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***Anandamath's* Nationalistic Call: A Critical Examination of Bankim  
Chandra Chatterjee's Work**

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## Abstract:

In the intricate web of princely kingdoms that was India in the 18th and 19th centuries, nationalism—a term that has become more popular in recent years had a distinct meaning. A large portion of India was ruled by different princely kingdoms during this time. This study aims to explore the viewpoints of the great nationalist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1834–1994), whose voluminous writings and impassioned speeches have left a lasting impact. By adapting and reinterpreting Chatterjee's theories, this research aims to clarify his views on nationalism and the country, as well as how his body of work inspired the Swadeshi movement and modern Indian culture. Interestingly, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was one of the first to include nationalism into the storyline of his publication, *Anandamath* which was released in 1882. In this groundbreaking work, he shed light on several aspects of nationalism, most shown by the moving song "Vande Mataram," which honours India as a motherland. Even though nationalism was still in its infancy when this song was written, it was a powerful source of motivation for rebels and eventually became the national anthem of India. Deeply ingrained in his political theory was Chatterjee's strong patriotism, which was based on his unshakable belief in the transcendental truths inherent in Hindu culture and religion. Being Indian gave Chatterjee great pride, and he believed that India was superior to the West in many ways, which he saw as legitimate reasons to be proud to be Indian. His goal was to instill in his fellow citizens a deep love for their own country and a revitalized feeling of self-worth. In order to bring readers a more complex understanding of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's masterpiece, *Anandamath* and its influence on Indian nationalist discourse, this study sets out on a thorough investigation of the work from a variety of angles. By means of a comprehensive examination, this research endeavours to illuminate the intricate relationship among nationalism, faith, and cultural identity in Chatterjee's story, providing novel perspectives on the eternal significance of his concepts within the framework of present-day India.

**Keywords:** Nation, Nationalism, Swadeshi movement, Mother India, Patriotism, Rebellion.

## Lead In:

In many ways, Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838–1894) was an innovative Indian author. In 1894, he went dead. His first published work, *Rajmohan's Wife*, was written in English and originally appeared as a serial publication in 1864. In the years that followed, he published fourteen works in Bengali, including romances, historical fiction, political thrillers, and even one that was based on his own life. Following his graduation



from the University of Calcutta, Chatterjee worked for the British administration as a deputy magistrate. His works provide a thorough analysis of the author's perspectives on life, society, and Bengal's current sociopolitical environment. At that time, in Bengal during the 19th century, "Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, later could with impunity make his version of the European novel into a domesticated, Bangla literary form," according to Clinton B. Seely. (Page 117, 2008) To better serve his purposes, Chatterjee altered Western literary art.

In the year 1882, he published *Anandamath*, which is considered to be one of his most important works. This book is a historical account of Bengal written during the 18th century. It concentrates on a patriotic insurrection led by a group of ascetics (Sanyasis) against the British authority in Bengal in 1770, which was sparked by the catastrophic Bengali famine of that year. The facts of history demonstrate that the taxation system implemented by the colonial authority was viewed as being oppressive, particularly during the time of the famine, and that the Sanyasis Revolution was essentially the result of actions conducted with the intention to force compliance with the taxation system. *Anandamath* is a work that is significant to history because of this aspect of its content. This is the first time that a particular strain of nationalism has been presented with such fervent passion; this gives the book an extraordinary character that distinguishes it from other works and makes nationalism the primary focus of the discussion. By recruiting ascetics as rebels against colonial tyranny and relating their efforts to the greater vital cause of the Indian nation, Chatterjee has chosen a fresh method by utilizing this group of people in his fight against oppression. In this particular instance, the following remark made by K. R. S. Iyengar is relevant:

*Anandamath* (1882) is Bankim's best-known, though not his greatest, novel. In this and other novels, Bankim introduced Sanyasis (wandering ascetics) into the fictional narratives; (1996; pg. 316)

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee has been the subject of more attention in cultural studies of Bengal during the entirety of the nineteenth century than any other literary or polemical figure from that time period. (Sarkar, 2001:351) [page number] He was an advocate of serious Bengali discursive writing as well as the Bengali novel. His interest in him might be explained by the fact that he was one of the first prominent Bengali authors. He made substantial literary contributions to Bengali literature and established the first structured nationalist tenets. Bankim is referred to as a "Janus-faced avant-garde intellectual" by NarasinghaSil. This is due to the fact that he was not only a supporter of religious and cultural revivalism, but he was also one of those who contributed to the formation of new political and theological standards to meet and oppose the



currents of his day. In other words, Bankim was a "Janus-faced avant-garde intellectual." This is due to the fact that he advocated for the renewal of religious and cultural traditions. (Sil, 2002:121)

Tapan Ray Chaudhuri places a great deal of importance on the fact that, despite the fact that, on the one hand, he was opposed to Western culture, on the other hand, he did not fully reject it. The internal conflict that Bankim has been going through may be inferred from the manner in which he has incorporated elements of Western culture into his day-to-day life. "*There was a gorgeously embroidered carpet on the floor,*" he said. Oil paintings were hung up on the wall in this room. Elegant arrangements were made with the lovely divans, chairs, and other furnishings. To put it another way, it is more likely to be the house of a Westernized Bengali than it is the home of the author of Dharmatva or the person who hailed the benefits of committed devotion "sanatans." (Ray Chaudhuri, 2002:133)

The objective of this study is to investigate Bankim's thoughts on nationalism as well as his contributions, which, in many respects, have been instrumental in the formation of the identity of the nation. *Anandamath*, regarded as one of the most intriguing books of its day, is the subject of this investigation, which focuses on its historical context. The book played the role of the Bible for extremists and was a significant source of motivation for nationalists and their cause. The research cannot claim to be an in-depth investigation of comprehending a crucial aspect of Bankim's effect on nationalism due to its magnitude and complexity. This prevents the researchers from making that claim.

### **The Concept of Nationalism:**

Nationalism may be traced back to its roots in a profound love for one's country and a sense of belonging in that country. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of in-depth debates centered on nationalism and its myriad components. If one wanted to avoid engaging the ongoing discussions on country and nationalism, all one would need to do is explain that nationalism is a universal idea and that its manifestation can be different depending on the culture and the nation in question. This would be sufficient. As a direct result of this, the expression exudes an impression of distinctiveness and even superiority over other expressions that are comparable in nature.

Native intellectuals from nations that were formerly colonized have, in a variety of different ways, struggled against the colonial notion of the country that has, in recent years, come to dominate the discourse in the region. This image of the country has grown to dominate the discourse in the area due to the fact that it was



once a colony. As a result, the entire concept of nationalism is contingent on the criteria that are utilized to arrive at a conclusion on a particular discourse that makes use of the word. This is due to the fact that the term "nationalism" may be used to refer to a variety of different concepts. It would be detrimental to spend an excessive amount of attention on concepts of nationalism that have emerged in the post-colonial age since the scope of this inquiry is limited to creating a picture of the patriotic impulses that were prominent in Bengal in the 18th century. Because the focus of this study is restricted to a representation of these emotions, several theories of nationalism have arisen as a result. It is a widely held belief that the notion of an Indian nation did not arise in the setting of India until the latter decades under the control of the British. This is the time when the British Empire had complete authority over India.

As a result, nationalism in India throughout the 18th century may be understood on a regional basis; nonetheless, the notion of a unified India or Bharat was still popularly believed by a significant number of people. Modernization and industrialization, according to the consensus among academics and political scientists, are the two fundamental concepts that nationalism relies on the most. The phrase "*The perception of uneven development*" was originally used by Ernest Gellner and was cited by Partha Chatterjee. (produced by industrialisation, which disturbs traditional society unevenly) opens the door for nationalism, which occurs when the more developed people can be separated from the less developed nations in terms of culture; in other words, it provides the circumstances for nationalism to form. Nationalism emerges when the more developed people can be distinguished from the less developed nations in terms of culture. "*Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist- but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on ...*" (Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World; 1999; Pg- 4)

### **Journey of Bankim on the Path of Nationalism:**

Scholars have talked about how "*Bankim was at war*" (Sen, 1980:754), in the sense that his works have displayed both his faith and his disillusionment in the institution, as well as his rebellious attitude and servile manner. Sen states that this is evidence that "*Bankim was at war.*" For instance, in a letter he sent to his close friend Sambhu Chandra Mookjee in 1872, he emphasized the importance of "*deanglicize themselves to a certain extent so that they can speak to the masses the language they could understand*" He said this in the context of the need to "speak to the masses the language that they could understand." However, he emphasized that "high English education was a crucial force in the making and imagining of a nation" in a



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speech titled "*The Confession of a Young Bengal*" in the year 1872. This was about the same period. (Ibid) He is referred to by Tripathi as a 'Hindu revivalist polemic.' the year 1967 according to Tripathi. Meenakshi Mukherjee made the same discovery, and she went on to explain that this contradiction was there throughout his whole career, appearing in all of his lectures, articles, and publications. (Mukherjee, 1982:905)

When Bankim first started writing his books, a new trend emerged in the field of Bengali literature. Even if the older English novels had an impact on the form, it is extremely important to emphasize that the spirit was entirely indigenous. This is an important fact that must not be forgotten at any time. The cultural renaissance occurred while he was still living at the time. He made it his life's work to uphold the traditions by drawing attention to the admirable principles that those traditions had upheld (Ghosh, 1969:73). It is an essential component of Bankim's nationalist ideology that ought to be stressed the fact that he was motivated to declare the cultural identity of the Indians as a resistance to imperial domination by the fact that his prior liberal rationalist perspective drove him to do so. By raising the question of why India has been subjected to so many years of incessant foreign invasions, he put the whole basis of colonialism into question.

The answer of the Orientalist to this topic centered on the population's lack of bravery and physical strength, while at the same time labeling Hindus as "effeminate." Indians have historically been incapable of defending themselves owing to a lack of physical force, which contributed to their hopelessness and ultimately led to their colonialism. (Chatterjee, 1993:54) [Chatterjee] This allegation is called into question by Bankim because he is dissatisfied with the response. If everything depended just on a person's physical strength, the force of their muscles, then, according to him, the "Kabulis," the Americans, who are far more physically powerful than the British, would be more powerful than the latter. He bases this argument on the fact that the Afghans are in a far stronger position than the British are. Bankim wants to make it very obvious that only having superior physical abilities and athleticism is not everything. Other factors may have a substantial bearing on the outcome. Bankim, with his liberal and analytical mindset, posed a challenge to the "fallacious" view of Indian society that was commonly believed at the time and provided a response to it.

When analyzing the concept of nationalism from Bankim's point of view, the concept of the country must come first. There is a degree of uncertainty in regard to the components of the nation's ethnic makeup, geographical make-up, and social makeup that he examines. He did on occasion use the phrase "Indians" as we know it now, but in subsequent years, the name "Indian" became synonymous with both "Bengalis" and "Hindus." This has contributed, in part, to thinking that is speculative and has made understanding more





challenging. Sudipta Kaviraj explains how people who invent fake histories usually take use of conceptual ambiguity in their writing.

Such writers use fuzziness of the idea of community to give their audience a community which had not existed before, by gradually conceiving a community called the nation. (Kaviraj, 1995:113)

It is important to highlight that Muslims were regularly barred from participating in the life of this nation. Even while he insisted on avoiding using the word "alien" to describe the Muslim administration, it was clear that he had a negative attitude about Muslims. Academics have paid a great deal of attention to how intricate Bankim is because of its nature. This is due to the fact that Bankim, along with many of his contemporaries, saw the centuries of Mughal control as decades of slavery, and he viewed the struggle that was put up by the Hindu chieftains as a sort of collective resistance. This is why the Mughal reign had such a negative impact on Bankim and his time. Because of this, the Hindu population was subjected to a great deal of repression under Mughal rule. This ultimately resulted in the predicament that we find ourselves in right now. (Raichaudhuri, 2002:136)

### ***Anandamath* - An epitome of Nationalistic Concept:**

One way to assess the establishment of India as a nation is to conduct study on *Anandamath* and think on what one finds. There are five different editions of the book to choose from. The history is important to know since the work has gone through a lot of revisions, and the story of how those revisions came about over the course of time is really interesting. The "standard edition" refers to the latest version, which is the fifth one. The original edition of the text that was published in Bangadarshan had a few editorial alterations, as well as the addition of an advertising that paid tribute to the British. In the second edition, there is a section that was taken from the review that was published in Liberal (Bandopadhyay, 1994:221).

In addition, the wording was modified in a few different ways. The Sanyasis uprising is identified as the historical source of the narrative in the third edition, which also incorporates several additional alterations. In the years 1881 and 1882, Bankim's journal Bangla Darshan ran a serialized version of *Anandamath*. In the year 1882, the novel's first draft was printed as a book, and in the year 1892, the novel's fifth draft was printed. (Lipner 2003:60) [footnote] The Sanyasis are credited with leading an uprising in Bengal in the years after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. This event served as the inspiration for the story's main plot point. The majority of the action that occurs in the novel takes place within the forest that serves as the setting for



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the story in Birbhum.

*Anandamath*, authored by Meenakshi Mukherjee, is regarded by Meenakshi Mukherjee as being India's first political book. This assertion is made in the author's book. It was widely assumed that Bankim's intention in authoring this book was to stir the nation in a manner that was a "*idealistic romanticized regeneration of the Hindu ethos*." (Mukherjee, 1982:903) [Mukherjee] On the other hand, it is debatable whether or not he successfully revitalized India. One may say that he was seeking to and was more concerned in restoring the lost identity of the Bengali people as their own. This interpretation would be more true. When nationalism was prevalent, it held utopian views, was heavily reliant on the past as a source of inspiration for the present, and made forecasts.

The result was that its adherents had a more positive outlook as a result of this. It is possible to assume that Bankim harbored nationalist sentiments due to the fact that he engaged in this action. In his work, he has provided an explanation of what a country, often known as a nation's homeland, is. This idea was used to the benefit of the nationalists, in particular throughout the Swadeshi movement and the later phases of the intense fight with the British. It emerged as a pivotal center for organizing efforts. Perhaps his ability to skillfully integrate nationalism and religion is most seen in the *Anandamath*, in which he refers to a goddess figure as "mother India."

In the lives of certain people, there are certain things that are both religious and secular, and religion is simply one facet of living. According to Voigt (1962:249), Bankim's life was profoundly impacted by his religious beliefs. This suggests that Bankim was aware of the potential consequences that may arise as a result of the transition of nationalism from the secular to the holy realm. Bankim incorporated two crucial components: first, he established the nation as a mother; second, he utilized the goddesses Durga and Kali to portray the mother. Both of these features are considered to be his most significant contributions. The identification of this nation with Durga will feed the flames of religious fervor. We are able to see that the results of this deification are still having a positive impact not just at the time it occurred but also now. It merely makes a passing reference to the elevation of nationalism to the status of religion and its effectiveness in exerting influence on the primarily religious populace of India.





Additionally, it is claimed to have "*unleashed a previously unknown spiritual force: nationalism was not merely a matter of sentiment, it was a confession and a faith*" (Ibid). During the nineteenth century, religion had a key role in guiding nationalism, with the concept of Mother India serving as the most prominent manifestation. In front of the temple dedicated to Kali, thousands of people made the following pledges and promises: "*Mother, I solemnly promise that to the best of my power, I will never use foreign articles...*" (Mukherjee and Mukherjee, 1968:252)

The brand of nationalism that Bankim represented had a significant impact on Aurobindo. In his works, he argued in favor of presenting the mother with the highest possible sacrifice. The mother was supposed to receive this sacrifice as a gift. As he puts it, "*She asks us for no schemes, no plans, no methods.... She asks us for our lives, nothing less, nothing more.*" (Ibid)

Bankim never took part in any organized politics of the period, despite the fact that his fervent nationalism was an inspiration to a great number of people, despite the fact that he had ties to Surendranath Banerjee and the British Indian Association. This was due to the fact that he thought it was related to anything like "*the blind beggar asking for alms.*" (Rai Chaudhury, 2002:201)

As a consequence of this, Tapan Raychaudhuri pointed out, very accurately, that it would be tempting to conclude that he had trust in violent revolution or, at the very least, the power to threaten such a revolution; he stated this as a result of the fact that "*physical strength is the best means of self-defence*" is what he repeated over and over again in his mind. In addition to this, he had a tremendous lot of ill will against the social reformers who sought to effect change via the use of legitimate channels. (Rai Chaudhury, 2002:134) He was of the opinion that emotional appeals, as opposed to revolutionary reform, were more likely to be successful in reviving a stagnant culture. Even if Bankim's point of view seems to have a lot of merit, it is possible that it will not always be successful because people are too deeply ingrained in their societal conventions and customs to be willing to change.

## **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, it is possible to draw the following conclusion: he unquestionably conveys the image of a scholar who tried to evaluate nationalism in a logical way. In India, Anandamath is regarded as one of the most important pieces of nationalist literature. This could be as a result of the novel's focus on cultural relics and the infusion of nationalist zeal to revolt against British oppression. When it was initially imagined, the



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inventor probably had a narrower idea of how widespread and profound the effect of it would be, but it seems to have had a lot more of both. This work of writing has maintained its place in the canon of Indian literature not only because of its cultural and historical aspects and prophetic importance, but also because of the historical setting in which it was written.



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