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BANKIMCHANDRA AND THE MAKING OF NATIONALIST CONSCIOUSNESS III : A CRITIQUE OF COLONIAL REGION

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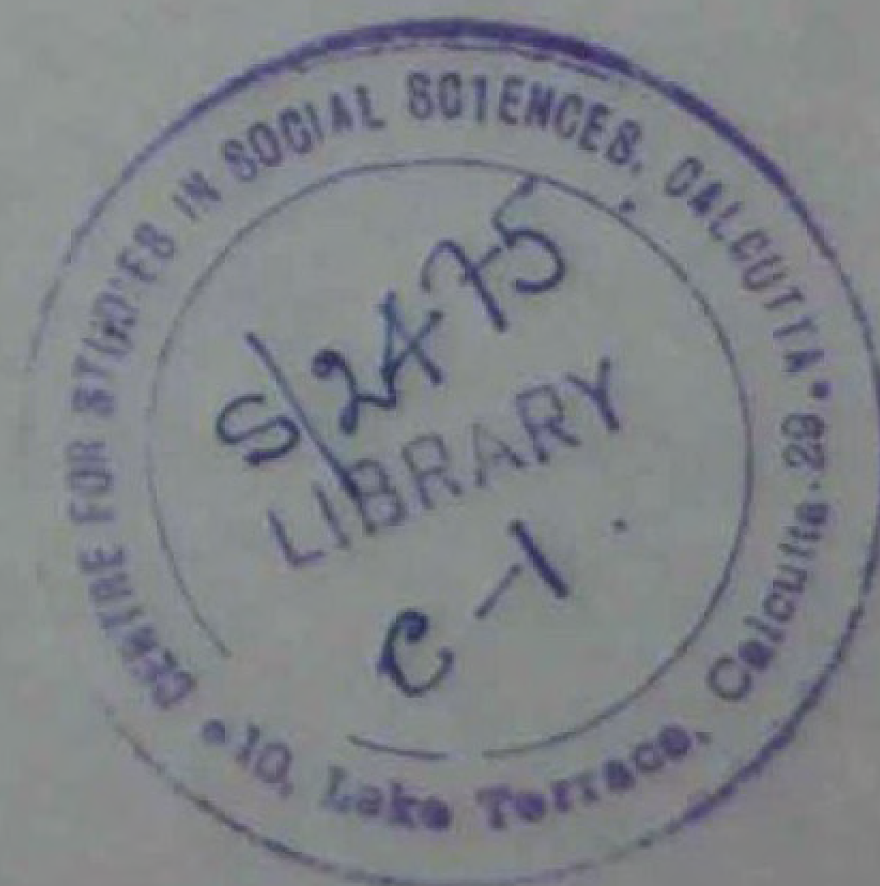

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Humour, is a way of inverting the world, a way of escaping from what is undeniably and intolerably true. I shall begin my textual reading of _Kamalakanta_ with a gesture of inversion. The text has three parts: the _daptar_, his diaries; his letters to the editor of _Bangadarsan_; and a last formally indescribable piece in which Kamalakanta takes on his favourite enemy, his eternal and favourite object of decision, called Kamalakanta's deposition (_Kamalakanter Jobanoandi_).

In _Kamalakanta_, but I suspect elsewhere too in Bankim, there is a space which enjoys an inverted privilege. Of all the spaces within colonial culture, Bankim chooses one which seems to be his favourite, where Kamalakanta and other characters of his creative world constantly return to enact a desecration. Obviously, this space of irony, of defilement, of a peculiarly sarcastic inhabitance is the court.

THE THEATRE OF JUSTICE

In this peculiarly compelling scene of the court the whole discursive field is set out with dramatic clarity, so that we can, if we look closely, see what is involved. The event is formally a judicial process, in which there is a great theatre of dispensing a just verdict; but what it actually achieves in the end is a strange combination of solemnity, injustice and pure farce. The whole colonial dispensation is present there in a transparent code; it is a powerful condensat of all colonial relationships, a scale model of a miraculour authenticity. But there are two dramas going on at the same time. There is at the surface level a judicial case, with its plaintiff, defendant, pleaders and judges: the plaintiff is Prasanna, the milkwoman of Kamalakanta's particular acquaintanc

the defendant a hazy underdetermined Muslim (nede), the witness Kamalakanta, and we have the entire theatrical personae of hākims, moktārs, muhuris. But it is easy to see that there is second judgment being prepared: in this deeper case, the people who get judged to their detriment are Kamalakanta and Prasanna; those who do the accusing and judging (crucially together) are the other set, from the judge down the line through the lawyers (on both sides, because both show an equal incomprehension of Kamalakanta's logic), the petty officials to the lackeys of the court system. Thus Kamalakanta is making a defence in a larger sense. Subtly and indirectly, he is less the witness, more the accused, or if he is witness it is to a defamation of something larger, incomparably more significant than the individual and a trivial cow. Actually, a larger historical case is being heard: and Kamalakanta is defending himself; and thus the scene shifts subtly from the theatre of this everyday courtroom to the general theatre of history where Kamalakanta with the occasional help from Prasanna, is concerned, with his meagre resources, to defend an entire civilisation.

But why is the court his favourite enemy ? Why does Kamalakanta the essayist and Bankim the novelist always choose the system of justice for their particular ironical attention ? Why not something else that is equally undeniably British, or equally clearly unjust ? Surely, there are other, perhaps greater theatres of injustice than the British courts. But in a sense, this institution particularly deserves travesty. For the system of justice is itself a parody in the first place, a distinctly un-Naoroji-like idea.[1] Courts carry on systematic practice of injustice in the name of justice, and the moral and institutional improvement of colonial people. That is why, it is the real centre of colonial ideology and is an eminently

suitable candidate for the unmasking of its pretensions. Earlier we have heard of Kamalakanta's wish, disclosed in a fit of confidentiality, to the Bangadarsan editor, to write a sequel to Don Quixote :

> "we can write novels quite well; although we thought instead of writing trivial fiction we would write sequels to Don Quixote or Giles Blas. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to read either. Would it serve your purpose, sir, if we write an appendix to Macaulay's essay; for that too is a novel, after all."[2]

Here, at the end of his fictive career, he does exactly that. Or indeed perhaps more: for he does not write a Don Quixote, but turns into one and takes on cultural monsters. It could be done only that way, only as parody, as a caricature of the self; in the world of colonialism, it was not in the realm of the possible. In a sense, there is thus an ambivalent climax, both a high point and the low point of Kamalakanta's idiosyncratic narrative: For he realises here, in a formal symbolism of the theatre what he had earlier merely suggested - a battle between the colonial rationalist system and its accomplices, and the single, vulnerable, unaided native, fortified by the double conviction of his helplessness and rightness. Appropr to the double valued structure of the narrative, this high poi is indistinguishable from its point of collapse, for here the text changes its tone degenerates often into pure farce. It i a literal denoument, for Kamalakanta does not appear again. Khosnavis, the babu chorus on his activity dismisses him with finality: dekhilām mānustā/nitanta ~~khepia~~ giāche:[3] I realised the man had become completely, irretrievably mad. Kamalakanta realise himself by going over a boundary of some kind, beyond the possibility of compromise and translation. From the point of view of collaborative colonial rationality, he was lost beyond redemption.

In this lonely battle Kamalakanta's manner of fighting is interesting. Notice his weapons. There were of course traditional arguments with which conservative Indians had fashioned a kind of defence the argument which said that our society was different, and your laws, though abstractly fine, do not fit this society.[4] Kamalakanta spurns such weapons. He goes directly into attack, not with "our" weapons, but "theirs". He is out to show - not that those arguments do not apply here - which grants that they are sound as arguments, but that they are inconsistent. Rationalism, when questioned from presuppositions different from its own, breaks down under investigation. But to do that, you must be a Kamalakanta, accept loneliness, to have the radical courage to turn his own trial into a trial of the court.

This farcical ending of Kamalakanta contains an intriguing questioning of the problem of identity as rationalism conventionally constructs it. On my reading, it also does something far more interesting and fundamental. Kamalakanta was a subtle observer of the complicity of philosophy in language and social practice; and it did not escape him that rationalism claims to use a peculiarly clear language, a language of the literal which holds in unambiguous forms its objective images of the world. Science speaks this clear, literal language, and so does judicial process and law, the field which, like science, claimed ability to reach undistorted truth. Kamalakanta's critique of rationalism must therefore begin at the beginning, in this literal language, in which beyond the judge and the lawyers, beyond even the legal system, his object of ridicule is the linguistic pretence of rationalism. It shows the vacuousness of its concept of identity, a concept or principle taken to be self-evident.

His brush with the court here is unusually violent: but that was hardly his fault. For in the first scene the court, representing western theory, is peremptory and aggressive. It asks Kamalakanta to define his identity before the actual business begins. The case is one of minor cattletheft: a cow belonging to Prasanna, the provider of milk and human kindness to Kamalakanta has been stolen and apparently found. During the proceedings inside the court it is tethered outside, suffering from a less acute problem of identity of its own. Kamalakanta is brought in as a prosecution witness to identify the vital cow, on the basis of her welljudged belief (she does not know how welljudged it is) that 'this Brahmin never tells lies'. This description is expected to do a great deal for the story, because it is because of his inability to play false, to bear a life of lies that Kamalakanta has accepted a life of madness. From the interpretative point of view the fact that the case is minor is evidently not a minor matter. It is a strange, evocative combination of the minor and the essential, an almost Gramscian construction. It is in its minor, everyday moments, its gestures of absentminded functioning that a system, a theory or a set of practices reveals itself, what it truly is.

As a matter of course, the court asks Kamalakanta to identify himself. Obviously it considered the question of identity a minor, routine one to be inattentively taken for granted. It does not realise the enormous significance of asking a thinking person "who are you?". Kamalakanta violently refuses - deconstructing, undermining, ridiculing the concept of identity implicit in the court procedure. He converts this from a mere empirical datum to a philosophical question. It is in that sense, though not aesthetically, a climatic point of interrogation and refusal.

Who are you? the lawyer asks Kamalakanta, disastrously underating his victim. (Literally a victim, badhya, to be destroyed; in his incarnation as the lawyer his legitimate victim is the litigant).[6] Kamalakanta refuses, and begins to play with this most commonsensical of questions. What could be more reasonable as a start of a judicial process, any process of judging? How do we judge a discourse unless we know who it is that speaks? How can Kamalakanta question this question? How can he see, or pretend that he sees unreasonableness in the most routine opening of a lawsuit? I believe this is the crucial centre of his enterprise. From the critical point of view, his approach is unexceptional, indeed, the only properly critical one. As a lonely critic, in a strange world in which even those he is speaking for are not with him, he realises that to be a critic is 'to go to the root of the matter' and to go to the root of the matter is to get behind the selfevidence of words and objects. Behind Kamalakanta's apparently casual style there lies thus a deadly serious programme of critical replies. In this we can hardly do better than follow the content literally.

"Kamalakanta was put into the witness box, and started chuckling.
The attendant took him to task : 'why are you laughing?'
Kamalakanta said with folded hands, 'I have not done anybody any harm, why are you boxing me up like this ?' The attendant did not see his point, shook his beard and said, 'This is not a place for jokes (tamasa, a clear double entendre, for it means both the art of joking and an object of jokes, something that is farcical or comic). Take the oath.' Kamalakanta said, 'Carry on'.
A. muhuri then began to read out the oath: Say 'With the direct knowledge of the almighty .....
K. (astonished) what was that you said?
M. Can't you hear me? 'With the direct knowledge of the almighty.'
K. With the direct knowledge of the almighty ! My goodness !
The Judge noticed that the witness was causing some trouble and asked, what disaster?
K. Must I say that I had direct knowledge of the almighty?
J. What is wrong in that? That is the form of the oath, after all

K. You are a great judge indeed, sir. It could perhaps be excused if I said some minor lies in course of my deposition, but should we begin by such a massive untruth?

J. What do you find untrue in this?

Kamalakanta said to himself "you would not have come this far if you could guess. Aloud he said, 'Your honour, I always had the impression that God was not an object of direct knowledge. I have never yet seen him clearly, directly, but that could be because of poor sight.'

The judge, to make matters brief, said, 'Give him a simple affirmation'. Kamalakanta is now asked to say "I swear", which he refuses on the Austinian ground that he could hardly say I swear without knowing what he would have to swear to. It is in other words a performative; and it was rather like getting someone to sign on a blank paper, which, he says archly, is common practice under the colonial administration. "I knew this was done outside court all the time, but did not know this was court procedure as well". Beginning his interrogation the lawyer asks what is his name, and what is his father's name, leading Kamalakanta to enquire if even depositions must have genealogies. 'Which caste are you?' which reading it literally he answers by asking how could he, an individual constitute an entire caste. Which category? Of the Hindu category.

Which _varna_?
Very dark. (because _varna_ means both colour and caste).
Have you got a caste?
Who can take it away?

Asked his age, Kamalakanta says, 'fiftyone years, two months, thirteen days, four hours, five minutes....
What nonsense. Who wants your hours and minutes?
Why? Did you not make me swear just now that I would not withhold any information?
Do what you will. I can't handle you. Where do you live?
Nowhere.
I mean where is you home?
I do not have a room to call my own, let alone a house.
Where do you live, then?
Wherever I can.
Dont you have an address of some sort?
I did when Nasibabu was alive, no more.

Where are you now?
Why? In this courtroom !
Where were you last night?
In a shop.
The judge butted in and said, 'let us stop this debate,
let me write down that he 'lives nowhere'.
What is your profession?
Am I a lawyer or a prostitute that I must have a profession?
I mean, how to you manage to eat?
Usually, mixing rice with dal, using my right hand to left it,
and direct it into my mouth down into the throat.
How is that rice and dal provided for?
If God provides them, not else.
Do you earn anything?
Not a penny.
Do you steal, then?
If I did, I would have sought your assistance sooner, and
you would have got your share of my earnings."

The lawyer fails. He gives up and tells the court he would not be able to question this witness. Symbolically, intransigence wins over power. For all the majesty of its power, the rationalist system of the court fails in its main dramatic purpose; it cannot bring Kamalakanta to submit to its discourse, to answer its questions its way. Rather, what happens is just the opposite, the questioning of the victim, Kamalakanta, breaks up the court's discourse, destroys its two crucial pretences of objectivity and consistency. The discourse of colonialism, and its supporting discourse of European enlightenment, are shown to be hollow and eventually vulnerable; its majesty holds only as long as its power exists, only as long as its interlocutors do not question its assumptions. Colonialism admits of no rational defence.

Kamalakanta's intellectual weapons in the court scene deserve some attention. He uses a simple but fascinatingly effective technical means. No one can escape the pervading sense of consistent, unremitting irony in his language, a startled feeling that nothing in colonial discourse is beyond an ironical double entendre, some ambiguity in its linguistic structure which Kamalakanta can seize upon, and overturn.

Its technical means is simple. Every sentence that is uttered fits into two quite different language games. These utterances have standard and unsurprising meanings within the language game of the judiciary, and more largely, within the life-form of colonialism.[10] However, they also have startlingly different meanings within Kamalakanta's language game, within the possible life-form of the uncolonised mind. Curiously, it is the language and the idiom of the Gita which is constantly invoked in a subtle and at the same time parodied form.

In KJ the technique by which self evidence of social relations are broken down is the simplest of all, a technique that insists on using words in their pristine literality. It treats every statement as if every word composing it means exactly what it says, and judging whether that statement, in this frighteningly literal form, can be allowed to pass. This immediately shows the haziness and negligent ambiguity of conventional speech of the court crowd. It is a symbolically indistinct crowd, formed partly of a judge, the lawyers, the transcribers, the ushers - all of whom are seen partially as in a painting of a crowd : their thinking and speaking are hazy, and they are entitled to only the haziest of existence. Against them figurally, Kamalakanta stands out clear and undeniable: he alone who takes responsibility for his words, who goes to the primal quality of their meanings deserves to be noted at all. The qualification for being a serious critic is set out sharply - a critic has to give to his vocation his life, not his spare evenings. Criticism is not a way of saying things, but a way of being in the world. But in this, its prepolitical stage, there is only one weapon of the critic, the literal words.

Kamalakanta's technique in taking apart the myth and theatre of colonialism and its ideology of justice is playing this game of literality against the literal language of judicial reason. We realise immediately that this is a particularly

powerful instrument of caricature, for it makes fun of the fundamental claims of rationalist discourse. Caricature of this sort does not merely show gaps or infelicities in rationalist doctrine from the outside; it does something more lethal.

It is an inextricable part of the rationalist project to clarify language, and its relationship with the world. It sees itself as a force that cleanses language, destroys superstition, and is entirely consistent within itself. To show that rationalism itself does what it condemns in others, to demonstrate that it is not adequate to its own declarations, is a particularly damaging criticism. And Kamalakanta's criticism of the enlightened court is mostly of this form. The theatre and conventions of colonial judicial practices were meant to induce belief that the process going on was unbiased, an entirely rational judgment about a case. These conventions are derived from prevalent philosophical doctrines, suitably dramatised and abbreviated into a popular language. Conversely, the judicial procedure draws its claim to immunity from criticism from philosophical theories of truth. Kamalakanta's early remarks reveal that this language and the philosophy that confers respectability on it, are full of unexamined propositions. Thus a theory which prides itself on its freedom from superstition begins with superstitious beliefs; a theory which ridicules others practices has ridiculous practices of its own. A system which declares its objectivity is biased in its own initial moves. Nothing could be more ignominious to rationalist doctrine than ridicule of this kind.

Examples are carefully constructed so that utterances have a routine meaning within the court language, but outside the language of the court they still retain enough of an identifiable meaning, but a meaning that is offensive, laughable or goes wild. The whole scene illustrates how, although they speak ceremoniously to each other, and are structured into

the same face to face situation, they are not able to effectively communicate. Kamalakanta's perverse consistency in misunderstanding whatever the lawyer says underscores this lack of communication. A word like sambandha (relation),[11] with a purely neutral connotation in law, means a simple acquaintance. In ordinary discourse of Bengali social life it could mean a marital, and special innuendo, extramarital relation, the sense in which Kamalakanta takes the word, to create an excuse for taking offence. A lighter game is played on the word sāmlā[12] indicating indistinctly a black cow or the lawyer's gown. This comedy of errors works on an interesting principle. In hermeneutic theory interpretative superiority is ascribed to that view which understands the view of the other, without its obverse being true. The situation in Kamalakanta is exactly similar: those who speak the indigenous discourse must, because of their subjection, understand the English rationalist language game. But the British, or the babu who inhabit the discourse of the coloniser and are used to its privileges, need not do this. Therefore, while what the lawyer or judge says is clear to Kamalakanta, although he creates more impenetrable incomprehension precisely because he understands, this is not true of the other side. By a different route, and in a literary manner Bankim comes to emphasise the idea that the subaltern, the dominated, must have a clearer view of the world, an idea that could almost be taken from the phenomenology.

At the end of the episode Kamalakanta is back to the question of colonial conquest in a reference that is at the same time explicit and travesties; the minor affair of the cattle theft is regarded as a small but typical example of the historical principle involved which make aggrandisement and justice indistinguishable

"Long ago a brahmin said to King Syenajita, between the owner of a cow and the thief whoever drinks its milk has a stronger claim to possession. For others to express any attachment to it is importunate. This is the law of the Hindus as expounded by Bhismadeva Thakur; this is the current European international law. If you wish to be regarded as civilised and advanced, you must snatch things away from others. Whether the word '<u>go</u>' means the earth or the cow, she is destined in either case for the enjoyment of theives. All theives from Alexander to Ranajit Singh illustrate this rule. If the right of conquest can be a right, why not the right of theft? Therefore, O Prasanna, act according to law. Follow the lessons of the history of diplomacy. Let the thief take the cow."[13]

It is obvious that in the court scene, if we understand the codes correctly, there is a refusal to say things, to participate in a particular discourse. But I am not sure that is all there is to this text. Within his refusal to say a discourse, I am not sure that he is not saying something else. Actually we simply see that he is refusing to answer the questions of the court, the underlying question of right conduct; but really he does give an answer. Our reconstruction till now is onesided and misleading, because although it shows something true about the text, that truth lies near its surface. What Kamalakanta does should not be regarded as a mere nondescription of the self; at a deeper level, it offers a description of the self in terms that are entirely different from what rationalist discourse can conceive.

If his answer to the court is not read as a series of no-sayings, like stating I would not say where I live, or more radically, I do not stay anywhere, or connecting all such nonanswers and thus undermining the court's conception of rationality, one perhaps finds something more interesting in the meaning of his madness. His intransigence could refer subtly to the condition of being <u>aniketa</u>,[14] someone who refuses a parochial home in order

to live in the world. It is then a positive philosophical statement, which the court, because it is inacquainted with Indian thought misunderstands in a way both comic and infuriating. The ideal of the aniketa even though translated to the hākim, would only elicit the astounding mistranslation - nibās nāi.[15] This is typical: it is both a literal transliteration of the word and a total incomprehension of the concept.

Perhaps Kamalakanta is doing more than what we saw in the firs place, with or without full knowledge of its author. It is inadequate to see him as merely nonstating, playing a farcical game of wrong answers; in fact, he is playing a game of a far more serious and deeper kind with the court. Through his enig and riddles he is indeed stating positive things. There is an underlying system of description of the self, but so coded th it might be missed by its two audiences, the internal audience of the court, but also by readers like us, to the extent we a like the people inside the court. The appellation of madness used by the dominant discourse is a way of creating a privacy for one's language. Within his game, it makes perfect sense say and not say exactly what he does: that he has no professio no residence, no income none of the fixed bourgeois references which are supposed to constitute a man's personality. They do so contingently, only in this social arrangement, and does no have any transcendental title to truth. Kamalakanta asserts, effect, you may know a person's income, profession, address, the entire list of characateristics which, on this theory, constitute his personality, yet not know him. By this, he is creating space within language to say both things, an enormous terrain of defence and interrogation. Through this undecipherable complexity, a language in which we are never able to reach the bottom, he does not seem to be what he is really doing. He is perpetually absconding within these words.

II

The Babu in synchrony and diachrony

This social world of Bankim can be mapped by a triangle of characters. In Kamalakanta, there are, apart from the unclassifiable commentator himself, who does not speak the language of any particular group, some other characters. Between them, they describe the social geography of colonial Bengali society. There is Prasanna, the symbol of the feminine, with the complex addition that she also represents the popular. There is the indistinct collective portrayt of the court men. They are of course paradigmatic babus, displaying their quintessential features. They are alienated from their society, achieving somehow a miraculous foreignness to their own culture. They speak and inhabit a foreign discourse. They are the ultimate subalterns, heteronomous actors with exaggerated conceptions of their own autonomy and reformism. The characteristic that distinguishes the babu in Bankim's time and ours is crucially the acquired unfamiliarity with one's own culture, its language and its discourses under the misleading belief that one has mastered those of the modern and advanced west. The historical a priori of their thinking, as Dilthey would have called them, are curiously not of their own culture but of another, a peculiar monstrosity that colonialism alone can produce. The men of the court are superstitious rationalists (rationalists without knowing why it is good to be a rationalist), which is their collective structural property, quite apart from being, as individuals, disingenuous rascals. But beyond the babu one gets an occasional glimpse of the third element of the Bengali society, the typical British colonial administrator. It is between these three that the entire social geography of colonial Bengal is laid out. I shall treat these types in succession :

first with the babu, the real object of description and travest
in the text. Second, we shall open up the condensation in the
character of Prasanna, and treat her two different characteris-
tics distinctly, the role and symbolism of the woman, and the
role of the popular characters in Bankim's humour. Although th
popular do not erupt in Bankim's descriptive world too often,
when they do, they appear as representatives of a laughing peop
Finally, we would turn to examine briefly, the figures of the
few Englishmen, because they complete the fictional picture of
the colonial society.

Within the pretences of the work, Kamalakanta's journals rests
on a scandal symbolic of the babu character. Kamalakanta's
conversations with himself are published by Bhismadev Khosnavis
without his knowledge and permission. There is a suggestion of
the transgression of privacy, a making public for pecuniary ga
what was meant to exist only as soliloquy, a form of expressio
which a man can afford to enter only with himself. But there i
also an immediate distintion between the function of the use o
words. For Kamalakanta the gift of thought is to enjoy and
unravel the world; for Khosnavis ideas are merely to be brought
into print, that is the destiny of all words.

The great object of attention of the Kamalakanta text of course
is the babu, he is the constant object of Bankim's humour, in a
its various moods, from the vicious, to the gentle to the
forgiving. And, not surprisingly, the babu is not a new theme
with Bankim, won for the dazzling show of his wit in KD; indeed
he is, in this wry sense, his first love. Two of his earliest
pieces of humourous writing immediately and unerringly identifi
this abiding object of his sarcasm, the babu the collective typ
with whom the author has such a fertile relation of contradict
He is undeniably a part, and at the sametime, he could not acc
he was a part, leading to the foundation of the great traditio

Bengali literary self-irony. Ingrājstotra (hymn to the Englishman),[16] helpfully subtitled 'translated from the Mahābhārata', the all seeing chronicle of India comprising its past and future, at once establishes both the form and the content of this humour. The stotra would undergo unending experiment at Bankim's hands, running the whole gamut of sentiments from the ridiculous to the sentimentally serious.[17] He was indeed to reshape this most fundamental form of invocation in the Hindu tradition to startlingly novel purposes. To be a stotra a composition must however conform to some purely formal properties of style. Incomparability of the deity is conveyed by a mannerism of descriptive excess.[18] Stotras usually have a circular, repetitive style, coming back, after each cycle of excessive praise to the signature phrase. In Bankim's early travestied uses of the stotra form there is a certain defilement of its style which can come only with an easy and shrewd familiarity with its formal aspects, just as a successful cartoonist would create laughter by exaggerating credible features of a face. Early parodies like the Ingrājstotra are therefore convex satires which pour sarcasm on the Englishman, the object of the incantation, the babu, the reciter whose discourse it encapsulates, but also, subtly, the doctrine of excess in the stotra form itself.

Formally, it immediately affiliates itself to Bankim's favourite, the alamkara of vyajastuti; and its content is a double description: a description of the Englishman in terms which vividly describe the describer, a self-characterisation of ascending/ intensifying servility.

> O one who can divine what is going on inside our minds ! whatever I do is meant to win your heart. (Though the Bengali verb 'bhulaibar janyya' is more doubleedged, and means equally, to deceive you;

> so the correct rendering of meaning would be: to win your heart by deception.) I give to charity because you will call me generous; I help others so that you call me an altruist; I study so that you may call me learned....
>
> If you so wish (Or, because you wish it) I shall establish dispensaries, for your approbation, I shall set up schools, according to your demands I shall give subscriptions. I shall do whatever you consider proper. I shall wear boots and pantaloons; put spectacles on my nose, eat with knife and fork, dine at a table, please have pleasure on me.
>
> I shall renounce my mother tongue to speak your language, abjure my ancestral religion and adopt the Brahmo faith, instead of babu use Mr as a prefix to my name, be pleased with me.
>
> I have given up my meals of rice and now eat bread; I do not feel properly fed until I have some forbidden meat; I make it a point to have chicken for snacks, therefore, O Englishman, please keep me at your feet.
>
> Please grant me wealth, honour, fame, fulfil all my desires. Appoint to high office, or a raja, or a raybahadur, or a member of the Council; if you cannot grant all that, invite me, at least, to your at homes and dinners, nominate me a member of high committees or the senate, or make me a justice or an honorary magistrate....
>
> Please attend to my speeches, please read my essays, give approbation - then I would not pay attention to the denunciation of the whole of Hindu society.[19]

There are two levels of meaning in this false hymn, clearly. At the first level, there is a caricature of both the babu and the Englishman who confers honour on him. Characteristically, Bankim goes immediately to the heart of the matter, cutting through the pretences. Only in appearance is colonial society a field of career open to talent, an achieving society at bottom, the colonial administrative system does not encour[age] meritocracy. The Englishman can give anything: it is the

arbitrariness of his conferments, his decisions which is emphasised, and which makes the babu's supplicatory self abasement a proper complement to it. High honour under colonialism in Bengal is not recognition for desert or services and ability, but for capacity for self-abasement. Clearly, colonialism confers on the Englishman a mystical power of nominalism; he can name anything into anything; and the main point is to be so named by the right authority. The English can rename all social and moral descriptions: and most tellingly of all, the babu's adoption of reform and rationalism is revealed for what it is. He is a rationalist out of opportunism, and entirely unclear about how a rationalist argument is grounded: he would do all the right things - accept modernity, break tradition, adopt altruism, not because he can ground it himself in reason, but because the English would consider it laudable. The babu's acceptance of western rationalism is fundamentally tainted by this heteronomy. Thus two types of acts can be behaviouristically indistinguishable: but whether it is an act of altrusism or servility can be found only by looking into its rational authenticity. The upside down character of the colonial world is etched in briefly and powerfully through this supplicatory refrain: I will do everything you ask for: turning the right acts into wrong ones. That is why colonial society is such a proper field for a sárcastic demystification. Even seemingly high-minded action must be probed by this saraostic mistrust, until they reveal their true motives. It is the unapparent, indistinct intention which can tell an act of kindness from an act of imitative servility, or simply verbal posing from genuine intellectual curiosity.

But this was an early piece. Compared to the subtlety and power of his later caricatures of the babu discourse, this piece was rather unrefined. Its significance lies in the fact

that it sets a pattern, a fundamental descriptive structure, a
it is interesting how little the main point of the structure o
babuness would change in his mind. In sheer literary quality,
it is not of the standard of the first, elegant essay on the
learned man among the tigers of Southern Bengal who delivers a
public lecture on his literally anthropological observations o
human society when he had strayed out of the forest and spent
an instructive period in the Calcutta zoo.[20] In that essay t
there are two of the abiding elements of Bankim's irony: the
relativity of truth and the possibility of inversion. Much o
human behaviour appears predictably irrational to the tiger.
Secondly, there is already at work this imaginative search fo
adequate ambivalent allegoresis: the tiger clearly a combinat
of superior strength and indifference of intellect. The tige
of course misconstrues the customs of human society, but does
it with the confidence normally found only among seasoned
anthropologists. However this piece is still closer to pure
humorous writing, for we do not find a systematic code so tha
all statements about tigers can symmetrically translated into
statements about someone else. But this wit turns immediatel
afterwards, in the succeeding pieces of the Lok Rahasya (LR)
into satire - pointed, malicious, with a clear target and a
deadly aim so that every sally finds its target perfectly. I
fact, part of the social geography of the colonial Bengal is
already laid out; for the main speakers in the pages of the L
are also the babu, English writers about India and the babu's
as yet culturally unreconstructed wife. It contains a piece
such sustained irony that I doubt if even Bankim ever matched
its vitriolic excellence.[21]

Like the hymn, this too is purportedly taken from the Mahābh
using it and travestying it at the same time, turning its
claims to allseeingness against itself. Vaisampāyana, the s

who recited the epic at the court of Janamejaya is caught in the early parts of his performance; and the king, a man of great historical curiosity, requests the sage to recite to him the qualities (guna)[22] of those who would adorn the earth in the nineteenth century and be known as the babus. This piece is particularly resistant to translation because of its heavy reliance on the form of vyajastuti manipulating with great skill the ambivalent associations of phrases and straight double meanings of terms in Sanskrit. In terms of the formal properties of his humour, Bankim is much closer to the classical tradition, and his humour uses wordplay much more than, say, Tagore's where wit depends more on meanings. Udaracaritra, for instance means one whose being is centred on his stomach, though phonetically close to udaracaritra, noble. Though Bankim used such pieces of modern vyajastuti later, few indeed would come anywhere near this unparalleled intensity of humour and ambivalent denunciation.

The author and reciter of the Mahābhārata enjoy the reputation of being sarvadarsī, allseeing. And this is not in vain; for he compresses the historical characteristics of the babu into an unsurpassable construction. The complex features which make the modern Bengali eligible for this ambiguous praise-abuse are described to perfection by Vaisampāyana, even from such historic distance. It is so good that it founds something like a distinct genre of praise-abuse of the self of the Bengali middle class bhadralok.[23] Only the rise of more serious nationalist politics puts an end to this humorous literary tradition.

An approximate idea of Vaisampayāna's characterisation of the babu could be found in some of the passages, though a translation would miss the insistence of the series of adjectives in Bankim's use:

"Babus are invincible in speech, proficient in foreign languag and hates their own, indeed, there would appear some *babus* of such amazing intellect that they would be altogether incapabl of using/conversing in their mother tongue. The *babus* are those who would save without clear purpose, earn in order to save, study in order to earn, and steal question papers to do well at examinations. Indeed, the word *babu* would be many-splendoured in its meanings: those who would rule India in th *kali* age and be known as Englishmen would understand by the wo a common clerk or superintendent of provisions; to the poor i would mean those wealthier than themselves, to servants the master. I am however celebrating the qualities of some peopl whose only purpose in life would be to spend a fittingly *babu* existence. If anyone takes this in any other meaning, his he ing of this *Mahābhārata* would be fruitless;[24] in his later existences he will be born as a cow and constitute a part of *babus'* dinner... Anyone who is devoid of any poetic sense, w an execrable musical sensibility, whose only knowledge is confined to textbooks read in childhood, and who regards hims as omniscient is a *babu*.... Like Visnu they would also always lie on an eternal bed. Like Visnu, they too would have ten incarnations: clerk, teacher, Brahmo, broker, doctor, lawyer, judge, landlord, newspaper editor and idler. Like Visnu, in every incarnation, they would destroy fearful demons. In his incarnation as a clerk he would destroy his orderly, as a teacher he will destroy the student, as station master the ticketless traveller, as Brahmo the small priest, as broker t English merchant, as doctor his patient, as lawyer his client, as judge the litigant, as landlord his tenants, as editor the ordinary gentlemen, as idler the fish in the pond. ... Anyon who has only one word inside his mind, which become ten when he speaks, hundred when he writes and thousands when he quarr is a *babu*. He whose strength is one-time in his hands, tenti

in his mouth, a hundred times in his back and absent at the time of action is a babu. He whose household deity is the Englishman, preceptor is the Brahmo preacher, scriptures are newspapers, and place of pilgrimage is the national theatre is a babu. One who gives himself out as a Christian to missionaries, as a Brahmo to Kashubchandra,[25] as a Hindu to his father and an atheist to the Brahmin beggar is a babu. One who drinks water at home, alcohol at his friend's, receives abuse at the prostitute's house, and kicks at his employer's is a babu... He who hates oil while taking his bath, his own fingers when eating, and for his mother tongue in conversation is indeed a babu....

O King, the people whose virtues I have recited to you would come to believe that by chewing pan, being prone on the pillow, having bilingual conversation, and smoking tobacco they will regenerate their country."[26]

Janamejaya, apparently an astute observer of mankind, had a fairly clear idea of what sort of beings the babus would be, and requested the sage, 'O sage, let the babus be victorious, please turn now to some other subject'.[27]

I have on several occasions mentioned a stylistic feature of Bankim's prose, his deliberate use of sanskritic tropes, and his general nearness in language use to the classical literary tradition. Nowhere does this come out so clearly as in this piece. His humour is inextricably related to the pleasurable discovery of the idiosyncracies of language, the capricious associations of its idioms, nouns, verbs. Entirely dissimilar things sound lingusitically, or rather phonetically similar.[28] This is stuff out of which poets would conventionally create the end-rhymes of their poetry. But this sort of classical poetics realises shrewdly that there is a place for such capricious phonetic similarity within prose styles too, creating startling

sound effects and pleasantly capricious affinities. Bankim literally revels in these startling resemblances. He loves t explore, as the musician does in case of notes, the internal continent of the language as a world of constantly changing, constantly surprising resemblances - of meanings, sounds, of rhythmic patterns. This however shows that Bankim belongs to a period of literary Bengali which is soon left behind. Puns become distinctly less reputable in a few years within seriou prose. Humour, by the time we come to Tagore is nearly all semantic rather than verbal.[29] The locus of the ironical is shifted from the sounds to the meanings, from the sensusous rustle of the language to the ideas connoted.

Bankim is still entirely at home in wordplay. Thus he makes the <u>babu</u> 'eat' the most humiliating menu of insults, using th peculiar idiomatic sense of the verb 'khaoa' to mean generall 'receive'. At Tagore's time, such love for wordplay has already been pushed out of respectable literary prose and has found refuse in humorous poetry, a realm of much greater tolerance, a field of literature specially demarcated for idiosyncracy and innovation. The classic and unsurpassable example of seeing the world in a grain of grammar, is of cou Sukumar Ray's celebrated poem to the verb for eating, <u>Khāi Kh</u> left unanlysed, alas, despite its obvious semantic and formal riches.

It exhorts the gastronomer to leap from theory to practice - <u>khāi khāi karo keno eso baso āhāre</u>,[31] but he follows it up wi a wonderfully ambiguous invitation which we tend to ignore: <u>khāoābo ājab khāoā bhoj kay jāhāre</u>.[32] We are invited to a <u>peculiar</u> dinner (or, in a Bengali context, more likely, it is a lunch). We are apt to be surprisised if we do notnotice th initial ambiguity in the invitation: in our expectation of th dinner, we forget the caution that it will be unusual. We ar

asked to spend an anxious time in preparation,[33] for we expect him to bring in everything the Bengali cuisine offers, and more. This is indeed what he does, but with a sharp and outwitting twist. We were inattentive and did not notice the play in the offer itself: he is not bringing us food, what is produced in the Bengali kitchen, but a menu of eating words, phrases that are written with 'eat' in our language. That alone can impose this weird but entirely unexceptionable similar between food and an absurd list of experiences, not merely befalling human beings, but also to inanimate things (tol khāy ghatī bātī, dol khāy khokārā).[34] The world is given a peculiar order, irrefutable, in its own terms, by the single, ubiquituous verb. He is thus entitled to turn hilariously from a gargantuan menu to a list of verbs and idioms.

Strangely, this is a triumph of literality. We cannot fault him for breach of faith, by saying that we literally expected food, because what could be more literal than the word itself, than the written verb? The poem takes its promise literally and fulfils it. He had after all written, jata kichu khaoā lekhe bāngālīr bhāsate: 'all the eating words that figure in the Bengali language'; he would look for them, rummage through the disorderly pile of our linguistic usage and serve them to us. That is exactly what he has done; if we are disappointed, that is hardly his fault. We took the wrong signal. Apart from being a poetic wonder, it is also an incredible semantic feat. Bankim's menu of humiliation is of the same genre of literary composition.

If we analyse all his characterisations, for Bankim, the babu's primary feature, which is instantiated in varying ways, is inauthenticity. The babu is a sudden and nonautochthonous arrival on the social scene. He was not implicit in any earlier development in Indian or Bengali society; he derives his sudden

appearance and immediate eminence to colonial conquest. So
babu is not the result of his own history, in a sense; he is
simply a contemptible corollary of British conquest of India
society. Inauthenticity is reflected in different aspects o
the *babu's* existence, and two fields are taken up for specia
attention: the *babu's* pretensions of power based on a ration
conception of the world, and his cultural existence, his cla
to be cultivated intellectually. Sometimes, it has been
remarked, to Bankim's detriment, that he did not understand
the intricacies of colonial political economy clearly enough
a strange and grevious fault in one who is so critical of
colonialism as a historical phenomenon.[35] In a limited sens
this objection is certainly valid. Even in his serious fora
into the historical role of colonialism in Indian society, h
comes often close to the frontiers of a political economy
argument, but does not get into that terrain.[36] The commons
sical discussions about the poverty and exploitation of the
peasantry are not seriously economic in character. However,
appears, to understand the historical nature of colonialism,
political economy is not the only route. Colonialism establ
immediately a particular logic of assaulting the colonised
culture; and if someone is a perceptive observer of this, h
as happens with Bankim, understand the larger logic of the
relation between the colonising and the colonised societies.
At least, he grasps with a sharp lucidity the great dismal
of nineteenth century colonial life: that colonialism does
allow a reenactment of European bourgeois development; it s
in motion an oppressive travesty.[37] By a cultural argument
Bankim establishes this truth for himself very early in his
career. Therefore, although he is not able to provide a
penetrating account of the political economy of *zamindari*,
is able to mount a withering attack on the *babu*, the creatu
of colonial reason.

The rationality of the babu which allows him to declare his flimsy rebellion against traditional Hindu society is derived from his conversion to a kind of discourse, made possible by the new, western education. But there are two senses in which this rebellion is hollow. Intellectual rebellions too have thei political aspects; the babus did not work through the logic of a rebellion against Hindu society. They were the products of the great externality of Indian history, their rise did not lie in anything internal to the processes of Indian events. They were the products, the accidental beneficiaries of the fateful process of British conquest. Affiliation to British power made them both vulnerable and irresistible. They could change everything they wanted in traditional Indian society, not by their own power, but of those they had chosen to become cultural brokers. This peculiarly vulnerable, shaky omnipotenc of the babu alternately produce mirth and indignation in Bankim literature.

Bankim lived at a time when the ambitions of the babu were primarily cultural and reformist; but he could see that it was already becoming political at the edges, something Bankim could only laugh at. He found even pretensions of reformism (of the Brahmo variety) ridiculous; no wonder he would conside the idea of more adult political ambitions of this dependent class a sordid joke. Politics, he implies, had two great sources: it could arise out of real power, or of a genuine, large, historic resentment. Babus were mere heteronomous agen of others' ideas and others' acts. Consequently, they lacked either the power to really restructure and rearrange their own society; for that kind of renewal too needs courcage, the sort of courage that the politics of the enlightenment demonstrated in European history; or the responsibility of being the focus of a society's historical resentments. Both these could arise out of being part of the society's logic of political or

economic reproduction, what could be called, in a different wa
greater authenticity. But this class lacked either of these
distinctions; for they were parasitical growths on the tree of
colonial power, a flimsy external imposition. As a result, th
were vulnerable from two sides; they did not know where they
stood with the British, and their position could change drasti
cally with the merest change in administrative policy of the
colonial power. They did not know where they stood in terms o
their relation with the indigenous society. Not accepted as
part of the British colonial power (culturally), rejected as
part of a society they had voluntarily disowned, they represen
the pure form of heteronomy. For such a heteronomous group, s
obtuse as not to see the racial basis of colonialism, who were
not Englishmen, not quite Indians, politics was a ludicrous
proposition. Naturally, it is hardly surprising, that with t
suicidal instinct, the editor of <u>Bangadarsan</u> requests Kamalaka
for an article on a political subject.[38]

The editor asks for an article on politics, because apparently
he would use this as part of his strategy; as a principled
Bengali gentleman, he always invites others, to fight for the
principles he holds most dear to his heart. 'Under the new la
there would be a shortfall of supply of political writing from
other sources;'[39] and Kamalakanta is asked to provide some from
his uncensorable pen. Kamalakanta snorts at the suggestion, a
denies all connection with the world of politics. He does no
he asserts, belong to the directory of politicians. His rambl
letter then bifurcates two definitions of politics, one that
sees it restrictively (the <u>babu</u> way: i.e. what happens in
meetings, speeches and newspaper articles), and the other whi
sees it as universal, something that is inescapable and goes o
everywhere (the non <u>babu</u> way).

"Am I a landlord or a sycophant or a fraud or a beggar or an editor that I should start writing on politics? You have I assume read my journal. Where did I display such imbecility that you ask me to write on politics of all subjects? True, I did occasionally flatter you to secure my supply of opium; still, I have not degenerated to such a selfinterested sycophant that I should write on politics. Fie on your editorship, fie on your gifts of opium, you have not realised that Kamalakanta Sharma is a highminded poet, not a meanspirited dealer in politics (politician)."[40]

But Kamalakanta is a prisoner of his second sight, which cannot stop seeing: it reveals the truth (or the logic) of the world, even when he turns away from it. Exactly this happens to him when he turns away from the irritating prospects of politics. Turning away from the subject he looks at what he initially believes is a ordinary everyday village scene - a courtyard of the house of a poor oilpresser (kōlu), his cattle feeding from their respective pots of hay, his son noisily prosecuting his lunch, his wife generally in charge of the peace of the household. This ordinary sight changes, and he makes a startling discovery. In his reverie he continues to think absently of politics and is reminded of a famous ditty from a folk play (jātrā), a travesty of a classical sloka :[41]

the dumb wishes to break into words
the lame wishes to run about
you likewise wish that learning should occur to you
remarkable wishes ! etc.

(in Bengali :
bōbār iccā kathā phute
khōndār iccā berāy ccute
tōmār iccā vidyā ghate
iccā bate ityādi.)[42]

Interestingly, we find something that we shall come across repeatedly. The voice of truth is a mocking, ironical voice, and the privilege of speaking it is accorded to the folk. W can half guess the historical reason for this, for it is tru historical. Through the unfortunate history of his society, the high culture has become decadent, nearly mute. The new culture is a culture of inauthenticity of colonialism, it si cannot have a right to speak what is true. That can belong to the folk, the voice, the mockery, the ironies of its peo Besides, in the original sloka 'mūkam karoti bācālam/pangur-langhayate girim', it is a mark of the omnipotence of God th he can make the mute garrulous and the lame cross a mountain and obviously, through the slide of associations, for the ba this can be done only by the Englishman who acquires through colonial culture a power, equal to God, of making the imposs happen. Thus, he continues:

> "We similarly wish to do politics, politics every week, everyday, every hour. But exactly like the wish of the dumb for oratorical excellence, the desire of the lame to travel fast, of the blind to see paintings, like the wish of the Hindu widow for the affection of her husband, like my wish for the love of a devoted wife, it is ridiculous, never to be realised. Brother dealers in politics, I, Kamalakanta Chakravarty, am advising you for your own good, even a sepoy can have in-laws, but a nation that allowed itself to be conquered by seventeen cavalrymen, can never achieve politics. "In the name of the Lord, give me some alms" – this is all the politics they can ever have."[43]

This passage and its tone is typical of Bankim: its mixture of sarcasm and a certain melancholy. It announces the impos sibility of politics; but the dialectic of this thought immediately sees the opposite. After this intense discharge he keeps looking at the scene in the oilpresser's house, depressed. Under the influence of opium, he saw something

metaphorically inscribed on the scene: a dog sidled up to the boy and started wagging its tail with demonstrative loyalty, and the boy dully rewarded him with a bone he had picked clean. Kamalakanta realised now that this dog was a politician; every move of his was political in character. The dog found that the boy took no further notice of him; so he moved up closer, started wagging his tail and putting out his tongue began to gasp. "Looking at his emaciated body, empty belly, beseeching eyes and quick gasping, the boy felt pity; taking a piece of fishbone he sucked it clean and threw it to him, and the dog's political agitation thus met with success. The dog, beside himself with joy, started munching, licking, swallowing and digesting it. His eyes closed with pleasure."[44] The dog grew bolder, and after a time started whining and moving forward slowly. The boy had then run through the fish and threw a gob of rice at him. The boy's mother came out, and finding a strange dog sharing her son's lunch threw a piece of stone. "The politician, thus hurt, gathered his tail, and to the loud accompaniment of various classical ragas made himself scarce with great speed."[45] At the other end of the courtyard, a more stout ox than the oilpresser's had come in and started eating his meal. The oilpresser's wife took a stick and chased the intruding ox. However, without moving, the ox lowered its horns, and 'intimated to her the strong likelihood of his horns entering her heart' if she persisted in her pursuit of justice, upon which the lady retreated and left him to conclude his unfinished if not wholly legitimate meal. "I thought this is politics too. Actually, I was shown politics of two different kinds: one a politics fit for dogs, the other for oxen. Bismarck and Gorchakoff are politicians of the ox variety, and from Cardinal Wolsey to our own Muciram Ray Ray Bahadur are politicians of the dog version."[46]

What happens inside this essay is symptomatic of Bankim's min
and who knows, perhaps for colonial consciousness in general
First, Kamalakanta decided not to speak about politics, and
affected disinterest; indeed, he disliked it so much that he
felt relieved when he found an apparently apolitical event to
look upon. But he is endowed with the second sight which
pierces and dissolves apperances in the world revealing what
is essential. He cannot escape seeing things which escape th
ordinary eye, blinded by repetition and selfevidence. Thus h
realised that politics was everywhere, what he mistook first
as a nonpolitical event was a metaphorical incident of politi
Just as a person denied love sees love everywhere, the world
becomes a theatre of love for him, for the colonial mind, den
the liberty of speaking about politics, it spreads across the
world in a gigantic and ineradicable metaphor. What is in th
heart but is denied speech obsesses and occupies the sight.
Kamalakanta does not speak about politics, but sees politics
written across the universe, and is endowed with the power to
decipher the hieroglyph of power in everyday life. Although
Kamalakanta began with a denial of politics, his vision leads
to a denial of this denial.

This is surely no modern suggestion that to understand the t
itself this should be used as a hermeneutic principle; but I
believe the latency and ubiquity of politics in colonialism
is a principle which ought to be applied to Bankim's own writ
too. In a colonial culture, politics must be nowhere and
everywhere. Utterances which seemingly have nothing to do
with power are at bottom political. Bankim eventually in my
view arrives, entirely on his own, at a form of thinking tha
is very common in modern times, a time of great violations,
and disasters. Critical thinkers often in such situations o
stress draw a single overriding distinction which governs th
sense of the world. Everything is seen through that overrid

criterion, nothing is too small to be judged by its exacting standards. Just as in a certain situation of desperate urgency to write lyric poems is to forget about the surrounding inhumanity, in a colonial culture, to write about anything else implies silence about the great collective indignity. It does not matter that this puts a somewhat misleading construction on the matter historically. There was strictly speaking no preexisting community which felt this insult, the community was being artistically invented along with the sense of colonial violation. The nation, which was violated by colonial power was in a paradox of history the creation of this power itself and its irresistible history. Such a sense that silence is criminal would increasingly permeate Bankim's artistic and discursive writing. But colonialism determines the response towards itself. The universality of its experience, and its obvious unanswerableness requires that all other speech becomes, metaphorically, surreptitiously, ironically, in humour, speech about this great single object. Metaphor, irony, tropes, the great armoury of speech, of culture, of literature extend the terrain of speech, of what can be said.

One of the essential marks of rationalism is its conceit of classification. One of its favourite ways of getting a grip on the world, the first step towards its ultimate object of control is very often a taxonomy. A classified world is already less threatening, less hostile. Colonial rationalism is also irresistibly drawn towards taxonomies, great classifications by which reason triumphs over the initial impression of chaos, its reduction of the unfamiliar into already something tractable. As a result, Bankim's urge to prepare whimsical taxonomies is equally endless. Throughout his work, we come across humorous classifications of the most diverse kinds. Kamalakanta has a famous essay on human fruits (manusya phal)[47] in which the entire urban <u>bhadralok</u> society of Bengal is taken through a metaphorical translation into fruits and classified.

English officials of the civil service are close to mangoes. "Someone brought them to this country from outside. They look beautiful, decorating anything they rest upon. When they are green they are inedibly sour, when ripe they do become sweet but often there is a deepseated sourness which never disappears. Some are so bad they remain sour even when ripe. Not everybody knows how to eat mangoes. Never eat this fruit picking it straight from a tree. Put it in the cold water of obeisance, if possible lace it with some ice of sycophancy; that would make it properly cool. After that you can knife it and eat it as you like."[48]

Metaphoric equivalence of babu roles is reserved for inferior fruits. Indian judges are gourds (kusmānda), a word used in common speech derisively.[49] 'If you train them on the roof they bloom into eminence, devoid of support they roll on the ground'. However, what makes the babu's essence, makes him into what he is, is a dual configuration; the support he receives from the colonial power, gourds destined for the dust trained on the colonial roof, and more crucially, the ideas, the much vaunted definitions of advanced thought with which the babu masters his social world. A critique of the babu must include a travesty of his beliefs, again for the double negative principle, because what is travestied is a travesty itself. Indeed, one could say it was a double travesty. Principles and ruling ideas had defensible, abiding definitions within Indian culture, but the babu is unacquainted with them. Great ideas also had defensible and rational definitions within the structure of western rationalist discourse. But the babu's adherence to them was purely and peculiarly external. He acceeded to them not because they were rationally justifiable; indeed, he would have been found wanting on the first principle of rational justifiability, which can be established only through an initial admission of sceptical doubt. The babu did not know how to

defend the rationalist corpus rationally, on his own; he took the entire apparatus of rationalism on trust, because the European believed in them. He had thus, an entirely irrational belief in rationalist theory.

Not surprisingly, this travestied rationalism gets a hilarious critique from Kamalakanta in one of the essays.

> "Learning : it is difficult to determine what learning really is. To some people, it is the ability to read and write. Others believe that to be learned it is not necessary to read and write a great deal, all that one must learn is to write books and in newspapers (publish). Some others differ, arguing that if someone does not know how to read or write how could he possibly contribute to newspapers? I consider such debate insignificant. Young crocodiles jump into the water the moment they come out of their shells; they do not have to learn swimming. Similarly, to Bengalis learning come naturally, they do not need to learn to read and write in order to be learned.
>
> Intellect: the amazing ability by means of which we can regard iron as cottonwool iron. Like the hoarded riches of the miser we can always see it, but it is invisible to others. Of all created things, this must be the most plentiful in the world, for I have never heard anyone say that he has less of it than others.
>
> Labour: to partake of properly heated delicacies, followed by sleep, followed in turn by taking the air, smoking the pipe, conversation with one's wife - strenuous activities of this kind are generally called labour.
>
> Power/strength: Longwinded sentences, flushed face, great verbal noise, a constant shower of Hindi and English words accompanied by spit, gesticulating kicks and blows from a reasonable distance, and a untimely exit at the slightest move by the adversary - such things are generically called strength.[50]

The sheer persistence of two themes is Bankim's rejection of the babu is remarkable. First, the inauthenticity of the entire intricate structure of the babu's thought, its rootlessness in his own experience, something intensely, obscenely, infuriatingly

false, but for which we have not as yet been able to find any appropriate name except the very abstract one of heteronomy. Theoretical constructions came on from the outside permanently marked by this flimsiness, this insignificance of exteriority, of not being a result of reflection of a deep historical experience, but a dishonorable result of cultural imitativenes The same idea, an identical sentence, spoken by a European author meant one thing, when spoken or rather uttered by an Indian _babu_ something quite different culturally. The two sentences may be exactly identical: yet one is a caricature of the other. The second remarkable feature is the constitution of the _babu_ almost entirely by his speech. The _babu_ is not a creature of practice, but of words. After devaluing his arguments, the destruction of his form of humanity is complete for he never left, in any case, any practical residue.

I have said earlier that I would not treat Kamalakanta as a text in the limited sense of a single book. Text means a weav and things could be woven into visions in endless different wa I have also tried to show earlier how difficult the author fou the business of bringing _Kamalakanta_ to a conclusion; it had several endings after which it began again. Since _Kamalakanta_ is Bankim's oblique vision, a crooked way of seeing to which the devious world reveals its truth, he irrupts everywhere in Bankim's work; for he is his other authroialself, as insepara from him as a shadow. _Kamalakanta_ is not a book, but a mood, a way of seeing, a way of relating to reality. And anything that is a product of this way of seeing I assimilate unrepentantly into the larger text of _Kamalakanta_. By this I assimilate two other texts into its typical weave: the short skits of _Lok Rahasya_ and _Mucirām Guder Jivancarit_, for they a visions of colonial life produced by the same eye. It is writ by the same askewed self of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the

self of which he had declared: "I am an opiumeater; my hearing, understanding and writing are out of tune." (Āmi āphingkhor, besuro suni, besuro bujhi, besuro likhi).[51]

It is not difficult to trace the connection between the tale of Muciram's irresistible rise in the colonial world and Bankim's more starightforward earlier invectives against the babu. That was a stotra, an invocation; this is a fable/myth. Indeed one can discern a strong, almost deliberate connection between the stotra to the babu and this peculiarly Voltairian tale of manifest colonial destiny, the babu's fate in this, the best of all possible worlds. To parody a sociological distinction, these are presentations of the babu in the synchronic and diachronic registers. Both are, first of all, true to the demands of their respective forms. Stotras were invocations or celebrations of divinity who are by definition eternal beings, about whom one could not speak in tensed historical terms except as sacrilege. The form does not require a presentation of historical process, a gradual acquision of characteristics, a linear story of birth, maturity and death, somebody gradually becoming what he is destined to become. For the idea of a divinity being present in any except its perfect form at any moment is unworthy of its object. What is presented in the babu essay is also a collective portrait. So although individual babus may take along to acquire characteristics of maturity, they are always simultaneously present in the collective form.

III

The Babu's Others: Women

The spectacle of Kamalakanta has three major protagonists; its speech, if conceived as a space would unfold between three characters.[53] At the centre of course is the babu; but the

babus character is constructed dialogically, through a series of descriptive and discursive constrasts with his others. True in terms of the amount said, or the simple amount of ironical attention given, the figure of the babu takes up much more; but purely from the artistic point of view, the figure is not complete without setting out his relations to his others.[54] We must therefore devote some attention to the question: who are the others of the babu? What are the principles of their construction in Bankimchandra?

These others of the babu do not have a merely conceptual existence. As ever Bankim's art mirrors the historical situation of his period of transition. These others of the babu are not merely brought in and created for a purely philsophic purpose of illustrating that there were other possibilities of living, other ways of living one's life. They were his historical neighbours too; actual types who surrounded and interacted with the babu, and in real life he had to contend with them. They are permanent, ineradicable presences in his world. The first other, less important for our purposes, is of course the dominating figure of the British, presented in a double caricature. Sometimes, the British are presented as civilians, administrators who are wellmeaning: but whose efforts at reforming from the outside a society which they merely dominate but does not understand and invariably in farcical results. Often however, the British are also presented in his other incarnation, the anthropologist and indological scholar who knows this society better than its inhabitants themselves, and is giving it a historical chronicle for the first time.[55] Let us however turn to the other others of the babu. They are, first his women, mostly his wife, the most intimate of his enemies, who represent in Bankim's world a different cultural principle, a different discourse, quite different standards of rationality and intelligibility. Besides, against the babu, in the space of the

transitional society of Bankim's Bengal stands the figure of t popular masses, the average lower order individual, still bearing in him the principles of the cultural world before the advent of colonialism. Since both of these types represent others or negations of the *babu*, it is not surprising that often they merge into individuals who display both these trai The best example of this is of course the figure of Prasanna, the foil to Kamalakanta in the text.

Prasanna is not the only representative of this principle in Bankim's work. In his novels, especially those which I shall call novels of praxis, we shall come across figures whose fictional attributes are different, but who share this cultur principle of nonbabuness and its connection to praxis. Notic the sharply nonbabu, i.e., indigenous education given to Shan and Devi Chaudhurani,[57] and that education unlike the crippli immobilising consequences of *babu* education, assists them in political praxis. Thus, quite generally, the woman represent a different principle of life - more spontaneous, popular, indigenous, very close to the resources of the folk, against the cultural inauthenticity of the *babu*. In several novels, women are the enemy of *babu*ness within the home. Consider Indira and Suhasini in the house of the *babu* lawyer;[58] or differently, Labangalata.[59] But this is brought out far more sharply in the more sketchily drawn women of his satire, part cularly *Lok Rahasya*. Think of the sceptical wife of the conve sation on the exalted occasion of the English new year, the wonderful play on the comicality of imitation (notice the structural parallel, which is the essence of every comical or satirical parallelism, between the stated imitation of the so in saying exactly what his father has said,[60] and the unstate structure of the *babu* saying exactly what his superior says). Speeches of superiors change their meanings subtly, inescapab when they are used by subalterns. They turn into lisping

imitativeness, at best, or grotesque insults as it happens in case of the son.[61] Or consider the dialogue, whose parallels must have been going on within every Bengali home of Bankim's time everyday, about the native language.[62] Indeed, few other writers of his generation show Bankim's sense of a moving temporality, the changing present, already giving way to something that is differently structured as a culture. Few others have this fine sense that the least noted elements of social life - its language, its clothes, roles, stereotypes, possibilities of lifestyles are decisively changing. Indeed, I have argued earlier, that the <u>babu</u> (or the heteronomous cultural principle) gradually conquers the social world; and the first token of this is his success in his taming of his women. Wives increasingly come to be cultural counterparts of their husbands; they exemplify the same cultural principle, only in a different gender. They feel the same sorrows and joys and express them in the same language. Indeed, the world of language becomes far more standardised, uniform, with even servants, in Tagore's fiction and afterwards, speaking an unrealistically chaste form of middle class prose.

Though perhaps this is not putting it quite properly. The authors require of course some semiotic markers of difference between the language spoken by the master-<u>babu</u> and his servant: but this is shown as a <u>lack</u>, as a failure of the servant to speak the chaste Bengali of the <u>babu</u>. This is an entirely different situation in which his language is not marked by a lack, but precisely by a fulness, by a great spontaneous competence. The women in Bankim do not speak the language badly; they speak <u>another</u> language exceedingly well. Its explotives do not arise from a fumble at not finding the right word; rather they arise out of a vocabulary that exactly matches their experiences a point Bankim makes quite explicitly in the

essay on the 'New Women and the Old'.[63] Bengali women in fiction in the nineteenth century undergo a transformation of their character parallel to Radha's. From aggressive, self assured, rural individuals (who are not weighed down by feeling of inferiority to their male neighbours), they turn like their husband's into delicate urban parasites. From now on they are unable to become the focus or the fictive symbols of a critique within the household, often extending to their rationalist spouses when they are prone to excesses of a subaltern rationalism, the criticism of household weapons.[64]

Nowhere in his novels Bankim has room for a woman of the new type, who represent the new cult of femininity.[65] Rationalist influence, ironically, turned women from subject, albeit unrefined and abusive, into objects of admiration, ciphers of a wailing vulnerability. Bankim's heroines are mostly powerful aggressive, masterful women who are able to take their decisions and work their way against an usually unreasoning and oppressive society. In 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

Bankim's consciousness of the historicity of such change shows two aspects to them, interestingly combined. There is a sense of the short term inevitability of this change, a clearsighted apprehension that such bad things are going to happen. But it is also marked by a sense of their contingency, a point that is crucial to his last novels of historical praxis. It is this combination of certainty about their happening, and his moral confidence that they are retrograde, a kind of reluctant helplessness in face of this historical process, which makes the rejection so passionate, his sarcasm so vicious. He takes refuge, in a way, from the stage of ongoing history on which he is entirely powerless to the stage of discourse, a world made

entirely out of the referential quality of language/words, in which he can take the victory away from them, a world in which he can resist history, because he is its creator. This is his world. Here he can name things into existence, and out of it. He uses this tragic sovereignty of language to avénge himself and his people on history.

In fact, two ways of this strange revenge are possible: to savagely satirise it; and to counterfactualise it. One way is to show what has happened as a tragedy, as bad for his people; the other is to emphasise the contingency of this necessity, pick a suitable breakoff point and create an alternative trajectory of history which gives confort. This is, to use a phrase that is both so illegitimate and so apposite, to brush history against the grain'.[66]

Prasanna in Kamalakanta or her counterparts in the novels are not depicted as examples of an existing prototype of women. Women were objects of history. For all their symbolic association with the nation's power, they are also undergoing a cruci transformation. But Bankim's theory of this transition is interestingly different from the tradition of Naoroji. Naoroj represents a trend of social reflection which believes in the rationalistic transferability of social institutions and individual character. The criticism of un-British rule in India could begin only on the prior assumption of a possibilit of British rule in his sense, which is crudely, ruling India the way Britain is ruled, establishing the parallelism promise in colonial ideology. What is remarkable in Bankim is his strong disagreement with this view, with the whole apparatus o presuppositions of this sort of theory of colonial society. " you expect Panci to transform herself into an English lady (an untranslatable phrase, bilatī mem), you could also expect that the indigenous sāl tree would someday turn into an oak."[67]

It would be wrong to dismiss this as a purely culturalist argument, for the political complement of these ideas are always present, although for understandable reasons, muted, dislocated, displaced. The women, who live always near the *babu* but defying him, thus contain the principle of redemption of himself and his own society. And what could be more typical of the heteronomy of the Bengali intellectualist middle class (not all intellectuals; but a middle class which evidently believed and does to this day, that by simply belonging to a particular social group one becomes an intellectual and empowered to legislate solutions to the world's many evils) that it would not find the principle of defiance, the implement to end his subjection, and to feel contempt for its only means of escape?

If we add all the different segments of his works which reflect on the question of women, they reveal a deep internal consistenc There are several places where the problem of women appears directly or under artistic or humorous disguise. Essays occasionally discuss it seriously. Indeed, the essay on equality explicitly connects the class question with the questio with the question of gender inequality, though the individual conclusions Bankim arrived at would not find favour in a more progressive age. Still, the way he generalises the question of equality is remarkable, for it perceptively asserts that all inequalities are interconnected, and form, to use more modern language, a structure; and the inequality that human persons experience in their life world are overdetermined forms of various pure inequalities.

> "All human beings have the same rights - this is the essence of the doctrine of equality. I have discussed the inequality between the landlord and the tenant as an instance of the infringement of the principle of equality. Now I wish to discuss the inequality between men and women as a second example.

> All human beings have equal rights. Women are human beings; therefore, they must enjoy rights equal to those of men. Whatever are the activities to which men have a right, it is reasonable that women have an exactly equal right to those. Why should it be otherwise?....'[68]

Bankim briefly discusses the conservative argument that rights are related to capabilities, and since the capabilities of men and women are naturally different, rights cannot be equal betw[een] the two sexes. This however is seen as unconvincing. "First, we reject the idea that if there are differences in nature this justifies differences in rights. This would destroy the principle of equality by its roots. For just as there are natural differences between men and women, there are exactly similar differences between Englishmen and Bengalis. The Englishman is powerful/strong, the Bengali weak, the English brave, Bengalis cowardly, the English hardy, the Bengali fragil[e] and so on and on. If such differences in disposition had justified differences in their rights, why do we shout so loudl[y] at even minor differences in rights between Englishmen and Bengalis? If it is reasonable to suppose that men are masters and women are their slaves; then it is equally reasonable that the English are masters and Bengalis slaves".[69] This is backe[d] up by a really ingenious argument for a Hindu Bengali of the nineteenth century: "Secondly, those areas in which there is evident differences in the rights of men and women, in these areas there are no real natural differences between them. Whatever is there, is due to the bad effects of social customs. The object of the theory of equality is to eradicate these practices."[70]

5 Development of men leads to the progress of society; but so does the development of women, for they constitute exactly half of this social whole. To say that the major objective of society is the improvement of one sex, and of the other only to the extent it serves the first, is an immoral idea.

But the lawmakers of society, in all societies at all times, have fallen into this error... In fact, it is impossible to find any field of action in which license for women can be considered worse than male licensiousness. After all, both actions are equally immoral. Just as men have a natural right to a faithful wife, women have an exactly equal right to a monogamous husband. Yet, if a man trangresses this rule that is considered modernity (babuness); if a woman does so, this destroys all the joys of her world, she is regarded as the lowest of the low, and considered more untouchable than a leper. Why? Chastity of women is necessary for male happiness; but for the happiness of women sexual restraint by men is equally necessary. But of course men are the society, women are nobody."

Despite all this discrimination however, women in his early humour perform an aggressive and critical function. There are particularly two brief sketches at the end of LR which, though unremarkable for literary quality, illustrate this critical principle with great effect. The first, called "Appreciation of Bengali literature" (Bangla Sahityer Adar)[73], begins with on an eveningscene which must have been common in most Bengali households; the dramatis personae are a man whose characteristics are typically indexed at some length: "a high-priced highly educated Bengali babu". Obviously, there is a sharply jesting play on the ambivalence of the term 'uccadarer' which hangs between highly priced and highly valued, and it is a high education, naturally, which has given him this value/price. Typically, the interlocutor is a less indexed person, marked only by her relation of subordination to him, 'his wife'

Although all societies are male dominated, Indian soci
can claim a special distinction. "The extent to which women a
repressed in our society, in England and America, they do not
have even a hundredth part of this. Our country is a land of
subordination/repression. Every kind of repression, once sown
in its seed, sprouts out and flourishes because of the fertili
of its soil. Nowhere is the subject as subordinated to the
ruler as here; nowhere is the uneducated as obedient to the
literate; the extent to which sudras and other lower castes ar
subordinated to the Brahmins, nowhere else are believers to
subordinate to religious preachers/the clergy. Nowhere are th
poor so repressed by the rich; and nowhere are women so subor-
dinated to the will of the male."[71] This is because inequalit
do not stand separately, unaffected by the relation between
different provinces of social relations. It follows therefor
that "if you are not able to provide for equality in all sphe
completely, you shall not be able to prodide for equality in a
one field. For the principles of the doctrine of equality are
closely interconnected." For his times, this idea, that all
inequalities reinforce each other, and the destruction of one
requires the destruction of all - is hardly a common doctrine.

It is remarkable that when he moves to the different
plane of humour, the drift of Bankim's argument does not chan
Often Bankim is negligently characterised as a conservative,
extraordinary judgment by any standards; for his arguments ar
not against reform, but against its hollowness. "Our social
reformers are somewhat more eager in establishing creating
reputations than in analysing the processes of social develop-
ment."[72] Indeed, he is in favour of providing secular,
independent arguments for the reform of women's lives instead
the derivative one that this is what has happened in the west

(sardonically sanskritised, tasya bharya).

The conversation begins at the babu's violet hour, when he returned at tea time after his unspecified exertions in the office, that mysterious mechanism of law, justifice and power, by which he controlled the world. He finds his wife reading a Bengali novel, which happens to be the Visavriksa, and asks why she persists in reading that stuff: "why do you read the Bengali garbage (chai bhasma)? It is better not to read anythi because those are 'immoral, obsecene, filthy'. Since these vitriolic adjectives are in English and inaccessible to the wife, she asks for a translation. The babu takes the characteri tics route of all textbook and external knowledge, he cannot breakout of the circular paths of a resounding tautology: immora is explained as that which is against morality. Since this remains equally unclear to his wife, he exclaims:
"No, no, do you know ... now where do I get a Bengali word for it? .... Actually, that which is not moral... there" and further down: "It is impossible to explain to that extent in Bengali language; but the main point is, to read Bengali books is bad." Who his wife explains that this is a book which has been translated into English, this revives the value of the work to him somewhat, but he admits that he thought it was an English work which was translated into Bengali, evidently because that is the single way of transmission of intellectual value. It is also interesting that when his wife asks him to explain the plot of Dante to her, for she is about to read a Bengali translation, all he finds remarkable about the poet's life is that he held high appointments in Florence. He declares in the midst of the conversation: 'Bengali and such stuff are read by people of the lower class...: We are from the polished society ... those have no value to the English (though the text uses: saheb loker kache o saber dar nei, in which saheb lok can be translated equally well for Englishmen as for Anglicised babus)...

how can such things pass in polished society?"[74]

The principles of the encounter between Rambabu and his wife are identical.[75] Conjugal lives are constantly beset by translation problems of the Winchian sort, bringing the painful experience of relativism to Bengali bedrooms as it were. Consi the predicament of Rambabu, whose friend visits him on the English New Year and shakes him by the hand, and says 'how do you do?'. His wife takes this, after Winch, as a mild form of physical assault, and an invitation to play a childish game of hadudu, inappropriate at their time of life. With great patience Rambabu explains to her the mysterious ways of enlightened etiquette: what his friend uttered was an advanced form of greeting, not a game; and she was misled because of the unfortunate indistinguishability of the phonetic form. But Rambabu's attempts at explanation are not more lucid than his predecessor. It is not hadudu, he says, but hadudu, that is how 'how do you do' is pronounced. "Wife. What does that mean?

Ram. It means, how are you?

Wife. But could that be? He asked you, how are you?, but you did not answer his question; you simply asked the same thing to him in return !

Ram. But that is modern civilised manners.

Wife. To say the same thing is modern manners? That means, if you ask our son "Why arent you studying, you rat?", he would say to you in return, "Why arent you studying, you rat?" and this is regarded civilised manners?"[76]

The wife asks Rambabu not to adopt such civilised attitude towards her. "You are always sick, and I have to ask you five times a day, how are you. Dont send me away with a how do you do. It does not matter if you do not adopt civilised behaviour towards me".[77] The babu after a few more, equally unsuccessful sentences, goes in search of a lawyer to find out if Hindu are permitted divorce of their wives.

Clearly the structural similarities between these two short sketches and the arguments in Kamalakanta are remarkable. At the most obvious level, there is the asymmetry of symbolisation: the *babu* unsymbolically represents himself, but his interlocutor is someone who bears in herself the sign of nativism: she is a woman, she speaks the vernacular, she is the unreconstructed principle of the indigenous culture. As in Kamalakanta, it is the *babu* who carries in himself only the crude and material principle of subjugation. If we look closely, he is not a product of combination of the western and indigenous cultures; he is merely an Indian bearer, in a travestied form, of the rationalistic civilisation of the west. But the grounds of his belief and acceptance of ideas is interesting - not that they are reasonable/rational, but that they are English. He know, without reading texts, that they are bad, a miraculous power conferred only by Macaulayan education. He regards anythin indigenous in principle in truly Macaulayan contempt. By contrast, his wife, does not take an indigenist position in culture. She is curious to understand western literature; only the *babu* fails to explain them to her. She does not represent an equally uncompromising rejection of western culture and the beliefs it has got to offer. On the contrary she represents a legitimate questioning about what could be the grounds for such a proposed shift in paradigms. In these parables of incomprehension, it is instructive to see the exact relation between the *babus'* powers and incapacities; because, as I am going to argue, this is sign for something much larger and more significant. Interestingly, the *babu* intellectual can state - but merely state - rationalistic propositions. Equally significantly, he fails to give grounds for his beliefs, or indeed to explain them, ie, to show what those beliefs consist in. Thus, these words, the magic words of rationalism by the enunciation of which one *babu* recognises another, take on something close to a purely

ritual character. Rationalist thought displayed contempt for nonrational modes of word use, particularly rituals, because of the often great distance between what a proposition meant literally and what they meant inside the ritual; because those who believed in them were not able to explain them commonsensically. Believers in those discourses could be said to have an external relation to them; were not literally true or demonstrable, but social signs by which one person belonging to a community recognised another. In Bankim's parables rationalist ideas come to assume such ritual qualities. Presumably, the "polished society" to which the husband belongs, rationalistic beliefs are held ritually, and its language used in the same uncomprehending and ungrounded way. Babu intellectuals are those who typically have not thought their way through to conclusions, they are holders of rationally ungrounded rationalistic beliefs. Accordingly, he is unable to explain why he believes in what he does and unendowed with even minimal skills in his own language it is hardly surprising he fails to convince others. He confuses explanation with tautology. In this Bankim demonstrates what he sees as the destiny of such social theory in India during his times and afterwards. Theoretical beliefs are held not because what they state about the nature of the world or society, but because they are indirect statements about the self of the holder. The inauthenticity of babu intellectualism is again signalled by this: presumably, a European Voltairian would not collapse when he is asked what was the meaning of an article of his belief. He would not be reduced to silence or tautology, and he in any case would not be exiled from his own language, the medium of contact and conversion of his people.

I suspect however that these short pieces, despite their lightness of tone, are symbolic presentation of larger questions of culture and politics, and are meant to be read in code.

Obviously, the <u>babu</u> represents only himself, but his wife is a sign of the larger historical incomprehension of the rest of society, indicated by the complex makers of femininity (which signifies for Bankim the principle of interiority), her use of the vernacular, her attainment of a spontaneous culture though not a costly higher education. If she is taken to be a figural representation of the non<u>babu</u>, popular audience (more directly, <u>gariber meye</u>), this takes on a more interesting historical meaning. Notice that the wife's strategy in this contest is exactly the same as Kamalakanta's. She demystifies the <u>babu</u>'s pretensious phraseology by an exactly similar form of literal mistranslation. The larger connotations of these scenes seem to point to a nearly Gramscian point about the emerging political theory of colonialism. It indicates precisely the great absences in the middle of the reenactment spectacle of colonial capitalism. Inability to explain their beliefs in modernity to the masses, to get them to accept these beliefs as reasonable, shows that the colonial middle class does not speak for any other class but itself; it bears no relation of organicity to the popular. Colonial enlightenment in a narrow sense reiterates the ideal content of rationalism, but lacks the crucial dialogical process out of which bourgeois hegemony was formed and set in place. Thus the <u>babu</u> remains suspended externally against the lower orders of people. They are condemned to a double exile : they remain exterior to the theory of rationalism; they also remain exterior to their own subject poeople.

Unfortunately, however, even women are subject to historical change. Bankim analyses the consequences of social change on the position of women with very mixed feelings. In this discussion too there is a phrase that is directly reminiscent of the celebrated temple scene in <u>Anandamath</u>: there the discussion is about what the mother was and has become; here it is her more

mundane counterparts who are the object of analysis (bangiya yubatira ki chilen, eksane ki haitechen.)[78] It is true that i some ways the womens' taste has improved. But there are serio charges against their transformation into modernity. Their foremost vice is laziness. The old woman was very hardworking and had high skills of housework; the new woman is a great bab Like the lotus on the sheet of water, she spends her day looki at her own beauty in the mirror in utter stillness. The whole burden of housework is left to hired maids.... I consider it a hateful way of life if they simply exert themselves to lift expensive carpets. Human beings are born in order to contribu to others' happiness. A woman who comes to the earth to loll on the bed, dress her hair in front of the mirror, roll up carpets, read 'The Exile of Sita' (sitar vanavas), and give bi to children, who contributes to the happiness of none except h own, she may be marginally superior to animals, but her womanh is worthless. We counsel such women to rid the earth of their useless weight by applying ropes to their necks."[79] For Banki clearly, the main disappointment is the conversion of women int female babu and in a society like nineteenth century middle class Bengal, inevitably, when turned into babus, women's live were bound to be more parasitic than of the men.

But characteristically, even the humorous presentatio the women's question does not end here. The essay is followe three letters written allegedly by three women. Obviously, th represent the need for lending a voice to them, because other they remain unrepresented in the discussions about their own condition. Again, the point of the critique is turned instan at the babu. The first lady essays on a symmetrical comparis between the old man and the new :

> "In only one way I find the new men superior to older ones: you have learnt a bit of English. But who have you benefited by learning English? I can see that learning English has helped you learn how to be clerks, but humanity? Let me tell you, what the differences between the old and new are. The old men looked after others' interests, you look after your own. They spoke the truth, you only what pleases. They worshipped the gods and the brahmins, your gods are the hybrid anglo Indians, and your brahmins are the goldsmiths. True, they worshipped idols, you worship the bottle..... We are idle; but you are not merely idle, you are babu. The English rulers led you by the nose, and you follow them because you have no strength; we too lead you by the nose, and you follow because you have no intelligence."80

The second correspondence simply accepts the charges, but adds innocently that these are due precisely to what men have done to them and taught them: "you are preceptors, we are disciples." But the main thrust is reserved for the last letter which suggests a role switch between men and women:

> "You wish to tie us down by the bonds of religion. That does not matter. But is that extra bond necessary over and above the bond of fasts and rituals? You take the responsibility of the fasts, and we would be too willing to tie these religious bonds more tightly than ever. I wish so dearly to exchange existences with you. Before you start abusing us, take a good reckoning of the happinesses and sorrows. When we die, you would fast in our everlasting memory, you would not eat meat, you would wear rags; when you go to heaven we would savour a second conjugal life; when you are alive, you would bear children, supervise the kitchen, on ceremonies you would draw the veil over your moustaches and with the plats over your heads, do the rituals, engage in womanly humour in the basar room; there would be no end to your happiness. We would go to the college with our books in our adolescence; in adult life put the turban obliquely over our coif-fieursand attend offices, and make speeches in the townhall to the accompaniment of wagging ornaments....

> "Stop boasting and do that. You come into the household, let us go to the office. Those who are carrying others' shoes on their heads for seven hundred years, are they men? Dont you feel ashamed to speak?"[81]

By iron regularity, the <u>babu</u> had lost this engagement as well.

IV

<u>The Babu's Others: The Lower Orders</u>

Despite the great variety of imposing women in Bankim's fictio world, the <u>Kamalakanta</u>, it may appear, has a different structu The only woman in its story is a <u>goālini</u>, the milkwoman Prasanna, the object of Kamalakanta's verbalising attention. Unfortunately, due to their prurient interpretation of the universe, <u>babus</u> naturally read this relationship in an amorous fashion. Prasanna I wish to argue is hardly negligible, and s shows features which are entirely compatible with the structur of Bankim's fictive world.

Prasanna is no ordinary woman. She condenses at least two principles of otherness to the <u>babu</u> at the centre of the ficti stage. She is a <u>woman</u>, but she also belongs, firmly, not in any oblique way, to the world of the <u>popular</u>. She represents the people. She represents the feminine principle I have discussed earlier. She is, like her social superiors, sponta-neous, completely self assured in her world, not assailed by any doubt about effectiveness and authenticity. Whatever she does, in the brief appearances in the story. Is wonderfully self evidently effective. She does not, like <u>babus</u>, even the critical ones, have to make an effort to be what she is. Bei herself comes quite naturally to her. She is wholly vernacul and more interestingly, untouched and unimpressed by the dis-course or institutional theatre of the colonial administratio

Unlike Kamalakanta, she , when she needs to confront the judge, does so without subterfuges, without the assistance of any subtle, hidden discourse. She is the embodiment of practical syllogism. She does of course reside in an unspecified village in British Bengal which comes under the laws of colonial administration, but she shows a wonderful incomprehension of the laws by which she is governed and being civilised. Practically, when she loses her cow, her means of production, she unmelodramatically takes recourse to a court of law: but is generally unsentimental about the qualities of colonial justice, does not expect too much out of it, and treats it with an admirable irreverence. But there are ways in which she is strikingly unlike her more socially exalted counterparts. She interacts with colonial law out of an external need. Otherwise, in the general administration of her life she is presumably unaffected by colonial culture. At the cost of her illiteracy, she has defended her culture and her self respect quite successfully. The court scene reflects this quite well. Of the entire range of characters who figure in its hilarious confusion she, and in a very different way Kamalakanta, are the only two do not compromise themselves, or get tied into knots by their own unmastered rationalism. She is literally a popular figure: she comes from the people. The text naturally divides very unequally between the verbal Kamalakanta and the reticent and active Prasanna. She has practically no share of the verbality of the fiction, which enhances its historical trut for she came from a group which was similarly unrepresented in the great verbalisation of nineteenth century Bengal.

On the surface, Prasanna is somewhat unlike the other women we encounter in Bankim's fictive world in terms of her social standing. Women in this created world belong to three essential social types. Some belong to the older aristocracy or nobility,

and their characters do not perform the work of a sign within the discourse of the novels which is contemporary. They are represented first by Tilottama and Ayesha, Cancalakumari, Zebunnisa and others. It is interesting to note however that, as Bankim's thinking turns more political, these types become less frequent in his creative fictive imagination. A second t of women - like Devi, Sree, Nandā, Ramā - are not exactly of t same type. Although they are elevated to royalty by favourabl turns of fortune, they still exude a certain commonness which stick to them from their earlier, presumably humble beginnings A second category of women in Bankim are inhabitants of ninet century babu households, wives of zamindars or successful pro sionals in the new circle of opportunities created by colonia administration, both highly unequal beneficiaries of colonial rule. Suryamukhi, Bhramar, Kundanandinī, Labangalatā would this classification. Normally Bankim's heroines would belong to one of these sets;. Despite their belonging to landlord c upper professional households, these women make a distinct ty and this is constituted not by their individual personalities but a structural feature. They live as parts of the same hou holds as their babu husbands, but in terms of both productive arrangements and culture, they represent the vitality of ano earlier world. They are married to babus, and according to customs of their societies, this meant delivered into subalt nity to them; but they are not babus themselves. And inside stories they of course show the great and fascinating repert that the neighbourly subaltern has at her disposal to turn r invert and offset this relation. In contrast to their male counterparts, Govindalal, Nagendra, Devendra, Hiralal, who h all been educated into a peculiar rationalism which has made them indecisive, hesitant, morally untrustworthy agents, th are of the exact opposite type as actors - clear about mora objectives, rights and wrongs in personal questions, unambi

even when taking tragic and martyring decisions about their own lives.[82] Bankim's novels replay in this circle again the contrast between the western-educated rationalistic, indecisive male and the indigenous, decisive female. Women represent such a strong foil to men precisely because of the subtle and unpronounced presence of the political in Bankim's thought, and because in that crucial but subliminal political field, they represent in a romanticised form the unconquered forces of the indigenous civilisation. Women are only maritally integrated in their husbands' households, their separateness in this fictional world is marked dramatically by a whole array of linguistic, semantic and discursive signals, and particularly by the half-humorous incomprehension which often separates and connects them. Nothing is more common in Bankim's depiction of the ironies of domesticity than their mutual incomprehension. Women finding incomprehensibly obtuse what for their husbands or other male interlocutors is simply to be taken for granted. But women are invested with a superior hermeneutic. It is quite natural for actors or speakers to find what they do or say intrinsically reasonable; hermeneutic superiority consists in being able to see why the other sees a certain course of action as reasonable while one finds it wrong. This ability to hermeneutically transcend the others' view of what is rational is rarely given to men, but common to feminine actors. Men look down on their wives, often in a loving way; fortunately for conjugal happiness considering one's wife entirely unreasonable is not incompatible with finding her irresistibly attractive. Women, on their part, put down this difference partly to a natural irrationality of the office going sex; but they often suspect that this has been compounded by an acquired obtuseness through their acceptance of colonial, <u>bilitī</u>, cultural norms. This adds to the fairly long list of ways in which men habitually make fools of themselves.

Bengali men especially have developed a special skill in the
of rationalistic stupidity. But this slightly derogatory ass
ment of each other did not stand in the way of their conjugal
happiness.

Perhaps one could identify a third type. They are women who
could not belong, by any definition, to the aristocracy; they
largely from the fringes between ordinary poorer people and th
middle order of confortable householders, like Prafulla, Sree
or a number of others. But Prasanna, the heroine of Kamalakan
is quite different. Although she is not artistically as com-
pelling a figure as Prafulla, she is interpretatively highly
significant. She is not worked out fully because the text is
not a novel, and does not make similar demands of investing a
character with real-world determinations. Besides, her charac
is left to an indescribable collage of forms. But what is
remarkable is the combination achieved in her of the unconquer
feminine, nativity, strong common sense, spontaneous and natur
self respect, her absence of a sense of servility or guilt in
front of the colonial structure. Symbolically, she represents
figure that is richer, more defiant, more full of radical poss
bilities than someone like Indirā. For Indirā despite her
vitality, is as a wife in a rich household, a prisoner of her
social eminence.

Prasanna's significance is emphasised precisely by her rarity,
her incomparable position in Bengali high literature of the
period immediately following. It is impossible to find simila
figures, referred to indulgently as 'prasannamayī namnī
gopakanyā' as time passes. Historically, two things become in
a literary way increasingly difficult: not merely the fictive
occurrence of a figure like Prasanna, but also the striking
tone Kamalakanta adopts towards her - half-familiar, indulgent
half-subordinate. By the literary and aesthetic standards of

later fiction, including Tagore's, she would be roundly denounced as ungainly, an artistically inadmissible figure who could not be allowed entry into the polite precincts of bhadralok art. Compared to Bankim's, Tagore's art, despite his conscious and stated philosophic doctrine, demonstrates the effects of a great purge, a great and merciless (because it is in the service of artistic purity) disenfranchisement of all social types who are nonelite, ie, nonbabu. Women who are given the place of honour in this new fiction are Sucaritas, Lalitas,[83] Bimalas,[84] or the highly artifical Kitty, the unconvincingly ethereal Labanya.[85] They are less various; and more significantly, they do not represent a wide social range, indeed their individual variety is also rather limited.[86] Tagore's heroines are different usually in terms of their intelligence, learning, obtuseness, occasional ill temper. In fact, in his impoverished social world it is rather difficult to find a woman who is really bad tempered, or a genuine temptress.[87] I am sure Tagore's defence of himself in the famous lines of Aikatan,[88] that on occasion he had stopped at the edge of the precincts of the other locality/neighbourhood but lacked the strength to step inside, was entirely adequate. Bankim after all lived in a society in which social distances between the new groups and the popular masses below had not become so unspeakably great. In Tagore's stories, which are far more fictionally credible than his novels, we often encounter some social variety, have an occasional encounter with poorer village folk; but they are obstinately, unmistakably different from the popular. They are seen, rather than heard or lived with.[89] Occasionally, the poor are merely unlucky babus, who have been merely financially unfortunate, and therefore socially misclassified rather than authentically poor. And their lost property documents have a way of returning to them on dark and rainy nights, confirming our sense of the fundamental moral order of the universe. A middle class audience can feel an appropriate wrench in their

hearts; and we can see clearly that they do not deserve their fate of subbabuness.

Prasanna does not have such affectations of middle class dignity. She belongs to a different class. She belongs to the folk, the popular - an entirely different world that is self sufficient with its rules, norms, imagery, language, even its special, freer form of abuse. This is a world that is gradually margi- nalised until it passes out of high literature - to great detriment of this literature itself. Later literature would capture and reflect less and less of social space, and retreat gradually into interiors of interiors. Increasingly, babus, when they condescend to look at the popular would merely see an undifferentiated blur, people designated not by proper names but by sociological functions. Women working in babu households would be called simply jhi, a typically disingenuous combination of the paternalistic (in this case also maternal) meaning of daughter and the occupational one of working woman (charwoman). Kamalakanta is not a babu: thus he is able to acknowledge a relation of productive dependence on Prasanna. Critically important, he retains the gift of seeing individuals in them; because the logic of the social discourse which he utters is from an earlier social world, smaller, more closed, in which personal contacts across social divides was possible.

Prasanna, despite her sketchiness, thus turns out to be a signi- ficant figure in the artistic and social signification in Bankim literature. First her relation with Kamalakanta mirrors accurately the relation between parasitic intellectuals of the upper class and the sustaining lower strata. It is not surpri- sing that she supplies Kamalakanta with food with nothing in return. Ordinarily babus would of course claim that what they get from the lower orders is in exchange for something.

Kamalakanta is the inverted babu, endowed with a self critical and self-revealing sight, a person who accepts and actually utters the truth of the babu world. He therefore sees the relation between Prasannamayī and himself, the parallel between the rentier orders and the lower productive strata, as one of unrequited support.

But this raises a more general question. Bankim's thought is not partial, or romantically admiring about what we now call the popular. How does the popular figure in his imagination? I shall discuss this in two sections: some of the features of his depiction of the popular in this section; and other aspects of his depiction of mass-popular actions later when we discuss his historical novels.

V

I feel I hear a strong presence of the popular in Bankim's art. But it is not easy to be convinced of this idea. For it is plainly counterintuitive in some ways. After all, Bankim was the creator of high literature in Bengali. He created a new language that did not suffer from the wooden formality of Vidyasagar's excessively sanskritic prose, nor from the vulgar limitedness of the babu colloquial. Still, it was unmistakably a high literature, a literate, deliberately cultured Bengali language; and it is rather odd to suggest that there could be something strongly popular inside its deliberate accents.

It is easy to ignore the existence of the popular in Bankim's fiction because these elements were not present where we usually look for them, or the way we think these were. We misjudge its site, its manner of existing. It existed in form, but in a latent form, not a form that was immediately available in terms

of the deliberate strategies of narrative or literary construc-
tion. There are two ways in which this occurs in his fiction.
First, the social and fictive world that is depicted has a
place for the lower orders in their own terms, and they are
treated as subjects. Secondly, travesty is a form of humour t
is intexricably connected to the subaltern, and much of the to
of Bankim's humour has the ring of travesty, and the sound of
what Bakhtin has called the laughter of a thousand years'.[90]

Later literature captures less and less of social space, and
retreats gradually into the interior of interiors. Literarily
the babu becomes totally narcisistic. Mental or psychological
novels, and romantic poetry - which a graduate male usually
addresses to undergraduate females-become his paradigmatic
literary norms. In these two forms of literature he could see
portrayed the little tempests of his middle class soul. A poe
heartbreak followed by an unromantic utilitarian marriage was
his idea of the limits of endurable risk of human life. Inte
nal spaces of the novel fail to record any social conflict wo
the name, occasionally offering misleading and melodramatic
pictures of terrorism, a perpetual fascination of the cautiou
middle class for the risks of revolutionary existence.

In Bankim's novels too the babu dominates the narratives, som
times masquerading as others in other quite inappropriate cen
ries.[91] But babus, his women, his servants, his milkwoman, h
vendors, the entire lower orders who constitute the market pl
of his everyday. The question of what to do with these other
does not figure in the theoretical consciousness of early Ben
literature, but since it is a real social problem it finds in
dious ways of coming into literary representation. Calcutta
a large decorated island in the sea of illiterate, unillumina
rural Bengal. Individuals from the lower orders are present
inside babu households, often in large numbers as servants an

other types of assistants. But their social place in this society is such that they do not deserve literary speech/subjectness. Bankim shrewdly observes the connection between cultural patterns and work relationships. Productive organisation within the middle class households change. Women become educated; unfortunately, in his view, they become babus as they too withdraw from housework; and the households of urban upper classes are invaded by armies of silent menials. Gruadually the workbased distinction between the babu and his wife changes too, to her detriment. Formerly, the babu symbolised parasitism; by contrast his wife was engaged in useful work at home, which was, apart from other partial explanations, the reason for her invincibility in domestic skirmishes. With changing productive regimes within the Bengali home, the wife comes to acquire a new kind of workless leisure, and she turns into a greater parasite than her husband, for internal productive work is given over to a retinue of servants, and external 'productive' work - the exertions involved in the earning of a primarily rentier income- was for social reasons monopolised by the husband. Upper class woman fall quickly into a leisured heteronomous existence which was historically quite novel, probably not enjoyed (or suffered) by anyone except royal concubines. Until the Bengali woman breaks out of the confines of the home to the great liberation of the office jobs, she is condemned to a life of decorative superfluity.

In this new world, the lower orders mean essentially servants and other dependants, held in various forms of the relation of subalternity. Interestingly, they play an important role in Bankim's fiction. There are some complex figures who are not easy to describe in these terms, like Bimala[92] or Indirā in her fallen state in the Calcutta household. Perhaps this is a technique of double significance which as much debases the

particular individual as places the state of servanthood into a kind of salutary ambiguity. More authentic subalterns (servant - Digvijay, Girijaya,[93] Rangalāl,[94] Māniklāl,[95] Rāmcaran[96] - constitute integral parts of the social world. It shows, often the dependence of the protagonists on their subalterns, and the parasitism. In subsequent literature, by and large, if servant do enter, they are hardly more than shadows. They never ever speak, are hardly ever parts of the proceedings, except as instrumentalities. Speech here is a major sign, a mark of the autonomy, of the existence of a subject. Denial of speech consequently debases them into a mute objectivity in a world in which the babu - garrulous and fractious - alone has the right to subjectivity. Even the bauls and baīragīs in Tagore are impeccably babu in their language and cultural taste.

It is of course possible, and I think correct, to sugge that this place of the lower orders as speaking subjects in Bankim could be a dual feature. Part of its inspiration could in fact be drawn from European literature. In the babus' cont with the west, literature played a major part. This was not o due to the natural curiosity of the new middle class intellige sia about western literature as a mirror of western society. It portrayed two features of western culture which they considered significant. First, novels gave a reliable picture of t mechanisms of social relations. Secondly, the novel was also expression of a rationalistic literary form: it was part of rationalism that the representation of society in art was made in the analytical form of the novel. The new Bengali intellig sia therefore went into western literature with great enthusia often to a complete neglect of their own literary heritage whi came to be regarded supersititously as unreadably vulgar.

Exposure to English literature involved acceptance of literary norms of criticism and construction. Renaissance literature therefore constituted for the Bengali babu the highest classical canons of literary excellence. I am not concerned here with its general influence, but only with the question of how it affected the depiction of the lower orders. Evidently, the internal social composition in high literature of Europe had a dual structure. In Shakespeare, as much as in Moliere, the gentleman is nearly always accompanied by a man in waiting, a servant who is also a friend, a Sganarelle to Don Juan. Obviously, this is a double technique. Only partly is this a mere depiction of the social rituals of noble society; it is far more significant as the use of a different eye, and a different voice, which plays against the eye and the voice of the master. By the nineteenth century in European literature such closeness and dependence between gentleman master and his servant is already quite rare, and replaced by bourgeois social distance which does not allow the lower order persons to play a speaking role in the story. They go away to live primarily in the murky margins of polite society as servants or criminals. Occasionally, they come to have a literature of their own, as in Zola.

This certainly could be one possible literary source of the lower order figures in Bankim's novels. But it also has another unmistakable function within these narratives. They contain a reflection of the social and symbolic order at that historical point in Bengali society. He lived at a time when modern class distances, although instituted and beginning to be codified, had not crystallised as they would in the immediately following decades. However, I think it would be an error to put their ability to speak down only to the survival of seventeenth century canonical forms, or the state of affairs in the Bengali family circle. It is because he has a dual, contradictory

relation to the culture that the babu world was creating for his country, which makes him turn repeatedly to a lower order (or perhaps better, a nonbabu) voice. It is not its frequency that matters, but its symbolic significance; not how many times this happens, but when. It is in these orders that Bankim finds a directness, authencity and unassimilated quality that can act as a foil to the inauthenticity of the new middle class.

What I wish to suggest is that in Bankim's art the soci world seen in terms of people who are considered admissible within the boundaries of this respected, enchanted, sacred worl is wider and consequently more realistic. Of course the babu dominates this world, both inside fiction as well as outside, but, because his world has not been so irreversibly formed, so strongly and irreversibly structured with the stamp of his dominance, he still lives in close neighbourliness with lower orders of people. Servants are almost always on attendance on their babu principals, not silently in demeaning postures of servility, but with ability to speak. And this ability immedia tely confers on them a different identity and vision, a distinc social sight. This sight is not different simply in terms of social perspectivality, but also a different kind of subtlety a perceptiveness. Not only does the arrangement of the social world appear differently to them; because they are free of typi higher order inhibitions they are able to see whole number of things which their superiors are either not able to see or admi they have seen. In European literature classical drama is the great illustration of this technique, particularly Shakespeare and Moliere, in whose work the underside of things figure constantly and come up for explicit discussion. Occasionally, they are used to observe reality in a related but different register. While main protagonists would often register a complex and vague impression like beauty, they might often

redescribe the same person in terms of anatomical observation. The bodily attractiveness of people, the materiality of the universe, figure largely in their observation and speech.

Their presence in the narrative is not just a literary excuse, not just a matter of dramatic empiricism - a technique of physical portrayal to make the setting credible. They are not just milieux; they are vital to both the structure of narrative and speech internal to the drama or the novel. For the point of the drama and the novel is to reveal the world. They bring a counterpointing commentary, a counterpointing experience of relations and objects, a greater earthiness of speech and observation to balance, complement, to fill out the absences and the inabilities of their superiors, who are tied down, encumbered and deceived by their own structures of censorship of the world. Servants or lower class figures represent voices and visions from outside the region of the repressed. Surely, such literature does not amount to a conscious celebration of the culture of the people - of the folk, the grotesque, the bodily, the licentous as does the Rabelaisian moment in European literature.[97] Still, it shows an interesting equipoise, at least a critical sense of this advancing repression, the closure and disqualification of whole branches of existence, whole terrains on the ground that they are unfit for aesthetic, literary representation. The classical vision shows a strong sense that this excluded world is part of the world, and that without some representation of this, the picture of the world would remain untrue. Between the idealism of the master and the materialism of his servants, the literary world achieves its fictional truth.

Clearly however 'the question of the popular' can be asked in two forms. First, we could ask how is the popular represented in a single work, or in a fictive world? A second concern could

be: is there a sense in which the art, the view of the world? can be called popular, or has some deep popular aspect to it? Bankim, we have said earlier, is not a popular writer in any direct sense. It was not part of his conscious ideology to speak for or in praise of the people, at least in their unreconstructed condition. He founds the tradition of high literature in Bengali. Occasionally, when he speaks feelingly for the people, for instance in his essays, he does so without the slightest intent of any metaphorical submergence into them as their representative.

Yet I cannot suppress a feeling of a strong presence of something popular in Bankim's writing. And I think it emerges not because of the substantive content of Bankim's literature, but through some of its implicit formal qualities. Bankim's use of language, for one thing, does not exclude or marginalise the popular use of it; on the contrary, as I tried to show earlier, he is perhaps the only Bengali writer of fame who discovers a distinct, different kind of power in ordinary men's speech, and said openly that literature would be poorer if it excludes that language.

In the play of formal elements in Bankim's humour there is a strange and often unremarked mixture. By form I refer to two aspects which are analytically or theoretically distinct. One aspect of formal artifice consists in the use of language to create literary tropes. In terms of tropes, Bankim's favourite is the ironical praise (or praise-abuse), a piece of alankāra taken straight out of classical sanskrit rhetoric. Alankāric play of this type can obviously be appreciated only by the highly literate, who can understand the rich vocabulary of classical sanskrit, and the still greater resources it gives itself by rules of grammatical manipulation and samasa and sandhi. Sometimes, as in case of the babu stotra it creates its humour by

use of a high language for a low occasion, giving the <u>babu</u>'s less exalted pursuits the ceremonial description of high ritual. None of these features can be called popular. But form, I would like to suggest, not merely refers to stylistics, but also to the philosophical tone, or way of relating to the world. In writing, this is the equivalent of what tone is in spoken utterance. And Bankim's manner of relating to the world all through is <u>travestic</u>, and travesty arises out of an urge to do a social sacrilege. It emerges through a popular urge to descreate the high rituals of a constituted society which the critics are powerless to challenge or transform. Those who lack the means of power to recreate the world according to their preferences, or answer everyday insults take their revenge through travesty, the typical weapon of the powerless. Bankim's art, if we read it in this way, achieves a curious mixture of the elite and the popular: while the language in which it speaks is elite, the way the world is brought into representation inside it is travestic and popular.

This is one of several ways in which Bankim's art stands still fairly close to earlier traditional forms of literary entertainment. Literature is still predominantly a form of play-its play with language, with its audible pleasures and idiosyncracies, whimsical play of sounds. Subsequent Bengali literature would look upon this with slight contempt, as unworthy of serious and subtle writers and the enjoyment of language would turn more on a play of meanings than of sounds. This also reveals itself in the quality of its humour - the rawness, directness and nonstylised character. Bankim's novels, or even his essays, if not like a marketplace in its noise, laughter, lack of formal structure and severity, its unstructured enjoyment of life like Bakhtin's Rabelais, is at least a much wider, open world. By the time we come to Tagore, this laughter, this openness, this this vitality has gone out of the novel form. The history of Bengali literature afterwards is a history of a great narrowing

of the social world.

VI

A Narrowing of the World

The world narrows because of and in exact measure with the babu's conquest of it. This process of restriction of literature is particularly evident in two respects. It is inconceivable that we would encounter a character like Prasannayi in subsequent literature, including I think Tagore's. This is not only because Tagore, quite legitimately, pursued different literary and creative objectives. It indicates a social aspect of fiction. In Bankim's time the shape of babu society was merely being formed; it was putting together its cultural furniture. Naturally, there was far greater catholicity in its literary tastes and repertoire. It experimented on the one side with classicisation, as with Bankim's Krṣnacaritra[98] or in a very different way Madhusudan Dutta's Meghanādvadh. But it still enjoyed earlier forms of literary traditions like the technically excellent though occasionally smutty poetry of Iswar Gupta.[99] It could still find enjoyment in vaisnava poets and the classical sanskrit tradition which would soon be put beyond the limits of refined taste by a double disqualification through the decline of sanskrit skills and acceptance of victorian censorship of the body.[100] Soon afterwards, the typical babu would regard the explicit eroticism of Jayadeva or Kalidasa as revoltingly carnal. In Bankim's time the search for norms was still open.

Literature, or the world to be presented in it, runs increasingly through a double filter: a filter that is aesthetic and at the same time surreptitiously social. Nowhere is this reflected more than in the internal complexity of the language.

Certainly, in a sense, language becomes more refined, capable of handling greater shades of situational and emotional tones, more developed as a literary language/vehicle. At the same time it becomes more one dimensional. It becomes exclusively the language of the babu, the language he would have considered refined, proper, fit for enjoyment. He imposes in other words the history of his class as a restrictive format on the language of his culture. Other languages are marked by a shamefacedness, and gradually disappear. Other languages, still present in Bankim, are most severely filtered and censored out of it. "You must express clearly what you wish to say; you must say all that you have to say; use whatever language is required for that purpose - English, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, rustic, savage, whatever language, take recourse to anything except the obscene."[101] This linguistic programme would become entirely unacceptable within two decades.

To relate the actual use of language and choice of words of a writer to the social world is a risky, if not misleading activity. Still, it is an intuitive truth that there are real and immediately perceived frontiers across the spoken and used language.[102] In the language that a writer uses, there is sometimes a deliberate strategy at work. Indeed, since the writer's production is related to words, no writer can have a purely unthought out relation to the language in which he writes and the language which gets represented in his writing. Even though he does not have a wholly deliberate strategy, either through design or half-indifference a writer lets some parts of language and some speakers and some modes of speaking to figure in his work. This could be used to discern his relation to the social world.

Bankim's language is not only wonderfully innovative, but also strikingly open. The idea of openness means simply that it lets the Bengali world before it becomes ordered and arranged according to a predominantly babu taste to be represented inside literature. It is a linguistic world full of tensions, of alternative possibilities. One cannot say that Bankim uses the language of the marketplace. But one could use the marketplace as a metaphor. If one wished to see the whole social world, to listen to it, the market was the proper place to do so. A market is the great social crossroad, where different classes come and interact and can be themselves. It is in the market that one can hope to hear all the accents, all the social dictions of the society's language. Markets are therefore microcosms of the social universe as nothing else can be. Occasionally, one hears something like a marketplace effect in Bankim's writing. Of course these languages carry their dense social markers. Bhadralok speak Bengali differently from the lower classes. Bhadralok speak differently when they speak to other bhadralok and when they are speaking to their inferiors. Within the bhadralok household the women represent a linguistic opposition. Later, this is replaced by a dull uniformity of bhadralok language. There could be great divergence of political opinion in a drawing room conversation, but these would all be expressed in the same drawing-room dialect. Depending therefore on what you hear or set out to hear, the conversation could be varied or uniform. To someone like Shaw's Higgins[103] it would b unbearably flat. He would say we are doing the wrong kind of listening.

To turn this around, a piece of fiction that is moderate in terms of the opinions explicitly expressed could be astonishingly varied and popular in terms of the sounds it allows entry within its fictive circle. Modern literary listening in Bengal in this sense, is utterly impoverished and one dimensional.

We have been trained now to listen to meanings, and somehow do not hear the sounds, reducing language to only its semantic register and entirely obliterating the phonetic one. Bankim has a listening which is attentive not only to meanings, but to sounds as well. In view of this, the presence of the popular in a literary text comes to appear as a more complex judgment that is usually believed. Is a character who speaks like the Communist Manifesto more 'popular' than one using an authentic people's accent? This raises the problem of the sense in which we can listen to the popular in cultural texts; and in Bankim the popular is present in this, more subliminal way.

Language for Bankim in any case is a theatre of war.[104] English culture, in its imitated babu form, is always the addressee and the adversary. And in this, Bankim seems to offer a solution to the problem of the linguistic crisis of Bengali which went right against the predominant thinking offered by the rest of Bengali culture. This point should not be misunderstood. Comparison with English threw Bengali language into a crisis; for it was clear that it must, in order to compel attention, offer resources of expression which are equally versatile. But the standard solution, which was historically accepted, was to integrate uses of English syntax and vocabulary, and to affect an increasingly refined, intellectualised style. Elements of the popular were generally excised from its ideals. Bankim's solution is to take the entire world of spoken and used language and use it against the invading English. Because of that theory later literary language becomes flatter in terms of social tonality, more impersonal, more formally equal.

Bankim's artistic practice therefore shows a certain adequacy to his aesthetic theory. Kamalakanta shows this aesthetic quite clearly even through its tone of halfseriousness, an aesthetic ecumenism which uses the historical availability of several

traditions to fashion a creative synthesis, rather than an impoverished westernised solution. Unlike later authors, he allows these different traditions to speak in their different voices, and he has the amazing, practically unique, ability to select and mix their strengths.[105] Later these diverse tendencies are excluded, censored, debarred. In the culture of Tagore, for instance, the high classical tone derived from Indian influences mix easily with high western aesthetic in a self-conscious and deliberate theoretical construct. But the element of the popular, the carnivalesque, the market like is missing. Of course in a certain way, the later culture is more refined and cultivated, but it contains an erasure which is worth analysing.

It is as a mark, a carrier of this principle that I see the figure of Prasanna goalini in Kamalakanta; that she is quite essential for its structure is revealed by her persistence. One feels, reading the more philosophically tones essays of the daptar that she is a mere curiosity, a structurally useless interloper. As the book proceeds, however, she reappears constantly, until she figures so strongly, as one of the central characters, in the last act, when in a startling change of scale a book of essays turns into a drama. As we have seen, this curious passage of form, from one vehicle to another, is however entirely in consonance with the principles which inform the whole work. The principle of negation, of being unreconciled, which has been articulated playfully, pronounced earlier as a joke, are suddenly given an immensely dramatic, condensed form. This is why despite the difference of form, both the author and his historical readership have taken the jobānbandī as a natural continuation of the conflict which is proposed and subtly begun in the daptar. It is also natural that in this, Prasanna as a figure condensing the feminine and the popular would play a central role.

In the discourse of a babu Prasanna could not have such a role; she could not have been a speaking figure. She could not be someone with things to say, with a right to intervene. If she or her kind is needed, it would be to simply and silently supply articles of need, a producer of goods, not of discourses. Hierarchy is of course there in the fable-like world of Kamalakanta; she is not his equal. But there is a real human transaction between people of higher and lower ors, the mark of a concrete, face to face society. The servant is still not mentioned by the generic name of a cākar or jhi; they still have, despite their menial occupation a discursive individuality. By Tagore's time, this had changed. Presumably, the life of the babus could not go on without an army of servants, but they work in the unseen and unmentionable depths of the household. Later, they are typed in a way fairly common in second rate Bengali theatre: servants come in with a gāmchā on their back, a figure expressing servility even in physical postures, and a form of comic dependence and unreason. This is the latent drift of description in Tagore's puratan bhrtya:[106] the old servant is silent both in life and death, and by this wins the babu's posthumous commendation. They become objective necessities of middle class life unendowed with other attributes of the human.

Puratan Bhrtya expresses the stereotype rather well, despite the comic intentions of the story. The servant, as a representative of the lower order is already a combination of ugliness, irrationality, mendacity. At the end of the poem it is slightly compensated by his loyalty to the narrating babu. What is interesting is the underlying operation behind this description. Such an uncomplex description is possible only on condition of lack of contact. Notice also the almost complete success with which the babu has learnt the lesson from his European instructors (he is a gurumārā celā, in Tagore's words).

He has transferred to his social inferiors a set of negative attributes in a way exactly similar to the one in which the Europeans confer attributes to their colonial subjects. He justifies his dominance in exactly similar ways, grounding it in some other bases than just power, or social luck. There is always a certain shamefacedness of power about being its own justification.[107] Not surprisingly the inequality between the colonial and the coloniser is seen to be based on something other than power, moral prowess, technical knowledge, rationality. Social differences are contingent, but biological and natural ones are necessary. The rationalist babu feels happier, more secure and coherent if the inequalities of which he is a beneficiary are seen on these grounds: unequal distribution of life chances are seen as the natural result of a similarly unequal distribution of the capacity for rational thought.

This leads to another point about social thought. Whether this is true of servants in general or not, the babu believes this to be true of servants in general. He may not feel that rational deficiencies are entirely irreversible/irreparable, and may become an excellent and devoted reformer. But he would not learn from or be led by them. For employers' contempt and reformers' pity share some common beliefs about what subalterns are like. Reform too assumes there is nothing to be learnt from them. For a more fully developed babu framework therefore it would be impossible to assert, as Bankim does, that the truth of the world is constructed out of the play of two sights, one of which is the sight from below.

After Bankim the space of literature undergoes a paradoxical change: it is enormously expanded and sharply restricted at the same time. The space of literature widens, for novels proliferated, literary genres become more established with clearer

appreciation of their boundaries, greater self conscious matching of a genre and its proper language. But this enlarged literary space reflects a smaller social world. It was more and more narration about less and less of the world of society. The only world to be depicted adnauseum was the world of the babu, the babu in his various incarnations, social groups, cultural types: the rural babu of Saratchandra, the urban babu of Tagore, the Hindu and the Brahmo, the indigenist and the westerniser. What is remarkable is the astounding self absorption, immodesty, collective narcissism, the world consuming pretensions of babu culture in its hour of glory. These were the times of its greatest self-confidence, the moment at which it could safely assume (and did not even take the trouble to argue) that the only interesting object in human life, except of course Europe, was themselves. Bengali literature becomes the great theatre which chronicled the babu's existence, the record of its great tragedies. Inside it, the Bengali babu analysed and justified himself, celebrated and abused himself, exulted and agonised about himself. Other elements and other social classes, experiences structured by other social places, other voices were severely and decisively excluded. In someways this was so complete that even large ideological differences were unable to break out of the bounds of this circle.

Surprisingly, even self consciously radical (or left) literature was also very much an inheritor of this enclosed tradition; for it did not break out of it except in its pretensions. When radical writers attempted descriptions of nonbabu life their evident unfamiliarity with the outside universe, the world of the lower orders, its language, its distinct culture, its idioms attained a strange and perverted form. In many intending radical narratives the vitality of the slums would be expressed only through its linguistic abuse and comparative sexual freedom.

It is hardly surprising that of the two basic tendencies in Bengali left literature one succeeded artistically more than the other. Thematically, radical writers sought to articulate their radicalism in two ways, which had, in my view, very different artistic consequences. In some cases, they brought a negative evaluative consciousness to their reflection on the babu world. For example, while one picture of the babu's sexuality showed him composing poetry for his lady, as Amit Ray does for Labanya,[108] some severely radical critics would show the other side of the picture in demonstrating his libidionous addresses to his maid servant. As one side of babu poetry would carry on upamās of the poetic tradition, there was, on occasion, a brilliant retort like Sukanta Bhattacharyya's startling and stark reversal into the metaphors of urban hunger. Also this was a brilliant poem in terms of its internal conceptual-aesthetic construction, for it shows an internal breaking down of poetry at its limits, for it is an argument for abandoning poetry in poetry.

> ebār kathin kathor gadya āno
> padalālitya jhankār muche jāk
> gadyer kadā hātudike āj hāno
> prayojan nei kabitār snigdhatā
> kabitā tomāy dilem ājke chuti
> ksudhār rājye prthivī gadyamay
> purnimācānd jeno jhalsāno ruti.[109]

Its appropriateness is enhanced by the association of poetry with the discourse of the leisured, the middle class, the unurgent. In poetry reaching its limit in poetry, it also signals the middle class reaching the limits of the consciousness of the middle class.

This however was only one side of radical literature, a literature which is a continuation, though a self consciously destructive continuation of the earlier literature of the _babu_. It announces an end of his literature from inside, not outside. It demonstrated, broughtout into the open space of literary comment the seamier, the dark side of the _babu_'s personality, its hidden tendencies, passions, lusts, small felonies, the akrasia of the everyday, all that hides behind the sparkling, intellectualised, self-portrait of the Bengali middle class. It chronicles its debasement, humiliation, disenchantment, and after the fifties the way it moves actually to the edges of real hunger. In this, too the control and refinement of Sukanta Bhattacharyya was the exception, rather than the rule. But although it is often, like some of radical theatre, melodramatic, exaggerating and unsubtle, it is generally successful.

Radical literature also tried its hand often at something else, in which it was less successful. This was when tried to act the proletarian. Tagore's admonition to the left was thus both right and wrong: To the extent the left tried to engage in _soukhin majduri_[110] it was bound to sound pretensiously false. But it was wrong in the sense that the left did not do merely that, and the self-critical part of its literature was powerful and authentic. From this powerful enclosure of literary discourse within the circle of the _babu_'s life and sight even the radicals were not entirely exempt.

FOOTNOTES

1. I have used Naoroji as a symbol for another trend of critical thought in early nationalism. Naoroji was the author of the work, Poverty and UnBritish Rule in India, which enunciated the 'drain theory', and began the political economic critique of colonial rule. Yet he represents a trend of thought which thinks high capitalist principles are enactable in the colonies; Bankim, on the other hand, considers that kind of reenactment impossible. Any attempt at reenactment must degenerate into travesty.

2. BR, ii, 92.

3. BR, ii, 108.

4. The most erudite and convincing presentation of this argument was perhaps Bhudev Mukhopadhyay's Samajik Prabandha (Essays on Society) written between 1887 and 1889. For an account of his ideas, Tapan Raychaudhury, Europe Reconsidered, OUP, Delhi, 1988, chapter 2.

5. BR, ii, 104.

6. This was stated much earlier in the famous essay on the babu in LR, through the sage Vaisampayana's omniscient speech. BR, ii, 11. For a discussion, see below.

7. BR, ii, 101.

8. BR, ii, 102.

9. BR, ii, 103-4.

10. I use the terms language game and life form rather than the more clearly defined practice or social form, precisely because these are hazier. But a hazier term can sometimes fit our intentions more precisely, as in my view it does here. To use terms like social form or political structure would attribute more deliberation to Bankim's use than is there, and give it too clear a theoretical form. However clearly Bankim is sensitive to the fact that court language is not an arbitrary, capricious use of language, it fits the social practice of law, and the legal structure of that kind can exists only under a colonial dispensation. It would be wrong to deny that there is a certain theoretical quality about this thinking, but equally to extrapolate a fully structured theory of colonialism from it.

11. BR, ii, 104.

12. BR, ii, 105.

13. BR, ii, 107-8.

14. The Gita, uses this idea to indicate a person free of the bonds of interest.

15. BR, ii, 103.

16. BR, ii, 9-10.

17. In this piece, and the two following pieces in Lok Rahasya, Bābu, and Garddabha (The Ass), the stotra form is alluded to more in terms of the semantic and rhetorical aspects, what Sanskrit rhetoricians would call in terms of the alamkaras used. Later, he experiments with a politicisation of the stotra form, first somewhat satirically in Āmār Durgostav, BR, ii, 81, later more seriously, in Ānandamath, with enormous success.

18. Another point usually missed by admiring commentators on Hindu religion is the savage competitiveness among its deities. Usually, commentators point only to the tolerance resulting from the pantheism of Hindu religious beleifs; a worshipper of one god can nevertheless have regard for others; persons belonging to the same family can worship different gods. First, of course such possibilities should not be overextended. In cases where ritual practices are sharply conflicting, there are real and narrow limits to such tolerance. Ritual practices of the strictly vegetarian vaisnavas can hardly be compatible with the ritual slaughter (bali) practised by saktas. However, the intolerance is sometimes shifted to the plane of a strange form of verbal measurement. It is common to find stotras to one deity which would assert that other deities are always worshipping at his feet, or more mystically, a million brahmas would not be able to measure your end, etc. A language of excess is quite often a part of the stotra form, and Bankim sees here great possibilities of travesty.

19. BR, ii, 9-10.

20. 'Byāghrācārya Brhallāngul', BR, ii, 1-9.

21. '<u>Babu</u>', BR, ii, 10-12, which I regard as one of the best pieces of satire Bankim ever wrote. For its rhetorical elegance, political point, and the sheer fury of the emotion it expresses, it has few comparisons in the history of Bengali literature.

22. This is typical of the double meanings used in traditional writing, for the term <u>guna</u> means both virtues and the more neutral meaning, qualities.

23. For a brief account see below.

24. This is a common phrase used by religious texts, to invigilate their own interpretation. The text itself offers alongside a sort of authoritative commentary.

25. Keshubchandra Sen, leading Brahmo reformer and leader of middle class opinion.

26. BR, ii, 11-12.

27. BR, ii, 12.

28. Like the play on <u>udaracaritra</u> and <u>udāracaritra</u>.

29. It is on rare occasions that Tagore would indulge himself with a few, obviously nonserious examples of wordplay. The versatility of a Bengali style which uses the double meanings and convenience of <u>sandhi</u> and <u>samāsa</u> is spontaneously rediscovered by Tagore in some of his witty songs, like '<u>cā-sprha cancala cātaka dala cala cala he</u>', Gitabitan, 598.

30. In Sukumar Ray's second collection of nonsense poems, <u>Khāi Khāi</u>. A few of his poems were translated by Satyajit Ray in his <u>Nonsense Verse of Sukumar Ray</u>, Writers' Workshop, Calcutta. More recently some of Ray's poems have been rendered into English with a skill bordering on the miraculous, in Sukanta Chaudhuri, <u>Selected Nonsense of Sukumar Ray</u>, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987.

31. Why do you merely say, I wish to eat; come sit down to eat.

32. I shall serve you a strange meal, one that is properly called a feast.

33. jado kare āni sab, thāko sei āśāte: I shall gather all of it together; spend your time in hope.

34. This is untranslatable, because it uses the idiom of "'to eat', but it literally means, untensils get dents on them, children are swung on swings.

35. Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World, 63.

36. Eg. Bangadeser Krsak.

37. It is remarkable that those who adopted a predominantly political economy view of the matter, tended to share economists' general optimism about social engineering, and believed in the theory of reenactment. By contrast, those who took a more cultural-political perspective doubted this.

38. BR, ii, 92.

39. Ibid, 93.

40. Ibid, 93.

41. The original sloka was devoutly intended, and was meant to announce the omnipotence of the lord by whose grace even the dumb can speak, the lame cross a mountain.

42. BR, ii; 93.

43. Ibid, 93.

44. Ibid, 93-94.

45. Ibid, 94.

46. Ibid, 94.

47. BR, ii, 51-54.

48. Ibid, 51-52.

49. Kusmanda, the sanskrit term for gourd, is used, to indicate someone who is similarly pompous and hollow.

50. BR, ii, 55-56, this piece, the third in KD, is called "Utility or the Philosophy of the Stomach".

51. BR, ii, 69.

52. This story is Voltairian in many senses. Formally, it is a similar story of fast, significant action. But the major similarity lies in their similar philosophic points. They take a deliberately constructed protagonist through the whole gamut of social institutions, in order to unravel their logic critically. In this best of all possible worlds, chances always goes in favour of Muciram, but his successful and eventually triumphant journey is successful in two sense. For him, it is a success in the literal sense; but for the readers of his amazing career too, it has revealed the essential structure of colonial life.

53. Among the reasons for Muciram being a weaker piece than Kamalakanta one is the relative absence of the others of the babu in the story. Women and the popular characters do not figure in it in the same manner.

54. I am not using the term to denote a narrow negative, or opposite. In the best of cases, it is difficult determine precisely which social role is, in the narrow sense, the opposite of another. In the babu's case, one could say that these are his opposites in the sense that he rules over them; but that is not equally or in the same sense true of all these types. They are called his others in the looser sense that their experience of the world was bound to be very different, and they could therefore, in satire, be seen as representatives of other principles.

55. Examples of this are: 'A Criticism of the Ramayana (written by a certain English critic)', BR, ii, 27-29, 'Letter from a "Special" (specialist)', BR, ii, 31-33, both part of LR, 'The Big Market' (Bada Bāzār), KD, BR, ii, 75-79. There are similar passages in other, more serious essays too, as in the Krsnacaritra.

56. Ānandamath, BR, i, 692.

57. Devī Chaudhurānī, BR, i, 764-768.

58. Indirā.

59. Rajanī.

60. Dharmaśiksā, in LR, ii, 42-44.

61. BR, ii, 48.

62. BR, ii, 44-47

63. Prācīnā eyam navīnā (The Old Woman and the New), BR, ii, 249-256. Interestingly, Bankim's perceptiveness about 'voices' is reflected here. After the first main essay, there are several brief comments purportedly written by women correspondents.

64. Ibid, 251.

65. Though he can describe them extremely well, cf. ibid. 252-3.

66. Walter Benjamin Illuminations (trans. Harry Zohn), Fontana Collins, Glasgow. 1970, "Theses on the philosophy of history", 259.

67. BR, ii, 249.

68. BR, ii, 399.

69. Ibid, 399.

70. Ibid, 399.

71. Ibid, 399-400.

72. Ibid, 250.

73. BR, ii, 44.

74. Ibid, 45-46.

75. 'New Years Day', BR, ii, 47.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. Pracina evam navina, BR, ii, 251.

79. Ibid, 252.

80. Ibid, 254.

81. Ibid, 256.

82. Like Suryamukhī in Visabrksa or Bhramar in Krishnakānter Will.

83. From Tagore's _Gorā_.

84. In Tagore's _Ghare Bāire_ (translated usually as The Home and the World).

85. Kitty and Labanya are the two opposed types of Brahmo women in _Śeser Kabitā_.

86. Though admittedly one comes across some figures like Lalitā who are outside this general norm in Tagore's novels. And surely, the conflicts Tagore is talking about are quite different. These have been shifted into the mind.

87. Except again characters like Binodinī in _Cokher Bāli_ or Nīla in the long story, _Laboratory_. In _Cokher Bāli_ Tagore creates a potentially explosive situation, but it bears the stamp of his characteristic sensibility in the comparative gentleness of the narrative end.

88. The famous lines in _Aikatān_, _Janmadine_,
'mājhe mājhe gechi āmi opādār prānganer dhāre
bhitare praveś kari se śakti chila nā ekebāre',
Sancayitā, 823.

89. Partha Chatterjee once said to me in conversation that they are like objects painted into a landscape, the way village life must have looked from the paradoxical combination of intimacy and distance of a cruising boat.

90. Mikhail Bakhtin, _Rabelais and His World_, (Trans. Helene Iswolsky) Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1984.

91. I have argued earlier that Brajeswar in _Devī Chaudhurānī_, although a protagonist placed in a historical milieu in which the _babu_ had not arrived, is as much a _babu_ as more straightforward cases like Nagendra or Govindalal.

92. Tilottamā's stepmother in Durgeshnandinī, though her actual identity is not revealed till the end of the story.

93. _Mrnālinī_.

94. _Devi Chaudhurānī_.

95. _Rājsinha_.

96. _Candraśekhar_.

97. This has been brought home very powerfully by the recent currency of Mikhail Bakhtin's work.

98. I have discussed this in the next chapter of this work, 'Imaginary History'.

99. In this connection Bankim's critical appreciation of Iswar Gupta is very interesting: 'Īswar Gupter Jīvancarit o Kavitwa', BR, ii, 835.

100. Bankim's literary criticism, though of admirable quality, are generally neglected - both in serious discussions of his art, and in the canonical introduction of Bengali adolescents to his literature. But his literary ideals, and a part of his poetics could be clearly found in his discussions of the vaisnava poets and high Sanskrit literature, particularly, the long essay on the *Uttararāmacarita*.

101. BR, ii, 373.

102. Ways in which such delicate operations can still be done, within the general ambit of marxist theory, is shown in Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, (trans. Ladislav Matejka and I R Titunik) Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1986. I simply invoke this text in favour of the view that marxism may have something to do with intangible but fundamental things like words and language too, besides tangible ones like production. It is not claimed however that the analysis undertaken is an application of the theoretical insights of Volosinov.

103. The linguistic expert in *Pygmalion*.

104. This is especially clear in his occasional references to the state of Bengali literature, and in the introductory remarks to the readers of his journal *Bangadarśan*.

105. He advocates this theory explicitly in his essay 'Bāngālā Bhāsā' (The Bengali Language), BR, ii, 368.

106. Rabindranath Tagore, '*Purātan Bhrtya*' (The Faithful Old Servant), *Chitra*, *Sancayita*, 236.

107. This idea has recently been investigated in the context of European philosophy. The work of Hans Georg Gadamer touches on several occasions on how justifications are seen as most acceptable if they are made on cognitive grounds, and how this sets up a tradition of what Rorty calls "epistemological privilege". Gadamer develops a critique of this implicit prejudice from a Heideggerian position. A concise account of this line of thinking and some of its implications is to be found in Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Blackwell, Oxford, 1981.

108. In Tagore's Ṡeser Kabitā.

109. 'He Mahājīvan,' (O Endless Life) arguably one of the most celebrated of Sukanta Bhattacharya's poems, in Chadpatra.

110. Tagore, 'Aikatān', Janmadine. In his criticism Tagore made two crucial points: only those who are participants of the life of the peasant, those who have won a 'real kinship' with him in both practice and words, have the title to write on their behalf. (krsāner jīvaner sarik je jan/karme o kathāy satya ātmīyatā kareche arjan je āche mātir kāchākāchi/ se kabir bānī lāgi kān pete āchi.)- "Let it be true; let it not try to deceive our eyes by its pretences/mannerisms." (setā satya hok/sudhu bhangī diye jeno nā bholāy chokh). Sancayitā, 823.

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