Title: Caring Enlightenment in Colonial India: Beyond the Kantian Paradigm

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Name of the publication: Transarea Journal

Volume Number: I

Issue Number: 1

Month and Year: Spring Issue (March), 2025

Page Number: 41–63

Publisher: Somaiya Vidyavihar University

Caring Enlightenment in Colonial India: Beyond the Kantian Paradigm

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of enlightenment articulated by Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century through the terms of Kantian critique in the context of philosophical thought in colonial India. In his essay, 'Answering the Question What is Enlightenment?' Kant delineated the concept of enlightenment as the courage to think for oneself and freely express one's thoughts in public without fear. Free thought in his view would have to be autonomous and independent of external influences, including those of benevolent guardians. His view of enlightenment emerged through his critique of the crises that prevailed during the historical period of Enlightenment in Prussia. Yet as his critics have observed, a critique of Kant (on a Kantian note) reveals how his conception of the enlightenment has its own limits, in being confined to the European bourgeois framework, through its exclusions of gender and race, among others. In the context of such critiques, this paper shifts to other geographic and historical contexts, such as colonial India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, to comprehend how they divulge alternate configurations of the enlightenment. It dwells on the works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Rabindranath Tagore to show that an alternative enlightenment of care emerges through the inclusion of social diversity of race and gender. It argues that their caring enlightenment is a response to another set of crises, at the civilisational crossroads of colonisation, which differ from those of eighteenth-century Europe. The paper concludes by gesturing towards the resonances and tensions between a caring enlightenment and the Kantian paradigm.[1]

Keywords: care, enlightenment, gender, Immanuel Kant, public, Rabindranath Tagore, reason, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain

I. Philosophy in Times of Crisis: Kantian Enlightenment

Crises have often given a new lease of life to the practice of philosophy as reflection on the self, the various world (natural and social) and their relationship. Philosophical inquiry, offsetting the quest for truth and social transformation, has often emerged with crisis as its framework of reference. Two instances from the history of philosophy attest to this.

In Athens, Greece in the fifth century BCE, philosophy was vitalised because of Socrates's dialogues in the public market place of *agora* in quest of knowledge of universals.[2] Disturbed by the crisis of morality in the clamour for power, where rhetoric and opinion replaced genuine knowledge, Socrates sought truth and morality by questioning set opinions and dogmas in the open assembly.[3] He engaged with points of view, often scattered and not well thought out, that were presented to him in informal conversations; he did so by rethinking them through reasoned revision or renunciation. He defined his own role of a philosopher as a divine calling to make the citizens of Athens aware of the need for self-examination and those of others. He was committed to practising philosophy despite being restrained by the state, as it was divinely ordained (Plato 1987a, 15). Socrates proclaims to have fulfilled his divine duty unconditionally, without holding formal public office or receiving payment (Plato 1987a, 17). He notes how his city "because of its size is inclined to be lazy and needs the stimulation of some stinging fly… rousing, persuading, reproving…" (Plato 1987a, 17). He characterised himself as a gadfly who performed this role.

Socrates' method of philosophy through public cross examination of unthought assumptions influenced the youth in Athens to embark upon a process of interrogating prevailing customs and the state. It also influenced his student Plato to adopt the dialogue form in writing, which allowed freedom to think through perspectives without proclaiming them as absolute in a theoretical manner.[4] As a result, Socrates was charged with corrupting the youth through impiety and invention false divinities for which he was eventually sentenced to death. Socrates responded to this by noting that the fear of death was also based on ignorance about what it portends; he claimed not to know what happened after death unlike the charlatans of his time who professed wisdom (Plato 1987a, 15). Plato's dialogues document Socrates' activity of philosophy through the wars, plagues and political instabilities of his times, as well as, by clarifying his own stance against unjust charges that were levied on him by the state.[5] He attempts to following Socrates in upholding the idea of philosophy as a training for death in his dialogue "Phaedo" (Plato 1987b). Socrates responded to this crisis through the balance brought about by thought and reflection; a project for which he had to give up his own life.

Many centuries later, Europe witnessed a period of scientific discoveries, intellectual achievements, mercantile growth and so forth from the late sixteenth century with the start of the Renaissance and Reformation. These achievements crystalised into what was known as the historical period of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Also known as the 'age of reason,' the Enlightenment period was characterised by an opposition to supernatural forces or fate in steering the world. There was a confidence in the rational self as the guiding force through which civilisation progressed. Also known as "the century of philosophy *par excellence*" (Bristow 2017), this period witnessed the French Revolution which degenerated into violence and anarchy shaking the foundations of the Enlightenment. Yet assurance in the historical era of Enlightenment had already begun to wane much before the end of the eighteenth century.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the French philosopher, in his 1750 "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts" (Rousseau 1987a) laments that the European civilisation had not

progressed despite a proliferation of scientists and artists. Its emphasis on instrumental reason undermined feeling, encouraged superficiality of institutional positions and condemned genuine citizens to obscurity. Later in his 1754 "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality" (Rousseau 1987b), Rousseau traced human inequality to the artificiality of "egocentrism" (Rousseau 1987b, 106) which led individuals to place absolute value on the self and enter into comparative, competitive relationships with others. In such a state, Rousseau noted how the law of property was also one of inequality that destroyed freedom forcing "the entire human race to labour, servitude and misery" (Rousseau 1987b, 70) for the "profit of a few ambitious men" (Rousseau 1987b, 70). He suggested turning away from competitive institutional involvements towards free, collaborative and spontaneous activities to undo such bondage.

Thus, for Rousseau the idea of progress in the epoch of European enlightenment was a hollow facade for vanity and unhealthy competitiveness. He believed that there was no progress made in the enlightenment, but on the contrary a crisis emerged of not having genuine knowledge or morality. Rousseau's critique can be contextualised in the eighteenth-century Europe, which was a period when advances in science led to an overinvestment in empirical proofs and rational consistency whereby that which could not pass their test was cast aside - religion in particular. The anxiety to pursue scientific discovery led to a widespread scientistic temperament. As a result, scepticism, atheism, religious dogmatism and authoritarianism loomed large with an overemphasis on knowledge as the only goal for human beings (Rohlf 2024).

One can read Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) as responding to the context of the crisis of Enlightenment (under Rousseau's influence) with his notions of critique and free public thought. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant suggests moving beyond accumulation of information in the guise of pursuing knowledge with "the following three questions—What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope?" (Kant 2009, 677). Kant's aim was to comprehend the conditions and limits under which scientific knowledge, morality, art and faith are possible. He goes so far as to claim that one would have to deny knowledge to make room for faith.

Yet this was not an exercise in upholding dogmatic beliefs about the metaphysics. Kant considered dogmatism to be despotic, whose arbitrariness made it vulnerable to anarchy and encouraged scepticism with respect to metaphysics. Scepticism, in his view, which attacked the very foundations of science did not patiently work towards inquiry both of the self and others. Moreover, it "shattered civil unity from time to time" (Kant 2009, 99–100). Such disconcerting prospects were already evident to Kant in some of the philosophical traditions of Wolff's and Baumgarten's rationalism, Lockean and Berkeleyan empiricism and Humean scepticism. He maintained that a more meaningful approach to knowledge without the consequences of scepticism or dogmatic assertions required a modest nondogmatic metaphysics as a supplement to empiricism. Such a metaphysics was needed for scientific concepts of understanding such as substance, causation and others that could not be proved scientifically but would reinforce its findings.

Kant also affirmed his own version of metaphysics as affirming faith in god and self without having to prove them scientifically. He notes that concrete conceptualisation requires content from empirical experience, so that thought and experience imply one another to be meaningful (Kant 1998, 193–194). Kant attempted to show a way out of the crisis of both dogmatically affirming an absolute metaphysics and lack of faith in the noncognitive domain of morality, art, religion through his three *Critiques* and several other writings. Kant avowed how his own personal crisis of overcoming his earlier dogmatic rationalist position motivated his critical turn; "I freely admit that the remembrance of David Hume was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy" (Kant 2004, 10).

The situation of crisis is one of urgency or a turning point that has to be confronted with a reflective process leading to a transformative judgement. Hence, for Kant dogmatism as the civilisational crisis of the Enlightenment era and his own personal crisis, required the balance of thought (instead of empty speculation) and empiricism (instead of scattered sense data). Such a balance was for Kant the process of critical thinking along with others in the domain of the public. As Kant puts it in a note in his preface to the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* "Our age is the genuine age of criticism, to which everything must submit. Religion through its holiness and legislation through its majesty commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way, they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination" (Kant 2009, 100–101).

Kant was well aware that the age in which he lived was not one that was free of dogmatism or scepticism, hence it was a period of crisis. Kant did not only critique dogmatism in the domain of abstract metaphysics or positivism in the domain of science and religion. His later writings explicitly examine another dimension of the crisis of Enlightenment, namely censorship of free thought that aimed at reigning in varied positions of fanatical religious beliefs and atheistic disavowals. Kant's own writings on philosophy as free thought were espousals of an ideal as he himself was surrounded by the spectre of censorship.

It is in the milieu of the crisis of censorship, both civilisational and personal, that Kant wrote his essay "What is Enlightenment?" in 1784 and published it in 1798 (Kant 1985a; Kant 1996a)[6]. With this essay, Kant entered a larger discussion on the very meaning of the term enlightenment and went beyond the limits of the historical era of Enlightenment. The context of Kant's essay was a larger public debate. In the year 1783, Johann Zöllner who was a pastor, remarked on the pages of a monthly periodical, the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* that he did not find an answer to the question 'what is enlightenment?' a question which he upheld was as important for seeking truth (Schmidt 1996b, 2). It later led to a decade long debate in which Kant (who was among others) responded to what it meant to be enlightened in thought and speech in the public domain.

The debate was partially driven by the concern that despite having the freedom of thought and expression during the forty-year rule of the monarch Frederick II, popularly

referred to as Frederick the Great. The monarch, who was a friend of the French philosopher Voltaire, attempted to introduce changes along the lines of the Enlightenment in Prussia with prison reform, loosening controls on press freedom and expanding the domain of religious freedom with an emphasis on tolerance. Yet Prussia had not made much progress during his forty year[7] rule (Schmidt 1996b, 3), which one could attribute to his adopting the style of an "enlightened despot" (Anderson) or an "enlightened absolutism" (Cavallar 1993, 103), encouraging the development of nobility and 'high culture.' This concern was expressed in the various informal discussion societies that met secretly due to fear of persecution.[8]

Kant's own relationship with the 'enlightened' monarch Frederick 'the Great' was complex.[9] Kant adopted the stance of being overtly uncritical of his regime because of his leniency towards censorship and promotion of religious tolerance. For Kant there were fewer hurdles in the process of cultivating an enlightened mind during the period of Frederick II. Hence, for Kant the historical period "In this respect, this age is the age of enlightenment or the century of Frederick." (Kant 1985a, 45)[10]. He further remarked that "A prince who does not find it unworthy of himself to say that he regards it as a *duty* to prescribe nothing to men regarding religious matters but rather to allow them full freedom in this area—and who thus declines the haughty title of 'tolerant'—is himself enlightened and deserves to be esteemed by the grateful world and by posterity as the first, with regard to government, who freed mankind from immaturity and left them free to use of their own reason in everything that is a matter of conscience" (Kant 1985a, 45).

Yet Kant later put forth his subtle critique of Frederick II via his critique of the Platonic ideal of the philosopher king that was akin to the ideal of an 'enlightened despot' underlying Frederick II's policies.[11] Unlike Plato, Kant maintained that such a position was not feasible as power clouds critical thinking and hinders public reasoning. Kant maintained "That kings should be philosophers, or philosopher's kings is neither to be expected nor to be desired, for the possession of power inevitably corrupts reason's free judgment" (Kant 1985b, 126; Cavallar 1993, 130). He also maintained that enlightened absolutism is not a genuine option in political life, as it is based on practical rather than ideal considerations (Cavallar 1993).

Returning to Zöllner's provocation in 1783, J.K.W. Möhsen, Moses Mendelssohn and others attempted to clarify the historical notion of Enlightenment in the decade that followed.[12] Zöllner, Mendelssohn and Möhsen were members of the *Mittwochsgessellschaft*, one of the several secret societies in Prussia.[13] They examined themes such as the extent to which citizens could exercise their free thought, cultivate open minds and the complex exteriority of freedom. They brought out the tensions between freedom of a citizen and that of a human being, as well as, the possibility of freedom due to censorship. Their concern was that despite having the freedom to write and publish for the past forty years, why have the masses not learnt from the same? Why have they not been enlightened? The notion of critique emerged from the ideals of the Enlightenment and its disconnect with the masses. Möhsen noted that freedom did not prevail under Frederick the first (Möhsen 1996). Mendelssohn also promoted the need to enlighten citizens because there is no automatic complement between civic enlightenment and

human enlightenment (Mendelssohn 1996). People express their opinions without critically reflecting on them: hence it is pseudo enlightenment.

As Schmidt notes, the enlightenment question started out by focussing on the lack of wisdom and the need for enlightenment among citizens and the extent to which censorship rules would have to be diluted. However, the enlightenment debate in Kant's later years went on to explore the relationship between "enlightenment, public discussion, religious faith, and political authority" (Schmidt 1996b, 2). This shift occurred with Johann Christoph Wöllner, the Prussian minister during the reign of the king Frederick Wilhelm II (who ruled from 1786-1797), issuing his edicts on "Religion and Censorship" in 1788. Frederick William II in his order noted that "press freedom has degenerated into press impudence, and the book censors have fallen completely asleep" (Laursen 1986, 590). He was worried about the seemingly enlightened scholars who have turned liberty into licence. Wöllner's edicts of 1788 therefore noted that any person was free to think "so long as he keeps any peculiar opinion to himself and carefully guards himself from spreading it or persuading others" (Laursen 1986, 590). They reflected an apprehensiveness of the new regime towards the enlightenment, in describing its effects as licentiousness, loss of faith and moral degeneration (Erspamer 1997, 27). His edicts prescribed censorship of free thought and curbed tolerance so that Christianity[14] would not be affected by the widespread culture of criticism spawned by the Enlightenment.

Wöllner's edicts led to Kant being called out for questioning religion in his 1793 work "Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason" (Kant 2001) which he published first by sidestepping the censorship of his times. He had to promise Frederick Wilhelm II[15] that he would not publish any work on religion and was banned from teaching for a year (Erspamer 1997, 28). But when Frederick Wilhelm II died in 1797, Kant believed that he was liberated from his promise and went on to republish this work along with others in 1798.

In the context of the changes in politics in Prussia, debates on enlightenment also engaged with the tension between citizen freedom and government power. This became more pronounced in the aftermath of the violence of the French revolution and the assassination of Louis the XVI in 1793 as German intellectuals of the Enlightenment were also enamoured of the French revolution. The debate regarding free speech also expanded to deliberate whether an enlightened public is also anarchic. The quest to search an answer to the question—What is enlightenment? became an exploration between public discussion, religious faith and political authority. A new intellectual mood emerged which regarded the various attempts to define the notion of enlightenment as vacuous, especially because it was elite intellectuals, rather than the masses, who spearheaded discussions.[16] They saw their task as one of enlightening the masses, yet their ideas often neither permeated nor mattered to the masses. Hence, attempts were made to restore an earlier model of society of religious dominance and curbs on free speech.

The crisis of the Enlightenment period is reflected in an article anonymously published in the journal *Deutsche Monatsschrift* in 1790. The article observed that the various discussions of the enlightenment were severed from their roots in recognisable conventions because of which they had degenerated into a "war of all against all" (Schmidt 1996b, 2). Kant's own

position can be traced to his 1784 essay responding to the question of enlightenment and the conflictual period of his times.

Kant's response took off from Möhsen and Mendelssohn by moving beyond the historical epochal notion of the enlightenment to comprehend it philosophically as a way of thinking and a work in progress, rather than as an established historical reality. Thus, for Kant "If it is now asked 'Do we presently live in an *enlightened age*?' The answer is, 'No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment*.' As matters now stand, a great deal is still lacking in order for men (sic) as a whole to be, or even to put themselves into a position to be able without external guidance to apply understanding confidently to religious issues" (Kant 1985a, 44).

Kant defined enlightenment philosophically as the courage of using one's own understanding or "*Sapere Aude*"[17](Kant 1985a, 33). It is an ability to think for oneself, using one's own ability to reason without succumbing to the pressures of external (social and political) propaganda. An enlightened person overcomes a "self-imposed immaturity" (Kant 1985a, (35), 33) often the outcome of lethargy and timidity. Such a person exercises freedom, both in the sense of being free from prejudice and being free to use reason. Hence, in Kant's view "Nothing is required for this Enlightenment, however, except *freedom*…" (Kant 1985a, 42).

Enlightenment is from Kant's perspective, a process of self-cultivation and education, as much as, a political condition of freedom. He regarded self-development as grounded in freedom of both the conscience, as much as, that of institutions. Kant conceptualised the enlightenment as distinguished between 'public' and 'private' uses of reason or thought. Its public use refers to a scholar's presentation of her or his thought to an entire reading world, subjecting it to scrutiny. Thus, the public use of reason was one of arguing incessantly, the activity of a philosopher.

In contrast, those who use it in a private capacity, bind reason instrumentally to the goals of the posts or offices they occupy such as those of a military officer, a tax paying citizen, a pastor and the like (Kant 1984, 42–44). The public use of reason is without constraints and free to promote enlightenment; but for Kant the restrictions on its private use need not contradict its public enlightened use.[18]

Kant noted "that kings or sovereign peoples (who rule themselves by laws of equality) should not allow the class of philosophers to disappear or to be silent, but should permit them to speak publicly is indispensable to the enlightenment of their affairs. And this class is by nature incapable of sedition and of forming cliques, it cannot be suspected of being the formulator of *propaganda*" (Kant 1985b, 126). Thus, Kant conceptualised enlightenment as the ability to speak one's own mind in public freely without fear (Kant 1985a, 43). However, an interrogation of the conditions underlying Kant's enlightenment definition (on a Kantian critical tenor), discloses that its professed universality notwithstanding, only a few can aspire to becoming enlightenment.

II. Kantian Enlightenment and Its Exclusions

Kant introduces restrictions on becoming enlightened, despite envisaging the enlightened mind philosophically as the unconditional and universal capacity to question. He discerns how a large part of the human race cannot muster up the courage to become enlightened, as they find the path both difficult and dangerous (Kant 1985a, 33). Kant attributes this lack of courage to the ease with which an individual can turn to a book or a pastor or a physician to be one's quick guide to judgements. Such easily available external props inhibit the use of reason and thought by encouraging laziness.

Interestingly, he notes in brackets that women per se show such reluctance to become mature, "(including the entire fair sex)" (Kant 1985a, 33). He portrays self-proclaimed "guardians" who "take over the irksome business" of thought and reasoning from gullible people and all women as obstacles to enlightenment. "Those guardians, who have benevolently taken up the oversight of mankind, take care that the far greater part of mankind (including the entire fairer sex) regards the step to maturity as not only difficult but also very dangerous" (Kant 1985a, 41).

In Kant's estimate the path of thinking for oneself is a laborious one and tendencies such as laziness can deflect one from such a path. Kant does not throw further light on why all women would find the route to maturity difficult and dangerous in his "What is Enlightenment?" (Kant 1985a). There is only one reference in the essay to women. However, if one connects it with his views on women in other works, such as *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Kant 1996), one does get a better idea of his reasons for thinking that the enlightenment is an almost unattainable goal for women.

In the case of women, Kant does not regard the tendency to be lazy as a contingent one to be overcome; it is not acquired through socialisation, but is an inherent trait. As Pauline Kleingeld observes (Kleingeld 1993, 135), Kant gives a detailed account of masculine and feminine traits, as well as, their relationship in Part II (b) of his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* entitled "Character of the Sexes" (Kant 1996, 216–225). She enlists three invariant feminine features in Kant's view—fear, design and affectivity—which contrast with their masculine counterparts of courage, straightforwardness and reason. He implies that these characteristics are contextualised by location where each maintain their dominance, women in the home and men in public office. Kant considers gendered attributes to be naturally ordained for the purposes of reproduction of the species (Kant 1996, 219) and instilling social norms through "moral behaviour, which is the preparation and introduction to morality" (Kant 1996, 220).

Nature, in his opinion, has entrusted women with the responsibility for these purposes, in his view, thereby ruling out their flexibility or cross-gender transitions and mutations. Kant goes on to add that these natural traits have resulted in a specific set of contrasting feminine and masculine virtues (Kant 1996, 221-222); women are patient, sensitive and thrifty, while men are tolerant, perceptive and earn for a living. As Kleingeld notes feminine features as Kant

understands them are "hard to unite with the '*Mündigkeit*'[19] Kant calls for in the Enlightenment essay" (Kleingeld 1993, 136). One can add that the feminine virtues that are prescribed by Kant cannot be reconciled with his notion of enlightenment.

Kant does not apply the methodology of his critique to ponder over the conditions under which women are stereotyped in the manner that he himself does. Nor does he perceive his contrast between feminine and masculine traits as socially constructed. Thus, women's differences from men in being confined to their homes or their difficulties in pursuing the trajectory of thinking courageously to write in visible monthlies such as the *Berlinischen Monatsschrift* are not problems for Kant. He did not interrogate how women's lack of access to education during his period hindered their freedom to publish and defend their views in public. This was because for him there is antithesis between scholarship and women as the following line from his *Anthropology* reveals: "As for scholarly women, they use their books somewhat like a watch, that is, they wear the watch so that it can be noticed that they have one, although it is usually broken or does not show the correct time" (Kant 1996, 221). His patriarchal assessment of women in the context of enlightenment overlooked how their abject conditions in France, whose philosophical and political traditions were venerated by Kant in Rousseau and the French Revolution. Nor did he care about the structural impediments that hindered women in Prussia from pursuing enlightenment.

Women in France (held in high esteem by Prussian thinkers) and Prussia did not have access to formal education as Robin May Schott observes.[20] They often struggled to acquire an education informally when formal channels were denied. Upper class girls received home education and were later sent to convents where harsh conditions prevailed. Instead of engaging them in the study of philosophy and sciences (both natural and social), they were given basic instruction in reading and writing. Further, they were taught what were perceived by their society to be feminine skills, such as sewing and religious education. Girls from underprivileged backgrounds only received training in manual skills from charitable institutions. Despite advancements in women's education in France during the eighteenth century (such as increased literacy and recognition of the need for organised public education) their exclusion from formal higher education and participation in the economy hindered their growth.

In France, women could publicly engage in scholarly, literary and political activities in a limited manner, only from 1879. They subsequently gained access to secondary education, university, publishing and so forth. In Prussia at Kant's University of Königsberg, women were prohibited from enrolling as students and of course had no opportunities to teach. Women gained access to public education and professions only by the early twentieth century (In 1914 women constituted 7 percent of the student body in Prussia, which was more than their enrolment from 1900). These conditions belie Kant's assumption of women's inherent laziness in pursuing enlightenment ideals.

One cannot absolve Kant of taking responsibility for his problematic views on women by maintaining that they reflect his historical period, as Kleingeld observes (Kleingeld 1993,

143–144). She notes that although the stereotype of gender essentialism and inequality prevailed socially, Kant knew about the scholarly women of his day such as Émilie du Châtelet and Anne Dacier whose achievements could have convinced him of women's equality and freedom with men. Further, he also met women socially, but was more inclined to discussing cooking rather than politics with them to their chagrin! Kant also knew about a book published in 1792 defending women's civic freedoms written by the Mayor of Königsberg Theodor Gottlieb von Hippel, namely *Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Weiber* (On the Civil Improvement of Women). Kant may not have read it, but he knew about its existence. Yet Kant missed these opportunities to critically revise his dogmatic views about women. Unfortunately, Kant remained uncritical in the domain of gender difference, even though he could have evolved past his own indolence to educate himself better.

There is another exclusion pervading Kant's enlightenment of reason, namely that of race. Kant's *Anthropology* has explicit denigration of the non-European races as not meeting his standards of autonomy and individuality. In the context of his appreciation of courage it is worth noting that he critiques colonisation and applauds courage for its potential to resist it (Reid 2023). Courage is for Kant a virtue that is grounded in principles and reason (Kant 1996, 162). He maintains that it requires a resoluteness which is strengthened by reason to embark on resistance, even when physical nature tends to work against it. He opposes patience to courage as "a feminine virtue" (Kant 1996, 162), which differs from courage in not having the strength to resist.

Patience in his view, only allows individuals to forbear their suffering and adjust to their situation without bringing about a fundamental change. It is not cowardice and is akin to screaming while having to undergo a painful medical procedure. He illustrates the notion of patience by citing American Indian tribes who when overpowered by their European conquerors, submitted to getting killed without resistance by casting aside their arms (Kant 1996, 162). They could have saved themselves had they asked for forgiveness, which they did not do due to the "vanity" (Kant 1996, 162) of their tribe's honour. But they did not muster up their strength for more courage by using their weapons either, Kant notes, to oppose their conquerors in the spirit of Europeans. Their patience and inherent lack of what Kant termed as European courage, simply led them to compromise with their situation and give up. Kant's characterisation of courage as European and patience as non-European demonstrates that the courage to think for oneself is restricted to Europeans, and is hardly universal.

Kant's definition of enlightenment is neither self-evident nor universal in the light of the various restrictions it upholds. He restricts himself to the individual European man's need to express himself freely and rationally on policy matters in public, although he is prepared to obey the same as an office holder (privately in Kantian parlance). The larger community's (for instance, women, and American Indian tribes) disempowerment has not mattered in debates on European enlightenment. In critiquing Kantian enlightenment in the twenty first century, one would have to examine other frameworks of enlightenment that arose in the non-European world and among women, frameworks that did not privilege the masculine or European value of courage. An engagement with thinkers in these other contexts, both women and men, show

that they did espouse philosophical aspirations of enlightenment, but did not define it as Kant did in theoretical contexts of elite academic institutional life.

Ideas of enlightenment that have also been articulated in a non-theoretical way in colonial India have responded to colonisation through the feminine lens of patience and care, rather than masculine reason and courage. Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Rabindranath Tagore demonstrate as much. They do not derive from the Kantian prototype of enlightenment, but do resonate with it, nonetheless partially.

III. Caring Enlightenments: Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Rabindranath Tagore

Colonial India illustrates the possibilities of philosophically spelling out the concept of enlightenment in ways that resonate with Kant, but also go beyond him in being more inclusive of gender and race. Unlike Kant's eighteenth-century Prussia, colonial India was not merely struggling for the individual's right to be free in public. It was rather a civilisational crisis of being enslaved and exploited by a foreign imperial power; it differed from Rousseau's and Kant's account of crisis as a self-inflicted one. Dominated by the British empire that imposed an administrative pattern of thinking on an entire population for its own exploitative goals, an instrumentalism prevailed in the formal realms of economic, administrative and political office. This aspect of instrumental reason in a colonial context is overlooked by Enlightenment debates recorded by Schmidt (1996a). Besides unreasoned opinions, inegalitarian and oppressive customs weighed upon social practices. There was an accompanying crisis of community with various social groups conflicting with one another through stratifications of gender, class and caste, as well as, religion.

In response to this crisis, thinkers and social reformers from all over India reassessed the impact of British modernity on India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to affirm what began to be termed as Indian versions of Renaissance.[21] These versions were critiques and reconstructions in the meeting of Indian and Western thought. The Renaissance was rife with socio-religious reform movements, literary societies, publishing houses, cinema production, artistic output and scientific discoveries, all of which enabled Indians to assert their own cultural identity to resist British colonisation.[22] Thus, the various kinds of Renaissance in India were not imitations of European Enlightenment, as the crisis that undergirded them had its own identity in the exploitation and loss of freedom under colonisation.

Two such thinkers and educationists, Hossain (1880–1932) and Tagore (1861–1941) from the Bengal Renaissance (Quayum 2017, 15)[23] reconstructed the idea of enlightenment as the openness of a free mind, without fear or prejudice. A free mind in their views neither succumbed to colonial propaganda of British supremacy, nor to the weight of inegalitarian traditions. It critiqued both the European and indigenous points of view to offer a fresh ground. Their contribution is one of introducing and expanding feminine values of care and nurture to the public domain, unlike Kant. For Hossain and Tagore viewed women as critical to the project of enlightenment. As educationists, they established schools to further their ideals of freedom, gender equality and enlightenment cultures as works in progress.[24]

A. Hossain:

Hossain defended women's enlightenment as having the potential to overcome the crisis of colonisation.[25] She critiqued patriarchy for inflicting unrealistic practices of domesticity and seclusion on women. She also argued that women tended to participate in their own subjugation for the comforts it offered. These included not undertaking the labour or risks of forming judgements based on free thought. She termed the comforts in exchange for women's freedom as chimeras, as they segregated women in the private sphere of the home. They hindered women from making their own decisions by encouraging indolence and easy judgement. Hossain suggests that to regain their freedom, women needed to make an effort to educate and enlighten themselves, so that their free thought could develop.

Hossain's portrayal of an enlightened mind is similar to Kant's in endorsing the importance of unlearning self-inflicted dependence on ready-made external options. She is well aware that these are not genuine options, but instruments that make use of women for exploitative patriarchy. Hence, unlike Kant, Hossain does not view indolence as an essentially feminine quality that permanently inhibits them from enlightenment. It is rather acquired when women are socialised under patriarchy, hence women can unlearn indolence through their own effort. Thus, it is a structural consequence of patriarchy in her analysis. As Hossain remarks, "So you see, sisters, where an illiterate eye sees clay, an enlightened eye sees ruby and diamond" (Hossain 2013a, 29).

In order to encourage free enlightened thought, Hossain built a school for girls in the then Calcutta[26]. She was characterised as "spider-mother" (Quayum 2017, 1) by her biographer Shamsun Nahar Mahmud, an educationalist who briefly worked in the school that Hossain founded. This metaphor is one of unconditional care that Hossain gave to children in her school,[27] akin to the care of a spider mother for baby spiders.[28] One can view Hossain's act of pioneering a school as one of creating an enlightened public with diverse discourses (of care and empathy for instance that is grounded in emotions and imagination), which is not confined to the legal academic argumentative discourse. Thus, Hossain viewed schooling which both critiqued gender divides and cultivated the mind as a socially transformative process.

Hossain wrote her critiques of patriarchy in fictional utopias such as "Sultana's Dream" (2005a) and "Padmarag" (2005b), as well as, in social commentaries. She envisaged a world in which women actively bring in feminine values rooted in the progressive aspects of Islam. Her critique of the public domain of administration and politics as dominated by aggressive masculinity and religious dogmatism motivated her to envision alternate forms of community. In the latter, women overcome the divide between the domestic inner world and the administrative outer world to recreate new communities—as they actually did in her school. Hossain's new communities offer ways of thinking about women's participation in public contexts that question Kant's problematic claims about women's inherent inability to be enlightened.

In Hossain's utopian short novel resembling scientific fiction, "Sultana's Dream,"[29] the narrator Sultana (who is in purdah) dreams of women's emancipation (Hossain 2005a). In her dream, Sultana finds herself in Ladyland, a city where women have the freedom of movement, unlike the real world. Sister Sara, a resident of Ladyland, introduces her to its ideology and practices. The men in Ladyland have been confined to the private sphere of the home doing house work after their participation in a war that was meaningless. A city of women's creativity and scientific achievements, it encouraged individuals to work moderately, use solar energy, orient technology to easing house hold tasks with a commitment to collaborative egalitarian human relationships of freedom and pacifism. Hossain's utopia had women's education in both the sciences and arts as its underlying force, Bagchi notes (Bagchi 2005, xii).

In "Sultana's Dream" (Hossain 2005a) Hossain envisions a world where women and men switch their roles to explore the possibility of women's active engagement in public space. In Sultana's fantasy world, "women… are devoted to the more productive goal of cultivating their minds…" (Bagchi 2005, xii). With a role reversal, women develop their talents to produce scientific research to improve everyday life and just governance, rather than militaristic goals, while the men hone skills of cooking and cleaning. The very notion of role reversal suggests that gendered identities are constructed, contesting Kant's rigid approach to gendered identity. It also upholds that capabilities for public participation with domestic skills would have to be developed through education that blurs the rigid line between them. For Hossain this requires aspects of the domestic to be integrated with the public domain; thus, typically feminine skills can empower the public sphere in a world where, for instance, technology such as solar power is used for cooking, rather than war.

The private-public nebulousness in Ladyland embodied the interdependence in society, where people from all walks of life depended on one another so that no one sphere can be privileged over others. The following passage from Hossain's socially critical essay on the relationship between genders illustrates how interdependence is prevalent both in the natural and social worlds: "It's true that being physically weak, women depend on the men for help. But that should not serve to make men 'masters.' In this world everything needs help from another in some form; nothing can survive without mutual help. As plants need the help of rain, so do the clouds need help from trees. Rain helps to fill the rivers, but again clouds are indebted to the river. Is the river then 'master' of the clouds, or the clouds 'master' of the river? If we turn from nature to society, we observe a similar law of mutual support. Some are carpenters, and some are weavers, etc. A barrister seeks the service of a doctor, and the doctor needs the barrister's help. Should we then consider the doctor as the barrister's 'master' or the barrister as the doctor's 'master'?" (Hossain 2013b, 39).

It is in this spirit of interdependence that Hossain integrates the skills of women's affective activities in the private domain of their homes with those of the public domain. She regards feelings as vital in this process of interaction between the private and public domains. Thus, unlike Kant, feelings such as compassion, are significant for Hossain in weaving new communities of openness, where women collaborate with men. Hossain turned to the constructive role of affect through her critique of rigid practices of seclusion to envisage a

specifically Indian notion of enlightenment that brought the public and private spheres together, instead of compartmentalising them.

B. Tagore:

The split between the public and private is understood by Tagore, like Hossain, in a more conventional way (unlike Kant) as the divide between the work of men in the public domain and women's work in a tapered private sphere. The public domain, according to Tagore, shaped by the goals of power and money (Tagore 2011a) has instrumentalised human relationships as means to ends. In his 1933 essay "Women's place in the World" (Tagore 1996) Tagore observes how men attained patriarchal freedom from the duties in the domestic sphere and went on to create a mechanised impersonal public world without feeling, under colonisation. The attitude of devaluing feelings and emotions in the public domain has, according to Tagore, lead to immense suffering and alienation. Hence, instead of communities with meaningful bonds, Tagore in his 1941 "Crisis of Civilisation" speech (Tagore 2011c) forebodes a speedy rush towards the divisiveness of war and exploitation to maintain its greed.

The crisis of modern civilisation for Tagore is one where such impersonal interactions among people through contractarian and utilitarian arrangements reduce individuals to homogeneous entities (Tagore 2011a).[30] It also fragments relationships and multiplies suffering. In this process there is a loss of individual uniqueness, as well as, a devaluing of communities where non-utilitarian sharing prevails. Tagore sees the possibility of an alternate form of life, if women's work permeates the public domain. He notes how "Today we find this un-cadenced civilisation crashing at a tremendous speed along a perilous slope, knocking against unforeseen catastrophes, never knowing how to stop. And at last, the time has arrived when woman must step in and impart her life-rhythm to this reckless movement of power" (Tagore 1996, 677).

Thus, for Tagore the qualities of feminine nature can step in to remedy the crisis in civilisation. Women by virtue of their work acquire qualities that can help a world damaged and fragmented by the pursuit of profit recover itself. He upholds that freeing feminine virtues in the public domain is possible if women's quest for freedom and equality is respected. According to Tagore, women's assertion of their freedoms is not merely a personal project, but is critical for transforming society. "It is not that woman is merely seeking today her freedom of livelihood, struggling against man's monopoly of business, but against man's monopoly of civilisation" (Tagore 1996, 678).

Tagore is avowedly indebted to feminine qualities of women as a poet, both on a personal level and culturally to chart an alternate enlightenment from Kant's. Tagore remarks that women's work of nurture embodies an energy[31] that is evident in their activities of "service… self-dedication and …daily sacrifices" (Tagore 1996, 676). Such feminine qualities would in his view allow for going beyond the masculinisation of civilisation. Given their work in the private domain, women acquire qualities such as patience and love that can provide the ground for nurtured lives.

Patriarchal men, according to Tagore, emphasise bargaining control through contracts and the like in their dealings with other human beings. But women differ in focussing on the ideals of compassion and integrating their surroundings into their perspective with their work in the private domain. He compares women's labour to that of the soil which enables trees to grow, while at the same time limiting them as the need arises. The crisis of fragmented communities which do not speak to one another needs a secure base, like the soil (Tagore 1996, 677). Feminine qualities can provide this base to encourage a growth where progress in civilisation is not measured through material accumulation, but through cultural gains, such as poetry, shaped by communities that value communication.

Tagore perceives personal bonds, which see even the ordinary as significant, as grounded in feelings such as love and expanded through the virtue of patience. Ties of love and patience are not based on the materiality of accomplishments or rational justification because of which they are integral to decolonisation. Tagore observes that their expansion to the public domain enables the unconditional affirmation of human dignity against the objectification of a profit-oriented society. "The future Eve will lure away the future Adam from the wilderness of a masculine dispensation and mingle her talents with those of her partner in a joint creation of a paradise of their own" (Tagore 1996, 678). Thus, feminine virtues such as patience have the potential to replace competitiveness with communication needed for building cooperative communities of equals.

Tagore's 1914 short story "The Wife's Letter" (Tagore 2014) is an epistolary fictional expression of his critique of patriarchy and his commitment to women's freedom and equality. He critiques women's domestic lives in a patriarchal society that disallows them from pursuing creative and religious freedom. Its protagonist Mrinal represents this critique and expresses her resistance in a personal way. An intelligent talented village girl, Mrinal is forced to become the second wife of a man from Calcutta because she is regarded as having ornamental value. She is unhappy with a marriage that values the superficiality of appearance and devalues her intelligence, enslaving her in the mindlessness of unreflective customary practices. As a "second daughter-in-law" (Tagore 2014, 606), she lives in seclusion in a household with "not even the smallest patch of earth in the - women's quarters" (Tagore 2014, 610). Mrinal is aware of going beyond conforming to her imposed role by secretly writing poems to express herself. She realises the value of her freedom through her bonds of nurturing and love with her relative an orphan Bindu who lives in her marital household. Mrinal observes Bindu's plight, common in many households, as one of being superfluous. Thus, "Inessential rubbish can easily find a place around our houses, because people forget it, but an inessential girl is in the first place unwanted, and moreover impossible to overlook; hence she does not find a place even in the rubbish heap" (Tagore 2014, 609).

Following patriarchal customs, Bindu whom Mrinal cares for very deeply, is married off to a mentally disabled man and commits suicide when she did not have a chance to return. Mrinal seeks freedom from an exploitative home situation and the freedom to practice her art of poetry, which she thinks of fulfilling through religion. She refuses to die; it is rather her role

of the second daughter-in-law that dies for Tagore as critics note. Mrinal lives on in another role by following the footsteps of the medieval saint Meerabai by leaving her husband and sending him a letter expressing her point of view of freedom.

As Malashri Lal puts it "The Wife's Letter positions his extraordinary entry into the interiority of women's worlds through a woman's voice and her agency" (Lal 2010, 4–5). It is an instance of a man putting himself in the position of a woman to enlarge his point of view and feel for her–in empathy. Such empathy led Tagore to offer a critical version of the woman who was capable of thinking for herself. She did not have to be under the guardianship of a man or coerced into domestic life. Tagore's woman at one level was an antidote to the image of the woman in Bengal's modernity as someone who occupied the inner space of spiritual growth away from the external public sphere of politics; a woman who symbolised the colonised Indian masculinity's control over the domestic sphere in lieu of the lack of presence in the public sphere (Mukherjee 2017, 65-66). Tagore's woman was an antidote to such an image, as Mrinal aspires for her freedom by going on a journey.

Moreover, against Reshma Mukherjee's critique (Mukherjee 2017), "The Wife's Letter" does not valorise the sacrificing woman or adopt an in-absentia mode of responding to patriarchy indirectly without confrontation. It is rather an endeavour to show how women's patient suffering empowers them to chart their own independence without seeking validation from the patriarchal structures that subjugated them. Through the epistolary mode, Tagore depicts a specific woman's choice of style in expressing herself, which need not be universalised. Mrinal's hope for leading a new life expresses an optimism of going on a journey like the Baul poets and musicians from whom Tagore learnt and commended (Tagore 2011b), without replacing the idea of the marital home with a religious one as Mukherjee upholds.

Mrinal leaving her husband's home in Tagore's "The Wife's Letter" can be understood in the context of the free spirit of the Baul religion. For the Bauls, the sacred is not to be found in external entrapments of temples, churches, homes and so forth (Moitra 2020, 407). It is rather expressed through free poetry that communes with others and responds to nature. Baul communities step away from the instrumental world of contracts to underline relationships of affect. They show patience, rather than masculine militaristic courage in resistance against the crisis of inegalitarianism and exploitation.

Tagore's appreciation of Kshiti Mohan Sen's narration of Baul folk religion and poetry in his 1931 essay "Religion of Man" (Tagore 2011b, 421-435) encapsulates their borderless religion of love. With Sen, Tagore went beyond the prejudiced disparaging attitude that society in Bengal had towards Baul culture (which was akin to Kant's attitude to American Indian tribes and non-European races). In their (Tagore's and Sen's) view, Bauls went beyond the boundaries of class, caste, gender and nation with their poetry; they also distanced themselves from orthodoxies, sects and theocracies. The Bauls eschewed both extreme asceticism and hedonism to uphold freedom of conscience and poetic appreciation of nature.

For Tagore such an artistic form of freedom to be creative is possible only when fear is dismantled by a calm faith in larger humanity motivated by love among all beings. He expands humanity to include the suffering, struggling and toiling masses, women, as much as, labourers as Shefali Moitra notes (Moitra 2020, 413). Such an expansiveness reflects the inspiration of the Bauls. Mrinal's act of leaving home is an aspiration to find an interrelated community of care and communication like those of the Bauls. She signs off in hope for a new life: "I too shall live. At last, I live. Bereft of the shelter of your family's feet…" (Tagore 2014, 619).

It is evident that both Hossain and Tagore have offered alternate ways of philosophising in public that go beyond argumentative discourses of responding to given theses via counter theses through a detailed logical or consistent argument. On the contrary, they regard literary works and the saint traditions, such as those of the Baul singers, as offering ways of forging together new publics that are not simply obedient members of a colonial nation. Their engagement with the indigenous is an attempt to overcome the crisis of broken public solidarities offset by the imperialism of administrative rationality. They also critique the oppressiveness of ossified customs that were patriarchal and classist.

In his final speech on the "Crisis in Civilisation" Tagore noted that the prevalence of conflict among social communities in India, the lack of access to technologies to reduce the burdens of labour, the lack of basic material well-being due to an exploitative foreign government crushed the spirit of growth and a civilisation that once had achieved a lot through its heterogeneity. Tagore suggests "opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere is rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice. Perhaps that dawn will come from this horizon, from the East where the sun rises" (Tagore 2011c, 268).

Tagore's new chapter is one of a civilisation of caring enlightenment, which is possible when there is a recognition like Tagore and Hossain that the private and public worlds of individuals, as well as, communities are entangled. Hossain's and Tagore's enlightenments valorise feminine care as a way out of the individualism, rationalism and the compartmentalisation of the private and public domains in Kant. As Schott notes, care ethics has emerged as an option for feminists in response to the non-affective rationality and individualism in Kant (Schott 1996, 480-481). Schott rightly observes that "the care perspective cannot be formulated by the normative principle 'Be compassionate' or 'Take responsibility.' The care perspective is committed to concrete, individual decision making as opposed to abstract, universal rules, which cannot help in deciding between conflicts of responsibilities" (Schott 1996, 481). It effects an important turn in taking relationships as the starting point in moral theory and focuses on their tensions, as well as, harmonies.

One can discern Hossain and Tagore as introducing a similar paradigm shift in thinking about the enlightenment via the care ethical model through their critique of the Kantian type courageous individualism and bureaucratic instrumental efficiency in colonial approaches to the enlightenment. The enlightenment of care regards interactions and interdependence between all beings (human and non-human) as morally significant. It does not stick to an

isolated individual's courage for self-expression as valuable, but rather considers feminine nurture and patience as values because of their potential to heal crisis ridden communities.

Hossain and Tagore do not privilege the strong or powerful or even the courageous in the Kantian sense as entitled to enlightenment. They do not essentialise gender norms and consider the conditions of nurture as critical for the development of all genders and races. Such conditions for Hossain and Tagore are possible only when social bonds establish communities through compassion, love and empathy (rather than just reason). Such communities comprise care givers and receivers whose roles are constantly changeable. This is because Hossain and Tagore are committed to regarding dependency and need as a part of the process of enlightenment (Sander Staudt).

Conclusion

In her *Black Enlightenment* (Parekh 2023), Surya Parekh argues that the possibility of non-European races and one might add women as subjects, is both necessary and "foreclosed" (Parekh 2023, 5) in Kant's thinking about the enlightenment. He illustrates his enlightenment notion of being grounded in reason and courage, by distinguishing it from non-European races and women. But his distinction is not merely descriptive, it upholds his European masculine framework as normative and thus, denies the possibility of being human to non-European races and women.[32]

By turning Hossain's and Tagore's conceptions of caring enlightenment in colonial India, the racism and patriarchy that has been a part of the Kantian project (implicitly and explicitly) is destabilised. Caring enlightenment that is grounded in care questions the very idea of individualism without community and rationalism without affect whose traces are visible in the race and gender bias of the Kantian model.

It also intersects with Kant's turn to the public in public reasoning, as a turn to the ordinary person who thinks informally, as opposed to a specialist or a person of position in Kant's private sphere, such as the lawyer who thinks in formal contexts. As Laursen notes, "Kant's usage is better characterized as a wholesale rejection of the lawyer's usage and acceptance of the usage of the growing number of books and literary periodicals written by 'general writers' for 'the whole nation'" (Laursen 1986, 586-87).

Kant clarifies that "by the public use of one's reason I mean that use which anyone makes of it *as a scholar (Gelehrter)* before the entire public of the *reading world*" (Kant 1996a, 60). If one interprets the notion of "reading" in the above quote as that of interpretation and thought, Kant opens the possibility of an unrestricted public. Such a public need not be the elites with access to academic institutions, but can include authors, house wives, school teachers, Baul singers and many others to listen and care for one another. Hossain's and Tagore's reimaginings of caring enlightenment reveal as much.

End Notes

[1] This paper is a revised version of my presentation entitled "Thinking Publicly, Thinking Plurally, Thinking Philosophically" at the Weekly Seminar of the School of Civilisation Studies, Somaiya Vidyavihar University on January 10, 2025. I am indebted to the organizers of the Seminar—Ganesh Devy, Kavita Pai, Gaurav Gadgil, Krishna Dange and others—for their invitation. I thank the participants at the Seminar for their energetic discussion, which has benefitted the revised paper. My special thanks to Bharatwaj Iyer, Ayush Srivastava and Kamala Ganesh for their time and expertise in giving me their detailed feedback. My gratitude to Kavita Pai for introducing me to the writings of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain almost a decade ago. *Vielen Dank* to Viplov Dhone and Shefali Moitra for their help. However, all the limitations in this paper are entirely my own.

[2] See Guthrie 1971 for an account of Socrates' life and thought.

[3] The Greek term *agorá* for public assembly, such as the market, is derived from *ageírein* which means to gather or assemble. An *agorá* was an open space, typically at the center of the city or close to, where people gathered together for social, religious, commercial or other informal activities. It offered protection from bad weather through coverings and columns (*stoa*). Tombs in the *agora* were marks of honour for eminent citizens ("*agora*").

[4] As Huntington Cairns notes, Plato did not discuss why he chose the dialogue form, but then he conveys in *Phaedrus* that the written word is not "alive" (Plato 1987c, 521) like speech to answer the reader. Hence, one could perhaps think of this as a reason for Plato to have chosen the dialogue model (Cairns 1987, xiv) in the spirt of Socrates for encouraging reflective conversations in the aspiration for truth, meaning, morality and the like. However, as Plato argues that the author of the written is often not there to defend it, Jacques Derrida critiques Plato for assuming that words have absolute meaning and disparaging writing (Derrida 1981).

[5] See Plato 1987a for a detailed account of Socrates on the crisis in Athens and his own defence. Yet, the extent to which Socrates as a historical figure matches with Plato's portrayal is a matter of debate.

[6] This paper references the two translations of Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" (by Schmidt in Kant 1996a and Humphreys in Kant 1985a). Although it largely derives from Humphreys's translation, it also refers to Schmidt's interchangeably. It uses Schmidt's translation when the need for reference to German terms arises (since Schmidt has cited German terms in his translation).

[7] Frederick II ruled Prussia from 1740 until his death in 1786.

[8] Schmidt mentions the *Mittwochsgessellschaft* that was connected to the *Berliner Monatsschrift* as an instance of such a society, where intellectuals and jurists met to discuss matters pertaining to free thought (Schmidt 1996b, 2–3). These societies were a platform for individuals to offer their perspective on politics, where these were absent in the monarchical context in which they lived. Schmidt observes that given social stratifications, these societies offered spaces where individuals from diverse social groups could democratically interact with one another.

[9] See Cavallar 1993 for a detailed account, which this discussion relies upon.

[10] Also see Anderson.

[11] He also dropped the suffix "Great" while referring to Frederick II as is evident in his essay "Towards Perpetual Peace" (Cavallar 1993, 129-130).

[12] See Schmidt 1996a for the various responses to Zöllner's question.

[13] See note 7 above.

[14] He himself espoused a mystical version of Christianity.

[15] The successor to Frederick II.

[16] This was because Frederick II did not concern himself with mass education through schools and educational institutions. He concentrated on military growth instead, a matter that Kant was uncomfortable with (Cavallar 1993, 117).
[17] Kant cites Horace's "Dare to Know" an adage of the Society of Friends for Truth, one of the Enlightenment circle of discussion in Prussia (Humphreys 1985, n. 3).
[18] Kant's appreciation of Frederick II is evident in his making this distinction as the following quote reveals: "Under him venerable clergy, in their role as scholars and irrespective of their official duties, freely and publicly present their judgments and insights—which here or there diverge from the established symbol—to the world for examination. Those who are not restricted by the duties of office are even freer" (Kant 1985a, 44).
[19] Courage.
[20] This account of women in France and Prussia is derived from Schott 1996.
[21] This expression is both descriptive of an epoch (albeit inadequately so) and attempts to philosophically articulate the meaning of free or enlightened thought. The focus in this paper is on the latter.
[22] However, as Panikkar has argued the Indian Renaissance (both epochally and conceptually) was uneven and incomplete without necessarily committing itself to progressive goals. It consequently also unleashed inegalitarian revivalist perspectives (Panikkar 2003).
[23] See Boparai 2023 for details. Boparai compares the Bengal Renaissance to its Italian counterpart in its focus on humanistic values, language and reconstruction of ancient wisdom. The erstwhile Calcutta she notes reinforced the communicative and pedagogical aspects of language with Bengali, English, and Sanskrit. As mentioned earlier, many regions in India went through Renaissance, see Belsare 1997 for an account of Maharashtra.
[24] In 1909 Hossain founded a school for girls in Bhagalpur, but after being compelled to move to the erstwhile Calcutta she reset a school there in 1910 (Bagchi 2005, ix). This school is running successfully as the Sakhawat Memorial Government Girls School in erstwhile Calcutta. Tagore established a school in Santiniketan, rural Bengal in 1901 and a university in 1921, the influential Visva-Bharati University. These institutions were founded on the principles of self-development through harmonious coexistence, both among human communities and nature.
[25] See Hossain 2013a, 2013b and 2013b for her socially critical essays on women's disenfranchisement.
[26] It is now known as Kolkata.
[27] She lost her children in infancy (Quayum 2017, 10).
[28] See Mirus 2020 for a detailed account of practices of nurture among spider mothers. Baer and Dayal have named a new translation of Hossain's works as *Spider Mother: The Fiction and Politics of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* (Baer and Dayal 2024)
[29] It was published in 1905 in English in the *Indian Ladies Magazine* whose coeditor was Sarojini Naidu (Bagchi 2005, viii). Hossain's visionary novel appears much before the American novelist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 feminist utopia *Herland*
[30] His "Modern Age" is a part of his 1922 work "Creative Unity".
[31] He terms this as "*Shakti*" (Tagore 1996, 676)
[32] See Mahadevan 2015 for an account of K.C. Bhattacharyya drawing upon Kant to read Indian philosophy in the colonial context and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial reading. It examines their tensions given the problems of race and gender in Kant.

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