More than a Strange Contradiction: *Dharma*, Colonialism and Agency in Bankimcandra Chatterji's Later Work

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Table of Contents

Introduction: A National Song	1
Chapter 1: Influences and Domination, Colonialism and Enlightenments in Bengal	7
Chapter 2: Religion, Reason and Secularism in Bankim's Dharma	31
Chapter 3: Women, Rituals and Goddesses	61
Concluding Remarks: Song and Agency	81
Bibliography	84

Introduction: A National Song

I revere the Mother! The Mother
Rich in waters, rich in fruit,
Cooled by the southern airs,
Verdant with the harvest fair.

The Mother – with nights that thrill
in the light of the moon,
Radiant with foliage and flowers in bloom,
Smiling sweetly, speaking gently,
Giving joy and gifts in plenty.

Powerless? How so, Mother,
With the strength of voices fell,
Seventy millions in their swell!
And with sharpened swords
By twice as many hands upheld!

To the Mother I bow low,
To her who wields so great a force,
To her who saves,
And drives away the hostile hordes![1]

In his novel *Ānandamath*, Bankimcandra Chatterji includes this song, known as *Vande Mātaram*. Though the characters in the novel sing it to inspire themselves to fight against and remove Muslim rule in India, it became a slogan for the budding nationalist movement in India and is today India's national song.[2] It holds within it a host of apparent contradictions. The Mother is rich and radiant, offering gifts and joys, yet martial and powerful, driving away enemies to save her people. The song

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[1] Bankimcandra Chatterji, *Ānandamath, or The Sacred Brotherhood*, Julius J. Lipner, trans. and ed., (Oxford:
[2] Julius J. Lipner, "'Icon and Mother': An Inquiry into India's National Song," *The Journal of Hindu Studies*, 1, (2008), 27.

has clear religious content, drawing on traditions of Goddess worship, particularly from Bengal but also from India at large, combined with a political call to arms, requiring the people to raise their voices and their swords for the Mother. It abstracts the feminine Mother to stand for all of India, a Goddess embedded in the geography of space, and denies stereotypical assumptions of feminine weakness. Finally, it is written originally in a combination of Sanskrit and Bengali, speaking to the locality of its author in Bengal and his goals to reach a pan-Indian audience as well as his desire to reach those familiar with local languages and those with respect for Sanskritic tradition.

Understanding these apparent contradictions requires a study of the environment, goals, and tools of its author, Bankimcandra Chatterji, hereafter referred to as Bankim. This essay attempts to accomplish exactly that. However, I will not be attempting to cover everything Bankim ever wrote. Instead, I will focus my attention on the later period of his life, when his writings take on a distinctly nationalist and didactic bent. As Tapan Raychaudhuri notes, "the year 1882 marks a climacteric in Bankim's literary career. Everything he wrote then on had a strong didactic overtone. His chosen task in this phase was to construct a philosophy of life, a system of discipline which could be the basis of national regeneration."[3] It is during this period that his philosophical project comes to a head. He constructs a system of discipline meant to recreate Indian superiority and, in the words of his song, drive away the hostile hordes of British colonialism. This system or philosophy, as Raychaudhuri describes it, has a specific name: *dharma*.

The purpose of this essay is to explicate this *dharma*, as well as the influences that led Bankim to his particular formulation of it. Bankim makes his *dharma* most explicit in his *Dharmatattva*, originally published in 1888. This text takes the form of a traditional dialogue between a Guru and a Disciple, where the Guru expounds the principles of *dharma* and how they should be applied. This *dharma* draws heavily on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and so I will also draw on Bankim's unfinished commentary on that text, published posthumously. In addition to simply describing this *dharma*, Bankim also used the *Krishnacaritra*, published in 1886, to provide an

[3] Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 145.

example of this *dharma*. He argues that the correct historical interpretation of Krishna is the ideal example of humanity, who achieved the most perfect *dharma* and serves as a divine example for humans to follow. In addition to Bankim's non-fiction, two of his later novels, *Ānandamath*, which contains the song *Vande Mātaram*, and *Debī Chaudhurānī*, published in 1882 and 1884, respectively, also describe Bankim's *dharma*.

In addition, my work will draw heavily on the work of secondary scholarship. Hans Harder, in his analysis of Bankim's commentary on the *Gītā*, includes an extensive review of the secondary scholarship on Bankim's work.[4] Most of the sources he mentions will not be included in this analysis. Some of the works I analyze appeared after Harder wrote this analysis, but many of the sources are in native Indian languages, typically Bengali, that are not accessible to me, while others serve more as biographies or analyses from a literary perspective rather than a religious or political perspective. While Bankim's work and talent has been recognized for a long time, it is mostly in more recent post-colonial studies that his role in the shaping of Indian nationalism and the overthrow of colonialism has been explored in depth. In fact, it is Harder's analysis itself that will be most important for this study. In his extensive analysis, he deals with Bankim's use of the term *dharma*, his engagement with a wide range of sources, the rhetorical strategies he uses in making his argument, and the audience he plans to engage in his work. In Chapter 2, I will take issue with two of his conclusions. First is that his use of Western sources makes his project, by its very nature, non-Indian in nature. Second is that Bankim's project is not essentially religious, but rather ethical and political. These arguments are mirrored in much of the secondary scholarship on Bankim.

Perhaps the most revolutionary interpretation on Bankim in recent scholarship is that of Sudipta Kaviraj in *The Unhappy Consciousness*. Kaviraj extensively explores the overall tenor of Bankim's work, arguing that it displays a mix of the liminal and tragic that represents Bankim's own conflicted personality. For Kaviraj, Bankim is a mix of both a conservative, and so interested in upholding traditional social structures, and an artist, and so interested in the power of desire to

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[4] Hans Harder, trans. and analysis, *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's* Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), 162-8.

subvert these very structures. This internal contradiction leads to the elements of tragedy and irony, and reflects the unhappiness of engaging with a colonial discourse that both offered him new ways of engaging with the world and denied him access to the advancement these new ways of thinking provided. Bankim's project, then, is to craft an imaginary history for the emerging Indian nation that will simultaneously undermine the stereotypes of racial inferiority imposed by the British and give Indians a common heritage to rally around in a nationalist movement intended to end colonialism. Though Kaviraj certainly does not imply, as Harder does, that Bankim is essentially Western because of his use of Western sources, he does not highlight the religious content of Bankim's work, and so his work remains an incomplete, if nuanced, interpretation.

A third important interpretation of Bankim comes from Partha Chatterjee. Partha Chatterjee invokes Bankim as the point of departure for nationalism in India, the one who determines what the basis of the nationalist project will be. However, he argues that Bankim's methods and modes of thought are derived entirely from Western sources. Even though Bankim combines religion and rationalism in a unique way and develops a novel interpretation of the material and spiritual aspects of culture and their relationship with power, he cannot escape the rational power of the Post-Enlightenment forms of reason he encounters. Therefore, while his project intends to offer a way for India to gain the material power it needs to become a powerful, independent nation, it can only achieve this, at least in Partha's interpretation of Bankim, by yoking its very Indian-ness to Enlightenment concepts that are then justified by Hindu religious ideas.

These three provide the most important and influential arguments surrounding Bankim for my purposes in this paper. I will accept many of their general points, but seek to argue that Bankim's combination of reason and faith in *dharma* does not betray his Indian roots; instead it reflects an eclectic use of sources that allows him to make compelling arguments for multiple audiences. In addition, I will emphasize the importance of religion for his project as a whole, moreso than these thinkers. I will also draw upon the work of Tapan Raychaudhuri, Julius Lipner, Ashis Nandy, Amiya Sen, and others, though their general arguments are less nuanced than the first three, or less relevant to my discussion. I will also use the work of scholars who did not focus their

attention on Bankim, and apply their insights. For example, Brian Hatcher's argument that Vidyasagar combined traditional and modern sources and modes of thought to modern legal problems in order to make compelling arguments in a diverse intellectual environment helps to make sense of Bankim's use of similar sources and methods in a similar cultural milieu.

Perhaps the most important recent commenter on Bankim who remains mostly absent from this study is Tanika Sarkar. This is because her scholarship generally emphasizes the way in which Bankim's project excluded women, lower castes, and especially Muslims.[5] This discussion is deeply important, especially given Bankim's real world influence on later forms of Hindu nationalism and the formation of the Indian nation itself. However, it is beyond the scope of this project. Rather than seek to re-hash claims that Sarkar has effectively made, this project intends to rescue Bankim's agency and religious thought from claims that he was imprisoned within Western modes of thinking and his *dharma* was not truly religious.

To make this argument, Chapter 1 will detail various influences and sources of thought that Bankim would have been exposed to, focusing on the filtering of Enlightenment modes of thought throughout the colonial project. I will provide a history of colonialism in Bengal and a brief biography of the relevant aspects of Bankim's upbringing and experience. Furthermore, I will use Montesquieu as a case study to explore the amorphous nature of Enlightenment impact on colonialism, and then explore how Bankim's two most important Western sources, positivism and utilitarianism, impacted his thinking. Finally, I will explore the ways in which other Enlightenment tropes have impacted scholarly attention to Bankim. Overall, I hope to complicate essentializing categories like Enlightenment and colonialism and show that these are made up of amorphous sets of ideas that impact different individuals in different ways. Rather than showing how these modes of thinking would have forced Bankim into specific modes of response, I explore how they would have provided sources that he could critically and thoughtfully draw on and adapt to his own needs.

[5] Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 2 explores the sources, methods and content of Bankim's *dharma*. I will start with a discussion of the term *dharma* itself, and show how its variable definitions allowed Bankim to develop a project that combined religious, political and ethical ideas to form a nationalist philosophy drawing on traditional Indian ideas. I will also use this chapter to argue against interpretations of Bankim that characterize him as trapped within Western ideas and/or as draining the religious content inherent in the term *dharma*. I conclude that Bankim's complex combination of sources, modes of thought, and ideas from both European and Indian sources represents a broad argument for the superiority of India through Hinduism meant to appeal to a diverse, fragmented audience of educated Bengalis. This analysis also allows us to better understand his nationalism, as he intends his *dharma* to encompass all the good the British have to offer, while subsuming it under the essential moral superiority of Hinduism, and therefore India.

Finally, in Chapter 3, I start from the fact that Bankim's *dharma* is by its very essence gendered. Since women must interact with this *dharma* differently than men, I explore the role of Bankim's powerful leading women in the novels *Ānandamath* and *Debī Chaudhurānī*. These women are powerful actors, and the men around them pale in comparison. However, I argue against existing arguments that Bankim essentially borrowed his views on women from Comte or that he rigidly compartmentalized women and men in separate spheres to show that Bankim provides women with the same spiritual belief and education as men, but restricts their modes of legitimate action, requiring that all their work benefits the men in their life, most importantly the husband. In this way, he treats women as tools. He uses them to represent his *dharma*, but does not actually seek any real change for their social status or ability to act in the world. Instead, they simply serve as a useful symbol to rally India and transform it into the powerful nation that he wants to take its rightful place as master of the world.

Chapter 1: Influences and Domination, Colonialism and Enlightenments in Bengal

No thinker works in a vacuum, and Bankim is no different. Understanding the complex historical period in which Bankim was born is essential to making sense of the political, religious, and social import of his novels and religious commentaries. Indeed, colonialism is the specter that hovers over much of Bankim's work. He confronted the intellectual and social theories of British domination and the deeply racist colonial administration, but also drew from their very ideas. Bankim was therefore an eclectic thinker, as likely to quote Auguste Comte or Jeremy Bentham as the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Puranas*. His work is thus dominated by engagement with two cultures. He draws heavily on the classical literature of Hinduism and the interpretations characteristic of the Bengali Renaissance, a period of reexamination that began with the work of Rammohan Roy. In many ways, Bankim continues the work of Roy in turning a contemporary lens to the interpretation of ancient Indian texts, most importantly, for Bankim, the Bhagavad Gita. This contemporary lens is highly influenced by Bankim's experience with a second culture – the British colonial culture.

Born in 1838, in the heyday of the British Raj in India and in its capital in Bengal, Bankim's upbringing was deeply influenced by the domination of the British. He lived through the reorganization of rule after the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion, and developed his religious theory in the 1880s. He "was one of the first systematic expounders in India of the principles of nationalism" and

"was greatly influenced, according to his own admission, by positivism as well as utilitarianism."[6] In addition, he was a religious theorist. He published analyses of the figure of Krishna in Hindu religious literature, the *Dharmatattva*, which laid out the principles of his ideal religious form, and worked on an uncompleted and posthumously published commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. In many ways, his work weaved the rationalism of Enlightenment philosophies, like positivism and utilitarianism, with traditional Hindu religion, interpreted for a new world.

This chapter will explore the influences that impacted Bankim's view of the world. However, it is important to note that a simple model of influence and impact does not accurately reflect Bankim's complex and conflicted relationship with the sources he uses, nor does it do justice to the creativity and innovation of Bankim's religious and political theories. Bankim lived in a rapidly changing time, when religious adaptations abounded. While some would argue these changes simplistically reflected the impact of British ideas, and even go so far as to suggest that modern Hinduism was invented by the British in their colonial project, Brian K. Pennington instead argues:

> "It would be a severe historical misrepresentation (albeit a faddish one, to be sure) to suggest, as many have, that Hinduism was the invention of the British. Adapting to the colonial milieu, Hindus themselves entered a dialectic space in which they endorsed and promoted the British publication of ancient texts and translations, resisted missionary polemic, and experimented with modifications, alterations, and innovations in Hindu religious forms."[7]

As Pennington demonstrates, the problem with the claim that the British invented Hinduism is that it "both mystifies and magnifies colonial means of domination and erases Hindu agency and creativity."[8] Part of Pennington's critique here is of the binary model that imagines a "collective" colonialism that can engage in such a monumental task, and he criticizes even scholars he generally agrees with for such claims.[9] Instead colonialism is "a largely unconscious, unintended system of

[6] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 54.
[7] Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.
[8] *Ibid.*, 5. Pennington's criticism is most vehement against Robert Frykenberg and Frits Staal, who he claims have disregarded much native Hindu testimony and made "often intractable attributions of immeasurable power and creativity to colonialism." For a further discussion, see pp. 168-72.
[9] These include Kopf and Bearce, who, Kopf especially, managed to maintain native agency but still pictured colonialism as a powerful, unified monolith. Another criticism, which highlights his rejection of binary models, is his claim that such models "[fail] to account for the ways Britain itself was transformed by the experiences of

often contradictory, contested power arrangements that pervaded the British/Indian encounter at every level."[10] D. A. Washbrook similarly examines the tensions inherent in British rule, showing how British rule simultaneously encouraged Westernization and affirmed local languages, and sought laissez-faire economics at the same time as they extracted and exploited local resources, among other tensions.[11] Therefore, colonial influence and native agency are not necessarily oppositional, but in fact interact in a dialogic process.[12]

In fact, I argue that British influence did not erase or limit native agency, but encouraged creativity and development.[13] Colonial dominance presents challenges, which colonized people are free to handle in whatever way they choose. It forces them to examine their own traditions as well as the ideas of the colonizer. In this way, colonial influence in India, rather than stifling native agency, in fact encouraged a vibrant religious discussion in which native actors found new ways to shape and develop their traditions. Bankim was one of these actors. Therefore, while this chapter will dwell on the powerful influence of colonialism itself and the European philosophers Bankim read, I do not wish to imply that Bankim was simply responsive. His agency lies in the choices he made in developing a new religious ethic that reflected, but was not solely defined by, the influences of his time.

This chapter will explore the various philosophical and historical influences that encouraged Bankim's political and religious thought. I will open with a discussion of colonialism in Bengal. I will attempt to tease out how Bankim's specific experience with colonialism and the social and intellectual environment it helped to create would have led to a particular understanding of the British. The second two sections will focus on the penetration of European ideas into India through

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colonialism and empire." For a further discussion, see Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented?*, Chapter 1 (and page 11 especially).

[10] *Ibid.*, 11.

[11] D. A. Washbrook, "India, 1816-1860: The Two Faces of Colonialism," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. III: The Nineteenth Century*, Andrew Porter, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395-420.

[12] Brian A. Hatcher makes a similar point, arguing that when thinking about cultural influence, "it is perhaps better to imagine the quantum physicist's cloud chamber than the billiard balls of classical mechanics." Brian A. Hatcher, "Bourgeois Vedānta: The Colonial Roots of Middle-Class Hinduism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 75:2 (Jun. 2007), 318.

[13] I do not mean to suggest here that colonialism was a "good thing" for India in this encouraging of agency. British hegemony did enormous mental, economic, and physical damage to the people of India, even as it brought new technologies and ideas that created an atmosphere of agency and change.

the medium of colonialism. I will use Montesquieu's political thought as a case study for how philosophy impacts and is used to impact political action, and how Enlightenment ideas found expression in colonial India. I will also include a discussion of Bankim's understanding of positivism and utilitarianism, perhaps the two most important European philosophical movements in his thought, and close with the ways in which Enlightenment and Orientalist influence did not end in Bankim's era, but continues to shape the ways in which he is interpreted in contemporary scholarship.

Colonialism in Bengal

One of the most dominating forces in both Bankim's life and thought was colonialism. Bankim was raised in Bengal and spent much of his life in Calcutta (now Kolkata), the capital of British India and the seat of dominance for the East India Company and the British Crown. In this section I seek to provide context for the political situation of Bankim's life through a brief history of colonialism in Bengal and the ways in which Indians in Bengal responded to colonialism. Major British trading contact with India began as early as 1600, with the formation of the East India Company that would eventually dominate South Asia both economically and politically. The early company skirmished with Portuguese and Dutch merchants, sometimes drawing Indian local authorities into the battles, but the British had little direct control in India. Even still, they gained control of Calcutta's international trade by the end of the seventeenth century.[14]

From the beginning, British domination in Bengal was based on the cooperation of local leaders. The Battle of Plassey, which was won when the British convinced a local general to betray his ruler, is usually used to mark the beginning of British domination in India and the century of rule by the English East India Company.[15] The East India Company spent the century consolidating their rule through a combination of enforcing debt among local Indian leaders, constructing a massive standing army made primarily of sepoys, or Indian mercenary soldiers, and building a

[14] Ralph Fox, *The Colonial Policy of British Imperialism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 10-11.
[15] Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy, 3rd ed.*, (New York: Routledge, 2011), 47-8.

centralized bureaucracy that organized the affairs of the company. The primary goal of the company in this period was to maintain land revenue, their primary source of income, and this led to the Permanent Settlement in Bengal in 1793. The Permanent Settlement gave local landlords, zamindars, control of their land in exchange for fixed tax revenue to the British. The project was controversial, and led to many zamindars defaulting, and the British gave the zamindars many powers, including eviction, to collect the revenue they needed.[16] In addition, the British encouraged the growth of indigo and opium, cash crops that allowed them to profit extensively.[17]

Many of the British during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century saw themselves primarily as delivering law and order to a despotically enslaved people: "As the British, India's new rulers, began, from Dow's time onward [1770], to write the history of India, the concept of 'despotism took on fresh life. It was now a way of contrasting India's history with the law and order that the British conceived they were bringing."[18] While this was perhaps the justification the British preferred, Bose and Jalal point out that "the period from 1757 to the 1810s was one of straightforward plunder of India's revenues."[19] This period was primarily characterized by non-interference in local customs. The Permanent Settlement was partially put in place in order to respect misunderstood systems of land management that supposedly existed in Bengal before the intervention of the British.[20] These policies "explicitly aimed at minimizing the threat of social reaction" and help explain why missionary activity was severely restricted until 1813 and not successful until even later.[21]

The early 1800s also saw the rise of both the *bhadralok* class and perhaps their most famous member, Rammohan Roy. The *bhadralok*, or gentlefolk, were a diverse group of educated colonial elites. Though he respects the great diversity of the group that included "wealthy entrepreneurs and impoverished school teachers, powerful landholders and struggling pandits, government servants

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[16] *Ibid*., 56.
[17] *Ibid*., 57. The growing of cash crops were influential in causing famines, one of which is quite important to Bankim's *Ānandamath*.
[18] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.
[19] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 57.
[20] Metcalf, *Ideologies*, 20-1
[21] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 59 and 63-4.

and independent journalists" and came from various castes, Hatcher still notes that they shared educational commitments and cultural goals.[22] These included "widespread commitment to colonial education and the Enlightenment project."[23] Though the true heyday of creativity and organization for the *bhadralok* class came later, their influence can be seen in the 1817 founding of the Hindu College and introduction of English education and their various aspirations were "harmonized by a common interest in participating in colonial society."[24] Though their goals changed over time, the *bhadralok* dominated culture in 19th century Bengal and, indeed, Bankim himself would be counted among their number.

Rammohan Roy was perhaps the most important of the *bhadralok* in the early 19th century, and is credited as the founder of modern India and the catalyst of the Bengal Renaissance, a series of religious revival and reform movements that swept through Bengal throughout the 19th century.[25] Roy and many of the other *bhadralok* of the time, though they recognized the potential dangers of British oppression, were cognizant of the opportunities for advancement it offered them as well. Many of their ancestors, Roy's included, had worked for the Mughal Empire and simply transferred their services to working for, and benefitting from English rule.[26] Furthermore, British scholarship of the time privileged higher caste sources of authority versus popular traditions and enforced a more rigid caste hierarchy.[27] Since many of the *bhadralok*, though not all, were upper caste, they found their traditions and status privileged and enforced by the British. This environment helped Rammohan see the benefits of British rule. In turn, he developed a monotheistic theology intended to combine the dictates of reason with traditional Hindu sources, most notably the Vedanta. He argued that practices he deemed non-rational, including sati, or widow burning, and idolatry, were not truly

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[22] Brian A. Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 67-8.
[23] *Ibid*., 69.
[24] Ferdinando Sardella, *Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life, and Thought of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19 and 18.
[25] *Ibid*., 19.
[26] Kenneth W. Jones, *The New Cambridge History of India: Socio-religious Reform Movements in British India,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30.
[27] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 63 and 65.

a part of Hinduism and that British colonization would help erase these perversions of true Hinduism and return India to a Golden Age of religion.[28]

This general cooperation between the *bhadralok* and the British continued in the Age of Reform, which began in 1828 with Lord William Bentinck's appointment as Governor-General and his program of reform.[29] Brian Hatcher sees this period as "a promising decade for the *bhadralok*."[30] In 1829 Bentinck made his first major reform with the banning of sati, despite the possibility for agitation among differing religious factions.[31] Many *bhadralok* saw this as a victory, affirming the ability for organized Indian elites to convince the British to make changes. This opinion was affirmed by the new Charter of 1833, which renewed the East India Company, but promised more administrative posts to Bengalis.[32] This sense of possibility contributed to a renewed battle for freedom of the press and a surge of voluntary associations, in which sections of the *bhadralok* organized for changes in religion, politics and society, ranging from the Landholders Society to the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge.[33]

However, Thomas Metcalf offers a different understanding of the Age of Reform. He sees colonial policy as an exercise for British liberals who, prevented from instituting reforms by political conflicts in Britain, could experiment with reforms in India and, hopefully, allow those reforms to flow back to Britain. These liberals had "little sympathy with established institutions sustained by simple antiquity alone" and believed their values could and should be universally applied around the world.[34] Therefore, the changes the East India Company was now willing to make in Bengal reflected not the needs of the people but the needs of British liberals to experiment with their rational reforms and justify their own rule under the doctrine of improvement. In fact, neither Hatcher nor Metcalf are wrong. Most likely, the British changes were inspired by the needs of liberals at home more than by the needs of reformers like Rammohan Roy, but because these immediate changes reflected many

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[28] Raja Rammohan Roy, *The English Works of Raja Rammohan Roy*, ed. Jogendra Chunder Ghose, comp. Eshan Chunder Bose (Allahabad: The Panini Office, 1906), 315 and 181.
[29] Metcalf, *Ideologies*, 28.
[30] Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, 70.
[31] *Ibid.,* 71.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid*., 72.
[34] Metcalf, *Ideologies*, 29.

of the desires of certain sections of the *bhadralok*, they interpreted these changes as potential for further changes. Once again, colonialism is not internally consistent, but full of contradictions.

As the 1830s progressed, the intentions of the British became more clear. Thomas Macaulay's 1835 Minute on Education infamously declared that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."[35] That same year, English replaced Persian as the official language of the government and the courts.[36] In addition, fears of Christian conversion grew. The well-publicized conversion of Krishna Mohan Banerjea by the prominent missionary Alexander Duff in 1832 caused an uproar in the community and prompted parents to pull their sons out of English language schools.[37] In addition to promising more administrative seats to Bengalis, the East India Charter of 1833 lifted the last restrictions on missionary activity.[38] Bengalis thus became more and more aware, throughout the decade, of how British domination would show little respect for local customs over time.[39]

Bankim was born on June 26, 1838 in a village about twenty-five miles north of Calcutta (now Kolkata). His father, from the year Bankim was born had a post in the British government, and Bankim attended English-teaching schools. However, he had various religious and traditional Indian influences in his family. He was exposed to eclectic religious influences, including Goddess traditions and Vaishnava traditions, especially focusing on Krishna, and his maternal grandfather passed on to Bankim a library of Sanskrit works, which Bankim read avidly, and he connected with local pundits to continue his Sanskrit education further.[40] In 1852, at the age of 13, Bankim published his first work by winning a poetry contest in the local newspaper. From then on, he published regularly, and learned from the poet Isvarcandra Gupta.[41] However, while he wrote for his entire life, he was also

[35] Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Minute on Education," in *Selections from Educational Records, Part I (1781-1839)*, edited by H. Sharp (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing, 1920).
[36] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, 68.
[37] T.V. Philip, *Krishna Mohan Banerjea: Christian Apologist* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1982), 7.
[38] Spencer Lavan, "The Brahmo Samaj: India's First Modern Movement for Religious Reform," in *Religion in Modern India*, ed. Robert D. Baird (Columbia, Missouri: South Asia Publications, 1989), 7.
[39] This pattern continued through the 1840s, which as Hatcher notes, saw the end of *bhadralok* entrepreneurship and increasing Christian polemic. Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, 82-3.
[40] Chatterji, *Ānandamath,* 10.
[41] *Ibid.*, 12.

left to foot the bill of his father's extravagance. This perhaps contributed to his need to work as, in his own words, a 'petty servant' for the British government.[42] Indeed, his life was marked by several encounters with racial difference with the British.

As a child of six, a classmate brought Bankim to visit a local District Magistrate. The white children were invited in for tea, but Bankim was not. He never visited again. In 1857, he had a confrontation with an English officer who had set his dog on Bankim's brother. Later, two drunk Englishmen physically ejected him from a railcar and a Colonel physically assaulted him after his palanquin passed through his cricket game. Bankim had no doubts then about the British opinions concerning racial difference.[43] He was restricted from advancing beyond a certain point in the British colonial administration.[44] However, at the time he was working, "the *bhadralok* were being squeezed out of any role of economic ascendancy in the region."[45] Thus, in addition to dealing with the realities of everyday life in a racist regime, Bankim was forced to work under British officials he considered his inferiors.

It is the writings of these later years that will form the focus of this essay. While Bankim's interests during his early and middle career were primarily literary, with some focus on religious and political themes, his later works are markedly didactic and religious. In his preface to *Debī Chaudhurānī* (1884), Julius Lipner notes that the novel is the second in Bankim's final trilogy of novels, the purpose of which is "illustrating in narrative form the ideology [he] developed in later life to undergird the polity of an India emerging into modernity."[46] I will use this particular novel as well as the first in that series, the famous *Ānandamath* (1882), which includes the nationalist song *Bande Mataram*, to help understand this ideology as well as its import for gender and religious difference in the emerging Indian nation. His later career also included several religious treatises in which he more explicitly delineates a *dharma* for the emerging India. These include, in chronological order, the *Krishnacaritra* (1886), his attempt to historicize Krishna as the incarnation of God in a truly

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[42] Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 109 and 117.
[43] *Ibid.*, 115-6.
[44] *Ibid.*, 114-5
[45] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 4.
[46] Bankimcandra Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī, or the Wife Who Came Home*, Julius Lipner, trans. and ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), *Preface.*

human form as the human ideal, the *Dharmatattva* (1888), an outline of his view of religion and what it should be, and the *Srimadbhagavat Gita*, an unfinished commentary on the Bhagavad Gita published posthumously.

Enlightenment and Empire

In addition to new forms of government and economy, the British brought new philosophies and assumptions about the world to India and, particularly, Bengal. The Enlightenment influenced many of these ideas. However, the question of what exactly the Enlightenment was or is remains contested. Reacting against monolithic definitions of Englightenment, some thinkers argue there is no singular Enlightenment. Dorinda Outram, in *The Enlightenment*, argues that it is helpful "to think about the Enlightenment as a series of interlocking, and sometimes warring problems and debates… as a group of capsules or flash-points where intellectual projects changed society and government on a world-wide basis."[47] This idea is the opposite of former approaches to the Enlightenment that saw them as a unitary, philosophical movement. She argues that "we are now far more aware of the many different Enlightenments" and more work remains to be done in understanding "issues of the relationship between the Enlightenment and the creation of a global world."[48] I follow Outram in understanding the Enlightenment as a diverse series of philosophical advancements with a distinct political impact in a rapidly globalizing world. Therefore I will not treat the Enlightenment as a single unitary project in which all thinkers were in agreement, but will instead look at the specific thinkers and movements that impacted Bankim and colonialism.[49]

One such philosopher is Montesquieu (1689-1755). Montesquieu was a member of the French parliament and came from a noble family, but is most famous for his political philosophy, specifically *The Spirit of the Laws*, among other works. Though he lived one hundred years before Bankim, his importance in England and for colonial policy displays the ways in which philosophers have a direct

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[47] Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment*, 3rd Edition, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 3.
[48] *Ibid.*, 7 & 8.
[49] This reflects my understanding of colonialism and the Bengali *bhadralok*; none of these categories are totally united.

political impact and how sources are used for various purposes. Montesquieu famously praised the English in *The Spirit of the Laws*, endorsing their balanced constitution, but less famously had a deep impact on British politics as a whole.[50] *The Spirit of the Laws* was first published in 1748, at about the same time as the true beginning of British domination in India.[51] Since Montesquieu made his greatest impact in England at about the same time colonialism was forming in and beginning to dominate India, I will seek to explore how Montesquieu's political thought impacted the development of British colonialism in India.

Thomas Metcalf indicts the entire Enlightenment in justifying colonialism by constructing an other: "To describe oneself as 'enlightened' meant that someone else had to be shown as 'savage' or 'vicious.'"[52] Metcalf specifically mentions Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* as a work that used the "East" to criticize the West, not by learning from its example but from using it as a tool: "From Montesquieu's 'Persian Letters' to the invocation of the 'noble savage,' the philosophes of the Enlightenment drained non-European societies of all content."[53] Gonthier notes that, in the Persian Letters, Montesquieu "depicts England in a manner that emphasizes the positive effects of increased popular involvement in the political process, thus indirectly indicting the French absolutist system of government."[54] Despite recognizing this indirect criticism, she fails to fully explore the importance of the East in the *Persian Letters*.

The *Persian Letters* is a novel in the form of a collection of letters. The cast of characters includes Usbek, a Persian travelling through Europe, and his wives and the eunuchs who guard them, who remain in the seraglio while he travels. Montesquieu depicts Usbek as having absolute power in his household. When he lived in the seraglio, as one of his wives recalls, "all of us were covered in your kisses; your inquisitive eyes investigated our most secret places; at every moment you made us pose in a thousand different ways; new commands came all the time, and were

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[50] Ursula Haskins Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England: Enlightened Exchanges, 1689-1755*, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 1 and F. T. H. Fletcher, *Montesquieu and English Politics (1750-1800)*, (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1939), 9.
[51] Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia,* 46.
[52] Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 6.
[53] *Ibid*, 5.
[54] Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England*, 8.

constantly obeyed."[55] He must be obeyed without question and, like a deity, can see and know everything about his wives. When he leaves, however, he must rule through the authority of the eunuchs he leaves behind. The First Eunuch is particularly enamored with his power. In a letter to Usbek's companion he confesses:

> I never forget that I was born to command over them, and it is as if I become a man again on the occasions when I now give them orders. I hate them, now that I can face them with indifference, and my reason allows me to see all their weaknesses. Although I keep them for another man, the pleasure of making myself obeyed gives me a secret joy. When I deny them everything, it is as if I was doing it on my own behalf, and indirectly I always derive satisfaction from it. The seraglio for me is like a little empire, and my desire for power, the only emotion which remains to me, is to some extent satisfied… Words like *duty, virtue, delicacy, modesty,* are always on my lips.[56]

The First Eunuch thus takes absolute power and enjoys wielding it over his charges, regardless of whether it is for their benefit. In the end, one of his wives, Roxana, betrays him and, after her lover is killed, commits suicide in a final act of defiance. In her last letter to Usbek, as the poison courses through her veins, she confesses: "I suborned your eunuchs, outwitted your jealousy, and managed to turn your terrible seraglio into a place of delightful pleasures." Even more important, "I have amended your laws according to the laws of nature, and my mind has always remained independent."[57] The absolute, but distant, power of Usbek is jealous, terrible and restrains pleasure and is in direct conflict with the laws of nature.

This situation has clear parallels with European societies. Gonthier is not wrong to say that Montesquieu indicts French absolutism in this work, as he indicts all absolute, despotic power. However, the similarities of this situation with the Christian church show that Montesquieu is making a much wider critique. Usbek, like God, has absolute power and knowledge, but is distant. In his absence, the eunuchs rule. The eunuchs, like Christian priests, have no sexual release, and so channel their desire into the desire for power. They enjoy their ability to control others, especially in terms of sexual desire, and justify their actions with terms like duty and virtue. This is a powerful, if slightly veiled, attack on Christianity disguised as the Persian seraglio.

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[55] Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, CJ Betts trans., (New York: Penguin, 2004), 43.
[56] *Ibid.*, 50-1.
[57] *Ibid.*, 280.

This interpretation of the *Persian Letters* parallels Montesquieu's use of China in *The Spirit of the Laws*. Montesquieu proclaims firmly that "China is a despotic state whose principle is fear."[58] In Montesquieu's words, it "has wanted in vain to curb itself; it arms itself with its chains and becomes yet more terrible."[59] More importantly, he uses this same chapter to compare the despotism of China with the despotism of Christianity. He notices that "our missionaries speak of the vast empire of China as of an admirable government."[60] This would seem strange, that Christian missionaries would admire a despotism based on fear. He resolves the contradiction by asking "Could it not be that the missionaries were deceived by an appearance of order, that they were struck by that continuous exercise of the will of one alone by which they themselves are governed and which they so like to find in the courts of the kings of India?"[61] Montesquieu asserts that the Christian missionaries recognized a kindred spirit in China because they themselves are governed by despotism. He also mentions India, where he claims missionaries were also happy to find despotism.

Therefore, while this was perhaps not Montesquieu's intention, his use of Eastern countries like China, Persia and India as a mirror to criticize European institutions like the church drains, in Metcalf's words, those societies of their content. Moreover, it essentializes those societies as intrinsically despotic. This type of characterization falls under one of the criticisms Festa and Carey list as typically poststructuralist and postcolonial: "frozen in the dark backward and abysm of the 'primitive' or 'savage,' non-Western populations are stripped of the agency and historicity that underwrites civilized advancement. The doctrine of progress, in turn, legitimates imperial conquest under the guise of the civilizing mission, while the celebration of reason disqualifies other belief systems."[62] Though Festa and Carey seek to complicate criticisms of Enlightenment by complicating the Enlightenment itself, it is clear that Montesquieu's use of non-European societies as a tool to criticize Europe contributes to this accusation. However, Ursula Haskins Gonthier and F. T. H.

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[58] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Anne Cohler et al. eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 128.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] *Ibid*., 126.
[61] *Ibid*., 127.
[62] Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa, eds., *Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-Century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 8.

Fletcher each show much more specifically the ways in which Montesquieu was used to shape colonial policy.

Gonthier analyzes Montesquieu's *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness and Decadence of the Romans* (1734) as a call to end empire and colonies abroad. She agrees with Paul Rahe that "Montesquieu was pinpointing territorial expansion as the reason for Rome's decline."[63] In other words, colonization and expansion, like what the British were engaging in when the *Considerations* were published, leads to a weakened state and eventual decline. More importantly, William Bowyer later used the text of the *Considerations* to make exactly this point. William Bowyer was an unusually learned printer whose company printed the notes from the House of Commons and many other scholarly books.[64] In the 1752 edition of the *Considerations*, "Bowyer seeks to enhance the text's relevance to the contemporary English situation by inserting excerpts of the recently translated *L'Esprit des lois* at various strategic points."[65] Most importantly, he shows how, within Montesquieu's thought, domination of global trade does not support imperial power. In this way he mobilizes Montesquieu's argument about Rome to battle the colonial impulse in Britain itself.

Though F. T. H. Fletcher's is a much older analysis, he traces the presence of Montesquieu's political thought throughout the trial of Governor General Hastings. Governor General Hastings was impeached in 1787 for his exercise of absolute power in India, but was acquitted seven years later. The primary accuser in this trial was Edmund Burke, an ideologue in parliament.[66] In fact, Fletcher traces the influence of Montesquieu as far back as the very beginnings of the controversy, when Governor George Johnstone recommends a change in colonial policy in 1771 and Phillip Francis fights against Hastings' government in 1777. Johnstone argued for a "mild, but certain, criminal code for India" that should respect "the prejudices and customs of the natives."[67] This follows Montesquieu's call in *The Spirit of the Laws* for mild punishments as well as respect for the mores of

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[63] Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England*, 89.
[64] Michael F. Suarez and H. R. Woudhuysen, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Book*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), accessed 12 March 2015, http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198606536.001.0001/acref-9780198606536-e-0727?rskey=92oBSJ&result=1
[65] Gonthier, *Montesquieu and England*, 103.
[66] Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 18-9.
[67] Fletcher, *Montesquieu and English Politics*, 216-7.

a society.[68] Indeed, Francis quotes Montesquieu directly in order to argue that making the prince a merchant, as Hastings was in his concern for commercial gain in India, is the worst form of despotism, and later follows Montesquieu when he recommends a return to the ancient customs of India.[69] Indeed, in 1781, Broughton Rous of the House of Commons compared England and her colonies to Rome, in language reminiscent of Montesquieu and Bowyer's printing of Montesquieu in 1752.[70]

Montesquieu's thought was also deeply influential in Burke's attempted impeachment of Governor General Hastings. Burke's essential point was that Hastings sought to benefit from India, regardless of the needs of Indians. His conquest benefitted the British at the expense of Indians, rather than through helping them, and failed to conserve their laws and mores. Both of these points are drawn directly from Montesquieu, who argues "conquest is an acquisition; the spirit of acquisition carries with it the spirit of preservation and use, and not that of destruction" and "in these conquests, it is not enough to leave the vanquished nation its laws; it is perhaps more necessary to leave it its mores, because a people always knows, loves, and defends its mores better than its laws."[71] However, Fletcher points out that "the defence had claimed, and had even quoted Montesquieu in support, that to exercise arbitrary power in India was to follow the invariable custom of the Mogul Empire, and that to use any other was to endanger British rule in India."[72] They argued that the Mogul Empire was despotic, and so if the British employed any government besides despotism they would be departing from the local mores and customs and, in turn, violating Montesquieu's rules of conquest. Here, Montesquieu's use of Eastern societies to criticize European despotisms helps to justify colonialism. This forced Burke to use Montesquieu to deny the value of

[68] See VI.9 and VI.13, where Montesquieu discusses how harsh penalties will corrupt all regimes, even a despotism, and X.11, where he advises a conquering people to respect the mores of the conquered. Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 82-3, 86-7 and 146.
[69] Fletcher, *Montesquieu and English Politics*, 217-8.
[70] *Ibid.*, 219.
[71] Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 139 and 146.
[72] Fletcher, *Montesquieu and English Politics*, 223.

despotism in any context and to criticize Montesquieu for using the reports of unreliable travellers.[73] Though Hastings was acquitted, Montesquieu remained present throughout the trial.

Certainly this case study has little direct impact on Bankim, but it helps to demonstrate my argument in several ways. First, it shows the contested nature of colonialism as a whole. Just as Montesquieu's thought is debated and utilized by different individuals within the larger structure of colonialism, these individuals put colonialism into practice in different ways, leading to a complicated experience of colonialism rife with internal tensions. Second, though the impact of philosophers like Montesquieu is indirect and amorphous, it is no less real. Montesquieu's ideas permeated colonial policies in contested ways, influencing the ways in which thinkers like Bankim experienced colonialism. This did not lead to a specific or predictable response, but instead encouraged creative and thoughtful responses like Bankim's formulation of *dharma*. Given the amorphous nature of this influence, this section also serves as a reminder that the influences on Bankim cannot be seen as direct or simple. Bankim negotiated these influences with care, as will be seen in his use of positivism and utilitarianism.

Positivism, Utilitarianism, and Bankim

Julius Lipner, in his introduction to *Anandamath*, describes the novel as an attempt to present an Eternal Code that should be the primary religious expression in India. He describes is as: "The Hinduism that would characterise this Code was a product of Bankim's own invention, the neo-Hinduism that was being forged with the help of Comtean and utilitarian ideas, glimpsed in the unfolding of *Anandamath*, and brought to a degree of maturation in a cluster of Bankim's final discursive writings."[74] Lipner is not the only scholar to note the influence of Comtean positivism and utilitarianism on Bankim's thought.[75] Both of these European schools of thought impacted the thinking of Bengali *bhadralok* society as a whole. Bankim quotes Comte and utilitarians throughout his religious works. This section will characterize these philosophical movements, explain how they

[73] *Ibid.*, 223-4
[74] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 73.
[75] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 191 and Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 144, among others.

came to influence political and religious thought in Bengal, and explain their particular significance for Bankim.

Positivism was a philosophical movement founded primarily by Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Comte led a deeply troubled life, characterized by poverty, pride, and obsessive love, but also developed one of the most influential philosophies in colonial Bengal. Positivism, at least as defined in Comte's early years, referred to the positive view towards science that Comte recommended. Positivists "were people who believed in the supremacy of science as our guide, while the derogatory label of 'negativism' was affixed to those who negated this view and continued to uphold old pre-scientific dogmas."[76] Science and the description of sensory phenomena were therefore the highest form, if not the only form, of knowledge that Comte argued could be accepted. In addition to this fundamental argument, Comte delineated stages of belief that societies went through on their progressive path towards utopia. These stages formed "the law of three stages," including the theological, the metaphysical, and finally the positive. The theological was characterized by the assumption that a divine being governs the world, the metaphysical by explaining natural phenomena through transcendental forces and finally, the positive by no longer seeking an ultimate cause. This final stage would lead to the establishment of universally valid laws through scientific observation.[77]

However, the positivism Bankim encountered in India was not exactly the same as the positivism prescribed by Comte.[78] Instead, it was transmitted through English positivists and philosophers. It was John Stuart Mill's essays on Comte and positivism "can probably claim the greatest responsibility for establishing Comte's ideas in England and in India."[79] This essay summarizes and analyzes Comte's work, but also attempts to understand which parts of his philosophy are original to him and which are present in other works.[80] However, Bankim's greatest

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[76] Stanislav Andreski, ed., *The Essential Comte*, trans. Margaret Clarke, (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 9.
[77] Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology*, (Colombia: South Asia Books, 1975), 9.
[78] This reflects the complex notion of colonial influence where nothing is monolithic, but individual and complicated.
[79] *Ibid.,* 17.
[80] John Stuart Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 3rd edition, (Edinburgh: Ballantyne Press, 1882), 8.

connection to positivism probably came through the positivist missionaries, as Forbes calls them, in India. Comte himself believed that the Brahmin class of India would recognize that his philosophy could free India from foreign domination. Three English positivists travelled to India as members of the Indian Civil Service and acted unofficially as missionaries for positivism. All three, though employed in different branches of the government, justified adapting positivist theories due to the backwardness of the local populace.[81]

Samuel Lobb, a teacher primarily at Krishnagar College who worked in India from 1861 to 1868 and from 1869 until his death in 1876, felt that the Indian mind was not ready for a positivist doctrine of science without religion. Therefore, he particularly highlighted the religious aspects of positivism, hoping to calm the confusing mix of religious traditionalism and English scientific education that Indians experienced. Though he believed positivism would be helpful for a few select minds, it would be dangerously unstable for the larger, unprepared populace.[82] James Cruickshank Geddes, who worked for the Indian Civil Service on and off from 1861, was an economist who developed a theory of Indian economics that blamed the English governing class for a system of economics that benefitted themselves at the expense of crushing the Indian peasantry. Not only did Geddes develop this theory, but he bluntly and publicly expressed it.[83] Similarly, Henry Cotton developed a golden age theory of pre-British India that blamed Britain for the economic, legal and social problems of contemporary India. Cotton believed that a shift in governmental policy towards positivist ideals would fix the problems of India and was not appointed lieutenant governor of India because of his sympathy for Indians. He also believed that understanding the *bhadralok* class held the key to effective government in India and emphasized the religious aspects of positivism, believing the similarities between Hinduism and positivism would help its spread.[84]

It is unsurprising that this particular branch of philosophy would be popular among Bengali intellectuals. The *bhadralok*, aware of the racism and domination inherent in colonialism, were

[81] Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, 32-3.
[82] *Ibid*., 36-7.
[83] *Ibid*., 40-1.
[84] *Ibid*., 43-7.

attracted to a counter-hegemonic philosophy that inspired such public criticisms of British rule. In addition, the British positivists in India related positivism as much as possible to Hinduism, emphasizing similarities wherever possible. Essentially, the *bhadralok* were attracted to positivism for the same reason the English were. It provided a framework for them to both accept the material and scientific dominance of the British without abandoning entirely the Indian-ness of their religious background or accepting British dominance as morally correct. Therefore, positivist thought had a deep impact on Bengali intellectual society as a whole.[85]

Bankim's work in the *Dharmatattva* reflects this influence. The *Dharmatattva* essentially intends to lay out the ideal religious life. In his discussion of knowledge and its acquisition, he claims that his religion offers the three most important aspects of knowledge: the universe, self, and God. He continues to claim that the universe is known through Comte's first four branches of knowledge - mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry – the self is known through biology and sociology, which is also found in Western thought, and God is known through Hindu scriptures.[86] Amiya Sen, in his introduction to the *Dharmatattva*, notes that this pattern essentially "replicates the Positivist schema" regarding knowledge.[87]

Utilitarianism in India both predated positivism and was deeply similar to it, since Mill was "one of the most important receptants of Comte's positivism in England."[88] Bankim read and quoted both Jeremy Bentham, considered the founder of utilitarianism, and John Stuart Mill, who wrote extensively about utilitarianism. However, utilitarianism had a less profound impact on Bankim's thought than positivism. He sums up utilitarianism through the voice of his disciple in the *Dharmatattva*. After the guru explains that a thief must be punished because, otherwise, the encouragement of thievery provides harm to society, the disciple responds "But this is what the Utilitarians say! 'The greatest good of the greatest number.' It seems to me that in your opinion this is the maxim that should be applied." The guru rejoins "Utilitarianism is not something to be scoffed

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[85] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 191.
[86] Apratim Ray, trans., *Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Dharmatattva*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 142.
[87] *Ibid*., 25.
[88] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 191.

at."[89] He continues to explain that utilitarianism is most useful in calculating the positive and negative impacts when personal concerns arise. By reminding oneself that one's own benefit is no more important than the benefits of others, people can come closer to achieving true *dharma*.[90] However, Bankim never fully accepted positivism or utilitarianism but adapted it, despite the fact that some historians see his *dharma* as a paraphrase of positivism for an Indian context.[91] This idea of "paraphrase" implies that what Bankim engaged in was "mere" copying, a less creative or dynamic way of thinking. I argue that Bankim's project more closely resembled what Hatcher refers to as eclecticism. This eclecticism, which involves drawing on interpretive sources from a variety of cultural locations, is a form of self-construction, and "it need hardly be pointed out that self-construction is by definition a creative process."[92] For example, in the *Dharmatattva*, Bankim deals with both of these movements the same way. Comte's positivism provides the scientific ways of acquiring knowledge of the universe and self, which have "made the Westerners our masters," but cannot grant knowledge of God.[93] Not only does this prevent Westerners from truly achieving ideal knowledge, it also makes positivism seem like "little more than a set of procedures."[94] Similarly, though utilitarianism "is a pious faith; not an evil creed," it "is a miniscule part of dharma."[95] Utilitarianism is not wrong, according to Bankim, it is just, like positivism, incomplete. Bankim's dharma, then, accepts both positivism and utilitarianism as generally effective and helpful philosophies, but proceeds to encompass and expand on them. Bankim's dharma recognizes these philosophies, but perfects them by adding the elements of theism and religiosity that the West simply cannot fully understand.

[89] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 192-3.
[90] *Ibid.*, 195.
[91] Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, 135.
[92] Brian A. Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11-2.
[93] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 142.
[94] *Ibid.*, 36.
[95] *Ibid.*, 193.

Secularism and the Traps of Post-Enlightenment Thought

Finally, the influence of philosophers like Montesquieu did not end with the fading of colonialism. Indeed, much of contemporary scholarship still remains within Enlightenment frames of thought. The most relevant for my analysis of Bankim is the understanding of secularism. While the Enlightenment is not monolithic and is fraught with internal contradictions, many Enlightenment thinkers from various Enlightenment strands have elements of secularism in their work. Perhaps the best study of the overwhelming influence of secularism in Enlightenment thought is the volume *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason*, edited by Christopher Nadon. In his introduction, Nadon claims that while forms of secularism can be detected since ancient times, "only the Enlightenment gave birth to secularism as a lasting political and social force."[96] Though he wants to talk about various forms of secularism, the one most relevant to this study is political secularism, here defined as "the favoring of this-worldly political concerns over religious claims or scruples."[97] He traces the origins of political secularism to Machiavelli, though it can be detected as early as Thucydides. For Nadon, "the secular thrust of Machiavelli's thought is usually and rightly considered to be manifest in a doctrine of *realpolitik* that shows the incompatibility of the demands of religion and traditional morality with those of politics, with the latter taking precedence."[98] In other words, truly effective governing required a willingness to transgress the high, but unrealistic, moral principles of religion.

More important than the political separation here is the assumption that informs the separation. Thomas A. Lewis points out that the contemporary public presupposes "religion as reason's other."[99] He argues that, especially in the wake of Enlightenment rational challenges to religion, religion is seen as something that cannot be discussed rationally. It is not even irrational, but arational. It is simply beyond discussion. In fact, he argues that this was primarily a Protestant

[96] Christopher Nadon, "Introduction" in *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason*, Christopher Nadon, ed., (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), *xviii*.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Ibid*.
[99] Thomas A. Lewis, "On the role of normativity in religious studies," in Robert A. Orsi, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 177.

response, meant to divide the field of discussion in "a kind of noncompetition agreement," which allowed religion to gain dominance in a field that reason could not touch.[100]

Lewis is primarily speaking of the contemporary American public when he makes this argument. He sees this claim "used to justify excluding 'religion' as a whole from the university as well as to defend religious claims from rational criticism," calling for religious arguments to be backed not only by faith but also by reason.[101] Though his intent is to argue against this conception of secularism that rigidly separates faith and reason, it can be seen in contemporary philosophers who engage in anti-religion polemics or attempt to explain religion away.[102] For example, Sam Harris, in a chapter tellingly titled "Reason in Exile," argues that religious faith is the primary cause of violence in the contemporary world. The relation between faith and reason is central to his argument. He agrees with Lewis that in modern society "religious beliefs are simply beyond the scope of rational discourse."[103] This is a problem because it prevents us from criticizing, and thereby expunging, faith. Indeed, the only way for people to collaborate is by leaving their beliefs open to modification by evidence or argument. "This spirit of mutual inquiry is the very antithesis of religious faith" and we must speak "plainly about the absurdity of most of our religious beliefs."[104] Pascal Boyer, while less polemical than Harris, also present religious belief as irrational. After a series of vignettes intended to present religion as irrational, he claims that, following Chomsky, the questions of why people have religious beliefs have ceased to become mysteries and are instead problems.[105] He continues to provide an argument incorporating elements of psychology, anthropology, and neuroscience to argue that the religious beliefs that trigger certain human responses and so propagate themselves in society, like genes, are the ones that survive.[106]

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[100] *Ibid.*, 178.
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] *Ibid.,* 179.
[103] Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 13.
[104] *Ibid.*, 48.
[105] Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*, (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 2.
[106] *Ibid.*, 50.

For both of these philosophers, religion is distinguished by its lack of rationality, which is best illustrated in how they apply rationality to religious beliefs. Harris wants to apply rationality to religious belief solely for the purpose of criticizing them. He thinks that bringing these beliefs into the realm of rational inquiry will destroy them, as he cannot imagine the possibility of defending religious beliefs through reason. Boyer applies rationality to religion to explain why people would believe in it. Similarly to Harris, he cannot imagine using reason to defend the beliefs themselves, and so provides psychological, anthropological and neuroscientific reasons for the prevalence of religious beliefs in human society. Both grant religion no part of reason, and cannot imagine the confluence of faith and reason. This separation of faith and reason is not something either of these thinkers feels the need to argue. Indeed, as Lewis argues, this simply appears as an assumption of the way the world works. This same assumption, I will argue, underlies many of the mistakes of modern scholarship on Bankim.

The other assumption that underlies many interpretations of Bankim is that of the "mystic" East. Richard King analyzes a strand of Orientalist discourse that romantically noted the superiority of Indian culture: "the romantic image of India portrays Indian culture as profoundly spiritual, idealistic and mystical."[107] Though often motivated by respect, it perpetuates cultural stereotypes of India as a place only of superstition and religion, and is therefore a distortion. Ashis Nandy notices a similar pattern. In an attempt to construct a self-image for India as fundamentally opposed to the West, "colonialism replaced the normal ethnocentric stereotype of the inscrutable Oriental by the pathological stereotype of the strange, primal but predictable Oriental – religious but superstitious, clever but devious, chaotically violent but effeminately cowardly."[108] Nandy's work draws on Edward Said, who argued that this separation allowed "European culture [to gain] in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self," building "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."[109] In other

[107] Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial theory, India and 'the mystic East,'* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 92.
[108] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), 72.
[109] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.

words, British colonialism used descriptions of India as spiritual, mystical and religious to construct hierarchical differences that allowed Europe to claim authority over India. Paradoxically, perhaps, Indians in time used this very description to claim their own superiority.[110] King's primary example of this is Vivekānanda, who "placed particular emphasis upon the spirituality of Indian culture as a curative for the nihilism and materialism of modern Western culture…" providing "India's special gift to humankind."[111]

Furthermore, these two assumptions, that religion is separate from faith and that India is by nature spiritual, interrelate. King notes this connection through two conflicting images in contemporary Western characterizations of Eastern religiosity. The first is the mystical East in which "the depravity and backwardness of the Orient thus appears to sit side by side with its blossoming spirituality and cultural richness."[112] The second is the idea of the militant fanatic or religious fundamentalist. These two perceptions are rarely juxtaposed because "the otherworldly Eastern mystic cannot be involved in a this-worldly political struggle without calling into question the strong cultural opposition between the mystical and the public realms."[113] Essentially the mystic East stereotype casts India as a place where religion dominates the people, and the secular assumption of the incompatibility of reason and faith informs understandings of Indians as irrational and unable to govern themselves. These stereotypes long infected Orientalist scholarship in India that attempted to create difference in order to achieve intellectual justifications for dominance.[114] Moreover, they continue to inform interpretations of Bankim (and most likely others), as I will argue in Chapter 2.

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[110] Richard Fox referred to this strand as "affirmative Orientalism." Richard Fox, "East of Said," in Michael Sprinkler, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 152.
[111] King, *Orientalism and Religion*, 93.
[112] *Ibid*., 97.
[113] *Ibid*., 98.
[114] See Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Chs. 3 and 4.

Chapter 2: Religion, Reason and Secularism in Bankim's Dharma

Julius Lipner, among others, points out that Bankim developed a religious code during the later years of his life. He characterizes his last three novels as "vehicles for expressing, through their events and characters, the neo-conservative vision of *dharma* (the right religious, social, and political order that must imbue the new India) that Bankim shaped toward the end of his life."[115] He did not rely on his novels alone, as it was in his later years that Bankim, for the first time, also published extensive religious commentaries. This chapter seeks to explore the primary elements of this *dharma* and the influences that impacted his particular expression. The primary sources are Bankim's later writings, including *Ānandamath* (1882), *Debī Chaudhurānī* (1884), *Krishnacaritra* (1886), *Dharmatattva* (1888), and his unfinished but posthumously published commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. The most important secondary source is Hans Harder's translation and extended analysis of Bankim's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, though I will also draw on the work of Partha Chatterjee, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Sudipta Kaviraj and Willhelm Halbfass.

These various analyses of Bankim's project generally share two common analytical interpretations. The first is that Bankim's formulation of *dharma* does not align with traditional Indian sources, but instead takes it primarily from Western sources. The criticism of this claim is that Bankim somehow does not remain true to his Indian culture, but betrays it through his use of "Western" modes of thought. The second is that Bankim's *dharma* is simply not religious. He makes

[115] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 6. Also see Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 145.

dharma primarily an ethical term, removing its religious roots. For these commenters, Bankim's *dharma* mingles Western and Indian thought in ways that cannot be found in the traditional texts, and drains the religious content from the term.[116] My overall argument in this chapter is that these commenters fall into the traps of Enlightenment formulations of secularism and the "Mystic" East that prevent them from recognizing Bankim's combination of Eastern and Western sources of rationality and religion.

Applying the strategies of thinkers in other contexts can help bring new tools of analysis to bear on thought about Bankim. In Brian Hatcher's introduction to his translation of Vidyasagar's *Hindu Widow Marriage*, he notes that similar charges have been laid against Vidyasagar: "he was thought by many to be too newfangled; in their view, his exposure to Western learning and institutions had caused him to lose touch with his Hindu values, if not to renounce them outright."[117] However, with careful attention to his historical context and Vidyasagar's rhetorical strategies, Hatcher claims that Vidyasagar is neither purely traditional nor purely modern, where traditional is associated with his use of religious authority and modern with his use of rational interpretation. Instead, he argues that Vidyasagar uses traditional texts "less as a statement of his own personal conviction and more as a warning to his opponents about their apparent hypocrisy."[118] Furthermore, in the very format of the text he mixes different styles. The text "looks like a modern book, right down to its many footnotes" but his "fluid interweaving of root texts and commentarial material gives *Hindu Widow Marriage* a distinctively traditional feel."[119] Therefore, he concludes that "his genius lies in the decision to create a modern species of traditional legal reflection that could accomplish the goal of advancing a contemporary reformist cause in terms faithful to his own intellectual heritage."[120]

[116] This is not true of all of these commenters. Kaviraj, for instance, does not make the claim that Bankim's project is primarily "Western," but downplays the role of religion in his overall project, simply by not addressing it in detail. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[117] Ishvarchandra Vidyasagar, *Hindu Widow Marriage*, Brian A. Hatcher, trans., (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 1.
[118] *Ibid.*, 32.
[119] *Ibid.*, 36.
[120] *Ibid.*, 40.

Hatcher's argument is that Vidyasagar's complicated interweaving of styles and sources that are traditional and modern reflects a deliberate strategic choice by Vidyasagar. He was not forced to use traditional sources because he was bound by his faith to an outdated religion, and he did not fight for the modern cause of widow marriage because he was betraying his Indian roots and accepting Western rationalism. Instead, he made the choice, an important distinction, to meld elements of both to make his argument. He "negotiated the ebb and flow of intellectual currents" and well understood his audience, the educated Bengali elite.[121] He knew that some would be swayed by his references to authoritative scriptures and others would be swayed by his modern style and interpretations, and so combined the two to make the most effective, eclectic case for the cause he believed in. I will argue that the similar charges laid against Bankim can be answered with a similar analysis. Bankim showed in various places that he understood his audience well. Therefore, his extensive combination of Western and Indian sources does not involve a betrayal of his Indian tradition but a strategic choice that demonstrates his flexibility as a thinker and his dedication to making the best case for his *dharma* as he could.

In addition, new ways of thinking about secularism can help reduce the undervaluing of the religious aspects of Bankim's thought. Talal Asad discusses the secular in depth, and characterizes the general secularization thesis as having the following three points, all essential to the development of modernity: "(1) increasing structural differentiation of social spaces resulting in the separation of religion from politics, economy, science, and so forth; (2) the privatization of religion within its own sphere; and (3) the declining social significance of religious belief, commitment, and institutions."[122] However, Asad argues against all three elements of the thesis. First, he notes that religion legitimately enters into debates on economic, scientific and education policy, and results in actual policies, defeating point (1). Point (2) falls because religion can be deprivatized in ways that do not undermine civil society or that promote debate of liberal values, thereby allowing religion to have a public role in modern, secularized states. And point (3) falls because public debates of policies

[121] *Ibid*., 31.
[122] Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 181.

involving religion continue to reveal passionate commitments to religious beliefs, even as church attendance falls.[123]

However, despite the failure of this thesis, Asad does argue that secularization has changed the ways in which religion interacts with modern society. Using the example of Islamism, he argues that secularization has reduced the spheres in which religion can legitimately act in society: "religion has the option either of confining itself to private belief and worship or of engaging in public talk that makes no demands on life."[124] Therefore, any act of religion to enter into a sphere demarcated as "secular" by secularism leads to suspicion, even if it is innocuous like the establishment of hospitals or schools in underserved areas, or seems politically legitimate, like Muslim movements to reform the state through popular majorities who vote to support their platform. He explains Islamism's "preoccupation with state power" as a result of the fact that "no movement that aspires to more than mere belief or inconsequential talk in public can remain indifferent to state power in a secular world."[125] Therefore, any religious movement that hopes to make any real impact on the world *must* engage with spaces deemed secular, otherwise it will not succeed. Religious movements that seek to do this cannot simply be reduced to secular concepts, like nationalism, but must be understood as fundamentally religious, but legitimately entering secular spheres to make real their designs.

Undergirding this rigid separation is the assumed distinction between reason and faith: "One old argument about the need to separate religion from politics is that because the former essentially belongs to the domain of faith and passion, rational argument and interest-guided action can have no place in it."[126] Secularists are therefore suspicious of the relationship between organized religion, authority and constraint. But since "the categories of 'politics' and 'religion' turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought," the secularization thesis breaks down.[127] C. S. Adcock complicates the picture further specifically for the Indian context. She argues that, historically, European scholarship has characterized non-European peoples as religious and European liberalism

[123] *Ibid.*, 182.
[124] *Ibid.*, 199.
[125] *Ibid.*, 200.
[126] *Ibid.*, 186.
[127] *Ibid.*, 200.

as political, separating the two into rigid spheres. However, she notes that the existence of and need for terms such as "service/worship" and "ritual-politics" that attempt to escape this distinction prove "the failure of the categories of religion and politics that organize academic scholarship – a problem of translation."[128] In other words, the European imagined (as Asad shows us) distinction between religion and politics simply does not translate to the Indian context.

All three thinkers undermine the crucial assumption that faith is by its very nature separate from reason. Hatcher's argument shows how the critical, rational mobilization of religious sources effectively combines the two, while Asad and Adcock show how their very separation originates in modes of thought that evidence shows must be complicated. By extension, they undermine the assumption that Indian tradition has no access to reason because it is by nature religious. This chapter seeks to advance a reading of Bankim's *dharma* that does not start from the assumption that reason and faith are by nature separate and that India and Indian culture is by nature religious and not rational. I will, of course, not make the argument that Bankim's *dharma* is only religious or that it is only Indian. Chapter 1 explained some of the ways in which Bankim was exposed to and accepted Western influences in his work, and reason is deeply important to his work. However, I will argue that Bankim sought to subsume Western forms of rationality within Indian sources of rationality, religion, and authority. His *dharma* was thus, in his own view, bigger than anything the West could create, and could absorb all of the good elements of Western culture while retaining its essential Indian-ness and religious superiority.

Dharma in Historical and Colonial India

Perhaps the most important term in Bankim's thought is *dharma*. It is the name of his project and the guiding influence for his goals. However, the term itself has a long and contested history, ranging from its use in Vedic sources to its reinvention and reinvigoration by thinkers like

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[128] C. S. Adcock, *The Limits of Tolerance: Indian Secularism and the Politics of Religious Freedom*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.

Bankim during the colonial period. Halbfass recognizes that *dharma* has a wide range of meanings that develop over time:

> In keeping with the associational wealth of *dharma*, the range of the Western expressions which have been utilized to translate this word (which is often called untranslatable) is wide indeed: it reaches from 'norm,' 'duty,' and 'command' to 'religion' and 'faith,' from 'justice,' 'custom' and 'law' to 'piety,' 'moral fitness,' 'virtue,' 'good work,' and 'religious merit.'[129]

This collection demonstrates some of the difficulties in expressing an effective definition of *dharma*. The meanings it covers are extensive, and conflates concepts (like religion and law) that modern interpreters may see as fundamentally separate.

One of the earliest uses of the term *dharma* is in the Rg Veda X.90, known as the Hymn of Primal Man. The final stanza reads: "The gods sacrificed to the sacrifice with the sacrifice, this was the first *dharma* / These powers are in the vault of heaven, where the ancient gods and *Sādhyas* (Demigods) are."[130] Here, the sacrifice itself is *dharma*, the right kind of action. The sacrifice, *dharma* itself, also creates the world and builds the four *varna* system that organizes the social community. *Dharma* here covers religious meanings of sacrifice to the gods and a creation myth, includes meanings of creating and supporting the world, and of organizing society. This *varnāsramadharma* system, which Halbfass defines as "the order of castes and stages of life" is perhaps explored in the most detail in *The Laws of Manu*, or *Mānava Dharmasāstra*.[131] This law code became the authority for legal thought by the fifth century, and was one of the first Sanskrit texts translated by colonial Orientalists, becoming the window into Indian culture for many Indologists.[132] It covered a variety of topics, including describing the creation of the world, the sources of *dharma*, the *dharma* of each of the four *varnas*, or social classes, and a description of *karma*, reincarnation and final liberation.[133] *Dharma* is thus expansive and difficult to pin down. It includes the origin of

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[129] Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 314.
[130] My translation: *yajñena yajñam ayajanta devāstāni dharmāṇi prathamāni āsan | te ha nākam mahimānah sacanta yatra pūrve Sādhyāh santi devāh* || Arthur Anthony MacDonnell, *A Vedic Reader for Students* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915), 203.
[131] Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 194.
[132] Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Law Code of Manu*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), *xvi-xvii*.
[133] *Ibid.*, *xxviii-xxix*.

the world, marriage rules for a Brahmin, what types of eating are acceptable, how to deal with the impurity caused by death, and how to achieve religious liberation.

Dharma is also the focus of perhaps the most famous of Hindu texts, the *Bhagavad Gītā*. This text describes the teachings Krishna gives to Arjuna before the battle on the "field of *dharma*." Though composed somewhere between the 4th and 6th centuries as part of the *Mahabharata*, it has been reinterpreted almost continuously since.[134] The idea that the text covers a field of *dharma* implies that "the teachings of the *Gita*, although set within a particular narrative and context, are intended to be abstracted to all situations."[135] *Dharma* is at the center of the conflict of the *Gītā*, as Arjuna questions whether he should do his duty (*dharma*) as a member of the warrior caste and fight in the impending battle, or whether it would be wrong (*adharmic*) to kill his family members and teachers who will fight against him. Krishna explains, first, that it is his duty to be a soldier and fight, and second, death is not permanent because all creatures have an inner, undying *ātman* that cannot be killed. Arjuna, understanding this, wants to renounce the world to avoid fighting, but Krishna argues that action (*karman*) is required of all life, and instead, Arjuna should renounce the fruits of his actions, and act without expectation of results. Turning these actions over to God, or Krishna, as an act of devotion (*bhakti*) is the ideal *dharma*, and Krishna reveals his true divine form to Arjuna.[136] As I will show, this formulation of *dharma* is the most important for Bankim. This *dharma* offers a way of life for every person, renouncing the fruits of their actions to God, while also upholding conservative values, which should be followed for the good of society and because the actions themselves do not matter so much as the spirit with which one acts.

In contrast, Willhelm Halbfass sees *dharma* in Post-Vedic Hinduism as primarily about xenology. The Aryan Hindus separated themselves from foreigners, or *mlecchas*, through the social order they constructed. Foreigners were foreign precisely because they took no part in the *dharmic* system, especially the four *varna*, or class, system.[137] Here, *dharma* is both a moral code for

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[134] Richard H. Davis, *The Bhagavad Gita: A Biography*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 6.
[135] Gavin Flood and Charles Martin, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015), *ix*.
[136] *Ibid*., *x-xiii*.
[137] Halbfass, *India and Europe,* 179-181.

individuals and a larger social system that upholds the morality of Hindu society against the amorality of foreigners. By Bankim's era, the term had developed in specific ways. Halbfass notes two primary, indigenous meanings for *dharma* in Bankim's context. *Dharma* could both mean the property, essence, or characteristic attribute of a thing and the religious, social and normative sense in which *dharma* is a code of right, moral action.[138] Therefore, it could be said that the *dharma* of a magnet is to attract metal, *dharma* in its sense of "characteristic property." But *dharma* could also refer to what should be done – the *dharma* of a person is to follow a normative code of action. As Apratim Ray notes, in Bankim's era the term *dharma*, "in its most simple and everyday sense it means religion."[139] Thus, another potential definition for *dharma*, though not indigenous, is simply of a particular religion, like Hinduism or Christianity.

Therefore, *dharma* can have any (or many) of these meanings. It has origins in foundational religious texts like the Vedas and the *Mahabharata*, it relates to the very structure of the world, it orders social relations, it creates the *varna* system, it describes what the essence of objects are, it offers rules on how people should live their lives, and it can simply refer to single religions. Bankim enters this debate in full understanding of the complexity of the term he chose. He himself discusses how to define the term in the *Dharmatattva*. He includes a discussion of *dharma* in the first appendix, which draws from his essay "*Dharmajigyasa*" or "An Inquiry into the Meaning of Dharma." Here he delineates six meanings of *dharma*: religion, morality, virtue, acts sanctioned by religious faith or code of morality, functional attributes (like a magnet's ability to attract metal), and custom. He identifies this confusion of meanings as the reason for "the decline in the standards of the Hindu religion, morality, as well as the present crisis of faith in them."[140] On some level, then, he seeks to define *dharma* through his usage of the term. The question remains, of course, how exactly he works with the term.

Other commentators, notably R. Antoine and P. Hacker, have seen Bankim as the first to marry the "essence" and "norm" definitions of *dharma*, therefore creating a religion that both

[138] *Ibid.*, 334.
[139] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, *vii*.
[140] *Ibid.*, 235-6.

matches the essence of what it means to be human with a normative description of how humans should live. However, Halbfass argues convincingly that others do this concurrently and even before Bankim.[141] Nonetheless, it is clear that Bankim does marry these two definitions. In the *Dharmatattva*, he refers to *dharma* as the "natural laws of conduct that hold true for all human beings," and gives examples like the natural law of magnets is attracting iron particles, the natural law of fire is combustion, and the natural law of water is moisture.[142] The natural law of humans is "humanism," or *manusyatva*, and describes "the appropriate development and maturity of all human faculties and… [the] striking of a balance between each of them."[143] Thus, *dharma* is what is natural for humans, it fits and describes their characteristic essence, but is also a normative guide that helps them cultivate their faculties to being the best they can be.

In addition to this combination of definitions, an important feature of Bankim's *dharma* is his "opening up and universalizing" of the concept.[144] This is in direct conflict with former xenological interpretations of the term. Bankim distanced *dharma* from the caste/*varna* system, since it cannot be universal if it is deeply entrenched within the geographically and culturally specific social organization of India. Halbfass argues that, in Bankim's thought, "the system of the four *varna* is not a hereditary and legalistic order, but rather an arrangement in accordance with natural dispositions of character and capabilities and the reflection of a universal lawfulness encompassing both the 'is' and the 'ought.'"[145] Harder, however, complicates this position. Bankim, at times, associates the *varnas* with systems of labor division that exist in all societies. However, at other times Bankim describes the *varnas* as determined by inheritance or by an individual's nature, instead of profession.[146] Harder interprets these inconsistencies as Bankim deprioritizing the *varnāsramadharma* system to the universalization of *dharma*.

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[141] Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 336.
[142] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 47.
[143] *Ibid*., 60.
[144] Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 337.
[145] *Ibid*.
[146] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 186-7.

In addition, Harder argues that Bankim was most attracted to the simple definition of *dharma* as religion.[147] Harder resolves this distinction by arguing that Bankim frequently uses *dharma* in different senses rather than sticking to a single, unified understanding.[148] In addition, he explores how Bankim shifts between *dharma* as a descriptive term and *dharma* as a normative term so he can make his particular interpretation of *dharma* accepted.[149] However, I argue that a close reading of Bankim's discussion of *dharma* in the *Dharmatattva* provides a more effective definition. He denies the simple definition of *dharma* as religion, claiming that it is "not home-grown but merely a modern equivalent of the English word 'religion.'"[150] The word "merely" shows that, for Bankim, religion as conceived in English is beneath *dharma*. There is something lesser about the English word and Western concept of religion, something that *dharma* absorbs. In addition he claims that *dharma* is the "natural laws of conduct that hold true for all human beings, irrespective of whether they are Christians, Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims."[151] Whereas these religions are particular, *dharma* is universal.

Bankim continues to associate *dharma* with two other important terms. After arguing that *dharma* covers the universal natural laws for human beings, he claims that humanism is the natural law for humans, thereby equating *dharma* with humanism. Humanism is the all-round development of human faculties in the correct balance, reaching for the "pinnacle of perfection" of humanity, and *dharma* refers not necessarily to the achievement of perfect humanity, but the fixing of the ideal "so that, in striving to acquire all virtues and all happiness, we may acquire many."[152] This acquisition of virtues, what Bankim calls the cultivation of mankind, comes from *anuśīlana*, translated as culture. *Anuśīlana*, for Bankim, is a particular term that describes a method for the cultivation of humanity. Through *anuśīlana*, people cultivate their human faculties and achieve happiness.[153] These terms overlap and equate in sometimes confusing ways, but *dharma* remains central.

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[147] *Ibid*., 183.
[148] *Ibid*., 185.
[149] *Ibid*, 184.
[150] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 46.
[151] *Ibid*., 47.
[152] *Ibid*., 51-2.
[153] *Ibid*., 42.

Humanism establishes the goal of cultivating human faculties to their highest point of development, in accordance with what Bankim considers natural law. *Anuśīlana* is the method, the way in which societies and people can and should organize their lives to perfect humanism. Bankim equates both humanism and *anuśīlana* with *dharma*.[154] Therefore, *dharma* for Bankim is the culturally specific, but universally applicable, combination of humanism and *anuśīlana*. It marries the perfect goals of humanism with the perfect method of *anuśīlana*, and derives from an Indian history and context.

Therefore, Bankim's definition of *dharma* is not simply religion. It is universalized, like the English term religion, but retains both the descriptive and normative senses of earlier uses of the word. It certainly includes the meanings of the English "religion," but pervades every aspect of people's lives and social organization. Moreover, it is more specific than religion. It is not just one way of being in the world, but "the" way. Finally, it is not only an Indian term, but perhaps one of the most important Indian terms in the formulation of philosophical and religious thought on the subcontinent.

Bankim's Strategic Methodology

Ashis Nandy, a primary commenter on the psychological impacts of colonialism on the self-image of the colonizer and colonized alike, claims that the ultimate violence of colonialism is "that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter."[155] In other words, colonized peoples, faced with the dominance of the colonizer's culture, feel that it is necessary to adopt the tools and restrictions of the colonizer's thought in order to battle colonialism itself. Nandy sums up Bankim's project, claiming he "projected into the Hindu past, into a lost golden age of Hinduism, the qualities of Christianity which seemingly gave Christians their strength."[156] He sees this particularly in *Ānandamath* and the *Krishnacaritra*. The order of *sannyāsīs* in *Ānandamath* "was obviously the Hindu counterpart of the priesthood in some versions of Western Christianity" and "his goal was to make Krsna a normal, non-pagan male

[154] *Ibid.*, 45 and 47.
[155] Nandy *The Intimate Enemy*, 3.
[156] *Ibid.*, 23.

god who would not humiliate his devotees in front of the progressive Westerners."[157] To this end he attempts to build a sense of the historical Krishna that denied all parts of Krishna's mythology that would be in conflict with new norms and emphasizing his perfection. Nandy essentially argues that Bankim borrows Christian, and therefore Western, norms and tools to build an acceptable Hindu religion.

Partha Chatterjee extends this argument by noting Bankim's use of Western methodology. Indeed, he makes the bold claim that "Bankim's method, concepts and modes of reasoning are completely contained within the forms of post-Enlightenment scientific thought."[158] In order to discover the true Krishna in the *Krishnacaritra*, Partha Chatterjee argues that Bankim "devised several criteria, all of them strictly scientific and rational" and eliminates all traces of supernatural myth.[159] Though Chatterjee's argument is complex, he consistently refers to Bankim as "imprisoned within the rationalist framework of his theoretical discourse and powerless to reject its dominating implications."[160] For Chatterjee then, Bankim's use of rationalism is purely a concession to the West, hence the idea in his title of a "derivative discourse." Colonialism brought rational discourse to India, made it the dominant framework for theoretical discourse and forced Bankim to use it as well.[161]

A third influential examination of Bankim's methodology can be found in Hans Harder's analysis of Bankim's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The most important part of this discussion is Harder's view of Bankim's use of sources. Harder delineates seven groups of sources: the *Bhagavad Gītā*, ancient Sanskrit texts, Sanskrit commentaries on the *Gītā*, Bengali translations of the *Gītā*, English translations and commentaries on the *Gītā*, other works of Western science, philosophy and literature, and Bankim's own writings.[162] Although Harder notes that most of the Western sources are from the nineteenth century while most Indian sources are ancient, this

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[157] *Ibid.*, 23 and 24.
[158] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 58.
[159] *Ibid.*, 59.
[160] *Ibid.*, 79.
[161] Amiya Sen makes a similar argument, that Bankim applies "tools of analysis borrowed from the West" in an attempt "at reconciling reason with faith." This results in a harsh criticism, and an implied betrayal, of Indian tradition. Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal: 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 89.
[162] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 160-1.

displays a wide breadth of influences to which Bankim ascribes some form of authority. However, Harder characterizes several differences in the ways in which Bankim uses these sources.

In terms of Indian sources, Harder argues "in view of their frequency, the quoted commentaries are of astonishingly little importance to Bankim's interpretation."[163] Even when they are helpful, they only clarify trifling details. Instead, Harder is interested in how Bankim disagrees with these commentaries. By examining three minor conflicts, Harder concludes that of Bankim's disagreements, "none of them comes near anything one could call sharp criticism."[164] Instead, he characterizes himself as humble and the authors of the commentaries as incredibly intelligent. For Harder, this constitutes a "polite dismissal" of the authors, allowing him to disagree with them while leaving their authority intact as representatives of the Indian nation he is building. Harder sees this as a rejection by Bankim of the validity of these sources, though Bankim feels the need to keep their authority intact. However, Bankim uses Western sources differently. When he agrees with them, he simply attaches them to the ends of his argument, giving them no credit for actually impacting his conclusions.[165] However, when he disagrees, they become the target of his sharp criticism and even ridicule. These criticisms are justified by the essential otherness and outside perspective of Western Indologists, meaning they "cannot claim authoritativeness."[166]

Harder feels that Bankim's deep criticism of the very nature of Western interpretations of the *Gītā* deeply contradicts his use of Western sources as authoritative. He explains this as two powerful influences on Bankim's thought. The first is his commitment to "critical inquiry within rational bounds," a rational and scholarly attitude that matches Western ideals. The second is an affective and political commitment to denying access to Indian texts to Western interpreters.[167] This, in combination with Bankim's claims to Hindu superiority, convinces Harder that "despite the rationalist outlook he tried to keep up, the emotional need for self-assertion proves to be more basic

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[163] *Ibid.*, 217.
[164] *Ibid.*, 220.
[165] *Ibid.*, 225.
[166] *Ibid.*, 228.
[167] *Ibid.*

to his thinking."[168] In this view, when Bankim is rational, he is Western, but when he is Hindu, he is emotional. It also contributes to Harder's argument that Bankim's project cannot be considered authentically Indian because it "is inconsistent only when this new definition of *dharma* is claimed to be intended in traditional texts."[169] Harder's misconception stems from and perpetuates the idea that reason and faith are fundamentally separate and India, as a spiritual culture, has no access to reason.

In reviewing the analyses provided by Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, and Hans Harder, I acknowledge that Western forms of rationalism had an influence on Bankim's thought. Indeed, as I argued in Chapter 1, some of the most important influences on Bankim were positivism and utilitarianism, both European rational movements. However, language like Chatterjee's that claims Bankim was "imprisoned" by Western rationalism ignores the rationalism and reason inherent in Indian culture and Bankim's agency in strategically crafting a method that would appeal to a broad audience. I argue that Bankim, like Vidyasagar, incorporated European and Indian rationalism into his methodology in an attempt to speak to a diverse and fragmented audience.

First, Bankim's use of sources represents his drawing on forms of both Indian and European forms of rationalism. Both Indian and European interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gītā* are rational, in that they seek to explain, elucidate and interpret a religious text. As Harder recognizes, the ways in which European and Indian sources impacted Bankim's arguments in his commentary on the *Gītā* is almost exactly the same. The important point is that Bankim draws his own conclusions. It is generally not possible to discern whether his conclusions are his own or whether they originate in these sources. When these sources agree with his interpretations, he tacks them on as an additional source of authority. When they disagree, he finds a way to move beyond them. Therefore, he treats European and Indian rational traditions exactly the same. He applies his own standards of reasoning to them and argues with either when necessary. Harder is certainly correct that Bankim tends to denigrate European interpreters while respecting the authenticity of Indian interpreters,

[168] *Ibid.*, 237.
[169] *Ibid.*, 238.

and is correct that this reflects his overall project of claiming Hindu superiority in the face of British colonialism. While Harder sees this as an emotional need for self-assertion, implying it is not rational, it is in fact quite rational in the context of Bankim's larger project. If Bankim's overall intent in his later work, as I will argue, is to convince his fellow Bengalis of the superiority of Hinduism and show them how to attain superiority by absorbing the useful aspects of European culture while maintaining Hinduism's spiritual strength, it is a fully rational strategy to denigrate British commenters who seek to interpret the *Gītā* often as a way of arguing to justify their own rule.[170]

In addition, Bankim knew his audience well. He intends to speak to the "educated" class. However, this educated class has been so indoctrinated by Western education that they have become like the Westerner in their ability to authentically interpret Indian sources: "The Western way of thinking is so different from the ancient Indian way of thinking that the ideas cannot be conveyed to them by a transformation of language. Our educated class has, from childhood on, followed the western way of thinking, the ancient Indian way of thinking is unknown to them."[171] Therefore, in speaking to this group, Bankim argues that he cannot help but use Western methods to teach the *Gītā* to a Westernized Bengali. Perhaps his most interesting use of this strategy is in his discussion of the *ātman*.

Bankim's extended argument about the *ātman* begins in his commentary on 2.12, in which he argues "There are, and may be, controversies concerning the condition of the *ātman* after death, but Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Brāhmas, Muslims and all others agree that the *ātman* is apart from, but still present in the body, that it is infallible to destruction and eternal."[172] The foundation of all religions is in fact this belief in an *ātman*, with the assumption that the Christian and Muslim soul is an analogue. However, Bankim argues that Hinduism has the highest, most brilliant formation for

[170] Kaviraj makes a somewhat similar argument that the Bengali obsession with history makes sense given the British use of history to create a discourse that characterized Indians as racially inferior. Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, 109-111.
[171] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 19-20.
[172] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 43.

understanding the *ātman*, indeed "man fulfils [sic] the purpose of his birth just by believing it."[173] This doctrine is the difference between *paramātman* and *jīvātman*. The *paramātman* is universal and fills all cosmic space and the *jīvātman* is the particular *ātman*, residing in individual animate beings while still remaining a part of the universal *paramātman*.[174] Unlike the Christian understanding, the Hindu conception explains the imperishability of the soul as well as its sameness in all beings, providing a justification for universal love.

Since religions generally agree on the existence of the *ātman*, Bankim instead feels it necessary to argue for its existence against scientists.[175] Bankim argues that science believes there is no proof for the *ātman*, and therefore it cannot exist. However, he believes that his is because science simply lacks the means to prove the existence of the *ātman*.[176] To offer proof Bankim draws from two sources: ancient Indian philosophers and contemporary German philosophers. Ancient Indian philosophers contended that *sabda*, or authoritative teaching, is a legitimate form of proof and, therefore the *ātman* exists because divine texts, like the *Gita*, say it does and nothing in science can prove it wrong. Since Bankim believes that this will not constitute proof for atheist scientists, he also argues that German philosophers think certain principles are proved *per se* in the mind, in a kind of *Transcendental Philosophy*, written in English in the original. He concludes, in bold type, "when all the faculties of the mind are adequately purified, this knowledge regarding the *ātman* is proved *per se*."[177]Bankim offers two forms of authority that can prove the existence of the *ātman*. Ancient Indian philosophers would cite the divinity of the text, which provides its authority especially since science cannot prove it wrong (this also allows Bankim to shape the divine text, given his own claim to be able to determine interpolations in the text) and the second uses German philosophy to prove the same point.

Indeed, he frequently argues with the straw man of a "scientist." Bankim then proves why the scientist's understanding is incomplete in every instance, and how the theistic beliefs the *Gītā*

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[173] *Ibid.*, 44.
[174] *Ibid.*
[175] The obvious analogue for the *ātman* would be the soul of Christian and Muslim traditions. Bankim does not consider Buddhism, some forms of which negate the *ātman*.
[176] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 47.
[177] *Ibid.*, 48-9.

provides can be reconciled with science.[178] When concluding, he introduces a new character, the devotee, for whom these discussions are unnecessary. Instead, he "would have to consider whether the doctrine of reincarnation as it is proclaimed in the *Gītā* is really divine speech or just the author's belief."[179] These characters are instructive. The scientist is a representation of Western science, and his intense rationalism prevents him from believing in anything he cannot see. Bankim argues against this figure within a rational sphere, the only sphere a scientist would be convinced by, and thereby convinces the Westernized Bengalis. Even still, he pays constant attention to a more religious viewpoint, recognizing their forms of proof. However, he does not accept their views outright, challenging them to think critically about the texts and to seek which parts are true and which are interpolated.

In this way, Bankim seems to understand the dangers of, in Harder's words, "fighting almost exclusively with *their* weapons," the rationalist tools and forms of critique of the West.[180] He fights back against the scientists in the only way that is convincing to scientists, using rationality. However, he tempers this rationality with reflections on faith and the needs of devotees. For these devotees, however, he challenges them to think rationally about the texts they put their faith in. He subverts the authority of both pure rationalism and pure faith, and instead seeks to combine them through his methodology.

Similar criticisms are leveled against Bankim's method in the *Krishnacaritra*, namely that his need to find the historical Krishna is an expression of European values.[181] Bankim writes this work because he feels the need to provide models for mankind to follow in their pursuit of *dharma*. As he argues, "every individual must have an ideal, for it is only then that he shall succeed in becoming what he wants."[182] Though there may not be men who achieve this ideal, the gaze can be

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[178] This is particularly interesting given his use of science elsewhere. Gyan Prakash describes Bankim as accepting "the conception of science as superior knowledge" and he in fact argues for the superiority of Hinduism because of its connection with science. Once again, Bankim speaks to multiple audiences, addressing the scientist with science and the devotee with religion. Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 57-8.
[179] Harder, Śrimadbhagabadgītā, 60.
[180] *Ibid.*, 230.
[181] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 59.
[182] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 55.

focused on God, as long as that God is personal and with attributes, like the God of the Purānas and of the Christians.[183] However, he also believes that human models exist. His examples from other traditions are Jesus and the Buddha. These are great examples of the best of men, but they cannot be ideal men because they do not engage in all the actions that men should perform. Instead, he suggests Krishna as an ideal example.[184] Krishna as an example of the best of men becomes the subject of the *Krishnacaritra*, a 371-page monograph.

Bankim is deeply interested in providing Krishna as a historical example to represent how his *dharma* may represent itself in the world.[185] Indeed, this is exactly why Partha Chatterjee argues Bankim worked solely within post-Enlightenment scientific thought. For Partha Chatterjee, the very fact that Bankim thought his discussion "*required* a demonstration of the historicity of Krishna" showed that "history, to him, was the receptacle of rational trush; conversely, the validation of truth had to lie in a rational demonstration of its historicity."[186] Underpinning this claim is that India had no rational history, and so Bankim's search for historicity was by its nature European.[187] Bankim, in fact, argues directly against this point. In the *Krishnacaritra*, he recognizes that in the *Mahābhārata* "there are many such matters as are clearly false, impossible and unhistorical. All those accounts can be discarded as being untrue and unhistorical. But those portions which contain nothing as may lead to their being considered mythical or imaginary, why should we discard those portions as unhistorical?"[188] He continues to argue that Europeans accept the histories of Livy and Herodotus despite their inclusion of clearly ahistorical material. In reference to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, he claims "European scholars decided that these

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[183] *Ibid*.
[184] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, Pradip Bhattacharya, trans., (Calcutta: M.P. Birla Foundation, 1991), 225-6.
[185] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 173.
[186] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 59.
[187] Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam confront the problem of Indian history. While British colonialists believed that there was no history in South Asia before British rule, these historians argue "the present work has been conceived largely to refute the notion that history was an 'alien' import brought in, for better or for worse, by colonial rule." For them, history as a specific genre did not exist India, so history simply took on a different form. They argue that there are subtle criteria in what they call the "texture" of texts. Native speakers are naturally attuned to subtle distinctions that signal historical fact, but non-native speakers can learn these cues. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600-1800*, (New York: Other Press, 2003), 1-5.
[188] Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, 29.

two works were epic poems. If they were poems, then no question of their historicity remained and in one word everything was swept away."[189] Based on genre alone, European scholars declare that there is no history in these works, but Bankim claims authority to find this history because he does not engage in the stereotyping and lack of cultural familiarity that plagues European scholarship.

In addition, Bankim's concern with historicity is not necessarily related to European valuing of historical truth. In fact, a particular aspect of Hinduism is its interaction with a local sacred geography. Perhaps the most startling recent example of this importance was the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque by Hindu fundamentalists. This destruction occurred because the Hindus believed the Mosque was built atop the birthplace of Ram, an epic figure. The epics, like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana*, and mythology build a sacred geography in India that is built upon historicity. Sondra Hausner notes the importance of this mythic geography in contemporary Hindu practice, especially related to pilgrimage places: "pilgrimage locations were usually described to me as the sites of particular mythic events or activities in the lives of deities. Often they were linked to a specific body part of Lord Siva or his wife in one of her many incarnations as the goddess Satī, Parvatī, Umā, or Kālī."[190] Though she writes of a different context and contemporary practice, her work highlights the importance of the historical truth of Hindu myths and epics for contemporary religious practice. A Vaishnavite example is the Yamuna river and Vrindāvan. "Lord Krishna is said to be naturally present in the very stones of Mount Govardhan and in the very dust of Vrindāvan," and it was his actual historical presence that sanctified this land.[191]

However, as Sen notes, "even as a young boy [Bankim] had allegedly shocked a local audience at Kanthalpara by doubting if the Krishna commonly worshipped was also husband to several hundred gopinis and reveled in stealing their garments."[192] In other words, the local community truly believed that Krishna had done these things. As an *avatāra*, or incarnation, of the divine, Krishna existed in the world. In Bankim's first chapter, he notes how Krishna worship

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[189] *Ibid*., 33.
[190] Sondra Hausner, *Wandering with Sadhus: Ascetics in the Hindu Himalayas*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 10.
[191] Diana L. Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, (New York: Harmony Books, 2012), 169-70.
[192] Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal*, 110.

dominates the language and religious practice of India, and Bengal particularly, but also that "they think he was a thief as a child… as a youth he was a philanderer… in maturity, a swindler and a knave."[193] In other words, Krishna is already a historical figure for his audience. Bankim's goal is not to claim that Krishna is historical, but to find which aspects of Krishna are historical. However, though the search for historicity itself has its roots in Indian culture, his method of analysis appears Western. In this respect, Nandy's critique that Bankim excised all aspects of Krishna that did not fit modern, and therefore British, norms is accurate.[194]

Sudipta Kaviraj provides an important intervention in this kind of scholarship by calling attention to Bankim's project as a whole rather than focusing too narrowly on the *Krishnacaritra*. He notes two types of history in Bankim and other thinkers of his era: "that of the real and the imaginary; recreation of the past through laborious academic research, and through the different inspiration of the fictive imagination turning towards historical subjects."[195] History was deeply important to the colonial intellectual, at least partially because it allowed him to shift the ideological conception of history away from racial superiority and inferiority.[196] Therefore, he sees Bankim's later novels as a kind of imaginary history, meant to provide social cohesion and a collective memory rather than describe what really happened.[197] Lipner agrees with Kaviraj, since "by dispensing with historicity, Bankim created space for historicality – the scope to hypothesize a historical trajectory out of actual events of the past."[198] In this interpretation, it is less problematic that the *Krishnacaritra* uses Western forms of history, as the project as a whole includes the later novels that also do a particularly imaginative, textured form of history that emphasizes narrative and ideology over factual accuracy.

Assuming Bankim intended a similar audience as for his commentary on the *Gītā*, meaning a Westernized, educated Bengali public, Bankim's construction of a historical Krishna would have given Westernized Bengalis an ideal man, who could be compared favorably to Jesus and the Buddha

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[193] Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, 21.
[194] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 23-4.
[195] Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, 111.
[196] *Ibid.*, 110.
[197] *Ibid.*, 132.
[198] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 59.

and provide a rational object of worship.[199] For more conservative Bengalis, it would have offered them a new historical vision of the mythical Krishna. At the same time, Bankim's novels provided the more conservative Bengali with a history that "felt" Indian in its narrative structure. Once again, Bankim simultaneously argues to a diverse audience. This would provide a single, unifying God-figure for the Indian public to unite behind that would also represent Bankim's own vision for what values and goals the emerging nation should adopt.

Bankim's *Dharma* and His Goals

The *Dharmatattva* is perhaps the clearest exposition of Bankim's *dharma*, in the form of a dialogue between a Guru and a Disciple. Bankim argues that *dharma* is achieved through *anusheelan*, or a process for achieving happiness, which involves "the appropriate development and maturity of all human faculties and… the striking of a balance between each of them."[200] These faculties are divided into physical faculties, knowledge-acquiring faculties, executory faculties and pleasure-giving or aesthetic faculties. By developing the most important of these faculties, like devotion, restraining the most dangerous, like carnal instincts, and cultivating the rest to their proper degree humans can achieve the perfect happiness of salvation.[201] He spends much of the rest of the *Dharmatattva* outlining what these faculties should look like in their most perfect form. However, at the end, he drops the faculties, as the student realizes "you had made them up to help me understand."[202] The student sums up what he has learned: man has faculties that, when they are cultivated correctly, in accord with Culture, are humanism. This is *dharma* and results in happiness. In this state, all the faculties turn towards God, who is in all things, leading to love of all and love is

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[199] For example, a popular book at the time was J. R. Seeley's *Ecce Homo*, which sought to create a historical biography of the figure of Christ before he was Christ. J. R. Seeley, *Ecce Homo: A Survey of the Life and Work of Jesus Christ*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1881), Preface.
[200] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 60.
[201] *Ibid.*, 73.
[202] *Ibid.*, 234.

divided, in a hierarchical ascending relationship, of self-love, love for kinsmen, love for the country, love for all creatures and benevolence, but love for the country is the "supreme dharma."[203]

Harder raises two criticisms of Bankim's *dharma*. The first is that "when this new definition of *dharma* is claimed to be intended in traditional texts" his work becomes inconsistent and departs from Indian culture. The second is that Bankim's *dharma* "is *ethical* rather than religious: it is religion reduced to ethics."[204] Bankim's *dharma* is not essentially Indian because it mingles Western and Indian sources, and he drains the religious aspects of *dharma*. Here, once again, I do not seek to claim that Bankim's thought is entirely Indian or entirely religious. However, I do argue that the role of Western influence on Bankim's *dharma* is exaggerated, which leads to an ignorance of the true religious content of Bankim's *dharma*.

Harder puts forward what he takes to be three clear borrowings Bankim made in his conception of *dharma*. The first is that religion is culture. Harder argues that Bankim borrows from Seeley's *Natural Religion*, which claims that religion is "the main system of mediation governing the relation between the individual, society and the Absolute."[205] Second, Bankim borrows his *manusyatva*, or humanism, directly from Comte's *humanité*, and the third is closely related in that Bankim borrows the concept of faculties from utilitarian and positivist ethics.[206] He does, however, recognize that there are substantial differences and "it would therefore be too superficial to speak of a mere adaptation of two closely related Western systems of philosophy."[207] Even with this disclaimer, these borrowings are not as simple as Harder argues.

First the idea that religion is culture, in Seeley, does not necessarily have the same import in an Indian context. Religion is a European term, growing out of an extended Christian context.[208] Indeed, the very separation of religion from other aspects of culture is an Enlightenment concept

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[203] *Ibid*., 233-4. Note the similarities between this formulation of *dharma* and *dharma* in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.
[204] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 232. These claims are not exclusive to Harder. For two other examples, see Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 244 and Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, 154.
[205] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 190.
[206] *Ibid*., 190-1.
[207] *Ibid*., 191.
[208] For an exploration of how the term religion grows out of Christian ideas, see King, *Orientalism and Religion*, Chapter 2.

that develops from secularist ideas of the proper role of religion in public life.[209] However, *dharma* as a term is not necessarily separate from culture. As I explored, *dharma* interacts with beliefs and institutions as well as with forms of societal organization in ways that would be considered both religious and cultural from a European standpoint. It is both more expansive than the English term religion and more normative. These connections help explain why Halbfass explains *dharma* as containing a constellation of meanings that together do not fit neatly into Western categories of religious or secular, including duty, religion, faith, justice, and law.[210] Therefore, it is quite possible that Seeley's contention that religion is culture, though perhaps remarkable in a Western context, would not have surprised Bankim, who would have noted the connection between *dharma* and forms of culture considered secular by the British in his extensive reading of Sanskrit sources.

Second is the claim that Bankim's *manusyatva*, or humanism, is simply Comte's *humanité*. For Harder, this connection is obvious and "the idea adapts itself smoothly to the Bengali language because *dharma*, as was observed, also means 'property': a magnet's *dharma* is magnetism."[211] However, this claim is anachronistic. Halbfass notes that this property definition has been a meaning for *dharma* "since ancient times."[212] Bankim's family, as I noted in Chapter 1, had a history of Sanskritic learning and his maternal grandfather left him a Sanskrit library. Moreover, Bankim took the initiative to contact and learn from the "famous Bhatpara pundits in their centre on the east bank of the Hugli River."[213] This cultivated "a robust knowledge of Sanskritic literature," which informed his interpretation of Sanskrit texts and his writing of the famous nationalist song *Vande Mātaram*, which is partially composed in Sanskrit.[214] Though Bankim was exposed to Comtean ideas as an undergraduate at Presidency College, he never read Comte widely and never fully accepted positivism.[215] Certainly, the details of this conception of humanism are influenced by Comte, and the

[209] Nadon, "Introduction" in *Enlightenment and Secularism*.
[210] Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 314.
[211] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 190.
[212] Halbfass, *India and Europe*, 334.
[213] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 10.
[214] *Ibid.*, 11.
[215] *Ibid.*, 23.

explanation of faculties comes from European ethics, but the concept itself of *dharma* as the property of humanity has deep Indian roots.

However, through Western assumptions of the separation of faith and reason, this overstating of British thought in Bankim's *dharma* has led to a devaluing of its religious content. This underlies Harder's claim that Bankim's *dharma* is "religion reduced to ethics."[216] Harder's argument rests upon the claim that "although he states his personal beliefs in a number of instances, Bankim does not attempt to make them compulsory for his readers."[217] From Bankim's introduction to the *Krshnacaritra*, this is certainly true: "I do not ask the reader to accept my personal belief: and establishing the divinity of Krshna is not my intention."[218] Similarly, after a long argument for the truth of reincarnation, Bankim considers whether someone who doubts reincarnation could still follow *dharma*:

> It is the best *dharma* for him who believes in reincarnation just as well as for him who does not. It is the best *dharma* for him who is devoted to Krsna as well as for him who is not. It is the best *dharma* for him who believes in God, and also for him who does not; for purification of the mind and constraint of the senses is the best *dharma* for atheists too, and this purification of the mind is the *Gītā*'s goal.[219]

This is precisely why Harder argues Bankim's *dharma* isn't religious. He sees belief in reincarnation, the divinity of Krishna, and God as *the* religious aspects of Bankim's *dharma*. Therefore, if Bankim is willing to abandon them for what Harder calls the ethical aspects of his thought, which are universal and truly normative, then his *dharma* is not religious.

Interestingly, two pages later, when considering why Bankim chose to use the *Bhagavad Gītā*, he claims it is because "he regarded *bhakti* as the most important element of any *dharma*" and its most important element was "the harmonisation of *jñāna* (knowledge) and *karman* (action) in subordination to *bhakti* (devotion)."[220] *Bhakti*, which Harder translates as devotion, is clearly a religious concept. This is clear in the *Dharmatattva*, where the disciple understands that "when all human faculties reach their desired level of growth and maturity and are made over to God's

[216] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 232.
[217] *Ibid.*
[218] Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, 22.
[219] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 60.
[220] *Ibid.*, 234.

purpose, then Knowledge and actions too come to be vested in Him and culminate into a form of worship."[221] The true devotee perfects his faculties and dedicates them to God: "Shutting oneself up in a room and making a show of being at prayer… does not make one a devotee… The devotee is he who has conquered himself; whose mind is calm; who views everything alike; and who is engaged in the service of others… This is why the Bhagavad Gita is the greatest holy book in the world."[222] It is precisely this vision of devotion that makes Hinduism superior.

This does reveal an apparent tension in Bankim's thought, though Harder does not acknowledge it. How can devotion be the most important part of *dharma* and yet this same *dharma* is best for atheists? Partha Chatterjee's distinction between a rational philosophy of spirit and a rational philosophy of power is helpful in resolving this tension. He argues that Bankim puts forward his philosophy of spirit by arguing rationally for the existence of God while accepting that it will not convince everyone. This philosophy of spirit is beyond the limits of science to prove or disprove, but Bankim shows how it could still be rationally accepted using the arguments of ancient Indian philosophers and contemporary German philosophers.[223] However, this is separate from the rational philosophy of power. Chatterjee argues that, in Bankim's conception, Europe has divorced its religion from its politics, resulting in a powerful culture that is completely amoral, and that India must establish "harmony between a comprehensive ethical ideal and the practice of power."[224] He continues to delineate Bankim's argument for how to correctly engage with power, which involves fighting when necessary, but limiting engagement with violence to certain instances of just war.

This separation of spirit and power can be applied to Bankim's view of the goals of different societies. In his discussion of what happiness is, he argues that "the objective of the Western system of Culture is happiness, whereas that of ours is salvation. I say that salvation is nothing but a particular state of happiness – in fact, its most perfect and consummated state, its highest

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[221] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 145.
[222] *Ibid.*, 157. This doctrine in the *Bhagavad Gītā* is known as *nishkama karmayoga*, the discipline of desireless action.
[223] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 69.
[224] *Ibid.*, 70.

conception."[225] Here, the development of faculties can be put towards different purposes. The British have developed some of their faculties, out of balance due to their lack of *bhakti* and have made their goal simple happiness, leading to the "amoral pursuit of worldly goods" described by Chatterjee.[226] Bankim's concession that not all readers have to believe in God shows his hierarchy of goals for Indian society. If atheists follow his *dharma* as far as possible, Indian society will become more powerful. This will allow them to achieve his rationalist philosophy of power and remove the British. This is a good step even if some Indians remain atheistic, and allowing atheists and agnostics to join his nationalist movement will improve its chances of success. I have already noted Bankim's attention to strategy and cognizance of audience, so this broad argument fits his general project.

However, Bankim believes that developing faculties correctly will lead people towards religious belief: "when all the faculties of the mind are adequately purified, this knowledge regarding the *ātman* is proved *per se*."[227] This combined with India's natural tendency towards salvation will allow India to effectively integrate the theory of spirit with the theory of power. Therefore, while achieving the theory of spirit makes India superior to the West, achieving the theory of power will allow India to be equal to the West. This reflects Bankim's hierarchy of goals. First, he intends to make India equal so that it can become free of British colonialism. Second, and concurrently if possible, he intends to make India superior so that it can achieve the salvific form of happiness that will establish it as the best of nations. Removing the British, his first goal, does not require the religious aspects, which is why he claims they are not necessary and Harder interprets his overall project as ethical instead of religious. Bankim believes India has the roots of perfect *bhakti* in its culture already, and so does not feel the need to argue so strongly for the religious aspects of his thought if this will alienate his Westernized audience. Religion is still central to his thought, however, since it is the key to the eventual superiority of India, allowing it to "become the master of the world and its leader."[228]

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[225] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 40.
[226] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 70.
[227] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 49.
[228] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 149.

Therefore, Bankim's project is broader and more Indian than the commenters give him credit. Since they are trapped in Post-Enlightenment modes of understanding religion and reason, they assume that the rational aspects of Bankim's thought are inherently Western because there is no basis for reason in Indian tradition. By thinking Bankim is Western, they further devalue the religious aspects of his thought and do not see that religion is absolutely central to the superiority of his *dharma*.

This discussion is meant to outline the ways in which the role of British thought in Bankim's development of *dharma* has been overstated. Even further evidence of this overstating comes from Bankim's overall view of the West. At the opening of this section, I noted that the *Dharmatattva* closes with the injunction that love of one's country is the highest *dharma*. Bankim contradicts himself here, claiming that love for one's country is the highest dharma when he explicitly argued earlier that universal love is the reason for Hinduism's superiority. His commentary on the *Gītā*, though unfinished, ends on the same point: "if that person acts while only desiring the welfare of his own country, then his action is desireless."[229] This contradiction draws attention to the political purpose of Bankim's *dharma*. This is not only a religious code of right living, but it is also a political call to action, providing the justification and the means for India to free itself of British rule.

With this in mind, it is clear that Bankim's general orientation towards colonialism and Europe is negative. He wants the British out of India, and highlights patriotism as the way to do it. However, given his use of European sources, I argue that Bankim's *dharma* recognizes the value of certain aspects of British and, more largely European, culture, but seeks to absorb and transcend it. *Dharma*, for Bankim, is something higher. It can contain all that Europe has to offer and combine it with the superiority of Indian culture in other spheres to produce the ideal country, which can overthrow the British and take its rightful place as a world leader.

I have already shown in Chapter 1 how Bankim attempted to absorb positivist and utilitarian ideas within his *dharma*. But the clear dominance of the British in the colonial context forced Bankim to admit that the British were, in some spheres, simply superior. In his discussion of

[229] Harder, Śrīmadbhagabadgītā, 154.

knowledge, Bankim argues that the necessary pieces of knowledge are of the universe, self, and God. The universe is known through physical sciences, like math, astronomy, physics and chemistry, and "it is these subjects that make the Westerners our masters."[230] The same is true of biology and sociology. Their understanding of material subjects grants them material dominance.[231]

However, Bankim's characterization of power is not so simplistic, as power is not the only goal. Bankim's *dharma* shows that true happiness is found in the balance of all faculties. This includes power, but power is certainly not the highest. The true happiness of a society requires the appropriate balance of happiness and power. For Bankim, Indian society already has the characteristics that will lead to happiness. For example, Indian culture sets salvation, which is really just the most perfect state of happiness, as its goal, while Western culture aims for the more mundane happiness.[232] Although Partha Chatterjee sees this as a criticism, since it allows Western culture to achieve dominance, for Bankim it is actually a form of moral superiority.

This moral superiority cannot ignore the material superiority of Europe. Bankim's solution is to learn from the British. Later, he argues "men shall be gods the day European science and technology, and this doctrine of disinterested action of Bhāratvarsha (India) become one. Then, the only use to which that science and technology shall be put will be the pursuit of disinterested action and none other."[233] Men can perfect themselves, he argues, but only if they combine the knowledge of the world of Europe with the doctrine of disinterested action found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Indeed, he believes this can only be accomplished in India: "If you who are the natives of Bhārat make it happen, it shall. If you will it, you can become the master of the world and its leader… but if you have no such aspirations, then I have been speaking in vain."[234] Since it already has the most important understanding of God and the correct form of spirituality, assuming Bankim's

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[230] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 142.
[231] Partha Chatterjee discovers several other reasons for the dominance of the British in India, all linked in that "Bankim's explanation of the subjection of India is not in terms of material or physical strength. It is an explanation in terms of *culture*. More specifically, it is an explanation which proceeds from a premise of cultural difference: an essential difference from all those attributes which make the European culturally equipped for power and for progress." However, since societies can cultivate "appropriate national-cultural values," power can be acquired. Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 55-8.
[232] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 40.
[233] *Ibid.*, 149.
[234] *Ibid.*

interpretation of *dharma* is accepted, all India must do is adopt the knowledge of science and technology that makes Europe powerful to its own ends. Indeed, though it is not explicit, Bankim implicitly argues that Europe cannot adopt India's spirituality, as it is too wrapped up in the material and patriotism, and so India is the only place in the world where this best combination, *dharma*, can occur.

Bankim does not only make this argument in the *Dharmatattva.* Indeed, it is the implicit argument of his novel *Anandamath*. The plot of *Anandamath* centers on historical events: the famine of 1770 and the resulting Sannyasi Rebellion in Bengal, but departs significantly from historical events in Kaviraj's conception of imaginary history. Bankim frees himself from the requirement to stay true to historical events in order to make a point about the present and the future he plans for his beloved India. This allows him to use the novel to make an argument.

The novel describes an ascetic organization known as the Children, who fight several battles against both Muslim and British forces. However, Bankim maintains that the only purpose the Children served was to abolish Muslim rule in India. This they achieve. But in the last chapter, Satyananda, the leader of the Children, has a conversation with the Healer, a mysterious figure who represents a divine intervention. This figure tells Satyananda that the British will now rule in India. Satyananda laments, believing he has failed Mother India and cannot establish the Eternal Code, or dharma. Here, the Healer outlines a plan for the establishment of true dharma:

> If one wishes to reinstate this Code, one must make known the outward knowledge first. The outward knowledge no longer exists in this land, and there's no one to teach it… The English are very knowledgeable in the outward knowledge, and they're very good at instructing people. Therefore we'll make them king. And when by this teaching our people are well instructed about external things, they'll be ready to understand the inner. Then no longer will there be any obstacles to spreading the Eternal Code, and the true Code will shine forth by itself again.[235]

He continues to explain that the entire purpose of the rebellion was actually to usher in English rule, which will help India develop. Bankim here uses the Healer to advance his spiritual, political argument. India has the seeds to become a great nation because its culture holds the necessary spiritual beliefs. However, these beliefs have faded and cannot be reclaimed without first gaining the

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[235] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 229.

knowledge of the physical world held by the British. This understanding of the physical world is represented by the superior technological warfare the British employ. Early in the novel, the narrator asks "but what chance do staves and spears and a few guns have against a cannon?"[236] The Children cannot compete without British technology, and their understanding of the physical world. Therefore, the best course of action is to let the British rule India and learn from their expertise.

However, Bankim also makes it clear that British rule is not meant to be permanent. The most obvious examples are that of education, where Bankim argues that the major flaws in the British education system have prevented the development of the knowledge-acquiring faculties, and of the law preventing Bengalis from using weapons, as this prevents them developing their physical faculties.[237] The most damning accusation, though, comes implicitly, in the discussion of self-defence:

> If self-preservation and the protection of our near and dear ones constitute dharma, so does the protection of the motherland… In the same way, because different societies do not have a common governing authority, the stronger of them live by pillaging those that are weak. I do not speak of barbaric civilizations; it is in civilized Europe that this has become the norm.[238]

He does not openly criticize Britain here for colonizing India, but the subtext is clear. Britain has preyed on India, pillaging its wealth. And the protection of the motherland against such aggression constitutes *dharma*, indeed, as he reminds the reader at the end, it is the highest form of *dharma*.

Therefore, Bankim's call for Indians to love their country as the highest *dharma* at the end of the *Dharmatattva* is more than a strange contradiction. It is Bankim's call to arms. The British have brought knowledge of material power to India, and Indians have and must continue to learn from it. But their influence has prevented the proper acquisition of human faculties, and the correct response is an uprising of nationalism to overthrow the British, allowing Indians to become gods among men. They will combine the material strength of Britain with the spiritual knowledge of India and realize his *dharma*. Bankim does not betray Indian thought with his incorporation of European ideas, but instead speaks strategically to a diverse audience, creating a religio-political *dharma* that can incorporate everything of value in the West while remaining true to Indian culture.

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[236] *Ibid.*, 170.
[237] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 99-101 and 92.
[238] *Ibid.,* 90.

Chapter 3: Women, Rituals and Goddesses

Bankim's *dharma*, at its core, is gendered. It applies differently to men and women and impacts their experiences differently. Krishna, as the ideal man, is the model for men. Bankim spends much of the *Krishnacaritra* explaining Krishna's relations with women, and they bear too much on his performance of *dharma* for the doctrine to apply the same to men and women. The same gendered nature is found in the *Dharmatattva*. It is clear that the Disciple of the *Dharmatattva* is male, but it is also clear that the *dharma* the Master describes is intended for men. This is evident in the simple gendering of the language he uses. For example, in his discussion of physical faculties, he claims that "dharma also behoves [*sic*] us to rise to the defence of our wives and children."[239] The assumed reader is automatically male. In his discussion of love for the family, he also assumes that women simply cannot provide for themselves.[240] Later, when the disciple mentions the potential equality of the sexes, the master is once again dismissive of the notion: "Is equality possible? Can men give birth or suckle their young? Conversely, are women capable of forming platoons and going out into battle?"[241] In other words, the idea that women could fight in battle is as ridiculous to this guru as a man breast-feeding his child. Gender is based on biological, natural differences that cannot

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[239] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 90.
[240] *Ibid*., 201.
[241] *Ibid*., 204.

be overcome. *Dharma*, for a woman, is to "wait upon" and "strive to make [her husband] happy" in all ways.[242] In this way, gender determines what a person's *dharma* truly is.

However, the picture is not so simple. Just reading the *Dharmatattva* and the *Krshnacaritra* shows only a fraction of Bankim's thought about women, and indeed the most conservative portion appears in these explicitly religious texts. Bankim's novels, however, are known for their portrayal of leading female characters. Lipner notes Bankim's tendency to dwell on feminine beauty, a "trait of classical Sanskrit" that is done "to show generally the subordinate social position of women with regard to men."[243] However, he also offers them the role of transmitting traditional values, something that requires them "to adapt to changing circumstances" and become true agents.[244] Shanti in *Ānandamath* joins a band of ascetic warriors and Prafulla in *Debī Chaudhurānī* becomes the leader of a similar band of warriors, and yet the Guru in the *Dharmatattva* cannot imagine a woman fighting on the battlefield.

It is notable that it is in fiction that Bankim deals most progressively with women. In the novels, as Kaviraj notes, "women are the prime movers of the verbs."[245] This is in contrast with Bankim's male characters in these novels, who are often weak, indecisive, and only successful through the advice of the women around them. The religious treatises, on the other hand, have no mention of women as agents. They speak to men about men's proper behavior, and the mention of women is rare and either oblique, referring only to how men should treat women, or demeaning, focusing more on what women cannot do than what they can. This apparent contradiction perhaps reflects the freedom and openness of the creative genre of the novel. Bankim uses this space to transgress typical social boundaries, and explore the limits of the inversion of typical gender roles.

This chapter seeks to examine the role of women in Bankim's religious and nationalist project. First, I will challenge two ways of interpreting Bankim's portrayal of women: the claim that Bankim's thought about women matches Comte's and that his work resolves the nationalist women's question through the separation of spheres into the dichotomies of feminine/masculine, home/world,

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[242] *Ibid.*, 200.
[243] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 12.
[244] *Ibid.*, 13.
[245] Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, 18.

and spiritual/physical. Lipner argues that Bankim's construction of Debī shows the influence of Comte's views on women, and Forbes argues that Bankim's *dharma* is a simple paraphrase of Comte's postivism.[246] Comte dedicated himself to the elevation of women, but did so by making them objects of worship. Forbes argues that these women, "retained the same position they had held under the old system; only now they had been shown that this position was morally right."[247] This leads John Stuart Mill to sum up Comte's opinions on women as "they were exalted into goddesses: honours, privileges, and immunities, were lavished on them, only not simple justice."[248] Comte makes women the objects of worship, but offers them no tools for actual social advancement. Lipner offers a different analysis, in which he recognizes that women are still limited to marriage as the only appropriate action for women, but adds that their circumstances could be radically transformed by the opportunity to follow Prafulla. He argues that though she returns to a domestic role, "in serving she really rules – effectively and for the benefit of all."[249] She is so radically changed as to be considered the rule of her domestic sphere, rather than a servant.

The second argument, which is that nationalism resolves the women's question through the separation of spheres, comes through Partha Chatterjee. It is notable that Partha Chatterjee does not apply this argument specifically to Bankim, but he uses it to explain the trend in all nationalist thought in Bengal at this time, as well as to Bankim's contemporaries. He presents the problem as "the rather sudden disappearance of such [women's] issues from the agenda of public debate towards the close of the century."[250] Though other scholars see this as a failure to live up to the liberal reform movements of the early 1800s, Chatterjee instead argues that nationalism put forward an ideological framework that was entirely capable of resolving the question of what role women play in the new Indian society. The focus on women disappears from later reform movements not because the

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[246] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 18 and Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, 135. Lipner also notes that concerns over the role of women can be traced back to Rammohun Roy and other Bengali reformers, but notes that Comtean ideas are important in these conversations.
[247] Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, 12.
[248] Mill, *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, 92.
[249] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 20.
[250] Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 233.

nationalist project must focus on other, more pressing issues, but because the role of women had been determined. The question is resolved through the creation of three related dichotomies: the spiritual/material, home/world, and feminine/masculine.

Chatterjee describes the spiritual/material distinction as a way to claim the superiority of India, at least in one area. The European countries were clearly more powerful in the material sphere: "science, technology, rational forms of economic organization, modern methods of statecraft, these had given the European countries the strength to subjugate non-European peoples and to impose their dominance of the whole world."[251] Faced with this clear dominance, nationalists agreed that these elements must be incorporated into the new India, but copying all elements of Western culture would lead to the complete erasure of Indian culture. Therefore, the concurrent goal was to "cultivate the material techniques of modern western civilization while retaining and strengthening the distinctive spiritual essence of the national culture."[252] This goal allowed the East to maintain its superiority while gaining the necessary tools to be a powerful modern nation.

As I explored in Chapter 2, the *Dharmatattva* contains this exact formulation of Western and Indian superiority in specific cultural spheres. Bankim admits that knowledge of the material sciences have made the British the masters of the Indians, but by adopting this knowledge and combining it with the best expression of Indian spirituality, "men shall be gods."[253] This corresponds to inner and outer forms of knowledge. The outer connects with the material, which must be dealt with, but is ultimately unimportant compared to the internal, spiritual dimension. This is essential, and if maintained, all material compromises can be made while retaining the distinctiveness of the culture.[254] Bankim recommends this exact form of adaptation.

Furthermore, Chatterjee argues that this dichotomy is further associated with a feminine/masculine dichotomy, where feminine corresponds to the spiritual and masculine corresponds to the material. This occurs through the home/world dichotomy. The world is clearly external and material, and the home is clearly internal and therefore becomes spiritual. Given

[251] *Ibid.*, 237.
[252] *Ibid.*, 238.
[253] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 149.
[254] Chatterjee, "National Resolution," 238.

traditional gender roles where men dominated the external, world sphere and women dominate the internal, domestic sphere, masculine becomes material and feminine becomes spiritual.[255]

My purpose in the first section will be to argue that the indigenous concept of *śakti* provides a better explanation for Bankim's views of women than that he borrowed from Comte or separated dichotomous spheres per Partha Chatterjee's analysis. I will argue that using the distinction of orthodoxy and orthopraxy to analyze Bankim's views of women complicates Chatterjee's and Lipner's analysis. In the second section, I will argue that Bankim portrays women this way in the novels not because he intends to truly change the experience of women in India, but because they serve as a useful tool in representing both his *dharma* and his plan for the emerging Indian nation as a whole.

Śakti and the Women's Question

The common factor in both Lipner's and Partha Chatterjee's interpretation of Bankim's views on women is that he spiritualizes them. Lipner connects him to Comte, who divinizes women, and argues explicitly that he makes Debī into a Goddess. Partha Chatterjee's involves the connection of feminine/masculine, home/world, and spiritual/material dichotomies. However, Bankim's views are somewhere in between each of these positions. Bankim offers greater agency and education than Comte suggests, but circumscribes women's behavior more than Lipner by only offering the benefit of her husband as an acceptable outlet for action. Similarly, Bankim's female characters break out of the home/world dichotomy. Therefore, I will argue that it is the principle of *śakti* that better explains Bankim's views towards women.

Śakti, as Tracy Pintchman defines it, is "the supreme, cosmic energy that produces and sustains creation."[256] It is specifically associated with goddess traditions, and can be the name of the goddess herself.[257] In Tantric contexts, *śakti* is representative of extreme feminine power and divinity. However, Usha Menon and Richard A. Schweder argue that as this icon is integrated into

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[255] *Ibid.*, 238-9.
[256] Tracy Pintchman, ed., *Seeking Mahādevī: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddesses*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 78.
[257] *Ibid.*, 79.

mainstream Hindu culture, "far from highlighting the potency of the female and her power to create and destroy with impunity, the icon is used to uphold Hindu family values, especially those encouraging female self-control and self-restraint."[258] They notice the ways in which Hindus in a small village in Orissa represent Kālī. Most of their informants argue that "it is female power that energizes the world, but such power when unchecked has disastrous consequences."[259] This type of argument helps explain the obsession with controlling female action in Sanskrit texts like *The Laws of Manu*.

The *Laws of Manu* claim that "even in her own home, a female… should never carry out any task independently. As a child, she must remain under her father's control; as a young woman, under her husband's; and when her husband is dead, under her sons'."[260] A woman's power can be dangerous when uncontrolled, and so must be rigidly controlled by turning her over to the authority of the men in her life. Bankim would have been intimately familiar with the concept of *śakti*.[261] In fact, Bankim deals with it explicitly: "*Sakti*, literally and ordinarily means force or energy. As destructive energy, force is Kali, hideous and terrible, because destruction is hideous and terrible. As constructive energy, force is the bright and resplendent Durga."[262] Therefore, Bankim is not only aware of *śakti* worship, but also of its potential for destruction.

Bankim's most important female characters in his later work are Prafulla in *Debī Chaudhurānī*, and Shanti and Kalyani in *Ānandamath*. Prafulla, though she begins the novel as a wife spurned by her husband's father due to unfair accusations relating to caste, she falls in with ascetic bandits who educate her. After her education, the first description of Prafulla is of her on a river barge, playing an instrument, "like an image of the Goddess Sarasvati herself."[263] The use of the river is important here, according to Lipner: "The Goddess often personifies, or emerges from, or

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[258] Usha Menon and Richard A. Schweder, "Dominating Kālī: Hindu Family Values and Tantric Power," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, At the Center, In the West*, Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 80-1.
[259] *Ibid.*, 87.
[260] Olivelle, *The Law Code of Manu*, 96.
[261] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 10.
[262] Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Essays and Letters*, Brajendra Nath Banerji and Sajani Kanta Das, eds., (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2010), 128.
[263] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 88-9.

returns to the river…Here, in the novel, for the first time Debi Chaudhurani is intimately associated with the river: she lives on the river and is at home on it. In a way, she is the Goddess of the river (hence *Debi* which means "goddess"), and a representative of Bengal."[264] Later, this divinity is connected to Krishna.

In Chapter 2 of Part III of the novel, Bankim takes a break from the action to relate a conversation of religious doctrine between Debī and two of her handmaidens, Diba and Nishi, uneducated women. This conversation occurs directly before Prafulla is reunited with her husband and a battle occurs.[265] Even though she can see the English forces gathering to surround and capture her, she insists on explaining how God can be perceived.[266] Though the break in the narrative is strange, it in fact greatly resembles the context of the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Just as Krishna expounds the nature of God and proper religion to Arjuna as they stand between two armies, viewing both but taking a break from the rising narrative tension, Debī expounds the ways of knowing God while forces for battle gather around her. Indeed, she uses the very relevant analogy of using a spyglass to see the English preparing to capture her to explain how the yoga, or practice, of knowledge, action and devotion allow her to perceive God.[267]

This connection to Krishna becomes explicit at the end of the novel. Here Prafulla returns to her husband's household and lives a life of desireless action, performing her duties with no attachment to their results, and building wealth and happiness for all those around her. He concludes with an exhortation to Prafulla:

> So come now, Prafulla! Return to our world once more and let us behold you. Why don't you confront this society of ours and say: 'I am not something new; I go back in time. For I am that very same Voice of the past. How often have I come to you, and you have forgotten me, and so I have come again. "*To protect the good, to destroy the wicked, and to establish right order, I take birth in every age.*"[268]

[264] *Ibid*. 196.
[265] *Ibid.,* 117-22.
[266] *Ibid*., 119.
[267] *Ibid*.
[268] *Ibid.,* 151.

The last words of his novel are an exact quote of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Book 4 Chapter 8.[269] In the quote, Krishna explains why, despite his own perfection, he returns to the world. When people lose sight of the correct way of living, he manifests himself to provide an example, and to extinguish evil. Thus Prafulla is not simply divine. She is the incarnation of Krishna himself, the best representation of spirituality possible for Bankim.

Here, Bankim makes an intentional choice to connect women with spirituality in the tradition of *śakti*. Carl Olson connects *śakti* to Bankim's nationalistic vision through the sacred geography of India, which contains sacred sites dedicated to the Goddess.[270] Lipner notes that this Goddess-orientated religion was one of the most prominent religious influences on Bankim, balanced by Krishna-oriented religion as well.[271] Therefore, the only innovation remaining in Partha Chatterjee's formulation of the ideological resolution to the women's question is the dichotomy between home and world.

However, Bankim seems to resist this interpretation through his female characters. Shanti in *Ānandamath* and Prafulla, the title character of *Debī Chaudhurānī* both take actions that seem to break out of the traditional understanding of gender roles and certainly outside of the home. Shanti is the wife of one of the Children, ascetic freedom fighters who swear to give up all contact with their wives to dedicate themselves fully to freeing India from Muslim rule. Shanti is living without him when his sister engineers their meeting. He sees her, but thereby breaks his ascetic vow and will eventually have to give his life in penance.[272] Later, at the start of Part II, Bankim describes the education of Shanti. Shanti lost her mother as a baby, and spent her early years in a school for Brahmin boys run by her father. She dressed as a boy, protested the limits placed on her because of her gender, and her father taught her Sanskrit grammar and literature.[273] One of the students, Jibananda, took her in and married her when her father died, but she was wild and stubborn and his

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[269] In Sanskrit, spoken by Krishna: *paritrāṇāya sadhūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām | dharmasaṇsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||*
[270] Carl Olson, "Śakti, Celibacy, and Colonial Polities: Interlocking Themes of the Ānandamath and Debī Chaudhurānī of Bankimcandra," *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 14:2, (December 2010), 288. For a more thorough examination of this, see Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography*, Chapter 6.
[271] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 10.
[272] *Ibid.*, 166.
[273] *Ibid.*, 171.

parents confined her to the house. She ran away, and joined a group of ascetics who recognized her brilliance and trained her physical capacities to match her intelligence.[274] However, one of these monks becomes attracted to her, and when he pursues her, she leaves the ascetics and returns to Jibananda. They fall in love, and as they live together, her "masculine ways gradually disappeared or were suppressed, and the delightful characteristics of a woman began daily to appear."[275] Marriage causes her to suppress her characteristics that are traditionally masculine and channel her energy into more appropriate domestic activities.

Later, Shanti returns to her earlier strategies and dresses as a man to join the Children, though their leader, Satyananda, sees through her disguise and tells her she cannot join. However, she meets each objection in turn. When Satyananda argues that she is not strong enough to fight, she strings a massive bow that only four of the Children have been able to string. When he claims it is sinful for her to pursue her husband, who has vowed not to see her, she fires back "Is it sinful, Master? The wife follows her husband. Is that sinful behaviour? If the code of the *santans* calls this sinful, then the code itself is sinful!" When he claims she will distract her husband, she claims that she will live celibately and only strengthen him.[276] So, he allows her to join. As an ascetic, she plays a role in many battles. In one episode, she meets a British captain in the woods. He threatens her, but she easily disarms him.[277] In the first battle, she does not appear to have a notable role, but she is clearly present, fighting, and leading the common soldiers.[278] Later she guides the faithful wife Kalyani to her husband through the post-war chaos and uses her sexuality as a weapon to gain information from the British.[279] She does not play a major role in the final battle, but when her husband gives his life, she faithfully searches for his body. There, the divine Healer helps her find the body, and restores life. She convinces him to leave behind the Children, but plans to live celibately with him so they each maintain their vows.[280]

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[274] *Ibid.*, 172.
[275] *Ibid.*, 173-4.
[276] *Ibid.*, 183-4.
[277] *Ibid.*, 192.
[278] *Ibid.*, 205.
[279] *Ibid.*, 216 and 221-2.
[280] *Ibid.*, 227-8.

Shanti certainly breaks out of the traditional spheres Partha Chatterjee delineates for women. Though at the opening of the novel she is living domestically, she is deeply unhappy and soon leaves home. She takes part in battles, clearly acting in the external, material sphere of the world, not the internal, spiritual sphere of the home. Despite her clear disassociation with the home, she remains spiritual. Not even the leader of the Children can overcome her knowledge of morality and correct behavior, and at the end of the novel she serves as a spiritual guide for her husband. When he feels he must sacrifice his newly restored life for the Mother, she explains to him that he must dedicate his life to her instead. When he mentions the "joys of married life," Shanti responds "For shame… The two of us must remain just as we are, renouncers, forever following the path of celibacy."[281] Unlike the men around her, Shanti consistently understands the best way to live, particularly in service of the Mother Goddess that the Children are dedicated to.

Like with Shanti, Prafulla's education in *Debī Chaudhurānī* is quite important. After her husband kicks her out of his home at the urging of his wicked father, she joins ascetic bandits and spends the next five years studying Sanskrit grammar and the most important logical and religious texts while limiting her food intake, possessions and clothing and learning to wrestle.[282] Then she spends the next five years learning how to put this education in practice. Obviously, this education bears a striking resemblance to the process of perfecting human faculties in the *Dharmatattva*, in which Bankim himself notes "Prafulla Kumāri has been depicted as the epitome of culture."[283]

As an ascetic bandit queen, Prafulla, in her guise of Debī, leads the bandits in their quest to defend the weak Bengalis against the enterprising British and the rich natives they work with. They

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[281] *Ibid*., 228. Here Bankim explores the tension between *sannyāsīs*, or renouncers, and *gṛhasthīs*, or householders. Perhaps most famously, Louis Dumont argues that caste is the defining feature of Indian society, but the existence of renunciation creates "the distinction between man-in-the-world and individual-outside-the-world" through which "one could attain a unified and ordered view of the proliferation of religious and contemplative movements in India" [Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: An Essay on the Caste System*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 185]. Despite critiques, Sondra Hausner and others have accepted his basic distinction. Indeed, the renouncer community defines itself through "a collective split from householder social life" (Hausner, *Wandering with Sadhus*, 52). Bankim presents examples of women who follow both paths. This is particularly strange given that, in the *Dharmatattva*, he calls asceticism "an inadequate religion" that denies what the *Bhagavad Gītā* says about the "pre-eminence of deeds and actions" (Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 72). Carl Olson suggests a way to resolve this tension, since Bankim's ascetics are active. They take political action in the world and their main form of renunciation is simply celibacy [Olson, "Śakti, Celibacy, and Colonial Polities, 290].

[282] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī,* 78-9.

[283] Ray, *Dharmatattva*, 93. See also Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 12-5.

steal from the rich to redistribute to the poor and fight the government whenever possible. Through this work, Prafulla is reunited with her husband when she loots his ship. She offers him the money he needs to pay off his debt, and they set a date when he will pay her back. However, while she looks like Prafulla, he thinks she died ten years before and does not realize it is her. Even still, he is overcome by her beauty and, as she weeps, kisses her, before realizing his mistake and fleeing the boat.[284] Despite all her education, strength, and command, her emotions and customs get in her way and she cannot reveal herself to her husband as she wants. However, Prafulla's husband's wicked father hatches a plan with the British to capture Debī and destroy the bandits when she comes to collect the debt.[285]

On the fateful day when they meet, Prafulla's husband intends to reveal that he has figured out her true identity and to rebuke her for living by banditry, but she descends into tears and instead explains that she was never truly a bandit.[286] She wants him to leave so she can be captured by the British, but he insists on remaining in order to protect her.[287] Prafulla then hatches a plan to delay the British until a storm rolls through, carrying her away with the English commander and her husband's father as captives. She, of course, gives credit to God for saving her in the form of the storm, but had the ingenuity to devise a plan to allow that intervention to save them.[288] At the close of the novel, Prafulla is living the life of an ordinary household wife. She does household chores and nobody in the household suspects she has the kind of knowledge she does or is even literate.

Despite Bankim's clear association of Prafulla with divinity, it is quite important that at the end of the novel she is a dutiful housewife. The men of the household consult with her on many issues, and it is because of her guidance that "the family's wealth and prosperity grew with each passing day."[289] However, none of her family members know her true abilities. Since there is no call for her to display her knowledge, "no one guessed that she was even literate."[290] All of her prodigious

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[284] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 104-5.
[285] *Ibid.*, 115.
[286] *Ibid.*, 120-1.
[287] *Ibid.*, 123.
[288] *Ibid.*, 136.
[289] *Ibid.*,150.
[290] *Ibid.*

training and intelligence is dedicated entirely to the welfare of her husband and the other members of her family, as well as the poor. Though Prafulla for much of the novel leaves the domestic sphere behind, she ultimately returns to it and spends the rest of her life working almost entirely within the home.

In many ways, Kalyani in *Ānandamath* is the foil for Shanti. While Shanti defies gender norms and breaks out of traditional roles, Kalyani fulfills them all. At the opening of the novel, Kalyani travels with her husband Mahendra during a terrible famine, searching for food and carrying her child. Mahendra leaves her in a deserted inn to look for food, but she is attacked by starving people and taken into the forest. She escapes and is saved by a sage, who brings her to a Hindu monastery. He offers her milk, and she gives some to her child, but refuses to have any herself. Despite starving, she follows the gendered convention of never eating before her husband, and refuses to eat until she knows her husband has eaten. When the sage insists, she takes some water, takes the dust from his feet, and drinks that instead.[291] Meanwhile, the sages have shown Mahendra the Goddess and attempted to get him to join their cause. When they meet again, Kalyani weeps and finally eats. Mahendra knows it is right to join the Children, but does not want to leave his wife. Kalyani, however, relates a dream where a shadowy, divine feminine figure tells her to let Mahendra join. Thereafter, Kalyani contemplates suicide to allow Mahendra to make his decision, but casts away the poison pill because she does not want to go to heaven without him. Their child finds it and starts to eat it. Kalyani removes it before she can get more than a small dose, but fearing the worst takes the pill herself to leave Mahendra unfettered. She then dies in his arms, and he joins the Children.[292]

Later, another member of the Children, Bhabananda, finds Kalyani and manages to heal her.[293] He hides her in the forest. She is consistently angry with him for saving her "worthless" life, and is so distracted by her concern for her husband that she cannot even educate herself. Bhabananda, however, falls in love with her and tries to convince her to marry him despite his

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[291] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 131-8.
[292] *Ibid.*, 152-5.
[293] *Ibid.*, 168.

ascetic vow. She is angry, remains faithful to her husband even though she could use Bhabananda's justification that she has been reborn to escape marriage if she wanted to, and refuses to marry him or think of him as anything but a sinner.[294] After Bhabananda's death, Kalyani leaves to return to Mahendra. On the way she meets Shanti, whom she follows, and is reunited with her husband.[295]

Kalyani is a difficult figure to interpret. Her extreme dedication to her husband is self-abnegating and borders on humorous at times. Her refusal to eat until she sees her husband eat seems foolish, especially to an outsider, but her willingness to commit suicide simply so her husband can feel free to join an ascetic group is tragic. These scenes reflect the deep-seated hierarchy of Indian householder life in which the wife is supposed to dedicate all of her concern towards the benefit of her husband, and Bankim is perhaps poking fun at some of the customs that arise from this hierarchy. Though Bankim is known as an expert satirist, this does not seem to be the case here. In the last paragraph of the novel, Bankim connects Kalyani, along with Shanti and Satyananda, with divinity. Specifically, Kalyani appears to represent sacrifice and duty.[296] Indeed, she is a representation of the concerns of an ideal woman.

Therefore, all three women leave behind the home. Shanti joins a band of ascetics in the jungle, Prafulla leads a band of ascetics in the jungle, and Kalyani is left alone when her husband joins a band of ascetics in the jungle. Both Prafulla and Kalyani return to the domestic sphere at the end of the novel, but Shanti remains an ascetic wanderer, quintessentially homeless. Therefore, the connection between the feminine/masculine and the home/world dichotomy is much more tenuous for Bankim than for other media Partha Chatterjee describes. Given that the spiritual/material dichotomy was already connected with the feminine/masculine dichotomy in religious practice of Bengal, to which Bankim would have been exposed, suggests that Bankim did not innovate Partha Chatterjee's dichotomy as an answer to the women's question. Instead, the one similarity in the ultimate outcome, and overall actions, of each of these women is that everything they do is dominated by their concern for the men in their life. Though Shanti appears to break traditional

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[294] *Ibid.*, 195-8.
[295] *Ibid.*, 216-7.
[296] *Ibid.*, 230.

gender roles in her cross-dressed education and ability to join an all-male organization, she leaves her education so that her beauty does not tempt and corrupt her teacher, and all her actions are dedicated to rejoining her husband. Similarly, Prafulla is willing to give up her own life and be hung by the British. When her husband refuses to leave her behind, she puts her faculties to use and saves them both, with the main purpose of saving him. Kalyani is the most extreme example, willing to commit suicide simply so her husband can join the Children. Bankim's women, though usually intelligent and powerful, dedicate their lives to the men around them in every situation.

With this in mind, I suggest an alternate framework for understanding Bankim's view of gender. While Partha Chatterjee admits that the spiritual/material, home/world and feminine/masculine dichotomies are not rigid, in Bankim they break down even further.[297] While the separated spheres remain helpful for understanding the examination of the woman's question in Indian nationalist thought at large, a different distinction may be more helpful for understanding Bankim in particular. Drawing from the religious nature of Bankim's *dharma*, a distinction between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, or belief and practice, may be helpful. It is fairly clear that Bankim calls for the same beliefs for both men and women. This is most notable in terms of education. As noted in the *Dharmatattva*, Prafulla is the ideal example of education as she follows the exact path recommended. In combination with Shanti's similar education, Bankim clearly wants women to learn the exact same information as men. He even makes his women teachers, as Prafulla teaches her handmaidens about how to perceive God and Shanti lectures her husband on how he should live after his life is rescued.

The true gendered difference of Bankim's *dharma* instead comes forth through practice. All of Bankim's female characters in *Ānandamath* and *Debī Chaudhurānī* dedicate all of their actions to the men around them. Even when they transgress traditional roles, by cross-dressing, leading bandit organizations or fighting in battles, they do so for the purpose of their husbands. It is notable, however, that Bankim still offers them agency. Bankim's male characters often seem to lack this agency. Prafulla's husband is consistently forced into actions he does not really want by his

[297] Chatterjee, "Nationalist Resolution," 243-4.

overbearing husband, and the Children are bound by vows that prevent them from seeing their wives and children and permit them only one way of life – constant battle and willingness to give up their lives for the sake of their mother country. His women are generally dynamic. However, their action is limited in that there is only one acceptable outlet – the benefit of their husbands. Bankim, therefore, genders the practice of *dharma* to control the inherent dynamism of women within socially acceptable realms. This reflects typical understandings of the dangerous potential of *śakti*, which must channel the action of women into the benefit of men.

Bankim's Status Rituals

To interpret how Bankim's novels present women who take on unusual roles in society while ultimately reinscribing a patriarchal view of women and their role in society I will draw upon the theory of liminal ritual used by Victor Turner. This will help explain both the ways in which Bankim uses his novels to recommend societal roles for real women and also how the symbolic image of the goddess is used to represent the emerging nation. I will argue that Bankim's novels are themselves liminoid rituals, in Turner's terminology, that play with traditional societal roles in the spirit of carnival, ultimately affirming the social rules and boundaries about gender that he turns upside down. Furthermore, framing Bankim's goal for the eventual rebirth of the nation as a ritual as well helps show how he intends his culture to adapt and change while keeping its essence intact.

Turner thinks through liminal rites with the work of van Gennep, who lays out a format for liminal rites of passage. He distinguishes the three stages of a rite of passage as the separation from ordinary life, the marginal or liminal state between past and present stages of existence, and ultimate re-aggregation with secular life.[298] This liminal space is in between aspects of normal life, and it is full of both potentiality and play, specifically a play of symbols or metaphors.[299] These ritual spaces and times are clearly demarcated as different and separate from ordinary time, but "in times of radical social change, some of these sacred items and symbolic processes burst out of the secrecy of

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[298] Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 6:4, (Dec., 1979), 466-7.
[299] *Ibid*., 465-6.

lodges and enter the public arena as part of the repertoire of prophetic leaders who mobilize the people against invaders or overlords threatening their deep culture."[300] Turner delineates two types of rituals that involve the liminal. The first is one of status elevation. In these rituals, an individual is humbled and debased, only to be restored in society with a higher social status.[301] In the second, the status reversal ritual, those of low status temporarily gain power over those of higher, but remain "perpetually of a lower status."[302] By making "the low high and the high low, they reaffirm the hierarchical principle."[303]

Turner draws a distinction, however, between the liminal and the "liminoid," which is like the liminal but not as extreme. While he seeks to describe how stage dramas are liminoid, he also includes novels as potential liminoid creations.[304] Liminoid phenomena are fragmentary and less hegemonic than liminal rituals, and generally schools of thought form around them by choice, not by social necessity. Furthermore, the liminoid "do not so much *in*vert as *sub*vert quotidian and prestigious structures and symbols."[305] This subversion "often takes the form of rational critique of the established order… [it] exposes the injustices, inefficiencies, immoralities, alienations, and the like, held to be generated by mainstream modern economic and political structures and processes."[306] Therefore, these critiques do not share the liminal's tendency to ultimately reaffirm social structures, but instead simply offer potential for change.

I will argue that Bankim's novels are themselves liminoid, but draw upon the liminal. His thought provides a rational critique and is not a dominant social necessity. However, his characters live in liminal spaces and break outside of traditional modes of authority. Sudipta Kaviraj sees as a larger concern for Bankim, the question of liminality: "Bankim's novels almost always centre on a play around the liminal, usually a liminality of morals, constructing fictional situations which pose

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[300] *Ibid.*, 470.
[301] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 170-1.
[302] *Ibid.*, 176
[303] *Ibid.*
[304] Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection," 492.
[305] *Ibid.*, 493. It should be noted that Turner argues that societies, as they grow more complex, develop their liminal forms into liminoid forms. Though I accept the existence of both of these types and the overlap between the two, I do not accept his construction of inevitable and positive societal progress.
[306] *Ibid.*, 494.

large, often unanswerable, questions to constituted moral theory."[307] Though Kaviraj argues these questions are unanswerable, Bankim, at least in his later novels, does attempt to provide some way of dealing with this social change.

Indeed, the physical space of the novels represents that the transgressions of typical gender roles are liminal. This is particularly true for Debī, who became a Goddess on the river. Diana Eck notes that rivers themselves are a liminal crossing place, where one can cross over either to the other side of the river or to the far shore of heaven.[308] The river is a place where the intelligent and dutiful Prafulla can become a goddess bandit queen, but when she leaves the river, Debī is dead and gone.[309] Shanti and Kalyani both enter the forest as their liminal space. Living in the jungle, Kalyani is separate from her husband and child. Even more dramatically, Shanti joins a band of ascetic warriors, dresses as a man and fights in battles. Gender roles are not completely inverted, but are certainly subverted. There is an element of play here as well, as Bankim uses dramatic irony to create humorous scenes. For example, Kalyani's husband happens to find her undoing the tiger skin of Shanti, dressed as a man. Her husband is shocked, but Shanti confronts him while Kalyani laughs.[310]

At the end of the novels, Shanti lives an ascetic celibate life with her husband, while Prafulla and Kalyani return home to their husbands live as dutiful housewives. They end in traditional roles properly constrained by their husband, where, as noted in the previous section, their actions are dedicated towards men. This mirrors the ritual process of status reversal. At the opening of the novels, Bankim very quickly establishes the separation from traditional space. Prafulla is rejected by her husband and wanders to the wilderness, Kalyani and her husband are confronted by famine and forced into the jungle, and Shanti sees her husband, removing her last reason for staying apart from him and encouraging her to go forth into the forest. Each spends the majority of the novel in this

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[307] Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*, 2. For Kaviraj, Bankim's obsession with the liminal undergirds his tragedy, and arises from the essential tension between Bankim as a conservative, supporting social order, and Bankim as an artist, respecting the power of desire. *Ibid.*, 25-6.
[308] Diana Eck, "India's '*Tīrthas*': 'Crossings" in Sacred Geography," *History of Religions*, 20:4 (May, 1981), 323 and 326.
[309] Chatterji, *Debī Chaudhurānī*, 143.
[310] Chatterji, *Ānandamath*, 217-8.

liminal state, either on the river or in the jungle. Finally, they return to society. Like in rituals of reversal, traditional social roles are ultimately affirmed, though the women have demonstrated their agency in choosing this role.

Bankim replicates this in his description of the three levels of the Mother Goddess in *Ānandamath*. This Goddess has three forms: the Mother-as-she-was, who subdued wild beasts and was happy, beautiful and adorned, the Mother-as-she-is, who is Kali, naked and blackened, wielding a club and crushing Siva underfoot, and the Mother-as-she-will-be, wielding ten weapons representing the multiplicity of her powers and surrounded by attendant deities representing fortune, wisdom, strength and success.[311] Tanika Sarkar claims that this formulation "decisively influenced all later nationalist imagination" of the goddess, particularly the goddess as Mother India.[312] She notes that the past Mother is uncomplicated and abundant, representing a golden past. The present Goddess is represented in many ways, but "Bankim sees her as a measure of our shame, deprivation and exploitation… the woman on top [Kālī standing on Śiva] signifies the total collapse of the ordered world, a violence directed basically against the self."[313] The final image has a similar mismatch. She is a smiling, benevolent mother who has just brutally killed demon. Sarkar argues that this juxtaposition hints at strength, "but it is overlaid and the overwhelming and final impression is that of a domesticated gentle femininity."[314] These three goddesses correspond to the three modes of being in a ritual.

The original mother goddess represents the original social structure, before the ritual begins. For Bankim, this is a clear golden age. The point of departure comes with the domination of the conquerors and the permitted decline of Hindu religion. Bankim's fierce critique of erotic and idolatrous traditions as well as Indians who ape British culture in an attempt to advance themselves shows that Indians themselves are implicated in the decline, and allowed for the dominance of the Muslim and British conquerors. The Mother-as-she-is, or Kali, represents the liminal state of the

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[311] *Ibid.*, 149-51.
[312] Tanika Sarkar, "Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22:47 (Nov. 1987), 2012.
[313] *Ibid.*
[314] *Ibid.*

ritual. Kali is literally standing on Śiva, a male figure, representing the complete inversion of traditional gender roles. She is fierce and unrestrained, but weak and poor. Bankim's overall implicit argument in *Ānandamath* is that the correct pursuit of *dharma* will allow for the combination of the material dominance of the British with the spiritual strength of India to create the Mother-as-she-will-be. This goddess is martial and powerful, but smiling and benevolent. She represents the correct channeling of female power towards the benefits of others. However, this ritual is clearly one of status elevation. The Mother-as-she-was is debased and humiliated into Kali, but through the correct application of *dharma* can become the Mother-as-she-will-be.

Lata Mani, in the context of debates about *sati* in colonial Bengal, argues that women are not central to the discussion. In fact, "women are neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on *sati*… women themselves are marginal to the debate."[315] Though she is talking about real world arguments about women and Bankim certainly offers more agency to his characters than she argues was offered to actual women, her insight can be effectively applied here. Women are a tool for Bankim, a medium through which to display what the ideal representation of *dharma* would look like. It is clear that Bankim does not truly offer meaningful advancement for women, as the ritual process they engage in mirrors Turner's conception of a status reversal ritual, which ultimately upholds existing social structures. By abstracting women to the image of the Goddess, a stand-in for the emerging nation of India at large, Bankim only subtly changes the ritual. Instead of a status reversal ritual, the Goddess goes through a status elevation ritual. Women, then, are a tool for Bankim to represent how India can achieve its elevation to its rightful station as leader of the world.

However, if women are only a tool, the question remains as to why Bankim uses strong female characters at all. Given women's notable absence from his religious reflections, what induces him to make them such a focus of his novels? Carl Olson offers one solution, suggesting that the choice is "intentionally ironical in that Hindus were characterized as effeminate by their Muslim and

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[315] Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique* 7, (Autumn, 1987), 152.

British conquerors, because they were not strong enough to defend themselves."[316] Metcalf makes a similar argument, claiming that the British interpreted Indian culture as defined by sensual indulgence, which "created, in the British view, 'effeminate' men as well as 'degraded' women."[317] Furthermore, "if not a land *of* women, for the 'sturdy' peasant gained British respect, India was a land ruled *by* women, or rather womanly men, who ran from battle, and so deserved their subjugation."[318] The womanliness, and therefore weakness, of the Bengalis and Indians at large signifies their need to be ruled by the powerful, manly British.

It is clear that Bankim was aware of this stereotype, as his depiction of Krishna implicitly responds to this criticism. Krishna, in direct opposition to the extremely pious Jesus, is a martial divinity. He fights in wars, slays his enemies, and was the most effective of statesmen. This is because Krishna has developed all of his faculties to their ideal state, not just the faculties dedicated to religion. He has perfected his piety, but can also defeat his enemies. By encompassing all that humanity can be and specifically by being more martial, and perhaps therefore manly, than the Christian ideal, Bankim's Krishna represents the perfect human model.[319] By making his women strong, intelligent, and powerful, in line with indigenous conceptions of *śakti*, Bankim battles the stereotype that effeminacy leads to weakness. By making them pure and engaged in the welfare of others, he battles the stereotype that Indian women are degraded and can only be saved through the energetic action of truly masculine British men. And by providing the example of Krishna as the most powerful of ideal men, Bankim shows the martial strength that is, or at least can be, present in Indian men. His use of women in his novels reflects his engagement with British stereotypes that justify colonialism, in another to fight for the independence of the emerging Indian nation.

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[316] Olson, "Śakti, Celibacy, and Colonial Politics," 285.
[317] Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 104.
[318] *Ibid.*, 105. For a more psychological view of the womanly man, see Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 7-11.
[319] Chatterjee, *Krishna-Charitra*, 225-7.

Concluding Remarks: Song and Agency

By way of conclusion, it will be helpful to return to the remarks on the song *Vande Mātaram* that opened the introduction. I noted apparent contradictions, including that the Mother Goddess it describes is both benevolent and martial, and that she is powerfully feminine, despite stereotypes surrounding the weakness of women. The song is both religious, in its call to worship the Mother, and political, in its call to remove the oppressors. Finally, it uses various religious idioms and a mixture of vernacular and classical language styles. Hopefully, this essay has offered theoretical tools to resolve these disputes. The Mother is able to combine such starkly different aspects of femininity because she is the embodiment of controlled femininity, bringing the dangerous power of *śakti* to bear on appropriate outlets for the benefit of men and society. She manages to overcome stereotypes of the weakness of women because of this *śakti*, but she does not provide any real improvement in the condition of actual women, as she is an abstracted tool Bankim uses to showcase his *dharma* and rally the people of India to his cause. The song is both religious and political because religion and politics are not truly separate spheres in India, and the use of religion allows Bankim to claim Hindu, and by extension Indian, superiority in a sphere to which he can deny the West access. Finally, his combination of vernacular and class languages, Bengali and Sanskrit, reflects his desire to appeal to a diverse audience, some of whom can only speak Bengali and English, others of whom respect the authority of Sanskrit. By combining both, he reaches a wider swath of this audience than would otherwise be possible.

Importantly, these contradictions, now resolved, do not occur because Bankim is somehow enslaved to Western notions of rationality and cannot reconcile these with an emotional need to reclaim the superiority of India. Instead they reflect a strategic choice in a confused milieu, a way to reach the broadest possible audience. Besides their lack of accuracy, these claims, put forward by scholars like Partha Chatterjee, Ashis Nandy, and Hans Harder, are damaging for a greater reason: they erase the agency of Bankim. The larger trend in postcolonial studies that paints colonialism as a monolithic force that precludes any creativity or original thought on the part of the colonized is overstated. Certainly, I do not wish to downplay the harmful psychological or material effects of colonialism. Colonialism, in an attempt to justify itself, characterized the culture of the colonized as primitive, superstitious and without value and colonized themselves as weak, backwards, and deserving of domination. Meanwhile, colonialism drained the economic resources and exploited the workforce of the dominated countries while enshrining marginalization and tyrannical governance in legal systems. It perpetually asserted the racial dominance of the colonizer.

However, despite these overwhelming consequences, colonialism did not, indeed could not, erase the agency of the colonized. From the very advent of colonialism in India, Indians engaged in strategic resistance against British domination. While some cooperated with the British because of the potential for economic and political advancement, others fought both martially and philosophically against domination. As the British employed powerful strategies, like dividing colonized peoples and ensuring the cooperation of certain powerful groups, their systems of ideas, governance and power filtered into the intellectual milieu of the colonial state. As military resistance grew less viable, Indians began to fight back against the British using their own philosophical tools. They found ways to adapt their modes of thought to new contexts, while re-examining their own traditions to adapt them to vastly changed context. Eventually, they succeeded in removing the British from India and building a modern nation state to take its place in the modern, globalized world. At every stage in this process, Indians made choices. Despite the restrictions of colonialism, and the domination of a foreign power, they found ways to mobilize their traditions and new ideas to influence British policy and eventually seize their own right to make policies. Bankim, though

certainly impacted by the negative influence of British colonialism, was one of these agents. He made choices, employed strategies, and reached a diverse audience. Indeed, he did this so successfully that his song, *Vande Mātaram*, became the slogan of the national revolution and the song of the emerging nation. While perhaps his *dharma* has not yet been achieved, its influence on the development of nationalism and the modern nation state in India cannot be overstated.

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