

# From Nation to Post Nation: The Making and Unmaking of National Consciousness in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath*

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## Abstract

**Purpose-** The main motive of the study is to understand the narrative of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath* as an expansion and critique of its thematic core 'Vande Mataram'.

**Design/Methodology/Approach-** The Divine personification of a Nation as a Matrabhumi (the one which nurtures), Punyabhumi (the Holy Land) and Dharmabhumi (the one with righteous conduct) inspires fear in us, a fear which will not dissociate us, but an awe-struck attraction which is beyond our mortal being. The mother as a divine Shakti, Goddess Durga is Vrihad, grand but we as Santan are the part of the Bharat-Mata, who in the past was Jagaddhatri, Protectress of the world, wonderful, perfect, and rich. In contemporary nuances of present-day politics, we as readers can see the mother has become an idol of Goddess Kali, in the haunt of a wild beast, enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom, one who is stripped of all and therefore naked. Wearing our sins and vices in the garland of a skull as an ornament, where the whole country is a burial ground and she tramples her god under her feet. The divine personified mother now will turn into goddess Durga, ten armed radiants in the light of the early sun, laughing and extending her ten arms towards the ten regions. The song Vande Mataram features as the manifesto of the Sanyasi group where words of its verses are rich in adjectives that praise every aspect of the country and emphasizes on idolizing her as Goddess reincarnate.

**Findings-** *Anandamath* is a text that is enthralled with the resonance of Vande Mataram in every character. As a post text, it is largely discussed in the context of history and politics but its narrative unfolds itself in three further aspects, namely Semiotics, Discursive, and Aesthetic.

**Research Implications-** The paper offers an insight into a semantic reverberation of Indian unconscious and traditional conventional context which gives an organic and a particular cultural perspective to the song Vande Mataram. *Anandamath* traverses the shift from the wilderness of nature to the refinement of culture. Wish for History is foregrounded in the novel to give us the idea of the nation that may not have been established. Bankim Chandra alludes to the imagined persona to give us a wish for a possible history, giving us a license with the factual history. The paper aims to analyze the historicity of the novel that juggles through the 'imagined' and 'lived' of the author. There is an overlapping of ideas and contradictions in the ideology of the novel because it is writing from contested political terrain. This paper attempts to study the problematics of depraved masses and natives who are fighting for the that contested 'nation' space' in the times of famines and crises. The idea of Punyaland is vitiated (and thus the 'unmaking' of a nation) and this is carried in the novel through language, metaphors, and discourse. The disintegration of family metaphorically hints at the fragmentation of the bigger structure, since family is the basic unit of a larger system, the nation too is in chaos. The Study reflects the effacement of the self, the annihilation of oneself in a given national space. Thus the writer foregrounds a formation of a spiritual nation from the threshold of Damphati Dharma (Language of household) through linguistic and cultural otherness.

**Keywords:** historicity, making and unmaking of nation, ideology, identity, entity, cultural otherness, national consciousness, cultural resonance, historicism, annihilation of self

Thou art Durga, Lady, and Queen,  
With her hands that strike her swords of sheen,  
Thou art Lakshmi, Lotus throned, and the muse a hundred  
toned,  
Pure and Perfect without peer, Mother lend thine ear,

Rich with thy hurrying streams, bright with thy orchard  
gleams,  
Dark of hue O candid fear. ( Aurobindo 4)

## Introduction

The phrase "I bow to thee Mother" was not only the mantra of Indian revolutionaries and nationalist leaders during the

country's struggle for freedom, but it conceptualizes nation in terms of Matrabhumi (the one which nurtures), Punyabhumi (the Holy Land), and Dharmabhumi (the one with righteous conduct). The divine personification of a nation inspires fear in us, a fear which will not dissociate us, but an awe-struck attraction which is beyond our mortal being. The mother as a divine shakti, goddess Durga is Vrihad, grand but we as santan are the part of the Bharat-mata, who in the past was Jagadhatri, protectress of the world, wonderful, perfect, rich, with every ornament. In the present, the mother has become an idol of goddess Kali, "ab vo khun ki pyasi hai", in the haunt of a wild beast, enveloped in darkness, full of blackness and gloom, one who is stripped of all and therefore is naked. Wearing our sins and vices in the garland of the skull as an ornament, where the whole country is a burial ground and she tramples her god under her feet. The mother now will turn into goddess Durga, ten armed radiants in the light of the early sun, laughing and extending her ten arms towards the ten regions. "Ab use sanhar karna hai", now she has to conquer her foe with her manifold weapons and with the lionheart for the steed of her riding, on her right is Lakshmi as a manifestation of prosperity, on her left is the giver of learning and science, Saraswati, Kartikeya with her as strength and Ganesh as a success.

### Method

The song Vande Mataram features as the manifesto of the Sanyasi group and eulogizes the land laden with rice and lush green foliage, sundry of multicolor flowers, and sparkling rivers adorning the terrain. The words of its verses are rich in adjectives that praise every aspect of the country and emphasizes on idolizing her as goddess reincarnate.

Anandamath is a text that is enthralled with the resonance of Vande Mataram in every character. As a text, it was largely discussed in the context of history and politics but its narrative unfolds itself in three further aspects, namely semiotics, discursive, and aesthetic. The literary level of characters in Anandamath is used to negotiate between the semiotic and discursive approaches. The first thematic discursive stand lies in the story of Mohendra, Kalyani and Sukumari in Padachinha. There is a resonance of semantic reverberation of Indian unconscious and traditional conventional context which gives an organic and a particular cultural perspective to the

song Vande Mataram. The second discursive stand encompasses the Santan of the Math, the guru of the math, Satyananda, and his disciples Jivananda, Bhavananda, Dheerajananda, Nibanananda. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wants his readers to comprehend the profound nuances in a novel and that is the reason, as to why he gives emblematic names to saints, Satya (truth), Gyan (knowledge), Bhav (emotion), Dheeraj (patience), and Jiv (Being).

### Findings and Results

Vande Mataram as a song is not only sung and written for its patriotic zeal, but it fetches a philosophical rendering that truth, knowledge, emotion, endurance are all the attributes that are required for a being to transcend the outer mundane worldliness. The devotion to Shakti is incomplete without being steadfast on these attributes. They are not only existential, metaphysical qualities but the very elemental and human components required in a being.

### Discussion

Kalyani, a manifestation of Sacrifice and Shanti, are the two embodiment of Adi Shakti, mother personified as a Nation. Both in different ways, represent various aspects of that cosmic energy that innate in a woman. Kalyani portrays steadfast devotion for her husband, ready to take even the poison so that Mohendra becomes free from the worldly web and becomes devout in his devotion towards Maa. Time and again it was Kalyani, who urges her husband to leave domestic responsibilities in order to tread on to the vow of Santan. It was Kalyani, who in the name of 'Hari, Murari' solidify Mohendra's devout devotion to take a vow of Brahmachari. Thus if Shakti is propelling rebels to fight, if Shakti in her Kali (demonic form) and Durga is trampling the demon on one side, she also possesses sacrificial stoic avatar of Brahmacharini in nine manifestations of goddess Durga, thus making her Kalyani of the entire mankind.

Vande Mataram is the signification, the result yielded from the blend of signifiers and signifieds in Anandamath. This signification emerges through the interaction of various layers and the result of it is various symmetries are drawn from these interactions. Like there is an interplay of 'light' and 'darkness': 'familiar' and 'larger political'; 'dark' and 'light'; 'arid' and 'river streaming'; 'shadow' and

'scorching sunshine'. Padachinha in itself is the signification, on the one hand there lies 'Culture manifested Anandamath' and on the other 'Nature in its crudeness and wilderness in the form of the forest'. The first two stanzas in the song Vande Mataram are depicted to the natural landscape, in praise for the beauty of the motherland, which is a signification of all the terrains that pervades in our homeland. There is a beauty even in the aridity of Rajasthan and there lies beauty even in the snow laded Ladakh. Thus Vande-Mataram as signification is converging the binaries and dichotomies of physical terrain and also converging the polarities in a being. Anandamath too traverses the shift from the wilderness of 'Nature' to the refinement of 'Culture'. Thus Anandamath and 'Vande-Mataram' both captures the conventional, traditional roots and how it reaches the zenith of culture. Thus the forms, the song, and the novel portray nature and gender as a cultural construct.

The historicity of Anandamath alludes to the imagined persona to give us a wish for history, giving us a license with the factual history. Wish for history is foregrounded in the novel to give us the idea of the nation that may not have been established. The historicity alludes to the possible history, a potential history that how the trajectory of a nation could have been if the facts were different. The historicity of the novel juggles through the 'imagined' and 'lived' of the author. There is an overlapping of ideas and contradictions in the ideology of the novel because it is writing from contested political terrain. On the one hand, the writer points as to how rulers are collecting taxes in the time of famine, on the other hand, he says, the king is indirectly ruling Bengal, they are a puppet in the hand of Britishers as the revenue is going indirectly to Britishers. Now the natives are fighting for the that contested 'nation' space, which exists in four forms of Motherland, Punyabhumi, Dharambhumi (space which demands righteous conduct from santan). But here lies the critique that we failed to understand in all four affronts. There is a rural agrarian economy, and because of famines, it follows deviance from the norm. In these circumstances human is less than human, the king is less than the king, the stability is less than stability, the idea of Punyaland is vitiated an this is carried in the novel through language, metaphors, and discourse. Feudal Agrarian system is on a lapse in times of crisis, then Mir Jaffar, Britishers, and Depraved

masses are another stands that are problematizing the times. These stands converge in a point for establishing a wish for utopia, which is represented in Vande-Mataram. Here we can critique or further delve into other nuances of times and the song for the cost it extracts from its participants.

The disintegration of family metaphorically hints at the fragmentation of the bigger structure, since family is the basic unit of a larger system, the nation too is in the chaos. Secondly, it refers to the question of how are emotions to be channelized within this space. Even there is a pattern in the disintegration, which occurred because of destiny. Destiny plays a vital part in envisioning this kind of nation because the human existential trajectory is foreshadowed by a different trajectory of Destiny. The vow, the shapath in Anandamath is greater than life "pran jaye par vachan na jaye". This vow is triggering the life of Shanti, who critiques the idea of Shapath. The narrative is expanded at multifold levels since there are constant configurations and reconfigurations of incidents where the writer is retaining his Indian sensibility.

Mohendra, on the one hand, is destined for action, while Kalyani is destined for passive death giving rise to gender-oriented discursive critique. The dialogues of Kalyani somewhere reflect effacement of the self, the annihilation of oneself in a given national space. The relationship where a male is in 'outer' realm, female in 'inner' realm, male as 'valorous', female as 'nurturer', male as 'active', female as 'passively active' uniting into Damphati Dharma ( Language of household). The love between them is channelized in the language of conduct, expectations, and hierarchies.

The 'vow' in Anandamath is nuanced at multiple levels which problematizes the characterization of Shanti, which further leads to a critique of Vande- Mataram. Shanti, on one hand, adheres to the devoutness of the vow, by restraining Jivananda, on his visit to fall in a trap of his senses. According to the shapath, the sanyasis should not meet their household women or child or any such forbidden relation. In their duty towards, Bharat Mata, they should renounce and partake of all otherworldly relations.

We are children. The children of the Mother. The children are not allowed to speak falsely, one who takes this vow must abandon wife and child, If you take this vow, you cannot meet your wife and daughter. (Aurobindo 35)

Now, on a visit to meet his sister Jivananda, he happens to see Shanti and was overwhelmed with tears. In the heart of heart, he knew he has transgressed the norms and the vow and the only penance to this is to embrace death, but Shanti knowing this restrained Jivananda to fall for her, Jivananda wanted to embrace Shanti for the last time because he was ready to accept death whatsoever as a penance to his transgression. Similarly, Bhavananda falls for Kalyani and couldn't stop himself to meet her, he too was ready to embrace rigorous penance and thus Bhavananda and Jivananda were ready to confront the severest punishment for breaking the much talked 'vow'. It was Shanti, who in a disguise went to Satyananda, to tell him that his vow was wrong, it was Shanti who time and again question Satyananda that his ideology has a flaw and death can't be the punishment to meet one's own family. "Guru, ap aj galat hai, agar is shapath ko todne ki sajah maut hai, to ye muje sweekar nae, mai bhi yha rehkar, pashchatap karunge". It was Shanti, who assures Jivananda, that he has not broken his shapath, his vow is still intact, "we are still not sharing the same couch". It was Shanti who resolves the Jivananda's dilemma of going back as sanyasi.

We need not to go there anymore. Mothers' work is done. This country belongs

to the Santans. We don't crave for any share in this government, then where

is the good of going there? Come, let us travel over the country on pilgrimage.

Then we shall build a cottage on the Himalayas and worship God there, seeking from him the boon of Mother's complete well being. (Aurobindo 159)

Satyananda, too in the end was full of repentance on the death of his disciple, Bhavananda, and was seen questioning his very own doctrine until the divine manifested voice assures him in the end that what he did was for the establishment of Hindutava and demolishing of Muslims. "Alas, Mother! I have failed to rescue you, you will again fall into the clutches of Non-Aryans. Alas, Mother! Why did I not die on the battlefield today"(Aurobindo 160).

### Conclusion

The question did not resolve in the end, that as to the wish of seeing one's own family is so severe, that death is the

ultimate penance for this? This is the question, that Shanti raised, whether one's own family, is a companion and a comrade to fulfill the vow or an obstacle on the path of devotion. These are the questions that baffle a being even today, "kya vachan pranon se bhi bada". We sing 'Vande-Mataram' in praise of mother Goddess, in praise of one's devotion, in praise of our submission to Adi Shakti, but on the other hand, Kalyani and Shanti portray the emblematic devotion, righteousness, dharma, and all the higher attributes of the Shakti incarnate, then as to why a santan is prohibited to meet his sacred partner? Shiv and Shakti, both blend to make a wholesome, fruitful union of Ardhanarishvara, similarly 'Home' and the 'World' both converges to make sukhad Damphati, then why we forsake 'She', 'Shakti', 'Shanti' and 'Kalyani' in a process of making a nation?

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