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HISTORY AND POLITICAL IDEALS IN BANKIM CHANDRA'S PROSE: A STUDY OF ANANDAMATH

Arnab Mukherjee

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Author Details:
Ph.D. Research Scholar,
University of Kalyani,
West Bengal, India

Corresponding Author:
Arnab Mukherjee

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Abstract

Serialized in the *Bangadarshan* in 1882, the magnum opus of nationalist intellectual and author Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, titled *Anandamath*, stands as one of the most influential literary works in the history of Indian nationalism. Written during the twilight of the Bengali renaissance, when the effects of British colonial exploitation were being widely felt across indigenous intellectual circles, Bankim's novel became a manifesto of patriotic awakening, a call to rediscover India's spiritual strength, and an artistic expression of resistance in the nascent phase of Indian nationalism. The novel, set against the backdrop of the Sannyasi Rebellion in the eighteenth century, pioneered the idea of envisaging the nation of India as a divine mother figure. It housed the famous song Vande Mataram, which served as an ode to the mother nation. The song, which today serves as the national song of India, went on to gain widespread political traction as the clarion call of Indian nationalists during the Swadeshi Movement (1905-11). This research seeks to analyse the role of Bankim Chandra's novel in pioneering the idea of personifying the nation as a deity. Through qualitative literary analysis, it aims to explore the legacy of Anandamath in Indian literature as a seminal work in the political frontier of national mobilization and its contemporary relevance as an instrument of national unity.

Keywords: *Nationalism, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Anandamath, Colonial Resistance*

Introduction

Following a prolonged period of social and cultural reforms, endorsed and enabled by the British colonial government from the early to mid-19th century in Bengal, where key figures amongst the educated elite of the Hare School and the Hindu College of Calcutta had found themselves enamoured with the customs and habits of Western society, the political milieu in Bengal had, since the mid-1870s, started to witness a reversal in its attitude towards the British (Raychaudhuri 1989, pp. 34 – 35). Factors leading to this reversal of attitude remained many and varied. A combination of blatant racism in speech and policy by the colonial government, coupled with the discrimination that the Bengali 'babus' were now experiencing in bureaucracy and academia, had soured the benign image of the colonial masters (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 32).

The persistent abuse of Hinduism produced a counterreaction in the educated youth of Calcutta. The alumni of the Presidency College (formerly the Hindu College), who were previously convinced of the 'superiority of English literature and the worthlessness of Indian traditions' (Shastri 1907, p. 181), now appeared to be abounding with the desire to believe that everything Hind was sublime and superior to all that the West had to offer. The Hindu self-image received a moral boost from the writings of Max Mueller and the theosophy of Olcott and Blavatsky (Raychaudhuri 1989, pp. 32-33). The illustrious literary career of *Sahitya Samrat* Bankim Chandra Chatterjee extended evenly across the course of this tumultuous period. He witnessed this shift in social attitudes from the early period of Bengali bonhomie with English imitation in the first half of the 19th century. This included the Derozians' open defiance of Hindu culture, conversion of upper caste Hindu youth to Christianity, the missionaries' ill-informed criticism of Hindu rituals, Rammohan Roy's attack on idolatry, and government-sponsored reforms in social customs like Sati, widow remarriage, and women's education. Then, the slow turn of the pendulum following the mixed reception of the Sepoy Mutiny (1857) in Bengal, the decade-wide aftermath of the Wilson-Macaulay Orientalist education controversy, and finally the Hastie letters (1882) in which Bankim himself played a key role. In many ways, his magnum opus, Anandamath, was one of the catalysts behind this shift (Meem et al., 2021, p. 114).

Anandamath stands at the foundational forefront of nationalist fiction in India. Considered by scholars (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903 & Dasgupta 1933, p. 16) to be the first political novel in Bengali literature, the novel is held as the most significant work in Bankim's literary canon. Intertwined with intense nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments are the axioms of love, lust, romance,

conjugal life, frustration, despair, renunciation, and perseverance, all woven together into the texture of the novel (Dhar 2019, p. 369). Biographer Jayanta Kr. Dasgupta goes so far as to postulate that "if Bankim Chandra had written only Anandamath and nothing else, it would have been sufficient to keep his name alive forever and give him an honored place among India's great sons." (Dasgupta 1933, p. 111)

The intent of this research is to analyse the nationalist ideals of Bankim Chandra's Anandamath. Starting with a brief biographical sketch of the author, leading to the penning of the magnum opus in 1882, the study shall furnish a truncated summary of the novel itself. Following this, the analytical section of this work shall be divided into the understanding of the definition and concept of the term 'nation', the veracity of Anandmath as a piece of historical fiction, and the importance of the historical framework that the novel utilizes. Then the iconic song housed in the novel, Vande Mataram, would be studied as an instrument of positing the nation as a Goddess. This research shall then explore the humanism and egalitarian ideals of nationalism as espoused in the novel. The penultimate analysis shall be of the ethical and professional dilemmas that Bankim faced as a bureaucrat in penning what would become the literary flagship of nationalist fiction. Finally, this research shall assess the historical significance of Bankim Chandra's Anandamath.

Biography

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was born on the 27th of June, 1838, in the village of Katalpara in the 24 Pargana district of West Bengal. His father, Yadav Chandra Chattopadhayay, was a kulin Brahmin, a reputed scholar of Sanskrit, and the Duty Collector of Midnapore. Enjoying a childhood of cultural affluence and a strong family tradition of pursuing literary arts and orthodox traditions (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 103-104), Bankim completed his early education in Midnapore before joining the Hooghly Mohsin College in 1847. A prodigious student, he was heralded as a genius by his contemporaries, joining Presidency College in 1957. Bankim was heavily influenced by the Sepoy mutiny (1857) that transpired during his college years. The aftermath of the movement instilled in him a nationalistic fervour that would mark his subsequent writings. He became one of the first graduates of the nascent Calcutta University, passing its master's program in 1858. Bankim gained an appointment as the Deputy Magistrate of Jessore in 1858, and following the death of his wife, Mohini Devi, he transferred from Jessore to Midnapore in 1859 (Dasgupta 1933, pp. 13 – 17). Bankim later served a stint in Baruipur, where he penned Durgeshnandini and Kapalkundala. Mrinalini (1869) was penned during his tenure in Murshidabad. It was during his years of service in Barasat that he founded the literary magazine Bangadarshan (the Bengali Perspective) in 1872 (Dasgupta 1933, p. 22). This magazine would go on to house serialized versions of his subsequent novels and play a defining role in shaping Bengali literary identity. The periodical would feature works by writers such as Harapradsad Shastri, Akshay Chandra Sarkar, and include articles on Puranas, Vedas, and Vedanta philosophy. It would also feature Bankim's own social commentaries on developments in the state, such as the Ilbert Bill, Surendranath's expulsion from civil service, and the inception of the Indian National Association, among others. Bankim, recognizing the value of mass appeal, intended Bangadarshan to become a medium of communication and sympathy between the educated and the uneducated classes (Das 1974), a sentiment that would later be reflected in Anandamath itself. Finally, he was transferred to Hooghly as the Assistant District Magistrate, where he took residence in the town of Chinsurah and started writing Anandamath.

A remarkable development during the early 1880s was when Bankim found himself in an intellectual collision course with Scottish missionary, Reverend William Hastie. Hastie, then the Principal of the General Assembly's Institution (later to become the Scottish Church College), wrote a scathing critique of Hindu religion, ritual, idolatry, and the tantrik in the editorial of Statesman on 22nd of September, 1882 (Ghosh 2011, p. 144). Bankim wrote a response penned under the pseudonym of Ramchandra. Bankim made a masterly defence of Hinduism and countered Hastie, exposing the fallacy of his arguments (Dasgupta 1933, p. 17). In Bankim's own words:

> "The religious worship of idols is as justifiable as the intellectual worship of Hamlet or Prometheus. The homage we owe to the ideal of the human realised in art is admiration. The homage we owe to the ideal of the divine realised in idolatry is worship."

This response, written on the heels of his publication of Anandamath, illustrates the sentiment that guides Bankim's conception of the nation as a Goddess. Historian Rakhal Chandra Nath described the Hastie controversy as the beginning of the New Hindu Movement in Bengal (Nath 1981).

Anandamath: A Brief Summary

The novel starts with a monologue from the omniscient third-person narrator about the deplorable state of affairs. As a consequence of the Bengal famine of 1770, many villages found themselves depopulated and devastated. Mahendra Sinha, a zamindar, leaves home with his wife Kalyani and young daughter Sukumari when a band of robbers kidnaps the latter two. Kalyani manages to escape with Sukumari and is rescued by the sannyasi Mahatma Satyananda. Satyananda is organising a band of sannyasis known as the 'Santans' or 'the Children' to free the country against the oppressive rule of the tyrant nawab and the Muslim hegemony. Their base of operations is the eponymous 'Anandamath' or the Abbey of Bliss. Kalyani and her daughter arrive at the Anandamath. Bhabananda is sent to find Mahendra. Mahendra, in the meantime, had been arrested as a robber by the sepoys and was later rescued by Bhabananda. On Mahendra's safe arrival at the Anandantmath, he is taken in by the creed of the Santans and is eager to embrace it. However, to meet one's spouse or children after this initiation was seen as a sin. Mahendra proposes to take Kalyani and Sukumari to his village home. On the way, Sukumari accidentally swallows a poison pill and becomes senseless. Kalyani mistakenly thinks that her daughter is dead. In the midst of grieving for his daughter,

Mahendra hears Satyananda singing a devotional song, the tune now made famous as the national song of India, Vande Mataram. Mahendra and Satyananda are then arrested by the Nawab's Sepoys. While being hauled off to be imprisoned, Satyananda continues to sing. Jibananda hears the song from a distance and understands in it the cryptic hint that Sukumari was lying in the forest. Jibananda heads to the forest in search of the child's body, but then finds that Sukumari was not dead but merely unconscious. Jibananda leaves Sukumari in the care of his sister Nimaimani and his wife Shanti.

The Santans, after a difficult fight, rescue Mahendra and Satyananda. However, they learn that Jibananda, by meeting Shanti, his wife, had transgressed the order's rule of asceticism. Shanti, a firebrand tomboy, in the meantime, follows Jiban out to the Math in the guise of a young man named Nabin. 'Nabin' is initiated as a Santan. Satyananda guesses the true identity of Nabin. Bhabananda finds Kalyani in the forest, discovering that she is still alive. Bhabani had fallen in love with Klayni, but she repels his advances.

Later, in a skirmish against the English, Bhabananda falls fighting but manages to rally his men into coming out victorious. Mahendra is then reunited with his wife and daughter and goes on to live with them at his native village. In the subsequent battle with the English, the Santans win the day, but Jibananda falls wounded. He, however, is saved by the mysterious Mahapurus, Satyananda's guru, under whose insistence the Santans were created. Jiban returns to Shanti. Shanti and Jiban go on to live the rest of their lives in the Himalayas. The Mahapurus then dissuades Satyananda from fighting any further, as all hopes of Hindu supremacy were over. The novel's conclusion, in which English tyranny is projected as a divine dispensation, is inspired by the widespread belief in the author's contemporaneous culture that the British government in Bengal was a necessary evil (Meem et al., 2021, p. 114).

Nations and Nationalism

The definition of a nation, as per the Oxford dictionary, is a 'large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language inhabiting a particular territory' (OAD 2020, p. 342). The etymological roots of the words can be understood in a linguistic trajectory. The word nation has its roots in the French word *nacion*, which in turn is derived from the Latin term '*nation-em'*, which means breed, stock, or race. There is some ambiguity on the role of ethnic identity in the social definition of the term 'nation' in Anandamath, where Bankim uses the word 'jati' instead. However, he also espouses the passionate need for unity of all races of India. Therefore, there is a contrast between the idea of the *'jati'* and the *'desh'* in Bankim's categorisation of a nation (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 155). By classifying the Hindu as a jati, Bankim essentializes the Hindu as one race rather than a religion, and the term *dharma* (generally meant to signify duty) consequently implies credo or way of life.

Ernest Renan, in 1882, attempted to define the Nation as a human endeavour that was collectively brought together by the will, consciousness, and collective memory of the individual involved in this endeavour (Renan & Giglioli 2018, p. 196). Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*, calls a nation an imagined political community where the members of the community, despite not knowing all the members of the community, have an idea of their communion. The idea of communion allows people to come together to fight for a common belief and cause. Ernest Gellner propounds that the idea of people coming together and consciously sharing a common belief and thought gives birth to a nation. This concept of coming together to create a community out of and for the pursuit of a common cause is illustrated in Bankim's Anandamath, opines Sukriti Deswal (Deswal 2022, p. 71). According to Partha Chatterjee,

> "In talking about the subjection of India, Bankim encapsulates into his conception of the cultural failure of the Indian people to face up to the realities of power a whole series of conquests dating from the first Muslim invasions of India and culminating in the establishment of British rule" (Chatterjee 1986, pp. 55 – 56).

The idealized vision of the nation as it ought to be is based on the feudal social setup of the past, with the ruler taking on the role of a feudal patriarchal lord, a benign father figure. Deswal, in this interpretation, relies on the words of Jason Stanley, "The ruler provides for his nation, just as in a traditional family the father is the provider, the protector, and benefactor. The patriarch father's authority derives from his strength, and the strength is the chief authoritarian value" (Deswal 2022, p. 76). The idea of *Dharma* keeps recurring across the novel when establishing the essential order of action and decision-making for the protagonists. Deswal highlights the somewhat pedantic, preachy nature of the novel's moral core. There is no place for questioning religious faith and practices in the novel. The sentimental value of the Cause comes before rational inhibitions (Deswal, p. 73). However, it is also recognizable in the author's desire for mass outreach; appeals to emotion are far simpler and adept at capturing popular imagination than appeals to reason. Therefore, Bankim relies more upon melodrama, chivalry, divine prophecy, and a simple linear morality to convey his message.

Imagined History: Framework of the Glorious Past

There remain disputes regarding the historical accuracy of the novel's events. Meenakshi Mukherjee, for one, calls it a 'Political Myth', one which also falls short in many ways as a historical novel (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903). Anandamath operates on a loose historical framework, with scholars such as Mukherjee and Tanika Sarkar (2006) rightly pointing out the chronological anomalies in its events. In 1771, when the events of the novel are set into motion, Bengal had not yet come under British Rule. The nawab Mir Jafar, the novel's overarching antagonist, had long since died in real life (1765) before the novel's commencement. Likewise, historically speaking, the abstract idea of nationalism was not prevalent amongst the sannayasis of the era (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903). Furthermore, the historical reasons behind the actual uprising were triggered as consequences of the famine itself rather than any grander notion of national duty. The main thrust of the uprising actually centred around Murshidabad and Baikunthupur

forests of Jalpaiguri rather than Birbhum, as it was stated in the novel's canon, to protest the oppressive taxation of the Britishers (Dhar 2019, p. 368). Furthermore, the uprising itself was religiously heterogeneous, comprising not only Hindu priests but also Muslim *pirs* and *moulavis* in the region (Sarkar 1994, p. 2554). Bankim did not emphasise the historicity of the novel in its first edition. However, he admitted in the second edition's preface that he did not want to write a historical novel. After further criticism from his contemporaries, he wrote in the preface of the third edition (1885), 'a novel is a novel, it is not history' and subsequently in the preface to his next work of the same genre, *Debi Chaudhurani*, that he 'did not pretend to be historical' (Dasgupta 1933, p. 104).

The problems of historical veracity of the novel having been addressed in her essay, Meenakshi Mukherjee goes on to state that the importance of the novel lies not in historical authenticity but rather in the appeal to the sentiments of its readership. The novel helped consolidate certain nebulous ideas and set about creating a new political and moral aspiration for a generation of Bengalis who needed a new myth (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903). Anandamath thus becomes a foundational text in the nascent nationalist movement in Bengal. It becomes, in Sudipta Kaviraj's words, an instance of 'imagined history' (Kaviraj 1995, p. 108). A generation following the publication of Macaulay's *Minutes on Indian Education*, which had helped antagonize the new generation of the formerly grateful class of Western-educated babus (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903), this imagined history becomes a symbol of hope. It created a sense of direction, a righteous cause in the noisy, diverse, and complex discourse that permeated the Bengali political milieu in the late 19th century (Kaviraj 1995, p. 107). Since academic history remained firmly under the thumb of the colonial educators, imagined history becomes a safe refuge for the 'unhappy consciousness' of the middle-class Bengali. The idea for the reclamation of this forgotten glory is derivative. Bankim himself, in his essay 'Bharat Kalanka' (the Indian Disgrace), states that the concept of nationhood was a direct result of his English education (Bankim Rachnaboli Vol II 1985, p. 241). Therefore, the novel was less of an exercise in the act of reclamation and more of a clarion call for revivalism. The Hindu revivalism propagated in the novel was very different from any form of recognizable Hindu religion of the time. It brings about a unique synthesis of the Vaishnava cult with Shaktism, something that was considered unacceptable for both parties involved during that era (Mukherjee 1982, p. 905). Thus, the non-traditional syncretism here becomes a tradition in itself. National traditions are as invented as nations themselves are imagined. Bankim's projection of nationalism in the novel contributed to the rise of the consciousness of nationalism among the local people. Nationalism in 19th-century Bengal was consistent with the ideas of modernization, which Bankim was tutored in, and industrialization that he had to witness firsthand (Bankim Rachnaboli Vol II 1985, p. 367). Partha Chatterjee pins down the constructed nature of Nationalism as the product of colonial industrialization in these words:

> "The perception of uneven development created by industrialization, which disrupts traditional society unevenly, creates the possibility for nationalism; it is born when more and less advanced populations can be easily distinguished in cultural terms. Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some preexisting marks of differentiation to work on" (Chatterjee 1986, p. 4)

Vande Mataram: An Ode to the Goddess

One of the greatest contributions of this novel to the literary canon of colonial India is the idealization of the country as a mother figure. The song Vande Mataram, literally meaning 'Mother I bow to thee', sung by the Santans, is Bankim's call to nationalism through literature. Bhabananda says that

> "We recognize no other mother. We say, the country is the mother. We have no mother, no father, no brother, no wife, no home, no habitation. We have only that land, well-watered, fruitful, cooled by the Southwind, and green with crops." (Anandamath, Part I, Chapter X)

The Santans are idealised as the sons of the soil, the children of the land, and the progeny of the greater mother that is the nation of India. The Santans revere the nation as a mother, the repository of all strength, and the destroyer of all enemies. In devising a symbol for this militant nationalism of his imagination, Bankim evoked the image of the Motherland, once glorious, now reduced to shameful misery (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 134).

The mother in Anandamath is identified with the mother goddess worshipped as Shakti, who is power incarnate, and in Vande Mataram, the weapons in her ten arms, her infinite strength, lineage of virtue, and the sharp blades in the hands of myriad children, the Santans, evoke an image of great power (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 154). The interpretation of the nation as a mother figure isn't unique to Bankim. The idea of imagining the earth as a portent of fertility, home, and care dates all the way back to Demeter and Ceres in Ancient Greek and Roman civilisations, respectively (Dhar 2019, p. 369). The idea of Mother Britannia expounded by our former colonial masters also has its influence on the manner in which our nation is portrayed in the present times. Bankim's own contemporary Bhudev Mukhopadhyay personified the nation as the Goddess *Adibharata* in his own seminal work, the *Unavinsha Purana* (1869).

In the novel, Satyananda leads Mahendra into the abbey to show him three images of the Mother in the abbey. The images depicted the Mother's past, present, and future. The Mother of the past, Jaggadhatri, is the Bearer of the Earth, who tamed animals and set her throne in the land. The second depiction is that of Kali, an angry and fierce protean, because the world is drowning in the chaotic rule of the enemy. The third image is that of Durga, the Mother in the future. She represents both the warrior of the present and the protective and serene nature of the past (Dasgupta 106). She represents the land's ability to become self-sufficient to protect itself from the evils all around and be a safe haven to all her children (Deswal 2022, p. 75). The images of the goddesses bestow a divine character upon the land in the novel. The abbey represents the safe haven, and the order

represents nationalist camaraderie. This deification of the land paints the bond between the land and its inhabitants, like that of a mother and her children. The very conception of the locating birthplace as a mother draws upon the allegory of the womb and maternal love.

The female characters of the novel also play a key role in highlighting the message. The novel's heroines are not passive characters, but rather, they actively steer the helm of the plot at different junctures. Shanti and Kalyani act as juxtapositions of one another (Deswal 2022, p. 76). Shanti is a tomboyish firebrand, adept at survival and martial craft. She is as much a warrior as any of the men amongst the Santans, and therefore her androgynous persona of Nabin finds acceptance amongst them. Despite Jiban having relinquished family vows after joining the Santans, Shanti follows her husband with little regard for her own safety. She reminds Jiban of his duty when his convictions appear shaken and finally finds marital solace as the couple retires to the Himalayas. Kalyani, on the other hand, is a domestic woman of a fallen genteel household who remains at the side of her husband, Mahendra. In the ensuing struggles of their life as impoverished drifters, Kalyani shows resilience and devotion to her husband and daughter. Despite being separated from each other, Kalyani remains stalwart in her vows and refuses to give in to Bhabani's desires for her. Her solace comes through her reunion with Mahendra and Sukumari. Jiban's married sister Nimai acts as a caregiver and source of moral comfort for both Sukumari and Shanti. Finally, Sukumari is the beacon of innocence and hope in the story. The women of Anandamath symbolize the roles of the warrior, the wife, the sister, and the daughter to complement the personification of the nation as the mother.

Espousing the land as an abstract entity to be revered and defended lies in the roots of the novel's idea of nation and nationalism. The emotionally charged language of the narrative, with its out-and-out simple didactic message, motivated generations of freedom fighters. This was the first time that the Hindu concept of the deity, the mother goddess with its connotation of Shakti or power, was linked with the idea of the country as a singular unified political unit, and the symbolic power of Bankim's fusion was far-reaching (Mukherjee 1988, p. 903). It must be noted that nowhere in the novel does Bankim use the term 'Bharat Mata' itself to refer to the figure. The terms *Ma, Jagatjanani, and Jananijanmabhumi* are used. The label of Bharat Mata became popular during the Swadeshi movement through Abanindranath Tagore's portrait of the figure (1905), inspired by Anandamath, originally named *Banga-mata* (Mother Bengal).

Humanist Ethos: Egalitarianism in Anandamath

Critics have labelled charges of islamophobia against the song and the novel (Meem et al., 2021, p. 116). The historical liberties taken in the narrative, coupled with Satyananda's declaration to Mahendra, illustrate so:

> "We do not want sovereignty; we only want to kill these Mussulmans, root and branch, because they have become the enemies of God." (Part II, Chapter IV).

However, these criticisms also ought to be assessed in the proper context of Bankim's times and his intentions. Vande Mataram, in reference to the twice seventy million arms of the Mother's children, equates the nation with all of the Indian population at that time. In this explicit statement, the Santans and, by extension, Bankim himself recognize the Muslims as an integral part of the Bengali society (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 135). Therefore, the role of the Nawab as the metaphorical antagonist is less so due to the fact that he is a *vidharmi* and more due to his being exposed as a ruler figure who refuses to perform his duty. It also must be noted that Bankim's villainization of the 'Mussalman' is not motivated by vengeance or prejudice, as evident through the evolution of his later writings (Sarkar 2006, p. 3964). The figure of the Nawab, as a juxtaposition to the Mother, was also more of an ideological figurehead. The message of the novel, being self-assertion, Bankim needed a foreign power for the protagonists to triumph over. Since the other foreigners in the country, the British, did not take too kindly to publications of openly seditious nature, least of all one penned by a bureaucrat in their own service, Bankim was forced to hold the Muslim rule as the main target, keeping the British in a more passive role.

The moral perspective behind the prose of Anandamath is anchored in Bankim's own views on the purpose of literature:

> 'The object of literature is not ethics, but ethics and literature have the same end in view. The secondary purpose of literature is to elevate the human mind – to achieve a purification of the human heart. Poets are the teachers of mankind, but they do not instruct by expounding the principles of morality. They purify the human soul by achieving the highest level of beauty.'

The humanist stance that Bankim adapts in Anandamath gives his magnum opus a universalist outlook. Bankim believed that beauty includes the good. Good included a moral criterion which was not contingent on any esoteric stipulation. The Santans, despite revering the nation as some higher force, do not subscribe to any manner of complex esotericism in their expression of devotion towards it. There is little division beyond that of the gender and perhaps the realms of the ascetic and the domestic (*Sanyas* and *Grihastha*) in their order. Hierarchy amongst the Santans is based on physical prowess and tactical acumen; the androgynous Nabin wins a rank amongst the brethren by demonstrating 'his' ability to string a bow, a feat thus far unaccomplished by anyone beyond Satyananda and his lieutenants. The camaraderie amongst the Santans is a demonstration of rustic brotherhood. Likewise, the songs of devotion sung by the Santans are more akin to folk symphony rather than high culture musicianship. The context of class and culture also plays an important role. The brotherhood between Mahindra and his family, who are the fallen scions of landed aristocracy, and the other notable members of the Santans from humbler lineages, also illustrates the message about transcending class barriers. Caste, another potent element of the Hindu way of life and society, plays a part in the discourse of the Santan's nationalism. To ensure unity among the Santans, the caste system is negated by Satyananda. While incorporating Mahendra and later Shanti into the abbey, Satyananda asks them to renounce their caste

identities, and states that the "Santans are of equal standing. Under the arms of this great vow, there is no difference between a Brahmin and a Shudra." The common cause of nationalism required all Hindus to come together and work for the common goal, disregarding their caste backgrounds (Deswal 2022, p. 74).

The Militant Bureaucrat: Dilemmas and Contradictions

Militant nationalism provides the context for Bankim's own perception of Vande Mataram, a counterattack against the all-pervasive bureaucratic servility that marked his own career. Bankim had little patience for the organized politics of petitioning during his days. The author called it the act of "the blind beggar asking for alms" (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 133). His nationalism was also a major determinant of Bankim Chandra's perception of the West. Bankim boasted an immense pride in his Indian heritage, illustrated through his glorification of the Hindu past, but Bankim was also pragmatic enough to recognize that contemporary patriotism was no part of that tradition. Bankim subscribed to the colonial orientalist view that the virtues of the Indian civilisation had declined over time, a departure from the heroic endeavours of earlier ages, into an effete enjoyment of the fruits of civilisations.

The Santan's call to arms and self-assertion in the generously tweaked historical setting of Bengal was borne out of Bankim's own regrets about the lack of masculine literature in Bengal and the feminization of the Hindus by the British rulers. Bankim expressed his dislike for effeminacy and Bengali indifference to displays of martial courage (Kundra 2018, p. 9). Bankim criticized the Hindu babus of 19th-century Calcutta as people who had forgotten their great past. However, even in this critique, argues Sisir Kr Das, Bankim remained aware and frustrated at his own dilemmas. In effect, he himself was but an 'English-educated' babu, in servitude to the same colonial masters against whom he dreamt of agitating. Though an author by passion, his livelihood relied upon his formal position as a magistrate of the British Indian government; an artist in chains (Das 1984, p. 56). Despite his own position, Bankim attempted to reconcile with his dilemmas through faith in his convictions. In spite of being forced to acknowledge that colonialism was a historical necessity (Sarkar 2006, p. 3961), Bankim believed that a renewed consciousness of that heritage was essential for national regeneration. As a writer and a proud Bengali, he held that the greatest duty of the people of his social class was to instruct his fellow countrymen about the nation's past achievements, current problems, and to utilize this glorious pride in the nation's past to bring about a better future (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 132).

Bankim's blueprint for a programme of national regeneration and the ethical implications of overt acts of violence against the British Raj were concerned about the apparent invincibility of British power in India. The colonial intelligentsia during Bankim's time was convinced that the British were here to stay for the long run. Bankim, in his didactic writing in the Anandamath, speaks for the need of spiritual discipline based on a cultivation of all human faculties, the physical, the ethical, and the cultural (Dasgupta 1933, p. 106). The concept of Sanyas in the novel is proposed for the service to one's country and mankind in a spirit of total detachment. The patriotic monks of the abbey in Anandamath are the fictional exemplars of this ideal lifestyle. Viewed in the historical context of Bengal literary tradition, Anandamath is a groundbreaking novel in its portrayal of asceticism. Asceticism and nationalism are often mutually exclusive terms, but Bankim manages to fuse them both very effectively to present a novel that not only has historical credence but also inaugurates a new era of Indian fiction. Bankim harmonizes the ascetic theme of renunciation with that of nationalistic reclamation (Dhar 2019, p. 369).

The Legacy of Anandamath

The idea of the country as the Mother to which Bankim gives such an impetus was then seen in a more developed form in the later stages of the Indian freedom movement. Bankim was prophetic in his creation, whereupon the author himself said of Vande Mataram:

"One day you will see, after twenty years you will see, Bengal has become mad over this gong – the Bengali has become agitated." The prophetic relevance, the historical background, and the cultural resonance all harmonize together to accord the novel an immortal place in the annals of Indian literature.

The great Surendranath Banerjee opined that Bankim could hardly have anticipated the part that the song would go on to play in the Swadeshi movement, or the assured place it was to occupy in all national demonstrations (Dasgupta 1933, p. 110). After 1905, Vande Mataram became the slogan of the Indian nationalists embroiled in the Swadeshi movement that conflagrated in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal by Lord Curzon. Anandamath thus found a new resurgence in popularity as the bible of the armed revolutionaries (Raychaudhuri 1989, p. 134). The idea of addressing the nation as a mother became prominent at the turn of the century through the writings of poets like Rabindranath and political agitators such as Chittaranjan Das. Dasgupta opines that, unlike nationalism in other parts of India, nationalism in Bengal sprang not from memory but rather from an imaginative source (Dasgupta 1933, p. 107). In the backdrop of the Ilbert Bill controversy, just a year after its publication, and then later in the light of the Swadeshi movement, about three generations later in the next century, Anandamath had found an all-India appeal, partly because the novel fused a revived Hindu religious fervor with a newfound nationalistic zeal (Mukherjee 1982, p. 903). The novel inspired countless young revolutionaries of the Anushilani and the Jugantar organizations to face overwhelming odds in service to their Goddess, the nation.

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