

## **Bankim and the Critique of European Modernity**

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### I

As a school of thought, “modernity” is essentially a phenomenon, beginning sometime in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, it still continues to hold a unique place in contemporary discussion. As a concept, ‘modernity’ does not have a fixed, easily delineated meaning [Lyon 2002]. The term specifically refers to the social order that emerged following the Enlightenment. The entire discourse of modernity is based supremely on the idea of science, reason and freedom. Throughout the period, modernity carried the crusade against everything conventional and traditional and signified at the same time that its inevitable growth and the emergence of discipline were closely related. That “the modern is ideal, perfect and pure” became the virtuous slogan of the day. In fact, Europe had taken it as the sole standard of characterizing “modernity”. They applied the same in the colonies and while comparing their superiority with those of the “others”—the conquered colonies—determined their positions on the basis of this fixed standard. They tried to prove that their civilization was superior to those of the colonies.

The Enlightenment had a central role in articulating the superior, civilized nature of modern empires. The ‘reformulation’ of empire with the Enlightenment and Modernity signified an important, if imperfect, change in

Western European political and cultural thought (Pagden: 1995). All Western European powers transported the civilization of modernity to their empires, with ambivalent consequences for the colonized. Modern technologies, railways, the telegraph and weapons were used to control and order colonial societies. Imperial expansion stimulated science and new botanical finds. It facilitated the exploitation of 'exotic' environments, legitimizing colonial conquest. Imperialism thus had an important function in taming and ordering the 'wild' through the introduction of Western science.

The culture of modernity was spread by the White Diasporas: the administrative elites in the non-settler colonies and the settlers who established mini Europe throughout the globe. White settler societies transported Western progress to the 'darker', less 'enlightened', parts of the world and white settler rule was premised on spatial and cultural segregation from the indigenous peoples (Evans and Grimshaw et al.(eds); 2003). Civilization/Superior religion was pitted against barbarism/paganism, order against disorder that threatened the civilized world, and the spread of a superior civilization provided a common justification of the Empires (Bush, 2006: 24)

A belief in the irreconcilable difference or 'otherness' of subordinated peoples is also a continuous feature of empires. Despite the enormous differences between the colonial enterprises of various European nations, they seem to generate fairly similar stereotypes of 'outsiders'—both those outsiders who roamed far away on the edges, and those who (like the Irish) lurked uncomfortably nearer home. Thus, laziness, aggression, violence, greed, sexual promiscuity, bestiality, primitivism, innocence and irrationality are attributed by the English, French, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonists to Turks, Africans, Native Americans, Jews, Indians, the Irish and others (Loomba, 1998: 107). These had played a great role in colonial stereotyping. 'New World Natives' have been projected as birthed by the European encounter with them;

accordingly, a discourse primitivism surrounds them (Greenblatt, 1991: 110). On the other hand, “the East” is constructed as barbaric or degenerate. In fact, for Europe to emerge as the site of civilizational plenitude, it was necessary for the colonized world to become emptied of meaning. In his book, “The Intimate Enemy” (1983), Ashis Nandy writes:

“This colonialism colonizes the minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural properties once and for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category.”

‘Colonialism’ thus marks the historical process whereby the ‘West’ attempts systematically to cancel or negate the value of the ‘non-West’ or the ‘other’ and establish its cultural superiority on them. Thus, the West emerges as the cultural superior—the embodiment of “Reason” against the barbaric, uncivilized other of their colonies who must be “enlightened” and metamorphocised into “moderns” under the tutelage of their Western Masters. It was only adopting the Master’s way of life, Master’s language, Master’s philosophy that the ‘barbar indigenus’ could only attain salvation. The West was the only model to be followed by the subjected colonized; modernity was the only way of life which would civilize these inferiors though never places them at par with their superior masters.

Said’s “Orientalism” unmasked the ideological disguises of this colonial imperialism. Said attempted to illustrate the manner in which the representation of Europe’s ‘others’ has been institutionalized since at least the eighteenth century as a feature of its cultural dominance. It proposes that ‘Orientalism’—or the project of teaching, writing about and researching the orient—had always been an essential cognitive accompaniment and inducement to Europe’s imperial adventures in the hypothetical ‘East’. Said examined how the knowledge that the Western imperial powers formed about their colonies helped continually to justify their subjugation.

Said pointed out that the western travelers recorded their observations based upon commonly held assumptions about ‘the orient’ as a mythic place of exoticism, moral laxity, sexual degeneracy and so on. These ‘observations’ were presented as ‘scientific truths’ that, in their turn, functioned to justify the way propriety of colonial domination.

However, much before Said and Postcolonialism became the fashion of the day; critique of Western modernity and Enlightenment was clearly conspicuous in the works of a handful of western-educated “colonized”. Nowhere is such a critique more transparent than in the writings of some of the great minds of the nineteenth century Bengal. With profound knowledge in both indigenous as well as western literatures, these writers have neither discarded everything western altogether nor have taken the ‘West’ uncritically. In fact, with a cautious bent of mind they have pointed out the criticisms quite reasonably. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838—1894)—the first important novelist in the Bengali language—is one of them and in the later sections; we will try to locate, how.

## II

One could find innumerable scholarly discussions on Bankim. It is the power and appeal of Bankim’s most celebrated writings that has attracted a lot of discussion about Bankim – the novelist, best known to the wider world for his patriotic anthem, “Bande Mataram”. In this context, the writings of Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj and Tapan Roychoudhuri, to name a few, are most important.

Knowledge of western civilization was a matter of pride at that period in India, in general and Bengal, in particular. It was very much a part of contemporary elite culture in Bengal. The then Indian Anglicists or the reformers rejected Indian philosophy and much of Sanskritic culture as useless and acknowledged the superiority of western civilization directly or indirectly. Whatever signified European – the master race –

was accepted unquestionably. The students of the first era of new schools and colleges had almost an unqualified admiration for the unfamiliar learning of the ideals of national liberation and post-enlightenment rationalism now accessible to them as well as for the civilization which produced them.

In most of the cases, however, the heritage of the glorious Hindu culture was the focus of emerging nationalist consciousness. Yet the nationalists of that period, mostly moderates, developed high hopes for a steady progress under Britain's providential guidance.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, however, if categorized (though such a categorization is unintentional) as the first important novelist in the Bengali language or the writer of national anthem, *Bande-Mataram*, it would be quite amateurish to label him with such categorization; in fact, one could find it very difficult to determine which identity suits him better when it comes to revere him either as a novelist or as an ardent patriot. As regards Bankim's thought process, it was very much influenced by his family environment—the environment of a pious Brahmin home where all ancient tradition was considered as worthwhile. Conflicts at many levels and in many forms were a basic part of his day to day interactions and life experience. A fundamental contradiction of Bankim's life derived from the fact that his livelihood depended on service to and collaboration with alien rulers whose contempt for Indians was a fact of daily experience. Tapan Roychoudhuri commented in this context that “the uncertainty as to where humiliation ended and honour began in the service to the colonial master was never entirely clear to the men of his generation” [Roychoudhuri; 1988:115-6].

Before his assessment of western civilization acquired a pre-dominantly negative character, Bankim's scattered comments on the European past contained a number of critical observations. He pointed out that fifteenth century's Europe was more backward than nineteenth century's India. The advent of Renaissance

changed all; Europe started to expand, both economically and culturally and it resulted in a metamorphosis. The critique of European aggrandizement is perhaps best expressed in the satirical sketches in *'Kamalakanter Daptar'*. This is written allegedly by Kamalakanta Chakrabarty, a Brahmin, homeless, occupationless, a drug addict, a parasite, a sayer of the unsayable. He can be said to be a lumpen, vagabond, crank character if one uses the European categories of understanding. [Kaviraj, 1995: 28] Kamalakanta symbolizes “the other” in terms of European colonialist understanding; he symbolizes “madness” vis-a-vis the European colonial white civilization. But madness, as Foucault has revealed, often symbolizes the different voice of civilization, a severe critique of civilization which civilization suppresses or silences. The unhappy consciousness of Kamalakanta, alias Bankim, takes shelter under the disguise of opium and presents a critique of the colonial world which “the normal”, “the civilized”, “the educated” never dares to undertake.

In the *“Deposition of Kamalakanta”*, the essence of International Law in Europe is stated to be the right of possession by any means. ‘If you aspire after civilization and progress, you must grab what you can’ because this world is for the enjoyment of thieves. If the right of Conquest is a right, then is not that the Right of theft a right as well? [Chattopadhyay 2006]. Kamalakanta’s logic of the *other* is echoed by an imaginary speaking white cockatoo. The bird’s identity is made quite clear when it informs that he and his ally spread their wings and flew across to settle in lands where food was plentiful. Those who protested, were either killed or driven away. It projected quite similar ideology constructed and repeated by the colonial administrator, that is, the rationalist intellectual. Kamalakanta cannot be read adequately without decoding all its pretences [Kaviraj 1995:29].

At the end of the piece, Kamalakanta notices a crowd of small creatures who in his blurred vision resemble ants. But

the cockatoo explains: “True these creatures are very small, like ants; they look like ants too, but they are not ants really. They are called Bengalis. Look, a small drop of milk just trickled down from my perch; and the Bengalis fell over it and started fighting with each other for a share.....Am I not a benefactor to them? [Chattopadhyay 2006]. By this phrase, Bankim wanted to show that how Bengalis were eager to receive patronage, compassion or opportunity from the English. For this they could fight with the men of own race! And it is only due to this that the colonial administrators had managed to remain in power. When Kamalakanta undergoes an awakening from his opium-induced stupor he finds himself face to face with *Prasanna*, his foil, witnessed to his secret helplessness. He still prophetically confuses between the Ant and the Bengalis and asks Prasanna to take a broom and ‘sweep these Bengalis away’. And the woman does exactly that. This is the last symbolic gesture on which Kamalakanta’s dream ends, or you may say, begins. Prasanna, the repository of the qualities of the people, untutored, unspoilt, undegraded, like his other women, becomes the figure of history. She does in the final line of the text, what the author and the dreamer had been trying to do all through by his humour; this great act of cancellation, denying the reality of the present life of the Bengalis (Kaviraj, 1995: 70).

According to Bankim, the English had failed to understand anything of India despite their close contact with the country for about hundred fifty years. His contempt for the less informed European critiques of Indian life and civilization is expressed powerfully in a best known satire, ‘*Byaghracharya Brihallangul*’. A learned tiger spends a few days among men in a cage. He interpreted as a temple for the worship of tigers, constructed by humans, an inferior species. As the tiger had never seen humans constructs buildings, these were not constructed by them. A foot note confirms the reasonableness of this argument , for James Mill had concluded through similar reasoning that Sanskrit was a

barbarian language and the ancient Indians were uncivilized people. Similarly, Max Muller's thesis proved that ancient India had no written language [Chattopadhyay 2006].

Bankim's imaginary letter from one of the special correspondents who accompanied Edward, Prince of Wales, on his India tour focused on Britain's civilizing mission in India. It opened with the casual assertion that the Indians know very little about their own country. Bengal was named after a great Englishman, Benjamin Gall, who had discovered this land. Most Bengalis wore clothes of Manchester. So it is clear that they were naked before coming in contact with Manchester. The British had rescued them from the shame of nudity. High Court, rail, decree etc Bengali words come from English language. So, it can be said that Bengali is a branch of English. So it is evident that this country had no language before the arrival of British. In any case, Dr. Lorinzer and others had proved that the name of God Krishna derived from Christ and the Geeta was a translation of the Bible. And of course the so called Sanskrit language was a forgery by William Jones for purposes of self aggrandizement [Roychoudhuri; 1988: 177].

A review of the Ramayana – the great Hindu epic - by some European critic notes with some surprise that the work is nearly as good as inferior European poetry. So this is a great achievement for a Hindu poet. The epic's purpose is explained as the glorification of monkeys. Rama, the son of an idiot, polygamous, barbarian king, went on exile at the behest of his father with her young wife Sita. As Indian women were naturally unchaste, Sita eloped with Ravan and so on. Ramayana is an obscene literature and full of incorrect Sanskrit. Tapan Roychoudhuri opines accurately in this context: "These double parodies of Europe's racial vanity and ignorance of India masquerading as learned expertise were only an exaggerated version of Bankim's seriously held opinion on Orientalism and British perceptions of Indian life" [Roychoudhuri 1988:178].



In his later years, Bankim was convinced that with rare exceptions the European scholars were guided by their racial arrogance in their academic judgments. The heroism of Pandava brothers was poet's imagination but the legend of Draupadi's five husbands was true because it proved that Indians were polyandrous and barbarous. Evidently, anything favorable to Indians, found in Indian texts were either false or interpolated.

On the basis of some nude woman sculptures, Ferguson concluded that Indian women were naked. While some other scholars were convinced to see the excellent sculpture at Mathura that it must be the work of Greek craftsmen. Being unable to question the antiquity of Hindu Astronomy, Weber concluded that they got their lunar calendar from the Babylonians. Bankim commented that Weber was anxious to prove that the Indian civilization was of recent origin because 'the glory of India was intolerable to this descendant of barbarians who roamed the forests of Germany only the other day' [Bankim in Roychoudhuri 1988:181].

Western civilization and its colonial disciples were dominated by one central question—money. Bankim's *Kamalakanta* strictly criticized this ever unsatisfied thirst in an irreplaceable language:

“Hara hara bom bom! Worship, material, prosperity. Hara hara bom bom! Pour more money on the heaps of money! Money is devotion, money is salvation, money is worship, money is the only way (...) Do what you can to increase wealth (...) we have no heart beyond money (...) education and enterprise are the offerings at the worship and the human, heart is the animal to be sacrificed [Chattopadhyay, 2006].

In *Kamalakanta*, there is a description of an imaginary market where one stall displaying dry coconuts belongs to Sanskrit pundits with long pigtailed. As they have no instruments to cut open the coconuts and are hence they are content to eat the fiber. European shopkeepers attack

their stall, seize and cut open the coconuts with various western instruments and feast on the kernel. This western enterprise is explained as “Asiatic Researches”. If one had to learn from Western Indology, then he had to trust on own intelligence [Bankimchandra in Roychoudhuri, 1998:178].

The most explicit criticism of the British is found in the novels dealing with the early days of Company’s rule. He protested strictly against England’s divinely ordained role in India. “*Chandrasekhar*” was written in the background of Mirkashim’s war with English. There is no such reference in ‘*Chandrasekhar*’ about Britain’s providential role in India. There was only a saying of Ramananda Swami that the English will probably capture the entire country some day because they were ‘very fortunate, strong and dexterous’ [Chattopadhyay 2006].

Bankim’s contact with Europeans in India was very probably a major factor in his eventual rejection of western values. The rejection was never total. Roychoudhuri opines, that ‘the impulse to reject was, however, strong; for whatever the attractions of Europe perceived through the written word, experience of encounters with the ruling race was for the most part deeply humiliating for this proud man [Roychoudhuri 1988:113].

Sudipta Kaviraj (1995) opines that Bankim had made a new review about ‘modernity’. It was basically a tragic one. This tragedy was expressed by a mixture of the tragic and the humour. According to Kaviraj, “Kamalakanta thus represents a break in the evolution of Bankim’s thought. After this, the discourse of the ironizing self would not be enough. It would be necessary to invent another self which would be able to break out of the prison of history—not in humour, but in truth” [Kaviraj 1995:71].

Colonial rule was a great factor in the assessment of West in Bankim’s thought. He was very much conscious about the glorious past of Hindu. But they (Hindus) had forgotten it. There was a lack of desire for freedom. Thus,

through his novels Bankim tries to construct such a courageous 'national' hero. As an example we can state the name of '*Rajsingha*', the '*vir*' of Bengal who deined the mighty Mughal patriarch Aurangajeb. Through this novel Bankim wanted to represent a bright and glorious image of India's past.

“For more than three thousand years, Aryans have fought against Aryans, or Aryans against non-Aryans, or non-Aryans against non-Aryans.....all of these people have fought against one another.....all of these were battles among kings; the bulk of Hindu society has never fought for or against anyone. Hindu kings or the rulers of Hindustan have been repeatedly conquered by alien people, but it cannot be said that the bulk of Hindu society has ever been van-quished in battle, because the bulk of Hindu society has never gone to war” [Chattopadhyay 2006]. After the arrival of the Aryans, they scattered in different parts of the country. A language, group, and religion based differentiation developed among them. As a result, disunity was forged among them. They did not have any idea of national solidarity. Bankim was of the opinion that it is the English who taught us the ideals of liberty and national solidarity. From this standpoint, the colonial rule was of great benefit to the Indians.

The concept of 'nation' in Bankim however is very confusing. Sometimes it is the Bengalis, sometime the Hindus and sometime it is the 'Bharatbarshiyas', the inhabitants of India. There is no such attempt to define the boundary clearly and there is always a clear tension in this regard [Roychoudhuri; 1988: 135]. A comparison between the two civilization is the main feature of Bankim's writing. To describe the reasons behind Europe's progress, he had written:

“Knowledge is power” - is the slogan of Western civilization; whereas “knowledge is salvation”, is the slogan of Hindu civilization. The two people set out on the same road bound for two different goals. The

Westerns have found power. Have we found salvation? Europeans are devotees of power. That is the key to their advancement. We are negligent towards power: that is the key to our downfall” [Chattopadhyay, 2006:560].

Europeans had always tried to prove themselves superior to East, specially Indians. They had always shown that the Indian culture was inferior and was no match to the western culture. The most interesting fact is that Indians also started believing it. This belief eventually decreased their patriotism. Bankim had no doubt about the superior aggressive “power” drive of the western civilization. While undertaking a comparative study of the Bengali and the English, he observed: “The difference between the two were just like the difference between men and women. The English were strong, courageous and hardy while Bengalis were weak timid and rather fragile” [Chattopadhyay, 2006].

According to Bankim, the ‘Geeta’ – the highly revered religious text among the Hindus - is the best of all the sacred scriptures known to him. In the ‘Introduction’ of his translation of the ‘Geeta’, he opined that generally the western educated people were called ‘educated’. This ‘educated’ group did not understand the speeches of old pundits. As the Sanskrit pundits did not understand the western translations, western educated people could not understand the translations easily. The western thought process is so different from Indian thought process that language translation cannot make thematic translation. As this ‘educated’ group was habituated to western thought process from childhood, ancient Indian thought process was not very familiar to them. So, in order to make them understand, Bankim had adopted western ideas to translate ‘Geeta’ thematically [Chattopadhyay; 2006:871-872].

The task of Bankim was to create a nationalist discourse that would gradually evolve the claim to equality, if not superiority to those of their ruling masters. One of the most

important features of colonial nationalism was to refute the statements of the ruling white skins about their tradition. The main focus of the Orientalist thought was 'we' and 'they'. This dualism ended with the long drawn conclusion about the inferiority of subject's culture or tradition. For this it became necessary (mental need) to prove that Indian culture was far more superior to that of the West. Bankim took up the challenge.

Bankim had warned his countrymen against the hypocrisies of the west. His many writings had shown western perceptions about India. His well-known satire, '*Byghracharya Brihallangul*' is one of them. The learned tigers accounts of human society is rudely questioned by an iconoclast young tiger in the audience. The Chair tiger mildly reprimands the heckler: "Please be quiet. It is not customary among civilized nations to abuse anyone so openly. You may however indulge in far worse abuse with due circumspection" [Chattopadhyay; 2006: 24].

There were many cultural and behavioural differences between the two civilizations. He was stringently agitated with the western idea of open discussion on sexuality. Such matters, according to him, differed strictly from country to country. For instance, kissing in public, a socially accepted practice in Europe, was a matter of extreme obscenity in India as far as the ancient traditional practices are concerned. Nevertheless, he admired European society for its greater scope for equality of opportunity. At this instance, he compared the Brahminical monopoly over knowledge with Europe's free access to knowledge. Through various examples he attempted to show how European women enjoyed relatively more freedom than Indian women. Yet, there were absolute social inequality in man-women relationship. From a legal standpoint, the law of inheritance excluded women in Europe. On this point, the Hindu law and even the Muslim Sharia were distinctly superior.

Furthermore, according to Bankim, western civilization lacked in liberal and humanitarian values. It could not be said that social oppression by majority and authority were absent. The barbaric survival of harsh punishment including the death penalty for minor offenses was a prevalent instance of social inequality among the westerners. Bankim had criticized the jury system introduced by the British in India. It was introduced to safeguard the poor and vulnerable from the powerful and authoritative men of judiciary.

Bankim also did not accept the western historical writing totally. Europeans in their great pride were obsessed with the writings of history. Even if they went out for shooting birds, a history of the event had to be written. They considered their every act an achievement. 'Even if we yawn, the act should be acknowledged as one of immoral glory in this world and hence duly recorded' [Chattopadhyay; 2006:806].

European perceptions of racial superiority and their desperate attempts to prove the inferiority of the Indians was one of the favourite themes of Bankim's writing. '*BRANSONISM*' was an instance of this type. A black Bengali Sahib, named 'Jan Dickson', son of 'Gobardhan, a labour was arrested in charge of stealing some 'sutki' fish. He was taken to a native deputy. He got punishment of one week jail after the proof of his offence. For this the deputy got a call from the District Magistrate to give some punishment: "Because it was very wrong for a native to convict a European British Subject.... a European British subject can not commit a crime and a native cannot judge honestly" (Chattopadhyay 2006:59).

In his famous essay "*Krishnachari*" Bankim had opined that there are many impossible, hypothetical, unhistorical facts in the 'Mahabharata' – another significant Hindu epic. Actually ancient history is mostly a mixture of history-unhistory, true-false of all nations. Famous historian Livy, Herodotus had mingled unhistorical facts in their analysis. If those could be called "history", then why 'Mahabharata' would be cancelled 'as unhistorical'? Europeans were not ready to accept the

‘Mahabharata’ as the glorification of ancient India’s past. According to Weber, there was no sufficient evidence to prove that ‘Mahabharata’ was present before the birth of Christ. A European, named Chrysostom, heard about ‘Mahabharata’ from a sailor. So he was not able to neglect this as it was heard by a European. Though it (Mahabharata) was referred in Panini, Weber was not ready to accept it. Another European, Megasthenis who was at the time of Chandragupta Maurya, had not mentioned about the ‘Mahabharata’. From this, Weber had concluded that ‘Mahabharata’ was not present at that time. Many Hindus had gone in a tour of Germany. They had not mentioned the name of Weber. Then at the same logic it could be said that Weber was not present at that time. There were many such instances of European’s non-sense logic [Chattopadhyay 2006:274].

Bankim furthermore strictly criticized the expansionist tendencies of modern European states and their mutual aggression. Just as in the absence of a powerful government the strong try and exploit the weak, so do powerful nations exploit weaker ones because there is no one to stop them. Bankim’s sentiments on the subject are made explicit by the language he uses: “Just as the [pariah] dogs in the marketplace snatch from one another whatever they can, so do the nations, civilized and uncivilized, seize from others what they can at every opportunity” [Roychoudhuri 1988:201].

In his earlier writings, Bankim had expressed his concern that Indians must feel superior to the West at least in some respect in order to shore up their self-esteem. Rational assessment should be the basis of this necessary sense of superiority, not stupid claims based on blind vanity. Recently, Partha Chatterjee (1986) has presented an important analyzing framework in this context. He opines:

“Bankim indeed undertakes the same classificatory project as the Orientalists and arrives at precisely the same typologies under which the Oriental (the Hindu, the

Bengali) is stamped with an essentialist character signifying in every aspect his difference from Western man” [Chatterjee 1986]. By this Chatterjee wanted to show that Bankim’s nationalist project has failed to achieve real independence. It becomes an elitist and a ‘derivative discourse’.

It is argued that though Bankim presented the conditions of the modern consciousness of historical freedom of subject nation in the colonial period, he had not recommended to apply physical power against colonial rule. He was telling the story of physical power of Hindus against the Muslim rulers. Thus Bankim had refuted his own proposal. Guha (1988) opines that the cause of self-contradiction of Bankim lies in the fact that though the real fight for independence was against British, the proposal could not be presented in public [Guha in Chatterjee 2000:9].

Sudipta Kaviraj, while appreciating the genius of Bankim, has taken *Kamalakanta* as his secret autobiography where he is craving to get rid of the boaring ‘*babu*’ lifestyle in his dreams. Though in his satires his thought was out of the prison of colonial category, it could not, however, give an alternative Indian social theory Strong, as these criticisms are, we should however try to make a critique of these.

### III

The Europeans had developed their concept of ‘modernity’ on the basis of a fixed standard. With this certain fixed standard of ‘modernity’, they sought to justify the colonies and referred them as uncultured, uncivilized, barbarian etc. ; in a word, colonies appearing as distinctly inferior to them. And thus they proclaimed proudly that they had taken up the great task of ‘civilizing’ this barbarian nation—taken up as the ‘*whites burden*’.



Basically there were two reactions towards the British colonialism in India: first, a well planned revolt against British colonialism and second, cooperation with British colonialism. The second reaction was derived from the blind admiration to whatever appeared 'modern'. Their aim was to be modern and rational by imitating British in every sphere of activity, be it education, dress code, food habit, life styles and so forth. In this context there was a need for a third alternative. Bankim, perhaps was the first, who got engaged in a serious dialogue between tradition and modernity in the colonial context. Bankim was greatly influenced by the European ideals of rationalism, liberalism, historicism, positivism, utilitarianism and modern science.

However, modern scholars, as we have noted in the last section, have opined that Bankim had not questioned the universal claim of European theory. They have strongly criticized Bankim's project of nationalism and identified it as a derivative discourse, a discourse which is not independent. That means, it cannot think independently of the categories or framework which is not derived from Europe. It cannot see the dream of a liberated future of India which remain outside of the category of modern western nation-state. In other words, the purpose of fighting back the British was merely to emerge as a nation in European style. However, in all fairness it can be said that Bankim was a victim of his time and his profession; all thinkers have their limitations. But what is notable is the fact that he presented a critique of colonialism at a time when the most of Bengali culture was engaged in a servile imitation of the white Christian culture and took pride in vilifying the indigenous culture. Bankim restored pride for the indigenous, engaged himself in a serious intellectual battle against the colonialist and fought open the door for imagining an Indian nation. True, that his profession prevented him to speak of political independence against the Raj; but that idea was very much in him. The critique of the political turned into a thorough critique of the European cultural superiority and a

simultaneous restoration of pride in the Indian. Moreover he also took recourse to the logic and arguments of the various schools of Indian philosophy, especially *Sankhya*. Thus to call his discourse as “derivative” is unjustified and to expect from him an alternative idea of nation is anachronistic. Bankim had tried to be eclectic; he never romanticized the indigenous culture or its evils, or claimed that everything European was bad. As we have already stated, the ideals of rationalism, liberalism, historicism, positivism, utilitarianism and modern science had greatly influenced him. As Tapan Roychoudhury (1988) has aptly opined, Bankim had criticized the ancient old traditional and social system of India. Because for him Hinduism had become seriously paralyzed for its deductive method. There was no scope for observation or experiment in the wide sphere of Hinduism; consequently myth established dominance over reason and religion over philosophy. In Bankim we find not only a critique of the European culture but of the then decaying and oppressive cultural practices of our country.

The source of the madness of Kamalakanta was the opposite of colonial rationality. The original criticism is found in ‘Kamalakanta’s *confession*’. Kamalakanta rejected the claim of European rationality which gave legitimacy to imperialism, challenged its conceptual categories and so called intellectual superiority.

The writings of Bankim gave birth to a new optimism to the concept of ‘nation’ and its associated phenomenon – “nationalism”. “Bankim’s final verdict was that even the civilization of nineteenth century Europe, which he once considered the highest level of progress ever attained by man, was but an immature stage in the development of human society. The alleged failure of the English to understand anything of India despite a hundred and twenty five years of contact was to him the most convincing token of their narrowness of intellect. Yet the patriotic virtues he prescribed were to be practiced within the bounds of loyalty to the British”

[Roychoudhury 1988: 202]. As Kaviraj argues, in the hands of Bankim, history became an 'empowering discourse'. Moreover, 'Anandamath', the 'Geeta' and 'Bande Mataram' - the patriotic song of Indian nationhood, have long symbolized the Hindu/Indian nationalism generation after generation. Bankim, actually attempted to give Indian nationalism the impression of a modern and civilized national character via the meticulous use of cultural resources of India. Though this "identity construction" was rational, it was qualitatively different from the ideal of 'western modernity'.

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