
Understanding Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Views on Nationalism

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Abstract: *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1834-94) is labelled as a nationalist, whose activities were confined largely to writings and speeches. The aim of the paper is to understand some of his perceptions on nation and nationalism. The impact of his work was felt not only during the Swadeshi movement but also in contemporary times, when we witness how some of his ideas are being used, re-used, and appropriated. This makes it imperative to explore the context in which he wrote and transformed the mundane land into a sacred deity through his literary genius. He established his reputation through his written works, which also provided a guarded platform from which he expressed his sentiments and criticisms, given the high-handedness of the British censorship of the time. The paper is based on the methodology of textual exegesis, and by doing a review of Bankim's novels and secondary literature, it explains the key components of his swadeshchinta (nationalist thought). For Bankim, patriotism was like the first principle of his political philosophy. This philosophy was based on his belief on the spiritual ideals of the Hindu culture and religion. Bankim felt the need to do so because he wanted to portray India as far more superior when compared to the West, and it is for this reason that one must take a pride in it. He wished to infuse a new feeling of self-respect for oneself and have passion for the nation.*

Keywords: *Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, nation, Swadeshi movement, BandeMataram.*

1. INTRODUCTION

It is in the context of the cultural encounter between the colonial state and the native intelligentsia, that the latter started engaging in the discourses through which they could claim their own representation. While it remained within the colonial paradigm, the scholars, authors, leaders defined the society and its past as an autonomous narrative. The nationalist imaginings that took place during this time, were made in what Partha Chatterjee calls the 'inner, spiritual domain.' (Chatterjee, 1993:3) This domain became a crucial sphere where the essence of the indigenous cultural identity could be celebrated. The purpose for such an engagement was to project a culture, that was superior than the West, while also at the same time challenge it. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, is one of those many luminaries that made an important interjection in reclaiming the past from the clutches of colonial domination.

It would not be wrong to say that the 'recent cultural studies of nineteenth century Bengal have been preoccupied with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee more than with any other literary or polemical figure.' (Sarkar, 2001:351) He was one of the champions of Bengali novel as well as serious Bengali discursive literature. The reason for this interest is because he is one of the first important novelists of the Bengali language, who contributed extensively to Bengali literature, and also along with that laid the initial foundation for systematic principles of nationalism. NarasinghaSil, considers Bankim as 'Janus-faced avantgarde intellectual' because he was not only a mere religious and cultural revivalists but he was also one of the formulators and creators of a new kind of political and religious norms that was generated to tackle and respond to the currents of his time. (Sil, 2002:121) Tapan Ray Chaudhuri also points out that while on the one hand he is against western culture yet on the other hand how he did not reject it completely. Bankim's tension is seen in the way he was accepting western culture in his life habits, 'there was a beautifully embroidered carpet on the floor. Oil paintings hung on the wall. Attractive divans, chairs, etc. were arranged tastefully.' In short, very much the home of a westernized Bengali rather than a man who wrote Dharmatva or eulogized the ascetic virtues of dedicated 'sanatans.' (Ray Chaudhuri, 2002:133)

The paper aims at studying Bankim and his views on nationalism and his contribution that has to a certain extent shaped the nation's identity. It explores the background context that paved the way for one of the most interesting novel of the time 'Anandamath'. The novel was considered as a bible for the extremists and it greatly inspired the nationalist movement. The paper cannot, for obvious reasons claim to be an in depth study of comprehending a very

significant aspect of Bankim's impact on nationalism, owing to its massiveness and complexity. Drawing upon the textual exegesis of Bankim's novels and the secondary sources the paper will discuss how Bankim and his novels impacted the anti-colonial movement, and also its presence in the contemporary times. Bankim is credited with making the practice of land as mother worship popular. Bankim remains one of the many figures that have been studied exhaustively in Bengal, besides Rabindranath Tagore, who later challenged the growing cult of Mother India worship. Finally, the paper will try to interrogate how much has Bankim's work shaped the iconisation of the land.

2. CONTEXTUALISING BANKIM

There are scholars who have discussed how 'Bankim was at war'(Sen, 1980:754), in the sense that his writings have reflected both his faith and disillusionment with the system and also his rebellious nature along his submissive attitude. For instance, in 1872, he wrote a letter to his friend Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, where he emphasised the need to 'deanglicise themselves to a certain extent so as to speak to the masses the language that they could understand. However, around the same time, in a lecture titled 'The confession of a young Bengal' in 1872, he emphasised the 'high English education was a crucial force in the making and imagining of a nation.' (Ibid) Amares Tripathi refers to him as a 'Hindu revivalist polemic.' (Tripathi, 1967) The same observation has also been remarked by Meenakshi Mukherjee also says that this dichotomy runs throughout his career, in his speeches, essays, and novels. (Mukherjee, 1982:905)

The context to Bankim's duality in his work must be understood in terms of his family background and the early exposure to Western thought and theory. He was born in 1838 in a village in West Bengal. He belonged to the '*kulin*' family, ritually the purest stratum of Bengali Brahmins. Bankim had an erudite beginning, this was because of his family's tradition like Sanskrit learning, Vaishnava devotionalism, the cultural ambience. This made it possible for him to have easy access to high education. He was born in what has been marked as Banglarnabayug (new era of Bengal) (Sil, 2002:123). He had exposure to European literature, most importantly of the 19th century political, economics and sociology. He was influenced by the Comtean Positivism, Benthamite Utilitarianism, John Stuart Mill's social and gender philosophy and several other strands of French Socialism. (Sarkar, 2001:135,138) This new age came under the guidance of the European Enlightenment, thus bringing in the modernity, rationality, and reason of the West. It positively had a profound impact in the morality and brought changes in the life and thought process of the people.

However, one could also sense the tension that was being surfaced in the modernist movement that was taking place in Bengal. The biggest impact was perhaps the awareness and the consciousness of the dismal situation that the people were living under the British rule. There was pressure thus to one hand challenge the British, and also on the other hand be selective in what could be used for their benefit. He worked in the provincial civil and judicial services of the Government of Bengal. However later Bankim describes his joining the bureaucracy as 'the greatest misfortune' of his life. Bankim's experiences both in and out of office were particularly unfortunate. There were incidents of how he was forcefully thrown out of a train compartment and even physically assaulted.

When Bankim started writing his novels, he initiated a vogue in the Bengali literature. The form was inspired by the English novels of the earlier period, but what is of value is that the spirit was indigenous. He lived in the times of cultural renaissance, where he sought to justify the traditions by emphasising the nobility of ideals presented by tradition (Ghosh, 1969:73). A significant point that should be noted in Bankim's nationalist thought is that his earlier liberal rationalist vision propelled him to assert the cultural identity of the Indians against the imperial rule. He questioned the very basis of colonialism by asking why has India been subject to repeated foreign invasions for so many years.

The Orientalist approached this question by pointing at the lack of physical strength and courage of the people and also tagging that the Hindus are 'effeminate'. The lack of physical strength has been the reason why Indians have been unable to defend themselves and thus fallen into despair and colonisation. (Chatterjee, 1993:54) Bankim, is not satisfied with this answer and he goes on to challenge this argument. He explains that if everything depended on sheer physical strength, on the power of muscles and if this was the case then the '*Kabulis*', who are physically much stronger than the British, would be more powerful than the latter. What Bankim wanted to explain is that there is

more to just physical and athletic strength. There are other factors that play a crucial role. Bankim used his liberal rational attitude in answering and challenging the 'fallacious' understanding of the Indian society, which was quite dominant.

Any discussion of Bankim's view on nationalism must begin with his concept of nation. There is some fuzziness regarding the ethnic, geographical and social constituents of the nation that he talks about. Sometimes he used the word 'Indians', as we use it now, then the same Indian became coterminous with 'Bengalis' and also with the 'Hindus'. This has to a certain extent created speculation and complicated understanding. Sudipta Kaviraj, explains how those who write imaginary history often take advantage of a conceptual indeterminacy. '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) What is interesting is to note that this nation often did not include the Muslims. Although he refused to identify the Muslim rule as the alien rule, but one could not fail to notice the prejudice he had it against them. Scholars have drawn particular attention to Bankim's complexity. This is because Bankim like any of his contemporaries did look upon those centuries of Mughal rule as periods of bondage and considered the resistance offered by the Hindu chieftains as a form a national resistance. (Raichaudhuri, 2002:136)

3. IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY IN FOMENTING NATIONALISM

Bankim uses the principle of historicity to formulate his idea. He was aware that nationalist consciousness could be regenerated by drawing the attention of the masses to an imagined past. This past which was a golden age (Smith, 1997:37) and now is gone, when compared to the degenerate status India was in then. The concept of golden age is interesting because the past is used in such a way in order to make it look authentic. The reference of past incidents are vital in the invention of tradition, as Hobsbawm explains that the past is claimed by the nationalists deliberately to create and formalise rituals and symbolic complexes that are central for invoking a feeling of belongingness to the nation. (Hobsbawm, 1983) Identities are based on shared memories of collective experiences and activities of the members of a group. This collective belongingness is based on a set of common myths of origin and shared memories, associated with the homeland. (Smith, 1996:584) Ernest Renan also recognised the significance of shared memories of golden past, which comprises of great sacrifices and battle experiences for the formation of nations. (Renan 1882). It must be understood that memories include not just wars and the heroes associated with it, but it has a much wider range, for it encompasses religious movements, discoveries, civilizations, paintings, architects and above all the idealised memories of a 'golden age' and its associated virtues, beauty, heroism, intellect, wealth, power, dignity, and prestige (Armstrong 1982).

Bankim hoped that memories would be helpful in generating the nationalist feeling. He felt that the main reason for the lack of nationalist feeling has been because the 'Hindus' have not been serious in writing their own history. He wanted to reclaim the past which would provide a stimulating narrative. Such a narrative would have the power of welding a common history. It is true when it is said that a nation cannot acquire greatness if it is oblivious to its past glory. (RaiChaudhuri, 2002) Bankim gives the examples of how Europeans took great pride and were obsessed with history writing, so much so that even if they went out for shooting birds, a history of that event had to be written. In writing the history free from supernatural elements, he sought to re-establish moral, cultural and religious traditions of ancient India. (Rai Chaudhuri, 2002:175)

History writing from the viewpoint of the Indians was necessary to make them aware of the greatness of the nation, this required the writing of annals of even the smallest detail. Bankim scornfully remarked that even if we yawn, the act should be acknowledged as one of immortal glory of this world and hence duly recorded.' (Ibid) While Bankim championed in the literary field with regard to nationalist imaginations, there was however an issue, 'almost inevitably this mythic past was imagined as a Hindu past.' (Sil, 2002: 126) The problem that occurs in romanticising past glories is that most of the heroes in such novels are inherently Hindus like the Marathas, Bengalis, Rajputs, becoming martyr in their war against the Muslim rulers. So Bankim while doing so obviously showed the Muslims in a very poor light. In such an engagement one fails to take note that constructing a golden past does not necessarily mean that it will be harbinger of a golden future.

Bankim knew that the European countries have been successful because of their nationalist fervour and so would India, if it was sufficiently charged. However there were two reasons why India was a subject nation. First, is that

Indians lack a natural desire for liberty. Bankim says that most of the Indians have never identified themselves with the ruler, so as long as the government is favourable towards them it is better to be in subjection than to be independent. He gives a historical narrative relating to how for more than three thousand years there has not been a feeling for liberty among the majority of the Indians. (Chatterjee, 1993:54) The second reason for subjection is that there is lack of solidarity in Hindu society. There should not only be solidarity but also the view that if needs arise one should keep its own interest before others. Bankim is aware that such feelings leads to a lot of misery and bitter warfare, as is seen from the history of Europe, but then such are the realities which has been lacking in the Indians.(Chatterjee, 1993:54)

4. CULTURAL IDENTITY

So we see Bankim's explanation is not the basis of physical or material prowess but is in terms of culture. This deficiency has been for historic reason as the governing of India has been traditionally the task of a specific caste (kshtreyas) keeping other castes aloof. Most importantly while the Europeans are culturally equipped for power and progress, the Indians were basically being influenced by the Sankhya philosophy which emphasizes on '*vairagya*', which means other worldliness and the other is fatalism. (Ibid:56) It is because of this that although they had physical power they had to come under alien rule, slowing down the social progress. The cultural difference is also seen when the western civilisation puts forward slogan like 'knowledge is power'; while Hindus say, 'knowledge is salvation'. This difference in attitudes has brought about different outcomes, in spite of setting out on the same road. (Ibid) What is important is to see the concept of power, while Europeans are devotees of power; the very negligence has caused the Indians their decline. Bankim points out that power takes place when four elements are applied on physical strength these are enterprise, solidarity, courage and perseverance. While it is true that 'Bengalis' have lacked these elements is true but it does not however mean that it cannot be cultivated. (Sil, 2002:128)

In 1884 Bankim wrote a long tract named 'The Theory of Religion', where he introduced the concept of '*anushilan*', which means systems of culture, this was to challenge the western notion of culture. *Anushilan* is based on the concept of '*bhakti*' which further is divided into knowledge and duty. Bankim was inspired by the Vaishnava tradition of devotion or bhakti. (Raychaudhuri, 2002:126) As Bankim himself defined it in Dharamatva, 'Bhakti is a condition in which all the faculties of man are turned towards God.' (Ibid) Bankim explained that in order to gain knowledge for natural sciences like mathematics, physics etc., the West is consulted as these have developed there and the latter is known for being superior in those aspects. However, if one wishes to gain knowledge of oneself, then the person has to depend on the Hindu *shastras*, that comprises of truth and the highest achievements, thus in this case we can see that India is superior. He further explains that a synthesis can be achieved between the teachings of the West and the India, but it must retain its spiritual superiority. In such cases there is always a danger that the whole process gets usurped by the learned and educated men and thus in the whole national-cultural regeneration system, it is the intelligentsia that leads, while the rest has to follow.

The way this can be avoided by projecting the importance of vernacular language. This will have a dual impact, through education of vernacular language and literature i.e., Bengali, a sense of unity is created and also it fills the people with a sense of pride about their own language. This seems quite a valid argument since majority of the population reside in the rural areas where English language was alien, moreover through this method the gulf between the educated and the uneducated could also be reduced. Although Bankim is said to have acknowledged that he was more at ease in writing and speaking in English than in Bengali. So we can say that he was definitely not free from the characteristic predicament of western-educated Bengali.

His programme for national regeneration was evidently an alternative to challenge the 'physical invincibility' of British power. The best portrayal of people that have imbued national regeneration is seen in the fictional characters of '*Anandamath*', '*Debi Chaudhurani*', and '*Krishna Charitra*'. The new Hindu, according to him, that will come to be formed after the national regeneration is to be a man of difference. He will be an embodiment of a rigorous, who has internalised certain reinterpreted concepts of Hindu knowledge and devotional practices. He will be the ideal patriot and a nation-builder. Tanika Sarkar rightly says that even in an imagined nation, the imagination is made by and ruled by agents who are male and upper caste. (Sarkar, 2001: 175)

5. RELIGION AND KRISHNACHARITRA

Bankim started writing from 1864, his take on religion and social theory is scattered all over his work but they are more particularly grouped together in three fictional works, Krishnacharitra, Dharmattava and Srimadbhagavat-Gita. The importance of religion has been reiterated by Bankim again and again. In Krishna Charitra, written in 1886, Bankim has attempted for the first time to arrive at a historical Krishna. This essay was a critique of a collection of old Bengali poetry edited by Akshay Chandra Sarkar, where Krishna was a major theme. In the essay he raised certain questions and issues, which was reflected in his work by the same name ten years later. 'Krishna' was also the major subjects of his trenchant rebuttal of the powerful attack on Hinduism launched by the Reverend Hastie in the late 1882. (Chatterjee, 1991:11)

The main problem he wishes to put forward is that while on one hand, the majority of Hindus and especially the Bengalis have a firm belief in Krishna as god, where Krishna's influence in people's lives is far reaching and he gives examples like none start their journey without taking Krishna's name; none will commence their study without writings Krishna's name, the beggar will not ask alms without uttering "hail *Radha-Krishna*" yet on the other hand they have no problem accepting him as a thief in his childhood-who used to eat stolen cream and butter; that in his youth he was a philanderer who seduced innumerable milkmaids away from their marital loyalty; and in his mature age, a swindler and a knave who slew men through deception. He therefore asks the question how can the people accept this as the nature of the divine? (Ibid, 1991:21) He, therefore, embarks himself in the task of removing all the falsities attached to Krishna's character and establish his historicity along with also proving that he is an ideal man. In trying to reach his aim, Bankim follows a Positivist approach, his method, concepts, and modes of reasoning are completely contained within the forms of post-enlightenment scientific thought. One major characteristic of this thought is its celebration of the principle of historicity as the essential procedure for acquiring 'objective' knowledge. The accounts according to him are found in three ancient Sanskrit texts. These are Mahabharata, Harivamsa, and Puranas. Now out of eighteen Puranas, only nine have an account of Krishna.

The intense prejudice is seen when he compares the ideal man of Indian with the ideal man of Europe i.e. Jesus Christ. He agrees that both these men were preaching dharma but there are two ways of doing so one, by advice regarding dharma and second by setting up one's action in accordance with the ideals of dharma. According to Bankim the first one was followed by Christ and the latter by Krishna. On another account Bankim mentions that Krishna is superior to Christ because the latter was professional preaching religion, while Krishna being the ideal was always engaging in those activities which are performed by men. Moreover Christ was not well versed with art of war and if one day there would be revolt and he was made the commander-in-chief, then he would have failed them, since he was not well versed like Krishna in war strategy. First this distinction stands baseless for me, because the time line in which Bankim's Krishna existed and Jesus Christ did was different, it was a different geographical locales too. Further with Christ it is already assumed that he is son of god, therefore he will preach the religion and with Bankim's Krishna it is assumed that he is a human, so obviously he will not be evangelizing. What is important to note is that for Bankim, the justification of Krishna is not armed at any other Hindu or Indian construction of idealities, but the rational theology of Christianity, the ideality of Christ as constructed by rationalist Christians discourses of the 19th century. (Kaviraj, 1995:88) Christ was a historical figure and so should Krishna be. On another note it is interesting to note the silence of Bankim with regard to Mohamed, who does not even figure in his list. According to Sudipta Kaviraj this is because Hindus saw Islam as a political threat but not an intellectual threat. (Ibid) Bankim's take on Islam is quite complex. As Tapan Ray Choudhury points out, while on one hand he refuses to identify the Indo-Islamic age as a foreign rule, and on the other hand it is difficult to overlook Bankim's passionate hostility against Muslims expressed in his novels especially the 'Anandamath'. (Ray Choudhury, 2002) So where does the problem lie? Partha Chatterjee locates this to his intellect which on one hand, was attracted by the rationality, historicity and scientific temper of the European enlightenment. But his heart remained in the mysterious, dreamy world of the imaginary authenticity of a glorious Hindu past. Irrational emotionalism on one hand, dispassionate rationalism on the other: Bankim's world was lashed violently by these opposing currents. (Chatterjee, 1993:80)

The question as to why did Bankim bank upon a figure in the epic, to create national ideal is because he had come to believe that if the nationalist fervour like that in Europe had to be asserted in India, it could be charged when the

Indians are given the ideal of Krishna. The point is while Europe was essentially political in character, India was intrinsically religious in nature and thus the best way was to appeal the religious nature and sentiments of the Indians.

6. SACRED BROTHERHOOD, ANANDAMATH

An analytical study on Anandamath help us in assessing India's birth as a nation. There are five edition of the novel. The novel has itself undergone many changes and the narrative of the vicissitudes that took place over time is curious and it is here that the context becomes important. The fifth edition is referred to as the standard edition. In the first edition, a few alterations were made to the text which appeared in Bangadarshan, and an advertisement praising the British was added. To the second edition was added a selection from the review published in Liberal was added (Bandopadhyay, 1994:221). There were also a few revisions in the text. Further changes were made in the third edition and the Sanyasi revolt is indicated as the historical source of the story. Anandamath was published in a serial form in Bankim's own journal Banga Darshan from 1881 until 1882. It appeared in book form in 1882, and by 1892, the novel's fifth had been printed. (Lipner 2003:60) The plot of the novel was inspired by the Sanyasis revolt in Bengal during the years that followed the Battle of Plassey 1757. The setting of the novel is in Birbhum, and most of the events take place inside the forest.

Meenakshi Mukherjee refers to Anandamath as the first political novel written in India. It was regarded that through this novel, Bankim was attempting to awaken the country in a kind of 'idealistic romanticised regeneration of the Hindu ethos.' (Mukherjee, 1982:903) Yet it also doubtful whether he was successful in regenerating the ethos of the whole of India. Perhaps, it will be safer to say that he was trying to and was more concerned with recovering the forgotten identity of the Bengali people. Nationalism in its inception created a hope for optimism, it was ideational and it heavily depended on the past to rejuvenate the present and make assumptions for the future. Bankim was nationalist in the sense that he participated in this process. In his work he has clearly provided the definition of nation, i.e the motherland. The nationalists especially during the Swadeshi movement and during the later phases of intense confrontation with the British, made use of this idea. They made it a rallying point for mobilisation. Perhaps it is in the '*Anandamath*' where he best blends nationalism and religion by invoking an image of goddess as mother India. In this he puts forward certain tenets of militant nationalism. This mother, who once was glorious, has now been reduced to shameful misery and therefore asking her sons to bring back the lost grandeur. Bankim draws a connection of the mother with '*shakti*', which figures in the famous hymn '*Vande Mataram*', the weapons in her ten arms, her infinite strength and sharp swords portray an image of great power. This mother has both the feminine and maternal qualities, she is also 'extremely violent and stimulating, invincible yet vulnerable when she needs to challenge her enemies.' (Das, 2012)

Such powerful image definitely paved the way adding intense emotions in the movement. One should note how Bankim's thought takes a sudden shift from patriotic concerns challenging the west to a more theocentric outlook, something that has not been explained. (Ray Chaudhuri, 2002:132) Towards the later part of his literary life he appears to be interested in preaching what is 'true' Hinduism, as man's religious experience. He knew that the feeling of nationalism is vague and therefore he embarked on the task of raising nationalism to the dignity of religion. Patriotism was preached as the highest religion and Hinduism was seen as a way of life and is superior. For instance through a comparison between Krishna and Jesus as discussed above. He had an obsession of being preoccupied in comparison. One argument as to why he did so is because of his unflinching faith in Hinduism; he went to the extent of questioning those who did not appreciate his faith.

The celebrated hymn of '*bandemateram*' needs a detailed discussion for herein Bankim's view on nationalism is best put forward. The song is a reiteration of the original bounty and nurture of motherland in the image of Durga, the demon slaying goddess asking her sons to bring back that strength. It was perhaps for the first time that in the Bengali literature that Bankim converted a neutral territory which is profane into a sacred land worthy of sacrifice and adulation. The land was turned into a 'feminine ground of sustenance, the other was the virulent goddess who belonged to the Hindu tradition. The novel later soon found an appeal with others outside Bengal, because the novel successful combines the trope of religion with nationalism. It is said to have inspired the nationalists in the early part of the nationalist movement to carry a copy of Bhagvat Gita, along with their revolver and the slogan of Vande Mataram. The song is highly charged with emotions. Now while this song was interpreted by the later nationalist in

a different light -the demon slayer being pitted against the colonial power and using the song as an condensed history of colonial exploitation and the patriotic struggle for liberation, the RSS on the other side took it to imply a historical struggle against the Muslims. Apart from being the most potent patriotic slogan of the 19th-20th century nationalism, it was one of the Hindu rallying cry at the moments of Hindu-Muslim violence after 1926. According to the SanghParivar it is 'VandeMataram' not Tagore's 'janagana mana', which is the authentic Indian national anthem. (Sarkar, 2001) The hymn in its entirety is sung in the RSS training meeting (shakhas), any change is strictly forbidden which will dilute the pre-partition motherland image.(Ibid) The Hindu nationalist as a matter of fact have found Bankim's novels inspirational.

For some people, religion is only part of life; meaning that there are things religious and there are things secular. For Bankim, his life was deeply inspired by religion (Voigt, 1962:249) With this we can see that Bankim was aware of the effect the transposition of nationalism from secular to the religious sphere could achieve. Bankim combined two crucial aspect, one the other hand he formalised the nation as a mother and on the other hand used the religious figures of Durga and Kali to identify the mother. This identification of nation with Durga would appeal to the religious sentiments. This deification was helpful not only then but we see its impact in the contemporary times too. It simply implies the rise of nationalism to the level of religion, and also its effectiveness to religiously bent mind of the masses in India. It is also said to have 'unleashed a hitherto unknown spiritual force: nationalism was not a matter of the mind, nor merely of sentiment, nationalism was a confession and a faith !' (Ibid) During the nineteenth century nationalism was guided by religion to a large extent and the best example was seen from the mother India image. Thousand promised and made a vow in front of the Kali temple: "Mother, I solemnly promise that to the best of my power I will never use foreign articles..." (Mukherjee and Mukherjee, 1968:252) This kind of nationalism as projected by Bankim deeply inspired Aurobindo. He in his writings called for ultimate sacrifice that is to be made to the mother. He says, "she asks us for no schemes, no plans, no methods.... She asks us for our lives, nothing less, nothing more." (Ibid)

It is important to see Bankim's view on British rule in India. In some novels we see that there is mention of the British being divinely ordained to bring about India's regeneration from its backwardness. This statement must be seen in a different light and TapanRaychaudhuri gives us an answer that it was said to 'counterbalance the seditious undertone of the novels in question'.(Ray Chaudhuri, 2002:183) As the later editions of *Anandamath* had to be censored as it was considered anti-British. In fact in three of his novels dealing with the themes of conflict, Bankim decides it to conclude it with the British victory and in two instances, the concluding passages contain praise for the British rule. Bankim's assessment on the British rule best appears in his essay, '*bharatvarshersvadhinataevam paradhinata*,' here he makes a list of what were the benefits of the rule and its detriments. Quite correctly he points out 'a country becomes dependent when the ruler is of an alien race'.(Ibid) In this alien rule there was maladministration and more importantly, India's interests was being sacrificed in favour of Britain's. Yet Bankim points out how British rule was way better than the Brahmanical tyranny. At least under the British rule, people were tried in a just manner, unlike the case of a shudra who could never even charge a Brahmin to begin with. He acknowledges the other benefits like the railways, steamships, telegraph, medicines etc, thus introducing a lot of things that has helped in being modern. He also applauded British administration of justice, which despite its shortfall was an improvement over the systems that existed before.

However, an out and out exaltation was not possible in the context of the new nationalism that was taking shape. He often criticised the British through his novels, for instance, in both *Debi Chaudhurani* and *Anandamath* describes in details the sufferings caused by the British. He criticised the expansionist tendencies of the European states, which he traces to the lack of mercy and use of force and he explains this by saying "just as the [pariah] dogs in the market place snatch from one another whatever they can, so do nations, civilized and uncivilized, seize from one others what they can at every opportunity." (Ray chaudhuri, 2002:201)

Bankim's intense nationalism was was an inspiration for many, and yet we see him never being a part of any organised politics of the day, even though he had contacts with Surendranath Banerjee and the British Indian Association. This was because he was of the view that it was something similar to the "the blind beggar asking for alms."(RaiChaudhuri, 2002:201) Thus Tapan Raychaudhuri very rightly pointed that, one might be tempted to say that he had his faith in violent revolution or at least the ability to threaten such a revolution; "physical strength is

the best means of self-defence” is again what he reiterated throughout his thought. He was also full of spite against the social reformers who wanted to bring changes through legislation. (Rai Chaudhury, 2002:134) According to him cultural backwardness could not be improved by reform but by appealing to the sentiments. Although Bankim’s view seems noble in the first instance, just appealing might not always work, since people are too tied down to the social practices and cultures and are not ready to change.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that he definitely comes across as a thinker who made a systematic attempt to theorise nationalism. His attempt to establish a regional identity as different from the other groups is there, however he falters to create an all-inclusive identity. His concept of religion as development of full humanity through cultivation and harmonious development of human faculties has influenced many stalwarts like Tagore and Vivekananda. While it is easy to criticise him for his incapacity to maintain distinction between religion and politics and providing an incomplete picture by omitting the minorities, yet it must be pointed out that he was using religion to foment a national identity which was missing, and which according to him was absolutely necessary. That his works have been a source of influence cannot be doubted. He was successful in propounding theory which was able to maintain unity. In spite of the criticisms, Bankim cannot be ignored or shunned, his works remain one of the greatest exposures of the cultural background of Bengal renaissance and also the native’s urge to have an equal standing, if not superior, to the West. Bankim has been credited with creating a new religion called nationalism. It was his formula of deification of the nation, basing it on his knowledge of India’s past. Thus he combined ‘a century old idea with the religious spirit of his days in a process of poetical inspiration.’ (Voigt, 1961:288)

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