

“Scott of Bengal”: Examining the European Legacy in the Historical
Novels of Bankimchandra Chatterjee

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ABSTRACT

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(Under the direction of Sucheta Mazumdar)

It is generally agreed that the novel is of European origin and that it was imported into non-European countries through colonial contact. While acknowledging this European precedence, it is important to also acknowledge the unique ways in which non-European authors indigenized the form to respond to the needs of their contemporary readers who were their intended audience. The works of the nineteenth-century Indian novelist Bankimchandra Chatterjee are a case in point. This dissertation focuses on the role the historical novels of Bankim performed in determining Indian identities at a particular juncture in Indian colonial history. A comparative study with selected novels of Sir Walter Scott, the premier historical novelist of Europe, helps illustrate the singularity of Bankim’s task; Scott and Bankim occupied quite different worlds and their works serve as metaphors of this difference. As the first successful novelist of India, Bankim took on the task of invoking history to create a national identity for a people who, he felt, did not have one. This identity had to be imagined through complex negotiations of race, religion, and gender, each of which required constant redefining. Bankim’s choice to define Indian history with a strong Hindu bias created an ambivalent

and often hostile space for the non-Hindu participants of Indian history. This dissertation examines that space and the role assigned to the antithesis of the Muslim “other,” the ideal Hindu. It also studies the role of the Hindu woman in Bankim’s historical novels. The nation is imagined as a woman and the many dimensions of that role add richness to Bankim’s texts.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: THE MILIEU THAT SHAPED BANKIM.....	18
CHAPTER 2: BANKIM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BENGALI NOVEL.....	43
CHAPTER 3: SCOTT AND THE“SCOTT OF BENGAL”: A STUDY OF SCOTT’S <u>IVANHOE</u> AND BANKIM’S <u>DURGESHNANDINI</u>	78
CHAPTER 4: THE NATION AND THE “OTHER” IN <u>ANANDAMATH</u> AND <u>OLD MORTALITY</u>	123
CHAPTER 5: THE MUSLIM IN BANKIM’S VIEW OF HISTORY ...	147
CHAPTER 6: A GENDERED IDENTITY: THE NATION AS MOTHER, WIFE, AND DAUGHTER IN BANKIM’S HISTORICAL NOVELS	202
CONCLUSION	254
BIBLIOGRAPHY	266

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on Bankimchandra Chattyopadhyay (1838-1894), who is generally considered to be the first successful novelist to write in any Indian language and the ways in which he shaped the emergence of the historical novel in India. The very mention of the term “historical novel” immediately brings Walter Scott to mind and the imprint of his legacy on the genre. Below, I introduce Bankimchandra or Bankim (as he is traditionally referred to in Bengali) and explore some dimensions of the influence of Scott on the historical novel in India.

In a literary career that spanned roughly thirty years, Bankim wrote in Bengali, the language spoken in the eastern state of Bengal in British India (now the language of the Indian state of West Bengal and the independent country of Bangladesh). Although much has been written in Bengali and other Indian languages about him, as one of the major literary figures of modern India, he has not received comparable attention in western scholarship. The power of transcending the limits of time and space, which makes works produced in one specific era and one specific culture relevant in another, belongs to those we call classics. Bankim’s works are certainly considered classics in the canons of Bengali literature, and as the first successful Indian novelist he has a permanent place in the canon of Indian literature as well. Bankim’s works continue to be of value more than a hundred years after the last of them was published, because they address many issues we still contend with in our own times.

One of the issues regarding which Bankim continues to be relevant is that of legitimate citizenship. He was the first Indian author to examine in a significant and sustained manner the underpinnings of nationalism. Benedict Anderson writes about nations as communities that are imagined into existence. In Bankim's works, especially in his novels with historical backdrops, we see this process of imagining unfold. Cultural roots, one of the many aspects of nationalism that Anderson discusses,¹ inspires people to kill and, more importantly, to die for a nation. These sentiments are visible in many of Bankim's works of which one of the best examples is the hymn "Bande Mataram" (alternately spelled "Vande Mataram" and translated variously as "Mother Hail,"² "I revere the Mother,"³ "I bow to thee, Mother"⁴). During the Indian freedom struggle Bande Mataram came to symbolize a militant nationalism with its emphasis on both dying and killing for the motherland.⁵ The song, which for Indian freedom fighters was a battle cry against the British,⁶ acquired more problematic connotations when used in

¹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities*. (London, New York: Verso, 1983, 1991) 7

²Basanta Koomar Roy, trans and ed. Anandamath (New Delhi, Bombay: Orient Paperbacks, 1992) 37

³ Julius Lipner, trans and ed., Anandamath or the Sacred Brotherhood (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) 144

⁴ This version by Sri Aurobindo is mentioned, among others, by Tanika Sarkar in Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism (London: Hurst and Company, 2001) 289 and Barbara Southard in "The Political Goddess: Aurobindo's Use of Bengali Śākta Tantrism to Justify Political Violence in the Indian Anti-Colonial Movement." South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 30:2, 269-292.

⁵ Bhabatosh Chatterjee makes this point in his discussion of polyvalency of the novel in his introduction to the compilation of essays on Bankim titled Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994). He also points out that the novel in which the song is embedded is routinely celebrated more for its nationalistic message than for other aspects such as romance between men and women and the challenge that desire poses to duty (LXXIV).

In the same anthology, Sunil Gangopadhyay mentions that Bande Mataram was originally written "when [Bankim's] press compositor asked him for a poem to fill up a blank space on a page" ("The Making of the Indian Novel" 390).

instances of political agitation and communal riots in independent India. The controversy provoked by *Bande Mataram*, which was initially chosen by the Indian National Congress as the National Anthem in 1896 and was later replaced because of its perceived Hindu supremacist overtones, continues even today. Proponents of *Hindutva* (loosely translated as Hindu-ness), who champion the cause of India as a Hindu nation and enthusiastically promote the conflation of religion and politics, find much to celebrate in the hymn by Bankim,⁷ and the song continues to be popular among the masses.⁸ Yet some Muslims citizens of India reject the hymn for its iconographic association with Hinduism. *Anandamath*, the novel in which *Bande Mataram* appears, provokes similar debates. The centenary of the novel in West Bengal was marked by the official distancing of the state government from the celebrations because of the novel's perceived anti-Muslim stance.⁹ In spite of the controversy (or perhaps because of it) that surrounds the works of Bankim, they prove to be concrete examples of Anderson's point about the cultural roots of nationalism that inspire extreme passions.

⁶ During the first partition of Bengal which lasted from 1905 to 1912, uttering *Bande Mataram* was prohibited by the Carlyle Act passed in October 1906. *Bande Mataram* came to be identified with the *Swadeshi* ("Indigenous") movements which championed the boycott of British goods and institutions and promoted everything that was deemed indigenous.

⁷ The ultra-Hindu organization *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (National Volunteer Organization) mandates singing the hymn in its entirety, since any truncation represents the desecration of the nation mother's body. Tanika Sarkar writes that for the RSS

Vande Mataram, not Rabindranath Tagore's 'Jana gana mana' is the authentic Indian national anthem. The hymn is sung in its entirety, including its Bengali passages [--there are both Sanskrit and Bengali passages in the hymn--], at RSS training meetings (*shakhas*). Any change or abbreviation is strictly forbidden because the song symbolizes the undivided, inviolate body of the pre-Partition motherland; hence, an abridgment amounts to a symbolic mutilation of the sacred body, a repetition of the partition of India in 1947. Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*. 164.

⁸ The hymn has been re-interpreted by popular Indian artists in recent times such as A.R. Rahman in 1997. The most popular version of the song is the one sung by Lata Mangeshkar in 1950.

⁹ A collection of essays written upon this occasion are available in the anthology *Anandamath Prasanga*. (Kolkata: Ganashakti Patrika Daptar, 1983).

The debate surrounding *Bande Mataram* and the other works of Bankim is linked to a larger set of questions posed in Bankim's works about the nature of citizenship that are as relevant in modern India as they are in many other nations in the post-colonial world. Who belongs in a nation and who does not is still being debated in a Hindu-majority India with a substantial Muslim population and similar questions are also under discussion in other contexts in other parts of the globe. How to accommodate multi-lingual, multi-racial, and multi-religious citizens within one nation-state is an issue that still has not been answered fully everywhere. So Bankim remains relevant in a significant manner to a global audience. Also, his writings in a regional Indian language may have reflected the political and cultural reality of a specific corner of the world in the last third of the nineteenth century, but such reality was not isolated from the larger currents of global history. If this was the age when European imperialism reached its height, it was also the age of incipient nationalism in the colonies. Thus Bankim's works are simultaneously specific to Bengal/India and are a part of a larger body of writings about the idea of the nation.

In Europe the birth of the historical novel was simultaneous with the age of the nationalism which was inaugurated by the Napoleonic Wars. While initially it was the poets through whom nationalism found its clearest expression, upon the return to peace in Europe after the defeat of Napoleon, historians fell under its sway. The writing of national histories contributed to the popularity of historical novels.¹⁰ India did not suffer directly from the cataclysms of the Napoleonic Wars but had its own first significant uprising against the British in 1857. The brutal suppression of the insurgency of Indian

¹⁰ H.M. Stephens. "Nationality and History." The American Historical Review XXI. No.2, (Jan 16) 225

soldiers and the onset of a more conservative phase of administration, combined with factors such as the spread of English education and a consequent spread of humanistic ideas, led to many changes in the mental landscape of the educated Indian. This was the age that saw the birth of the novel and the proliferation of newspapers--two phenomena that also went hand-in-hand in Europe as scholars such as Anderson have noticed. Nationalism inspires interest in the past and India was no exception. Inspired by archaeological findings, European modes of historiography and other factors, Indians began to look at their own history in a new way. This new historical perception was reflected in Indian literature.

In these early days of Bengali prose fiction, Bankim's contemporary Bhudev Mukhopadhyay ¹¹ wrote historical novels, as did a younger writer, the I.C.S and economic historian, R.C. Dutt, ¹² among others. Yet neither Bhudev's novels nor Dutt's continue to generate the kind of interest that Bankim's do. In 1860 Bankim's close friend and dramatist Dinabandhu Mitra (1829-74), penned the incendiary play Neel Darpan (The Indigo Mirror), exposing the horrors of forced indigo cultivation in Bengal, thus treating contemporary history as his material. The play was a literary landmark both for its stark portrayal of administrative callousness and greed and the suffering it caused to the indigo farmers, and for the imprisonment of its publisher, the British missionary

¹¹ Bhudev Mukhopadhyay (1827-94) wrote history books as well historical novels. His Anguriya Binimay or The Exchange of Rings (included in Aitihāsik Upanyas or Historical Tales: 1862) was inspired, according to Professor Sukumar Sen, by J.H. Caunter's Romance of History. History of Bengali Literature (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, first published 1960, reprint 1992), 208.

Bhudev also wrote Swapnalabdha Bharatbarsher Itihaṣ which can be translated as The Imaginary History of India or The History of an India Received in a Dream.

¹² R.C. Dutt (Romesh Chandra Dutt, 1848—1909) wrote four historical novels. Sukumar Sen calls his first two novels, Bangavijeta (Conqueror of Bengal, 1874) and Madhavikankan (The Wristlet of a Madhavi-twig, 1877), semi-historical and deems the two others, Maharashtra Jivanprabhat (The Dawn of Life for the Marathas, 1871) and Rajput Jivansandhya (The Dusk of Rajput Life, 1879), historical. (Sen 218).

Reverend Long. The court proceedings surrounding its publication remain important events in the history of Bengali literature. But in India today, interest in Neel Darpan is limited to occasional stage productions and a mention in the history of Bengali literature. While writers such as Bhudev, Dutt, Dinabandhu and others whom I have not mentioned, showed flashes of excellence and presented visions of Hindu-Muslim unity (for instance, Bhudev's Anguriya Binimay in which a Hindu king and Muslim princess fall in love) or of a united resistance against powerful British indigo planters (as in Dinabandhu's Neel Darpan), none of them articulates a vision of nationhood in the way Bankim's historical novels do.

As a historical novelist Bankim is in the tradition of the historical novelist par excellence, Walter Scott, and that is yet another reason it is worthwhile to study Bankim's works. While the influence of Scott on the tradition of the European historical novel is well documented, there has been no parallel study on the influence of Scott on the Indian novel. Given Scott's dates (1771-1832) and the fact that many of his relatives and acquaintances served in India, it is surprising that he did not write about India as much as he might have, especially since India was a popular subject for British novelists. (The Surgeon's Daughter, 1827, is the only Scott novel that is set in India.) Yet Scott plays an important role in the development of the historical novel in India. There is no better figure with whom the study of Scott's Indian influence could begin than Bankim who was called the "Scott of Bengal" by his contemporaries. The very epithet places Bankim in line with others who have been called the Scotts of their own nations, such as Baron Miklós Jósika (1794-1865) of Transylvania (Hungary),¹³ Adam Mickiewicz

¹³ Emilia Szaffner. "The Hungarian Reception of Walter Scott in the Nineteenth Century." The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe. ed. Murray Pittock (London, New York: Continuum, 2006) 153

(1798-1855) of Lithuania (Poland),¹⁴ and the Slovene writer Josip Jurčič (1844-1881).¹⁵ Of course Scott's legacy is not limited to those who have been directly compared to him. Indeed, the number of those authors who were never called the Scott of their respective literatures but were directly influenced by him is far greater. Among them are Victor Hugo (1802-1885) and Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880). Hugo's 1831 novel, Notre-dame de Paris has been compared to Scott's Ivanhoe (1819), and Flaubert has been shown to have shaped his characters—Emma Bovary being the most notable—with Scott's novels in mind.¹⁶ Even the great Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), who supposedly was no admirer of Scott, could not avoid the influence of the Scottish writer, and one scholar has found similarities between Tolstoy's War and Peace (1860) and Scott's Talisman (1825).¹⁷

A comparative study of Scott and Bankim has great possibilities and still remains to be undertaken. Scott and Bankim wrote under quite different conditions yet both chose to write historical novels. As a British national, Scott was situated at the center of political power of the British Empire. As an Indian, Bankim was at the opposite end of the spectrum. Both as a high-ranking government employee and an author he may have been a man of considerable prestige in his home state of Bengal (which is where the capital of British India, Calcutta, was located), but he was still a colonial subject. This fundamental difference was reflected in the way Scott and Bankim used the material of

¹⁴ Mirosława Modrzewska. "The Polish Reception of Sir Walter Scott." The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe. 191

¹⁵ Tone Smolej. "Slovene Reception of Sir Walter Scott in the Nineteenth Century". The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe. 249

¹⁶ Richard Maxwell. "Scott in France." The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe

¹⁷ Mark J. Altshuller. "The Rise and Fall of Walter Scott's Popularity in Russia". The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe. 227

history in their respective works. Scott did not have the burden of history weigh on him as much as Bankim felt it did. Scotland had a well-documented history and the Scottish people were never thought to be incapable of having the kind of mind that was deemed essential for history writing.

India, on the other hand, was often presented by the British as being a land without history and Indians were thought to lack historical imagination. Bankim's acerbic comment that Bengalis had no recorded history while even the bird shooting trip of an Englishman was dutifully recorded,¹⁸ points to the urgency that the educated Bengalis felt about creating a tradition of history writing. Hence, Bankim wrote to instill pride and hope in his readers, who he felt had lost their own history, and he had to do so without arousing the suspicion or ire of the British administrators. Scott did not have to tread as lightly. He was the most popular literary figure of his own age besides Byron, and although he had constraints of his own (personal debt, failing health later in life) that occasionally hampered his literary output, they were substantially different from those under which Bankim labored. Bankim and Scott were both prolific writers and a detailed study of their entire corpuses lies beyond the scope of my dissertation. So I limit my comparison to four novels, two by each author, selected on the basis of some obvious similarities which I discuss in detail later.

In addition to writing historical novels Bankim also wrote novels that were set in his own times and dealt with social issues. In the social novels he treated contemporary society and its ills as his subject while telling tales of love and betrayal. His Krishnakanter Will (Krishnakanta's Will) and Bishabriksha (Poison Tree) gripped the

¹⁸ Bankimchandra Chatterjee. "Bangalir Itihas". Bankim Rachanabali Vol II. ed. J.C. Bagal. (Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad, first edition 1953, reprint 2003) 285. Hereafter, B.R.

public's imagination with their portrayals of the joys of ideal marital love and the pain inflicted by marital infidelity. They presented the triumphs and punishments of women who challenged the mores of a patriarchal tradition-bound society. Even though the social novels upheld conventional morality and social customs, they presented pictures of Bengali family life with a sensitivity that was entirely new. In addition, Bankim edited newspapers, and wrote polemical essays on a wide variety of topics, as well as humorous and satirical sketches. He fashioned the young Bengali prose into a powerful language capable of depth, beauty, and flexibility, and created the kind of middle prose that negotiated a new ground between the highly formal Sanskritic prose on the one hand and colloquial Bengali on the other. A man of considerable genius he enriched Bengali literature in many ways.

In this dissertation I choose to focus on the historical novels because it is in his historical novels that Bankim explored most fully the concept of an ideal motherland and her ideal children. History allowed him to tell his stories of exemplary men and women on a different plane of time where contemporary reality couldn't intrude and where, in the guise of the past, a vision for the future could be presented. This vision of the future is highly complex and nuanced. With British rule stretching back almost a hundred and fifty years and with no end in sight, dreaming of a hopeful future could not have been easy for Bankim or anyone else of his era. Yet the artist in him did manage to have a vision and communicate it successfully enough to inspire generations of readers, and his works are still a pleasure to read. They are not merely fanciful romances, even though they have elements of romance (idealized characters, glorious deeds, lofty passions, etc.),

but serious literary works that merit consideration as much for their power to entertain as for their political implications.

Its comparative study with Scott provides the foundation for the dissertation to examine the specific ways in which Bankim formulated his concepts of political independence and an ideal citizenry. The two strands I examine in this context are religion and gender. I am interested in analyzing how religion and gender factored into Bankim's vision of an independent nation and how contemporary political and social issues influenced it. Since Bankim imagines the nation as a woman and since his concept is deeply Hindu in nature, critics who write about nationalism in Bankim's works naturally pay considerable attention to this interweaving of gender and religion into the fabric of nationalism. But such discussion generally tends to be centered on a handful of novels such as Anandamath (1882) and Debi Chaudhurani (1884). My discussion is more inclusive in nature because I believe that including all the historical novels in my research makes a more nuanced study possible, since they offer a wider scope to trace the development of Bankim's concept of the ideal Hindu nation.

The novels I examine are Durgeshnandini (1865), Mrinalini (1869), Chandrasekhar (1874), Sitaram (1887), and Rajsingha (1893)¹⁹ to find out what dimensions they add to the version of nationalism presented in Anandamath and Debi Chaudhurani. I will not include in my discussion Yugalanguriya (1874). I have decided not to analyze this short story because I feel that here history is used as a mere backdrop without shedding any useful light on the subjects I am interested in, such as Bankim's view of history and history writing, the intertwining of nationalism and religion, and

¹⁹ Although Rajsingha was published earlier, the expanded version published in 1893 and included in the collected works of Bankim is so different from the earliest version that it is almost a different work.

nationalism and gender. Also, for the same reason, I shall not discuss another popular novel, Kapal Kundala (1866), which, in spite of having a historical backdrop, does not explore issues of history, nationalism, and gender. Here history is merely incidental with the focus being on the struggles of an individual who is raised outside human civilization without the ties of conventional relationships, and who is forced to cope with the demands of conventional society. In choosing to categorize Bankim's novels as either historical or social, I follow the lead of Bankim editor J.C. Bagal. Bagal considers Bankim to have written fourteen novels, eight of which have historical backdrops (are set in past) and six of which are contemporary.²⁰

The historical novels went through several publications during Bankim's own life time and received both national and international attention. A brief overview of the publication history of the works helps us to understand the magnitude of Bankim's energy and creativity and gauge the depth of his popularity.²¹ Durgeshnandini went through thirteen editions during Bankim's life time and was translated into English, Hindusthani, Hindi, and Kannada. Mrinalini was adapted for the stage in 1874. Chandrasekhar was initially serialized in Bangadarshan, the newspaper which Bankim himself edited, and went through three editions as a book under his supervision. Rajsingha, which too was a serialized novel, was expanded almost fourfold in the fourth edition with the changes between the first and the fourth edition being so significant that some regarded the two as separate works. Anandamath, which went through five

²⁰ Bankim editor J.C. Bagal divides the novels into three groups: historical (*aitihāsik*), social (*samajik*), and nationalistic (*jātiyatamulak*). I have decided to consider the novels as either being set in the past (historical) or in the present (social). This is not to say that the historical novels do not have social dimensions or vice versa; however, it is in the historical novels that Bankim's nationalism is articulated most clearly.

²¹ The following details are condensed from the preface to the first volume of B.R.

different editions, was singled out for special mention by R.C. Dutt in his entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica. Initially serialized, Debi Chaudhurani went through six editions during Bankim's life, was translated into English and several Indian languages, and was performed as a play. Sitaram began as a serial (in Prachar, another newspaper periodically edited by Bankim) and went through three editions with the second one being substantially revised from the first. Bankim's prolific nature becomes even more evident if we keep in mind that in addition to constantly revising new editions of the historical novels, Bankim also wrote contemporary social novels which he subjected to the same meticulous editorial process as the historical novels.

In addition to studying the historical novels of Bankim, I refer extensively to specific essays by him. While his nonfiction covers a wide variety of topics, I refer to the essays that explore the concept of nationalism, history, and historiography from various angles. These essays present in a theoretical and analytical fashion the ideas that Bankim fleshes out in his historical fiction. In this sense the essays can be read as companion pieces to the novels and I use them as such. For the novels and the essays my primary sources are the two-volume collected works of Bankim in Bengali, Bankim Rachanabali, published by Sahitya Sangsad under the editorship of J.C. Bagal.

The first chapter of this dissertation explores the historical background of the emergence of the novel in India, as well as covers the salient details of Bankim's literary life. Bankim was very much a product of the political and socio-cultural forces that combined to catapult the educated middle and upper middle class citizens of mid-nineteenth century Calcutta (now Kolkata) to a position of intellectual leadership in India. I provide an overview of the multilingual and multi-disciplinary education that Bankim

received and that brought him into close contact with the intellectual traditions of both India and Europe. I examine the religious and cultural milieu of Calcutta which shaped many of his views along with the cultural and religion traditions of his own Brahmin background.

In the second chapter I provide a general analysis of Bankim's literature to examine why and how Bankim followed certain conventions of the European novel tradition and not others. I argue that what may appear to be failings of Bankim's novels if the traditions of European realism are applied to them are actually conscious choices on Bankim's part. Bankim's decisions to borrow plots, create characters who are types rather than individuals, include supernatural elements, and other techniques which go against the early realist tradition of the European novel were deliberately made. The chapter lays out the theoretical framework on which my dissertation rests.

The third chapter is a comparative study of Bankim's Durgeshnandini with Scott's Ivanhoe. I begin by looking at Scott's literary life and highlight the political, social, and cultural events and trends that shaped his genius. My discussion of Bankim's background in this chapter is briefer and it contains some details not included in the preceding chapter. The focus of this chapter is primarily on the characters of Scott's and Bankim's novels to show how Scott's men and women and their Bengali counterparts in Bankim's novel differ from or resemble each other. My argument is that the differences in the authors' agenda guided these differences and similarities. Here I explore the subject of nationalism and show how it is more developed in Scott's novel than in Bankim's. This discussion allows me to examine how the historical juncture at which each author wrote shaped his works in unique ways. Scott could write about a healing

process between the Normans and the Saxons out of which a new English entity arose. For Bankim in Durgeshnandini there are no enemies along clear-cut ethnic, religious, or political lines. It is novel about feudal ideals where high-born Pathan and Hindu men and women behave according to codes of chivalry and courtly romance. Yet in these characters we can see features that become the hallmark of the men and women of the later novels—heroes and heroines of great strength who are capable of making extreme personal sacrifices for high ideals, guru-figures who are men of deep learning who provide guidance at critical moments, and others. Although Durgeshnandini is thought by some to lack originality because of its undeniable plot similarities to Ivanhoe, I argue that it is actually substantially different from Scott's novel.

The fourth chapter studies Bankim's Anandamath alongside Scott's Old Mortality. My discussion of these two novels centers primarily on the definition of the enemy since, in both novels, the enemy of the religion and the enemy of the nation are one and the same. The comparison between the two works raises the question of how different vantage points regarding the "enemy" affected plot and narrative style. I read Old Mortality as a novel of healing in spite of the deep religious schism and the ensuing bitterness and violence it describes. The narrator clearly situates the novel in the past and we can read it from the perspective of a later more peaceful future when such old rivalries have already been absorbed into the fabric of a unified nation. Anandamath too is situated in the past; but here history does not offer much solace. In spite of the promise of a new beginning under British occupation, which is delivered at the end of the novel, what rings truer is the stories of men and women who fought to win political independence but could not attain it in spite of their victories on the battlefield. All these

men and women happen to be Hindu and since it is they who are presented as being morally on the right side of history, their opponents, the British and the Muslim, are firmly and unequivocally on the wrong side. Old Mortality does not divide its readers, but Anandamath, belonging to the literary tradition of a multi-religious country, has the capacity to do so.

The centrality of religion in the fourth chapter makes possible a segue to the fifth which analyzes how Bankim deployed religion in forming his conception of national identity. I begin by discussing the features of the European historical novel and its evolution in Bankim's work. Since Orientalist and other European ideas of history and history writing influenced Bankim deeply, a discussion of these points is also included. I suggest that Bankim assimilated selected ideas about a classical Hindu past, the fallen state of his own countrymen, and the role of Muslim rule in the degeneration of Hindu religion and culture in his own versions of history. Bankim's ideas about how and what kind of history should be written also forms an integral part of this chapter because Bankim believed that history and national self perception were intimately connected and that just as history shaped nation, nation too shaped history by highlighting some details while downplaying or erasing others. Since, for Bankim, the enemy of the nation and the enemy of the Hindu religion are one and the same, I use selected examples from the novels to illustrate how he represented Muslims as the arch enemy of the Hindus. A comparison of the portraits of Muslim characters and of the British illustrate differences between two kinds of enemies—the Muslim who is an enemy at every level and the British who is an enemy at the political level.

An examination of the importance of gender in the construction of nationalism forms the core of the sixth chapter. I examine the three feminine dimensions of the nation, namely the mother, the wife, and the daughter and the ways in which Bankim reconciles the opposites inherent in each role: the mother as one who protects and one who has to be protected, the wife who is the spiritual partner of her husband as well as the one who has the capacity to destroy him, the daughter who obeys her parents (especially her father) and one who asserts her independence by following the dictates of her own heart. The role of female education and the debates generated in the nineteenth century around this subject are central to the context in which Bankim was writing, as were the debates about widow remarriage and the age of cohabitation in marriage for women. I include brief overviews of these topics in this chapter. Exploring dimensions of gender, I analyze how femininity and masculinity came to be interpreted by Indians and the British and look into how each group used the concepts to strengthen its own position.

I use the term nationalism in my analysis, and it is useful to clarify the circumscribed frame of its utilization here. Much has been written about the many possible definitions and dimensions of this crucial term. I have decided to adopt Charles Heimsath's²² definition of the term because it is simple yet rational and it serves well as a foundation for my discussions. Heimsath differentiates between patriotism which arises organically from within a group, and nationalism, which is imposed externally. In nineteenth-century India what started out as localized patriotism sometimes grew to become nationalism. For example, the patriotism of the Bengali, which conceived of the

²² Charles Heimsath, "The Emergence of Nationalism." Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1964)

nation in terms of a particular region (Bengal), was lifted out of its purely local base and given a national (pan-Indian) stature. If this Bengali patriotism had Hindu roots, then these roots continued to exist even after its evolution to nationalism. Heimsath points out that “Speeches and writings on political, as well as on social and religious, subjects were sometimes made in behalf of the Indian ‘nation,’ although the ‘nation’ was in fact only Maharashtra, Bengal, or at most the Hindu community.”²³ In Bankim’s writings we see this process in action. In his writings the Bengali is not simply somebody who lives in a certain geographical location but also who is a Hindu and, by extension, an Aryan who can claim ancestral residence in the Indian land mass since time immemorial. Unless he writes about specific groups of Indians such as Rajputs or Sikhs to differentiate them from the Bengali, Bankim often uses the term Bengali as a code word for Indian, Hindu, and Aryan. Since in Bankim’s works the lines between patriotism and nationalism blur quite often, I have taken the liberty to use the terms interchangeably.

Anandamath is the only novel of which I have used a recent English translation; all the other translations from Bankim are my own. Wherever I have borrowed translated material, I acknowledge the sources. Bengali names have been spelled differently by different authors writing in English; I have maintained these spellings as they have been presented by these authors in my quotations from their works. Otherwise, I have spelled them as they are pronounced in standard Bengali, and I am confident that readers familiar with Bankim’s works will have no difficulty in identifying them.

²³ Heimsath, 136

CHAPTER 1: THE MILIEU THAT SHAPED BANKIM

As chroniclers of the history of the novel have outlined, the birth of the novel in Europe, particularly England, was made possible by certain social, economic, and religious phenomena that brought the rights of the individual to the forefront.²⁴ As a result of these changes, the private lives and deeds of ordinary individuals came to be considered subjects worthy of literature to be consumed by ordinary individuals. Although the primary purpose of the novel still was to entertain, for the first time it also began to be a way to give voice to certain segments of the population, notably women and the middle class. Since its inception in the 1700s, the novel has continued to gain in strength and has evolved to suit the tastes of the reading public. Now, in the twenty-first century, novels are written everywhere and in all modern languages. In the age of globalization, novels speak across boundaries and reach audiences beyond the author's known worlds. Because the novel has become such a widely accepted literary form, it is easy to forget that its evolution has a very specific history that it was born in a specific time and place and because of very specific socio-cultural reasons. Also, because of the ubiquitous nature of the novel, the circumstances of its adoption by non-European cultures do not always get paid as much attention as they should. But those circumstances remain pertinent; originary histories are important for reasons beside those of purely antiquarian interest. The past is important because it can provide a basis of

²⁴ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957)

comparison for the present. By looking at the past we can measure how far we have come and whether we have progressed at all. Moreover, periodic stock-taking of where something began and how far it has come also allows us to see how the form itself has changed. That is what this dissertation will do—look back at the history of the novel, specifically at its point of introduction into a specific non-European language and culture (Bengali/Indian), at a specific historical juncture (19th century in British colonial India), by a specific author (Bankimchandra Chatterjee, 1838—94).

Bankim is generally regarded to be the first successful novelist to write in an Indian language. Of course to make a statement like this, one has to first adopt a working definition of the term “novel.” I shall borrow the definition of M. Asaduddin, who calls the novel “a sustained prose narrative of a certain length which contains realistic portrayal of individuals and events in society and presents a particular world view.”²⁵ This is somewhat fuller than the more famous definition that E.M. Forster provides in Aspects of the Novel, a definition that he borrows from the French critic Abel Chevalley’s Le Roman Anglais de Notre Temps. According to Chevalley a novel is “a fiction in prose of a certain extent.” To this Forster adds that the word count of a novel should not be less than 50,000.²⁶ I accept Forster’s proposition that the novel is a longish prose creation but will not hold to the number of words he recommends; rather I will focus on the characteristics mentioned by Asaduddin. If any of these various characteristics—prose medium, length, realism—are removed, then the parameters of what can be considered to be a novel becomes considerably wider. But for the purpose of

²⁵ M. Asaduddin, “First Urdu Novel.” Early Novels in India. ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2002) 118

²⁶E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1927) 6

this dissertation I will accept Asaduddin's definition as being applicable to the Indian novel in its early stages and consider Bankim's Durgeshnandini written in 1865, to be the first novel written in an Indian language.

But before discussing Bankim's works, I would like to first provide a survey of Bankim's milieu. It is important to understand where he came from in order to appreciate why he wrote the way he did. Calcutta in the nineteenth century was quite a remarkable place which saw a surge of new ideas in every aspect of life during what is commonly called the Bengal Renaissance, and Bankim was one of the finest products of this phenomenon. In this chapter I would like outline the major influences on Bankim's life. I begin by discussing the circumstances under which the novel arose in Calcutta. Then I examine the four aspects that T.W. Clark believes to be crucial in the shaping of Bankim. I follow this section with a brief description of Bankim's education and early achievements.

I will first look at the circumstances under which the novel arose in India. In many ways nineteenth-century Calcutta, where the first Indian novel was written, was similar to the metropolises of Europe where the form came into being. The first English novels were metropolitan creations fueled by many factors,²⁷ the most prominent being the rise of a middle class that derived its wealth from the trades.²⁸ This new bourgeoisie looked for expressions of individualism in religion, politics, and culture. The growing wealth of this new middle class, the members of which lived in or close to London, allowed it to exercise its purchasing power to determine literary output, a phenomenon

²⁷ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel

²⁸ Like any other major theory, the one about novels being bourgeois creation, has been the subject of much debate. Michael McKeon mentions them in the introduction to The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987, 2002) 3.

that the increasing numbers of printing presses noticed. Newspapers increased in numbers and the essays they published began to reflect topics of concern and interest to a literate population that was acquiring sufficient wealth and education to become interested in buying periodicals. The popularity of the novel and that of the newspaper were intimately tied because they depended on the same audience—a middle class willing to read in its leisure time. The first English novels were often serial productions that appeared in popular newspapers. Another feature of this new print culture movement was that middle-class women—who increasingly had both the education and the free time necessary—formed a significant part of the reading public.²⁹

In India the novel arose in Calcutta, the capital British India, a port city that started out as a small trading post. It was here that Bankim's first novel Rajmohan's Wife, which was written in English, was published in an English periodical, Indian Field, in 1864. Although his ancestral home was some twenty kilometers from Calcutta, Bankim attended Calcutta University becoming one of the two Indians who were the first among their countrymen to obtain the B.A. degree in 1858. During his working life as a government employee, he periodically resided in Calcutta and ran a printing press in the city. According to M. K. Haldar, Bankim's residence in Calcutta and all the other places he lived "became regular haunts of scholars and literary men."³⁰ To all intents and purposes, Bankim's intellectual life was shaped largely by the vibrant social, political and cultural currents of the city.

²⁹ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel 45

³⁰ M.K. Haldar Foundations of Nationalism in India: A Study of Bankimchandra Chatterjee. (Delhi: Ajanta Publication, 1989) 21

T. W. Clark identifies four elements of nineteenth century culture that shaped Bankim. They are the development of Bengali prose, popularity of newspapers, emergence of “New Hinduism,” and rise of an educated middle-class that modeled its tastes on the “literature and manners of the West.”³¹ I take my cue from Clark in organizing my discussion of these four elements, beginning with a look at the history of the development of Bengali prose.

In choosing to write in English Bankim was following the trend common to English-educated Indians of his time. Although a Bengali prose tradition had existed since the sixteenth century and had “developed a number of crucial features and reasonable fluency through the exercise of an epistolary tradition, ... [through] Vaishnavite theological expositions; and through descriptions of pilgrimage,”³² Bengali was still trying to establish itself as a modern literary language.³³ One of the most prominent poets of the era, Michael Madhushudan Dutt (1824—73), also began his career by writing in English.³⁴ In fact there was considerable disdain for the Bengali language among the westernized Bengali, an attitude that Bankim later satirized in his essays and skits. Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit were the only Indian languages deemed worthy of literary production. The following quotation shows the changing history of linguistic supremacy in Bengal in the 1800s.

³¹ T.W. Clark, “The role of Bankimcandra in the Development of Nationalism.” Historians of India Pakistan, and Ceylon, ed, C.H. Philips, (London, New York: OUP, 1961. Reprinted 1962) 423

³² Tanika Sarkar. Hindu Wife and Hindu Nation. 26.

³³ Bengali language and literature is commonly thought to have been born during the three-century reign of the Pala kings. J.C. Ghosh, Bengali Literature (London: OUP, 1948) 5.

³⁴ Sisir Kumar Das mentions other notables of the period who wrote in English such as Kashiprasad Ghosh, Krishnamohan Banerjee, and Toru Dutt. The Artist in Chains. (Kolkata: Papyrus, first edition 1984, reprint 1996) 35.

In 1800, seven languages were in use somewhere or other in the Calcutta area: Persian, still the language of the law courts and to some extent of government; Arabic, the language of the Islamic scripture; Sanskrit, the language of the Indian scriptures and Brahmanical ritual; Hindustani, including both Urdu and Hindi, the language of certain groups and occupational classes in the metropolis and its hinterland; Portuguese, which for years had been the mercantile language and the lingua franca of the western seaboard; Bengali, which the majority of the population spoke; and English, the language of the foreign invader. Of these Portuguese soon disappeared. Persian was finally deprived of statutory status in 1835, though it had been in decline prior to that date. Arabic and Hindustani still remained, but with limited currency. By 1830 only three languages remained to dispute for the favour of the educated classes, Bengali, Sanskrit and English.³⁵

Even though Bengali is mentioned by Clark as one of the three languages contending for supremacy, it was the language of everyday speech and of the common, often unlettered, men and women and lacked the literary heritage of either Sanskrit or English. But, while there was yet no real prose tradition in Bengali, there was a well-established tradition of verse. There were verse tales (kavyas and mangals) celebrating the exploits of gods and goddesses who were conceived as divine entities with human limitations and experiences; devotional poems especially from the Vaishnava tradition; secular love poems often set to music; and other genres. Bengali verse continued to grow in the nineteenth century, with the contribution of several remarkable poets such as Michael Madhusudan (1824—1873), Rangalal Banerji (1826—86), and Navin Chandra Sen (1846—1909). Among these poets Michael Madhusudan is particularly notable for coining new Bengali words from Sanskrit roots which, in spite of their being largely limited to the vocabulary of poetry, still invigorated the Bengali language in general.

The development of Bengali prose was facilitated by the bureaucrats of the East India Company and the Christian missionaries. The administrators learned Bengali to

³⁵ T.W. Clark, "Encounter and Growth in Bengali Culture: A Survey of Modern Bengali Literature." *Bengal: Literature and History*. ed. Edward C. Dimock, Jr. (East Lansing: Asian studies Center, Michigan State, September, 1967) 18

communicate with the Bengali clerks in the employ of the Company while the missionaries wanted to use the language to spread Christianity to the Indian masses. An employee of the East India Company, Nathaniel Halhead, published a book of Bengali grammar in 1778 and, around the same time, the missionary William Carey employed a group of Bengali academics to produce works in the vernacular to teach British administrators. The establishment of printing presses and School Book Societies energized the language in general and its prose in particular. The earliest prose pieces were non-fiction and included writings as varied as translations of Persian legal works, translations and adaptations of Sanskrit historical/mythical accounts of kings, retellings of popular religious tales, catechisms and other moral instructions. As this brief list shows, the emphasis was on utility rather than originality. Yet the increasing number of Bengali publications helped the vernacular to mature. Pioneers such as the principal of the Sanskrit College, the great Sanskrit scholar Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891) wrote prose pieces in Bengali on themes borrowed from Hindu epics and other sources. While Vidyasagar's language borrowed liberally from Sanskrit grammar and diction and was indicative of the high literary style of Bengali (known as *sadhu bhasha*), in 1857 Alaler Gharer Dulal (The Spoilt Son of a Rich House), a satirical work about the immoral and indolent lifestyle of an imaginary Calcutta character, was written in colloquial Bengali by Peary Chand Mitra. It was a bold and original experiment, but its literary style was criticized by many of the educated readers as coarse and inappropriate.

There were a few authors before Bankim who produced significant prose pieces and some of these had certain novelistic features as well. Clark mentions an early work

of historical fiction published in 1801, Raja Pratapaditya Charita,³⁶ which some consider the first historical novel in Bengali. There were other attempts at writing prose pieces, both novels and essays/sketches, that helped refine the Bengali language. Periodicals further helped the Bengali prose to develop. Publishing most of his novels serially and thus writing for a newly literate audience that could read Bengali and was ready for quality pieces, Bankim took the language to a new level of suppleness and depth by finding a happy medium between the heavily Sanskritized Bengali prose of Vidyasagar on the one hand and the colloquial Bengali of the “Alal” school on the other. Although others before him and also some of his contemporaries had made significant contributions to the development of Bengali prose, none matched his achievements in making the vernacular a suitable medium for an educated reading public. For Bankim the absence of a “predecessor in the true sense,” as Professor Bhabatosh Chatterjee puts it, was daunting, but this absence “was also a challenge to make daring experiments.”³⁷

Bengali prose found a powerful medium in vernacular newspapers, the second of the four factors that Clark deems influential in having shaped Bankim. Paralleling the growth of periodicals in London during the birth of the novel, in Calcutta, too, periodicals became a steady feature of literary life. Subir Raychaudhuri writes, “Between 1818 and 1867, as many as 219 periodicals were published, mostly in Bengali but some in English or in both languages.”³⁸ Periodicals, both daily and monthly, became the medium through which the general public as well as the prominent men of the period began to express

³⁶ T.W. Clark, The Novel in India, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) 18

³⁷ Bhabatosh Chatterjee, “Introduction” Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective, 79

³⁸ Subir Raychaudhuri, “The Lost World of the Babus.” Calcutta, the Living City. Vol 1. ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri. (Calcutta: OUP, 1990, first paperback edition 1995) 71

their views (there were comparatively fewer women who wrote publicly) on matters they considered important and helped shaped public opinion.³⁹ The proliferation of newspapers contributed greatly to the development of the fledgling Bengali prose. Amiya P. Sen mentions several newspapers by name that “had already set high standards in Bengali journalism”⁴⁰ and Bankim himself was associated with several newspapers, the most notable of which was Bangadarshan first published in 1872.

A related phenomenon was the surge in the number of printing presses, which led to a proliferation of non-periodical publications as well. Priya Joshi mentions that the Bengal Presidency was the leader in the number of publications, with 2428 publications in 1888.⁴¹ Alongside reprints and translations of indigenous classical and popular literature, there were books that were published in Europe, chiefly England, and shipped to India to cater to the growing demand for European literature among Indians. (In researching the data from fourteen Indian public libraries between 1850 and 1891, Priya Joshi discovered that Bulwer-Lytton and Scott were represented in all fourteen of these libraries⁴²—a fact that becomes significant when we consider Bankim’s literary milieu). The increase in the number of readers and the availability of print material led to a greater exchange of ideas than was previously possible. (An aside here: Bankim himself was a

³⁹ Mrinalini Sinha’s discussion of the debates surrounding the Ilbert Bill, the Native Volunteer Movement, the Public Service Commission Act, and the Age of Consent provides an excellent example of the crucial role played by periodicals in the 1880s. Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly’ Englishman and the ‘Effeminate’ Bengali’ in the late Nineteenth Century. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995)

⁴⁰ Amiya P. Sen, Hindu Revivalism in Bengal: 1872—1905: Some Essays in Interpretation. (Oxford: OUP, 1993) 83

⁴¹ Priya Joshi, In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India. (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) 144

⁴² Joshi, 65

regular contributor to British publications such as Blackwood's Magazine, the Spectator, and the Westminster Review.⁴³) A quote from an English journal published in Calcutta testifies to the vigor of the print culture in Calcutta even as early as the last decade of the eighteenth century. A certain William Dune, the editor of The World wrote in its October 1791 issue:

In splendor London now eclipses Rome ... and in similar respects, Calcutta rivals the head of empire ... But in no respect can she appear so eminently so, as in her publications If in Europe, the number of publications gives the ground to ratiocinate the learning and refinement of particular cities, we may place Calcutta in rank above Vienna, Copenhagen, Petersburg, Madrid, Turin, Naples or even Rome.⁴⁴

The combination of the burgeoning Bengali prose, a vigorous print culture, and the spread of literacy led to what Tanika Sarkar, taking her lead from Christopher R. King, terms the “vernacular elite.”⁴⁵

The New Hinduism that Clark mentions as his third point was another important feature of the new spirit of Bengal, and Calcutta was where social and religious reformers congregated and debated issues. To those who were dissatisfied with traditional Hinduism, with its elaborate caste system and ritualistic practices, Christianity offered an alternative, especially in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. The Brahmo Samaj, a new religious order started in 1828 by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774-1833), that superimposed Christian monotheistic inflections on the monotheism of the ancient Hindu Upanishads, offered another alternative to traditional Hinduism. It received its greatest impetus under Keshub Chandra Sen (1838—1884).

⁴³ Baridbaran Chakraborty, “Samya: Bankim Bikshan.” Bankimchandra: Adhunik Mana. ed. Kshetra Gupta. (Kolkata: Pushtak Bipani, 1989) 70.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Nikhil Sarkar “Printing and the Spirit of Calcutta.” Calcutta: The Living City. Vol 1. 128.

⁴⁵ Tanika Sarkar. Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 3

Around the same time the Hindu reformer Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820—1891) pushed for remarriage of young Hindu widows, thus challenging one of the dominant practices of traditional Hinduism. Another Hindu reformer, Vidyasagar's contemporary Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824—1883) founded the Arya Samaj which encouraged the practice of a reformed, anti-Brahmin form of Hinduism. Although the Arya Samaj was not based in Calcutta, its influence was felt in the metropolis.

This new multiplicity of religious options focused attention on Hinduism yet offered the opportunity to those who decided to remain within its folds to examine it from new perspectives. Like Bankim's friend Bhudev Mukherjee some individuals decided to embrace selected aspects of traditional Hinduism, some like the Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani tried to prove the infallibility of all things Hindu by attempting to provide scientific explanations for Hindu rituals, beliefs, and practices, and others leaned towards the philosophy of the religion rather than its day to day practices and rituals. Age-old practices such as sati (the immolation of widows) and the marriage of pre pubertal girls came under examination. Sati was abolished in 1829, widow remarriage was legalized in 1856, and the age of marriage was raised to twelve in 1891. The abolition of sati happened before Bankim was born, but the other two reforms and the debates that preceded them took place during his lifetime and had wide ranging social implications.

Perhaps the most important element of the four that Clark mentions is the emergence of the educated middle class or the bhadralok. Just as the rise of the middle class is generally thought to be the chief catalyst behind the birth of the European novel, the emergence of the Indian middle class, made possible by India's encounter with the

west via British colonization, was a major force behind the birth of the novel. The “Bengali intelligentsia,” as Tapan Raychaudhuri points out in the preface to the first edition to his Europe Reconsidered, was “the first Asian social group of any size whose mental world was transformed through its interaction with the West.”⁴⁶ Bankim was a part of this intelligentsia.⁴⁷

The encounter with the West changed the traditional socio-economic hierarchy of India in fundamental ways and brought in new ways of thinking, preparing the ground for the novel. While the Bengali middleman was the first to try to communicate with the Englishman (often through gestures), the first class of Bengalis to be formally educated in English were the literate elite and the most affluent members of Calcutta. They were soon followed by a rising number of middle class bhadralok or gentlemen. Subir Raychaudhuri defines these bhadraloks (also called babus) who were often maligned by the British, as “Western-educated, professional, urbanized, middle class.”⁴⁸ The growing literacy of this class and the eventual spread of education among the women of the bhadralok households played a significant role in the popularity of reading as a leisure activity. Saroj Bandopadhyay points out the close connection between Calcutta and the rise of the bhadralok, a connection that he deems vital to the birth of a strong Bengali prose and eventually to that of the novel.

The people identified with this group [bhadralok] centered on Calcutta, and applying to their lives the education received in the city, they ushered in a hitherto unknown world view. Some of them had been attracted to Calcutta from villages

⁴⁶ Tapan Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered: Perception of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal. (New Delhi: OUP, first published 1988, OUP India Paperbacks 2006) xxi

⁴⁷ M.K. Haldar, Foundations of Nationalism in India. 21

⁴⁸ Subir Raychaudhuri, “The Lost World of the Babus.” Calcutta, the Living City, Vol 1. 70

and small towns, and the city provided a new momentum to their lives. Driven by the dynamics of new inquiries, they forged new modes of creative expression.⁴⁹

Virtually all the notables of the phenomenon termed the Bengal Renaissance--a period of significant cultural, social, and religious, developments that began with advent of European culture—emerged from the bhadralok class and had Calcutta connections. Even before the founding of Calcutta University in 1858, educational institutions had been proliferating since the founding of the Hindu College in 1817 by the man who was at the fountainhead of the Bengal Renaissance—Raja Ram Mohan Roy. While the education of women lagged behind significantly with schools for girls being few and far between and marriage ending the prospect for home schooling for most girls at a young age, female education was definitely on the rise. The affluent and literate middle class woman who spent time reading novels rather than on housework emerged as a character in contemporary literature. Hailed as pathbreakers by some, this new class of women was ridiculed by others for taking up an idle vice—reading for entertainment. (Ian Watt discusses a similar phenomenon in England where foreign visitors commented on the amount of leisure hours that middle class women had once they were freed from cumbersome household chores with the help of hired help and merchants.⁵⁰) And it was not only the city women who read; the spread of literacy took the literary publications to the more remote outposts where professional Bengalis lived and worked with their families.

Bankim's first novel Rajmohan's Wife came out in 1864, seven years after the uprising of 1857, which the British termed the Sepoy Mutiny and Indian nationalists

⁴⁹ Saroj Bandopadhyay, "The Novel in Bangla." Early Novels in India. 33

⁵⁰ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel. 44

think of as the first war of independence. This was an event that seriously challenged the growing power of the East India Company in India but which was effectively crushed with the political and economic power being transferred from the privately held Company to the British Crown in 1858. So, for the better part of his life Bankim was a subject of the British Empire in a part of India that had already had a hundred years of British contact. Robert Clive, an East India Company man, defeated the Nawab of Bengal in 1757 in the battle of Plassey, thus putting the political and economic power of the Company on a solid foundation. Bankim's life corresponded with what is termed the high noon of colonialism in the Victorian era. Victoria ascended the throne in 1831, Bankim was born in 1834; the queen died in 1901, and Bankim died in 1894. As a resident of the colony that was famously regarded as the jewel in the crown, Bankim unavoidably faced the reality of the empire. He was fascinated with discoveries in the physical sciences and he wrote in great detail about the technological progress of the Victorian age. His college curriculum as well as his private readings exposed him to much of what an educated Englishman read, and he was familiar with current trends in philosophy, sociology, and literature. So, while as a colonial he faced certain repressive colonial policies (the Ilbert Bill, The Vernacular Press Act, The Arms Act.), he was also influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of England. Much of his life was spent during what is described as the Anglicist phase of British administration in India. During the 1830s, trends in the political climate of England, such as the strong popularity of Mill's utilitarian theories, were already driving colonial administrative policies towards increasing conservatism. After the military uprising of 1857 the earlier Orientalist policies which were generally more liberal, if not less paternal and patronizing, and

which favored a policy of non-interference in cultural and social matters, gradually gave way to more governmental involvement in more aspects of colonial life. The push for English education produced large numbers of young men who found employment in colonial administration. A large number of these men were clerks who, on an everyday basis, faced the indignities of life as colonized individuals. As a lifelong government employee (he retired as a Deputy Magistrate and Deputy Collector), Bankim was familiar with the colonial policies in action. So while he admired several political and cultural aspects of Europe/England, he was also aware of the shortcomings of the British Raj. A comment that Sucheta Mazumdar and Vasant Kaiwar make about the response of the Indian collaborator in the British colonial system regarding the forces of Enlightenment, colonialism, and racism can be applied to the response of the nineteenth-century educated Indian in general.

After all, the Enlightenment and racism came to the colonies in the wake of colonialism. In its more radical tendencies the former promoted equality, while the latter dwelt on ascriptive hierarchies cloaked in the language of sciences. Simultaneously committed to both, the colonized ruling class revealed its split personality.⁵¹

As a member of the aforementioned bhadralok class, Bankim inherited the identity of the babu—an identity riddled with complexities and indicative of the split personality that Kaiwar and Mazumdar mention. In the colonial era the babu was forced to examine his beliefs about himself and often found himself lacking the attributes he needed to confront his British masters with dignity. Mrinalini Sinha discusses this issue in great depth in Colonial Masculinity. Referring to a point raised by Tanika Sarkar, Sinha argues that since the idea of manhood for the Bengali was tied to that of owning

⁵¹ Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar, “Race, Orient, and Nation in the Time-Space of Modernity.” Antinomies of Modernity: Essays on Race, Orient, Nation, eds. Vasant Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar (Durham, North Carolina :Duke UP, 2003) 268

property and since the rentier class was losing out to the new influx of immigrants from other parts of India, there was a general sense of limited abilities among Bengali men.⁵² Government services offered some employment opportunities and its lower ranks were populated by Indians, a large number of whom were Bengalis, but the upper echelons were reserved for the British. In the aftermath of the rebellion of 1857 there was a series of repressive measures to control the power of the colonized population through the likes of the Vernacular Press Act (1878) designed to suppress anti-British sentiments in the periodicals, the Arms Act (1879) which prohibited Indians from bearing certain kinds of arms, and others. Europeans unleashed a storm of protests against the Ilbert Bill in 1883 whereby senior covenanted Indian officials were to have the power to try British citizens in mofussil or country courts. There were prolonged and bitter debates about widening the admissibility of Indians into the ranks of the Public Service. In 1873 there were riots by land tenants against landlords in the district of Pabna, an event that Tanika Sarkar believes made nationalists out of Bengalis who had remained unmoved by the great rebellion of 1857. The perceived leniency of the government toward the rioters, according to Sarkar, shook up Bengali self-confidence.⁵³ Sarkar also suggests that the non-participation of the Bengalis in the uprising of 1857 led to a feeling of guilt that contributed to the more critical outlook towards the administration in the post 1857-phase.⁵⁴

This sense of disenfranchisement added to a growing political awareness of the educated Indian, which expressed itself in the establishment of groups that allowed the

⁵² Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity.

⁵³ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation .15

⁵⁴ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 142

expression of political sentiments and opinions. The British India Association was established in 1851, preceding the Mutiny of 1857; this was followed by the Indian National Association formed in 1876 which changed into the Indian National Congress in 1885. While none of these associations challenged British authority outright, they provided a safe avenue for the educated sections of the colonial population to express political criticism. Bankim was associated with such organizations marginally and his political activism was most effective in his literary output.

He lived and wrote during the phase of early nationalism. After the excesses of the first generation of western-educated young men in the 1830s and 40s, often referred to as the Young Bengal, who discarded all aspects of a traditional Hindu way of life and embraced western culture in an uncritical way,⁵⁵ the men of Bankim's generation reacted differently to the west. The west to them was a more complex entity—to be consumed more critically (a point that Tapan Raychaudhuri discusses in detail in Europe Reconsidered). The very ideas of personal freedom espoused in western cultures contrasted sharply with the material reality of a European colonial administration. But the continuous exposure to western education and an educated middle class that grew both in number and political strength led to the inevitable—the Bengali and the Indian began to harbor dreams of greater political freedom, if not full independence. The historical novels that Bankim wrote during the last phase of his literary career are more strident than the earlier novels in promoting Hindu martial glory and are reflective of this desire

⁵⁵ Charles Heimsath provides an interesting quote from a description of the Young Bengal. [they] adopted an aggressive attitude to everything Hindu and openly defied the canons of their inherited religion, while some of them offended public opinion by their youthful exuberance, such as drinking to excess, flinging beef-bones into the houses of the orthodox, and parading the streets shouting 'we have Mussalman bread.' Some of them embraced Christianity. Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform 13.

for political freedom. Tanika Sarkar dates the change in Bankim's general tone to 1882 when Bankim engaged in a debate with the principal of a Calcutta college, William Hastie. After Hastie wrote articles criticizing Hindu religious rites that he witnessed at a funeral ceremony hosted by a local landholder, Bankim engaged in a very public debate with him defending Hinduism. Sarkar contends that after this incident Bankim became more conservative in his tone and that this conservatism is reflected in the overtly Hindu brand of nationalism that he began to promote in his post-1882 works.⁵⁶ In his earlier works dreams of independence are masked in romantic tales of love and war, but in his later works these dreams are articulated quite openly as in his best-known novel, Anandamath (1882).

While this was the milieu that shaped Bankim, circumstances of his birth and family life were also a major influence. Bankim's education and upbringing played an important role in shaping his intellect and taste. According to the brief biography presented by editor J.C. Bagal in the preface to the collected works, Bankim's formal education began in 1844 when his father was transferred to Midnapur. For five years he studied English at the local school until the family's return to its ancestral village of Kathalpara in 1849. At Kathalpara he was tutored in Sanskrit and Bengali and was exposed to the Hindu epic Mahabharata for which he retained a lifelong admiration and which turned out to be a major influence on his works. He entered Hooghly College and studied for seven years until he took his B.A exam in 1857. During his school years he received several prizes for academic excellence.⁵⁷ What Bankim learned during his

⁵⁶ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, 170

⁵⁷ I have condensed the information presented in the preface to the first volume of B.R. which appears on pages 9-10.

formative years is quite typical of what the educated public was taught in government institutions of higher learning. Tapan Raychaudhuri mentions a few works that Bankim and his contemporaries read: “Shakespeare and Byron appear to have been universal favourites, but Bhudev [a contemporary of Bankim] admired Goethe, barely mentioned in one statement concerning Bankim.” Bankim admired Walter Scott, had a “dismissive attitude towards Jane Austen, [used] quotations from Campbell and Southey in introducing the various chapters of his novels,” had a “distaste for Zola,” and “[maintained a] deafening silence about Dickens.”⁵⁸ Raychaudhuri refers to the curriculum of the Hindu College, the premier educational institution of higher learning, as mentioned in the autobiography of another Bengali Rajnarayan Basu (1826—1899) who was senior to Bankim by eight years.

... There was a heavy emphasis on English literature, especially Bacon, Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope. The syllabus also included Young’s *Night Thoughts* and Grey’s *Poems*. Next in importance was history. The required reading, which ran into 36 volumes for the one-year course, included Hume’s *History of England*, Mitford’s *History of Greece*, Fergusson’s *Roman Republic*, Gibbon, Elphinstone’s *India* and Russell’s *Modern Europe*. In addition, there was an extensive syllabus on mathematics, including optics and astronomy, besides moral philosophy, not based on any prescribed texts.⁵⁹

According to historian M. K. Haldar,

⁵⁸ Tapan Raychaudhuri. Europe Reconsidered. 19

I would like to note here that the curriculum was designed to include only those works that were thought to contain elements that could improve the character of Indians. Analyzing the British parliamentary papers on Indian education, Gauri Viswanathan comes to the conclusion that ... while Englishmen of all ages could enjoy and appreciate exotic tales, romantic narrative, adventure stories, and mythological literature for their charm and even derive instructions from them, their colonial subjects were believed incapable of doing so because they lacked the prior mental and moral cultivations required for literature. “Introduction.” Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India. (The Social Forms of Aesthetic Forms Series) (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 5

⁵⁹ Tapan Raychaudhuri. Europe Reconsidered. 56.

Bankim was examined in the following subjects for his B.A. degree: English; Greek and Latin; Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi and Oriya; History and Geography; Mathematics and Natural Philosophy (ie, Physics); Natural History and Physical Sciences: and Mental and Moral Sciences.⁶⁰

Tapan Raychaudhuri calls Bankim an autodidact; he prepared for the university entrance examination and another similar examination by reading on his own, since Presidency College where he was enrolled to study law, “did not provide for the relevant instruction.”⁶¹ He continued to be a voracious reader throughout his life and this ability to read on his own served him well. The scope and depth of his knowledge on a wide-ranging array of subjects was invaluable to him as both an essayist and a novelist.

Like many educated men of his time, Bankim was attracted to western philosophers such as Comte, Mill, Bentham, Huxley, Hume, Rousseau, and Bacon. His interest in Comtean Positivism is evident in a series of essays he wrote in Bangadarshan and which were published as a book titled Samya (Equality) in 1879. In these essays he wrote about different kinds of inequalities, exploring their roots and proposing solutions. His topics included social, economic, political, religious, and gender inequality and presented some of his most liberal and revolutionary thoughts. However, in spite of its being well-received, this was one book he did not republish.⁶² Scholars have read this reluctance to revisit the essays as an indication of his adopting a more conservative stance in later life. Similarly, while he admired John Stewart Mill in his youth and wrote a touching piece in Bangadarshan upon Mill’s death in 1873 referring to him as a close

⁶⁰ M. K. Haldar, Foundations of Nationalism. 9

⁶¹ Tapan Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered. 125

⁶² B.R. Vol II 11

relative,⁶³ he later claimed to have rejected Mill's philosophy.⁶⁴ In his essays he wrote with great ease about international politics and history and revealed deep understanding of international commerce and the political aspects of economy. Commenting on Bankim's familiarity with both Indian and western literary traditions, Tanika Sarkar writes

[Bankim] explored and employed various currents of Comtean Positivism, Benthamite Utilitarianism, the social and gender philosophy of John Stuart Mill, and several strands of French Socialism... At the same time, he wrote commentaries on Hindu philosophies and made original and acute reflections on the Nyaya, Sankhya, Vedantic and Bhakti schools.⁶⁵

His familiarity with the rich religious/philosophical and literary tradition of Sanskrit literature is evident in his fiction as well as his essays, and is especially evident in his later works, which are generally more serious in tone. The later novels such as Anandamath (1882), Debi Chaudhurani (1884), Sitaram (1887), non-fiction works such as Krishnacharitra (1886), Dharmatattwa (1888), and the unfinished commentary of the Gita bear testimony to this change. In these works the focus is on moral and spiritual perfection and the possibility of attaining such perfection through the practice or anushilan prescribed in texts such as the Gita which are fundamental to understanding Hinduism. While Sanskrit was the language of Bankim's spiritual and intellectual life and English was the language of his public and intellectual life, Bengali, the vernacular of the Calcutta region, was the language of his family and society.⁶⁶

⁶³ B.R. Vol II 808

⁶⁴ B.R. Vol II 14

⁶⁵ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, 138.

⁶⁶ One wonders whether Bankim was exposed to any of the books written by contemporary British authors about India. Allen J. Greenberger mentions that according to one source the list of works about

Bankim started his literary career by writing poetry in Bengali when he was still in school and was talented enough to win a poetry contest run by a popular newspaper. His mentor at this stage of his life was the eminent poet and editor Ishwar Gupta. It is interesting to note that while editing Gupta's works after his death, Bankim purged them of what he regarded to be coarse and unacceptable elements, even though he was aware that such purging would rob the poems of their earthy vitality. He recognized and appreciated that Gupta's works mirrored the taste of contemporary society truthfully and he mourned the passing of a simpler age. "Madhusudan, Hemchandra, Nabinchandra, Rabindranath are the poets of educated Bengal; Ishwar Gupta was the poet of Bengal,"⁶⁷ he remarked astutely. But he also admitted that "truly Bengali poets are not born anymore—neither is it possible for them to born anymore—nor is it desirable. Unless Bengal turns its back on progress, a truly Bengali poet cannot appear."⁶⁸ Bankim was honest enough to admit that the new Bengali culture of which he himself was a part was deeply influenced by elements foreign to it and he welcomed this change. He regretted the absence of "refined taste" and "lofty goals" in Gupta's works⁶⁹ (which he attributed to the lack of formal education) and the lack of Gupta's ability to respect women.

Women are to him the objects of derision. Ishwar Gupta points his finger, makes faces, and hurls abuses at them. That they are the vessels of sin, he points out with a great deal of obscenity. He cannot present them as joyful, pleasant, and virtuous. Sometimes he attempts to satisfy his theatrical desire to put them on a pedestal—but he fails in his attempts. His elevated women turn into monkeys.⁷⁰

India published between the 1880s to the mid 1930s ran to sixteen pages. The British Image of India. (Oxford: OUP, 1969) 4.

⁶⁷ B.R. Vol II 763

⁶⁸ B.R. Vol II 763

⁶⁹ B.R. Vol II 766

Evident in a comment such as this is Bankim's awareness of the beginning of a new way of looking at familiar objects, a new perspective and a new aesthetics in Bengali literature.

This new way of thinking was not limited to literature. The Calcutta University curriculum mentioned on page 36 provides more details about the study of literature than the kind of training the graduates of Calcutta University received in the sciences. But India's encounter with modern science was crucial in changing the mental landscape of the Bengali as well. Bankim lived and wrote in times when interest in western sciences in India existed alongside an interest in making the sciences relevant to Indians and unearthing indigenous scientific traditions. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in 1784 and opened to Indians in 1829. The Calcutta Museum (later known as the Indian Museum) was opened to the public in 1878. Indians also took an active interest in promoting scientific knowledge among their countrymen. The religious organization Brahmo Samaj, established in 1829, promoted scientific education. Indians scholars such as Rajendralal Mitra and Akshay Kumar Dutt wrote on scientific topics.⁷¹ Physician and scientist M.L. Sircar founded the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences in 1867. According to Amiya P. Sen, around the mid-1870s, "at least six Bengali periodicals devoted exclusively to the promotion of science and scientific literature had come into existence."⁷² In one of the programs for the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Sciences, M.L.Sircar wrote

⁷⁰ B.R. Vol II 768 (my translation)

⁷¹ Gyan Prakash, Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999)

Ancient Hindu sages sowed the seeds for several of the sciences that have become advanced in the present times. Several branches [of scientific study] such as astrology, arithmetic, fractions, geometry, medicine, oceanography, chemistry, botany, music, psychology, philosophy had extended quite far. But it is regrettable that much of these have disappeared; whatever exists does so in name only.⁷³

One of the aims of the association was to discover the lost scientific texts of antiquity and publish them. Bankim wrote a tract in 1873 commenting on Sircar's seven-step proposal detailing the goals of the association. What is noteworthy in this tract is the regret he expresses at the lack of scientific training in his countrymen. He describes scientific knowledge as being the root cause of European domination of the world and cites as an example the economic crisis in Lancashire having the power to adversely affect the economy of India as one of the results of India's backwardness in science and technology.⁷⁴ He states "If you serve science, it is your servant; he who worships science is worshipped by him. Science is the implacable enemy of him who ignores it."⁷⁵ This declaration is followed by a step-by-step discussion and explanation of ancient Indian mastery of the subjects that Sircar mentions.

Bankim wrote several essays on various scientific topics⁷⁶ which were later published in an anthology. As the advertisement to the first edition of this anthology shows, Bankim was interested in reaching a very specific audience comprising "the average Bengali reader, boys of senior classes of Bengali schools, and the modern

⁷² Amiya P. Sen, Hindu Revivalism in Bengal. 83

⁷³ B.R. Vol II. 951 (my translation)

⁷⁴The outbreak of the American Civil War hampered the supply of cotton to the mills of Lancashire causing much hardship in India, since Indian cotton fed these mills.

⁷⁵ B.R. Vol II. 953

⁷⁶J.C. Bagal includes the following in the second volume of B.R. "Great Solar Eruption", "Multitudes of Stars", "Dust"; "Aerostation", "The Universe in motion", "Antiquity of Man", "Protoplasm", "Curiosities of Quantity and Measure", and "The Moon".

educated woman.”⁷⁷ These essays are straightforward expositions of scientific facts and Bankim mentions that these are based on the writings of “Huxley, Tyndall, Proctor, Lockyear, Lyall, and others” although none of the essays are direct translations of those authors.⁷⁸

So, as an educated Hindu who was able to reap the benefits of the newly emerging vernacular prose, the burgeoning print culture of periodicals, the stimulation of New Hinduism, and the growing prominence of the bhadralok class that reaped the benefits of western education, Bankim was eminently suited to become an intellectual leader of his age. Such men were not rare in the nineteenth century, yet few of Bankim’s contemporaries (except perhaps his junior contemporary the reformer Swami Vivekananda) continue to get as much attention in the present day as he. The reasons are many. As Tanika Sarkar so aptly puts it,

Bankim was, acknowledgedly, the real maker of the Bengali novel, of mature and serious Bengali prose, and the founder of literary journalism and literary criticism. His writings, therefore, may be taken to express, more decisively than those by others of his period, the processes by which intellectual opinion are made.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ B.R. Vol II 19

⁷⁸ B.R. Vol II 19

⁷⁹ Tanika Sarkar, ‘Bankimchandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda.’ Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 135

CHAPTER 2: BANKIM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BENGALI NOVEL

In this chapter I focus on how the development of the Bengali novel was influenced by Bankim. I begin by examining the points at which Bankim's methods depart from the methods of the European novel, especially the realist novel. In discussing why Bankim chose to adopt certain characteristics of the European novel and reject others, I briefly look at the European adventure novel, a genre that was highly popular in his time but that Bankim did not follow. I also present some background information about the rise of the historical novel in Europe and a survey of the historical writings that were produced by Bankim's contemporaries. I end the chapter with a few remarks about how Bengali, the language of choice for Bankim, helped him shape his ideas about the kind of nation he wanted to celebrate.

Literary historians generally accept that prose forms such as the novel and the essay are not indigenous to India and were introduced by way of English education. The question of borrowing is a delicate one. It involves examining how much is borrowed and how much is original and at what point the question of debt becomes irrelevant. In the context of the Indian novel several answers have been attempted. It has been said that while the form was borrowed, the contents were indigenous. Or that even in their early days Indian novels had remarkable similarities with indigenous Sanskrit classics and

were more than slavish imitations of their European predecessors.⁸⁰ (Namwar Singh believes that Bankim's Kapalkundala is influenced by the Sanskrit romance Kadambari. If so, then one can argue that even in its early stages the Indian novel leaned toward both an indigenous form and indigenous subject matter.) These issues are important because the question of borrowing is not limited to literature. It spills over to the arena of political and cultural self assertion and becomes linked with issues of resistance within the colonial context. If we accept that "the novel, the concept of history and the idea of the nation-state are all signs of the modern"⁸¹ then for Indian novelists such as Bankim the debt to the English colonizers becomes heavy indeed, given that post-Enlightenment modernity was assuredly a European transplant. So, it is all the more remarkable when we are able to find ways in which Bankim was able to carve out his own space and make his work undoubtedly original.

Having looked in the previous chapter at the major influences that shaped Bankim, we can now turn to a discussion of how Bankim adapted the features of the European novel to suit his own needs. I would like to begin this section with one of the leading literary theorists of the twentieth century, Georg Lukács (1885-1971).

In The Theory of the Novel Lukács claims that the novel is the product of a world from which god has disappeared. Lukács advanced his theory in the years between the two world wars and his sensibility was shaped by historical elements particular to this time period.⁸² He himself admits to having a pessimistic world view, yet his theories

⁸⁰ Namwar Singh points out the similarity between Bankim's Kapalkundala and Kadambari in his essay, "Reformulating the Questions." in Early Novels in India. ed. Meenakshi Mukherjee. 2

⁸¹ Meenakshi Mukherjee, Introduction Early Novels in India. xvii

⁸² The immediate motive for writing was supplied by the outbreak of the First World War and the effect which its acclamation by the social-democratic parties had upon the

occupy a central position in the history of literary criticism and are accepted by those who do not belong to his generation. However, once we apply them to the Indian context, significant differences between Lukács and Bankim begin to emerge, differences which go a long way to dispel the idea that the novel, in order to be successful, had to fit a specific mold. Bankim wrote his novels in a world fundamentally different from the one Lukács inhabited. While there are dark moments in his novels, I do not find in them the kind of pessimism that Lukács admits to.

The world of Bankim's works is not marked by the absence of God, or even by a temporary withdrawal. What may appear to be even a temporary absence of divinity is actually an illusion resulting from the short-sightedness of individuals. A good example of this is the reflective essay, "Amar Durgotsab," ("My Durga Festival"). (I mention this particular essay because of its close similarity with a very important and iconic scene in Bankim's best known novel Anandamath and because the very point under discussion here—the sense of the presence of a divine being even in the darkest moment—is clearly evident in it.) In "Amar Durgotsab", on a clear autumn night when the rest of his fellow men are celebrating the seventh day of the Durga Festival, the first person narrator, Kamalakanta, has an opium-induced vision of a darkening world where the statue of the goddess Durga, that takes on shades of the nation-mother sinks into the dark waters. But

European left. My own deeply personal attitude was one of vehement, global, and especially at the beginning, scarcely articulate rejection of the war and especially of enthusiasm for the war....The Central Powers would probably defeat Russia; this might lead to the downfall of Tsarism; I had no objection that. There was also some probability that the West would defeat Germany; if this led to the downfall of the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs, I was once again in favour. But then the question arose: who was to save us from Western civilization?"

Thus ... [the book] was written in a mood of permanent despair over the state of the world. It was not until 1917 that I found an answer to the problems which, until then, had seemed to me insoluble." Georg Lukács, The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature. trans. Anna Bostock, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971) 11-12

this disappearance is not final. The absence of the mother is an illusion and not the final truth. Kamalakanta's vision of her disappearance works to raise him to a higher level of consciousness. The essay ends with the opium addict who lives on the fringes of society, conjuring up a more optimistic scenario and making an impassioned plea to his fellow countrymen:

Come, brothers all! Let us dive into this dark stream of time. Come, let us lift the goddess with our twelve crore⁸³ arms and carry her home on our six crore heads. Come, what is there to fear in the dark? The stars that shine and hide in turns, they will show us the way—come! Come!...At most we will die; what good is there in the life of a motherless one? Come, let us lift the idol. ...⁸⁴

Thus hope continues even in the face of great despair. There is promise that the world of half-men like Kamalakanta can eventually be replaced by a world where such men can reclaim their humanity fully, and only in such a world can there be full freedom—both personal and political. And even in his stupor Kamalakanta has an inkling of what it would take for such a world to be brought into existence; instead of simply observing the rituals of the ceremony, the mother's children have to go through a deeply personal ritual of purification. As Kamalakanta puts it, the sacrificial animal at the altar of the goddess has to be replaced by petty vices such as envy which have to be destroyed by the sword of righteous deeds. The task is difficult but not impossible and it contains within it the assurance that the temporary disappearance of the nation-goddess is actually the promise of her permanent presence in the future. The mother removes herself from the sight of her children so they may rouse themselves to the right kind of action. This motif of present darkness and despair pointing to a promise of permanent divinely sanctioned glory is evident in several of the novels, the most well-known being Anandamath. But

⁸³ One crore is equivalent to 1,000,0000.

⁸⁴ B.R. Vol II 73 (my translation)

the particular novel I would like to choose as an example here is Mrinalini, both because it is not discussed as often as Anandamath and also because I feel it is a better example of the point I am trying to make.

The novel is about the defeat of the last independent Hindu king of Bengal by a small band of Muslim cavalrymen in the thirteenth century, an event which inaugurated a period of five hundred years of Muslim rule. When Bankim writes about the symbolic departure of the protecting goddess of Gaud (the capital of the Hindu kingdom), he situates this poignant moment within a larger context of history which points to an eventual end to Muslim sovereignty. So, while the novel's present—the thirteenth century, is dismal from a Hindu point of view, there is hope in the future through a prediction made by the hero's guru of a time when the “western merchant” will liberate India. Of course the guru mistakenly thinks the hero of the novel is that western merchant (because of the hero Hemchandra's residence in a land that lay to the west of his father's kingdom and because of his adoption of the disguise of a merchant during the sojourn), but Bankim's nineteenth-century readers were aware of the irony. They had witnessed the end of the Muslim period in Indian history, signified by the defeat of the last independent Muslim king of Bengal at the hands of Robert Clive, an officer of the East Indian Company man and therefore the right kind of “western merchant,” in 1757. The prediction is an important element of the novel, since it impels the hero to act and thus sets the plot in motion.

One can argue that the prophecy is purely fanciful, but I believe that a more productive reading is possible when we keep in mind the narrator's belief in an all-seeing divinity. Divinity has a carefully laid out plan which wise men like the guru can vaguely

comprehend. In addition, there is the unspoken reminder that nothing is permanent and even the longest occupations do end eventually. History in Bankim's novels is not an independent entity (as it is in Lukács's world view); rather it is divinely ordained with space for human choice. And because of this, it is so important that men and women behave righteously. The wisest of Bankim's heroes and heroines never consider the world as an amoral place devoid of divine oversight. They know that what will happen is already decided but because mankind cannot know the future, it acts in accordance with its own nature and the circumstances with which it is faced. Although I am fully aware of the pitfalls of identifying the viewpoint of the narrator or a character in a novel with that of the author, it is certainly tempting to want to read some of Bankim's own concerns in the voices we hear in his novels. Works such as Tanika Sarkar's which identify certain moods or patterns in specific phases of Bankim's literary career encourage me to take such a stance. For example, Sarkar sees a certain darkening of tone and consolidation of issues in Bankim's post-1882 works, both in the novels and in the non-fiction works where the voices of the novelist and the polemical author are remarkably similar. Based on such interpretations, it is possible to read Bankim's novels as vehicles for the transmission to his audience of the author's deeply held convictions. Particularly in the later novels these convictions are quite strident and I see in them a consolidation of the author's belief in a benevolent God who controls history. This God appears in Anandamath and Debi Chaudhurani as Vishnu and in the philosophical work Krishnacharitra as Krishna. So, contrary to Lukács's vision of the nineteenth century European novel being a product of the novelist's awareness of a universe devoid of

divinity, the novel in nineteenth century India, at least as Bankim created it, posited history within an all-encompassing divine plan.

This stance is not naïve but is born out of a deep conviction in a wise and ultimately benevolent God, the belief in whom was fundamental to Bankim's world view. This omnipotent and omniscient God, however, is not like the strict God of the Old Testament. He does not demand unquestioning submission and devotion to himself. In fact, as Vishnu it is he who holds the deity who represents the motherland on his lap, thus making space for the nation- mother to be worshipped too (a point I discuss in detail with reference to Anandamath, later in this chapter). So nationalism and religion become bound intimately and religion becomes the precondition for nationalism. Although the religion celebrated is not the kind of Hinduism that is defined only by rituals and practices, it is nonetheless quite recognizably Hinduism in its core sets of beliefs.⁸⁵ It is a combination of the śākta tradition that worshipped the active female principal of creation as śākṭi or strength and the Vaishnava tradition that emphasized devotion. Bankim celebrates the strength of Vishnu rather than his gentler aspects and casts him as the ideal to emulate. This reliance on Hinduism makes Bankim a fundamentally different kind of novelist from those that Lukács bases his theory.

Another significant difference that emerges if we apply commonly held European theories of the novel to Bankim's works has to do with the centrality of realism.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Bankim proposed a highly selective version of Hinduism that stressed moral perfection through discipline and celebrated Krishna--the perfect leader, householder, and warrior—as the perfect model.

⁸⁶ Although the reliance on realism is generally taken to be one of the most central differences between the romance and the novel, Many critics have pointed out that even though Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding explicitly subvert the idea and ethos of romance, they nonetheless draw upon many of its stock situations and conventions.... Moreover, "romance" continues to suffuse the period itself. The Restoration and the early eighteenth century experienced an enormous outpouring of fiction that, by Watt's and

Judged by a twenty-first century perspective, the plots of Bankim's novels might seem highly contrived. There are many coincidences, improbable bouts of good fortune, and instances of deus ex machina. Yet what makes the novels hold their own is what Sudipta Kaviraj calls "an entirely unlikely chain of events in an entirely likely world."⁸⁷ Kaviraj asserts that "The realism of a story is, after all, a rather complex affair. It is not just a matter of the plot, the sequence of events which constitute the movement of the story from one point of equilibrium to the next."⁸⁸ Kaviraj is particularly impressed by Bankim's power of keen observation which he makes central to his argument about Bankim's ability to be realistic. While this strength comes to the forefront most clearly in the social novels and satirical sketches in which Bankim has the chance to describe the familiar world of everyday life, we do see evidence of it in the historical novels as well. Even though the artificiality and constructedness of the plots are evident, the way the events are presented, characters are developed, and scenes are unfolded are entirely believable. Bankim is particularly adept at describing spaces, be they forests (Anandamath), ruins (Sitaram), or the interior of royal palaces (Rajsingha), realistically. Also he captures the relaxed, bantering give and take between women very well making them come to life. In addition, some of his most developed characters such as the Brahmin pundit Chandrasekhar in the eponymous novel or the Mughal princess Zebunnisa in Rajsingha show a considerable degree of psychological realism. The

most other standards, must surely be associated with the anti-individualist and idealizing tradition of romance. Finally, there is the corollary problem that even those ancient and medieval forms that define our notion of what 'romance' amounts to can be shown to reflect, critics have claimed, some major features of 'formal realism.'" Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel 1600—1740. 2-3.

⁸⁷ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India. (Oxford: Oxford UP: 1995) 8.

⁸⁸ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness. 8

bookish Chandrasekhar's realization that he can never be the ideal husband for his beautiful, passionate, and much younger wife, and Zebunnisa's realization that Mobarak, the socially inferior much younger man whose affections she toyed with, is the love of her life are conveyed with sympathy and delicacy and are highly convincing. The events that these characters encounter may test the limits of credibility from time to time, but the way they react to these events do not. They act in accordance with a logic that we find convincing and that we accept as real.

Another point to note is that early European novels distinguished themselves from romances in their reliance on realistic depictions of actual men and women in actual situations. A high number of such characters and situations were taken from common everyday life far removed from the idealized world of royals and aristocrats that was the staple of romances. Referring to the central characters of some of the first English novels, Ian Watt points out "Moll Flanders is a thief, Pamela a hypocrite, and Tom Jones a fornicator."⁸⁹ While in his social novels Bankim does deal with less-than-perfect men and women who have serious moral failings, in both his social as well as historical novels it is generally the more peripheral characters that are free to behave badly or be outright thieves and fornicators. His historical novels have idealized characters at the center because they were created to inspire readers whom he identified as a people in need of an inspiring history. Since his stories were also meant to serve as moral tales teaching codes of behavior, Bankim's ideal men and women are often more embodiments of abstract values than living, breathing individuals. Yet they are not uninflected two-dimensional characters of romances. They show flashes of individuality while embodying specific virtues or moral codes. One of the best examples of characters being both types and

⁸⁹ Ian Watt. The Rise of the Novel. 11

individuals are the two pivotal female characters of Anandamath, Shanti and Kalyani.

Their names mean “peace” and “benevolence,” respectively, and their symbolic nature

becomes evident in the final paragraph of the novel.

...[I]n the dim light before the massive four-armed image, in the solemnity of the Vishnu temple, two human forms filled with a great wisdom shone out, one clasping the hand of the other. Who had clasped hands there? Knowledge had come and taken hold of dedication. Duty had come and taken hold of action. Sacrifice had come and taken hold of honour. Kalyani had come and taken hold of Shanti.

...Sacrifice had come and departed with Honour.⁹⁰

While Shanti and Kalyani are young, beautiful, and virtuous like stereotypical romance heroines, they are also two of the novel’s most fully fleshed-out characters whose actions influence the plot in a significant manner. Shanti is a remarkable woman who challenges commonly held societal rules and insists on serving alongside her husband who is one of the leaders of the band of ascetic monks fighting to free the country from misrule. She is learned, skilled in the martial arts, quick thinking, fearless, and fiercely loyal to her husband and his cause. Her individuality is clearly evident in the many scenes where she is shown arguing, bantering, mocking, scolding, or flirting. Kalyani is less remarkable, but she too is an individual. Together these two women exhibit the highest ideals of Hindu womanhood and as such they are embodiments of abstractions, but they are not limited by this responsibility; they hold their own as individuals. And Shanti and Kalyani are not exceptions; there are many other characters like them. So I would like to argue that while following the convention of depicting real men and women, Bankim found ways of transcending the limits of realism. That he could create highly realistic portraits of actual men and women is evident in his social novels and in his skits and sketches; the

⁹⁰ Anandamath, trans. Julius J. Lipner. 330

preponderance of larger-than-life characters in his historical novels is a matter of conscious choice and not because of an artistic failure. Also, even these larger-than-life characters are complex and believable.

Another difference between Bankim's historical novels and the early realist novels of Europe is in his use of elements of romance. According to European literary tradition, some of the hallmarks of romance literature are lofty passions and improbable deeds by larger-than-life characters and the presence of supernatural elements. Romance transcends the ordinary while novels resolutely remain within the bounds of everyday life. In the chronology of literature the romance precedes the novel and is seen as a less sophisticated genre. Bankim's novels largely follow the European realist tradition yet do not shy away from incorporating supernatural or extra-logical elements into the framework. I propose that in Bankim these elements are neither gratuitous nor cheaply sensational; in addition to serving as plot devices they function as vehicles of the author's nationalist message. In an age when it was impossible to write an outright indictment of colonial administration, the use of extra-realist dimensions allowed him to create an artistic space where he could take an oppositional stance. I would like to discuss this point by analyzing the novel which I think contains the highest number of supernatural elements of all of Bankim's historical novels, Chandrasekhar.

An East India Company employee Lawrence Foster abducts a Hindu woman, Shoibolini. Foster is eventually apprehended, brought to justice, and made to testify to Shoibolini's physical purity in a public trial held before the nawab of Bengal. What is remarkable about the scene of Foster's trial is that he is made to confess after being hypnotized in public. According to the strictest standards of realism such selective

hypnotism, where a single individual is put under a spell in the presence of others who are unaffected, might be hard to defend. A Hindu sage, the guru of Shoibolini's husband, is able to put Foster in a trance simply by *looking at him* and he is able to cast his spell in the presence of a crowd that has gathered to witness the trial. Only Foster can hear the guru's questions and he answers in a clear voice that all who are present can hear, that he has not been Shoibolini's lover. What this scene does is pose the guru as the repository of centuries-old mystical/spiritual (ie. supernatural) tradition face to face with Foster, who represents a newer era of Cartesian empiricism and brute force. (Earlier in the novel, Bankim has much to say about the rapaciousness and hypermasculinity of the Company men of Foster's generation.) Although Foster succeeds at the beginning (in abducting Shoibolini, in managing to escape those that pursue him, and in keeping silent about his crime when he is caught), ultimately he has to bow to the greater power of the guru. Foster had resolved not to confess his guilt in public but the guru is able to drag his confession out of him. In this contest of power, the Englishman is no match for the Indian. This victory for the Indian is all the more meaningful because at the end of the novel the combined forces of the Hindu Pratap and the Muslim king Mir Qasim are defeated by the British troops and the battle strengthens Britain's hold on India. It is possible to read the scene of Foster's confession as one of a poignant reminder from the author that at that particular juncture in history India may have been a defeated nation but she would always have a store of ancient knowledge that the British could not access and that the loss of political sovereignty could not destroy. This was a view popular with nineteenth century Indian nationalists and was echoed in contemporary political and inspirational writings. Bankim is able to take it and give it a highly imaginative

treatment. He wanted to remind his readers that even when the country was laid low politically, she had much to be proud of in her spiritual heritage. And this message could safely be couched in the language of the supernatural.

This scene serves another purpose. It proves that the body of the Hindu woman is inviolable. Foster may have captured her but she is strong and resourceful enough to maintain her chastity. She stands for the inviolable core of India that the British cannot sully. The foreigner is drawn to the beauty (bounty) of the land and may even be its temporary master, but the “essence” of India will forever be out of his reach. And he will eventually be defeated. Read as such the scene becomes charged with nationalistic aspirations and becomes much more significant than what it initially appears to be.

Foster’s hypnotism is preceded by a similar scene where Shoibolini is put under a trance by her husband, Chandrasekhar, at the behest of his guru. All Chandrasekhar has to do to put Shoibolini under the guru’s spell is to make her drink water that has been blessed by the guru, Ramananda Swami. Shoibolini enters a trance-like state and does in private what Foster will later do in public—declare that she has not been violated by Foster. Her inquisition is long and detailed and it has an interesting twist. Through the blessed water that she has imbibed, Shoibolini acquires powers that enable her to foretell the future. She correctly predicts that the king’s soldiers are coming to fetch her and her husband to testify at Foster’s trial. Her predictions prove to be true and Chandrasekhar tells her that the new powers have been transmitted to her by his guru. Bankim titles this chapter “Yogabal na Psychic Force?” which translates as “The Power of Yoga or Psychic Force?” This is an extremely interesting choice of words. The title pits against each other two different kinds of supernatural powers belonging to two very different

traditions. After the scene with Foster it is clear that this is indeed the power of the ancient tradition of yoga, although those who are outsiders to the tradition may call it psychic force (a term that Bankim's western-educated nineteenth-century readers would be familiar with⁹¹). In this tension between old and new sciences we read the nineteenth-century Hindu nationalist's desire to assert the existence of an indigenous scientific tradition of yoga that predates by several centuries the new western import of psychic sciences.⁹²

Like Foster's hypnotism Shoibolini's recovery from a psychological breakdown that seemed to be incurable cannot be explained by logic or common sense. After a prolonged bout of madness brought about by her intense guilt for loving a man other than her husband, Shoibolini recovers suddenly. Of course her recovery may be attributable to the same yogic powers of the guru Ramananda Swami who oversaw Shoibolini's moral recovery from an errant to a dutiful wife. The same yogic powers come into play in the transformation of Chandrasekhar himself. By himself Chandrasekhar cannot do much and needs his guru's powers to guide his change from a man of contemplation to one of action. When he discovers that Shoibolini has been abducted by Foster, the scholarly Brahmin burns his beloved books and then leaves home. In In Another Country Priya Joshi interprets this poignant scene as Chandrasekhar's realization that the intellectual tradition he has inherited can do little to counter the new age of foreign

⁹¹ The theosophist Madame Blavatsky, a proponent of psychic force, was well known in India and had actually moved to India in 1879.

⁹² In Another Reason Gyan Prakash writes about how nationalistic self assertion played out in the scientific arena. He mentions the work of chemist and teacher Prafulla Chandra Roy's Hindu Chemistry (1902) and philosopher and polymath Brajendranath Seal's book The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus (1915) which discusses texts from 500 B.C.E to 500 A.D.

domination. Bankim lists the titles of the books that are burned individually to convey the magnitude of the act. The funeral pyre is symbolically a pyre for Chandrasekhar himself, for the man he used to be as much as it is for the tradition that he had considered infallible. The new Chandrasekhar that emerges is more a man of action who actively participates in the search for his wife and her eventual rescue. Yet what is significant is that he does not sever his ties with his guru, who embodies the tradition to which the burned books belonged. Perhaps the novel makes the point that it was no longer enough to have a theoretical knowledge of the past, one had to adapt that knowledge to everyday living. Also, it is not enough for a few remarkable men like the guru to be able to tap into this knowledge; average men like Chandrasekhar had to learn to use it in the material world. This was a view commonly held by many nineteenth century Indians and was famously espoused at the end of Anandamath.⁹³

The unpalatable reality of British occupation was made bearable by the belief that the cause of India's fallen state was not due to any inherent inferiority (as the British

⁹³ One of the first notable Indians to argue in favor of western science being taught to Indians is Raja Ram Mohan Ray. In his letter to the Governor-General Lord Amherst on December 11, 1823 the Raja wrote:

The establishment of a new Sanskrit school in Calcutta evinces the laudable desire of Government to improve the natives of India by education—a blessing for which they must ever be grateful.... When this seminary of learning was proposed, we understood that the government in England had ordered a considerable sum of money to be annually devoted to the instruction of its Indian subjects. We were filled with sanguine hopes that this sum would be laid out in employing European gentlemen of talents and education to instruct the natives of India in mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, and other useful sciences which the nations of Europe have carried to a degree of perfection that has raised them above the inhabitants of the other parts of the world....

We now find that the government are establishing a Sanskrit school, under Hindu pundits, to impart such knowledge as is already current in India. This seminary... can only be expected to load the minds of the youth with grammatical niceties and metaphysical distinctions of little or no practicable use to the possessors or to society. The pupils will there acquire what was known two thousand years ago, with the addition of vain and empty subtleties since produced by vain and speculative men, such as is already commonly taught in all parts of India. From The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781—1843. eds. Lynn Zastoupil and Martin Moir (Surrey: Curzon, 1999) 111.

believed), but its misplaced and excessive reliance on spirituality and an aversion to the material world. Once Indians regained their mastery over the material world, they would become more powerful than the British. Bankim delivers this message through the remarkable transformation of Chandrasekhar after his wife is abducted by Foster. Chandrasekhar's newly-acquired muscularity is emphasized in the latter part of the novel when under his guru's guidance he effortlessly lifts the fainted Shoibolini and carries her up a steep mountain. It is as if freed from the constraints of an excessively cerebral life, Chandrasekhar, initiated into the world of action, discovers his ability to take charge of his own life. In Chandrasekhar's transformation we see knowledge in action. Although Chandrasekhar himself does not acquire any special powers in the course of the novel, his change from a bookish Brahmin to a purposeful husband is miraculous, and there is the implicit hope that someday Chandrasekhar himself will be able to use the occult knowledge he had read about to effectively to solve practical problems. In this combination of the spiritual and the material lies the hope for a fallen nation. India had immense spiritual wealth; she simply had to find the right material instrument with which to apply it to a modern world. This is a powerful message and the use of extra-realist details to convey it is an effective artistic choice.

In Bankim's historical novels indigenous scientific knowledge is associated with the teacher/healer figures. These men are presented as having mastered the positive sciences which are out of reach for the common Indian. And to these common Indian what the sages are able to do is nothing short of miraculous. Through these teacher-healers, the dead are brought to life by the application of botanical remedies (Anandamath), future is able to be foretold (Mrinalini and Anandamath), and magnetized

weaponry is produced to aid the righteous (Sitaram). Although they are largely magical figures, Bankim's sages come right out of the pages of Orientalist works which identified the best of Hindu classical tradition with the forest-dwelling Brahmins. The subtext in the novels is clear: the Hindu might have to learn new sciences from the European but there was also much that the Hindu could learn from his own tradition. India was not a blank slate but rather a slate on which ancient writings had faded. So the occult and the mysterious events in the novels are not absurd or improbable; they only appear to be so because, both the ordinary men and women in the novels, like their nineteenth-century readers, have lost their connections with the indigenous sciences that made such events possible.

The absence of realism was a charge frequently laid at the door of the Indian literary tradition and was taken by Europeans to be the evidence of a lack of intellectual sophistication. Indians themselves accepted this idea and consequently there was a heavy insistence on realism in the Indian prose writings of the nineteenth century. But gifted artistes such as Bankim found a way to adopt the standards of realism and graft non-realist aspects on them to widen the boundaries of the novel. I contend that this inclusion of some of the standard elements of romance and supernatural elements is a sign of innovativeness and originality rather than of artistic failure. As is evident from his essays on scientific topics, Bankim was deeply interested in science and adept at writing with great clarity on scientific topics. That he had a logical bent of mind is clear from these essays as well his tracts on sociology, philosophy, literary criticism and others. So, his choice of using non-realist features in his otherwise realistic novels can be read as being conscious and deliberate.

Another difference between early European novelists and Bankim is that while European writers invented their plots rather than borrowing them from “mythology, history, legend or previous literature,”⁹⁴ Bankim borrowed plots from history for his historical novels. Although he used minor historical events more as instruments for character depiction and storytelling than for portraying actual historical facts, all of his historical novels refer to actual historical events and characters alongside fictional events and characters. His social novels have original plots but they were not intended to instill patriotism in the readers. The historical novels had to recreate the kind of positive history that Indians had been denied either because of their own indifference to historiography or because of misrepresentation by non-Hindu historians (points that I will cover later). Without the memory of the past there was no possibility of a future.⁹⁵ So Bankim chose to write about history not because there was a dearth of material but because he felt the urgency of recreating historical details to serve the cause of nationalism.

By the time Bankim started writing, the novel was a well-established genre in England and had appeared in forms as different as the third-person omniscient narrative, the first person narrative, the epistolary narrative, and the multiple narrative. Novels had been written about contemporary men and women, their romantic and social lives and financial pursuits; there had been novels of adventure, of caricature, and novels had been written about historical subjects. Samuel Richardson’s Pamela, generally acknowledged to be the first successful novel in English, and was published in 1740. Bankim’s

⁹⁴ Ian Watt. The Rise of the Novel. 14

⁹⁵ Bankim emphasizes the importance of history in several of his essays, notably “Bharat Kalanka,” and “Banglar Itihas.”

Rajmohan's Wife appeared in 1864, 124 years later.⁹⁶ So Bankim had at his disposal a wide array of genres and styles to choose from. He wrote social novels and historical novels, employed the tactic of multiple narrators following the example of Wilkie Collins's Women in White, and modeled one of his characters, Rajani, a blind girl whose story is narrated entirely in the first person, on Bulwar-Lytton's blind flower seller Nydia in The Last Days of Pompeii.

But what he did not write is as important as what he did write. One of the genres he did not engage in was adventure tales, which was wildly popular in England in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. There is no mention of his having read R.L. Stevenson, H. Rider Haggard, or other adventure novelists who were his contemporary. Of course, those English authors wrote for adolescent boys, while Bankim wrote for adults. Yet he shares one trait with them—that of writing about exemplary characters. British adventure tales promoted qualities such as pluck, dash, quick-wit, and a muscular Christianity that were deemed essential for empire builders. A belief in the inherent superiority of the white Christian male was instilled into young men and boys through this literature of ideology, and generations of readers grew up believing in the infallibility of the lessons they learned through reading these tales. Bankim too wrote about courageous men and their deeds on the battlefield. But his heroes did not have to find adventure in foreign lands like the protagonists of the British tales. His heroes were Indians, mostly Hindus, and the land where their stories unfolded was the land they were born in and were

⁹⁶ There have other claimants for the titles of the first novel and the first novelist in India. In “The Novel in Bangla: The first steps.” in Early Novels of India, Saroj Bandopadhyay mentions a few potential first novels and discusses the merits of one in particular, Alaler Gharer Dulal, published in 1858 (28). In the same anthology, M. Asaduddin mentions in his essay, “First Urdu Novel: Contesting Claims and Disclaimers,” that Qurratulain Hyder advances the case of Nashtar (1790?) as being “the first novel in any Indian language” (117).

familiar with. They had no need to subdue savage races to establish trade with them or bring them into the fold of mainstream western religion; instead, they had to fight to preserve their own way of life and independence. While the European authors wrote to promote colonial expansion, Bankim wrote to promote independence from colonial occupation. This is why he delved into history for the kernels of his historical novels while his European contemporaries looked outside of known history and to new and unknown lands for their stories. Also, the adventure tales were written for boys and had no or few significant female characters. Bankim's novels, on the other hand, are remarkable for the number of strong women they contain.

Besides creating inspiring characters, there is another similarity between the European adventure tales of the late nineteenth century and Bankim's historical novels. Both allowed an imaginative space for their readers to vicariously indulge in behavior that was not possible in real life. The European readers of adventure tales knew that the qualities that brought success to the enterprise of empire building were not necessarily conducive to a civil society which depended on conformity, tolerance, and structure. In fact, foreign lands were needed to accommodate what could not be safely accommodated in the domestic sphere, and reading about exciting deeds of daredevil young men was cathartic for the armchair-bound Victorian reader. Bankim's readers needed a different kind of release. Reading tales of courageous and noble men and women allowed them to imagine a grander life than what the reality of a being citizens of a defeated nation offered. They needed to develop qualities that they perceived themselves to be lacking, qualities that they would need to cultivate to be worthy of political independence. So, if the European reader needed to read to purge his darker and perhaps anti-social energy,

the Indian reader needed to generate some of that very energy that was necessary for character building.

This difference is reflected in the kind of “Other” that we see in these two kinds of writing. In the European adventure stories the other is often the non-European who is racially and culturally different from the white Christian male. The antagonist has to be civilized according to the hero’s code, or driven away or eliminated if he or she is incapable of being assimilated, leaving the territory wide open for European settlers. In Bankim’s novels, too, there is the all too recognizable other. It is whoever threatens Hindu culture, religion, or sovereignty, namely the Muslim and the British, and the chance of assimilation is little to none.

In Europe the realist novel preceded the historical novel but in India the two arose simultaneously. As the first successful Indian novelist, Bankim introduced both types into Indian literature. Rajmohan’s Wife, his first novel, was written in English and while it does not generally figure prominently in a discussion of his works, it is notable for its contemporary setting with ordinary men and women as heroes and heroines. Discussing the phenomenon of early Indian writers writing in English, Sisir Kumar Das argues that “modern Bengali literature first appeared in English” and “[w]ith the English language they [these early writers] tried to break with the earlier literary tradition.”⁹⁷ After the poor reception of Rajmohan’s Wife, Bankim found his voice in Durgeshnandini, his first novel with a historical backdrop. He wrote seven other novels set in the past. The European historical novel, after reaching its peak with Walter Scott in Britain, continued

¹⁹ Sisir Kumar Das. The Artist in Chains: The Life of Bankimchandra Chatterjee. 35-36.

A contemporary of Bankim, the Marathi novelist Naro Sadashiv Risbud, believed that Indian life was too ordinary to be the subject of the novel, but evidently Bankim did not think so. Priya Joshi. In Another Country. 146

to have a long tradition in the rest of the continent. In India the historical novel did not follow the same trajectory. In Bengal, romance and realism both had a strong and simultaneous presence for at least the first forty years after which point the realist novel, especially the social realist novel, became the dominant form.⁹⁸ Among Bankim's works, however, historical novels outnumber those that are set in contemporary times and focus on the lives of ordinary men and women.

While Bankim is known for the earliest and most sustained exposition of nationalistic sentiments in Bengali literature, the expression of such sentiments could be traced back as early as the history books of mid-nineteenth century. In his analysis of early historical writings in Bengali, Partha Chatterjee mentions how history writing in Bengali changed from the mode employed by Mrityunjay Vidyalankar (1762—1819) who explained the defeat of Hindu kings at the hands of Muslim invaders as a result of supernatural intervention, to the mode employed by the historians commissioned to write books for the newly established Calcutta University. Chatterjee quotes from one such book published in 1869 in which the defeat of the last independent king of Bengal, Siraj-ud-daula, by Robert Clive in 1757 is explained to be the result of betrayal by the king's trusted general Mir Jafar, thus treating history as being shaped by human rather than divine action. In yet another book published in 1878, the charge of spreading lies about Siraj having committed the atrocities known as the "black hole of Calcutta" is laid at the door of the cunning British as a cause of the king's defeat in addition to Mir Jafar's treachery.⁹⁹ As these examples show, in the second half of the century, human rather

⁹⁸ Khsetra Gupta. Banlga Upanyaser Itihas Vol I (Kolkata: Granthailay, 1980, 1994) 21

than divine agency was already beginning to be attributed to outcomes of historical events following the example of European historiography.

Although he was not the first Bengali author to turn to history as his material, Bankim was certainly the most successful. His predecessors Bhudev Mukherjee (1827-94) and Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya (1840-1932) had dealt with history, and I shall briefly discuss them here. In addition, I shall provide a brief survey of other elements that prepared the ground for the reception of Bankim's historical novels.

Surveying the history of the Bengali novel in his Bangla Upanyaser Itihas (The History of the Bengali Novel), Kshetra Gupta mentions the elements that influenced the first historical writings in Bengali fiction. Among these are tales of the Arabian Nights. The first edition of Richard Burton's annotated sixteen-volume translation of the tales was published in the North Indian city of Banaras in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰⁰ Versions of these tales and others like them were extant both in written and oral traditions of India. And Burton's was not the only available translation of the tales. There were several translations by Indian authors in addition to several original works clearly inspired by the tradition.¹⁰¹ Gupta suggests that for the Bengali author who was familiar with the Arabian tales and their imitations, there was yet another impetus to recreating the motifs of these stories in historical romances—the not-too distant memory of the royal harems which existed even after the coming of the British. (Bankim's novels too have lavish descriptions of women's quarters in royal palaces. The seminal events of

⁹⁹ Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism." Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity. eds. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (New Delhi: Sage, 1995) 111

¹⁰⁰ Kshetra Gupta Bangla Upanyaser Itihas 62

¹⁰¹ Gupta provides a list of some such titles in 62-63

Rajsingha among others, unfold inside harems.) Upon this fertile ground of indigenous material (the Arabian-Persian tradition had become indigenized by this time), there was the grafting of historical tales from the west, not only through the likes of Shakespeare and Scott, but also through lesser known authors to whom the Bengali public had access.

Gupta mentions one Hobart Caunter (1794-1851) whose Romance of History: India (1836) seems to have had significant influence on both Bhudev and Krishna Kamal.¹⁰² Bhudev not only translated Caunter's "The Traveler's Dream," but also borrowed the plot of his own Anguriya Binimay (The Exchange of Rings) from the latter's "The Marhatta Chief." Comparing the storyline of the two works, Gupta points out that Bhudev added certain quite significant elements to Caunter's tale to make his own creation pertinent to his own times. Among them are supernatural elements (which Gupta ties to the author's inherited belief in certain Hindu spiritual traditions¹⁰³), nationalist thoughts,¹⁰⁴ and sacrifice for a greater ideal.¹⁰⁵ One finds these elements in Bankim as well. Perhaps it is for this reason that Bankim scholars count Bhudev as being one of the influences on Bankim. Also, the intertwining of the elements of romance and patriotism begins to be visible in these early works. Quoting from the letter of Roshinara, the daughter of the Emperor Aurangzeb and the heroine of the novel, Gupta illustrates this point by highlighting the princess's awareness of her lover's destiny as a leader of his people and the rightness of his desire to remain politically independent. Roshinara writes to her lover the Maratha chieftain and the arch enemy of the Mughals, "Becoming a king

¹⁰² Khsetra Gupta. Bangla Upanyaser Itihas, 60

¹⁰³ Gupta, 128 (my translation)

¹⁰⁴ Gupta, 129

¹⁰⁵ Gupta, 128

is not your sole desire. So, just as I deny myself the pleasure of my beloved's company thinking of his future sorrow [ie. the sorrow that will result from Shivaji's choosing love over duty] so will you give up your wife because of your love for your own race."¹⁰⁶ The themes of love, sacrifice, and race are simultaneous presences here.

Krishna Kamal too used Caunter's material for his own creations, although he borrows from Caunter significantly less than Bhudev does. The last of his six picaresque-type string of stories, of which the only common element is the hero, share some similarities with Caunter's tale "The Pariah." Krishna Kamal's novel is called Durakankher Britha Bhraman (1858), which can be translated as The Fruitless Travels of the Inordinately Ambitious One, and is set in different locations within India. Here there is love but no overt nationalist sentiments. Yet, looking at the map of India on which Gupta charts the hero's adventures,¹⁰⁷ it is possible to argue that Krishna Kamal's work was an early if not entirely conscious example of conceiving of India as one entity. The hero's travels are limited to the familiar landscape of India as he moves among the princely courts of Mysore and Malwa, the desolate mountain fort of Travancore, the forest at the foot of the Vindhyas, the open waters of the Bay of Bengal, and finally the Jagannath temple of Orissa. However far the hero might venture, he stays within the geographical boundaries of the land of his birth. (This reminds us of Tapan Raychaudhuri's assertion that Krishna Kamal's contemporary Bhudev's idea of imagining India as a single entity was not inherited from the west but was homegrown,

¹⁰⁶ Gupta, 128

¹⁰⁷ Gupta, 136

since for Bhudev it is the 52 pithasthanas¹⁰⁸--places made sacred by the 52 parts of the dismembered body of the goddess so important to Hindus--that unite the country, rather than any externally imposed political boundary.) The idea of the motherland and the idea of personal sacrifice for the motherland are themes that can be read more clearly in Krishna Kamal's Bichitrabirya (1862), the hero of which is a character from the Mahabharata. While the work is unremarkable, Gupta traces in it nationalistic emotions which were new to contemporary Bengali literature. The hero is courageous and patriotic,¹⁰⁹ his patriotic anger stemming from the presence of the Persian merchants who are aided by Bengalis.¹¹⁰ In Bichitrabirya's sacrifice of life for independence Gupta reads the author's anger and frustration at the lack of support of the Bengali intelligentsia for the Sepoy Mutiny or the first war of independence of 1857. Gupta writes

[Krishna Kamal's] praise of the courage of the soldiers from Punjab-Uttar Pradesh-Bihar (as they are known now) and the strident criticism of the Bengali race [because of its lack of participation in the uprising] reminds us of the Sepoy Mutiny. In Durakankhya he wanted to strike at the base of Fort William [the bastion of British power in Calcutta]. In Bichitrabirya there are no Englishmen. But the fact that the foreign-born Persians have crossed the seas to establish themselves in Bengal and are strengthened by the sycophancy of the Bengali—points the finger at British occupation.¹¹¹

In Bengali poetry too, concerns for the country began to manifest around the same time. The charismatic Derozio (1809-1831)¹¹² in poems like "To My Native Land" and

¹⁰⁸ Tapan Raychaudhuri . Europe Reconsidered, xi

¹⁰⁹ Kshetra Gupta. Bangla Upanyaser Itihas, 142

¹¹⁰ Gupta, 143

¹¹¹ Gupta, 143 (my translation)

¹¹² Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was a professor at Presidency College and the hero of the Young Bengal set.

“The Harp of India,” lamented the fallen state of India but it was not until later that Bengali nationalism found a clearer voice. According to Amiya P. Sen

Prior to Bankim, the reference to one’s place of birth as the Mother occurs in at least two poems of Madhusudan Dutt—*Banga Bhumir Proti* (‘An Ode to the Land of Bengal) and *Birbahu Kavya* (‘The Saga of Birbahu’), published in 1862 and 1864, respectively. That such imageries became more political in their intensions is borne out by the sharp reactions of the Bengal Government to the poet Hemchandra Bandopadhyay’s poem *Bharat Sangit* (‘The Song of India,’ 1870).¹¹³

Palashir Yuddha (“The Battle of Plassey”) by Nabinchandra Sen (1847-1909) in 1875 was by far the most popular patriotic poem of the times. In a review of the work Bankim remarked that the true history of the battle had not been written¹¹⁴ (implying that the account written by the victorious British was less than true) and that if “loud wails, genuine heart-wrenching cries, fearless spirited honesty, anger befitting Durbasha [a sage famous for his anger] are the marks of love of one’s country—then such love is Nabin Babu’s and much of it illumines this poem.”¹¹⁵ Another noted poet of the nineteenth century was Rangalal Bandopadhyay whose 1858 verse tale, Padmini Upakhyan (The Saga of Padmini), was inspired by an account in Colonel James Tod’s Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan. While Padmini Upakhyan is no longer read widely, a short excerpt from it, “Swadhinata hinatay ke bachite chai” (“who wants to live a life without freedom”) is one of the better known poems of the era. Both in expressing the desire for freedom and borrowing from Tod’s Annals, Rangalal was a precursor of Bankim.

The characteristics present in fiction and poetry, were also present in plays produced in the second half of the century. Perhaps the most significant example of

¹¹³ Amiya P. Sen. Hindu Revivalism in Bengal, 100

¹¹⁴ Amitrasudan Bhattacharya. Bankimchandra Krita Sahitya Samalochana: Dushprapryo Rachana Samagra. (Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1975), 115

¹¹⁵ Amitrasudan Bhattacharya. Bankimchandra Krita Sahitya Samalochana, 129

political criticism through drama was Neel Darpan (The Indigo Mirror), a play published anonymously in 1857 by Bankim's close friend Dinabandhu Mitra. It is a play in which the excesses of indigo planters and the sufferings of enforced indigo cultivation in rural Bengal were detailed in a manner unprecedented in Bengali literature. The play caused a furor with charges being filed against the publisher, a British clergyman by the name of Reverend Long. One of the most striking features of the play is the attempted rape of a pregnant woman, Khetro, by an English planter. The horrors of the planter's action are exacerbated by his kicking Khetro, which causes her to miscarry. Although there is no overt linking of the once-fertile woman's loss of her fetus and the enforced barrenness of once-productive lands under indigo cultivation, it is tempting to read the former as a metaphor for the latter. After all, the name of this beautiful and fecund woman is Khetro which literally means "field" or "land."

During this age, Bengali theater began to come into its own. To cater to the demand for Bengali plays, the National Theater was founded in 1872, opening with a performance of Neel Darpan. The use of the theater as a political weapon was curbed by the passage of the Dramatic Performance Control Act of 1876 after the production of a farce about the Prince of Wales's visit to India and his meeting with the women of the household of a progressive Hindu gentleman.

Contemporary journalism was another medium to express political aspirations. Their self-consciously political stance of some papers was clearly evident in their titles; the National Paper (started in the 1860s) and the Hindu Patriot (started in 1853), were clearly distinct from publications such as the Englishman. In addition, there were events such as the 1876 founding of the Hindu Mela ("The Hindu Fair"), an annual gathering of

politically conscious Bengali gentlemen, which provided a forum for the expression of Hindu cultural pride. The Mela emphasized physical betterment through disciplined living and exercise. It also encouraged the preservation of indigenous culture and discouraged blind imitation of the west. Thus, when Bankim took up his pen to write about segments of Indian history, the public was ready for tales of heroism and hope.

But why did historical subjects prove to be so popular in the nineteenth century only to have their popularity peter out after a mere forty or so years? The most obvious reason is probably that when nineteenth-century readers needed models of bravery that were absent in their own times, they had little alternative but to turn to the past. Constrained by their political limitations as colonial subjects, these readers needed to look beyond the present for a canvas that could accommodate larger-than-life characters with their larger-than-life passions and actions. The past offered a suitable alternative because there the imagination could have a freer play than it could in tales of contemporary existence.

Since the historical novel was of European origin, it makes sense here to examine the background of the rise of the historical novel in Europe. Theorists of the historical novel generally hold that it came into being after the Napoleonic wars and that there is a connection between the birth of the historical novel and the rise of nationalism. Lukács argues that during the Napoleonic wars nationalist propaganda became an effective tool for recruiting soldiers. (Lukács is not the only person to draw a connection between war and nationalism; scholars of classical Greek history hold that the Greek tradition of recording history is intimately connected to foreign invasion of Greek city states.) The emphasis on individual responsibility for national development and national security led

to the development of national history for the masses. Also, during the Napoleonic wars ordinary people saw history in action for the first time. Previous wars were fought by smaller armies of professional soldiers or mercenaries and not by ordinary individuals as they were during the period that followed the French Revolution. (There is a parallel here between this commonly accepted view of European history and Bankim's view of Indian/Hindu history. Refuting the charge that the Hindu is easily defeated, Bankim writes that this is an unfair accusation because the ordinary Hindu never fought in wars; wars were fought by kings and their armies and not by the ordinary people of India.¹¹⁶) Thus during the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic wars, history became something concrete that touched the ordinary man and woman in tangible ways.¹¹⁷

In England where the historical novel had its finest and most prolific flowering in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the rise of the historical novel coincided with the Romantic period, when society changed in fundamental ways. In this context the historical novel can be seen as serving a two-fold purpose: it allowed a nostalgic look back at a grander and more beautiful past unsullied by encroaching industrialization, and it also facilitated the understanding of the disorienting changes of the present by finding their roots in the past. As we will see later, although Bankim's historical novels are romantic in their depiction of beauty and chivalry and with the recreation of an ideal past, emphasizing the pre-industrial nature of that past is not his goal. As is evident in many of his essays and novels that deal with the encounter with the British, Bankim was in general a proponent of western-style technological education for Indians. While he may have been a social conservative advocating the preservation of a

¹¹⁶ "Why is India Unfree?" B.R. Vol II 209.

¹¹⁷ Georg Lukács, The Historical Novel

Hindu way of life in the domestic sphere, he realized the necessity of westernization in public life and welcomed it. The past that Bankim's historical novels want to recreate is one of Hindu glory, the memory of which was sorely needed under the foreign yoke of the present. As for the second point, understanding the present by analyzing the past, this is something Bankim does consciously. He analyzes the common charges leveled against the Indian, especially the Hindu, that the Hindu has no sense of history, that he is not as courageous on the battlefield as his enemies, and that his religion encourages him to be a thinker and not a doer. In his essays and novels dealing with history, he analyzes these accusations, accepting some of them and refuting others, and finding solutions to the problems of the present by finding their causes in the past. Also, the past is really an image of what the author wishes the future to be; once the nation is independent it is possible to have a future that is different from the present only if the mistakes of the past are not repeated. Thus Bankim's tales of the past serve a cautionary purpose.

According to historian Herbert Butterfield, historical novelists have two ways to make use of history, either by fitting isolated historical material into their fiction or by selecting particular historical events around which they weave their fiction.¹¹⁸ Bankim uses both methods. He writes about isolated events and characters and fashions a story out of them, and Anandamath is a good example. He constructs the plot of Anandamath from the records of skirmishes between roving bands of dispossessed peasants and the Bengal nawab's soldiers during the famine-stricken years of the 1770s and the sannyasi rebellion of the same period. His characters are all invented; he does mention names of specific historical persons, but they are not important players in the drama and he can invent details about them that suit his purpose. He also uses the second method that

¹¹⁸ Herbert Butterfield. The Historical Novel. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1924) 31

Butterfield writes about, choosing specific historical events and personalities around which he weaves his story. Rajsingha is of this kind and it is about the battle between Rajsingha and Aurangzeb, a specific historical event in which two historical figures participated. Of course Bankim does use fictional elements in depicting details about the battle and the persons involved in it, thus letting fiction mingle with history.

But without such intermingling of fact and imagination, historical novels are not possible. Butterfield's assertion assigns an important place to imagination in a historical novel.¹¹⁹ Since a historical novel has to have elements of history and fiction, a historical novel which does not follow the bones of history faithfully can be seen as going beyond history rather than as failing to be historically accurate. Aristotle recognized this distinction when he declared poetry, because it relies on imagination, to be a fitter medium than history for higher truths. Poetry can portray the ideal—what should or could be—while history was limited to dealing with the actual—what is or was. Bankim wrote to entertain as well as to inspire, and it is by these standards that we should judge the success or failure of his novels. Looking for historical accuracy would be a fruitless exercise since the author himself refused to categorize any of his novels except Rajsingha as historical and, as I show in chapter 5, it is possible to debate the merit of even this claim.

I would like to end this chapter with a discussion of Bankim's language since the language in which he chose to write, was as important as his choice of subjects. Patrick Parrinder contends in Nation and Novel, that "The idea of national literature is

¹¹⁹ "When history tells us that Napoleon did a certain thing, it is the work of each of us, in trying to bring history home to ourselves, to amplify in our imagination what the history book gives us, and to *see* Napoleon doing the action." Herbert Butterfield. The Historical Novel. 23

inseparable from the phenomena of national languages;”¹²⁰ this statement holds true in Bankim’s case. In choosing to give voice (especially in the historical novels) to the many ways in which a fledgling nationalism was struggling to assert itself (in the search for role models, codes of ideal behavior, a history not of defeat but of victory) and in choosing to do so in a language that was helping forge this sense of national identity, Bankim is a textbook example of Parrinder’s argument. Even works where he uses the more colloquial style could invoke a sense of unity in his readers because it was the language that they spoke in their everyday lives. If the formal language of the historical novels was an apt vehicle for grand dreams, the informal language was an equally apt vehicle for the quotidian experience of the Bengali. Although Bankim privileges certain registers of language (literary, formal, aristocratic), both in narration and dialogue, over others (colloquial, informal, popular), his novels, nonetheless, reflect how different groups were bound by the shared experience of inhabiting the same geographical space, participating in a common set of events and experiences, and sharing the same cultural and religious codes. So although the aristocratic heroes and heroines of the historical novels spoke in a Bengali that was different from the language used by their subordinates, these two groups had no difficulty understanding and communicating with each other. Even the groups that stood apart because of their different culture and religion, reinforced the similarity and unity of the ones that shared culture and religion by acting as a foil. The best examples of this are the British characters, who mangle the language the most often. The British mark themselves as outsiders by their unwillingness and inability to master the vernacular, which is symptomatic of their failure to understand

¹²⁰ Patrick Parrinder, Nation and the Novel. (Oxford: OUP, 2006) 15

the land and the people they rule. This in turn makes one question their right to rule. It is in Bengali that the hopes of freedom of Bengalis/Indians were articulated, and through Bankim and others that followed him, Bengali gradually became capable of voicing the concerns and demands of a people who were becoming increasingly conscious of their status as colonial subjects. While political engagement was still largely an area of interest to the English-speaking elite, it was no longer limited to them.

Initially, Bankim's language disappointed purists who faulted it on the ground of grammatical anomalies but fortunately this criticism did not deter him from writing. He wrote with equal adeptness in both formal and informal styles. In the novels, especially the historical ones, he relied heavily on formal style; and in the social novels, the comic/satiric pieces, as well as dialogue spoken by women and people from the lower social strata, he showed his virtuosity with the spoken informal style. Writing for and editing newspapers (he edited Bangadarshan and Prachar) helped him hone the journalistic skills needed for polemical writing. In short, in the three decades that cover his voluminous output, Bankim was able to establish Bengali prose on a firm footing. I would like to quote from Sudipta Kaviraj on the linguistic versatility of Bankim

As a serious artist, Bankimchandra created an artistic world of great internal variety. He was extremely sensitive to possibilities inside language, and controlled its resources with an admirably deliberate precision. He could create inflections at the touch of a word—a skill which may have come down to him from the classical Sanskrit tradition he admired, in which apart from a fictive imagination, a highly refined linguistic sensibility was considered a prerequisite for literary creation.¹²¹

Kaviraj credits Bankim with having an ear that could detect the idiomatic differences not only between the educated and the uneducated but also between men and women, and between the two worlds of the home and the office. In fact, Kaviraj seems to imply that

¹²¹ Sudipta Kaviraj. The Unhappy Consciousness. 2

the ability of Bengali prose to move among different registers of language that Bankim perfected, gradually disappeared as Bengali prose became more genteel and stilted in the hands of his successors, the most important of whom is Rabindranath Tagore.¹²²

Whether we agree with Kaviraj on this point or not, we can agree that Bankim did indeed transform Bengali prose in a significant manner. He opened the language to possibilities that had not existed before or had not been explored fully, and helped it attain a wholeness that had been lacking. In this new and confident Bengali the grandest of national dreams could be expressed and transmitted to a wider audience. And it was this new prose that made possible the first successful Bengali novel as well as the first successful historical romance, Durgeshnandini.

¹²² Sudipta Kaviraj. The Unhappy Consciousness. 8, 69

CHAPTER 3: SCOTT AND THE “SCOTT OF BENGAL”: A STUDY OF SCOTT’S IVANHOE AND BANKIM’S DURGESHNANDINI

In this chapter I shall study two novels, one by Bankim, Durgeshnandini, and the other by Scott, Ivanhoe. In the following chapter I shall present a similar study of two other novels, Anandamath by Bankim and Old Mortality by Scott, to find out how the “Scott of Bengal” and the author he was compared to, dealt with history in their unique ways. The differences that emerge will help me to lay the foundation for my later chapters in which I will isolate and study two strands—religion and gender—in the historical novels of Bankim.

Scott is admittedly at the head of the European tradition of historical novel writing. In the foreword to the Edinburgh edition of Old Mortality, editor David Daiches writes “Balzac in France, Manzoni in Italy, Gogol and Tolstoy in Russia, were among the many writers of fiction influenced by the man Stendhal called ‘notre père Walter Scott.’” Even a casual skimming of a list of Scott publications¹²³ shows the continued interest in Scott. Although his detractors have been many (Mark Twain being one of the most notable), the fact that Scott continues to be a major figure in European literature cannot be doubted. (In the publication list I mention above, the various literatures in which different aspects of Scott are discussed include German, Austrian, French, and Spain.) Bankim too was an ardent admirer. By all accounts he was not enamored of the tradition

¹²³ <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/publications/criticism/2006.html> is one of the lists one can skim for a glimpse at the Scott-related publications in the UK alone in 2006. In 2007 there were some thirty chapters and articles on Scott, according to this website.

of the realist and the naturalist novel; neither did he admire the novels of sensibility such as Jane Austen's. He preferred to write grand tales of passion and chivalry à la Scott, with the purpose of teaching his countrymen to be patriotic. So Scott's novels were perfect models to follow. It is interesting to note here that although the title the "Scott of Bengal," by which Bankim's contemporaries described him, is generally accepted as a complimentary one, at least one reader of Bankim, the redoubtable patriot Sri Aurobindo, did not seem to think of it as being an honor.

Bankim, after a rather silly fashion of speaking now greatly in vogue, has been pointed at by some as the Scott of Bengal. It is a marvelous thing that the people who misuse this phrase as an encomium, cannot understand that it conveys an insult. They would have us imagine that one of the most perfect and original of novelists is a mere replica of a faulty and incomplete Scot author! Scott had many marvelous and some unique gifts, but his defects are at least as striking. His style is never quite sure; indeed, except in his inspired moments, he has no style: his Scotch wit of humour is always militating against his power of vivid incident; his characters, and chiefly those in whom he should interest us most, are usually very manifest puppets; and they have this shortcoming, that they have no soul: they may be splendid or striking or bold creations, but they live from outside and not from within. Scott could paint outlines, but he could not fill them in. Here Bankim excels; speech and action with him are so closely interpenetrated and suffused with a deeper existence that his characters give us the sense of their being real men and women.¹²⁴

Sri Aurobindo first published his essays on Bankim serially in 1894 soon after his return from England, and he later mentioned his wish to modify some of his remarks. Since he specifically mentioned that he would like to modify his comments on Indian art (which he characterized as "raw" in the original version), one is not sure whether he would have changed his opinion of Scott's artistic stature. Sri Aurobindo's comments were certainly

¹²⁴ Sri Aurobindo, Bankim Chandra Chatterji. (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2000) 4

colored by his deeply militant patriotism (he was tried for his alleged involvement in the famous “Manicktala bomb case”¹²⁵ which ended in his acquittal).

It seems that the comparison with Scott sprung up right after the publication of Durgeshnandini which, among all of Bankim’s novels, has the greatest resemblance to a Scott novel.¹²⁶ None of Bankim’s other historical novels has such obvious similarity with a European work. Some scholars agree that Bankim was influenced by his contemporary Bhudev Mukherjee, who also wrote historical novels, but the similarities between Durgeshnandini and Scott’s novel are more obvious. One would be hard pressed to find any direct resemblance between the novels written by Bankim after Durgeshnandini with any other work, Indian or European. However, the epithet “Scott of Bengal” seems to have stuck. As far as Durgeshnandini is concerned, Sri Aurobindo’s comments notwithstanding, Bankim scholars generally agree that an argument can be made to the effect that much in the novel appears to be influenced by Scott. But it is also possible to agree that it is not a slavish imitation but an original work, and that when the Bengali novel was in its infancy, borrowing from the already established European tradition was not altogether a bad idea. Historian and Bankim’s junior contemporary Rameshchandra Datta provides one of the best assessments of the foreign influences of Durgeshnandini.

Captious critics raised a clamour of censure. *Durgesnandinī* was filled with foreign sentiments, Bankimbabu had incorporated foreign ideas, Bankimbabu was crazy. But this censure was drowned in a country-wide acclaim

¹²⁵ In 1908 two Englishwomen were killed by Bengali terrorists who wanted to kill the Magistrate D.H. Kingsford. The investigation implicated the members of the Anushilan Samiti with which Aurobindo was allegedly involved.

¹²⁶ Sarowar Jahan mentions that it was the newspaper Hindu Patriot which in its 24th April and May 1st issues first noted the similarity between Durgeshnandini and Ivanhoe. Bankim-Upanyase Muslim Prasanga O Charitra. (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1984)1

that rose to the skies. There is evidence enough of foreign influence in *Durgeśnandinī*. The enterprise and high-spiritedness of Osman and Jagatsi□ha, the intense feeling in Ayesha’s heart, Vimalā’s encounter with the enemy and revenge are novel situations in Bengali literature. Having received a foreign education and profited from many branches of learning, Bankimchandra has nurtured native literature. This is the spirit of the modern age and it is this spirit that has found full expression in Bankimchandra. Is this censurable?

The English poets of Shakespeare’s age had culled treasures from the storehouse of Italian literature to add luster to English literature. In Dryden’s period, the poets of England had enriched their native literature with the gems of French literature. In ancient times, the Roman poet Virgil had drawn upon the resources of Greek literature to enhance his own. Modern-day Bengalis are profiting from the treasures of English literature and imbibing efficiency, enthusiasm, and patriotic fervor to some extent. It will indeed be beneficial for the country if these qualities are acquired more extensively.¹²⁷ (Essays in Perspective 76)

Of course Scott and Bankim inhabited different worlds, and my interest is in analyzing these differences on a limited basis. I say limited, because a full comparison of the authors encompassing all or most of their novels would be much larger than what I can productively cover in a chapter or two. That is why I have chosen to look at two novels from each author, novels that share certain basic plot similarities. As such the comparison between Scott and Bankim will surely be less than comprehensive but more focused. This focused study will also help me closely examine how Bankim adapted the European form to the specific needs of an Indian audience.

This discussion will be preceded by a brief look at some salient biographical details of the authors which influenced their literary choices in significant ways.

Although both Walter Scott (1717-1832) and Bankim (1838—1894) are literary icons, much more is known about Scott than Bankim. Scott was able to trace his lineage back to several generations: Scott’s biographer John Sutherland recounts half humorously how in reading the unfinished autobiography of Scott, “the reader is dragged headlong

¹²⁷ Rameshchandra Datta, “Bankimchandra and Modern Bengal.” Essays in Perspective. 76

through the thickets of homonymic ancestors.”¹²⁸ Characters such as the ardent Jacobite and Scott’s father’s grandfather Walter Scott also known as Beardie (on account of the beard that he refused to shave until the restoration of Stuart rule) and the “freebooting” chieftain Auld Wat”¹²⁹ seemed to step out of Scott’s own novels. Quite possibly these ancestors account for at least a part of Scott’s fascination with colorful Scottish characters. Some have interpreted Scott’s modeling his residence Abbotsford on Scottish castles and his joking reference to himself as the “laird of Abbotsford,” as proof of his desire to immerse himself in a culture that was far removed from his tame and respectable existence as a lawyer, a desire reflected in his choice of history as the subject of his novels. His collection of relics of Scottish history (Sutherland mentions Robert Bruce’s skull and Rob Roy’s long gun) is further testimony to his deep interest in the past. He was a lawyer’s son and his grandfather was a university professor and a sheep farmer—a connection which, according to Sutherland, Scott was not very proud of. He had four children, two sons and two daughters. The sons were rather unremarkable and died childless; one of his daughters never married and the other married Scott’s most famous biographer, John Lockhart.¹³⁰ Apart from his astounding literary output (Scott wrote some 27 novels, numerous short stories, a voluminous biography of Napoleon, several long and short poems, edited 18 volumes of Dryden’s poetry and drama, 19 volumes of Swift, and edited a newspaper), the most notable feature of his life was his decision to

¹²⁸ John Sutherland, *the Life of Walter Scott: A Critical Biography*. (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995) 1

¹²⁹ Sutherland 2

¹³⁰ Sutherland situates his critical biography of Scott as somewhat of a counterpoint to Lockhart’s rather uncritical one.

singlehandedly pay off the debt incurred by his printing press investments,¹³¹ a debt he could have gotten rid of by declaring bankruptcy.¹³² Scott was made a baronet in 1820 and the bestowal of this royal favor firmly established him as a member of the aristocracy that he portrayed in his novels, thus securing his link with a past he so admired.

As a child Scott was somewhat of an invalid who spent time away from his family home in Edinburgh on his grandparents' farm at Sandy Knowe, a sheep farm where he had the chance to come in contact with the rich oral tradition celebrating the history of Scotland—a fact that undoubtedly influenced his literary choices. According to Sutherland,

As an author Scott inhabited the border between oral and literary narrative. His novels characteristically define themselves as things told verbally by an old to a younger person, who writes them down ('Tales of My Landlord', for example). Scott was fixated on oral tale-tellers, whether bard, minstrel, grandfather, balladeer, Wandering Willie, or merely some garrulous Edinburgh burger. Scott's powers of memory and orality are plausibly linked. He saw himself as both an aural—oral and a literary artist. And in the former character, memory was a main element of his art. The minstrel (as in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*) has his poem not as a text, or prompt copy, but in his head. He learns through hearing, and performs from memory—and is free to improve what he remembers, or to fill in where memory fails. Scott's seed-time at Sandy Knowe confirmed this sense, which he later cultivated, of being a novelist of the nineteenth century drawing on the creative resources of a balladeer of the seventeenth.¹³³

Scott inherited his love of reading from his mother and is reputed to have been a child prodigy on account of his photographic memory. He had a complex relationship with his authoritarian father who was Calvinistic in his beliefs and Scott scholars see a reflection

¹³¹ According to Sutherland, the man who was Scott's associate in the venture, John Ballantyne, was a "crook". Scott's association with him probably sprung out of their Masonic connection (86) besides old friendship.

¹³² Sutherland calls the decision to not declare bankruptcy Scott's single most heroic act. By trying to pay off the debt Scott did in life what his heroes did in the novels—accept responsibility and act bravely.

¹³³ Sutherland 17

of this less-than-ideal father-son dynamics in many of the father figures of his works. Many of Scott's siblings died at birth and Scott himself was afflicted with various bouts of illness, the result of one of which was that his right leg was crippled by a childhood fever. Some believe that the desire to overcome this weakness spurred Scott to become interested in manly pursuits such as riding, participating in group scuffles in his school days and signing up for a volunteer platoon of guards. Perhaps his fascination with tales of adventure and heroism could also be attributed to his desire to transcend in imagination what was limited to him in reality because of his physical disability.

Scott attended the High School in 1779 in the second form where the curriculum was heavy on Latin classics with some Greek, and mathematics. In addition, he was probably also tutored privately (as was common) in "French, German, geography, drawing, mathematics, science of fortification [probably some degree of engineering], and music."¹³⁴ This was followed by his enrollment at Edinburgh University as a student of Humanities. Although he graduated, he was not a particularly serious student and later expressed regret for missed opportunities. What probably influenced him more deeply than structured academics is what he had access to outside of school. Sutherland mentions Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, Richardson, Smollett, Fielding, MacKenzie and other novelists.¹³⁵ Later favorites included "Burns, Southey, Wordsworth, Byron, ...Crabbe."¹³⁶ In 1786 he became his father's apprentice and thus entered the field of law. Scott reentered the university and spent 1789—92 studying under teachers such as Dugald Stewart and David Hume who influenced the formation of

¹³⁴ Sutherland 22

¹³⁵ Sutherland 24

¹³⁶ Sutherland 35

Scott's rationalistic bend of mind and deep belief in progress¹³⁷—an important point to remember, especially because the overwhelming impression of Scott we often tend to have is that of a romantic interested in a pre-industrial past.¹³⁸ Along with his membership in the Speculative Society that discussed current topics and which exposed Scott to European affairs, the exposure to German Romanticism was another formative influence on him during this period.¹³⁹ Upon completing his university education, Scott embarked on a walking tour of Scotland, which eventually inspired the settings of many of his novels. His actual experience of the Scottish landscape, along with his formal education of Scottish philosophy and his antiquarian tendency of collecting relics, formed the persona of the quintessential historical novelist he later became.

The first notable publication of Scott was a collection of ballads which was actually a collaborative work, although it was not acknowledged as such. It was the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, completed in five years in 1802, which thrust Scott into literary limelight. His first original work was the verse ballad The Lay of the Last Minstrel in 1805 which some believe to have been influenced by unpublished versions of Coleridge's Christabel. The popularity of the Lay was unprecedented in the "entire history of English poetry."¹⁴⁰ Among his other noted poems were Marmion in 1808 and Lady of the Lake in 1810. The period of novel writing began with the anonymous

¹³⁷ Sutherland 41

¹³⁸ He was a lifelong Tory and was always in favor of landlordism which he believed was capable of maintaining the level of order necessary for the gradual progress society to mercantilism.

¹³⁹ Some of Scott's earliest works were direct translations or imitations of German literature. His translation of Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen cast shadows on novels "as far away as Ivanhoe and Anne of Geirstein" (Sutherland 70).

¹⁴⁰ EdgarJohnson qtd. in Sutherland 105

publication of Waverly in 1814 which inaugurated a new phase in the history of novel. Guy Mannering, the second novel in the Waverley series, appeared in 1815, followed by The Antiquary and the first installment of The Tales of My Landlord series in 1816, a four-volume publication which contained Old Mortality. With these publications Scott was firmly established as the most important historical novelist of English literature. He received several honors, among which was the poet-laureateship of Scotland which he declined.

Although he declined poet-laureateship of Scotland, there were other honors that came his way which he accepted. Besides becoming a baron, [i]n May 1820 he was offered honorary degrees by both Oxford and Cambridge ... In November 1820, he was elected President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh—an institution devoted to the furtherance of science.... The ‘practical’ Scott had a keen interest in technology, and in 1823 he was put on the board of a new company set up to extract gas from oil—a process for which he became an energetic evangelist.¹⁴¹

Apart from his wife Charlotte Carpenter whom he married in 1797, there were at least two other women in Scott’s life. He had an early association with a “Jessie” about whom not much is known and the other was Williamina Belsches who married a man socially superior to Scott. While his affair with Jessie most likely was a passing fling, the beautiful Williamina was somebody he loved deeply and is thought to have immortalized in the figure of the Lady Green Mantle of Redgauntlet. Scott scholars have found echoes of his frustrated love for Williamina in numerous other novels as well. In contrast, his association with his wife is believed to have been of a tamer, less passionate nature.

Although he once mentioned that he wanted to write as a hobby and not to earn money, he ended up having to rely on his pen to discharge his debts, often dashing off novels in quick succession. As far as his personal finances are concerned, Scott was by

¹⁴¹ Sutherland, 240

turns comfortably well-off and in debt. Apart from earning royalties from the publication of his works, Scott had a fixed income from his appointment as Clerk of the Sessions and sheriff. However, his tendency to overspend, coupled with injudicious business ventures, landed him in debt. The most disastrous of his financial misadventures took place in 1826. He continued to write till the end of life, often laboring under the illusion that he was close to clearing his debts in total. He suffered from ill health towards the end of his life, was plagued by a series of strokes, and passed away in 1826. His death was commented on by English and Scottish newspaper with “signs of mourning usual on the demise of kings.”¹⁴²

The details of Bankim’s life are far sketchier than Scott’s and his biographies are generally laudatory in nature, unlike some of the critical biographies of Scott. Bankim was born in a Brahmin family and was the third of four sons of a Deputy Collector father. His brahmanical upbringing and deep attachment to household deities exerted a strong influence on him and can be linked to the later more ardently Hindu and conservative phase of his life after a period of relative secularism and critical distance from traditional religion. His familiarity with traditional Sanskritic learning is reflected in his novels (such as Debi Chaudhurani and Anandamath) where he outlines the superiority of a Hindu non-western training. Once quite western in his habits—he ate meat, drank wine, and used cutlery instead of his fingers in the traditional Indian way—he later became a vegetarian (although he remained “a moderate drinker all his life”).¹⁴³

His first formal education started at the age of six in an English school in Midnapur, where his father was stationed. At the age of eleven he returned to his

¹⁴² Lockhart qtd. in Sutherland 355

¹⁴³ Tapan Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered. 124

ancestral home of Kathalpara, where his education in Bengali and Sanskrit began. In 1849 he was admitted to Hooghly College, where he studied for seven years and won a prize for “general efficiency”¹⁴⁴ in his first year and an academic scholarship in 1853; the latter feat was repeated in 1854 and 1855. In 1856 he joined Presidency College to study law but discontinued his studies to enter government service as Deputy Collector and Deputy Magistrate and continued to work in this capacity until retirement in 1891. As a government employee he travelled quite extensively in the province of Bengal and many of the places he visited inspired the settings of his novels. Upon retirement he lived primarily in Calcutta where he continued to live the life of a man of letters until his death in 1894. According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, Bankim’s university education included “English, Greek, and Latin; Sanskrit, Bengali, and Hindi; history and geography, mathematics and natural philosophy.”¹⁴⁵ In addition, he read Shakespeare, Byron, Scott, Southey, Thompson, Campbell, Macaulay, Buckle, Comte, Dante, Goethe, Hugo, Balzac, among others and could read Latin, Arabic, and French.¹⁴⁶

Bankim’s first notable literary achievement was in 1853 when a poem by him won a poetry competition sponsored by one of the foremost newspapers of the day. In 1856 his first volume of poetry was published. Alongside poetry in Bengali, Bankim wrote essays quite regularly for English newspapers and his first novel was also written in English. Realizing the need for writing quality pieces in Bengali, Bankim started his

¹⁴⁴ The biographical details are borrowed from J.C.Bagal’s introduction to the first edition of the collected novels of Bankim.

¹⁴⁵ Raychaudhuri 125

¹⁴⁶ Raychaudhuri 125. I have intentionally kept my discussion of Bankim’s academic training brief in this chapter and have included only those details that I did not mention in chapter 1 while discussing Bankim’s intellectual milieu.

own newspaper, Bangadarshan in 1872. Although the publication history of the newspaper was spotty (with periodic suspension and irregular appearance), Bangadarshan was a major force in shaping contemporary literary taste. Many of Bankim's fourteen novels were serialized in it and several of his essays were also published here. In addition to himself and his brothers (who were also quite gifted), a coterie of other Bengali intellectuals contributed to his newspaper. Bankim editor J.C. Bagal mentions the wide array of topics covered in the newspaper: "science, philosophy, literature, Sanskrit literature, sociology, religion, history, archaeology, economics, music, linguists, and book review."¹⁴⁷

In addition to being a busy government employee (the nature of his work being quite different from Scott's sinecurial positions that did not require full-time attendance) and a prolific writer, Bankim also served in other capacities. Bagal mentions Bankim being engaged in publishing Bengali Selections in 1892 for the university entrance examination. He was also instrumental in making Bengali one of the examined languages at the university level and perhaps because of his efforts in this department as well as his literary standing, he was recruited by the Senate to publish the textbook. He was also a member of the Central Text Book Committee for English language and literature and on the subcommittee for Bengali in 1894.

His first successful novel was Durgeshnandini in 1865, which went through thirteen editions during Bankim's lifetime, was translated into various Indian languages and English, and was dramatized. The publication of this novel marked the beginning of a new era in Bengali literature. Kapal Kundala appeared in 1866 to enthusiastic reception and was greeted by R.W. Frazer in his Literary History of India as there being "nothing

¹⁴⁷ B.R. Vol I 18

comparable to the ‘Kopala Kundala’ in the history of Western fiction” outside of “Marriage de Loti.”¹⁴⁸ It was translated into German and various Indian languages, including Sanskrit, and also dramatized. The first social novel Bishabriksha (The Poison Tree) was about marital infidelity and also tackled two major social issues—widow remarriage and polygamy. As Rabindranath Tagore commented, while the historical romances were charming, they were far removed from the realities of everyday life. Bishabriksha, on the other hand was rooted in contemporary reality. This was also the novel that Bankim hinted at as stemming out of personal experiences, although he declined to specify the details. Another interesting detail is that the novel was translated into Swedish in 1894. Bankim wrote eleven more novels, five of which had contemporary settings and the remainder were historical.

Bankim was married twice. His first wife, who was five at the time of marriage, died when she was fifteen. Bankim is silent about her but scholars and critics have tried to read in Bankim’s comments on the sweetness and enduring quality of first attachments, his nostalgia for the first love of his life. Yet he remarried within a year of her death. His second wife, Rajlakshmi Devi, survived him; while not much is known about her, Bankim was evidently deeply attached to her and expressed his gratitude to her support which was crucial to making him who he was. Attempts have been made to trace the shadow of Rajlakshmi Devi in the many strong and loyal wives of errant husbands in Bankim’s novels. The couple had three daughters and no sons. It is said that Bankim often wondered whether the suicide of a neglected wife in one of his novels was responsible for the suicide of one of his daughters who was unhappily married.

¹⁴⁸ B.R. Vol 1 23

Although Bankim had a respectable job and steady income from his literary ventures, he was forced to live modestly on account of financial responsibilities aggravated by his spendthrift father and less than successful brothers. While his strong sense of family obligations made him bail out his less responsible family members, he often expressed his resentment at their selfishness and immaturity. All his life he was acutely conscious of the fact that his responsibilities made his government job, something he appears not to have been happy in, a necessity. Amiya P. Sen mentions

[I]n his biographical sketches of Sanjib Chandra [Bankim's brother] and his intimate friend, the playwright Deenabandhu Mitra, Bankim drove home the point how such men got far less from their official careers than they actually deserved. His own career seems to have been marred by unpleasant memories of unreasonable superiors but the biggest upset came in 1882 when the post of Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal to which Bankim had been recently promoted was suddenly abolished only to be given later to a European.¹⁴⁹

He was awarded the honorary titles of Rai Bahadur and C.I. E (Companion of the Indian Empire) for his distinguished service to the British government. While he expressed ambivalence and even downright embarrassment about these honors (especially the title of Rai Bahadur) in private, he never rejected them (which was not really an option to him as a government employee) publicly. He was a member of the British Indian Association, the Bengal Social Science Association, and lent his support to the Indian Association which, as M.K. Haldar puts it was “a direct precursor of the Indian National Congress,”¹⁵⁰ which eventually became the leading political organization of India. Although he was never involved in direct politics in the sense of giving speeches or organizing meetings, he did write about political issues as varied as the Ilbert Bill (“Bransonism”), socialism (“Bida’l”-- “The Cat”), the condition of farmers

¹⁴⁹ Amiya P. Sen, Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 93

¹⁵⁰ M.K. Haldar, Foundations of Nationalism 23

(“Bangadesher Krishak”--“The Farmers of Bengal”) and others. His support for the Vernacular Press Act of 1875 which was aimed at regulating the vernacular press was criticized by many. Yet some have tried to explain the support stemming out of Bankim’s distaste for certain kind of literature that he considered to be of low taste.¹⁵¹

Separated by a century, Scott and Bankim experienced two different phases of British politics. Scott lived and wrote in a time when England was emerging as a confident nation after its victory in the Napoleonic Wars, in which Scottish soldiers had performed brilliantly alongside their English counterparts. As a writer who was wildly popular in England and who was regarded as a national treasure of not only Scotland but also of England, Scott was instrumental in perpetuating a positive image of Scotland. Yet, while there is pride in his Scottish heritage, there is no urgency to prove its superiority. If there is nostalgia for a simpler and more innocent past which the Scottish scenarios of his novels represent, there is also the pragmatic acceptance of the inevitability and the desirability of material progress which, by its very nature, entails the loss of the kind of innocence that a pre-industrial past represents. In contrast Bankim’s texts are marked by a greater urgency. There is constant tension between the need to acknowledge the superiority of the west in its many facets and at the same time its negative aspects manifest in the day-to-day practices of the colonial bureaucracy. Faced with an erasure or distortion of Indian history, there is the need to remember, and if the need be--to recreate, a past that the Indian could be proud of and, at the same time, acknowledge the many defects of his present fallen state of being. Carlyle called Scott the amanuensis of history, someone who recorded history faithfully; one would of apply that epithet to Bankim. Scott could survey the past with an antiquarian’s eye but Bankim

¹⁵¹ M.K. Haldar, Foundations of Nationalism 23

could not. Bankim had to write a history that had not been written, a history that could rouse a despondent nation. However, although he could write an imaginary history or an alternate history, he was ultimately bound by the incontrovertible fact of British domination. The warrior monks could defeat the British in one pitched battle or the Hindu Pratap could join the Muslim Mir Qasim in fighting the redcoats in an act of religious and national solidarity, but the fact of eventual British victory remained unaltered. Moreover, Scott did not have to choose his material as carefully as Bankim had to. Scott's choices were guided by literary tastes and profit projections; Bankim had to be guided by more serious considerations. He had to skip writing about the Queen of Jhansi whose opposition to the British in the war of 1857 made her an iconic figure of colonial resistance. Having faced official disapproval for writing Anandamath the ending of which had to be changed for the book to remain publishable, Bankim had to be careful about his material.¹⁵²

Scott's Ivanhoe and Bankim's Durgeshnandini are both "firsts" in their own ways. Ivanhoe was Scott's first novel about English history (the preceding novels being on Scottish themes) and Durgeshnandini was Bankim's first novel in Bengali (his first novel was written in English) as well his first historical novel (Rajmohan's Wife, the first novel, was a contemporary social novel). But there are also major differences between the authors. I will now analyze these differences by first focusing on Ivanhoe and the circumstances of its creation followed by a similar discussion of Durgeshnandini.

Ivanhoe is about the conflict between the vanquished Saxons and their Norman rulers in twelfth-century England. Cedric, one of the few remaining independent Saxon

¹⁵² Priya Joshi mentions that Anandamath was translated blandly which saved it from outright proscription. In Another Country 49

thanes, holds out hope for the reunification of the splintered Saxon factions through the marriage between his royal ward Rowena and Athelstane, who is also of royal blood. His plans are foiled by the attraction that springs up between his son Wilfred and Rowena and results in the banishment of the young man, who goes to Palestine to fight under the banner of Richard the Lion Heart. After returning in disguise, Wilfred and Richard challenge the authority of Richard's brother Prince John and his band of corrupt Norman barons, and they are aided by Robin Hood and his men. An important subplot involves the Jew Isaac and his daughter Rebecca, who help Wilfred and are in turn helped by him. Although Rebecca falls in love with Wilfred, the novel ends with the marriage of Wilfred and Rowena. Prince John and the Norman barons who opposed Richard are defeated, and a new era begins under the rule of Richard.

Scott was already an established author when Ivanhoe was published in 1819. For the well-regarded author of the Scottish Waverley series, switching the setting from Scotland to England was nothing short of taking a calculated risk. So concerned was Scott about the reception of Ivanhoe that he was initially in favor of publishing the novel under a pseudonym to distance the author of the English novel—in case it was not received favorably—from the highly successful author of the Waverley series.¹⁵³ Scott himself offered novelty as being the reason for switching from writing about Scottish to English subjects so that he might retain the interest of his readers. Comparing his

¹⁵³ Of course as critics such as Andrew Lang have pointed out, Scott's English characters are, for the most part, like his Scottish characters—stock characters and are not really radically new creations.

DeBracy is but Marischal of Marischal Wells, in chain mail; Cedric is a Baron Bradwardine of the twelfth century; Ursula is one of his many weird women, such as Meg Merilies and Norna of the Fitful Head; Locksley is a frank, English Rob Roy; Wamba is a Davie Gallatley of the far-off feudal past. (qtd. in the Introduction of the Airmont Classics Series Ivanhoe 3)

Scottish novels to a spring that was in the danger of becoming muddied from long use by “men and horses, cattle, camels and dromedaries”¹⁵⁴ he presented his venturing into the new territory of English history as the search for an “untasted fountain.” He chose the twelfth century as the backdrop for his first historical novel because the period was associated with historical and mythical personage such as Richard the Lion Heart, Prince John, Robin Hood and his men—whose names the average reader was familiar with. In Ivanhoe Scott continued with the story-within-a-story device (the novel is purportedly written by a certain Laurence Templeton and dedicated to the erudite Dr Dryasdust) which was a continuation of the conceit begun in the Waverley novels. This device allowed Scott to explain the decisions he made in terms of plot and character without sounding like an apologist. He mentions several difficulties that he faced in writing an English story. While sections of Scotland in Scott’s own times still resembled what he depicted in the Waverley novels set in preceding centuries, the twelfth-century England depicted in Ivanhoe was far removed from the England of his day, and the latter presented a bigger challenge of representation to the author than writing about Scotland of antiquity. Beside the problem posed by the dearth of information about life in twelfth-century England compared to the wealth of material available on more recent Scottish history, there was the possibility that English readers would not easily accept the portrayal of a more barbaric state of society as being a legitimate part of their own past.¹⁵⁵ However, Scott, in the guise of Laurence Templeton, claims that this very

¹⁵⁴ Ivanhoe, Airmont Edition, 1964, “Introduction” 12

¹⁵⁵ This is how Scott paints the picture of English society at the time of Ivanhoe.
The condition of the English nation was at this time sufficiently miserable....The [many] causes of public distress and apprehension must be added, the multitude of outlaws, who, driven to despair by the oppression of the feudal nobility, and severe exercise of the forest laws, banded together in large gangs, and keeping possession of the forests and

unfamiliarity of material and scarcity of details, which might appear to be a hindrance at first glance, can actually be turned into strength. A remote and scarcely populated scenario also allows more artistic freedom, which makes it possible for the author to make his characters come alive in a way that his readers find credible. Since the details of what was or what actually happened are absent, the author fills in the gaps by inventing details about what might have been or could have happened. Similarly, Scott admits that he had to take liberties with the demeanor and sentiments of his character so that his readers would be able to relate to them. In making this argument Scott very cleverly defends himself against the possible charges of falsifying history.

It is true, that I neither can, nor do pretend, to the observation of complete accuracy even in matters of outward costume, much less in the more important points of language and manners. But the same motive which prevents my writing the dialogue of the piece in Anglo-Saxon or in Norman-French, and which prohibits my sending forth to the public this essay printed with the types of Caxton or Wynken de Worde, prevents my attempting to confine myself within the limits of the period in which my story is laid. It is necessary, for exciting interest of any kind, that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manner, as well as the language, of the age we live in.¹⁵⁶

His masterstroke is in admitting that he has fashioned for himself, “a minstrel coronet, partly out of the pearls of pure antiquity, and partly from ...Bristol stones and paste”¹⁵⁷ because of the necessity of better communicating with his readers. Telling a good tale appears to have been Scott’s chief motive in writing Ivanhoe, and the artistic choices he made were guided by this principle.

wastes, set at defiance the justice and magistracy of the country.Under the various burdens imposed by this unhappy state of affairs, the people of England suffered deeply for the present, and had yet more dreadful cause to fear for the future. To augment their misery, a contagious disorder of a dangerous nature spread through the land; and, rendered more virulent by the uncleanness, the indifferent food, and the wretched lodging of the lower classes, swept off many whose fate the survivors were tempted to envy, as exempting them from the evils which were to come. (79)

¹⁵⁶ Ivanhoe 32

¹⁵⁷ Ivanhoe 26

John Sutherland has interesting comments to make on the writing of Ivanhoe. Not finding quite believable Scott's claim that he chose to switch subjects so as not to bore his readers, Sutherland asserts that at least part of the reason why Scott chose to write about England was that he wanted to flatter the man he had marked as his new patron, the Prince Regent.

This interregnum state of things [depicted in Ivanhoe] is analogous to the current condition of England in 1819. It was titularly under the rule of a wholly disabled monarch, the mad George III [comparable with the unpopular Prince John in the novel], with a competent, masterful heir-presumptive [George IV] in the wings waiting to sweep in like the black knight and rescue his country from scheming politicians. *Ivanhoe* could hardly but be flattering and Scott's royal friend was, it seems, captivated by the novel when he read it.¹⁵⁸

Sutherland also sees the choice of an English subject as Scott's recognition of "Albion's growing cultural domination over its dependencies."¹⁵⁹ Whatever the real reasons behind the composition of the novel, and Ivanhoe is notable for many, not the least among them is that it is "responsible for injecting consciousness of race (and a sizeable dose of racism) into the popular British mind."¹⁶⁰ Indeed, behind the façade of a swashbuckling tale of romance and chivalry, Ivanhoe is a story of nation building and the role of race in this enterprise. It gives us a glimpse into the early moments of how an English identity arose out of a fusion of two cultures. According to Sutherland, the novel gave currency to the theory of polygenic origin later popularized by the anthropologist Robert Knox in the 1830s, which proposed the simultaneous evolution of different races (which accounted for differences in physiognomies) thus countering the theory of monogenic origin, which proposed that all humans evolved from one race. In his essay "The Aryan

¹⁵⁸ Sutherland 228

¹⁵⁹ Sutherland 227

¹⁶⁰ Sutherland 229

Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance,”¹⁶¹ Vasant Kaiwar mentions Knox’s comments on the Jew as being a “sterile hybrid,” with “no ear for music, no love for science or literature.”¹⁶² Thus in the nineteenth-century perspective, the Jew was the member of an inferior and darker race. A corollary to the polygenic theory was the belief in the inherent superiority of the fairer races to the darker ones. The villains in the novel, most of whom are Normans, are swarthier than the more admirable Saxons. Sutherland also believes that the history of English resistance against Normans in the twelfth-century was particularly relevant to Scott’s own times when there was yet another Norman threat to England, embodied by Napoleon. When we consider the novel in this light, we find the past being used to interpret the present, a feature we also find in Bankim’s novels.

That the fair-skinned Saxons are the on the side of the right is never in doubt. They are the true children of the soil while the Normans, even after four generations, are still outsiders with little desire to assimilate. The Saxons, who are the true Englishmen, are courageous, disciplined, loyal, quick-witted, and just. Even the outlaws represent these qualities which makes them fit for self-rule, more so than the aggressive, avaricious, hypocritical, and immoral Normans. The outsider status of the Normans is reinforced by their adherence to French customs and their disdain for all things Saxon. Any Norman who is willing to be different is a sympathetic character. The fact that in spite of being born a Norman, King Richard can associate with and appreciate his Saxon subjects, marks him as someone who is the right kind of ruler. There are several instances in the novel when this is highlighted. Friar Tuck and Richard strike up an

¹⁶¹ Vasant Kaiwar, “The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance: The Politics of Identity in an Age of Revolutions, Colonialism, and Nationalism.” *Antinomies of Modernity* 3.

¹⁶² Kaiwar 21

almost instantaneous friendship when they meet for the first time, even when the king is in disguise. The proud Cedric, who is no friend of Normans, chooses to propose a toast to Richard when challenged by Richard's traitorous brother Prince John to name a Norman who is worthy of admiration. And when he is disinherited by Cedric for daring to fall in love with Rowena, Wilfred (Ivanhoe) takes up service under Richard. All these events lead up to the logical climax of Richard heading a Saxon army to storm the castle of Torquilstone, which is a Norman stronghold, and where Rowena, Ivanhoe, and Rebecca along with many of Cedric's servants, are imprisoned. Before launching the attack, which is a decisive action against the Norman barons, Richard seals his identity by openly declaring that there is "no one...to whom England, and the life of every Englishman, can be dearer."¹⁶³ Naturally, in this tale of Saxon glory, with the exception of Richard, all the other Normans are reprehensible in every way. The attempts of Waldemar Fitzurse, the counselor of Prince John, to regroup the followers of the Prince, when they begin to disperse at the possibility of the rightful king Richard returning to England is a good example.

No spider ever took more pains to repair the shattered meshes of his web, than did Waldemar Fitzurse to reunite and combine the scattered members of Prince John's cabal. Few of these were attached to him from inclination, and none from personal regard. It was therefore necessary, that Fitzurse should open to them new prospects of advantage, and remind them of those which they at present enjoyed. To the young and wild nobles, he held out the prospect of unpunished license and uncontrolled revelry; to the ambitious that of power, and to the covetous, that of increased wealth and extended domains. The leaders of the mercenaries received a donation in gold; an argument the most persuasive to their minds, and without which all others would have proved in vain.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Ivanhoe 180

¹⁶⁴ Ivanhoe 145

This one passage is enough to establish the Norman nobles as being cunning, selfish, greedy, licentious, and totally unscrupulous—and there are several such passages in the novel.

The swarthy Norman knights have in their employ attendants and servants of African origin. While these Africans are shown as doing their masters' bidding rather than acting independently, it is clear that they are capable of unusual cruelty. In the age-old conventions of literature, the darkness of their skins is symbolic of the darkness of their hearts which make them efficient executors of their masters' evil wishes. Between the dark European Norman and the darker African stands the Jew. It is clear that although English by birth, the Jews are not English in full connotation of the term. Their religion (which is of Eastern origin) and their association with international banking seemingly render them incapable of patriotism, which, by definition, is loyalty to one specific region and its attendant culture, language, and religion. Since the Jew is neither a Norman nor a Saxon by birth, since his primary language is neither Saxon nor Norman-French, and since he does not worship a Christian God, he is marked as a perpetual outsider. Moreover, since Jews are depicted as belonging to the darker races, the anti-Semitism of the novel fits neatly into the polygenic framework. Sutherland reminds us that the entire Napoleonic war was largely financed by Jewish money¹⁶⁵ and there was much resentment towards the group. So it is no surprise that at the end of the novel, Rebecca and Isaac are made to leave England for Spain which, in the twelfth century, is under Moorish rule.

In this tale of national types, Isaac of York typifies everything that is despicable of his race. Even though Scott does mention the constant humiliation and injustice that

¹⁶⁵ Sutherland 231

the Jews have to face on account of their supposedly ill-gotten and ill-deserved wealth, he also presents Isaac in a stereotypical manner.

Introduced with little ceremony, and advancing with fear and hesitation, and many a bow of deep humility, a tall thin old man, who, however, had lost by habit of stooping much of his actual height, approached the lower end of the board. His features, keen and regular, with an aquiline nose, and piercing black eyes; his high and wrinkled forehead, and long grey hair and beard, would have been considered as handsome had they not been the marks of a physiognomy peculiar to a race, which during those dark ages, was alike detested by the credulous and prejudiced vulgar, and persecuted by the greedy and rapacious nobility, and who, perhaps owing to that very hatred and persecution, had adopted a national character, in which there was much to say the least, mean and unamiable.¹⁶⁶

What is highlighted in later descriptions is Isaac's terror at the prospect of imprisonment and his fear of extortion. In spite of Scott's attempts to point out the cruelty with which the Jews were treated, Isaac's portraiture makes us uneasy. Isaac's gesture of offering horse and armor to return the kindness of the Palmer (who is Ivanhoe in disguise) in Cedric's dining hall (where Isaac is repeatedly insulted) is overshadowed by his unwillingness to part with money. Unlike his more generous daughter, Isaac is miserly and suspicious of nature. Also, it is hard to admire a man who cringes constantly and appears to shrink in the presence of people who insult him. Even the lowly pig herders like the Saxon Gurth are proud of their race and miss no opportunity to insult and harass their Norman victors, but Isaac cannot assert any kind of racial or religious pride. All he and his brethren can do is to lie low so that all blows may pass.

To emphasize the otherness of the Jews, Scott points out that they are associated with the East which is both exotic and evil. The supporters of King John "whom the crusades had turned back on their country [were] accomplished in the vices of the East,

¹⁶⁶ Ivanhoe 60

impoverished in substance, and hardened in character, and ... placed their hopes of harvest in civil commotion.”¹⁶⁷ The African retainers of the Knight Templar Bois Guilbert (who also come from the East) are inscrutable but clearly dangerous as is borne out by the conversation overheard by the Palmer. Bois Guilbert speaks to them in a “savage” language ordering them to imprison Isaac once he is on his way to the tournament. King Richard is imprisoned in the East in an unspecified location. Even Rebecca, in spite of her obvious beauty, is clearly associated with the East and therefore ultimately inassimilable in a western society. Her symmetrical form is “shewn to advantage by a sort of Eastern dress, which she wore according to the fashion of the females of her nation.”¹⁶⁸ The obvious foreignness of her dress is augmented by her dark hair and the fact that she leaves the three uppermost of the gold and pearl clasps of her dress unfastened “on account of the heat,” something that perhaps the more modest Saxon and Norman beauties would not dare do.

So, if we read Ivanhoe as a tale about the forming of a national identity, it is as much a tale of assimilation as of exclusion. The platform of language where the possibility of Norman and Saxon unification is first played out in the novel, allows no place for the language of the Jew. Rebecca and Isaac can speak in both Saxon and Norman French but neither Saxon nor Norman can speak Hebrew. Nor do they need to. The new culture that the fusion of Saxon and Norman elements are to bring about, does not need any Hebraic contributions. The commonality of European origin and Christianity can overcome the difference between the Saxon and the Norman, but the differences with the Jews are another matter. That is why even Rebecca with all her

¹⁶⁷ Ivanhoe 78

¹⁶⁸ Ivanhoe 84

excellent qualities needs to leave England at the end. She may love England (and Ivanhoe) but her love will never be returned. The only European and Christian who recognizes her worth and is willing to risk his life for her is the wrong kind of European and Christian. Brian de Bois Guilbert has supreme disdain for conformity, and, by his unwillingness to live by rules designed by others, he marks himself as a less than ideal citizen of England. His love for Rebecca may be grand but it is not the kind of union that can or should be socially sanctioned. At the very basis of a stable nation is stable family structure held together by the institution of marriage, which upholds the values of the members of the nation. In such marriages race compatibility is important. Bois Guilbert and Rebecca belong to two different races and their union cannot be sanctioned. Men like Bois Guilbert, who is a magnificent loner, can prove to be disruptive for social order. His passion might be of epic proportions, but his very attraction to Rebecca marks her negatively. The fair Ivanhoe is attracted to the fair Rowena, and that is as it should be. Ivanhoe lives by the rules of chivalry and is rewarded for that. Bois Guilbert is too individualistic to be of any good to the kind of society that the likes of Ivanhoe and Rowena can build. Naturally, at the end of the novel, Bois Guilbert has to die and Rebecca has to leave the place of her birth.

Of necessity the choices Bankim made as an author were different in nature. In contrast to Scott Bankim was still a relatively unknown writer in 1865 when Durgeshnandini appeared. He had less at stake than Scott. His first novel had not fared well so he did not have a standard to uphold and he still had an audience to acquire. Neither did he have a royal patron that he could please. In this tale set in the fifteenth century during the rule of the third Mughal emperor Akbar, the Rajput noble Jagatsingha

falls in love with Tilottama, the daughter of his father's arch enemy, Birendra Singha. When the lovers rendezvous in the fort-palace where the heroine lives, it is attacked by the very same Pathan army that Jagatsingha has come to subdue as Akbar's representative. The severely wounded Jagatsingha is captured along with the other residents of the fort and is put in the care of the beautiful Ayesha, the daughter of the Pathan chief Katlu Khan. Ayesha falls in love with Jagatsingha, but the novel ends with the marriage between him and Tilottama. Katlu Khan is slain by the widow of Birendra Singha thus avenging his death, which Katlu Khan had ordered, and a truce is signed between the Pathans and the Mughals, ending the war.

Durgeshnandini begins in a conventional way, with the authorial voice appearing as that of the omniscient narrator and not with an introductory epistle dedicated to an imaginary person (as Scott's novel does). Whatever the author has to say to his readers has to be said in the preface or as the omniscient narrator's comments. The similarities between the Bengali novel about the love of two women (the Hindu Tilottama and the Muslim Ayesha) for one man (the Hindu Jagatsingha) and Scott's novel about the love of the Saxon Rowena and the Jewess Rebecca for the Saxon Ivanhoe drew attention as soon as Bankim's novel appeared. Bankim strongly denied having read Scott's novel,¹⁶⁹ although he was a great admirer of Scott.¹⁷⁰ Opinions vary from the similarities between the novels being the result of sheer coincidence to Bankim's having heard Scott's tale as a child and unconsciously following the story line. Whatever the true explanation might

9. Editor J.C. Bagal quotes a contemporary of Bankim, Kalinath Dutta, being of the opinion that Bankim was of "honesty unimpeachable" (B.R. Vol 131).

10. According to Tapan Raychaudhuri, to Bankim "Walter Scott was one of the great literary figures of all times. He bracketed him with Kalidasa [generally regarded to be the greatest poet of Sanskrit lyrical poetry] and compared him, favourably, with Shakespeare for his insight into human nature" (Europe Reconsidered 128).

be, the resemblances are indeed striking. However, there are significant differences as well.

In Ivanhoe, the two opposing forces of history are the vanquished Saxons and the victorious Normans working towards a still uneasy reconciliation. Scott does not use the plot device of a marriage, as Bankim does, to bring the two sides together. (There is a marriage at the end of Ivanhoe, but it serves only to reconcile the errant Ivanhoe and his strong-willed father and is a resolution of family differences rather than a resolution of Norman-Saxon problems.) So, if Ivanhoe is the story of the forming of a nation, it represents, at best, a tentative beginning. And this tentative beginning is best signified by the birth of a new language which is still in its infancy during the time period of the novel.

Norman-French was the only language employed; in courts of law, the pleadings and judgments were delivered in the same tongue. In short, French was the language of honour, of chivalry, and even of justice, while the far more manly and expressive Anglo-Saxon was abandoned to the use of rustics and hinds, who knew no other. Still, however, the necessary intercourse between the lords of the soil, and those oppressed inferior beings by whom that soil was cultivated, occasioned the gradual formation of a dialect, they could render themselves mutually intelligible to each other; and from this necessity arose by degrees the structure of our present English language, in which the speech of the victors and the vanquished have been so happily blended together; and which has since been so richly improved by importations from the classical languages, and from those spoken by the southern nations of Europe.¹⁷¹

Language does not play any such important role in Durgeshnandini, which is more of a romance than a story of nation building. Rajputs, Mughals, Pathans seem to have no difficulty in communicating with one another, although we are not told what their chosen language is. The only instance where language is brought into focus is when a foolish Brahmin mangles it, and this scene serves merely as a comic relief unlike the

¹⁷¹ Ivanhoe 30

opening scene of Ivanhoe, where the languages signify the gap between the two sides. One reason Bankim does not focus on language being a unifying force is because, unlike the monolingual Britain of his own times, India was not the home of one primary language. New languages like Urdu and Hindi did arise out of the admixture of Arabic, Persian, and the regional languages of India during the long Muslim rule, but the regional languages continued to hold sway in a manner not found in Britain. In Britain the hybrid English language replaced other languages and dialects, but such was never the case in India. The regional differences were strong in Bankim's days as they continue to be today.

Although in Bankim's novel there are two warring sides, the battle lines are less clearly drawn than in Ivanhoe. The Hindu Jagatsingha is on the side of the Mughal emperor Akbar and leads a faction of the Mughal army against the Pathan ruler of Bengal (who is a Muslim), and also counts among his enemies the fiercely independent Hindu chieftain Birendra Singha. Here enmities are forged neither because of cultural or linguistic differences, nor because of religious differences (as they are in Bankim's later novels or in the Scott novels of Presbyterian-Reformist conflict), but purely along political lines. The problems of nation building are not the issue here, the consolidation of the Mughal Empire with its Muslim rulers and Hindu generals, is. Bankim does not have to decide who deserves the rights of citizenship in the yet unformed nation. So the question of inclusion or exclusion does not arise as it does in Ivanhoe. In this respect Bankim's novel presents a more hopeful picture than some of his later novels where the erasure of the Hindu-Muslim divide seems a near impossibility. Of course in spite of the intensity of Saxon-Norman rivalry depicted in Ivanhoe, to the nineteenth-century readers

of Scott, this rivalry was little more than a historical curiosity, the racial differences having long been subsumed into the integrated English identity. There might be vicarious sympathy of the Scottish reader (because of Scotland's history of subjugation by England) for the proud but eventually defeated Saxon, but this sympathy would be purely aesthetic with little historical urgency. After all, the composite England that emerged out of the intermingling of the Norman and the Saxon was the historical inevitability and the more desirable state of things than the heroic but barbaric society riven by conflict depicted in the novel.

In Bankim's novel the enmity between characters is on a personal level, and, for the reader, there is no one person or group to be drawn towards or away from. There are individuals to admire and to dislike, but these individuals do not represent racial, cultural, or religious groups to rally behind. There is no British redcoat to defeat (for that would be anachronistic) and the Muslim is not yet an enemy. As a result, the tone of Durgeshnandini is much less strident than that of the later nationalistic novels. Although the Mughals are referred to as foreigners, the general tone is accepting and even respectful. Akbar, during whose reign the novel is set, is described as the "grace of the Mughal dynasty."¹⁷² If Hindus are praised, they are not praised as a race or for their religion, but for individual qualities. For example, Akbar's decision to send the Hindu general Mansingh to fight the Pathan chieftains, who have challenged Mughal power in the provinces of Orissa and Bengal, is based on Mansingh's military abilities. His religion is not a factor in this decision.

The great Akbar was wiser in every way than his predecessors. He believed in his heart that the natives of the land were the best administrators of the land—

¹⁷² B.R. Vol I 5. This remark stands in contrast to the attitude expressed towards Akbar by Nirmal Kumari in Rajsingha, where Akbar's name is treated with the same respect as garbage.

foreigners were not as good; and in matters of war or administration Rajputs were the foremost experts. That is why he always employed men of this land, especially Rajputs, in important royal matters.¹⁷³

In this passage it is the military and administrative abilities of Rajputs rather than their religion which is highlighted. What is even more striking is that alongside the valor of Rajputs, Mughal bravery is also celebrated. When Mansingh proposes to form a guerilla army to harass the marauding Pathans and offers to put at the charge of this guerilla force the general who is willing to lead the smallest number of men (thus taking the biggest risk), both Mughal and Rajput generals volunteer. Mansingh lauds them by saying that the very willingness of these men to put their lives at stake for the emperor is proof enough that Mughal *and* Rajput valor will continue to be celebrated. In the novel, ethnicity (Mughal, Pathan, and Rajput) takes on greater importance than religion, and the very fact of belonging to a particular religion does not automatically make one an enemy as it does in later novels.¹⁷⁴ Also, unlike in Scott's novel, the appearance or customs of the Rajputs and Pathans are not set up in stark contrast. The differences that exist are between the aristocrats and the commoners or between the world of men and that of women of both communities. Tilottama, Bimala, and Ayesha are all beautiful; Jagatsingha, Birendra Singha, and Osman are all valiant; and the Brahmin Vidyadiggaj and the Pathan soldier that Bimala tricks repeatedly during the occupation of the fort of Mandaran are both comically susceptible to the charms of beautiful and clever women. Unlike the Jew in Ivanhoe there is no one group to be singled out and excluded.

¹⁷³ B.R. Vol I 5 (my translation)

¹⁷⁴ In his essay Bankim separates the Mughals from the Pathans and Afghans as separate groups of invaders and does not take into account their common religion, Islam.

Of course when he has to choose between the Hindu and the Muslim, Bankim does make the Hindu fare better. Although the gallant and handsome Osman (who is Ayesha's cousin and her suitor) is generally presented in a favorable light, when he challenges Jagatsingha to a duel, it is the Rajput prince who comes off as more chivalrous and cool-headed, and is eventually victorious. Jagatsingha fares better not only because he is the hero of the novel but because he is a Rajput and a Hindu. Even though Osman is bent on killing him, Jagatsingha desists from hurting Osman because Osman had saved his life during the capture of Birendra Singha's fort. But Osman continues to attack him because he is jealous of Ayesha's feelings for the Rajput prince. Bankim slips from referring to Osman by name and as the "Pathan" to calling him the "yavana"—a not entirely complimentary term. The usually dignified Osman is also shown as insulting his enemy by calling him a coward even though on several occasions earlier he had praised Jagatsingha for his bravery and chivalrous code of conduct. In this novel of cross-religion love, Jagatsingha gets the final victory when we see him stepping on the prostrate Osman's arms and disarming him. For a soldier this is the ultimate insult and, it is the Muslim Osman who has to undergo this indignity.

Like the Saxons of Ivanhoe, The Hindus, except for a minor character (the foolish Brahmin Vidyadiggaj) fare quite well. Although the Hindu Birendra Singha and his associates are initially defeated, none of them is humiliated. Birendra dies a brave death; his widow kills Katlu Khan; his daughter Tilottama escapes the indignity of becoming Katlu Khan's concubine, and Jagatsingha emerges as the victor from the duel and marries Tilottama in the end. The gallery of Bengali characters is quite varied in Durgeshnandini and presents quite a wide spectrum. Birendra Singha is an impressive individual. He is

presented as a lusty warrior who has a quick temper and is obstinate. He does not forgive a slight and bears lifelong enmity to Mansingh because the latter forced him to marry the low-born Bimala when he caught Birendra Singha visiting her chamber. (Bimala was the lady-in-waiting for one of Mansingh's wives and as such was a ward of the king.)

Although he loves his daughter Tilottama dearly, Birendra refuses to hear her name once he believes she has been sent to the harem of his captor, Katlu Khan. He welcomes death because he regards imprisonment as a worse fate. Bimala, another Bengali, is his fit companion because of her intelligence and fierce loyalty to Birendra and her stepdaughter.

Among the less admirable characters is the Brahmin Abhiram Swami who is Bimala's father. He is depicted as an intelligent and learned man who had an unprincipled youth. As an upper caste man who consorted with a lower caste woman out of wedlock, he transgresses caste barriers but not in a way that we can admire. He is driven by lust and Bimala, the product of this union, has to bear the burden of being the daughter of an untouchable and unmarried woman. Yet Bimala harbors no grudge for her father and the Brahmin mends his ways becoming a mentor to Birendra Singha.

Although his transformation from a wayward youth to an erudite and level-headed guru is admirable, Abhiram Swami is nowhere close to representing the kind of idealized spiritual men who are the leaders and mentors in later novels such as Anandamath.

Another Bengali character in the novel, the comic Vidyadiggaj (literally, an elephant of learning) is a village dunce with pretensions of learning. He is there for purely comic relief. He is a perfect counterpoint to the proud and fierce Birendra Singha and the shrewd and brave Bimala, and thus comes close to the Bengalis that Bankim pokes fun at

in his essays and in his writings of the Kamalakanta series. Although the fact of these characters being Bengali is not highlighted, it is still a significant one. The brave Bengali/Hindu characters in Durgeshnandini are the precursors to the Bengali heroes and heroines who appear in later novels where Bankim's stated goal of writing historical novel to create a martial history of the Bengali/Indian becomes more evident. The reformed Brahmin Abhiram Swami is the first in the long line of gurus and spiritual guides who play significant roles in novels such as Mrinalini (Madhavacharya), Chandrasekhar (Ramananda Swami), Anandamath (Satyananda) and others.

As for the Pathans, Bankim is generous towards Ayesha and Osman but presents Ayesha's father Katlu Khan as a reprobate who has a penchant for wine and women. Katlu Khan installs Bimala and Tilottama in his harem but dies before he has the chance to dishonor them. Since Bankim's anger at individuals who are non-Hindus is absent here, we do not find the kind of blatant anti-Muslim sentiments we find in his later novels. Tapan Raychaudhuri notes that the tone becomes considerably darker in the second historical novel, Mrinalini, which is about the fall of the last independent Hindu kingdom of Bengal. In fact, in Durgeshnandini Bankim inserts a brief but significant criticism of Hinduism. At the very beginning of the novel there is a surprisingly frank statement by Bimala, which blames Hindu social customs for the lack of a woman's right to utter her own name in public.¹⁷⁵ There is no direct mention of Hinduism in Bimala's conversation with the prince when he asks who she and her companion are. But since the

¹⁷⁵ Tanika Sarkar mentions Bimala as an example of a mature woman in love. (Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation)

Bimala is the wife of Tilottama's father but has to keep her relationship with Birendra Singha a secret. I would like to point out that in addition Bimala is also a woman who is conscious of her own rights and is unafraid to express her opinion in a male-dominated society.

conversation takes place in a Hindu shrine which only Hindus enter, the context itself establishes Bimala's accusations being as much for the religion as for the social practices it enforces.

The older woman said "what identity does a woman have? How will those who are not allowed to bear the family name introduce themselves? How can those who are used to living in secrecy, reveal themselves? The day god forbade woman to utter the name of her husband, that very day he closed the path to her self-revelation."¹⁷⁶

While Jagatsingha's reason for concealing his identity is political—he is on a military mission in an enemy territory, Bimala's reason for concealing her own identity as well as that of her ward is social and religious. In the light of Bankim's pro-Hinduism stance in his later works, this is indeed a significant utterance.¹⁷⁷ Besides this indictment of certain practices of Hinduism, there is also a brief, almost forgettable, remark about the Bengali (a topic that Bankim writes about copiously in his essays) that is negative in nature. When the Pathan Osman tries to negotiate with the prisoner Jagatsingha the possibilities of settling the Mughal-Pathan rivalry, he compares the Pathan favorably with the Bengali who, once he is defeated, stays defeated. Osman says:

Akbar Shah had conquered Utkal [the older name for Orissa] in the past, but how long could he collect taxes there? The same pattern will be repeated if he does so [ie, conquer Orissa] again. He might send his army again; Utkal will be won again; [but] Pathans will be independent again. Pathans are not like Bengalis; they have never accepted dominance; nor will they do as long even there is one [Pathan] alive; I am sure of this.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Durgeshnandini. B.R. Vol I 3

¹⁷⁷ Bimala's protest against religiously-sanctioned social strictures stands in stark contrast to Nirmal Kumari's celebration of the special kind of strength that Hinduism confers on a woman. I have discussed this point in detail in Chapter Five of the dissertation.

¹⁷⁸ Durgeshnandini 61

This indictment of the Bengali is in line with Bankim's earlier essays, where he consistently upbraids the Bengali for his many weaknesses. The kind of criticism that the Pathan Osman directs at the Bengali is directed at the Muslim in a more virulent form by the narrators and characters of many of Bankim's late novels.

Even though Bankim lets the Hindu Jagatsingha emerge as the undisputed romantic hero at the expense of his Muslim rival in love, he shows no such bias towards his Hindu heroine Tilottama. Tilottama is indeed beautiful, as all other Bankim heroines are. If we accept the interpretation that Sudipta Kaviraj provides, this beauty becomes more than a requirement of romantic convention. Bankim's heroines are beautiful because "they have to symbolize the power of their sex, their fatal attraction; for they always represent the liminal; their beauty is a mark of their being expressions of a principle, something larger and more inscrutable than themselves."¹⁷⁹ It is entirely fitting that this tender sixteen-year-old who is named after a mythical celestial beauty would steal the hero's heart at first glance.¹⁸⁰ Tilottama is described lovingly by Bankim. Her youth and innocence are emphasized in a rather idealized sort of way and she is one of those young beauties in Bankim's works in whom it is possible to find images of the lost love of Bankim, his first wife who died at fifteen. But apart from capturing Jagatsingha's heart during a chance encounter in a deserted temple and setting the plot in motion in this story of family rivalry, Tilottama does not do much. The real women of action are her stepmother Bimala who kills Katlu Khan and her rival in love, Ayesha, who helps her to

¹⁷⁹ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness 6

¹⁸⁰ Tilottama was a celestial maiden fashioned particle by particle ("til" = particle) by divine hands from the most beautiful earthly objects. She was used to create strife between two brothers whose united strength could not be fractured otherwise.

escape from Katlu Khan's clutch. Incidentally, as Sudipta Kaviraj points out, both Tilottama and Ayesha can lay claim to being the woman referred to in the title of the novel which can be translated as the "Daughter of the Master of the Fort."¹⁸¹ Tilottama's father Birendra Singha and Ayesha's father Katlu Khan are both chieftains and lords of their own forts. It is of course the regal Ayesha whose love for Jagatsingha remains unrequited, who generally strikes the reader as being the real Durgeshnandini (Durgesh = Lord of the fort; nandini = daughter). Ayesha's proud answer to the question about her relation to Jagatsingha has acquired iconic stature in Bengali literature: "the prisoner is the lord of my heart." The answer is significant because to profess love for the son of the enemy and a man of a different faith is tantamount to courting death. Moreover, the man that Ayesha answers thus is Osman, her cousin, who is in love with her and who is her father's trusted lieutenant. Ayesha's bold declaration of love signaled a new age in Bengali literature in which the average reader was challenged to live and love large.

In contrast Tilottama is silent; she is unable to defend herself when Jagatsingha charges her with being unfaithful. Tilottama does not speak but has to be spoken for. Initially it appears that Tilottama is deserving of the title of the daughter of the lord of the fortress. After all, it is her chance encounter with Jagatsingha that draws him into secretly entering her father's fort to see her, a rash act that leads to his imprisonment. (Bimala, who aids the prince in his secret assignation, accidentally leaves the back entrance to the fort open and thus makes it possible for the Pathan army hiding in the surrounding forests to enter the fort secretly and capture all its occupants including Jagatsingha). But once Ayesha enters the picture as the daughter of the other lord of the fort, it is clear that she is more deserving of the title than the lovely but more insignificant

¹⁸¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness. 4

Tilottama. Even though Ayesha is Muslim, she is allowed to overshadow the Hindu heroine. By declaring her love openly, Ayesha breaks the code of silence that is enjoined on the heroine of romance where the man is the one who acts and the woman bears the consequence of his actions. In “The Novel in Bangla,” Saroj Bandopadhyay considers Ayesha to be a modern woman not only because of her courage to declare her love openly but also because of her choice to live rather than commit suicide, when her lover marries another woman. Bandopadhyay hails Ayesha’s act of throwing away the poison ring at the end, when Jagatsingha and Tilottama are married, as the act of a new woman, who can assert her individualism and choose life over death.¹⁸² It is significant that in this story of daring cross-religion love (which was never replicated by Bankim in any of his other novels), Bankim chooses a Muslim woman to come to the forefront in such a manner.

As a woman Ayesha represents a new modern sensibility but she does not embody the ideals of womanhood of a particular religion or culture as some of Bankim’s other heroines do, or as both Rowena and Rebecca have to do in Scott’s novel. In Ivanhoe, Rowena, the blond blue-eyed Saxon beauty, becomes the hero’s wife, while the dark-haired and dark-eyed Rebecca is like Ayesha, the woman destined to spend her life without the man she loves. While Bankim differentiates his heroines by their age and personality, Scott does so by religion and ethnicity. He employs the time-tested convention of the fair and the dark beauties (a convention more readily available to European authors and less to Indian authors who had little choice in the matter of eye and hair color!) with the dark heroines being associated with some kind of exoticism and therefore being too unconventional to be absorbed into a traditional society. However, in

¹⁸² Saroj Bandopadhyay, “The Novel in Bangla.” 35

contrast to the timid Tilottama, the Saxon Rowena is more mature and aware of her rank in Cedric's household. She is an orphan and although Cedric is her guardian, he defers to her because of her rank. Rowena takes her place in the dining hall against Cedric's express wishes when the Knight Templar and the Prior turn up as unexpected guests. She speaks up on behalf of Ivanhoe when the Knight Templar throws a challenge to the absent knight. When Bois Guilbert stares at her beauty, Rowena draws the veil across her face to signify not her bashfulness but her disapproval. It is hard to imagine the girl-woman Tilottama behaving with such courage. From the beginning it is clear that unlike Bankim's heroine, Scott's Rowena is no shrinking violet. Indeed she could not be. In this novel about Saxon-Norman conflict Rowena has to be drawn as a dignified and regal Saxon woman, someone worthy of Cedric's respect and Ivanhoe's love as much for her high birth as for her personality. Her descent from King Alfred accords her a place of high respect among the Saxons and she is a woman who makes her own decisions. Rowena has to represent the best in Saxon womanhood not only through her blond blue-eyed beauty, but also through her ability to hold her own. Like a true heroine, Rowena brings out the best in the men that are attracted to her: Ivanhoe becomes a true knight when he is banished for loving her; her other suitor De Bracy becomes ashamed of his boorishness when he sees how upset she becomes at the news of Ivanhoe and Cedric's captivity; and even the normally passive Athelstane who labors under the delusion of being betrothed to her, takes up arms to fight Ivanhoe when the latter chooses Rowena as the lady of love at the games. Scott develops Rowena more than Bankim does Tilottama because while Scott needed a heroine who had to be decidedly Saxon, Bankim only

needed a heroine that the hero could fall in love with. Being a Bengali or a Hindu is just an accident of birth for Tilottama; it does not mark her in any special way.

Rowena's rival in love, Rebecca the Jewess, is one of Scott's most celebrated characters. Her mettle is recognized by a man as unusual as Brian de Bois Guilbert who is a war-hardened cynical Knight Templar. Initially attracted by her beauty, Bois Guilbert recognizes in her character much that he finds admirable. The epigraph to the chapter in which he tries to break down Rebecca's resistance in the castle of Torquilstone is revealing: "I'll woo her as the lion woos his bride."¹⁸³ A healer by training and a woman of immense wealth, Rebecca is a remarkable character. She is well aware of the danger that might befall female healers like her (Rebecca's teacher Miriam was burned at the stake on the charges of being a witch) yet she practices her avocation without fear. Indeed fearlessness is one of her most noticeable traits. Her excitement at the sight of battle when she describes the events to the wounded Ivanhoe is telling. The way she and Ivanhoe react to the prospect of battle, mark them as kindred spirits.¹⁸⁴ That she does not flinch at the prospect of death (she threatens to jump from the parapet when Bois Guilbert presses his suit upon her), indicates that she is spirited and brave. Scott goes to great lengths to show that Rebecca is not marked by the negative stereotype of her race. But being a remarkable woman who represents many admirable characteristics (high-

¹⁸³ Ivanhoe Chapter xxiv

¹⁸⁴ Tremendous as these sounds were, and yet more terrible from the awful event which they presaged, there was a sublimity mixed with them, which Rebecca's high-toned mind could feel even in that moment of terror. Her eye kindled, although the blood fled from her cheeks; and there was a strange mixture of fear and of a thrilling sense of the sublime, as she repeated, half whispering to herself, half speaking to her companion, the sacred text,—"the quiver rattleth—the glittering spear and the shield—the noise of the captains and the shouting."

But Ivanhoe was like the war-horse of that sublime passage, glowing with impatience at his inactivity, and with his ardent desire to mingle in the affray of which these sounds were the introduction. (Ivanhoe 243)

mindedness, bravery, quick-wit, kindness, loyalty to religion and to those of her race) does not guarantee her happiness. She has to leave England because race and religion triumph over personal worthiness in determining on whom the nation will confer citizenship. Rebecca has a dual role—she is both a tragic heroine and she represents the best of her race. This is a heavier burden than Bankim places on Ayesha. Just as there is nothing specifically Bengali or Hindu about Tilottama, there is nothing specifically Pathan or Muslim about Ayesha.

The only woman in Bankim's novel who has to uphold the pride of her race and religion is Bimala. Bimala has her parallel in Ulrica in *Ivanhoe*, but there are significant differences. Ulrica, the daughter of the Saxon thane Torquil of Torquilstone, is portrayed as an avenging fury who burns down the castle to punish her long imprisonment and dishonor at the hands of the Norman usurper of the castle, Reginald Front de Boeuf, and his father. Although not past middle age, she is presented as an ancient woman with grey locks. Her death in the burning castle is both an atonement (for having lived as the mistress of the Norman conquerors—there is a hint of incest, that both father and son were her lovers) and an act of revenge. Her death is a release and the manner in which she chooses to die restores in some measure the Saxon dignity that Scott celebrates in the novel. The seductively beautiful Bimala, on the other hand, is never dishonored and is allowed to avenge her husband's death by getting the man, who ordered the execution, drunk and then stabbing him. Bankim presents Bimala as a remarkably transformed woman after she kills Katlu Khan. Her appearance is so altered that it bears little resemblance to the glamorous and seductive figure who managed to become a favorite of Katlu Khan in a short time and gain access to his innermost circle. Bimala functions as

the perfect wife and mother even though these are not her socially sanctioned roles. By keeping her marriage to Birendra Singha a secret because he so desired, by murdering her husband's murderer, and by adopting the dress of a widow after her husband's death, she behaves as an ideal Hindu wife. By protecting Tilottama, who is both the daughter of her sister and her stepdaughter, she functions as an ideal mother. Bimala is the true Hindu shahadharmini—the co-religionist, the ideal wife. As such she is allowed to live on after her husband's death so that she can continue to be with Tilottama, her child-surrogate and assume the role of the only parent after Birendra's death. Since Scott has other Saxon figures to exemplify the bravery and integrity of the race, he can dispense with Ulrica in a shorter space. Her presence is more of a vignette rather than a full portraiture, and she is brought in to provide the important service of burning down Torquilstone to aid Saxon victory. Our sympathy for her is offset by her hatred and bitterness towards Rebecca, which, the narrator tells us, is occasioned as much by Rebecca's religion as by her youth and beauty.

Bimala by contrast is a grander figure. She impresses us with her strength and in her we see the shades of the other mature women of Bankim's novels—Debi, Sree, Jayanti, Shanti, and others. Her parentage is uncertain,¹⁸⁵ her marital status is unstated, and her maternal role is by proxy. So she derives her identity from none of the socially-sanctioned roles accorded to women--daughter, wife, and mother. Unencumbered by her ties to parent, husband, and child, she is an independent woman, heralding the women of Bankim's later novels, whose freedom to act in the public arena comes from their independence from social strictures. In pure Bankimic (a word I borrow from Sujit

¹⁸⁵ That she is Abhiram Swami's daughter is kept a secret.

Mukherjee¹⁸⁶) tradition, Bimala is an attractive woman and can use her beauty to achieve her goals. It is her beauty that attracts Birendra Singha to her in the first place and induces him to marry her against odds, and it is her beauty that enables her to gain access to the man who is responsible for her husband's death and kill him in revenge. Of all the vignettes in which Bankim presents Bimala, perhaps the most impressive is the one where she chooses to watch her husband being executed. After openly addressing him as her husband she whispers in his ears her vow to avenge his humiliation and death. She takes off the ornaments from her arms, promising to Birendra that the only metal her arms would touch would be iron. It would have been easier for Bimala to die than to go on living, an option that a lesser woman would have chosen. But Bimala, like Ayesha, makes the much harder choice to live.

As a romance Ivanhoe is a more mature product than Durgeshnandini. It is more complex and has a wider canvas. Scott is not simply interested in the telling of a tale; he wants to engage the reader's attention in the historical background as well. That is why he goes to great length in depicting the differences in the language, dress, food, customs, and beliefs of the victors and the vanquished so that the period in which the tale unfolds comes alive. He succeeds in showing how wide a gulf had to be bridged in the making of the English nation. But the formation of a race or nation is not yet Bankim's subject. He is more interested in the characters than the history they participate in. There is no significant difference between the dress, customs, and dwellings of Bengalis, Rajputs, Pathans, and Mughals. Here history is of less significance than the story itself. If there is

¹⁸⁶ Sujit Mukherjee uses this adjective in his translation of Saroj Bandopadhyay essay on Bankim. "The Novel in Bangla."

a strand of nationalistic thought, it is, as I mentioned earlier, muted. Here we get to see more of Bankim the entertainer as opposed to Bankim the teacher of history.

So, to what extent is Durgeshnandini an imitation? I feel if it is indeed an imitation, it is only nominally so. Apart from the basic plot similarity, there is not much that Bankim borrowed—if he indeed deliberately borrowed the plot. Durgeshnandini offers in an embryonic form many of the characteristics that become staples of Bankim's later historical novels and assume lives of their own. Jagatsingha who is a chivalrous hero is the forerunner of characters like Rajsingha and Hemchandra, who combine chivalry with patriotism and lead to characters such as the Children of Anandamath, for whom love is a distraction and patriotism becomes all important. Tilottama does not contribute much to the lineage of the heroines of Bankim's historical novels. In the later novels the beautiful women become more spirited: Shoibolini leaves home in search of her true love, Chanchal Kumari defies the Mughal emperor to preserve Rajput glory, and Debi and Shanti step out into the world of men to work alongside them. Finally, that the Hindu pride that becomes more pronounced in the later novels is muted here is a point I have already mentioned. So, we might say that Durgeshnandini is more significant for where it stands in relation to the other historical novels of Bankim than for how much it resembles Ivanhoe.

Because nationalism is not yet Bankim's theme, the concept of homeland, a place or even an idea to fight for and to protect, is muted in Durgeshnandini. The fort of Mandaran which belongs to Birendra Singha but is occupied by Katlu Khan is the home of Birendra, Tilottama, and Bimala. Situated in a territory that is fought over by Mughals and their Hindu allies and Pathans, the fort stands for a home, the ownership of which is

disputed. The novel ends with the recovery of the fort with the death of Katlu Khan and a truce being signed between the warring factions with stability being restored temporarily. Yet the fort does not symbolize home/nation in any significant way. The image that the reader is left with at the end is that of the lonely but regal Ayesha returning to her own home where she is destined to live without the man she loves. The idea of the home/homeland is superseded by the idea of the tragic heroine of the story. But in the next Bankim novel I shall discuss, Anandamath, the figure of the homeland is brought to the forefront. The love-relations (like all other relations) in the novel are examined vis-à-vis service to the nation; they do not exist independently. In Anandamath history and the idea of nationhood are not merely a backdrop, but become the very subject of the novel.

CHAPTER 4: THE NATION AND THE “OTHER” IN ANANDAMATH AND OLD MORTALITY

Anandamath was published in 1882 first serially and then as a book in the following year. During Bankim’s lifetime it went through five editions, with each edition being revised to some extent. The story is inspired by the famine of the Bengali year 1176, famously known as “Chhiattorer Manwantar,” literally, “the famine of ‘76” (1769 CE), and the Sannyasi rebellion of 1772. Against the backdrop of a severe famine caused by unfair tax laws which, combined with successive droughts and administrative mismanagement, brought about a period of lawlessness, Bankim tells the tale of a band of dedicated Hindu ascetics who call themselves “Santans” or “Children” (of the nation mother), organize guerilla soldiers, and win victorious battles against the combined forces of the Company and the Muslim nawab of Bengal.¹⁸⁷ However, although the monks are victorious initially, they do not press their advantage and leave the field following the advice of a mysterious seer who suddenly appears in the final scene. This seer whom even the guru of the monks Satyananda obeys, tells them that British rule is necessary for the restoration of the true spirit of Hinduism, since such restoration can only be brought about through lessons learned from the west. Within the framework of

¹⁸⁷ In Foundations of Nationalism M. K. Haldar mentions that in one of the editions of Anandamath the editor “suggested that... [the novel] was inspired by the life and exploits of Basudeo Balbant Phadke ...But there is hardly any direct evidence given to substantiate the same”. Haldar also mentions that Sukumar Sen writes in his *History of Bengali Literature* (238) that “[t]he philanthropic society outlined in Chapter Twenty (of *Kanthamala* by Rabindranath Tagore 1877) supplied the idea of *Ananda Math* to Bankim.’ This is also a conjecture without any evidence” (92).

this tale there are parallel subplots detailing the relationships of men and women who take part in this rebellion.

The Scott novel I would like to compare it with is The Tale of Old Mortality centered on the Scottish Presbyterian uprising of 1679 against the Loyalists (also referred to as Monarchists and Royalists) to assert the sovereignty of the Scottish church in opposition of the Reformed Church sanctioned by the English monarch. The romantic subplot has the hero Henry Morton, whose father first supported the Presbyterian cause but later supported the monarchy, falling in love with Edith Bellenden, the daughter of a staunchly monarchist house. The most dominant figure of the tale is John Balfour of Burley, the diehard leader of the Presbyterian rebels. An accidental association with him leads to a chain of events that makes the pacifist middle-of-the-road Henry Morton take up the rebel cause. After a few initial victories, the rebels are eventually defeated and peace returns to the land when the grievances of the Presbyterians are partially amended through reformation of the administrative system. Henry Morton and Edith Bellenden are married, their union signifying the reconciliation of the opposing sides and the restoration of social order through economic power reverting to the hands of the landed gentry. Old Mortality was first published in 1816 and is regarded as being one of the best novels of Scott.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Old Mortality was quite popular in Europe in the nineteenth century. The French author Barbey d'Aurevilly's le Chevalier des Touches (1863) was deeply influenced by it. (Richard Maxwell, "Scott in France," The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe 25). Another Frenchman Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret, who was responsible for popularizing Scott through his translations, chose Old Mortality as the first Scott novel to translate in 1817 (Paul Barnaby, "Another Tale of Old Mortality: The Translation of Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret in the French Reception of Scott." The Reception of Sir Walter Scott 30-44). There was a Spanish translation of the novel in 1817 (José Enrique García-González and Fernando Toda, "The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Spain." The Reception of Sir Walter Scott 47). There were numerous others translations of Old Mortality and novels inspired by it which are discussed in The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe.

The plot similarity that is the most obvious basis for comparison of Anandamath and Old Mortality is a nationalistic war which the rebels (the Children and the Presbyterians) regard as being divinely sanctioned. The oppressed in both novels believe it is their duty to fight to the death for the restoration of the true religion (Hinduism and a conservative brand of Presbyterianism) and an independent homeland (India and Scotland) where this religion can be practiced. They oppose the greater and, in the case of Old Mortality, better-organized, enemy forces (British and Muslim forces in Anandamath and the Scottish and English Loyalists in Old Mortality). Romantic love is fraught with difficulty in both novels, with the men and women being torn between personal desire and duty to a higher cause. My interest is in focusing on the differences to see what they reveal about the authors.

Bankim's novel begins on a somber note. The omniscient narrator describes a dark and surreal scene indicative of the darkness of the novel itself.

A vast forest....The trees, with foliage intertwined, stretch out in endless ranks. Without a break or gaps, without even openings for light to penetrate, boundless ocean of leaves, wave upon wave ruffled by the wind, rolls on for mile after mile.

Below, profound darkness prevails. Even at high noon the light is dim, dreadful! Humans never venture into that forest, and except for the ceaseless murmur of leaves and the cries of its wild beasts and birds, no other sound is heard in it.

Not only is this a vast profoundly dark forest, but it is also late at night. And it is an extremely dark night, dark even outside the forest. Nothing is visible. And the mass of gloom within is like the darkness in the very bowels of the earth.

The birds and animals are completely silent. How many countless millions of animals, birds, worms, and insects live in that forest, yet not one makes the slightest sound. Indeed, the darkness of which we speak, could be imagined, but that brooding silence of a clamorous world is beyond conceiving.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹Julius Lipner. trans. Anandamath of the Sacred Brotherhood. 130

This darkness is replicated in the central scene of revelation in the novel where Mahendra, newly initiated into the order of the monks is shown the images of the nation mother for the first time. Leading him through a dark tunnel after visiting the shrine of the “mother as she used to be” (a glorious and victorious goddess), the guru, Satyananda, takes him where the second of the three images of the Mother is revealed as the dark and naked Hindu goddess Kali. This is how Satyananda explains the fearsome image: “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.”¹⁹⁰ Anandamath, in spite of its name which one of the translators (Naresh Chandra Sengupta in 1906) has translated as The Abbey of Bliss, is a dark novel.¹⁹¹ Just as the Scott scholar David Brown, believes that the reason Scott’s The Bride of Lammermoor (1819) is dark because it expresses the “the mind of the doomed aristocracy represented by the novel’s hero,”¹⁹² it is possible to argue that the mood of Anandamath is predominantly dark because it represents the despair of the author. There is darkness in Old Mortality too, in the battle scenes and in the scenes of despair of the characters, and of course personified by Burley, the darkest character of all. But this despair is a purely artistic creation to a greater degree than Bankim’s is. In fact, in light of the comment above on the darkness of The Bride of Lammermoor, we note that it is not Scott himself who is thought of by Brown as having a dark psyche, rather the darkness belongs to the hero who is the creation of the author, and not to the author

¹⁹⁰ Lipner, 150

¹⁹¹ The suffix “ananda” (joy) which forms the last part of every initiated monk’s name signifies the joy they take in laying down their lives in the service of the nation mother. Hence Anandamath is the Abbey of the Anandas.

¹⁹² Harry E. Shaw, Introduction. Critical Essays on Sir Walter Scott: The Waverley Novels. (Critical Essays on British Literature, General Editor Zack Bowen, New York: G.K. Hall, 1996) 8

himself. After all Scott himself did not live and write in political subjugation. If anything, he lived and wrote in a time when Britain was well secure in its imperial journey, having pulled itself out of its perceived provincial status in the pre-empire days.¹⁹³ Bankim, on the other hand, lived in the second of the three phases described in Anandamath, a bleak one situated between an idealized glorious past and an equally glorious hoped-for future. The difference between the two authors in this respect is akin to the difference between the English Renaissance and the Indian Renaissance¹⁹⁴ as viewed by Shantinath K Desai,¹⁹⁵ “The English Renaissance was the product of the triumphant nationalism of a free and powerful country, whereas the Indian Renaissance was the product of the simmering and restless nationalism of a *slave* country.” As in Scott’s novel, the conclusion in Bankim’s was already a foregone one by the time of the writing of the novel because the battles that each novel describes had already become part of recorded history. Both the Presbyterians of Scott and the Sannyasis of Bankim had been defeated by the Loyalists and the British respectively. But Scott could look back with a different perspective. His narrator can draw a connection between the opposing sides as sharing certain common human traits:

...it would be unjust to forget, that many even of those who had been most active in crushing what they conceived the rebellious and seditious spirit of these unhappy [Presbyterian] wanderers, displayed, when called upon themselves to suffer for their political and religious opinion, the same daring and devoted zeal, tinged, in their case, with chivalrous loyalty, as in the former with republican enthusiasm. It has often been remarked of the Scottish character, that the

¹⁹³ Alok Yadav makes this point about the change of self perception of England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in his book Before the Empire of English: Literature, Provinciality, and Nationalism in Eighteenth-Century Britain. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

¹⁹⁴ It is more common to hear of “Bengal Renaissance” rather than the term Desai uses, “Indian Renaissance.” Bankim was a part of this remarkable period of creativity.

¹⁹⁵ Desai makes this point in “History as Setting.” Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective. 508

stubbornness with which it is moulded shews most to advantage in adversity, when it seems akin to their native sycamore of their hills, which scorns to be biased in its mode of growth even by the influence of the prevailing wind, but shooting its branches with equal boldness in every direction, shews not weather-side to the storm, and may be broken, but can never be bended.¹⁹⁶

The two parties share at least two common attributes: that of humanity and a common Scottish heritage (since there are both Presbyterians and Loyalists who are Scottish).

And it is not only the narrator standing outside the frame of the novel who observes this commonality. The old Major Bellenden who had fought in the continent as well at home remarks on how much easier it is to cut down an enemy that looks and sounds different.

Although I had my share of the civil war, I cannot say I had ever so much real pleasure in that sort of service as when I was in the wars on the continent, and we were hacking at fellows with foreign faces and outlandish language. It's a hard thing to hear a hamely [sic] Scotch tongue cry quarter, and be obliged to cut him down just the same as if he called out *misericordé*.¹⁹⁷

Scott treats both the Covenanters (another name for the more radical Presbyterians) and the Loyalists fairly, highlighting the positives and the negatives of individuals on both sides. The Loyalist Bothwell's mean-spirited harassing of the Covenanter Burley at the inn (where the former forces the latter to drink in the name of the Scottish Archbishop appointed by England and hated by the Presbyterians) is matched by Burley's slaying of the Loyalist soldier Cornet Grahame who comes to deliver an offer of surrender and pardon to the Presbyterian army during the battle of Bothwell Bridge. Cornet Grahame's brave act of venturing close to the enemy to offer truce and Lord Evandale's charge to avenge the cornet's death are examples of the kind of brave acts the King's men are capable of. They are matched by the Covenanters who stake all to fight an oppressive

¹⁹⁶ The Tale of Old Mortality, The Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 8. Hereafter Old Mortality

¹⁹⁷ Old Mortality 98. Sutherland mentions a similar unease that Scott spoke about while describing his having to take part in suppressing an unruly crowd during the Bread Riots.

political system believing that death is better than obedience to a monarch who, according to them, is an unbeliever.

This recognition of there being good and evil on both sides allows Scott to introduce characters that are more nuanced than those we find in Anandamath. Burley, the leader of the Presbyterians is a good example. He is brave yet cunning, totally committed to the liberation of Scotland yet not above letting personal ambition guide his actions. Men fear and distrust him yet follow him. In this respect he is totally different from the leader of the Children in Bankim's novels. The white-haired leader Satyananda is an ideal character who inspires deep reverence in his followers. But Satyananda lacks the humanness of Burley. Satyananda's being the embodiment of a noble idea is more important in the novel than his being a fallible human being and this is generally true of most characters in Anandamath. Scott wrote about real men and women; Bankim wrote about real men and women also, but he was not limited by the nineteenth-century European definitions of novelistic realism. He chose to create an ideal world because his purpose was different from Scott's. So, the men of the sacred brotherhood might make mistakes but they are not dangerous like Burley and do not have his shade of evil. Men like Bhavananda and Jibananda may be tempted to break the laws of the brotherhood, but they are untainted by the kind of greed, zealotry, and selfishness that colors Burley's actions such as his slaying the defenseless Archbishop when the latter's traveling party falls into the hands of the Covenanters. Burley might be an appropriate leader for an unruly crowd, but he lacks the qualities that are called for in a leader of independent Scotland. Bankim, on the other hand, chooses to make his heroes ideal, so they are perfect leaders both on and off the battlefield.

Burley's fanaticism on the Presbyterian side is matched by Claverhouse's lack of principles on the Loyalist side. Just as Burley stands for the most dangerous aspects of the Presbyterian cause, Claverhouse represents the most undesirable aspects of the Loyalists. Although he is a fine soldier and an efficient general, Claverhouse is not averse to abandoning his principles for personal gain. He is willing to side with the Presbyterians when he believes that his political interests would be best served by switching sides. There are no characters among the Children in Bankim's novels who are capable of such duplicity. And Bankim does not really flesh out the British and the Muslim characters in Anandamath to the extent that Scott fleshes out characters like the Loyalists Claverhouse or Evandale who, if we follow the equation I presented earlier, are the equivalent of the British-Muslim side in Anandamath. Scott's novel follows the principles of classical tragedy; great passions are allowed to play out while the drama is being enacted, but it is moderation which wins in the end. So from the likes of Burley and the Claverhouse, the spotlight shifts to Morton and Edith and their marriage when the novel ends. In Anandamath there are no fanatics among the main characters¹⁹⁸ and the novel leaves us believing that if the Children had not been stopped by the edicts of history, they could become the perfect leaders of a perfect future nation.

The awareness of the common humanity of the two warring sides that bade Scott portray both their follies and their admirable qualities is not a factor in Bankim's novel because the enmity here is more pronounced. Scott lived in a Britain where the Scots and the English could coexist while maintaining their individualities. The enemies in Anandamath present a more difficult case for Bankim. The British who are obviously

¹⁹⁸ The Hindu crowd that runs amuck after the victorious battle and vandalizes Muslim property and kills Muslims is differentiated from the Children.

foreign are blatantly inassimilable and the cow-devouring, mosque-building Muslim with his shaved head who is the foe of the Hindu at every level is not desirable as a co-nationalist. None of them is welcome in a new and independent nation. Yet, while Bankim can be angry at the British for their rapaciousness and manipulations, he can also admire them grudgingly for their intelligence and courage, a concession he is unwilling to make to the Muslim. One reason perhaps is that Bankim hoped that the British rule would be shorter-lived than the long Muslim rule and believed that the British were a race impelled by history to put an end to Muslim rule in India. That is why, even in this most patriotic of his novels, Bankim can praise the British for their astuteness and bravery. The Governor General Warren Hastings, although not a direct player in the novel, is mentioned several times and mostly favorably. When the Muslim rulers of Bengal claim to have the political situation of Bengal in control, Hastings is correct in his skepticism of this claim. Bankim writes:

There's no knowing how long this [lawlessness] would have continued, but at the time, by God's will, Warren Hastings was governor-general in Kolkata. Now, Warren Hastings was not the man to let his eye deceive his mind; if he were so inclined, where would the British Empire be in India today?¹⁹⁹

In another brief but telling reference to Hastings, Bankim uses the Englishman as someone whose authority in matters of historical records is unimpeachable. Also he praises British bravery on several occasions. Moreover, the British are so different from the Indians in every respect that imagining a new nation that counts the British among its “children” is nothing short of ridiculous. Their very difference removes any threat of their demanding citizenship in the predominantly Hindu nation of Bankim’s vision.

Unlike King Richard proclaiming his love for England in Ivanhoe, there are no instances

¹⁹⁹ Lipner, 219

of any British character proclaiming his love for India in Anandamath. The fact that the British had come as merchants and then transformed themselves into rulers was well recognized. That the distance between the rulers and the ruled would ever be erased or that the two would combine to form a new nation was not even a distant possibility.²⁰⁰ Also, the similarities of features and language that makes slaying Scottish Presbyterians so difficult for the Loyalist Major Bellenden, does not pose a problem for the Children. The British look different and they do not speak the languages of India, at least not fluently. Finally, the desire to depict the British as the enemy one could respect probably sprung out of the very practical consideration of not wanting to anger the British by an outright condemnation. It is important to remember that Bankim expunged passages in the earlier versions of the novel which mentioned the lasciviousness of the East India Company men.²⁰¹

The Muslim in Anandamath presents a different case. Attempts have been made to explain statements in the novel such as “If we don’t get rid of these bearded degenerates will anything be left of our Hindu identity?”²⁰² and “All we wish to do is uproot the Muslims completely because they are enemies of our Lord”²⁰³ as being evidence, not of Bankim’s hatred for all Muslims, but rather of his anger at the irresponsible and ineffectual Muslim rulers. Critics have also argued that the passage in the hymn “Bande Mataram,” which mentions twice seventy million hands upholding

²⁰⁰ The impossibility of the British and the Indian becoming close as equals is a recurring theme in colonial novels. Allen J. Greenberger deals with this subject in depth in The British Image of India: A Study in the Literature of Imperialism 1880—1960. (London: OUP, 1969)

²⁰¹ Julius Lipner. Anandamath 47

²⁰² Lipner, 147

²⁰³ Lipner, 180

sharpened swords to liberate the motherland,²⁰⁴ indicates that Bankim included both Hindus and Muslims in his count of seventy million children of the mother. These arguments are powerful, yet it is undeniable that in Anandamath it is not only the Muslim rulers who are mentioned by name and criticized, but there is a general animosity and contempt for Muslims. A case in point is the discussion between Mahendra and Bhavananda regarding the feasibility of the Children defeating an enemy that is superior in number. Drawing on the example of the battle of Plassey of 1757 where Robert Clive vanquished the larger force of the Nawab of Bengal to inaugurate the rule of the East India Company, Bhavananda asks rhetorically,

“How many men did the English have at Plassey?...”

“You’re comparing the Bengali to the English!”

“Why not,” answered Bhavananda. There’s a limit to physical strength. Do you think a stronger person can make a bullet fly farther?”

“Then why is there such a difference between the English and the Muslims?” asked Mahendra.

“Listen,” said Bhavananda. “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... [W]hen they see a single cannonball, a whole tribe of Muslims will flee, whereas a tribe of cannonballs cannot make a single Englishman run!”²⁰⁵

In Chapter 1 of the third part of the novel where he describes the strategy that the Children adopt of sending agents to Hindu villages to form bands to loot Muslim villages, the narrator seems to condone this act of lawlessness encouraged by the monks as being the direct result of anger caused by the long anarchical reign of the Muslim rulers. There is no mention in the novel that the widespread famine which gave rise to the Sannyasi

²⁰⁴ Lipner, 145

²⁰⁵ Lipner, 148

rebellion affected Muslims as well. Neither is it mentioned that both Hindus sadhus (ascetics) and Muslim fakirs (holy men who live on alms) were parts of the so-called Sannyasi rebellion and that they had both Hindus and Muslims among their followers. Based on such evidence one can conclude that there is not much sympathy for Muslims in Anandamath. As is clear in the comparison of British and Muslim soldiers, the martial example that Bhavananda wants the Children to follow is clearly that of the British soldiers of Plassey. That it is better to have an enemy one can respect than one who is contemptible is also a point made in a very interesting earlier essay by Bankim, “Jatibaira” (“Race Enmity”) written in 1873. In it Bankim wishes for a continuation of the animosity between the British and the Bengali to ensure that the Bengali, who was inferior to the British (“in strength, civilization, knowledge, and fame”²⁰⁶), would be motivated to catch up with the British and thus improve himself. Efforts by the British to treat the Bengali with respect were not likely to inspire the latter to change his state and were therefore not something to be desired. Nowhere in Anandamath or any other novel is any significant Muslim character held up as a similarly exemplary individual. Of the few admirable Muslim characters in the other novels, their Muslim-ness is more of an accident rather than an integral part of their being. In other words, Ayesha, Mobarak, Dariya, or Mir Qasim are admirable because they are good human beings and not because they are Muslims.

Scott’s acute awareness of the commonalities of the warring factions makes his narrator look back with compassion to both: “We may safely hope, that the souls of the brave and sincere on either side have long looked down with surprise and pity upon the

²⁰⁶ B.R Vol II 809.

ill-appreciated motives which caused their mutual hatred and hostility while in this valley of darkness, blood, and tears. Peace to their memory!”²⁰⁷ The real tragedy here appears to be the inability of each party to “appreciate” the motives of the other because the ability to understand the enemy would perhaps have prevented the bloodshed. But Anandamath takes the opposite stance. The final battle of in the novel may not have brought about independence, but there is no regret about its having taken place and certainly none for the lives that were lost. There is no sorrow for the dead soldiers of the East India Company and there is pride for the martyrs of the brotherhood.

At the time of the writing of Anandamath, victory was indisputably on the side of the British. In the last decade of the Victorian period when the fifth edition of Bankim’s novel was published, British control over India was fully and firmly entrenched after the upheaval of the 1857 uprising. The earlier Orientalist tendency to regard the subjugated people through the filter of a shared humanity and history was increasingly replaced by the more separatist Anglicist tendency that depended on the assumption of the innate inferiority of the occupied races. In accordance with the now famous Macaulay Minutes on Education of 1835 about the necessity of producing Indian men who were English in taste, the civilizing mission of the British administration was active in full force alongside securing absolute political power.²⁰⁸ Living in such a world, Bankim could not convincingly write about any common humanity between the British and the Indians. And whatever commonality was there between the Hindu and the Muslim was ignored by Bankim in the interest of an all-Hindu nation. The pro-Hindu nationalism celebrated in

²⁰⁷ Old Mortality 14

²⁰⁸ I have discussed the political situation of these times earlier in the dissertation.

Anandamath was a living force when Bankim wrote the novel in a manner that the animosity between the Presbyterians and Loyalists was not for Scott at the time he wrote Old Mortality; for him it was more a matter of historical curiosity than an element that influenced the relationship between Scotland and England of his times.

Perhaps it is because of this difference in historical perspective that Scott's novel has more humor in it. Within the first couple of chapters we are introduced to some of the funniest characters in the novel, the hero's sidekick—Cuddie Headrigg, his mother—Mause Hedrigg, and the hapless young boy who minds the estate fowls, Goose Gibbie. These characters and others continue to provide comic relief throughout the novel even when the tone is somber. Perhaps the most memorable scene is in chapter seventeen when the Loyalists led by Claverhouse meet with the Presbyterians for the first face-to-face encounter. The plot turns grim here with the death of the brave young Cornet Grahame, who tries to persuade the rebels to lay down their arms, and the death of Bothwell, one of the leaders of the Loyalists and one of the staunchest enemies of Burley, the leader of the Presbyterians. The comic relief is provided by Cuddie's overzealous mother, Mause, who is unfazed by the battle in front of her and the cowardly preacher Gabriel Kettledrummle who is struck dumb with terror. Held captive by the Loyalists on the suspicion of harboring anti-monarchical sentiments, Mause and the preacher witness the skirmishes in which the Presbyterian rebels seem to have the upper hand.

“O, sirs,” exclaimed Mause, “here's a goodly spectacle indeed! My spirit is like that of the blessed Elihu, it burns within me—my bowels are as wine which lacketh vent—they are ready to burst like new bottles. O, that He may look after his ain people in this day of judgement, and deliverance!—And now, what ailest thou, precious Mr. Gabriel Kettledrummle? I say, what ailest thou? Thou that wert a Nazarite purer than snow, whiter than milk, more ruddy than sulphur, (meaning, perhaps, sapphires)—I say, what ailest thee now, that thou art blacker than a coal, that thy beauty is departed, and thy loveliness withered like a dry

potsherd? Surely it is time to up and be doing, to cry loudly, and to spare nought, and to wrestle for the safety of the pair lads that are yonder testifying with their ain blude and that of their enemies.”

This expostulation implied a reproach on Mr. Ketteldrummle, who, though an absolute Boanerges, or son of thunder, in the pulpit, when the enemy were afar, and indeed sufficiently contumacious, as we have seen, even when in their power, had been struck dumb by the firing, shouts, and shrieks, which now arose from the valley, and,—as many an honest man might have been, in a situation where he could neither fight nor flee, was too much dismayed to take so favourable an opportunity to preach the terrors of presbytery, as the courageous Mause had expected at his hand, or even to pray for the successful event of the battle. His presence of mind was not, however, entirely lost, any more than his jealous respect for his reputation as a pure and powerful preacher of the word.

“Hold your peace, woman,” he said, “and do not perturb my inward meditations and the wrestlings wherewith I wrestle—but of a verity the shooting of the foeman doth begin to increase; peradventure, some pellet may attain unto us even here. Lo! I will ensconce me behind the cairn, as behind a strong wall of defense.”

“He’s but a coward body after a’,” said Cuddie²⁰⁹

It is mostly the village folk like Cuddie, Mause, and the preacher, who provide comic relief in the novel. Scott is deft at presenting their colorful language, shrewd observations, and personal idiosyncrasies. There is no condescension in this humor; we laugh not at them but with them.

Bankim uses humor too, but he does so sparingly. After all, in a novel that is intended to arouse feelings of nationalism and provide history lessons, humor can be distracting. Scott writes to entertain and not to instruct, so he has more leeway than Bankim, and in Old Mortality there are both Loyalist and Presbyterian comic characters. Bankim’s humor which is often laced with sarcasm is at the expense of the British or their Indian (mostly Muslim) cohorts. The warrior monks and their associates are never on the receiving end. In his letters to the cleric William Hastie²¹⁰ and many of his essays

²⁰⁹ Old Mortality 145

Bankim criticizes the inability of the British to speak and understand Bengali, and in his novels he uses this failing of the British officers and administrators to create situational humor. In addition to having the moral authority of being ardent patriots, the rebel monks have the additional advantage of being able to use language as a weapon. Shanti calls the British officer Captain Thomas a red-faced monkey and she tricks another officer, Major Edwards, into letting her ride away from the British camp after she has gauged the strength of the combined armies of the British and Indians under their command. Not only does she escape with valuable information, but she also gets to insult the British officer, taking advantage of his inability to comprehend and communicate in Bengali. In his translation of the exchange between Major Edwards and Shanti, James Lipner points out that Shanti tries to confuse the Englishman with the subtle differences in the pronunciation of the word *gad* (“fort”) pronounced with a hard “r” sound and *ghar* (“home”). Trying to gauge the strength of the Santan army at its stronghold, the fort of Padacinha, Major Edward quizzes Shanti who has come to the British camp on a reconnoitering mission in the guise of a female ascetic.

The Major asked, “Where do you live, lady”?

...”I live in Padacinha.”

“Well, that is Padsin—Padsin, is it? Is there a gar there?”

“*Ghar*? House? Yes, plenty of houses!”

“No, not *gar*--...*gar, gar!*”

“Sir, I think I understand what you want to say. Do you mean *gad*, ‘fort’?”

“Yes, yes, *gar!* Well, is there one?”²¹¹

²¹⁰ I discuss Bankim’s encounter with Hastie in chapter 5 of the dissertation.

²¹¹ Lipner, 221

The inability to master the language of the land is symptomatic of the inability of the foreigner to gain a true understanding of India. The lack of understanding symbolizes the lack of the right to be a legitimate ruler. Another difference between Old Mortality and Anandamath is that the kind of common folk that provide the bulk of the humor in one are absent in the other. The individuals that Bankim focuses on are mostly the Children and their associates, all of whom are educated and belong to the upper classes. So the kind of hearty laughter that Bankim evokes in his writings of the Kamalakanta series, where he presents a whole range of common people, is absent here. In Anandamath, a novel replete with hymns, quotations from scriptures, and evocations of scenes of divine exploits, laughter is almost an unwelcome presence. It makes its appearance lightly.

This difference is carried on in character delineation. The central female character in Scott's Old Mortality has a lighter burden to bear than Shanti or Kalyani. Edith Bellenden, noble-born, pretty,²¹² and loyal, is the object of the affections of two eligible young men—one sympathetic to the rebel cause and the other a Loyalist, each of whom is willing to step aside for the other to make Edith happy. Edith is not required to be extraordinarily courageous like Shanti because she does not have to project a national ideal. In fact her grandmother, the spirited widow Lady Margaret Bellenden, is a more colorful character and is more stridently political than Edith. It is Lady Margaret who, with her endless reminiscences of Charles Stuart's having breakfasted at the Castle of Tillietudlem, keeps the history of the conflict between Presbyterians and Loyalists alive. Her ties to this history are personal, since her husband and two sons died defending the

²¹² Scott's heroines are beautiful just as Bankim's heroines are. But beautiful as Edith Bellenden is, her love affair with Henry Morton grows out of mutual sympathy and common interest. Both Morton and Evandale admire and love Edith but it is difficult to envisage Edith as being the possessor of the kind of beauty that Sudipta Kaviraj describes Bankim's women as possessing, as marks of their fatal attraction and as signs of their liminality. See chapter 6 of the dissertation.

Royalist cause against the supporters of Cromwell. On the other hand, although she lost her father when she was young and although she grew up amidst tales of rivalries of her family and the Presbyterians, history for Edith is less personal, at least when the novel opens. Even when she is caught up in the tides of history later, Edith has little chance to affect its course. As a romantic heroine she is not expected to do anything grand; she only has to faithfully follow the script of traditional romantic tales where separation from her beloved is followed by her eventual union with him after the third character in the triangle of love, the young man whom Edith admires but does not love, dies a convenient and noble death. Since Edith does not have to step outside of her prescribed role, she can behave like a natural woman. She faints when she mistakes the flesh and blood Henry Morton for a ghost (since Morton was believed to have died at sea), and we sympathize with her. Her behavior is perfectly credible and does not detract from her character as a romantic heroine in any way.

Bankim's Shanti does not faint, but of course she is not a traditional romantic heroine even though she is young and beautiful and a man loves her deeply. There are numerous instances in the novel when we see her getting the better of men who either try to molest her or treat her as a physically or morally weak creature. When the guru Satyananda rebukes Shanti's decision to enter the monastery in the guise of a man to serve alongside her husband, Shanti is able to defend her decision in a spirited and logical manner. She also proves her worth by serving as a very efficient spy for the Children. Bankim presents her roaming the battlefield at night with a flaming torch, searching amidst the heap of dead bodies for her slain husband. But Shanti can do this because she is not an actual woman but a wish fulfillment. She is the kind of woman who was absent

in Bankim's contemporary India but whose absence was felt by the nationalist author. So, she combines the self control, physical prowess, and shastric knowledge of the ideal Hindu woman who is meant for the arena of action, a new woman who can rejuvenate an emasculated nation. The likes of Edith Bellenden are necessary for restoring stability to a nation that has gone through upheavals. Women like Shanti flourish when the nation is in crisis. Domesticity is much too tame for them and there is a reason why Shanti and Jibananda's domestic bliss is short-lived. Shanti is presented as always having been comfortable in the saffron garbs of a renouncer,²¹³ or assuming an androgynous identity. Highly educated and trained in the martial arts, she would probably feel stifled within the narrow confines of the home. All we know about Edith is that she likes to read romances (Scuderi is mentioned) and we can guess that she has probably received the kind of education deemed suitable for well-born women of her times, an education that would make her an efficient and gracious wife and mother of an aristocratic family. Shanti is trained in the classical Hindu academic tradition and in the martial arts. She is the incarnation of *śākti*, the active female principal of strength in the cosmos. As a woman who embodies the best qualities of her gender, she is the representation of the perfect female who is envisioned in the Hindu classics as the ideal complement to the perfect man. The union between them makes the complete individual--*ardha-nariswara*²¹⁴-- the perfect balance of male and female principles.²¹⁵ Simultaneously strong and feminine, she is a more complex character than Edith.

²¹³ As an adolescent she studies alongside her father's male students; she travels with a band of child-stealing gypsies who train young boys and girls in martial arts; as a young adult she travels with a band of sannyasis in the guise of a man; she enters the sacred brotherhood of which her husband is a member, as a man assuming the name Nabinananda (the young ananda).

²¹⁴ Ardha = half, nari= woman, iswara= god.

It is generally accepted by Scott scholars that Scott's heroes are like his heroines—likeable and adequate, but not extraordinary. They are decent young men who are caught up in events which they have little power to affect. In his famous essay on Scott, Lukács states that Scott's heroes occupy a middle ground while the historical characters who are generally on the periphery of the novels, represent extremes. In the preface to his Hero of the Waverley Novels, Alexander Welsh speaks of the “passive stance [of Scott's heroes]—their quite proper determination not to act for themselves.”²¹⁶ Henry Morton is no exception. Morton, the hero of Old Mortality, is the son of a brave soldier who--although he initially fought for the Presbyterian cause, eventually switched sides and died fighting for the Loyalists--was far removed from the fanaticism of Burley, the leader of the rebels that Morton encounters and with whom he is forced to throw in his lot. Like Edith Bellenden, Henry Morton is an orphan, his father having died when Morton was a young boy. His guardian, his father's brother, is far less enamored of history than Edith's guardian, Lady Margaret. Morton's uncle, the Laird of Milnewood, who inherited the elder Morton's property, is cowardly tight-fisted old man who wants to avoid trouble at any cost. Unlike Edith's home, the Castle of Tillietudlem where the memory of Charles Stuart and his loyal men are revered, Milnewood, Henry Morton's ancestral home, is a place that shuns history. When Morton is first introduced in the novel, he has no historical trappings. He appears in the *wappen schaw* (a village sports festival) scene as the winner of the archery contest of the Popinjay and is presented as a conventional romantic hero, an impoverished young man whose romance with a lovely young woman above his station sets him up for suffering. Since he has neither wealth

²¹⁵ Lipner contends that Shanti embodies the *ardha nariswara* concept herself (13).

²¹⁶ Alexander Welsh, Preface. Hero of the Waverley Novels. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) xii

nor accomplishment to recommend him, it is his gentleness and intelligence that draws Edith to him. In spite of his skill as a marksman, Morton does not appear to be dashing or exceptionally brave. His decency, however, is underscored time and time again. He graciously swaps horses with Lord Evandale, the other contender for the title of the Popinjay and for Edith's affections, when the latter admires the steadiness of Morton's horse and credits it as being a factor in Morton's hitting the target. He stands up to the insults of the drunk Loyalist guards at the village pub when they pick on the silent Burley and offers to help Burley simply because he was his father's one-time comrade. In other words, Morton is presented in a favorable light from the very beginning, but he is presented as a quite ordinary young man. He does develop into a courageous man of action who is unfailingly decent and principled, but he is never allowed to dominate a scene like Burley, Claverhouse, or even the imperious Lady Margaret Bellenden. Scott delineates his hero in muted shades because he has to eventually affect a compromise between two extremes that are presented in stronger terms. In Scott's own times the historical rivalries that Old Mortality celebrates had mellowed and compromises had been affected. Such compromises could be sustained not by the likes of the fanatical Burley (who, unlike Morton, is painted rather flamboyantly) but by men such as Morton, men of moderation and good sense. Scott believed in the linear and progressive view of history and he could explain the eventual defeat of the Presbyterian rebels, however painful it might be for a Scottish patriot, as a necessary step in the ultimate progress of Scotland, a progress that was intimately tied up with that of England. For such progress the Burleys, the Bothwells, or the Claverhouses were not the right agents because they were uncompromisingly tied either to their ideologies and political convictions or to

personal gain, but the Henry Mortons were. While this belief in compromise can be a positive one, it is easy to see why it might also have critics. Harry E. Shaw tells us that Mark Twain and the Irish nationalist and poet Hugh MacDiarmid criticized Scott for espousing values that they perceive to be conservative and reactionary.²¹⁷ Alexander Welsh interprets the passivity of Scott's heroes as springing from the desire to obey laws that eventually secure them property and consequent prosperity.²¹⁸ However one may regard the outcome of Scott's romantic heroes, the point remains that Scott's belief in progress though assimilation is evident in several of his novels and Old Mortality is no exception.

There are no Henry Mortons in Anandamath because there are no Edith Bellendens whose love has to be won at the end and no property to be secured. The only character in the novel who is shown as owning property is Mahendra, the landlord of the village of Padacinha. At first Mahendra leaves his property behind to leave the deserted village with his family and later he consecrates it to the cause of the rebels, agreeing to build a fort in Padacinha and turn it into a factory to manufacture arms. And Mahendra is already married. The relationship between him and Kalyani is not defined by romance but by sacrifice. Kalyani is prepared to die to make it easy for Mahendra to join the brotherhood and Mahendra is prepared to join the brotherhood because he believes that with his wife and daughter gone he has nothing to live for. There is another married pair, Shanti and Jibananda. Bankim presents glimpses of a young Shanti and Jibananda in the first flushes of romance, but the focus of the novel is on their marital relationship which, like Kalyani and Mahendra's, is also defined by incredible sacrifices. The only

²¹⁷ Harry E. Shaw, Introduction. "Critical Essays on Sir Walter Scott, 3

²¹⁸ Alexander Welsh, Preface. The Hero of the Waverley Novels xii

significant character who is unmarried and falls in love is Bhavananda, who is attracted to the already-married Kalyani. Extra-marital love cannot be sanctioned where purity of every kind is upheld at great cost. So Kalyani remains faithful to her husband even when there seems to be no chance of being united with him, and Bhavananda has to die. In this novel of ideals, husbands and wives love each other unconditionally, in accordance with religious principles, and their love has the strength to withstand great obstacles. At the end of the novel, Kalyani is united with Mahendra so that they can continue to serve the cause of the children. Shanti and Jibananda are also reunited, although, unlike Kalyani and Mahendra or Edith and Morton, they do not participate in the new phase of history. They withdraw from history, deciding to seek refuge in the mountains to spend their remaining days in meditation and spiritual purification. For Bankim there was no other solution. History had mandated that India be under British domination and this occupied nation was no place for warriors like Shanti and her husband. There had to be a period of relative calm essential for material progress before India could demand independence and produce children like the characters of Anandamath. But this very exclusion from history allows the characters of Bankim's novel to be larger than life. When such men and women love they love on a grand scale. Shanti is willing to live as a celibate with her husband if she can fight and die by his side. Kalyani commits suicide so that her husband can join the brotherhood unburdened by familial responsibilities. Bhavananda never forces Kalyani to give in to his demands although he could have easily done so and goes into battle determined to die because he has desired another man's wife. If his passion is great, so is his self restraint.

Unlike Anandamath which remains one of Bankim's most popular works, Old Mortality is not one of the most widely read Scott novels today. Although it inspired several translations in the nineteenth century, it never had the iconic status in Europe that Anandamath on account of its patriotic message did and still continues to do in India. In fact Old Mortality is not a patriotic novel because here Scott does not celebrate a particular cause. He tells a gripping story with compassion and tries to present both sides. Bankim's novel is one of ideas but Scott's novel is one of history re-imagined. Through Anandamath Bankim looked forward to a time when the nation would become independent, something he himself never got to see during his lifetime. Scott does not hope for anything in Old Mortality; he retells an old tale and does it well.

CHAPTER 5: THE MUSLIM IN BANKIM'S VIEW OF HISTORY

In this chapter I explore how Bankim came to formulate his ideas about the place of the Muslim in Indian history. I begin by looking at specific Orientalist ideas about India that influenced Bankim and the legacy of those ideas in modern day India. I follow this with a discussion of the two main ways that British historians and administrators viewed Indian history and the merits and problems of such views. Next, I analyze selected historical novels to understand how Bankim formulated his concept of a Hindu hero and used Muslim characters as foils. To round out this portrayal of the Muslim, I present a comparative study of British characters in the novels since the British, alongside the Muslim, is the “other” in Bankim’s novels. I end this chapter with a discussion of some of the possible reasons behind Bankim’s decision to portray Muslims in a negative manner.

Bankim wrote eight novels which use history as a backdrop. Set in the thirteenth century, Mrinalini (the novel takes its title from the name of the heroine) deals with the earliest time period of Bankim’s historical novels, the beginning of Muslim occupation of Bengal and the eastern provinces. Durgeshnandini (The Daughter of the Lord of the Fort) is set in the sixteenth century during the time of the third Mughal emperor, Akbar. Rajsingha (named after the hero) depicts events that took place a century later during the reign of Akbar’s great grandson, Aurangzeb, in the seventeenth century. Sitaram (another novel named after its hero) unfolds during the early eighteenth century when

Mughal supremacy had effectively disintegrated, creating space for independent kingdoms of various stripes. Debi Chaudhurani (named after the heroine who is given the honorary title of a high-ranking lady) and Anandamath (The Monastery of the Anandas) are also set in this eighteenth century interregnum when Muslim sovereignty was on the wane and the power of the East India Company was on the rise without having been fully consolidated. The events of Chandrasekhar take place in the post-battle of Plassey period when the East India Company became by all intents and purpose the ruler of Bengal. Yugalanguriya (The Twin Rings), a novella, is set in an indefinite time period which appears to be pre-Muslim (as I have indicated earlier, I don't engage with this work.)

Collectively these works cover a wide swath of time, from the beginning of Bengal's loss of independence to Muslim conquerors to the British period. The canvas is effectively all of India although in seven of the eight novels, all or most of the action takes place in Bengal and its surrounding regions. Rajsingha is the only novel that has the western state of Rajasthan as its backdrop. But, as scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj have remarked, Bengal comes to represent India and Bengalis come to represent Indians.²¹⁹ Bankim's readers recognized this, and that is why his novels had popular appeal and were widely translated from Bengali to other Indian languages and even into English. Each of these novels contains men and women who are heroic and while some employ their heroism in clearly patriotic ways, others prove their worth by being loyal to high ideals of personal duty and moral purity—traits that came to be valued in the nationalist construction of the ideal Hindu/Indian who was capable of self rule.²²⁰ Although all of

²¹⁹ Sudipta Kaviraj discusses this point in The Unhappy Consciousness. 144—46.

the novels except Yugalanguriya are based on actual events (in Yugalanguriya history is nothing more than an unobtrusive backdrop), the imaginative recreation of the circumstances surrounding those events rather than historical accuracy is Bankim's goal.

Critic Nicholas Rance's statement about the historical novelists who came after Scott in England could be applied to Bankim: "where little was known, history was what one made it. Too removed from the age to perceive its motivating forces, they found themselves writing the kind of history in which they wished to believe."²²¹ Rance uses the example of the George Eliot novel Romola "set in Renaissance Florence, [demonstrating] the futility of political reform in the 1860s."²²² Although the characters and events portrayed in the novel belong to the past, the issues the novel presents belonged to Eliot's own times. We see the same pattern in Bankim's novels. Underneath the stories of remarkable men and women falling in love and fighting wars in bygone eras, there is the desire to portray issues dear to the novelist, the most important being awakening in his readers the memory of a history that they could be proud of. The truth that Bankim wanted to put forth in his historical works was that the Hindu was not always weak—as charged first by Muslim and later English historians and that there was a period when he had his *bahubal*,²²³ (which literally means "physical strength" but Bankim uses it in a general sense for both physical and moral courage). All eight²²⁴ of

²²⁰ Kalyani in Anandamath is a good example of the latter kind.

²²¹ Nicholas Rance, The Historical Novel and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England. (New York: Barnes and Nobles, 1975) 26

²²² Rance, 26

²²³ In his essay "Bangalir Bahubal" ("The Bahubal of the Bengali." B.R. Vol II, 186), Bankim describes bahubal as "enterprise, unity, courage, and perseverance," qualities that even the physically weak Bengali could acquire.

Bankim's historical novels are celebrations of martial successes of Hindu men and women and use historical details in various degrees. A significant part of this imaginative recreation of history was the hearkening back to a pre-Muslim and glorious Hindu past. This was a complex process riddled with contradictions, some of which I will now explore.

The idealizing of a pre-Greek Aryan golden age with its roots in India was an important element of German and British Orientalism which scholars believe was impelled in part by the desire to downplay the importance of the French Enlightenment associated with a Latinate culture (as opposed to Anglo-Saxon/Germanic culture) and Catholicism (as opposed to Protestantism²²⁵). (Raymond Schwab argues that this desire of European Orientalists to search for roots in a distant and alien past was impelled by their unease at the instability generated by the French Revolution.²²⁶) In this Orientalist version of history there was a cultural continuity from the Aryans of India and Greece through the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon races to the Germans and Britons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Europeans, especially the Anglo-Saxons, wanted to see their past in eighteenth and nineteenth century India. Commenting on the works of the historian Henry Sumner Maine (1822-88), Ronald Inden writes: "India was...in

²²⁴ As I mention in my introduction, Bankim editor J.C. Bagal divides Bankim's novels into three categories: historical, social, and, nationalistic. Since some of Bankim's nationalistic novels use historical backdrops, sometimes those are counted among his historical novels. Hence the number of Bankim's historical novels varies from six to eight. I have decided to treat as historical novels all of the eight that use history in some measure.

²²⁵ Vasant Kaiwar, "The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance." Antinomies of Modernity, 27

²²⁶ "Raymond Schwab's insight that the 'Oriental Renaissance' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was associated with the threat of rapid changes, initiated by the French Revolution, is borne out by the revitalization of a conservative universalism that valued stability, which it ostensibly found in the 'Orient' (Kaiwar and Mazumdar, "Race, Orient, Nation in the Time-Space of Modernity." Antinomies of Modernity 271).

Maine's eyes, a living museum not just of the ancient, but of those ancients destined to rule the world, the Aryans."²²⁷ In this highly selective version of a continuous Aryan history, the contributions of Egyptians, Jews, and Muslims, among others were systematically downplayed or erased.²²⁸ Also, while the contributions of ancient Hindu India were extolled by many Orientalists, the India of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was deplored by some for its fallen condition. The difference between the images of India of the past and India of the present were explained by the theory of racial degeneration in a hot and humid climate—a point I will later cover.

Interest in ancient India led European Indologists to search for ancient Indian texts. This search was fueled by the Orientalist belief that the discovery of a lost part of the Aryan heritage would result in a cultural renaissance just as the rediscovery of Greek civilization had led to the European Renaissance. Hindu nationalists applied a similar logic in constructing their own history: the Hindu was the inheritor of a true Aryan heritage, the rediscovery of which would lead to an Indian Renaissance. Hindu scholars, who aided English Orientalists in their pioneering work of translation and interpretation, played a significant role in deciding which texts could be considered the true bearers of Aryan culture.²²⁹ Commenting on how a particular version of the Hindu Aryan past came

²²⁷ Ronald Inden, Imagining India (138). In his chapters on the caste system and Indian villages Inden writes about the Orientalist perception that castes and villages of India are ancient and unchanging features. While some Orientalists saw this essential and unchanging nature as hampering progress, others praised it as instrumental in preserving the essence of India.

²²⁸ Martin Bernal's authoritative study Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1994) deals with this subject.

²²⁹ In extreme cases these scholars sometimes inserted spurious materials into classical texts. Srinivas Aravamudan mentions several such examples in his book Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006) One of them involves the Orientalist Francis Wilford who "to his chagrin, ...discovered that the pandit in his employ had composed over twelve thousand fake 'Puranic' verses as interpolations within existing texts, including a rousing account of Noah's sons Ham, Shem, and Japhet as Sharma, Karma, and Jyapati" (34).

into being, scholars such as Uma Chakravarti have pointed out that the indigenous literati, on whom English Orientalist scholars depended to translate Sanskrit texts, often privileged certain texts or textual elements over others “to argue the debates of the present.”²³⁰ This highly constructed and sanitized version of a Hindu/Aryan past which was initially manufactured for publication in Orientalist journals “was taken over lock, stock, and barrel by nineteenth century Indian writers to build a picture of Indian civilization not just for a particular region like Bengal [where these translations were done] ...but for the whole of India.”²³¹

Some of the Orientalist ideas that had initially been formulated with reference to Greece and Europe came to acquire interesting connotations when applied to the new colonialist dynamic between India and Europe. Among the most striking features of this phenomenon were beliefs such as that the Aryan migration happened from the west and north and that the purest of Aryan elements were to be found in the northern territories; that the fair-skinned Aryans always vanquished the darker-skinned indigenous people, pushed them to the south, and decimated the culture of the latter; and that the Aryans excelled the non-Aryans in every field because they were genetically superior.²³² This pattern conceived of in regard to Greece was so successfully applied toward India that it became an integral part of Indian self-identity formed during the colonial period and still endures. Bankim certainly was influenced by it; we see this set of beliefs at play in his

²³⁰ Uma Chakravarti, “Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*?” Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History. eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1997) 32

²³¹ Chakravarti, 30-31

²³² Vasant Kaiwar discusses these points quoting from Orientalist of various stripes in his essay “The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance.” Antinomies of Modernity.

version of Indian history. His historical novels all unfold in the northern half of India—Rajasthan, the Gangetic plains, and Bengal, and the heroes and heroines are of Aryan descent, as is evident from their lineage and physical appearance (all of them are upper caste, are beautiful by Caucasian standards, and none of them are dark) and demeanor (they are courageous, morally upright, and intelligent—virtues associated with noble birth). Their nobility seems to spring naturally from their character and is not something they have to acquire.²³³ Such characters, largely products of Orientalism-inflected history, held possibilities of pride and the hope for Bankim’s readers that the virtues that once existed in Indians, could be reawakened.

Of course the dismal present intervened between the past and the future and it had to be explained in a manner satisfactory to the Hindu (since they were not Aryan-derived, non-Hindus did not count in this version of history). Several theories were put forward by both European Orientalists and their Hindu counterparts to explain the fallen state of the nineteenth-century Hindu—removal from the original stock of vigorous Aryans; the settling of Aryans in a land where the enervating climate and the ease of food production made the once-warrior-like race lazy and effeminate; continuous invasion of foreigners inimical to Hindu religion and culture, and others. While in his essays Bankim alludes to many of these theories, in his novels—especially the later ones, Muslim intervention in the continuous development of a vigorous Hindu culture comes across as being the most detrimental. As a result, what one finds in many of these novels is a denigration of the long Muslim rule and its accomplishments. The belief that the Muslim period in India

²³³ The correlation between physical beauty and moral superiority is inherent in the tradition of romance. One of the many authors who discuss this is Michael McKeon in The Origins of the English Novel: 1600-1740 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1987, 2002).

was one of darkness was of course common between both Europeans and Indians, especially Hindus; ²³⁴ like most Indians of his generations Bankim had been exposed to this idea in the writings of European historians. The upshot was that Bankim's version of a history leading to a free India did not include Muslims in any significant way. Tanika Sarkar relates the nineteenth century revivalist tendency to single out the Muslim as the arch enemy to the Hindu reluctance to believe that "internal reform" could be "a way of self-redemption." Sarkar argues that once the Hindu male accepted that there was no need for internal reform and that the Hindu way of life was fine as it was, then the cause for Hindu degeneration and the way out had to be located elsewhere. This cause of course could be conveniently located in the long Muslim rule of India and became the justification of "an apocalyptic war against the Muslims."²³⁵

In eliding the positive aspects of the non-Hindu elements of Indian history and in deciding to follow the path trodden by European Orientalists who had mastered the art of conjuring up a timeline of universal history, whereby all non-Aryan, especially Semitic, elements were systematically downgraded, Bankim inherited a legacy of anti-Muslim bias that still continues. The proponents of the Hindutva (Hindu-ness) ideology in modern India, who hold up a distorted, historically inaccurate, and selective version of Hinduism as the only acceptable culture and religion in India, clamor for the suppression and expulsion of non-Hindus. The logic that they produce to disguise their intolerance of entire groups of people is that Hindutva is not simply a religion but a culture that demands allegiance to one's place of birth over allegiance to one's religion and that it

²³⁴ Among the many who held this view are Tod, and Elliott and Dawson whose accounts I refer to later in this chapter.

²³⁵ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 141

was indeed possible to have Hindu mosques and Hindu churches.²³⁶ What this ideology does is privilege one particular religion (Hinduism) over others and promotes cultural practices associated with it (Hindutva) as the preconditions for being “authentically” Indian.

In adamantly pushing for the continuation of what the proponents of the Hindutva ideology see as the “eternal religion” (the term “sanatan dharma” or “eternal religion” was used in the nineteenth century—just as it is used now, to describe Hinduism), what is forgotten is that the concept of a uniform and homogeneous Hinduism is a relatively new one. In the editorial introduction to Representing Hinduism, Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron write

If at all unity and uniformity existed in the Hindu religions of the pre-nationalist period, it was within the various denominations of *saṃpradāys* or the Vaiṣṇavas [Vishnu worshippers], Śaivas [Shiva worshippers], Śāktas [worshippers of the Mother goddess], etc. But the lumping together of all these smaller religious communities, and their identification as parts of one so-called religion of national proportions called ‘Hinduism’, is a relatively modern phenomenon.²³⁷

Scholars such as von Stietencron argue that the idea of a homogeneous Hinduism “was introduced by Christian missionaries and scholars from the West”²³⁸ and was adopted by Hindu nationalists. When religion was conflated with peninsular geography (whereby Hinduism became the religion which sprang up in the land bounded by the

²³⁶ In her essay “Politics of National Origin: Rediscovering Hindu Indian Identity in the United States,” Sucheta Mazumdar quotes Ashok Signal the general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad as stating in the “Seventeenth Annual Calendar (1995), ‘The Hindu Rashtra can only be a state where there must be Hindu churches and Hindu mosques for Hinduism is not a religion...in Hindu India everyone has to call himself a Hindu.’” Antinomies of Modernity 241.

²³⁷ Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron eds. Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London: Sage Publication, 1995).

²³⁸ Heinrich Von Stietencron, “Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the modern Concept of Hinduism.” Representing Hinduism. 50

Himalayas on the north and the oceans on the south), even those non-Hindu children of the soil who were converts or had lived in the peninsula for generations²³⁹ were branded as unassimilable because they followed a religion that originated outside of India. While Bankim's novels have not yet been thrust to the forefront by Hindu supremacists as legitimizing examples of the impossibility of the Muslim being a true Indian (the logic being that if the Muslim was not fully integrated in nineteenth century India, there was no hope of his being integrated in twenty-first century India), it is important for his modern-day readers to be aware of the possibility.

In addition to Orientalist ways of thinking, Bankim's views about the role of the two most prominent religions in India in forming Indian history were also largely affected by the way the British thought about these subjects. Theories about Hindus inherently lacking a sense of history abounded in contemporary European writings about India. Probably partly to blame was the Hindu understanding of history as is described in a well-known *sloka* (quotation from classical Sanskrit texts) which describes history as "a narrative of old times, which contains instruction about dharma (religion/ethics), artha (material affairs), kama (love), and moksha (salvation)."²⁴⁰ According to this view, history was not merely a factual recounting of events and their causal analysis but a more comprehensive discipline encompassing the whole of human experience. The English were understandably dismissive of this model of history. They also believed that history writing was born of a sense of national identity and since Hindus did not have a sense of belonging to a nation, they did not have a national history. Muslims, on the other hand,

²³⁹ Dalmia and von Stietencron 21

²⁴⁰ The translation of the Sanskrit *sloka* is by Sudipta Kaviraj (Unhappy Consciousness) 183.

did have a historical tradition, however flawed. It is true that the most complete historical writings that the British found in India were written by Muslim historians. Most notable of these were those written in the times of the various Great Mughals.

Yet although the British judged Hindus as less adept than Muslims at the contest of history writing, there were some Englishmen who did not view the paucity of western-style history writing by Hindus as a defect. The differences between these two schools of thought—one that saw the shortage of historical writing as a lack and one that didn't—were best embodied by two spokesmen on Indian history, James Mill (1773--1836) and Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779—1859). While Mill's utilitarian views were generally dismissive of Indians, Elphinstone was more tolerant and romantic in his approach. In the introduction to The Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, editor C.H. Philips sums up these differences between Mill and Elphinstone:

Although both [Mill and Elphinstone] accepted the superiority of British over Indian rule, Mill wrote to assert the importance of utilitarianism in government and the power of government and law to change people, and Elphinstone simply to describe the political story and nature of Indian society before and after the British conquest. Detesting Mill's doctrinaire, philosophical approach Elphinstone set out to refute it. We now know, what perhaps Elphinstone himself only dimly perceived, that Mill's philosophy and approach rested on a basically different psychological outlook from that of Elphinstone; Mill assuming that everywhere human nature is the same and is therefore capable of being changed in the same ways and brought to the same level by the application of government and law, and that it was the historian's primary task to demonstrate this; Elphinstone accepting the opposed view that human nature may differ in different parts of the world and that the historian's first duty was to describe rather than to evaluate these differences.²⁴¹

A precursor to Elphinstone in this regard was Lieutenant-Colonel James Tod (1782—1835), an East Indian Company Officer whose collection of the legends, folklores, and recorded histories of Rajasthan was one of the first scholarly works on

²⁴¹ C.H. Philips, Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon, (London: OUP, 1961) 7--8

Indian history produced during the colonial period.²⁴² It was immensely popular and inspired several nationalistic works. Bengalis in particular were great admirers of Tod's annals and accepted his stories of brave Rajput heroes as proof of Hindu martial excellence.²⁴³ In the introduction to the first volume of his anthology The Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han, Tod presented a highly laudatory view of Rajput valor in preparation for presenting his collection of the histories of various states and tribes of Rajasthan:

[T]here is not a petty state in Rajast'han that has not had its Thermopylae, and scarcely a city that has not produced its Leonides. But the mantle of ages has shrouded from view what the magic pen of the historian might have consecrated to endless admiration; Somnat'h [the Hindu temple reportedly raided by Mahmud of Ghazni twenty-one times on account of its fabulous riches] might have rivaled Delphos; the spoils of Hind might have vied with the wealth of the Lybian king; and compared with the array of the Pandus²⁴⁴, the army of Xerexes would have dwindled into insignificance. But the Hindus either never had, or have unfortunately lost, their Herodotus and Xenophon.²⁴⁵

According to Tod, the Rajputs were warlike and wealthy and they indeed had histories. He laid the blame for the relative sparseness of Rajput historical records on repeated Muslim invasion—a view commonly held by historians sympathetic to Hindus. Tod mentions among the sources for his voluminous two-part collection of history and folklore,

[T]he collections of Jessulmer and Puttun...[which] escaped the scrutiny of even the lynx-eyed Alla, who conquered both these kingdoms, and who would

²⁴² James Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India. Vol 1(London, Bradford: Lund Humphries, 1829, 1957) 301

²⁴³ Michael Madhusudan Dutt's play Krishnakumari was based on a tale from Tod. Bankim borrowed the plot of Rajsingha from Tod.

²⁴⁴ Probably a reference to the one of the two royal dynasties that engaged in the fratricidal war celebrated in the epic Mahabharata.

²⁴⁵ James Tod, "Author's Introduction" Annals and Antiquities Vol. I. xviii

have shown as little mercy to those literary treasures, as Omar displayed towards the Alexandrine library.²⁴⁶

Tod's assumption is that for every Jessulmer and Puttun library that survived, there were many that were destroyed. Moreover, repeated depredations by implacably hostile foes hindered the development of a tradition of preserving historical research.

After eight centuries of galling subjection to conquerors totally ignorant of the classical language of the Hindus; after almost every capital city had been repeatedly stormed and sacked by barbarous, bigoted, and exasperated foes; it is too much to expect that the literature of the country should not have sustained, in common with other important interests, irretrievable losses. My own animadversion upon the defective condition of the annals of Rajwarra [a variant of the name Rajasthan, the land of kings] have more than once been checked by a very just remark: "when our princes were in exile, driven from hold to hold, and compelled to dwell in the clefts of the mountains, often doubtful whether they would not be forced to abandon the very meal preparing for them, was that a time to think of historical records?"²⁴⁷

According to Tod there were several possible explanations as to why the Hindus of Rajasthan did not have much written history: either there was never a Hindu recorder of historical events of the stature of Herodotus and Xenophon (which is not the same as not having a historian), or that written versions of histories were lost. Tod refers to the argument raised by the French Orientalist Abel Remusat in Mélanges Asiatiques that if Hindus did not record history then "whence 'Abulfuzil' [commonly spelled "Abul Fazal" the famous Muslim historian of emperor Akbar's court in the sixteenth century] obtained the materials for his outlines of ancient Hindu history?"²⁴⁸ Tod also mentions the name of the 12th century compilation of the history of the kings of Kashmir titled Rajatarangini (River of Kings) by the court historian Kalhan as proof of the existence of a Hindu

²⁴⁶ Tod, "Author's Introduction" Vol I xiii

²⁴⁷ Tod, "Author's Introduction" Vol 1 xiv

²⁴⁸ Tod, "Author's Introduction" Vol 1 xiv

tradition of recording history in India.²⁴⁹ Later historians have pointed out that Kalhan refers to several sources on which his own history is based but none of these were extant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that this absence lent strength to the charge of a lack of Hindu historiography. Another interesting argument that sympathetic historians have presented in favor of an early historical tradition in India is that the very works that Kalhan borrowed from fell from popularity and eventually ceased to be read after Kalhan's own work, which was a comprehensive compilation of the earlier ones, came into being. So, in a way, the creation of one historical text led to the demise of others.

However, there are as many arguments against the views stated above. Historian Vinay Lal²⁵⁰ points to the fallacy in Tod's argument that Muslim conquerors destroyed texts of Hindu histories: if the Muslim rulers were systematic destroyers of all Hindu texts, why then did many Hindu texts of various stripes survive? Of course Tod's antipathy towards Muslims stemmed from the fact that as a representative of the British East India Company he regarded the ruling Muslims as the chief obstacle to the establishment of British supremacy in India. Also, although Kalhan's work is held up as an example of a historical sense existing in pre-British India, historians argue that Rajatarangini can be attributed to non-Hindu influences dominant in Kalhan's home state of Kashmir, specifically Buddhist, Jain, and early Muslim, all of which had traditions of historiography. These historians also point out that the only other set of histories that

²⁴⁹ Tod, "Author's Introduction" Vol 1 xiii

²⁵⁰ Vinay Lal, The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India. (Delhi: OUP, 2003, 2005) 36

have survived from the Hindu period were of Sri Lankan origin and came out of a Buddhist tradition.²⁵¹

The sympathetic voices of Tod, Elphinstone, and others were drowned out by that of Mill whose linear progressive view of history in which the scientific and technological progress of Europe was identified with a later, more developed, phase of human history gained precedence in the colonial period. In this framework of history there was no place for the Hindu world view that time is cyclical and consists of four unequal parts, with every cycle beginning with an era of perfection and progressively declining until the fourth era or “yuga” of calamity when the world is destroyed so that a new cycle of four eras (satya, treta, dwapar, and kali) could begin again.²⁵² The Hindu Puranas, a body of literature that contained myths, histories, philosophical discussions and didactic tracts, functioned within this cyclical frame and promoted resignation and acceptance on the part of man. Colonial scholars such as Mill and Macaulay dismissed the Puranas as infantile and inferior and paved the way for colonial history writers to regard Indians as “backward and inward-looking, at best a lump of clay to be suitably moulded.”²⁵³ The English had one way of looking at the world and the Hindus quite another. But in colonial hierarchy one view was privileged over the other, resulting in the assumption of the British that not only did they have to create a history for India but they were

²⁵¹ A.L. Basham, “The Kashmir Chronicle.” The Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon. 57-58

²⁵² The cyclical view of history is not limited to India. Herbert Butterfield makes this point in The Origin of History. (Basic Books: New York, 1981). This is what he has to say:

[Plato] sees a god who puts the whole work into rotation, guiding it for a time and keeping it in happy and prosperous ways, but then withdraws his hand, so that everything turns into opposite direction, everything going to the bad until another era is completed, and he takes it into care, revolving it in the other way again. Polybius in the second century B.C. still connects the cyclic view of history with the notion of recurrent catastrophe (125).

²⁵³ C.H. Philips, Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon 8

responsible for showing Indians why they needed to be under British domination. Sudipta Kaviraj echoes this point when he writes “By telling the history of India, Europeans were constructing an essentialist image of a subject people, whose whole history destined them for British conquest.”²⁵⁴ According to Kaviraj, all history is contaminated by interest and histories from an alternate view point that go against the mainstream are no less valid (despite what the colonial British believed). (If the opposite were true and if history could be narrated in only one way, then there would be no place for Marxist history or subaltern history.) So Bankim’s imaginary history was as relevant as Mill’s fine-tuning of Bentham’s utilitarian history whereby he “designed a ladder or scale of civilization to simplify the legislator’s task of prescribing for each society on each particular rung.”²⁵⁵ Also, though Mill “had never been to India...had no acquaintance with its languages,”²⁵⁶ and was biased in his selection of details,²⁵⁷ it is his view of history that held sway with the work going through reprints in 1820, 1826, and 1840,²⁵⁸ and became “an established text-book at Haileybury College, where from 1809 to 1855, the Company’s Civil Service cadets were trained, and where a succession of

²⁵⁴ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness 109

²⁵⁵ C.H. Philips, The Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon 220

²⁵⁶ Philips, 219

²⁵⁷ Mill chose to rely...on the evidence of Robert Orme, whose accounts of India were written early and not intended for publication; on Buchanan, who had tried and failed to learn Sanskrit and was prejudiced against Indians; on Tennant, a most superficial observer; and on Tytler, who was very young and had seen Indian society through the refractive medium of the criminal law courts. Once committed to this view that Indian society was barbarous, Mill was highly selective in his use of evidence. The testimony of Dubois, the missionary, of Tytler and others, is cited when hostile to the Hindus, ignored when it is favourable; and the massive evidence on the character of Indians, collected in the parliamentary investigation of 1813, on the whole favourable to them, went unnoticed. (Philips 221)

²⁵⁸ Philips, 221

eminent utilitarians or close sympathizers held senior teaching posts.”²⁵⁹ Elphinstone’s more tolerant and romantic view lacked the vigor of Mill’s school of historiography and was surpassed in popularity by the latter; as a result we see intellectuals such as Bankim taking a defensive stance against the overwhelmingly negative portraiture of the Hindu as someone who lacked a sense of history.

Since he was unwilling to give credence to what he felt to be a version of history biased toward the Muslim and, later, toward the British, Bankim decided to write his own kind of Hindu history. Unlike his contemporary Bhudev who argued that there was not just one model of history as Europeans proposed but several, and that every culture wrote the kind of history that was best suited to its nature, Bankim did not write in defense of the Puranic model of history. Instead, he accepted the charges that there was no Hindu history and set about to fill in this gap.²⁶⁰ In his essay “Bharat Kalanka” (“The Shame of India”) Bankim justifies the necessity of writing a national history which is effectively a Hindu history.

²⁵⁹Philips, 226

²⁶⁰ While agreeing that evidence of history writing in Hindu India is indeed scant, historians such as R.C. Majumdar tried to refute the charge that there was no history or that whatever there was could not be accepted as history. Majumdar points to the presence of the word *Itihasa* (“history”) in classical texts, particularly in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* dated between the third century B.C.E and the first century C.E., as proof of a historical awareness. The sub disciplines within Itihasa contained “tales, anecdotes, songs and lore that had come down through the ages...traditional account[s] of men and things of the times that are past...account[s] of divine and human beings...biographies or events which illustrated some important moral principles or political precepts...” (14). Even if we grant that some of the elements included in Itihasa did not meet the modern European criteria of history, it possible to consider the contents as being embryonic history. Majumdar also mentions a tradition of record keeping at the village level where a designated scribe kept track of agricultural production and economy for the king and a special group of individuals were responsible for recording royal genealogies and genealogies of sages, gods, and great men. R.C. Majumdar, “Ideas of History in Sanskrit Literature.” *Historians of India, Pakistan, Ceylon*.

Bankim was not the only one of his contemporaries preoccupied with the question of India having a history. In 1838 the reading of one of the first papers of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge was attended by 300 people; the title of the paper was “On the Nature and Importance of Historical Studies ” and the presenter made the claim that the chief cause behind the rise of the west was its attention to history. Vinay Lal, *The History of History* 27

There is no Hindu history,--if one does not sing one's own praise, nobody does. Such is human nature that if one does not advertise oneself as great, nobody takes any notice of him. When has the praise of one nation been sung by another? The proof of Roman prowess [is in] the history written by Romans. The knowledge of Greek warriors [is in] books written by Greeks. That the Muslim is an expert in war, this we know only by believing the words of the Muslim. Only the Hindu can claim no such glory because the Hindu has not borne witness [to his own greatness].²⁶¹

In writing his own version of history Bankim chose not to follow the example of an earlier nationalist Rajnarayan Basu who asserted the importance of Muslim participation in nation building. Nor did he accord to Muslim rulers the kind of place one of the earliest history books written by an Indian (although at the behest of the East India Company) did. The history book I refer to is Rajaboli (The Account of Kings) which appeared in 1806 and which was a record of the actions of not only Hindu kings, but also of Muslim and British rulers of India. Also, Bankim's contemporary and friend Bhudev Mukherji chose to write a historical novel about a Hindu-Muslim romantic pair, the Maratha chief Shivaji and the Mughal princess Roshanara. T.W. Clark comments on that novel's sympathetic delineation of the Muslim princess's character. In one of his essays Bhudev credited the Muslim rule of India with uniting India, a view entirely missing in Bankim. Sudipta Kaviraj sums up Bhudev's vision of history in the following manner:

Indian unity was primarily a cultural idea during the ancient period. Muslim rule introduced significant institutional elements into this cultural process, especially the administrative structure, and the creation of the minimal common language in Hindusthani. British rule simply carried forward this logic of unity by creating preconditions for the translations of this cultural unity into a more self-conscious political sense of the self. Indian history could thus be seen as a great narrative of the rising of a culture to self-consciousness.²⁶²

²⁶¹ B. R. Vol II 206. (my translation)

²⁶² Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Reversal of Orientalism: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and the Project of Indigenist Social Theory." Representing Hinduism 273

Moreover, Bhudev pointed out that in spite of their different religion, the Muslims of India had cultural similarities with the Hindus and “[s]haring the same nature and same history ha[d] created a ...commonality of happiness and suffering” that the British chose to ignore.²⁶³ When viewed in this manner, Muslims had a chance of becoming an integral part of Indian history and not the destroyers of civilization that some nineteenth century Bengali intellectuals considered them. But in Bankim we see a clear difference. His vision of a free India is more articulate than Bhudev’s²⁶⁴ but also more chauvinistic and problematic. Bankim was preoccupied with writing the kind of history that his countrymen could be proud of, but what he had at his disposal by way of recorded history was not particularly inspiring. Neither the Muslim nor the British historians of India were complimentary or sympathetic. He found the writings of Muslim historians especially distasteful and had this to say about what they wrote: “Muslim historians are biased towards their own race (*jati*): [they are] Hindu haters. They often hide the glory of the Hindus—especially the accounts of the Rajputs, the eternal enemies of Muslims.”²⁶⁵

Thus in the mid-nineteenth century, however he may have tried to interpret history, for Bankim the fact remained that after several hundred years of Muslim rule, Hindus had merely changed masters by taking on the yoke of British rule and the new masters did not hold the Hindu in very high regard. But the British had to be dealt with differently in the writing of a new Indian history. In spite of his care in separating Turks

²⁶³ Kaviraj, “The Reversal of Orientalism: Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and the Project of Indigenist Social Theory.” Representing Hinduism 257

²⁶⁴ Bhudev wrote an imaginary history of India titled Swapnalabhdha Bharatbarsher Itihas. The title can be translated variously as An Imaginary History of India or The History of an Imaginary India. 9 B.R., Vol. 1 42

from Pathans from Arabs (each of whom came to India in successive waves²⁶⁶), Bankim refers to their collective years of sovereignty as Muslim rule. In contrast, the history of first the East India Company and then the Crown are never referred to as Christian rule and never studied as separate histories. To Bankim, where British rule was concerned, religion was of less importance than other aspects while the converse was true for Muslim occupation.²⁶⁷ Since religion became the defining feature of the Islamic period of India, predictably, the antidote Bankim offered was another religion, Hinduism. Bankim quotes Elphinstone's opinion²⁶⁸ that Hindus staved off Muslim rule for as long as they were able to (which according to Bankim's detailed math is more than three hundred years) because of Hindus' adherence to their religion, but Bankim disagrees with this point of view. According to him, the modern Hindu living under British rule was just as loyal to his religion but lacked the military skills of his forefathers. Of course Hinduism did play a role in the shaping of India's history: Bankim argues that aspects of Hinduism such as the practice of regarding the material world less important than the spiritual world engendered in the Hindu a curious lack of interest in political independence.²⁶⁹ To this he adds the opinion popular among Orientalists that for climatological reasons which made food abundant and life easy, Indians had the leisure to engage in mental rather than physical activities and while they attained great heights in philosophy, they failed to develop a corresponding desire for material prosperity necessary for fostering the kind of

²⁶⁶ "Why is India Unfree?" B.R. Vol II 206.

²⁶⁷ This view of history as being made by man and not by divinity came into being after the Enlightenment. This secular view of history was bolstered by the "sciences" such as anthropology and hailed as being superior to an earlier one whereby history was believed to be ordained by God and entangled in fate and predetermination.

²⁶⁸ "Why is India Unfree?" B.R. Vol II 206.

²⁶⁹ "Why Is India Unfree ?" B.R. Vol II 208.

individualism one sees in peoples who succeed as warriors and empire builders. Since interest in history is driven by the desire to keep records of political and martial events of nations, the Hindu's lack of interest in the material world, while conducive to producing a philosophical bent of mind, was inimical to producing a historical one.

But the fact remained that the most comprehensive history of the Hindu during the Muslim rule of India came from what the Muslim historians had recorded. There were no significant extant accounts from the Hindu point of view. Writing an inspiring history while inheriting a burdensome legacy was indeed a formidable challenge for Bankim, and this is where imagination helped him triumph over hard fact. Debating the historian Minhajuddin's telling of how in 1205 the last independent Hindu kingdom of Gaud (as parts of Bengal was known) was conquered from the last king of the Sen dynasty by only seventeen Muslim horsemen, Bankim has this to say:

Who knows how much of this is true and how much is false? In the picture drawn by man the lion is defeated and man is depicted as humiliating him. How would it be if the lion had the canvas? There is no doubt that man would be painted as a mouse. Ill-fated Bengal is easily weak, and the canvas is in the hands of the enemy.²⁷⁰

In Mrinalini (first publication 1869) Bankim provides an alternate account of this invasion and conquest; the seventeen horsemen who entered the capital were ahead of a much larger army—of 25,000 by some accounts. The citizens mistook the soldiers as traders and had no time to prepare for the terrible destruction that was about to come. In addition, the old king had been betrayed by his ministers who colluded with the enemy for personal gain. The Hindu hero of the novel Hemchandra (who is not a historical character unlike the Muslim invaders or the Hindu king who are) shows exceptional valor

²⁷⁰ B.R. Vol 1 190

by sallying forth to meet the enemy but is sage enough to realize that there is nothing that he can do single-handedly. He retires to a region unconquered by Muslims where he builds a successful Hindu kingdom that provided a safe haven for Hindus. Eventually the leader of the seventeen horsemen, Bakhtiyar Khilji, who Bankim reminds us was “short, long-armed, ugly” and “apelike,”²⁷¹ is killed fighting in the north-east (that Khilji died fighting in India is supported by recorded history).

As the analysis of Mrinalini shows, several details not supported by mainstream history are marshaled into the service of countering the charges of incompetence and cowardice leveled at the Hindus of the Sen Period. The period after the fall of Sen kingdom is presented as a period of darkness. Bankim tells us that the guardian goddess of the kingdom departed when the old king fled through the back door after being surprised at his lunch by the noontime invasion of the palace. It is important to note that Mrinalini, which J.C. Bagal mentions as being the first novel in which Bankim’s nationalism has its first expression,²⁷² is marked with antipathy toward the long Muslim rule of India.

It is of little surprise, therefore, when in a later novel, Rajsingha Bankim proceeds to denigrate even Akbar, widely accepted as the most liberal and enlightened Muslim ruler of India.²⁷³ While Akbar’s policy of establishing marriage alliances with Hindu Rajput royal families, employing Hindus in important positions, and founding a syncretic religion that combined elements of Hinduism and Islam made him popular with Hindus,

²⁷¹ B.R. Vol 1 189-190

²⁷² B.R. Vol 1 33

²⁷³ In both Durgeshnandini and in Kapalkundala, a romance that I have not included in my discussions because of the incidental nature of its historical details, Akbar gets a fairer treatment.

Bankim has one of the Hindu women in Rajsingha utter a surprising comment: “*Akbarer name Rajputani jhadu mare.*” An approximate translation of this highly colloquial phrase will be something like, “A Rajput woman deems Akbar’s name fit only for a broomstick.” This effectively reduces Akbar’s stature to that of garbage.²⁷⁴ In the same novel Bankim tacitly criticizes Prince Man Singh, Akbar’s brother-in-law and general and, by some accounts, the first Hindu royal to allow his family to enter a marriage alliance with the Mughals.

This alternative reading of history where Akbar and Man Singh are not wholly admirable figures fits neatly into the philosophical framework of the novel because the central episode of it is the battle between Rajsingha, the descendant of the most prominent Rajput dynasty that refused to accept Mughal sovereignty and paid a heavy price for it, and Aurangzeb, the descendant of Akbar. There were apocryphal stories about Rajsingha’s ancestor Rana Pratap, who was reduced to living in extreme hardship after being defeated by the Mughal army, refusing to eat with Man Singh who came as Akbar’s emissary. He is said to have sent his son in his stead because a king sat down only with a king and Man Singh was only a prince while Rana Pratap was a king. Admirers of Rana Pratap read into this act the proud king’s condemnation of a fellow Rajput who sold out to the enemy. Anecdotes of Rana Pratap’s bravery were recounted in Tod’s Annals and, although Bankim does not directly mention this particular hero, we can assume that such stories were not unknown to the educated Bengalis of his times.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ In “Akbar’s Dream”, Tennyson draws a sympathetic portrait of the emperor as an enlightened and sensitive monarch, as true a progenitor (as a non-European can be) of the enlightened and sensitive Englishman. Bankim is silent on this aspect of the Great Mughal.

²⁷⁵ The best known evidence of Tod’s influence on Bengal is probably Abanindranath Tagore’s 1905 children’s book Raj Kahini, a retelling of nine of Tod’s stories.

So what kind of a hero or heroine did Bankim deem to be the ideal protagonist of the kind of history he wanted to write? Perhaps the question is best answered by an examination of the kind of Hindu characters he portrays in the novels. And the spectrum ranges from near-perfect to heavily flawed characters. While the first kind are straightforward role models, the latter show us how their personal shortcomings negatively affect their lives and the lives of those around them. Although I focus in more details on the portrayal of Hindu women in the historical tales in the following chapter, I do include some of them in my discussion here. Bankim's ideals of Hinduism are embodied as much by his women as by his men. Also, alongside examining the Hindu characters I would also like to look at the Muslim characters because Bankim often uses them as foils to his Hindu heroes and heroines.

The first novel that I would like to examine is Rajsingha because Bankim called it his only historical novel and because here he provides two sets of royal characters, Hindu and Muslim, and makes them in many ways emblematic of the differences he perceived between Hindus and Muslims. Since Bankim himself called it his only historical novel, Rajsingha allows us to see Bankim's theories about writing a Hindu history in practice. First published in 1882 as a slender volume of only eighty-three pages, the novel was expanded through four editions with the fourth one appearing in 1893 with 434 pages. The novel's climax is the battle between the sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb and the Hindu Rajput king Rajsingha which is not much more than a mere footnote of Indian history. Even in the annals of the battles between Mughals and Rajputs it does not occupy the stature of encounters such as the battle of Haldighat (fought in 1576 between Rana Pratap and Akbar) or the battles for the capture of Chittorgarh (there were several

such battles). Many of the details of the fight between Rajsingha and Aurangzeb in the novel are invented and Bankim admits that they had to be invented since they were not recorded. In The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan Tod records the encounter between Rajsingha and Aurangzeb in this manner.

The Mogul [Aurangzeb] demanded the hand of the princess of Roopnagurh, a junior branch of the Marwar house, and sent with the demand (accompliance with which was contemplated as certain) a cortege of two thousand horse to escort the fair to court. But the haughty Rajpootini [Rajput woman, ie. the princess], either indignant at such precipitation or charmed with the gallantry of the Rana [Rajsingha], who had evinced his devotion to the fair by measuring his sword with the head of her house, rejected with disdain the proffered alliance, and, justified by brilliant precedents in the romantic history of her nation she entrusted her cause to the arm of the chief of the Rajpoot race, offering herself as the reward of protection. The family priest (her preceptor) deemed his office honoured by being the messenger of her wishes, and the billet he conveyed is incorporated in the memorial of this reign. "Is the swan to be the mate of the stork: a Rajpootni, pure in blood, to be wife to the monkey-faced barbarian!" concluding with a threat of self-destruction if not saved from dishonour. This appeal, with other powerful motives, was seized on with avidity by the Rana [Rajsingha] as a pretext to throw away the scabbard, in order to illustrate the opening of a warfare, in which he determined to put all to the hazard in defence of his country and his faith. The issue was an omen of success to his warlike and superstitious vassalage. With a chosen band he rapidly passed the foot of the Aravulli [mountains] and appeared before Roopnagurh, cut up the imperial guards, and bore off the prize to his capital.²⁷⁶

This is the kernel of history on which Bankim bases his novel. But what was it exactly that made him select this particular story? While an exciting event, the story of Rajsingha's kidnapping of the princess of Roopnagar is neither unique nor the most famous among the annals of the princely states of Rajasthan. And the outcome of the battle did not result in lasting independence for the states of Rajasthan, although Mewar, Rajsingha's kingdom, did continue to maintain its pre-battle independence. It appears that certain features of the story of Rajsingha, the princess of Roopnagar (whom Bankim names Chanchal Kumari) and Aurangzeb suited Bankim's purpose better than other

²⁷⁶ Tod, . Vol I 301

stories of romantic elopement/abduction and consequent battles—the most famous of these being the story of another Rajput king, Prithviraj, abducting of the daughter of a rival king and the ensuing enmity that left the independent Hindu kingdoms of northern India splintered and vulnerable to Muslim invasion. Bankim mentions this incident briefly in one of his essays²⁷⁷ as a negative example of internecine rivalry that proves harmful to a nation. Since Rajsingha’s defiance of the Mughal emperor did not produce any negative consequences for Hindus, it could be held up as a shining example of Hindu martial glory. Moreover, its being more of a footnote rather than an important chapter in history provided Bankim with the added advantage of allowing room for invention that helped him write his particular brand of pro-Hindu history. It allowed him to endow Rajsingha with all the traits of an ideal hero. The king is a fearless warrior, loyal to his duties as a Hindu, the protector of the weak, a heroic lover, yet a man of admirable self-restraint. The princess who eventually becomes his bride is his ideal match. She is beautiful, courageous, intelligent, loyal, and loving. Recorded history does not tell us much about what kind of individuals the king and the princess were, and this lack of detail allows Bankim to fashion out of these shadowy characters the ideal men and women whom Hindus could be proud of.

In Rajsingha Bankim chooses to elevate the status of the battle between Rajsingha and Aurangzeb to the level of the battles of Salamanca and Austerlitz. (In Austerlitz Napoleon defeated the combined Russian and Austrian Third coalition, which had 30,000 more troops; in Salamanca the Anglo-Portuguese-Spanish army commanded by the Duke of Wellington handed the French army a decisive victory.) Also, Bankim titles the

²⁷⁷ “India’s Independence and Dependence.” B.R. Vol II, 213.

chapter on Rajsingha's battle in the mountain passes of Rajasthan "Second Xerexes—Second Palatea," obviously comparing the Rajput army, which was much smaller than the Mughal army, with the small but eventually victorious Greek army that defeated the Persians. Such comparison lifts an unknown event of Indian history out of obscurity and places it in the mainstream of world history. (In doing so Bankim does what Scott had done for several relatively unknown events of Scottish history, present them as events of great historical significance.) Although there was no successful resistance to the Mughals on a continued basis by a combined Rajput army during the long Mughal rule, there were several individual instances of heroism such as Rajsingha's, and Bankim chooses to immortalize it. Rajsingha is also compared to William of Orange and the two are compared favorably with Aurangzeb and Philip II of Spain, respectively. Both Aurangzeb and Philip II of Spain were "cruel, hypocritical, devious, egotistical, selfish, and oppressors of their people."²⁷⁸ Such comparisons magnify the status of Rajsingha and raise him to the level of well-known actors of European history and highlights events that Bankim believes should be brought to the attention of his readers. The relative obscurity of Rajsingha in Indian history is explained by Bankim in the final laconic comment "This country [India] has no history, so nobody knows about Rajsingha." This comment could be read in two ways: the version of history that has relegated Rajsingha to its footnotes while giving Aurangzeb the lion's share, is highly skewed and needs to be set right, and the right kind of history (one that celebrates Hindu prowess) has not been recorded.

²⁷⁸B.R. Vol I 652

As to be expected, none of the Muslim characters who are historical get a sympathetic treatment in Rajsingha.²⁷⁹ Aurangzeb is without scruples and code of honor; his daughter Zebunnissa and his favorite wife Udipuri Begum are caricatures of lascivious and debauched harem women. Their moments of brief redemption are engineered by Hindus. Aurangzeb is at his most human when he confesses his love for Nirmal Kumari, a Hindu woman (a non-historical character invented by Bankim), and appeals for help to her when the Rajput warriors led by Rajsingha trap the Mughal army in a mountain pass.²⁸⁰ It is another Hindu woman, the princess Chanchal Kumari, who brings out the best in the haughty and nymphomaniac princess Zebunnissa. By arranging a meeting between Zebunnissa and her socially inferior lover Mobarak whose offer of marriage the Mughal princess had spurned earlier, Chanchal Kumari helps Zebunnissa find the strength to reveal her love for Mobarak and thus become a better person. Aurangzeb's wife, Udipuri Begum (who is Christian), is at her purest when she prays to the crucifix and a statue of Mary for the first time in a long time after being justly humbled for her pride by Chanchal Kumari. As the portraiture of Udipuri Begum reveals, although most of Bankim's criticism is leveled at Muslims, Christians do not fare well either; they appear to be no match for the morally upright Hindu. (In another novel with a historical backdrop, Chandrasekhar, the plot is set in motion by the abduction of a Hindu woman by an English, hence Christian, soldier.)

²⁷⁹ On this point I differ from Tanika Sarkar who feels that even though Bankim starts out by stereotyping Aurangzeb, he does humanize the emperor as the novel progresses. She refers to Bankim's description of the white-haired emperor when he is first introduced in the novel and to his "melancholy love for a Hindu serving maid" and takes this description to be a positive one (Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation 188). I feel that if there is any sympathy for Aurangzeb in the novel, it is obscured by the negative connotations of the emperor.

²⁸⁰ Bankim makes no mention of the accounts that record the piety, frugality, and diligence of Aurangzeb who lived a simple life.

The only historical character in Aurangzeb's family who gets a sympathetic treatment in Rajsingha is Jodhpuri Begum, and it is no accident that she is a Hindu woman. True to his goal of focusing on Hindu virtues, Bankim fleshes out the character of the Hindu wife of Aurangzeb and the mother of his first son. Not much is known about this Rajput princess (who is mentioned in certain accounts as Nawab Bai) except that her marriage to Aurangzeb was arranged at the behest of Aurangzeb's father, Shahjahan, and that she was not known for her beauty. (It is reputed that Aurangzeb's chief wife and favorite, Dilras Begam, was a Persian princess of great beauty.) After the death of his father, Aurangzeb sent Jodhpuri Begum away and she lived out her life in obscurity, doing charitable deeds, as was common for royal women. One of her two sons disavowed any relationship with her because of her Hindu origin and the other fell into disfavor because of his desertion of his father's army during an important battle.²⁸¹ Bankim paints Jodhpuri Begum²⁸² as a woman of dignity and resourcefulness and in the novel she is accorded the rank of the chief wife of Aurangzeb. She puts her own life at risk helping Nirmal Kumari (the loyal attendant of the Roopnagar princess) when the latter is brought into the women's quarters. Bankim has Jodhpuri Begum wishing for her husband's death when she hears of his plan to humiliate the princess of Roopnagar by making her a servant of the alcoholic Udipuri Begum. When Jodhpuri's role as a mother to one of the possible claimants to the throne conflicts with her devotion to her religion, the latter triumphs and she tells her confidante that she would much rather see the evil Mughal empire crumble under the joint onslaughts of the Maratha chieftain Shivaji and

²⁸¹ Annie Krieger Krynicki, Captive Princess: Zebunnisa, Daughter of Aurangzeb, trans. Enjum Hamid. (Oxford, New York: Oxford UP, 2005) 3, 93

²⁸² It is not clear why he so names her. Jodhpur was one of the Rajput royal houses that were allied to the Mughals through marriage. But Nawab Bai was not from Jodhpur.

the Rajput king Rajsingha (both Hindus) than safeguard it for her son (who is Muslim). Having lived a life of dishonor in the imperial quarters (she mentions having been assaulted by her sister-in-law Roshanara for expressing her wish to be the mother of an emperor—a detail that the biographer of Aurangzeb’s daughter Zebunnisa, Annie Kreiger Krynicki, supports²⁸³), the queen sends message to Chanchal Kumari that it is better to commit suicide rather than enter the harem of the Mughal emperor.

Jodhpuri’s choice of widowhood over witnessing the dishonoring of a kinswoman is extremely significant. For a devout Hindu woman, wishing for her husband’s death is sacrilege--as Bankim’s readers were well-aware. The only way the queen can utter such a terrible wish and still remain a sympathetic character is if the author can make her suffering credible, and Bankim does this effectively by highlighting her selflessness, purity, and courage in a hellhole of extreme luxury and vice. Bankim emphasizes the queen’s steadfastness to her religion by mentioning that she managed to maintain the ritual purity of the food she ate by employing Hindu cooks and by worshipping her own gods even in the palace of an emperor known for his enmity towards idol-worshippers. When, upon being imprisoned in the royal palace, Nirmal Kumari insists on maintaining her caste purity, Aurangzeb allows her to stay in the quarters of his Hindu wife. Thus adherence to the ritualistic practices of Hinduism in the face of obstacles is celebrated as an admirable trait.

In the novel there are no Hindu characters that are not admirable. Even Maniklal, who starts out by being a robber, is transformed into the hero’s trusted servant after his encounter with Rajsingha. Maniklal is quick-thinking, loyal, and brave. His voluntary

²⁸³ Krynicki, 115

act of slicing off his index finger as proof of the seriousness of his pledge to Rajsingha certainly lends weight to the message about the Rajput/Hindu/Indian courage. Bankim scholars recount that Bankim had temporarily halted serializing the novel because some of his readers were concerned by the negative example of a Hindu bandit.²⁸⁴ The fact that Bankim took these charges seriously enough to disrupt the serialization of the novel speaks volumes about the earnestness of his purpose in writing a historical novel which celebrated the virtues of Hindu men and women.

One of the most memorable moments of the novel, and one that highlights the Hindu's indomitable courage, occurs when Aurangzeb tries to seduce Nirmal Kumari to get her to reveal the whereabouts of Rajsingha. A true Rajput woman, Nirmal Kumari indicates her willingness to die rather than be disloyal to her king when the emperor threatens to force her secrets out of her. What follows is an amazing exchange in which Nirmal Kumari reminds the emperor of his past misdeeds and the forgotten lessons of history. She reminds him that when he murdered his elder brother and the successor to the throne, Dara, and invited Dara's wives to join his harem (a common practice among Muslim rulers), the Rajput wife of the murdered prince committed suicide and his Christian wife (Udipuri Begum) willingly entered the harem. The emperor threatens Nirmal with a veritable list of tortures--cutting off her tongue, burning her at stake, denying her food and water, and the most terrible threat for a Hindu—robbing her of her

²⁸⁴ Bankim mentioned his reluctance to creating characters such as Maniklal in Rajsingha whom the reader first meets as the wily leader of a band of robbers and who transforms into a loyal follower of the hero Rajsingha when the latter spares his life after having slain or injured the members of his band. Maniklal evolves into the trusted sidekick who becomes instrumental in securing Rajsingha's victory and even marries the close companion of the heroine of the novel. It is not quite clear what Bankim's friend saw as objectionable in this character and, more importantly, why Bankim took to heart this objection. The narrator of this event (Srish Chandra Mazumdar) and others stressed that a characters like Maniklal were not necessarily bad examples and could even be considered good for the country. Bankim eventually overcame his initial hesitation and completed the novel.

religious purity by force-feeding her beef. As expected, Nirmal Kumari is more than a match for the emperor. She retorts by saying that cutting off her tongue will deprive the emperor of forcing out of her the very secrets he is after; burning at stake holds no threat for the Hindu woman who is prepared to sacrifice herself willingly on the funeral pyre of her husband; denying her food and water is no torture for a Hindu woman who is used to fasting on holy days; and she is ready to commit suicide by ingesting poison which she carries on her person before she has to eat cattle flesh. Nirmal Kumari's willingness to die in the course of right action, Chanchal Kumari's willingness to lay down her life to stop unnecessary bloodshed,²⁸⁵ and Nawab Bai's courage in being ready to choose widowhood over witnessing the dishonoring of a kinswoman are all offered as proof of the Hindu woman's indomitable courage. In their own ways each of these women are potential satis—women who could fearlessly ascend the funeral pyres of their dead husbands either out of a desire to follow them in death or to save themselves from potential dishonor at the hands of a victorious enemy to fulfill their dharma, or moral duty for any other reason. In commenting on the recurring patterns of Hindu nationalistic histories in the nineteenth century, Partha Chatterjee writes that “the courage of Hindu women” and their “intelligence” were traits that nationalistic historian often harped upon.²⁸⁶ Bankim's ideal Hindu women appear to have sprung directly from such nationalistic histories.

Not only are these women virtuous and courageous, they are good teachers of the right kind of history, the kind that Bankim sought to teach his readers. When Mobarak

²⁸⁵ Chanchal Kumari steps between the armies of Rajsingha and Mobarak challenging them to kill her first before continuing with a battle in which severe loss of lives was inevitable.

²⁸⁶ Partha Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, Representing Hinduism, 123.

tries to persuade Chanchal Kumari to accompany him to the imperial court in Delhi and leave Rajsingha's protection, the princess reminds the Mughal general that history is full of instances where Mughal forces have been defeated by much smaller Rajput armies. In using the reference of the battle of Haldighat²⁸⁷ Chanchal Kumari positions herself as the repository of the kind of knowledge about national history that needs to be preserved and transmitted through generations. Nirmal Kumari also fulfils a similar role—we see her reminding Aurangzeb of his own bloody history of fratricide.

However, in other instances the way in which Bankim uses her is highly problematic. Through Nirmal Kumari Bankim alerts his readers to the fact that Muslim kings have routinely defeated Hindu armies by placing in front of themselves in the battlefield herds of cattle, regarded as sacred by Hindus. Nirmal Kumari makes this out to be the chief reason why Muslims have been successful in defeating Hindus. (Bankim neglects to mention the source for this rather startling bit of supposedly historical assertion which is by no means common knowledge, making this detail highly problematic in a novel that its author considers to be his only historical novel.²⁸⁸) She compares the military might of the Muslims to that of the Hindus negatively by calling the former *gospad* or water that collects in the hoof print of a cow and the latter, an ocean. While one can understand Bankim's reasons for making Nirmal speak in hyperboles in favor of Hindu might and courage, his inclusion of the rather disturbing detail about Muslim subterfuge in battle is hard to accept and seriously undercuts the

²⁸⁷ Although the battle of Haldighat or Haldighati in 1567 resulted in a defeat for Rana Pratap, it is often held up as an example of Rajput courage in which a Rajput army fearlessly took on a much larger enemy.

²⁸⁸ In his "Appeals to Young Writers of Bengali" Bankim exhorts writers "do not write what you cannot prove. It is not always necessary to provide proof, but you should have them at hand" (B.R. Vol II 237). One wonders what proof he would have "at hand" for some of his assertions.

historical value of Rajsingha. This omission is all the more disturbing since Bankim is quite good at mentioning sources in his novels and essays. In the preface/advertisement to the fourth and most expanded version of Rajsingha he names Tod (James Tod) and Orme (Robert Orme, historiographer of India) as his sources. In the novel he quotes from Rajsingha's letter to Aurangzeb about the former's refusal to pay the zeziya tax which Aurangzeb imposed on the Hindus and he cites Tod's volume as the source, including even the page number. In the light of such meticulous attention to detail and Bankim's obvious erudition, the lack of supporting evidence reduces the "proof" of Muslim duplicity to the level of sensational falsehood. Significant parts of the history that Rajsingha tries to promote become pure fiction and quite dangerous fiction at that. Ironically, discussing the issue of authenticity of history, Bankim himself was aware of how even histories written by Rajputs could be biased. In the preface to the fourth edition of Rajsingha he writes: "one cannot wholly rely on Rajput histories either, it is not like [accounts written by Rajput historians] are free of bias towards their own kinds."²⁸⁹ But this awareness was not enough to guarantee his strict adherence to recorded facts. In writing his own version of history, it seems the historian Bankim lost out to the patriot Bankim.

So, one is not surprised when in his bid to denigrate Aurangzeb, who is widely accepted as being the most religious of the six great Mughals, Bankim emphasizes the sensuality of the Mughal emperor as proof the general moral laxity of the Mughals as opposed to the purity of the Hindus. Here is how Aurangzeb is introduced to us:

Emperor Aurangzeb was world famous. He became the ruler of an empire that was world famous. He was intelligent, hardworking, a skilled administrator,

²⁸⁹ B.R. Vol I 42

and had many other kingly virtuous. In spite of possessing such qualities this world famous emperor died after destroying his own world famous empire.

The only reason was that he was a great sinner. It is hard to come by a ruler who was as cunning, hypocritical, unhesitatingly sinful, selfish, oppressor of others, and [especially] of his subjects. He pretended to be in control of his sensuality—[but] his harem buzzed day and night like a beehive with the voices of countless beauties.

His wives were many—and he had countless pleasure women with whom he had no connections according to the laws of the sura.²⁹⁰

This portraiture is followed by a vignette of the drunken Udipuri Begum, Aurangzeb's chief wife. The overwhelming impression that one gets from these two descriptions is that the Mughal palace in Delhi was a den of sin. All the Mughal royals—Aurangzeb, his daughter Zebunnisa, and Udipuri Begum—are portrayed as licentious, cunning, and morally weak. No evidence is presented of any evidence to the contrary or to portray positive facets of Aurangzeb, who was an astute ruler and soldier and was reputed to live a frugal and disciplined life in accordance with the strictest principles of Islam, a fact recorded by both European and Indian historians of his day. Also disregarded is the princess Zebunnisa's reputation as a poet, scholar, and a philanthropist—facts perhaps less well-known in Bankim's day than details about her father. Bankim appears to have modeled the character of Zebunnisa on that of her aunt and Aurangzeb's favorite sister Roshanara—about whom stories abounded. Even Aurangzeb's father Shahjahan and older sister Jahanara are not spared, even though they are not part of the plot of the novel. Bankim hints at the rumor that the emperor Shahjahan had an illicit relation with his daughter Jahanara. He does not mention the emperor by name but makes the sly remark, “there were many to satisfy [Jahanara's

²⁹⁰ Rajsingha, B.R. Vol II 568 (my translation)

sexual] hunger; among them there is one mentioned by European travelers, writing whose name would pollute my pen.”²⁹¹

Largely apocryphal stories of Jahanara’s resemblance to her mother, Shahjahan’s beloved Mumtaz Mahal, and Shahjahan’s remark to his gardener that a planter of trees has rights to the fruits thereof, have continued to survive.²⁹² As such they are fair game for a writer of historical fiction. But what is surprising is that Bankim’s disparaging remarks about Shahjahan and Jahanara, who were cruelly treated by Aurangzeb, go against the generally favorable view of the father-daughter duo. Bankim could have followed popular tradition and written about the imprisonment of Shahjahan by Aurangzeb after the latter seized power, the beheading of the crown prince Dara at his behest, and his sending Dara’s head on a platter to their imprisoned father. These historically accurate details would have certainly added to the villainy of Aurangzeb, but Bankim chooses to leave them out. Perhaps he feared that reminding his readers about the sufferings of the Muslim Shahjahan and Jahanara would divert their sympathy and Bankim needed to reserve all of the reader’s sympathy for his Hindu characters. That is why in this novel about Hindu moral superiority and bravery, Muslim characters—especially if they are based on actual historical records—are tarnished quite indiscriminately.

The only Muslims who get a sympathetic treatment are the fictional ones.

Mobarak, the husband of Dariya and the lover of Zebunnisa, is initially seduced by the

²⁹¹ B.R. Vol. 1 558 (my translation)

²⁹² In Captive Princes Annie Krieger Krynicki writes Shahjahan loved this daughter very much. Both Bernier and Tavernier went to the extent of insinuating incest in the relationship, though Manucci, the emotional Italian ever faithful to Dara and Shan Jahan, gallantly takes Bernier to task over this, refuting his slanderous accusation and at one point referring to Jahanara as ‘calm like a clear wave, virginal as the lily’ (xvii).

princess's charms but soon realizes his mistakes and comes back to his wife. That Mobarak is a character the reader (who we can assume to be Hindu) can side with is signaled early in the novel. When Zebunnisa responds to Mobarak's marriage proposal by saying that she is a Mughal princess, not a Hindu Brahmin woman or a Rajput woman who was destined to serve one husband her entire life and end it in the flames of his funeral pyre, Mobarak reacts with horror. Bankim tells us "Mobarak was astounded; he had never heard anything as despicable—not even in a city as hellishly sinful as Delhi."²⁹³ Bankim's implication is that the concept of multiple partners for a woman is unnatural and Mobarak, by his acceptance of this standard of female purity, firmly places himself on the side of righteousness, which by default is Hindu code of behavior. As is to be expected, no rebuke is directed at the men who have more than one wife. In the Muslim Mobarak's distaste for the idea of one woman having more than one partner, it is possible to read subtle criticism of the practice of divorce and widow remarriage in Islam.²⁹⁴ Mobarak's tacit admiration of the Hindu brand of female chastity (whereby a woman is allowed to have only one husband during her lifetime) is a mark of his superiority among depraved Muslim characters of the palace. This superiority is further evinced by his behavior on the battlefield when he looks upon Chanchal Kumari for the first time. Mobarak is a young man who is attracted to beauty (even though he is already married, he falls in love with older Zebunnisa because she is beautiful), but he treats Chanchal with deep respect and addresses her as mother—thus acknowledging her nobility rather than her beauty. In other words, his behavior is the same as that of the

²⁹³ B.R. Vol I 560

²⁹⁴ In Samya, Bankim expressed his firm belief that even if widow remarriage became legal, a loyal wife, who truly loved her husband, would never marry after his death. B.R. Vol II 347

Hindu soldiers of Rajsingha's army who hail the Hindu princess as a divine being. Mobarak's eventual success in making Zebunnisa admit her love willingly and marry him without regard to consequences is further testimony to his worthiness. In short, in his belief in the sanctity of marriage and in his ability to treat women with respect, Mobarak behaves like an exemplary Hindu male. Dariya, his neglected wife, who remains devoted to him and eventually wins him back from the clutches of Zebunnisa, albeit temporarily, behaves like a Hindu woman in her steadfastness.

The necessity of fidelity in a Hindu woman is emphasized in several Hindu scriptures and is reflected in beliefs such as that the husband is the greatest god for a wife, that a marriage lasts seven lives, that it is a wife's duty to obey the wishes of her husband even if he is immoral and abusive, and others. These were held up by conservative Hindus of Bankim's days as proof of the inherent moral strength of the Hindu woman and the superiority of the Hindu culture. Although Bankim does not endorse them outright in the novel, it is possible to see his covert support of the ideals--if not the details--of such beliefs. Of course because Mobarak cannot openly be acknowledged as the husband of Zebunnisa (because Mughal princesses since the time of the third emperor, Akbar, were not allowed to marry and acknowledging a marriage between Zebunnisa, who was an actual historical character, and the fictional Mubarak would be too flagrant a flouting of history), he has to die. And it is Dariya who kills him in a fit of madness. This is the only instance of a wife killing her husband in Bankim's novels. While there are instances of wives unwittingly being the instruments of their spouses' destruction,²⁹⁵ Rajsingha is the only novel where a wife kills her husband, and it is no accident that this act is committed by a Muslim woman. While a pious Hindu

²⁹⁵ Manorama in Mrinalini is one such example, and Shree in Sitaram, another.

woman such as Aurangzeb's Rajput wife may wish for widowhood because her husband is an oppressor of Hindus, she does not actually kill him because, however justified such an act might be, it is nonetheless unnatural. While we sympathize with Dariya we still recognize that by murdering her husband she crosses a boundary that no Hindu woman in Bankim's historical works is made to cross.

In this novel of celebrating Hindu ideals, much rides on the figure of the hero. It is interesting to note that in a novel replete with remarkably descriptive passages, the hero is never described in any detail. Rajsingha is introduced as an unnamed cavalier who is shown in the middle of action. All we know about the personal details of the king is that he is not a young man, that he has many wives, and that he has sons that have come of age. But these details are incidental. What is important is that he live up to the myth that has built up around him, a myth that motivates a beautiful and courageous young princess to choose him over the emperor of India. Rajsingha's lion-like courage is emphasized again and again as is his ability to inspire deep loyalty in his followers. Faced with a challenge such as this, Aurangzeb does not have a chance. As Bankim had stated in one of his essays, the power is in the hand that holds the pen and we see this theory in action in the novel. Although he makes a disclaimer in the postscript about religion not being the guarantor of inherent qualities and that being a Hindu does not automatically make one good and being a Muslim does not automatically make one evil,²⁹⁶ Rajsingha largely contradicts his claim.

The expanded edition of Rajsingha was published one year before Bankim's death, and as editor J.C. Bagal suggests, it can be counted among the last novels of

²⁹⁶ B.R. Vol 1 652

Bankim.²⁹⁷ As such it is among the works that came into existence in the darker phase of Bankim's literary career which Bankim scholars such as Tanika Sarkar and Amiya P. Sen believe to have begun in 1882. The pre-1882 phase was more experimental, prolific, and humorous. According to Sarkar, the second phase began in 1882 after Bankim took up his pen against Reverend Hastie, a clergyman and an educator, who pointed to a prominent Bengali landholder's lavish funeral rights for his mother as an example of the many faults of Hinduism. The letters written by both sides were published in a local newspaper and later put out in a book form by Hastie and created quite a stir among the reading public. The darkening of Bankim's tone that Bankim scholars notice in this phase is in the substitution of "an argument that continuously poses new questions and issues" by a "prose [that] remains uncompromisingly solemn, weighty, and ponderous, all of which, at least overtly, suggest a single and authoritarian polemical thrust."²⁹⁸ The prose of *Rajsingha* does not reflect this solemnity; it is lively and grand by turns, but the novel, in its single-minded determination to promote Hindu glory and its paucity of admirable Muslim characters, belongs to the later phase of Bankim's creative life.

Much of the writings of this second phase contain in them elements that were in common with those of a later phase of Hindu revivalism and chauvinism. The Hindus and Muslims in *Rajsingha* are drawn in a fairly straightforward manner. The Hindus are admirable and the Muslims—barring a few examples—are not. But in another novel, *Sitaram*, Bankim presents a more complicated hero, one who is a Hindu but is both admirable and base. If *Rajsingha* is the kind of hero that Hindus could be proud of,

²⁹⁷"Notes on the Novels" *B.R.* Vol II 41

²⁹⁸ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*. 165

Sitaram is one that disappoints. He has many of the qualities that the Rajput king has but he succumbs to his desire for a woman and follows the path of ruin. Here there are no Muslim characters comparable to Aurangzeb or Zebunnisa, that is characters who are morally the polar opposite of the Hindus. Here every major character—all of them Hindus—are deeply flawed. Sitaram, the petty chieftain who becomes a king, is a man of courage and duty but cannot control his passions. He neglects his duties as an administrator and plunges into debauchery. His brother-in-law and general Gangaram lusts after one of Sitaram's wives and betrays his king to the enemy. Sitaram's first wife, Shree, makes the impossible demand that her husband transcend his fleshly desires before they can consummate their marriage. Her inability to clearly choose between her two roles, that of a world-renouncing ascetic and that of a wife, leads her to a strange kind of inaction and drives her husband crazy. The upshot is that these people have lost their moral compass and their misguided choices lead the kingdom built on Hindu principles (which was named Muhammadpur and also contained Muslims) to crumble in the face of an enemy onslaught. The three final works of Bankim, Debi Chaudhurani, Sitaram, and Anandamath, are generally thought to outline his belief that the ideal political institution was one that was built according to certain chosen principles of Hinduism, the chief of which was unwavering devotion to morality and duty. The fourth edition of Rajsingha upholds the hero's devotion to duty. However, unlike the three novels mentioned above, it contains no detailed discussion of the tenets of Hinduism because its focus is on dispelling the charges of Hindu cowardice. Rajsingha is presented as the embodiment of certain virtues but he does not have to face moral choices like the central characters of the other three do. As such Rajsingha is a simpler novel. The Hindu seems to clearly know

his or her duty and is able to discharge them without much thought. But Sitaram is a more mature work, dealing with the difficulties that even a remarkable man has to face when he is confronted with the conflict between personal desire and duty. It does not posit the inherent moral superiority of a Hindu; in fact, as has been pointed out by many, the one minor character who serves as a moral compass of the novel is the Muslim holy man who leaves the kingdom of the immoral Sitaram saying, “I shall not live in a land where there are Hindus. Sitaram has taught me this lesson.”²⁹⁹

Of course, all the novel’s Muslims are not peaceable and level-headed. Sitaram begins with a Muslim fakir sleeping in an alley in the middle of the night; when a desperate Gangaram hurrying to get a doctor for his dying mother trips on the fakir, the latter lodges a charge against Gangaram of insulting a holy man. The judge at the court is also a Muslim and in cahoots with the fakir, and together they impose the death penalty on the Hindu man. This sets off a chain of events which leads Gangaram’s sister Shree to seek the help of her estranged husband, Sitaram, which renews his memory and desire. The Hindu-Muslim tension reaches an early climax in the novel when the normally shy Shree unwittingly whips the anti-Muslim fervor of the crowd that gathers to witness Gangaram’s execution. Standing atop the lower branches of a tree she exhorts the onlookers to kill “the enemy,” who is described as “the enemy of the gods, the enemy of humans, the enemy of the Hindus, my enemy.” Described in this manner the Muslim becomes an enemy both at a personal as well as cosmic level. The pitched battle between the Hindu crowd and the Muslim law-keepers assumes the status of an all-compassing, inevitable, and divinely sanctioned war. The divine presence is supplied by Shree. The shy woman we meet in the earlier chapters, who goes to her husband for help in saving

²⁹⁹ B.R. Vol II 884.

her brother, is transformed into a warrior goddess, whose very presence energizes the Hindus.³⁰⁰ As he does in many of his novels, here Bankim successfully employs the motif of the mother goddess, the slayer of demons and the protector of her devotees.

However, it is not only the military aspect of Hinduism that is played up. Sitaram, a high ranking official, is motivated to offer his life to save his brother-in-law because it is the duty of a Hindu to protect one who seeks help, and Shree had appealed to her husband to save her brother, saying, “Who other than a Hindu would save a Hindu?”³⁰¹ Shree’s words prompt Sitaram into action. But Sitaram is successful in building a safe haven for Hindus (where Muslims are also welcome) only as long as he puts duty first. When he swerves from the path of duty, there is no more divine protection for him.

Between the perfect Rajsingha and the flawed Sitaram stand the monks of Anandamath. They are ascetics who have given up domestic ties to serve the nation mother. Yet even among them there are men who, in spite of their impressive abilities, fall victim to their passion for beautiful women. They have to pay with their lives, even though the battles they lead against the British are successful. In the controversial ending of the novel there is a call to accept British domination until the children of the nation have achieved the material knowledge they lack. Bankim’s message seems to be that a few enlightened but flawed leaders cannot lead the imperfect masses to freedom. And that the masses are imperfect is clearly evident in the novels. Common people can be manipulated easily: the Hindu crowd takes cue from Shree and breaks out into a communal riot; in Anandamath Hindu mobs vandalize Muslim properties and kill

³⁰⁰ In the figure of Shree in this scene, Tanika Sarkar reads the body of the woman as symbolically giving birth to violence. “Imagining Hindu Rashtra: the Hindu and the Muslim in Bankimchandra’s Writing.” Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation 186.

³⁰¹ B.R. Vol I 812

Muslims when the monks are victorious against Muslim and British forces; the citizens of Nabadwip stand in amazement when the seventeen horsemen ride into the city and are later slaughtered indiscriminately. These average children of India have to rise to a certain level of perfection before they can claim political freedom, and their leaders have to reach absolute moral perfection before they can lead the masses to such freedom. So, even though in his imagined history of the battle between the monks and the British Bankim awards victory to the monks and their followers, for the sake of recorded history he had to postpone full independence for India. The masses had to reclaim their true Hindu heritage of spiritual as well as material superiority by going through a period of British tutelage before they could dream of independence. In this preparatory stage their duty was twofold: self-improvement and constant vigilance against the enemy.

Although in nineteenth-century India logically the enemy were the British, in the novels it is the Muslim who bears the greater share of the Hindu's enmity. Critics come up with a variety of reasons to explain Bankim's choice. Two of the most logical explanations is that as a colonial subject and a government employee Bankim couldn't jeopardize his career by attacking the British directly, so the Muslim was an easier enemy to target; and Bankim considered British occupation of India, however painful, a better option than Muslim occupation, especially because he considered the latter more harmful for India than the former. To this we may add a third reason: as an enemy the British was more admirable than the Muslim, hence although the British are criticized but not with the venom reserved for the Muslims. I would like to analyze a few of Bankim's portrayures of the British to present a comparative perspective.

Just as he harped on the sensuality of the Mughal royals in Rajsingha as proof of their moral depravity, cowardice is the criticism he hurls most often at the ordinary Muslims—who are mostly soldiers either in the pay of nawabs or the East India Company in Anandamath. When the incredulous Mahendra questions the rationale of Bhavananda’s argument that it is possible to drive the Muslim nawab and his army out of the land, Bhabananda reminds him that the English defeated the nawab of Bengal at Plassey with an army that was smaller than the nawab’s and what the English did, the Bengalis could do as well, simply because the enemy for both was the Muslim.

“Then why is there such a difference between the English and the Muslims?” asked Mahendra.

“Listen” said Bhabananda, “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 will hang on, they’ll finish what they’ve begun. But the Muslim plays fast and loose.... [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!”³⁰²

This image of the cowardly Muslim is in stark contrast with the portrait of the warlike Turkish soldiers marching into Gaud in Mrinalini.

Around midday the astonished townspeople saw seventeen horsemen of an unknown race traveling towards the palace along the main road. The people of Nabadwip [the capital of Gaud, the kingdom of the Sena kings] began to praise their appearance and demeanor. Their figures were impressive, tall yet strong; their complexion was of the color of molten gold; their faces were broad and covered with thick dark beard; their eyes were large and burning. Their clothing was unostentatious; they were dressed like warriors; their bodies were covered in armor of iron mail and there was a look of resolution in their eyes. And the horses they rode, the ones that came from the other side of the Indus River, were beautiful. Their bodies were large like boulders and well-groomed; their necks arched and they chomped at their bits; they pranced proudly. The riders were skilled in handling them—they restrained those spirited horses, that were like confined forces of wind, with ease. The citizens of Gaud heaped praises.³⁰³

³⁰² Lipner, 147-8

³⁰³ B.R. Vol I. 189 (my translation)

Such positive portrayals of groups of Muslims are rare in Bankim, although there are individual portraits of valor and pride (Osman in Durgeshnandini, Mobarak in Rajsingha, Mir Qasim in Chandrasekhar) in many of the novels. Generally the ordinary Muslim is referred to as “nede” (the shaved head), “yavana” (the foreigner), “bidharmi” (one outside of religion or of a different religion), and he is painted as duplicitous, cruel, and greedy.

In contrast, the masculinity of the British in both their virtues and vices is emphasized, with the implication that such a ruler is more acceptable than one who is cowardly. Chandrasekhar which was serialized in 1874 and first published as a book in 1875, serves as a good example of this argument, and I would like to quote from it at some length to show how it represents the British.

There were only two acts that the Englishmen who resided in Bengal in this period [the 1770's when the novel is set] were incapable of. They could not control greed and could not accept defeat. They never believed that they should desist from something that was seemingly impossible; and they never believed that something was better not done because it was unjust. Seldom has the earth seen a people as powerful and as willful as those that first established a British kingdom in India.^{304 305}

Foster knew for sure that the enemy was behind the cover of the forest. He also knew that the same enemy that had remained invisible and killed the guard could kill him instantly. But he had arrived in India after the Battle of Palashy [Plassey] and did not even consider the possibility of a native marking an Englishman. Most importantly [Foster believed] an Englishman who feared a native enemy was better off dead.³⁰⁶

By this time the Englishmen had run out of patience. Johnson said, “Why wait? Kick the door down, an Indian door cannot withstand English kicks.”

³⁰⁴ B.R. Vol II 349 (my translation)

³⁰⁵ Gauri Viswanathan discusses how the excesses of the East India Company men in India were viewed with alarm in England. Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India. (New York: Columbia UP, 1989). 24

³⁰⁶ B.R. Vol II 362 (my translation)

...Galston kicked the door ...later Johnson did the same. The door broke open. Saying "May all of India break like this under the British boot" the Englishmen entered the house.³⁰⁷

Amyot said, "The day that an Englishman runs away in fear of an Indian will mark the end of British hopes of an empire in India. If we raise the anchors from here, the Muslims will know we are scared. It is better that we die standing [our ground], we shall not run in fear."³⁰⁸

Addressing his companions Amyot said, "Why should we drown like cattle? Let's go out and die like brave men with weapon in hand."

Sword in hand the three Englishmen stepped fearlessly in front of the uncounted number of yavanas. One yavana saluted Amyot and said, "Why do you wish to die? Come with us instead."

Amyot said, "We shall die. The fire that will engulf India if we die here today will signal the end of Muslim reign." If our blood soaks the soil, the standard of George III will be planted in it easily."

"Then die." With these words the Pathan cleaved Amyot's head with his sword.

In a trice, Galston swiftly beheaded the Pathan.

Then ten or twelve yavanas surrounded Galston and began to assault him. Soon, wounded by the attacks of many, both Galston and Johnston lay on the floor of the boat, dead.³⁰⁹

While the British are the political enemy in the novel and Lawrence Foster, whose abduction of a married Hindu woman sets the plot in motion, is initially portrayed as an unsavory character, Bankim takes pains to indicate two points clearly, that these men belonged to a past generation of Englishmen and whatever their other faults were, they were brave in a hypermasculine manner. As such, they are different from the Englishmen who ruled in India in the nineteenth century. In Bankim's essays and other novels many

³⁰⁷ B.R. Vol II 367 (my translation)

³⁰⁸ B.R. Vol II. 394 (my translation)

³⁰⁹ B.R. Vol II 395 (my translation)

individual Englishmen are portrayed favorably and the ones that are not so lucky may be the objects of his anger and ridicule but never of his venom like the Muslim khansama (waiter/serving man) whom he mentions in passing in Chandrasekhar in this manner: “of all species of humans, the Muslim khansama of the English is the lowest.”³¹⁰ Chandrasekhar is rare in that it has a sympathetic portrayal of a Muslim historical character, the Nawab of Bengal Mir Qasim who fought against the British. There was a real opportunity here to weave a grand and inspiring tale of Hindu-Muslim unity against a common enemy, and Bankim’s refusal to write such a story is telling. The Nawab of Bengal or even his traitorous general could be figures of individual valor, but the common Muslim was not to be a part of a tale of heroism. Bankim might make occasional concessions towards Muslims (as he does in the conclusion to Rajsingha where he writes that being a Hindu or a Muslim does not automatically make one good or bad and that many Hindus have flourished under Muslim rulers), the fact remains that the new India he dreams of is by no means an inclusive nation.

The animosity that Bankim seems to bear toward Muslims has been problematic to his admirers. It has been said in his defense that the Muslims against whom he vents his anger are not his contemporaries, but rather figures belonging to the past. In one of the most recent and certainly most authoritative translation of Anandamath, the novel which can easily be held up as having the most concentrated examples of anti-Muslim sentiments, translator and editor Julius Lipner tries to portray a favorable version of Bankim by putting forth several well-argued points, which I will summarize. Bankim’s use of the specific location of Birbhum as the backdrop in an earlier version of the novel,

³¹⁰ B.R., Vol II 377

Lipner argues, is significant because the rulers of Birbhum had a greater measure of freedom in administrative responsibilities and were more directly responsible for the suffering of their subjects. Also, since the ruler of Birbhum during the time period of the novel was a Muslim king, the criticism in the novel is actually directed at the Muslim ruling class and not toward the general Muslim population. Historically this may be true, but one could counter-argue that since Bankim expunged these details about the ruler's religious background in the later version that has remained the most popular, and since he does not provide the details about the political responsibilities of the rulers, intended readers are more likely to respond to the general anti-Muslim feelings in the novel rather than to Bankim's purported motive in choosing Birbhum as his venue in an earlier version. Lipner also mentions that the six crore "children" of the nation mother that Bankim cites in the nationalistic hymn *Bande Mataram*, include Muslims as well as Hindus, a fact supported by the contemporary Bengal census. Again, the question remains how starkly does this number stand out as proof of Muslim integration against the overwhelmingly Hindu iconography of the song. Perhaps not very strongly. Similarly one could argue that the essays from which Lipner quotes to support his point about Bankim not being anti-Muslim were less widely read than his novels and were known by fewer of his readers. Because of these reasons the pro-Hindu/anti-Muslim tone in his works continues to pose a problem. In Bankim's writings, religion is conflated with race and nation, and the India that Bankim idealizes is undoubtedly a Hindu India inhabited by people who are culturally, if not racially, Aryan. While he may have written sympathetically about the Muslim peasant suffering alongside his Hindu counterpart under British rule³¹¹ and portrayed a few likeable Muslim characters in his novels, these

³¹¹ "Bangadesher Krishak" B.R., Vol II 250

concessions pale in comparison to his more numerous bitter anti-Muslim remarks. In the introduction to his translation of selected Bankim essays, Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Sociological Essays: Utilitarianism and Positivism in Bengal, S. N. Mukherji and Marian Maddern assess the pathology behind Bankim's anti-Muslim feelings in this manner:

Much of Bankim Chandra's antipathy towards the Muslims could be explained as a part of the process of mental colonization. He accepted the British view of Muslim rule in India. Most modern scholars have argued that Bankim Chandra was a Hindu revivalist who identified 'nation' with 'religious community'. This very notion excluded those who did not belong to a particular religious community (in India Hindu 'nation' excluded the Muslims). [T.W.] Clark even suggested that "He, (Bankim Chandra), took his stand with the defenders of the ancient faith. He has nothing to say of Christianity and Islam as religions though believers in these faiths occur frequently as characters in his stories."³¹²

Elsewhere in the essay Mukherji and Maddern note Bankim's familiarity with the highly-biased eight-volume History of India as Told by its own Historians: The Muhammadan Period by Sir H.M. Elliott and John Dowson, which was written with the express desire to make Indians "more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our [British] rule."³¹³ They editors also reminds us that Bankim had little contact with Muslims in general, functioning as he did in a predominantly Hindu society. Even his travels as a government official did not expose him to many Muslims. As a western-educated Hindu Bankim traveled along a path that did diverge widely from that of a Muslim middle class male.³¹⁴ Also, in a British

³¹² Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Sociological Essays, Utilitarianism and Positivism in Bengal. (Calcutta: Riddhi, 1986) 11

³¹³ S.N, Mukherji and Marian Maddern. eds. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee: Sociological Essays, 11

³¹⁴ Historians agree that for various reasons Hindus accepted western education more readily than did Muslims. Even in matters of trade Hindus engaged more readily with the British than did Muslims. Economically Hindus prospered more than Muslims under British rule, and eventually the growing gulf between the two communities grew wide enough to result in the partition of British India along religious

dominated nation it was far safer to find a culpable “other” in the Muslim than to directly blame the English colonial administrator for the “fallen” state of the Bengali/Hindu/Indian.³¹⁵ In spite of attempts by various scholars to explain why Bankim wrote the way he did, the fact remains that Bankim’s ideal nation has a masculine, reformed, “pure” version of Hinduism as its one and only religion and a homogeneously Sanskrit-derived culture; it has no place for the Islamic Arab/Persian traditions that had been part of Indian history since the twelfth century.

Although there had been sporadic contact with Muslims before the 11th century, Muslim presence in India became permanent after the founding of Perso-Turk sultanate in Delhi in 1206.³¹⁶ One significant feature of Islam in India was that the more conservative factions of Indian Muslims were always conscious of their ties with Muslims outside India. According to Amalendu De, one such movement that flourished in the 16th century and onward, Mujaddidiya, “had Pan-Islamic and anti-Hindu content.”³¹⁷ After being in power for more than five hundred years, Muslim supremacy in India was challenged by the British, an event which many Hindus welcomed. In general, Hindus accepted western education more readily than Muslims and were represented in the British Indian bureaucracy in larger numbers. Analyzing the different

lines in 1947. When these factors are considered, Bankim’s attitude towards Muslims while regrettable, can be understood as having been shaped by political and economic circumstances of his times.

³¹⁵ Julius Lipner argues against this position pointing out that Bankim’s attitude towards the necessity of British rule is clearly outlined in the end of the novel and that this attitude is quite positive. But one could counter argue that criticizing British rule was not really an option for an employee in the colonial bureaucracy and a novelist who had to save his works from being censored.

³¹⁶ Amalendu De traces the history of Islam in India in Islam in Modern India, (Calcutta: Maya Prakashan, 1982) 2

³¹⁷ De, 7

trajectories that the Hindus and Muslims took in the early days of political activism in Bengal, John R. McLane writes

Although 23.4 million of British India's 49.5 million Muslims lived in Bengal province, according to the 1891 census, there is little evidence of Muslim participation in provincial conferences, the Indian Association, or the British Indian Association in the 1880s and 1890s. Surendranath Banerjea had persuaded Amir Ali and the Central Mahomedan Association to participate in the National Conference in Calcutta in 1885. But after that, Congress' emphasis upon representative government and competitive examinations and the lack of concerted Hindu overtures to Muslims deterred most prominent Bengali Muslims from joining...

...Matiur Rahman has explained the separation of Muslims from nationalist politics as a consequence of the Hindu character of such activities as the *Hindu Patriot*, the Hindu Mela [festival organized to arouse pride in Hindu heritage], and the Shivaji festival. However he has not produced evidence that those activities were motivated by anti-Muslim bias, or more importantly, that Bengali Muslims perceived those activities as unfriendly or threatening. A more pertinent reason for Bengali Muslim abstention from the Congress may be that the Congress activities in prepartition Bengal were confined largely to Calcutta, that the most active and influential Muslim civic leaders in Calcutta were non-Bengalis, that few Bengali Muslims in Calcutta belonged to the same educational and economic strata as congressmen, and that the source of separation was therefore as much regional as communal.³¹⁸

Other factors that McLane mentions as possible reasons for Muslim alienation are the rising tide of a cultural Hindu nationalism which focused attention on "Hindu" issues such as the Age of Consent Bill and to a lesser extent, the cow protection movement. Although the latter did not create as much stir in Bengal as in other parts of India, McLane feels that "[t]here is no doubt that the Congress leadership's failure to dissociate the organization fully from the cow protection movement was a factor in the decline in Muslim participation in the Congress."³¹⁹ British colonial policies in 1880s

³¹⁸ John R. McLane, "Bengal's Pre-1905 Congress Leadership and Hindu Society," *Aspects of Bengali History and Society*. Asian Studies at Hawaii. ed. Rachel Van M. Baumer, (Hawaii: University Press of Hawaii, 1975) 172—173

³¹⁹ McLane, 171

also played into the Hindu-Muslim division. The manipulation of the Public Service Commission to keep in check the number of Hindus (especially Bengalis and South Indians) by raising the specter of Hindu domination in the colonial bureaucracy was one such policy. Amalendu De³²⁰ points out that the nineteenth century saw the founding of several Islamic political organizations some of which articulated their nationalistic aspirations in terms that were significantly different from those of the Hindu-majority All India Congress Party.³²¹ Several Muslim newspapers also came into being around this time, some of which were fairly militant in nature. In 1903 one of the newspapers belonging to the most radical group named several Hindu authors it deemed to have portrayed Muslims negatively. Bankim was one of them. The fact that Bankim had shown a Muslim woman (Ayesha) to have fallen in love with a Hindu (Jagatsingha) in one of his novels (Durgeshnandini) was singled out for criticism.³²² Amiya P. Sen mentions the “serious objection to the dramatization of *Rajsingha* (1896)—a novel in which Aurangzeb is not only a vanquished Emperor but also an extremely unhappy person” by the newspaper Mihir-O-Sudhakar.³²³ While the growth of a Muslim identity that eventually articulated the need for a separate homeland for the practitioners of Islam is a complex topic, the full treatment of which lies outside the scope of this paper, I would like to present here a quote that sums up some of the factors that helped

³²⁰ See Mrinalini Sinha, “Competing Masculinities: The Public Service Commission 1886-87.” 106, 110, 119, 124

³²¹ Amalendu De. Islam in Modern India. 16-17

³²² De, 32

³²³ De, 125

transformed Islam as it was in Bengal, especially in its more rural parts, to a more consolidated religion.

There is ...no denying that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Bengali Muslims became increasingly aware of the beliefs and practices then current in the Arab heartland, and that they attempted to integrate those beliefs and practices into their identity as Muslims. The factors contributing to this sense of awareness are well known: the assault on Islam mounted by Christian missionaries in India, the spread of reformist literature facilitated by print technology, political competition between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the context of colonial rule, steamship technology, and a quickened incidence of pilgrimage to Arabia. As the ethnographer H.H. Risley wrote in 1891: “Even the distant Mecca has been brought, by means of Mesrs. Cook’s steamers and return tickets, within reach of the faithful in India; and the influence of Mahomedan missionaries and return pilgrims has made itself felt in a quiet but steady revival of orthodox usage in Eastern Bengal.”³²⁴

A political dimension provided by the educated urban elite was gradually added to this growing awareness of the separateness of a Muslim identity. With a corresponding strengthening of the cultural and religious ideology of the Hindu middle class in political movements and the British administrative policy of divide and rule, the gulf between Hindus and Muslims widened. In 1905, within eleven years of Bankim’s death, the first law attempting to split India along religious lines was enacted. Although the act was eventually repealed because of overwhelming public opposition to it, it was a powerful predictor of what would come in 1947, when the separate nation of the “pure” was carved out of the provinces of the eastern province of Bengal and the western province of Punjab which had some of the highest concentrations of Muslims in India. However, even the trauma of the partition has not erased the Hindu-Muslim distrust in present-day India, and the increasing popularity of hardliners on both sides is something that warrants careful watch. History is repeatedly pressed to the service of chauvinisms of various stripes, and

³²⁴ Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204—1760*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California UP, 1993).

a careful examination of how certain views of history came to take root in the national consciousness are now as important as ever.

CHAPTER 6: A GENDERED IDENTITY: THE NATION AS MOTHER, WIFE, AND DAUGHTER IN BANKIM'S HISTORICAL NOVELS

Nations have often been imagined as women and defeated nations are particularly easy to characterize as feminine.³²⁵ European Orientalists and Indologists, whose writings on India had significant impact on how British administrators viewed India, portrayed India as feminine. There are many telling examples and the quotation below from Hegel is a good one.

From the most ancient times, downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gaining access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the Earth presents; treasures of Nature--pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose-essences, elephants, lions, etc.—as also treasures of wisdom.... Those wishes have been realized; this Land of Desire has been attained; there is scarcely any great nation of the West, nor of the Modern European West, that has not gained for itself a smaller or larger portion of it.³²⁶

Here, “this land of marvels,” namely India, is presented as bountiful and desirable, a treasure that European nations want to possess.³²⁷ In this chapter I examine

³²⁵ Shankar Raman analyzes the representations of occupied lands as feminine in “Framing India”: The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000). Quoting from Dryden’s 1763 play, Amboyna, Raman highlights the terror of the bride Ysabinda, an Indian woman of the Dutch East Indies, at her approaching nuptials with the Englishman Towerson, presenting this marriage, as “legalized rape.”

The Bridegroom come, he comes apace,
With love and fury in his Face;
She shrinks away, he close pursues,
And Prayers and Threats, at once do’s use,
She softly sighing begs delay,
And with her hands puts his away,
Now a loud for help she cries,
And now despairing shuts her Eyes. (375)

³²⁶ From G.W.F Hegel’s The Philosophy of History trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1st pub. 1899, 1956) qtd. in Ronald Inden’s Imagining India (U.K.: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 70

how Bankim handles this trope of feminization in his historical novels. I study three aspects of the nation woman, the mother, the wife, and the daughter. I explore the contradictions of all three: the mother who protects and is in need of protection herself, the wife who is the perfect partner yet has the potential to destroy her husband, and the daughter who obeys her parents yet asserts her independence. Here I also discuss how the proper role of the woman came to acquire deep significance in the colonial age, when the masculinity of the Indian male came under attack, and I also explore how contemporary social, political, cultural, and religious debates influenced the determination of the masculine and the feminine.

The most obvious representation of the nation as a woman in Bankim's historical novels is as a mother. This vision is most fully fleshed out in Anandamath where, in a climactic scene, the new initiate into the ascetic brotherhood, Mahendra, is shown three images of the nation, as-she-was (past), as-she-is (present), and as-she-will-be (future). The images representing the past and the future are both gloriously bedecked and beautiful. But there are subtle yet significant differences. Chronologically, the earliest is the mother as-she-was, and, as such, she is a conqueror of wild spaces and animals and the one who made human habitation possible. Appearing in the third and last stage, the mother as-she-will-be is a multi-armed warrior goddess who is flanked by deities of learning and wealth. This trio of goddesses in the mother-as-she-will-be tableau, consisting of the mother, the goddess of learning, and the goddess of wealth, represents the combination of power, wisdom, and resources respectively, and stands for a more complete and advanced stage of human civilization than what is represented by the first incarnation of the mother-as-she was. Intervening between these two is the dark figure of

the mother as-she-is, embodied by Kali, the deity associated with death and destruction. In the words of the guru who leads Mahendra through the labyrinthine temple complex, the mother in her present phase is “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 [signifying spots designated for cremation] she is garlanded with skulls.”³²⁸ It is the duty of all of the children of this mother to rescue her from her present dismal state and restore the greatness that is her due.³²⁹ That this prescribed duty is riddled with complexity is already evident here: the child of the mother, the *santan* (the Sanskrit term for child) as he chooses to call himself, is also her rescuer. He is both the one who will be protected (once the nation is restored her independence) and the one who protects. This combination of the roles poses a further conflict for the mother’s male children because being a husband and/or father conflicts with being the ideal child.

Mahendra is a perfect example; his duty as a husband to Kalyani and father to Sukumari prevents him from becoming a dedicated child. Kalyani has to help him along the path of duty by committing suicide, thus removing herself from the mother-child dyad of Mahendra and the nation-mother. (Ironically, this choice is made easier for her when she discovers that their own child has accidentally ingested poison. Both she and Mahendra mistakenly think that Sukumari is dead) As Kalyani realizes, wholehearted devotion to the nation-mother becomes possible only when the impediments of family life are completely removed. In a dream sequence the nation-mother points her finger at Kalyani as the obstacle that prevents Mahendra from serving her. This dream sequence

³²⁸ Julius Lipner, *Anandamath*. 150

³²⁹ The militant monks led by Satyananda call themselves “*santans*” (children) and all adopt names ending with –ananda (joy). The temple-monastery complex is Anandamath (the “*math*” or monastery of the Anandas).

spells out clearly what, according to Chandrima Chakraborty, Bankim's nationalistic agenda proposes: the wife in the Hindu male's life has to be replaced in his heart by the nation woman for the dream of independence to be achieved.³³⁰ In a reversal of the Freudian pattern, instead of the daughter hoping to eliminate the mother to gain the father's affection, here it is the mother who eliminates her rival claimant to her son's affection.

There is another reversal of a usual pattern. In deliberately choosing the child metaphor to emphasize the masculinity of the militant monks, Bankim presents a subversive reading of a trope common in the drama of colonization. The usual plot in this colonial drama involved the feminization and the infantilization of the colonized to justify a corresponding masculine and parental role for the colonizer. But Bankim's warriors are simultaneously children and men, with the two roles complementing rather than opposing each other. In an age when regarding the colonized Indian as less-than-adult was commonplace, the monks of Anandamath were Bankim's answer to this humiliation. Moreover, the santans are not children of just any mother; it is a mother who, above all, exemplifies strength. The Bengali mind was familiar with the maternal figure being multidimensional as the site that combined strength with the usual maternal aspects of nurture and love. The popularity of the śākta tradition³³¹ in Bengal, in which the mother-goddess was worshipped, and to which most upper-caste Bengalis belonged,³³² rendered the concept of a powerful mother easily acceptable to the Bengali

³³⁰ Chandrima Chakraborty, Gender, Religion, and Nationalism: The Trope of the Ascetic Nationalist in Indian Literature. (unpublished dissertation, Toronto, Canada: York University, 2004)100

³³¹ Śākta is the adjective derived from śakti which stands for strength. This strength is the preeminent attribute of the mother goddess primarily as Kali, who is most commonly represented as the goddess of death, who in her act of cleansing the world, destroys all that she confronts.

readers of Bankim. The greatest philosopher-poets of the śākta tradition (Ramprasad Sen and Ramakrishna Paramhansa are two good examples) were able to conceive of Kali as a loving mother, thus playing up the nurturing aspects of Kali the Mother over Kali the destroyer.

This multidimensionality is also reflected in the image that Bankim presents in the hymn *Bande Mataram* which has been both inspirational and problematic. There are no geographical specificities in *Bande Mataram* like the ones we find in the song that was chosen over it to become the national anthem of India, Rabindranath Tagore's composition, *Jana-gana-mana*. The first paragraph of Tagore's composition (which is the part that is generally sung), was criticized by some because it was supposedly composed to celebrate the visit of Emperor George V to India and thus had overtones of subservience to an alien political authority. *Jana-gana-mana* is different from *Bande Mataram* in that it imagines the nation not as a militant mother goddess but simply as a land with specific geographical features (mountains, rivers, oceans which are named) and states (which also are named). The homage the poet pays is to the "one who decides the fate of India," a phrase which could be variously interpreted as applicable to George V or God. This unspecified god is male.³³³ Although objections are sometimes raised to the anthem on the grounds such as the entire southern part of India is lumped in the category "Dravid" and the entire northeastern part is unmentioned³³⁴ and others, *Jana-gana-man* has not caused as much furor as Bankim's hymn. The reason of course is that although

³³² Chandrima Chakraborty, "Ascetic Nationalisms." 83

³³³ The adjective "adhinayaka" (leader) is masculine

³³⁴ Madhu Kishwar, "To Sing or Not To Sing: The National Anthem Controversy." Religion in the Service of Nationalism. (Delhi: OUP, 1998)

the Hindu flavor of the national anthem is evident in its language (which is Sanskritized Bengali), there are no overt references to a weapon-carrying female deity in it. The objections raised against Bankim's hymn spring not from the nation's portrayal as a mother but its portrayal as a Hindu deity. But it is this very compounding of three separate identities—the land as a geographical entity, the figure of the mother, and the figure of the goddess—that gives *Bande Mataram* its potency. Bankim presents the very same combination in his depiction of the three images that Mahendra is shown in the temple of the brotherhood.³³⁵

In his essays Bankim emphasized the need to unify the nation but he also realized how difficult it was to unite a disparate people in the name of an abstraction. The nation had to be more than an idea; it had to be a concrete reality. And few things could be more concrete or potent than a visual representation of this idea. Bankim was astute enough to recognize the easy transferability of the idea of nationhood onto the body of the mother goddess that every Bengali was familiar with in some form. Sri Aurobindo, who was a great admirer of Bankim, wrote:

It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fear and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born.³³⁶

The image of the nation-mother as the mother goddess first made its appearance in Bankim's essays of the Kamalakanta series. The opium eater Kamalakanta "sees" the

³³⁵ In his foreword to Manisha Roy's Bengali Women (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972, 1975), Edward C. Dimock notices this "three-way equivalence [of]...mother as woman, as great goddess, and as the land of Bengal itself" in Rabindranath Tagore's "*Amar Sonar Bangla* ("My Golden Bengal"), now the national anthem of Bangladesh" (ix).

³³⁶ Charles Heimsath, *The Emergence of Nationalism.* "Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform. 138

familiar world from unusual perspectives in an opium-induced vision in which Durga and the nation-mother blend into one. In the traditional immersion ceremony after the ten-day period of Durga worship in which the idol is immersed in sacred bodies of water, Kamalakanta sees the immersion of the nation. (In the opium-addled vision of Kamalakanta the goddess is immersed on the seventh day of her worship, well before the traditional tenth day, the early disappearance symbolizing the dismal nature of the era of darkness.) Unlike the image of the mother as-she-will-be in Anandamath, there are no comparable images in the Kamalakanta essays. Kamalakanta has a glimpse of the smiling golden image of the goddess before it is lost in the dark water of time. Alternating between hope and despair, the opium-addict cries out: “The mother did not rise. Will she not rise?”³³⁷ He promises to be a “good son,” stay on the “right path,” get rid of envy and perform “good deeds.” He exhorts his “brothers” to dive into the waters without fear to rescue the mother. There is a clear sense of atonement and martyrdom in these essays; the sons have failed the mother and have to make up for this by extraordinary deeds. For such deeds they need to transform themselves into extraordinary individuals, and an important first step in this new journey is self-betterment.

An integral part of this betterment is building up a strong body to house a strong mind, and it is no surprise that desire for strength is projected on to the image of the nation as a lion-riding weapons-carrying goddess. Since the Hindu pantheon allows for the mother goddess to evince different aspects of femininity (Annapurna the dispenser of food, Jagaddhatri and Durga the protectors of their worshippers, and Kali the destroyer, are a few examples), it is as if the nineteenth-century Hindu had multiple possibilities of

³³⁷ “Amar Durgotsab.” B.R. Vol II, 72

envisioning the feminine divinity laid out for him. The religious and cultural tradition already contained the script of what could be translated into terms of political reality. The ideal feminine did not have to be conceived anew; she already existed. All that remained to be done was give body to an idea and to translate the language of religion and ritual into that of literature and politics. The potency of Bankim's vision made later nationalists respond to the concept of the regal and warlike mother in crucial ways. The fiery nationalist Sri Aurobindo made the icon of the nation-mother central to his inspirational pieces which he continued to publish even after his retirement from active political life. Many responded not only by sacrificing "their careers...liberty, and...lives,"³³⁸ but also by taking aim at the "white Asuras...the Feringhee white goat."³³⁹ Thus the personal vices that Bankim's Kamalakanta intended to sacrifice at the altar of the mother (instead of the traditional animals)³⁴⁰ evolve into white goats in Aurobindo's writing.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Rachel Fabish, "The Political Goddess." 292

³³⁹ From Jugantar in 1905 (qtd. in Rachel Fabish, "The Political Goddess." 291).

Another striking image of the white goat as the sacrificial animal appears in a speech delivered by Aurobindo's associate Bipin Chandra Pal. In a speech delivered in Calcutta in 1907 he promoted the worship of Kali in her incarnation of the one who protects, "Rakshakali," and suggested that ...sacrifices acceptable to Rakshakali are white goats and not black ones. It would not be a bad thing if we could organize public Rakshakali pujas at the present juncture, where large crowds could be collected, and 108 goats sacrificed. It could put courage into drooping hearts. It would impart a religious meaning and significance to our national movements.

Barbara Southard. "The Political Strategy of Aurobindo Ghosh: The Utilization of Hindu Religious Symbolism and the Problem of Political Mobilization in Bengal." Modern Asia Studies. 14.3 (1980), pp.352-376 (367-368).

³⁴⁰ "Amar Durgotsab". B.R. Vol II, 72

³⁴¹ Another evidence of Bankim's allure to militant nationalists was the choice of the name Anushilan Samiti (*anushilan* being the mode of discipline and behavior that Bankim believed was crucial for moral and spiritual upliftment) for one of the most radical groups that promoted independence through violent means. In the newspaper published by the Samiti, Jugantar, Aurobindo espoused his militant nationalism.

There is a well-recognized element of violence in Kamalakanta's evocation of the Hindu practice of blood sacrifice at the altar of the goddess, yet the commonality of practice blunts its edge, at least to its Hindu Bengali readers. But in Sri Aurobindo's open solicitation to spill the blood of the white goats, this violence breaks out into the open. Tanika Sarkar recognizes the intertwining of femininity and violence in the figure of the *sati* (evoked frequently by Bankim) who laughingly ascends the funeral pyre of her husband and reduces her physical body to ashes for the promise of his eternal companionship in the afterlife.³⁴² In showing their willingness and ability to bear great pain for the love they bear towards their husbands, the women of the defeated nation inspire their men to suffer for the sake of a noble cause. However, in spite of associating the nation-woman with the figure of the loyal and strong wife, Bankim does not directly show the nation-woman suffering. That she has suffered is evident from her transformation from the mother-as-she was to the mother-as-she is and also by her weeping visage that Kalyani sees in her dream. Yet, the tableau of her actual humiliation is not shown. It was left to men who came after Bankim, men such as Aurobindo, to depict the suffering in more graphic terms.

I know my country as Mother. I offer her my devotions, my worship. If a monster sits upon her breast and prepares to suck her blood, what does her child do? Does he quietly sit down to his meal...or rush to her rescue?³⁴³ I know I have in me the power to accomplish the delivery of my fallen country....³⁴⁴

³⁴² Tanika Sarkar, "Bankimchandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda." Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 158.

³⁴³ Incidentally, sitting down at meal is precisely how one of the most pitiable male characters of Bankim's historical novels, Mrinalini is presented. The last independent Hindu king of Bengal, Lakshman Sen, is at his lunch when the palace is attacked by Muslim cavalymen. Instead of confronting them, the elderly king allows himself to be led away to safety by his queen, thus leaving the kingdom to fall into the hands of the enemy.

³⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo, Bhavani Mandir. qtd. in Ashis Nandy. The Intimate Enemy. 92

In images such as this one, the sight of the monster sucking the blood of the mother inspires the mother's children to spill its blood, avenging the pain and humiliation of the mother.

Although the nation is envisioned as the mother, this envisioning is done almost exclusively by males. In Anandamath the three images of the mother are shown by a man (the guru Satyananda) to another man (Mahendra) and it is significant that the first glimpse of the mother (shown before the three-state-tableau) is as a beautiful female form on the lap of the male Vishnu—the sustainer in the Hindu trinity of creator, sustainer, and destroyer. The monks worship Vishnu as a figure of strength, and although the nation-mother eventually displays her military aspects, the very first time Bankim presents her, she is shown simply as a glorious female form who occupies the role of a daughter in the hierarchy of divine relationships.³⁴⁵ The statue of Vishnu is flanked by two other female deities, Lakshmi and Saraswati, the representatives of wealth and wisdom. Lakshmi appears terrified, her “flowing hair disheveled,”³⁴⁶ probably on account of the two demons whose heads lie at Vishnu's feet. Although there are three female figures in this tableau, they are overshadowed by the towering presence of Vishnu. Moreover, the nation-mother appears in Kalyani's dream as “thin, but beautiful ... weeping with anguish.”³⁴⁷ She weeps because Kalyani's presence deters Mahendra from becoming a fully initiated “child.” In making Mahendra choose between herself and Kalyani, the

³⁴⁵ Another possible reading of this scene of the nation-mother on the lap of Vishnu connotes a sexual rather than filial relationship. Either way, as a daughter or as a consort, the mother is subordinate to Vishnu.

³⁴⁶ Lipner, 149

³⁴⁷ Lipner, 54

mother seems to be less of a maternal figure to Kalyani than to her male children.³⁴⁸

Paradoxically, this maternal void is filled by the father figure of Vishnu who promises to be “husband, mother, father, son, daughter.”³⁴⁹ In this “rejection” of Kalyani by the nation-mother and the acceptance of her by a greater father figure, it is tempting to read a clear hierarchy: while the mother is powerful, her strength springs from that of a male entity (Vishnu) who is greater than her both in Kalyani’s dream (where Vishnu appears as a blue mountain) and in the representation of him in the temple. Also, it highlights the fact that even though the mother is the source of strength to her children, she is also someone to be protected both by Vishnu and her male children. As such, the nation-mother in Bankim is a problematic and flawed entity. Perhaps even in his dreams of freedom Bankim could go only so far. The depressing political reality precluded simple, uncomplicated storytelling, where the nation-woman could be totally triumphant and self-sufficient. The imperfect vision of the emaciated nation-mother who weeps is like the imperfect vision of the wife who has to step out of the arena of action back into the smaller, more confining arena of family life or of one who destroys her husband through her misguided actions. Such visions are poignant, powerful, evocative, and ultimately more honest.

Representing the nation as a woman and situating her in a familial relationship yields three possibilities: nation as mother, or wife, or daughter. In critical literature about Bankim’s historical novels the first two have been exploited more fully than the

³⁴⁸ In spite of a few strong maternal figures that are present in them (Bimala in Durgeshnandini, Jayanti in Sitaram), the novels are generally marked by an absence of mothers. Shree and Praphulla lose their mothers early in the novel; Shanti’s mother is not mentioned; the mothers of Shoibolini and Mrinalini are not mentioned.

³⁴⁹ Lipner, 154

third one. I am interested in analyzing nation as daughter. But before analyzing how the nation figures as a daughter in Bankim's works, I will turn my attention to the second topic—nation as wife. It is easier to graft the national dream on the maternal body than the body of the wife. While there are clear references to the nation as mother in Bankim's works, there are no direct references to the nation as wife and indeed, there cannot be. But there are such references in the oblique; they can be detected in the subtext and are extremely powerful. The sheer number of ideal wives or ideal wives-to-be in the novels is no accident. It is directly related to the nineteenth-century Hindu male's re-evaluation of the role of marriage in this period of intense self-examination. So, while the nation could not directly be addressed as a wife, the Hindu male's relationship with the nation was influenced by his relationship with his wife. Tanika Sarkar describes the link between conjugality and nationality in Hindu Wife Hindu Nation in this manner:

Conjugality provided a variety of possible registers which could test, confirm or context the Hindu's political condition. Conceived as an embryonic nation, this relationship could also define ingrained Hindu dispositions that might mirror or correct or criticize and overturn the values structuring colonialism. Virtues accumulated through proper expertise in conjugality could equip the man to a share of power in the world; equally, proof of the absence of moral leadership here would disqualify him and explain his subjection.³⁵⁰

The husband was the unquestioned head of the household and his ability to rule the domestic sphere was a test of his merit to eventually claim the right of self-rule.³⁵¹

Sarkar provides several examples of nineteenth-century writing in which the connection between the Hindu male's relation to the colonial masters and his relation to his wife and family are consciously made and explored. These run from scathing indictments of men

³⁵⁰ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 39-40

³⁵¹ Sarkar, 38

who are kicked by their masters and in turn kick their wives³⁵² to autocratic assertions of the inviolability of the man's rights over the female body. Sarkar proposes that while total subjection is posited in both relationships (colonial and conjugal), it is thought of as being forced in one and voluntary in the other. The colonial masters hold sway over their subjects through asymmetry of power. The Hindu husband, on the other hand, held sway over his wife by commanding her unquestioning and selfless love. The Hindu woman surrendered to her husband because she loved him unconditionally and her love made her immune to the pain he inflicted on her—through the enjoyment of her infantile body, polygamy, early and frequent maternity, extreme deprivation in widowhood, and her self-immolation in his funeral pyre. Moreover, he demanded absolute purity and she consented. Because of her seclusion from the outside world, the Hindu woman could maintain her purity in a way that the man couldn't. She was expected to maintain the traditional way of dress which Sarkar describes as “the conchshell bangle, the ritually pure fabric, the sindur [the vermilion powder worn on the forehead and the parting of the hair].”³⁵³ In the state of widowhood she was expected to wear “cloth... [that was] necessarily indigenous, the water she [drank had]...to be carried from the sacred river and not through foreign water pipes, and the salt that [went] into her food [was] special rock salt untouched by machines.”³⁵⁴ As long as the woman was pure and unreformed, there was hope for the regeneration of the nation imagined as a woman. The willingness of the Hindu woman to bear pain and deprivation was a mark of her strength.³⁵⁵ So, the

³⁵² Sarkar, 40

³⁵³ Sarkar, 35

³⁵⁴ Sarkar, 42

reformers argued, even if girl-brides died on their marriage beds³⁵⁶ and widows suffered through fasting and other hardships, nothing needed to be changed because the amelioration of their physical suffering would lead to spiritual degradation. Sarkar provides one particularly telling example of the extreme nature of the conservative Hindu view when she quotes from Chandranath Basu's piece in the December 25, 1890 edition of the Bengali newspaper Bangabashi. In a piece titled "Hindutva," Sarkar explains, Basu wrote to the effect that

[I]f infant marriages led to violence, even to bloody death, then it was the unique privilege and strength of the Hindu woman to accept the risk. Its practice could lead to weakened progeny and racial degeneration. But "the Hindu prizes his religion above his life and short-lived children."³⁵⁷

Child marriage became one of the practices by which the Hindu male came to be defined by the colonial administration. It was held as proof of the Hindu's excessive sexuality and moral weakness. In this instance, hypersexuality was not equated with virility, but with effeminacy, since controlling sexual appetite was the marker of the right kind of masculinity.³⁵⁸ While social reformer and educationist Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was able to pass without much opposition the Widow Remarriage Act in 1856 and the age of intercourse with wives was fixed at ten in 1860, child marriage, polygamy, early maternity, and the high number of young widows were social

³⁵⁵ Sarkar, 203

³⁵⁶The death of the 11-year-old Phulmonee as a result of marital rape by her 35-year-old husband in 1890 was a crucial event that energized both the faction which was in favor of administrative intervention in the form of laws preventing such occurrences and that which was against such intervention.

³⁵⁷ Sarkar, 50.

³⁵⁸ Even as late as 1927, Katherine Mayo's book about Hindu socio-religious practices such as child marriage and resulting early pregnancy in India, Mother India, caused a maelstrom of protests from such notables as Gandhi and Tagore. Mayo argued against political independence for India on the grounds that the Indian character was unsuitable for coping with the rigors of political self governance. Gandhi, Tagore, and others objected to distortions and scurrilous details in Mayo's book. See Manoranjan Jha. Katherine Mayo and India. (New Delhi, Ahmadabad, Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1971).

phenomena that continued to be prevalent all through the nineteenth century and were topics of frequent and intense debates.³⁵⁹ Of these the debates, those about the right age of cohabitation for girls caused the most furor. While some shastric traditions emphasized the importance of consummation of marriage immediately after the girl-bride reached puberty, the plight of young mothers bearing children before their bodies matured raised serious concerns among many.³⁶⁰ Traditionalists interpreted any government involvement in this matter, such as passing the Age of Consent bills (the second one was passed in 1891), to be an unwarranted interference in religious practices, but reformists in general welcomed it. Although the most influential doctrine regarding child marriage was published in Bombay in 1884,³⁶¹ the debate over the age of consent was the most fractious in Bengal. As Mrinalini Sinha puts it,

While the upper-caste Hindu practice of child-marriage was fairly common among different caste/class and religious groups all over India,

³⁵⁹ In Rule of Darkness: Literature and British Imperialism: 1830-1914 (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) Patrick Brantlinger mentions Tennyson's 1892 poem "Akbar's Dream" in which Tennyson writes about a prophetic dream that Akbar has about the destruction of the Mughal Empire and the subsequent restoration of civilization by the British. What is of particular interest to me is what Tennyson has to say about the women of India.

I watched my son,
And those that followed, loosen stone from stone,
All my fair work; and from the ruin arose
The shriek and curse of trampled millions, even
As in the time before; but while I groaned,
From out the sunset poured an alien race,
Who fitted stone to stone again, and Truth,
Peace, Love and Justice came and dwelt therein,
Nor in the field without were seen or heard
Fires of suttee, nor wail of baby-wife,
Or Indian widow: and in sleep I said
"All praise to Alla by whatever hands
My mission be accomplished! (italics are mine)

³⁶⁰ Charles Heimsath mentions several social reasons for the practice: introduction of a bride into her husband's family at a young age fostered easy adaption to it; the fear that raising the age of marriage would lead women into immorality; difficulty in finding suitable husbands for older girls, and others.

³⁶¹ Behramji Malabari published his "Notes" on "Infant Marriage in India" and "Enforced Widowhood" on August 15, 1884 (Heimsath 151).

there was a general consensus that the problem of premature consummation of child-marriage was to be found mainly in the province of Bengal.³⁶²

As Sinha shows through her meticulous research, all parties debating the issue, liberals and conservatives, anti-colonial nationalists and colonists, Indians and Englishmen, were motivated by reasons other than simply saving the girl brides from their rapacious husbands or from preventing undue interference into the Hindu way of life. Those who were against raising the age of consent from ten to twelve argued that the generally early age of menstruation of Bengali girls rendered them ready for early cohabitation (as opposed to up-country girls who menstruated later³⁶³), wives “in heat” were in danger of going astray if consummation was denied to them,³⁶⁴ wombs would become impure if consummation did not occur at the onset of the menses and make the progeny unfit for specific rituals. The supporters of the bill pointed to death and injury caused to young wives by early consummation,³⁶⁵ generations of weak progeny having an adverse effect on the physical and mental being of the Bengali,³⁶⁶ early exposure to sexual activity leading to an unhealthy interest in sex in the Bengali household,³⁶⁷ and others. Of course, the women who were supposedly at the center of the debate were silent; the males on both sides spoke for them, and it was the interests of the males that

³⁶² Mrinalini Sinha, “Potent Protests: The Age of Consent Controversy, 1891,” *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995) 138

³⁶³ Sinha, 147

³⁶⁴ Sinha 168

³⁶⁵ Sinha, 171

³⁶⁶ Sinha, 157

³⁶⁷ Sinha, 169

were safeguarded at every step. British reaction to the controversy was shaped, in part by generally negative reaction to the rising tide of feminist activism at home, and Indian responses were conditioned by the desire to protect patriarchal interest. But these complex motivations were couched in the language of blame. The rulers constructed the ruled in terms of sexual excess and physical enervation while Indians blamed the British for attempting to emasculate them by taking away their authority to regulate their own domestic sphere.

Further disenfranchisement of the Hindu male was caused by the Ilbert Bill controversy in 1883-84. This bill was designed to give “various classes of native officials in the colonial administrative service limited criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects living in the *mofussil* or country towns in India.”³⁶⁸ As Mrinalini Sinha explains, the colonists objected to the bill on the assumption that the effeminate Indian was inherently incapable of adjudicating competently and impartially over the manlier Englishman. The specter of the helpless Englishwomen in the power of lustful and immoral native judges kindled the imagination of the anti-Ilbert Bill section of the Anglo-Indian populace as well as the British public. This, coupled with the Indian’s perceived aversion to sports and his generally smaller build than the Englishman, was construed as absolute proof of the Indian’s unfitness to rule over Englishmen.

Bankim does not deal with these issues directly in his historical novels, but the prevailing sentiments about them are evident in his portrayal of women. There are no child brides in his novels: Shanti (Anandamath), Debi (Debi Chaudhurani), and Shree (Sitaram) are all young married women, but there is no indication in the novels that they

³⁶⁸ Mrinalini Sinha, “Reconfiguring hierarchies: the Ilbert Bill controversy, 1883—84”, Colonial Masculinity. 33

were children when they got married. And none of the heroines in his historical novels are as young as some of the heroines of his social novels,³⁶⁹ where he deals with problems such as polygamy and unfaithfulness in marriage. When the novels in which they appear take place, Debi is no less than twenty-five years old and Shanti is twenty-five, as well. Shree may have been a child wife—we do not know—but when she reappears in her husband’s life as the novel begins, she is a strong and mature young woman of exceptional beauty and strength of character. Chanchal Kumari, (Rajsingha) is eighteen and not married; we are not told how old Mrinalini (Mrinalini) is, but the long period of separation from her beloved before their eventual marriage and her brave decision to leave her foster parents’ house when she is unfairly accused of being immoral, precludes the possibility of her being very young. Of all the heroines of the historical novels, Tilottama of Durgeshnandini is the youngest. Bankim refers to her variously as “yuvati” (young woman) and “balika” (child)³⁷⁰ thus indicating her to be probably in her teens and she is not married either.

None of these women are mothers. Debi is the only one whom the author mentions as eventually having children, but that becomes possible only after she has renounced her life of public action as Debi and resumed the role of Praphulla. So, when she is the symbolic mother of the people she protects (as Debi), she has no biological children of her own; it is only when she renounces the role of mother to many that she can be the mother to a few (as Praphulla). None of Bankim’s women of action are mothers in the biological sense; their procreative energy has to be harnessed to the

³⁶⁹ Kundanandini in Bisha-briksha (Poison Tree) is one such heroine.

³⁷⁰ Durgeshnandini. B.R. Vol I 3

service of the nation and the physical aspect of marital love has to be sacrificed at the altar of nation worship. In denying the procreative role, these women are female counterparts of the ascetic male children of the mother who channel their sexual energy into single-minded service for the mother.

Chandrima Chakraborty reads the ascetic males of Bankim's historical novels as alternates to the usual model of Bengali masculinity presented by men who married child brides and indulged in polygamy.³⁷¹ Just as the men conserve their virility for martial purposes, the women remain childless for greater good. Since they do not procreate, they do not function as "biological reproducers of national collectivities"—as Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias suggest that women often do in the text of nationalism.³⁷² Shanti's total immersion in the role of a "child" excludes any possibility of her having a child of her own. It is significant that when Shanti's husband Jibananda rescues the infant daughter of Mahendra, he gives the child to his sister rather than his wife to raise. Shanti is too much a woman of action to be a mother; the boundaries of the home are too confining for her. The only person who addresses her as mother does so out of respect and because it is a traditional form by which a man addresses a woman not related to him, thus ruling out any possibility of sexual attraction. The man in this instance is Satyananda, Shanti and Jibananda's teacher and spiritual mentor, and in this newly forged family of the "*anandas*," Shanti is a child to the white-haired guru as well as his mother. She is his mother not only because societal rules dictate that she be addressed as such, but

³⁷¹ Chandrima Chakraborty, "Ascetic Nationalisms." 69

³⁷² Quoted in Anne McClintock's "No Longer in a Future Heaven." Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context. (New York: Routledge, 1996) 355.

also because she is able to silence him effectively with her arguments in favor of her being allowed to serve the nation-mother in the guise of a man.

Similarly Shree in Sitaram does not or cannot become a mother because she is not a wife in the full sense of the term. Shree chooses not to live with her husband conjugally even though she loves him and prefers to divert her attention to his perceived spiritual needs. As for the other heroines of Bankim's historical novels, Mrinalini, Tilottama, and Chanchal Kumari fall in love but are not married till the end of the novels. Since their marital lives begin after their stories end, there is no scope for us to see them as wives or mothers. Shoibolini (Chandrasekhar) is married but childless. Probably the author introduces her as such because the novel is about Shoibolini's love for her childhood friend, Pratap, which complicates her relationship with her loving but much older and unromantic husband, Chandrasekhar. Shoibolini is not an ideal wife—the only one in the gallery of heroines of Bankim's historical novels who is not. As such she cannot be allowed to be a mother. Perhaps she does have children after Pratap is dead and she is reunited with her husband, but the novel does not deal with this phase of her life. And this later phase of her life only becomes possible when, through performing terrible penance for loving Pratap, she purifies herself to be worthy of her husband, who accepts her in spite of her transgressions. But even if these women do not become mothers, there is no doubt that they have the capacity to be the exceptional mothers when the time comes. They have been chaste in their youth (even Shoibolini, who is the only transgressor among such women, remains physically pure and undergoes harsh penance for loving Pratap) and this chastity coupled with utter devotion to their spouses makes them fit for bearing ideal children.

Bankim is concerned with the female body in a symbolic manner and this choice leaves no space for the body of the child bride and mother who was being written about in contemporary newspaper and social tracts. The only reference to physicality in his novels are in his descriptions of female beauty. All his heroines are beautiful in the tradition of classical Sanskrit literature and as such they are little more than stereotypes. Of course we can interpret this beauty differently. Sudipta Kaviraj suggests that perhaps it is inevitable that they be beautiful because their beauty is symbolic of a dark and often destructive power intrinsically associated with femininity.³⁷³ Certainly, it is because women like Shree, Manorama, Kalyani, Rama and others that are irresistibly beautiful, courageous men like Sitaram, Pashupati, Bhavananda, and Gangaram plunge into dark deeds to attain them. These women are also high born; they belong either to royal lineages or to the higher castes. Physical beauty and noble birth in Bankim's world are preconditions for moral strength, which these women are called upon to display.³⁷⁴ But the romantic in Bankim was only too aware of the attractions of physical beauty and the dangers it can pose to men, especially if the latter were to be engaged whole-heartedly in the task of nation building. Pashupati's obsession for Manorama (Mrinalini), Bhavananda's obsession for Kalyani (Anandamath), and Gangaram's obsession for Rama and Sitaram's obsession for Shree (Sitaram) are cases in point. Pashupati and Gangaram

³⁷³ Sudipta Kaviraj, The Unhappy Consciousness. 6

³⁷⁴ Michael McKeon cites several authors on the correlation of beauty and virtue: According to aristocratic ideology, honor as virtue is an inherited characteristic. On Aristotle's authority, "Those who are sprung from better ancestors are likely to be better men, for nobility is excellence of race." James I claimed that "virtue followeth ofttest Noble blood." The worthiness of their antecessours craveth a reverent regard to be had unto them.' Moreover, external appearance itself seemed to substantiate the notion that honor is truly intrinsic, an inherited trait in the biological as well as the genealogical sense of the term, for the privileged also tended to be physically more distinguished—taller, heavier, better developed—than the rest of society." (The Origins of the English Novel 131-132).

turn traitors to their king and country under the misguided impression that this will enable them to possess the women they desire and have to pay with their lives for their sin. Sitaram plunges in licentiousness to avenge the disappearance of Shree and loses his kingdom. In each case the Hindu kingdoms the men were supposed to protect fall to Muslim invaders. All of these men, except Gangaram, realize their mistakes and atone for their actions. Bhavananda dies on the battlefield; Sitaram rouses himself from sloth to lead a final charge against his enemies, and Pashupati dies trying to save Manorama from a burning house after he realizes the futility of his treachery.³⁷⁵ Even exemplary heroes like Hemchandra and Jagatsingha are not immune to the danger of being led astray from the path of duty by their desire for the beautiful women they love. Hemchandra threatens to disregard his guru's injunction to not unite with Mrinalini till the foreign invaders have been driven away. Jagatsingha falls into enemy hands when he foolishly enters the castle of the enemy to meet with his beloved, thus allowing himself to be used as pawn in the contest between the heroine's fiercely independent father Birendrasingha and Katlu Khan who demands his surrender.

But if controlled properly, the woman's beauty can be made to serve the greater good, a point of which Anandamath is a good example. Shanti uses her charms to secure valuable information from the English camp for the santans. What is interesting is that while she seduces the gullible English officers, she simultaneously enforces her vow of chastity in the presence of her husband. She dresses like a woman during her reconnaissance trip to the English camp but wears the garb of a male ascetic complete with a beard in her husband's presence. In both instances she is guided by her desire to be a *shahadharmini* as the Hindu wife is required to be, one who travels with her husband

³⁷⁵ After occupying Gaud, Khilji imprisons Pashupati when he refuses to convert to Islam.

along the path of *dharma* or morality and duty with her husband. Her conviction gives her the courage to stand up to the guru Satyananda's accusation that her presence among the santans will distract Jibananda. She proves her worth by helping Jibananda to keep his vows of celibacy even when he comes perilously close to breaking it and by guiding his actions at the end when he seems lost. While Shanti keeps her marriage vows by stepping back into her husband's life after a period of absence, Kalyani does just the opposite: she disappears from Mahendra's life because he cannot serve as a child while he is still a husband. Both women are ideal wives and at the end of the novel it is their names that are invoked together to signify complementarity and perfection.

However, while Kalyani and Shanti's choice of being spiritual rather than physical companions for their husbands produces positive results in Anandamath, a similar choice by Shree has the opposite effect in Sitaram. Shree too tries to be a spiritual companion to her husband and denies her husband sexual satisfaction because she makes spiritual preparedness a precondition for consummation. But in her case this denial proves to be disastrous. A frustrated Sitaram engages in senseless debauchery and eventually loses his kingdom because he stops being a king. Bankim editor J.C. Bagal mentions one critic writing "what kind of a bhairavi [a female ascetic of unusual power] is Shree who remains unmoved even at the prospect of the destruction of a dharmarajya [a just kingdom], and leaves only after it is brought to dust!"³⁷⁶ This is in line with Sitaram's long arguments with Shree about the duties of a wife toward her husband. Sitaram emphasizes the total submission of a wife to her husband in accordance with the strictures of Hinduism. Shree counters this argument by saying that marriage is not for satisfying one's physical needs because such a marriage is no better than coupling

³⁷⁶ B.R. Vol 1 59

between two animals. She vows to keep wearing her saffron garments as an outward sign of the extension of her celibate state until Sitaram can come to her purged of his lust. She threatens to take poison if he forces himself on her. When the situation becomes intolerable for both of them, she escapes in disguise. This causes the total collapse of the once moral and industrious king who resorts to abducting women from all walks of life in his efforts to forget the unattainable Shree. The violated women celebrate the eventual downfall of Sitaram's empire and interpret the king's downfall as the invisible workings of *dharma*. But while Sitaram's culpability is beyond doubt, we get the uneasy sense that Shree is not blameless either. The omniscient narrator in the novel, who, as Priya Joshi indicates, serves as a point of moral fixity in Bankim's novels,³⁷⁷ interjects his doubts about the rightness of Shree's conduct:

It is hard to know whether Sitaram would have fallen so low if Shree had not appeared; he had decided to concentrate on being a king to forget Shree . . . When Shree appeared when she should not have, his determination fell away like a dike of sand in the flood of desire . . . If Shree did come she could have remained as the queen in the palace like Nanda [another wife of Sitaram]. If like Nanda she would have helped the king discharge his royal duties, perhaps he would not have fallen so low. . . . Instead of staying like a queen in the palace, if Shree had decided to stay like a mistress in Chittabishram ["Soul's Rest," the name of the cottage Sitaram built for Shree] then there would have been no problem. Her fatal charm would have diminished [for Sitaram] once [his] desire had been slaked . . . Now, if Shree had decided to be a typical sannyasin, there would have been no danger. But this Indrani-like³⁷⁸ sannyasin sitting on tiger-skin³⁷⁹ showered [Sitaram] with honeyed words and all Sitaram was allowed to do was gaze at her face sitting apart like a dog, and this while she was his wife!

380

³⁷⁷ Priya Joshi. *In Another Country*. 156

³⁷⁸ Indrani is the queen of the king of gods, Indra.

³⁷⁹ Ascetics are often depicted as sitting on deer or leopard skin. Shree's choice of tiger skin is probably a testimonial to her being a bhairavi—the kind of ascetic who emphasizes spiritual and physical strength.

³⁸⁰ B.R. Vol 1 876 (my translation)

However we many read this curious passage, as an indictment of Sitaram or an indictment of Shree, it is clear that some measure of the blame for Sitaram's failure is attributable to Shree. But the irony is that Shree did believe what she was doing was right. While her beauty had caused Sitaram to do the right thing at the beginning of the novel (saving the innocent Gangaram who is both his kinsman and a Hindu, by putting his own life in peril), it causes the loss of his kingdom at the end. Perhaps the fault lies within Sitaram for not being strong enough to choose duty over desire as Pratap is able to do in Chandrasekhar or Hemchandra is able to do in Mrinalini. But the presence of men like Sitaram, Pashupati, and Gangaram demonstrate that feminine beauty is capable of taking on a life of its own and perhaps it is not always possible for the woman to control the effects it produces on those she loves.

If Anandamath and Sitaram are at opposite ends of the spectrum of Bankim's exploration of the role of female sexuality within marriage vis-à-vis nation building, Debi Chaudhurani offers a middle ground. As a wife Praphulla allows her husband the right to her body and she keeps herself chaste when he disappears from her life. She gladly goes to her husband's bed when she meets him for the last time as Praphulla and before her transformation into Debi and does so again at the end of the novel when she is remarried to him. Both times the effect is positive for her. The memory of the first night spent with him is enough to give her the strength to go on living even when she leaves his home. Even when there is no hope of her being reunited with her husband, she does not stop loving him and insists on eating fish on specific days prescribed in the Hindu calendar to assert her still-married status (observant Hindu widows are expected to be strict vegetarians). Even as Debi, the queenly protector of her people, she never stops being

Praphulla, the wife, and this enables her to love her marital family unquestioningly and forgive all their faults. Their faults are many. Her handsome but spineless husband Brajeswar marries two more times after he abandons Praphulla on his father's orders. Being financially dependent on his father, Brajeswar is unable to provide for Praphulla but has no qualms about bedding her when she comes to him seeking help after her mother's death. (Of course Praphulla regards this one-night relationship in a different light; she is grateful to have shared Brajeswar's bed and looks upon her night with him as a "pilgrimage.") His father, Haraballabh, is no better. He abandons Praphulla when the neighbors of her mother, discontented over the quality of food served to them at the wedding feast, spread libel about the mother's character. When Praphulla's mother dies, Haraballabh refuses to help her saying that he cared not if she begged, robbed, or stole to live. When he falls behind on his taxes having failed to curb his lifestyle in a period of diminishing income and Praphulla as Debi helps him, he returns the favor by acting as a state informer and leads the troops to her secret location. When his plan to have her captured fails and he becomes a prisoner, he gets off by agreeing to let his son be married to Debi without knowing who she truly is. In short, Haraballabh is an utterly despicable human being in every respect.

Yet Debi holds no grudges. She is prepared to surrender and court death to save her husband and father-in-law. She always wanted to be a wife and her wish comes true at the end when she can re-enter the polygamous domestic sphere and discharge her duties as a wife, mother, and head of household with perfection. That she never stopped loving Brajeswar is made clear in her conversation with Nishi, another student of her guru and mentor Bhavani Pathak. When Nishi tells Praphulla that she is married to her

personal god Krishna and is happy because his “beauty is endless, youth is eternal, wealth is boundless, and virtues uncountable,” the illiterate Praphulla has no words to answer her. At this point the narrator interjects:

The preceptors of Hinduism knew the answer. We know that God is endless. But we cannot hold the Endless One in the small cage of our hearts as we can the one who has bounds. That is why the Lord of the world is boundless but Krishna can be contained in the heart of the Hindu; the husband is even more attainable. That is why pure love for the husband is the first step for approaching God. That is why for the Hindu woman the husband is God. All other societies are inferior to the Hindu society in this respect.³⁸¹

This instance of the narrator’s perspective serving as a moral guide for the reader echoes the more conservative Hindu patriarchal views discussed earlier. Praphulla feels in her heart that her love for her husband is sublime but she has no words to express it because she is illiterate. Lest the reader accept the more learned Nishi’s assertion that the love for God does not compare with the love for a mortal husband, the narrator steps in to assert that Nishi is wrong. Once Praphulla’s steadfastness as a wife is established, Bankim has no trouble ending her story with her return to the domestic sphere of marital and familial duties.

The famous ending of the novel has left many a reader of Bankim dissatisfied. The once queenly woman is reduced to living a life of the purdah and the author seems to imply that ruling over an embryonic nation (which Debi used to do) is no greater a duty than ruling over a household. The narrator’s explanation is that both roles are of equal importance to Praphulla/Debi because she is trained in the Hindu philosophy of detached action. When she was required to be a queen, she was a superb queen; when she was required to be a wife and mother, she was equally perfect in these roles. She could perform both duties with utmost sincerity without becoming attached to either. Only

³⁸¹ B.R. Vol I 751

someone who is developed spiritually can handle such different roles with ease.

Marriage is a spiritual contract that requires the ideal wife to be a dedicated participant.

As the ideal wife, Praphulla restores harmony and balance to her marital family just she had done in her “kingdom” as Debi. While Shanti in Anandamath has to retreat from the world at the end (albeit with her husband) and we suspect that Shree in Sitaram has to do the same, Praphulla can continue to live out the four stages of the ideal Hindu’s life.³⁸²

As such she achieves a perfection that is denied to the two other women.

It is no wonder that Debi Chaudhurani ends with a hymn to Praphulla which praises her in terms reserved for ultimate godhead in the Gita. She is presented as the eternal being who appears or reincarnates in every age to protect the virtuous, punish the evil, and to restore justice and religion (this belief in reincarnation being consistent with the Hindu concept of time being cyclical with each cycle consisting of four eras). While love is the underlying message of this hymn, it is strength that is foregrounded. Even when Praphulla re-enters the household, it is her efficiency as the head of the inner quarters, rather than her eroticism or sexuality, which were highlighted in her earlier encounter with her husband, that is played up. Sudipta Kaviraj (among others) mentions Bankim adopting a similar tactic while writing about the divinity of Krishna in Krishnacharitra (one of the last religious-philosophical tracts written by Bankim). The folksy and popular aspects of Krishna, the lover of many women, the playful cowherd, and the player of a magical flute that drew the listeners to him, are discarded in favor of

³⁸² There are four stages in a Hindu’s life. The first is one of learning and celibacy (*brahmacharya*); this is followed by the householder stage (*garhashthya*); the third stage is of gradual withdrawal from the material world (*vanaprashya*); the fourth and final stage advocates passing the last days away from human habitation in contemplation of death and the life after (*sannyasa*).

Krishna the warrior, statesman, and ideal householder.³⁸³ It is of course Krishna who recites the Gita³⁸⁴ with the celebrated promise of returning as an avatar when the just need to be protected and the evil have to be punished. What is surprising is that Bankim chooses to address not the regally powerful Debi in these words, but the gentle and loving Praphulla. Perhaps the implication is that once the virtuous have been protected, evil has been punished, and justice and religion have been restored (or, in the context of political history, when the British have taken over the task of administering Bengal/India thus restoring law and order), the woman can turn her attention to building a strong family which is the first step of building a strong nation. The procreative energy that had to be channeled earlier into ruling a kingdom can now find its natural outlet through producing biological offspring who, to use the words of Yuval-Davis and Anthias, are “members of national collectivities.”³⁸⁵ Debi Chaudhurani is the only novel in which Bankim shows the fruition of the perfect wife into the perfect mother and, as such, Praphulla/Debi presents the most complete version of the ideal woman. All his other historical works end with marriages (Durgeshnandini, Mrinalini, Rajsingha), reconciliation within a broken marriage (Chandrasekhar), withdrawal from the material world (Anandamath), or inconclusively (Sitaram). Only Debi Chaudhurani deals with the entire life span of a

³⁸³ Sudipta Kaviraj discusses Bankim’s treatment of the Krishna figure in “The Myth of Praxis: Construction of the Figure of Kṛṣṇa in Kṛṣṇacaritra.” The Unhappy Consciousness. Ashis Nandy also comments on Bankim’s restricting the image of Krishna in “The Psychology of Colonialism” (The Intimate Enemy, 23).

³⁸⁴ In the epic Mahabharata when his protégé Arjuna is despondent at the prospect of killing family and friends in the imminent fratricidal battle, Krishna as Arjuna’s non combatant charioteer recites the Gita to inspire him to action.

³⁸⁵ Qtd. Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 355.

young wife who matures into an independent woman and chooses domesticity over life in the public sphere.

In allowing Debi to be the ideal mother both in the symbolic and literal sense, of all his other heroines, Bankim makes her the closest approximation of the imaginary nation-mother. Debi shares all the attributes of the nation-mother. She is beautiful in a regal way, she is the possessor of immense wealth which she uses for her subjects' welfare, she watches over her children vigilantly, and she is an independent woman functioning without a consort. She is simultaneously a *debi* (goddess) and *chaudhurani* (woman of high social and economic rank), thus straddling the two worlds of divinity and materiality. It is true, as Chandrima Chakraborty comments, that Debi's choice of a life of action is brought about by men and not through the "autonomy and self-choice that is associated with the male *santan*,"³⁸⁶ but it is possible to read in Bankim's selection of her as the heroine his tacit admission that given the chance women too can achieve the kind of perfection usually envisioned for men. If Krishna in Krishnacharitra is the ideal male, embodying the attributes of householder, statesman, warrior, and philosopher, Debi is the ideal woman possessing all these qualities that make the perfect human. Krishna is celebrated in the Gita, and the most familiar passage from the book is used to describe Praphulla at the end of Debi Chaudhurani. Krishna already existed as a religious/mythological/epic figure in the Hindu tradition, but Debi/Praphulla had to be imagined into a literary existence. The transformation of the rather ordinary Praphulla (she is beautiful, loyal, docile, and eager to learn—all admirable characteristics but which are not heroic by any stretch of the imagination) into the ideal human being Debi is extremely interesting. Bankim did not transform Krishna; he had to be imaginative and

³⁸⁶ Chandrima Chakraborty, "Ascetic Nationalisms." 103

selective in his choice of the attributes he wanted to highlight. But the transformation of Praphulla was a more difficult task. It had to be brought about through a carefully planned rigorous program of physical, academic, and philosophical/religious training—a point I would like to discuss next with reference to Shanti and Shree in addition to Praphulla.

The education that Bankim prescribes for his heroines is significant. They undergo intense multifaceted preparation for that role. Shanti is trained by her father and by other teachers in the shastras, as is Debi. The extent of Shree's academic training is not discussed, but she spends considerable time in the company of her mentor, Jayanti, who is a learned woman and an ascetic. The classical Hindu/Sanskrit education that these women receive is the same as what their male counterparts receive. This education consists of literature, grammar, religion, arts, philosophy, and history. Although it is devoid of western-style scientific training (which would have been anachronistic any way, given the novels' pre-nineteenth-century settings), this education gives the female protagonists what they need to carry out their duties successfully. In other words, this is a complete education since it equips them well for their roles in the world.

This emphasis on classical education reflects the nineteenth-century Indian's concern with the right kind of education.³⁸⁷ Western-style scientific and technological

³⁸⁷ While there was some ambivalence about Indian men receiving western education, there was generally a great deal of support for such education. Of course, as Gauri Viswanathan shows in Masks of Conquest, the urgency of educating Indian men stemmed not from pure altruism on the part of the British, but rather from the desire to secure political stability and from the necessity to have literature, especially English literature, function as “a surrogate Englishman in his most highest and perfect state,” since the actual Englishmen that most Indians met on a daily basis were less than ideal (20). However, the issue of women receiving western education was far more complicated. During the Ilbert Bill controversy, a “memorial” supposedly composed and signed by educated Indian women stressed these women's ostensible participation in public life. The memorial pointed out that unlike the university-educated Indian women who had B.A. degrees, there were no comparably university-educated English women. Discussing this memorial, Mrinalini Sinha mentions that “the University of Calcutta had admitted female graduates to

education was something that had become an integral part of the education system by Bankim's day. While there was recognition, admiration, and acceptance of this kind of education among the indigenous population, there was also considerable unease towards the cultural transformations it inaugurated. The necessity of earning a living in a colonial administration made it imperative for Indian men to embrace western education but women were immune from this necessity. According to Henry Schwarz, although the Charter Act of 1813 formally widened the scope for education for the Indian male, it was not until 1859 that the first school for women was founded by John Drinkwater Bethune, and not until 1883 that the first woman graduated from Calcutta University.³⁸⁸ In fact, westernization was thought by many to be unnatural for women since it was believed to encourage laziness, immorality, disregard towards tradition, and other vices. The new woman who adopted western ways was the object of ridicule in much of contemporary literature. (Bankim himself writes about such women in his essay "Prachina o Nabina"—"The Old and the New Woman.")³⁸⁹ The education that was best for Hindu women was

its degree programme in 1878, before any of the English universities" (*Colonial Masculinity* 62). Although the memorial turned out to be a hoax, Sinha notes the significance of the composers' underscoring the importance of the baccalaureate degree being indicative of being the right kind of education and the importance of educated women participating in the public sphere. Bankim, on the other hand, stresses indigenous education for his women in the historical novels.

³⁸⁸ Henry Schwarz. "Sexing the Pundits: Gender, Romance, and Realism in the Cultural Politics of Colonial Bengal." *Reading the Shape of the World: Toward an International Cultural Studies*. eds. Henry Schwarz and Richard Dienst. (Politics and Culture Series, editors Avery Gordon and Michael Ryan. Boulder, Colorado, Oxford: Westview, 1996) 226

³⁸⁹ In this essay where he moves easily from a serious polemical tone to a humorous one, Bankim writes:

...the women of yore were extremely hardworking and expert housewives; the women of the present are perfect babus [men whose superficial westernization renders them useless]; they spend their days gazing at their own beauty in the clear mirror like lotuses in a pond. The burden of housework is now on the maid. There are many evil effects of this. The absence of physical exertion is rendering these young women weak and their bodies the abode of diseases The constant illnesses of the new woman are a constant irritation and make her husband, father, and son unhappy. Naturally, the household affairs fall into disarray and produces unhappiness. If the

the kind that reinforced the superiority of her inherited tradition without needing to turn to any extraneous traditions—Islamic or western. Tanika Sarkar summarizes this attitude very aptly in this description of the ideal Hindu woman.

Her entire being, conditioned by scriptural commands, was adequate to sustain an embryonic nation that lay hidden and protected within her chaste womb. She was perfect as she was, her glory lay in the discipline that formed her. Any modification in that disciplinary regime would fatally injure that perfection and lead to a fall from grace. Thus, any suggestions that social and religious reformers made to change the conditions of her conjugal discipline, to educate her and make her a conscious subject, would not only spell the ruin of the Hindu faith, but also of the Hindu nation, for there was no one else fit enough to be its future subject.³⁹⁰

Most Hindu girls who received any education did so only until they were married, and while Bankim presents Debi and Shree as becoming educated after their marriage, he also presents their celibacy as an important condition of their education. In making some of his women celibate during their student phase, Bankim follows the prescribed requirement of the first stage of the male Hindu's life known as *brahmacharya*. Not only are young males required to study and maintain their physical purity during the first stage of their lives, they are required to be indifferent to the temptations of the material world. Bankim's women follow the same path. After becoming the disciple of Jayanti, Shree wears saffron (the color associated in Hinduism with renunciation) and smears ashes on her body as ascetics do to signify their withdrawal from the world of materiality. Becoming a sannyasi often involves performing one's own funeral rites (which in the case of a householder is performed by his or her children) to signal the new sannyasi's death to the material world. Hence for women like Shree or Shanti, dressing as ascetics

wife is weak and bed-ridden, the house ceases to be an abode of grace; there is great expenditure, the children are neglected. (B.R. Vol I 220)

³⁹⁰ Tanika Sarkar. Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 143--44

is much more than changing outwards appearances; it has deep spiritual significance. It signifies a denial of their sexual and procreative aspects. Like the warrior monks of Anandamath, who have to give up physical pleasures and channel their sexual energy into martial prowess, the women of Bankim's historical novels have to negate their reproductive roles to fully engage in the service of the nation. Knowledge can only be achieved on the condition of single-minded determination. We see this phenomenon in action most clearly in Debi Chaudhurani.

In the third year of her initial five-year training, Debi has to wear white and shave her head. As such she is indistinguishable from the Hindu widow, and this temporary widowhood marks the break between two phases of her life. So, by dressing as monks and widows Shanti, Shree, and Debi divest themselves of their householder status which is the second stage of the lifecycle of the Hindu, and extend the first stage, that of scholarship and celibacy. By not dressing as married women, they strip themselves of their femininity and reject the social contract of marriage. While their married status would usually proscribe their presence outside the home, their status as women who are temporarily unmarried allows them to step in the male world of actions and claim it as their own. In suppressing her feminine and sexual side, Debi has to go the farthest. Her teacher and mentor Bhavani Pathak insists that she have literary discussion with his best male students and that she learn wrestling. She is even made to practice her skills at wielding the *laathi* (bamboo staff) with Bhavani Pathak's male disciples. For the once-unlettered Praphulla, who moved about in the women's quarters, this is a significant change. But by doing so willingly (Bankim makes clear that she submits to the wishes of her teacher Bhavani Pathak voluntarily), Praphulla breaks down the walls between the

home and the world as do Shanti and Shree. By living as celibate student ascetics, all three women interrupt the normal four-stage life they were born into. But desperate times call for desperate measures, so these women have to live unusual lives because the times they are born into makes normalcy impossible. Normalcy would be attainable only within the narrow sphere of domesticity, and these women cannot change anything if they remain within its confines. In stripping these women of the normative kind of femininity, Bankim makes them develop another, a more potent kind. Their stories of desexualization and masculinization are meant to serve as exemplars for an effeminate nation.

According to Bankim, the ideal education also has a corresponding physical component which makes these women physically powerful and courageous. Shanti and Debi are both taught self-defense and various martial arts, and while Shree is not shown acquiring any such training, she learns to wield the trident and helps rescue her husband and the women and children of his fort in a moment of crisis. These women appear in battles and even when the odds are heavily against them, they persist without fearing for their lives, even if they are not shown actively participating in battles.³⁹¹ Even the women who do not have the occasion to display their martial skills are allowed to display their moral courage. For example, Chanchal Kumari, who is more a romantic heroine than a woman of action, laughingly steps between the warring armies of Rajsingha and Aurangzeb to stop unnecessary bloodshed. Defying death in this manner she reminds Bankim's readers (who were familiar with tales of Rajput bravery) of her lineage—she comes from the same stock (as does Rajsingha) as the legendary Queen Padmini and other women like her who are reputed to have chosen death by fire to save their honor

³⁹¹ Chandrima Chakraborty raises this point in "Ascetic Nationalisms." 103

when their menfolk fell in battle. (Bankim does not tell us what kind of education Chanchal Kumari received. But he does not have to. By virtue of being a Rajput woman Chanchal is privileged to be born into a tradition of valor and sacrifice.) Another woman Manorama (Mrinalini) actually commits sati when her husband dies, thus fulfilling her role as an ideal wife in death when she could not be the ideal wife in life. (Because of the misinterpretation of a prophecy, she had to live as a widow even though she was married. Pashupati, who desires her, is her husband but is unaware of it.) Also, in dying with him she atones for his sins of betraying his country. In a strange way justice is served because she is the *shahadharmini*, the fellow traveler on the path of duty, but also because it is partly to secure her that Pashupati betrayed his king. Unafraid of physical pain and death, these individuals are Bankim's answer to critics who doubt the Bengali's *bahubal*.

Needless to say that the women that Bankim idealizes in his novels are not his contemporaries. Only the illiterate Praphulla, who is poor but is selected by a rich family on account of her beauty and then deserted on the basis of a false accusation, comes close to reality. The rest of the women can trace their lineage to an earlier and supposedly freer age when the Hindu male was politically free and had no need to keep his women in subjugation. One of the most powerful beliefs of nineteenth-century Hindu nationalism was that in the pre-Muslim (and therefore pre-British) period Hindu women were free and equal to men. Scholars have shown the superficiality of this idea, which conveniently blames the presence of the foreigner as being the chief cause of the Hindu's decline in every respect. Kumkum Roy³⁹² point to the preponderance of discriminatory practices against women sanctioned in the same sacred texts which are held up for their

³⁹² Kumkum Roy, "Where Women are Worshipped, there the Gods Rejoice": The Mirage of the Ancestress of the Hindu Woman." Women and Right-Wing Movements. eds. Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia. (London, New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995)

few laudatory remarks on women, and Uma Chakravarti³⁹³ reveals the upper-caste bias in the construction of the image of the free Hindu/Aryan woman in nineteenth century nationalist thought. The title of Chakravarti's essay is telling: "What About the Vedic *Dasi*?" Her argument is that the figure of the conquered woman who was relegated to the very unfree position of the *dasi*, or the female servant, in the conquering society is conveniently left out in the celebration of a mythical glorious Aryan womanhood, where all women supposedly enjoyed every possible right and freedom.

Bankim, however, chooses to believe in the idea of the free woman and makes the mythical Aryan woman the foremother of his heroines. Since the loss of political freedom is simultaneously the cause and the result of the loss of spiritual and moral strength—the argument being that it was the weakened state of the Indian that opened the nation to foreign invasion while the continuation of foreign domination perpetuated this weakened state, the women in his novels represent what is possible when the nation is restored its political freedom. That it is the Hindu woman and the not Hindu male who represents this hope is significant. Tanika Sarkar posits that Bankim could not reconcile certain dualities that he perceived the nineteenth-century Hindu male confronting, and that is why none of his novels puts forth the vision of political freedom and moral perfection, which is the pre-requisite of such freedom, in a male figure. These dualities are characterized by Sarkar as what the Hindu males saw as "socially just and human, and

³⁹³Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever Happened to the Vedic *Dasi*? Orientalism, Nationalism, and a Script for the Past." *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*. eds. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1990, second paperback 1997) 27-87

all they saw as authentic and indigenous:³⁹⁴ In a fuller exposition of these irreconcilables

Sarkar writes:

Bankim looks for an ethico-religious site for a Hindu people whose dominant priority is not social justice but rather what is truly indigenous—that is, Hindu. ... Within this reoriented problematic, agency could now be restored to Brahmanic forms of knowledge and upper-caste social leadership. But this presented equally powerful problems. Bankim continued to believe that past traditions of Hinduism had not generated the impulse for freedom and nationhood: these new changes needed to be improvised and old forms of knowledge or rule would not automatically yield them.³⁹⁵

Since the woman, on the other hand, was less visible in the public sphere and did not have to engage in negotiating the antinomies that complicated the Hindu male's existence, she was an easier material to work with. The figure of the child-wife, the loving mother, and the suffering widow remained hidden from the gaze of the colonist. The more visible figure of the goddess, belonging to the realm of scriptures and the distant past, was equally removed from the public arena of action. The artist's imagination could have a freer play with the feminine and invest it all his hopes and aspirations. This is why Bankim was able to create such an array of strong-willed, morally upright, and courageous women. In a way the examples of such women are already nostalgic because, as Kaviraj astutely remarks, Bankim was acutely aware of the gradual change that Indian women were undergoing in becoming "like their husbands... delicate urban parasites".³⁹⁶ While Kaviraj makes this remark in his discussion of the differences between the old and the new woman in Bankim's essays and

³⁹⁴ Tanika Sarkar, "Bankimchandra and the Impossibility of a Political Agenda." Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 162

³⁹⁵ Tanika Sarkar, "Imagining Hindu Rashtra: The Hindu and the Muslim in Bankimchandra's Writings." Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 172

³⁹⁶ Kaviraj, 53

the belle lettres of the Kamalakanta series, it is applicable to the women in Bankim's works in general.

Bankim's heroines are mostly powerful, aggressive, masterful women who are able to take their own decision, and work their way against a usually unreasoning and oppressive society. In actual Bengali society however, he was conscious there was a fast transition to the Victorian feminine. The battle that he helped women win in his fiction they had already lost in society.³⁹⁷

The case that Kaviraj makes is certainly true and this is why Bankim's decision to continue to create powerful women in his novels in spite of the dismal social reality is all the more remarkable. All the heroines of Bankim's historical novels, with the exception of Tilottama in Durgeshnandini, are strong women. This strength often springs from their attachment to the men they love and their desire to be the perfect helpmeet. Many of these men have other wives but the heroines evince no jealousy towards them and gain the men's admiration (as in the case of Chanchal Kumari) and that of their co-wives (as in the case of Debi) through the sheer force of their personalities. These women embody the kind of moral perfection that the colonists accused the Hindus as lacking.

Bankim's preoccupation with moral perfection springs out of the desire of the nineteenth-century nationalist to posit the superiority of a spiritual east versus a material west. Believing that the Hindus were the inheritors of an unbroken eastern tradition, in which the spiritual world was valued over the material, allowed the colonized Indian male to feel a measure of pride in the face of the overwhelming political, military, and technological domination of the west. It also allowed them to hope that once he caught up with the west, the Hindu would become the perfect human being, superior to the

³⁹⁷ Kaviraj, 53

British. While the Hindu nationalist turned the spirit-body dichotomy to his advantage, his European masters looked at the same preoccupation with the non-material world as a defect directly responsible for the former's subject state. Philosophy was no match for military might, and that is why the worldly British ruled the other-worldly Indian. In the language of colonialism, this difference became gendered: the effeminate Indian was dominated by the virile English. To this gendering the Indian reacted in interesting ways. There was a surge of interest in Hindu heroes of yore and a matching effort to portray the Hindu of the present day as physically strong. Bankim's novels reflect this phenomenon. While he could turn to history for examples of male valor such as Rajsingha, Sitaram, and the rebel monks of Anandamath, he had to create the women that matched them in courage and greatness, since Hindu historical narratives offered fewer examples of women warriors. What is admirable is that he was able to create so many of them. The strength of his heroines comes from their connection with the indigenous culture. They study the Hindu shastras, immerse themselves in Hindu spiritualism, and honor family ties. In other words, they do what the men of Bankim's own age, swayed by the temptations of the west, struggled but failed to do. Bankim's women are the true keepers of the flame and they are ultimately responsible for bringing many of the errant men back to the path of duty.

With the Indian/Hindu gender roles having to be reevaluated under the pressure of colonialism, there was constant focus in the nineteenth century on the body of the colonized. Since a strong body was necessary for a strong spirit, many of the socio-religious debates of this period focused on the body. The enervation of the erstwhile vigorous Aryans caused by a hot and humid climate, the vegetarian diet of many Hindus,

the prevalence of child mothers were some of the reasons advanced to explain the Hindu's weakness. Tanika Sarkar provides a very interesting expose of several geological factors that contributed to food shortage and spread of communicable diseases in the nineteenth century and in turn influenced the Hindu male's self-perception. Important tributaries of the Ganges silted up; the condition was exacerbated by the construction of railways which led to the stagnation of water creating conditions ideal for disease-bearing mosquitoes and parasites, and crop failure.³⁹⁸ What is of particular interest to me is Sarkar's argument that

A dread of prolonged and fatally weakening fevers, and of sudden and unexpected epidemics, structured the self-awareness of Bengalis. Enough ecological information had come in by the first three-decades of the century to build up a pessimistic picture of the land, the air, and the people. Contrasts between an earlier era and present times were most often made in terms of impaired health... [E]ven though children, young women and agricultural laboureres were the worst victims of fevers and epidemics, it was the vulnerability and degeneration of the body of the Hindu male babu which became the most significant sign of the times. One might even say that this is how the Bengali middle class sought to express its hegemonic aspirations; not by attributing to itself political or economic leadership roles, not through claims to power, but through ascribing to itself all the ills and deprivations that marked nineteenth-century society as a whole.³⁹⁹

That Bengal was not a land that produced healthy offspring was not a new idea. Mrinalini Sinha refers to John Roselli's list of British men who had commented on the Indian/Bengali's physical and corresponding moral weakness: Richard Orme in the 1770s, Bishop Heber in the 1820s, and Charles Grant, James Mill, and Thomas Babington Macaulay later in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰⁰ In 1908, echoing earlier authors on India and Bengal, Indologist Maurice Bloomfield (1855-1928) wrote that it was only

³⁹⁸ Sarkar, 32

³⁹⁹ Sarkar, 32

⁴⁰⁰ Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity. 15

after they had come down the hot Gangetic plains that the “sturdy, live-loving” Aryans started composing “pessimistic philosophies.”⁴⁰¹ According to Bloomfield,

There in the land of Bengal, if anywhere on the face of the civilized earth, the doubts and misgivings that beset human life at its best might permanently harden into the belief that life is a sorry affair. ...Hypochondria, melancholia, dyspepsia—call it what we may—conquered the conquering Aryan, whose stock was no doubt the product of a more northerly and invigorating climate.⁴⁰²

No wonder that Bankim lived in a period that saw a surge of interest in finding ways to make the body whole and strong. Diets were reviewed, gymnasiums sprouted, and hygienic practices were encouraged. Internalizing the criticism that he was weak and effeminate, the Indian male turned to an exploration of ideals to masculinity to emulate. There were several models available and Chandrima Chakraborty refers to many of them.

Multiple models of masculinity were available for emulation, including imperial masculinity, two Aryan models of native masculinities: virile aggressive kshatriyahood [kshatriyas being the warriors in the multi-layered Hindu caste system] and the “self denying asceticism,” restrained, rational model of brahminhood (Nandy, *Intimate* 10), and the model of androgyny, associated with the *bhakti* traditions of lower-class spiritualism (Krishnaswamy 42—22). Ashis Nandy argues that the nineteenth-century Indian elite saw the British as an agent of change and progress and accepted the masculinized ethos of aggressive imperial masculinity. They held themselves responsible for their subject status, and chose the kshatriya model of manliness, seen as equivalent to the imperial model of masculinity (*Intimate* 7).

Chakraborty argues that while the warrior-caste model was indeed privileged in this choice of a new masculine ideal, Indians “did not deny the ascetic models of brahmanical masculinity.”⁴⁰³ In her dissertation Chakraborty is able to show the

⁴⁰¹ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*. (102)

⁴⁰² Inden, 102

⁴⁰³ Chandrima Chakraborty, “Ascetic Nationalisms.”27.

prevalence of this ascetic model in combination of the militant model in specific novels, two of which are Anandamath and Debi Chaudhurani.

Ashish Nandy makes an interesting point in his discussion of how the masculine/feminine dynamics played out in nineteenth century Bengal. In addition to the recognized categories of *purushatva* and *naritva*, masculinity and femininity, he adds a third category that is present in classical Hindu culture, that of the “*klībatva*”. The adjective from which this noun originates (*klībatva* translates as “the state of being a *klīb*”) is *klīb*, which designates a man without virility, or as Nandy explains it, the bad model of androgyny.⁴⁰⁴ Extending Nandy’s argument we can say that *klībatva* poses a second alternative to masculinity, with femininity being the first, normative, and the more acceptable alternative. Masculine and feminine characteristics are complementary opposites but *klībatva* is something else. It is the state of being the not-quite man. *Klībatva* is different from the good or acceptable model of androgyny in the sense that whereas an androgynous man is one who has both masculine and feminine traits, a *klīb* is a man who is designated in terms of the absence of virility rather than in terms of acquiring characteristics of the feminine. Men who possess certain feminine traits such as emotional expressiveness, nurturing tendencies and kindness may be looked upon as being effeminate by those who are critical but may be accepted and admired by others as examples of good androgynies. Proponents of the bhakti tradition in India which emphasize the devotional all-surrendering aspect of religion highly value these qualities and examples of male practitioners of this tradition who were not afraid to show so-called

⁴⁰⁴ Ashis Nandy. “The Psychology of Colonialism.” Intimate Enemy. 8

feminine traits were not unknown in Bengal or elsewhere.⁴⁰⁵ In contrast the *klīb* was neither accepted nor respected. The nineteenth century Bengali male saw himself as a *klīb* and in doing so he took seriously the charge of effeminacy, assimilated it into a category recognizable in his own culture, and turned it into a tool of self castigation. Nandy argues that the ability to establish “the homology between sexual and political dominance” was an example of the western colonist’s successful deployment of the masculine/feminine opposition with a total “denial of psychological bisexuality”.⁴⁰⁶ The upshot of this suppression was the designation of the masculine and feminine as total opposites, a dynamic that the Hindu male met with great unease.⁴⁰⁷

The privileging of the masculine was also tied to the self-representation of the Englishman and his representation of the Indian male. Scholars such as Sinha have analyzed how a particular masculine ideal that emphasized physical vigor was highlighted and how the Englishman was presented as exemplifying that ideal. Also, the necessity of recruiting Indian soldiers after 1857 played into the categorizing of different sections of Indians as martial and non martial. The martial races were generally those who did not challenge the administration politically. On the other hand the western-educated Indians, a large number of whom were concentrated in and around Calcutta and were Bengalis and who were the most politically aware, were deemed “unnatural.” In her

⁴⁰⁵ Ashis Nandy mentions the social reformer Vidyasagar who worked relentlessly to better the condition of women in the face of great opposition, yet was perceived as having the heart of a Bengali mother, as an example of an androgynous figure who was admired. (“The Psychology of Colonialism.” The Intimate Enemy. 29)

⁴⁰⁶ Nandy, 4

⁴⁰⁷ Hinduism itself was regarded as feminine by westerners. Ronald Inden’s discussion of historian Vincent Spear’s reference to Hinduism as a sponge that has an almost infinite capacity to absorb (86) is an example of this. In addition to this Inden notes the perceived lack of Hinduism, of its not having a “world-ordering reality” which is a masculine trait (86) and its being amorphous in addition to being absorptive (86).

essay on the debate surrounding the admissibility of Indians into the Public Service branch of colonial administration in 1986-87,⁴⁰⁸ Sinha analyzes the administration's efforts to reduce the admissibility of educated Indians, especially Bengalis, among the upper echelons of public service through measures such as by allocating employment along provincial lines and alternately raising and lowering the age to sit for competitive examinations to ensure that the number of successful British candidates was more than that of Indians/Bengalis. Sinha quotes from an essay ("The Place of Bengalis in Politics") published in 1892 by Sir Lepel Griffin, a senior Anglo-Indian official, in which Griffin holds the Bengali's desire "for political enfranchisement" to be as unnatural as an Englishwoman's desire to participate in the arena of political action. The reason for Griffin's objection is rooted in the femininity of the Englishwoman (which is natural) and the effeminacy of the Bengali (which is unnatural).⁴⁰⁹ The educated Bengalis posed a contradiction since they were non-martial yet presented a threat to the administration. They were represented as lacking the manly characteristics that the Englishmen and the martial Indians supposedly possessed, and this perceived lack of physical vigor was linked to a corresponding absence of certain moral qualities. The alleged timidity of the

⁴⁰⁸ Mrinalini Sinha, "Competing Masculinities: The Public Service Commission." Colonial Masculinity.

From the first introduction of the competitive examination up to 1886, a total of ninety-three native candidates had appeared at the examination in London and only fifteen had been successful...nine out of the fifteen successful native candidates at the competitive examination...were Bengalis (104).

...not only were the majority of native covenanted civilians in 1886 Bengalis, but, even more importantly, Bengalis in the lower levels of the civil service had been among the most successful of the native groups that had also followed the expansion of the colonial administrative structure into other provinces in India (106).

Theodore Beck, the principal of the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh wrote in a letter to the *Pioneer* in 1986, "[T]he most patriotic Englishman would not risk heavy stakes on John Bull beating the Bengali babu in a competitive examination" (qtd. in Sinha 116).

⁴⁰⁹ Sinha, 35

Bengali was held up time and again as proof of his inability to serve the empire in any martial capacity. The Native Volunteer Controversy, which was initiated by the administration's need to recruit a volunteer force to counter the threat of Russian territorial aggression, exposed the dilemma of the administrators. The need to recruit Indian volunteers was countered by the deep rooted reluctance to allowing educated Indians, especially Bengalis, to acquire martial training and access to weapons.⁴¹⁰ The timidity of the "valiant wielder of the pen"⁴¹¹ who "would see his country over-run, his house laid in ashes his children murdered or dishonoured without having the spirit to strike one blow"⁴¹² was played up. Hindu socio-religious practices such as child marriage and the consequent early pregnancy, polygamy, and others were interpreted as outward manifestations of the moral inferiority of the Hindu Bengali/Indian male.⁴¹³ Sinha exposes the intricately connected political and economic reasons which led to the construct of the babu as the epitome of the kind of Indian to avoid because the western-educated, upper-class, upper-caste Bengalis that the term designated was likely to challenge the political and economic authority of the administration. (In Katherine Mayo's 1926 book Mother India we see the longevity of the stereotype of the physically weak, bookish, seditious Bengali men.) Of all the negative characteristics ascribed to the babu (pomposity, hypocrisy, cunning, superficiality), the most relevant to my discussion here is that of effeminacy.

⁴¹⁰ Sinha, 87

⁴¹¹ Bengalee June 19, 1886, 291, qtd. in Sinha, 80

⁴¹² Englishman June 24, 1885, qtd. in Sinha, 80

⁴¹³ Mrinalini Sinha, 45

It is no surprise, therefore that in addition to the emphasis on organized sports and body building in India in general, and Bengal in particular, the nineteenth century was also when specific aspects of the worship of the ten-armed goddess Durga that has continued into the present day became highly popular in Bengal. The slayer of demons, the mother of four children (each of whom represented a facet of human development— education, wealth, perseverance, and military might), the feminine divinity that combined in itself the best of what the entire pantheon of male gods had to offer (Durga came into being when, failing to stem the rise of demonic powers individually, the male gods combined their strengths to create her), came to represent a vision of triumph for a subjugated people. Neither was this celebration of strength limited to Bengal. Festivals celebrating militant heroes such as Shivaji became popular in western India and existing religious and cultural events came to acquire new dimensions with the celebration of Hindu heritage grafted on them. Quite often these festivals emphasized the celebration of Hindu strength and became important features of nineteenth century nationalism.

The exploration of the feminine aspects of the nation will remain incomplete without an analysis of the nation as daughter, which is what I will now engage in. The closest that Bankim comes to giving a literary dimension to the symbol of nation as daughter is in Rajsingha when the possession of Chanchal Kumari by Rajsingha is thwarted by her father who favors an alliance with Aurangzeb. While it is relatively easy to read the contest for the princess between the Hindu Rajsingha and the Muslim Aurangzeb in terms of possession of nation as woman/wife, how do we read the withholding of parental consent from the ideal husband? Perhaps one way to read this is to interpret the passing of the woman from the custody of the father to that of the less

than ideal suitor (Aurangzeb) as being done in the interest of maintaining the status quo. The refusal to give his daughter to the Mughal emperor can mean devastation for the king of Roopnagar. Yet Chanchal Kumari desires Rajsingha who is the enemy of both Roopnagar and Aurangzeb. The desire of the daughter challenges the authority of the father, threatening destruction for her father's kingdom and thereby his status as head of a clan. The failure to harness individual desire to furthering social good can be disastrous as we have seen in instances such as Sitaram, and thus Chanchal Kumari is a less-than ideal daughter. But when the father's choice is clearly wrong (he is the sole parental figure in that all Chanchal Kumari's mother can do is weep and plan her daughter's wedding; she has no power to act), the daughter has to make her own choice. Because the narrator agrees with the choice, he lets her marry her hero while her father's sovereignty remains intact after the humiliating retreat of the Mughal aggressor.

In reality, however, the kind of freedom Chanchal Kumari is allowed to have was beyond the grasp of most women in Bankim's own times. In a society that traditionally valued sons more than daughters, there were few resources for girls. Sons were valued because they could offer ritual food and water to the ancestors and thus ensured that their parents escaped the special kind of hell reserved for those that failed to have male offspring. Daughters, on the other hand, carried no such rights. Moreover, their chastity had to be jealously guarded, and they had to be married before puberty to ensure ritual consummation immediately after their first menstruation (the failure to do so would bring sin upon the parents). Discussing the irony of the term "consent" in the Age of Consent debate, Tanika Sarkar mentions a comment by the social reformer Rajendralal Mitra, "Hindu women are given away as cattle are, how can their consent make any difference

to marriage transactions?”⁴¹⁴ The consent of course was made by the male members of society on behalf of the girls and, according to Sarkar, the consent involved an agreement about the age at which the female body was deemed ready for consummation and procreation. Western medical opinion was that early pregnancy was undesirable because young mothers produced weak offspring and because the risks to maternal and infant health were higher. Hindu traditionalists countered with opinions, supposedly sanctioned by Hindu scriptures, and argued that the Hindu valued his afterlife more than his present life with its threat of maternal and infant disease and mortality and was prepared to risk the lives of young mothers and their weak children.⁴¹⁵ There were of course a few exceptions to the traditional Hindu woman. Women like Pandita Ramabai who married out of caste, remarried after the death of her first husband, converted to Christianity, and travelled abroad, and Rukmabai who refused to live with her husband (who by most accounts was illiterate, elderly, and consumptive and to whom she was married at the age of eleven), were emerging in the 1880s. These individuals posed the kind of challenge to orthodoxy that was new and had far-reaching effects. They asserted their wishes as daughters in not letting their male guardians determine whom they should marry.

But for every Ramabai or Rukmabai there were scores of young girls whose fates were determined in accordance with age-old customs enforced by orthodoxy. There is no direct reference in Bankim’s historical novels to the subject of child marriage and its attendant problems, but the fact that he wrote about women choosing their own partners after they reached both physical and emotional maturity is quite remarkable. Of course one reason is that he wanted to write about romantic love and he could not have child

⁴¹⁴ Tanika Sarkar, Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation. 246

⁴¹⁵ See footnote 357 in this chapter

heroines in romantic tales. Shoibolini and Pratap are childhood companions, but their relationship as adults is the subject of Chandrasekhar, as is the case with Shanti and Jibananda in Anandamath. The point remains that in his historical novels where idealized passions are presented, there are no child marriages.

Also, a significant number of his heroines do not have parents who can dictate their lives. Praphulla's mother dies in the beginning of Debi Chaudhurani; in Sitaram, Shree has a brother but no parents; Shanti in Anandamath is an orphan; Mrinalini in the eponymous novel is an orphan in the care of less-than-perfect foster parents; Shoibolini in Chandrasekhar is a married woman but her parents are not mentioned. Chanchal Kumari is the only heroine apart from Tilottama in Durgeshnandini who has a significant parent figure. Although Chanchal Kumari's assertion of her individuality in the face of parental wishes initiates the conflict in the novel, at the end there is reconciliation of the wishes of the father and the daughter and social equanimity is restored. The passing of Chanchal from the custody of her father to that of her husband is eventually done in accordance with prevailing customs (as some have pointed out, the bride and groom are even caste-compatible) and society can carry on without disruptions. Although her self-assertion initially leads to a potential conflict between her father and herself, Chanchal Kumari is a good daughter after all because she chooses not to marry her beloved until her father's permission has been secured and all conflicts have been resolved. The marriage at the end of the novel is a promise of restoration of social and political order.

While several of Bankim's heroines are introduced into the novels as married women, few have any choices in the matter of whom to marry. If a wife chooses to love a man other than her husband, the results are disastrous. Among Bankim's women

Shoibolini is the only one who exercises this choice by loving Pratap instead of her husband and she has to go through a terrible penance for her transgression. In a state of prolonged hallucination she sees the hell awaiting women like her who disregard the bonds of marriage. This punishment is meted out to her by a father figure, Ramananda Swami, her husband's guru. If the daughter disobeys the rules of dharma she has to be punished. Once purified, Shoibolini is allowed to reenter her husband's home, but not before Pratap, who is sinless, is made to die. Perhaps Bankim's implication is that having been an errant wife once, Shoibolini might rebel again and the removal of her greatest temptation, Pratap, is therefore necessary. It is significant that Ramananda Swami who presides over Shoibolini's moral recovery is present when Pratap dies. Although Pratap dies proclaiming his love for Shoibolini, the swami does not punish him. Instead he recognizes Pratap's nobility and pays homage to him. Pratap, the ideal son, is allowed to have a glorious exit, but Shoibolini is condemned to a loveless marriage where duty to her husband is the only reality. Acting like a stern father, Ramananda Swami hands Shoibolini over to her husband Chandrasekhar so that status quo may be restored.

Compared with Shoibolini Chanchal Kumari is lucky. She loves the right kind of man (his polygamy is overlooked as being inconsequential and probably for the sake of historical veracity as well—Rajsingha had grown sons during his conflict with Aurangzeb over Roopnagar), and she is fortunate to have the chance to fall in love before she is married. One important difference between her and Shoibolini is that Shoibolini falls in love while Chanchal Kumari chooses to love. Pratap is Shoibolini's childhood friend and their love is a natural outcome of their friendship. Since they are distant relatives, marriage is taboo for them, a fact which Pratap is aware of but Shoibolini is not.

Such unthinking attachments can be dangerous, no matter how ideally suited the partners are. That is why Shoibolini suffers. Chanchal Kumari, on the other hands, loves Rajsingha for the right reasons: his valor, his caste loyalty, his lineage. She loves him before she sees him in person and in spite of knowing that he has other women in his life. Bankim can approve of this kind of love on a daughter's part because it does not grow out of physical attraction for her beloved but, rather, out of attraction toward the ideal qualities that the person represents. As a young woman, Shoibolini is attracted to Pratap's beauty which is she describes as "*atulya debamurti*," which translates as "incomparable divine beauty."⁴¹⁶ Chanchal Kumari, on the other hand, loves Rajsingha who is middle-aged and warrior-like but not handsome. However, since not all daughters are good choosers, they are introduced to us as women for whom the choice of loving an individual has already been made through arranged marriages.

Bankim's explorations of the nation as a woman are multifaceted and rich. And, as such experiments often are, they are not neat and predictable but multilayered and full of contradictions. I believe this very lack of neatness and predictability makes the gallery of Bankim's women so rich and wonderful to explore and makes a re-reading of the novels intellectually exciting and pleasurable more than a hundred years after their creation.

⁴¹⁶ Chandrasekhar, B.R. Vol I 366

CONCLUSION

As India becomes an increasingly prominent player in the global arena, Indian literature has been keeping pace by finding wider audiences. However, much of this prominence is due to the writings in English by contemporary Indian writers--both those who live and work in India and those who live and work outside India. Literatures in Indian languages do not yet have a comparable global exposure. There have been some noteworthy English translations of contemporary Indian works in regional languages that have helped these regional works reach an audience beyond those that can read the works in their original languages.⁴¹⁷ However, there is much more that can be done in this respect. Older Indian works are translated even less, yet there is a serious need for such translation. Julius Lipner's translation of Anandamath (2005) is an excellent example of what can be done with classics. Lipner provides detailed analysis of the background of the text in addition to annotations that bridge the gap of culture and language that separates Bankim from his twenty-first century readers. Hopefully, other scholars will take up the challenge of translating Bankim as well as other Indian writers of his period. With print-culture undergoing unprecedented transformation through its contact with electronic media, new avenues of publishing are opening up and consequently the competition for audience is becoming more and more intense. In this context, making a

⁴¹⁷ Gayatri Spivak's translations of the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi's selected pieces are a good example.

case for the relevance of the historical works of a nineteenth-century Indian writer is not an easy matter.

Yet, Bankim remains relevant to us at many levels, as the first successful Indian novelist, as the first successful Indian writer of historical fiction, as the first Indian cultural figure to engage with the concept of citizenship and its tangled web of definitions. His works are not fossilized period-pieces; they challenge us with questions to which we are still trying to find answers. With their focus on questions of national identity, they can be placed in the tradition of works such as Jose Rizal's 1886 novel Noli Me Tangere, set in Rizal's contemporary nineteenth-century Philippines, as well as in the tradition of European authors such as Catalan Ramón López Soler⁴¹⁸ and Polish Adam Mickiewicz,⁴¹⁹ who looked to the past to find answers to the present. Bankim does not deal with contemporary history as Rizal does; however, in expressing the first stirrings of nationalism in Indian literature, Bankim occupies a place in the Indian canon similar to that of Rizal in the canon of Philippine literature. As a writer of historical tales, Bankim is an inheritor and appropriator of Walter Scott's legacy just as López Soler and Mickiewicz are. A comparative study of Bankim with other Asian authors of the nineteenth century and with European authors of the same period dealing with colonial legacies is a yet unexplored area. Such studies can help form a new literary canon, one that cuts across the boundaries of cultures and languages in exploring how concepts of nationalism were formed and expressed in the nineteenth century in different parts of the world.

⁴¹⁸ López Soler was a key figure of the Catalan Renaissance of the mid nineteenth-century

⁴¹⁹ Mirosława Modrzewska describes Mickiewicz's Grażyna as "the chivalric story of a lady ...who defends her people against the Teutonic Order." "The Polish Reception of Sir Walter Scott." 193

Also, a fuller comparative study than what I have done, with more of Scott's novel, could be an exciting project. Even selected aspects of such a study--for example, comparing the heroines of Scott's major novels with Bankim's or a similar study of the heroes of the two authors--could prove to be fruitful. Through such enterprises the Asian dimension of Scott's influence can finally begin to be addressed. Not only would such studies add to the existing corpus of Bankim scholarship, but they would also unveil new ways of studying Scott.⁴²⁰

In addition, there is scope for more critical works on Bankim by his contemporaries in Bengali and other Indian languages to be translated into English. Reading how Bankim's contemporary Indian scholars reacted to him can offer us perspectives different from what the current critical works of academics trained in western literary theories do. Also, there is a place for current critical writings on Bankim in Indian languages to be made available to those who do not have access to those languages. Because of Bankim's centrality to Indian political and cultural life, much has been written about him, and, as I mention in my introduction, the bulk of such work focuses on a few selected novels and few selected topics. I strongly feel that the entire corpus of his works, particularly his fiction, needs to get similar attention. More critical works and more translations would open up Bankim to more readers, and make different perspectives possible.

Bankim's enduring appeal to scholars is evident in the number and quality of critical works that continue to be done on him and my own understanding has been greatly helped by some of these. Tanika Sarkar, herself a formidable Bankim scholar,

⁴²⁰ The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe edited by Murray Pittock, is a collection of essays on Scott's influence in various European countries and national cultures and can be an excellent example of the kind of work that can be done on the influence of Scott in Asia.

lists several titles in the fourth chapter of her Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation as examples of some of the “better known works” in English on Bankim.⁴²¹ Of these, only one is a full length study of Bankim. Sudipta Kaviraj’s The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of the Nationalist Discourse in India, includes the chapter, “The Signs of Madness,” which Sarkar mentions by name. Kaviraj’s work has come to acquire a must-read status for those who study Bankim in depth. It covers a wealth of topics, the most striking of which is liminality in Bankim’s works. Kaviraj links the preponderance of characters that exist between two well-defined worlds (wife and mistress, sane and mad, private and public) with Bankim’s own status as a colonized individual, whose voice is the clearest in his Kamalakanta pieces. This phenomenon of liminality, of being between two modes of existence, that Kaviraj unearths in Bankim is entirely new in Bankim scholarship. That such a new way of studying a major author can be proposed, after he has been written about for over a century, is extremely exciting. It indicates the possibility of other dimensions in Bankim scholarship that are yet to be brought to light. Kaviraj’s take on a variety of topics (Bankim’s linguistic dexterity, his perception of feminine beauty, his treatment of realism in plot structure) has inspired me explore these topics on my own.

The other works that Sarkar mentions are indispensable to studying Bankim as well. Bankim was among the cultural vanguards of late nineteenth century India and his influence was crucial in shaping the political views of his countrymen in his own times and beyond. That is why in Europe Reconsidered (1988) Tapan Raychaudhuri chooses to

⁴²¹ Sarkar lists Ashis Nandy’s The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism, Tapan Raychaudhuri’s Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-century Bengal, Ranajit Guha’s An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-century Agenda, Sudipta Kaviraj’s “Signs of Madness: A Reading of the Figure of Kamalakanta in the Work of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya,” and Partha Chatterjee’s Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World.

study him alongside two others (Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Swami Vivekananda), to exemplify the point that the response to the west by nineteenth-century Indians was neither uncritical nor homogeneous. Raychaudhuri's reading makes space for Indians, especially Bengalis, to be part of a colonial drama in which the script was written not exclusively by the British who held political power. Raychaudhuri also shows how many versions of this script existed and how three individuals of similar background (educated, Hindu, upper-caste, and middle-class) could respond to colonialism in highly individual ways. Apart from providing valuable analysis of the political, cultural, social, religious, and literary facets of nineteenth century Bengal, Raychaudhuri's work allows us to study Bankim alongside his contemporaries, thus offering a comparative perspective. Europe Reconsidered has helped me understand Bankim's milieu and allowed me to gain a critical perspective of why Bankim wrote the way he did.

A predecessor to Raychaudhuri's Europe Reconsidered is Ashis Nandy's against-the-grain study of the established hierarchies of colonialism, The Intimate Enemy (1983). The subtitle of Nandy's work is significant, The Loss of Recovery of Self under Colonialism; it indicates Nandy's avowed purpose to restore agency to the colonized and unearth ways in which they maintained a sense of self against great odds. Nandy's exploration of the psychosexual dimensions of colonialism is particularly helpful for my dissertation, especially in my discussion of the ideals of masculinity in Bankim's works. Nandy also explores how the efforts to accommodate categories such as bisexuality and androgyny that did not fit into the rigid frameworks of masculinity and femininity affected the colonist's self perception. (The British fashioned their image as ideal masters who possessed the right kind of masculinity deemed essential for running an empire).

Nandy's work on gender in the Indian colonial context has been extended by Mrinalini Sinha's brilliant Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate' Bengali in the Nineteenth Century, another work on which I have relied heavily, especially in my discussion of the women in Bankim's historical novels. Sinha studies four political issues in the 1880's, the Ilbert Bill, the Native Volunteer Movement, the Public Service Commission, and the Age of Consent bill, to expose how both the Indians and the British worked in tandem to reinforce their patriarchal norms even as they fought on opposite sides. In each case British administrators attempted to counter native demand for greater political rights by denigrating Indians as being effeminate and therefore incapable of handling the responsibilities that such rights would bring. The treatment of Indian women by Indian men became the grounds on which the greatest debates about Indian capacity for greater freedom were conducted. While both sides claimed to be acting in the best interest of the Indian woman, it was male privilege that was protected in the end.

Along with Sinha's book, I have used Tanika Sarkar's Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation to examine Bankim's use of the feminine in his texts. Sarkar's exploration of the Bengali, who was ruled by his white masters and in turn ruled over his women, exposes the schizophrenic nature of the Bengali's male's self-perception. Sarkar's chapters on Bankim are of particular interest to me because of their insightful analysis of the Bengali male's search for an identity that was crucial for an oppositional stance against colonial powers. Also, her detailed, even-handed reading of *Bande Mataram*, and examination of how it has been used by ultra-Hindu nationalist, is one of the most insightful examinations of the song.

The last author I would like to mention in this context is Priya Joshi, whose In Another Country: Colonialism Culture, and the English Novel in India, provides an important perspective on the patterns of literary consumption in nineteenth century India. Joshi finds Bankim adapting the imported form of the novel to uniquely Indian circumstances and, like Raychaudhuri and Nandy, Joshi establishes Bankim as an author whose response to the west may have been shaped by the asymmetry of power but who was able to carve a space within the colonial framework within which he could operate independently. Joshi shows how Bankim chose aspects of western culture (In Another Country concentrates on the western import of the novel) and molded them to suit his own intellectual requirements. Taking my cue from Joshi I examined in detail how Bankim formed his novels in a uniquely Indian way and how he used historical novels to project his nationalistic ideals in a manner that no Indian author had done before him.

Bankim has also been the subject of dissertations at American universities. Two of these dissertations are of particular interest to me. Sangeeta Ray's dissertation (University of Washington, 1991) devotes one chapter to the analysis of two of the most popular novels of Bankim, Anandamath and Debi Chaudhurani. Ray concentrates on the female figures of the novels, Kalyani, Shanti, and Praphulla, in her study of how the Indian woman was represented in colonial fiction by both Indian and non-Indian authors. (In addition to Bankim and Tagore, Ray writes about Kipling, Flora Annie Steele and others.) The second dissertation is by Chandrima Chakraborty (University of York, 2004). It discusses the role of Hindu asceticism in the formation of nationalism. My dissertation is in line with those of Ray and Chakraborty in its treatment of the role of gender in the formation of nationalism in India. While Ray and Chakraborty write about

various others besides Bankim (Chakraborty's discussion includes Tagore, Gandhi, and Raja Rao), I focus on only one, Walter Scott. I begin by examining two of Scott's novels to ascertain the merit of the title, "Scott of Bengal," as applied to Bankim. My findings lead me to engage with the subject of historiography and the situating of the Muslim as an antagonistic figure. Since the stigma of effeminacy and its attendant connotation of moral inferiority were important factors in the nineteenth century Hindu's way of looking at the world, and since constructing an ideal masculine identity was closely linked with a parallel construction of an ideal feminine identity, a discussion of gender and nationalism was a logical step for me in my final chapter.

My reading of critical material on Bankim in Bengali has been most helpful in tracking the development of the Bengali novel. In this area I have relied on the work of Kshetra Gupta. I have not used his structural analysis of Bankim's novels since that is not what I focus on. However, his research on the literary works preceding Bankim's, especially those by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya, have offered valuable perspectives on the early notes of nationalism in Bengali literature. Other critical works in Bengali have offered interesting perspectives as well, but they are too numerous to mention here.

While I am indebted to these scholars and others, I have not found any of them to address the issue of Bankim's supposed debt to Scott. Like the other epithets associated with Bankim such as "*Sahitya Samrat*,"⁴²² or "*Rishi*,"⁴²³ "Scott of Bengal" remains unexamined. I find this title to be more interesting than the other two because it is more problematic. The other two are wholly complimentary and they do not imply a

⁴²² "Emperor of Literature"

⁴²³ "Seer" or "Sage"

comparison. Debates may occur about whether Durgeshnandini is the first Indian novel, but that Bankim was the first all-India literary figure of the nineteenth century is generally accepted. Thus the title of “*Sahitya Samrat*” is well-deserved and it does not have other claimants. Similarly, since in classical Hindu culture *rishis* were venerated for their wisdom and moral rectitude, it is easy to understand how Bankim’s deep understanding of Hindu religious and philosophical texts and his privileging of a particular Hindu mode of action (*anushilan*) which inspired a generation of Indians to assert the value of Hindu/Indian traditions, would make him an apt recipient of that title.⁴²⁴ “Scott of Bengal” is markedly different. It implies anteriority, both chronological and in matters of originality, and it is that second kind of anteriority in which I am interested. If all non-European national literatures are believed to be in the image of their European predecessors, then their claims of originality become severely compromised. My dissertation occupies a space between acknowledging the contribution of a European tradition while highlighting what was uniquely Bankim’s own.

While my primary motivation in choosing Bankim as the subject of my dissertation is impelled by the desire to study him in a more global context than what has been done till now, I am aware of the current crucial role he occupies in India, especially in the possibility of his appropriation by Hindu supremacists. As literature is often pressed into the service of politics, Bankim’s status as the father of the Indian novel renders him particularly vulnerable. Although a wholesale resurrection of Bankim by the Hindu right wing justifying the claim that India should be for Hindus only has not happened yet, one wonders about the possibility of appropriation. On the other hand,

⁴²⁴ Sri Aurobindo designated Bankim as *Rishi*, to emphasize Bankim’s contribution to Indian nationalism.

suppressing Bankim's controversial works to appease those who see Bankim simply as a Muslim-hater would be just as unfortunate as perceiving him only as a promoter of Hindu values. The best way to read Bankim is to read him objectively as well as critically. Literary history is full of authors who elicit both praise and blame. We still read and have debates about Shakespeare and Kipling, but we do not stop reading them. Allowing debates about Bankim is the ideal way to guarantee that multiple points of view can be heard. This can at least deter, if not wholly prevent, a passive reception of the powerful message that Bankim's works can deliver, a message which can become divisive—as I have tried to show. Studies of Bankim that acknowledge such debates can have a receptive audience both in India and the west and both inside and outside the academia.

I would like to end my dissertation with a brief discussion of the work that Bankim is best known for, the unofficial “national song” of India, *Bande Mataram*. Although there have been other popular national songs that have grabbed the public imagination (Muhammad Iqbal's “*Saare jahan se achccha*”⁴²⁵ and the marching song of the Azad Hind Fauz, “*Kadam Kadam barhaye ja*,”⁴²⁶ are two of them), few have challenged the stature of the official national anthem as *Bande Mataram* has. *Bande Mataram* is popular among the more conservative elements of the Hindu right.⁴²⁷ Since few of those who use the song for political and religious purposes are familiar with the novel in which it appears, or with other works by Bankim for that matter, there is always

⁴²⁵ “*Saare jahan se achccha, Hindostan hamara*” translates as “My India is the best in all the world.” It was written in 1904 by the poet Muhammad Iqbal.

⁴²⁶ The “Azad Hind Fauz” or the “Free India Army,” also known as “The Indian National Army” or INS was formed in 1942 out of the Indian soldiers of the British Army captured by Japan during the Second World War. “*Kadam Kadam barhaye ja/ Khusi ke geet gaye ja*” was the marching song of the INS and the first two lines roughly translate as “March boldly and sing a happy song.”

⁴²⁷ I quote Tanika Sarkar's comments on the reception of the song by the RSS. (“Introduction” Footnote 7)

the danger of their interpreting the song to be representative of the entire corpus of Bankim's works. If *Bande Mataram* assumes the stature of a verse that extols violence, then Bankim's authority can be used to sanction such violence. The extremist views of Sri Aurobindo and the militant faction of Indian nationalists in the early twentieth century already provide a precedent of how Bankim can be deployed in a dangerous manner. The formation of secret bands of militants on the model of the monks of Anandamath, the emphasis on the need to shed blood, and the veneration of the image of the fearsome Kali on whom the ideals of the nation as a woman are projected⁴²⁸ are all well-documented by scholars who focus on the use of religious symbols in nationalist movements. The song is particularly vulnerable to misuse because no specific enemy is mentioned in it and only the warlike nature of the nation-mother is alluded to. The lack of a concrete identity of the victim of the mother's wrath, and the description of the mother in a state of war is like a template that can be used in a wide variety of situations. In the Hindu religious texts from which the figure of the mother goddess is borrowed, the enemies are demons and others who challenge the authority of the gods. In Aurobindo's⁴²⁹ interpretation, the "white goat" replaced the demons as the enemy; the present-day RSS have replaced the British with the Muslim. Ignoring the gentler and more nurturing aspects of the nation-woman, aspects which most of the song celebrates, allows for a corresponding highlighting of the militant facets, thus reducing the song to a mere celebration of violence. Such reductive interpretations are always dangerous because they suppress the multi-dimensionality of the particular work that is subjected to such a

⁴²⁸ I have discussed these points in the sixth chapter.

⁴²⁹ Along with another nationalist and political personality, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo edited a Bengali newspaper which bore the title of the song.

process. *Bande Mataram* is a part of a novel which belongs to a corpus of works by a particular author, and detaching the song from its context distorts it seriously. The most effective way of challenging such distortion is through constantly emphasizing the interconnected nature of all of Bankim's works and highlighting their polyvalency. Reading *Bande Mataram* and *Anandamath* with a novel like *Sitaram*, which is about a less-than-admirable Hindu leader, can provide a more balanced perspective of Bankim's legacy.

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