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The Imagined Community in Bankim Chatterjee's *The Abbey of Bliss*

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Bankim Chatterjee's framework of nationalism in *The Abbey of Bliss*. Bankim's dream of a nation-state for the Hindus is visible in the novel. On the other hand, Bankim's docile position against the British imperialist power is visible too. This paper examines Bankim's ambivalence as a colonial writer. From the postcolonial perspective, this paper tries to interpret Bankim's position. He also gives a framework of community that works for the establishment of the admired nation-state. In this paper, this community is regarded as Bankim's imagined community. The framework of nationalism Bankim provides in the novel is an amalgamation of the European framework and his thoughts. This is why this paper claims his framework is a hybrid one. This paper finds that Bankim's framework has its strengths and weaknesses. This study tries to point out some of these strengths and weaknesses as a model of a nation-state.

Keywords: *Bangladeshi Nationalism, Colonial Ambivalence, Imagined Community, Postcolonial Perspectives.*

Introduction

A blessing for one is a curse for another; the curse fights back and contaminates the blessing as well. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's the "Abbey" of bliss (not the novel but the place which Bankim imagines in his novel *Anandamath* or *The Abbey of Bliss*) manufactures violence. Bliss in violence is an absolute paradox. However, violators every time come with a justification for their violation. Bankim's spokesmen of the Abbey are no exception to that. Bankim imagines a community in his novel *The Abbey of Bliss*. This community includes a fundamentalist religious persona, Satyananda. Interestingly, the fundamentalist, Satyananda, intentionally breaches the fundamentals of Vaishnavism. Bankim's imagined community in this way has its imagined religion. Hinduism is an envelope covering Bankim's own modified version of religion. The inclusion and exclusion of communities are the imagination of the writer.

The Abbey of Bliss is the transcription of Bankim's imagination and thoughts. His imagined community delimits people based on religion. The *children* are citizens of Bankim's imagined nation. His treatment of two major religious groups in the subcontinent is the opposite. The agenda of the *children* is to create a Hindu nation-state, but it can be sensed that not all the Hindus of the subcontinent in Bankim's



imagined community are *children*. Satyananda along with his pupils imagine a community for the Hindus; they expect the Hindus to be part of their community and exclude the Muslims from the community. Bankim Chatterjee's imagination is limited in the sense that he excludes people from his imagined community from their motherland. He treats the Muslims as others. The strength of Bankim's imagined community is that the *children* have a feeling of "deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) which is imposed by his main spokesman Satyananda. The readers of *The Abbey of Bliss* will sense the depth of the comradeship of Satyananda's pupils as these children remain ready to kill as well as to sacrifice their lives, as Anderson also notes in his *Imagined Communities* (7).

The problem with Bankim's imagined community or his dream for a Hindu nation-state is that it does not have the limited sovereignty it needs to have; at the end of the novel, the conversation between Satyananda and the physician reveals much of that. The physician reveals that without the help of the British government, Satyananda and his pupils cannot establish their dream nation-state. That means Bankim's imagined community substantially lacks the quality of being a nation-state because it is not sovereign even if it excludes their imaginary enemies, the Muslims from their map. To exclude the Muslims they need to form an association with the British. Instead of a successful mapping for a nation-state, Bankim's stance is to create a sense of nationalism where religion is a unifying element, an element of division as well. He is successful in showing the implication of nationalism, the formation of an imagined community or an imagined nation; but his imagination of a nation-state is dependent on the British contribution, thus it lacks sovereignty. The point to focus on is that a dependent sovereignty does not exist, and the existence of a dependent sovereignty is an illusion.

This paper aims to look at Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *The Abbey of Bliss* to interpret the strengths and weaknesses of his imagined formation of a community; inclusion of homogenous group and culture, exclusion and alienation of the imagined others, dependence on the imperialist enterprises, religion and its modified political implication, the avoidance of human feelings, and so on are included in this interpretation. Bankim's position, stance, and artistry in the novel *The Abbey of Bliss* as a novelist are also examined in this paper. This paper attempts to answer several questions that may arise in the minds of the readers while reading Bankim's *The Abbey of Bliss*. Fiction and fact are two opposite words. It is Bankim's brilliance that the fiction was accepted as a fact by many Hindu nationalists, and even today this is celebrated as a sacred book by many Hindu nationalists in India. The question to ponder is, why and how after the exclusion of a major portion of people this novel gets a sacred position? Was Bankim successful in speaking out for the Hindus of undivided India? Did Bankim speak for the Hindus or his position was of a docile obedient colonized subject? Does the amalgamation of religion, politics, and nationalism make Bankim a communal writer? Was his stance of excluding the Muslims from his imagined community a demand of time? The ultimate question this paper tries to



answer is whether, was the Rishi Bankim for Hindus a demon of history for the Muslims who had sown the seed of partition of undivided India.

Based on the research questions the paper tries to interpret *The Abbey of Bliss* concentrating on several claims. First, Bankim's imagined community, though is dependently sovereign, has the potential to sow the seed of independence in the mind of the Hindus. Then, Bankim's sense of dependence on the British imperialist power makes him an intermediary and hybrid intellectual. After that, his exclusion of the Muslims gave him a parochial and communal face, which alienated the Muslim community in their motherland. Furthermore, though his thoughts are not free of a colonized mind, he effectively voices out a partial idea of freedom for the citizens of his imagined community. Finally, this paper claims that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *The Abbey of Bliss* influenced the contemporary communal disputes and riots that later led to the partition of the subcontinent into two nation-states, one of which is similar to Bankim's imagined community in the novel.

Method

This is a qualitative study. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *The Abbey of Bliss* (*Anandamath*), translated by Nares Chandra Sen-Gupta is the primary text for this paper (originally published in Bengali in 1882, the English translated version was published in 1906). Besides that, the film adaptation of *Anandamath* directed by Satish Dasgupta named "Ananda Math" (1955) is also considered as the primary data of this research, because the verbal expression depicted in the film adaptation gives more eloquent ideas about Bankim's characterizations.

"Anandamath: A Political Myth" (1982) by Meenakshi Mukherjee, "The Nation and the Community: Hindus and Muslims in the Novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee" (2012) by Ranjana Das and Ranjan Das, "Sakti, Celibacy, and Colonial Politics: Interlocking Themes of the Anandamath and Debi Chaudhuraṇi of Bankimcandra" (2010) by Carl Olson, "Intellectuals in a Colonial Society—a Case Study of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay" (1980) by Amiya Sen, "Birth of a Goddess: 'Vande Mataram', 'Anandamath', and Hindu Nationhood" (2006) by Tanika Sarkar, "Positivism and Nationalism: Womanhood and Crisis in Nationalist Fiction Bankimchandra's Anandmath" (1985) by Jasodhara Bagchi, "Writing the Nation's Destiny: Indian Fiction in English before 1910" (2005) by Alex Tickell, "Revisiting Hindu Nationalism: Perspective of Bankimchandra" (2020) by Sujay Mondal, "Reading Anandamath, Understanding Hinduvta: Postcolonial Literatures and the Politics of Canonization" (2006) by Chandrima Chakraborty, and "'Icon and Mother': An Inquiry into India's National Song" (2008) by Julius J. Lipner are the secondary resources for this research.

This study includes colonial and postcolonial perspectives to interpret Bankim Chatterjee's *The Abbey of Bliss*. His perspective as a colonial subject, his aspiration as a colonized intellectual, and his desire for the colonized subcontinent are speculated in this paper. Besides these, postcolonial prospects are applied to interpret *The Abbey of Bliss* whether Bankim's narrative voice in the novel is parochial, intermediary, and hybrid; or it is a mere voice of imagination that represents his thoughts and no shrewd diplomacy behind that. The interpretation in some sections connects the ideas presented by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* and Rabindranath



Tagore's "Nationalism in India" to throw light on the prospectus of Bankim's imagined community. From a postcolonial point of view, Bankim's relevance with the "Two-nation theory" and the partition of India and Pakistan as two separate nation-states is briefly studied in this paper.

Results and Discussions

Meenakshi Mukherjee in her article "Anandamath: A Political Myth" (1982) notes *Anandamath* as one of the earliest political novels in India. According to her it strongly influenced the nationalist notion in India. Further, she mentions that the novel had caused an awakening in the region which brought forward their "forgotten glory" (903). She emphasizes the point that this novel not only had an appeal in the Bengal but also had an overarching impact all over India. She claims this novel is an admixture of religious and nationalist ideologies that had inspired many of the Indian youth; this novel had an instigating quality that laid the foundation for some "inspired young terrorists" (903). She perfectly mentions the role of the song "Vande Mataram" which had a unifying and motivating effect on the people. This song, according to her, was a fusion where the divine power and motherland were brought together. She pointed out the setting of the novel which was around 1773; in that time according to her nationalism was "an abstract idea" (903) but Bankim was successful in fusing the concept of nationalism in that setting. She mentions Bankim's concern over the misrule of the Muslim administrative bodies. After that, she points out the organized effort of the *children* who treat their motherland as mothers and want to protect their mother from the oppressors. In addition to that, the submissive end dialogues between Satyananda and the physician are noted by Mukherjee, where Bankim indicates that the dream of the formation of a Hindu nation-state would not come true without the intervention of the British imperialist power. She claims the novel is "unsatisfactory" (903) as it shows pure devotion but excludes some basic "human instincts" (903). Furthermore, she claims that the novel was not a piece of historical authenticity but its impact on people was significant. She explains a quotation from Romesh Chandra Dutt and points out Bankim's "ambivalence" (904) of dreams which lingers between the dream of "an independent Hindu India" (904) and the dependence on the "British rule" (904) for the fulfillment of the dream. For his dichotomous position and his nature of attributing the British imperial power, Mukherjee mentions *Anandamath* as a "simplistic work of Hindu propaganda" (905) at the end of her article.

Ranjana Das and Ranjan Das in their article named "The Nation and the Community: Hindus and Muslims in the Novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee" (2012) mention the 'self' representation of colonial "subject intellectual class" (578). They further note Bankim's position as a colonial intellect who wanted to "reclaim the Indian past from colonial appropriation" (578) and demanded the revival of the autonomous history of India. They note Bankim's sense of nationhood in his novels in connection to culture; where Bankim had given the motherland "feminine qualities"; with its "maternal instincts" and "vulnerability" but maintained the extreme violence



which is inseparable form of some Hindu goddess (perhaps like Durga or Kali). The researchers justifiably point out Bankim's "preoccupation" related to the representations of the Hindus and the Muslims in his novels (578). They also noted Bankim's "understandings of the nation and the community" about the cultural understandings and tension of power between the Hindus and the Muslims (578-579). The researchers claim that Bankim became "dogmatic" in the later phases of his writings where the gist of his writings was to support and promote Hinduism (579). Then the researchers make a bold claim that it was not the fact that Bankim only promoted Hinduism in his later writings like *Anandamath*, but even in his earlier writings like *Durgeshnandini* Bankim had represented the Hindus as 'self' and the Muslims as others (579). The researchers then noted Bankim's dichotomous representation of the Hindus and the Muslims where Bankim condemns the Muslim rulers for "cultural ruin and degeneration" of the Hindus (582). According to the researchers, Bankim surely represented the Muslims as an opposition to the people who worshipped their motherland as a goddess. Thus, in *Anandamath*, Satyananda and his pupils (the *children*) show pure disgust for the Muslim rulers. In addition to that, Bankim's ambivalent position as dependent on British wisdom to restore the glory of Hinduism is noted by the researchers.

Carl Olson in the article "Sakti, Celibacy, and Colonial Politics: Interlocking Themes of the *Anandamath* and Debi Chaudhuraṇi of Bankimcandra" (2010) like the previously noted scholars mentions the cultural and religious tension and power relation between the Hindus and the Muslims as the point of narrative tension in Bankim's *Anandamath*. He praises Bankim's use of the motherland as a source of power, the power which is creative and destructive at once. He notes that Bankim represented the Hindus as oppressed by both the Muslim rulers and the British colonial power (285). Another important point he raises is that the setting of the novel which was in the 1770s, when the "Muslims were in control of Bengal and the British were mostly functioning as tax collectors" (286). Olson points out the feelings of the monks who had prejudiced the Muslims as robbers and explicitly blamed the Muslims for turning "the land into a wasteland" (286). Furthermore, Olson mentions that the monks who thought that they were deprived of their rights and the cause behind their misery was the oppression of the Muslim rulers, dismissed the way of peace and took the path of violence to restore their rights and to restore the glory of the motherland. He rightly pointed out the vision of Satyananda about Mahendra; according to Satyananda, Mahendra can contribute significantly to restoring the glory of the mother with his wealth; Mahendra's can be used for making weapons for the *children* who would restore their mother's glory by "destroying the foe" (286). Then he further notes the importance of unified faith to restore the mother's glory instead of individual devotion. The importance of the song "Vande Mataram" as a unifying element is noted by him as well. The suppository exclusion of the Muslims from Bankim's community is noted as an act of purification of "Mother India" by the *children* (289). After that, Olson notes how the *children* of *Anandamath* rejected their social identity (though social desires are significantly visible in the actions of Jivananda, Bhavananda, and Shanti) as a means of devotion (292).



Amiya Sen in his article named “Intellectuals in a Colonial Society—a Case Study of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay” (1980) mentions Bankim as the most studied colonial intellectual after Rabindranath Tagore. He rejects the concept of two different sides of Bankim as an ‘earlier’ Bankim and a ‘later’ Bankim (753). He justifiably notes the “ambivalence” of Bankim in his works by the involvement of Bankim’s writings in dual linearity like “war and peace”, “faith and disillusionment”, and “rebellion and submission” (753-754). Hereafter, Sen attempts to connect Bankim’s personal life with his image as a novelist. According to Sen, Bankim as an administrative working under the British colonial power had a sense of “loyalty and discipline” towards the British, on the other hand, the writer in Bankim was “inspired by human passion and lofty idealism,” thus the ambivalence in Bankim as a writer was the result of such an “innate contradiction” (755). Sen claims Bankim’s *Anandamath* as an example of his “loyalty” as Sen mentions Bankim’s emphasis on the point that the British imperialist power could save Bengal from “anarchy” (755-756). He also mentions another novel named *Mrinalini* (1869) by Bankim where he mentioned the “despotic Muslim rule” (756). Significantly, Sen brings out some differences between Bankim’s first edition of *Anandamath* and its later editions. As Sen writes, in the first edition the physician tries to refrain Satyananda from any further bloodshed as the vision of a Hindu nation-state is not feasible, but in the later edition, the physician tells Satyananda that the vision can be taken forward by the intervention of the British imperialist power. This docility of Bankim has been noted as his limitation as a novelist by Sen (756). Bankim surrenders his vision to British rule and mentions that the people cannot get free from that grip of British rule unless they made themselves perfect “in knowledge, virtue, and power” (757); the promotion of violence and then such a docile submission make it challenging to locate Bankim’s position as a writer.

Tanika Sarkar in her article “Birth of a Goddess: ‘Vande Mataram’, ‘Anandamath’, and Hindu Nationhood” (2006) notes the issues which divert the song from its patriotic meaning to a “militaristic” sense which are noted in the unsung part of the song as the national song of India, but it has significant linearity with the narrative tension of the novel *Anandamath* (3959). She notes Bankim’s attempt in that novel was to portray “the idea of the Hindu nation and an altogether new Hindu goddess” (3959). Sarkar then notes Benedict Anderson’s commentary about the “structural connection between the modern novel and the imagined nation” and adds that Bankim in his novel *Anandamath* had portrayed a nation that was “unimaginable” at that time (3959). Then she points out Bankim’s ambiguity in the novel, like the previously noted scholars. She adds that the several editions and different conclusions in *Anandamath* made Bankim’s explanation in that novel “confusing and mysterious” (3960). Then she points out the position of the “puppet Nawab” whom Bankim rebukes in the novel and alleges him for the subsequent famine (3960). In addition to that, the misrule of the Nawab was responsible for the Hindu-Muslim dispute, though the common Muslim community was also the victim of that famine. Sarkar points out Bankim’s elimination of “the role of Muslim fakirs” in the narrative development of *Anandamath* (3960). Furthermore, Sarkar recognizes *Anandamath* not as a novel to represent the history of



the fraternity of Hindus, but as propaganda to instigate people. She justifiably points out the nature of the colonizer-colonized relationship; where the part of the colonized raised the desire for “internal colonialism” (3961). Further, she mentions that except in the first edition of *Anandamath* in no other edition, there were any significant anti-colonial notes; even the note in the first edition was “an oblique reference” (3961). Then, she criticizes Bankim’s *Anandamath* as an “elusive” novel noting the discrepancy between different editions; those would have done “under political pressure” (3962).

Jasodhara Bagchi in her article named “Positivism and Nationalism: Womanhood and Crisis in Nationalist Fiction Bankimchandra’s *Anandmath*” (1985) writes that *Anandamath* represents Bankim’s crisis of “national consciousness.” Bankim’s duality as a colonial subject and as a colonial writer has been extracted by Bagchi, where she discusses two quotations by Bankim. In one of them, Bankim had commented on his position as a colonial subject, and as the colonial subject he was not an English hater and he had praised the greatness of English as a language; on the other hand, he had expressed his sense of realization that Bangla as a language could touch the people of the Bengal more than English (58-59). According to Bagchi, Bankim’s expression does show some signs of nationalism, but it is not a fully flourished version of national consciousness. Furthermore, while commenting on Bankim’s *Anandamath* and other later novels, Bagchi points out Bankim’s tendency to interpret history in a “vengeful” and mythic way which was confusing; however, *Anandamath* according to Bagchi has some qualities of a “Positivist Utopia” (60). As other scholars discussed previously, Bagchi also points out the overarching effect of the song “Vande Mataram” both as the essence of the novel and as a mantra of Hindu nationalism. Like Meenakshi Mukherjee, Bagchi also notes Romesh Chandra Dutt, who commented on *Anandamath* and “its astonishing political consequences”; Dutt also pointed out the submissive nature of Bankim to the British power but the novel had a significant role in restoring the glory of “Hindu kingdom in India” (60-61). Bagchi later justifies Bankim’s emotion that though limited Bankim attempted to restore the glory of the Hindu kingdom which he worshipped as a goddess; the partial restoration of the threatened glory shows Bankim’s national consciousness (61) (limited one). Bankim’s organized brotherhood of the *children* is also a note of “absolute submission” (61) to mother or motherland or goddess, writes Bagchi.

In the article “Writing the Nation’s Destiny: Indian Fiction in English before 1910” (2005), Alex Tickell gives an account of the writings of Indian intellectuals of the colonial period. According to him before the introduction of formative nationalist novels by the Indian writers; primordial nationalism, cultural stigma, “communal racial identity” and political issues related to these were some primary elements of many Indian fiction that were in English or were translated into English (525). Tickell concerning Jawaharlal Nehru mentions “Hindu nationalism as an undeniable but redundant part of the nation’s ideological maturing” (525). He further refers to Nehru and quotes Nehru’s concern that mere Hindu nationalism would restrict the path of “larger nationalism” (525). Then, Tickell points out the connection between history, literature, nationalism, and Indian intellectuals writing in English or their works translated into English. In relevance to the account of different writers, Tickell also points out Bankim and his novel *Anandamath*. Tickell notes this novel as an account of



Bengali nationalism. He further quotes Partha Chatterjee to refer to Bankim's model of nationalism in *Anandamath*, "a project of national-cultural regeneration in which the intelligentsia leads and the nation follows" (529). Furthermore, Tickell points out that in Bankim's *Anandamath* the Sannyasi rebellion and brotherhood among the Hindus played a crucial role in the narrative development but the "Puranic" notes of devotion are also an important part of the narrative (529). Tickell by noting Chetan Bhatt points out that, Bankim's style of using the Puranic notation was his avoidance of the "Western metaphysical model" (530). Further, Tickell writes, "The elitism intrinsic in much early nationalist thought is also evident in Bankim's call for an intellectual and moral vanguard that would supervise the nation's rebirth" (537). Tickell's notes on Nehru and Bankim are useful, but he did not point out the contradiction between these two visions. This study "*The Abbey of Bliss: Bankim's Imagined Community*" is attempting to throw light on the point.

Sujay Mondal in the research article named "Revisiting Hindu Nationalism: Perspective of Bankimchandra" (2020) notes that before Bankim's proses and novels, nationalism in India was an unknown phenomenon. He notes the influence of Western education on Bankim. Mondal mentions how Bankim incorporated politics and revolution in his works where he expressed nationalism as a means of the "rise of India" (19). Mondal states that, the concept of nationalism in Europe and the concept of nationalism in India are not similar. Like the other noted scholars, he claims the importance of the song "Vande Mataram" as the essence of the novel. Further, Mondal raises some questions regarding the connection between nationalism and religion. He claims that Bankim was influenced by the ideas of utilitarianism and the French Revolution which played important roles in the formation of Bankim's political thoughts (22). According to Mondal, Bankim, later in his career, had accepted the limitation of utilitarianism (22). Mondal notes that, the apparent failure of Ram Mohan's effort to reform the movement led Bankim to think in a different way to "mix up religion with the sentiment of nationalism (23). Thus, religion became a unifying element to bring people together and arouse a sense of nationhood among them. According to Mondal, Bankim's concentration was to focus on true religion and to use its essence as a constructive element of national identity. Mondal tries to bring out the humanitarian side of Bankim who had a sense of love for other societies as well. However, Mondal refutes his argument by quoting another note from Bankim, where Bankim said, "We shall inflict misery on others to bring good to our nation" (25). Then, Mondal raises questions about Bankim's ambivalence between a Hindu nationalist and a humanist. Concerning Bankim's *Anandamath*, Mondal tries to say that Bankim was not an anti-Muslim or communal person; but Bankim's distaste was for a portion of the Muslim community whose misrule created misery in the inhabitants of India.

Chandrima Chakraborty in an online article named "Reading *Anandamath*, Understanding Hinduvta: Postcolonial Literatures and the Politics of Canonization" (2006) notes Bankim's *Anandamath* as the initiation of anti-colonial expression in colonized India. "Vande Mataram" as an unofficial anthem played a politically constructive role in colonized India where there was recurrent invocation of the Hindu



ideologies, writes Chakraborty. According to her, the novel was a note of self-representation to the British imperialist power.

Furthermore, in the article, she brings Edward Said's vision of translation which was a method of domesticating the Orient with "European learning" (sec. 1). Bankim's *Anandamath* was not written in English, but in Bengali vernacular which significantly can "redefine the colonized subject" by removing the Orientalist myths and by creating a sense of national identity (sec. 1). She claims Rabindranath Tagore's visions about nationalism are in a contrast with Bankim's one. She refers to Tagore and writes for Tagore that "nation building" was a "colonial activity" that "erases local cultures and promotes a homogenous national culture" (sec. 1), which can involve acts of violence as well. In the next section of her article Chakraborty writes about the education system of colonized India; and notes Bankim as a byproduct of the English-led education and employment systems. She further mentions the depiction of the Muslims and the British in *Anandamath* as "alien invaders" (sec. 2). According to her Bankim's representation of the power of militancy is a protest against the Western representation of India as a powerless land of fragility. Bankim's narration shows the agenda of Satyananda and the *children* is to revive Hinduism, but it was not an attempt to revive the glorious past of Hinduism; Bankim's vision was a modified version that better suited that time, adds Chakraborty. What is problematic with her article is that she noticed the anti-colonial aspect of Bankim, but his submissive nature at the end of *Anandamath* also shows his fragility as a colonial writer.

The strength of Julius J. Lipner's article named "'Icon and Mother': An Inquiry into India's National Song" (2008) is besides giving the historical background of the song "Vande Mataram" he includes the contemporary debates related to this song. He points out that India which is constitutionally a secular state has a National Song and a National Anthem which have different official uses (26). He rightly mentions the "religious and political controversy" that is related to the Indian National Song "Vande Mataram" (26). Furthermore, he mentions Bankim's *Anandamath* as a "religio-political" novel; the hymn "Vande Mataram" is the glorification of the motherland as a goddess, and the children of the mother remain in a state of frequent rebellion and war against the alliance of Muslim and British rule (26). He perfectly points out that the portion which is the National Song of India does not contain anything directly related to the goddess. He points out the background of Bankim's narrative where a condition of "lawlessness" was prominent because there was no clearly defined authority in the era where Bankim set his narrative, but misrule of the Muslim-British alliance had a significant role in the famine which Bankim used as his background (29). According to Lipner, "Bankim has iconized the land. The *santāns* are Children of the Goddess as also of the motherland, and the motherland is an embodiment of the Goddess in some way" (30). Then, Lipner brings out a conversation between Bhavananda and Mahendra where Bhavananda boldly claims only the land is their mother. While considering the whole verse "Vande Mataram" Lipner finds it as a clear indication of "religious overtones" which represent the motherland as a "deity" (33). In the later part of the article, Lipner notes Bankim's two-way use of "Vande Mataram," one is, of course, the song which is the soul of the novel, but another use of this as a "password," so "Vande Mataram" became both "song and slogan" (38). At the end of



the article, Lipner notes Jinnah's discontent with this song, as well as the discontent of the Muslim League (42).

From the analysis of these articles, this study attempts to connect the ideas of Bankim's community portrayed in his novel *The Abbey of Bliss*. Bankim's portrayed community has both its strengths and weaknesses; that community also has some characteristics to be called a nation; some ideological values in that imagined community can be differently interpreted by different theoretical and humanitarian perspectives. Based on the listed works of the scholars this study tries to establish the noted claims while evaluating the framework of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's imagined community in *The Abbey of Bliss*.

Bankim's imagined community which he dreamt of in *The Abbey of Bliss* was a byproduct of his ambivalent thoughts. His aspiration for independence is visible as he dreamt of a nation-state for the Hindus, but his apprehension of the inability of not accomplish it without the interference of British imperialist power shows his dependency on his dream of independence. This duality takes the novel in a position where Satyananda's pupils are fighting against the Muslim-British alliance, but for the accomplishment of Bankim's imagination nation-state Satyananda and his pupils, the *children* of the mother-goddess, are dependent on the British power. They are fighting against a force and expecting help from the same force. The purpose of Bankim's dream community becomes blurry. It seems in the novel that Satyananda and his pupils are never against the British, they are against the Muslims, and then the later part of the novel the conversation between Satyananda and the physician reveals that they aspire to a Hindu-British alliance. Bankim's position against the British power keeps shifting, and different editions of the novel also reveal the truth. In the earlier version, Bankim was not apologetic towards the imperialist power, but in the later versions, his tone was apologetic towards the British. This shows Bankim's ambivalence as a colonial subject. He was working as a government employee under the British government, he was writing in the colonial time, and he had aspirations of building a nation; this proves his urge to attain an independent nation-state for the Hindus. However, he was also aware of the fact that his aspiration was imprisoned by the colonizers, thus he could not directly go against them. Aspiration and imprisonment both were true for Bankim and thus the novel and its different versions show his ambivalence.

Bankim was successful in creating an imagined opposition for his imagined community. As it was impractical to make the British imperialist power the opposition, Bankim found the Muslims as a perfect opposition. The misrule of the Muslims, who were in different administrative roles under British power, was also questionable. That was why Bankim found them as a suitable opposition and it was a demand of time. The Hindu-nationalist groups adored *Anandamath* as a sacred book because Bankim sowed the seed of the dream of a nation-state for them, which excluded the misruling Muslims from its framework. A handful of Muslims were responsible for the ongoing misrule in colonized India, but Bankim was successful in making the Muslims "Others," both in his novel and in the sentiment of many Hindu groups. The Muslims living in



colonized India spoke the same language; their skin was the same as the Hindus, but Bankim created a division amongst them by politicizing religion. The true Others were the colonizers, but Bankim portrayed half of the self (the Muslims) as Others. Many Muslim groups also misrecognized who were the true others and they started fighting against the Hindus. Bankim, as an intellectual of his time, did not know who was the true others, but he intentionally represented the Muslims as others which shows his docility as a colonial intellectual. His position in the novel shows his intermediacy of thoughts. Whether he was a parochial writer or not? The answer depended on the readers. For some readers he was a Rishi, he was a villain. Bankim's standpoints in the novel show his parochial and communal thinking. However, even if some readers contemplate his narrow thoughts, a broader underlying thought is also visible in the novel. That was his dream for a nation-state and his implementation of the framework of the nation-state in a historical setting when the idea of nationalism was unknown in the subcontinent. That made the novel more acceptable for the readers of his time because Bankim was probably successful in portraying the demands of many Hindu groups in the novel.

The framework of nationalism Bankim gives in the novel is partially borrowed from Europe and the implementation of his thoughts. That means, this framework of nationalism also shows his duality as a colonized subject. In addition to that, this implementation of dual thoughts in a single framework makes Bankim's framework of nationalism a hybrid one. Bankim borrowed the European framework of nationalism but ignored that European nationalism was a political agenda, the purpose of which was to delimit the authority of religion. Bankim's framework of nationalism also showed a political agenda, but it was based on religion and the politicization of religion, where maxims of religions were broken to establish the agenda of nationalism. Bankim's hybrid framework also exhibited his ambivalence, firstly because he included religion in his framework it became a hybrid framework, secondly religion was included in a manipulated form so it did not remain a religious framework as well. This is to say that, Bankim neither included religion in his framework in a proper manner nor excluded it. This shows Bankim's ambivalent position as a writer within his framework. His duality is also visible in his attitude towards the motherland which he regarded as a goddess. Whether he was a nationalist or a patriot, his attitude towards his imagined opposition makes this question problematic. If he and his mouthpiece Satyananda regarded the land as mother, all the communities living in the land should be their brothers because they all were born in the same land. No, that was not Bankim's position; he regarded the land as a mother but not all the children of the mother as part of the brotherhood he admired in his imagined community. This shows ambivalence in Bankim. The probable reason is, that there is a difference between mother and goddess. Bankim in his imagined community brought both mother and goddess together to describe motherland. The probable position of the Muslims was they could regard the land as mother, but like *children* (Satyananda's pupils) they could not regard the motherland as goddess. This stance of Bankim was commendable. Uniting the Hindu people and excluding the Muslims, Bankim also played the 'divide and rule' game for the establishment of his imagined community. Whether Bankim was a nationalist or patriot remains a matter of debate. However, he gave a



framework of nationalism and included devotion in that framework. His position as a writer shows duality as well in this aspect. Bankim's framework in the novel shows some sort of devotion but there is also the greed of accumulating power. Devotion towards the motherland is an abstract patriotic act, on the other hand, the greed for power which Satyananda's pupils work for seems an extreme nationalist act. The readers may find Bankim's duality here as well.

Bankim's imagined framework of nationalism has both its strengths and weaknesses. In *The Abbey of Bliss*, there remain people from the homogenous group who are from the same religion. They are committed to avoiding all earthly happiness (though some of the characters break their promise and remain ready to repent with their lives). They are always ready to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their motherland. They can kill anyone for its sake. Violence is their power, and as the history of the world says, most of the time nation nation-building involves bloodshed, so that is the strength of Bankim's imagined community. The *children* are united and ready for every occasion of bloodshed. In addition to that, they are working for a common goal of building a separate nation-state for the Hindus. Bankim gives his community its imagined opposition, the Muslim-British alliance (actually targeting the Muslims, as we can see in the final part of the novel where the Physician and Satyananda in the conversation reveal that with the intervention of British power, they can regain their lost glory). As a political agenda, this imagined opposition strengthens the formation of Bankim's imagined community. Another strong point of Bankim's imagined community is its limited sovereignty. The community thus has some quality for the formation of the nation. This community is sovereign within its territory, the Abbey. Within it, their leader, Satyananda, makes its constitution, and all the people of the community are obliged to abide by that. This imagined community also has established its economy. All the *children* are committed to spending all of their properties for the sake of their motherland till their aim of establishing a nation-state gets fulfilled. Robbery and the spoils robbed from the battles also provide this community with money and precious elements. Moreover, rich people like Mahendra are also included in that community who are committed to spending all their properties for the sake of their motherland. This makes the economy of the imagined community stronger and provides it with the chance to manufacture ammunition for its further battles. Satyananda, like the political leaders, shows the character of nationalists who with their eloquent speech persuade people to sacrifice their family life, wealth, and lives, where the underlying reason behind this is greed for power. They manipulate people to maintain their position as leaders but hardly take part in any direct battle. They observe the battle and change their position with time. As in the case of Satyananda and the physician, their pupils' battles are against the Muslim-British alliance, and in the later part, the two leaders show their obedience to the British power. The conversation between Satyananda and the physician shows when the physician says, "Your mission has been fulfilled; you have done good to your Mother and established the English rule. Give up fighting..." (200). When Satyananda replies that he wants to continue the battle against the enemy, the physician replies,



“Where is the enemy now? There is none. The English is a friendly power, and no one, in truth, has the power to come off victorious in a fight with the English” (200). Satyananda and the physician are more like the political leaders who instigate people in the name of nationalism. On the other hand, people like Jivananda, Bhavananda, Mahendra, and Santi are more like patriots where their main reason for sacrificing and killing people or investing in violence is not the underlying power related to it, but their true devotion. Bankim, like the political leaders, maintained his tone of violence towards the Muslims and docility toward the British imperialist power together. He instigated both the Hindu people and the Muslim people against each other; but as the political leaders hardly participated in any battle, they just instigated people with their speech, Bankim did it with his book. The most wonderful and important unifying element as previously noted in Bankim’s imagined community is the inclusion of the song ‘Vande Mataram’. Benedict Anderson also noted the unifying quality of the anthem. Anderson writes, “Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody” (145). Likewise, ‘Vande Mataram’ works as the anthem of Bankim’s imagined community. This song keeps reminding the *children* about their duty to the motherland and what their goal is. It is thematically and emotionally a strong connecting element in Bankim’s imagined community.

Bankim’s imagined community has its weaknesses as well. As previously noted this community has its limited sovereignty within the ‘Abbey’, but later in the novel the submissive nature that Bankim exhibits, shows the dependence on this sovereignty. Dependent sovereignty makes Bankim’s framework of nationalism weak. The conversation between Satyananda and the physician shows a tone of helpless surrender. Then comes the humanitarian side of Bankim, which can be questioned because of his attitude towards the Muslims. Bankim alienates the Muslim people from his imagined community which shows his lower human instinct. Bankim’s idea is the implementation of violence for the establishment of a Hindu nation-state, but as we see in the novel in certain parts because of the chaotic situation created by the *children*, violence is not limited between the Hindus and the Muslims. Even the Hindus were robbing other Hindus. The fire of violence in the novel is not inter-communal, sometimes it is intra-communal as well. In addition to that, Bankim’s book had created real riots in that time’s colonized India, so likewise the novel there were inter-communal riots. Bankim’s book had sowed the seed of violence which later came into reality as the partition of India.

Moreover, Bankim’s imagined community created the chance for an imagined community for the Muslims, and both of these imaginations were later transformed into truth. The bliss of the Hindus became a curse for the Muslims, the Muslims fought back, and there was a division. If today’s context is taken into account, if in a hypothetical situation, the partition had not taken place, and had the undivided India got independence, the undivided India could have been one of the most powerful states of today’s time because of its vast land and marine territory. Going back to the weakness of Bankim’s imagined community, Bankim indeed alienated the Muslims in



his imagined community, but he also rephrased the historical background where he set the framework of his imagined nation. He ignored the role of the Fakirs in the Monks' Rebellion and only signified the roles of Sannyasis. Bankim's imagination thus modified history. Besides these, it modified religion as well. Love and sympathy are overlooked maxims of Vaishnavism in Bankim's framework. There is no love for the Muslims for obvious reasons, but the *children* who are the citizens of Bankim's imagined community are not allowed to enjoy the love of family life. This is of course bizarre that one is making a framework of bliss and excluding love and sympathy, the essential parts of humanity from the framework. Rabindranath Tagore in his "Nationalism in India" writes, "Each individual has his self-love. Therefore, his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help" (24). If compared to Bankim's idea, Bankim's imagination puts his self-interest in the center. His instinct for violence shown in the novel is brute and it excludes the higher instincts of humans. Even if someone claims that Bankim's framework is as wonderful as framework nationalism, Bankim's imagination is philosophically poor.

His parochial and communal face are noteworthy elements of the novel, but his imagination which alienated the Muslims from their motherland, also created a counter-imagination, and the formation of two nation-states was the result of this imagination and counter-imagination. It shows that Bankim as an intellect assumed a partition nearly sixty-five years before the actual one, and his imagination and assumption came true. Thus, it can be boldly claimed that Bankim as a thinker could think ahead of time and his thought was not confined within the thought, it was spoken (through the novel) and later came into reality. This is not even the full scenario; *Anandamath* was adored as a sacred book in the past by many Hindu nationalists, and even in this present time many Hindu groups adore this book as a sacred book. There can be several reasons behind that. Even after the partition, of India and Pakistan, none of the states was purely a nation-state. There always remained people of different religions. Religion is still in today's world sometimes used politically, and Bankim's idea is very similar to that. In Bankim's time, the novel spoke for Hindus, who were dominated by the administration of the Muslim-British alliance. In the present time, the novel speaks for those Hindus who want to dominate or in an exaggerated manner eliminate the Muslims from their territorial border. Bankim blended some facts, some moderated history, and some manipulated maxims of religion, and presented them in a fiction; and successfully imposed that fiction as a fact in the mind of some readers.

Bankim's framework is half-borrowed from Europe, and he shows his submissive nature in the novel, it was effective as the contemporary readers responded to it whether positively or negatively. This means Bankim was successful in creating a voice (narrative voice) that reached people. Even if he was a colonized subject, he had a voice to touch or burn people's hearts. Nevertheless, his voice was unquestionably effective and echoes of his voice are alive even in the present day.



Conclusion

Nationalism itself is problematic and there is no universally acknowledged definition of it. Bankim's framework of nationalism portrayed in the novel thus can be questioned; the construction of the plot of this novel can be questioned; however, his framework was a demand of time and he perfectly met that demand. Directly blaming (or praising) Bankim for the partition of India is not an accurate idea, but the readers can assume that Bankim was one of the earliest introducers of the Two-nation Theory. In *The Abbey of Bliss*, he shows his dream of independence, on the other hand, he shows some signs of a docile colonized subject. Thus, this novel remains ambiguous, and the readers find signs of Bankim's ambivalence as a colonial writer. His docile position in the novel shows some qualities of intermediary intellectuals as well like those of Macaulay's children, not totally but partially. Again, the framework of community and nation-building that he exhibits in the novel is half-European and half of his imagination. This framework shows some qualities of European nationalism, some elements of Bankim's understanding as an intellectual, and some elements of him as a by-product of colonial education. This is why his framework seems a hybrid framework where different elements are incorporated, somewhere in a synchronized manner and somewhere in an unsynchronized manner.

Bankim's clear intention in the novel is his dream of a Hindu nation-state, but apart from that everything in the novel is ambiguous. Bliss and violence, freedom and subjugation, animosity, and dependence, strength and fragility, and his changing positions in the novel like an amphibian are some noteworthy elements in the novel. Bankim portrayed violence in the novel but his path was a "literate art" (Pratt 37) to reach his readers. Bankim, in his time, had taken full advantage of print capitalism and successfully spread his agenda. Bankim wrote *Anandamath* in a manner that easily conveyed the message to the readers. For some readers, it was an agenda, and for others it was propaganda. Through his artistry he created both a party in his support and an opposition as well, thus his literate art was political as well. Whether the novel had any literary value or not, it created "contact zones" (Pratt 34), where the clash of fiction was replicated in a real scenario between the Hindus and the Muslims of that time's undivided India. Whether the readers regard Bankim as a Rishi or as a villain, he was successful in presenting his thoughts through his narration. However, it is true that in his novel he has presented an example of degenerated humanity in some instances, but history shows many instances of bloodshed for nationalist thoughts. Political alienation of religious or ethnic groups is even true in today's world. To conclude, Bankim's ambivalence and hybridity of his nationalist framework can be questioned, but his quality as an influencer is unquestionably noteworthy.

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