

Contextualizing Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's Nationalist Discourse in Contemporary India

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Abstract

Research is based on secondary sources.

Subtle nuances of Indian Nationalism, the willingness or apathy towards rendition of '*Vande Mataram*', (I worship the motherland), citizens' readiness to cry out '*Bharat Mata ki jai*' (Hail the motherland) in full throat are not just semantic issues of heated debate in India today but actually matters of life and death, as borne out by the turn of events since the ascendancy of the Sangh Parivar to position of power in recent past. Nationalist discourse has unfortunately become a divisive agenda of positing communities against each other. A large section of majority community is becoming intensely passionate about following the 'Hindu way' of doing things, of paying compulsive obedience to all Hindu customs, religious and cultural mores, food habits and even 'Gou Bhakti', often tending to impose the same on other communities and interpreting any transgression as nothing less than treason. There have been repeated instances of horrific violence unleashed on members of minority communities whenever they have been suspected of hurting the 'Hindu' sentiments, construed forcefully as the pan Indian sentiments. This attempt to project a single narrative of Hindu Nationalism as the Indian Nationalist credo and to sweep all different customs and practices under the carpet of Hindutva, a doctrine of equating Indian-ness with Hinduism, has been viewed with consternation by all liberal thinkers who apprehend that such attempt is sure to jeopardize the complex mosaic of Indian society characterized by diverse caste, community, cultural and ethnicity related identities. These thinkers believe that the heterogeneous, pluralist, inclusive matrix of Indian society needs to be protected at all cost so as to ensure survival of Indian people as a nation, that imposition of a Hindu idea of nation may actually undermine the very existence of India as a nation, that a culture of respect, acceptance and accommodation of different ways of life and belief can only ensure its progress. It is needless to say that such deep rooted conflict of ideas needs continuous deliberation, even at the cost of repetition. This paper begins with some reflections on the concept of nationalism by some Western and prominent Indian scholars. It then proceeds to take a look at the origin of the concept of nationalism in India in the writings of the celebrated author, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, who is venerated as the creator of the magical words '*VandeMataram*' by the Hindutva brigade and belittled by some as a bigot whose ideas were allegedly regressive and communal. This paper attempts to establish that Bankimchandra's ideas were the product of a particular time and place and played a glorious role in the course of our movement for national liberation but Bankim had his ambivalence and was constrained by his own temporal and spatial experience. Hence attempt to replicate the extraordinary effect of his literary creation in India of 2018 by forcing everyone

to chant '*VandeMataram*' will not do justice either to his genius nor to the requirements of an evolving nation trying to march towards a better future.

I

Benedict Anderson in his magnum opus, **Imagined Communities**, envisaged that "a nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion".¹ He said members of the community probably will never know each of the other members face to face and yet they may have similar interests or identity as a part of the same nation. Members hold in their minds a mental image of their affinity, of their sense of belongingness to the larger group which is often the product of historical experiences and which requires continuous nurturing. In the context of an increasingly polarized Indian society with rising level of bitterness and animosities towards each other, one wonders if such affinity and bonding can ever be forged again or rejuvenated.

During the twentieth century, the nationalist movements became a major force in Asia and Africa, which were the colonies of Europe. Their fights for independence from European rule were closely linked to struggles for national identity, unity, and self-determination. Several scholars have defined nationalism in more or less identical fashion. Hans Kohn considered nationalism as first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness. Heimsath defined nationalism as an attitude of mind, or set of beliefs, that is shared by a group of people large enough to be influential, and that embodies ideas of the nation and the nation's goals, elevates those ideas to a prime position over other public values, and compels the assertion of the identity and the aims of the nation. Hayes included four different meanings of nationalism. These were: (a) the name of a historic process; (b) the ideas embodied in that process; (c) the activities of a particular party, and (d) a condition of mind among members of a nation.² Most genuine movements of nationalism must include all of these different dimensions. Particularly, Indian nationalism included the components of all of these, and the definition proposed by Hayes, is broad enough to encompass a variety of activities. Defined as the fight for nationhood, nationalism was the ideal.

Celebrated historian RomilaThapar has studied in detail the birth nationalism in post Enlightenment period in the continent of Europe and its significant role in consolidation of bourgeoisie rule through the dismantling of the feudal system and how Indian intellectuals of early nineteenth century received the idea form the from the West and then turned it into a weapon against the West to end colonial oppression. She strongly felt that in the colonial set up of India, germination and consolidation of Nationalism as an ideology required far greater commitment to attending to the needs of fellow countrymen and readiness to make immense sacrifices for the well-being of one's own people.³ Subsequent discussion will try to establish that Bankimchandra's '*VandeMataram*' acted as a catalyst for the upsurge of such sentiments at a particular moment in Indian history. Thapar elucidated in her writings that nationalism may begin with ideas among the elite but its propagation involves having mass support. Initially, anti-colonial Indian nationalism, which among other things, found its earliest espousal in the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, had a limited appeal but attained wider reach and appeal when in twentieth century, the nationalist struggle got converted into a mass movement. She made a very prudent observation that nationalism can be a positive force if it calls for the unification of communities but equally it can be a divisive and therefore negative force if it underlines exclusive rights

for one community on the basis of a single identifying factor and her observations resonate very well with the prevailing situation in India.

Sudipta Kaviraj is another distinguished scholar who delved deep into the layered nuances of nationalist discourse in India which emerged during colonial rule and underwent considerable metamorphosis. Kaviraj has analysed how anti-colonial sentiments gradually crystallized into nationalist thinking in the writings of Bankimchandra and other pioneers who choose a particular identity, the Hindu identity as the foundation of the idea of a nation, due to a host of circumstances prevailing at the moment and yet had a lot of hesitations and doubts about such selection. It was made under compulsion of a time when he felt a need to consolidate the Hindu community for resisting colonial regime and decaying Muslim rule as well which was unable to offer any resistance to colonial aggression. But as Kaviraj has beautifully expressed, that Bankimchandra's generation was seen, correctly in its own way, as the founding generation of this nationalist tradition, erasing from this narrative all the hesitation, tentativeness and anxiety which surrounded that choice. History is after all the story of what happened, and not of possibilities which came close to happening but did not.⁴

II

Literature all over the world acts as a powerful medium of generating and disseminating political thoughts and ideas. Starting from the Vedas, through the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata as well as Kautilya's Arthashastra, Sukracharya's Sukraniti, Banabhatta's Harshacharita and Kalhan's Rajatarangini, India has a long tradition of sages, scholars and great minds using literature to present their treatises on politics and society. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay has been a glorious addition to this venerable tradition.

Bankimchandra was born to an orthodox Brahmin family in 1838, five years after the demise of Rammohun Roy and died in 1894, when Rabindranath Tagore was thirty three and well launched into his spectacular literary career. This indicates the tremendous significance of the period in which he lived and worked. It was a period in which both Bengal and India was undergoing a tremendous intellectual churning, often referred to as Bengal Renaissance. Bankim was educated at Hooghly Mohsin College and later at Presidency College, Calcutta. He was one of the first graduates of the University of Calcutta. From 1858, until his retirement in 1891, he served as a deputy magistrate and deputy collector in the Government of British India. He witnessed from close quarters the oppression unleashed by British rulers and abhorred them for such atrocities. But at the same time, he was impressed by their ability to carry out a rule based administration, their sense of discipline, their matured legal system and could not help admiring such attributes, explaining his equivocation about the effects of British rule in India.

Bankimchandra, who straddled the literary scenario of India in late nineteenth century like a colossus, was the pioneering exponent of the Bengali novel as well as of serious Bengali discursive literature in political theory. He took up the challenge of awakening Indian masses from their stupor to engineer social change, much before the famous exhortation of Martin Luther King Jr, 'If you want to change the world, pick up your pen and write.' His contribution in Bengal Renaissance was profound and far reaching as through his writings, he tried to remind Bengalis and Hindus of their lost glory, sensitized them about the progress in literature, arts, scientific endeavor made by their forefathers, and generated hope that if they give up their inertia and stand united and steadfast against foreign rulers, they can revive their lost glory. He successfully presented a blend of western ideas like rationality and scientific spirit with age old norms, values and customs in his writings. In his most celebrated novel, *Anandamath*,

he created a motherly, goddess like image of India, something which caught the imagination of a budding nation, and his eloquent expression of obeisance to motherland, the famous patriotic hymn 'Vande Mataram' became the battle cry of generation of freedom fighters for whom these two venerated words were the source of infinite courage and drive to sacrifice everything for the motherland. The idea of India as a unified, cohesive, glorious nation, found its first espousal in Bankim's essays and novels, and he became the harbinger of a remarkable nationalist churning. His exegesis of the Gita propounded a doctrine of activist social ethics which formed the spiritual and emotional basis of Indian nationalism, after his death in the hands of Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose.

Bankim was ambivalent in his approach towards the Muslims. He had a denunciatory approach towards Muslim rule in India. He wrote 'How do our Muslim rulers protect us? We have lost our religion, our caste, our honour and family name, and now we are about to lose our very lives. How can Hinduism survive unless we drive out these dissolute swine?' (*Anandamath*) This lamentation does not need historical authentication as it was posed fictionally. At other places, his serious discursive prose refers to Islam with respect, his novels depicts Muslim men who are courageous and honourable, (characters of Osman and Ayesha in his novel *Durgeshnandini* are cases in point) and poor Muslims are portrayed as hapless victims of colonial exploitation, exactly like their Hindu brethren.⁵ There was definitely no espousal of rabid communalism or fratricidal sentiments in these novels. Genesis of pluralist ethos are found in writings as well as way back in 1889, when he observed that Bengal belonged to both Hindus and Muslims but the two communities had become estranged and for the real progress of the land it was necessary that they become united. Bankim was severe in his criticism of contemporary Hindu society as well as he used satire to lampoon the 'babu culture', the lethargic and promiscuous life style of Bengali upper and middle classes, as he wanted to take shake them out of their stupor and make them dedicated soldiers of a Hindu revivalist movement. Thus he was a product of his time and yet thought ahead of his time. Any attempt to appropriate and project this multi-faceted personality as a propounder of Hindu Rashtra calling for the complete capitulation of the Muslim community would be an injustice to a man who constantly kept challenging his own ideas, and went through phases of doubts and ambivalence regarding the equilibrium among various communities in his search for national rejuvenation.

From 1865, when he published his first novel *Durgeshnandini*, till his death, he reigned over the literary field of Bengal as a novelist, literary and social critic, essayist and explorer in all fields of modern knowledge. He gave Bengali prose, then in its infancy, an adult strength and grace and made it a fit vehicle for communication of all modern ideas. One of the finest products of the nineteenth-century renaissance in India, he was imbued in his entire literary activity with a sense of a high mission—that of reconciling the modern culture of the West with the traditional Hindu base. In fact, he advised intending writers to write only with the objective of doing some good to the nation or the world or of creating beauty. A keen student of the Western philosophy of positivism, he yet believed in the miracle-producing powers of saints and holy men. Bankimchandra wrote fourteen long and short novels—one of them, *Rajmohun's Wife*, in English. He also edited a reputed intellectual journal of his time, *Bangadarshan*. Of his thirteen Bengali novels, nine belonged to the genre of historical romance and four were set in the backdrop of his contemporary times. Generally speaking, all his characters were set in what may be called the heroic mould. They tower high above the average individual and rise or fall by the quality or defect of their characters. Seen in the light of his religio-ethical writings, it may be said that with him character is destiny. Most of his women have nerves of steel in sharp contrast to

contemporary Indian womanhood.⁶ Needless to say, Bankim may thus be treated as a pioneer of gender discourse as well.

As has already been noted, ideas of modern nationalism to India from Europe. Almost everyone agrees that the genuine nationalist sentiment emerged in India some two decades after the Mutiny of 1857. In the sixties of the last century, the word 'national' captivated the imagination of young Bengal. The National Mela (1866) was started, the National Paper (1866) was circulated, and the desire for Independence was articulated and expressed. But Bankim knew that nationalism was an exotic plant transplanted to the Indian soil from Europe and conducive atmosphere was to be created so that the plant could grow.

At a much earlier stage, Bankim Chandra realized that lack of social cohesion was an impediment to the flourishing of nationalist sentiments. Indeed, a prerequisite to nationalism was the close identification of the individual with a particular community, and the differentiation of the interest of the particular community from other communities. Without this identification, individuals will have no urge or drive to unite and strive for the liberation of motherland.

Bankim took up the mission of giving a concrete shape to nationalist underpinning of a suppressed, dispossessed and demoralized people smothered under the misgovernance of a decaying Muslim rule and emerging, exploitative British rule. The principal agenda of Bankim was to elevate nationalism to the status of a religion. He rightly recognized that nothing can move the heart of Indians so much as religion. The innate feeling of indifference toward nationalism could be overcome only by placing new religious ideals before the people of India.⁷ He made a noble attempt to attain those objectives through his novels. The most notable attempt was his magnum opus *Anandamath*, often regarded as the Bible of modern Bengali patriotism.

In *Anandamath*, he wanted to create a new myth of valour for Bengal in order to shake the people out of their somnolence, and he found in the historical record of the Sanyasi Rebellion a convenient point where elements of bravery, religion and patriotism could be made to converge. Thus, *Anandamath* was a deliberate attempt to create a myth of national character. The Encyclopedia Britannica (11th edition) entry on Bankim summarises the plot of the novel thus:- 'The story deals with the sanyasi rebellion of 1772 near Purnea, Tirhut, and Dinajpur and its culminating episode is a crushing victory won by the rebels over the United British and Mussalman forces, a success which was not, however, followed up owing to the advice of a divinely inspired prophet to abandon further resistance, since a temporary submission to British rule is a necessity. Hinduism has become too speculative and impractical, and the mission of the English in India is to teach Hindus how to reconcile theory and speculation with the facts of science. The general moral of the *Anandamath*, then, was that British rule and British education were to be accepted as the only alternative to Mussalman oppression'. Written by Romesh Chandra Dutt during Bankim's lifetime, this entry underlines the characteristic ambivalence in Bankim's attitude which wavered between the dream of an independent Hindu India and acknowledgement of the fairness and justice of British rule.⁸

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was a civil servant under the British administration – a Deputy Magistrate who remained at the same position without any promotion throughout his career, except for the few months when he was appointed as the Assistant Secretary of Bengal Government in September 1881. This post was a temporary one, but when he was reverted from this post, there was a general protest in the newspapers, including the British owned paper, *The Statesman*. Whether there was any connection between this demotion and the fact that *Anandamath* was being serialised in *Bangadarshan* during this

period cannot be conclusively proved. But it is not difficult to guess that the rousing nationalism of Anandamath, in spite of occasional tributes to the British rule, could not have altogether pleased the rulers. In the five editions of the novel that appeared in his lifetime, Bankim continued to make minor changes in the text quite often softening the adjectives applied to the British as the enemy, - or substitution of the word British (Ingrej in Bengali) by *yavana*. In the novel, both the Muslims and the British are the enemies and the words *yavana* or *bidharmi* (i.e., those belonging to a different religion) can refer to either. The country has to be saved from both of them, but the author sometimes exploited the ambiguity of the words and remembered to comment on the relative superiority of the British as a race. Considering Bankimchandra's official position, it is not easy to decide today how much of his admiration for the British came out of conviction and how much out of expediency.⁹

The high point of Anandamath is depiction of motherland as a Goddess who has lost her earlier glory and is now in shackles, and the *santans*, the devotees of the mother, guided by the pristine ideology of the famous Sanskrit sloka believed to have been uttered by Lord Rama in Ramayana, "*Janani janmabhoomischa swargadapi gariyasi*" (one's mother and motherland are dearer to him/her than heaven), have taken up the mission of liberating the motherland.

Bankim had originally composed *Vande Mataram* as a song in 1875. Later, when he had finished the highly influential novel, *Anandamath*, he inserted it within the story and vested it with highly significant narrative functions. The song, on its own, would have made an original move towards a deification and fetishisation of the country. The hymn, subsequently, was detached from the novel and achieved a life of its own as a slogan in mass nationalist rallies.¹⁰ The song begins in Sanskrit, then turns into Bengali and ends with Sanskrit passages again. Several interesting observations can be made of this powerful and awe inspiring song. First, it not only stirs up the imagination of countrymen through the evocation of the bounteous, beautiful image of the mother land that generously nurtures its children, (*sujalang sufalang malayaja sitalang shasyasyamalang mataram*), it puts vigour in the minds of the countrymen by pointing out her immense strength. Secondly, the strength of the mother is derived, not from any particular section of the people, but from the whole body of the population of the country. He draws the picture of a national militia defending the country. The necessary corollary from this is that Bankimchandra advocated the vesting of political power in the hands of the masses. From his essays on Equality and Peasants of Bengal, too, it appears that he was an advocate of democracy, a point of enormous significance in the context of present day India when *Vande Matram* is unfortunately causing divisive dissension. Thirdly, Bankimchandra identifies the individual with the country. The country is described as the life in the body of the inhabitants. The various faculties of men, knowledge, good conduct, love and faith, are described as springing from motherland. Such identification between individual and the greater community was particularly necessary for India, as India had suffered grievously in the past owing to the lack of such a spirit of identity. Fourthly, he raised patriotism to the status of highest of religions by identifying the motherland with *Durga*, *Lakshmi* and *Saraswati*.¹¹ As have been portrayed in the song, the bounty and physical richness of motherland turned into an image of latent strength, derived from the image of *Durga*, the demon slaying goddess, from the numerical strength of the population, compiled from Census statistics, and from the supreme sacred significance that Bankim ascribes to her within the Hindu pantheon: "It is your image that we keep in all temples". The land, for a while, is at one with the icon of *Durga*. The image of *Durga* then quickly and insidiously transforms itself into that of Kali, another manifestation of the Mother goddess, but as a destructive, angry force. It ends with a reiteration of the original sense of bounty and nurture, and an exhortation to

her children to enrich her strength with their own. In between, there is just a suggestion of her present weakness-"with such strength, why are you helpless?"-but the overwhelming sense is one of power. The power is undifferentiated and flows back and forth from the mother to the sons, though it certainly originates with the mother. The song encapsulates, in an unbroken musical flow, the three distinct images of the nurturing mother of the past, the dispossessed mother of the present and the triumphant mother of the future that are developed at much greater length within the novel. Later nationalists clearly saw the demon slayer as pitted against the colonial power and used the song as an abbreviated history of the growth of colonial exploitation and the patriotic struggle for liberation.¹²

Many scholars have commented on Bankim's identification of motherland with a Goddess in *Anandamath*. B. R. Purohit in his able work, *Hindu Revivalism and Indian Nationalism* reiterated that Bankim raised nationalism to the dignity of a religion, and he added a new image, the image of the 'motherland' in the pantheon of the Hindus. He made '*Vande Matram*' an inspiring national hymn.¹³

The influence of the '*Vande Mataram*' song and '*Anandamath*' on the course of our tumultuous freedom struggle has not been of lesser import than the impact of Rousseau's *Social Contract* on the trajectory of the French Revolution.

Bankim not only have ardent admirers, but severest critics as well. Noted social scientists Partha Chatterjee has completely ignored Bankim's novels as important ways of negotiating with political themes.¹⁴ Sudipta Kaviraji, another noted scholar on nationalist discourse has been critical of Bankim's ambivalent approach towards the British rule, and the issue of the turbulent relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India.¹⁵

As pointed out by Meenakshi Mukherjee, this dichotomy in Bankimchandra Chatterjee runs through his entire career. The so-called bourgeois writer understood the plight of the exploited peasants and pleaded for the greater good of the common men. The novelist who understood the anguish of the child-widow (eg, Rohini in *Krishnakanter Will*) also felt the need to kill her as punishment for threatening the stability of the social order. The loyal civil servant of the British made fun of the English officers in *Anandamath* depicting them as comic and venal, and projected the Hindus as capable of vanquishing them. But such ambivalence was perhaps natural in a man in search of understanding, a man who was grappling with the challenge of infusing vigour, vitality and vision in a moribund society, smothered under the oppressive regime of declining Muslim rule and emerging despotic British domination. His ambivalence is a testimony to his willingness to grow, to evolve, and to avoid bigotry. He created a stir, he generated hope and his eternal words, *Vande Mataram*, invoked intense passion for motherland in the hearts of millions, compelling them to come out of the comfort zone of their domestic lives and plunge into the life threatening vortex of the freedom struggle. Posterity will always reverentially remember Bankimchandra for his groundbreaking words. His ambivalence about the troubled relationship among the Hindus and Muslims in particular was testimony to the fact that he was far from a Hindu fanatic, he had genuine empathy for his miserable countrymen of both the communities and he had a vision of a free country where all could flourish.

Interestingly, during the course of freedom struggle, *Vande Mataram* was hardly conceived as a song of Hindu community only. The song came into the limelight for the first time, when it was sung by none other than Rabindranath Tagore in the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress. Tagore was vociferously opposed to jingoistic proclamations and aggressive nationalism and yet he found the song to be a magnificent tribute to motherland. The British soon banned both the novel and the song, an act which had the opposite impact of enhancing the mass appeal of both. The last words of many fallen

revolutionaries, waging a losing battle against the mighty British empire was *Vande Mataram*, an unmistakable sign of the tremendous ideational and emotional of the immortal words created by Bankim. It was taken up as slogans of choice by the likes of Chandrashekhar Azad, Ashfaqullah Khan, Maghfoor Ahmed, Bhagat Singh, Shahnawaz Khan, Maulana Azad, Ramprasad Bismil, and even Mahatma Gandhi, Allama Iqbal and Babasaheb Ambedkar.¹⁶ Reflecting on the appeal of *Vande Mataram*, Mahatma Gandhi, in an article in Harijan dated July 1, 1939 wrote,

“...No matter what its source was and how and when it was composed, it had become a most powerful battle cry among Hindus and Musalmans of Bengal during the partition days. It was an anti-imperialist cry. As a lad, when I knew nothing of Anandamath or even Bankim, its immortal author, *Vande Mataram* had gripped me, and when I first heard it sung it had enthralled me. I associated the purest national spirit with it. It never occurred to me that it was a Hindu song or meant only for Hindus... It stirs to its depth the patriotism of millions in and outside Bengal. Its chosen stanzas are Bengal's gift among many others to the whole nation.”

III

Vande Mataram continued to be a mellifluous, heart warm song for millions of Indians who would be moved by its patriotic fervor even after Independence but its rendition was not viewed as any duty of paramount national importance like the duty of exercising right to vote or to pay taxes until the Sangh Parivar tried to project its chanting as solemn responsibility of all true Indians. The BJP- RSS brigade, buoyed by their electoral success have embarked on an agenda of changing the narrative of progressive, liberal secular ethos and replacing it with ideas of narrow, aggressive and militant nationalism, pivoted around symbols like chants of *Bharat Mata ki Joy* and *Vande Mataram*, *Gauraksha*, (cow protection), *Surya Namaskar* (worshipping Sun God) and so on, with the objective of consolidating Hindu vote bank, and unleashing a reign of majoritarian political domination as well as marginalization and subjugation of various minority groups. The repeated use of hate speeches against members of minority communities, not so adequate attempt to stem the tide of violence perpetrated on them by so called ‘fringe elements’ despite Prime Minister's oft repeated homily about ‘*Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas*’ (development for all) and continuous tirade about the agenda to create a Hindu India through rejuvenation of its past glory, often fictitiously constructed, have vitiated the ideational and social landscape so much that something which was a spontaneous, admired and spirited chant of all right minded Indians now got degenerated into a battle cry smacking of fanaticism and fascist mindset. The diatribes of radicals and bigots on both side of the issue added to the complexities of cauldron when RSS *pracharaks* insisted that all Indians should have no hesitation in chanting *Bharat Mata ki Jay* and *Vande Mataram* and Muslim clerics declared that it implies obeisance to a Mother Goddess which is un-Islamic. Matter came to a head in April 2016 when Lok Sabha MP from Hyderabad and the chief of All India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), Asaduddin Owaisi, declared that he wouldn't chant ‘*Bharat Mata ki jai*’ even if someone held a knife to his throat, thereby providing ammunition to Mohan Bhagwat-led RSS and other leaders from the Hindutva brigade who could conveniently project such aggressive denunciation of commonly revered chants like *Vande Mataram* and *Bharat Mata ki Joy* as definite proof of anti-national mindset. Comments of Owaisi are as regressive as that of the insistence of RSS leaders on the chant as a sure proof of one's nationalist orientation. It only helps to perpetuate the culture of perceived persecution as the majority community projects any refusal to chant *Vande Mataram* and *Bharat Mata ki jai* as indication of disrespect both for the country and sentiments of majority community and the minorities

are made to believe that such imposition is an attempt to obliterate their distinct religious identity. Religious thoughts, as well as patriotic discourses must move with time and keeping in mind the valiant attempt of the founders of our constitution to create a modern rationalist, progressive republic, instead of branding a chant as ultimate proof of nationalist zeal or making it an issue of affront to one's religion, the need of the hour is to focus on a genuine commitment to the welfare of the republic, to socio-economic development of all sections of society irrespective of their beliefs and system of chanting. Perhaps that would be proper justice to Bankim's immortal words through which he exhorted his countrymen to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation. Commitment to the creation of a pluralist, inclusive, heterogeneous India free from obscurantism and attuned to socio-economic progress will be the true worship of our homeland.

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