

HINDUISM AND THE EVOLUTION OF SACRED NATIONALISM: ANANDAMATH PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper investigates the critical role of Hinduism in shaping Indian identity in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath (1882). Set against the backdrop of colonial tyranny, the story depicts Hinduism as a unifying cultural and spiritual force that transcends individual identities and fosters a collective feeling of nationalism. Chatterjee highlights the profound emotional connection between the land and its people by personifying India as a mother figure (Bharat Mata). The Sanyasi figure represents ideas of sacrifice and devotion, demonstrating how Hindu traditions shape their opposition to colonial rule. Anandamath illustrates the profound impact of Hinduism on the development of a unified Indian identity by uniting religious convictions with the freedom movement and this serves as a source of cultural legacy in the face of external obstacles. This analysis emphasizes how Hinduism continues to have an impact on the story and how significant it is to the larger conversation about Indian identity.

Keywords

Hinduism, Indian identity, Anandamath, Nationalism, Colonialism, Cultural heritage.

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Introduction

The novel *Anandamath* (1882), masterwork of Bankimchandra Chatterjee, was written at a pivotal point in the Indian independence movement and has had a greater impact on the country's self-perception than any other piece of Indian literature. Bengal's famine in the 18th century and the Sanyasi Rebellion in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 served as inspiration for the novel's plot. *Anandamath* is a seminal work that masterfully intertwines nationalism, Hinduism, and identity creation, profoundly shaping India's collective psyche. The concept of "Sacred Nationalism" combines national aspirations with spiritual and cultural legacy, raising pivotal questions about Indian identity amidst colonial dominance. At its core, *Anandamath* explores fundamental inquiries: What does it mean to be Indian? What traditions and ideals characterise the nation? How can India reclaim its cultural heritage and sovereignty? These questions remain essential to understanding India's ongoing journey of self-discovery and nation-building. *Anandamath* embraces the divine and uses Hindu mythology, symbolism, and philosophy to construct a potent picture of Indian nationhood. Novel's significance extends far beyond its literary merit, as it has profoundly influenced generations of Indian intellectuals, leaders, and thinkers, the novel's impact on India's struggle for independence cannot be overstated, with various interpretations of the text shaping and informing the nation's fight for freedom. The present paper explores the intricate relationship between nationalism and Hinduism in *Anandamath*, looking at how the novel influences Indian identity. By analyzing the novel's key themes, characters, and historical context, this paper aims to disclose the concept of sacred nationalism and its significance in *Anandamath*.

Hinduism and Nationalism: Conceptual foundations spiritual nationalism is the central theme of *Anandamath*. The book justifies and sanctifies the fight for India's independence by using Hindu religious concepts, especially those found in the Bhagavad Gita. What can be called "Sacred Nationalism" a type of nationalism that sees the country as a holy being worthy of respect and sacrifice, is the result of the blending of Hindu spirituality with the political cause of Indian nationalism. When expressing his opinions on nationalism in his talks from 1908, Aurobindo Ghosh states, "Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed which you shall have to live" (*Bande Matram*, 118). Therefore, in contrast to secular or materialist forms of nationalism that were prevalent in other regions of the world during the colonial era, *Anandamath* takes a spiritual approach to nationalism. Throughout the narrative, numerous examples illustrate how the concept of Vaishnavism (a major form of

Hinduism) converges with the struggle against colonial and Mughal rule, transforming the fight into a Dharma Yudha (righteous war). This intersection of spirituality and nationalism underscores the novel's profound sacred undertones. When Bankimchandra wrote the novel, India was still under British colonial rule. His novel was a deliberate attempt to counter the colonial narrative, which stereotyped India as a culturally barren and historically insignificant land. Through *Anandamath*, Bankimchandra envisioned Hinduism as a powerful catalyst for reclaiming India's lost national identity and cultural heritage. The novel posits that Hinduism, with its extensive spiritual philosophy and deep roots in Indian history, is more than just a religion; it is a worldview that includes the Indian people's cultural, moral, and national life.

Vedic Revivalism: In *Anandamath*, Bankimchandra draws upon the timeless principles of the Vedic tradition to instill pride in India's rich cultural heritage. The novel seamlessly weaves together key Vedic concepts, including: Dharma (righteousness), Karma (selfless action), Moksha (Salvation), Bhakti (devotion), Yajnas (sacrifice). These ideals form the narrative backbone of *Anandamath*, infusing the story with a profound sense of cultural identity and spiritual purpose. These ideas, which combine social engagement with spiritual philosophy, serve as the inspiration for the characters' goals, spiritual development, nationalistic aspirations, and national identity. Chatterjee highlights moral obligation, spiritual awakening, and national consciousness in the face of colonial dominance by incorporating these Vedic ideas into the narrative. Dharma is the driving force behind the Sannyasi uprising at *Anandamath*. They believe that it is their moral duty to defend the motherland and its spiritual legacy by rebelling against British control. In novel characters like Satyananda, Mahendra, Bavananda, Kalyani, and Shanti fight for independence because they feel it is their dharma to restore their land's historic, spiritual and cultural heritage, not because they are motivated by personal ambition but by the divine instinct in them. Therefore their only 'Karma' is their selfless effort of restoring righteousness (Dharma) to the motherland. As Satyananda asserts, "If we see the faces of our wives and children, we forget the work of the Gods. The rule of the Santan Dharma is this, that, whenever it is necessary, a Santan must sacrifice his life' (*Anandamath* 80). In Indian mythology, the attainment of Moksha (salvation) is a fundamental belief and the ultimate spiritual goal of Vedic philosophy. In *Anandamath*, the Sannyasis' ascetic lifestyle reflects a profound spiritual longing for liberation, not only for them but also for the nation.

They view the struggle for freedom as an expression of spiritual awakening. By sacrificing their lives for their motherland, they feel fortunate and believe in the

idea of salvation, which is the supreme spiritual goal. While explaining Vaishnavism to Mahendra, Satyanada says, “The sign of true Vaishnavism is the suppression of the wicked and the salvation of the world (81 *Anandamath*). Next come Bhakti, or devotion the fundamental concept in Hinduism, emphasizing deep love and devotion to a personal God or Goddess. In the Vedic tradition, Bhakti involves forming a strong emotional and spiritual connection with the divine through prayer, song, and rituals. Satyananda elucidates in *Anandamath* that compassion and its associated virtues emanate from the Sattvaguna. He emphasizes that cultivating these virtues necessitates a profound spiritual practice, namely Bhakti, or devotion to the divine (*Anandamath* 82). Bankimchandra prominently features a pantheon of Indian deities in *Anandamath*, including Lord Vishnu, Goddess Kali, and Goddess Durga. Notably, the novel also introduces Bharat Mata, the personification of India as a mother Goddess, as a central figure. This symbolic representation embodies the nation’s spiritual and cultural essence, evoking a sense of reverence, patriotism, and national identity. The novel narrates how these deities fought against demons to establish righteousness, illustrating the importance of Gods and Goddesses in Hinduism as guides on the path of righteousness. In *Anandamath*, a powerful example of Bhakti is the iconic song, *Bande Mataram*. The patriotic hymn expresses profound devotion to the motherland, personified as a divine being; similarly the Sannyasis’ reverence for Bharat Mata embodies the Bhakti principle, where the nation is revered as a sacred entity. This deep spiritual connection fuels their determination to fight against their foreign rulers.

Another dominant principle of the Indian Vedic system skillfully woven throughout the novel is Yajna, or sacrifice. In the Vedic tradition, Yajna refers to rituals where offerings are made to the Gods, often through fire ceremonies. It symbolizes surrendering one’s actions, thoughts, and belongings to a higher power, seeking spiritual growth and self-transformation. In *Anandamath*, the selfless sacrifice of the Sanyasis embodies the concept of Yajna, as they willingly dedicate their lives to the nation’s cause, their bravery in war and endurance of pain for India’s greater benefit exemplify the Vedic concept of sacrifice, where an individual’s life is offered for a higher purpose transcending personal interests. As Homi K. Bhabha denotes, “The nation’s narrative is articulated through the trope of sacrifice, where individual loss becomes the sign of national gain” (Nation and Narration, 1990, 2). In the novel, characters like Satyananda, Mahendra, Bhavanand, Kalyani, and Shanti epitomize sacrifice. Satyananda renounces everything to become an ascetic guru, guiding the Santans toward freedom. Mahendra leaves his wife and daughter to join the Sanyasi rebellion. Kalyani attempts to poison herself and her daughter, unwilling

to hinder her husband's dream of serving the motherland. Bhavananda and Shanti sacrifice their married life for the same cause. Shanti makes a selfless decision to join the Sanyasi's group, prioritizing the greater mission over personal interests and avoiding any hindrance to her husband's duty. With unshakeable resolve, she pledges to contribute to the noble cause, and under Satyananda's mentorship, she undergoes a transformative journey, emerging as a Santaan, a formidable warrior-saint. Shanti says, "My husband's religion is his own concern. Who am I to take him from the path of his religion? In this life, to a woman, her husband is a God, but in the life to come to us all, our religion is our God. To me, my husband is great, but my religion is greater, but greater still than that is the religion of my husband. I can sacrifice my religion whenever I so desire. But shall I sacrifice my husband's religion? At your command, if my husband has to die, let him die; I shall not ask him to live" (*Anandamath* 117-118). Throughout the novel, numerous examples illustrate characters performing Yajna, or sacrifice, in various ways to serve the motherland, demonstrating the profound impact of selfless sacrifice on the pursuit of freedom and national pride. Thus, Bankimchandra promotes the ideals of the Vedic tradition in *Anandamath* to foster pride in India's ancient cultural heritage. The Vedas, foundational scriptures of Hinduism, are presented not only as religious texts but also as the core of India's civilization and national identity. Through the narrative, the revival of Vedic values, such as selflessness, dharma (duty), and the pursuit of spiritual truth, serves both as a critique of colonial rule and as a blueprint for national revival. Thus, the Vedic revivalism in *Anandamath* establishes Hinduism as a spiritual foundation for political resistance.

India as a Sacred Motherland: *Anandamath's* most lasting legacy to Indian nationalism is the iconic representation of Bharat Mata as a revered and sacred entity. Beyond simple representation, Bharat Mata, as a symbol in the novel, embodies the core of national identity and collective awareness. According to the study by Ray, "Motherland should be taken as the ultimate end and to be worshipped by her every child. Since the Mother represents the essence of being of her children, it is the sacred duty of all her children to devote themselves to the service of the Mother" (qtd. In Mondal 21). In the novel, the Sanyasis see India as a mother who needs protection and care. They believe their fight for freedom is a sacred duty to save their motherland and this idea to consider country as their divine mother comes from Hinduism, where mothers are revered for their love, strength, and selflessness. The concept of Bharat Mata in *Anandamath* becomes more than a political symbol; she is a spiritual and cultural entity whose protection requires personal sacrifice and devotion, transforming the political struggle for independence into a holy war. When Mahendra speculates

and says to Bhavananda that “That is the country, it is not the Mother.” Bhavananda replies, “We recognize no other Mother. ‘Mother and Motherland is more than heaven itself.’ We say the motherland is our mother. We have neither mother nor father nor brother nor friend, wife nor son nor house nor home. We have her alone, the richly-watered, richly-fruited, cool with delightful winds, rich with harvests” (*Anandamath* 31). This idea of Mother India inspired India’s nationalist movements, making the fight for freedom feel sacred and meaningful.

Hinduism’s Impact on Indian identity formation: In *Anandamath*, Bankimchandra Chatterjee masterfully weaves a narrative that profoundly depicts Indian identity, particularly during the colonial era. Through the novel, Chatterjee reclaims and redefines Indian identity, which had been eroded by colonial rule. He draws heavily from Hindu mythology, folklore, and cultural heritage, infusing the novel with a strong sense of national pride and self-awareness of Indian identity. The characters Mahendra and the mysterious monk Satyananda represent the true spirit of Indian identity, combining spirituality, patriotism, and selflessness. Bankim Chatterjee’s novel portrays the fight for independence as a sacred responsibility, taking Indian identity to a higher level. This inspires readers to feel deeply connected to their country and its rich cultural heritage. The novel portrays Indian identity formation in three significant ways: Firstly, it plays a pivotal role in reviving Hindu culture and heritage, emphasizing the importance of Bharat Mata (Mother India) and symbolically portraying all Indians as her children. This narrative reinforces a shared sense of national identity and belonging, while also highlighting the systematic erosion of India’s rich legacy by colonial rulers. By underscoring this loss, the novel inspires a sense of national pride and resistance, fueling India’s struggle for independence. Bankimchandra’s invocation of Hindu mythology and scriptures served as a poignant reminder to Indians of their profound spiritual and cultural heritage. This narrative strategy effectively fostered a deep sense of national pride, celebrating the grandeur of India’s civilizational accomplishments. This renewed appreciation for their cultural heritage empowered Indians to recognize their inherent strength, emboldening them to resist British and Mughal rule. As they fought to reclaim their lost heritage and freedom, the struggle for independence evolved from a mere political movement into a comprehensive cultural revival. Driven by a deep desire to reclaim and restore India’s rich legacy, this movement sought not only political liberation but also cultural rejuvenation. Secondly, Bankimchandra’s novel elevated the struggle for independence to a spiritual level, transforming it into a sacred nationalism. By blending spiritual ideals with nationalistic goals, he challenged Western notions of nationalism, portraying the freedom struggle as an act of dharma

and part of a divine plan. Lastly, *Anandamath*'s depiction of Hinduism proved to be a galvanizing force for India's independence movement. By positioning Hinduism as the cornerstone of Indian identity, the novel presented a compelling counter-narrative to the dominant British colonial discourse. This, in turn, helped forge a unified national identity deeply rooted in India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage, inspiring a collective sense of purpose and shared belonging among Indians. Ultimately, Bankimchandra's novel, *Anandamath*, had a profound impact on the development of Indian national identity. By effortlessly combining Hinduism with Nationalism, Bankimchandra crafted a significant narrative that still echoes in the hearts of Indians today.

Conclusion

Anandamath holds a seminal position in the discourse on Indian Nationalism, transcending mere politics to explore the intricate relationship between Hinduism and the national struggle. Through the novel, Bankimchandra presents a vision of India that goes beyond geography and becomes a sacred space. Here, the nation is not just a group of people, but a divine entity, the Mother that deserves respect and protection. The idea of sacred nationalism in *Anandamath* inspired many nationalists. It provided a spiritual and cultural framework for the fight against colonialism. Even today, the themes of *Anandamath* are still relevant in discussions about Indian identity, nationalism, and religion. The novel shows a vision of a unified India where religious identity, cultural pride, and political freedom come together for a sacred cause. In this sense, *Anandamath* is not just a critique of colonialism but a powerful reimagining of India's future, rooted in its ancient traditions and the spirit of its people.

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