



Revisiting Bankim Chandra's Idea of Cultural Nationalism-A Perspective

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Abstract

In the 19th Century, due to the influence of the West, there was a tendency to offer reasons for and against standard practices. Dharmic traditions and practices, too, suffered a similar fate. Young nerves in Bengal were influenced by Western culture and started to doubt the validity of any classical understanding of life's problems. Several attempts to understand dharma as being based on morality, science, art, or as a type of philosophy have resulted in a wide range of views among classical philosophers. On the other hand, there have been some critical attempts to distinguish religion from other forms of understanding. It has been argued that the enterprise started by early classical thinkers to rescue religion from obscurity and isolate what is unique about it by approaching it psychologically dominates our thought today. Bankim was the one who attempted to offer a secular basis for religion to a mind that had already embraced the empirical objection to all suprasensible phenomena. Thus, this paper will further explore the colonial literary thoughts raised by Bankim against the secular orientation of dharma in the Indian context.

Keywords: Literature, dharmic consciousness, omnipotent, reformation, and nationalism.

Introduction

The intersection of literature, politics, and colonial contestations has been a fertile ground for the emergence of various nationalist discourses in the colonial world. One of the most influential and enduring models of nationalism in this context was cultural nationalism, which sought to cultivate a sense of national identity and pride rooted in a people's unique language, history, customs, and cultural heritage. In the Indian context, the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) played a pivotal role in shaping and propagating the idea of cultural nationalism, which would profoundly impact the anti-colonial movement and eventual



attainment of independence. Bankim was a Bengali novelist, essayist, and civil servant who lived and wrote during the heyday of British colonial rule in India. As a member of the educated Bengali elite, he was deeply influenced by the currents of *dharmic* and cultural revivalism that swept through nineteenth-century Bengal and the growing nationalist stirrings that challenged the legitimacy of British imperial domination (Kaviraj, 1995, 110). In his voluminous literary output, Chatterjee articulated a vision of Indian nationhood grounded in the rich tapestry of the subcontinent's civilizational heritage while engaging critically with colonial modernity's political, social, and economic realities.

At the core of his cultural nationalism was a profound attachment to the Bengali language and its embodied literary and intellectual traditions. In works such as *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), *Durgeshnandini* (1865), and *Anandamath* (1882), Chatterjee not only demonstrated his mastery of the Bengali language but also wielded it as a powerful tool for the articulation of a distinct Bengali and, by extension, Indian cultural identity. By drawing on the tropes and motifs of classical Sanskrit literature, Hindu mythology, and Bengali folklore, Chatterjee sought to create a literary canon that could serve as a bulwark against the cultural hegemony of the colonial regime (Dutta 1999, 45). Significantly, his cultural nationalism was not merely a nostalgic retreat into the past but a dynamic and forward-looking vision that sought to reconcile the tensions between tradition and modernity, the local and the global. In his essays and political writings, he grappled with questions of social reform, economic development, and political emancipation, permanently anchoring his analysis in a deep appreciation for the enduring value of India's civilizational heritage (Barthwal 2018, 112-13). For him, the task of the nationalist intellectual was to synthesize the best of traditional Indian culture with the progressive ideals of the modern world to forge a new, self-confident, and self-determining Indian nation. One of the key pillars of his cultural nationalism was his deep reverence for Hindu religious and philosophical traditions, which he saw as the wellspring of Indian cultural identity (Bose 1991, 98-99). In works like *Krishna Charitra* (1886) and *Dharmatattva* (1888), he engaged in a sympathetic and erudite exploration of Hindu theology, mythology, and ethics, arguing that these constituted the essential core of Indian civilization. At the same time, he was not unsighted to the social and political shortcomings of contemporary Hinduism, and his writings also grappled with issues of caste, gender, and religious reform (Dutta 1999, 88).

His primordial vision of cultural nationalism, however, was not without its critics, both during his own time and in the present day. Some have argued that his privileging of Hindu religious and cultural traditions effectively marginalized the diverse spiritual, linguistic, and cultural



pluralism that has historically characterized the Indian subcontinent. There are also concerns that his cultural nationalism, emphasizing a unitary and essentialized Indian identity, may have laid the groundwork for Hindu nationalism and communal politics in the twentieth century (Chattopadhyaya, 1992 (reprinted), 134). Nevertheless, his influence on developing Indian nationalist thought and the anti-colonial movement cannot be overstated. His writings, alongside literary sophistication, political acumen, and cultural erudition, helped galvanize a sense of Indian cultural pride and self-determination that would prove crucial in overthrowing British colonial rule (Chatterjee 1993, 140). Moreover, his ideas continue to resonate in contemporary debates about the nature of Indian national identity, the role of religion in the public sphere, and the challenges of navigating the complex terrain of cultural globalization. Bankim's articulation of cultural nationalism must be understood within the broader context of the Bengal Renaissance. This cultural and intellectual movement swept through nineteenth-century Bengal and laid the foundations for the emergence of modern Indian nationalism (A. P. Sen 2010, 120). The Bengal Renaissance was characterized by a profound engagement with the region's classical cultural heritage, a fascination with the latest currents of Western thought and science, and a growing sense of Bengali and Indian identity in the face of colonial domination. Key figures of the Bengal Renaissance, such as 'Raja' Rammohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and 'Michael' Madhusudan Dutt, made seminal contributions to the fields of religion, education, literature, and social reform, often drawing inspiration from both Indian and European intellectual traditions. It was within this milieu of cultural efflorescence and nationalist stirrings that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee came of age, and his writings must be seen as both a product and a shaper of this broader movement. His cultural nationalism was mainly influenced by the Hindu revivalist currents gaining momentum in nineteenth-century Bengal. The decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of British colonial rule led to a widespread sense of cultural crisis and a perceived need to revive and reassert the vitality of Hindu civilization (A. P. Sen 2011, 140). Thinkers like *Ramakrishna Paramahansa* and *Swami Vivekananda* played a vital role in this religious and cultural renaissance, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Hindu philosophy, spirituality, and social teachings in the modern world. His deep engagement with Hindu theological and mythological traditions, as evidenced in his writings, must be understood against this backdrop of religious revivalism. However, unlike some of his more orthodox contemporaries, he was also profoundly influenced by the progressive ideals of the European Enlightenment, including notions of individual rights, political liberty, and social reform (Barthwal 2018, 132). His cultural nationalism, therefore,



sought to strike a delicate balance between the preservation of traditional Indian values and the incorporation of modern, liberal principles.

One of the central tenets of his cultural nationalism was the idea of the Bengali language as the repository of Indian cultural identity. In his novels and essays, he championed the Bengali language as a means of literary and artistic expression and a vehicle for articulating a distinct national consciousness (Das 1984, 98). By drawing on the rich scholarly heritage of Bengal, from the medieval mystical poetry of *Chaitanya* to the classical Sanskrit epics, he sought to forge a linguistic and cultural continuity that could serve as a bulwark against colonial domination. Moreover, his valorization of the Bengali language was intimately tied to his vision of a revitalized, self-confident Bengali society. He believed that cultivating Bengali literature, scholarship, and intellectual life was crucial for the moral and material upliftment of the Bengali people, who had been subjected to centuries of foreign rule and cultural subjugation (S. Sen 1960, 131). In this sense, his cultural nationalism was not merely a defensive reaction against colonial encroachment but a proactive effort to cultivate a robust and dynamic Bengali (and, by extension, Indian) cultural identity. Remarkably, his cultural nationalism was not limited to language and literature; it also had significant political and social implications. In his seminal work *Anandamath* (1882), he wove together religious revivalism, armed resistance, and political independence themes, creating a powerful narrative to inspire the Indian nationalist movement. The novel's depiction of a secret society of Hindu ascetics who take up arms to overthrow the oppressive *vidharmi* (i.e., Britishers or alien rulers) rule struck a deep chord with a generation of anti-colonial activists and revolutionaries (Kaviraj 1995, 140).

Similarly, he grappled with questions of economic development, social reform, and political self-determination in his political writings, always grounding his analysis in a deep appreciation for India's cultural heritage. He argued that the revival and strengthening of Indian culture was a necessary precondition for attaining political freedom and economic prosperity and that the task of the nationalist intellectual was to chart a course that would reconcile the demands of tradition and modernity (Sen, 2010, 81). Bankim's articulation of cultural nationalism had a profound and lasting impact on the trajectory of the Indian nationalist movement and the eventual attainment of independence. His writings, with their combination of literary sophistication, political acumen, and cultural erudition, helped to galvanize a sense of Indian cultural pride and self-determination that would prove crucial in the overthrow of British colonial rule. Nevertheless, his influence on developing Indian nationalist thought and the anti-colonial movement cannot be overstated. His writings, alongside literary



sophistication, political acumen, and cultural erudition, helped galvanize a sense of Indian cultural pride and self-determination that would prove crucial in overthrowing British colonial rule (Sen, 2011, 111). Moreover, his ideas continue to resonate in contemporary debates about the nature of Indian national identity, the role of religion in the public sphere, and the challenges of navigating the complex terrain of cultural globalization. Thus, Bankim's articulation of cultural nationalism remains a significant and influential component of modern India's broader intellectual and cultural landscape (Kopf 1969, 41-42). His vision of a resurgent and self-confident Indian nation, rooted in the rich tapestry of the subcontinent's civilizational heritage, continues to shape the ongoing discourse on nationalism, identity, and the politics of culture in the post-colonial era.

The act of resurgence of 'dharmic' realization

At a time when many educated Indians had become enamored with Western ideas and customs, he stood out as a staunch defender and interpreter of the native religio-cultural ethos. Through his magnum opus *Anandamath* and treatises like *Krishna Charitra*, he skillfully wove together Hindu theology, mythology, and ethics strands to articulate a compelling vision of India's civilizational heritage. In doing so, he helped galvanize a resurgence of 'dharmic' realization - a renewed sense of pride, purpose, and self-determination rooted in the timeless principles of dharma (Kaviraj 1987, 22). Bankim's significant works and intellectual oeuvre lie in profound reverence for Hinduism's spiritual and philosophical foundations. Throughout his diverse work, he consistently sought to reaffirm the relevance and vitality of the 'dharmic' worldview. These interlocking ethical, metaphysical, and soteriological principles have sustained Indic civilization for millennia (Nicholas 1969, 12-14). This reverence is perhaps most vividly expressed in his magnum opus, the novel *Anandamath*, which has been hailed as a seminal text of the Indian nationalist movement. On the surface, *Anandamath* is a thrilling tale of a band of ascetic revolutionaries who rise to overthrow the oppressive rule of the British-allied *Nawab* of Bengal. But at a deeper level, the novel is a powerful vehicle for his vision of a resurgent, 'dharmic' India.

The central protagonists of *Anandamath*, known as the '*Sanyasis*,' are depicted not merely as political insurgents but as spiritual warriors imbued with a profound sense of religious duty and cosmic purpose. Their rebellion against Nawab's regime is framed not merely as a struggle for political autonomy but as a sacred struggle to defend the sanctity of the dharmic order and usher in a new era of spiritual and national rejuvenation (Chattopahdyaya 1992 (reprinted), 65).



This theme is most powerfully expressed through the character of *Satyananda*, the revered leader of the *Sanyasis*, who articulates a sweeping philosophical and theological framework for their cause. In one pivotal passage, *Satyananda* declares that "the time has come to establish the sovereignty of dharma, to overthrow the rule of greed and lust, and to reinstall the eternal principles of righteousness, justice, and truth. This is our holy war, our great crusade. We fight not for petty, transient gain but for the eternal glory of *Bharat Mata*, the sacred motherland. (Lipner 2005, 65-66). Here, he imbues the revolutionary struggle with profound spiritual and metaphysical significance, casting it as a cosmic battle to restore the priority of dharma in the face of moral degradation and foreign subjugation. The *Sanyasis* are not merely soldiers but 'dharmic warriors' fighting to reclaim India's rightful place as the guardian of eternal, universal truths(ibid).

This motif of dharmic revival is further elaborated in his other major work, the historical and theological treatise *KrishnaCharitra*. In this text, he provides a sweeping reinterpretation of the *Krishna* narrative, situating the divine incarnation as the embodiment of the essential principles of Hindu philosophy and ethics (Kaviraj 1987, 99). Through a close, erudite analysis of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other *Vaishnava* scriptures, he describes *Krishna* as the supreme exemplar of dharmic consciousness. This avatar descended to earth to revive the sacred order and illuminate the path of righteous, duty-bound action. Significantly, he does not simply deliver these texts' detached, scholarly exegesis. Instead, he imbues his analysis with a vibrant, almost devotional tone, repeatedly emphasizing *Krishna's* teachings' continuing relevance and transformative power for the modern age (Sen, 2011, 90). He presents the *Gita* not merely as an abstract philosophical tract but as a living, vital wellspring of wisdom that can galvanize individual and national regeneration. In this context, his *KrishnaCharitra* can be seen as a seminal work in the broader Hindu renaissance of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which sought to revive and reinterpret the indigenous spiritual heritage in the face of colonial cultural hegemony. By casting *Krishna* as the supreme embodiment of dharma, he provided a compelling counter-narrative to the reductive, Orientalist caricatures of Hinduism propagated by many Western scholars and administrators (Nicholas 1969, 110-11).

Underpinning Bankim's 'dharmic' vision was a deep reverence for India's storied past's spiritual and cultural achievements. Throughout his writings, one can discern a pronounced tendency to romanticize and idealize the glories of ancient and medieval Indic civilizations, which he saw as exemplars of the proper 'dharmic' way of life. This reverence is particularly evident in his



depiction of pre-colonial India as a land of spiritual enlightenment, cultural refinement, and moral virtue - a stark counterpoint to the perceived decadence and subjugation of the colonial era. In *Anandamath*, for instance, he paints a vivid portrait of the mythical 'golden age' that existed before Nawab's authoritarian rule, where the principles of dharma were assiduously upheld, and the nation flourished under the benevolent stewardship of wise, righteous kings. Similarly, in *KrishnaCharitra*, he constructs an idealized vision of the *Vaishnava* devotional tradition, portraying it as the pinnacle of Hindu spirituality and the wellspring of India's civilizational grandeur (Kaviraj 1987, 156). He waxes eloquently about *Krishna* worship's aesthetic and theological sophistication and the profound metaphysical insights within the *Bhagavad Gita* and allied scriptures.

Significantly, this romanticization of the past was not merely an abstract academic exercise for Chattopadhyaya. Instead, it was a deliberate, strategic move to foster a renewed sense of cultural pride and self-confidence among his compatriots, who had internalized the colonial depiction of India as a benighted, uncivilized backwater. He sought to counter this narrative and reaffirm Indic civilization's inherent worth and dignity by evoking the glories of ancient India's spiritual, philosophical, and artistic achievements. He helped galvanize a powerful resurgence of '*dharmic*' consciousness - a renewed appreciation for the timeless principles and values that had sustained India through the ages and an unwavering determination to reclaim and revive this hallowed heritage. His insistence on the enduring, universal relevance of Hindu cosmology and ethics further bolstered this romanticization of the past. In his writings, he repeatedly emphasized that the spiritual wisdom encapsulated in texts like the *Gita* transcended the bounds of time and place, serving as a wellspring of timeless truths that could speak to the most profound existential and moral difficulties of the modern era. By framing Hindu philosophy and theology in this expansive, universalist light, he sought to counter the reductive, Orientalist caricatures that had relegated Hinduism to the realm of exotic, irrational 'superstition' (Bagal 1969, 140). Instead, he positioned it as a sophisticated, comprehensive worldview capable of providing robust, contemporary solutions to the social, political, and metaphysical challenges confronting India and the world.

Bankim's literary and intellectual oeuvre reflected his profound conviction that Hinduism's spiritual and cultural heritage was key to India's national rejuvenation and political emancipation. Throughout his writings, one can discern a concerted effort to articulate a distinctive '*dharmic nationalism*' - a vision of Indian self-determination and resistance to



colonial rule firmly grounded in Hindu theology and ethics principles (Bose 1991, 110). This is most vividly expressed in the revolutionary narrative of *Anandamath*, where the *Sanyasi* insurgents are depicted as spiritual warriors fighting to defeat the forces of moral and political corruption that plagued the nation. Their struggle is framed not merely as a quest for political independence but as a sacred crusade to restore the priority of dharma and usher in a new era of national glory (Lipner 2005, 80). He does not present this 'dharmic nationalism' as a narrow, exclusivist creed. Instead, he envisions it as an expansive, universalist vision that can accommodate and synthesize the diverse strands of India's pluralistic cultural tapestry. In *KrishnaCharitra*, for instance, he celebrates the syncretic, all-encompassing nature of *Krishna* worship, which he sees as a unifying force capable of transcending sectarian divides and galvanizing the entire nation (Kaviraj 1987, 99-100).

Similarly, in his political essays and commentaries, he consistently argued that the principles of Hindu philosophy with their emphasis on social harmony, ethical duty, and the transcendence of narrow self-interest - could provide a robust, principled foundation for Indian nationalism. He saw these '*dharmic*' values as a vital antidote to the corrosive individualism and materialism that he perceived as the root causes of India's subjugation and moral decay. Significantly, his brand of '*dharmic nationalism*' did not merely espouse a romantic, nostalgic vision of India's past. Instead, it was imbued with a pronounced modernist sensibility, seeking to reinterpret and translate the timeless realities of Hinduism into a coherent, compelling political and social program for the present age (Rangahari 2004, 55-56). His unwavering reverence for the dharmic ethos, his romanticization of India's storied past, and his articulation of a distinctive '*dharmic nationalism*' all coalesced to forge a powerful new vision of cultural and political self-determination. In doing so, he helped galvanize a profound shift in the national consciousness - a renewed sense of pride, purpose, and self-belief that would animate and energize the broader Indian independence movement. By championing the universal relevance and transformative power of Hindu philosophy and ethics, he helped empower his compatriots to reclaim their rightful place as the guardians of an ancient, noble civilization - a civilization poised to reassert its rightful place on the global stage (Ramaswamy 2010, 110).

Bankim and the Omnipotent: Textualizing the Literature of Cultural Nationalism

The 19th century in India saw the rise of a vibrant literary and intellectual movement that would come to be known as cultural nationalism. Bankim's writings were deeply influenced by a Hindu revivalist worldview that sought to reclaim India's cultural heritage from colonial rule



and establish a distinct national identity rooted in the ancient traditions of the subcontinent. A central theme that permeates his literary corpus is the idea of the *Omnipotent* (Sen, 2010, 120). This transcendent, all-powerful divine force is the wellspring of India's spiritual and cultural greatness. Through his depictions of this *Omnipotent* presence, Bankim crafted a powerful religious-nationalist imaginary that galvanized his readers and laid the groundwork for the emerging political movement of Indian self-rule (Sen, 2011, 130). *Anandamath* is widely regarded as a seminal text of the Indian nationalist movement. Set against the backdrop of the *Sanyasi Rebellion* of the late 18th century, it narrates the secret society of ascetic warriors who rise to overthrow the oppressive Muslim rule of Bengal (Lipner 2005, 79-80). At the heart of their struggle is a profound reverence for the divine Mother Goddess, whom they see as the ultimate source of India's spiritual and political sovereignty.

Bankim's *Kṛṣṇa* is the latest hermeneutic type, very different from the widely known figure of this God in *Vidyāpati*, *Candidās*, *Cāitanya*, *Jayadeva*, or the *Purānas*. This is the “first *Kṛṣṇa* to be formed by an actual historical statement, not poetic, which self-consciously follows a process quite unlike the *Purānas*' unrigorous narrative procedure (Sen 2011, 34). So, Bankim introduces and acts on a Western, or at least Western, theory of textuality, but his study focuses on a text of traditional Indian religion. The character of the *Omnipotent* in *Anandamath* is embodied by this Mother Goddess, *Bhawani*. *Bhawani* is portrayed as a transcendent, all-powerful deity transcending human existence's limited, mortal realm. As one of the novel's protagonists, *Satyananda* proclaims: "She is the Eternal, the Infinite, the Absolute...She is the One who was, is, and shall be (Chattopahdyaya 1992 (reprinted), 112-13). This vision of the Goddess as an eternal, all-encompassing divine force imbues the nationalist struggle with a profound sense of metaphysical significance - the fight for Indian independence is reframed as a sacred cosmic battle between the forces of light and darkness. Significantly, Bankim links *Bhawani's* Omnipotence to the inherent spiritual greatness of the Indian nation. As the monks declare, India is the holy land of the gods...India alone is the eternal seat of the mother, *Bhawani* (Bagal 1969, 89) Through this formulation, Bankim constructs a direct, causal relationship between India's divinely ordained status and the righteous cause of political self-rule. The *Omnipotent* Goddess is not just a transcendent deity but the very embodiment of India's cultural and spiritual sovereignty - to fight for the nation's freedom is to align oneself with the will of this all-powerful divine force (Das 1984, 121).



Bankim's conceptualization of the *Omnipotent* in *Anandamath* must be understood within the context of the 19th century Hindu revivalist movement. As scholars have noted, Bankim's writings were deeply influenced by neo-Vedantic thought's philosophical and theological currents, which sought to reaffirm Hinduism's eternal, universal truths in the face of colonial cultural hegemony. In his non-fiction work *KrishnaCharitra*, Bankim articulates a vision of the Hindu deity *Krishna* as the embodiment of the Omnipotent divine force (Kaviraj 1987, 30). Based on the rich mythopoetic tradition of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Puranas*, Bankim portrays *Krishna* as a transcendent, all-powerful godhead representing the Hindu faith's metaphysical unity and timeless wisdom. As Bankim writes, "*Krishna* is the Absolute, the One without a second...He is the Lord of the Universe, the All-Powerful, the Eternal" (S. Sen 1960, 42-43)

By framing *Krishna* as the *Omnipotent*, Bankim sought to elevate Hinduism as the wellspring of India's cultural and spiritual greatness. Just as *Bhawani* in *Anandamath* represents the divine sovereignty of the Indian nation, *Krishna* in *KrishnaCharitra* embodies the eternal, universal truths that undergird the Hindu civilizational order (Bose 1991, 67-68). In this way, Bankim's conceptualization of the *Omnipotent* bolsters the Hindu revivalist project of the 19th century, which aimed to reassert the centrality of Indic religious and philosophical traditions in the face of colonial cultural hegemony (Barthwal 2018, 129).

Bankim's literary articulation of the *Omnipotent* was not merely a philosophical or theological exercise - it also carried profound political implications for the emerging nationalist movement. By framing the struggle for Indian independence as a sacred battle ordained by the divine *Krishna*, Bankim imbued the nationalist cause with a powerful metaphysical legitimacy that transcended the immediate material realities of colonial subjugation (Kaviraj 2014, 76). As the scholar Partha Chatterjee has argued, Bankim's invocation of the *Omnipotent* allowed the nationalist intelligentsia to carve out a distinct "spiritual" domain immune to colonial rule's encroachments. While the British Empire could assert its dominance over the material and political realm, the nationalists could claim sovereignty over the sacred inner world of culture, religion, and tradition (Chatterjee 1993, 130). This conceptual separation allowed the nationalist movement to develop an autonomous ideological foundation that the colonial state could not easily undermine or co-opt. Moreover, Bankim's vision of the *Omnipotent* as the wellspring of India's civilizational greatness galvanized popular support for the nationalist cause. By tapping into the deep-seated religious sentiments of the masses, Bankim cultivated a broad-based cultural nationalist movement that could challenge the political legitimacy of



colonial rule. As the scholar Sumit Sarkar has noted, Bankim's writings "provided the ideological cement" that united diverse social and religious constituencies under the banner of Indian self-rule (Sarkar 2005, 90).

Concluding Observations

Bankim was undoubtedly a pioneering figure in developing cultural nationalism in colonial India. Through his literary works, political writings, and philosophical musings, Bankim crafted a vision of Indian national identity rooted in the subcontinent's cultural heritage and spiritual traditions. His ideas not only influenced the growth of the Indian independence movement but also had a lasting impact on subsequent generations of Indian intellectuals and political leaders. At the core of Bankim's conceptualization of cultural nationalism was a genuine belief in the unique spiritual essence of the Indian civilization. He saw Hinduism, with its rich philosophical traditions and sacred texts, as the defining feature of Indian national identity. Bankim was intent on reviving and valorizing India's indigenous cultural resources in the face of aggressive colonial modernization and the perceived corrosive influence of Western values. Through works like *Anandamath*, he sought to kindle a sense of Hindu pride and martial spirit among his compatriots, urging them to cast off the shackles of foreign rule and reclaim India's rightful place. Integral to Bankim's vision of cultural nationalism was the role of the vernacular language and literature. He championed the Bengali language as the vehicle for expressing the authentic voice of the Indian nation, and his literary oeuvre in Bengali became a foundational element of the emerging nationalist canon. Bankim's novels, essays, and poems not only popularized themes of Indian self-assertion and anticolonial resistance but also codified a distinct Bengali literary tradition that could stand in opposition to the encroachment of the English language and culture.

However, Bankim's brand of cultural nationalism was not without its limitations and contradictions. His glorification of Hinduism and the upper-caste, male-dominated social order inherent within it excluded large swathes of the Indian populace, including religious minorities, lower castes, and women. Bankim's elitist and patriarchal worldview sat uneasily alongside the egalitarian and inclusive rhetoric of the nationalist movement. Moreover, his veneration of the past and idealization of a pristine, pre-colonial Indian civilization tended to gloss over the internal hierarchies, inequities, and dynamic changes that had always been a part of the subcontinent's cultural landscape. Nonetheless, Bankim's impact on the trajectory of Indian nationalism cannot be overstated. His articulation of cultural nationalism as a powerful



counterpoint to the political and economic subjugation of colonial rule galvanized a generation of Indians to throw off the shackles of foreign domination. Bankim's ideas profoundly influenced *Aurobindo Ghose*, *Rabindranath Tagore*, and *Subhas Chandra Bose*, and his lasting legacy can be seen in the enduring importance of religion, language, and cultural identity in the post-colonial Indian nation-state.

In the contemporary era, Bankim's vision of cultural nationalism casts a long shadow over Indian politics and society. The rise of Hindu nationalist movements that seek to define Indian nationhood in exclusively Hindu terms bears the imprint of Bankim's thinking. The heated debates around issues like language policy, education curriculum, and the place of religion in the public sphere all echo the tensions that Bankim's writings sought to navigate. Even as India grapples with the challenges of modernization, globalization, and pluralism in the 21st century, the specter of Bankim's cultural nationalism remains a potent force shaping the contours of the national imagination. Ultimately, his legacy represents both the promise and the perils of cultural nationalism in the Indian context. His articulation of a unitary, Hindu-centric vision of Indian identity was a powerful tool in the anti-colonial struggle. Still, it also contained the seeds of future exclusion and conflict. As India continues to evolve and reinvent itself in the post-colonial era, reconciling the competing claims of cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity remains an ongoing challenge. His ideas and writings stay relevant and significant in navigating this complex terrain.

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