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## The Genealogy of Cultural Nationalism in India: A Critical Intellectual History of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's Nationalist Thought

**Raju Sarder**

Post-Graduate Scholar,  
School of Global Studies,  
Central University of Kerala,  
Periyar (Kerala, India)

E-mail: [rsarder624@gmail.com](mailto:rsarder624@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper examines the critical intellectual history of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's nationalist thought. It argues that Chattopadhyay's nationalist thought did not originate solely as a reaction against colonial domination of the British Empire in India. Instead, it's a complex synthesis of various ideological strands such as indigenous socio-religious culture and colonial knowledge system, especially Orientalism and Utilitarianism. While placing Chattopadhyay in the context of the socio-political and cultural milieu of the so-called 'Bengal Renaissance', this paper explores various intellectual and cultural underpinnings of the advent of a unified national consciousness embedded in communal historical narratives constructed by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. This paper, while utilising a historical-analytical and textual method, critically explores how Chattopadhyay provided an epistemological foundation to construct a unified and monolithic national identity of India and its communalistic implications in the intellectual history of Indian nationhood. This paper also examines Chattopadhyay's epistemological project of unifying Indian identity by utilising his literary works on historical fiction and its implications on vulnerable social intersections, such as women and non-Indic religious minorities, especially Muslims.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Nationalism, Intellectual History, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Nationalist Thought, Colonial Knowledge Production

### **Introduction:**

The emergence of a nationalist consciousness embedded in India's cultural and socio-religious traditions in nineteenth century colonial India was not a simple reaction against colonial rule but was a nuanced ideological synthesis between indigenous socio-cultural traditions and post-Enlightenment Western ideological tools, such as Orientalist, Utilitarian, and Evangelical thought. At this transformative juncture, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) stands as one of the most significant figures whose impactful philosophical and literary contributions effectively provided the

foundational structure and essential philosophical tools for the Indian cultural and religious nationalism based on the Hindu socio-religious cultural traditions and Western Orientalist and Utilitarian narratives. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was a career civil servant in the colonial British government and occupied a highly liminal space, which possessed an 'unhappy consciousness' for being a 'subaltern intellectual' of a colonised state, who was simultaneously a product of European Western education and culture and one of the aggressive critics of its often totalizing Ethnocentric claims (Mondal, 2024, pp. 140-146).

Additionally, even though most of the Chattopadhyay's literary and philosophical works effectively moved beyond just mere addressing of political grievances to the British colonial administration to construct a spiritual and cultural sovereignty which sought to reclaim and establish a unified and monolithic Indian self-based on its own traditional socio-religious and cultural traditions, which is free from the epistemological and ontological categories of the coloniser. However, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay effectively utilised many European Orientalist narratives and Utilitarian ideological tools to construct a national monolithic identity of India, which was deeply embedded in the religious and cultural traditions of Hindus, the majority religious community in the Indian Subcontinent. While doing this, Chattopadhyay used many exclusionary ideological tools propounded by the early Orientalist scholarship of the nineteenth century, such as a deep and antagonistic Orientalist binary between 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' cultural traditions. He also used the Orientalist narrative of the hierarchy between socio-religious traditions in the Indian subcontinent. Which envisages the scriptural Vedic Sanskrit Brahminical 'Hinduism' was the most 'pure' religious tradition in the Indian Subcontinent, and other Shramanic non-Brahminical subaltern within and outside of the 'Hindu fold' as 'degenerated forms' of its Vedic Sanskrit 'pure' cultural tradition and racialisation of the Muslims in India as the religion of 'barbaric' medieval invaders. Furthermore, Chattopadhyay also used the Utilitarian account of India's history, *The History of British India*, published in 1817 by the British colonial historian James Mill. In which Mill had explicitly communalised Indian history by dividing historical epochs along religious lines (Kaviraj, 1995) explicitly.

### **The Significant Historical Juncture of the 'Bengal Renaissance':**

The socio-political milieu of the nineteenth century colonial Bengal rightly served as the primary catalyst for the construction of the modern Indian self by the synthesis of traditional socio-religious culture and the colonial project of knowledge production, deeply embedded in Orientalist and Utilitarian ideologies. This historical juncture is often termed the so-called Bengal Renaissance. This was identified by an intense civilizational exchange between the traditional society of the subcontinent and Western European values such as Orientalism, Utilitarianism and classical liberalism, through the colonial Western educational system in India (Kopf, 2023, pp. 1-21). In this liminal epoch, the Bengali

'Vadralok' or the English-educated, tiny social cleavage found themselves in a paradoxical situation. Even though this Bengali 'Vadralok' community was the substantial beneficiary of the colonial English rule, they were facing enormous racial arrogance and Bureaucratic discrimination at this juncture, which ignited a sense of disdain in them for the British colonial rule in India. But it is important to note that this disdain was not coming from a normative or moral standing against the exploitative colonial rule, but rather for their social and material class interest (Sarkar, 1971, pp. 1-34).

Additionally, this phenomenon of the synthesis of traditional and Western culture into the 'modern' Indian identity was often misconceived and misrepresented as a 'renaissance' by most of the scholars of South Asian Studies and Modern Indian History in Indian and Western academia. However, for having 'renaissance' in any society, there must be a deep-rooted and widespread transformation of the society in the spheres of art, science, economy, religion and other social structures. But the so-called 'Bengal renaissance' in the epoch of the nineteenth century remained a very restricted change confined to a narrow, English-educated urban upper-caste Bengali middle class, which is also known as "Vadralok Shreni" (Sarkar, 2000, pp. 1-8). Various scholars, such as Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee and others from the Subaltern Studies Collective, envisaged that this so-called 'renaissance' in nineteenth-century Bengal was a cultural and epistemological project of a narrow elite class to forge modern Indian identity, which was forged by the colonial Western educational system and colonial institutions such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Which is, by any sphere, not a cultural awakening by the broader masses, but rather an elite-driven intellectual endeavour (Chatterjee, 1993, pp. 3-13). Additionally, one of the major criticisms of the so-called 'Bengal Renaissance' is that it was by no means characterised by the broad social depth and inclusivity of diverse identities. Interestingly, even though the socio-religious and cultural reform movements associated with the prominent figures such as Raja Rammohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar were enormously progressive for the society and epoch they were in. However, the impact of their progressive reforms, such as the abolition of Sati, widow Remarriage, women's education, etc., remained restricted to only the upper caste Hindu society, excluding other socio-religious marginalised sections such as the so-called 'lower caste' and other vulnerable groups such as Muslim women (Sarkar, 1983, pp. 70-75). Ranajit Guha (1982) rightly pointed out that the marginalised subaltern classes, such as small peasants, landless agricultural labourers, sharecroppers and the underprivileged castes, were completely excluded from these progressive urban, middle-class reforms. According to Guha, this phenomenon can be effectively evaluated by seeing how these urban middle-class reformist projects of the so-called 'Bengal Renaissance' did not fundamentally challenge the village-based feudal agrarian hierarchy and colonial exploitation of these subaltern groups. Most importantly, the so-called 'Bengal renaissance' failed to bring about a comprehensive structural transformation of the broader society, which is one of the key characteristics of any 'renaissance' (Guha, 1982, pp. 1-8).

Additionally, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's intellectual journey and its growth depict this liminal tension of his times. He was one of the first students to graduate from the University of Calcutta since its inception in 1857. Chattopadhyay primarily studied in Presidency College under the University of Calcutta, where he first stepped into Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill's form of Utilitarianism (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 22-45, 58-70). However, the initial overestimated optimism of Bengali English-educated intelligentsia on the colonial British rule as the 'god's provident' to Indian was evaporated by this time on the face of enormous colonial exploitation of Indian resources and the poverty of racial arrogance of the British colonial administration. This liminal, paradoxical intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century colonial Bengal catalysed the intellectual shift from liberal reformism to cultural revivalism in India. Partha Chatterjee termed this process of forging an Indian national identity by shifting from initial liberal reformism to cultural revivalism in India as 'Moment of Departure' (Chatterjee, 1993, pp. 54-81). Chatterjee defined this phrase as the English-educated local intelligentsia's intellectual indebtedness to Western philosophy and reason, to the inherent natural desire of cultural autonomy and revivalism. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, in his cultural revivalist project, argued that Indians were conquered by a handful of British because contemporary Indians lacked the inherent natural desire to be free and did not possess any cohesive history of their own. Consequently, Chattopadhyay's intellectual project became a revivalism of Indian culture and historical narratives and reforming the Indian mind to be capable of self-rule by the pedagogical mobilisation of his writings on historical fiction such as *Anandamath*, *Debi Choudhurani*, etc. (Ray, 1975, pp. 467-473).

However, the increasing interaction between the British colonial state and the rapidly emerging local Bengali Intelligentsia was deeply marked by an 'asymmetry of power' which gradually surpassed the initial political domain, and later moved to the cultural domain of colonial knowledge production (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 36-53). Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay seems to be aware of the essentialist element of colonial knowledge production on the colonised subject. It is important to note that Chattopadhyay did not outrightly reject the essentialist project of colonial knowledge production, which certainly essentialised the rich, spatially and culturally diverse socio-religious tradition within the Indian subcontinent and reduced it into a monolithic socio-religious and cultural entity. But rather Chattopadhyay was aware that the essentialised elements of the colonial knowledge production may have disastrous consequences for the rich and diverse cultural heritage, but he realised the potential essentiality of the essentialising element of the colonial knowledge on India, which can amalgamate the antagonistic diffracted intersections of Indian Society, such as religion, religious creed, caste, etc and made Indian society a singular monolithic entity which is imperative to have a single national identity for the whole Indian subcontinent (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 107-125). However, it is important to note that Chattopadhyay completely overlooks this process of amalgamation of a diverse Indian

society based on the Sanskrit Vedic Brahminical Hindu culture, which is historically divided by various social intersections and power structures, and excludes a sizable population of the marginalised section of Indian society, such as the so-called 'lower caste', religious minorities, such as Shramanic religious traditions within and outside of the broader Hindu fold and other religious minorities (Sarkar, 1994, pp. 825-867).

### **The *Anandamath*: The Foundation of Ascetic Cultural Nationalism of India:**

The publication of *Anandamath* in 1882 was the watershed moment in the genealogy of Indian nationalism. The *Anandamath* was set against the crucial backdrop of the Sanyasi Rebellion and the critical juncture of the devastating Bengal famine in the 1770s. This novel, originally written in Bengali, presented a comprehensive depiction of a traditional organised resistance against colonial oppression by the stout ascetic warriors who were known as 'Santans' or the children of one single mother, in the novel (Sarkar, 1994). The primary significance of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* is that it created a fusion of Hindu renunciation or 'Sanyasa' with the militant nationalist warrior creed, who were committed to liberating their motherland from the foreign shackles at any cost. Thereby, this novel led to the transformation of 'ascetic nationalism' from passive word negation to becoming an active militant weapon for political change (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 132–57).

Additionally, the 'Santans' lived in the forest under strict discipline and adhered to one supreme goal of defending their 'nation' from external forces like a religious duty. In the novel, Chattopadhyay treated the nation as a divine entity. He also imposed a narrative of the mother as a divine Hindu goddess to reflect the three stages of India, past cultural glory, as the goddess Jagadhatri, the Hindu goddess of past wealth, the present cultural and moral darkness of the nation as, the goddess Kali, and finally for the future victory of Indian nation, as the goddess Durga, the Hindu goddess from victory (Kaviraj, 1995, pp.131-143). However, this analogy of the Indian Nation as Hindu goddesses reinforced the essentialized narrative of the Orientalist project of colonial knowledge production, which envisaged India as having a glorious cultural and moral heritage in its Vedic ancient antiquity based on the scriptural Sanskrit Tradition, but lost all its moral and spiritual heritage in present, which is a mere 'degenerated' version of ancient 'glorious past' (Kopf, 2023, pp. 275-281). Even though Chattopadhyay utilised this Orientalist narrative of India's 'golden past', the major difference between the Orientalist scholars and Chattopadhyay was that the Orientalist scholars had used this narrative to justify the colonial rule by depicting the British colonial rule in India as the 'rational' essential factor to revive India's lost glory and made them capable of their self rule. On the other side, Chattopadhyay used the Orientalist narrative of India's glorious past to establish the notion that Indians, given the fact of their ancient cultural glory, are fully capable and ready for their self-rule and to eradicate the British Empire from India's 'divine' soil (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 76-81).

However, Chattopadhyay's conscious synthesis of the Hindu religion with India's national

identity reflects Chattopadhyay's insistence on the Western conception of a racialised ethnic idea of nation (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 74-81). Additionally, Chattopadhyay's mixing of nationhood with Hindu religious identity had some far-reaching implications. Firstly, this idea of religious nationalism under the guise of culture effectively excludes the religious communities other than the Hindu majority, such as Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and other various religious minority communities of the Indian subcontinent and places them out of the purview of Indian nationhood (Sarkar, 1994). This phenomenon is certainly one of the major factors behind the substantial upsurge of identity politics and Hindu nationalist majoritarianism in postcolonial India (Sarkar, 1998, pp. 358-390).

### ***Vande Mataram* and the Construction of Indian Self:**

The patriotic song *Vande Mataram*, or 'I bow to thee, Mother', evolved from a mere literary expression to a nationwide nationalist symbol of resistance in India's freedom struggle. *Vande Mataram* was first published in the *Bangadarshan*, a Bengali monthly journal. A few years later, this song was incorporated into the *Anandamath* novel. The song uses a comprehensive natural imagery which effectively describes India as a fertile land of living, benevolent presence. Various academic analyses of *Vande Mataram* highlight its role in 'feminising the Indian nation' while establishing the nation as divine mother (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 128-135).

Additionally, the historical trajectory of this one single song effectively projected the intensification of nationalistic feeling in the early decades of the twentieth century. After the song's initial publication in the *Bangadarshan* magazine, it was restricted to being only a literary artefact until Rabindranath Tagore composed music to it and performed at the 1896 session of India National Congress at Calcutta (Kaviraj, 1995, pp.129-131). After this, the true transformation of this song from a mere literary artefact to an active war cry of resistance and later it became the effective slogan of the Swadeshi movement (1905-1908) in Bengal, which started as the resistance movement against the Bengal Partition by Lord Curzon. The slogan *Vande Mataram* surpassed all its linguistic and regional barriers and was effectively echoed by the diverse nationalistic entities, from the radical revolutionaries of the Ghadar Party in California to the soldiers of Azad Hind Fauj in Southeast Asia (Bhattacharya, 2003).

Subsequently, the British colonial state machinery perceived the *Vande Mataram* song as a valid and effective threat to the existence of the British Empire in India and aggressively tried to suppress the performance of the song, which only fueled the popularity of the Song and made it a symbol of resistance against British rule in India. However, for the explicit Hindu imagery to represent the Indian national self, and to be a particular analogy of the Indian nation with the Hindu goddess Durga, raises a reservation about the acceptability of the song. Some sections of the Muslim community argued that bowing down to a personified Indian nation would be seriously contrasting with the Islamic ideal of monotheism (Bhattacharya, 2003, pp.65-82). Ironically, Chattopadhyay

himself depicted in the *Anandamath* novel, the British colonial empire in India as a 'suitable' alternative to the previous 'oppressive' Muslim rule in India. This complex legacy of the Vande Mataram song was one of the primary reasons to choose the song as the 'national song' and not the national anthem, which is an explicit compromise between the need to honour the historical significance of Vande Mataram as the symbol of resistance in the Indian freedom struggle, while also acknowledging the diversity and plurality of India (Sarkar, 1994).

### **Foundation of the Resistance: Anushilan and Dharmatattva:**

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay not only shaped the proto-nationalist identity of India by reviving the ancient Vedic 'Golden Age' of India through the pedagogy of his historical fiction. But he also provided an ethical and philosophical foundation for a modern form of 'Hinduism'. His crucial literary works, such as *Krisna Charitra*, published in 1886 and *Dharmatattva*, published in 1888, depicted a 'de-mythologising' project that had the objective of rescuing the Hindu past from the onslaught of indigenous obscurantism and Western colonial misrepresentation (Raychaudhuri, 1988, pp. 150-185). In his non-fiction religious treatises, *Dharmatattva* (1888), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay opined for the 'Anushilan theory', or the 'Theory of Culture', which envisaged that an ideal human entity contains four elements, such as the physical element, mental element, moral element and finally the spiritual element (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 81-105). In this work, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay redefined the notion of 'Dharma'; according to him, Dharma is not just the religious process of ritualistic observation, but rather it is the all-around development based on the four crucial elements of Dharma. Chattopadhyay also envisaged in his conception of 'Dharma' that the ideal should always be for the service of the broader society rather than the individualistic endeavour to attain salvation. This move of Chattopadhyay to move away from Individualistic interpretation to a more communitarian interpretation of Hinduism led to the subsequent politicisation of Hinduism and the establishment of the Hindu socio-religious community as a political unit (Halder, 1989).

Additionally, pointed out the lack of solidarity, political will and the 'physical strength' in Indians and to be praised within the Hindu community. He also posited that the lack of physical strength and socio-political solidarity in Indians is the primary reason for their exploitation and subjection under colonial rule. He used the theory of Anushilan as a community-making pedagogy, which can effectively construct an assertive, politically conscious community dedicated to national service to snatch freedom from the colonial oppressor (Raychaudhuri, 1988, pp. 134-42). This approach taken by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was a crucial departure from the prevailing intellectual thought of that time, which explicitly demarcated the boundary between Western 'materialism' and Eastern 'spiritualism' and perceived these two as mutually exclusive civilizational entities. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's approach provided for a synthesis of the Western and the indigenous Indian socio-cultural tradition (Chatterjee, 1986, pp. 60-5). According to him, India can

effectively adopt the Western advancement of scientific knowledge and institutions and mechanisms of governance while sticking to its own spiritual and cultural roots (Kaviraj, 1995, pp.72-9).

Additionally, the influence of Chattopadhyay's Anushilan theory extended beyond the literary circles of colonial Bengal to the training camps of secret revolutionaries, such as Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar. The Anushilan Samiti was established in colonial Calcutta by Satish Chandra Bose and Pramathanath Mitra in 1902. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's works directly inspired the founders of Anushilan Samiti. The Anushilan Samiti operated by the autonomous network of 'Akharas' or local gymnasiums, where the young Bengalis learned martial arts and deeply studied contemporary revolutionary literature. The newly joining members of the Anushilan Samiti had to prove their pledge of loyalty by swearing an oath on the Bhagavad Gita and signing the pledge in their own blood at the goddess Kali temple. This combination of 'physical strength' and spiritual awakening of the secret revolutionary groups in early twentieth-century Bengal is deeply derived from the philosophy and religious ethics of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's literary works (Heehs, 1993).

### **Reclaiming the Lost Golden Past: Rationalising the Hindu Mythology and Nationalist Historiography:**

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay revived the Krishna cult and Vaishnavism in colonial Bengal. It is one of Chattopadhyay's significant contributions to his nationalist project. In his *Krisna Charitra* Chattopadhyay transformed the cult of Krisna from a lens of religious textual criticism to a more historical interpretation of the cult of Krisna. Chattopadhyay discarded the flute, holding romantic and mystic Krisna instead, and reinforced the 'supreme human' self of Krisna as an effective political strategist, peacemaker and diplomat (Raychaudhuri, 1988). This 'rationalised' cult of Krisna was focused by the approach to emulate a 'historical' figure who contains the balanced qualities of supreme physical strength, administrative efficiency and most importantly spiritual wisdom (Kaviraj, 1995)

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay dedicated his 'rationalist' cult of Krishna to the nationalist project of India to build a uniform moral and spiritual background for the Indian nation. Chattopadhyay sought to provide a single role model to the diverse socio-religious population of India to attain a single monolithic moral outlook. He attained this agenda by 'demythologising' the ancient Vedic Hindu deities and by aggressively arguing that most of the Hindu festivals historically emerged more from the socio-cultural domain rather than solely from the religious domain (Kaviraj, 1995, pp. 80-85). Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay provided a rationalist approach to historicize and 'modernise' Hinduism from within the Hindu fold. Chattopadhyay's rationalist depiction of 'modern' Hinduism also came as a response against the European Western evangelical critique of Hinduism as a 'superstitious' religion. Chattopadhyay's depiction of Krisna as both an eminent social personality and god is, in a sense, a very similar project to that of European culture studies scholars such as Strauss and Renan's construction of historical and sociological Christ in later years (Raychaudhuri, 1988, pp

136-145). This rationalist depiction of Hinduism became an effective defence of the religion against the vehement critiques of Hinduism as a religion of 'heathen superstition' by the European Christian missionaries. Chattopadhyaya's rationalist and modernist approach towards Hinduism tried to diminish the mythical religious deism from the Hindu mind; instead, he established Hinduism as a religion with a dynamic religious and social tradition, which is certainly subject to the concept of 'rationality' and 'utility' (Kaviraj, 1995).

### **Critiques Nationalist Thought of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya: Gender, Communalism and Others:**

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's cultural nationalism, even though it had enormous mobilising capabilities. It also contains various internal contradictions, which are certainly subject to nuanced academic criticisms. Chattopadhyaya, while fusing Hindu religious culture in Indian national identity, also constructed a deeply communal national identity of India (Chatterjee, 1986). Chattopadhyaya, in his various novels and other literary works of historical fiction, including the *Anandamath*, depicted the Indo-Islamic rule in India as 'sin-ridden' and 'extremely oppressive. He also projected the British colonial rule in India as 'rescue' gives to the Hindu Indian subjects from the 'oppressive' and 'tyrannical' Islamic rule (Sarkar, 1994). In *Anandamath*, the nationalist rebel sanyasis not only fought with the British colonisers but also against the Muslim Nawab of Murshidabad. Through his fictional narratives, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya effectively communalised the nationalistic struggle by systematically excluding Muslims from the Indian national consciousness by constructing the communal narrative of Muslims as 'religious others' and 'foreign invaders' (Kaviraj, 1995) And by this communal exclusionary religious narrative, Chattopadhyaya intended to channelise the Hindu communal Vengeance against the minority Muslim community in India to a unified Hindu political consciousness (Sarkar, 1998).

Additionally, the revenge narrative of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Anandamath*, in which the 'Santhans' or the rebel nationalist group burn Muslim houses and property out of communal vengeance, which later became one of the foundational texts for the emergence of Hindu chauvinism and exclusionary Hindu nationalism or Hindutva ideology in postcolonial India (Sarkar, 1994). Various critics had projected how the initial significance of the Song, *Vande Mataram*, was an urban, middle-class and upper-caste phenomenon which explicitly rejects the inclusion of non-Indic religious minorities into the Indian nationalist consciousness (Sarkar, 2000). This legacy of scapegoating of religious minorities certainly intensified the emergence of communal divide and identity politics in the postcolonial Indian state (Sarkar, 1998).

Additionally, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's nationalist thought explicitly centred a patriarchal gendered logic of Indian national consciousness. Tanika Sarkar, in her research, depicted how Chattopadhyaya equated the purity of character of Hindu women with the religious identity and

community respect (Sarkar, 2001, pp. 23-52). Chattopadhyay simply mirrored the nineteenth-century notion of 'ideal Hindu wife', which was imagined as a sacred and sacrificial figure for the community's betterment, who embodies some of the most utopian moral standards while subject to dystopian realities of women's agency (Chatterjee, 1986). Chattopadhyay created some of the most deviant female characters in his literary writings of historical fiction, such as Shanti in *Anandamath* (1882) and Kundanandini in *Bishabriksha* (1873). However, Chattopadhyay defied and appropriated the female character's defiance by equating their actions with the honour of the community and the purity of religion. It is also important to note that all the defiant female characters in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's historical fictions were structurally appropriated with the status quo patriarchal society and did not challenge the contemporary prevailing patriarchal power relations (Sarkar, 1994).

### Conclusion:

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay certainly occupies a significant position in the intellectual history of modern India. He is often seen as a seer and the founder of modern India, who provided the foundation of its modern national consciousness and identity. Chattopadhyay, by his literary works of historical fiction, served the project of epistemic decolonisation by constructing a unified and monolithic national identity (Kaviraj, 1995). The intellectual contribution of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay has influenced various significant formations and prominent personalities of nationalist movements, such as Anushilan Samiti, the material and spiritual synthesis of Swami Vivekananda and M.K Gandhi's duty-based political consciousness, etc. (Bhattacharya, 2003).

However, even though the nationalist thought of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay has various significance in the history of India's nationhood, it also possesses substantial internal contradictions. While constructing a unified Indian national identity through the communal interpretation of Indian historiography and excluding the religious minorities, especially the minority Muslim community of India, from the purview of the national consciousness of India. The fusion of communalism with the national identity of India by Chattopadhyay certainly provided the ideological foundation of the subsequent upsurge of religious exclusion, communalism, and exclusionary ideology of Hindu nationalism in postcolonial Indian politics (Raychaudhuri, 1988).

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