

***Vande Mataram* functioning as the core around which Bankim Chandra Chatterji's *Anandamath*, or *The Sacred Brotherhood* is conceived.**

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*Anandamath* was first serialized between December 1882 and July 1883 in a Bengali literary magazine, *Bangadarshan* founded by Bankim Chandra Chatterji himself. It was then published in a book form and was subsequently translated into almost all the regional Indian languages. It played a crucial role in concretising and strengthening the national identity of a people who had been under the subordination of foreign rule, Mughal and English, as far as they could remember. It is considered to be a foundation text for the understanding of Indian nationalism. Bankim Chandra Chatterji has been variously described as the father of the Indian novel and very rightly so, keeping in view his *Rajmohan's Wife*, *Durgeshnandini*, *Kapalkundala*, *Mrinalini*, *Vishabriksha* etc. He is also one of the most important Indian political novelists of his time. History of the Indian novel and the then political scenario often refers back to Bankim Chandra Chatterji, and to his *Anandamath* in particular, which stands as the first nationalist imagining of the "nation" as mother in the context of Indian fiction. It is also the first novel which deals with the question of the nation-in-making.

The novel is set in India as it was during the 1770's, precisely during the desperate times of the Great Bengal Famine between 1769 and 1773. It had affected the lower Gangetic plain of India from Bihar to the Bengal region. The novel, which makes and remakes the times, begins from 1770 in a fictional village Padachina and then goes on till the *Sanyasi* Rebellion as the author moulds and remoulds history to serve his motive of writing. Along with dealing with the question of the nation-in-making, the novel also deals with history-in-making. But this history always runs in the backdrop and is never foregrounded. The historical context of the novel doesn't build the story, it merely supports it. Chatterji judiciously engages history as building blocks for his novel. Thus, it would be apt to call *Anandamath* an account of historicised fiction of the Indian subcontinent. Though a proper understanding of the story requires historical knowledge, but what it requires more on the part of a reader is development of a historical consciousness. The reader is thrown into time, space and action as the story sucks him in. The story is written in a manner as to persuade the reader into a certain kind of

perspective. And since the novel was meant to drive its readers towards a prospective collective dream, i.e. towards the acceptance/ realization of the notion of the Indian Mother Goddess, the persuasive narrative is but natural to exist.

The narrative of the novel is developed around the song *Vande Mataram*, which was originally a hymn to the motherland penned by Chatterji in the early 1870s. It was included in the novel in 1881 and was expanded to endow the motherland with militant religious symbolism as the context of the narrative demanded. The people of India were in dire need of a binding force which could make the whole nation come together. *Vande Mataram* did this job. It is sung in the novel by the idealistic and nationalist saints fighting for their motherland's freedom. The song played a key role in mobilising and uniting Indians in the freedom struggle. The national song of India has been characterized as one of the most inspiring utterances in the history of India's birth as a nation. It grew to become a symbol of dedication to a free India. Chatterji tried to impress upon his readers the concept of believing in the existence of motherland and the need to cherish, preserve and praise her in order to raise a collective consciousness among all Indians. There is a strong didactic undertone to his writing.

Just like *Vande Mataram* was accused of being biased against Muslims and their religious practices, *Anandamath* too has been labelled as anti-Muslim by many. It creates a kind of double ledger between 'we' and 'them', where this distinction is both binding and disintegrating at the same time. Though creating this anti-Muslim binary of *Anandamath* isn't completely fair towards the seminal novel. Its first translation from the original Bengali to English was done by Naresh Chandra Sengupta. He was a legal scholar and novelist based in Kolkata, and he is the one who gave it the title *The Abbey of Bliss* in his translated version. However, just before he concluded his prefatory note, he added "But with all this, one cannot but regret the anti-Mussulman sentiments that our author has so freely introduced in the present work." Thus, the first seeds of such misinterpretations and subsequent seeds of misrepresentations about *Anandamath* were sown due to a half-baked understanding of the text by Gupta. A careful reading of Chatterji's prose reveals that he never differentiated between Hindus and Muslims—his argument was more naturalistic in nature. His differentiation was more of a political nature, between the Muslims who had come from the outside to rule over the Indian subcontinent and to oppress (*jaban*) and the ones who were indigenised (*desi*). Thus, in *Anandamath*, when one of the characters, i.e. Bhavanand, criticises the Muslim ruler Mir Jafar, who was the notoriously incompetent and greedy Nawab of Bengal, was held principally

responsible for famines and poverty during his reign, and had given a free hand to the British to exploit the poor and downtrodden of Bengal, there's absolutely nothing that suggests a communal bias. In *Rajsimha*, the novel Chatterji wrote just before *Anandamath*, he says "There is good and bad amongst both equally. In fact, one must admit that when Muslims ruled India for so many centuries, they were certainly better than contemporary Hindus where kingly qualities were concerned". Another reason why the novel and its central piece i.e. the song *Vande Mataram* is considered to be against the Islamic ideals because it advocates idol worship of the Mother Goddess. But when looked at carefully, it's neither anti-Muslim nor idolatrous in any obvious or traditional sense, because the images of the Mother are holy, not because the worshiper believes it to be his god, but because it's an expression of a contract he and his society have made to treat that image as God's image for the sake of culture and discipline.

Initiation in the 'Sacred Brotherhood' that this novel talks about suggests Chatterji's advocacy of the need to annihilate the caste-system, so that Indians could stand united against the invaders. This is one face of unity that the song *Vande Mataram* aims to achieve at a national front. The following extract, where Mahendra and another patriot are to be initiated into the sacred brotherhood by Satyanand, dispels all falsehoods regarding casteism loaded against Chatterji's masterpiece of a novel that *Anandamath* is:

"One other thing", said Satyananda. "Caste. What is your caste? I know Mahendra is a Kayastha, but I do not know the caste of the other".

"I am a Brahmin. I'm not married", was the answer.

"Very good. Will both of you be able to renounce caste? All the Children are of equal standing. Under the terms of this great vow there is no difference between a Brahmin and a Shudra. What is your reply?"

"We will not make such distinctions. We are all the Children of the same Mother".

Chatterji introduces *Vande Mataram* in the tenth chapter of the first part of the novel. The entire narrative could be divided by this. Everything before it could be considered as a base required for this introduction. As was the task of the song for the nation as a whole, it also brought together all the characters in the story. Before the song is introduced in the story, all characters were leading their own lives. As the song took its form, so did the life goals of the lead characters take form in accordance with the gist of the song's meaning. Having just rescued Mahendra, a wealthy man who had to leave his village because of the famine, from a fleet of soldiers carrying tax collections to the British headquarters, Bhavanand broke into a

song, i.e. *Vande mataram*, which rose the curiosity of Mahendra. He confusingly enquired about the identity of the mother Bhavanand sang about after hearing the first couplet. Bhavanand then responds with the next four verses:

शुभ्रज्योत्सनापुलिकतयािमिनीम्  
फुल्लकुसुमितद्रुमदलशोभिनीम्  
सुहासिनीं सुमधुर भाषिणीम्  
सुखदां वरदां मातरम्।

(The Mother – with nights that thrill in the light of the moon, Radiant with foliage and flowers in bloom, smiling sweetly, speaking gently, Giving joy and gifts in plenty)

Mahendra cried it was about their land, and not about a mother. It is at this moment that Bhavanand explained to him the actual meaning of the song, and the reason why he sang it. This is when he was detailed about the notion that the land they live on isn't merely some physical entity they walk on rather it is their motherland which all the Mother's children are to not only praise but also protect. The all comprising aura of this bountiful mother is also detailed to the readers through Bhavanand's mouthpiece i.e. the *Vande Mataram* song. Soon the Sacred Brotherhood is also revealed to Mahendra and he's told that Bahavanand was also one of the *sanyasis* who consider themselves the 'children' or the *santan* of the motherland he was just introduced to. They had taken a vow to give up all material pleasures of the world, their families, and matrimonial ties, to serve the one and only Mother who was suffering under the siege of Muslim rule and British exploitation. In the words of Bhavanand, "The motherland is our only mother. Our motherland is higher than heaven. Mother India is our only mother we have no mother. We have no father, no brother, no sister, no wife, no children, no home, no....all we have is the mother." The safety of Mother is a prime motive of life for the *santans* who form a nation for a common collective cause. Like other mythological gods and goddesses, the idea of Mother exists as an integrative force among the believers. As the novel proceeds, Mahendra also becomes one of the *santans*, takes the vow and sheds his wealth and associates himself with the cause of the 'children'. One of the many factors that motivated him to do so was his visit to the brotherhood's operational headquarter—a cave called Anandmath which was hidden in a dense forest and could only be located by one of the *santans*. It was the abode of all the *anandas* who called themselves the children of the mother and were the stimuli who led people towards change. This abbey is where the vision of a new India was born and was being contained. This abbey was home to the elixir of a new nation, a fresh embodiment of the

Eternal Code (*Sanatan Dharma*) of the Hindus. The *math*, as was the song *Vande Mataram*, was the locus for an impetus towards change. Here, Mahendra was introduced to three idols of the ‘mother-goddess’—Mother’s past, present and future. The Mother-as-she-was:

There he (Mahendra) saw a beautiful image of the Goddess as Bearer of the earth, perfectly formed and decorated with every ornament.

Satyananda says, “She who subdued the wild beasts such as the elephant and lion underfoot and set up her lotus throne in their dwelling place. She was happy and beautiful, adorned with every ornament, radiant as the risen sun and full of majesty. Prostrate yourself before her.”

This face of the Mother is what is being lamented upon in the beginning of the novel. Severe drought and famine have snatched away all beauty and radiance of the motherland and only plunder and devastation remain. The very Preface is an introduction to the morbid atmosphere. But this horrid scenario is being built up through negative narrative tradition. All the negatives are suggestive of a replaced positive. The discourse being created is that of a situation which wasn’t so earlier. The first stanza of *Vande Mataram* explicates this beautiful face of the Mother. All these three faces being shown to Mahendra in the cave are so represented in the song as well. This now leads us to The Mother-as-she-is:

“Yes Kali”, said the monk. —Blackened and shrouded in darkness. She has been robbed off everything; that is why she is naked. And because the whole land is burning- ground, she is garlanded with skulls. And she’s crushing her own gracious Lord underfoot. Alas, dear mother.

The tears streamed down the monk’s face. Mahendra asked, “Why has she a club and begging-bowl in her hands?”

“We are children, and that’s all we could put in her hands as weapons”, said the monk”

Mother in the form of Kali was naked because the earth is impoverished in the chaotic rule. The land had become a cremation ground, so Mother was garlanded with skulls. The tone now shifted to a sterner attitude where the speaker along with lamenting the Mother’s pathetic condition also seemed reflective of the fact that it’s because of her Children’s negligence that she had been reduced to this state. The conversation now moved towards the glorious future of the Mother that *santans* envisioned and were striving to achieve. Satyanand now described The Mother-as-she-will-be:

“Mahendra saw a golden ten-armed image of the Goddess in a large marble shrine glistening and smiling in the early morning rays. Prostrating himself,

the monk said, “And this is the Mother-as-she-will-be. Her ten arms reach out in ten directions, adorned with various powers in the form of the different weapons she holds, the enemy crushed at her feet, while the mighty lion who has taken refuge there is engaged in destroying the foe. Behold her whose arms are the directions”—here Satyananda’s voice broke down and he began to weep—“whose arms are the directions, who holds various weapons and crushes the enemy and roams on the lordly lion’s back, who has Lakshmi personifying good fortune on her right, and the goddess of speech who bestows wisdom and learning on her left, with Kartikeya signifying strength and Ganesh good success, in attendance! Come, let us prostrate ourselves before the Mother”

Then with folded hands and upturned faces both cried out in unison: “You who are blessed above all good things, the gracious one, who bring all things to fruition, our refuge— Trymbaka, Gauri, Narayani— salutations to you.”

The third image, the mother in future or the Mother-as-she-will be was Durga, as detailed in *Vande Mataram*. Durga represented the empowering and protective nature of motherhood. Her ten arms were well-weaponed and spread in ten directions indicating her influence. With the lion as her steed, she was herself engaged in demolishing *Asuras* representing the forces of evil. Her two daughters, Lakshmi and Saraswati, represent respectively wealth and learning, and her two sons, Ganesha and Kartikeya, symbolize success and strength. Thus, the image represented happy and prosperous people. These images of the goddesses bestow a divine character upon the land. It is not only a personification but also the deification of land. Mother is revered and worshipped. The bond between the land and its inhabitants is the one between a mother and her children, and a goddess and her devotees. It is a befitting example how a national culture is being invented by Chatterji and a concept of nation is being created and being infused with the minds of the novel’s characters and then reader’s. *Vande Mataram* was made India’s National Song. Despite all the other problems pertaining to the other stanzas apart from the first two, this song was given to the people so they could find their own selves and their land reflected somewhere in the lines which would sensitize them and bring them all together. This is also the same thing that *Anandamath* seeks to achieve. The narrative of the novel is tightly spun around the National Song and each incident in the story either leads us towards the realization of the dream of a united people in a free nation in one way or the other. Chatterji’s depiction of nation was a deliberate ‘metaphorization’—to familiarize an oppressed people with their glorious past, to make them come to terms with their tragic present, and to give them an idealistic future to aspire for. The novel *Anandamath* is just an extension of the metaphor that the song *Vande Mataram* is.

Chatterji has depicted a ‘holy-war’ without the imperative of power and self-interest. This helped him instil patriotism through the images of the Mother-goddess. In the novel, all the three forces—selfless purity, populism, and faith, jointly strive to lay the foundation of the new Hindu nation. In one of the battles in the novel when the *santan* army wins and has taken control of the land, the Children suggest to put their leader Satyanand on a throne in a clearing in the forest to which he blatantly denies. This win was the Mother’s win. They were fighting the fight to restore the Mother’s honour and drive away the evil outside forces, not to establish a new tyranny over the motherland.

The author places land at the highest pedestal and awards it with the title of the Mother. Nothing and nobody comes before or above it. Both the song and the novel abide by this fact. Similar to the greatness of the Mother, *Anandamath* also portrays very strong female characters. Though all the names in the book are metaphors but the strongest ones emerge with those of Shanti and Kalyani. They are the threads that not only bind the narrative together but also drive it with full force. Greatness of Mother is exemplified by the female and the task of reclaiming it is also directed by her.

The concept of *desh* as envisioned in *Vande Mataram* is infused with the words *bhakti*, *shakti*, and *mukti* in the novel. Realization of one leads to the realization of the others. They’re intra-boundary and when they converge, they create Anandmath—both a physical and an abstract place. The physical one being the cave of the Sacred Brotherhood and the abstract one being the mental satisfaction or *anand* that all the Children of the Mother would derive if this matriarchal personification of the nation is achieved in accordance with the real Eternal Code—the Hindu rule of life. The use of the hymn and that of *Vande Mataram* as a slogan in the novel have subtle but different important functions: password, battle-cry, victory shout, clarion call, etc. This repetitive use heightens its emotional charge along with giving a shape to the narrative of the novel. Thus, it would be appropriate to term *Vande Mataram* as the core around which *Anandamath* revolves and is created.

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