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Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay: The Man Who Wrote Vande Mataram

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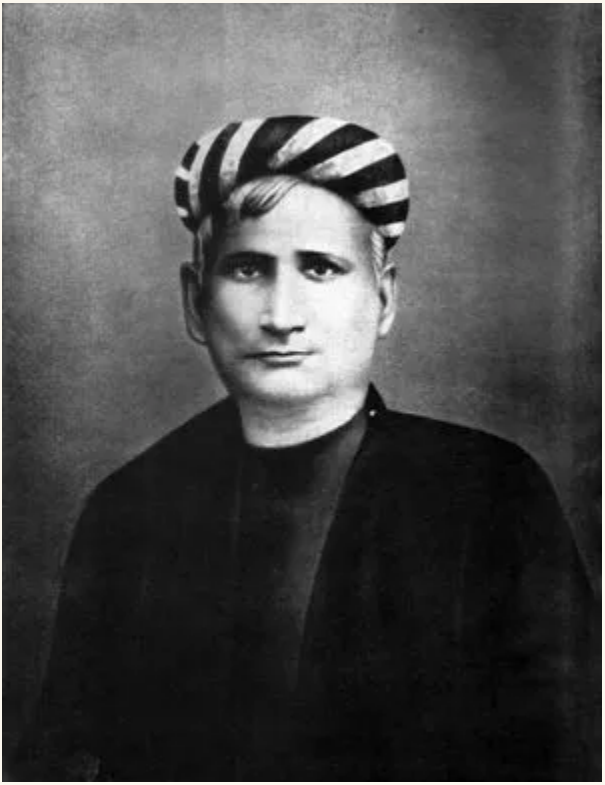
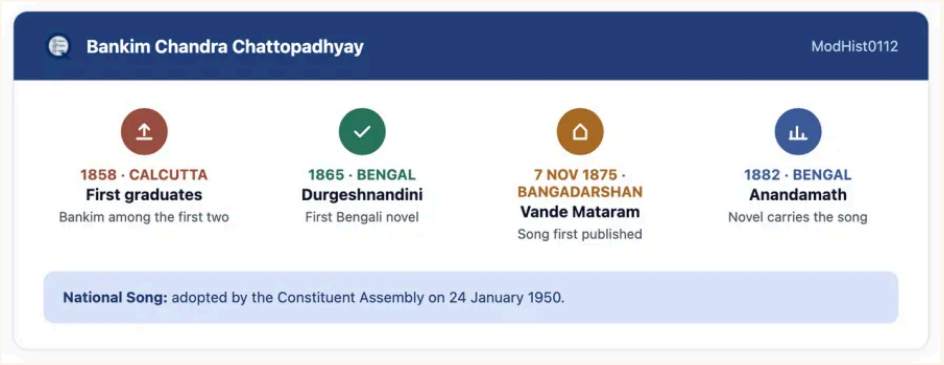
Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay: The Man Who Wrote Vande Mataram

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay served the colonial government for over 30 years. In his spare hours he wrote the song that outlasted the empire.

That song is “Vande Mataram”, India’s National Song. This lesson covers his life, his novels, the song’s journey and the exam traps around it.



Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, photographed before his death in 1894. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.



From first graduate to National Song: four dates in Bankim’s life.

Born. 26 June 1838, at Kathalpara, Naihati, Bengal.
1865. *Durgeshnandini*, his first Bengali novel.
1872. Founds the literary magazine *Bangadarshan*.
1875. Writes and publishes “Vande Mataram” in that magazine.
1882. Publishes *Anandamath*, which carries the song.
Died. 8 April 1894, in Calcutta, aged 55.

Vande Mataram: “I bow to the Mother”. It is a hymn to the motherland.

Sannyasi Rebellion: an 18th-century revolt of ascetics against East India Company rule.

Bangadarshan: the Bengali literary magazine Bankim founded.

1 Who was Bankim Chandra?

He was a civil servant by day and a novelist by choice.

- Bankim was born on **26 June 1838** at Kathalpara, Naihati.
- His family was Brahmin. His father later served as Deputy Collector of Midnapur.
- He studied at Hooghly College and then at Presidency College, Calcutta.
- In 1858 he was one of the first two graduates of the University of Calcutta.
- He soon joined the colonial service as a Deputy Magistrate.
- He worked as a civil servant for over **30 years**.
- He retired in 1891. He held the title Rai Bahadur.
- He died on **8 April 1894** in Calcutta, aged 55.
- Exams like the contrast. A government servant wrote a song of resistance.

Quick check 1. Bankim wrote Vande Mataram in 1875, seven years before Anandamath. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 What did he write?

He wrote a long list of novels, and *Durgeshnandini* was his first in Bengali.

- His first novel was in English. It was *Rajmohan's Wife*, of 1864.
- His ***Durgeshnandini*** of 1865 was his first Bengali novel and a landmark historical romance.
- He is called a pioneer of the Indian novel. He adapted the Western novel form to Bengali.
- Other major works include *Kapalkundala* (1866) and *Mrinalini* (1869).
- He also wrote *Bishabriksha*, or *The Poison Tree* (1873).
- Later came *Anandamath* (1882) and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884).
- He wrote about 14 novels in all.
- He also wrote essays on religion and society, such as *Krishnacharitra*.
- In 1872 he founded and edited the magazine **Bangadarshan**.
- Bengali literary circles gave him the honorific "Sahitya Samrat", or Emperor of Literature.
- West Bengal's Bankim Puraskar is named in his honour.

3 What is Anandamath about?

It is a novel set in a real revolt, built around one hymn.

- **Anandamath** came out in **1882**.
- It is set during the **Sannyasi Rebellion** against East India Company rule.
- That revolt was a real 18th-century uprising by ascetics.
- Bankim turned a real episode into lasting nationalist fiction.
- The novel shows the Mother Goddess in three forms.
- She appears as she was (Jagaddhatri), as she is (Kali) and as she will be (Durga).
- The hymn “Vande Mataram” is part of the story.
- The novel made the song known to a wider public.
- Exam trap: the song was written first. It was not first published in the novel.

4 How did the song become a national symbol?

It travelled from a magazine to the streets, then to the Constitution.

- Bankim wrote “Vande Mataram” in **1875**.
- It first appeared in *Bangadarshan* on 7 November 1875.
- That was seven years before it entered *Anandamath*.
- 2025 marked 150 years since its composition.
- Rabindranath Tagore set it to music.
- Sri Aurobindo later translated it into English.
- He sang it at the **1896** Congress session in Calcutta.
- On **7 August 1905**, thousands marched in Calcutta against the Partition of Bengal.
- The song became a rallying cry of the swadeshi and boycott movement.
- Officials tried to suppress it. In November 1905, a school in Rangpur fined students for chanting it.
- In **1907**, Madam Bhikaji Cama raised a flag with the words “Vande Mataram” at Stuttgart.
- That flag is often called the first Indian flag raised on foreign soil.
- On **24 January 1950**, the Constituent Assembly adopted it as India’s National Song.
- It was adopted alongside Jana Gana Mana, the National Anthem.
- For the song’s full story, see Vande Mataram: From Novel to National Song.

5 What are the exam traps?

Exams love dates and the order of events.

- CDS II 2025 asked which work shows the Mother Goddess in three forms. The answer was **Anandamath**.
- UPSC 2018 asked which of four events came earliest.

- The answer was Dinabandhu Mitra's *Neeldarpan*, of 1860.
- It came before Satyendranath Tagore's ICS success in 1863.
- It also came before the Arya Samaj's founding in 1875, and before *Anandamath* in 1882.
- Do not say the song first appeared in 1882. That is the novel's date.
- Do not say Bankim was a full-time author. He served the government for over 30 years.
- Remember who set the song to music: Tagore, not Bankim.

> **Quick check 2.** Bankim worked full-time as a novelist and never held a government post. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember: Born 1838. Durgeshnandini, 1865. Bangadarshan, 1872. Vande Mataram written 1875. Anandamath, 1882, set in the Sannyasi Rebellion. Tagore sang it in 1896. Adopted 24 January 1950. Died 1894.

> **Think it through:** Why did the song gain far more fame in 1905 than in 1875?
>
> In 1905 the Partition of Bengal gave people a shared anger. They needed a shared voice. The song already existed, so it filled that need.

> **Quick check 3.** The Constituent Assembly adopted Vande Mataram as the National Song on 24 January 1950. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Asked before

PYQ 1 · UPSC CSP 2018, Q80

Which among the following events happened earliest?

(a) Swami Dayanand established Arya Samaj.

(b) Dinabandhu Mitra wrote Neeldarpan.

(c) Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote Anandmath.

(d) Satyendranath Tagore became the first Indian to succeed in the Indian Civil Services Examination.

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Practice MCQs

1. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1865 novel Durgeshnandini holds which distinction?

A. His first novel, written in English

B. First Bengali novel translated into English

C. His first novel in Bengali

D. First novel to feature a female protagonist

See answer ↓

2. In which 1882 novel did "Vande Mataram" first appear as part of the story?

A. Devi Chaudhurani

B. Kapalkundala

C. Anandamath

D. Mrinalini

See answer ↓

3. On what date did the Constituent Assembly formally adopt "Vande Mataram" as India's National Song, alongside which anthem?

A. 26 January 1950, alongside Jana Gana Mana

B. 24 January 1950, alongside Jana Gana Mana

C. 15 August 1947, alongside Sare Jahan Se Achha

D. 26 November 1949, alongside Jana Gana Mana

See answer ↓

4. Who first set "Vande Mataram" to music and sang it publicly, at the 1896 Indian National Congress session in Calcutta?

A. Subramania Bharati

B. Rabindranath Tagore

C. Sri Aurobindo

D. Bipin Chandra Pal

See answer ↓

5. Where was Vande Mataram first published, before it was included in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's 1882 novel Anandamath?

A. The literary journal Bangadarshan, on 7 November 1875

B. The newspaper Amrita Bazar Patrika, in 1870

C. As a standalone pamphlet, in 1880

D. It was never published separately; it appeared only in Anandamath

See answer ↓

6. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is widely regarded as a pioneer of the Indian novel because he did what?

A. Adapted the Western novel form to Bengali language and Indian historical/social themes

B. Translated European novels word-for-word into Sanskrit

C. Wrote exclusively in English for a European audience

D. Revived the ancient Sanskrit epic form

See answer ↓

7. The Sanyasi Rebellion of the late 18th century, fictionalised in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novel 'Anandamath', broke out chiefly in?

A. Manipur

B. Assam

C. Bihar

D. Bengal

See answer ↓

8. On 24 January 1950, the Constituent Assembly adopted 'Vande Mataram' as India's National Song. What did it adopt on the same day?

A. The national language policy

B. The Ashoka Chakra as a state emblem

C. The national flag's current design

D. Jana Gana Mana, as the National Anthem

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Durgeshnandini, of 1865, was Bankim's first novel in Bengali. His earlier novel, Rajmohan's Wife (1864), was in English. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** "Vande Mataram" was incorporated into Bankim's 1882 novel Anandamath, set during the Sannyasi Rebellion against East India Company rule. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** The Constituent Assembly adopted "Vande Mataram" as India's National Song on 24 January 1950, alongside Jana Gana Mana as the National Anthem. (26 November 1949 is when the Constitution itself was adopted; 26 January 1950 is when it came into force — both real dates, but for different events.) ↑ Q3
4. **B.** Rabindranath Tagore set "Vande Mataram" to music and first sang it publicly at the 1896 Congress session in Calcutta. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** A PIB Backgrounder on the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026 notes that Vande Mataram was first published in the literary journal Bangadarshan on 7 November 1875, seven years before it appeared in Anandamath in 1882. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** Bankim Chandra Chatterjee took up the novel -- a literary form with no exact precedent in earlier Sanskrit, Persian, or regional Indian traditions -- and reshaped it around Bengali language and Indian historical and social themes. This adaptation of a Western structure to distinctly Indian content is why he is regarded as a foundational figure in the development of the modern Indian novel. ↑ Q6
7. **D.** The Sanyasi Rebellion involved bands of dispossessed ascetics (sanyasis) and fakirs, alongside displaced peasants and former Zamindar retainers, resisting British revenue policies and the broader economic dislocation following the Bengal famine of 1770. Chatterjee's later novel 'Anandamath', though a work of historical fiction rather than strict history, dramatised the rebellion and introduced the song 'Vande Mataram', which became a major nationalist anthem. The rebellion was eventually suppressed under Warren Hastings's administration. ↑ Q7
8. **D.** It adopted Jana Gana Mana as the National Anthem on the very same day, 24 January 1950. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3

Previous year answers

1. **(b) Neeldarpan** Dinabandhu Mitra wrote Neeldarpan in 1860, the earliest of the four events. Satyendranath Tagore passed the ICS in 1863 and Arya Samaj was founded in 1875. Anandmath was published later, in 1882.

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