

The Subalternity of a Nationalist Elite*

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The terms *middle class*, *literati*, and *intelligentsia* all have been used to describe it. Marxists have called it a petty bourgeoisie, the English rendering of *petit* marking its character with the unmistakable taint of historical insufficiency. A favourite target of the colonizer's ridicule, it was once famously described as 'an oligarchy of caste tempered by matriculation'. More recently, historians inspired by the well-meaning dogmas of American cultural anthropology called it by the name the class had given to itself—the *bhadralok*, 'respectable folk'; the latter interpreted the attempt as a sinister plot to malign its character. Whichever the name, the object of description has, however, rarely been misunderstood: in the curious context of colonial Bengal, all of these terms meant more or less the same thing.

Needless to say, much has been written about the sociological characteristics of the new middle class in colonial Bengal.¹ I do not wish to intervene in that discussion. My concern in this book is with social agency. In this particular chapter, my problem is that of mediation, in the sense of the action of a subject who stands 'in the middle', working upon and transforming one term of a relation into the other. It is more than simply a problem of 'leadership', for I will be talking about social agents who are preoccupied not only with leading their followers but who are also conscious of doing so as a

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'middle term' in a social relationship. In fact, it is this 'middleness' and the consciousness of middleness that I wish to problematize. Of all its appellations, therefore, I will mostly use the term 'middle class' to describe the principal agents of nationalism in colonial Bengal.

THE 'MIDDLINESS' OF THE CALCUTTA MIDDLE CLASS

Like middle classes elsewhere in their relation to the rise of nationalist ideologies and politics, the Calcutta middle class too has been generally acknowledged as having played a pre-eminent role in the last century and a half in creating the dominant forms of nationalist culture and social institutions in Bengal. It was this class that constructed through a modern vernacular the new forms of public discourse, laid down new criteria of social respectability, set new aesthetic and moral standards of judgment, and, suffused with its spirit of nationalism, fashioned the new forms of political mobilization that were to have such a decisive impact on the political history of the province in the twentieth century.

All this has also been written about at length. But this literature adopts, albeit necessarily, a standpoint external to the object of its inquiry. It does not let us into that vital zone of belief and practice that straddles the domains of the individual and the collective, the private and the public, the home and the world, where the new disciplinary culture of a modernizing elite has to turn itself into an exercise in self-discipline. This, however, is the investigation we need to make.

I propose to do this by taking up the question of middle-class religion.² As a point of entry, I will consider the phenomenon of Sri Ramakrishna (1836–86), which will afford us an access into a discursive domain where 'middleness' can be talked about, explored, problematized, lived out, and, in keeping with the role of cultural leadership that the middle class gave to itself, normalized.

The colonial middle class, in Calcutta no less than in other centers of colonial power, was simultaneously placed in a position of subordination in one relation and a position of dominance in another. The construction of hegemonic ideologies typically involves the cultural efforts of classes placed precisely in such situation. To identify the possibilities and limits of nationalism as a hegemonic movement, therefore, we need to look into this specific process of ideological construction and disentangle the web in which the experiences of simultaneous subordination and domination are apparently reconciled.

For the Calcutta middle class of the late nineteenth century, political and economic domination by a British colonial elite was a fact. The class was created in a relation of subordination. But its contestation of this relation was to be premised upon its cultural leadership of the indigenous colonized people. The nationalist project was in principle a hegemonic project. Our task is to probe into the history of this project, to assess its historical possibility or impossibility, to identify its origins, extent, and limits. The method, in other words, is the method of critique.

I will concentrate on a single text, the *Ramkr̥sna kathamṛta*,³ and look specifically at the construction there of a new religion for urban domestic life. The biographical question of Ramakrishna in relation to the middle class of Bengal has been studied from new historiographical premises by Sumit Sarkar:⁴ I will not address this question. Rather, I will read the *Kathamṛta* not so much as a text that tells us about Ramakrishna as one that tells us a great deal about the Bengali middle class. The *Kathamṛta*, it seems to me, is a document of the fears and anxieties of a class aspiring to hegemony. It is, if I may put this in a somewhat paradoxical form, a text that reveals to us the subalternity of an elite.

[...]

DOUBTS

[...]

[...] The Brahma religion, influential as it had been in the social life of urban Bengal, was undoubtedly restricted in its appeal to a very small section of the new middle class. In the 1870s there were scarcely more than a hundred Brahma families in Calcutta; fewer than a thousand persons in the city declared themselves as Brahmans in the 1881 census.⁵ Keshab [Chandra Sen, 1838–84] was beginning to feel that there was something inherently limiting in the strict rationalism of the new faith. In his writings and speeches of the mid-1870s, Keshab talked frequently of the importance of a faith that was not shackled by the debilitating doubts of cold reason. [...]

[...]

[... Keshab] was deeply concerned that the rationalist ideal which he and his predecessors had pursued was alien to the traditions of his country and its people. [...]

It is also significant that in his search for a path of reform in consonance with Eastern spirituality, Keshab was looking for an

inspired messenger through whom God makes his appearance in human history. The idea was repugnant to many enlightened brahmos, for it smacked of the age-old Hindu belief in the *avatara* (divine incarnation); Debendranath Tagore is said to have remarked that in a country where even fish and turtles were regarded as incarnations of God, he found it strange that Keshab should aspire to be one.⁶ But Keshab's doubts were of a different sort: he had become skeptical about the powers of the human intellect and will. [...]

This was roughly Keshab Sen's frame of mind when, one day in the middle of March 1875, he retired as usual to the quiet of the garden house in Belgharia and had a visitor.

THE MEETING

[...]

Ramakrishna was at this time entirely unknown among the Calcutta middle class. True, he had been patronized by Rani Rasmani of Janbazar, and she along with several members of her family regarded Ramakrishna with much veneration. But Rasmani's family, largely because of its lower-caste background, was not a part of the culturally dominant elite of Calcutta, although she herself was well known as a spirited and philanthropic woman. [...]

[...]

What might be called the official biography of Ramakrishna, the *Ramkrshna-lilaprasanga*, describes Ramakrishna on this day as clothed in 'a dhoti with a red border, one end thrown across the left shoulder'. On being introduced, he said, 'Babu, I am told that you people have seen God. I have come to hear what you have seen.' This is how the conversation began. [...]⁷

The same incident is described by Pratap Mozoomdar from the point of view of Keshab's followers. 'Soon he began to discourse in a sort of half-delirious state, becoming now and then quite unconscious. What he said, however, was so profound and beautiful that we soon perceived he was no ordinary man.'⁸

[...]

THE DISCOVERY

Keshab Sen ran two newspapers. The English paper, the *Indian Mirror*, began as a weekly and in 1871 became a daily. The Bengali weekly, *Sulabh Samacar*, was started in November 1870 and in three months reached a peak circulation of twenty-seven thousand. Even in 1877

when its circulation had dropped somewhat because of competition from other publications it was still the most widely circulated paper in Bengali.⁹

Two weeks after the meeting between Keshab Sen and Ramakrishna, the *Indian Mirror* published an article entitled 'A Hindu Saint'. After describing the great Hindu devotees talked about in the religious literature of India and still revered in popular memory, it continued: We met one not long ago, and were charmed by the depth, penetration and simplicity of his spirit. The never-ceasing metaphors and analogies in which he indulged are, most of them, as apt as they are beautiful. The characteristics of the mind are the very opposite of those of Pandit Dayanand Saraswati, the former being gentle, tender and contemplative as the latter is sturdy, masculine and polemical. Hinduism must have in it a deep source of beauty, truth and goodness to inspire such men as these.¹⁰

It is more than likely that the article was written by Keshab himself and a few weeks later something along the same lines appeared in *Sulabh Samacar*, the first of several articles on Ramakrishna published in that paper.

Suddenly Ramakrishna became an object of great curiosity among the educated young men of Calcutta. [...]

Balaram Bose, who came from a wealthy family of landlords and was one of Ramakrishna's principal patrons in the last years of his life, first read about him in Keshab Sen's newspapers.¹¹ So did Girishchandra Ghosh, the foremost personality in the Calcutta theatre at this time.¹² By the early years of the 1880s, when most of the men who would form the closest circle of disciples around Ramakrishna had gathered in Dakshineswar,¹³ he was a frequently discussed personality in the schools, colleges, and newspapers of Calcutta.

Remarkably, the enormous legend that would be built around Ramakrishna's name in the words and thoughts of the Calcutta middle class was the result of a fairly short acquaintance, beginning only eleven years before his death. Only in those last years of his life did he cast his spell over so many distinguished men, who would make his name a household word among educated Bengalis.

The followers of Keshabchandra and Ramakrishna have, of course, never managed to agree on which of the two great leaders influenced the other. The hagiographers of Ramakrishna write as though Keshab, a determined seeker after truth who roamed aimlessly for the greater part of his life, finally found salvation at the feet of the Master. [...] A biographer of Keshab, on the other hand, complains: 'It

is sad to contemplate that such friendship should be misunderstood, misinterpreted. It has even been suggested that Keshub borrowed his religion of Harmony, the New Dispensation, from Ramakrishna.¹⁴

With the advantage of a hundred years of hindsight, we have no need to take sides in this quarrel. But, for precisely that reason—the fact that we are prisoners of an incorrigibly historical vision of our selves and the world—we had to begin our story with the meeting in Belgharia on a spring afternoon in 1875.

DIVINE PLAY

This, however, is not how the story is supposed to begin. Those who tell the story of Ramakrishna remind us that the Master's life was not the life of any ordinary man, not even that of an extraordinary man. The Absolute being, in one of his inscrutable, playful decisions, appears on earth from time to time in the guise of a human being to act out an exemplary life for the edification of the world. According to the authorized version, therefore, the story of Ramakrishna's life must be told as one more episode in an eternal *lila*.

[...]

In the *Lilaprasaṅga*, Saradananda [Ramakrishna's biographer] takes great pains to explain to what he presumes will be a skeptical readership the significance of...extraordinary and miraculous happenings surrounding Ramakrishna's birth.¹⁵ He argues, for instance, that such events are common to the life stories of all great souls 'who sanctify the earth by their birth,' stories that 'are recorded in the religious books of all races.' Similar events portray 'the unique spiritual experience and visions' of the parents of Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, Jesus, Sankara and Caitanya.¹⁶ [...] Miraculousness, it would seem, is the aura that surrounds the life histories of those who are the incarnations of God and marks out their lives as different from history itself.

But Saradananda also has other arguments to offer. India, he thinks, has been particularly blessed by the Almighty Being in the matter of incarnations. This explains the spirituality of Indian culture. When we make a comparative study of the spiritual beliefs and ideals of India and of other countries, we notice a vast difference between them. From very ancient times India has taken entities beyond the senses, namely, God, the self, the next world, etc., to be real, and has employed all its efforts towards their direct realization. ... All its activities have accordingly been coloured by intense spirituality throughout the ages. ... The source of this absorbing interest in things beyond the senses is due to the frequent birth in India of men possessing a direct knowledge of these things and endowed with divine qualities.¹⁷

Knowledge of a similar kind, Saradananda is sure, is denied to the West, for the procedures of Western knowledge are 'attracted only by external objects.'

Although capable of achieving great progress in physical science, the [Western] procedure...could not lead men to the knowledge of the Atman. For the only way to attain that knowledge is through self-control, selflessness and introspection, and the only instrument for attaining it is the mind, with all its functions brought under absolute control.

Western knowledge could not accomplish this. Consequently, Western people 'missed the path to Self-knowledge and became materialists, identifying themselves with the body'.¹⁸

We have here the familiar nationalist problematic of the material and the spiritual, the identification of an incompleteness in the claims of the modern West to a superior culture and asserting the sovereignty of the nation over the domain of spirituality. In itself, this is not surprising because Saradananda himself was very much a part of the middle-class culture of Bengal that had, by the turn of the century, come to accept these criteria as fundamental in the framing of questions of cultural choice. What is curious is that instead of 'cleaning up' the layers of myth and legend from the life story of someone like Ramakrishna and presenting it as the rational history of human exemplariness, as in Bankim's *Krsnacaritra*, for instance, Saradananda seeks to do the very opposite: he authenticates the myth by declaring that the life of Ramakrishna is not to be read as human history but as divine play.¹⁹

Indeed, Saradananda is forthright in stating his purpose. Why does he feel called upon to write the story of Ramakrishna's life for his educated readership? The reason has to do with 'the occupation of India by the West'.

Coming more and more under the spell of the West, India rejected the ideal of renunciation and self-control and began to run after worldly pleasures. This attitude brought with it the decay of the ancient system of education and training, and there arose atheism, love of imitation and lack of self-confidence. [...] The influence of the west had brought about its fall. Would it not be futile, then, to look to the atheistic West for its resurrection? Being itself imperfect, how could the West make another part of the world perfect?²⁰

The conditions of the problem were clear. The assertion of spirituality would have to rest on an essential difference between East and West, and the domain of autonomy thus defined would have to be ordered on one's own terms, not on those set by the conqueror in the material world. If myth is the form in which the truth is miraculously

revealed in the domain of Eastern spirituality, then it is myth that must be affirmed and the quibbles of a skeptical rationalism declared out of bounds.

[...]

Thus it was that Ramakrishna decided to gather around him a circle of young disciples and to initiate them into his religion. In each case, the Master had a yogic vision of the disciple before he actually arrived in Dakshineswar.²¹ From the beginning of 1881, ‘the all-renouncing devotees, the eternal playmates of the Master in his Lila, began coming to him one by one’.²² By 1884, they had all arrived. It was only then that Ramakrishna finally took up his *divyabhava*, ‘the attitude of the divine’.

The purpose of all this is clear to Saradananda. Had not the Divine Lord promised in the *Gita* that whenever religion declines, he would assume a human body and manifest his powers?²³ Now, when the nation lay enslaved and its brightest minds confused and frustrated, had not such a time arrived?

[...]

But although the *Lilaprasanga* claims to be something like an official biography, it is not the text that is most familiar to generations of avid readers of Ramakrishna literature. That honour is reserved for the *Ramkrshna kathamrta*. Circulated now in several editions and virtually annual reprints, it is a collection of the Master’s ‘sayings’. Ever since its publication in the early years of this century, its five volumes have acted as the principal sourcebook on Ramakrishna.

LANGUAGE

Sumit Sarkar has noted the stylistic peculiarity of the *Kathamrta* in the way it combines two radically different linguistic idioms—one, the rustic colloquial idiom spoken by Ramakrishna, and the other, the chaste formality of the new written prose of nineteenth-century Calcutta.²⁴ The former, for all its rusticity (a ‘rusticity’, we must remember, itself produced by the difference created in the nineteenth century between the new high culture of urban sophistication and everything else that became marked as coarse, rustic, or merely local), was by no means a language that any villager in nineteenth-century Bengal would have spoken, for its use by Ramakrishna shows great conceptual richness, metaphoric power, and dialectical skill. It was the language of preachers and poets in pre-colonial Bengal, and even when used by

someone without much formal learning (such as Ramakrishna), it was able to draw upon the conceptual and rhetorical resources of a vast body of literate tradition. By contrast, the new written prose of late nineteenth-century Calcutta, in what may be called its post-Bankim phase, was distinct not so much as a 'development' of earlier narrative forms but fundamentally by virtue of its adoption of a wholly different, that is, modern European, discursive framework. Recent studies have identified the ways in which grammatical models borrowed from the modern European languages shaped the 'standard' syntactic forms of modern Bengali prose; other studies have shown similar 'modular' influences of rhetorical forms borrowed from English in particular.²⁵

The appearance of these formal differences between the two idioms was of course intricately tied to another difference—a difference in the very conceptual and logical apparatus articulated in language. The users of the new Bengali prose not only said things in a new way, they also had new things to say. This was the principal intellectual impetus that led to the rapid flourishing of the modern Bengali prose literature; by the 1880s, when Mahendranath Gupta (1854–1932) was recording his diary entries of Ramakrishna's sayings for what was to become the *Kathamrta*, a considerable printing and publishing industry operated in Calcutta (in fact, one of the more important industrial activities in the city), testifying to the creation of both a modern 'high culture' and a 'print-capitalism', the two sociological conditions that are supposed to activate the nationalist imagination.²⁶ What is nevertheless intriguing is the quite rapid 'standardization' of this prose. The 1850s was still a time when a 'standard' form had not appeared; by the 1880s, the 'standard' form had come to stay. It is worth speculating whether the sheer proximity of European discursive models—available, palpable, already standardized by more momentous historical processes and hence unquestionably worthy of emulation—had something to do with the astonishing speed with which the entirely new form of narrative prose came to be accepted as 'normal' by the English-educated Bengali middle class.

The modular influence was strongest when written prose was employed to discuss subjects that were explicitly theoretical or philosophical. The *Kathamrta* is marked not only by the divergence between the 'rustic' and the 'urban' idioms in Bengali; it is an even more explicitly bilingual text in its repeated employment of English terms, phrases, and quotations. It is remarkable how often Mahendranath

introduces with a heading in English sections in which Ramakrishna discusses questions of a philosophical nature: there must be some fifty sections with titles such as ‘Reconciliation of free Will and God’s Will—of Liberty and Necessity’, or ‘Identity of the Absolute or Universal Ego and the Phenomenal World’, or ‘Problems of Evil and the Immortality of the Soul’, or ‘Philosophy and Scepticism’, and so on. Each heading of this kind is followed by a recording of Ramakrishna’s own words or a conversation, directly reported, between him and his disciples. Mahendranath, in his self-appointed role of narrator, does not attempt to explicate the sayings of his preceptor, and yet this form of introducing sections serves to create the impression that Ramakrishna is dealing with the same questions that are discussed in European philosophy. Mahendranath also repeatedly translates various philosophical concepts used by Ramakrishna with English terms and inserts them into the text in parentheses or in footnotes. Thus, for instance, when Ramakrishna describes his state of trance as one in which he is unable to count things—*ek duier par* (literally, ‘beyond ones and twos’)—Mahendranath adds a footnote in English: ‘The absolute as distinguished from the relative.’ [...] A section entitled ‘Perception of the Infinite’ has a footnote saying, ‘Compare discussion about the order of perception of the Infinite and of the Finite in Max Müller’s Hibbert Lectures and Gifford Lectures.’

This bilingual dialogue runs through the text, translating the terms of an Indian philosophical discourse into those of nineteenth-century European logic and metaphysics. It is as though the wisdom of an ancient speculative tradition of the East, sustained for centuries not only in philosophical texts composed by the learned but through debates and disquisitions among preachers and mystics, is being made available to minds shaped by the modes of European speculative philosophy. (The invocation of Max Müller is significant.) This dialogue also expresses the desire to assert that the ‘common’ philosophy of ‘rustic’ Indian preachers is no less sophisticated, no less ‘classical’ in its intellectual heritage, than the learned speculations of modern European philosophers: in fact, the former is shown as providing different, and perhaps better, answers to the same philosophical problems posed in European philosophy.²⁷ [...] But for both narrator and reader of the *Kathamrta*, the terrain of European thought is familiar ground—familiar, yet foreign—from which they set out to discover (or perhaps, rediscover) the terrain of the indigenous

and the popular, a home from which they have been wrenched. The bilingual discourse takes place within the same consciousness, where both lord and bondsman reside. Contestation and mediation have taken root within the new middle-class mind, a mind split in two.

[...]

THE PRISONHOUSE OF REASON

For the colonized middle-class mind, caught in its 'middleness', the discourse of Reason was not unequivocally liberating. The invariable implication it carried of the historical necessity of colonial rule and its condemnation of indigenous culture as the storehouse of unreason, or (in a stage-of-civilization argument) of reason yet unborn, which only colonial rule would bring to birth (as father, mother, or midwife—which?), made the discourse of Reason oppressive. It was an oppression that the middle-class mind often sought to escape. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), unquestionably the most brilliant rationalist essayist of the time, escaped into the world not of mythic time but of imaginary history, sliding imperceptibly from the past-as-it-might-have-been to the past-as-it-should-have-been to an invocation of the past-as-it-will-be.²⁸ So did the most brilliant rationalist defender of 'orthodox' tradition—Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827–94), in that remarkable piece of utopian history *Svapnalabdha bharatbarser itihās* (The history of India as revealed in a dream). More common was the escape from the oppressive rigidities of the new discursive prose into the semantic richness and polyphony of ordinary, uncolonized speech. [...] Even more striking is the communicative power of the modern Bengali drama, the least commended on aesthetic grounds by the critics of modern Bengali literature (certainly so in comparison with the novel or the short story or poetry) and yet arguably the most effective cultural form through which the English-educated literati of Calcutta commanded a popular audience (and the one cultural form subjected to the most rigorous and sustained police censorship by the colonial government). Reborn in the middle of the nineteenth century in the shapes prescribed by European theatre, the modern Bengali drama found its strength not so much in the carefully structured directedness of dramatic action and conflict as in the rhetorical power of speech. Where written prose marked a domain already surrendered to the colonizer, common speech thrived within its zealously guarded zone of autonomy and freedom.

FEAR

It is important to note that the subordination of the Bengali middle class to the colonial power was based on much more than a mental construct. Hegemonic power is always a combination of force and the persuasive self-evidence of ideology. To the extent that the persuasive apparatus of colonial ideology necessarily and invariably fails to match the requirements of justifying direct political domination, colonial rule is always marked by the palpable, indeed openly demonstrated, presence of physical force.

For the middle-class Bengali babu of late nineteenth-century Calcutta, the figures of the white boss in a mercantile office or a jute mill, the magistrate in court, the officer in the district, the police sergeant or uniformed soldiers and sailors roaming the streets of Calcutta (invariably, it seems, in a state of drunkenness) were not objects of respect and emulation: they were objects of fear.

Consider the following episode from a skit written by Girishchandra Ghosh (1844–1912), the most eminent playwright and producer on the nineteenth-century Calcutta stage and a close disciple of Ramakrishna. This minor farce, *Bellik-bajar*, was first performed at the Star theatre on Christmas Eve of 1886, only a few months after Ramakrishna's death.²⁹

The opening scene is set, not without reason, in the Death Registration office at the Nimtala cremation ground in Calcutta. We meet first a doctor and then a lawyer inquiring from a *murdapharas* (whose business it is to burn dead bodies) about recent cremations. They are practitioners of the new arts of commercialization of death: the first works upon bodies in a state of sickness, prolonging the disease while holding death at bay; the second begins his work after death, entangling surviving relatives in an endless chain of litigation. The colonial city is where people come to make money out of death. The sole official representative here—the registration clerk (who, when we meet him, is, suitably enough, asleep)—has the job of putting into the official accounts the details of every death.

Enter Dokari, himself a recent and lowly entrant into the world of the Calcutta babus, learning to survive by his wits in a city of worldly opportunities. He tells the two gentlemen about the death of a wealthy trader whose only son, Lalit, would be an easy prey for all of them. The three strike a deal and proceed to lure the moneyed young man into the path of expensive living, dubious property deals, and lawsuits. In time, Dokari is predictably outmaneuvered by his more

accomplished partners and, thrown out by his wealthy patron, finds himself back on the street. It is Christmas Eve, and the lawyer and doctor have arranged a lavish party, at Lalit's expense, of course, where they are to deliver upon their unsuspecting victim the coup de grâce. Dokari, roaming the streets, suddenly comes upon three Englishmen and, instinctively, turns around and runs. (The italicized words in the following extracts are in English in the original.)

ENG. 1: *Not so fast, not so fast...*

They catch hold of Dokari.

DOKARI: Please, saheb! *Poor man!...License have, thief not.*

ENG 1: *Hold the ankle, Dick. Darkee wants a swing...*

They lift him up and swing him in the air.

DOKARI: My bones *all another place*, my insides *up down*, head *making thus thus*. [Falls]

....

ENG 2: *Grog-shop?*

DOKARI: Curse in English as much as you please. I don't understand it, so it doesn't touch me.

ENG 2: *A good ale house?*

DOKARI: Let me give it back to you in Bengali. My great-grandson is married to your sister, I'm married to your sister, I'm her bastard. ...

ENG 3: *Wine shop...sharab ghar...*

Dokari now realizes what the Englishmen want and remembers the party in Lalit's gardenhouse.

DOKARI: *Yes, sir, your servant, sir. Wine shop here not. Master eat wine? Come garden, very near. ... Brandy, whiskey, champagne, all, all, fowl, cutlet...free, free, come garden, come my back, back me, not beat, come from my back.*

The party is a travesty of 'enlightened' sociability, with a couple of hired dancing girls posing as the liberated wives of our friends the lawyer and the doctor. A social reformer delivers an impassioned speech on the ignorance and irrationality of his countrymen. As he ends his speech with the words 'Oh! Poor India, where art thou, come to your own country,' Dokari enters with the three Englishmen. The sight of the white men causes immediate panic, the party breaks up in confusion, and the Englishmen settle down to a hearty meal.

A mortal fear of the Englishman and of the world over which he dominated was a constituent element in the consciousness of the Calcutta middle class—in its obsequious homages in pidgin English

and foul-mouthed denunciations in Bengali no less than in the measured rhetoric of enlightened social reformers. But fear can also be the source of new strategies of survival and resistance.

WITHDRAWAL FROM KARMA

[...]

MASTER: [...] In the Kaliyuga the best way is bhaktiyoga, the path of devotion singing the praises of the Lord, and prayer. The path of devotion is the religion [*dharma*] of this age.³⁰

This recurrent message runs through the *Kathamrta*. Worldly pursuits occupy a domain of selfish and particular interests. It is a domain of conflict, of domination and submission, of social norms, legal regulations, disciplinary rules enforced by the institutions of power. It is a domain of constant flux, ups and downs of fortune, a domain of greed and of humiliation. It is a domain that the worldly householder cannot do without, but it is one he has to enter because of the force of circumstances over which he has no control. But he can always escape into his own world of consciousness, where worldly pursuits are forgotten, where they have no essential existence. This is the inner world of devotion, a personal relation of *bhakti* (devotion) with the Supreme Being.

[...]

OF WOMAN AND GOLD

What is it that stands between the family man and his quest for God? It is a double impediment, fused into one. *Kamini-kañcan*, 'woman and gold', 'woman-gold': one stands for the other. Together they represent *maya*, man's attachment to and greed for things particular and transient, the fickle pursuit of immediate worldly interest. Together they stand as figures of the bondage of man.

[...]

This woman who stands as a sign of man's bondage in the world is the woman of flesh and blood, woman in the immediacy of everyday life, with a fearsome sexuality that lures, ensnares, and imprisons the true self of man. It binds him to a pursuit of worldly interests that can only destroy him. The figure of this woman is typically that of the seductress.

[...]

MASTER: [...] You must be extremely careful about women. *Gopala bhava!* Pay no attention to such things. The proverb says: 'Woman devours the three worlds.' Many women, when they see handsome and healthy young men, lay snares for them. That's *gopala bhava!*³¹

[...]

The only path for survival for the householder is to reduce one's attachments in the world, to sever oneself and withdraw from the ties of worldly interest, escape into the freedom of a personal relationship of devotion to an absolute power that stands above all temporal and transient powers.

[...]

The creation of this autonomous domain of freedom in consciousness impels the family man to an everyday routine of nonattached performance of worldly activities, guided by duty (*kartavya*) and compassion (*daya*), not by the sensual pursuit of *kama* (desire) or the interested pursuit of *artha* (wealth).

[...]

MASTER: When one has true love for God [*ragabhakti*], there are no ties of attachment with one's wife or child or kin. There is only compassion. The world becomes a foreign land, a land where one comes to work. Just as one's home is in the village, Calcutta is only a place where one works.³²

[...]

MASTER: [...] So I say to those who visit me: 'Live in the world by all means. There is no harm in that. But always keep your mind on God. Know for certain that this house, family and property are not yours. They are God's. Your real home is beside god.'³³

In fact, with an attitude of non-attachment, the family man can turn his home into a haven for his spiritual pursuits.

MASTER: [...] Why should you leave the world? In fact, there are advantages at home. You don't have to worry about food. Live with your wife—nothing wrong in that. Whatever you need for your physical comforts, you have them at home. If you are ill, you have people to look after you.³⁴

[...] For the most part, the life of a householder can be ordered by means of a suitable *asramadharmā*.

MASTER: The renunciation of woman-and-gold is meant for the sannyasi. ... [It] is not meant for householders like you. ... As for you, live with woman in an unattached way, as far as possible. From time to time, go away to a quiet place and think of God. Women must not be present there. If you acquire faith and devotion in God, you can remain unattached. [...] ³⁵

[...]

THE ASSERTION OF MASCULINITY

The figure of woman often acts as a sign in discursive formations, standing for concepts or entities that have little to do with women in

actuality. Each signification of this kind also implies a corresponding sign in which the figure of man is made to stand for other concepts or entities, opposed to and contrasted with the first. However, signs can be operated upon—connected to, transposed with, differentiated from other signs in a semantic field where new meanings are produced.

The figure of woman as *kamini* and the identification of this figure with *kancan* (gold) produced a combination that signified a social world of everyday transactions in which the family man was held in bondage. In terms of genealogy, the specific semantic content of this idea in Ramakrishna's sayings could well be traced to a very influential lineage in popular religious beliefs in Bengal, in which the female, in her essence of *prakṛti*, the principle of motion or change, is conceived of as unleashing the forces of *pravr̥tti*, or desire, to bring about degeneration and death in the male, whose essence of *purusa* represents the principle of stasis or rest.³⁶ (One must, however, be careful, first, not to attribute to this any essentialist meaning characteristic of 'Hindu tradition' or 'Indian tradition' or even 'popular tradition', for it is only one strand in pre-colonial religious and philosophical thought. Second, we must bear in mind that even this idea of the male and female principles operated within a rich semantic field and was capable of producing in religious doctrines and literary traditions a wide variety of specific meanings.)

But in the particular context of the *Kathamṛta* in relation to middle-class culture, the figure of woman-and-gold could acquire the status of a much more specific sign: the sign of the economic and political subordination of the respectable male householder in colonial Calcutta. It connoted humiliation and fear, the constant troubles and anxieties of maintaining a life of respectability and dignity, the sense of intellectual confusion and spiritual crisis in which neither the traditional prescriptions of ritual practice nor the unconcretized principles of enlightened rationality could provide adequate guidance in regulating one's daily life in a situation that, after all, was unprecedented in 'tradition'. The sign, therefore, was loaded with negative meanings: greed, venality, deception, immorality, aggression, violence—the qualifications of success in the worlds both of commerce and of statecraft. The signification, in other words, could work toward a moral condemnation of the wealthy and the powerful. It would also produce a searing condemnation in nationalist mythography of the British imperialist—the unscrupulous trader turned ruthless conqueror.

The figure of woman-and-gold also signified the enemy within: that part of one's own self which was susceptible to the temptations of an ever-unreliable worldly success. From this signification stemmed a strategy of survival, of the stoical defence of the autonomy of the weak encountered in the 'message' of Ramakrishna. It involved, as we have seen, an essentialization of the 'inner' self of the man-in-the-world and an essentialization of womanhood in the protective and nurturing figure of the mother. This inner sanctum was to be valorized as a haven of mental peace, spiritual security, and emotional comfort: woman as mother, safe, comforting, indulgent, playful, and man as child, innocent, vulnerable, ever in need of care and protection.

But we are dealing here with a middle class whose 'middleness' would never let its consciousness rest in stoical passivity. The 'hypermasculinity' of imperialist ideology made the figure of the weak, irresolute, effeminate babu a special target of contempt and ridicule.³⁷ The colonized literati reacted with rage and indignation, inflicting upon itself a fierce assault of self-ridicule and self-irony. No one was more unsparing in this than Bankimchandra.³⁸

[...] [C]onsider the following, purportedly a prediction by the sage Vaisampayana, the all-seeing reciter of the *Mahabharata*:

The word 'babu' will have many meanings. Those who will rule India in the Kali age and be known as Englishmen will understand by the word a common clerk or superintendent of provisions; to the poor it will mean those wealthier than themselves, to servants the master. [...] He who has one word in his mind, which becomes ten when he speaks, hundred when he writes and thousands when he quarrels is a babu. He whose strength is one-time in his hands, ten-times in his mouth, a hundred times behind the back and absent at the time of action is a babu. He whose deity is the Englishman, preceptor the Brahmo preacher, scriptures the newspapers and pilgrimage the National Theater is a babu. He who declares himself a Christian to missionaries, a Brahmo to Keshabchandra, a Hindu to his father and an atheist to the Brahman beggar is a babu. One who drinks water at home, alcohol at his friend's, receives abuse from the prostitute and kicks from his boss is a babu. He who hates oil when he bathes, his own fingers when he eats and his mother tongue when he speaks is indeed a babu. [...]

O King, the people whose virtues I have recited to you will come to believe that by chewing *pan*, lying prone on the bed, making bilingual conversation and smoking tobacco, they will reconquer India.³⁹

The mode of self-ridicule became a major literary form of expressing the bhadralok's view of himself. And once the moral premises of the auto-critique had been stated publicly—the valorization, that is to say, of courage, achievement, control, and just power as the essence of

true manliness—the critique of babu effeminacy could be legitimately voiced even by the babu’s indigenous ‘others’, that is, by the women in their families and by both men and women of the lower classes. Fiction and drama in late nineteenth-century Bengal are replete with instances of women, from ‘respectable’ families as well as from the urban poor, showing up the pretentiousness, cowardice, and effeminacy of the educated male.

We have then, simultaneously with the enchantment of the middle class with Ramakrishna’s mystical play upon the theme of the feminization of the male, an invocation of physical strength as the true history of the nation, an exhortation to educated men to live up to their responsibilities as leaders of the nation, as courageous sons of a mother humiliated by a foreign intruder. Narendranath transformed into Swami Vivekananda is the most dramatic example of this switching of signs, converting Ramakrishna’s message of inner devotion into a passionate plea for moral action in the world, turning the attitude of defensive stoicism into a call for vanguardist social and, by implication, political activism. Bankim too used the inherently polysomic possibilities of the construction of social entities as gendered categories by classicizing, in an entirely ‘modern’ way, the ideal of masculinity as standing for the virtues of self-respect, justice, ethical conduct, responsibility, and enlightened leadership, and of femininity as courage, sacrifice, inspiration, and source of strength.

Ramakrishna was hardly appreciative of these exhortations of hyper-masculinity in the male or of the supposed activization of the masculine-in-the-female. [...] ⁴⁰. More interesting is a report on Mahendranath’s reading passages from Bankim’s novel *Debi Caudhurani* to Ramakrishna. [...] [and] then read from the novel the section on Praphulla’s education, on how she read grammar, poetry, Sankhya, Vedanta, logic.

MASTER: Do you know what this means? That you cannot have knowledge without learning. This writer and people like him think, ‘Learning first, God later. To find God you must first have knowledge of books!’ ⁴¹

Ramakrishna was thoroughly unconvinced by the emerging middle-class ideal of the ‘new’ woman who would fulfil her vocation as daughter, wife, or mother in respectable urban homes precisely by means of an education that had been denied to ‘traditional’ women or to women of the lower classes. [...]

What is rational and realistic to Bankim becomes immoral worldliness to Ramakrishna; what is true devotion to Ramakrishna

becomes hypocrisy to Bankim. Both attitudes were, however, parts of the same consciousness. They came to be reconciled in curious ways, most importantly by an ingenious and not always comfortable separation between, on one plane, the outer and the inner selves, and on another plane, the public and the private selves. The public self of the intelligentsia was its political self—rationalist, modern, expressing itself within the hegemonic discursive domain of enlightened nationalism. The private self was where it retreated from the humiliation of a failed hegemony. [...]

TO RETURN TO MEDIATION

There are three themes in this reading of the *Kathamrta* that I will pursue in the rest of this book. All of them have to do with nationalism as a project of mediation.

First is the appropriation of the popular. Mahendranath's favourite description of Ramakrishna is that of the child—laughing, innocent, mischievous, playful. This innocence is not quite pre-adult, but an innocence that has passed through the anxieties and misfortunes of adulthood to return to itself. It is an innocence that contains within itself a wisdom far richer and more resilient than the worldly cunning of worldly adults.

We know this to be the preferred form in which middle-class-consciousness desires to appropriate the popular. The popular becomes the repository of natural truth, naturally self-sustaining and therefore timeless. It has to be approached not by the calculating analytic of rational reasoning but by 'feelings of the heart', by lyrical compassion. The popular is also the timeless truth of the national culture, uncontaminated by colonial reason. In poetry, music, drama, painting, and now in film and the commercial arts of decorative design, this is the form in which a middle-class culture, constantly seeking to 'nationalize' itself, finds nourishment in the popular.

The popular is also appropriated in a sanitized form, carefully erased of all marks of vulgarity, coarseness, localism, and sectarian identity. The very timelessness of its 'structure' opens itself to normalization.

The popular enters hegemonic national discourse as a gendered category. In its immediate being, it is made to carry the negative marks of concrete sexualized femininity. Immediately, therefore, what is popular is unthinking, ignorant, superstitious, scheming, quarrelsome, and also potentially dangerous and uncontrollable. But with the mediation of enlightened leadership, its true essence is

made to shine forth in its natural strength and beauty: its capacity for resolute endurance and sacrifice and its ability to protect and nourish.

The second theme is that of the classicization of tradition. A nation, or so at least the nationalist believes, must have a past. If nineteenth-century Englishmen could claim, with scant regard for the particularities of geography or anthropology, a cultural ancestry in classical Greece, there was no reason why nineteenth-century Bengalis could not claim one in the Vedic age. All that was necessary was a classicization of tradition. Orientalist scholarship had already done the groundwork for this. A classicization of modern Bengali high culture—its language, literature, aesthetics, religion, philosophy—preceded the birth of political nationalism and worked alongside it well into the present century.

A mode of classicization could comfortably incorporate as particulars the diverse identities in 'Indian tradition', including such overtly anti-Brahmanical movements as Buddhism, Jainism, and the various deviant popular sects. A classicization of tradition was, in any case, a prior requirement for the vertical appropriation of sanitized popular traditions.

The real difficulty was with Islam in India, which could claim, within the same classicizing mode, an alternative classical tradition. The national past had been constructed by the early generation of the Bengali intelligentsia as a 'Hindu' past, regardless of the fact that the appellation itself was of recent vintage and that the revivalism chose to define itself by a name given to it by 'others'. This history of the nation could accommodate Islam only as a foreign element, domesticated by shearing its own lineage of a classical past. Popular Islam could then be incorporated in the national culture in the doubly sanitized form of syncretism.

The middle-class culture we have spoken of here was, and still is, in its overwhelming cultural content, 'Hindu'. Its ability and willingness to extend its hegemonic boundaries to include what was distinctly Islamic became a matter of much contention in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bengal, giving rise to alternative hegemonic efforts at both the classicization of the Islamic tradition and the appropriation of a sanitized popular Islam.

The third theme concerns the structure of the hegemonic domain of nationalism. Nationalism inserted itself into a new public sphere

where it sought to overcome the subordination of the colonized middle class. In that sphere, nationalism insisted on eradicating all signs of colonial difference by which the colonized people had been marked as incorrigibly inferior and therefore undeserving of the status of self-governing citizens of a modern society. Thus, the legal-institutional forms of political authority that nationalists subscribed to were entirely in conformity with the principles of a modern regime of power and were often modelled on specific examples supplied by western Europe and North America. In this public sphere created by the political processes of the colonial state, therefore, the nationalist criticism was not that colonial rule was imposing alien institutions of state on indigenous society but rather that it was restricting and even violating the true principles of modern government. Through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, accompanied by the spread of the institutions of capitalist production and exchange, these legal and administrative institutions of the modern state penetrated deeper and deeper into colonial society and touched upon the lives of greater and greater sections of the people. In this aspect of the political domain, therefore, the project of nationalist hegemony was, and in its postcolonial phase, continues to be, to institute and ramify the characteristically modern forms of disciplinary power.

But there was another aspect of the new political domain in which this hegemonic project involved an entirely contrary movement. Here, unlike in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the public sphere in the political domain, and its literary precursors in the debating societies and learned bodies, did not emerge out of the discursive construction of a social world peopled by 'individuals'. Nor was there an 'audience-oriented subjectivity', by which the new conjugal family's intimate domain became publicly transparent and thus consistent with and amenable to the discursive controls of the public sphere in the political domain.⁴² In Europe, even as the distinction was drawn between the spheres of the private and the public, of 'man' and 'bourgeois' and later of 'man' and 'citizen', the two spheres were nevertheless united within a single political domain and made entirely consistent with its universalist discourse. In colonial society, the political domain was under alien control and the colonized excluded from its decisive zones by a rule of colonial difference. Here for the colonized to allow the intimate domain of the family to become amenable to the discursive regulations of the political

domain inevitably meant a surrender of autonomy. The nationalist response was to constitute a new sphere of the private in a domain marked by cultural difference: the domain of the 'national' was defined as one that was different from the 'Western'. The new subjectivity that was constructed here was premised not on a conception of universal humanity, but rather on particularity and difference: the identity of the 'national' community as against other communities.⁴³ In this aspect of the political domain, then, the hegemonic movement of nationalism was not to promote but rather, in a quite fundamental sense, to resist the sway of the modern institutions of disciplinary power.

The contradictory implications of these two movements in the hegemonic domain of nationalism have been active right through its career and continue to affect the course of postcolonial politics. The process could be described, in Gramscian terms, as 'passive revolution' and contains, I think, a demonstration of both the relevance and the insurmountable limits of a Foucauldian notion of the modern regime of disciplinary power.⁴⁴ The search for a postcolonial modernity has been tied, from its very birth, with its struggle against modernity. [...]

NOTES

1. To mention only a few of the more notable works: J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal* (Berkeley, 1968); Anil Seal, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1971); Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History* (Calcutta, 1978); Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (New Delhi, 1973); Rajat K. Ray, *Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal, 1875–1914* (Delhi, 1984).

2. A recent work that raises this question is Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Delhi, 1988).

3. Ma [Mahendranath Gupta], *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, 5 vols (Calcutta: 1902–32). For this study, I have used the single-volume complete edition (Calcutta, 1983). [...]

4. Sumit Sarkar, "Kaliyuga," "Chakri" and "Bhakti": Ramkrishna and His Times', *Economic and Political Weekly* 27, 29 (18 July 1992), pp. 1543–66.

5. In 1931, there were a total of 1,544 Brahmos in Calcutta, nearly two-thirds of them concentrated in the single municipal ward of Sukea's Street. *Census of India, 1931*, vol. 6 (Calcutta), pts 1 and 2 (Calcutta, 1933), imperial table 13, pp. 169–71.

6. Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmacarit* (1909), in Nareschandra Jana, Manu Jana, and Kamalkumar Sanyal, (eds), *Atmakatha* (Calcutta, 1981), 1, p. 72.

7. Swami Saradananda, *Srisriramakrsnalilaprasaṅga* (1908–20; reprint, Calcutta, 1965), 2, pp. 398–9 [...].

8. P.C. Mozoomdar, *The Life and Teachings of Keshub Chunder Sen* (1887; reprint, Calcutta, 1931), p. 227.

9. Meredith Borthwick, *Keshub Chunder Sen: A Search for Cultural Synthesis* (Calcutta, 1977), pp. 140-1. Anil Seal, quoting Grierson, gives much lower figures: in 1882-3 there were, according to this government source, only two Bengali papers, the *Bañgabasi* and *Sulabh samacar*, with circulations of 4,000. Seal, *Emergence*, p. 366.
10. Nanda Mookerjee, (ed.), *Sri Ramakrishna in the Eyes of Brahma and Christian Admirers* (Calcutta, 1976), p. 2.
11. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (New York, 1965), p. 240
12. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
13. The closest devotees all arrived between 1879 and 1884. Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, p. 811. A recent study of Ramakrishna's disciples is Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived with God: Life Stories of Some Devotees of Sri Ramakrishna* (St Louis, Mo., 1989).
14. Prosanto Kumar Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen* (Calcutta, 1938), p. 119.
15. Saratchandra Chakrabarti (1865-1927), who with the founding of the monastic order after Ramakrishna's death adopted the name Swami Saradananda, was the secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission from 1898 to his death. Between 1908 and 1920 he wrote the series of articles that were later compiled to form the *Lilaprasaṅga*, the authorized account of the Master's life, of which *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* is a translation.
16. Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, p. 33
17. *Ibid.*, p. 5
18. *Ibid.*, p. 13
19. See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, 1986), pp. 58-60.
20. Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, p. 15
21. *Ibid.*, p. 811
22. *Ibid.*, p. 711
23. *Ibid.*, p. 16
24. Sarkar, "Kaliyuga," "Chakri" and "Bhakti".'
25. I have in mind the researches of Sisirkumar Das, Tarapada Mukhopadhyay, Anisuzzaman, Pradyumna Bhattacharya, Debes Ray, and Prabal Dasgupta. For a recent survey of the questions surrounding the development of the new Bengali prose, see Pradyumna Bhattacharya, 'Rammohan ray ebam banla gadya', *Baromas* 11, no. 2 (April 1990), pp. 1-22.
26. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).
27. There have been many attempts in the last hundred years to place Ramakrishna in the tradition of classical Indian philosophy. One of the most erudite of these is Satis Chandra Chatterjee, *Classical Indian Philosophies: Their Synthesis in the Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta, 1963).
28. Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Bankimchandra and the Making of Nationalist Consciousness. IV: Imaginary History', manuscript.

29. Girishchandra Ghosh, *Giris racanabali*, vol. 1, (eds), Rathindranath Ray and Debipada Bhattacharya (Calcutta, 1969), pp. 113–28.
30. Ma [Mahendranath Gupta], *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, pp. 41-2; [Mahendranath Gupta] *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), pp. 142–3 [...]. Unless otherwise specified, I will quote from this translation of the *Kathamrta*. I must, however, point out that there is a quite deliberate attempt in the *Gospel* to ‘Christianize’ Ramakrishna’s language: the translation into English provides the opportunity to put yet another gloss on the language of the *Kathamrta*.
31. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, pp. 334–5; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York, 1942), p. 603 [...]. Unless otherwise specified, I will quote from this translation of the *Kathamrta*. I must, however, point out that there is a quite deliberate attempt in the *Gospel* to ‘Christianize’ Ramakrishna’s language: the translation into English provides the opportunity to put yet another gloss on the language of the *Kathamrta*.
32. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, pp. 64–65; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 173
33. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, pp. 104–5; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 456–7
34. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, p. 122; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 627
35. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, p. 177; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 866
36. A useful account of these religious ideas will be found in Sashibhusan Das Gupta, *Obscure Religious Cults* (Calcutta, 1969).
37. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983).
38. See Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘Bankimchandra and the making of Nationalist Consciousness: I. Signs of Madness; II. The Self-Ironical Tradition; III. A Critique of Colonial Reason,’ *Occasional Papers* 108, 109, and 110 (Calcutta, 1989).
39. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, *Bankim racanabali* (Calcutta, 1965), 2, pp. 11–12 [...]
40. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, p. 191; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 891
41. Gupta, *Srisriramkrsna kathamrta*, pp. 362–6; *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 683–6
42. The classic analysis of this process in western Europe is in Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, 1991).
43. Homi Bhabha points out an interesting distinction in nationalist narratives between the people as ‘a pedagogical object’ and the people ‘constructed in the performance of the narrative’. The former produces a self-generating tradition for the nation, while the latter ‘intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation’s *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as “image” and its signification as a differential sign of Self, distinct from the Other or the Outside.’ ‘Dissemi nation: Time, Narrative, and the

Margins of the Modern Nation', in Bhabha, (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), pp. 291–322. I am trying to explore a similar disjunctive process in anti-colonial nationalist encounters with the narrative of modernity.

44. I have attempted to trace the course of anti-colonial nationalist politics in India in these terms in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.