

Spiritual Nationalism, Gender Ambivalence, and the Politics of Historical Memory in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath*

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Abstract

Anandamath (1882), authored by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, occupies a foundational position in the intellectual history of Indian nationalism. Set against the historical backdrop of the late eighteenth-century Sannyasi Rebellion and the Bengal famine, the novel fuses militant nationalism with Hindu religious revivalism through epic narrative strategies and powerful ideological symbols, most notably *Vande Mataram*. This paper offers an interdisciplinary analysis of *Anandamath* using close textual reading of the Chatterjee (1882/2016) English translation alongside a systematic synthesis of scholarship. The study examines how the novel constructs a spiritually sanctioned model of militant Hindu nationalism while simultaneously engaging in revisionist practices that reshape historical memory. Particular attention is paid to the ethical framing of violence, the sacralisation of the nation as Mother Goddess, and gender ambivalence through the character of Shanti. The paper argues that while *Anandamath* functioned as a powerful mobilising text within anti-colonial nationalist consciousness, it also embedded enduring ideological tensions related to gender, secularism, and communal identity that continue to shape contemporary debates in India.

Keywords: Anandamath, gender, Hindu nationalism, historical memory, Vande Mataram

Introduction

Literature has historically played a decisive role in the articulation of nationalist consciousness, particularly in colonial contexts where formal political participation was constrained and ideological mobilisation relied heavily on cultural production. In late nineteenth-century India, literary texts assumed a central function in translating political discontent into moral narratives capable of sustaining collective identity, emotional solidarity, and ethical purpose. Among these texts, *Anandamath* stands out not merely as a reflection of emergent nationalist sentiment but as a formative intervention that actively shaped the ideological grammar of Indian nationalism.

Published in 1882, *Anandamath* situates its narrative during the late eighteenth-century Sannyasi Rebellion, a period marked by famine, agrarian collapse, and the expansion of colonial authority. By reworking this historical episode into a mythic struggle for national regeneration, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee transforms social suffering into moral justification for militant resistance. Famine and dispossession are not presented as accidental outcomes of political economy but as symptoms of civilizational decay demanding radical ethical response (Chatterjee, 1882/2016). This narrative strategy allows the novel to critique colonial governance obliquely while constructing a moral archive that legitimises revolutionary action.

The ideological significance of *Anandamath* lies in its fusion of nationalism with religious devotion. Unlike liberal or civic models of nationalism grounded in rights, representation, and constitutionalism, the novel conceptualises the nation as a sacred Mother whose redemption requires sacrifice, renunciation, and obedience. Nationalism is thus framed not as a political choice but as a moral and spiritual obligation. This framing distinguishes *Anandamath* from contemporaneous reformist writings and aligns it more closely with what later scholarship has described as ethical or civilizational nationalism (Miller, 2024; Kundra, 2021).

Central to this ideological project is the hymn *Vande Mataram*, embedded within the narrative as both lyrical interlude and political theology. Through its personification of the land as Mother Goddess, the hymn sacralises geography and converts political loyalty into devotional practice. Its subsequent adoption as a nationalist anthem during the Swadeshi movement demonstrates how literary symbolism migrated into mass political mobilisation, blurring boundaries between religion, culture, and politics (Hashmi, 2024). At the same time, *Vande Mataram* has remained a site of sustained controversy, particularly in debates surrounding secularism and religious pluralism in modern India.

Despite its canonical status, *Anandamath* has generated sharply divergent interpretations. Early nationalist readings celebrated the novel as a clarion call for resistance and moral renewal, while later critics have interrogated its religious majoritarianism, gender politics, and revisionist treatment of history. Scholarship over the last three decades reflects this shift, moving from celebratory nationalist criticism to more critical engagements that foreground issues of violence, gender, sexuality, and memory (Varshney, 1993; Chatterjee, 2021; Miller, 2024). This paper positions itself within this latter tradition, seeking neither to dismiss *Anandamath* as mere communal propaganda nor to romanticise it as unproblematic nationalist literature.

A particularly significant dimension of contemporary scholarship concerns gender and sexuality in *Anandamath*, especially the character of Shanti. Shanti's passing as a male fighter destabilises Victorian gender binaries and gestures toward pre-colonial traditions of gender fluidity. However, feminist and queer critics argue that this transgression is ultimately instrumental and contained, aligning nationalist respectability with colonial legal and moral frameworks, notably those institutionalised after the Indian Penal Code of 1860 (Mondal, 2020; Manion, 2024). The novel thus simultaneously acknowledges and erases non-normative gender histories, revealing deep ideological contradictions at the heart of nationalist consolidation.

Another major line of inquiry examines *Anandamath* as a site of historical revisionism. By mythologising resistance and selectively reconstructing the past, the novel produces a morally legible history that marginalises plural, Adivasi, and gender-fluid narratives in favour of a coherent Hindu nationalist imaginary (Pinch, 2017; Rashkow, 2017). This process of selective remembrance has been identified as central to the novel's enduring political utility, enabling later nationalist movements to claim continuity with an imagined heroic tradition.

The influence of *Anandamath* extended beyond literature into revolutionary nationalist thought. Historical studies demonstrate that figures such as Subhas Chandra Bose engaged deeply with Bankim's ethical nationalism, drawing upon its emphasis on sacrifice, discipline, and devotion to articulate militant political visions (Mukerji, 2022). This underscores the novel's role not merely as a cultural artifact but as an active ideological resource whose meanings have evolved through translation, political mobilisation, and scholarly reinterpretation.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to offer a comprehensive, interdisciplinary analysis of *Anandamath* grounded in close textual reading of the Chatterjee (1882/2016) translation and systematic engagement with scholarship published between 1993 and 2024. The paper addresses three central questions. First, how does *Anandamath* construct a spiritually sanctioned model of militant nationalism through narrative, symbolism, and ethical discourse? Second, how does the novel negotiate gender and sexuality within the nationalist project, particularly through the ambivalent figure of Shanti? Third, how does *Anandamath* reshape historical memory to produce a morally coherent yet exclusionary vision of the nation?

By addressing these questions, the paper seeks to contribute to ongoing debates on nationalism, literature, and identity in colonial and postcolonial India. Rather than treating *Anandamath* as a static historical text, the study approaches it as a dynamic ideological site whose contradictions continue to inform contemporary political and cultural discourse.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in close textual analysis and structured literature synthesis. The primary text analysed is *Anandamath* (1882), using the English translation published by Auro e-Books (2016). The choice of this edition is methodologically significant because it preserves the lyrical structure of

Vande Mataram and maintains narrative continuity necessary for ideological analysis. All quotations cited in this study refer to this edition, with chapter and page numbers provided to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

The analytical procedure followed three sequential stages. First, a close reading of the primary text was undertaken to identify recurrent narrative motifs, symbolic structures, and ethical propositions related to nationalism, religion, violence, gender, and historical memory. Particular attention was paid to passages that explicitly articulate renunciation, sacrifice, and devotion to the Motherland, as well as to scenes involving Shanti's gendered performance and the insertion of *Vande Mataram* within the narrative.

Second, an integrative synthesis of scholarship was conducted to situate the textual findings within existing academic debates. Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters published between 1993 and 2024 were identified. These sources include studies published in *Victorian Studies*, *Journal of Religion and Violence*, *Daedalus*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Indian Historical Review*, *Journal of Language and Politics*, and *Rupkatha*. The literature was coded thematically under five analytical axes: (i) nationalist ideology and loyalty, (ii) religious symbolism and political theology, (iii) gender and sexuality, (iv) historical memory and revisionism, and (v) political reception and translation. This coding enabled systematic comparison between textual evidence and scholarly interpretations (Varshney, 1993; Kundra, 2021; Chatterjee, 2021; Miller, 2024; Hashmi, 2024).

Third, comparative thematic analysis was employed to integrate insights from the primary text and secondary scholarship. Rather than treating the novel and the criticism as separate domains, the study reads them dialogically, identifying areas of convergence, divergence, and scholarly silence. This approach allows the paper to contribute not only to textual interpretation but also to methodological clarity regarding how literary texts function as ideological resources over time.

The study is limited by its reliance on published secondary sources and the absence of direct archival work on unpublished manuscripts or early reception histories. Nevertheless, the use of high-quality literature and a stable primary translation ensures analytical rigour and scholarly reliability.

Results

The analysis identifies five dominant and interrelated thematic patterns in *Anandamath*: (i) militant spiritual nationalism, (ii) ethical legitimisation of violence, (iii) sacralisation of the nation through *Vande Mataram*, (iv) gender ambivalence and instrumental gender fluidity, and (v) revisionist historical memory. These themes recur consistently across the narrative and are reinforced through character construction, symbolic imagery, and narrative repetition.

Table 1
Core Ideological Themes in *Anandamath*

| Theme | Narrative Strategy | Ideological Function |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Militant nationalism | Ascetic brotherhood | Moral legitimacy of rebellion |
| Ethical violence | <i>Dharma Yuddha</i> | Sacred justification of force |
| Motherland worship | <i>Vande Mataram</i> | Devotional nationalism |
| Gender ambivalence | Shanti's male passing | Tactical empowerment |
| Historical revisionism | Mythic past | Ideological coherence |

Militant Spiritual Nationalism as Moral Order

The results demonstrate that *Anandamath* constructs nationalism as a total moral order rather than a political programme based on rights or representation. The ascetic brotherhood functions as an ethical institution in which renunciation, discipline, and obedience are cultivated as civic virtues. Domestic attachments, property, and personal desire are portrayed as impediments to national duty, while sacrifice is elevated as the highest moral act.

This ideological position is articulated explicitly when the ascetic leader declares:

“We have no mother, no father, no wife, no child. We have only the Mother.” (Ch. X, p. 96)

Here, kinship itself is subordinated to national devotion, transforming nationalism into a quasi-religious vocation. National belonging is conditional upon moral transformation rather than birth, consent, or civic participation. This finding aligns with Miller’s (2024) analysis, which argues that *Anandamath* establishes a hierarchical “taxonomy of loyalty” in which devotion to the Mother supersedes all other affiliations.

The results further show that this moral nationalism is exclusionary by design. Those unable or unwilling to renounce personal attachments are implicitly positioned outside the ethical community of the nation. This supports Kundra’s (2021) argument that *Anandamath* advances a form of civilisational nationalism grounded in spiritual discipline rather than pluralistic inclusion.

Ethical Framing of Violence

A second major result concerns the ethical legitimisation of violence. Violence in *Anandamath* is not depicted as chaotic or impulsive; instead, it is framed as *Dharma Yuddha*, a morally sanctioned struggle undertaken in response to historical necessity. The narrative repeatedly emphasises restraint, discipline, and sacrifice, distinguishing militant action from criminal aggression. This ethical logic is articulated early in the novel:

“Life is a small thing which all can sacrifice.” (Prologue, p. 9)

By presenting life itself as expendable in the service of the Motherland, the novel removes violence from moral ambiguity and situates it within a sacred ethical universe. This finding corroborates Kundra’s (2021) analysis that *Anandamath* transforms Vaishnavism into a political theology capable of legitimising militant resistance.

Table 2
Ethical Violence and Moral Justification

| Narrative Element | Textual Evidence | Interpretation |
|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| Sacrifice | “Life is a small thing...” | Supremacy of duty |
| Moral war | “This is Dharma Yuddha.” (Ch. XI, p. 104) | Sacred violence |
| Discipline | Silent obedience | Ethical restraint |

The results also indicate that emotional regulation is central to this ethical framing. Fear, grief, and hesitation are portrayed as weaknesses, while controlled affect is valorised as moral strength. This emotional discipline enables the normalisation of violence within the nationalist project and contributes to what later revolutionary movements adopted as a culture of sacrifice.

Vande Mataram and the Sacralisation of the Nation

The hymn *Vande Mataram* emerges as the emotional and ideological nucleus of *Anandamath*. The results show that the hymn operates simultaneously on lyrical, religious, and political levels. Through its invocation of rivers, fields, and fertility, geography itself is transformed into divinity. The text reads:

“Rich with thy hurrying streams,
Bright with thy orchard gleams,
Dark fields waving, Mother of might.” (Ch. X, p. 101)

This passage sacralises the land and collapses distinctions between territory and deity. Political loyalty is converted into devotional practice, intensifying nationalist affect. Hashmi’s (2024) study confirms that this structural embedding of religious symbolism explains why later attempts to secularise *Vande Mataram* proved ineffective.

Table 3
Functions of *Vande Mataram* in the Narrative

| Function | Narrative Role | Political Effect |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Poetic | Lyrical interlude | Emotional intensification |
| Religious | Goddess imagery | Sacred nationhood |
| Political | Battle hymn | Mass mobilisation |

The results suggest that *Vande Mataram* functions as a political theology rather than a mere patriotic song, providing emotional legitimacy to militant nationalism.

Gender Ambivalence and Instrumental Gender Fluidity

A further significant result concerns gender ambivalence, particularly through the character of Shanti. Shanti adopts a male identity to participate in militant action, destabilising Victorian gender binaries and enabling her entry into the nationalist struggle:

“Shanti put on the garb of a boy and stood among the fighters.” (Ch. XIII, p. 118)

However, the results demonstrate that this gender fluidity is instrumental and temporary. Shanti’s transgression is tolerated only insofar as it serves nationalist objectives, after which normative gender order is restored. This finding aligns with feminist and queer critiques that identify *Anandamath* as simultaneously acknowledging and erasing non-normative gender histories (Mondal, 2020; Manion, 2024).

Revisionist Historical Memory and the Construction of a Moral Past

A central result of this study is that *Anandamath* systematically reconstructs history to produce a morally coherent and ideologically serviceable past. The novel does not aim to offer a historically exhaustive account of the Sannyasi Rebellion; rather, it transforms the event into a mythic narrative that legitimises militant nationalism. Complex socio-economic factors such as colonial revenue extraction, agrarian collapse, and regional heterogeneity are subsumed under a moral explanation of decline and regeneration.

This revisionist strategy is evident in the repeated metaphor of national “sleep” or forgetting, which frames political subjugation as a moral lapse rather than a structural condition. The narrative asserts:

“The Mother slept while her children forgot her.” (Ch. X, p. 98)

Here, historical decline is attributed to ethical negligence rather than political economy. This rhetorical move shifts responsibility away from material conditions and towards moral consciousness, enabling nationalist regeneration to be framed as a process of spiritual awakening. Such moralisation of history allows the novel to offer clarity and purpose, but it does so at the cost of historical plurality.

Scholarship supports this finding. Pinch (2017) conceptualises *Anandamath* as a “site of memory” where literature acquires political authority comparable to physical monuments. Rashkow (2017) further demonstrates how such literary sites marginalise Adivasi and subaltern histories, replacing them with simplified nationalist myths. The results of this study confirm that *Anandamath* participates in this process by foregrounding a Hindu ascetic resistance while erasing other forms of historical agency.

Table 4
Revisionist Memory Strategies in *Anandamath*

| Strategy | Narrative Mechanism | Ideological Outcome |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Moralisation of decline | Forgetting the Mother | Ethical explanation of subjugation |
| Mythic resistance | Ascetic heroism | Legitimation of militancy |
| Selective omission | Absence of plural actors | National coherence |

The results indicate that this selective reconstruction of the past is not incidental but integral to the novel's ideological function. By producing a morally legible history, *Anandamath* equips nationalist movements with a usable past capable of mobilising collective affect and political action.

Colonial Legal Frameworks and the Regulation of Gender and Sexuality

Another significant result concerns the influence of colonial legal and moral frameworks on the novel's representation of gender and sexuality. While *Anandamath* gestures toward pre-colonial gender fluidity through Shanti's male passing, the narrative ultimately aligns itself with heteronormative and patriarchal norms institutionalised during the colonial period. This alignment reflects the broader impact of colonial law, particularly the Indian Penal Code of 1860, which criminalised non-normative sexualities and gender expressions.

Shanti's transgression is thus framed as exceptional and temporary rather than as a legitimate alternative identity. After fulfilling her role within the nationalist struggle, she is reinscribed into normative gender order, reinforcing what Mondal (2020) identifies as Bankim's commitment to nationalist respectability. This containment ensures that nationalist militancy does not destabilise patriarchal social structures.

The narrative's ambivalence toward gender nonconformity is evident in the way Shanti's bravery is celebrated while her gender transgression remains unspoken and unresolved. The absence of sustained reflection on her identity signals a deliberate narrative silencing. Manion's (2024) work on trans-historicism provides a useful interpretive lens here, arguing that nationalist texts often exploit gender fluidity to energise political action while erasing its radical implications.

Table 5
Gender, Law, and Ideological Containment

| Dimension | Narrative Treatment | Structural Effect |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Gender fluidity | Tactical male passing | Temporary empowerment |
| Legal context | Silence on deviance | Colonial moral alignment |
| Narrative closure | Restoration of norms | Patriarchal stability |

The results confirm that *Anandamath* negotiates gender through a strategy of instrumental inclusion followed by ideological containment, reflecting broader colonial-modern anxieties about sexuality and social order.

Emotional Regulation and the Ethics of Sacrifice

The analysis further reveals that emotional regulation plays a crucial role in sustaining militant nationalism in *Anandamath*. Emotions such as grief, fear, and attachment are acknowledged but systematically subordinated to the demands of national duty. Excessive emotion is portrayed as weakness, while restraint and silence are valorised as moral strength.

This affective discipline is particularly visible in scenes involving death and suffering, where personal loss is subsumed under collective purpose. The ascetic ethos requires individuals to suppress grief in favour of resolve, reinforcing the ethical legitimacy of sacrifice. Such emotional regulation supports the normalisation of violence by preventing hesitation and moral doubt.

This result aligns with Kundra's (2021) argument that *Anandamath* constructs a disciplined emotional community in which ethical legitimacy derives from self-control. It also resonates with Varshney's (1993) observation that nationalist movements often rely on emotional simplification to sustain political mobilisation.

Table 6**Emotional Regulation in Nationalist Ethics**

| Emotion | Narrative Framing | Political Function |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Grief | Minimized | Prevents hesitation |
| Fear | Transformed into courage | Enables violence |
| Love | Redirected to nation | Sacralises loyalty |

The findings suggest that emotional discipline is not merely a by-product of militant nationalism but a foundational mechanism through which ethical violence is sustained.

Translation, Circulation, and Ideological Reinforcement

The results also highlight the role of translation in extending the ideological reach of *Anandamath*. The English translation analysed in this study (Chatterjee, 1882/2016) preserves the devotional and epic tone of the original while making the text accessible to broader audiences. Translation thus functions not as neutral transmission but as ideological reinforcement, enabling the novel's symbols and ethics to circulate beyond their original linguistic and regional contexts.

Chatterjee's (2021) analysis of nation-in-translation demonstrates that English translations of *Anandamath* played a significant role in embedding Hindu nationalist discourse within colonial and postcolonial intellectual spaces. The results of this study confirm that translation amplifies the novel's political theology, particularly through *Vande Mataram*, by preserving its affective and symbolic power.

Table 7**Translation and Ideological Circulation**

| Aspect | Function | Outcome |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| English translation | Wider readership | Expanded ideological reach |
| Lyrical preservation | Emotional continuity | Devotional nationalism |
| Political context | Colonial circulation | Reinforced authority |

The findings indicate that translation is central to understanding *Anandamath*'s long-term influence, as it facilitates ideological continuity across historical periods and political contexts.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that *Anandamath* constructs a coherent but exclusionary nationalist ideology through the integration of militant spirituality, ethical violence, gender regulation, emotional discipline, and revisionist historical memory. Each thematic strand reinforces the others, producing a tightly woven moral universe in which national devotion supersedes individual identity, plural history, and ethical ambiguity. This synthesis confirms that *Anandamath* functions not merely as a literary text but as an ideological apparatus that continues to shape nationalist imagination through narrative, symbolism, and affect.

Discussion

The findings of this study position *Anandamath* as a formative yet deeply ambivalent text within the genealogy of Indian nationalism. Rather than functioning solely as a literary representation of anti-colonial resistance, the novel operates as a pedagogical and ideological apparatus that actively shapes nationalist subjectivity. Through narrative strategies that privilege renunciation, emotional restraint, and ethical violence, *Anandamath* constructs an ideal national subject whose moral worth is measured by willingness to sacrifice personal identity for collective devotion.

A central implication of the results concerns the transformation of nationalism into a sacred moral order. The ascetic brotherhood does not merely model resistance but embodies a normative ideal of citizenship grounded in discipline

and obedience. This form of nationalism departs sharply from liberal democratic traditions that emphasize pluralism, deliberation, and rights. Instead, it aligns with what Miller (2024) describes as a “hierarchical taxonomy of loyalty,” wherein devotion to the Mother supersedes all other affiliations. Such an ethical structure reduces the space for dissent and reframes political disagreement as moral failure rather than legitimate difference.

The ethical framing of violence as *Dharma Yuddha* further reinforces this moral absolutism. By situating militant action within a sacred ethical universe, *Anandamath* neutralizes moral ambiguity and legitimizes coercion as duty. This finding corroborates Kundra’s (2021) argument that the novel converts Vaishnavite theology into a political ethic capable of sustaining militant nationalism. Importantly, this ethical logic does not merely justify violence retrospectively; it actively disciplines emotion, suppressing fear and grief in favor of resolve and sacrifice. The result is a nationalist ethic that privileges emotional regulation as a prerequisite for political legitimacy.

The discussion of *Vande Mataram* underscores the affective power of this ideological framework. As demonstrated in the Results, the hymn functions as a political theology that sacralizes territory and collapses distinctions between religion, nation, and devotion. Hashmi’s (2024) analysis of the hymn’s “secular cleansing” highlights the structural difficulty of detaching *Vande Mataram* from its religious symbolism. The present study extends this insight by showing how the hymn’s affective force is inseparable from the novel’s ethical economy: devotion to the Mother becomes the emotional engine that sustains militant sacrifice.

Gender emerges as a critical site of ideological tension within this framework. Shanti’s male passing momentarily destabilizes Victorian gender binaries and gestures toward pre-colonial gender fluidity. However, as the Results demonstrate, this transgression is instrumental and temporary. Feminist and queer scholars have argued that such containment reflects nationalist anxiety over respectability and social order (Mondal, 2020; Manion, 2024). The present analysis supports this view, showing that *Anandamath* exploits gender nonconformity to energize nationalist action while ultimately reinscribing patriarchal norms aligned with colonial legal frameworks, particularly those institutionalized after the Indian Penal Code of 1860.

This pattern of instrumental inclusion followed by ideological containment reveals a broader contradiction at the heart of nationalist consolidation. While nationalist movements often rely on symbolic transgressions to mobilize resistance, they simultaneously suppress these transgressions to preserve moral coherence. Shanti’s narrative arc exemplifies this contradiction, exposing the limits of nationalist inclusion for women and gender-nonconforming subjects. The novel thus anticipates later nationalist discourses that celebrate women symbolically while restricting substantive autonomy.

The discussion of revisionist historical memory further illuminates *Anandamath*’s enduring political utility. By moralizing historical decline as collective forgetting rather than structural domination, the novel simplifies complex socio-economic processes into a narrative of ethical awakening. This selective reconstruction produces what Pinch (2017) terms a “site of memory,” where literature acquires political authority by offering emotionally compelling narratives of origin and destiny. Rashkow’s (2017) work on dispossessed memory further contextualizes this process, highlighting how such narratives marginalize Adivasi and subaltern histories in favor of a coherent nationalist myth.

The influence of *Anandamath* on later nationalist movements underscores the practical consequences of this ideological architecture. Historical studies demonstrate that revolutionary figures such as Subhas Chandra Bose engaged deeply with Bankim’s ethical nationalism, drawing upon its emphasis on sacrifice and devotion to articulate militant political visions (Mukerji, 2022). This continuity confirms that *Anandamath* functions not merely as a historical artifact but as an evolving ideological resource whose meanings are continually reactivated through political practice and cultural discourse.

At the same time, the novel’s engagement with Western liberal ideas complicates simplistic readings of *Anandamath* as purely revivalist. As Chatterjee (2021) and Gupta (2015) note, Bankim selectively incorporates utilitarian ethics and universalist ideals, producing a hybrid nationalist vision that critiques colonial authority while resisting wholesale rejection of modernity. The present study suggests that this hybridity contributes to the novel’s durability, allowing it

to be reinterpreted across changing political contexts. However, this flexibility does not negate the exclusionary effects of its moral absolutism; rather, it enables those effects to persist under shifting ideological guises.

Conclusion

This study has examined *Anandamath* as a complex and contested text that played a foundational role in shaping Indian nationalist imagination. Through close textual analysis of the Chatterjee (1882/2016) translation and systematic integration of scholarship, the paper has demonstrated how the novel constructs a spiritually sanctioned model of militant nationalism grounded in ethical violence, devotional affect, and revisionist historical memory. The analysis reveals that *Anandamath* functions as an ideological apparatus that disciplines emotion, regulates gender, and moralizes history in order to produce a coherent, though exclusionary, vision of the nation.

While *Anandamath* contributed powerfully to anti-colonial nationalist consciousness, it also embedded enduring tensions related to gender, secularism, and pluralism. The instrumental treatment of gender fluidity through Shanti, the sacralization of territory via *Vande Mataram*, and the selective reconstruction of the past collectively underscore the ideological costs of nationalist consolidation. Recognizing these contradictions is essential for any critical engagement with the novel's legacy.

Rather than approaching *Anandamath* as a static historical text, this study has argued for understanding it as a dynamic site of memory whose meanings continue to evolve through translation, political mobilization, and scholarly reinterpretation. Continued interdisciplinary research particularly archival work on reception history and intersectional studies of gender and sexuality is necessary to reassess the novel's relevance within contemporary debates on nationalism and identity in India.

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