Congress’s vociferous critique of the “drain” of wealth from colony to metropole—articulated primarily in terms of economic resources but also principled governance—

³⁹ Ibid., 101. Until 1908 all Congress reports included a prefatory document entitled “Some of England’s Pledges to India,” which contained quotations from these decrees and speeches. See Daniel Argov, *Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement*, 38-39.

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Schneer, *London 1900*, 188. See also Harish P. Kaushik, *The Indian National Congress in England*, 11.

⁴¹ Qtd. in Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 103.

⁴² Ibid., 106.

⁴³ Kipling, “The Enlightenments of Pagett, M.P.,” 346. Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 105.

⁴⁴ Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 101.

reflects the growing perception that Britain was brazenly flouting its most essential duties towards India. The revered “Grand Old Man of India,” Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), made the following observations in 1880 and 1901 respectively:

In this Memorandum I desire to submit for the kind and generous consideration of His Lordship the Secretary of State for India, that from the same cause of the deplorable drain, besides the material exhaustion of India, the moral loss to her is no less sad and lamentable. *With the material wealth go also the wisdom and experience of the country.* Europeans occupy almost all the higher places in every department of government...While in India they acquire India’s money, experience and wisdom, and when they go, they carry both away with them, leaving India so much poorer in material and moral wealth...*All [Europeans] effectually do, is to eat the substance of India, material and moral, while living there, and when they go, they carry away all they have acquired...*⁴⁵

My whole object in all my writings is to impress upon the British People, that instead of a disastrous explosion of the British Indian Empire, as must be the result of *the present dishonourable un-British system of government*, there is a great and glorious future for Britain and India to an extent unconceivable [sic] at present, *if the British people will awaken to their duty, will be true to their British instincts of fair play and justice, and will insist upon the faithful and conscientious fulfilment of all their great and solemn promises and pledges.*⁴⁶

Here Naoroji casts himself as a well-wisher of Britain, a humble envoy who makes a moral appeal to his rulers to recognize their wrongdoing and change course not just for the sake of their Indian subjects but also their own. The persistent “drain” of material and intellectual resources from colony to metropole, which leaves India impoverished on all counts and unable to progress, constitutes a profound injustice that the British nation cannot sanction. Taken from Naoroji’s magnum opus *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, the second excerpt pointedly refers to Britons’ perception of themselves as an enlightened and civilized people, a nation whose very sense of self was grounded in liberal ideals. By thus exposing the “dishonourable un-British” character of the Empire, Naoroji attempts to shame his metropolitan audience over their country’s glaring hypocrisy towards India. Strikingly

⁴⁵ Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Moral Poverty of India, and Native Thoughts on the Present British Indian Policy,” 465-466. Emphasis added. See also Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 124.

⁴⁶ Qtd. in Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 104, fn. 24. Emphasis added.

reminiscent of Edmund Burke's charges of the wrongdoing by Warren Hastings and the East India Company over one hundred years earlier, Naoroji makes the case that if British claims to beneficence, civility, and nobility are not mere rhetorical flourishes, the colonial government must be held accountable for its malfeasance and fulfill all "great and solemn promises and pledges" made to India.⁴⁷ Much as Mitra and Ghosh will do at the end of the decade in *Hindupore* and *Prince*, Naoroji offers both the carrot and the stick. Adopting a truly "British" course of action will redeem Britons in the eyes of their Indian subjects, restore the integrity of their rule, and inaugurate a "great and glorious future" for both countries. But should Britain continue on its immoral path, a "disastrous explosion" of its regime was imminent.

Naoroji's arguments reflect early Congress ideology that British rule on the whole was a positive development for India, one that could benefit the country immensely. While its officials and policies were often prejudiced, overbearing, and cruel, there remained great faith that these regrettable aspects could be remedied by "reminding," "urging," or "recommending" Britons near and far to live up to their liberal ideals and execute their noble mission in India in full measure. But it bears emphasis that in doing so Britain would merely be keeping promises already made or implied to Indians precisely as fellow subjects beholden to the Crown.⁴⁸ That the early Congress earnestly believed that India's advancement could occur only under British guidance was not a contradiction in terms. Seth explains this in an incisive passage:

the moderation of Moderate Nationalism lay not in a failure to imagine the nation, in an insufficiency or lack of nationalism to be explained by an external cause, but rather in the face that its imagination was one in which the 'nation' included people unfitted for political rights, in which politics was identified with that domain of

⁴⁷ Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 30-31.

⁴⁸ Sinha, "The Strange Death of an Imperial Ideal," 36. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 31.

public life created and made by possible by British rule, in which the inadequacies of ‘the people’ were measured by their distance from this domain, in which the educated elites had to represent the poor, rough, and ignorant masses, and where the *continuation* of British rule was necessary for its eventual supersession.⁴⁹

Thus, while the Congress was *national* in the sense that its elite leaders viewed themselves, to use Naoroji’s own words, as the “true interpreters and mediators between the masses of our countrymen and our rulers,” the body hardly qualifies as *nationalist* in the way of demanding independence as an autonomous nation-state.⁵⁰ Consonant with their quest for *civis Britannicus* and the attendant rights and privileges enjoyed by Britons around the world, early Congress leaders went no further than advocating Indian self-governance under the British aegis.⁵¹ As Surendranath Banerjea asserted in 1902, “We have no higher aspiration than that we should be admitted into the great confederacy of self-governing states of which England is the august mother.”⁵² With such a perspective in place, the so-called moderation or loyalty that is frequently cited as evidence of a limited, deficient, or immature Congress is more accurately understood as a “constituent element” or “structuring principle” of its ideology, “the very ground from which criticism [of British rule] became possible.”⁵³

Partition and the Indian “Unrest”

The tenure of the arrogant and imperious Governor-General George Nathaniel Curzon from 1899-1905 proved cataclysmic for the early Congress and turn-of-the-century Indian politics. Contemptuous of the Congress’s political aspirations, Curzon imposed a number of draconian measures targeting its elite Bengali leadership. The most significant of

⁴⁹ Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 115. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Qtd. in Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 259. Banerjee-Dube similarly points out that the early Congress “can hardly be called nationalist in our common understanding of the term” (206).

⁵¹ Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 31.

⁵² Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making*, 291. See also Gobinda Prasad Sarma, *Nationalism in Indo-Anglian Fiction*, qtd. in 162.

⁵³ Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism,” 103.

these was the 1905 partition of Bengal; the act carved up the province such that there was a Muslim Bengali-speaking majority in the east and a Hindu non-Bengali speaking majority in the west, thus rupturing the stronghold of the Bengali *bhadralok*.⁵⁴ This calculated division of Bengal along sectarian lines, justified on the basis of administrative “efficiency,” deeply offended Bengalis and non-Bengalis alike, and demonstrated once again and in no uncertain terms that Britain neither considered nor cared for its Indian subjects.⁵⁵ The stimulus of partition catalyzed the *swadeshi* movement, a vehement campaign of protest against the colonial state that spread rapidly from its origin in Bengal to Maharashtra, Punjab, Madras, and other regions.⁵⁶ Frequently described as the Indian “unrest” by Britons and Indians alike, the *swadeshi* movement lasted from approximately 1904—when rumors of the impending partition produced the first wave of protests in Bengal—to 1912 when Bengali terrorists threw a bomb at the new Viceroy Charles Hardinge in Delhi.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ As Metcalf and Metcalf explain, “Bengal had long been regarded as too large a province to govern efficiently. Curzon therefore united the eastern regions of Bengal with Assam, forming a new province of some 31 million, leaving almost 50 million to a second province in the west that included half of Bengal with Bihar and Orissa...Splitting the province in this fashion, however, made Muslims the majority community in eastern Bengal, while non-Bengalis (Biharis and Oriyas) formed the majority in the west. To the English-speaking Bengali middle class this was a vivisection of their beloved homeland and a blatant attempt to reduce their power” (156).

⁵⁵ While it was true that the province of Bengal was far too populous and unwieldy to govern well, the Bengali *bhadralok* correctly detected that British claims about administrative “efficiency” masked the more sinister motivation to weaken their power and stymie the burgeoning agitation against the Raj (Wolpert 273, Metcalf and Metcalf 156, Bose and Jalal 95). As Curzon averred in 1903, the separation of the Hindu-dominated eastern regions would surely weaken the “hotbed of purely Bengali movement, unfriendly if not seditious in character” (qtd. in Banerjee-Dube 225). A subordinate of Curzon affirmed this rationale: “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided would pull in different ways...one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule” (qtd. in Bose and Jalal 95). That the partition resulted in a new Muslim majority in the east and a non-Bengali speaking majority in the west confirmed the widespread belief that British malevolence had driven the scheme. Curzon’s earlier actions against the Bengali *bhadralok* had included the Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act (1899), the Indian Universities Act (1904), and the Indian Official Secrets Amendment Act (1904), all of which curbed various rights and freedoms hitherto enjoyed by the community (Banerjee-Dube 226, Bose and Jalal 95, Manjapra 2012: 59).

⁵⁶ Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 157. Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 227.

⁵⁷ Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 226. Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 163. Given the great complexity of the *swadeshi* movement and the numerous ways in which it intersected with phenomena both before and after the immediate tumult in Bengal, there are differing views among historians regarding when the movement began and ended. As will be discussed, Sumit Sarkar’s theorization of the movement as spanning from 1903-1908 has been broadened in recent scholarship (Bate 42). The attempt on

As suggested by its name, a portmanteau of the Sanskrit words *swa* [self] and *desb* [country], a primary tenet of the *swadeshi* movement was self-reliance, which broadly advocated a repudiation of the Raj in all possible spheres and the privileging of indigenous goods, services, and institutions. Galvanized by the hostile act of partition, Bengalis and non-Bengalis alike took up the *swadeshi* cause and in its first wave the movement transcended class, caste, and religious divides.⁵⁸ Historians have noted that resistance manifested in numerous ways from mass meetings, lengthy petitions, printed materials, boycotts, bonfires of British goods, and, soon enough, violence. The Congress leader Surendranath Banerjea, whose inspiring commitment to *swadeshi* earned him the nickname “Surrender Not,” likened the furor surrounding *swadeshi* to that of a *bona fide* political revolution:

I have not witnessed a revolution in my time, nor by an effort of the imagination can I conceive what it is like. But, amid the upheaval of the *Swadeshi* movement, I could, I think, obtain some idea of the transformation of public feeling and of the wild excitement which must precede a revolutionary movement. A strange atmosphere is created. Young and old, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, all breathe it, and all are swayed and moved and even transported by the invisible influence that is felt. Reason halts; judgement is held in suspense; it is one mighty impulse that moves the heart of the community and carries everything before it. An eminent doctor told me that in the height of the *Swadeshi* movement girl-patient of his, not more than six years old, cried out in her delirium that she would not take any foreign medicine.⁵⁹

While Curzon’s hostile policies had given the Congress a powerful *raison d’être* and incited Indians on a wide scale, the overall cohesion that Surendranath had observed did not last. As the leading historian of the movement, Sumit Sarkar, has observed, the *swadeshi* cause rallied a number of political actors who had been agitating against the colonial state in various ways

Viceroy Hardinge’s life notably took place during festivities celebrating Delhi as the new capital of the Raj in India. Hardinge was wounded by the bomb blast but survived—the Indian attendant riding behind him did not (Ramnath 66). See Bernard Bate, “Swadeshi in the Time of Nations: Reflections on Sumit Sarkar’s *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, India and Elsewhere*” (2012) and Maia Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar through Anarchist History and Historiography” (2012).

⁵⁸ Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 227.

⁵⁹ Banerjea, *A Nation in the Making*, 182-183. Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 252. See also Goswami, *Producing India*, 269-270.

both in and out of Bengal. They all had their own agendas and approaches regarding India's subjugation yet held in common a rejection of the conservative Congress tack. Indeed, it is only when juxtaposed against these additional players that the early Congress may be deemed "moderate" in so far as it now found itself on the defensive in an ever-burgeoning political field. Sarkar's influential four-fold classification of the major strands of *swadeshi* resistance is briefly summarized as follows:

- *The Moderate Tradition.* Here the main actor is the Indian National Congress and leaders like Surendranath Banerjea and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Sarkar notes that the moderate strain was dominant before the partition was finalized, a period ranging from December 1903 to July 1905.⁶⁰ Predictably, this coterie relied upon the established methods of organizing meetings, delivering speeches, drafting petitions, and disseminating printed material in which they advanced logical arguments against the partition, and almost always in English. They aimed to mobilize their fellow educated Indian elites and appealed directly to British officials.⁶¹ With the exception of Surendranath, most leaders only very reluctantly endorsed the boycott.⁶²
- *Constructive Swadeshi.* This contingent advocated a program of self-reliance or *atmashakti* that essentially entailed ignoring the British regime by creating an autonomous cultural space informed by "traditional" Hindu practices and beliefs. Constructive swadeshi flourished from approximately 1905-1907 and Rabindranath Tagore was its main champion.⁶³ The primary method of protest was the boycott of all foreign goods and privileging *swadeshi* products. This strand continued an ongoing practice of establishing independent shops, small-scale industries, educational institutions, presses, newspapers, and juridical bodies, all of which were to be patronized instead of their British counterparts. A program of national education was an especially important element of its platform.⁶⁴ Constructive swadeshi appears to have petered out beginning in mid-1907 due to its overly ambitious agenda as well as Tagore's shift in thinking on *swadeshi* and Indian nationalism more broadly.⁶⁵
- *Political Extremism.* This strain diverged from both the moderate tradition and constructive swadeshi and was active from 1905-1907.⁶⁶ Leaders such as Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh, and B.G. Tilak had long been turned off by the Congress, finding its obsequious manner both ineffective and insulting. They also

⁶⁰ Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 32.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 36-39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 47, 43.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 44. Goswami, *Producing India*, 244-251.

⁶⁵ Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 52-53, 76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

thought that constructive swadeshi was unrealistic—complete independence from Britain or *swaraj* [self-rule] would be necessary before any program of national regeneration could be legitimately assumed.⁶⁷ Rather than appealing for change or withdrawing into an insular cultural space, the extremists held that British rule was fundamentally incompatible with India's wellbeing and confrontation with the colonial state was unavoidable. In April 1907, Aurobindo Ghosh advocated adding methods of “passive resistance” and civil disobedience. They also sanctioned violence when repression became intolerable.⁶⁸

- *Terrorism*. Beginning in 1908, Bengal and other parts of India witnessed increasingly frequent and effective assassinations of British officials, robberies, bomb blasts, and other acts of violence. Terrorists shared many of the same ideals as the political extremists, including a desire for immediate *swaraj* and the glorification of violence.⁶⁹ Their dominance from 1908-1911 may be attributed to the growing influence of ideas and persons from Maharashtra (where violence had been ongoing for some time); the arrest or exile of various extremist leaders; and the suppression of self-improvement groups or *samitis* that had been active for a few decades.⁷⁰ A particularly notorious terrorist act occurred at Muzaffarpur, Bihar in April 1908 when a bomb intended for a British magistrate killed two British women instead; Tilak defended the attack in his Marathi-language newspaper *Kesari* and was subsequently arrested.⁷¹ Sarkar distinguishes this strand from “revolutionary” or “militant” nationalism because such acts of violence were carried out primarily by elite actors and did not constitute nor inspire a groundswell against the colonial state.⁷²

Sarkar's schema elucidates the sheer dynamism of the *swadeshi* movement, in particular how a number of different actors consciously overlapped and collided with one another in terms of ideology, leadership, and method. The emergence and interaction of these four major strains of *swadeshi* resistance from 1904-1912 suggest that Curzon failed miserably at his goal of denuding Indian political aspirations, but when it came to “assist[ing] [the Congress] to a peaceful demise,” he may have been successful to an extent.⁷³ The divergence of

⁶⁷ As Sarkar argues, for this legion the primary goal was “...political independence—complete and unadulterated *swaraj*, and not piecemeal constitutional reform or slow self-regeneration...” (ibid).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 55-58.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 64. Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 66.

⁷⁰ Peter Heehs, “Revolutionary Terrorism in British Bengal,” 153-169.

⁷¹ Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 282.

⁷² Sarkar counters the tendency in Indian nationalist historiography to label this strand's activities as indicative of “revolutionary” or “militant” nationalism (63). Ramnath argues that the colonial government's tendency to label swadeshi militants as “anarchists” is similarly mistaken (64).

⁷³ Qtd. in Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 274.

constructive swadeshi, political extremism, and terrorism from the established Congress tack and the organization's relegation to the periphery during much of the decade evidences a shifting political climate in which new ways of dealing with Britain were increasingly desired.⁷⁴ As Goswami observes, the *swadeshi* movement evidenced a meaningful expansion and redefinition of Indian politics at the turn of the century: “[The *swadeshi* movement] contested both narrow institutional understanding of politics and the formalistic conception of rights enshrined in classical liberalism and permanently deferred in a colonial state. What it rejected outright was the relegation of the political to the ‘speechifying’ sanctified precincts of the [Congress], what Tagore called the ‘book-learned... watch-and-chain-bedecked assembly.’”⁷⁵ Indeed, the very fact that the partition of Bengal was finalized in October 1905 *despite* the persistent protest of Congress leaders for well over a year crystallized its futility for many Indians.⁷⁶ Mounting tensions within the organization regarding the efficacy of “constitutional methods” culminated in an ugly split—complete with the hurling of insults and shoes—between the moderate and extremist wings at Surat in 1907.⁷⁷ The two factions would meet separately until 1916.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 227.

⁷⁵ Goswami, *Producing India*, 253.

⁷⁶ As Bipin Chandra Pal observed in July 1905, “If anything could prove the utter futility of our so-called methods of constitutional political agitation, with a view to enforce the will of the people upon those who are vested with the authority and functions of the State in this country, the history of the agitation against the proposal to partition Bengal has done it.” See Pal, *Swadeshi & Swaraj: The Rise of the New Patriotism*, 39. See also Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 36.

⁷⁷ Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 238.

⁷⁸ Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 281. Despite its overall passivity during the *swadeshi* years, it may be argued that to some extent the moderate Congress was ultimately the victor over all parties, Curzon in particular. With the involvement and encouragement of Congress leaders, the liberal Secretary of State for India, John Morley, passed the Indian Councils Act of 1909, which expanded Indian participation in local governance, and in 1911 the Raj appeased public sentiment by reversing the partition and reuniting Bengal. However, one could pose the counterargument that the concurrent decision to relocate the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi amounted to a symbolic demotion and denigration of Bengal and a rebuke of all forms of Bengali political agitation. Historians have noted that the decision to shift the capital to Delhi was driven in part by the Raj's desire to distance itself from the political hotbed of Bengal and to associate its rule with perceptions of past Mughal glory. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 161.

In addition to revealing growing dissatisfaction with the Congress and the increasing volatility of Indian politics, the *swadeshi* movement crucially reinforced the idea of India as the Hindu space Bharat. As Goswami has shown, the *swadeshi* movement both relied upon and concretized the perception that India's social body was righteously Hindu.⁷⁹ With the exception of the moderates, *swadeshi* activism was overwhelmingly articulated, performed, and reinforced in a potent sociocultural idiom grounded in Hindu beliefs and practices.⁸⁰ These highly overdetermined rites included the tying of *rakhis* [sacred threads] to represent solidarity, taking collective vows in Hindu temples to abstain from foreign goods, wearing *swadeshi* clothes after bathing in the Ganges, and the condemnation of British goods by Hindu priests. The appropriation of Bankim's "Bande Mataram" as the movement's rallying cry is particularly telling given its manifest Hindu imagery and the virulent anti-Muslim prejudice of *Anandamath* from which it was drawn. By 1908 British officials had deemed the slogan subversive enough to outlaw its utterance in public spaces.⁸¹ "Bharat Mata" herself became ubiquitous in the form of songs, visual imagery, and other cultural works, an ever-present reminder of an imperiled Hindu motherland that demanded unity and sacrifice from her "children."⁸² As Rabindranath Tagore later explored in *Ghare Baire* [*The Home and the World*] (1916), the fetishization of *swadeshi* as a profoundly Hindu endeavor resulted in the alienation of Bengali Muslims and other marginalized groups, a bitter irony given *swadeshi's*

⁷⁹ As Goswami explains, "Nationalists yoked together the demand for *swaraj* (in its varied meanings of self-rule, autonomy, and independence) with the developmentalist and productivist ideology of *swadeshi* (indigenous manufactures). This welding of *swaraj* and *swadeshi* [was] underwritten by a territorial nativist conception of nationhood..." (244). See also Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 228.

⁸⁰ Goswami, *Producing India*, 270. Goswami focuses on the ways in which the Hindu idiom manifested within the thought of Rabindranath Tagore and Bipin Chandra Pal, whom it seems Sarkar identifies as symbolic of constructive *swadeshi* and political extremism respectively. It is important to note, however, that Pal was among many leaders whose beliefs evolved throughout the period and thus defy easy classification. Sarkar admits that his schema should be regarded as "a kind of abstract model" and that "contradictory attitudes within a single man at different times (or sometimes even simultaneously) are not uncommon" (29-30).

⁸¹ Goswami, *Producing India*, 259.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 257.

initial claims of brotherhood and solidarity.⁸³ Lower-class Muslims in east Bengal were also coerced into the expensive boycott effort through threats of social ostracism and violence, which in turn convinced Muslim leaders of the need for separate political representation from Hindus.⁸⁴ Serious communal riots erupted in east Bengal from 1906-1907, evidencing the problematic elitism of the movement as well as its exclusionary Hindu bent.⁸⁵

Swadeshi Transnationalism

The rather insular story of *swadeshi* has received new attention in the past decade as historians have sought to broaden Sarkar's model within a wider geopolitical frame. Kris Manjappa, Maia Ramnath, and Dilip Menon are among many scholars who in recent years have elucidated the ways in which the conventional story of *swadeshi*—one in which the region of Bengal and the strands of constructive swadeshi and political extremism predominate—overlooks its crucial transnational dimensions.⁸⁶ On top of the partition of Bengal and the formal launch of *swadeshi* protest, 1905 must be considered an *annus mirabilis* due to the occurrence of several momentous events outside of India that influenced *swadeshi* resistance both on the ground and in the global Indian diaspora.⁸⁷ While it may seem paradoxical to consider the transnational elements of a movement that so heavily emphasized indigeneity, it is only by situating *swadeshi* within a more expansive temporal and geopolitical context that the movement's sheer complexity and dense entanglements far

⁸³ Ibid., 266-269. See also Banerjee-Dube, *A History of Modern India*, 234.

⁸⁴ Goswami, *Producing India*, 266. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 70.

⁸⁵ Heehs, "Revolutionary Terrorism in British Bengal," 162. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 67-69. Goswami, *Producing India*, 266. Both Sarkar and Guha have argued in different ways that these two limitations in particular led to the overall dissipation of the *swadeshi* movement.

⁸⁶ See, for example, the October 20, 2012 edition of *Economic & Political Weekly*, which featured a total of six articles under the heading "Swadeshi in the Time of Nations: Reflections on Sumit Sarkar's *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, India and Elsewhere."

⁸⁷ Harald Fischer-Tiné makes a similar point though his points of emphasis are reversed (329). See Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces,'" (2007).

beyond its immediate location of Bengal and the colonial state come into focus.⁸⁸ With such a perspective in place, the apparently local strategies of resistance that Sarkar identifies emerge as demonstrably transnational in scope. This is particularly true when considering the wide-ranging movements of a small yet influential contingent of elite Indians who eagerly pursued various kinds of alliances with sympathetic actors around the world. Fanning out to Britain, France, the United States, Japan, and elsewhere, these Indians forged new connections with those who could provide the kinds of knowledge, ideological support, or material resources deemed necessary at this critical juncture. The intensification of Pan-Asian discourse after Japan's victory in the Russo-Japanese War on the one hand and the establishment of various institutions by diasporic Indians on the other bolstered local *swadeshi* resistance by expanding its geopolitical configurations and imaginings beyond the colonial dyad.

* * *

George Nathaniel Curzon is notorious for his brazen policies in India, but the fact that he considered himself an expert on East Asia and wrote a book entitled *Problems of the Far East: Japan-China-Korea* is less well known. First published in 1894, *Problems* was based on Curzon's travels in the region and offered a typical positivist account of recent sociopolitical events and their significance for the world and especially the British Empire.⁸⁹ That Curzon was quite taken with Japan is clear, but his prescience about the nation's ascent onto the world stage is particularly striking:

... [Japan] sets before herself the supreme ambition of becoming, on a smaller scale, the Britain of the Far East. By means of an army strong enough to defend our shores, and to render invasion unlikely, and still more of a navy sufficiently powerful to sweep the seas, she sees that England has retained that unique and commanding position in the West

⁸⁸ Bernard Bate, "Swadeshi in the Time of Nations," 42.

⁸⁹ George Nathaniel Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, vii.

which was won for us by the industry and force of character of our people, by the mineral wealth of these islands, by the stability of our Government, and by the colonising genius of our sons. *By similar methods Japan hopes to arrive at a more modest edition of the same result in the East.*⁹⁰

Curzon's praise of Japan, arguably sincere yet inescapably paternalistic, must be read within the context of the evolving discourse of Yellow Peril, the xenophobic idea that the "yellow" nations, specifically China and Japan, posed a serious threat to Western white racial hegemony.⁹¹ While the discourse had thus far centered on a menacing yet dormant China, immense in population and resources, Curzon argued that it was in fact Japan that held the greatest potential and ambition to arise.⁹² Confident in his forecast, he even made the rather specific prediction that "in the course of the next quarter of a century she will take her place on a level of technical equality with the great Powers of the West."⁹³ Yet such assertions about Japan's latency are undermined by Curzon's arrogance that the country would act in predictable ways complimentary of the British. Far more than reflexively praising Britain for being Japan's natural role model, Curzon's characterization of the island nation as an incipient "Britain of the Far East" reveals an attempt to contain the nation's ascent within desirable parameters. Dismissing the necessary corollary of his argument, Curzon maintains that though Japan's star is on the rise, it would pose no danger to Western (and British) interests.⁹⁴ Contrary to suggestions that a dominant Japan would challenge the "White ensign in the Asiatic tropics," Curzon avers that "[The Japanese] are lacking in colonising (though certainly not in commercial) energy, and in the hereditary instinct for expansion."⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Ibid., 392-393. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Akira Iikura, "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Question of Race," 222.

⁹² Ibid., 223.

⁹³ Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, 392.

⁹⁴ Iikura, "The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Question of Race," 224.

⁹⁵ Curzon, *Problems of the Far East*, 412.

Curzon's clairvoyance was limited to his prediction of Japan's ascent alone. Not only did the nation modernize far more quickly than he had reckoned, it did indeed have the "hereditary instinct for expansion" after all given that its conflict with Russia concerned holdings in Korea and Manchuria.⁹⁶ Curzon's decision to go forward with the partition of Bengal in order to suppress Indian political aspirations appears all the more calculated when considering that large portions of the Indian public were rapt with the Russo-Japanese War and later the Russian Revolution.⁹⁷ The first major armed conflict of the twentieth century, the War captivated people worldwide as it pitted a newly modernized Asian nation against an established European power, symbolizing a veritable test of widely held notions about intrinsic Western supremacy and Eastern backwardness.⁹⁸ By the time Curzon announced the partition of Bengal in July 1905, Japan had definitively routed Russia, and Indians joined oppressed peoples near and far in celebrating the victory and its significance for contemporary geopolitics.⁹⁹

Constituting what Cemil Aydin calls a "global moment," Japan's startling triumph over Russia was universally regarded as a watershed event because it upended entrenched beliefs about the world order held by Western and non-Western countries alike.¹⁰⁰ While Japan's victory reinforced growing fears of Yellow Peril and the decline of Western authority for European powers, countries in the global south were spellbound by a peer nation's transformation into a commanding presence on the world stage. An excerpt from a Gujarati newspaper in January 1905 testifies not just to the depth of such awe but also the widespread

⁹⁶ Cemil Aydin, "A Global Anti-Western Moment?" 213.

⁹⁷ Steven G. Marks, "Bravo, Brave Tiger of the East!" 612.

⁹⁸ Aydin, "A Global Anti-Western Moment?" 213-219. Aydin describes the conflict as the "first modern war of the century" (214).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

feeling that the Japanese victory was a collective “Eastern” achievement: “...the twentieth century could not have breathed a more...encouraging message of hope into the ears of the downtrodden nations of the East than that which it has whispered on the opening day of the present year through the surrender of Port Arthur by Russia to Japan.”¹⁰¹ Observing the events from South Africa, M.K. Gandhi similarly asserted that “So far and wide have the roots of Japanese victory spread that we cannot now visualize all the fruit it will put forth. The people of the East seem to be waking up from their lethargy.”¹⁰²

The reverberation of such reactions around the world heralded the dawn of a new era. Among the most significant ideological effects of the Russo-Japanese War was its reinforcement of the overdetermined categories “East” and “West” but in entirely new ways as the ostensibly core qualities of each had been proven malleable.¹⁰³ Japan’s impressive victory over a European power was widely commended in other Asian countries for its perceived success in synthesizing the best of East and West, that is, achieving rapid modernization in the manner of the “West” but while retaining its core “Eastern” or “Asian” identity.¹⁰⁴ As long-held beliefs about Western superiority and Eastern inferiority dissolved, Asian countries increasingly looked to Japan as a shining example of a uniquely “Asian” modernity that could be replicated in their own countries.¹⁰⁵ Departing from notions of complementary East/West identities advanced in recent years by Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and Kakuzo Okakura, countries in the global south were more interested in mimicking Japan’s “Western” progress than in bolstering ideas about a pacific,

¹⁰¹ Qtd. in Marks, “Bravo, Brave Tiger of the East!” 612.

¹⁰² M.K. Gandhi, “Australia and Japan,” 470-471.

¹⁰³ Aydin, “A Global Anti-Western Moment?” 216-217.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 224-229.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* Ideas about Japanese supremacy, were, importantly, already in place by the time of the Russo-Japanese War. See Mark Ravinder Frost, “That Great Ocean of Idealism,” 271-272.

unifying “East.”¹⁰⁶ Demonstrating what Kris Manjapra calls “intellectual swadeshi,” in the aftermath of the War Tokyo grew in popularity as a destination for Indian students to gain the valuable knowledge that Japan had harnessed from the West, which was then to be applied domestically.¹⁰⁷ In addition to pursuing such expertise, Indian students sought alliances with those who might to be sympathetic to their cause. Especially considering the derision that they frequently confronted in Japan, efforts to generate cross-cultural camaraderie along the lines of a shared “Asian” identity are remarkable.¹⁰⁸ For example, in April 1907 a small contingent of Indian students in Tokyo came together to celebrate Tilak’s Shivaji festival, an event that was attended by Chinese activists as well as the former Japanese prime minister Okuma Shigenobu.¹⁰⁹ The presence of the revered Japanese leader helped solidify perceptions of Pan-Asian unity though he did have certain provisos for Indian political aspirations.¹¹⁰ The Indian and Chinese participants subsequently formed the Asian

¹⁰⁶ Stolte and Fischer-Tiné define “Asianisms” as “discourses and ideologies claiming that Asia can be defined and understood as a homogeneous space with shared and clearly defined characteristics.” See Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, “Imagining Asia in India,” 65. Keshab Chunder Sen is regarded among the earliest Indian thinkers to espouse the idea of a coherent and unified “Asia” (Prasad 122, Stolte and Fischer-Tiné 68). Sen’s comments that form the first epigraph of this chapter were part of a lecture entitled “Asia’s Message to Europe” delivered in Calcutta in 1883. Ten years later, Swami Vivekananda reinforced prevalent notions of “East” and “West” at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he advanced Hinduism a universal faith and synthesis of all religions (Chowdhury-Sengupta 1998, 26-27). The Japanese art critic Kakuzo Okakura visited India from 1901-1902 where he notably interacted with a number of eminent thinkers including Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Surendranath Tagore, and Sister Nivedita (Frost 255-258). While in Calcutta he became a regular of the Tagore family parlor in Jorasanko. It was during this trip to India that Kakuzo wrote his first major book, *The Ideals of the East* (1903), which begins with the famous declaration, “Asia is one.”

¹⁰⁷ Kris Manjapra, “Knowledgeable Internationalism and the Swadeshi Movement,” 56. See also Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 336.

¹⁰⁸ Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, “Imagining Asia in India,” 70. See also Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 336.

¹⁰⁹ Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World*, 169. Birendra Prasad, *Indian Nationalism and Asia*, 45.

¹¹⁰ Prasad cites the June 15, 1905 edition of *The Bengalee*, which reported “The celebrations partook of the nature of the Pan-Asiatic demonstration.” It is important to stress that while on the one hand Shigenobu’s presence solidified perceptions of Pan-Asian unity, the overall condescension of the Japanese towards Indians was unmistakable through his admonitory comments that Indians must first reform themselves before espousing political ideals. Count Okuma cautioned that “A nation is entitled to talk of independence only after it has entirely abolished its own evil customs, ennobled its own character and attained the same qualifications as any other powerful rising nation. Neither the evolution theory nor any modern advanced thought admits that

Solidarity Society, which was founded on a platform of *diguō zǐbǐ* [opposition to imperialism] and *zǐbào qī bāngzū* [protection of solidarity].¹¹¹ The political agitation of the pan-Islamist Maulavi Baraktullah, Professor of Urdu at the School of Foreign Languages at Tokyo University from 1909-1914, further contributed to perceptions of Pan-Asian solidarity in Japan.¹¹²

But undoubtedly the most significant Indian agitating abroad during these turbulent *swadeshi* years was Shyamji Krishnavarma, a highly influential revolutionary who brought the movement's politics to the very seat of imperial power. His track from loyalist to firebrand was a familiar one for turn-of-the-century Indian elites, but in this case the consequences would prove grave for the Raj.¹¹³ It was in the cataclysmic year of 1905 that Krishnavarma established three key institutions that provided a platform for Indians both inside and outside of Britain to agitate and forge new alliances with sympathizers around the world. Through Krishnavarma's efforts it was London that became, ironically enough, the most important node of *swadeshi* political agitation after Bengal.¹¹⁴

the evils consequent on the Hindu Caste System and religious superstition should have a place in any civilized nation" (qtd. in Prasad 45-46). See also Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces,'" 336.

¹¹¹ Karl, *Staging the World*, 169. Karl notes that "The society's stated goals were to establish the principle of mutual assistance among any and all peoples who were engaged in struggles for national and cultural independence in Asia."

¹¹² According to one contemporary Indian observer, Baraktullah was an inspiring and influential political leader in Tokyo and held in esteem by both Indians and Japanese alike. This source also stated that "[Baraktullah] said that India would regain her liberty one day through the combined assistance of China and Japan... In my opinion, Baraktulla is the Shyamji Krishna Verma of Japan." See Aravind Ganachari, *Nationalism and Social Reform in a Colonial Situation*, qtd. in 143.

¹¹³ Having pursued his higher education at Oxford in the early 1880s, Krishnavarma worked in India for about a decade where he held various positions. It was during his time in India that he became disillusioned with the Raj, inspired by extremists like Tilak, and returned to London in 1897 to agitate. Shah indicates that Krishnavarma had "suffered humiliation from British authorities" but does not specify what happened. A.M. Shah, "*The Indian Sociologist*," 3436.

¹¹⁴ Fischer-Tiné, "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces,'" 330.

In February 1905 Krishnavarma founded the Indian Home Rule Society, a political association dedicated to mobilizing support for Indian self-government within the Empire.¹¹⁵

A critical component of the Society was *The Indian Sociologist*, a monthly periodical that became a leading mouthpiece of revolutionary Indian politics worldwide.¹¹⁶ Presenting himself as a “genuine Indian interpreter” for the U.K. in the inaugural issue, Krishnavarma sharply indicted British imperialism as a profound hypocrisy: “The British people...can never succeed in being a nation of freemen and lovers of freedom so long as they continue to send out members of the dominating classes to exercise despotisms in Britain’s name upon the various conquered races that constitute Britain’s military Empire.”¹¹⁷

Krishnavarma’s close colleague and ally, British socialist Henry Hyndman, addressed Indians in the manner of *swadeshi* political extremists and terrorists and implicitly criticized the moderate Congress position: “Indians must learn to rely upon themselves alone for their political salvation, that is, the forcible expulsion of the British rule from India and not hope for anything from the changes of governors and governments.”¹¹⁸

Given the *Indian Sociologist*’s incendiary politics, it is not surprising that the British government banned its importation into India in 1907 or that its publisher was arrested for sedition in 1909.¹¹⁹ Testifying to Krishnavarma’s alliances with an array of prominent figures, the anarchist Guy Aldred took over publication of the *Sociologist* at his own press; he too was convicted of sedition and imprisoned for a year.¹²⁰ Printing then shifted to the continental home of revolution, Paris, where Krishnavarma had relocated earlier under threat of arrest in

¹¹⁵ Rozina Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 103.

¹¹⁶ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 330. Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 64.

¹¹⁷ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 331. Qtd. in Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 64.

¹¹⁸ Qtd. in Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 64-65.

¹¹⁹ Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 104-105. Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 65.

¹²⁰ Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 104-105.

London.¹²¹ Here he reassumed editorship of his monthly, which in April 1909 offered a provocative assessment of ongoing Indian terrorism. In an unsigned article entitled “A Suggestion for a Panasian Union in Paris,” Pan-Asianism and *swadeshi* resistance were linked together in the following way:

It is very sad to note such symptoms of terror. But they are not unnatural. Unless England can win the heartfelt love of the Indian masses; it is felt that [British legal] precautions are in vain. Deplorable, indeed, is the outlook. Perhaps the only consoling feature of public opinion at the present day is the marked improvement in English public morality as regards the doctrine of political assassination...It is felt that the use of Russian methods by the Indian malcontents is a proceeding which shows the proceeding [sic] in quite a new light to the English mind.

Speaking as a friend of Asia, long oppressed and robbed by the European tyrannies, I cannot recommend too strongly the cultivation of a Panasian Union at Paris... There are educated Indians, Osmanlis, Egyptians, Japanese, Chinese, Arabs, Armenians, Parsis, Persians, Siamese, and others all to be found at Paris. A PANASIAN PARLIAMENT could be easily organized, which would co-ordinate the ambition and policy of an Emancipated East...Asia has sat too long in darkness and in the shadow of death. Let Asia arise in Unity, and Unity will bring Might. When the English Mlecha partitioned the Bengali Land, when they tore the Garment of Gunga, they did the last insult and the last outrage which were required in the decrees of destiny to herald the Freedom of the Glorious East.¹²²

Here the anonymous author makes the understated “suggestion” that various “Asian” peoples in Paris ought to come together to form what is ostensibly a sovereign political institution representing their home countries’ mutual interests. The French capital is cast as London’s foil, a city amenable to peoples of all backgrounds and creeds, and especially revolutionaries, where such a scheme could be “easily organized.” A major motivation behind the Union is the partition of Bengal, a local grievance that is cast as a collective injustice for all of Asia. Decried as “the last insult and the last outrage,” the partition constitutes an effective rupture or rape of the holy river Ganges, whose “Garment” has been

¹²¹ Ramnath, “Reading Sumit Sarkar,” 65. Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 104-105.

¹²² *The Indian Sociologist*, “A Suggestion for a Panasian Union in Paris,” (April 1909), 16. Italics and capitalization in original; my emphasis is underlined. See also Stolte and Fischer-Tiné, “Imagining Asia in India,” 70-71.

“tor[n].” This image is likely an allusion to the pivotal scene of the attempted disrobing of Queen Draupadi in the epic *Mahabharata*, a profound humiliation that her five husbands later avenged with a fury. Similarly, the grave injustice of the partition compels Asians worldwide to unite and herald a new era in which an “Emancipated East” would form a potent geopolitical bulwark against any future oppression by “European tyrannies.” Though the author proffers another solution to the ongoing conflict between Indian terrorists and British officials—England winning the “heartfelt” love of its Indian subjects—this proposal is not pursued. Instead, the author speculates on the possibility of eliciting British sympathy for Indian political terrorists, citing a favorable shift in “English public morality” with respect to the assassination of Russian officials by revolutionaries.

Krishnavarma’s third significant contribution to *swadeshi* transnationalism was the establishment of the India House hostel in July 1905, a converted mansion in north London that provided quarters for roughly twenty-four students.¹²³ Hyndman delivered the inaugural address at the opening in which he echoed his earlier comments in the *Indian Sociologist* and reminded Indians that “loyalty to Britain would mean treachery to India.”¹²⁴ Dadabhai Naoroji and the suffragist Charlotte Despard were also in attendance, and the Irish M.P. Frank O’Donnell, a long-standing supporter of Indian causes, similarly endorsed the venture.¹²⁵ Krishnavarma additionally offered five fellowships for Indian students to pursue their education in England; in true *swadeshi* style the recipients had to “solemnly declare that after [their] return to India [they] shall not accept any post, office, emoluments, or service

¹²³ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 331. See also Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 123.

¹²⁴ Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 104. Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 339.

¹²⁵ Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 104.

under the British Government.”¹²⁶ The most (in)famous fellowship recipient was undoubtedly Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, future Hindutva ideologue and godfather of the Hindu Right, who became a leading figure at the hostel soon after his arrival in London in 1906.¹²⁷ British fears that India House was “sinister and evil” were realized on July 1, 1909 when Madan Lal Dhingra, a student closely associated with the hostel, shot and killed Sir William Curzon Wylie at a social gathering. Dhingra was hanged shortly thereafter and hailed a martyr by his fellow radicals.¹²⁸ In the wake of the event, India House was shut down, and increased British repression, on top of Krishnavarma and Savarkar’s departure to Paris, concluded *swadeshi* agitation at the heart of empire.¹²⁹

Hospitality and Cosmopolitanism in “East-West” Novels

Dhingra’s assassination of Sir William Curzon Wylie, political *aide-de-camp* to the Secretary of State for India, sent shockwaves across Britain. While terrorism had by now become increasingly common in India and particularly Bengal, the targeted killing of a high-ranking British official by an Indian in London was unprecedented. Yet, as Alex Tickell has argued, the Wylie assassination could not have been entirely unexpected given British suspicion about the incendiary activities of the India House and its leaders.¹³⁰ Two years before his death Wylie himself had been a part of the Lee Warner Committee, a governmental deputation that investigated the ongoing problem of Indian students’

¹²⁶ James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 171. See also Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 331-332.

¹²⁷ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 332. Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 105. See also Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 174, 177.

¹²⁸ Fischer-Tiné, “Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces,’” 332. Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 108-112. In addition to Wylie, Dhingra killed a Parsi doctor, Kaikhusro Lalca, who tried to assist Wylie after he was shot (Visram 108).

¹²⁹ Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 109. Ker, *Political Trouble in India*, 193-194.

¹³⁰ Alex Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature*, 154.

radicalization in Britain.¹³¹ The Committee's primary recommendation was the formation of an advisory board that would serve as a resource for this group by providing information about lodging and writing letters of reference.¹³² But underlying such apparently hospitable endeavors were the ulterior motives of gathering intelligence and heading off potential risks. Such surveillance would have complemented ongoing British scrutiny of Indian political activity in the metropole.¹³³ The Lee Warner Committee also considered the feasibility of starting a government-run hostel that would provide channels of approved guardianship and guidance to the Indian students in its charge; in the words of one Indian detractor who lambasted the idea, the hostel was obviously intended to function as a "sort of counterblast to India House."¹³⁴

The Lee Warner Committee's recommendation for an advisory board was implemented in 1909, but its avowed purpose of providing watchful assistance to Indian students had already been in effect for some time.¹³⁵ As Antoinette Burton has shown, the British perception that Indian newcomers to the metropole required supervision was nothing new, and had already guided the establishment of a number of organizations since the mid-nineteenth century.¹³⁶ Much like the advisory board and government-run hostel proposed by the Lee Warner Committee, altruistic missions touting the welfare of itinerant Indian laborers, activists, and students masked more insidious aims of guiding and regulating their

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 155.

¹³³ As Jonathan Schneer notes, as of 1898 the India Office was spying on the meetings of the London India Society (187). Krishnavarma's India House was also frequently infiltrated by British spies (Visram 104).

¹³⁴ Qtd. in Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature*, 156-157.

¹³⁵ Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 123. Lahiri notes that an Advisory Committee and Bureau of Information was established in London in 1909 under the chairmanship of Lord Ampthill and the executive control of T.W. Arnold.

¹³⁶ See Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (1998). Such organizations included the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders (1856-7) and the Northbrook Indian Club (1879). The Northbrook Indian Club's avowed mission was to serve as a "common centre of social community for English gentlemen interested in India, and Indian gentlemen who may be in England, either as students or travelers" (qtd. in Burton 55).

behavior in particular ways. One such body was the National Indian Association (NIA), founded in 1870 by Elizabeth Manning with the espoused goals of “extend[ing] a knowledge of India” in Britain and “promot[ing] by voluntary effort the enlightenment and improvement of our Hindu fellow-subjects.”¹³⁷ Anticipating the proposals of the Lee Warner Committee by approximately twenty years, the NIA steadily assumed more of a supervisory capacity in light of the growing number of Indians coming to Britain to pursue educational opportunities and professional training.¹³⁸ The Association eventually formed a “Superintendence Committee” in order to dispense “friendly guidance” to the Indian student community that it regarded as highly impressionable and vulnerable to hostile influences; one way in which it disseminated its paternalistic advice was through a formal handbook with detailed recommendations, guidelines, and precautions.¹³⁹ The NIA also hosted regular “At Home” meetings, soirees, and lectures, all of which were essentially socially sanctioned occasions for Indians and Britons to mix.¹⁴⁰ Given the high-profile nature of such gatherings and the relative ease of access to British officials that they afforded, it should not be surprising that Dhingra killed Wyllie at such an event in July 1909. Notably, even the student’s noncompliance with the Association’s request that Indian guests wear “native costume” posed no obstacle to his entry.¹⁴¹ And unlike his recent attempt on the life of George Nathaniel Curzon outside of the Savoy Hotel, this time Dhingra succeeded in his reported aim of producing the maximum amount of “horrorism” among the British public.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Qtd. in Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire*, 58.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴¹ Alex Tickell, “Terrorism and the Informative Romance,” 73.

¹⁴² Qtd. in Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature*, 136.

Though the seeds of such discord had been sown much earlier, the Wyllie assassination was an unmistakable indicator of the extent to which British-Indian relations had deteriorated during the *swadeshi* years. Indeed, the shooting itself was far less shocking than the rather spectacular way in which British complacency about the metropole's isolation from the Indian "unrest" had imploded from within. While at first glance it seems rather ironic that an event promoting India-British collegiality devolved into violence, the assassination is better understood as a forthright repudiation of the arrogant imperialist ideology that had underpinned such endeavors for decades. As Tickell notes, "if the National Indian Association meeting in South Kensington sought to promote [a] kind of friendly guardianship, the Curzon Wyllie killing...represents an act of anti-colonial terrorist violence staged both as voluntary martyrdom and as an almost Oedipal refusal of the colonial rhetoric of control."¹⁴³ At his trial, Dhingra defended the assassination as follows:

If it is patriotic in an Englishman to fight against the Germans if they were to occupy this country, it is much more justifiable and patriotic in my case to fight against the English; I hold the English people responsible for the murder of the sons of my countrymen...and they are also responsible for taking away £100,000,000 every year from India to this country...In case this country is occupied by the Germans and an Englishman not bearing to see the Germans walking with the insolence of conquerors in the streets of London, goes and kills one or two of the Germans, then that Englishman is to be upheld as a patriot of his country, then certainly I am a patriot too, working for the emancipation of my motherland.¹⁴⁴

I make this statement, not because I wish to plead for mercy or anything of that kind. I wish that English people should sentence me to death, for in that case the vengeance of my countrymen will be all the more keen. I put forward this statement to show the justice of my cause to the outside world.¹⁴⁵

Here Dhingra rationalizes his murder of a high-ranking British official as an act of war fueled by patriotism, one that was no different than an Englishman defending his country from a

¹⁴³ Ibid., 157. See also Alex Tickell, "Scholarship Terrorists," 13.

¹⁴⁴ Qtd. in Visram, *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 111.

¹⁴⁵ Qtd. in Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature*, 137.

foreign intruder. Evoking Naoroji's critique of British rule as an unconscionable drain of wealth and resources from India, Dhingra views British officials like Wylie not as legitimate rulers but as virulent trespassers who must be expelled for the wellbeing of the nation. Just as Britons would be incensed by Germans walking cavalierly "with the insolence of conquerors in the streets of London," so too Dhingra acted to rid his country of a poison and thereby "work for the emancipation of [his] motherland." Dhingra was sentenced to death and became a political martyr as he desired, yet the irony remains that it was over four thousand miles away on British soil that this *swadeshi* terrorist achieved his "patriotic" aims.

* * *

Dhingra's rationalization of his crime as a righteous eradication of a contagion from his homeland reveals the way in which a logic and ethics of hospitality had come to inform the thought of Indian revolutionaries, writers, and thinkers during the turbulent *swadeshi* years. What had become of the colonial relationship and what was its future? Were Britons fellow subjects, rulers, guardians, or intruders? Could Indians ever achieve an equal footing with them or would they remain perpetual pupils or wards of the state? What were the responsibilities and duties of Indians and Britons towards one another and how did these change depending on context and location? Disappointment surrounding *civis Britannicus* were at the heart of such reflections as injustices ranging from routine racist abuse to grand decrees such as the 1905 partition had steadily caused large numbers of Indians around the world to lose faith in Crown Rule and Britannia. While men like Surendranath Banerjea and Shyamji Krishnavarma had expressed their resistance through moderate and extremist methods respectively, *swadeshi* terrorists like Dhingra held that violence was the only recourse. Having arrived in London from South Africa shortly after the Wylie assassination,

M.K. Gandhi witnessed firsthand how the incident had unsettled Indians and Britons alike and offered his own assessment of the events:

The assassination of Sir Curzon Wylie and Dr. Lalkaka was a terrible thing... On July 2, there was a tea-meeting of the National Indian Association in the Jehangir Hall of the Imperial Institute. *Such meetings are arranged with the object of bringing Indian students into contact with Englishmen, who therefore attend as the guests of Indians. Sir Curzon Wylie was [thus] a guest of his assassin. From this point of view, Mr. Madanlal Dhingra murdered his guest in his own house...*

It is being said in defense of Sir Curzon Wylie's assassination that it is the British who are responsible for India's ruin, and that, just as the British would kill every German if Germany invaded Britain, so too it is the right of any Indian to kill any Englishman.

If I kill someone in my own house without a warning—someone who has done me no harm—I cannot but be called a coward. There is an ancient custom among the Arabs that they would not kill anyone in their own house, even if the person be their enemy. They would kill him after he had left the house and after he had been given time to arm himself.

A man's own courage consists in suffering deeply and over a long period. That alone is a brave act which is preceded by careful reflection. I must say that those who believe and argue that such murders may do good to India are ignorant men indeed. No act of treachery can ever profit a nation. *Even should the British leave in consequence of such murderous acts, who will rule in their place? The only answer is: the murderers. Who will then be happy? Is the Englishman bad because he is an Englishman? Is it that everyone with an Indian skin is good? [...]*¹⁴⁶

In this article published in the *Indian Opinion* just three days before Dhingra's execution, Gandhi laid out in embryonic form provocative ideas that would soon form the basis of his masterpiece *Hind Swaraj*.¹⁴⁷ That Gandhi would condemn the attack and censure Dhingra's sympathizers is to be expected, but the logic by which he arrives at his conclusion is striking. Rather than making an overt appeal to religious norms, moral values, or even the law, he too deploys an ethics of hospitality to make his case. Upending conventional readings of the

¹⁴⁶ M.K. Gandhi, "London [After July 16, 1909]," 427-429. Emphasis added. Interestingly Gandhi himself gestures to the unfinished nature of his reflections, which would eventually form the basis of *Hind Swaraj*: "This train of thought leads to a host of reflections, but I have no time to set them down here" (429). See also Anthony Parel, "Editor's Introduction," xxvii.

¹⁴⁷ Visram notes that Dhingra was hanged at Pentonville prison on August 17, 1909; see *Ayabs, Lascars and Princes*, 109.

affair, Gandhi understands Dhingra not as a guest of the NIA or British society who transgressed moral and legal codes, but rather as a host who violated his most sacred responsibilities of honoring and protecting his guests. Through such a lens, the killing was less courageous than cowardly as Dhingra wrongfully exploited his dominant position as a host to inflict violence upon an unassuming visitor in his charge.

Gandhi goes on to eviscerate Dhingra's rationale that Wyllie was an intruder who deserved to be killed for the welfare of India and that Britons themselves would surely have done the same. Ever the wily lawyer, Gandhi charges that such a defense is "fallacious" because "if the Germans were to invade [Britain], the British would kill only the invaders. They would not kill every German whom they met. Moreover, they would not kill an unsuspecting German, or Germans who are guests." Gandhi thus urges Indians to make distinctions, to realize that not all English men are bad simply because they are Englishmen, much as all those with an "Indian skin"—Dhingra and other terrorists—are not necessarily good. Rather than enact senseless violence that only harms Indian interests, one should instead inspire one's adversary to reform by "suffering deeply and over a long period." Anticipating his arguments regarding *satyagraha*, Gandhi advances his own brand of *smadeshi* resistance: only morally upright toleration of abuse and injustice, however painful it may be, constitutes true courage and can engender meaningful change.

Jacques Derrida's theorizations on hospitality are helpful in understanding Gandhi's prescription for *satyagraha* or patient suffering. In what scholars have called his "late" period, Derrida submitted to deconstructive analysis a range of concepts including cosmopolitanism, forgiveness, and friendship in light of contemporary politics. Hospitality in particular became a prevalent theme in these meditations as Derrida repeatedly pushed the idea to its limits and in so doing observed a productive aporia. Pure hospitality did not and could not exist

because the ostensible warmth or generosity offered by hosts to guests in any given situation was inescapably conditional and thus *inhospitable*. Since on some level guests must recognize and respect the dominance of their hosts and behave according to prescribed norms—and hosts too expect this—Derrida argued that conventional understandings of hospitality are troublingly limited, plagued by arbitrary parameters that undermine the very gesture itself. Such conditional hospitality, Derrida argued, was inseparable from an animating corollary of unconditional or absolute hospitality:

...absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names...¹⁴⁸

For Derrida, any full comprehension of hospitality requires awareness of both the *conditional* and the *absolute* because the two guide and sustain one another. Just as the restrictions inherent within any act of hospitality undercut the generosity and warmth of the very concept, so too absolute hospitality constitutes an ever-present horizon that can never be reached. Yet knowledge of this aporia is empowering. By recognizing that absolute hospitality can never be achieved, and that conditional hospitality does violence to the very concept, one becomes better able to try to bridge the gap between the two. For Derrida, ethics itself “straddles” this gap between “the unconditional or hyperbolic on the one hand, and the conditional and jurido-political...on the other.”¹⁴⁹ As he states elsewhere:

Hospitality is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others. Insofar as it has to do with the *ethos*, that is, the residence, one’s home, the familiar place of dwelling, inasmuch as it is a manner of being there, the manner in which we relate to ourselves

¹⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 25. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners, *ethics is hospitality*; ethics is so thoroughly coextensive with the experience of hospitality...¹⁵⁰

In a similar way, Gayatri Spivak theorizes what she calls the “founding gap” between the ethical and historical-political: “...the ethical situation can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible... This is the founding gap in all act or talk, most especially in acts or talk that we understand to be closest to the ethical—the historical and the political... we must somehow attempt to supplement the gap.”¹⁵¹ For both theorists, it is precisely through academic analysis of the liminal space between the ideal/actual, the unconditional/conditional, and the ethical/political that social change can begin to occur.

This distinction between the ideal and the actual was at the core of Indian complaints surrounding *civis Britannicus* and forms a prevalent theme in numerous Indian works that explored the pitfalls and possibilities of the colonial relationship. In their respective novels *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest: An Anglo-Indian Romance* and *The Prince of Destiny: The New Krishna*, S.M. Mitra and Sarath Kumar Ghosh offered a unique perspective on the ongoing *swadeshi* agitation from within the imperial capital itself. While it remains unclear if Mitra and Ghosh ever met one another in London, they had a good deal in common as they ran in similar circles and were regarded as prominent “experts” on India by the time their novels were published in 1909. Owing to their similarity in theme and publication history, *Hindupore* and *Prince* have long been discussed together in literary scholarship with greater attention and praise usually being bestowed upon the latter.¹⁵² In the past decade Alex Tickell has emerged as the most significant critic of both works, having

¹⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 16-17.

¹⁵¹ Gayatri Spivak, “A Moral Dilemma,” 215.

¹⁵² Early Indian scholars include Bhupal Singh (1934), Meenakshi Mukherjee (1971), G.P. Sarma (1978), Harish Raizada (1978), and K.S. Ramamurti (1982, 1983, 1987). In addition to Alex Tickell, more recent critics who have discussed both *Hindupore* and *Prince* include Sheng-yen Yu (1996) and Philip Darby (1998), while Bart Moore-Gilbert (2002), Adam Barrows (2011), and John Marx (2012) have focused exclusively on *Prince*.

addressed matters of genre and theme in a number of essays as well as his 2012 monograph *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature, 1830-1947*.

Despite the fair amount of critical attention paid to these novels and to *Prince* in particular, there has been insufficient analysis about how their imagining of India as a fundamentally Hindu space was both informed by, and intersected with, the vast global dynamics of the *swadeshi* movement as well as the discourses of Pan-Asianism and Yellow Peril. Developing John Marx's argument on the global orientation of many twentieth-century Anglophone novels—including Ghosh's *Prince*—I examine how these works reflected a sociopolitical milieu in which Indians and other colonized peoples were thinking less in terms of nationalism and the nation-state and more in terms of broader geopolitical and regional alliances.¹⁵³ Though a few critics have mentioned that both Mitra and Ghosh warn of the rise of a menacing Pan-Asian regional bloc, the way in which this cautionary message connected with the overall Hindu imagining within their novels has not been addressed. Misguided readings of *Hindupore* and *Prince* that have anachronistically projected nationalist desire onto the texts, stressed racial identity instead of religious belonging, or viewed the two as simply anticipating later sociocultural developments perform a disservice to the striking ways in which their authors intervened in the political debates of their specific historical moment.¹⁵⁴

Mitra and Ghosh's portrayals of grand Hindu kingdoms, magnificent Hindu princes and princesses, and a rich Hindu cultural heritage not only urged the British to respect India

¹⁵³ John Marx, *Geopolitics and the Anglophone Novel, 1890-2011* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁵⁴ Here I am specifically referencing Sheng-yen Yu, "British Imperialism and the Rhetoric of Cross-Cultural Representations in *Kim*, *Hindupore*, *The Prince of Destiny*, and *A Passage to India*" (Ph. Diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1996) and Alex Tickell, "The Discovery of Aryavarta: Hindu Nationalism and Early Indian Fiction in English," in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, edited by Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005).

as a colonial possession worth cherishing, it also threatened the Raj with violent retaliation through powerful alliances. In these fictional worlds, the idea of India as Bharat is a given, but rather than being a condition that has long since passed, these novels suggest that an expansive bloc of nations united by a common Hindu identity is latent at the present moment. The ethical horizon intrinsic to Derrida's notion of absolute hospitality is part and parcel of this two-pronged message as highly romanticized elite figures travel freely within and outside of the British imperial web where they cultivate different kinds of alliances and affiliations. While both *Hindupore* and *Prince* embrace the genres of romance and epic respectively, it is in their odd and clumsy denouements that they fail. The romance of *Hindupore* is undone by the stark warnings of a Japanese pilgrim, and Prince Barath's refusal to lead a revolution is not certainly typical of an epic hero. It is precisely in this failure to achieve their formal aims of romance and epic that *Hindupore* and *Prince* emerge most vividly as provocative political allegories in which the many modes of *swadeshi* resistance active at this moment awkwardly competed, collided, and coalesced with one another.

S.M. Mitra: Collaborator Turned Critic

Biographical information on Siddha Mohana Mitra is strangely in short supply even though he was a well-known figure in India and Britain in the early twentieth century. A descendant of Raja Digambar Mitra, a former disciple of Henry Derozio, S.M. Mitra was a prominent collaborator with the colonial government. He was a journalist by trade and had been proprietor-editor of the *Deccan Post* in Hyderabad.¹⁵⁵ Like his relative, Mitra was a staunch loyalist of the British regime. At the Delhi Durbar of 1903, he dined with a group of loyal Indian "veterans" of the 1857 rebellion who had just been honored by George

¹⁵⁵ Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency, and Indian-English Literature*, 170.

Nathaniel Curzon and other British officials; Mitra was notably described in the news coverage as “a generous and enlightened Indian gentleman, well known for his charitable and benevolent undertakings.”¹⁵⁶ Shortly thereafter Mitra travelled to London, where he became a member of the Royal Asiatic Society and joined Sarath Kumar Ghosh and other self-proclaimed Indian “experts” on a popular lecture circuit. Like his peers Mitra addressed a range of topics including Indian history, the Bengali language, and even “Persia in Indian Imperial Politics.”¹⁵⁷ He also continued his political journalism, contributing to the *Asiatic Quarterly*, the *Nineteenth Century*, and other periodicals. Considering Mitra’s loyalist bent, it is not surprising that British presses frequently published and republished his writings under titles such as *British Rule in India* (1905) and *India and Imperial Preference* (1907). The most well-known of these was *Indian Problems* (1908), which amalgamated Mitra’s views on the Indian “unrest”; the text is rife with salacious statements as the writer freely heaps gratuitous praise upon the British while issuing biting criticisms of his fellow Indians.¹⁵⁸ To give just one example, on the origin of the Indian “unrest,” Mitra held that “The Partition of Bengal was a grand move from the administrative as well as the commercial point of view. The name of Lord Curzon will go down to a grateful posterity as a promoter of civilization and benefactor of mankind.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ *The Graphic*, “A Group of Indian Mutiny Veterans who were Entertained at the Delhi Durbar,” (May 9, 1903), 622.

¹⁵⁷ See for example, *The Daily News*, “To-day,” (August 2, 1905), 9. *The Nottingham Evening Post*, “British Rule in India,” (August 3, 1905), 6. *The Daily News*, “To-day,” (November 8, 1905), 9. *The Daily News*, “English-Made Bengali,” (March 27, 1906), 4.

¹⁵⁸ S.M. Mitra, *Indian Problems* (London: John Murray, 1908).

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 186. Mitra often parroted racist and paradoxical British opinions. For example, while on the one hand Mitra praised the English for giving Hindus “an idea of the real blood and bone of human heroism,” on the other he indicted the *swadeshi* terrorist as a thoughtless mimic who “can do nothing without mischievous guidance from English malcontents” (363, 72). He was also very critical of the Congress, dismissing the organization as pretentious and insignificant. Rather than simply gathering together to complain and dictate, Congress leaders were lacking “a sincere desire to *discuss*” policies. As Mitra warned, “It is better to be *rational* than *national*” (336-337; emphasis in original).

But Mitra's message was quite different with *Hindupore*. This was his only literary work, and as he claims in the preface, the novel might never have come about if his articles on the Indian unrest had not proved so popular that "[he] was asked to deal with the subject in a more popular form."¹⁶⁰ While literary critics are right to point out that *Hindupore* was by all accounts quite poor and inferior to Ghosh's *Prince*, what remains unexplored is just how profound was Mitra's shift from his earlier espoused loyalty to the Raj. In marked contrast to the pro-British, totalizing views about India that he put forth in his political journalism, fiction appears to have offered Mitra a new and flexible medium in which to nuance his beliefs and present a different perspective on the *swadeshi* agitation. The loyalist's message had changed—Indian elites had a right to be disgruntled and it was imperative that the colonial government make certain adjustments in its policies and practices.

Modeled after and in direct conversation with "Enlightenments," *Hindupore* features a range of singular characters that stand in diametrical opposition to those offered by Kipling. For the imperious Pagett, Orde, and Dr. Eva Winthrop, Mitra gives us Lord Tara, Herbert Harvey, and Dr. Celitia Scott. Mitra introduces the reader to many of these exceptional metropolitan characters at the outset of the novel as they begin their journey to India aboard the *Nur-Jehan*. The exceptionality of the hero Lord Tara is made apparent on the first page, as the narrator describes him as "a young Irish Member of Parliament, full of ardour and enlightened zeal for the true welfare of the vast Indian Empire, which he was about to visit for the first time."¹⁶¹ Tara travels to India to visit his friend Herbert Harvey, an exceptional ICS officer with a deep love for and knowledge of India. Tara's fellow passenger Dr. Celitia Scott similarly looks forward to her visit to India; she is to become the

¹⁶⁰ S.M. Mitra, *Hindupore: A Peep Behind the Indian Unrest: An Anglo-Indian Romance* (London: Luzac, 1909), vii.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1. Mitra's choice of name for his hero further emphasizes the latter's singularity—*taara* is the Hindi word for "star."

superintendent of a hospital and intends to care for women pilgrims at the upcoming Hindu festival celebrating the deity Jagannath. Tara and Celitia's profound attraction to India is partially explained by their lineage. While Tara's grandfather was a former Viceroy of India, Celitia inherited her enthusiasm from her mother, who was raised by a Hindu family after being rescued as a child during the 1857 rebellion. Having always harbored an affinity for India, Celitia effuses that this trip is the fulfillment of the "dream of [her] life."¹⁶² Mr. Long, a missionary, joins them shortly thereafter; he is a rather unusual devotee of Christianity as he effusively praises Hinduism and states that he travels to India simply to "meet" Hindu pilgrims. A champion of Hindus, Long mentions that he may well travel to the upcoming Jagannath festival in order to correct erroneous views about sati held by the British public: "I...may possibly go...if only be able to contradict, from personal observation, the absurd reports concerning the self-immolation of human victims that are still often circulated in England."¹⁶³

These singular metropolitan travelers are matched by their idealized Indian hosts. Raja Ram Singh, the ruler of the princely state of Hindupore, is the first Indian character to appear in *Hindupore*. Though the reader does not learn until later that Singh is a king, his stature is apparent from the narrator's initial description: "At Suez the only passenger to come on board was an Indian gentleman of remarkably distinguished appearance, dressed in a light English travelling suit, and attended by a Hindu servant with the greatest deference."¹⁶⁴ The charming Singh impresses everyone on board; the narrator notes that he "spoke English perfectly and bore the inevitable *désagrément*s of the Suez Canal with true

¹⁶² Ibid., 7.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 25-26.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 12.

Oriental fortitude.”¹⁶⁵ Both Tara and Celitia find Singh alluring and their acquaintance with him rapidly transforms into friendship, a relationship that is sustained and deepened by the king’s immense kindness and graciousness. Even before the *Nur-Jehan* arrives in Bombay Singh has fully assumed the position of gracious host to the two newcomers. Ever the chivalrous gentleman, Singh catches Celitia when she faints, cares for her while she recovers, and takes an avid interest in her medical mission, wishing to “interest her in everything connected with the manners and customs of India.”¹⁶⁶ He reinforces Celitia and Tara’s positive impressions about India and Hinduism, explaining that ostensibly novel or innovative aspects of contemporary European medicine actually derive from ancient Hindu knowledge: “European medicine down to the seventeenth century was practically based upon the Hindu, and the name of Hindu physician Charaka repeatedly occurs in the Latin translations.”¹⁶⁷ Singh further regales his new friends with the story of Nala and Damayanti; the tale is told in detail, inviting Mitra’s British readers to delight in Hindu folklore.

Such hospitality continues upon their arrival in India. Singh’s initial invitation that Tara spend a few nights at the Taj-Mahal Hotel as his guest leads to yet another request that Tara stay at Hindupore on his way to visit Herbert Harvey.¹⁶⁸ A microcosm of a glorious Hindu India, the kingdom of Hindupore and all of its representatives are idyllic. Tara’s love interest, Princess Kamala, is a paragon of Hindu femininity. Demonstrating the profound overdetermination of “Hindu” as at once a religious, cultural, and national identity, the narrator notes that “Like most Hindu princesses, Kamala was a devout Hindu.”¹⁶⁹

Hindupore’s physical environs are majestic; soon after arriving Tara praises the kingdom in

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 53.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 60.

superlative terms: “This is the most beautiful place I ever saw in my life...like the Vale of Cashmere. If there’s an Elysium on earth, it is this...I feel as if I were in an enchanted forest, and all the trees and flowers had something to say.”¹⁷⁰ The narrator later fleshes out the elegant buildings and palaces of Hindupore. The armory is described as a “magnificent hall with marble columns of serpentine form, the ceiling painted in rich colours with stirring scenes from the warlike exploits of the Rajput Princes in defending Ajmere against the Mahomedan invaders.”¹⁷¹ Similarly, the ceilings of Princess Kamala’s boudoir display scenes from Hindu mythology and the *Mahabharata*; the narrator further comments that “Tradition said that the staircase was the work of the same hand that had designed the famous Taj at Agra.”¹⁷²

It is against this wondrous backdrop that Lord Tara increasingly becomes an intercultural ambassador between India and Britain. In sharp contrast to the conversations in Kipling’s “Enlightenments,” Tara’s endearing naiveté encourages the Indians he meets to express themselves candidly with him. Mitra’s portrayal of Tara as Irish is significant in this regard as he is seen as a natural ally, which he himself affirms: “There is, perhaps, something sympathetic in the temperament of Irishmen that appeals to the Hindu nature. I certainly feel as if I had found a new home here...”¹⁷³ The first grievance that Tara hears comes from Hindupore’s prime minister Mohan Lal, who laments that the British do not understand and appreciate Singh’s loyalty:

“The Raja seems very popular with his people,” said Tara.

“So he ought to be; he is their friend, and they know it. Loyalty in India, if founded on sentiment, is a very real fact, but the Hindus are the most conservative people in

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷² Ibid., 75.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 111.

the world. They cling to their beliefs with incredible steadfastness, and next to God, they have faith in their native Rajas. That is why the manner of espionage in British India is so much to be regretted. It estranges the masses of the people when one of their Princes of ancient and honored descent, whose loyalty to the Sovereign Power has been proved in the willing submission of his followers for more than a century, is subjected to slight and indignity. For instance, just before the Raja Ram Singh went to Europe his name was actually entered in what is called the 'Black Book' of the Secret Branch of the Intelligence Department as a person not above suspicion..."¹⁷⁴

Part and parcel of the instructive "peep" that Mitra provides to his British readers, Lal is bitter that on top of denying Singh the respect that he deserves, colonial officials actually view him as an agitator. Rather than being honored, loyal rulers such as Singh are often disparaged by arrogant British administrators, an affront that in turn "estranges the masses of the people" from the regime. Lal goes on to explain that the demeaning treatment meted to undeserving Indians usually results from British arrogance and ignorance.¹⁷⁵ Tara later meets a Muslim leader, the Nabob Shamshere Khan, described as a "descendant of the Great Mogul of Delhi, and a political pensioner of the British Government."¹⁷⁶ The Nabob complains to Tara that officials had insensitively scheduled the Delhi Durbar during Ramazan.¹⁷⁷ Since many Muslim elites were compelled to participate in the festivities, they had to suffer through lengthy rehearsals outdoors while fasting. It is precisely through such callous acts that the British alienate their loyal supporters and sow the seeds of Indian discontent. Moved to tears as he describes his grief over such treatment, the Nabob points out the irony that "The rulers that come out to this country demand loyalty, but through sheer ignorance sometimes trample upon it when found."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁷⁵ For example, the reviled Anglo-Indian spy Charles Hunt mistakenly thinks that Tara is a Fenian agitator (260).

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 77.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 81.

This representation of the Muslim perspective, however, does not undermine *Hindupore's* privileging of Hindus as the righteous nationals of India. In addition to fielding complaints, Tara learns key lessons of Indian history, namely that the British took over governance of India not from the Mughals, but from India's original Hindu inhabitants. Tara first hears this from Singh, who remarks that "all the Rajput Princes voluntarily placed themselves under the protection of England."¹⁷⁹ This idea is later fleshed out in an exchange between Tara and Radha Nath Sircar, a lawyer and journalist:

[The Indian Empire] never could have been ours but by the will of the people," said Tara thoughtfully. "I suppose they prefer English to Mahomedan rule; many of the Hindu Princes fought bravely to retain their ancient rights.

It is an Anglo-Indian fallacy, Lord Tara, that the British won India from the Moguls. No doubt the Battle of Plassey was fought against the Mahomedans, but a quarter of a century after that memorable battle, when Burke moved the impeachment of Warren Hastings in the House of Commons, Hindu Sindhia occupied the Mogul capital, Delhi. The last Mahratta War dated as late as 1818, and the Sikh Durbar and army were not finally overcome until 1849. The British, therefore, won India from the Hindus, and perhaps Hindu sentiment may be worth some consideration.

The so-called Mahomedan States contain a large number of Hindus; in fact, the majority are Hindus, and being an intelligent race, they always manage to exert a great deal of influence. It was a Hindu Prime Minister through whose influence, fifty years ago, the British succeeded in getting the premier Mahomedan Prince of India to assign to them the large province of Berar; and it was, again, a Hindu Prime Minister who was recently useful to Lord Curzon's Government in the permanent leasing of that province—a province as large as Ireland.¹⁸⁰

Tara's innocence and naiveté form the crux of such exchanges as they enable his interlocutors to enlighten him freely with beliefs, opinions, and wishes posing as facts. Here Tara's mention of "Mahomedan rule" prompts Sircar to correct this widespread "Anglo-Indian fallacy." Much as Bankim did in *Anandamath*, Mitra attempts to minimize the significance and duration of the Mughal Empire by arguing that the British continued to

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 74.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 197-199.

confront resistance from Hindus through the mid-nineteenth century. Disparate moments of conflict are reimagined as an organized campaign on the part of a cohesive Hindu bloc to ward off the British. And even though the British were the victors, Hindus have remained dominant as influential political leaders and advisors to them, including even George Nathaniel Curzon.

Over the course of the narrative, Tara's profound affinity with Hindupore and its people results in his literal transformation into a *bona fide* Hindu hero. On top of being honorable, kind, and sympathetic to his Hindu hosts, Tara evinces a genuine regard for Hindu beliefs and practices. He also proves his virility in an archery contest; it is no coincidence that he defeats a romantic rival for Princess Kamala in the challenge, catching her attention as he does so.¹⁸¹ Tara's skin also noticeably darkens over the course of his stay, so much so that he actually begins to resemble a Hindu prince: "Tara looked remarkably well in his Hindu dress...it was not a state costume, but the ordinary dress worn by a Rajput gentleman when travelling. He had become much tanned during this Indian sojourn, and might easily have passed for a Rajput."¹⁸² Tara welcomes the change when it is pointed out to him: "I never had a fair complexion; but you are right—I certainly am tanned by your Indian sun. I like it."¹⁸³ Tara's evolution into a Hindu hero is crystallized in his marriage to Kamala, a match that has been anticipated throughout the narrative and represents the desired unity and affection between Britain and India. As Mohan Lal advises Singh, "I can see nothing but good in it...Lord Tara is a charming man, and a marriage like this would do

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 104-105.

¹⁸² Ibid., 244.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 165.

more than fifty treaties to bring the two races into closer touch with each other. It would be a truly patriotic and diplomatic alliance on both sides.”¹⁸⁴

But *Hindupore*'s happy conclusion—complete with three marriages including that of Tara and Kamala—is interrupted when distant *swadeshi* agitation rears its head in the antepenultimate chapter entitled “Hindu-Japanese Affinity.”¹⁸⁵ While thus far incidents such as the proliferation of “Bandemataram flags” and the murder of hated colonial officials have been obliquely referenced and portrayed, the presence of a robust and menacing Pan-Hinduism is now made apparent and acknowledged as such.¹⁸⁶ Shortly after Tara and Kamala's wedding, a Japanese pilgrim accosts Singh, Tara, Long, and the other main characters. After congratulating Tara on his recent marriage and affirming that the union “was more valuable to India and England than a dozen Royal Commissions,” in the next breath the pilgrim makes a number of bold statements that undermine these good wishes:

It is a sense of nationality as well as religion that brings me here... [Buddhism] is only another name for the vast synthesis which in India is called Hinduism. The Brahman monk has Hinduized the Buddhism of Japan... Wandering monks have proved beyond doubt that Buddhism, as it exists in Japan to-day, is the Hinduism of Jagannath, and vice versa...¹⁸⁷

[The Himalayas] do not separate; they only accentuate the fact that, in spite of the Himalayas, China, Japan, and India form one mighty web. For mental convenience, different names are given to the same faith. Hinduism mirrors the beliefs of all three countries, with their seven hundred millions of inhabitants.¹⁸⁸

[Japan] is true to the land that civilized her. It was the Indian King Asoka who first sowed the seed of civilization by sending missionaries to preach Buddhism. The Gen dynasty in the fourteenth century introduced Bengal Tantrikism into China. At the dawn of our history we breathed Hindu mythology. Our respectable families say: ‘We come of Ama.’ What is Ama? ‘The land of Rama.’¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 286.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 110, 221.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 287.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 287-288.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 288.

‘Our folk-story says: China, Japan, and the Sacred Land make a fan. China is the paper, India (the birthplace of Buddha) the radiating sticks, and Japan the handle.’ Folk-lore represents the national mind more than all foreign opinion. A day will yet come when this fan will cool the aggressive ardour of the West.¹⁹⁰

Japan loves India for the sake of the future, as well as the past. Without the Hindu, Japan cannot attempt the unification of a grand Asiatic empire. India, China, and Japan in one empire would be beyond the dreams of any Western Power. And such a day will come...¹⁹¹

While the details of S.M. Mitra’s life remain a mystery, these excerpts illustrate that he was likely very familiar with Kakuzo Okakura’s 1903 treatise *The Ideals the East*.¹⁹² The second excerpt in particular echoes Okakura’s famous opening assertions: “Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilizations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barriers can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the Ultimate and Universal...”¹⁹³ But while Okakura’s “single mighty web [of] Asiatic races” was peaceable, Mitra’s bloc strategically reinforces intensifying concerns of Yellow Peril: “India, China, and Japan in one empire would be beyond the dreams of any Western Power. And such a day will come.”¹⁹⁴

Relatedly, Mitra reworks extant Pan-Asian discourse such that Hindu India, not Japan, is posited as the crux of a latent “grand Asiatic empire.” Eschewing British perceptions of the Raj as an organized and knowledgeable enterprise as portrayed in Kipling’s *Kim*, the pilgrim’s warnings confirm earlier admonitory statements made by the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 289.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 291.

¹⁹² Kakasu Okakura, *The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1903).

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁹⁴ Okakura remarks, “For if Asia be one, it is also true that the Asiatic races form a single mighty web. We forget, in an age of classification, that types are after all but shining points of distinctness in an ocean of approximations, false gods deliberately set up to be worshipped, for the sake of mental convenience, but having no more ultimate or mutually exclusive validity than the separate existence of two interchangeable sciences” (3).

astute Herbert Harvey concerning the colonial state's profound ignorance about the real state of affairs in India: "...we are absolutely in the dark. We cannot see the subtle but sure progress of Pan-Hinduism under our very noses. That giant is wide awake. He has never slept for three thousand years—only occasionally pretending to sleep."¹⁹⁵ Here the menace is not a sleeping China but an awakened India and its allies. Rather than India and other "Eastern" countries admiring Japan, it is the island nation that exalts Hindu India as the source of its power and pride. Anticipating the turn that Asianist discourse would eventually take in the hands of Romesh Chandra Majumdar and other thinkers, Mitra advances a potent "out of India" theory in which the ancient inhabitants of Bharat had spread Hinduism outside of the nation as they colonized surrounding regions.¹⁹⁶ An implicit critique of British imperialism, the pilgrim indicates that these conquests were not at all militaristic but pacific and civilizing in nature. Yet the capacity for aggression exists, as is made explicit by the pilgrim's provocative metaphorization of this Eastern bloc as a paper fan that will one day surely "cool the aggressive ardour of the West."¹⁹⁷ While initially taken aback by these statements, Singh, Tara, and the others quickly accept the pilgrim's predictions as credible. The narrator himself confirms the clairvoyance of the pilgrim: "The political events of the last five years had proved that the 'pilgrim' was no ordinary man. He could unravel all the threads of the world's politics. Five years ago he predicted the defeat of the Russians and the

¹⁹⁵ Mitra, *Hindupore*, 221-222.

¹⁹⁶ The following is an excerpt from Majumdar's lecture, "Ancient Indian Colonization in the Far East," delivered in 1940: "...Indians established political authority in various parts of the vast Asiatic continent that lay to the south of China proper and to the east and south-east of India. Numerous Hindu states rose and flourished during a period of more than [sic] thousand years both on the mainland and in the islands of the Malay Archipelago. Even when the Hindu rule became a thing of the past in India itself, powerful kings bearing Hindu names were ruling over mighty empires in these far-off domains. The Hindu colonists brought with them the whole framework of their culture and civilization and this was transported in its entirety among the people who had not yet emerged from their primitive barbarism" (161-163).

¹⁹⁷ Mitra, *Hindupore*, 289.

intervention of President Roosevelt.”¹⁹⁸ The pilgrim’s jarring interjection into the story ends with his departing rallying cry: “Rise of Asia at any cost!”¹⁹⁹

That *Hindupore* has been panned by literary critics is understandable as it was unable to balance its competing aims of entertaining romance with political exposé. Yet the manner in which Mitra moderated his views on colonial rule so markedly in fiction deserves greater comment. In reply to Kipling’s presentation of a stagnant India with unimpressive commoners and pretentious elites in “Enlightenments,” Mitra portrayed a splendid Hindu kingdom complete with kings, princesses, and heroes that warranted understanding and respect. But as the awkward conclusion of this romance revealed, this was also an India with agency and autonomy, the nexus of a “grand Asiatic empire” that could readily arise to overtake Britain and the West.

East and West Shall Meet: An Indian Prince in London

Critics have long regarded *Prince* as superior to *Hindupore* and Ghosh as a more accomplished novelist than Mitra, but this is true only to a negligible extent. A tome of over six hundred pages, *Prince* has been described by Alex Tickell as a “bildungsroman on an epic scale” and its pretensions in this regard are unmistakable.²⁰⁰ As in *Hindupore*, Kipling remains a specter in *Prince* as Ghosh endeavors to prove, contrary to the claims of the “banjo poet...the chest-thumping imperialist,” that East and West can in fact be reconciled.²⁰¹

Ghosh takes on this lofty task through the singular Prince Barath, hailed as an avatar of the Hindu deity Krishna, who is prophesized to liberate his kingdom from British rule. The titles

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 293.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 295.

²⁰⁰ Alex Tickell, “The Discovery of Aryavarta,” 31. Meenakshi Mukherjee has very similarly characterized *Prince* as a “novel of epic proportions.” See Meenakshi Mukherjee, *The Perishable Empire*, 52.

²⁰¹ Sarath Kumar Ghosh, *The Prince of Destiny*, 223.

of the three books that comprise *Prince* reflect this trajectory: “Preparing for Destiny: In India”; “Preparing for Destiny: In England”; and “The Destiny.” Born either during or shortly after the Delhi Durbar of 1877, Prince Barath, whose name is an anglicized rendering of Bharat, was very likely the first character in modern Indian fiction to have been “handcuffed to history,” preceding Salman Rushdie’s Saleem Sinai by over seventy years.²⁰² However, as a result of his sensitive and thoughtful nature, and profuse love of Britain, Barath refuses to fulfill his destiny when the opportunity presents itself. A novel of unseasonable youth, *Prince* instantiates Jed Esty’s observations regarding the breakdown of the turn-of-the-century bildungsroman as broader geopolitical forces increasingly eclipsed the nation at this moment, obliterating the structuring “soul-nation” allegory observed in classic bildungsromane.²⁰³ Indeed, far from a “bildungsroman on an epic scale,” *Prince* is perhaps best characterized as a negative allegory or what Esty calls the metabildungsroman, as Barath’s development and destiny are sacrificed so that India can exist in an uncertain geopolitical future, one in which the polity will either remain a part of the British Empire or join Japan to displace Western hegemony.²⁰⁴

The first book of *Prince* tracks Barath’s childhood and early education as both he and his family become increasingly aware that he is indeed quite different from other children. Barath’s exceptionality is apparent even prior to his birth as he is the long-desired male heir born to the ancient kingdom of Barathpur that stands as a microcosm of a glorious Hindu India: “When Rome was not built, when Tyre and Carthage were yet unbegotten, the house

²⁰² Salman Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, 3.

²⁰³ Jed Esty, *Unseasonable Youth*, 24-27.

²⁰⁴ Esty observes that the “metabildungsroman [lay] bare that contingent elements of a progressivist genre formed inside the framework of the nineteenth-century European nation-state” (13). Prince Barath is one such figure of unseasonable youth who finds a home in the metabildungsroman, which “encodes the impossibility of representing global capitalism’s never-ending story via the offices of finite biographical form” (27).

of Barath reigned supreme over India.”²⁰⁵ Alluding to the glorious kingdom of the five Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*, the two revered Hindu leaders Viswa-mitra and Vashista have divined that Barath is the “New Krishna” who has come to “to rebuild the walls of Indraprastha where he had reigned as King in his first coming.”²⁰⁶ His lovely elder sister Delini—a woman who will ultimately fight her way to becoming a *sati*—provides his initial education: “She taught him the customs of their caste, the legends and traditions of their dynasty—aye, the memories and associations of Barath-barsha.”²⁰⁷ Vashista similarly regales Barath with stories from “the ancient classics [which contained] the religious and moral principles of the Hindu faith.”²⁰⁸ By the end of the first book, Barath’s exceptionality is clear but his future is uncertain. He realizes that he does not wish to succeed his father as king of Barathpur but to become a pacific agent of goodwill who will ease suffering and the “pain of the world” wherever it might manifest: “A voice in his ear bade him arise...and that henceforth his task must be to lessen pain...”²⁰⁹

Having established Barath as a marvelous son, student, brother, and friend, Ghosh has his hero travel to the metropole where he continues his education and forges significant new bonds with others. His journey to Britain to study is itself reflective of a significant gesture of hospitality. Barath was just an infant when Colonel Wingate, a former official of the colonial government and friend of his father, requested that the young prince be sent to England for his higher education. Like nearly all the characters of *Prince*, Wingate finds himself strangely drawn to Barath and desires to be his “guide and guardian” when he

²⁰⁵ Ghosh, *The Prince of Destiny*, 20.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

eventually comes to Britain.²¹⁰ While Wingate is Barath's surrogate father, the warm and maternal Ellen, Wingate's daughter-like caretaker, is Barath's adoptive mother.²¹¹ Through Barath Ellen achieves her long-held desire to be a mother; she dotes on him and gives him the loving nickname "Dilkhusha" [my heart's delight].²¹² Wingate and Ellen's loving embrace of Barath as a member of their family epitomizes the goodwill with which Britons ought to treat the many Indian students in their midst.²¹³ Barath proves so comfortable in his new environment and family that he even admits to Wingate that he believes he might have been an Englishman in a former life.²¹⁴ Again, the meddling narrator drives home this point:

And you, my English reader, pause and consider. There are seven hundred young Indian students in London: guideless, friendless, knowing no Englishman in his home. Falling back upon their own resources in a strange country, they gather together in lodging-houses—and talk politics: for where two or more Indians are gathered together there is nothing else to talk about outside their studies save politics; and from politics comes discontent, from discontent sedition. These young men must come to England for their studies by the regulations governing public services in India, and *the failure of the British nation lies in not providing one more Ellen and one more Wingate. For if there were one more Wingate, there might also be one more Barath.*²¹⁵

Published in the same tense sociopolitical milieu that had radicalized Dhingra, *Prince* delivers a timely rebuke of the discrimination and hostility that Indian students usually met in the metropole. Rather than being naturally wayward or malevolent, Indians students who turn to "sedition" or violence are the natural products of a profoundly inhospitable environment. Far from home and often privy only to the stern public faces of Britons, Indians students could not but become alienated and susceptible to "discontent." Evoking Derrida's notions of absolute hospitality, Wingate and Ellen's loving yet paternalistic acceptance of Barath as a long-lost cherished son provides an inspirational horizon for how Indian students ought to

²¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

²¹¹ Ibid., 153.

²¹² Ibid., 157.

²¹³ Ibid., 153.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 163-164.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 158. Emphasis added.

be treated. In the wake of the Wylie assassination, British readers are encouraged to consider alternative paths Dhingra may have taken. Perhaps he could have been “one more Barath” instead of an assassin?

In addition to these ties of kinship, Barath cultivates other relationships that deepen his affection for Britain. Barath serendipitously meets and befriends the poet Francis Thompson, who was in fact a good friend of Ghosh.²¹⁶ In one significant scene Barath and Thompson stay up all night to translate Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* into English. Like Tara and Kamala’s marriage in *Hindupore*, the translation is hailed as a kind of elixir that will inspire true amity between Britons and Indians. As Barath states, “Let the British public read it, and thus understand our most cherished ideals. That will serve to remove a mountain of misconception between Great Britain and India.”²¹⁷ He also falls in love with Nora, Ellen’s angelic niece, who much like Tara in *Hindupore*, is a vacuous figure who either parrots positive opinions about Hindu cultural practices or supplies affirmative re-interpretations whenever negative views about the religion are expressed.

A consummate gentleman despite his youth and inexperience, Barath’s impeccable behavior consistently endears him to his British hosts and vice versa. He attends Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebration in which he causes a “sensation”; as the most dashing and charismatic Indian prince in attendance, he is the “cynosure” of all attendees.²¹⁸ Increasingly perceiving himself to be an agent of goodwill, Barath continues to perform noble deeds, such as sabotaging his performance in an exam so that his more deserving rival

²¹⁶ John Walsh, *Strange Symphony: The Life of Francis Thompson*, 188. Thompson’s biographer, John Walsh, confirms that autobiographical elements were at play in Prince—Ghosh and Thompson resided for a time at the same boarding house in London a boarding house and Thompson apparently did have a penchant for working through the night. Walsh suggests credibly that Ghosh fictionalized not just Thompson but also himself: “In a rambling, amateurish novel [Ghosh] wrote...both Ghosh and Thompson figure as characters...Thompson retains his own name in the book; ‘Barath’ is Ghosh himself.”

²¹⁷ Ghosh, *The Prince of Destiny*, 296.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 232.

would win: “Yes, a thousand times yes! Robert’s need was greater than his!”²¹⁹ The narrator confirms Barath’s boundless open-mindedness, respect, and affinity for Britain and its people:

[Barath] wished to understand the English people, understand their joys and pleasures no less than their tribulations. Some day in the far future he might perchance have a larger mission, which would include not only India but in part England, perhaps in part Europe. The thought flashed through his mind as a vague possibility. He let it rest at that.²²⁰

Yes, [Barath] might be intended for a larger scheme of fate, to be revealed to him in the distant future...The best way for a man of keen perception to know England objectively—that is, truthfully—is to be born outside, and then to come in and become an Englishman. By being born outside he will possess the eye for the objective vision—and by subsequently becoming an Englishman he will prove that after the objective vision of England he loves her still. This is a simple truth, but a great truth—even though it has been left to an Eastern to discover. I mean Barath, yea, Barath.²²¹

Here the narrator underscores Barath’s profound affinity for England and his aspiration to understand not just its “joys and pleasures” but also its “tribulations,” and in fact “all that was humanly possible.” Such a desire evokes imperialist attitudes about knowing India in all possible respects but with a crucial difference: Barath’s cause is noble and he will continue to love England even after the discovery of any flaws. In a highly melodramatic scene, on his deathbed Wingate exacts a promise from Barath along these lines: “I see England’s peril in India. Barath, Barath, promise me—in the hour of England’s peril you will judge her generously? Generously for the intention if you cannot for the deed? [...]”²²² Having thoroughly become an Anglophile, Barath naturally gives his word to Wingate. Prior to

²¹⁹ Ibid., 270.

²²⁰ Ibid., 183.

²²¹ Ibid., 252-253.

²²² Ibid., 287-288.

returning to India Barath even takes some soil from Ellen's garden as a "memento of the country he had visited and had found to be a second home."²²³

Having established Barath's exceptionality and deep affection for Britain, Ghosh now turns to the matter of whether he will indeed emerge as the "New Krishna" and liberate Barathpur in the third and final book, "The Destiny," which comprises just over half of the novel's six hundred and thirty pages. Though similarly episodic in nature, the narrative picks up speed as Vashista mounts increasing pressure on Barath to claim his destiny and lead the prophesized revolution against the British. It is in Vashista and Barath's confrontation that *Prince's* allegorical nature manifests most clearly as numerous players representing various modes of *swadeshi* resistance come to the fore. Vashista embodies the political extremism and transnationalism strands as he urgently desires to eject the British from the kingdom and has cultivated technological expertise from other countries in order to bolster Barathpur and foment a revolution. While Barath has been away in Britain, Vashista has dispatched Barathpur's brightest young men across the world to "study the best institutions of the West, especially the methods of material progress" so that they will bring this knowledge back to the kingdom.²²⁴ The motivations of these young men serve as a cautionary tale for Britain, as several of them harbor deep resentment against the Raj due to firsthand experience with its oppressive policies. One such figure is Vindara, who qualified for the Indian Civil Service but was denied an appointment on discriminatory grounds.²²⁵ Instead of using their talents for the benefit of the colonial government, the men travel to nations like Germany and Japan to learn and import the technologies necessary for building both infrastructure

²²³ Ibid., 305.

²²⁴ Ibid., 219.

²²⁵ Ibid., 220-222.

(“cranes, steam-hammers, bridges, and locomotives”) and weaponry (“other big, big things of steel and iron”).²²⁶

As a result of Vashista’s endeavors, Barath eventually learns that he sits on an army consisting of one hundred and twenty thousand men with the promise of many more across India, China, and Japan.²²⁷ Paralleling actual terrorist secret societies active at this moment, many of the disaffected men of Barathpur have formed an underground terrorist cell, the House of the Serpent Gem, where they prepare for the imminent revolution. The narrator matter-of-factly tells the reader that the insurgents are “misguided men” whose fervor has transformed an intended revolution of thought to one of violence. Blinded by resentment, the men do not realize that military aggression “could only end in failure [and] that it might even spoil their juster cause.”²²⁸ During a meeting of the brotherhood, one of its leaders affirms that violence is warranted in order to dispel false beliefs of Bengali cowardice spread by writers like Kipling:

Comrades, to those of you, who, like me, belong to Bengal, I have something to say of this banjo-poet. For twenty years he and his hundred imitators in England who write of India by his inspiration, have abused us and insulted us most deeply. I have in mind a recent book deemed to be almost a standard work on India. Confirming the banjo-poet and the others, it calls the Bengalis cowards, despicable cowards, devoid of a redeeming virtue, nay, even *beneath* contempt. Why? Because for twenty years we have taken their abuse lying down...²²⁹

Brothers, we have to correct another libel. These abusers, sitting in safety, tell the Government to crush us with an iron hand, saying that in the East clemency is mistaken for weakness. These men are fools: they confuse the near East, the Mohammedan East, with India, China, and Japan. The Mohammedan faith is a militant faith and advocates the strong arm. But in India a Hindu king says from his throne to the lowest criminal in the kingdom, ‘Brother, thou art forgiven’—and the

²²⁶ Ibid., 226.

²²⁷ Ibid., 545-546, 573.

²²⁸ Ibid., 559.

²²⁹ Ibid., 560.

criminal does lifelong penance in expiation. It is not likewise in China and Japan wherever the teachings of Buddha and Confucius prevail? [...]”²³⁰

Comrades, shall we show the banjo-poet and his hundred imitators that the Bengalis may be ‘the Japanese of India’?²³¹

Like Mitra, Ghosh suggests that India is part of a broader Eastern configuration that includes China and Japan. A shared religious heritage unites the countries, one in which Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have been conflated with one another. The presence of Chinese and Japanese “comrades” at the House of the Serpent Gem reinforces this connection. Japan is particularly important in this regard because high-ranking Japanese military leaders have come to teach Barathpur’s revolutionaries *jiu-jitsu*. “Though a colonel, Kaneko is willing to teach us the wisdom of his country; for jiu-jitsu makes a man of the lowest wreck of humanity.”²³² The speaker goes on to stress that they must use their newfound knowledge to prove Kipling and his ilk wrong. As “the Japanese of India,” the Bengalis are indeed a formidable enemy and capable of armed aggression.

Such tensions climax in heated exchanges between Vashista and Barath over the prince’s divided loyalties. Though Barath had attempted to shed his Western associations and predilections when he returned to his kingdom, the unexpected arrival of Nora distracts him and rekindles his ardent love for both her and Britain: “Since Nora’s coming his mind had unconsciously reverted to the West, and he saw again with English eyes.”²³³ Evoking the many marriages of *Hindupore*, with Nora as his intended bride Barath wishes to inaugurate a new era of friendship and goodwill between India and Britain: “...we shall arouse [Britain] to the memory of Beaconsfield; thus shall our alliance be but a symbol of the bond between

²³⁰ Ibid., 561.

²³¹ Ibid., 562.

²³² Ibid., 471.

²³³ Ibid., 509.

Britain and India.”²³⁴ In contrast to Vashista for whom violence is the only answer, Barath repeatedly voices the moderate *swadeshi* view, which informs his rationale for not leading the desired revolution:

For the present it is essential that the East should be on terms of friendship with the West for its own sake. Are we fit as yet? Fit to govern ourselves in the best possible manner without Western aid? Fit intellectually and morally? Intellectually perhaps—among the higher castes. But morally? For seven long centuries we have betrayed one another for a selfish gain. How many true patriots are there in India to-day? How many that could not be bought by the British Government with a high office, a high honor, a high dignity?²³⁵

...[Britain] has given us internal peace. To a generation brought up in tranquility that may not seem much, nevertheless it is a priceless blessing and the beginning of all other blessings. Again, she has given us the possibility of adopting what is best in Western institutions. Japan has indeed done that for herself, but Japan was an independent country. We were not; at least we were independent of each other, but fighting each other. Thirdly, during the last fifty years the spirit of nationalism has first been begotten in India. That is due directly to the British by the work of consolidation...²³⁶

...My people, I would plead with you to aid me in restoring India’s true mission. It is not to begin the invasion of Europe—for the westward movement, if begun in India, might spread through Asia. Alone, of all countries of the earth, no invasion has ever gone forth from India, except the invasion of a religion—a religion of universal brotherhood, universal peace, universal love. Would you seek a new Krishna, or instead a New Buddha?²³⁷

My people, do not rage. There is no room for rage, but for love. Forgive the West. Though the West has crucified the East, yet forgive the West. Forgive all things that you may understand all things...

Barath’s followers remain unmoved by his pleas and he is ousted from power. And even though the stage has been set for the revolution, it does not occur because, apparently, no one else can lead the uprising in his stead. The force of 120,000 men that stands ready for

²³⁴ Ibid., 538.

²³⁵ Ibid., 549.

²³⁶ Ibid., 594.

²³⁷ Ibid., 596-597.

attack grows tired of waiting for its desired leader and disbands after three days.²³⁸ The narrator affirms that it was indeed because of Barath's refusal to lead the men that the uprising did not occur: "...the revolution at Barathpur, deprived of Barath's sanction was deprived of its cause of existence. It failed because of Barath's love for England."²³⁹ Here Barath's failure to act provides an opportunity for the colonial government to take up a truly "British" form of ruling that moderates like Dadabhai Naoroji had craved: "an era of prosperity, contentment, happiness—an era of goodwill and friendship and ardent affection for Britain, through whose guidance all [desired material progress] will come to pass."²⁴⁰

But in terms of genre, the prophesied revolution cannot occur in this non-epic and non-bildungsroman because Barath is a hero burdened by politics, one in which India's future was an open question. Unable to reconcile all of the competing and conflicting forces acting upon him, Barath attempts suicide, is saved, and ultimately abandons his kingdom and embraces a path of renunciation. *Prince* concludes with the heavy-handed message from the narrator that Britain is obliged to make itself worthy of Barath's sacrifice by following his example: "try moral influence alone of the best and noblest kind...try to turn the coming conflict of East and West into concord..."²⁴¹ This directive resonates with Barath's frequently expressed wish that was simultaneously an indictment: "I would rather see Britain just than Britain great, but much more would I see her great by being just."²⁴² This plea might yet come true as the British resident assigned to Barathpur is so moved by Barath's sacrifice that he learns to "see Indian affairs not only with English eyes but also Indian."²⁴³

²³⁸ Ibid., 621.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 623.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 625.

²⁴² Ibid., 590.

²⁴³ Ibid., 622.

But should Britain continue to treat India with disdain, the revolution that was just narrowly averted today could very well occur tomorrow.

Conclusion

As the vast global expanse of the *swadeshi* movement demonstrates, Indian writers and thinkers were readily exploring the pitfalls and possibilities of the colonial relationship not just in India but across the British imperial web. While on the one hand *Hindupore* and *Prince* perpetuated the message of their romantic predecessors that India deserved British respect because of its wondrous past as Bharat, the flexibility of this cultural imagining also enabled them to make bolder claims that reflected the profound changes occurring in the global landscape during the first decade of the twentieth century. In spite of the arrogance of Kipling, Curzon, and other imperialists, Mitra and Ghosh, among many other Indian elites in this period, remained optimistic that the colonial relationship was worth salvaging. This guarded optimism is reflected in the fictional worlds of *Hindupore* and *Prince* where exceptional British and Indian elites are able to freely meet with one another and form deep and meaningful bonds including marriage, friendship, and kinship (though other kinds of political formations were also possible). The rather lackluster quality of *Hindupore* and *Prince* may be attributed precisely to a paradoxical political message that could not be contained within their espoused and implied generic aims of romance and epic. As time went on and reality (and social realism) increasingly set in, it would become all the more difficult to sustain the myth that empire and benevolence could coexist.

CONCLUSION
CONTAINING BHARAT: TAGORE'S WARNING

“Amongst the civilizations of the world Bharatvarsha stands as an ideal of the endeavour to unify the diverse. Her history will bear this out.”

-Rabindranath Tagore, “The History of Bharatvarsha”¹

“There is only one history—the history of man.

All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one.”

-Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism*²

“Imagining Bharat” has argued that the turn of the twentieth century was a pivotal moment for contemporary Indian nationhood, endeavoring to elucidate the longer history behind the seemingly axiomatic idea held by many Hindus around the world that India’s genuine identity is a Hindu space called Bharat. M.K. Gandhi popularized visions of India as a “Ram Rajya” [Reign of Ram] in the 1930s and 1940s, but the literature examined here suggests such ideas had long been circulating among Hindu elites across the colonial state.³ While these visions galvanized Hindus, they also excluded or marginalized Indian Muslims, women, and other minorities in profound ways. In the wake of an increasingly contentious nationalist movement and violent bifurcation of the subcontinent along religious lines, not one but two independent nation-states emerged: the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of India. The inflammatory rhetoric and divisive politics of religious nationalism have endured within both countries, with the idea of “Bharat” continuing to play a key role in the Hindu nationalist vision of India. The recent victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2014 national elections and the appointment of controversial Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi to the post of Prime Minister have been particularly devastating to the country’s avowed commitment to secularism.

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, “The History of Bharatavarsha (August 1903),” 34.

² Rabindranath Tagore, “Nationalism in India,” 65.

³ Ayesha Jalal, *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia*, 207.

It is fitting to conclude with a discussion of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who was prescient in his wariness towards nation-states and the violent ideologies that led to their creation. Tagore's thinking on such issues evolved over the course of his adulthood, and his eventual turn away from prevailing ideas of nationalism in the early twentieth century led to frequent disagreements with his contemporaries, in particular Gandhi. Given the troubling legacies of religious nationalism in the Indian subcontinent, we can appreciate how perceptive Tagore had been in his suspicion towards limited (and limiting) ideas about Indian nationhood and belonging. Having become a figure of global stature after winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, Tagore was also shrewd in using his newfound platform to voice his concerns to generally unreceptive audiences at a time when, particularly after the Second World War, empires were on the decline and nationalist desire was on the rise.

In his masterful novel *Gora* (1910), Tagore registered his growing misgivings about the exclusionary violence intrinsic to nation-making, offering an incisive critique of conflating religious belonging with national identity. As mentioned in Chapter Four, Tagore had been a leader in *swadeshi* agitation in the early phases of the movement but grew disillusioned after witnessing its initial promises of brotherhood and amity dissolve into communal riots and violence: "Having seen all this at first hand...I no longer feel any desire to idealize the Hindu *samaj* through delusions pleasant to the ear, but ultimately suicidal..."⁴ Although Tagore explored such themes in what is perhaps his best-known novel, *Ghare Baire* [*The Home and the World*] (1916), here I focus on *Gora*, a bildungsroman full of dynamic male and female characters that was first serialized in the Bengali monthly *Probasi* from 1907-

⁴ Qtd. in Tapati Dasgupta, *Social Thought of Rabindranath Tagore*, 140.

1909.⁵ A sharp rejoinder to Bankim's *Anandamath*, and, to a lesser extent, Kipling's *Kim*, *Gora* centers on the maturation of the eponymous protagonist, a charismatic young pillar of the Hindu *samaj* in Calcutta who equates conservative Hindu orthodoxy with authentic devotion to Bharat. Gora finds himself increasingly isolated and unhappy as he discovers that his lofty ideals for himself, others, and the nation cannot be reconciled with the harsh realities he confronts. Through Gora's ultimate realization that even he would be excluded from the constrained vision of Bharat that he advances (he learns near the end of the novel that he is not Indian but Irish), Tagore argues for a more expansive vision of Indian belonging that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, caste, or class.

Set in Calcutta during the 1880s, *Gora* stages a sustained debate between both orthodox and liberal adherents of Hinduism and the Brahmo Samaj, a reformist religious movement founded by Ram Mohan Roy in 1828.⁶ Tagore's caution against conflating Hindu identity with India manifests primarily through the evolution of Gora's views, which transform as a result of his interactions with his best friend and fellow Hindu, Binoy, a local Brahmo family, and most crucially, less privileged and uneducated Hindus and Muslims in surrounding villages. Gora gradually comes to realize that the intolerance and exclusions embedded within his exclusionary religious orthodoxy runs counter to his professed love of Bharatvarsha. Tagore makes heavy use of irony in the novel as Gora's edicts to himself and others to "know thyself" ring hollow since Gora is oblivious to the crucial fact that he was adopted as an infant by his Hindu parents and is thus neither Indian nor Hindu.⁷ Through

⁵ Sujit Mukherjee, "Translator's Preface," np.

⁶ The Brahmo Samaj was a reformist movement that desired to eliminate what it deemed to be retrograde elements of Hinduism, such as sati and idolatry. The Brahmo Samaj had a strong following among the Bengali *bhadralok*, including the eminent Tagore family. Rabindranath Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore, was a close associate of Roy. See Metcalf and Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, 86-88.

⁷ Rabindranath Tagore, *Gora*, 78.

Gora's ultimate epiphany, when he learns of his adoption, and subsequent liberation from the confines of his suffocating orthodox Hindu patriotism, Tagore advocates an India in which peoples of diverse faiths and creeds are able to live together.

As wealthy, urban elites whose exposure to the world has come largely from schoolbooks, Gora and Binoy are initially characterized as naïve yet ambitious young men. Binoy is effectively an adopted brother of Gora and is regarded as another son by Gora's (adoptive) mother Anandamoyi. The narrator's remarks about Binoy—"All he knew about the world had been gleaned entirely from books"—also describe Gora.⁸ Both are members of a Hindu welfare society and "had resolved to remain bachelors, devoting their lives to the service of the nation."⁹ But while Binoy has begun to have his doubts about the abstract nationhood that commands their all, Gora is unwavering in his commitment:

B: "Where is this Bharatvarsha of yours?"

G: "Where the compass here points, day and night," replied Gora, touching his heart, "not in your Marshman saheb's *History of India*."

B: "Where your compass points, does something exist?"

G: "Indeed it does!" cried Gora, indignantly. "I may lose my way, or even drown, but my treasured port remains. It is my Bharatvarsha in all its glory, replete with wealth, knowledge, spiritual faith. To say that this Bharatvarsha does not exist! That only falsehood around us is real! ... There is a real Bharatvarsha—a complete India. Unless we establish ourselves there, we can't absorb its true living essence into our minds and hearts. Therefore I say, forgetting all else, discarding book-learning, the lure of prestige, and the temptation of odd profits, we must set sail for that very port, whether we drown or perish. No wonder I can never forget the true, complete image of Bharatvarsha!"¹⁰

This exchange signals Binoy's growing alienation from Gora and his extreme beliefs. At stake are the fundamental questions such as those posed by John Strachey: "What is India?"

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Ibid., 8, 81.

¹⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

“What does this name really signify?” Echoing Bankim’s views in *Anandamath*, Gora argues that the true, real Bharatvarsha will manifest when all Hindus come together in devout adherence to Hinduism. Yet Binoy is wary of such abstractions and desires something more concrete to warrant such blind devotion: “Either show me that image, or let me remain all at sea, like everyone else.”¹¹ Evoking the ardent devotion and sacrifice to the nation required by Bankim’s ascetics, Gora’s vision of Bharat requires intensive labor and sacrifice and is, accordingly, impossible for many to attain: “Strive for it. If you are a believer, you will find happiness in sincere effort.”¹² Binoy’s lingering doubts after this tense exchange are revealing: “Today his heart rose in rebellion. He began to feel that Bharatvarsha was only a figure of negation.”¹³

Binoy and Gora’s ties to one another—and to the largely nebulous ideas of the nation that they struggle to maintain—are challenged through their exposure to the liberal and progressive Poreshbabu Bhattacharya and his family, who are adherents of Brahmoism. In line with this creed’s rejection of many aspects of traditional Hindu practice held to be retrograde, Poreshbabu’s daughters do not observe *purdah*, and are highly educated, independent, and outspoken in their opinions and beliefs. It is in the inviting space of Poreshbabu’s home that Binoy and Gora’s conservative Hindu beliefs clash with the more progressive, liberal views of the Brahmo faith. The early conversations between Poreshbabu, Binoy, Gora, and Poreshbabu’s daughters Sucharita and Lalita largely center on Hinduism and contentious practices such as idol worship and caste.¹⁴ While Binoy tries to adopt an agreeable tact in his arguments, Gora assumes an offensive and even combative posture that

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 37.

¹⁴ Ibid., 51-53.

is off-putting to everyone. The narrator observes that “[Gora] was the living image of rebellion against the modern age” as he flagrantly showcases his Hindu identity through his “*tilak* of sacred Ganga soil,” “coarse dhoti,” and “Cuttack shoes with pointed curling toes.”¹⁵ Gora also ostentatiously observes purity rituals even in Poreshbabu’s home (i.e., by not eating proffered food), which is highly offensive to his hosts, particularly Sucharita and Lalita, as well as to Binoy.¹⁶

Tagore critiques not only the religious orthodoxy in the Hindu tradition but also that of the Brahmo faith. The designated suitor to Sucharita, Haranchandra Nag is the zealous Brahmo counterpart to Gora’s staunch Hindu orthodoxy.¹⁷ Soon after they meet the two start bickering over Haranchandra’s aping of British views about the inferiority of the Bengali Hindus: “However successful they may be at passing examinations, Bengalis are incapable of doing any work.”¹⁸ In his angry reply, Gora cites the hollow nature of the Haranchandra’s beliefs and charges him with being an unthinking mimic of the British: “Your account of social evils is merely learned by rote from English books... You yourself know nothing of such practices. You should voice your opinions on this subject only when you are capable of expressing a similar contempt for all English practices.”¹⁹

The novel further censures the orthodoxies of Haranbabu and Gora when the two discuss the controversial topic of Hindu reform. To Haranbabu’s suggestions that a widespread Indian nationalism could only occur after Hindus first rid themselves of certain ostensibly backward practices, Gora retorts:

¹⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹⁶ Ibid., 52.

¹⁷ Ibid., 53-54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55.

“I believe in the ideas you denounce as superstition. Until you can love your country and join your own countrymen on an equal footing, I shan’t tolerate the slightest criticism of the nation from your lips. . . . Reform must come much later. Love and respect are more important by far. We must unite first; then reform will follow automatically, from within. Remaining separate, you all want to fragment the nation; alleging that the nation is full of social evils, you wish to keep aloof as a band of do-gooders. I tell you, it’s my greatest desire not to separate myself from anyone else on the pretext of superiority. Afterwards, when we are one, the nation, and the Maker of its destiny, will decide which customs to retain, and which ones to discard.”

“There are customs and beliefs that prevent the unity of the nation,” countered Haranbabu.

“Expecting to uproot those customs and beliefs one by one before uniting the country, is like dredging the ocean before attempting to cross it,” Gora declared. “With humility and love, banishing contempt and arrogance, surrender yourself wholeheartedly to all, and such love will easily overcome a thousand faults and shortcomings. Every country, every society, has its faults and shortcomings, but as long as the people of a nation are bound together by love for their countrymen, they can deal with the poison. The germs of decay exist in the air. As long as we stay alive, we manage to survive them, but once dead, we succumb to decay. I tell you, we shan’t brook any attempts at reform, whether from you or from missionaries!”²⁰

While for Haranbabu, the reform of Hindu traditions must precede nationalism and nation, for Gora, reform is a profound betrayal to the cultural integrity of Bharat. Gora’s view is evocative of many Bengali *bhadralok* in the late nineteenth century; owing to its ostensibly Anglophilic and Christian orientation, the Brahmo Samaj was perceived to be an elitist and exclusionary organization.²¹ This exchange is also heavily ironized in that Gora, born to an Irishman (though he does not yet know it), suggests that Haranbabu is not an authentic Hindu, Bengali, or Indian. For Gora, Haranbabu’s flaws include not only his shameless parroting of British views, but also his adherence to a doctrine, Brahmoism, that was founded on the wrongful internalization of British critiques of Hinduism.

²⁰ Ibid., 63-64.

²¹ As Metcalf and Metcalf observe, “For the most part, these men were unwilling to follow Ram Mohan Roy in repudiating so ruthlessly so much of contemporary Hindu devotional practice” (88).

The irony of the passage further manifests in Gora's declaration that he will "not separate [himself] from anyone else on the pretext of superiority" because he ultimately becomes estranged from Binoy on precisely such grounds. As a result of his ongoing interactions with Poreshbabu and his daughters, Binoy gradually shifts his allegiance from Gora to the Brahmo family. Much like Sucharita and Lalita, Binoy is drawn to Poreshbabu's open-mindedness and humility, and eventually falls in love with the bold and charismatic Lalita. When the two decide to get married, Gora disapproves of the union because Binoy is an orthodox Hindu and Lalita is a Brahmo. Even though his condemnation of the marriage means that Binoy and Gora's friendship will effectively end, Gora is adamant that such a drastic course of action is necessary: "When our own dear ones become alien to us we have no choice but to abandon them completely."²² Gora's reaction stands in stark contrast to that of Poreshbabu, who, after careful thought and consideration, agrees with both Binoy and Lalita that narrow-minded and arbitrary dictates of one's society ought not to trump the will of the individual, especially when the latter is honorable: "I have realized that there is no religious cause to oppose your union...in such a situation you are not obliged to accept any objections raised by society. I just have a small thing to say: if you wish to exceed the limits of society then you must rise above society, be greater than it."²³ For Tagore, Poreshbabu's equanimity and humility, which favors unity over separation, is precisely what India needs.

The turning point of the novel occurs when Gora, like his literary precursor Kim, takes a walking tour on the Grand Trunk Road in order to expose himself to unfamiliar

²² Ibid., 411.

²³ Ibid., 409.

elements and discover his nation in its fullness.²⁴ Yet, as the narrator reports, what Gora discovers is deeply disappointing:

For the first time, Gora saw what our country is like, outside the social worlds of the respectable bhadrak, the educated, and the Kolkata-dwellers. How fragmented, narrow-minded and feeble was this vast, concealed realm of rural Bharatvarsha—how utterly unaware of its own power, how completely ignorant and indifferent about its own interests! How extreme were the social differences between places only...ten to fifteen miles apart—how many self-created and imaginary obstacles constrained the land from advancing in the world's giant workplace—how much importance it attached to trivialities, how moribund it had grown, clinging to every prejudice and superstition—how somnolent was its mind, how faint its heart, how feeble its efforts! *Had he dwelt among the villages in his way, Gora could never have imagined this.*²⁵

While Binoy's realization about the limitations of Bharat had been prompted by the nation's exclusion of women, Gora is roused from his naiveté when he views the devastation wrought by caste, communalism, and ignorance. Upon seeing the discouraging realities of the rural populations, Gora begins to understand that his staunch brand of Hindu orthodoxy is profoundly shortsighted and far too exacting. His later observations of Muslim villagers reinforce his growing realization that Hinduism is intrinsically flawed in its prescription and sanction of social antagonism and violence within the fold: "It pained [Gora's] entire being to acknowledge that Muslims were united by their dharma, not merely by their practices. Just as the bonds of tradition had not needlessly restrained all their activities, so also were their bonds of religion extremely close."²⁶

In the novel women emerge as critical interlocutors with the men in numerous substantive discussions about religious belonging and the Indian nation. In sharp contrast to the flat and one-sided Hindu heroines observed in the works of Bankim, Ghosh, and Mitra, the majority of *Gora's* female characters are dynamic figures who, for the most part, do as

²⁴ Ibid., 149.

²⁵ Ibid., 180. Emphasis added.

²⁶ Ibid., 463.

they please and affect real change in their environments. For example, through Lalita's encouragement, Binoy comes out of Gora's shadow and realizes the limitations of his friend's orthodoxy and conservatism. On top of refusing to participate in a demeaning, obsequious play put on for the amusement of British officials, Lalita flees the humiliating scene with Binoy, causing great scandal in the Brahmo community. She again defies Brahmo custom when, with her father's blessing, she marries Binoy according to Hindu rites.²⁷ Similarly, Sucharita refuses Haranbabu's relentless proposals of marriage, and after much careful thought and consideration, realizes that her exchanges with Gora have actually led her to identify with the Hindu faith (albeit a reflective, moderate brand analogous to Poreshbabu's Brahmoism). As she tells her father, "All these days I felt no connection with my nation's past or future, but so powerfully has my heart now recognized the great reality of that connection, I simply cannot drive it from my mind... But now my heart vehemently and unabashedly proclaims: 'I am a Hindu.' That brings me great joy."²⁸

The most significant female character in *Gora* is Anandamoyi, who is at once the mother of all and the mother of no one. The female counterpart to the liberal Poreshbabu, she evinces precisely the kind of broadminded and egalitarian notions towards self and other that Tagore considers necessary for the nation-in-the-making. Much like the younger women Sucharita and Lalita, Anandamoyi readily challenges unthinking adherence to immoral or unjust behavior. For example, when her husband Krishnadayal hesitated to give shelter to Gora's birth mother during the chaos of the 1857 rebellion, Anandamoyi found a way for the woman to stay with them (she died just after giving birth to Gora).²⁹ While Krishnadayal wanted to send the infant to an orphanage, Anandamoyi insisted that the child be raised in

²⁷ Ibid., 402.

²⁸ Ibid., 447.

²⁹ Ibid., 31.

their home. The following exchange reveals the stark differences between Anandamoyi and

Krishnadayal when it comes to arbitrary religious and social dictates:

A: “So what if I’m a Brahman’s daughter? I have given up Brahman practices, haven’t I? Just recently, at Mahim’s wedding, the bride’s family had threatened to create trouble about my Khristani ways. So I had deliberately remained aloof, not said a word. The entire world calls me a Christian, and many other things besides, but I accept everything, saying: Aren’t Christians human beings after all! If you are of such high caste and so dear to the Almighty, why does He let you suffer defeat at the hands of Pathans, Mughals and Christians, in turn?”

K: “That’s a long story. You’re a woman. Such things are beyond your comprehension. But you do understand don’t you, that there is something called a community, which you should respect?”

A: “I have no need to understand such things. I only understand that having reared Gora as my son, if I now pretend to be orthodox, my faith will certainly be lost, whether the community remains or not. It is out of respect for religion that I have never concealed anything. I let everyone know that I don’t follow any restrictions, and suffer everyone’s contempt in silence...”³⁰

In this exchange, Tagore pits religious orthodoxy (as represented by the unsympathetic and dislikable Krishnadayal) against an open, inclusive humanism (as embodied by Anandamoyi).

Although she was raised in a Brahman household, Anandamoyi has since abandoned its many restrictions and pays no attention to other Hindus decrying her “Khristani” [Christian] ways. Anandamoyi would rather remain true to what she believes is moral and just—including taking in the orphaned infant Gora—than cater to orthodox Hindu opinion, which would have disapproved of this act.

Much like Poreshbabu, Anandamoyi evaluates all prescriptions of thought and action, especially those that do violence to others, through her own brand of personal ethics and morality. In sharp contrast to Krishnadayal whose newfound religious turn results in a withdrawal from the world—and particularly Gora whom he regards as polluting—Anandamoyi challenges any action that irrationally divides people rather than fosters

³⁰ Ibid., 32-33.

connections between them. No matter the difficulties or disgrace that may befall her, she consistently acts in ways that she holds to be honorable and right. Similar to Poreshbabu, Anandamoyi's warmth and openness draw many "children" to her, among them Binoy, Sucharita, and Lalita. For example, when Binoy desires to marry Lalita and is faced with the prospect of no family attending his wedding, Anandamoyi enthusiastically does her part to represent Binoy's family and welcomes Lalita as a daughter-in-law. As she tells Poreshbabu, "Please have no worries about Lalita...She will never suffer any pain at the hands of the one to whose care who have surrendered her. And after all this time, the Almighty has filled a gap in my life. I had no daughter, but now I have acquired one."³¹

Anandamoyi's authenticity additionally stands in stark contrast to the vanity of Borodasundari, Poreshbabu's selfish and callous wife, and Harimohini, Sucharita's shrewish widowed aunt. Both women are depicted as extremely conservative in their respective religious beliefs and are offensive in their interactions with others, particularly their own family. Despite being a Brahmo, and having ostensibly progressive views, Borodasundari constantly compares Sucharita with her three daughters by birth (Lalita, Leela, and Labanya) and marginalizes the former within the family. She also does not attend Lalita's wedding to Binoy. In a similar manner, Harimohini, a highly conservative Hindu woman, designs to marry off Sucharita to a Hindu family of her (Harimohini's) choosing. Considering that Poreshbabu gave her shelter when she was in need, and that she remains dependent upon Sucharita for her livelihood, Harimohini's desire to marry off Sucharita into a Hindu family is highly offensive, demonstrating the systemic nature of the abuse that conservative Hindu women frequently inflict upon one another and across generations. In contrast to these women who are staid and unthinking figures, Anandamoyi, Lalita, and Sucharita function as

³¹ Ibid., 460.

positive role models for Hindu women as they consistently embrace righteous action over senseless and unjust customs and beliefs.

Tagore completes his critique of unreflective adherence to religion at the conclusion of the novel when Gora (finally) discovers that he is in fact not Hindu by birth. This revelation is nothing less than profoundly liberating for Gora given his growing awareness of the many deficiencies of orthodox Hinduism and in particular its tendency to keep its adherents alienated from one another. Rather than decrying or lamenting this knowledge as might be expected, Gora is elated and goes to Poreshbabu's house right away. Blurting out that he "has no ties," Gora is elated to tell Poreshbabu that

Today I have become an Indian—Bharatvarsha. In me there is no hostility towards any community, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. Today I belong to every community of this Bharatvarsha. I accept everyone's food as mine... You are the one with the mantra for this freedom. That is why, in our present times, you could not find a place within any community. Make me your disciple. Initiate me today into the mantra of that deity who belongs to everyone, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, or Brahma, whose temple doors are never closed to any community, or any individual, who is not merely a deity for Hindus but the deity of Bharatvarsha!³²

In this ironic denouement, Gora reaches a newfound awareness about himself and the world through his discovery that he never was, nor need be, bound to Hinduism. Gora finds himself liberated from its many restrictions and is now able to embrace his newfound beliefs and desires, including his love of Sucharita. Unencumbered by demeaning and exacting caste restrictions, Gora can now rekindle his friendship with Binoy and is free to request water from Anandamoyi's low-caste maid, an act that would have been unthinkable before.³³ He can also now admit his admiration for Poreshbabu and approach him as his guru, for he is the only one "with the mantra for this freedom." Much like Anandamoyi, it is Poreshbabu who embodies the egalitarianism and equity that is consonant with what Bharatvarsha really

³² Ibid., 506-507.

³³ Ibid., 508.

needs. Likewise, Gora's embrace of Anandamoyi in the concluding scene of the novel, "Ma, you are my real mother! ... You have no caste, no discrimination, no contempt for anyone. You are the very image of goodness! It is you who are my Bharatvarsha!..."³⁴ emphasizes the openness and love that will bring Indians together. Eschewing Bankim's violent deification of the motherland as a Hindu goddess, Tagore upholds a vision of Bharat in which all Indians—Hindus and Muslims, men and women, those of high and low castes—may come together rather than remaining aloof and hostile to one another on the basis of religious orthodoxy and dogmatism.

In *Gora*, Rabindranath Tagore offered a powerful critique of Hindu nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century, which Tanika Sarkar has called a "significantly new political imaginary."³⁵ As opposed to the romanticized portrayals of Bharat offered by Bankim, Ghosh, and Mitra, Tagore called attention to the inherent dangers of this idea that was being shrilly advocated by an intellectual elite disengaged and disaffected from more peaceable ways of rallying the masses. His admonitions about nationalism were prescient in their emphasis that the ideology of India as Bharat was informed by discriminatory views of not just religion, but also class, caste, and gender. Given that this dissertation has only examined male writers, Tagore's powerful words, uttered through Binoy, deserve reflection: "We see Bharatvarsha only as a land of men; we don't notice women at all."³⁶

In considering the longer cultural history behind Hindu nationalism, "Imagining Bharat" intervenes in scholarly discussions about the inherent instability of group and national belonging and the powerful ways in which nostalgia can activate nationalist desire. Rather than continuing to look to proximate causes for India's ongoing communal strife, this

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Tanika Sarkar, "Rabindranath's 'Gora' and the Intractable Problem of Indian Patriotism," 37.

³⁶ Ibid., 110.

dissertation has endeavored to illuminate the ways in which the seeds of such discord were sown in literature published well over a century ago. Events such as the 1947 Partition and the ongoing instances of communal violence in India are thus thrown into sharper relief, as outcomes of an ideology that has long privileged India's Hindus to the detriment of religious minorities, women, and those of low caste. By examining how India became imagined as Bharat, the dissertation has attempted to highlight literature's critical role in shaping our ingrained ideas about who we are and where we belong, and how such beliefs may, perhaps, change.

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