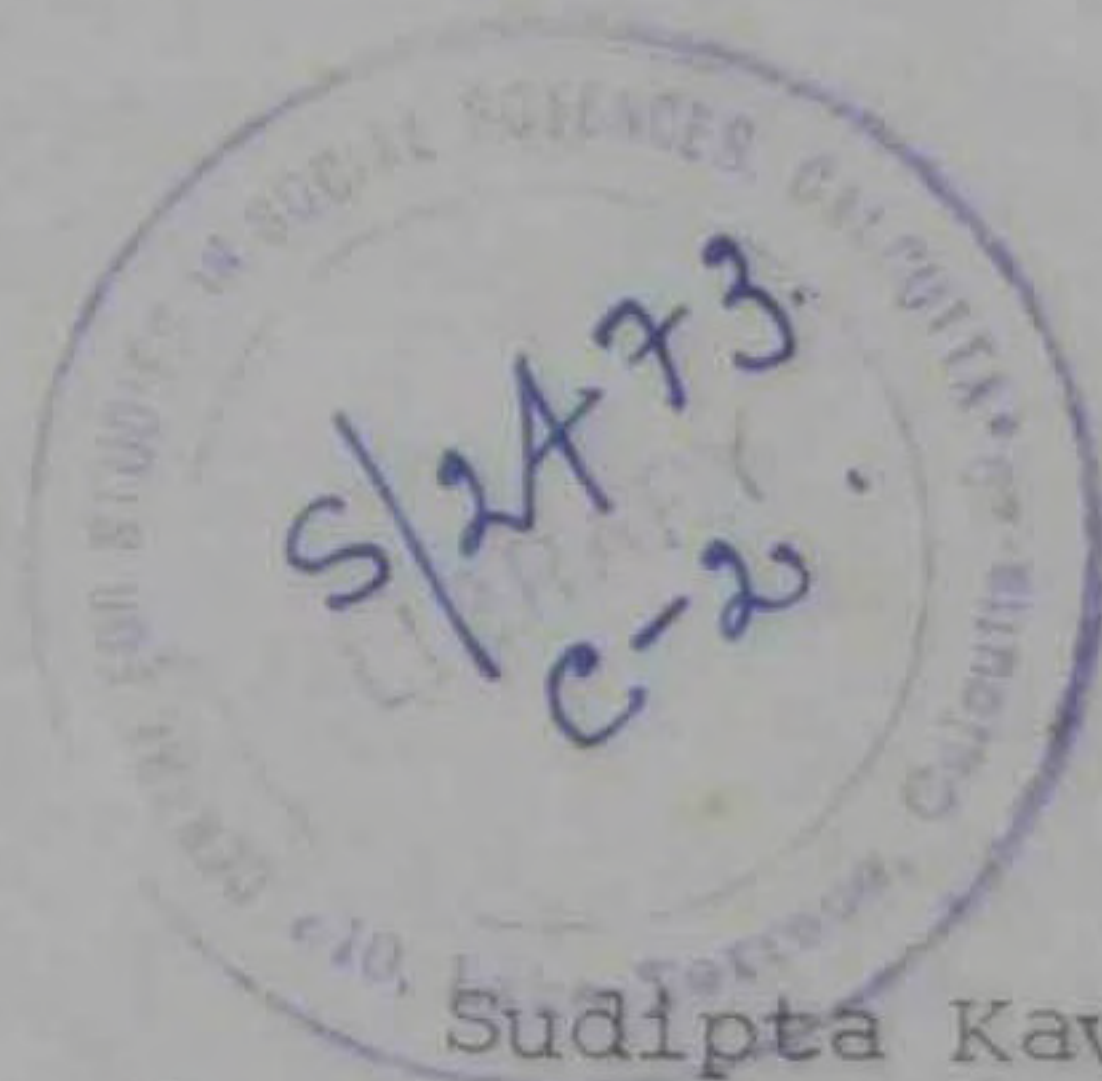


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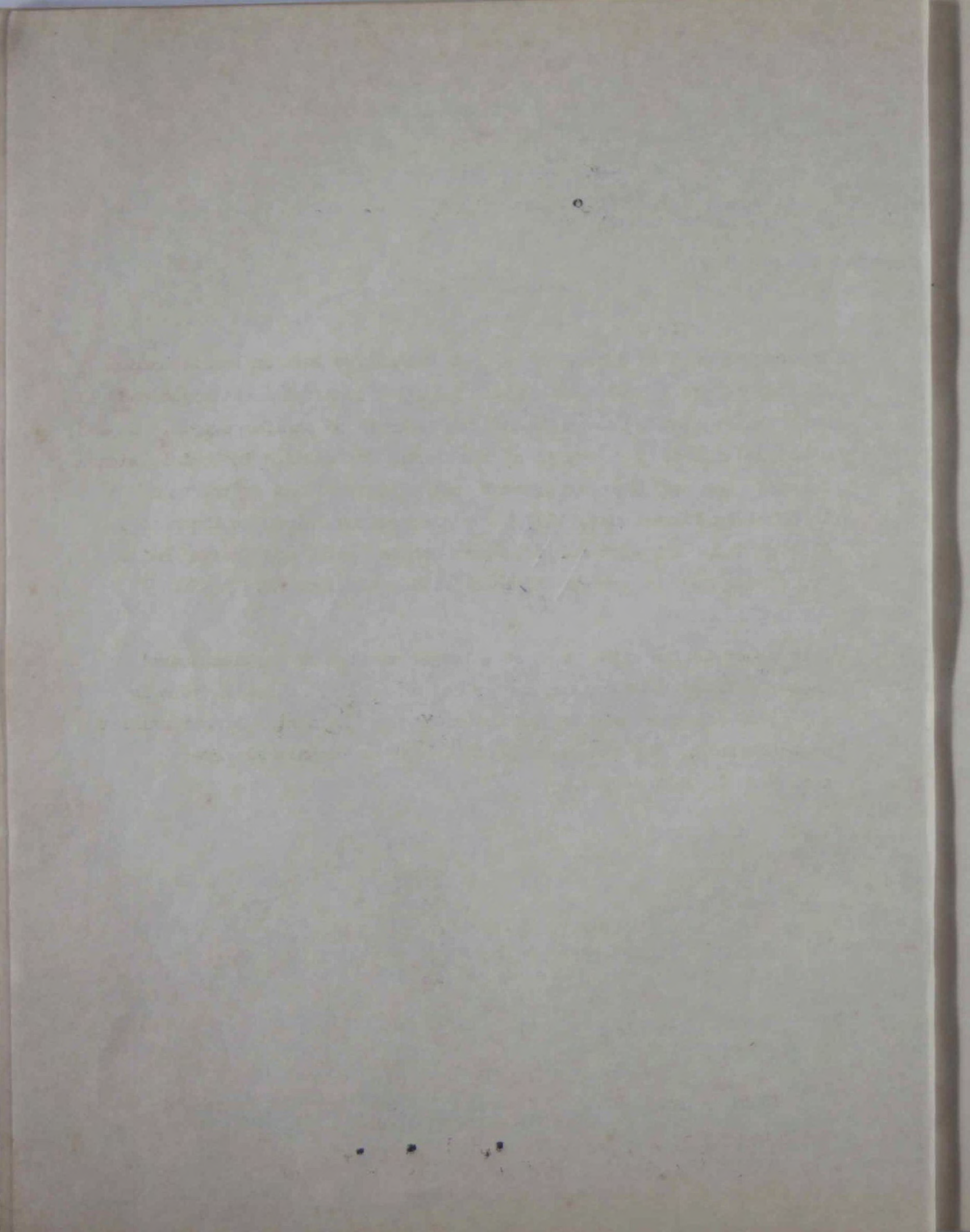
BANKIMCHANDRA AND THE MAKING OF NATIONALIST
CONSCIOUSNESS I : SIGNS OF MADNESS



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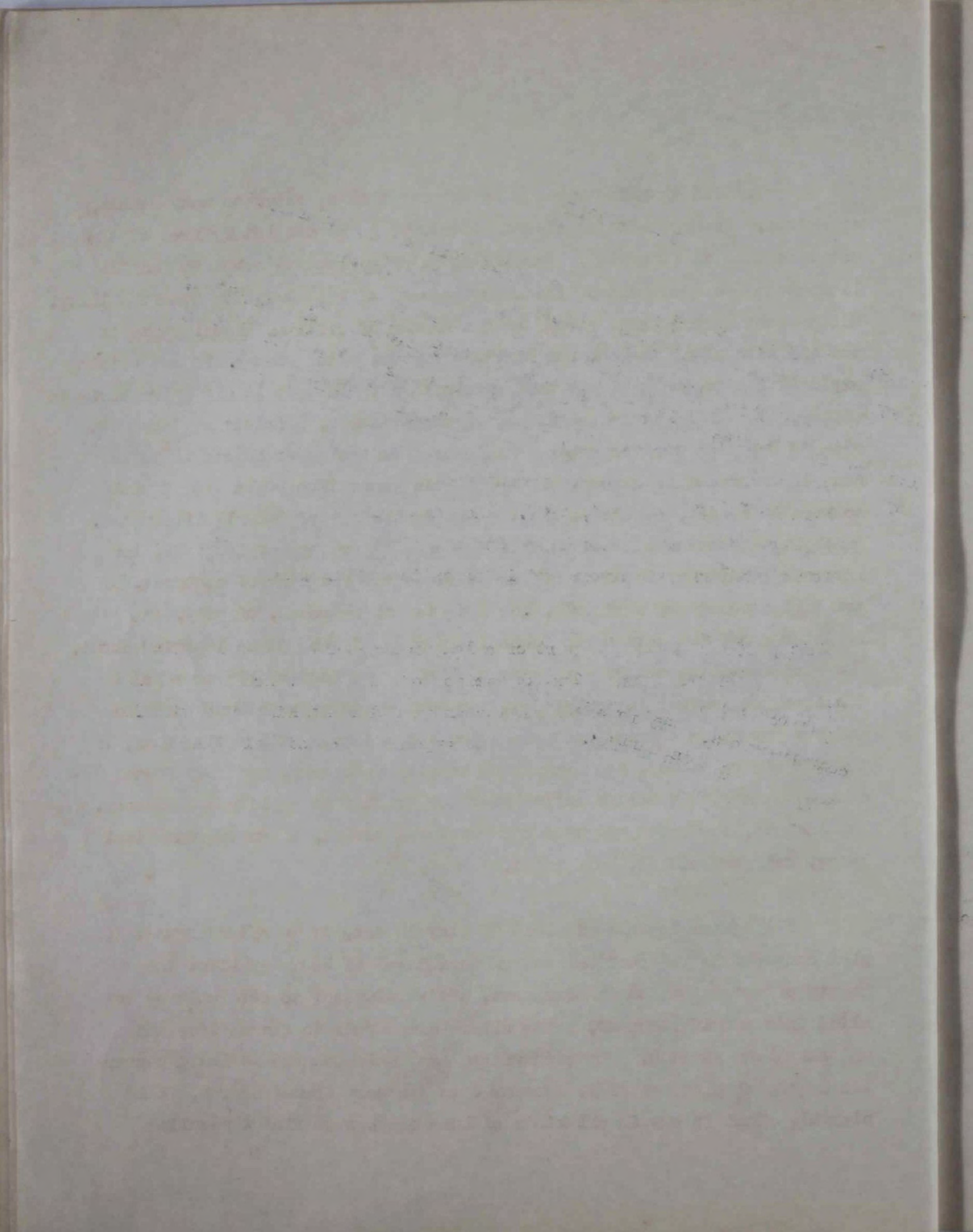
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This paper is the first part of a longer chapter on Bankimchandra's humour entitled 'Humour and the Prison of Reality' which in turn is a part of a larger work on Bankimchandra and the making of nationalist consciousness. The remaining parts appear as Occasional Paper and in this series.



Nothing in discourse can be so many things, carry so many meanings as humour. Perhaps nothing else in discourse is so completely free of the usual demands of linearity. Bankimchandra's Kamalakanta¹ shows in Bengali literature the spectacle of the mansidedness of laughter, its indefinability. But my text here is less a book than a manner of writing. Kamalakanta is not the only place to look for Bankim's humour. Even when he is not writing explicit satire, he tends to take refuge in it. He made it his characteristic weapon, his way of attacking without being attacked, criticising those with whom he does not wish to enter a dialogue. Control over humour is in any case an unanswerable weapon, and few of his generation could use it with comparable effect, few indeed in the entire history of Bengali literature. Kamalakanta shows the great versatility of a literature of laughter, its internal repertory; it is at different times the laughter of contempt, of not taking something seriously, the laughter of reproach, of pity, the laughter about the self which feels it is part of what it is laughing about. The fundamental secret of the power of humour was wonderfully revealed in two lines in Sukumar Ray's Khicuri, the poem which reports that the duck and the porcupine carried on a traditional existence until a time when, by the miracle of humour, the grammar of reality fell away, and they formed a mixed animal.² It allows us to break the grammar of reality and history. Kamalakanta, the protagonist of his humorous essays, is an ungrammatical being, half conformist, half rebel.

Laughter is an equivalent of play in art, it is often argued, is play compared to the seriousness and deadliness of everyday life: the beauty of art a foil to its drabness, art's poignancy to its tendency to slide into meaninglessness, art's clear form a foil to its endless and and shapeless stretch. But even within art, which can be serious, humour has a special place as play. Compared to its more formal styles, it is playful. That is why in all kinds of humorous art we find a peculiar

gaity of liberation from encumbrances of form. There is a peculiar openness of form in Kamalakanta: because it is a mixture of several things. It is in part serious ironical prose, in part essay, story, drama mixed together. It takes the most unpredictable of turns. As it is nonserious, it is free from obligations of consistency, it can play between its own possible meanings. It can be any of them, it can be all; it can be precisely because it is laughter, be this play of astonishment.

I

Signs of Madness

The text we are going to read is a text of madness. Its putative author, Bankim says, was regarded by ordinary people, as mad.³ But the madness that produces this text is a text in itself, a sign. It can be read, made to yield its meaning. We must first understand who says this text, before we can grasp what it says.

In a manner of speaking this essay is about the almost unknown author of one of the most celebrated texts of Bengali prose. These are written allegedly by Kamalakanta Chakrabarty, a brahmin, homeless, occupationless, classless,⁴ a drug addict, a parasite, a sayer of the unsayable. Curiously, very little is usually said about this remarkably odd figure, He is wholly merged into the authorial personality of Bankimchandra. But he is not so negligible; because he exemplifies, to my understanding, not only an important segment of Bankim's art, but also his strategy of intellectual existence. Still, it is hardly ever asked in the literature why did the author create another author who is such an interesting negation of himself. What does the author's alienation of his own text signify ?

On his own part Bankim clearly took great pains to put the text at a distance from himself, alienating Kamalakanata's utterances from his own by a series of symbolic disjunctions.⁵ Bankim is sane, Kamalakanta is suspected of insanity; Bankim is staidly respectable, Kamalakanta is marginal, of doubtful (unspecified) occupation; the author normal, Kamalakanta an opiumeater; Bankim is a solid civil servant, a salaried man of a decidedly upper bracket, he is dependent on something of a mixture between respect and pity; Bankim is a realist, he is a dreamer. To state the argument in more serious form, Kamalakanta is a bundle of negative attributes, indescribable in terms of the available categories of social description.⁶ Whatever, he might be, he is, quintessentially, not a babu. Bankimchandra was a model of the successful Bengali gentleman (bhadralok, the English term is a common but strictly inappropriate translation) under the colonial social dispensation - successful, contented, reconciled. Kamalakanta is his exact opposite - idle, disorderly, unmarried, unkempt, socially indescribable, an irrationalist, or perhaps, a rationalist dedicated to the cause of what his contemporaries would have seen as 'irrationality'. Yet, despite his incongruity in this babu world of nineteenth century Bengal, Kamalakanta is something undeniable. He is an outsider to this civilisation, its Don Quixote.⁷ He is everything that Bankim is not, or in a different reading, everything that Bankim would like to be in his dreams of an alternate world. He is his self which has broken the syntax of reality, his self in a dream. He is therefore writing the secret autobiography of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

II

Here Bankim is really into his own. In humour he has no rival in Bengali literature. His humour is more than just a matter of literary versatility. Of course he was a versatile writer. Except for verse,

which he wisely avoided after initial undistinguished attempts early in his career, he created, practically singlehanded, the continent of Bengali prose. Above all, he determined its prose in two forms - the prose of literary imagination and the very different prose of serious reasoning. He created the novel form,⁸ though curiously enough, the economy, density, abbreviation of the short story - the condensation of a mood into a moment - somehow escaped him. (Witness the story Buvarnagolak,⁹ in which after a brisk and uproarious start, he does not seem to quite know what to do with its end; and the story peters out, rather than comes to an end.) Tagore, by contrast, was a master of this form, though some of them tended to be rather long. But Bankim is truly at home in humour, and he has the mark of a really humorous writer: he is witty not only when he is writing humour, but also when he is not.

The fact that a work is humorous does not mean it cannot be complex. Indeed, Kamalakanta cannot be read adequately without decoding all its pretences. Some of these are of course fairly obvious. It pursues a line of thought entirely unrepresentative in this Bengali 'age of reason'. It is quick to remark that in colonialism everything that was part of European history tended to have a parodied reenactment. It refers constantly to this effort at reenactment of European history by the babu and destroys it by satire. Parody contains a principle of this alternative construction of reality. By a change of pronunciation, an altered inflection of the voice, by changing a word, parody achieves a startling displacement of meaning. Bankim's humour was the myths, the tropes, the hierarchies of significance of enlightenment discourse itself to undermine that discourse. His special favourite is a form of humour sanskrit poetics called the vyāsatuti (literally, false praise). In that poetics all literary expression is called yakrokti (utterances which have some obliqueness about them); but this has an obliqueness that makes it yakrokti par excellence. And there

is an adequacy between the obliqueness of this form and the obliqueness of Kamlakanta's vision on the world. The world, especially the social world, hides its truth; it requires an oblique, a second sight to see its truth.

Defying the grammar of reality has some implications which ought to be stated. Humour has a more open structure than other types of discourse because it regards more possibilities as admissible than real life does. That is why humour is critical and subversive, and particularly effective against those assumptions of social life which pretend to some kind of self-evidence. It is hopeful precisely because in ridiculing the reality of social relations it asserts the important fact that the world that exists is always short of; is a travesty in a sense, of the world that ought to be. Other types of thinking do this too. One obvious parallel would be religious utopian paintings of paradise, where nonviolent lions live on excellent terms with the deer. Another could be the utopia of a revolution which defies a grammar of a political kind. Conceptions of revolution, of paradise and humour - all, on this view, would have something in common - they all defy the colligation of reality, they all have the gift of seeing as historical and contingent what to ordinary eyes appear as necessary.

A study of Bankim's humour must be an analysis of its totality, not just a part. And we sometimes see glimpses of such things too in its quick changes of mood. I would not like to associate his humour too closely only with the mood of defiance, for there is also a sorrowful, dark aspect to it - the fact of its mocking itself in the act of what it says, its perpetual tension between the babuness of his existence and his intellectual rejection of the babu social and ideological order, and what could be called an implicit rejection of this rejection by choosing to do it within a subterfuge.

It indicates a bad conscience, not a rebellion. It is followed by a certain sense of guilt. Obviously, he was not able to attempt what, if radical historiography is to be trusted, the unlettered peasantry undertook at times. Berkin in that sense retreats from the more demanding task of 'changing the world' into merely offering an inter rotation. The babu gets his contempt because they translate acts into discourse, which is moving in the wrong direction, turning away from the obvious practical syllogism of colonial political existence. Instead of going forward from liberal, rational premises into action the babu collapsed back into discourse, substituting radical propositions for radical acts. Some of the humour, particularly its occasional pessimism must be linked to the perception that Berkin himself could be rebuked for doing the same thing, and the limits of the existence of the babu that he analysed with such power turned out to be the limits of his own self. Irony thus turns back upon itself; it can be seen in an ironical light. It is common knowledge that insanity is a way of living with unresolved contradictions. This could be one reason why the speaker of this ironical discourse uses the literary sign of madness. But madness means different things in different cultures. It meant radically different things in the culture of rationalist Europe and traditional India. I wish to suggest that the madness of Kamalakanta is a complex sign constructed out of elements taken from both these conceptions of insanity.

In quite a literal sense Kamalakanta offers us a play of two sights. He is gifted with a second sight which opens up when he takes opium. To the ordinary sight the world is closed in its transparency. It can see only self evident things. Opium intensifies his sight, and when he takes it what he sees is a world of essences alone. To this sight things turn into objects, objects into things, cats begin to speak and carry on socialistic disputation of a delightful and convincing irreverence. In a word, the world opens itself, and yields its secrets to this second sight. Take the cats discourse on property, his inverted socialistic vision of a world. It is a rationally defensible construction of the social world, but it does

not figure in the real world, because there is no one to say it, the contingent absence of a speaker of true speech. But truth should not be voiceless simply because it does not have a speaker. In a world of essences, it can be spoken by a political cat.

Since it reveals essences, something that ordinary sight cannot, people need this second sight, which shows the structure of the world as it really is, quite different from the way it appears to be. He too could say, conceding someone else had the world of appearances been the same as the world of reality/essence, human beings would not have needed opium. It is wrong to say that when he has opium he sees better, because that would be a physicalist idea; it assists him to see in an altogether new way. He sees the world through the logic of alternatives as it could have been, as it could, alternatively, be.

III

Madness, it is often said, is a failure to be consistent. To turn this idea around, those who wish to live in inconsistency may find in madness their appropriate and spontaneous symbolism. It is hardly surprising that Bankim chose the figure of a man suspected of madness to speak his ideas. Indeed, this insanity is also under question; the cryptic sentence announcing this title for the speaker is filled with ambiguity: 'most people treated Kamalakanta as a madman',¹⁰ which implicitly leaves open the possibility of someone not seeing him as mad, on condition he did not share the majority's way of viewing the historical world. This is also an use of liminality, but it does very different things here from his novels.

Madness is a form of liminality, a way of being outside the definition of normalcy, particularly in an age of reason, as Foucault

has shown, the most disreputable liminality of all.¹¹ It represents what lies outside the limits of reason - the faculty which, though granted in unequal measure, united all human beings in an abstract consciousness. It is outside the limits that rationality constitutes for itself. It enjoys a peculiar dishonour in times which gave such uncontested privilege to knowledge and all that was done in its name. Truth, in its rationalist form, is the most intolerant value of all, because it does not acknowledge in any form the legitimacy of a competitor. To understand madness becomes inextricable from an understanding of the arguments of rationality and its historically available forms.

'The limits of reason' is a rather curious idea. These can be seen in two ways. First, it could be seen as the way in which reason constitutes its limits, what it marginalises and ostracises as irrational. Such irrationalities are of course seen as entirely objective, not a line constructed by an historically contingent rationality and its equally contingent definitions.¹² But it could also be seen in a second way, from the outside as it were, from a standpoint that lies outside the boundaries that this reason has constructed, seen by its 'other'. Unreason can also write a commentary on how reason constitutes its limit and impoverishes the world. Indeed, this kind of a reverse commentary is not as rare one would imagine; and particularly in colonial cultures there seems to be a great tradition of such self imposed insanity. A semiotic of madness is not peculiar to Bankim's art. The discourse of colonialism seems to be filled with the signs of madness. From the metaphorical madness of Kanchankanta through La Moun's diaries of a madman¹³ to the frighteningly literal insanities in Fanon,¹⁴ colonial discourse offers a great spectacle of political insanity, perhaps because it is a discourse of the other which announces itself as the other. This nature of this discourse requires some discussion in my view because it represents the structure of a great philosophic difficulty, and recurs constantly in Indian

nationalism in changing forms - this is its double bind, its eternally renewed contradiction. It is the contradiction in which the colonial rationalist finds himself - he finds his society and its whole culture being fundamentally violated and changed by and in the name of rationalist theory, which he accepts in its abstract form but which justifies colonialism.¹⁵ He cannot either accept or reject it, because either way he falls into inconsistency. As madness is inconsistency of thought, the dilemmas of the colonial rationalist intellectual could be captured symbolically in the figure of an eloquent insanity. As he is an intellectual, he is condemned to intellectual solutions to all his problems; he must exercise by discourse the difficulties he imagines to have been caused by discourse.

In a rationalistic civilisation, a culture created at the behest of an aggressive and intolerant reason, madness takes on an added and exaggerated meaningfulness. Of course this is the conclusion of Michel Foucault's seminal argument; and it is important to note how sensitively Rankin uses the symbolic resources of this reason/unreason dichotomy. In Europe, as Foucault showed, attitudes towards insanity change from a tolerant indifference to an attentive and constantly invigilating suppression. Curiously, the crucial factor which causes this enormous difference seems to have been a conceptual change, a strict equation of the human with the rational. So that, by implication, those who fell out of these severe criteria of rationality fell automatically outside any claim to a human status. In a sense, of course, the mad were not the only group of people to be given such treatment. Enlightenment Europe devised a surprisingly large list of disqualifications from humanity on grounds of insufficient reason, modifying its abstract promise of treating all men as equal. For varying reasons, women, the working class, nonwhites, and of course the entire noneuropean world were considered obviously ineligible for such high title.

But it could be asked, is Bankin's world a rationalistic one in quite the same sense, so that we can profitably apply these distinctions to understand its mind? Indeed, the place of rationalism in the world of Bankin is more complex and curious. Rationalism is not a theory which is autochthonously produced by this culture. But probably, its social arrangements were even more deeply affected by rationalistic ideas than European society. It had borrowed it, and had it imposed on it - a complex and unextricable process of these two. Its elite was taking it on trust from an aggressive legislating colonialism which was, precisely at that moment, redefining its entire world, wiping out the common names on which this society and its relations had been founded. Foucault's Europe generated this rationalism, which admittedly repressed and excluded large classes and groups of the underprivileged, but those repressions were after all indigenous. In the colonial world, this rationalism was entirely without restraints; and both radicals and reactionaries alike could use these unresisting societies as their legitimate laboratories for social engineering.¹⁶

In Bankin's world therefore this rationalism was the great intruding force which conquers, renames, rectifies and defiles his country. And Bankin was sufficiently subtle in his political perception to detect the fallacy of a consequentialist argument about colonialism.¹⁷ Colonialism was not contested because it had had consequences; even if it had good consequences, hypothetically, it could have no right to do good. Thus the ideology of rationality, though not arranged in exactly the same way in the colonies, is equally significant in Bankin's world. He lived under the written, but more significantly unwritten laws of its culture, and shared the strangely divided attitude of intellectuals towards rationalism acquired through a play of coercion and internalisation. This, I suggest, above all else imposes the half light half darkness of humour on his critical thought.

So the ideas that were being articulated were partly hidden not only from the colonial rulers, their censoring officials, the imitative babus, but insidiously and subtly, also his self.

There is thus a bit of Don Quixote in Kamalakanta - in his project of fighting his times (in the secrecy of these popular essays), the British and their collaborators with the weapon of discourse. It bears the stamp of the same ridiculous knighthood. Invoking of madness gives him the right of inversion - of the relations between rational and irrational, possible and impossible, and reality and imagination.¹⁸ It is a symbolic condition: and what is remarkable in this is that this irrationality is not conferred upon the speaker by a legislating reason, but dramatically assumed by the self. The epithet of irrationality is assumed by design. Just as in Foucault's story, rationality defines madness in order to say what it thinks about it, in exactly inverse terms, in Kamalakanta, madness assumes this title to say what it thinks about rationality. In this I see the working of both an internal and an external tradition which are opportunistically blended. The trace of the European definition of insanity is of course very clear. But we must also seek more seriously for the influences of an indigenous tradition of the reverse type to understand this unprecedented insanity of Kamalakanta. The liminal figure, or rather the outsider figure of the mad is deeply blended with another outsider figure of the renouncer, the sannyasi. When saying his farewell, Kamalakanta explicitly marks himself as a sannyasi 'kamalākānta is a sannyasi at heart' (kamalākānta antare antare sannyāsī).¹⁹ He cannot be a classical, but only a debased renouncer, because all possibilities are debased in his culture. He is both a sannyasi, and his caricature, just as Bankim is a rebel and a caricature at the same time (antare antare). All that the babu inside Bankim is capable of is this secret resentment and a secret rebellion; such things like secret rebellions, are really dreams, or judged more severely, a defilement.

Why does he need this figure? The Indian tradition has of course a great and complex heritage of thinking on this point; we can indicate only some important elements in this. First, there is the dichotomy between the grihī and the sannyāsī, the householder and the renouncer, one treads the path of desire, the other of abjuring them. But I suggest the dichotomy not only contains a theory of moral excellence, but also a theory of truth. To understand the world of the ordinary man, the grihī - not the way it appears, but the way it actually is - is impossible within his own standpoint. For it cannot provide us with any tool with which we can know when we have found a truth and when a mere rationalisation. Someone else, someone radically different, someone who stands outside the circle of the grihī's possible experience can alone see its truth. This might occasionally involve a theory that truth is always the property of the other. It can come to the self only when it has placed itself in an other's position. Thus the sannyāsī, or his innumerable forms, can possess the miracle of truth, only by paying a price, by crossing a limit and setting up a critical distance from their object.

The relation between grihī and sannyāsī is an opposition in the true sense, and is developed by a long tradition. Within this tradition of Hindu doctrine this is sometimes seen as parallel to/interchangeable with the dichotomy between reason and madness; but here reason does not enjoy a comparable privilege. Indeed, this is embedded in a relativistic theory of rationality. What is rational is what is everyday, what is appropriate, not what is in some ways transcendently true. Consequently, madness has a very different significance in this traditional discourse. It seems never to have contained the intimation of an incurable disorder, the dark possibility of extinction always present at the edge of all existence. Accordingly it did not evoke the kind of picture of deviance which European rationalism sought to punish by the great confinement. Madness in the Hindu

tradition (but perhaps it could be extended to Muslim mystical traditions as well) is seen as something that is eminently tolerable, almost, a minor extension of the attributes of normalcy between the everyday limit. Even the most collected people get mad sometimes. Being mad is not a permanent state of their personality, but of a particular time, a peculiar set of circumstances, to be dispelled when that conjuncture disappears. People play hide and seek with insanity. Sources of insanity are many - these could be fear, anger or desire. These make human beings go mad; but, paradoxically, if they do not have these attributes, they would hardly be human beings. A collected person - a *sthitaprajna*²⁰ - conversely has a mind permanently at peace; and in the Hindu tradition reason has a strong affiliation to stillness. Peace is stillness - a stillness of sounds, a stillness of movements, a stillness of desire or a pure negative state of the mind.²¹ Life, instinct is movement, is equivalent to agitation; when this agitation becomes violent it can turn to insanity. So madness is not something sharply delineated and opposed to daily life, but only an extension, an intensification of things that happen in normalcy. To use a famous example, it is normal to have desire, but abnormal to desire desires, when desire becomes abstract, and an indulgence. That is, to become, in the wonderful verse of the *Gītā*, a *kāmakāmi*.

āpūryamānam akalapratiṣṭhaṃ samudramapah praviṣanti yadvat
tadvat kāma yaṃ praviṣanti sarve sa śāntimāpnoti na kāmakāmi.²²

Through this theory, madness and normalcy form a continuum, and it is unbecoming for one point in a continuum to condemn its neighbour. Still, strictly speaking, we are dealing with a relativistic argument, not a real inversion. For this suggests a contiguity of madness and ordinary reason. The two states of the mind, so sharply and irremediably separated by modern thought, are still bound by a neighbourly tie.

The next step in traditional thought is towards an inversion in the strict sense. The earlier argument simply establishes that the world must look very different to the *grihī* and the *sanyāsī*. But the weight of numbers and therefore commonsense must be on the side of the *grihī*. It is the man of superior reason, of stillness, of quiet emotions who is rare; and therefore, with a sudden twist, in such of the Indian tradition, he is invested with the attributes of not being normal. Now this 'other' of normalcy can be called madness, and in that sense an inversion of ordinary reasonableness.

The *Gitā*, Rankin's permanent favourite among the Hindu texts, sees this connection between outsidersness and inversion: what is normal from one point of view is unreasonable from the other. The picture of the world from one angle is the reverse of that from the other. There is no transcendent point of rationality. For-

yā nīṣā sarvabhūtānāṃ tasyaṃ jāgarti sanyamī 23
sanyam jāgrati bhūtāni sā nīṣā paśyato muneh.

Analysis of this particular *śloka* could reveal a significant structure of argument about the relation between normalcy and its other. What we earlier saw as a metaphor of a continuum, is now seen as a relationship of inversion resulting in a careful counterpointing of attributes. Through these oppositions we find a project of turning the world, at least its normal portrait, upside down. It is in seeing the world upside down, through the inversion of normalcy, ie, by rejecting its presuppositions, that we grasp the truth about the world. There are at least the following opposite sets in the verse:

ordinary creatures / the seer

sarva (most people) plural / the singularity or rarity of the muni, singular

day/night

day of the senses/night of the senses

waking/sleeping

self control/desire

truth/verisimilitude

A subtler feature of the aloka is that the initial impression is not the final or conclusive one. Turning the world upside down is of course suggested in all these binary structures; but it is still unclear if this leads to a relativistic conclusion or not. Initially, it seems that it does; the day for ordinary mortals is darkness for the seer. And he can begin his business of seeing the world only when others are asleep. It appears at first that the aloka is saying that if A and B are two observers of the world and x and y are two contradictory objects, then what x is to A y is to B and vice versa. This would amount to a simply relativistic point. But the poem moves, subtly but definitely, to a clearly nonrelativistic preference for the view of the sanyasi, though he is in a statistical minority, and though (the day and night metaphors point towards this) the self evidence of things is against his view. However there is a clear hierarchy, the muni's view is superior to the ordinary man's. The upside down view is a higher view in a moral and cognitive sense because it is a view unbound and unbounded by ordinary presuppositions. What is called sanity in this tradition is indeed far removed from what European enlightenment called rationality. To act sensibly is simply to act rationally within certain premises, but these premises of everyday rationality are not uniquely grounded and justifiable. They indicate mere appropriateness, and its premises, it is readily conceded, would not hold under serious philosophical questioning. This theory of an inversion of the everyday sight in the truth perceived by a higher sight is simplified by popular consciousness into ^{La}strange equation of religious insight and madness. Anyway, this could in fact turn the rationalistic theory upside down by claiming that it is those who do not live within the limits of rationality who can speak the truth.

We should however consider a possible objection. It could be objected, with reason, that this way of arguing is historically doubtful. It is possible that there is a theory which sees truth as the privilege of the outsider in the *Gitā*, but is it not historically unreasonable to suppose that such renunciators, or rather, the idea of such renouncing is still available in nineteenth century Bengal? Should we not, in view of the thousand or so years separating the two utterances, presume that this theory is unavailable unless otherwise proved?

This is a sound objection; but these considerations show precisely the great continuity of such ideas in the traditional structures of thought. First, of course, during the nineteenth century there is a studied revival, or at least a curiosity, about ideas that are designated as ancient, partly perhaps because of the unconscious urge on the part of this intelligentsia to reenact the moves of European history.²⁴ Bankim, along with Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and other contemporaries, were engaged in a process of rediscovery of the traditional philosophical positions. It is quite possible for such writers to attempt to state an ancient philosophical doctrine of truth. But I suspect this doctrine was also available in a living tradition of thought, which celebrated marginality, and treated it as a sign and a qualification for seeing great truths of existence. Take a song from Tagore, a text written such after Bankim, which illustrates this figure clearly. It is not a situational²⁵ song from the *danodranas*, which could simply put into words a situational anguish of a dramatic character. It is wholly abstract, unnamed, without a proper name protagonist, and as such, as implying the idea that all humanity was eligible to utter it. This seems in my view to underline the universality of the idea, an invitation to any individual into its paradoxical privacy.

erā parke āpara kare, āpanāre par
bāhīre bānsīra rabe chene jāy ghar
bhālobāse sukhe dukhe
byathā sahe hāsimukhe
marāhēre kare cira jīvananirthar²⁶

I find the last phrase irreducibly ambiguous. The rest of the verse clearly speaks of the same kind of exalted unreason. There is of course a difference: in the Gītā, what was being discussed was the right to truth, here the right to true love. The behaviour described is however unmistakably similar. Whoever these unspecified people are, they do exactly what the sanyamī did, they have turned the world upside down. Ordinarily, people should not turn their kins into strangers, or leave the safety of their homes for the terrible yearning for the outside world; love should produce happiness and pain is not ordinarily borne with a smile. Exactly like the muni's inverse relation to the world, these people also live their lives inversely. There is of course an obvious unstated reference in this poem. Through this inversion we get a glimpse of Rādhā - who had turned her kins into strangers and strangers into her own, who had left her home to the music of the outside world. She alone, of all classical heroines did all these things incomparably well. Indeed, in another wonderful poem, instantiating the same structure of thought, she wonders whether it is sounding inside the forests or inside her heart (banamājhe ki e manamājhe)²⁷ - so similar, so indistinguishable in terms of sounds, but philosophically what a confusion to have! At any rate, these reveal a certain figure of thought, which associate privileges of either cognition or of sentiment, with the outside. The right to the truth, as the right to love, belongs to one who has the courage to step into this great unknown outside.

Transpositions of night and day, seeing and not seeing, of self evidence and truth are also the features of the lives of some liminal characters in the high literary tradition of Bengal. We encounter them in Tagore's frequent bauls, characters like Dhananjay Bairagi,²⁸ or again, symbolically, the dadanashay.²⁹ Together, they constitute a group of people who have crossed the circle of ordinary everyday experience. Things consequently appear quite differently to them than to those who are more selfishly, seriously and immediately engaged in life's deadly pursuits. They represent lyrically the philosophic idea that the same object, even the world, must look different to people who have an interest in them and those who do not. It is not a mere dramatic event that dadanashays come from the outside and purify the atmosphere of selfseeking by a touch of peace and kindness; there is a theoretical doctrine behind it.

Bankim's Kamalakanta belongs to this tradition, but with a certain obliqueness, both an ancestor and inheritor. He is an inheritor of the of this curse (or gift) of an inspired liminality, being able to see what others cannot. But he emphasises by signs the tragedy of prophecy, its mixed quality of being half gift and half curse. He is also an ancestor of Tagore's bauls and bairagis. In both him and in Tagore these outsiders are marked by a different language. In Tagore too these characters most often leave their commentary on the everyday in songs - a rhythmic, harmonic counterpoint to the prose of everyday life. Kamalakanta too speaks a different language: he speaks in humour, in a different key from the humourless seriousness of the everyday language of interest.

Popular religion in particular is a field in which this theme of an ambiguous insanity is not very often. Men of god are often insane from the point of view of ordinary men, a transformation of the sign of insanity and its investiture with a certain mystery and grandeur.³⁰ At crucial points

of the narratives of the purānas or saṅgītkāvyas or even early modern drama there is occasionally, as part of dramatic convention, an appearance of a person from outside the circle of ordinary interests - a ṛṣi, a god, a poet, a singer, or a madman. Sometimes, this would be done by an śrāvaṇī, a voice from the sky, an utterance without a speaker. All of them would in different ways carry a signature of divinity, of the other. They are independent of the circle of human causalities and interests. Philosophically, they signify the need to look at something from the outside to gain its truth. They act as symbols of an other discourse, an other register of being that is always possible, and against which ordinariness should be judged.

But Kamalakanta is quite different from Tagore's rather weaker figures;³¹ precisely because his madness is a convex combination of the insanity of the east and the west. While Tagore uses an ancient tradition skilfully to offer an internal commentary, to act as a outside voice, Bankim's Kamalakanta is more complex, for he is a creation of combined features of two traditions, and consequently more contradictory, more tortured, more original voice. It is the voice of the other in the rationalist discourse, who is punished, ostracised, marginalised, merged with the voice of the other other from the traditional Indian discourse, lonely, enigmatic, with the right to speak the truth. What he says constantly plays, falters, alternates between two notions of otherness, and he lives a constant fugitives between these two of his equal selves. When we see him speaking in one register he suddenly switches to the other. It is this peculiar mixed quality of the insanity in Kamalakanta which makes him so interesting. For in Tagore's figures there is no irony about the self, no underlying sense that the period of this kind of seeing, this sort of prophecy is over. Kamalakanta is more reflexive, because he does not miss his own ineffectuality and of the discourse he represents. His matter of reflection or

search for truth is not only the world, but also his self: for he finds not only the world deeply problematic, but his self as well. He therefore turns to humour, and constitutes himself into the speaker of a discourse of unreason, an outsider to the well-known diction of colonial rationality, the joint reason of the coloniser and the babu. There is however another feature of his irony about the self which ought not to be missed. Reflection about the self can easily turn inwards, and become an essentially psychological journey. But Kamalakanta defines his self so strongly and indelibly in social terms that the questioning of the self is inextricable from a question of the society and history which makes him what he is.

To understand what is happening in that history, it is essential to analyse western rationalism; but Bankim was one of the first to sense that this has to be done in two forms. For the subject intellectual of the colony the first task is to break through rationalism's pretence of homogeneity, to see that a rationalist civilisation means one thing in the west, in its home, and quite another in its colonies.³² Justification of colonial structures in terms of the promise of rising capitalism in the metropolis is a wholly false argument. But the question of the nature of rationalist thought keeps coming up again and again in Bankim's reflections. Rationalism obviously believed progress depended on precise practices which worked on the basis of sharp, harsh distinctions, definitions that are remorselessly executed, a world that is absolutely and unsurpassably classified.³³ This alone provided certain knowledge, and that knowledge alone provided an opportunity of controlling the natural world and the less clearly understood processes of social life. The history of European social theory of the enlightenment showed that this process had great costs; it made the eligibility criteria for belonging to the properly human condition very high, by placing successive barriers in the path of the naive and tragic claim that all men belong to a rational humanity.³⁴ Rational theory of the

nineteenth century believed, by implication, that the wonderful apparatuses of civilisation, of knowledge, power and control, are too precious and potent to be trusted to nonadult hands. Too naive a belief in human equality could spell disaster. Only those who could scale such high criteria could have a claim to this wonderful apparatus of power. Consequently, the age of reason becomes an epoch of exclusion, the great age of bourgeois inequality. As it went along, it constantly invented new disqualifications, new excuses for putting whole peoples out of the claim to being fully human. Rationality, instead of being a principle of equality, becomes a principle of exclusion. Early rationalist culture therefore fings with the metaphor of adulthood and childishness, of discretion and irresponsibility. Whole parts of mankind are excluded by its stringently conceptually defined childhoods - slaves in the United States, the propertyless in Europe, women inside bourgeois families, and entire peoples in Europe's colonies.³⁵ It is a great age of enlightenment and disenfranchisement.

It would have been surprising if the more sensitive minds in colonial societies did not sense this contradiction in rationalist discourse. Indeed, for us it is a mere matter of historical reconstruction; for them it was a question of making sense of the history they were living in. It occupied the unavoidable centre of the historical stage. In a subtle way this could be seen as a contemporary problem even in today's third world. But our generations are familiar with historical possibilities and weapons of criticism which Bankim's generation never knew. We would today justify much of our acceptance of ideas of western prominence by making a distinction between their intellectual point and their circumstances of origin. The fact that modern socialism was first thought of in Europe does not make it a European mode of thought, any more than the spread of agriculture in the world should be seen as a spread of overwhelming Egyptian influence. Intellectuals of the nineteenth century, in the colonial city of Calcutta, were generally unacquainted with such arguments. European provenance of

rationalist thought was so obvious, and the question of culture was so obviously intricately with the question of power that it was impossible to question the affiliation of ideas to a cultural entity, and the invading civilisation of a rationalist western colonialism.³⁶

Kamalakanta's insanity, I suggest, has something to do with the untidy, tortured, self-doubting beginnings of a critique. This is reflected in the patchy clarity of his utterance. In individual parts, in segments of its theoretical concerns, Kamalakanta's arguments are clear and theoretically sound; but it does not add up to a general solution to the question that is latent in his discourse. He sees clearly that colonial representations of western rationalism need critiques, but not very clearly what that critique would be in its full form. And madness offers a wonderful sign of this indecisiveness, a subtle way of asserting statements, but putting these statements themselves under a sort of questioning at the same time. Madness gives this whole undertaking a philosophically tentative, interrogatory form, a sign of the unconcluded nature of this critique.

The sign of madness therefore performs several functions in Barua's discourse. It is first of all a sign of evasion, but it was an evasion in many senses. Freud said in his celebrated analysis of humour that jokes are usually devices for circumventing censorship.³⁷ In his analysis of smutty jokes, Freud shows how sexual references, inadmissible in polite society in the presence of ladies, can be made with impunity in the form of jokes. Humour, to generalise this point, is then a way of saying the unsayable. To the culture of a colonial society this insight seems particularly apposite. A colonial culture is very closed, in which some fundamental and spontaneous ideas are made unutterable, and in response it gives rise of a form of discursive deceit, uses of discourse which hide ideas while speaking them, developing skills of saying and not saying

at the same time. By its overwhelming power to control and direct, colonialism invites a discourse of deception. Dissenting intellectuals in colonial Calcutta must be adept at saying what they seem not to be saying.

But this censorship for Bankim should not be read too simply as merely avoiding bureaucratic censure and possible punishment. He has to contend with several layers of censorship. Humour is an evasion, at the surface level, of his professional controls.³⁸ After all a deputy magistrate under the colonial administration was a position of unattainable eminence for most of his envious imitators among the baby society, though for its incumbent perhaps this looked like an unjust termination of upward mobility for purely racial considerations.³⁹ In fact, Bankim seems to have had considerable difficulty with the colonial censors, and had to contend with varying forms of disagreements from his English superiors. Of course this is too obvious a reason for the distancing of his utterances from his self by this equally transparent and invincible device of humour and insanity. Apparently, no one, in reason, could penalise an author for what he has put into the mouth of a character he himself characterises as insane. His own reason is corroborated by the fact that he distances, alienates the putative author of these remarks: "every empty head, fixed and classified according to the reason of men, utters contradiction and irony, the double language of wisdom".⁴⁰ Kamalakanta uses the right of this ambiguity, the kinship, to the mad, between reality and illusion. He sets up, at the first level, a double and ambiguous relation to his own texts: he both the author and the condemner of these utterances. He is both the sayer and the critic of the unsayable.

There is some truth in this avoidance, but this seems to me to be too simple, and too obvious to be all of the circumvention in Bankim's humour. A second level of censorship was represented surely by the

collective mentality of the nineteenth century babu of colonial Calcutta. Humour enables Bankim to evade the pressures if not actual censorship of the rationalist consensus of the middle class intelligentsia of which he was an increasingly alienated member. This is a particularly difficult and complex relation: for he is both an eminently successful babu, and his foremost critic. Madness is particularly expedient at this level because it is a way of evading strict formats of distinction and choice that colonial rationalism imposes on the indigenous intelligentsia; a way of having both ends of a contradiction. Kamalakanta, as we shall see later, uses the entire apparatus of rationalist discourse indeed of rationalist philosophy, in his arguments; still, to the Bhismadevs of his time, he is irremediably demented - not because his arguments lack consistency in the logical sense, but precisely because it shows the threatening form of an alternative construction of what is rational.⁴¹ Irrationality of this kind is not unable to draw distinctions, but draws them at wrong places. After all, sketches of an entirely different, but wholly rationally defensible, picture of a moral and political order is created in essays like Bidal⁴² or Deser Srivridhi,⁴³ which is actually a signed, not a secret essay. Here the author of Kamalakanta slips out from behind his more cautious, guarded, official front, and we get a glimpse of this truant, uncensored, undiplomatic writer, through a characteristic rupture in the style, an interlude of inversion so common to all his writing. But it is the rationality of this second point of view, what could be called his second text, of his perverse alternative constructions which so frightens Khosnavis; and it is the very possibility that such alternative constructions are eminently defensible makes it all the more necessary that they be pronounced mad. Khosnavis is an immediately recognisable figure taken from the Foucault story, though far away from his European habitat. But in his few introductory remarks to the Kamalakanta text, he uses the two unmistakable weapons - of definition and slander.⁴⁴

But the pretence of madness indicates something still deeper. Apart from being an avoidance of the silence imposed by his profession, of the pressures of conformity and expectation of his social group, it is also an evasion of the self. It is the exercise of the right of tentativeness, which all serious thought would claim for itself. The self, after all, is constituted by society, it speaks the society's language in its affirmation and negation. Insanity in this sense, of the kind that Kamalakanta particularly displays is, in a manner of speaking, an autonomisation of the voice. Of course, there is an implicit autonomy of the voice, the subject that speaks in a story or a novel, from its actual author. That shadowy subject always manages to utter, send into print, ideas which the author may have been unsure about. But the sign of insanity is a strategy which takes this autonomy into a purer form, in which it asserts the right to say out, declare and set into the world in the form of a discourse ideas about which the author himself is not entirely certain. This is a manner of discoursing which we should analyse seriously, for it is too easy to see in it a simple statement of contradiction. It is a freedom which is easy to confuse with irresponsibility because it is in fact quite close to it. But it asserts the usually suppressed right say exactly what comes to mind, against the censorship of the self; the urge of the self to be understood, recognised and described in particular ways. Through this theatre the author can escape his own self censorship., This affords him an opportunity to take a holiday from his identity constituted in the social everyday, and live a dream, to become, for these moments of mimesis, another, a juster, straighter, more fearless, honourable and playful self. Insanity offers him an opportunity to live a life of temporary perfection.

This could however be seen another way. I have argued elsewhere⁴⁵ that we find quite often that authors who are in the midst of a phase of life in which they do not reject but problematise a structure of thought which they had owned, shift to a less structured, more interrogative form of

writing. Often, these thoughts are written in a way it seems they wish to deny the necessary distance between what Marx called the logic of presentation and the logic of thinking (in fact, he said, enquiry)⁴⁶ a form in which the form strives precisely to set the thinking down in the order in which it is thought. Cast in this form, it shows a polemical relation not only with other bodies of thought, but with its own discrete statements. This is not to be misdescribed as contradictory thought, but the coherence of a thought which is in the process of self-questioning. Usually, this is cast in the more private form of a diary, or notes, or penses.

Kamalakanta is a text which captures subtle but great transitions in Bankim's thought about history and social destiny; and with his mastery of form, he finds the formal structure that exactly suits the open and unstructured nature of his enterprise. It simply puts forward his private utopia of freedom, an unsubjected people.⁴⁷ But these have the unmistakable print of being private thoughts; there is a stealthiness, a hesitation, which is the mark of the shyness with which private dreams are falteringly brought out into the publicity of discourse. But the greatest mark of transition in Bankim's thought can be detected in relation to these ideas precisely. The inspired passage on the sequence of the mother recognised as the land, the country, the mother not of an individual devotee but the very different mother of a nation, recognises this dream as individual and private.⁴⁸ The passage that says all this is therefore an apostrophe an apostrophe inserted into the general flow of the discourse, marked on all sides by a break, it is like a cry of the heart with its urgency and its abruptness. It is a short glimpse, an abrupt breaking in of an entirely unrelated subject into the essay on the durgā puja. Interestingly, very little has changed in the literal aspect of the passage when it reappears in the Anandamath,⁴⁹ yet clearly everything has changed. Its semiotic has been transformed. It now comes smoothly within two different sequences - the sequence of speech, and the sequence of the narrative.⁵⁰ It is no longer

an abrupt cry inserted into an essay which was gossiping about other, more mundane things. It comes with a structured, sequenced discursive context, as part of an unfolding explanation. It is not difficult to recognise it now, or to listen to it. Narratively, too it now has a clear place. It has in other words moved out of a private dream into the world, something unclearly like a collective image.

Kamalakanta's madness is not a state depicted from the outside, it speaks from within this. It is a lighthearted pretence, a ploy for license, a licence to abuse and libel with impunity, to get away with things one would not be allowed to say ordinarily. But Kamalakanta can say them because the mad, along with their infirmities also have their strange privileges. He does not court a martyrdom; he simply wishes to cheat the censor, the dispenser of colonial justice. To be mad in his sense is to have fun, to taste the joys of forbidden speech. Indeed the feeling of being mad becomes so pleasurable that it appears that everybody who is rational must deserve this joy of madness. In this form, it is very close to a secular inspiration, to having a second vision to which the secrets of the world are revealed of themselves, to which mysteries surrender on their own.

A Double Irony

Humour, by itself, is an abstract idea, because it can be of various forms. Of the great number of possibilities in humour I classify Bankimchandra's humour in Kamalakanta as double irony. Now double irony can have an individual or a social form. In some types of social discourse this sort of irony occurs systematically. In engali village life, for instance there is a seasonal feature called sang. This belongs to the class of inverzia festivals common all over the world. As in the English All Fools' Day, sang is a festival in which socially important institutions

or individuals were caricatured, probably a generally harmless outlet of grievances. However it also uses the technique of double irony, and perhaps some of the general or more abstract features of the utterance of double irony could be better understood in its collective rather than more individualised form. Double irony has a simple formal feature which distinguishes it from other kinds of humour. It not merely mocks at the world; it does also, in the same act, mocks at its own mocking at the world, and therefore its self.

Sang is an inversion, a caricature of social norms, particularly the norms of everyday hierarchy and subordination. Inversion festivals usually have a critical function; they show the 'absurdity' of the given, of what is taken for granted, the whole circle of roles that people take as unproblematic and repeat and rehearse everyday. As it is a rejection, and inversion of the structures of the quotidian, it is a metaphor for, or akin to a crisis; but its connection to a crisis is complex. It is an enactment of a crisis, but it shows at the same time what an absurd thing a crisis is. It is a crisis shown in jest, and jesting is absolutely constitutive of the act. For this reason, a festivity like sang cannot be regarded as truly radical, because of the admission of frustration built into its definition. It ridicules the everyday surely; but in the same act, it ridicules its rejection. It contains a certain criticism, at least its possibility, but in its demonstration it uses the extenuation of jesting. It does that by seeing and showing the act of criticism as a joke, and therefore to be undertaken only on a day set apart for such frivolity, never as serious practice. It is tragically evenhanded: for it shows in a paralysed evenhandedness the absurdity of social relations and the absurdity of their criticism.

Does this sort of discourse when used in high literature indicate anything beyond an individual predicament or an individual style? Does this show something interesting only about the author of these essays, or are there perhaps signs in this discourse of a shared, collective difficulty? Are there some people, some class, some political group, who must speak like this, in this manner of saying and not saying, hiding what they say, turning their whole discourse into an endless double entendre? It seems to me that this is the typical discourse of subalternity, of a subaltern group which feels the inevitability of criticism and the inevitability of its practical failure. Also quite typical of the subaltern is this tragic disingenuousness, of making criticism, and hiding it in the act. Subalternity is a tragic fate, and for those who are not able to come to terms with it cognitively and practically, the only recourse, the most ambiguous recourse of all, is the discourse of irony. Abstractly, the two kinds of discourse, the tragic and the ironical, could be very far apart. ; but it is this situation of subalternity which constantly mingles them into peculiar unstable configurations, and his thought moves from a tragic perception of the world to an ironical way of dealing with it.

Underlying Kamalakanta, then, there is a theme of subalternity, always present but never speld out. The mad are deprived of power, and Kamalakanta who speaks out of his eloquent political madness represents, in his world, the powerlessness of an alternative construction of rationality. But to relate Bankimchandra's work to the notion of subalternity, we have to recapture the double valued quality of Gramsci's concept. Historians have of late made the narrower of the two concepts of subalternity in Gramsci very well known.⁵¹ On this narrow definition, the idea denotes the state of the lowest strata of society,⁵² the lower peasantry in colonial India or the modern proletarian. Occasionally, there are disputes about who would have a copyright over the experiences of these deprived groups, the right to be the discursive inheritors of

their historical suffering. Subalternity, in this definition, is a finalist concept, a position which is defined fixedly, and for ever. There is no doubt, Gramsci quite often uses the concept in this sense. But there is in his theory an alternate use of the term which is relational and not finalist.⁵³ People are not subaltern in themselves but only in relation and reference to someone else. A subaltern in one situation can be a dominant group in another. While talking of lower middle class intelligentsia Gramsci would, at times, use such a concept of subalternity to characterise them.

If subalternity is used as a relational term, we come to see some features of a situation of power more clearly, which a finalist perspective denies us. First, we see the social hierarchy as a double relation, a system which not merely requires disjunctions between its constituent groups, but also crucial relays, in which there is a daily transference of subaltern consciousness from one group to another. In the second meaning of the term, the subalterns are the active carriers and makers of ideology, of the presuppositions of the discourse of dominant classes into the mental world of lower strata.

Domination is not defined finalistically only because the structure of power in society is fluid and subject to historical change. There is an interchangeability of positions which keeps individuals within classes and groups jostling for economic improvement inside a generally oppressive structure rather than trying to destroy it. Ideologically, such intermediaries are crucial; and Gramsci's method of analysis implicitly warns against a romantic overestimation of the spaces of their autonomous discourse. It is because of these interchangeable roles and positions, overlaps and indistinctions that bourgeois power is so durable, because it contains a social principle which prevents the formation of large coalitions of interest against itself. It is the subaltern intermediary who occupies a peculiar double position, who are both dominated and dominant,

whose discourse is caught in this indefinability of their collective position. They are the only groups who ornament their subalternity, surround it with subterfuges.

In the colonial society of late nineteenth century Bengal this classical subaltern intermediary is the babu. Typically, he is the incarnation of a double relation, for he has the opportunity to dominate others in his society. But he also tries to hide his subalternity from others who surround him in social intercourse, his women, his domestics, the whole lower orders, and often with great success from himself.⁵⁴ Politically, much of this class is explained by this duality: this is why the early babu is a reformer and not a nationalist. Reforms were real, but they also represented a theatre of a large collective self deception of babu culture. He could see himself as an equal collaborator with the British rulers in the rationally sacred tasks of improving his society. It helped him to confuse, to his great benefit, the initiatives of utilitarian administrators as his own. To be a political nationalist (ie, minimally, to want British rule to end or generally to wish it ill) required an end to this reformist self deception. The babu must recognise and admit his subalternity squarely before he could wish to put an end to it.

Yet all this time the acceptance of western liberalism deved the babu deeper into contradiction. The babu became a convert to liberalism, but forgot to ask for even elementary self government. He rejoicingly accepted the principles of liberty and equality, but omitted any questioning of the propriety of political subjection. To use an appropriately western concept, one that babus would have appreciated, the babus failed in front of what Aristotle had called a practical syllogism.⁵⁵ If the belief in the general principles of liberal theory were at all serious (the major premise),

and the identification of their political situation was after all entirely obvious (the minor premise), what followed was not a proposition, but an act. This was the structure of experience of the colonial babu intelligentsia: the two erudite brothers in Tagore's poem on the history curriculum were wonderfully informed about the great occasions of fight against unjust and external rule⁵⁶; but failed, as good babus, to draw the self-referring inference. Political defiance was thus absent, unnameable yet always inferable act, the conclusion which followed from all this theoretical premises.

Bankim's Kamalakanta shows the first stages of the rupturing of this discourse. A consciousness that is still imprisoned within the reforming mentality but is not at home in it, a mind which is unable to spell an alternative idiom of political existence, tends to fall back into irony against the world and the self, a double articulation of frustration. Some types of humour contain an element of radical questioning, though not all. Straightforward form of satire have an internally asymmetric structure, by which I mean that its attitude toward its object and its self are entirely different. It does not take its object seriously, but as a matter of ridicule; but it takes itself, its own position in the world and what it has to say with complete seriousness. Often in such satire there is a thinly veiled tone of sanctimoniousness. We can see, to use Kolakowsky's memorable phrase, the jester turning into the priest.⁵⁷

What I have called double irony is different, because it does not contain that internal asymmetry. In mocking at the world, it can also mock at its own mocking at the world. This is not just a rhetorical phrase, but with a precise enough meaning. This implies that if all that the humorous statements say about colonialism is true, then it could hardly do to merely mock at it; and we are back at the guilt about practical syllogism. In

Bankin surely the critique of the babu by Kamalakanta is mixed with a critique of Kamalakanta. It comes close to a nihilistic pessimism: for it satirises power but does not forget to satirise helplessness. It has that rarest of ability to turn the critique towards the self. In calling the world in question, it can also call in question its own pretensions. It is in that sense a deeply tragic sense of the comical. For the sense within a discourse that it is a comic spectacle is an ultimately tragic sense. Ultimately, it is an admission of defeat, of its inability to do anything to the world of injustice, leaving this world regretfully as it found it. I suggest, therefore, that there is a serious theoretical connection between the phases of melancholy and attempts to transcend it through humour. They are not disjointed, but internally related.

The Kamalakanta text is unfinished in two senses. It is of course finished in a most perfunctory way⁵⁸; so formally it could be said not to have an ending. But there is another, it seems deeper, reason. For the Kamalakanta text attempts an important political rupture, rupture in a constituted political discourse, without finding quite an alternative to it. So the argument, the fundamental political idea that this quixotic form expresses is itself unfinished. It has the unfinishedness, the jagged, character of the fragment, not because of its form, but its political, argumentative content. It goes in forward movements and twists. Consider Amar Man (My Mind): the title says it reveals what goes on in his mind; but in the text the bisection of the author himself and the babu is clear. One could almost restate it in the form of the inner dialogue between sumati and kumati in Krishnakanter Will⁵⁹; for the distinction between ami and tumi is between two arguments which reside inside Kamalakanta. The grammatical form actually misstates the philosophic form of the movement of thought. What is most remarkable however is the suddenness of the turn and the unexpected end. After two pages of a solid and a gradually ascending

argument against utilitarianism, the claims of colonial reason, of bourgeois belief in the translatability of everything into money, there is that unmistakable, sudden break, an abandonment of the argument in the middle: tonarē keha kamalākānter ekā bibāha dite pāra? (Could you, anyone, arrange a marriage for Kamalakanta?)⁶⁰ This is just as sudden, as illogical, as such an external closure as some phases in his narratives - Devi's return to domesticity, Satyendra's inexplicable renunciation after victory. What makes it especially intriguing and the text contradictory in the parallel structure of fiction and essay, of high seriousness and jesting; both the argument and the war end in a dissolution after victory.⁶¹ Not surprisingly, his entirely admiring readers saw no disloyalty to their author in choosing to extend the argument and the story beyond the point where their author had concluded them, or did he? This strange humour which constantly touches the borders of melancholy is adequate to the personality and its period; by their simultaneous presence they give a strange coherence to this personality living in its dark time.

FOOTNOTES

1. Kamalakanta, published first as essays in Bankim's periodical, Bangadarsan (BD) between 1873 and 1875, were brought out together as a single work in 1875. Some of the essays appearing in Kamalakanter Daptar were not written by Bankim. A second, revised and enlarged edition was brought out in 1885c. A second edition of this larger work was brought out in 1889.
2. Sukumar Ray, 'Kicari', Aboltebel.
3. Bankim Ranayali (BR), 11, 49.
4. He can be called a lumpen of course. But lumpen in marxist theory is not an independent descriptive term, but indicates a sort of degraded version of more solid social types. People have to lumpenbourgeois, or lumpenproletariat; but it is not easy to find such a second term for him.
5. There is a simpler disjunction in the text itself. It is supposed to have been put together by a person called Bhismadev Khoanavis.
6. This is suggested clearly in the interrogation of Kamalakanta in the court scene in Kamalakanter Jobanbandi (KJ), BR, 11, 101ff.
7. Bankim sees this quite clearly,. Kamalakanta announces in Kamalakanter Patra (KP), I, 'Ki Likhiba?' (What To Write?): "We can produce excellent novels; but we had a desire to write sequels to Don Quixote or Gil Blas, rather than write petty fiction. Unfortunately, we have not been able to read either of these two works yet. Would it meet your needs if we write a sequel to Macaulay's essay, for that too is a novel (fiction) after all?" (92).
8. In a general sense this is true, and I subscribe to it, but I introduce qualifications into this idea in other parts of my argument.
9. BR, 11, 23ff.
10. BR, 11, 49.
11. Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, (trans. Richard Howard), vintage Books, New York, 1973, the English version rather alters the point of the original French title, by relegating it to the subtitle: a history of madness in the age of reason.

12. Foucault's work shows the complex but reinforcing ways in which such definitions were constructed and the controls that were justified in its case.
13. Lu Hsun, Diaries of a Madman.
14. Franz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, (trans. Constance Farrington), Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969.
15. The general structure of this contradictory position of the colonial intellectual is described with admirable clarity by Partha Chatterjee, though I am not in agreement with his confident inclusion of Benkin within this cast of thought. I believe however that he has shown a problem or structure of a fundamental importance, which confronts every nationalist writer, but allows each one of them to shape it in his own way. Some of my differences of judgment with Chatterjee would be obvious from the argument of his chapter. Cf. Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987, especially, chapter 2.
16. For accounts of how European social thought about reform affected administrative initiatives within British colonialism, and how these ideas affected the Indian, but particularly Bengali intelligentsia, see, Eric Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India, Oxford University Press, London, 1959; David Kopf, British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969.
17. Colonial intellectuals could see the fallacy of a consequentialist argument about colonialism simply because they were at the receiving end of these efforts. Considerable confusion still exists about these arguments. Marx's remarks about British Rule in India are, for instance, often read through this form, and I think inappropriately criticised.
18. This is so frequent that it could be called the specific formal signature of Kamalakanta. Not only is the world and its constituted hierarchies turned upside down in what the book says; its manner of saying, in the most formal sense, is made of such turns, inversions, between the two sights and voices, of the rational and the nonsensical.
19. BR, 11, 100.
20. The term the Gita uses.
21. Though the idea of negativeness is more Buddhist than Hindu.

22. The Gita, canto 11, 70.

23. Ibid, 11, 69.

24. For a detailed, and sensitive analysis of such intellectual trends, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988, particularly because it compares the ideas of Bankimchandra with those of Bhubdev Mukhopadhyay. It is a pity that Bhubdev's essays on the comparative sociology of European and Indian societies is not available in English translation, because that is the most systematic and theoretically penetrating discussion of this problem.

25. What I mean by situational is to be distinguished and opposed to the manner of statements in songs which could be called general or abstract. Inside his dancedramas, often individual characters make statements through songs; as statements they are specific to those circumstances. Songs which are not situated within such determinate plots, invite in a way all human beings to be their subjects.

26. Rabindranath Tagore, Gītabitān, 415.

27. Gītabitān, 327.

28. In Tagore's Muktadhāra.

29. The figure of the grandfather too is very common in Tagore's artistic world. Two famous examples could be the figure of the dadamasay in Dekghar (The Post Office) and the character of Basantaray in Bauthakurānīr Hāt.

30. Classical religious doctrine admitted of states of insanity like divyormāda, literally a divine madness, or an insanity touched by the divine. Caitanya's trances are traditionally described as divyormāda, a typical example of an upper case of insanity. However, this is a tradition that is entirely alive in more recent times too: religious masters are called khepa, or pagal, like Ramakhepa of people referring to Ramakrishna as pagla thakur - all by virtue of their possession of this second sight, a vision different from that of common reason.

31. My point is not so suggest strict comparisons, which are invidious. Tagore's outsiders fulfil a different kind of fictive purpose.

32. This idea, that there is an inevitable difference between the form capitalist civilisation assumes in the metropolis and in the colonies, is increasingly common in European radical thought in late nineteenth century. In the colonies however it was quite uncommon at Bankim's time. But Bankim insists on this in his discussions of colonialism and its consequences. This reminds one of the Hegelian idea that some truths in a inequitable world reveal themselves more easily to the slave. This is a paradoxical cognitive privilege of subalternity.
33. These classificatory excesses of rationalist discourse are famously discussed in Foucault. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things, Tavistock, London, 1970.
34. One excellent example of such ingenuity is John Locke's theory which posits at the same time an equal and unequal rationality for mankind. All men have rationality and they are equal in this sense; but they possess it in different degrees. For a wellknown discussion, C B Macpherson, Political Theory of Possessive Individualism Oxford University Press, 1963.
35. There is a large literature which analyses and maps such exclusions from the rationalist conception of humanity. A concise account could be found in E J Hobsbawm, Age of Revolution, Abacus Books, London, 1977.
36. For a detailed and sensitive discussion of this, Tapan Raychaudhury, Europe Reconsidered, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983.
37. Sigmund Freud, Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1983, 140-145.
38. Raychaudhury discusses some of these problems of Bankim's professional career, in chapter 3.
39. Ibid. Anil Seal says rather cryptically: "This left the uncovenanted service as the best opening for Indians. But here promotion and pay went so far and no further. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee swiftly scaled the ladder as high as deputy collector, but here he stopped for eighteen years. The iron of this rung so entered his soul that he took to novel writing." It is not easy to make out what this wishes to suggest. For purely temporal reasons the causal suggestion is false. Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism, Cambridge University Press, 118.
40. Foucault, Madness and Civilisation, 35.

41. BR, ii, 49. For instance, to Bhismadev 'knowledge' does not mean mere knowledge, but that form of knowledge which could be put to some mercenary use: "It cannot be said that he had no education. He had had some English education, and some Sanskrit. But can you call education which does not help you earn money real education?"
42. BR, ii, 85ff.
43. BR, ii, 208, part of the essay on the Bengal Peasantry, Bangadeser Kriśak.
44. BR, ii, 49.
45. 'Gramsci and Different Kinds of Difference', paper for seminar on Gramsci and South Asia, held at Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, July, 1987. That paper suggests a parallel between the two unstructured texts, Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, both of which in my view have a definite firm, one that is close to the way in which ideas are actually thought.
46. Marx, Capital, volume I, afterword to the second German edition.
47. Amar Durgotsav, BR, ii, 79-81.
48. Ibid.
49. Anandamath, BR, i, 676-77.
50. I have discussed this more fully in the section in chapter 4 called 'the identity of a text'.
51. I have in mind particularly the debates around the Subaltern Studies project. See especially the programmatic first essay by Ranajit Guha in Guha(ed) Subaltern Studies, I, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1981.
52. Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971.
53. Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 52-55.
54. Bankim is particularly amused by his attempts to hide the fact of his subjectness from his women; and he makes a great play of the fact that she knows, but the babu normally does not know that she knows; and, to stretch this a bit, she knows that he does not know that she knows.

55. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book Nevea, (trans. J.A.K. Thomson)
Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, 198-202.
56. Tagore, Mangai, 'Bangabir' (Heroes of Bengal). written in 1888.
57. 'The Priest and the Jester', in Leszek Kolakowsky, Marxism and Beyond,
Paladin, London, 1971.
58. It could be said to end three times: first with the end of the daptar,
then after the patra, and finally with the jobanbandi.
59. BR,1, 448-99.
60. BR,11,62.
61. For a fuller discussion of what this dissolution signifies, see chapter 4,
of this work, available in a preliminary form in 'Imaginary History',
Occasional Paper, Second Series, No. 5, Nehru Memorial Museum and
Library, New Delhi, 1988.