

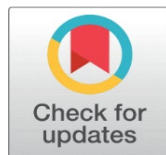
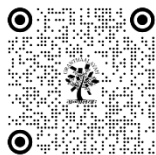


# NATIONALISM AND ANANDAMATH: CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

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## ABSTRACT

Nationalism is an ideology that emphasizes the values, traditions, and distinctive characteristics of a particular country or group of people. As a reaction to many of the problems posed by globalization, nationalism frequently advocates the preservation of local economies and identities while providing possibilities for growth and collaboration. The present political atmosphere has been influenced by this continuous struggle on a global level. This research paper will delve deeper into the theme of nationalism in Bankim Chandra's novel *Anandamath* and explore the aspects of how it reinforces the idea of a uniform national identity by emphasizing sacrifice and devotion to the country. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities that culture narratives shape nations and the role of print media (literature) in the formation of the collective identity is also taken into consideration. Besides, the paper will also analyze conflicting ideologies with respect to nationalism in India. The statement makes the case for a more thorough and critical examination of the *Anandamath* in scholarly contexts, emphasizing its significance in both historical and contemporary debates concerning the Independence movement. Lastly, the paper will also deliberate upon the timeless relevance of the novel and its role in maintaining the socio-economic framework

**Keywords:** National Identity, Nationalism, Ideologies, Nation, Mother India

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is a worldview comprising all aspects of politics, society, and culture that prioritizes the principles, customs, and distinctive characteristics of a specific nation or community. Nationalism frequently acts as a response to many challenges brought on by globalization, appealing for the safeguarding of regional identities and economies even as it displays alternatives for development and partnerships. On a worldwide scale, this ongoing conflict impacts the political environment of today. Also, nationalistic values face a crisis owing to the conflict between cultural preservation and cultural assimilation. Overly forceful integration policies have the potential to destroy the very diversity that nationalism constantly strives to preserve, sparking opposition and fracturing society. On the other hand, an extensive focus on cultural preservation might cast doubt on the idea of a uniform national identity and spark discussions around inclusion and representation.

Benedict Anderson, in his book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) emphasizes the fact that "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7), stating that people see themselves as belonging to a wider community with similar pursuits and values, even if they face real unfair practices

and oppression that occur within a country. With this, individuals may be encouraged to make significant sacrifices, such as surrendering their lives for their country. He draws attention to the contradiction that multitudes of people might come together to defend or sacrifice their lives for a romanticized idea of national identity, even if that idealized version fails to accurately reflect the imbalances they experience on a daily basis.

Anderson has made an important contribution towards an understanding of the relationship between media and national identity formation. His idea of “imagined communities” emphasizes how essential print media is in generating a feeling of community among individuals who may never have met or had direct contact with one another (44). Additionally, Anderson’s study delves into the idea of “print capitalism,” which describes the expansion of printed materials, including books and newspapers, and the spread of printing presses from the 15th to 17th centuries. Because of this, vernacular languages and a common discourse developed, allowing readers of different regional dialects to better understand one another. European nation-states subsequently started to emerge based on their “national print-languages” (67).

## 2. NATIONALISM IN INDIA

Before India became independent from British rule on 15th August 1947, the Indian subcontinent went through one of the longest nationalist movements in the history of the ‘nation states’ in the world. Since the failure of the First War of Independence in 1857, which the British called the Sepoy Mutiny, the Indian subcontinent was increasingly getting charged with the fervour of nationalist thoughts and ideals. Every now and then, every nook and corner of the subcontinent would throw up some text or personality to stir the nationalist sentiment against British rule. But the arrival of Bankim Chandra’s novel *Anandamath* in 1882 was a milestone in the history of the nationalist movement in the subcontinent. *Anandamath*’s depiction of a unified Indian identity aligns with Anderson’s argument that cultural narratives construct nations. Religious symbols like Mother Goddess have been used in the novel to establish a collective sense of unified identity in colonial India. The Sannyasi uprising in India in the 18th century serves as the story’s background, depicting the fight against British colonial power. By highlighting the value of sacrifice and devotion for the nation’s independence, the book reinforces the notion of a unified national identity. In this respect, the novel demonstrated how literature may express and fortify community identity by engaging with the social and political goals of its day. Riding the waves of such nationalist sentiment, in addition to other historical factors, the Indian subcontinent managed to prove Winston Churchill’s imperial assertion (i.e. the sun never sets in British empire) wrong on 15th August 1947.

Near about six decades after the Independence of India, the issue of nationalism came back to public debate in 2014 when the Bharatiya Janata Party led National Democratic Alliance snatched power from the Congress led United Progressive Alliance and formed government at the Centre in India.

In 2016, there was a protest throughout the country against the “nationalistic ideologies” of BJP-led central government and Jawaharlal Nehru University, the premier University known to be a bastion of Leftist ideology became the epicenter of such protests. Some group of students who were backed by separatist ideologies supported Afzal Guru, a separatist from Kashmir who was found guilty of executing the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. His conviction had been upheld by the Supreme Court on August 4, 2005, and on February 9, 2013, he was executed by the court’s order. This decision of the Court was welcomed by many Indians, but the opposition parties responded differently to the execution. On February 9, 2016, students who supported Afzal Guru staged demonstrations at the JNU campus to oppose the Court’s decision. According to the protestors, there was nothing anti-national in Afzal Guru’s conspiracy to attack the Parliament of India, and hence the execution of Afzal Guru was nothing less than state-sponsored murder, and for that they blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party’s so called ‘narrow’ idea of nationalism. The university was shut down and the classes were suspended as thousands of students and faculty joined protests. Throughout the whole month, the lecture series on nationalism was organized on the campus, in which Makarand R. Paranjape, a former professor of English at JNU, delivered a lecture on nationalism and uncivil war, which was later published in the book titled *JNU: Nationalism and India’s Uncivil War* (2022). In his lecture, he supported nationalism and criticized the university’s strong leftist ideology. Later, in his conversation with Barkha Dutt, an Indian journalist, Paranjape also discussed the “cancel culture” and “political correctness”, the two concepts that fettered the university in its tight strings during those times. Although there have been many healthy student rebellions in the past, say Navnirman Andolan in 1974 in Gujarat, that led to the overthrow of the elected state administration. Yet sometimes, the breakaway group of people often base their ideology on a reductionist quality. Anyone who is not going according to their principles and using nationalist philosophy like

Dharma gets branded, brainwashed, attacked with subtle threats, and lastly, boycotted (Paranjape). The academic freedom becomes a matter of frivolity in their hands.

No government can be considered a totalitarian government as long as citizens are able to celebrate different cultures and live in harmony. In fact, this idea is closely linked to the concept of equality. It doesn't mean that the government is unknown to the complexities of India, but they also value the democratic notion that every individual has the right to conceiving and formulating the notions of the good and can safeguard the nation from being attacked by the outside forces and thereby contribute to the nation-building.

In his book *Nationalism* (1917), Rabindranath Tagore, a prominent poet and a profound thinker, criticized western nationalism as being driven by power and aggression. He warned against fanatic nationalism and draws attention to the humanistic approach that goes beyond certain religious or political beliefs. He emphasized that literature and the arts could dissolve barriers by cultivating compassion and understanding among people. His novel *Gora* (1910) demonstrates the protagonist (Gora) who struggles with his Hindu nationalist identity and tries to figure out where he fits into a society that is changing quickly. In another novel, *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*), published in 1916, the same tension is portrayed through the character of Bimla, who finds herself divided between two contrasting ideologies, whereas her husband, Nikhil, embraces rationality over oblivious patriotism.

### 3. DEBATES CONCERNING ANANDAMATH

Oftentimes, *Anandamath* has come into the controversial framework that it promotes Hinduism. Given the fact that Sannyasis are the main characters of the novel, it is not surprising that they would sing religious hymns at Bhavani temple (at *Anandamath*) in order to gain independence. Also, it is worth noting that Bankim Chandra himself was a civil servant at the time of British Raj, so it was obvious for him to see the outsiders as enemies or non-Hindu. The ending of the novel suggests that Muslim rule has come to an end and there are better chances of living the life.

Moreover, *Anandamath* had been outlawed by the British soon after it was released in 1882. However, it was translated into English as *Abbey of Bliss* by Nares Chandra Sen-Gupta in 1906. The title "Abbey" refers to the safe haven with the novel's examination of the spiritual awakening and the idea of egalitarian society. Freedom fighters were inspired by the book *Anandamath* in the times of struggle for independence. Aurobindo Ghosh has written a political pamphlet titled "*Bhavani Mandir*" to uplift the spirit of revolutionaries. In that time, British used to arrest the young men who would seem to be carrying the Bankim Chandra's *Anandamath*, *Gita* (holy book), or Swami Vivekanand's writings, but Hinduism was not at all a central subject to these writings.

It should be noted that Sannyasis are not trained military as compared to the British army. But when they got "initiated", they were able to defeat the trained British too. Although Mughal rulers attacked the fort with the help of British rulers, Sannyasis blocked the bridge. Despite inflicting several injuries upon Sannyasis, the British lost, and Sannyasis won their first battle. The story ends with the fall of Islamic rule. Mohendra and Kalyani build their home again.

There are two ways of saying it. It is mentioned in the novel that people were not disgusted by the Muslims but outraged by the "government and anarchy that prevailed under Muslim rule" (96). In the opening of chapter 7 of Part 1, it is clearly mentioned that the Nawabs used to be under the influence of opium.

They collected the taxes due to the treasury, but up to that time they had not taken upon themselves the burden of protecting the life and property of the Bengali people. The burden they had accepted was to take the country's money; the responsibility of protecting life and property lay upon that despicable traitor and disgrace to humanity, Mirzafar. Mirzafar was incapable of protecting even himself; it was not likely that he would or could protect the people of Bengal. (27)

Also, when British like Warren Hastings claimed that "With this chain I shall bind India with her islands and her seas." (97) The national fervor was obvious to emerge among citizens. But it doesn't imply that every citizen would be accompanied with arms and guns. But they have to safeguard their identity and, most importantly, safeguard the nation.

Similarly, when Captain Thomas, the Head of the regiment of East Indian Company, wanted to "crush" the rebellion, then his soldiers were "cut like corn by the scythes of the peasants" (97), since the "Santans were now innumerable and unconquerable". (97)

In addition to this, *Anandamath* introduces the celebrated song "Vande Mataram" which stands for Indian nationalism and honors the homeland as a valuable treasure. In the book's Foreword, Girija Sankar Roy Chaudhuri

applauds the song as “replete with mighty power, being a sacred ‘mantra’ revealed to us by the author of “Anandamath”, who might be called an inspired “Rishi”...” as this song was not only a national anthem, which European Nations perceive it is. Girija further states that:

The “mantra” of Bankim Chandra was not appreciated in his own day, and he predicted that there would come a time when the whole of India would resound with the singing of the song, and the word of the prophet was miraculously fulfilled.” (8)

Yet the song “Vande Mataram” has often sparked controversy due to its apparent Hindu motive. But an in-depth look at the song’s historical background and lyrics indicates that it is a commemoration of India’s motherland that cuts across religious lines. In the song, “Mataram” refers to Mother, who is a symbol of nation. India is brought to life in “Sujalam Sufalam Malayaja Sheetalam” as a country brimming with fertility, resources, and an idyllic landscape. Bankim Chandra has used both Sanskrit and Bengali to establish a melodious and figurative style that would draw attention to India’s linguistic diversity. The analogies and the references to geographical and cultural attributes, including rivers and mountains, were utilized to stress India’s unique identity. Nearly every religion acknowledges this mother figure. It is significant for one religion to demonstrate tolerance while respecting the greatness of other faiths. This in no way devalues their religious devotion, nor does it make them more communal. Bankim was inspired by John Stuart Mill, who himself advocated for inclusivity and egalitarian society, underlying that every individual ought to have the same opportunities and privileges. Bankim was also the follower of August Comte, who was progressive in thought. So those who denounce him as a fanatic are merely misguided. Similarly, readers cannot ignore the traits of genuine nationalism as exhibited by characters like Mohendra Bhavananda, Mangal Pandey, Jivananda in Anandamath. In fact, women characters, too, do not portray the shallow display of patriotism for political advantage, nor is there an aberrant view of individuality. Rather, they showcase the earnest desire of nationality and identity for Mother India and illustrate brotherhood, shared principles, and sheer responsibility towards society. The novel, in its sense, acknowledges the nation’s diversity and advocates positive social engagement.

#### 4. PLOT AND THEMATIC CONCERNS

Anandamath is the first political novel that sparked a nationalist dialogue. Besides discussing the Sannyasi uprising against the British tax collectors, it sheds light on the Battle of Plassey in India (1757), which ushered in the onset of British control in India. The British had solely engaged in trade in India before this. Following the conflict, they gradually seized more and more territories until they were in charge of all of India. The novel also features the historical context of Sepoy Mutiny 1857 (India’s first national movement) that nurtures a sense of patriotism and the idea of independence from the British.

Timeless relevance of Anandamath rests on the fact that it not just discusses nationalism but brings notice to the adverse effects of colonial practices on Indian society by demonstrating the financial challenges brought on by the famine and resource exploitation. The idea behind this novel was to free India from the inequities of the caste system, freedom from the prevailing writing styles in literature (that’s why it broke from traditional verse), freedom of women from the tyranny of men, freedom of the farmers laid up on them from the oppression of wealthy zamindars, and freedom of thought and action so that India should not remain crippled for long.

At the beginning of the story, Mahatma Satyananda, the head of the Order of the Children (Santan Dal), explains that children can be divided into two categories: those who are “initiated” and those who are “uninitiated” (81) (who are either householders or beggars); the latter only show themselves during times of conflict. They receive rewards and retire. However, individuals who are initiated give up everything, including their homes and families. They are in charge of the order. “They are the guides of the association.” (81) The plot of the novel revolves around the characters Mohendra, Jivananda, and Bhavananda, who become Sannyasis and abandon their home and family in order to free Mother India, as their “religion is destroyed, our caste defiled, our honour polluted, our family honour shamed and now our very lives are going the same way”. (33) They take vows to go back to their homes and carry out their roles as husband and son as soon as Mother India is free. The theme of devotion is prevalent throughout the novel, as discussed in the prologue when asked, “What is the stake put down?”, the answer came “Life”,

“Life! it is a small thing which all can sacrifice.”

“What else is there? What more can I give?”

This was the answer, “Thy soul’s worship.” (9)



With the faith and nurtured ideology, the Sannyasis overcome many obstacles in order to achieve their objectives. Tagore draws comparisons of Sannyasis with

characters in the Mahabharata — where God Krishna appears as a character among Princes, Princesses, sages, heroes, noblemen, evil courtiers, soldiers!" (qtd. in Kundra)

The novel's protagonist, Mohendra, is shown the three faces of Bharat Mata (India) by Mahatma Satyananda. One, what India looked like prior to British rule is represented by Goddess Jagadhatri, "Protectress of the world, wonderful, perfect, rich with every ornament" (37). Second, India as under British rule is represented by Goddess Kali, who is "the Mother garlanded with skulls" (37) showcasing power and destruction. Third, what India will become after the British leave is represented by "Ten-armed Goddess" Durga:

With the regions for her arms, wielder of manifold weapons, trampler down of her foes, with the lion-heart for the steed of her riding; on her right Lakshmi as Prosperity, on her left Speech, giver of learning and science, Kartikeya with her as Strength, Ganesh as Success. (38)

Time and again, the characters are shown singing the glory of Mother India. Bhavananda is one of the characters who is a powerful commander of the rebel organization "Anandamath", which opposes the East India Company's control over India. He discusses the nature of Mother India in his reply to Mohendra's query:

"We recognize no other Mother. 'Mother and Motherland is more than heaven itself.' ...We have her alone, the richly-watered, richly-fruited, cool with delightful winds, rich with harvests — " (31)

Later Bhavananda sings:

Who hath said thou art weak in thy lands,  
When the swords flash out in seventy million hands  
And seventy million voices roar  
Thy dreadful name from shore to shore?  
With many strengths who art mighty and stored,  
To thee I call, Mother and Lord!  
Thou who savest, arise and save!  
To her I cry who ever her foemen drave  
Back from plain and sea  
And shook herself free. (31-32)

The novel also elucidates the role of women in the Independence movement. Although the novel was heavily criticized for associating women's roles with sacrifice and motherhood, despite that, those women actively participate in the fight against the British army. Mohendra's daughter playfully consumes poison, and Kalyani, his wife, too absorbs it in order for Mohendra to carry out his purpose. Kalyani claims:

"Consider who has the strength to transgress what God has willed. He has laid his command on me to go; could I stay, if I would? If I had not died of my own will, inevitably someone else would have slain me. I do well to die. Perform with your whole strength the vow you have undertaken, it will create a force of well-doing by which I shall attain heaven and both of us together will enjoy celestial bliss to all eternity." (45)

Another woman character, named Santi, Jivananda's wife, disguises herself as a male and joins the Anandamath as Nabinananda. Satyananda describes Santi as "pure-hearted and is my dearest disciple" (134). She battles alongside her husband and the Sannyasis of Anandamath. Moreover, Santi showcases her horse-riding skills, especially when she turns down the Englishmen:

Lindley removed his foot from the stirrup. Immediately Santi gripped his neck and threw down the foolish Englishman. Then Santi seating herself properly on horse-back struck the side of the horse with her ankles and set the Arabian horse at full gallop...Lindley lay there with his legs fractured. Santi rode away like the very winds. (149-150)

The dialogue between Captain Thomas and Santi is of utmost importance.

Captain Thomas: Will you stay in my house?

Santi: How? As your mistress?

Captain Thomas: You can stay as my wife but there will be no marriage.

Santi: I too have a request to make. In our house there was tame monkey. Recently the monkey has died. The cage is empty. I shall put a chain about your waist. Will you stay in that cage? There are very good bananas in our garden.

Captain Thomas: You are a very spirited woman, I am pleased with your courage. Come to my home. Your husband will die in the fight. Then what will happen to you?

Santi: Then let both of us make an agreement. The fight will take place in three or four days. If you win I shall remain as your mistress. I agree to that in case you are still alive. And if we win, you will come to our cage and dress up as a monkey and eat bananas, will you not? (100)

Bankim's writing style is often compared with Walter Scott since both of them were influenced by Romanticism, which places a strong emphasis on imagination, emotional intensity, individualism and natural beauty. Yet it is not appropriate to call Bankim the "Scott of Bengal" (3). Because

Scott could paint outlines, but he could not fill them in. Here Bankim excels; speech and action with him are so closely interpenetrated and suffused with a deeper existence that his characters give us the sense of their being real men and women. Moreover to the wonderful passion and poetry of his finest reactions there are in English fiction, outside the Brontes and the supreme genius, George Meredith, no parallel instances. Insight into the secret of his feminine characters, that is another notable concomitant of the best dramatic power and that too Bankim possesses. (3)

Bankim is frequently cited as a source of inspiration for his representation of women since the writers in the past were "bad tailors" who depicted women "through an English crucible and in the place of the old type which, with all its fatal defects, had in it some supreme possibilities, they have turned out a soulless and superficial being fit only for flirtation, matchmaking and playing on the piano." But it is Bankim who has portrayed them not only as an emotional being but also emphasizes "her steadfastness, tenderness and loveliness, in fact, her woman's souls". (4)

## 5. CONCLUSION

In addition to denouncing the contemporary state of affairs, Anandamath anticipates a post-colonial India, an idealistic vision that echoes with the ambitions of nationalists amid the independence movement. Most importantly, within the framework of Viksit Bharat 2047, this subject aligns with the objective of a self-sustaining and culturally resolute India. The characters in Anandamath are robust and have a willingness to make sacrifices for the benefit of humanity. This reflects the goals of a modern India where people are empowered to make contributions to the improvement of society. In light of India's 2047 vision for holistic development, people can develop greater knowledge of their general well-being and strive for harmony and balance in their lives. Contemporary groups who advocate civic service and participation in nation-building can be encouraged by the novel's call to action. It acts as a reminder of the principles and battles that can lead modern civilization to a bright and cohesive future.

In the academic discipline, Anandamath is more than a work of fiction. It has been introduced as a part of Value Addition Courses (VAC) at the Department of English, University of Delhi, since its ideas of multiculturalism and multilingualism resonate with the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP). As a matter of fact, it should be read across the globe since it serves as a catalyst for movements related to Indian nationalism. Considering that Indian citizens are the nation's vital resource, NEP's approach strikes a balance by underscoring the beneficial role that education serves in building social and economic integrity. Bankim's writings should be understood as an elaborate response to tyranny and power rather than as a simple endorsement of nationalism. Additionally, being a product of historical truth and constructed in specific cultural moments, Anandamath acknowledges the influence that literature has on how we perceive the past and present.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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