

**NATIONALISM, COMMUNALISM  
AND THE  
HISTORICAL NOVEL:  
A Study of Two Texts**

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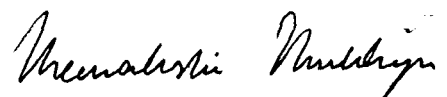
CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Nationalism, Communalism and the Historical Novel: A Study of Two Texts" submitted by Sutapa Dutta, Centre of Linguistics and English, School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil.), is her original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
(H.S. GILL)

Chairperson.



  
(MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE)

Supervisor.

*To*  
*Ma and Baba*

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, NOVEL, NATION

There is inevitably a time gap between the writing of a literary text and its critical scrutiny. The past, the historical point at which a book was written and produced is different from the present in which it is being read and analysed. There is considerable difference of opinion about how the critic should negotiate this distance in time. Should the critic attempt to recreate the circumstances that shaped the author, try to understand the nature of the discourse of which it was a part, and imagine the statements or questions to which the text might have been an indirect answer? Or should the critic respond to the text as an autonomous entity and read it from the perspective of his own time?

The problem gets further complicated when the text in question is itself set in another past, as for example in a historical novel. Three moments in the temporal scale have to be reckoned with -- the past in which the story is set, the past in which the author is writing, and the present in which the critic/reader is situated. The mutual relationships among these three moments in time may be intricate and varied, and one of the challenges of reading a historical novel is to be alert about the shifting reaches of its possible meanings.

In any case, no text, whether it is a historical novel or not, can claim to possess a stable, composite and unified meaning. Interpretations are likely to be conditioned by the spatial, cultural and class location of the particular reader and often also by his/her gender, race, ethnicity and ideological orientation. In the case of a historical novel all these variables are compounded by the question of history and the reader's relationship with the past. We cannot abandon history; some understanding of the political, social and ideological climate that generated a work of art is necessary for engaging with a text. But it is difficult to assert that we can, in any immediate and certain way know the past -- as it was. History is not an objective narration of facts. It is a narrative artefact -- consciously or unconsciously guided by the social and cultural pressures that govern the historiography at any given time. One way of knowing the past is, as Marjorie Levinson prescribes, "to establish the intelligibility of the past by restoring it to its original subjective state, either by an emphatic reenactment or through an engagement with the less objectified forms of the historical record: what we today would call material and popular culture."(1) For this reason literary texts are now increasingly being used by social historians as their quarry, because these texts can highlight the contours of consciousness of an age.



To make analytical distinctions between history and literature, fact and fiction, concept and metaphor is an act fraught with risk, and is not the major thrust of this dissertation. Instead, what is being demarcated as an area of inquiry is the nature of the relationship among various analytically defined distinctions. My interest in the past, especially the historical novels written in the past, stems from a desire to see the mutually affecting relationship between a writer and the socio-political situation in which he writes -- to study the effect society has on literature and also reciprocally the effect literature has on the time it was written and how it may continue to have an impact on the subsequent generations. In my study of the two historical novels written in India in the late 19th and early 20th century, Rajsingha (1889) in Bengali by Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Tara (1902) in Hindi by Kishorilal Goswami, I propose to analyse the nature of relationship between history and literature, the past and the present, fact and fiction. How and why literature becomes complementary to history for evoking the past and whether the novel as well as its critical interpretations, may have provocative implications for historical discourse are of interest to me. My basic premise is that the past is not an objectified entity that may be either neutrally represented or reprocessed drastically to suit our present interest. The past has to be understood as far as possible within its own discourse or cultural code. The modern critic of Bankim and Goswami has to first acknowledge

his/her position in time and place and recognize the pastness of the past and the fact that its world and its purposes were vastly different from those of today.

An interactive relation between history and literature, illuminating both disciplines is becoming a common academic phenomenon now. The emphasis is no longer on a rigorous and assiduous search for 'facts' but an attempt is being made to have a more fruitful understanding of the mentality of the past from the study of imaginative literature. In recent times historians have become aware that any attempt to narrativise events is predicated upon the existence of a conscious or implicit ideological frame. Unlike creative writers, however, historians choose not to emphasize the fictive element of their work and "effect a disciplining of the imagination, in this case the historical imagination, and they set limits on what constitutes a specifically historical event".(2) History and Literature are both narrative discourses but with a vital difference: whereas history purports to portray facts, to focus on the verifiable events, to give a dispassionate view of what actually happened, literature gets the license to magnify, play down, obscure, neglect, imagine an entire gamut of characters and actions. In trying to describe a situation, and to make sense of what has happened both the historian and the novelist rely on narratives that are essentially imaginative.

In India, history had always been handed down the generation in the form of oral literature. Except for the 'buranji' of Assam and 'bakhar' of Maharashtra, systematic chronicling of historical 'facts' is a relatively recent phenomenon in India, inspired largely by colonial education. The interfusion of history and imaginative fiction can best be seen in the Mahabharata where the 'real' and the supernatural blend harmoniously together. In Sanskrit poetics 'itihas' (which today stands for history) like 'kavya' (poetry) and 'natya' (drama) was considered a genre of composition. Irawati Karve in Yuganta brings to our notice the fact that in Sanskrit a clear distinction was made between 'kavya' and 'itihas'; while the Ramayana is a 'kavya', the Mahabharata is an 'itihas'. The word 'itihas' which means "it was thus" is a narrative, a tale, a story which could be either true or imaginary.(3) The Mahabharata which depicts a narrative amalgam between truth and fiction serves as a common 'itihas' for the inhabitants of this country. The narrative reflects the ideological position of the society and the culture out of which it arises, and also the way it has been constantly shaped by the culture in return. Both Benedict Anderson, the author of Imagined Communities (1983) and Homi Bhabha, the editor of Nation and Narration (1990), consider a common history and literature two of the many factors that consolidate a community. According to them, a community or a nation is not a God-given permanent physical entity. A nation is neither an abstraction nor a dry political fact. Personal or cultural

differences are overlooked and ostensibly different and unlike races, classes, beliefs, customs, and languages may be homogenised to give a composite nature to the nation. The idea of a nation as defined by Anderson or Bhabha is essentially a Western concept and had never existed in India before the late 19th century. A vague idea of a large geographical area called 'Bharatvarsha' or 'Jambudvipa' did exist in the mind of the people but this was largely a cultural rather than a political entity. The need to define a united self was never felt so acutely as when their identity was questioned by the British colonizers who after 1857 had become the masters of India. The prolific writing of historical novels in almost all the Indian languages in the late 19th century was part of an attempt to imagine a strong and united 'nation'. Ernest Gellner stresses the element of 'artefact', 'invention' and 'social engineering' which enters into the making of nations in his book Nations and Nationalism (Oxford, 1983). A group of people 'imagine' themselves to be a community or to stretch it further, to be a nation when they either share a common geographical territory, language, religion, economic life, history or cultural traits. Sociologists like Ernest Renan considers none of these crucial or adequate enough to determine a nation. According to him: " A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarised, however, in the present by a

tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life."(4)

Constructing a particular past can be thus seen as a conscious effort to invent a nation where none existed before or to consolidate and bring together a group of people fragmented by internal differences. The urgency to unite a disjointed people is most felt when threatened by external forces, when the danger of a foreign power intruding into their shared orbit becomes imminent. Or, the alien power might have already infiltrated. In such a case the construction of a particular past and glorifying this imagined past can be seen as a resistance -- a subjugated people's way of retrieving their self-respect. The past then becomes a resource for propaganda; for the colonised it becomes a tool for shaping a desired future. This conscious agenda of nationalism is best accomplished by narratives-- oral and written, in the forms of songs, stories, and dramatic performances. Certain events from the past are then highlighted and glorified to arouse the communities sense of pride in its own people and actions, and certain events are deliberately forgotten or made obscure. The implicit purpose of such narratives is to make the people become what they believe themselves to be.

History, myths, stories or legends shared by a group of people provide a sense of oneness and help to bring them together. This is evident in the case of India where the epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabhrata have through the

centuries played a crucial role in giving a heterogeneous people a collective self-identity. The reverse might be also true; a common past or history might be deliberately imagined and created to consolidate a group of people. The urge to give solidarity and a sense of oneness led Germany to the first serious collection of folktales and folksongs which according to Bakhtin are the roots of the novel. The rise of the novel in England coinciding with the rise of nationalism in the late 18th and early 19th century Europe show on the one hand how nationalism affects the course of literature and also on the other hand, how the novel played an important role in creating a national awareness. In England especially, the novels of Richardson, Fielding and later Jane Austen and Dickens show a definite attempt to create a national prototype and to define what 'Englishness' constitutes. Timothy Brennan in his essay, 'The National Longing for Form', asserts the dependence and inseparability of the two: "Nations, then are, imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role."(5)

Herder, who coined the word 'nationalism' (in German Volksgeist), by invoking the 'people' showed that the 'folk', the 'plebians', the 'working class', had become important components for any inclusive treatment of the nation. This went very well with the ideology of democracy in Europe and Marxism in Russia. The novel as a form was

ideally suited for this purpose. Without rejecting the cosmopolitan upper classes the common people could also be included in it. Brennan points out how the structure of the novel mimicks the structure of the nation. The polyphonous voice of the novel objectifies the 'one, yet many voice'(6) of the nation, and invites the members of a particular group of people to identify with a 'national' character and a 'national' language. The novel by telling the people how they should behave, what they should like and hate actually allows them to imagine that they are a community. So Wordsworth advocated the use of a 'common language' and composed poems about the reaper and the leech gatherer, Hazlitt's 'On familiar style' showed a marked departure from the prevalent use of language and Pater's Marius the Epicurean showed a fertile mixture of high and low idiom. But it cannot be overlooked that though the novel incorporates the common folk it is essentially an elitist form when compared to folktales, songs or films. It is written and read by a section of the upperclass educated readers and seldom or never by the 'solitary reaper' or the 'leech gatherer'. However sensitive or committed a novel might be towards the plebians, it communicates only to the metropolitan reading public. Nationalism is in that sense an urban movement--led by a group of elitist intellectuals. In this regard it is difficult to agree with Bruce King who feels that "Nationalism aims at...rejection of cosmopolitan upper classes, intellectuals and others likely to be influenced by foreign ideas."(7)

The rise of the novel in Europe and India, the situations that shaped the novel, the commitment of the novel towards a national agenda, and the awareness that it generated among the readers were bound to be different in these two parts of the world. The birth of the historical novel in India in the late 19th and early 20th century was the result of a particular constellation of socio-political situations peculiar only to India. I shall discuss in the next chapter some of the causes that gave rise to this mammoth literary phenomenon and how far these novels reflected the 'people's' discontent with the contemporary situation. My analysis of the two novels Rajasingha by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya and Tara by Kishorilal Goswami in the third and fourth chapters respectively, would be an attempt to reconstruct the ideologies that shaped these novels. The last chapter will analyse how far such ideologies are successful in coalescing a group of people ostensibly divided by religion, community, caste and language and the political signification of the collective identity that emerges from such literary discourses.



NOTES

- (1) 'The New Historicism : Back to the Future' , by Marjorie Levinson; Rethinking Historicism by Marjorie Levinson, Marilyn Butler, Jerome McGann, Paul Hamilton (Basil Blackwell, U.K., 1989), p.29.
- (2) Hayden White, The Content of the Form : Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation (Baltimore, 1987), p.66.
- (3) Cited in Meenakshi Mukherjee's Realism and Reality : The Novel and Society in India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985), pp.41-42.
- (4) 'What is a Nation ?' by Ernest Renan, Nation and Narration ed by Homi Bhabha (Routledge, London and New York, 1990), p.19.
- (5) Nation and Narration ed by Homi Bhabha, p.49.
- (6) *ibid.*, p.49
- (7) Bruce King, The New English Literature (Macmillan, London, 1980), p.42.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RISE OF THE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN INDIA

In the late 19th and early 20th century a spate of novels were being written in almost all the major languages of India. The novel was a relatively new genre in India, the first texts of which appeared in Bangla and Marathi in mid 19th century to be followed by texts in other languages. Close contact for the first time with Western thought and literature is definitely one reason why the novel was accepted as a literary mode and why this genre became particularly popular. The genre, borrowed from the West, was moulded by the Indian intellectuals to suit the purpose of the time -- a nascent period in the history of Indian nationalism when the unhappiness against the British foreign power was beginning to get manifested in several ways. And one of these ways was an interest in history. Narration of stories about the past, as we shall see in this chapter, in the form of songs, novels and plays became a powerful medium of evoking a feeling of oneness, patriotism and dissent against the foreign rule. The two novels, Rajsingha by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (Bangla, 1893) and Tara by Kishorilal Goswami (Hindi, 1902) which are being studied in this dissertation are not arbitrary choices made from the list of historical novels written by Indians but rather the result of deliberate selection. The two novels have the same story line and are what Engels called "written with a purpose", whose "purpose become manifest from the situation

and the action themselves without being expressly pointed out and that the author does not have to serve the reader on a platter the future historical resolution of the social conflicts which he describes."(1)

It then becomes necessary to understand the historical and political nature of "the social conflicts" that the two novels describe for an analysis of the purpose of the writers. The idea of India as a one political entity came from the West after the British education policy made English the language of higher education in India, and European concepts became easily available to the educated Indians. Of course, a vague feeling of belonging to a sub-continent, of an 'Aryavarta' did exist amongst the people even in the pre-colonial days. Every upper caste Hindu had recited 'Bharatvarshe Bharatkhande Jambudvipe' for centuries but such a notion of 'Bharatvarsha' was more cultural than political. The differences between the people living on this sub-continent were numerous-- religion, caste, language, and above all, distance separated them. The process of becoming one, 'a people', was slow and complex. Even under the Mughal kings like Akbar, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb when the mighty empire stretched from Afghanistan to the Deccan and from Sind to Burma, India was at best only a "natio", which as Timothy Brennan defines is "a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging."(2) The reason why India could still not be called a nation was that the existing character of the

Indian economy, social conditions, caste structure, and political institution were so fragmented that the unification of India under one centralised banner was highly improbable. With the decline of the Mughal Empire after Aurangzeb's death in 1707 A.D., a succession of weak rulers made it easy for the Marathas, the Jats and the Rajputs to consolidate their regional, tribal or familial interests. Taking advantage of the political turmoil, there arose a large number of independent and semi-independent powers in Bengal, Avadh, Hyderabad, Mysore, and the Maharashtra. The break-up of whatever semblance of unity that had existed previously became one of the crucial reasons that enabled the British to consolidate their power in India after coming to the sub-continent as a trading company. In 1608 Captain Hawkins obtained a firman from Jahangir to trade in India. By 1757 the Battle of Plassey firmly established the East India Company in Bengal from where they spread their tentacles to the rest of the country. Taking full advantage of the weakness of the Nawab of Bengal, the Company established dual government in 1765 in Bengal. The consequences of this was disastrous for the people of Bengal; neither the Nawab nor the Company cared for their welfare. The result was mass scale exploitation. For the first time in the history of India there was a ruler who did not live in the country that he ruled but gathered all the material benefits as a ruler. Even the Company's servant, Lord Clive the Governor of Bengal confessed: "I shall only say that such a scene of anarchy, confusion, bribery,

corruption, and extortion was never seen or heard of in any country but Bengal; nor such and so many fortunes acquired in so unjust and rapacious a manner..."(3)

From 1775 to 1782, the Company was involved in a long war with the Marathas, the strongest Indian power of the day. By dividing the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the other smaller Nawabs and rulers of the time with his diplomacy and shrewdness, Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor General of Bengal succeeded in firmly establishing British supremacy in the South. The Maratha chiefs were not the ones to surrender their tradition of independence without a struggle. But even in this moment of their peril they would not unite against a common enemy. The disunity existing among the Sindhis, Bhonsles, Gaekwads and Holkars allowed Arthur Wellesly and later Lord Hastings to completely subjugate what was once a proud and independent clan. By 1818 the entire sub-continent excepting the Punjab and Sindh had been brought under British control. The former state was seized in 1843 and finally Sindh too fell in 1848.

Meanwhile the Company's commercial relation with India had undergone a tremendous change from what it was initially in 1608. The Company eliminated its rivals, both Indian and foreign merchants, and established its monopoly over the Indian market. The Industrial Revolution in England had completely transformed Britain's economy. The need for new markets and raw materials was acutely felt. To meet the demands of the growing industries and population, they

looked for new colonies and markets, especially in Africa, Asia and West Indies. Part of India's wealth and resources were exported to Britain for which India got no adequate economic or material return. Other foreign conquerors before the British had come to rule in India but they had settled here and had spent the revenue they extracted from the people inside the country. The British pattern of rule was different. In the words of John Shore, "The fundamental principle of the English had been to make the whole Indian nation subservient, in every possible way, to the interests and benefits of ourselves. The Indians have been excluded from every honour, dignity, or office, which the lowest Englishman could be prevailed to accept."(4)

Whatever may have been the intention of the British rulers, there were certain indirect consequences of their educational and other policies. Under the impact of Western culture and thought, the first half of the 19th century saw the birth of a new social awakening in India. An attempt was made to synthesise the thoughts of the East and the West by Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal, Jotiba Phule, Gopal Hari Deshmukh ('Lokahitawadi'), Dadabhai Naoroji in Maharashtra and Karsondas Mulji in Gujarat. International political events of importance like the French Revolution (1789), the American War of Independence (1776), the Revolution in Naples (1821), and the Revolution in Spanish America (1823) heightened the political awareness of young intellectuals in

India, taught them to think rationally and to question all authority. The philosophies of Mill and Carlyle inspired them to love liberty and equality. A study of Western theology, especially the Bible, made them appreciate that truth is many sided, and that the world encompasses a good deal more than just one's own family, class or society.

Under the Mughal rulers, or even before them, it made very little difference to the subjects as to who ruled them as long as he ruled them well. Hardly was any discontent shown by the Hindu masses, even against the tyrannical rule of Aurangzeb. The reason perhaps was a lack of awareness of political and social freedom. But as the British, for over a century spread over the country little by little, popular discontent and hatred against the foreign rule gained strength among the different sections of the society. The early stages of the discontent burst forth into the Revolt of 1857. To say that all sections of the society participated in it or that the entire country was involved in this would be an exaggeration. Mostly the Nawabs and the petty rulers affected by the Subsidiary Alliance and the Permanent Settlement took the initiative. The peasants, especially in Northern and Central India, oppressed by the land revenue policies, and the soldiers in the Company's army revolting against the use of cartridges allegedly greased with the fat of cows and pigs, pitted in with leaders like Nana Sahib, Tantia Tope, Kunwar Singh and the Rani of Jhansi. Even though the revolt was spread over a

vast area in the northern and central regions of India, it could not embrace the entire country or all the groups and classes of the Indian society. The Sindhia of Gwalior, the Holkar of Indore, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Raja of Jodhpur, the Nawab of Patiala, and many other rulers refused to join the revolt and in some cases actively supported the British in suppressing the revolt. Though absence of a unified programme was the main reason for failure of the revolt, the event did for the first time create a mass consciousness for the rights of the people.

A political incident of such magnitude was bound to affect the literature of the time. After 1857 numerous newspapers and magazines, some handwritten, were secretly circulated among a chosen group of sympathizers for the national cause. Some of these were banned. Bengal, the seat of the East India Company, and also the first one to shape a distinct literature, and fine arts of its own, curiously remained unaffected by the Revolt of 1857. Bengal's marked indifference towards the Revolt of 1857 could stem from a desire to avoid displeasing the British rulers and from having a direct confrontation with them. The upper class because of their personal interests did not participate in the revolt and in fact demonstrated their loyalty and support to the British. The lower classes were influenced by the 'bhadrolok' class. The folksongs of this time show that the rural section of the society was impressed by the British might and favoured the 'gora' over



the leaders of the revolt of 1857.(5)

The elite section of the society, the Bengali Babus, were the products of an English colonial system and had to correspond closely to the standard set by Macaulay in his Minute of 1835, "...a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." Attempts by liberals like Rammohun Roy was towards an acculturation of the East and the West, so that European thoughts, and literature were gladly welcomed and incorporated into Bengali literature.

The indigenous grass root culture continued to exist along with the newly formed tastes and practices of the Bengali elite of Calcutta in the 19th century. The early part of this century also showed evidence of the Hindus and the Muslims of rural Bengal living in relative communal harmony. Their composite culture indicated an intermingling of language, culture and living habits. The 'tantis' (weavers), 'kobi-walas' (local poets) and 'patuas' (folk painters) comprised of both the Hindus and the Muslims. The language of their songs, rhymes and doggerels was interfused with Bangla, Arabic and Persian words.(6) Such compositions popular since the late 18th century, reflected upon the daily social life, peasant uprisings, the foppishness of the rich babus and religious hypocrisies. The dialect used for their literary compositions was called 'dodbhasi' (derived from two languages) and till early 19th century expressed some sort of communal solidarity.

The lower strata of Bengali Hindus and Muslims worshipped certain common gods and goddesses, like Shitala to avert small-pox, Ola Bibi to ward off cholera, Satya Per for curing ailments, Manik Peer for protection of cattle. As the mixture of Hindu and Muslim names suggests, the Hindu gods and Muslim saints were worshipped by both the communities. Again Sabrid Khan, a Muslim poet was the first to compose a poem on the story of Vidya and Sundar in the 16th century. Mohammad Kabir composed Madhumalati about the love of a Hindu prince and princess. And Syed Alawal in the mid 17th century had composed Padmavati based on the queen of Chittor. The Hindus too, like the Bengali poet Sitaram Das who wrote a ballad praising Peer Machandali and Bharatchandra Ray's poem on Satya Peer, liberally used Muslim characters, motifs and themes in their poems, ballads, and stories.

While the fusion of two cultures was a common feature of rural Bengal, by late 19th century, the elite section of Bengal became conscious of a need to develop and crystallize its own identity. The upper class Bengali Muslim society known as 'ashraf' tried to preserve their cultural purity and thwarted any kind of amalgamation with either the lower class Muslims or the Hindus. While the lower class Muslims shared their shrines, tombs, saints and festivals with the Hindus, the 'ashrafs' looked with contempt at all these and tried to preserve the purity of Islam, the beliefs and practices and the language. The



'bhadrolok' as the Hindu Bengali respectable class was called, in many cases uprooted from the social and cultural base of the villages, also tried to discover a new identity for themselves. A deliberate and conscious effort was made by the 'bhadroloks' to distance themselves socially and culturally from the lower classes, who were pejoratively termed as 'chotolok', 'itar', and 'gainya'.

The consciousness to maintain their cultural identity both by the upper class Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslims, was an urban phenomenon. It was triggered by contact with a colonial power which had a totally different set of ideas and threatened the Bengali's identity. The result is that "in the interaction, the regional community resists, subverts and also collaborates with the encroaching ideas of the colonial power at the different levels of its existence-- economic, social, political and cultural. The encounter endows its self-identity with a purpose of self-direction, in the course of which it redefines itself in terms borrowed both from the hegemonistic ideology of the invading colonial power, and from its own past historical memories." (7)

Englishmen, like Macaulay, expressed their disapproval of such an indigeneous culture and termed it as trash, vulgar, indecent and capable of polluting the minds of the cultured and polite society. On the other hand, the English Orientalists like William Jones, Horace Hayman Wilson and General Charles Stuart emphasised the cultivation

of the respective religious scriptures, laws and literature by the Hindus and the Muslims. They put pressure on the educated class to turn their attention to the sophistication of the Sanskrit language. Instructed to look down upon the popular dialects and culture, the educated Bengalis began to dissociate themselves from the folk cultural heritage, the popular expressions, and the lower class people themselves. The Bengali elite writers and composers now derived ideas from Sanskrit classics and Western literature. They were afraid that the country would suffer from the insomnia plague. The sickness of insomnia, as the Indian woman explains in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, One Hundred Years of Solitude, "...was not the impossibility of sleeping, for the body did not feel any fatigue at all, but its inexorable evolution toward a more critical manifestation : a loss of memory" when the identity of the people and their past would be erased from their memory.(8) To keep their identity intact, the intelligentsia took upon themselves the task of re-evoking the past, to hold on to it with all their strength, and also to invent a common past to evoke a feeling of oneness. They realised the immense potentialities of the past; the past was by no means a finished story of dead people. The past became a potent formative factor to stir up, discover, and shape the present. The Bengali Hindu intelligentsia tried to amalgamate the diversities of race, language, creed and culture under a new type of citizenship-- 'Indians'. They realized, what a research student of Calcutta University was

to put so succinctly some years later in 1922: "... the establishment of the British supremacy was not seriously thwarted by that jealousy of the foreigner which is the necessary correlative of the sense of nationality. It is not therefore a conquest in the ordinary sense, that is, the subordination by a foreign power of a conquered people's nationality... Thus the utter lack of nationality in India was historically the cause of the establishment of British rule in the country, and the cause is a continuing one and constitutes the real secret of the continuance of British power."(9)

From the middle of the 19th century there was a definite movement to turn towards the past -- the religious scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads and the ancient history of Hindu kings. Significantly enough there was always an attempt to work out a compromise between the traditional Hindu society and the requirements of the present day. In 1829 the British historian, James Tod wrote Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan, the first of a kind to give a comprehensive idea about the cultural heritage and historical resources of any particular region of India. Till the mid 19th century there was no indication of any tangible influence of Tod's Annals on the Indian intellectuals. When the need to formulate a new identity arose, Tod's Annals served the purpose very well because not only did Tod refurbish the intellectuals' awareness of a heroic and ennobling past, but also because Tod spoke

favourably of the Hindus as compared to the Muslims. Tod's work was not a mere reaccounting of history but contained popular folk tales and ballads of the region and thus he supplied the Bengali nationalists with the much needed tales of heroism based on past history, even though it was from another part of the country. The heroism of Rana Pratap of Rajasthan and Shivaji of Maharashtra was again and again evoked in the literary works of Bengalis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While invoking the heroism of the Hindu rulers of the past, the Muslim rulers were inevitably seen as the enemy. The anti-Muslim stance in the writings of the Hindu Bengalis was a feature peculiar to the urban elites and was not continuous with indigenous Bengali way of life. In rural Bengal, as has been discussed above, the Hindus and the Muslims continued to live together and share each other's culture. As early as 1640, Alawal, a Muslim Sufi poet of Bengal had composed the poem 'Padmavati' based on Padmini of Chittor. Mullah Daud, a disciple of the well known Sufi saint Jainuddin (during Feroz Shah Tughlaq's reign) rendered into Avadhi Hindi, the popular love story of Luda-Chand. It is surprising that not much attempt was made to make use of Bengal's past -- where the Hindu ruler of Jessore, Pratapaditya, as well as the Muslim ruler of Suvarnagram, Isha Khan -- both Bengalis put up a heroic resistance when the Mughals attacked Bengal. Instead, inspiration was sought from the Rajputs and the Marathas who were culturally different from the Bengalis and who had very little in common with the Bengalis; on the contrary the

Bengalis hated and feared the Marathas because of the frequent looting sprees and raids by the Maratha horsemen ('bargis') in Bengal.(10)

However, what is important is the Bengali Hindu intellectuals' attempt to create an Indian identity by relating themselves to the heroic past in other regions of India. It had to be proved by mythological legends, geneological records or ancient Sanskrit literature that they possessed heroic characters, a common past and a socio-cultural unity even before the British came to India. In their attempt to assert their identity vis a vis the British the intellectual Bengalis were compelled to adopt the terms of discourse settled by the colonial rulers. Hence the Rajputs and the Marathas, different from the Bengalis in language, culture, food or dress, were assimilated in the cultural fold of the Bengalis, and they were perceived as 'us', because of their courage, valour and their success in thwarting the Muslims--a foreign power. The Muslims were the outsiders, the 'yavanas', the 'mlechchhas', who then by extension became the surrogate for the English rulers in India. The hatred and the venom that could not be poured directly on the then English rulers was directed towards the Muslim rulers of yesteryears.

Not only in Bangla, but also in Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi and Hindi, a number of historical novels came to be written at the end of the 19th century. "The framework of history," says Meenakshi Mukherjee, "afforded

the novelist a way to glorify the past, and the past, however nebulous, meant the pre-British past: any tale of past bavery or heroism vindicated present servitude. This was the safest form a newly awakened nationalism could take."(11) The Bengali intellectuals' attempts to valorise the past started understandably in verse form. Rangalal Bandyopadhyay (1827-87) enthused the people of Bengal with a new political idealism, when in 1858 he wrote Padmini Upakhyaana--a verse narrative of the resistance of the valiant Rajputs against the attack of Ala-ud-din Khilji and the self-immolation of Padmini of Chittor to save her honour and chastity. Michael Madhusudan Dutt in 1860 wrote a play on Krishnakumari, the princess of Mewar who took poison to save her father from a state of great predicament. Romesh Chandra Dutt's novels Rajput Jivan Sandhya (1874) and Maharashtra Jivan Prabhat (1878), and plays like Dvijendralal Roy's Tarabai (1903) and Girish Chandra Ghosh's Chatrapati (1907) were attempts to show that India's past was not vile, corrupt or unworthy of regard.

With Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and his historical novels, the valorisation of Kshatriyahood came to be projected for specific contemporary socio-political purposes. The founder-editor of Bangadarshan, the Bangla journal that served as a platform for the discussion of social, intellectual and psychological issues as well as for publishing fiction, Bankim had probed vital questions like 'Bharatbarsha paradhin keno?' (Why is Bharatbarsha



subjugated?) and analysed the cause of 'Bangalir Kalanka' (The Bengali's Dishonour) and 'Bharat Kalanka' (Bharat's Dishonour). He had, in his essays, laid stress on the need to chronicle one's own history, of creating a mass consciousness and he attempted to do this through his historical novels. This can be seen as the first phase of any national movement, one which E.J.Hobsbawm calls, 'purely cultural, literal and folkloric.' (12) Realising the special religious connotation that narratives have for the Hindus, Bankim made full use of it. Moreover, history in the form of imaginative literature could enjoy the privilege of exaggerating, highlighting, distorting or eliding certain characters and incidents without offending the reader or making him question the authenticity of the narrative. The setting of almost all of Bankim's novels, except four (Bishbriksha, Krishnakanter Will, Rajani, Indira), are in the past belonging to the period commonly known as the 'Muslim period' in Indian history. His twelve historical novels span the period from the invasion of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khilji to Mir Kasim of Bengal, that is, from 1202 AD to 1764 AD.

Durgeshnandini (1865), Bankim's first novel in Bangla, is set within Bengal though it has Rajput and Pathan characters in it. The historical background of this novel is the upsurge of the Pathan ruler Katlu Khan against the Mughal ruler Akbar. Jagat Singha is sent by his father, Man Singha to quell the rebels. He meets Tillotama, the

beautiful daughter of Birendra Singha at a roadside temple and falls in love with her. Later Jagat Singha is seriously injured in a confrontation with the Mughal army and is taken captive by Osman, the Pathan general. He is taken care of by Ayesha, the daughter of Katlu Khan. At the end Jagat Singha is reunited with Tillotama and Ayesha who also loves Jagat Singha adds a new dimension to the story by accepting her suffering with dignity and determination. The historical facts in Durgeshnandini may not all be accurate but what is important is Bankim's ability to capture the atmosphere of a particular period so brilliantly.

Mrinalini (1869), Bankim's third novel was again an attempt to write one's own history and to refute the popular belief that Bakhtiyar Khilji in the 13th century conquered Bengal with the help of seventeen horsemen.

In Anandamath (1882), Bankim made use of two historical events--the economic condition of Bengal in 1770, and the killings of Captain Thomas and captain Edwards in December 1772 and March 1773 respectively. Anandamath is in many ways a reflection of what the author's attitude was towards his own past in relation to the West -- enigmatic and complex. The novel derived its material from Sannyasis rebellion in North Bengal and Bihar in the 1770's. Bankim's position as a government servant, the contemporary events and attitudes of the British, the prosecution of Upendranath Das for his play Surendra-Binodini (1875) which presented a scene of a British magistrate being shot dead by a Bengali,

were some of the factors that constrained Bankim's overt representation of the nationalist spirit and forced him not only to tone down the obvious references to the English but also to give the novel an ambivalent closure. He was, to borrow Sisir Kumar Das's term, "the artist in chains" struggling to get his message of militant patriotism across to the people of India.(13) Anandamath became the Bible for the young revolutionaries of Bengal and the song 'Vande Matram' their gospel.

Bankim's last novel Rajsingha, first published in Bangadarshan as a short novel in 1877-78 and later developed into a full length novel in 1893 is what the author himself claims to be his only historical novel. The characters like Aurangzeb, Rajsingha, Zeb-un-nissa and Udipuri are historical figures and so are the battles fought between Rajsingha (the ruler of Mewar) and Aurangzeb (the emperor of Delhi) historically verifiable. But these as Sisir Kumar Das puts it, "do not make Rajsingha as a novel more historical than his other novels for which he did not claim that distinction."(14) The implicit purpose of Bankim in writing this novel was to glorify the past, create a sense of oneness among the people of India, and to valorise Kshatriyahood which by extension was made to appear synonymous with Hinduism.

Inspired by Bankim's writings (most of which were translated or adapted soon after in several Indian languages) and the need to 'invent' a nation, a number of Indian writers took upon themselves the task of bringing to the people their own history through historical novels. The backdrop of these novels in most cases was Rajasthan or Maharashtra and the characters were brave and valiant Kshatriyas or Marathas.

In Hindi the advent of the historical novel occurred with Kishorilal Goswami who wrote twelve historical novels. The Hindi critic Gopal Rai in his critical work, Hindi Katha Sahitya, is of the opinion that "all of Goswami's novels are mostly love stories. The character names are historical, but the relationship of the plot to history is almost nil." (15) Whether Goswami's novels have more of fact or imagination in them is not as important to us as his object in writing them. In the preface to Tara (1902) Goswami makes it clear that his purpose is to depict "the true glory of the Aryans". Hridyahaarini, wa Adarsh Ramani (1890), Goswami's first novel depicts Bengal during Nawab Siraj-ud-daullah's reign. The Nawab's weakness for beautiful women and sensual pleasures are shown to be the causes of his subjects revolting against him. The Hindu king of Rangpur, Narendra Singh undertakes the task to free the people of Bengal from the tyrannical rule of the Nawab. Lavanjalata, wa Adarsh Bala (1890) again shows a lustful Nawab Siraj-ud- daullah, this time desiring Narendra Singh's

sister and capturing her. He keeps her a prisoner in his palace but she manages to keep her virtue intact till her brother rescues her. Lavangalata is presented as an exemplary 'Bharatiya' woman. Tara (1902), influenced by Tod's Annals and Bankim's Rajsingha, depicts the battle between the Rajputs and the Mughals.

Orissa being close to Bengal, geographically and culturally, the Bangla novels of the mid 19th century were bound to influence Oriya literature. Most of the educated Oriyas were also well versed in Bangla. Ramashanker Roy's (1858-1907) Bibasini (1891) shows Orissa in the second half of the 18th century under the Maratha rule. Umesh Chandra Sarkar's Padmamali (1888) depicts the relationship between the British administrators and the native rulers.(16) Both Roy and Sarkar were influenced by Bankim's writings.

The first Gujarati novel, Karan Ghelo(1866) by Nanda Shankar Tilijashankar Mehta (1835-1905), also a historical novel, narrates the story of the last king of Gujarat, Karan who lost to Alauddin Khilji, the Sultan of Delhi, as no Hindu king came to his help. The novel became popular because of its successful evocation of the city of Surat.

The British rule also influenced the Marathi novel. In 1818 the last Peswa finally collapsed and Maharashtra was integrated with the rest of Western India under the British rule. The move towards social reforms in India was made in Bombay even though Bengal experienced the western impact

before Maharashtra. Yamuna Paryatan written by Baba Padmanji in 1857 is generally accepted as the first Marathi novel. In the first three decades of its existence, the Marathi novel showed two marked tendencies; it was either romantic and entertaining or had a social message. Mochanqad (the name of fort) written by R.B Gunjekar (1843-1901) in 1871 was the first historical novel in Marathi. It was inspired by the writings of Sir Walter Scott and Alexander Dumas. This novel served as a starting point for Hari Narayan Apte. One of the main reasons for the tremendous popularity of Apte's historical novel was the political development in Maharashtra after 1875. The nationalists led by Tilak vigorously advocated full concentration of all national forces on the attainment of political independence. To inspire the feelings of loyalty and patriotism, M.G Ranade submitted to the public the "authentic" source of the history of the Marathas in The Rise of the Maratha Power. Hari Narayan Apte, from 1895 onwards, wrote five historical novels on the life of Sivaji:- Usakkal, Gad Alal Pan Sinha Gela, Madhvanha, Suryodaya, and Suryagrahan; one on the history of the Rajputs, Rupnagar ki Rajkanva; one on the age of Chandragupta, Chandragupta; and one against the background of the Vijayanagara empire, Kalkut. Apte's historical novels dealt with the loyalty of the Maratha youths towards their leader, the pride in their independence and the treachery of the Muslims. Most important of all, Apte's contribution lies in depicting the social history of

Maharashtra in this period.

The first historical novel in Tamil was Mohananki by Sarvanamutha Pillai in 1895. But the person who gave shape and character to the historical novel in Tamil was R. Krishnamurthy (1899-1954) also known as 'Kalki' whose works fall outside the period of our study.

In Malyalam ,the first historical novel Marthanda Verma, by C.V. Raman Pillai was ready as early as 1883, but was published in 1891.It created quite a sensation in the literary world and was hailed by the Hindu of Madras(Dec. 21,1891, editorial) as "...a book written ....after the manner of the modern historical romance."(17) Marthanda Verma, based on the tumultuous epoch of the history of Travancore was further extended by the author in his other two novels Dharmaraja(1913) and Ramarajabhadur(1920).

The historical novels written in almost all the Indian languages within a span of thirty to thirty five years was a remarkable phenomenon. In fact it was the first conscious step towards a new self identity. The past became a means for propaganda for present use. Concepts like nation and nationalism were still foreign; religion, community, caste, region, language, or occupation were still the principles that bound groups of people together. But at the same time these parameters for defining the self were felt to be inadequate to meet the challenge of colonialism. A stronger united identity was necessary to confront the aggression of

the colonizers. Almost all the historical novels mentioned above have certain common features. First, they are mostly inspired by the stories (real or fictitious) as narrated by European authorities like Tod or Orme. Second, the plots of the novels are based in the 'Medieval Period' of Indian history when the Mughals ruled over the country. Third, the characters in the novels are brave Rajputs or Marathas. Fourth, these heroes are involved in a conflict or a direct war with the Muslims. Fifth, the novels end either in a definite victory for the Rajputs/Marathas or the endings are left deliberately ambiguous. What was the significance of all these features? What was the reason for including the Rajputs and the Marathas in the Bengalis or Malayali's ambit of a community when they had had very little reason to identify with each other? What exactly was the picture of the collective 'we' that emerged from these narratives? When did the Muslims become 'foreigners' and for what purpose? How successful were these historical novels in creating an awareness of a 'nation' amongst the people? A study of two historical novels in Bangla and Hindi, Rajsingha and Tara respectively, would attempt to explore these questions, keeping in mind the colonial context. Narratives of this period, as we shall see, underneath the veneer of enthralling adventures and accounts of bravery, had a sub-text of ideological and political agenda.



NOTES

- (1) Marx-Engels, On Literature and Art (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978), p.88.
- (2) 'The National longing for Form' by Timothy Brennan in Nation and Narration, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge, London, 1990), p.45.
- (3) Quoted in Modern India by Bipan Chandra (NCERT, 1986), p. 71.
- (4) *ibid.*, p. 109.
- (5) Sumanta Banerjee in The Parlour and the Street Elite and Popular Culture in 19th Century Calcutta (Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1989) quotes the popular folk lyric of 19th century Bengal:

Bilet theke elo gora  
 Mathar par kurti para,  
 Padobhare kanpe dhara,  
 Highlandnibasi tara.  
 Tantia Topir man  
 Habey ebey kharboman,  
 Sukhe Dilli dakhal hobey  
 Nana Saheb padbe dhara. (pp.145-6).

(White men have come from Europe. They wear jackets over their heads. The earth is trembling under their footsteps. They are Highlanders. Tantia Tope's pride will be humbled now. Delhi will be reconquered with ease. Nana Sahib will get caught). The author's translation.

- (6) *ibid.*, p.127.

Sumanta Banerjee quotes the following 'gaan'(song) to illustrate the use of 'dodbhasi' by the rural folk of Bengal:

Ami raja bahadur,  
 Kochubaganer hujur,  
 Jomi nai, jama nai,  
 Naiko amar praja...  
 Andorey abola kande  
 kheye amar saja.  
 Orey baja, baja, baja,  
 Ta dhin ta dhin nachi ami  
 Kochubaganer raja.

(I'm a noble raja, the king of the garden of trifles.  
 I've no land, no savings, nor do I have any

subjects...I punish women in my home and make them weep. Beat the drum! Let me dance! I am the king of the garden of trifles). \_The author's translation.

- (7) Sumanta Banerjee, Popular Perception of Tension Between Regional Identity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengali Culture (Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1992, mimeographed), p.1.
- (8) Gabriel Garcia Marquez, One Hundred Years of Solitude (Picador, London, 1978), p.43.
- (9) Sukumar Dutt, Problem of Indian Nationality (University Jubilee Research Prize: Thesis, 1922. Published by the University of Calcutta, 1926), p.11.
- (10) Lullabies sung by the mothers to their children about the atrocities of the Maratha 'bargis' are popular even now:
- Chele ghumolo pada judolo,  
Bargi elo deshe.  
Bulbulitey dhan kheychhey,  
Khajna debu kishey?
- (My child is asleep, the village is peaceful. The 'bargis' come into the country. The birds have eaten the crops, how are we to pay the taxes?) \_My translation.
- (11) Meenakshi Mukherjee, Realism and Reality : The Novel and Society in India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985), p.46.
- (12) E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), p.12.
- (13) Sisir Kumar Das, The Artist in Chains: The life of Bankimchandra Chatterjee (New Statesman Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1984).
- (14) *ibid.*, pp.189-90.
- (15) Gopal Rai, Hindi Katha Sahitya aur uske Vikas par Pathako ki Rucchi ka Prabhab (Granth Niketan, Patna, 1965), p. 307. (My translation).
- (16) Sources : Comparative Indian Literature (Vol. I), Director and chief Editor K.M.George (Macmillan India Ltd. and Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1984).

Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature (Vol.IV), Chief Editor Mohan Lal (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1991).

A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910. Western Impact: Indian Response, Sisir Kumar Das (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1991).

- (17) Quoted from 'History as Literature with special reference to Martanda Verma' by A. Sreedhar Menon in Martanda Verma, National Seminar, 21-22 August, 1992 (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi).

### CHAPTER III

#### RAJSINGHA

In Midnight's Children Saleem Sinai's thirty jars of pickled history "stand upon a shelf waiting to be unleashed upon the amnesiac nation."(1) Whether it is Salman Rushdie who covers Indian History from 1915 to 1978 in his novel Midnight's Children (1980) or Bankimchandra Chattopadhyya who more than a hundred years ago wrote Rajsingha based on an episode of 17th century Indian history, their purpose in some ways are parallel: to revive memories, to reawaken a sleeping people, to give shape, form and meaning to their present by reorganising their past. In the "chutnification" of history and imagination what is required are "raw materials, obviously...but also: eyes...which are undeceived by the superficial blandishments...and above all a nose capable of discerning the hidden languages of what must be pickled, its humours and messages and emotions..."(2) The process of pickling as Saleem Sinai points out is bound to lead to the "inevitable distortion" of the raw material but it is a small price to pay since "to pickle is to give immortality". The justification of the interrelationship between history and literature is that "one day, perhaps, the world may taste the pickles of history. They may be too strong for some palates, their smell may be overpowering, tears may rise to eyes; I hope nevertheless that it will be possible to say of them that they possess the authentic taste of truth...that they are

despite everything acts of love."(3)

Bankimchandra's historical novels are despite everything, "acts of love" -- love for the country and its people. Of all his historical novels Rajsingha (1892) is perhaps Bankim's best work. In Durgeshnandini and Mrinalini history is relegated to the background and the private lives of the characters become more important. One is uncertain whether to hold the events and characters against the imaginary or the historical horizon. Anandamath is aggressive in tone with its overt suggestions of Hindu nationalism. But Rajsingha is subtle yet dynamic, an account of an individual's war with a Mughal ruler and yet messages of nationalism and patriotism are woven into its texture. Here the two worlds of imagination and history blend without one annihilating the other. Rajsingha recreates a world of past thought and feeling and at the same time illuminates the personalities who took part in the action. The recreation of the past was not without a purpose. Bankim desired to generate confidence among the Indians and this he felt could be done by making the people feel proud of their history. He believed that the Indians had never felt strongly that foreign rule was ipso-facto bad and to be rejected, nor was there any urge to form a nation. The growing aggression of the British rule and the submission of the Indians made Bankim feel the need to create consciousness among the masses for freedom and self-government. Glorifying a particular period or

character in the past, therefore can be seen as a form of resistance -- a subjugated people's way of retrieving their self-respect -- a means to shape a better future. For shaking the people out of their amnesiac condition, Bankim chose imaginative literature as his medium, because as Bacon puts it in Advancement of Learning, "The acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfies the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical..."(4) Imaginative literature has the added advantage over history in that it can magnify, delete, and realign events and actions. In this marriage between history and literature, Bankim is conscious all the while that he is a novelist not a historian. The study of history as a discipline was derived from the West and the first academic history of India came to be written by Englishmen like James Mill, Charles Grant, and Horace Hayman Wilson. History of India as written by these Englishmen was inevitably coloured by their prejudices, ideologies and purposes. Not only Indian past but also Indian culture, religion and social practices came to be seen from the perspective of the colonizers. Perhaps no scholar was more frank in revealing the purpose of studying Indian traditions from the Western point of view as was Horace Hayman Wilson. He stated that "the necessity of studying Hindu religions was to prove their erroneousness and persuade the Hindu intelligentsia to adopt the Christian faith."(5) But not all Englishmen could be regarded as such fanatics. It was at this time that James Tod, an English army officer in the

service of the East India Company, recorded his experiences and involvement in the changing political scenario of Rajasthan in Western India. Colonel Tod's Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (1829) was a remarkable record of the variegated life of the Rajputs -- their social, political, cultural, economic and religious affairs. He made a sustained effort to collect the prevalent and the long forgotten ballads and folk-tales of the region. Tod's Annals showed the Rajputs as a brave and valiant race, morally upright and more chivalrous than their life long enemy -- the Mughals. Tod's unabashed admiration and glorification of the Rajputs probably sealed his career in India and compelled him to depart from India with a premature retirement. But Tod's Annals continued to inspire the literature of India, especially of Bengal, and novels and plays revealing the greatness and the courage of the indomitable Rajputs were written.(6)

Bankimchandra too made an incident from Tod's Annals the nucleus of his magnum-opus Rajsingha (1892). Rajsingha had first come out in 1882 as a 'kshudra katha' (a short tale) of about 83 pages in 19 chapters in the Bengali journal Bangadarshan (the literary journal founded by Bankim's elder brother Sanjeev Chandra). The enlarged version of more than 434 pages in 61 chapters was published ten years later in 1892. Aware of the inherent potential of the germinal plot in Tod's Annals, Bankim developed upon it and breathed life into a remote place in Rajasthan and the

obscure characters living in it. Tod describes Rajsingha, the son of Juggut Singha as "the royal lion" (7) who mounted the throne of Mewar in 1654 A.D. It was impossible for the Rajput fiefs and rulers to remain indifferent towards or uninvolved with the Mughal rule in Delhi.

The Emperor of the Moghals had reached extreme old age, and the ambition of his sons to usurp his authority involved every Rajput in support of their individual pretensions. The Rana [Rajsingha] inclined to Dara, the legitimate heir to the throne, as did the whole Rajput race; but the battle of Futtehbad silenced every pretention, and gave the lead to Aurangzeb, which he maintained by the sacrifice of whatever opposed his ambition...(8).

The seed of Tod's story about Rajsingha which later sprouted into a novel in Bankim's hands appear in Tod in one brief passage:

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



guards and bore off the prize to his capital. The daring act was applauded by all who bore the name of Rajpoot, and his chiefs with joy gathered their retainers around the 'red standard', to protect the queen so gallantly achieved.(9)

It might seem surprising that Bankim chose this particular incident from Tod to create a full length novel. Rajsingha was not a king who could be classified as one of the greatest rulers of Rajasthan, nor was his chivalry towards the princess of Roopnagar a much remembered incident in history. But by retelling this minor incident, Bankim tried to give a position of uniqueness not only to Rajsingha, but to all obscure Rajput rulers of that time. The very fact that a small kingdom like Mewar offered strong resistance and refused to submit to the might of the Mughal power, resurrected the latent ideology of the Indian martial races being 'masculine', courageous and chivalrous. As Ashis Nandy rightly points out, "Many 19th century Indian movements of social, religious and political movement -- and many literary and art movements as well -- tried to make Ksatriyahood the 'true' interface between the rulers and ruled as a new, nearly exclusive indicator of exclusive Indianness."(10)

The urban educated elite's anxiety to create an "authentic" Indianness could be seen as a reaction against the colonizer's version of the 'Orient' as ignorant, effeminate, lazy and disloyal. The Kshatriya therefore represented agency, virility and potency. The counterposing of an opposite argument by the Indian intellectuals

therefore meant a certain degree of acceptance of the dominant ideology of the colonizers. Instead of finding an alternative framework in which the oppressed would not seem weak or degraded, they implicitly accepted the colonial ideology that the present India was degraded and decrepit and went on to demonstrate that India's past was civilized, glorious and authentic. The image that the colonizer constructed of the colonized legitimized the former's role as a civilizing and proselytizing agent. Once the images were constructed and propagated, once the binary opposition between the West and the East, the strong and the weak, the civilized and the uncivilized was established and internalized, the subjugated people started believing that a particular race or nation was superior to the rest, or that a particular community was militant and another passive, one materialist and the other spiritualist. Therefore history of India as documented by the colonizers, homogenized, generalized and created stereotypes in the minds of the Indian people.

So great and pervasive was its influence that even Bankim who in his historical novels appear to be putting to use the malleability of history actually gets caught in the stereotypes constructed by colonial historiography and ends up talking the same language. So Bankim's Krishnacharitra (1886) purposely elides from the pastoral phase in Krishna's life and focusses on Krishna as the apostle of duty. Bankim does not dwell on the fun-loving, frolicking, adolescent

Krishna who dances with the gopis on the banks of the Yamuna river, and depicts him only in the next phase as a strong, virile, masculine warrior. Furthermore Bankim generalizes that Bengalis are weak and effeminate, and "except for Mewar nowhere in the Hindu society do we see any inclination to act for freedom." (11) He considers the accounts of the Muslim historians biased, is unable to cite examples from Bengal's history or quote Hindu historians because "Hindus have no history of their own", (12) and turns towards an Englishman's account of Indian history for his sources. The paradox in Bankim is that on the one hand he depends on the Western historians like Tod and Orme for knowledge of India and makes the incidents culled from these texts central to his novels like Rajsingha, and on the other hand he condemns the Western scholars attempt to interpret India. (13) Tod's Annals might have appealed to Bankim for two reasons: Firstly, Tod gave a favourable account of the Hindus as compared to the Muslims, and secondly, Tod was an Englishman, the outsider, the supposedly dispassionate judge. Tod in his Annals was projecting the English ruler as an unbiased and benevolent alternative to the 'tyrannical' and 'barbarous' rule of the Mughals and thus won the sympathy of the Hindus.

In Rajsingha, by distancing the characters in time and space Bankim not only gave a fairy tale like quality to his novel allowing a 'willing suspension of disbelief', but also appeared to state that the Hindus were great men in the past

but have been subjugated in the present because of their loss of Kshatriyahood. In his critical essays like 'Banglar Kalanka', 'Bharat Kalanka', 'Bangalir bahubal', 'Bharatbarsher Swadhinta O Paradhinta', Bankim lists the possible reasons for the loss of freedom and political subjugation of India at present. The list is in effect an enumeration of the differences between the West and India and there is an implied argument that the latter is inferior and subjugated because of these differences. The West, for Bankim, is the role model, the exemplum, the touchstone.

Bankimchandra sets out to write Rajsingha to justify the greatness of the Hindus in the past. In the preface to the novel Bankim writes :

It is only during the rule of the British that the Hindus have lost their bahubal (physical strength); but before this they had never lost it. To establish that the Hindus have bahubal I have written Rajsingha.(14)

Bankim by this statement was not only countering the colonial assumption that the Hindus are effeminate but was also unwittingly acknowledging the superiority of military and technical prowess over any other kind of strength. To suit the needs of the present, to encourage political unity of the Hindus, the militant past had to be remembered and re-enacted. In the present the outsider was the British colonizer; in the past it was the Mughal ruler. An anti-British stance could not be openly taken by the author who was a civil servant under the British government. Even in those who derided the British rule there was a sneaking

admiration for the strength and achievement of the colonizers. An anti-Muslim stance was more convenient to adopt and this could be seen as a "displaced hostility against the colonial power."(15)

The two principal characters of Rajsingha are -- Rajsingha the prince of Udaipur and Chanchalkumari the princess of Roopnagar. The historian Jadunath Sarkar identifies Roopnagar as corresponding to Udaipur. According to him, although Jodhpur and Udaipur were neighbouring kingdoms of Rajasthan their attitudes towards the imperial Mughal power in Delhi was very different.(16) The Rathors of Jodhpur accepted the sovereignty of the Mughal power during the time of Akbar and played a significant role in perpetuating Mughal rule in India. It was one of the foremost Rajput houses that had sullied its name by offering the daughters of their houses to princes of the Mughal court. They had derived material benefits of such acts as well as suffered the ignominy of being rendered subservient to the Mughal authority. The Sesodias of Udaipur, the clan to which Rajsingha belonged, was known to have been the last to give in to the Mughal power and was regarded with awe and respect by both the Rajputs and the Mughals.

In Bankim's novel Chanchalkumari's father though of the Rathor clan is the ruler of a tiny kingdom in Rajasthan called Roopnagar and Bankim with his characteristic tongue-in-cheek style states: "Even if the kingdom is tiny there should be no objection if the name of its king is huge

-- The name of the king of Roopnagar is Vikramsingha."(p.561) Rajsingha begins with the entry of an old woman into the palace of Roopnagar. She sells the miniatures of famous kings. As the old woman shows the portrait of Aurangzeb to the Princess, the Rajput Princess stamps on it and breaks it into pieces. While all her friends shiver in anticipation of the terrible consequences of such an act, Chanchalkumari with a smile says,

As children play with dolls and fulfil their desire of keeping houses, so have I fulfilled my desire of kicking the Mughal Emperor on his face.(p.564)

Then looking at her friend Nirmalkumari, she goes on to say:

Friend Nirmal!, one day the children's desires are fulfilled; they do have a family. Won't my desire be fulfilled? On the face of the real Aurangzeb will I not be able to...(p.564)

She is unable to complete her sentence as an aghast Nirmal places her hand on Chanchal's mouth. Chanchal's contempt is extended towards the Hindu toadies of the Mughal court. She refuses to buy the portraits of Raja Mansingha, Raja Birbal, and Raja Jaysingha because "they are not Hindus, they are the servants of the Muslims."(p.563) Only the portraits of Rana Pratap, Rana Amarsingha, Rana Karna, Jasovantsingha and Rajsingha are bought as they are the true Kshatriyas, and therefore worthy to be venerated. Once the news of Chanchalkumari's arrogant act reaches Aurangzeb in Delhi through a circuitous route, he decides to teach the haughty princess a lesson and expresses his wish to marry her. His wish is a command and the people of Roopnagar not knowing the reason behind the Emperor's proposal are

gratified. But Chanchal who secretly loves and admires Rajsingha sends a letter to him soliciting his help and protection.

In the second part of the novel Bankim vividly depicts the opulence and the extravagance of the Mughal court in Delhi -- the bejewelled throne, the flower-decked streets, fragrance of flowers and perfumes, loud laughter, the lavish feasts where meat and wine are served, and the presence of women add to the royal entertainment.(p.568) This part of the novel which is entitled 'Nandane Narak' (Hell in Heaven) show the sensual and sinful lives of the Mughal rulers. Aurangzeb is "intelligent, hardworking and efficient as a ruler" but the only reason of his downfall is that he is a 'mahapapishta' (a grave sinner) and "the world had not seen another cunning, sinful, selfish, sadistic and whimsical person like him. He pretended to be pious but the interiors of his palace resounded with the laughter of numerous beauties who were kept for his pleasure."(p.576) Aurangzeb is also shown to be under the sway of his wife Oodipuri and his daughter Zeb-un-nissa, so much so that the reins of the Mughal administration are virtually in their hands. Bankim depicts Zeb-un-nissa as a cunning politician, sensual, arrogant and proud of her beauty. Her dialogue with her lover, Mubarak, is Bankim's way of contrasting the Hindu 'dharmic' (virtuous) women with the 'irreligious' life style of the women of the ruling Muslim families. When Mubarak, a mansabdar in the court of Aurangzeb, expresses his love for

her and wishes to marry her, Zeb-un-nissa rejects him outright and says:

Allah has fixed these laws (of marriage) for the common man -- for the kafirs. Am I a Hindu Brahmin's daughter or a Rajput's daughter that I shall after serving one husband for my entire life die on his pyres? If Allah had decided such a fate for me He would have never made me a Princess?.

Mubarak fell from the skies. He had never heard such a disgusting thing, not even in as sinful a place like Delhi.(p.572)

Not only the Muslim but also the Christian woman is derided in Bankim's novel when compared with the chastity and loyalty of the Hindu woman. According to Bankim, Aurangzeb's favourite wife was Oodipuri, a Christian who was initially Dara's wife. After Aurangzeb defeated and killed his eldest brother Dara, she happily agreed to be Aurangzeb's wife. But another wife of Dara who was a Hindu did "what any Hindu girl would hve done under the circumstances, but girls of no other community could have done so; -- she died by taking poison."(p.576) That a good and religious Hindu is respected even by the Muslims is brought out in the description of Aurangzeb's Hindu wife Jodhpuri Begum, who "even inside Aurangzeb's palace maintained her own religion. She was served by Hindu servants; and ate the food cooked only by the Hindu cooks. Not only that, she worshipped Hindu idols inside the palace. That even a well known idol-hater like Aurangzeb tolerated this was an indication that he respected her." (p.578)



As Bankim is to state so explicitly in the Epilogue to Rajsingha, the purpose of this imaginative fiction is to compare and contrast characters like Oodipuri and Chanchalkumari, Zeb-un-nissa and Nirmal Kumari, Maniklal and Mubarak, Rajsingha and Aurangzeb so as to highlight the good versus the bad, the virtuous versus the sinful, the exemplary versus the despicable. The Hindu women in the novel are shown to be chaste, religious, devoted to their husbands. The Muslim women are shown to be promiscuous, perpetually inebriated, highly arrogant and cruel. The Hindu men, or rather the Rajput men emerge as strong, chivalrous, loyal and courageous. The Muslim men on the other hand inspite of their bravery on the battle-field are drawn as debauches or spiritless in the domestic sphere and easily influenced by the physical beauty of women. The first half of the book shows Mubarak fawning over Zeb-un-nissa's beauty and grovelling and pleading before her to marry him, and the second half of the novel depicts Zeb-un-nissa smitten with guilt at having ordered Mubarak's death, pleading for his mercy till the latter relents.

Even Aurangzeb the Emperor of Hindustan is shown to be influenced by the women of his household, especially by Oodipuir and Zeb-un-nissa. But such is the skill of Bankim's writing that what in the hands of a lesser writer would have become bland generalizations, appear to be the specific characteristics of Oodipuri, Zeb-un-nissa, Aurangzeb or Mubarak as individual characters. But in the

case of Rajput characters like Chanchalkumari, Nirmalkumari, Maniklal or Rajsingha care is taken to extend their characteristics to an entire community, to give the impression that all Rajputs are brave, loyal, etc.,etc. When the battle between Rajsingha and Aurangzeb is over and when Aurangzeb has been irredeemably defeated, Chanchalkumari who uptill now has been living under Rajsingha's protection, sits down to write a letter to her father seeking his permission once more to marry the Maharana. As usual her worldly wise friend Nirmal dictates the letter to her. Chanchal writes : "At the hands of the Maharana, the Moghal Emperor has..." and then stops to ask Nirmal whether she should write "at the hands of the Rajput" instead of "at the hands of the Maharana." Nirmal smiles and says, "Write so." Then Chanchal writes as Nirmal asks her to do -- "At the hands of the Rajput the Moghal Emperor has been defeated and has been driven out of Rajputana. Now there is no chance of their forcing us to do anything. In such a case what is your command for your daughter? I remain faithfully yours..." (p.661) Here an individual's ability to thwart his enemies successfully, becomes by extention a quality possessed by the entire race or community.

A typical device adopted by Bankim in this novel is to contrast the inside and the outside, the domestic confines and the open space of the battlefield, to bring out the complex personalities of his characters. To give the

readers a glimpse of Aurangzeb the man, Bankim shows the inside of Aurangzeb's palace where the emperor is in conversation with Nirmal for whom he feels an inexplicable attraction.

AURANGZEB: I hesitate to say because I have never said such a thing before. I have grown old but I have never loved any one. In my life I have loved only you. So if you would only say that in case you did not have a husband you would have agreed to be my Begum, then this heart---bare as a rock---would have some peace.

Nirmal believed what Aurangzeb said because his voice corroborated his emotions.(pp.638-39)

Aurangzeb gains the readers sympathy when he goes on to say:

Happiness cannot be gained or desires fulfilled even if one is the Emperor of this world. On this earth I have loved only you---but could not call you mine. I have loved you so I shall not keep you a prisoner ---I will let you free. I shall do whatever pleases you and not do anything that displeases you. You may go. Remember me.(p.639)

A lonely Aurangzeb longing for love and affection is juxtaposed sharply in the next chapter where Bankim presents the scene of the battlefield. On the battlefield Aurangzeb is a towering and majestic personality, a conqueror, a brave, shrewd, calculating manipulator. When he and his army are trapped by Rajsingha in a mountain pass he is like an angry lion, belying the weakness he showed for Nirmal.

In the treatment of Zeb-un-nissa's character also a contrast is shown between Zeb-un-nissa the Princess and Zeb-un-nissa a woman. Aurangzeb's daughter Zeb-un-nissa, puts forth an appearance of aloofness and coldness for her lover Mubarak and rejects all humane emotions on the plea that these are only worthy of lesser mortals. Once Mubarak

returns to his wife Dariya and refuses to meet the princess, she is hurt and angry and orders the death of Mubarak by snake-bite. As soon as her orders are executed she feels for the first time in her life the pangs of love and realizes what a great leveller love is--- "that even Empresses can love."(p.632)

She flung herself on the hard rock and wept like a peasants daughter. A sorrow that cannot be revealed to anyone is truly unbearable. The Empress experienced such a pain. Zeb-un-nissa thought, "If only I was a peasants daughter!" (p.634)

A dramatic change is also seen in Chanchal and Nirmal. Inside the palace in Roopnagarh where white marble is engraved with precious stones, thick carpets cover the floors, beautiful paintings decorate the walls, the beautiful women seated in the hall are surrounded with extravagance and opulence. Amidst all this Chanchalkumari makes her appearance, an eighteen year old beauty clad in the finest clothes and adorned with the most expensive jewels, looking like 'an idol of a goddess', 'fairer than a flower', 'a sculpted doll'.(p.562) In the battlefield she metamorphoses into 'Mother Kali' 'the saviour of the Rajputs', when she stands in front of the 50,000 Mughal soldier and challenges them to kill her first before they can fight with Ragsingha.(p.604) Fearlessly she faces the gigantic canons, the arrows and the fire-spitting army, till the enemy impressed by her beauty and courage relents and accepts defeat. Again Mubarak, Nirmal and Maniklal each become a different personality altogether once they leave

the enclosed space of domesticity. It is as if the open space of the battle field, its vastness and sparsity transform them, help them to transcend their petty everyday selves and desires, and invest them with magnanimity and courage. In fact for large parts Rajsingha presents an endless scene of grey battlefields, rugged mountains and valleys, advancing armies, great violence and the fluctuating destinies of two large collectives: the Mughals and Rajputs. The domestic lives of the protagonists and the human drama of love and desire get overshadowed by the epic movements of history.

Bankim's attempt to reconstruct the past was naturally based upon personal selection, upon infinite permutations, albeit from a finite source. Amitabh Ghosh in a discussion held in Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, pointed out that an artist working with historical material in his novel is like a potter. The potter unlike a painter has a tangible and irreducible substance in his hand: clay which he can only mould or shape.(17) In choosing to write a historical novel Bankim's imagination has to be confined by the factual evidences. Hence an obscure incident and a lesser known personage from history were deliberately picked up so as to make full use of the factual sparseness. The gaps and indeterminacies could be filled up with imagined details and magnified for creating an impression. So what might actually have been skirmishes between Aurangzeb and Rajsingha appear as fierce long drawn battles, and Rajsingha

is not merely a Rajput skilled in warfare but also "the refuge of the rejected and the protector of the weak"(18) the two epithets often used for Krishna.

The ideal man, as Bankim elucidates in *Krishnacharitra*, is the one who possesses "scholarship in knowledge, competence in judgement, promptitude in work, piety at heart, connoisseurship in taste...Again above that is total physical change, that is, body must be strong, healthy and expert in all type of physical exertion." The intention of Bankim in writing *Krishnacharitra* was not to establish Krishna's divinity but to "discuss only his human character".(19) For him Ramachandra, Yudhisthira, Arjuna, Laksmana and Devavrata Bhisma are more admirable and complete as human beings than the godly sages like Narada or Vasistha. It is to be noted that Bankim admires the essence of Kshatriyahood more than the passive godliness of the asectic Brahmins. It is therefore the Kshatriyas, whose greatest representative, according to Bankim, is Krishna himself,(20) who "posses all qualities and it is in them that all the faculties have developed fully. They [the Kshatriyas] are aloof though seated on thrones, fond of truth though wielding the bow, scholars though monarchs, powerful yet filled with love for all".(21) In this definition Kshatriyahood is conflated with the ideal of manhood in general. Bankim's Rajsingha possesses all these attributes. He has maturity and wisdom of middle age, handsome demeanour and the gentleness of noble breeding.

Above all he is a brave warrior who also respects his enemies; a chivalrous man who rescues Chanchal from the Mughals but would not marry her without her father's consent; a king who looks after the welfare of his subjects. All these qualities in Rajsingha are meant to highlight the contrast between him and Aurangzeb as kings. At the end of his novel Bankim maintains that Rajsingha's sons spread his kingdom even upto Saurashtra "but the oppressed subjects came and complained to Rajsingha. A merciful Rajsingh feeling pity for them ordered Bhimsingha to come back. On the plea of mercy he did not re-establish the Hindu kingdom".(p.667) The magnanimity on the part of Rajsingha serves two fictional purposes. It establishes the greatness of Rajsingha for whom human considerations stand higher than territorial ambition. And it also relieves Bankim of the responsibility of documenting something (expansion of the Hindu rajya) that could not be historically authenticated.

If Bankim's purpose in drawing men like Rajsingha and Maniklal, Jagatsingha and Hemchandra was to nullify the charge of effeminacy levelled by the Europeans on the Indian men, his heroines too are often empowered women, thereby proving, to quote Ashis Nandy " the critical role that women as a symbol and womanliness as an aspect of Indian identity have played".(22) The equation between women and political potency was not new in the Hindu culture and can be seen in the Mahabharata and the mythologies. Shakti in the form of a woman was not new but its potentials were being harnessed

for the first time in literature for a definite political purpose. In the first part of Bankim's Sitaram, Shri appears as Chandi, the fierce goddess who destroyed the demon Mahisasura. A frenzied Shri interrupts a fight between two communities: the Hindus and the Muslims. Bankim describes her as :

..the long-haired dusky Chandi with her two feet strongly implanted on the two branches of a tree, her left hand held a branch, with her right hand she spun the end of her sari in the air and shouted, "Kill! kill! Kill the enemy!...as if the rider of the lion herself stood on the back of a lion fighting in the battlefield. As if the Mother intoxicated by the desire to kill the demon was calling, "Kill! kill! Kill the enemy!". A shameless, possessed, fearless and unrelenting Shri kept shouting, "Kill! kill the enemy! The enemy of the gods, the enemy of men, the enemy of the Hindus, my enemy---kill them. Her beautiful arms, parted lips, dilated nostrils, glittering eyes, hair falling on her forehead moist with sweat inspired all the Hindus who shouted "Victory to Mother Chandi" and rushed toward the enemy.(23)

Kali the sustaining feminine principle, the goddess of annihilation, vengeance and aggression became increasingly popular in Bengal in the the 19th century. Worship of Kali formerly done only by the marginal sections of the society like the dacoits and the prostitutes, came to be slowly appropriated by the urban nouveaux rich of Bengal -- the Mullicks, Debs, Sens, and the Sinhas. Durga, the other co-ordinate of the Shakti image was a mother figure, the benign protector, the provider of food and nurture (Annapurna). Durga Puja became a popular religious and cultural festival of this region and came to be associated with the elite castes. In India as in most agricultural countries, the dominant image of the land has always been



feminine -- 'dharitri', the all sustaining land, the provider of food and shelter. Similarly all natural calamities were associated with the female principle; Nature -- 'Prakriti' itself was feminine. Chandi was a personification of this principle -- a mother goddess with ten hands who is supplicated by the gods to kill the demon Mahisasura in order to liberate the oppressed people of the earth. In Bengal the Mother goddess acquired a double persona. She could be either the fair, serene, benign mother surrounded by her four children, or she could be the dark, naked, tongue-lolling annihilator, a garland of skulls around her neck, dancing in rage, with her foot poised over the prostrate Shiva. Both the images admirably suited the nationalist purpose of the times. In Anandamath, Mahendra is led into a temple in the forest by Satyananda Thakur, the leader of the 'Santans'. In the first chamber Mahendra sees an extremely beautiful, bejewelled image of a smiling Jagadhatri. Mahendra asks, "Who is she?" and Satyananda replies, "Mother -- as she was." Next Mahendra is taken to a dimly lit room where he sees the image of Kali.

'The Brahmachari said, "See this is what the Mother is now."

Mahendra fearfully said, "Kali."

Brahmachari: Kali---shrouded in darkness, the dark Mother. Impoverished, that is why she is naked. Today the entire country is a cremation ground ---that is why the Mother wears a garland of skulls.

Then Mahendra is taken through a tunnel which leads into a brightly lit chamber which is filled with the sweet songs of birds. Here Mahendra sees the golden image of the ten armed Goddess, laughing and looking radiant in the new light of the morning. The

Brahmachari saluted her and said, "This is what the Mother will become."(24)

Almost all of Bankim's novels are centered around women, and whether it be Tillotama and Ayesha in Durgehnandini, Mrinalini and Manorama in Mrinalini, Suryamukhi and Kunda in Bishbriksha, Saibalini in Chandrashekhar, Rohini and Bharamar in Krishnakanter Will, Debi in Debi-Chaudhurani, Shri in Sitaram, Kalyani and Shanti in Anandamath, or Chanchal and Nirmal in Rajsingha, they all show a queer synthesis between the submissive and the empowered roles of women. The novel Rajsingha though named after the hero is actually more fit to be named after the heroine. Though Rajsingha is important as far as his status as a king is concerned, it is actually the women in the novel who propel the action and enable the plot to progress. Without transgressing the accepted feminine qualities Bankim's heroines are made to possess power and agency. In the process they get cast in a double role. Like most of Bankim's female protagonists, Chanchal and Nirmal are paragons of beauty and therefore vulnerable, so that they have to be protected and this becomes the extended metaphor for the motherland to be protected from territorial aggression. On the other hand beauty itself empowers them. Nirmal's beauty and wit overpowers Aurangzeb so that far from punishing her for her impudence he fulfills most of her whims. Chanchal's divine beauty in the battlefield impresses the chief of the Moghal army, Mubarak, so much that he declines to fight with the Rajputs and leaves with

his army.

These women brought up in the sheltered comfort of palaces often break the standard feminine paradigms. They go against their fathers wishes, propose to men whom they want to marry, enter the battlefield with naked swords in their hands, and are successfully able to cheat, deceive and manipulate their enemies with their superior intelligence and martial art. The exact balance of meekness and aggressiveness, of coyness and boldness, of feminine grace and intelligence is manipulated with extreme dexterity in an attempt to create and fulfil the need for a woman who can fight against oppression and injustice and yet can be contained within the patriarchal society. So the princess of Roopnagar, the paragon of beauty can appear as Chandi on the battlefield, 'a goddess with huge eyes and a smile on her face' and be hailed as 'the Mother Goddess', 'Victory to Mother Kali' as she faces the fifty thousand armed Moghal soldiers.(p.604) Her action does not surprise the readers nor are they intended to find her role inappropriate because a page later Bankim explains the reason why Rajput women 'have to' transgress the traditional limits of femininity. Seeing a woman with a sword in her hand and leading the Rajput army Mubarak tauntingly asks Rajsingha: "Since when have the brave men of Udaipur been under the protection of women?" 'Rajsingha's burning eyes emitted fire. He said, "Since the day the Moghal Emperor has started oppressing the helpless, since then the Rajput women have gained

strength."'(p.606)

The figure that captured the literary imagination of the 19th and 20th century was that of a powerful autonomous and self confident woman who could be a custodian of the moral life of both the household and the nation. In Bankim's novel the women who defined the normal canons of femininity were the same time "both the symbol of a ravaged order and of the resistance to such ravage".(25) In most instances like Debi Chaudhurani, Shri, Shanti or Chanchalkumari the ravaged order itself gives them the strength and the resolution to resist such ravages. In Bankim, as in the other nationalist writers of this period, the position of women is ambivalent. On the one hand characters like Shri, Shanti, Debi Chaudhurani and Chanchal are 'Viranganas'- the women who appropriate masculine attributes by joining the army in the battlefield with a sword in their hands. On the other hand, and often simultaneously their weakness as women become their strength. Their spritiual strength lay in the fact that they were women -- an ideology that Gandhi was to adopt later. Thus Devi Chaudhurani, the dacoit who struck terror in the heart of many, still holds the rein in the private domain when she comes back as the third wife of Brajeshwar; and Chanchal who leads the Rajput's army against the Mughals -- a radiant Shakti figure -- can threaten to consume poison because according to her, "If you men know how to die fighting, cannot we women give up our lives too ?(p.606) And

Nirmal when threatened to be killed by Aurangzeb smilingly replies:

The daughter of a Hindu is not afraid to die by fire. Has the emperor of Hindustan never heard that Hindu women can smilingly accompany her husband on the burning pyre ? The death that you are threatening me with, my mother, my grandmother, and my ancestors have died the same death. I too pray that by the grace of God I can get a place besides my husband and die by burning myself on his pyre.(p.627)

It must be remembered that the practice of Sati had reached a climax during the East India Company's rule especially in Bengal. From 1815-1828 the Bengal Presidency recorded the highest figure for immolation of widows on their husband's pyre. The Sati was a person to be respected and venerated and was considered to embody a high ideal of womanhood. Immediately after William Bentick abolished Sati in 1828, the Samachara Chandrika let out a volley of criticism in its editorial and published protests from the influential section of the public.(26) While most of the Bengali intellectuals of the subsequent generations may have been against the barbaric practice in real life, the emotive value of the image of a woman of the past who had the courage to face death for an abstract ideal continued to be potent.(27) Again, the Rajput practice of 'Jauhar' where the women of the royal household threw themselves into a burning pyre in order to save their chastity from the invading enemies still continued to have a strong emotional appeal. It would be wrong to say that Bankim approved of these practices. What he certainly tried to do was to harness the image of the courageous and self-annihilating woman for

nationalist purpose. By drawing on traditional symbols of female power he was emphasizing women's strength and appealing to them as self-conscious arbiters of their own destiny.

The idea or the vision in Bankim's novel is of a community of people who would be able to overthrow the foreign ruler and return to their glorious, unclouded past. The 'golden' past was an idealised utopia, an exemplum which had to be recreated once more. It is clearly identified as a Hindu past. The valorisation of the past involved a detailed agenda -- the spread of knowledge about the religion and the tradition of the community and the enrichment of one's own language. In several essays in Bangadarshan, especially in 'Bangla Bhasha', Bankim pleaded for the cause of Bangla -- not at the cost of English, but side by side with it and he mocked the English educated Bengalis who had given up their mother tongue. He gave a new direction to Bangla prose by experimenting with its different registers -- from the highly Sanskritized to the Prakrit-oriented colloquial; from the formal to the local and indigenous. The question of language in Bankim's Rajsingha is complex, and I have attempted to analyse the fictional purposes behind the different registers. In this novel, Bankim makes prolific use of Hindi and Urdu words to show that the Muslims characters speak another language. The Rajputs who are identified as 'we' speak in Bengali though being from Rajasthan, in real life they do not speak this

language. The linguistic variation therefore indicate the difference between two communities. The Rajput characters while speaking to the Muslims occasionally use Hindi-Urdu but when they talk amongst themselves they use their 'own' language, that is, Bangla. Because of linguistic similarity the readers of Rajsingha, that is, the Bengali readers would immediately identify with the Rajputs, a community with whom they have actually very little in common. An examination of the dialogue between two Muslim characters -- the old woman who comes to sell portraits of kings in the palace of Roopnagar and her son -- would show the effects of Bankims's deliberate usage of Bangla- Hindustani distinction in speech. The old woman has seen Chanchalkumari stamp on Aurengzeb's portrait and though she has been paid to keep her mouth shut she is unable to digest this sensational piece of information. When her son sits down to have dinner they have the following conversation which I have transcribed phonetically. To make a typographic distinction between the Bangla and the Hindi words bold face type has been used for the Bangla words in this conversation.

Chele Khaite Khaite bolilo, "Ammaji! Roopnagarka jo kessa aap farmaenge boli thi ?"

Ma bolilo, "Chup! Woh baat muh me mat lao baapjan! Meyne keya boli thi ? Kheyalme boli thi shaeyd!"...

After some prodding from her son she confesses that the incident had to do with the princess of Roopnagar.

Ma: Shref dimag bapjan. Londi-ne badshahe Alam ko nahin manti!

Chele: Badshahe Alam ko gali di hogi ?

Ma: Gali -- bapjan ! Usse bhi jabar kuuch !

Chele: Ussei bhi jabar! Keya ho sakta ? Badshah Alam ko am mar sakta nai !

Ma: Usse bhi jabar.

Chele: Mar se bhi jabar ?

Ma: Bapjan -- aur puchio mat -- Maine unki neemak khaeen.

Chele: Neemak khaey ho ! Kistare ma ?

Ma: Asharfi deen.

Chele: Kahe maji?

Ma: Uski gunah-ke bat kisika pas bolna monaseb nehin, isliye.

Chele: Accha bat hai. Mujhko ekh-to asharfi bakshish farmaiye.

Ma: Kahe re beta ?

Chele: Nahin to mujhko bol dijiye bat-tho kiya hai ?

Ma: Bat aur kiya, Badshahka tasvir- toba! toba! bat-tho abhi nikli thi !

Chele: Tasvir bhang dala ?

Ma: Are beta, lath-se bhang dala! Toba! Maine neemakharami kar chuka.

Chele: Neemakharami keya hai isme,- tom ma, maine beta! Hamara bolne-se neemakharami keya hai ?

Ma: Dekhio baapjan, kisiko bolio mat.

Chele: Aap khaterjama rahiey- kisiko pas nehin bolenge. (pp.566-67)

Certain observations can be made about such linguistic usages. First, the Hindi as spoken by the portrait seller and her son is often grammatically and syntactically wrong. In fact this is exactly the way a Bengali who knows a little Hindi would speak. This makes it easier for Bengali readers



to understand the conversation. It will also be noticed that a mixture of Bangla and Hindi words like 'bhang-dala' is used. Second these two characters do not speak pure, courtly Hindi. Instead they use a dialect which is clear by words like 'puchio mat', 'Khaeen', 'deen', thereby reflecting the class to which they belong. Bankim's astuteness as a writer lay in his alertness about the difference between the earthly and pungent dialect of the common people and the refined language spoken by the upper classes. For Bankim it has always been "the subject of the composition that should determine the greatness or the commonness of language." (28) Hence the language of the portrait seller or her son, or Dariya, or Maniklal's aunt marks them out as belonging to the lower rungs of society and is sharply contrasted with the formal and refined language used by Rajsingha, Aurangzeb, Chanchalkumari or Zeb-un-nissa. Bankim uses different linguistic registers to show difference not only between two religious communities but also between the classes in the same community. The method is not mimetic, merely suggestive. Bankim's effort of coalescing two different communities -- the Rajputs and the Bengalis -- to give them one identity is never made explicit. This seems to be an unspoken assumption in the text. The only link among the Rajputs and the Bengali readers of Bankim was their religion -- they were all Hindus. Hinduism became a tool for building a nation. Knowing well how difficult it was to unite a people with so many differences amongst them, Bankim appealed to their

common denominator :

I am a Hindu, You are a Hindu, Ram is a Hindu, Jodu is a Hindu; there are millions and millions of Hindus. The welfare of these millions of Hindus would mean my welfare. What does not benefit them would not benefit me. So I must not do anything that harms them. As I must perform certain action and forbear from doing others, so should you, Ram, Jodu and all the Hindus. The duty of all Hindus is therefore to work unitedly for a common goal. This is nationalism's first lesson but only half the lesson.

Apart from the Hindu jati there are other jatis in this world. Their welfare may not mean our good. In many places their good might mean harm for us. Where it means good for them and harm for us, we shall see to it that no good can come to them. If it means ill-treating another community, we shall do so... This is nationalism's second lesson. (29)

Sudipto Kaviraj in Imaginary History brings to our attention the ambiguous use of the term 'jati' in Bankim's essays.(30) In Bangla 'jati' has a wide range of linguistic connotations---caste, religion, linguistic community, nation. Bankim had often to add footnotes in his essays in order to explain the exact way in which this term was to be construed in a particular context. How the nation was to be visualized was not yet very clear. The indeterminacy of the collectivity that would constitute the nation and the 'fuzziness' of the boundary were problems bothering the minds of the Indian intellectuals of that time. 'Nation' and 'Nationalism' were terms borrowed from the West but were alien in the context of India where the concept of a community was more important. The exact defining parameter of this collective had not been determined yet. Bankim's writing reflects the discursive difficulty in the usage of these new terms. Sometimes for Bankim, the Bengalis

constitute a community but he overlooks the fact that the Bengalis include the babus and the peasants, the Hindus and the Muslims. The 'we' for Bankim when the need arises include the Rajputs and the Marathas, a people linguistically and culturally vastly different from the Bengalis. Again he is not very sure about the people he ought not to include in this sphere of solidarity. Unlike the religious rigidity in some of his novels, in his essay titled 'Bangadesher Krishak' (The Peasants of Bengal) Bankim makes no distinction between the Hindu peasant and the Muslim peasant, both of whom are seen to be Bengalis and equally oppressed. Obviously then for Bankim the subalterns have a solidarity irrespective of the religion or caste to which they belong. If 'mlecchhas' and 'yavanas' are to be left out then exactly who or what constitutes these sections? Bankim is not unaware of the problems of such negations in nation formation. In the essay 'Bahubal O Bakyabal', he concedes that the Bengali community which is apparently 'an uncontaminated Aryajati', appears upon closer inspection to be a mixture of four distinct races: 'the Arya Hindu, the Anarya Hindu, the Arya-Anarya mixed Hindu, and the Bengali Muslim.' (31) Since the times demand a tangible concept of a nation and all the available identities cannot fit into it, it is imperative to imagine an utopia. A community which needs to be united now is imagined to have been already united in the past, and as Kaviraj puts it, "only a fictional history can show such reconstructed Hindus or Indians, putting men of the future into events of the past."

(32)

The ending of the novel Rajsingha ---the victory of the Rajput army against Aurangzeb---may not be historically verifiable but it follows the logic of the fictional narrative. The closures of Bankim's novels are often fraught with ambiguity and troubled with an anticlimactic note. Rajsingha, Sitaram, Debi-Chaudhurani, Anandmath end in the moral victory of justice over oppression. Rajsingha is shown to have defeated the Mughal army successfully once and for all; in Sitaram, Shri and Jayanti successfully thwart the fiendish oppression by Sitaram; the notorious outlaw Debi-Chaudhurani is tamed; and the Santans of Anandamath give a crushing defeat to the Muslims and the English army so that "none was left to take the news of the war back to Warren Hastings".(33) After the victory, and after the spell of individual heroism there is a curious vacuum in all these novels: a sense of disappointment, a dissolution of the exhilarating moment, a feeling of expectations not fulfilled. Shri and Jayanti leave for an unidentified place; the imperious Debi-Chaudhurani, now Profulla, emerges as a good daughter-in-law, washing utensils and caring for the large household; and at the end of Anandamath the Mahapurusa consoles Satyandra saying that the time has not come to establish the Hindu rajya. The English would rule for some more time as "they are not our enemies. The English are our friends. There is no power that can defeat them."(34) So saying the two leave for some

unknown destination in the Himalayas to seek further spiritual knowledge in order to liberate their motherland. Only Rajsingha is an exception--- it ends on a high note. The victory of a handful of Rajputs over the formidable Mughal army with which the novel ends is in no way an attempt to falsify history or to revert facts. But by choosing to end the novel at a particular point in time Bankim gives a different interpretation of history, and shows that all historical situations can be regarded as open and that all political situations can be renegotiated.

Sudipto Kaviraj draws our attention to the "double endings" of Bankim's novel like in Anandamath, Debi-Chaudhurani and Rajsingha. By double endings Kaviraj means that "these stories end twice".(35) Sometimes for example the Santans in Anandamath defeat the enemies in a battle, which is in a way the end of the novel, but when this victory is invalidated at the advice of the spiritual leader the second closure is achieved. The narratives are situated in the past, but the ending of these novels brings the reader to the present. The past and present converge at the end of the narrative and the hope for a better future is expressed. "The narrative end, but in each there is a case for an analogical extension: if there are similar circumstances in future, similar acts would be necessary".(36) The sudden shift in tense adds a folkloric dimension to these novel. After the past deeds and acts have been narrated, the storyteller comes backs to the

present so that his present audience can relate to the characters of the past. In Anandamath after Shanti and Satyananda disappear into the night, the authorial voice takes over, or one can say the voice of Time intrudes:

Alas mother, would they come again ? Would a son like Jivananda and a daughter like Shanti take birth again ?(37)

The convergence of two times is more explicitly seen in Debi Chandhurani:

Now come again Profulla... Come and stand in our midst- let us see you once more. Stand once more in front of this society and say, " I am not new, I am old. I am merely those words. I have come so many times, but you had forgotten me, so I had to come again.(38)

Rajsingha ends in an Epilogue, an 'Author's Appeal' that he should not be misunderstood as a hater of Muslims. His intention is not to "depict the Muslims as inferior because good and evil exist in both Hindu and Muslims," but to show that the one who has dharma- whether a Hindu or a Muslim- is the best". After this gratuitous justification of his unequal handling of two religions---something Bankim himself must have been self-conscious about, he ends with a comparison of Aurangzeb with Philips the Second of Spain and Rajsingha with William of Orange.

In Europe William is well known as one of the foremost patriotic and virtuous heroes; this country does not have a history- so no one knows Rajsingha.(pp.667-68)

It is significant that Bankim has to compare the rulers of Hindustan with those of Europe to drive home his point. It shows that there is an obvious admiration for the

foreigners who were not only great rulers of their Empire but also great conquerors. At the same time, Bankim's attitude reveals the attempt of a subjugated and humiliated nation to raise its head, to prove its worth not only in the eyes of the foreigners but, more significantly, in the eyes of its own people. Bankim was also acknowledging the role that history and stories play in uniting a nation. By dislocating the events of the past and giving it a contemporary significance, Bankim was providing a conscious nationalist subtext to his novel and trying to unite the nation by narratives before action could do so.

- (1) Salman Rushdie, Midnight's Children ( Avon Books, New York, 1982), p.549.
- (2) *ibid.*, pp.548-49.
- (3) *ibid.*, p.550.
- (4) Quoted from Historical Drama : The Relation of Literature and Reality by Herbert Lindenberger (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1975), p.54.
- (5) Quoted from Cultural History of Rajasthan by Kalyan Kumar Ganguli (Sandeep Prakashan, Delhi, 1983), p.243.
- (6) At the end of the nineteenth century a number of novels and plays written in Bangla were the result of Tod's influence. Romesh Chandra Dutt's novels Rajput Jivan Sandhya and Mahatrashttra Jivan Prabhat, and plays like Dvijendralal Roy's Tarabai and Girish Chandra Ghosh's Chanda were based on Tod's Annals.
- (7) James Tod, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (Vol.I) (K.M.N. Publishers, New Delhi, 1971), p.297
- (8) *ibid.*, p.297.
- (9) *ibid.*, p.301.
- (10) Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy : Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism (Oxford University Press, 1993), p.7
- (11) 'Bharat Kalanka', Bankimchandra Chattopadhyya , Bankim Rachanavali, Vol.II, (Sahitya Sansad, Calcutta), p.238. All further references to Bankim's essays are from this volume. Translations from the original Bangla have been done by me.
- (12) *ibid.*, p.236.
- (13) BR,II, p.197.
- (14) Preface to Rajsingha, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyya Bankim Rachanavali, Upanyas Samagra Vol.I, (Tuli Kalam, Calcutta, 1986). All further references to Bankim's novel wherever quoted would be made from this volume and would be indicated only by the page number. Translations from the original Bangla have been done by me.
- (15) Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy, p.26.
- (16) Sir Jadunath Sarkar, History of Aurangzib : Northern India 1658-1681 Vol.III. (Orient Longman Ltd., Bombay, 1972)
- (17) The discussion was held at Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi on 4th March, 1994. In another recent Sahitya Akademi meet in New Delhi on 6th February, 1994, Henri Lopez said something similar. He said that there are two kinds of novelists who can be compared with architects and musicians respectively. One kind builds with available material, the other is not limited by material constraints.
- (18) Preface to Rajsingha.



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- (19) Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Krishna Charitra (Classics of the East, M.P.Birla Foundation, Calcutta, 1991, Chapter I, 'The Aim').
  - (20) Krishna may have had all the qualities of a Kshatriya but actually he was a Yadav by caste. Thus when Bankim calls Krishna the greatest representative of the Kshatriyas, he is not talking about caste but about the ideals of manhood.
  - (21) Krishna Charitra, 'The Aim'.
  - (22) Ashis Nandy, At the Edge of Psychology (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993), p.40.
  - (23) BR, I, p.835.
  - (24) BR, I, p.683.
  - (25) Jasodhara Bagchi, Economic and Political Weekly. Quoted from Women Writing in India Vol.I, ed.by Susie Tharu and K.Lalita (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1991), p.173.
  - (26) Upendra Thakur, History of Suicide (Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, Delhi, 1963), p.176.
  - (27) Tagore wrote a passionate homage to all those widows who chose to immolate themselves on the pyre of their husband:  
  
Salutations to all those grandmothers of Bengal who sacrificed their lives. She who nurtured the nation, do not forget her even if you be in the heaven. O, Aryan woman, promote your beloved sons from troubles and anxieties of the world...You have beautified the death and sanctified it too ...By your sacred sacrifice of yourself the flames of Bengal have purified...We will bow down before the fire which is imperishable...Death, how easy, how glowing, and how noble it is.  
  
Cited in Upendra Thakur, History of Suicide (Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, Delhi, 1963), pp.183-84.
  - (28) 'Bangla Bhasha', BR, II, p.373.
  - (29) 'Bharat Kalanka', BR, II, p.239.
  - (30) Sudipto Kaviraj, Imaginary History (Occasional Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi), p.62.
  - (31) BR, II, p.363.
  - (32) Sudipto Kaviraj, Imaginary History, pp.69-70.
  - (33) BR, I, p.738.
  - (34) BR, I, p.742.
  - (35) Sudipto Kaviraj, Imaginary History, p.133.
  - (36) *ibid.*, p.135.
  - (37) BR, I, p.740.
  - (38) BR, I, p.826.

## CHAPTER IV

### TARA

To reinforce its power and control over the Indian people, the British needed a historiography that justified their presence on the sub-continent. The project was predicated upon the need to highlight the difference between two cultures: the Indians and the British, the colonized and the colonizers.(1) The irreconcilable differences in colour, moral values, work culture and religion between the British rulers and the Indian subjects formed the subtext of colonial history. The deliberate and conscious attempts on part of the English historians to pinpoint certain obvious and often constructed polarities between the Orient and the Occident in order to consolidate its position of ideological control, gave rise to a completely new kind of knowledge. As Edward Said points out in the introduction to his influential work Orientalism : " Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections."(2)

The European colonizers had to constantly reiterate their position of superiority over the colonized and also had to demonstrate the precise conditions of this superiority if they were to successfully maintain their

power over the indigenous people. The colonialist discourse of the Orient , " a created body of theory and practice", (3) which Said terms as 'Orientalism' was a much needed tool for the easy management and domination of the subject race. By pointing out the limitation of the subject race , by telling them what is good for them, by perpetuating the ideology that the Orientals are lazy, inefficient and cunning, their civilization primitive, their religion barbaric and their minds irrational, the colonizers hoped to strengthen their own positions. They could control efficiently by making the Indians believe that the Europeans are physically stronger, technically superior, mentally advanced and worthy of ruling over them. How else, the implicit argument went, could a handful of English traders conquer such a vast sub-continent inhabited by millions of people?

Once the representation of the Orient was complete, once the dichotomy between 'Us' and 'Them' was firmly entrenched, no empirical evidence could alter or dislodge this knowledge. But as one critic of British hegemony in India points out, " There was one Indian battle that Britain never won. It was a battle for appropriation of the Indian past." (4) As the colonizers negatively assessed the Indians, it made the subject people eager to reconstruct their past in order to define and affirm their identity. So if the colonialist enterprise was to perpetrate the ideology that the Indians are effeminate, lazy and martially inferior to the West, the colonized's project was to prove that their

past was exactly the opposite of this. By attempting to do this they were in a way submitting to the terms of discourse set up by the British, accepting the valorisation of aggression and masculinity.

The nationalist project of appropriating the past for their own use can in no way be interpreted as anti-imperialist or an attempt to destroy or dislodge the colonial state. In fact, many of the Indian nationalists actively colluded with the British Raj and accommodated themselves in its administration. Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, the Brahmo leader Keshabchandra Sen, his close associate Protap Mazoomdar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya and Vivekananda retained an almost unqualified admiration for many facets of European culture. The reconstruction of the past was a defensive attitude -- a subjugated people's feeble attempt to assert their pre-colonial identity. At the same time it was also natural that they should secretly admire the civilization of the master race. In Europe Reconsidered Tapan Raychaudhuri who records the changing perceptions and attitudes of 19th century Bengal when it confronted the West, writes:

We do not have the data to decide what proportion of the new intelligentsia [of India] thought of western culture as something wonderful and believed, overtly or otherwise, that it represented heights India could never hope to attain. The evidence, however, suggests that such attitudes were fairly pervasive. The fact of dominance was evidence enough of superior might. That might was seen to be based on formidable material and intellectual achievements.(5)

Dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary Indian society, political subjection and the resultant loss of self-respect was markedly seen in the works of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya, the first important novelist in the Bengali language. Like Bankim, Kishorilal Goswami the first historical novelist in Hindi literature, too felt no hope of national regeneration until India justly felt a sense of pride in her past if not in her present. Born in Brindavan (in present Uttar Pradesh) in January 1866, and known as the father of historical romances in Hindi, Goswami wrote 12 historical novels within a period of 33 years. His first novel Hridayaharini, wa Adarsh Ramani was written in 1890 and his last novel Gupta-Godna in 1922-23. He died in 1932 in Kasi. Very little is known about Goswami's life and background primarily because of the absence of any biographical work on him, and secondly because of a lack of enthusiasm amongst the literary critics who dismiss him as a minor writer of fantasy and adventure not worthy of serious critical scrutiny. But his name continues to be included in the histories of Hindi literature nor can one overlook the immense popularity of his books in the early 20th century. Most of Goswami's historical romances saw at least two reprints within ten to fifteen years of its publication. While Bankim and Goswami wrote roughly in the same period and sometimes on identical themes (for example Rajsingha and Tara), the former's works continue to generate an ever increasing response from readers and critics, but Goswami's works are hardly known today even in academic circles. What

was Goswami's inspiration, his agenda and ideological stance? Once a best-selling writer why is he so little read today? To answer these questions we have to rely totally on his texts and the prefaces he wrote to them, for unlike Bankim, Goswami's views are not available to us in the form of essays. I have selected Goswami's Tara for analysis not only because of all the novels written by him that are set in the past this comes closest to being a historical novel but because this novel best illustrates the contemporary concepts of nationalism and its link with the projection of a Hindu identity

As a writer of historical romances, Kishorilal Goswami, is conscious of the responsibility he owes both to the field of history and imaginative fiction but unlike Bankim's essays in Bangadarshan on history, Goswami did not record his thinking at length through analysis and discussion. All we have are his brief prefatory comments to the novels. Like Bankim, Goswami feels the urgency to chronicle the events of the past so that "the readers of novels should also enjoy facts from history. This would cultivate the taste of the readers to read not only novels but also history, so that the lack of history in the Hindi language can be mitigated."(6) The preface to Tara shows Goswami's awareness of the interactive relationship between history and literature:

The foundation of history is imagination. As there can be no history without true facts, similarly there can be no novel without a fitting imagination. As in history one cannot do without real events, similarly a

novel cannot be written without depending on imagination.

He goes on to state categorically:

I am writing a novel, not history... In my creations [novels] I have given less attention to historical events and paid more importance to imagination. Sometimes in a tussle between imagination and history I have said goodbye to the latter.(7)

Goswami's novel fits precisely that category of historical fiction which in a different context an American critic describes as recreating "a world of past thought and feeling, rather than those which interpret or illuminate a personality or a group of novels", because in such novels the fictional narrator's attitudes towards the event is more important than the event itself.(8)

Like his contemporary Bankim, Goswami too has greater faith on the European historians from whom he culls his material for his novels than the "fanatic Muslim historians who are inclined towards their own community" and gives "a thousand thanks to the European historians by whose efforts we know a lot of truth about the Muslim rule."(9) Tara, he says in the preface has been inspired by "Tod's Rajasthan, Bernier's Travels, an essay in Bangla and the records of Signor Mannucci." Goswami does not specify details of the essay in Bangla'. He was well versed in Bangla among many other languages like Sanskrit, Urdu, Farsi and it is quite probable that Bankim's historical novels, especially Rajsingha which had been published nine years ago in 1893 might have influenced Goswami's writings. The construction

of a particular history or to be more accurate, the appropriation of particular events in the past was a part of a conscious political process. The past had to be seen in a certain perspective to create a sense of pride and to consolidate a nation in the present. The earlier cultural and conceptual identities of Bharatvarsha or Jambudwipa were empirically unhelpful in the modern context as these lacked a political identity.

Goswami's assertion about the inextricable mixture of truths and untruths in his novels can then be seen as an attempt to construct an alternative history of India that would be morally uplifting. In this process Goswami, like Bankim was doing an important thing--- they were not only justifying the worth of their community or nation to the outsider but were also trying to raise the self-esteem of their people in the present. But the 'we' that would constitute a nation remained somewhat indeterminate, language, religion and geographical location providing different, and at times overlapping markers of cohesiveness. Ironically, it was the British who with their picture of the 'Orient' or with their 'history of India' provided a sense of oneness to the Indians looking for an identity. When Bankim referred to 'amader jati' (our community or nation) he often meant the Bengali, but sometimes he included the Rajputs and the Marathas in this collective fold. In the Preface to Tara Goswami says that he sets out to write about "the true glory of the Aryans" --- a declaration of intent



that attempts a definition of his chosen community even though the geneology may be doubtful. By this statement Goswami is entering into a narrative contract with his readers, making it clear whom it excludes. Narrating a story then becomes an act of consolidating the identity of a group.

Hindu renaissance and the portrayal of the ancient glory of Hinduism seem to be Goswami's aim in writing historical novels. The careful manipulation of characters and events bear evidence of this. In the fifth part of Goswami's first novel Hridyahaarini, Bharatvarsha in the past is presented as an utopia, a land of the Gods, the learned and the just:

See, there was a time when our Bharatvarsha was the principal country on this earth. The kings of this land ruled over the entire world. In this country the virtuous Laxmi and Saraswati were born, the learned Brahmins of this land spread all existing knowledge in this world, and even the uncivilized countries reached the peak of civilization after receiving knowledge from the learned of this country.(10)

Potentially, one of the most marked feature of this aggressively Hindu orientation was the negative representation of the rule of Muslim dynasties in India. The use of prejorative like 'mlechha' and 'yavana' express a growing hatred for the outsider. In the Nineteenth Purana the 'yavanik' is perceived as an 'evil-doer' and a 'plunderer'.(11) Even Bankim while evoking a Hindu identity never failed to make a dig at the Muslim rulers.(12) Goswami's views conformed with those of his

contemporaries. Blaming Bharat's loss of independence on "cruel fate" and the Muslims, he writes :

Since the day this country became a slave of the Muslims, she lost her learning, religion, glory, self-respect and the sense of a community. So much so that today the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the history of the past ages appear to be false or to have been a dream. Isn't it the cruel manipulation of Time that it has picked up Bharat from the highest peaks of progress and dropped it to the darkest hell of suffering ? (13)

Goswami's anti-Muslim feeling manifests itself clearly in the beginning of Tara where Dara, the eldest son of Shah Jahan the Emperor of Hindustan, is shown to profess his love for his sister Jahanara. The obvious hint at an incestuous relationship between Dara and Jahanara, as depicted by Goswami, does in no way further the plot except to malign the royal Muslim characters in particular and Islam in general. Dara who is enamoured by the beauty of Tara, the Rajput princess, solicits the help of his elder sister Jahanara in obtaining Tara. The offended Jahanara feels threatened at this request. Their conversation is quoted below:

DARA: ...Dear sister! Except you, not even God can fulfil my desire [to marry Tara].

JAHANARA : But Prince! Just consider the plight of your beautiful wife, Mehar-un-nissa, think of that slave from Baghdad who a short while ago was sent as gift to you by Shah Bukhara, and also think of those women from foreign lands who have left everything for you. And don't you remember that day when you promised something to me in the presence of the Koran? You, who had made a bond of agreement with me is now pleading and grovelling before me to solicit Tara's case. This only shows how shameless and unjust you can be! It is indeed sad that I trusted you and as a consequence destroyed myself. (Tara, Part One, p.3)

In almost all his novels Goswami has depicted the Muslim characters negatively. They are mean, selfish, treacherous and suspicious by nature, and except perhaps for the character of Kanak Kusum 'mastani', none of the others has been shown to be straightforward in their dealing with either their Hindu or Muslim acquaintances. Goswami sets out to reconstruct his own history which disregards all the existing views of historical figures that do not suit his purpose. Akbar, Dara and Siraj-ud-daullah who are generally regarded both by the Muslim and the Hindus historians as worthy and benevolent rulers are depicted unfavourably by Goswami. In Sona aur Sugandha (1909) Akbar is shown to be a cunning and selfish ruler, fond of a life of extravagance and sensual pleasure. In Lavanjalata wa Adarsha Bala (1890), Siraj-ud-daullah is a cruel tyrant. About the Nawab of Bengal Goswami writes:

Some historians depict him as a good, worthy and able ruler. I have no hesitation in accepting their opinion, but he was so arrogant and pleasure loving that Bengalis hated him and entire Bengal came to support the British. If Siraj-ud-daullah's extravagance and oppression had not reached such a limit, then perhaps there would have been no discontent in Bengal. But when people could see no way of saving the honour and dignity of their daughters, they sought the Englishmen's protection and this proved to be extremely beneficial for this country. (14)

Again in Tara, Dara is shown to be a venal and cunning person. It is his own sister Jahanara who informs Tara:

Dara is irreligious and a 'kafir'. Dara claims that he has read a lot of books on Hindu religion, especially the Vedas and the Upanishads in Pharsi. But don't get carried away by what he says. This is not at all true; he does this only to throw dust in the eyes of the Hindus. His true religion is now Christianity and he has fully been converted into a Christian. (Tara, Part

One, p.20)

It will be noticed that while English rule is welcome (this will be discussed later), conversion to Christianity was seen as the most ignominious act possible for any self-respecting Hindu or Muslim. The element of xenophobia in this world view was a direct reaction to the Christian missionary onslaught on the cherished beliefs and practices of the people. The criticism of indigenous religious practices by foreigners triggered off an enthusiastic defence of it against all assailants, native or foreign.(15) Only a very small subset of the Indian intelligentsia adopted Christianity while a section of the economically depressed classes did so to avoid casteist discrimination prevalent in Hinduism or to achieve a better standard of living or to survive famines and other calamities.

Hatred for another community within the community, or 'Communalism' as it is known in India today, was as Gyanendra Pandey points out, a 19th century colonial construct in order to keep the Hindus and the Muslims divided. Before late 19th century "terms like 'race', 'nation', 'nationality' and 'class' were regularly used by colonial writers and administrators in the subcontinent to describe groups as diverse as Rajputs, Sikhs, Muslims and Bhils."(16) But the political situation from the end of the 19th century made it necessary for the rulers to play on the 'duality' of India and the 'separateness' of Hindus and Muslims if they were to successfully thwart the nationalist

struggle to overthrow the colonial rule. The continuous harping on the evil customs of the Hindus and the proselytizing efforts of the Christian missionaries resulted in a burgeoning enthusiasm on the part of the Indian nationalists to emphasise the Hindu identity. The emerging nationalist consciousness adopted the Hindu past and its heritage as the focus of its identity; in the process a marginalisation of Islam was inevitable. The glorification of the Hindu past that began in the late 19th century carried well into the early 20th century. If there was any sense of anxiety or feeling of inadequacy in accomplishing this task, the assurance came in the form of the Theosophical Movement in India. The white persons themselves--- Mrs. Anne Besant, Colonel Olcott and Madame Blavatsky arrived to declare India's great spiritual superiority.

The 'femininity-in-masculinity', to borrow Ashis Nandy's term, that the West projected on the Hindu men began to be perceived by the Indian nationalists as "the final negation of a man's political power." (17) Subsequently stress began to be given on the essence of masculinity 'purusatva' and Indian past was depicted as a period of aggression and power over the 'other'; this 'other' in the context of the past became the Muslim invaders. In the narratives of Bankim and Goswami, the Hindu past is not just associated with spiritual superiority and tolerance but a new dimension is given to the Hindu past as being far from 'effeminate' or

'childlike'. In Bankim's novel Rajsingha's hesitation to marry Chanchal without her father's consent, or his leniency towards the Mughal army are shown not to be the result of his cowardice or effeminacy but evidences his gentlemanliness and tolerant attitude. Goswami repeatedly stresses the quality of 'veeratva' (heroism) , that the Hindu men in the past possessed and laments that it is the present loss of his courage and heroism that has led to the subjugation of the country. In Hridayaharini a mad elephant rushes towards a girl on the street and raises its foot to trample her, when an unknown man saves her by killing the elephant with a poisonous arrow. The crowd is wonderstruck at this display of bravery and discuss it amongst themselves:

Whatever may be the case we are sure that this brave man must be a Hindu because apart from Hindus who else in this world can possess such skills in archery? If Hindus have any fault in them it is a lack of unity amongst them. If the Hindus were not disunited then these tyrannical 'yavanas' could not step on the soil of Bharat [Bharat Bhumi]. The fact is not hidden from those who know history that the Musalmans have not conquered Bharatvarsha by the strength of their swords but by their shrewdness, cunning and deceit.(18)

Another bystander observes:

You are right but Bharat is no longer what she was in the past. Now bravery exists only in name. When Bharat was united, then courage and bravery were also at their full glory. But since unity disappeared, heroism too has surreptitiously vanished from this land. So it will not be unjust to say...there is no greater courage on this earth than unity.(19)

Tara projects the greatness of the Rajputs even when the Mughals are the Emperors of Hindustan. Tara's father, Rao Amarsingha is the son of the Rathor Kshatriya king Gajasingha of Jodhpur. A family quarrel leads Amarsingha to leave his birthplace and move to Agra -- the seat of the Mughal power in India. It is to be noted that nowhere does Goswami disapprove of Amarsingha's act of leaving his community or his birthplace and being subservient to the Mughal rulers in Delhi and Agra. In fact it is reiterated that Shah Jahan the then Mughal Emperor, could have never captured the throne of Delhi without Amarsingha's help. This is not seen as an act of treachery towards other Hindu rulers but is perceived as a measure of the leniency, warmth and help that a Rajput is capable of offering a friend even when he is a Muslim. Tara the Rajput princess, whose beauty is capable of "seducing the three worlds", (Part One, pp.46-7) is about sixteen years old. Dara the eldest son of Shah Jahan, enamoured by Tara's beauty desires to marry her and seeks the help of his sister Jahanara. The Emperor's treasurer Salawat Khan who secretly hates Amarsingha for his close friendship with Shah Jahan, plans to humiliate him. He too is interested in Tara whom he wishes to procure first for himself and later as a gift for Aurangzeb (Shah Jahan's youngest son) whose favour he seeks. Both Dara and Aurangzeb are claimants to the throne of Delhi and again both are rivals over the possession of a woman. Like the land itself, a woman has to be possessed with the help of power and aggression. Dara and Jahanara belong to one camp

and Salawat and Roshenara (Dara's younger sister) working as agents of Aurangzeb (who never appears in the novel) belong to the opposite camp. Jahanara, shown to be a clever and politically shrewd woman realizes the influence that a beautiful woman like Tara can have over Dara and how it can weaken her position of authority. She decides to help Tara escape the clutches of both Dara and Salawat Khan, if only to secure her own interests. While the 'yavanas', the outsiders, circle like vultures over their prey, Tara and her resourceful friend, Rambha, seek the help and protection of Rajsingha, the son of Maharana Jagatsingha of Udaipur, to whom Tara is already betrothed. Rambha too sends a letter to Chandravat, Rajsingha's friend and companion. In the meantime the fearless Rambha has through a series of adventures in underground tunnels and secret chambers, unearth Salawat Khan's plot to capture Tara. When Salawat Khan's soldiers attack Tara's palace in a bid to carry her off, their plan is foiled as Rajsingha and Chandravat, disguised as Mughal soldiers make their appearance and give a fitting fight to the Mughals. The end of the novel shows Tara wedded to Rajsingha and Rambha married to Chandravat, both pairs leading happy conjugal lives.

In Goswami's novel Tara's character transcends her individual identity to become a symbol of the land itself, to all that is glorious in Kshatriyahood, and in Hinduism. Like the land Bharatvarsha, she has to be protected by her own people from the outsiders. Tara's mother Chandravati,



realizing the imminent danger to her daughter, appeals to her brother Arjun to become a true Kshatriya and not to sell his soul to the 'yavanas'.

CHANDRAVATI: Shame on you brother! You are insisting on giving your niece in marriage to those untouchable 'yavanas', the very touch of whom makes religious Hindus take a bath. You want to sell Tara to the Emperor in exchange for the post of a Wazir? Do you think this position is worth treachery against your religion and Kshatriyahood? Has such a time come, is it such a 'kaliyuga' now, that even the brave Kshatriyas would now abandon their religion and their nation (jati) for the sake of greed? ...It is a pity that even though the history of Bharatvarsha is there in front of everyone's eyes to learn a lesson from, still blinded by your own self-interest you have trusted the 'yavanas'. Brother! Wake up, give up your selfish interests and turn your attention towards the protection of the Sanatan Dharma and the glory of Kshatriyahood. (Tara, Part Two, pp.39-41)

Any critical reader of Bankim and Goswami can discern that the two writers had very different political agendas. In Bankim the 'mlechhas' and the 'yavanas' often become the extended metaphors of the British and his allegedly anti-Muslim stance may be interpreted as hostility against an outside power, a surrogate hostility because his anti-British views could not be expressed directly. Arguably he regarded the British rule as the only truly alien rule in Indian history though this is not to say that he did not admire some features of English culture. The admiration for the English as a superior military power is evident in Anandamath where Bankim accepts the historical inevitability of the British Raj but at the same time envisages a hope for a future when the country will be liberated from this bondage. Again, he hopes that men and women like Rajsingha,

Shanti, Debi Chaudhurani and Jibandas would be born again in the present times because the country needs them once more to be free from the present 'yavanas'. As has been already discussed, Bankim's attitude towards the Muslims was ambivalent. Hostility was expressed towards the Mughal rulers who were seen as outsiders. But he felt differently about the common Bengali Muslims of his own time. But it would be difficult to argue that the Muslims are the surrogate of the English in Goswami's novels. In the absence of any other evidence Goswami's views and ideological position have to be understood only in the context of his novels. In novel after novel we find the Muslims rulers' policy of duplicity and cunning focussed as the main reasons for their being able to subjugate the noble Kshatriyas. In a meeting between Peshwa Bajirao and the Nizam, in his novel Kanak Kusum, wa Mastani, the former tells the latter:

I have to face the consequences of my deeds and so have you to face yours; so why should I turn away from my duty and my 'dharma'? Our dharma-sastras tell us to behave well with the enemies we have defeated, but you like all Musalmans know only the cunning policies. If the Muslim Emperors had not used deceit and treachery then this country would never have been defeated and there would have been no sign of their name on this earth. The way you people have occupied this country, the brave Kshatriya kings of this country would have considered it a sin to do so. That is why you could have your way!!! (20)

In Hridyahaarini, Goswami writes:

It is clearly evident from history that whenever the Muslims defeated any country it was only by deceit, cunning and oppressive behaviour. And wherever they went, they demonstrated their prowess by looting, burning, destroying, kidnapping girls, and disrespecting the Hindus and their religion. (21)

It is not clear from this above quotation as to whose version of history Goswami is referring to. Obviously not the Muslim historians' records because these, according to his statements are spurious. In the preface to Tara, for example, Goswami writes:

The 'yavanas' like Mahmud Gazni, Ala-ud-din, Aurangzeb and Nadir Shah who left no stones unturned in destroying Bharatvarsha's religion, respect, pride, virtues and her heroism. And people like Akbar who with their sweet talk nearly destroyed the national glory of Hindustan; how can then one trust the history written by the Muslim historians who were under the patronage of such rulers? (Tara, Preface)

The policy of the British in the late 19th century was to justify the colonial rule on the ground that the 'natives' were divided on matters of religion and caste, given to primitive passions and therefore needed a strong but dispassionate arbiter to solve their disputes. Rev. James Kennedy after his stay in Northern India in the eighteen seventies and eighties wrote: "The antagonism [between Hindu and Muslim 'systems'], though generally latent, every now and then breaks out into fierce strife, which but for the interposition of Government would lead to civil war". (22) Partly influenced by this colonialist ideology and partly by the awe of a master race that had subjugated a good part of the world, many Indian intellectuals of this age regarded the English rule in India as necessary and beneficial for the country. The British came to be seen as the liberators of the Hindus 'from the tyrannical rule of the Muslims'. Bharatendu Harishchandra in his lecture delivered at a meeting organized by the Arya

Deshopkarni Sabha in Ballia in November 1884, said:

The people of Hindustan are like a train. Even if there are many fine and expensive first class and Second class coaches in a train, it cannot run without an engine; in the same way the people of Hindustan are capable of great achievements if they can find someone to move them... My friends have asked me to say something today about how india can progress. What else can I say on this subject? There is a verse in the Bhagavat Purana...God says that, first of all, to be born a human being is itself good fortune; in addition you have your guru's blessings and my favour. If with all this, a person can still not attain liberation, he can only be called a murderer of the self. That is precisely the condition of India today. If even under British rule, when we are given every kind of resource and opportunity, we do not progress, it can only be because of our (bad) fate and the wrath of God... If under British rule, we remain trapped like frogs in a well, an owl on its branch, or a bird in a cage, then we deserve all that we suffer. (23)

An open admiration for the Raj is evident also in the Prefaces of Goswami's novels. Condemning the rule of Aurangzeb, he writes in Sona aur Sugandha (1909):

God was very kind in placing an oppressive and selfish ruler like Aurangzeb on the throne of Hindustan because had Aurangzeb not been so tyrannical and such a hater of Hindus, the Muslim Sultanate would not have seen its downfall so soon and we the inhabitants of Bharat (Bharatbasiyo) would not have been fortunate to experience the peaceful rule of the British. (24)

In an earlier novel apprehension has been expressed at the growing political supremacy of the British in India, but fear was mixed with contradictory emotions of gratitude and relief. Narendrasingha, the son of Maharaja Mahendrasingha of Bangadesa says:

If the situation in Bharat was not so bad as it is today, then she would not have had to spread her hands for help in front of an alien friend. As far as I can guess, one day these foreign merchants would plant their flag all over Bharatvarsha. And then only God can say how well those people would behave with the people here, but at present they are saving the people

from the tyrannical Mussalmans and this itself is no little matter for happiness... (25)

Madhavsingha replies:

As you say, the way the Company is planting its feet in this country, one day they would surely be the kings of Bharat and the people of this land would still remain subjugated. But it is a thousand times better to be the slave of a just king rather than the subject of an oppressive ruler. Bharat would forever remain grateful to the British because they have liberated the people of this land. If at such a time the British had not come then the people here would never have been able to save their country because after being the slave of the Mussalmans for over a hundred years there was very little life left in them. (26)

It is evident from the use of words like 'they', 'their', 'them', and 'those' that the Muslims and the British are both outsiders. Though Goswami never mentions who the actual 'Bharatvasi' is, it is self evident that he has the Hindus in mind when he talks of the 'people here' and 'the people of this land'. As the next quote would show, Goswami is not happy with the British rule in India but accepts 'paradhinata' (subjugation) as the fate of the country -- a situation that has become the accepted norm. Challenging the present situation does not enter Goswami's discourse on colonialism.

The fate which led to the ending of Bharat's independence, the same inevitable fate led to the setting of the glorious rule of the Muslims in India till it sunk in the Western Mahasagar (ocean) forever. The English merchants on the pretext of trade snatched away this country. Though this country still remains shackled in the chains of 'paradhinta' (subjugation), but it is for our benefit that the English liberated the half-dead country from the oppression of the Muslims. Though the English do not use the same codes of law and justice for the people of Bharat as they do for their own brothers, yet it is a matter of relief for the people here who have been saved from the tyrants... (27)

The purpose of Goswami's novels is therefore not to question colonial rule because a politically subjugated and backward India is constantly seen vis-a-vis a militarily superior and culturally dynamic West. Two opposite and contradictory forces working simultaneously in Goswami's writings also mark a feature of the emerging nationalist consciousness. On the one hand was a pride in the Hindu identity and an anxiety to prove the greatness of Hindu civilization, and on the other hand was an admiration for the alien rulers and their civilization. The hierarchy of relationship between two cultures is often the result of the power equation between them. Goswami's statements avowing British supremacy or Bankim's views on the present worthlessness of the Bengali are prime examples of a generalized sense of inadequacy of a defeated people. Since the West is identified with power and with a superior civilization, there is a constant attempt in Goswami's novel to bridge the 'difference' between the 'superior' West and the 'unworthy' East and to be judged worthy by the Western standards. Therefore there is an anxiousness to show that what the West is in the present, India was in the past. All that the West admired and considered civilized existed in our past, but now India was in a state of subjection and degradation because of years of slavery and foreign rule. There is a constant attempt in Goswami's novels to Westernize Hinduism, to coalesce the admirable 'Western' traits with the 'Oriental' virtues. The heroes in his novels like Narendrasingha in Hridayaharini, Madanmohan in

Lavanjalata, Peshwa Bajirao in Kanak Kusum and Rajsingha in Tara are admirable because of the qualities of Kshatriyahood in them -- they are strong, brave, fearless, virile men of action -- qualities that the West valorises in a man. These characters successfully disprove the colonial allegation of the 'effiminacy' of Indian men. Rajsingha in Tara possesses all the attributes of royal manliness. Tara's letter to him for help addresses him as :

Swastishree upama, asesh upameya! Virvar!  
 Nripati chakra churamani! Bhupati kumud kaladhar!  
 Bhanuvansa avatansa! Chatrakul kamal divakar!  
 Shubh Sisodiya sar saroj sushama ke akar!  
 Udaypuruday Ravi! Mewar bhu-bhudar bhupati! (28)

Although one of Goswami's tasks is to project the masculinity of the Kshatriya warrior, paradoxically in Tara the pivot of the plot is a woman. Rajsingha who makes his appearance in the third and last part of the novel pales into insignificance before the character of Rambha, so powerful is her personality. The reader is left with the impression that nothing would have been lost and the end of the story would have been yet the same even if the character of the hero had been deleted altogether from the novel. Though Goswami names his novel after Tara it is Rambha who possesses the attribute of agency and propels the action of the plot. Her qualities are typically 'feminine'. Unlike Chanchalkumari in Bankim's Rajsingha, Rambha does not enter the battlefield with a sword in her hand, neither is she portrayed as an image of Shakti. It is the peculiar combination of guile and courage, of secrecy and openness,

of duplicity and straightforwardness that makes her character so attractive and endearing. Skilful in the art of disguise, she dresses sometimes as a wandering musician, sometimes as a gypsy who can foresee the future, sometimes as her friend Tara, and successfully cheats, deceives and tricks her way out of the most difficult situations. With her superior knowledge she is able to decipher coded messages which enables her to know the plots being hatched by Salawat Khan and Roshenara and by flattery and cunning she manages to extract the court secrets from the servants. Goswami shows Rambha achieving all that a woman can do without transgressing the parameters of femininity. She is depicted as a woman, who to suit the pressing needs of the time widens her identity without breaking totally from the psycho-biological definition of a woman.

Tara is a perfect counter-part of Rambha and is meek while Rambha is bold, still while Rambha is mobile and dynamic, innocent while her friend is clever. Tara is good at embroidery and painting miniatures, and totally ignorant of the adventures that Rambha goes through to save her from the Muslim rulers. Like most of Goswami's other heroines, Tara is an 'adarsh-bala' (an ideal girl) who incorporates within herself all the virtues of a 'Bharatiya' woman. A character like Tara corresponds to the letter to the ideals of womanhood propagated in earlier Hindi fictional texts like Devrani Jethani ki Kahani (1870), Vamashikshak (written in 1872 but published in 1883), Bhagyavati (written in 1877



but published in 1887), and Stri Upadesa. As the titles suggest, these books set out role models and were conduct manuals for upper/middle-class Hindu women. In Devrani Jethani ki Kahani an ideal 'devrani' who is shown to be educated, looks after the family, is skilled in embroidery and household work, keeps the house neat and clean, cooks food for everyone and toils from morning to night to keep others happy is contrasted with her good for nothing 'jethani' who is lazy, quarrelsome, a gossip and an inefficient manager of the household. The devrani because of her virtues contributes to the well being of the entire family and saves the entire household from the disaster the jethani has engendered.. Shradharam Fullori's Bhagyavati, is also an attempt to perpetrate the ideology of submissive but efficient womanliness. In the preface to his novel Fullori writes : "For a long time I had the desire to write such a text in Hindi which when read would enable the women of Bharat to gain knowledge about their household duties." (29) The point was not the woman's personal happiness, but the integrity and the well being of the family. The woman was seen as the moral centre, the repository of values -- not only of the family, but also by extension of the community and the nation.

Goswami's Leelavati wa Adarsh Sati is a comparison of a 'good' Leelavati and a 'bad' Kalavati with the explicit purpose to highlight the qualities of an ideal Indian woman. The concept of the ideal passive womanhood was necessarily

linked with the idea of the valiant and aggressive manhood. The uncontaminated and pure woman was considered a pivot on which the ideals and values of a society rested, and the protection of her against outside assault was the man's sacred duty. These didactic books then obviously had a definite readership in mind--- the literate upper/middle-class women who had sufficient leisure time. Tara is also meant for such a clientele of readers. It is dedicated to :

Only you, because you are the only well-wisher of my novel and whatever I am writing is only to please you. That is why Tara is dedicated only to you. I shall be satisfied if you accept this character, if not as your sister then at least as your friend. You must also remember that Tara is a princess, and if not as your sister then at least she is worthy to be your friend. Depending only upon your affection, the Author. (Tara, Preface)

After making an appeal to the women readers to identify with Tara, Goswami goes on to show the qualities of a virtuous Hindu woman. The greatest quality of such women is their chastity, life-long faithfulness to one man, protection of their religion and dharma from defilement. Tara's mother would rather that her daughter immolated herself on the funeral pyre than sleep on a Muslim's bed:

I would be extremely happy to know that Tara has given up her life to save herself from the company of the 'yavanas', because I consider it to be a thousand times better to sleep forever on a funeral pyre rather than sleep on a Musalman's bed. (Tara, Part Two, p.42)

Self-immolation of Hindu women in order to show their firmness of mind, and adherence to dharma gave them a sense of power. This was the only way in which, without transgressing the limits of womanhood, they could emerge victorious in a patriarchal society. Paradoxically in the act of dying with her husband to prove that she was true to him and virtuous, the victim of patriarchal attitudes could appropriate power for herself. Tara, the idealized Rajput woman of Goswami's novel, too threatens to take her life and in a letter to her fiance Rajsingha, she writes:

I will end my life by hanging myself to death,  
Kill myself either by hanging, or poison, by jumping off, or  
burning.  
There are a hundred ways to save my virtue from the 'yavanas'.  
(^&Tara\&, Part Three, p.22)

Like Bankim, Goswami centres almost all his novels around women characters and names the novels after the female protagonists. But his Lavangalata, Kanak Kusum, Kusumkumari and Tara are far from the image of the empowered woman that Bankim's characters like Debi-Chaudhurani, Shanti, Shri or Chanchalkumari embody. A character like Rambha who apparently seems to be defying the traditional role of a woman actually does not break totally from it. When it comes to physical might or intellectual superiority Rambha is shown to be defeated by Chandravat whom she has chosen to marry thus confirming the stability of the social order. And when at the end of the novel Chandravat confesses to have been defeated by her, he is actually admitting to have been a victim of Rambha's physical charm

and feminine spirit.

Kishorilal Goswami's purpose in creating ideal men and women like Tara and Rajsingha stems from the need to defend the Hindus and their culture from the colonizers attack. Only if the 'Other' is posited negatively can the 'Self' gain a positive centrality. The Muslims in Goswami's novel are the 'Other' and only by degrading their culture, society and people, Goswami can create a definite, valorised identity for the Hindus. Rajsingha, Chandravat, Tara, Rambha, Chandravati, Amarsingha -- in short, all the Hindu characters in the novel are the embodiment of whatever is good and appreciable in Hinduism. Tara and Chandravati are the ideal 'sati' (a true and virtuous woman), Amarsingha is brave and loyal but his only fault is that he trusts all men even the 'untrustworthy Muslims'. Rajsingha and Chandravat epitomize Kshatriyahood and possess all the qualities that make up a true Rajput. Chandravat's long monologue at the end of Tara is not so much to accuse Rajsingha of inactivity nor to arouse the fighting spirit in Rajsingha, but to tell the readers what Kshatriyahood precisely is. When Rajsingha receives Tara's letter requesting for his help, he asks Chandravat what he should do now. Chandravat says:

Prince! What is there to think of in this matter? After reading these letters why are you still hesitating? When the princess Tarabai has devoted herself to you, then instead of making her your wife, would you allow her to go into the hands of the 'mlechha' or compel her to commit suicide? Would the true dharma of the Kshatriyas and the meaning of Kshatriyahood be wiped away from this world? Just think of how the name and power of Hindu kings would be maligned if the Turks forcefully marry your betrothed.

To maintain the dignity of Mewar, our ancestors have sacrificed thousands of brave sons, and today would a prince of their dynasty leave his queen to sleep on the Mislms' bed, or would he allow a helpless girl, who has sought his protection to kill herself? From time immemorable the duty of the people of Mewar have been to protect those who seek their shelter and protection...

Prince! would Kshatriyahood be wiped out from Bharatvarsha? Is the Kshatriya mother giving birth to cowards instead of brave Kshatriya sons? Would the Hindu ruler of Mewar be afraid of the 'yavana' kings? Will a descendent of Bappa Rawal, instead of protecting the helpless and fighting in the forest, behave like a coward? So my prince! what makes you hesitate even after reading the princess's letter? One day we all have to die. Didn't our ancestors die? So how long shall we be immortal? When we all have to die, why not die in the battlefield after killing our enemies? As long as we are alive we cannot let anyone defile our dignity. That is why it is a thousand times better for Kshatriya sons to give up their lives in a battle rather than lead a life of humiliation. We shall benefit both ways--- if we are victorious our honour is saved and if we die we attain the company of the gods in Heaven.

As he said all this Chandravat's voice choked with emotion, his eyes burnt with rage and his body shook with anger. Seeing his condition, the brave prince Rajsingha calmly said--

"Why are you losing control over yourself? Have I refused to marry the Rathor princess, Tarabai, or have I refused to protect those who seek my refuge? Then why do you get so angry and make such irrelevant statements?" (Tara, Part Three, p.29-31)

This long speech by Chandravat acts as an incitement for the readers to recognize the greatness of the Kshatriya code, the bravery of the martial races, the chivalry of the Rajput men. In emphasizing the aspects of manliness, courage, action, and loyalty, Goswami is challenging the colonialist perception of the Orient. The ending of the novel makes it clear that the greatness of the Rajput is vindicated. Back from a hunting expedition, Dara comes to

know of the entire incident and is struck with remorse and guilt because it was his desire for Tara that had triggered off the conflict between the Rajputs and the Mughals. The result was that 'he wrote a letter to Rajsingha in which he apologized for his indecent behaviour, and the magnanimous Rajsingha readily accepted it.' (Tara, Part Three, p.103)

In shaping the identity of a community and giving it a distinct cultural function, language itself came to be seen as a powerful tool. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century there were attempts to standardise Hindi prose and project a stabilized Hindi diction. The battle for installing Hindi in the court and government offices which began in the last decade of the 19th century, succeeded in 1901.(30) Language had become both among the Muslim gentry and the Hindu upper castes a means as well as a symbol of community creation. Urdu was not dropped but it developed the image of a 'foreign' language. Recently Sudhir Chandra has argued the writers like Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-85), Pratap Narain Mishra (1856-94), and Radhacharan Goswami (1859-1923) had an ambiguous attitude towards the Muslims and the use of Urdu.(31) Harishchandra in his Ballia lecture said: 'Whoever lives in Hindustan, whatever his colour or caste, is a Hindu. Help the Hindus. Bengalis, Marathas, Punjabis, Madrasis (sic), Vaidiks, Jains, Brahmos, Musalmans, should all join hands.'(32) But this consciously invested non-communal connotation did not change the essentially communal nature of the underlying

assumption. All three of them unhesitatingly asserted that the Hindus constituted the real population of India and all the others were secondary. The selected remembrance of the past and the desired future lead to acerbity of communal passion. In 1883 Radhacharan Goswami wrote: 'Whether today or eight hundred years ago, the Hindus never fought the Muslims without being provoked.' Two years later in 1885 he wrote: 'The aggressive and strife-loving nature of the Muslim community is hidden from no one. Mischief making courses through their veins...' Addressing the Muslims he added: 'You were baptised with blood and we with milk. The essence of your religion is discord, and that of ours is peace. We do not therefore provoke anyone. But when you nettle us needlessly, our policy, too, is to meet evil with evil... Finally we implore the Musalmans to give up their Nadirshahi temperament. Such tyranny and obduracy would not last long!'(33)

The context in which a particular piece was written could alter the way the communities were perceived. Depending upon the motive behind a particular piece of writing, the Muslims could be shown as tyrannical from whom the British had delivered the Hindus, or they could also be shown as a strength which if united with the Hindus could overthrow the British from India. In Goswami's novel the British are seen as 'friends' who have come to liberate the country from the Muslims. But Goswami too could also adopt an ambivalent position towards the Muslims when it suited

his purpose. Thus in Raziya-Begum the 122 years old Swami Brahmananda from Kashi advices Raziya:

Listen Raziya! In front of God (Khuda) both Hindus and Musalmans are equal. Hindus worship Him as 'Ram' and the Musalmans call him 'Khuda'. Hindus worship his idol while the Musalmans meditate on him without keeping any idol in front of them. But the God of both the Hindus and the Musalmans is the same and he is equally pleased by their devotion. The ruler who wants to keep the reins of Hindustan in his hands must give up all religious discriminations. If the Emperor of Hindustan does not keep this in mind, and does not treat all his subjects as equal, then he will harm his self-interests and lose control over his Empire. (34)

Like Bankim in Rajsingha, Goswami in Tara too makes use of linguistic variations to show differences between religious communities. The prolific use of Urdu and Arabic words by the Muslim characters in the novel demarcate them as a separate community from the Hindus who speak Sanskritized Hindi. Dara's letter to Tara is in the pattern of stylized Urdu 'gazal', But Tara's letters to Rajsingha is strikingly different as it is written in the format of 'shloka'(couplets) in Sanskrit poetry. Urdu therefore becomes 'foreign' language spoken by a community of people who do not belong to the 'imagined community' called Bharatvarsha.

A complex relationship existed between national consciousness and communal consciousness in India in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Nation and community could be complementary as well as contradictory categories. In most cases Indian intellectuals of this period did not see any conflict between the two sets of



loyalties. The perception of the Hindus and the Muslims as two separate communities existed simultaneously with a desire for Hindu-Muslim unity. There was a genuine sense of appreciation for Muslim saints, Islamic architecture, and the Urdu language. Kishorilal Goswami inspite of his overt resentment for the Muslims begins every chapter of his novel with a couplet in Urdu. Pratap Narain Mishra when he wrote in 1889, "Hindus and Muslims are the two arms of Mother India. Neither can exist without the other,"(35) was not being hypocritical. The ambivalence of the Hindu attitude towards the Muslim was also reflected in their attitude towards the British rule in India. On the one hand there was a willing acceptance of foreign rule, and on the other hand a strong resentment against them. Communal loyalties, sectarian strifes, ambivalent attitudes toward the outsider are the manifestations of the intrinsic contradiction involved in the emerging national consciousness and the attempt of a hetrogeneous people to become a nation.

NOTES

- (1) John Stuart Mill, for one, viewed India as "a peculiar country", its people "most difficult to be understood and still more difficult to be improved." In Memorandum of the Improvements in the Administration of India during the Last Thirty Years, 1858. Collected in Writings on India by John Stuart Mill, ed. by John M. Robson and others (University of Toronto Press, Routledge, 1990), p.155.
- (2) Edward Said, Orientalism (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Henley, 1978).
- (3) *ibid.*
- (4) 'Dominance without Hegemony and its Historiography' by Ranajit Guha; Subaltern Studies VI: Writings on South Asian History and Society ed. by Ranajit Guha (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989), p.210.
- (5) Tapan Raychaudhuri, Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988), p.3.
- (6) Kishorilal Goswami, Preface to Raziya Begum, 1904, (Publisher not mentioned). All further translations of Kishorilal Goswami's novels from the original Hindi have been done by me.
- (7) Kishorilal Goswami, Preface to Tara (Hitchintak Press, Kashi, 1902). All further quotations from this volume would be indicated only by the name of the novel and the page number.
- (8) Cushing Strout, The Veracious Imagination -- Essays on American History, Literature, and Biography (Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 1981), p.160.
- (9) Kishorilal Goswami, Preface to Tara.
- (10) Kishorilal Goswami, Hridyahaarini, wa Adarsh Ramani (Shri Sudarsan Press, Brindavan, 1918), p.22.
- (11) Cited in Tapan Raychaudhuri's Europe Reconsidered, p.71.
- (12) See Bankim's essays 'Bharat Kalanka' and 'Banglar Kalanka' where he asserts that the Muslims conquered Africa, Spain, Kabul and Turkistan but they had the greatest difficulty in conquering Bharatvarsha because of the staunch faith that the Hindus have in their religion.

- (13) Kishorilal Goswami, Hridayaharini, p.22.
- (14) Kishorilal Goswami, Lavangalata, wa Adarsh Bala, 1890, p.9 (Publisher not mentioned).
- (15) It is well known how in 1882 Bankimchandra under a pseudonym entered into a long newspaper correspondence with Reverend Hastie in the pages of The Statesman defending Hinduism against the charges of idolatory and superstition. [See Bankim Rachanabali Vol.III (English Works) ed.by Jogesh Chandra Bagal, p.186-223]
- (16) Gyanandra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992, p.2).
- (17) Ashis Nandy, The Intimate Enemy -- Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1993), p.8.
- (18) Kishorilal Goswami, Hridayaharini, pp.4-5.
- (19) *ibid.*, p.6.
- (20) Kishorilal Goswami, Kanak-Kusum, wa Mastani, (Shri Sudarsan Press, Brindavan, 1914), pp.63-4.
- (21) Kishorilal Goswami, Hridayaharini, p.23.
- (22) Cited in Gyanendra Pandey's The Construction of Communalism, p.45.
- (23) *ibid.*, Appendix II, pp.272-73.
- (24) Kishorilal Goswami, Sona aur Sugandha, 1909, p.155
- (25) Kishorilal Goswami, Hridayaharini, p.30.
- (26) *ibid.*, p.31
- (27) *ibid.*, p.23.
- (28) Kishorilal Goswami, Tara, Part Three, p.19.  
Translation:

Thou, who art comparable to the greatest riches,  
 who art beyond all comparison, O bravest of all!  
 The King of kings, the Lord of the Earth,  
 repository of all the arts.  
 Descended from 'Bhanuvansa', lotus faced,  
 bright as the Sun,  
 Born in the blessed Sisodiya dynasty,

Risen in the city of Udaipur in the land of Mewar,  
King and Lord of this world.

- (29) Cited in Gopal Rai's Hindi Katha Sahitya aur uske Vikas par Pathoko ki Ruchi ka Prabhav (Granth Niketan, Patna, 1965), p.191. My translation from the original Hindi.
- (30) Paul Brass, Language, Religion and Politics in North India (Cambridge, 1974).
- (31) Sudhir Chandra, Communal Elements in the Late Nineteenth Century Hindi Literature (Occasional Papers, No.XV, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, Year not mentioned). This is now available in a book The Oppressive Present : Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India (Oxford University Press, 1993).
- (32) Gyanendra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism, Appendix II, p.227.
- (33) Cited in Sudhir Chandra's Communal Elements, p.19.
- (34) Kishorilal Goswami, Raziya Bequm, Part Two. p.21.
- (35) Cited in Sudhir Chandra's Communal Elements, p.10.

## CHAPTER V

### NATIONALISM AND COMMUNALISM: PART OF THE SAME DISCOURSE

In the first version of the song Vande Mataram in Anandamath, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya invokes the image of seven crore voices singing in unison and fourteen crore hands rising together to liberate the Motherland. Who constituted the seven crores and by what principle of unity was the idea of a nation being invoked? Seven crores was not the population of India, nor that of Hindu India, nor even that of Bengalis. It was the population of British created contemporary Presidency of Bengal which also included Oriyas, Assamese and Biharis. Within his lifetime Bankim revised the seven crore voices to twenty crore -- this time leaving out the princely states out of the ambit of Indian nationalism. (The latter were incorporated among the Indian people only in the 1930's). Is nationalism then, as Jawaharlal Nehru was to put it much later, 'a natural growth from the soil of India',<sup>(1)</sup> or was it a contrived consciousness, a deliberate manipulation of heterogeneous sects and communities to form a nation? Was there a possibility of a co-existence of loyalty to the community and loyalty to the country? Was one primarily a Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Parsi, etc. or was one first an Indian and everything else afterwards?

The distinctly anti-Muslim tone in the writings of Bankim and Kishorilal Goswami and in the numerous novels, plays and songs written in this period, was also reflected in the speeches and writings of some of the most advanced and supposedly advanced sections of the Hindu nationalist intelligentsia in the last quarter of the 19th century. Madan Mohan Malviya said in the 1880's that the purpose of the Hindu Samaj established in Allahabad was 'to encourage the uplift of the Hindus to nurture their self-dependence, and to present a strong face to their enemies.'(2) Real or fictitious incidents from history were narrated and reiterated by the Hindu nationalists to create certain stereotypes in the minds of the people. The view that the 'Medieval period' of Indian history represented 'Muslim tyranny' and was one of hostility and oppression towards the Hindus was to a large extent the adoption of the imperialist viewpoint. The neat division of Indian history into Ancient, Medieval and Modern period and the subtle implication that these periods coincided with the primitive, the barbaric and the progressive periods of Indian history was a strategy to suit the colonizing mission. In such an ideological framework the medieval period was identified as the 'dark period' -- the period that gave rise to Communalism. Such colonialist projects not only transferred a contemporary situation to a past that functioned in an all together different context but such arguments also ignored that in the 'medieval' period the oppositional segments of the society were not determined on the basis of religion.

Conflicts between kings and chieftains was a personal affair and rarely was there any communitarian mobilization based on religion. The outcome of the frequent battles that the rulers got involved in did affect the common man but people of all communities suffered alike. Inspired by the British historians' accounts, novels, plays and songs written by Indians portrayed the Rajputs, Marathas, and the Sikhs as truly heroic, patriotic and 'national' heroes because they fought the Muslims who were the 'foreigners'. But what was overlooked or ignored was the fact that Maharana Pratap Singha had Hakim Khan Sur leading his army while Raja Man Singha commanded the opposing Mughal army; the campaign against Shivaji was led by Raja Jai Singha while the chief of Shivaji's naval force was led by Ibrahim Gardi; and the most vehement protest against the execution of the Guru's two sons came from the then Nawab of Malerkotala. Also the Rajputs, the Marathas, and the Sikhs were not always inspired by profound sentiments of nation-building but were more often motivated by considerations of territorial expansion, self aggrandisement or procurement of wealth.

If today commuanlism is defined as a 'false consciousness of a situation', and represents a 'distorted or perverse reflection of reality', (3) then can Bankim and Goswami be regarded as 'communalists'? It cannot be overlooked that the ideology of Bankim, Goswami and their contemporaries was a 'true' consciousness and served very well to promote the purpose of the time. In fact the

ideologies that the 19th century intelligentsia espoused and that had moulded their views was a necessary step towards nationalism'. Communalism as it is understood today in the context of India has a peculiar meaning--- a meaning that has been inherited from the colonial experience. 'Communal' in India means not just pertaining to a community but more as pertaining to the interests of any racial or religious community. Bipan Chandra defines communalism thus: 'Communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have as a result common social, political and economic interests.'(4) In the later 19th century terms like 'nation' and 'community' were used ambiguously. As Sudipto Kaviraj has pointed out, the term 'jati' could mean caste, religion, community or nation.(5) Again the word 'qaum' in Urdu was used for a community, nation or the inhabitants of a place. Service to the community and service to the country were often interchangeable acts. Protecting the interests of one's community or venerating the deeds of one's own people were not considered parochial; if anything it was highly patriotic. The idea of the 'Indian nation', its form and meaning was still in the early stages of construction. Communitarian mobilization was in large part an answer to the colonial exigencies that challenged the validity of an Indian identity. The Wahabi and the Faraizi movements, the Brahma Samaj and the Prayag Hindu Samaj represent an effort by people at different levels of the society to overcome the marks of subordination and humiliation that had come with



the colonial rule.

The adoption of new uniting principles and the formation of a collective political identity was bound to be a gradual and difficult process. Ideas and concepts such as nationalism, cultural-linguistic developement, and politicization of social and religious groups were borrowed from the West. These required time to seep into the mental makeup of the Indians used to the familiar pre-modern categories of cohesiveness such as religion, caste, locality, region or occupation. With the advent of colonialism and the emergence of modern politics, such categories of identity proved inadequate in creating a stronger, united self-image. It became imperative to make wider connections and to evolve new identities. Sometimes the parametres of a community were stretched or redefined. Bhartendu Harishchandra in the 1870's produced a detailed geneology of the origins of his Agrawal sub-caste and claimed lineage from Krishna. He also claimed that the 'Khatris' were the Kshatriyas. From the last decades of the 19th century more and more groups sought to establish their identity and status by seeking public recognition of their genealogies. The 'Kurmis' proposed that their name derived from 'Kurma', the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The 'Chamars' claimed that their progenitor was the younger of four Brahman brothers who was turned out of caste by his elder brothers. The 'Noniyas' or 'Luniyas' (salt makers) traced their ancestry to the line of Prithiraj Chauhan, king of

Delhi.(6) All these were attempts to bolster their self-image and find a continuity in history. By claiming descent from a noble lineage the lower castes and the sub-castes like the 'Chamars' and the 'Noniyas' were doing precisely what writers like Bankim and Goswami were doing for their own communities. They were all resisting the colonial impulse to homogenize. These histories of caste, religion and geneology were an assertion of an identity, a heritage of common traditions of an autonomous, politically and culturally independent community. Paradoxically, while the idea of a natural, geographical unity called Bharatvarsha came to be regularly invoked, at the same time there emerged and developed a consciousness of sub-groups.

British rule and its policy of Divide and Rule made Indians conscious of their structured society. By treating the different religious communities as separate entities and extending favour and patronage to any one religious community only, aggravated the development of communal politics. Also the Hindu ideological underpinning to Indian nationalism was a strong contributory factor. Religion, religious practices, its symbols and myths began to be made use of in politics. Early in the 20th century Tilak used the Ganesh puja and the Shivaji festival to propagate nationalism, and Bankim's motherland was an image of Chandi. The Hindu Mahasabha stood for the promotion of Hindu interests while the Muslim League existed primarily to safeguard the interests of the Indian Muslims as a separate

political identity. Syed Ahmad Khan starting with the basic assumption that the Hindus and the Muslims had separate political, social, and economic interests because they belonged to two different religious communities, argued in 1883 that self-government by means of representative institution would work in England because the population of England belongs to one religious community.(7) But it could not work in India because the majority community would override the minorities. At this stage of political development the Muslim communalists preferred British rule as they believed that a foreign power could protect the interests of the minority communities. Muslim communalists depended more on religious and minority feelings for creating an atmosphere of psychosis and fear. The Hindu communalists being the majority had to develop other tactics. They relied on the past and had to focus on those tales and heroes from the medieval period who had fought against the Muslims. The anti-Muslim heroes served very well the communal needs of the time. Since the Muslims were constructed as 'foreigners' the heroes who fought against them came to be evoked as 'national' heroes. Hence Shivaji ceased to belong to Maharashtra only, or Rana Pratap to Rajasthan, and became 'Hindu' or 'national' patriots. The foundation of the Rashtriya Svayam Sevak Sangha (RSS) in 1925 gave a new aggressive tone to communalism. During the late 1930's Vir Savarkar in his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha said:

Till at last Shivajee was born, the hour of Hindu

triumph was struck, the day of Moslem supremacy set. Under one common name 'The Hindus', under one common banner, the Hindu banner, under one common Hindu leadership, with one common ideal of the establishment of 'Hindu-Pada- Padashahi' (the Hindu Empire), with one common aim, the political liberation of 'Hindustan', the emancipation of their common Motherland and Holyland, the Hindus rose from province to province till at last the Maratha confederacy succeeded in beating to a chip the Moslem Nawabs and Nizams, Badashahas and Padashahas in a hundred battlefields.(8)

After the nineteen-twenties greater stress began to be given to nationalism which probably indicates that communalism was becoming a problem to be reckoned with. Whereas before 1920 Hindu or Muslim political mobilization was necessary, even inevitable in the process of Indian nationalism, now communitarian mobilization came to be seen as divisive, narrow and constricting. The birth of nationalism was in a way an opposition to certain extreme form of communalism which saw 'the interests of the followers of different religious or of different 'communities' to be mutually incompatible, antagonistic and hostile.'(9) Without negating the role that religion played in our private lives, nationalists like Gandhi began to give more stress on loyalty to the nation over and above loyalty to one's community. Pure nationalism above the pulls of caste, religion and community may have been only a conceptualized notion but there was definitely an emphasis on the separation of religion and politics to form a collective 'we' called the 'Indians'. The change from Hindu nationalism to Indian nationalism was, as Nehru puts it, 'inevitable'(10) because 'real or Indian nationalism was

something quite apart from the two religious and communal varieties of nationalism [Hindu and Muslim] and strictly speaking is the only form which can be called nationalism in the modern sense of the word.'(11)

The emergence of nationalism that sought to be 'secular' and exist beyond the religious community feelings led to the emphasis that India was more than only, or primarily, Hindu. The new 'India' was no longer 'Hindustan', no longer the land of any given community but the land now belonged to the millions of individuals who constituted India.(12) With this shift in the discourse, there was felt the need to forge a different kind of secular historical tradition for the 'Indian' citizen. A past had to be highlighted that gave greater emphasis on communal harmony, tolerance and national integration. With a substantial counter-construction of the Indian past an alternative reading of history, very much different from the interpretation of history in the late 19th century as in the texts we have analysed, became necessary for a common struggle against colonialism -- an effort that was bravely put up by some Indian nationalists like Gandhi and Nehru. But the India of their dreams was not yet a fully structured nation but a nation-in-the-making. Nationalism was never and could never be counter-posed to communalism -- they were always part of the same discourse. The emergence of a national identity cannot overlook the diverse regional, linguistic and ethnic identities of India -- they derive

strength from each other.

People like Bankim and Goswami tracked out a path in what used to be a void. They were creative writers but they were not merely engrossed in the pleasure of creation. They were devoted to action -- calling on others to unite in action, to resuscitate the past of their country, to reshape and restore the past for the present. Their love for their Motherland may not be nationalism of our modern times. We have to understand them in the context of their time, because we who have in recent times seen the long term consequences of communal ideology tend to impose our perspective on writers who were situated differently. In today's world and particularly in political theory a great deal of rethinking is going on about the idea of a nation -- how it is defined, how it is constructed in people's imagination, and how its continuity is ensured. This is evident in recent publications like Homi Bhabha's Nation and Narration (Routledge, 1990), E.J. Hobsbawm's Nations and Nationalism since 1780 (Cambridge, 1990), Partha Chatterjee's Nationalism and its Fragments (O.U.P. 1994), and Ashis Nandy's The Illegitimacy of Nationalism (O.U.P. 1994). In the context of this present discourse earlier texts like Rajsingha and Tara gain special significance because we see in them the beginning of the formation of new social and political identities and the adoption of new uniting principles.

NOTES

- (1) Jawaharlal Nehru, Discovery of India, (Bombay, 1961), p.286.
- (2) Qouted in The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India, Gyanendra Pandey, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992), p.212.
- (3) Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, (Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1989), p.30.
- (4) *ibid.*, p.1.
- (5) Sudipto Kaviraj, Imaginary History. (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2nd Series, No. VII, New Delhi, 1988), pp.62-3.
- (6) Source: The Construction of Communalism by Gyanendra Pandey.
- (7) Bipan Chandra, India's Struggle for Independence, (Penguin Books), 1989, p.415.
- (8) V.D.Savarkar, Hindu Rashtra Darshan, p. 40.
- (9) Bipan Chandra, India's Struggle for Independence, p.399.
- (10) Nehru, Discovery, p.286.
- (11) Nehru, Glimpses of World History II, pp.1129-30.
- (12) See Discovery of India by Jawaharlal Nehru (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982), p.60 where Nehru says that 'Bharat Mata' is not just the land or an abstraction but the millions of people who live on her.

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