

## Uncovering the Hypothesis of Hinduism in Bankimchandra's Writings

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### ABSTRACT

Bankimchandra Chatterjee has been regarded by some authors as the chief exponent of Neo-Hinduism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. One writer has described the Hastie controversy as the beginning of the New Hindu Movement in Bengal (Nath, The New Hindu Movement). I have used the term Revivalism and I do not regard the Hastie controversy as the beginning of a movement. The reservations regarding Neo-Hinduism will be explained later. Bankim was a litterateur and his explanation of Hinduism was an important development in the field of Bengali literature. It is well to remember that he was not a religious leader like Ramakrishna Paramhansa or Swami Vivekananda. The difference in their attitudes was fundamental. No one will deny that Ramakrishna Paramhansa had a more pronounced influence in the Revival of Hinduism than Bankim. Bankim's principal contribution to the religious revival of the late 19th century was "the study and interpretation of Hinduism as an intellectual discipline" (Rambachan). It is said that, Bankim was engaged in a controversy with the clergy-man William Hastie in 1882. The occasion which gave rise to this controversy was the performance on 17 September 1882 of the Dansagar Sraddha ceremony of an old lady of the Sovabazar Raj family, the grandmother of Maharaja Harendra Krishna Deb Bahadur, Bankim Chandra made an elaborate defense of Hinduism in a series of letters published in the Statesman. No doubt, The Hastie controversy was an important step in the propagation of Hinduism. But it was not the first step taken by Bankim. Anandamath was published earlier.

**Key Words:** Neo-Hinduism, Revivalism

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#### Introduction

My idea is that there is not much room for debaters if Bankimchandra Chaterjee is described in many popular terms like Swadesh Mantra Udgata ,Sage Bankim, the creator of Bengali fiction, the sabyasachi of Bengali literature. In his essay 'Dedication to New Writers of Bengal', he himself wrote that if you think that by writing for the people of the country you can do some good to the nation Or you can create beauty, then you must write. He issued this instruction not only for others but also for him. He himself was engrossed in the pursuit of literature for the rest of his life. Rabindranath wrote in his essay Bankimchandra that It would have been difficult for anyone else to take the weight that Bankim had taken. In the light of spirituality Bankimchandra saw the world and life, he became a devotee of Sabyasachi in the awakening and development of his country and nation. In the case of the presentation and Bankimchandra's innovation, the subject matter has been completed in itself. Bangadarshan, the first contemporary religious magazine in Bengali literature, has been published. The literary emperor Bankimchandra appeared on the occasion of this magazine. Bangadarshan became a degree in literature and the English educated readership of the country became interested in reading Bengali literature in a short period of time. The journey

began with Durgesh Nandini in the novel Bankimchandra's first debut.

Bankim's trilogy, Anandamath, Debi Chowdhurani and Sitaram were conscious efforts at the propagation of Hinduism. Bankim wrote a series of letters to Jogendra Chandra Ghosh, a positivist thinker. These were his Letters on Hinduism. He devoted himself to a study of Hinduism and its interpretation in the last ten years of his life (1884-1894). Bankim's journal 'Prachar'(July,1884) and Akshay Chandra Sarkar's journal Navajiban(New Life) were published from 1884 (Bose). Bankim's works Krishnacharitra, Dharmatatava, Devatatva O Hindudharma, Srimadbhag vatgita were published in the last ten years of his life.

### Literature Review:

There are many works on Bankinchandra's idea of Hinduism and dharma I have mentioned two of them below

1. **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's Concept of Dharma** by Malabika Majumdar on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2007
2. **The Nation and The Community:Hindu and Muslims in the Novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee** by Ranjan Das

But none of the works focuses on the Revivalism of Hinduism, in this paper I want to established Bankimchandra as the chief exponent of Neo-Hinduism.

### Research Proposal :

Bankimchandra's concept of Hinduism, as it should be, can be found in all these writings. Three main points may be mentioned about Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's writings on Hinduism.

(I)

According to him Hinduism is not merely a religion. Rather it was a way of life, a system of values, a culture in itself. "The substance of religion is culture, the fruit of it the higher life". (B. C. Chaterjee) This view of Bankimchandra has been explained in the novel Devi Chowdhurani and in his another notable works Dharmatatva. Bankim believed that it was possible to attain the higher life by a proper cultivation of the faculties (Vritti) of man. The faculties, according to Bankim were four, devoted to the development of Jnana, Karma, Chitta and Sharira (i.e. knowledge, work, mind and physique). He emphasized that true religion was the assimilation of all the faculties and their full development (Vrittinichayer Samanvaya).

## (II)

A second element in Bankimchandra's religious thinking was that an ideal was necessary for the development of full man. In Bankim's opinion this ideal could be found in Sri Krishna. Thus Bankimchandra has a strong belief in Avatara or in other words incarnation. The Avatara can be regarded as an ideal among human beings. The ideal human being was Jesus Christ among the Christians, Gautam Buddha among the Buddhists. But the Hindu ideal was Sri Krishna of the famous Indian epic Mahabharata. Bankim reconstructed the life of Sri Krishna and attempted to establish him as an ideal figure. Sri Krishna, according to Bankimchandra was the avatara par excellence. Amal Tripathi skillfully describes Sri Krishna, the king of Dwaraka as "He was the synthesis of the impersonal and the personal, the divine and the human, at once individual and universal". (Tripathi)

To put it simply Bankim's ideal was not the impersonal God of the Vedantist or 'the Inscrutable power in nature' of Herbert Spencer. He made it clear that the worship of the impersonal God was fruitless, that of the personal God was fruitful. (Ray)

## (III)

A third element in Bankim's religious thinking was the concept of Bhakti. Bankim's concept of Bhakti was totally different from the concept of Bhakti as propounded by the medieval Saints. These saints defined Bhakti as total surrender to the will of God (prapatti) and attainment of the grace of God (prasada). It is evident that there is no place for any rational exploration or argument in this concept of Bhakti. Only a loving devotion to a personal god could lead to one's salvation. When Bankimchandra speaks about Bhakti as the highest form of religion he has a definite outlook. This outlook is clearly defined in his work Dharmatattva.

"A condition in which all the faculties of man are turned towards God is Bhakti. A development of all faculties is needed for the perfection of man. But perfection also consists in the progress of all faculties towards Bhakti" (Ray).

This is a basic element in Bankimchandra's explanation of religion. And he had reached the conclusion after years of search.

"From very early life I have faced the question : What is to be done with this life ? What shall I do with my life ? I have searched for an answer throughout my life, practically my life has been spent in finding an answer ... I have read many books, written much, conversed with many people and come into contact with many people in course of my service career. I have read literature, science, history, philosophy, native and foreign scriptures. I have labored hard for the fulfillment of life. After hard labor and suffering I have found an answer to my query : what shall I do with life ? I have learnt that Bhakti is attained when all human faculties are turned towards God. There can be no perfection in man without Bhakti." (Ray)

## Chapter : (I)

### **The Intellectual and rationalist Analysis of Hinduism**

Any assessment of Bankimchandra's religious ideal has to take into account these basic elements in his thinking. He has written much and on many subjects. Naturally his writings can be, and have been, used to suit particular viewpoints. Often his contribution to neo-Hinduism has been exaggerated beyond measure. We have to remember that Bankim's medium was literature. Literary work on Hinduism can have a limited influence, confined as it is among the educated classes. Secondly, Bankim was a writer cum civil servant. There was no religious fervour in him. His analysis was cold, intellectual and rationalistic. Thirdly, his Anushilan dharma was something abstract. Bipinchandra Pal has compared it with "Brahmoism and found the two alike." (Pal). From this one can conclude that Bankim's Anushilan dharma could not have like Brahmoism, a major influence in shaping the Hindu outlook on religion. This position has been accepted by later writers like Bhabatosh Dutta in his works as well. (Dutta)

These reservations should not be construed as attempts to denigrate Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Rather they are intended to have a study of Bankim's religious outlook in proper perspective. Bankim devoted the last 12 years of his life (1882-1894) to an elaborate defence of Hinduism and attempted to give Pauranic Hinduism a rational basis. This was not something new as to merit the nomenclature neo-Hinduism. Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda also preached the revival of Hinduism, not a new Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda opinion about Hinduism is found in his speech at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago

".....I thank you in the name of the mother of religions, and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects..... I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true.I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth..... O Lord, the different paths which people take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee. The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita." (Vivekananda)

Although , Bankimchandra and Vivekananda had wide differences in their approach. But they were all revivalists, not innovators. On this point sister Nivedita is very clear when she write on Swami Vivekananda.

"In his case as in that of the Buddhist missionaries the impelling force that drove him out to foreign lands was the great personality of One at whose feet he had sat and whose life he had shared for many years. Yet in the west he spoke of no personel teacher, he gave the message of no limited seet. 'The religious ideas of the Hindus' were his theme at Chicago., and similarly thereafter, it was those elements which were common to and characteristic of orthodox Hinduism in all its parts that formed the burden of his teaching. Thus for the first time in History, Hinduism itself formed the subject of the generalisation of a Hindu mind of the highest order." (Nivedita)

I have quoted Nivedita at some length to establish my contention that there was not much which could be regarded as substantially New in the so-called New Hinduism. Both Bankimchandra and Vivekananda wanted to protect the citadel of Puranic Hinduism, not While they should not be ranked with other orthodox thinkers of the Century like Sasadhar Tarkachuramani they wanted a Hindu revival to combat the challenge of Christianity and Brahmoism. The principal points of Bankimchandra may be summarized first.

(1) The fundamental doctrines of Hinduism are what no European Scholar understands and what no European Scholar is competent to teach. The native Scholar is decidedly a better teacher than the European.

(2) Knowledge in India come to be in part recorded in a written language and in part handed down as unwritten and traditional, .. Now all this traditional and unwritten knowledge which is flesh and blood to the dry bones of the written literature is wholly unavailable to the European Scholar, ... "The breathing form of the old learning and old civilization is visible to the native eyes only." (Chatterjee 100)

(3) Bankimchandra did not think that Hinduism was placed on the defense by an attack of Christianity. Rather Christianity has to maintain a hard struggle for its existence at home.

(4) He makes a few observations from the Hindu's point of view. Hinduism consists of a doctrinal basis of the creed, a worship or rites and lastly a code of morals, more or less dependent upon the doctrinal basis. The doctrinal basis will be found to consist in dogmas formulated, explained and illustrated in a number of philosophical literature and legends, which from the legitimate subject of the puranas.

(5) Bankim is not apologetic about the prevailing form of Hinduism and does not contend that something New should take its place. Often he would suggest reforms But his Hinduism was basically a revival of old values and ideals of traditional Hinduism. This is evident from what he writes to Hastie in (22 October 1882) the Statesman. "Pantheism and polytheism, Philosophy and mysticism, all lent a hind ; and out of this bold eclecticism rose the beautiful religion, which I do not believe of divine origin, but which I accept as the perfection of human wisdom." (Chatterjee 104)

(6) Bankim admits that idolatry is a part, but not an essential part of Hinduism. But he has no word of condemnation for idolatry.

"The existence of idols is as justifiable as that of the tragedy of Hamlet or that of Prometheus. The religious worship of idols is as justifiable as the intellectual worship of Hamlet or Promethens. The homage we owe to the ideal of the human realised in

art is admiration. The homage we owe to the ideal of the divine realised in idolatry is worship." (Chatterjee 105,106)

The image, according to Bankim is simply the Visible and the accessible medium through which the worshipper can send his homage to the throne of the Invisible and the Inaccessible. (7) Caste, idolatry and ritual can be dispensed with. But the principal doctrines of Hinduism are unchangeable and have continued to remain for ages; Bankimchandra wants a proper understanding and revival of the pure doctrines of Hinduism.

## **Chapter : (II)**

### **The Idea of Neo-Hinduism**

His works over last 10 years indicate the meaning of Neo-Hinduism or what he wanted in revived Hinduism. Firstly, The term Hinduism has to be restricted to the articles of religious belief accepted by Hindus generally at the present day in exclusion of the vedic and Brahmanic faith out of which Hinduism evolved itself, ... The noxious parasitic growth must be exterminated before Hinduism can hope further to carry on the education of the human race.

Secondly, Reformed and purified Hinduism may stand forth in the world as the noblest system of individual and social culture available to the Hindu even in this age of progress. Bankim says very frankly.

"I have certainly no serious hope of progress in India except in Hinduism, in Hinduism reformed, regenerated and purified. Let us revere the past, but we must in justice to our new life, adopt new methods of interpretation and adopt the old, eternal and undying truths to the necessities of new life". (Chatterjee 11-13)

Thirdly, The worship of the personal God is, in Bankim's opinion the highest form of religion. "A personal God alone realizes the highest and most perfect ideal of the Good, the Beautiful and the True... If religion is culture, the worship of such a perfect ideal is by far the most important means of culture." (Chatterjee 14)

Fourthly, It is again true that Bankimchandra did not envisage any basic change in puranic Hinduism, He suggested reform of certain customs or rituals, which were not central to his idea of Hinduism. This position is categorically stated in the letters on Hinduism,

"If the ultimate principles of Hinduism be found true and sound and the practiced applications of these principles erroneous, the wise course is not to subvert and annihilate Hinduism which is the cry of the educated India, but to discard the erroneous applications and to remodel life in accordance with its true principles. That is the direction in which religious reform is most desirable and in which alone, I trust, is its success possible." (Chatterjee 17).

The legends of Hinduism are not to be rejected out of hand. They should be carefully studied, so that the true Hinduism latent in them may be discovered. "The spurious Hinduism is in

their literal interpretation; the true Hinduism is in their historic interpretation." (Chatterjee 23)

It will be seen that Bankim does not reject any vital part of Hinduism and the new Hinduism is substantially the old puranic Hinduism. Professor N. R. Roy rightly comments that Neo-Hinduism is "a more convenient than correct nomenclature for the nineteenth Century religious reaction in India," (History of Bengal)

Bankim maintains that polytheism is one of the distinguishing features of Hinduism. He is not apologetic about it. "A pure monotheism is not to be found among the most cultured nations of the earth. ... If it is found at all, it will be found in spheres of lower culture, among Mahammedans for instance." (Chatterjee 45) The passage quoted above indicates also Bankim's attitude to Muslim Culture. Hinduism does not accept more than one God in spite of its

polytheism. It does not suppose the existence of a number of duties subordinate to or coordinate with the great author and ruler of the Universe. Hinduism in its days of corruption lost sight of this important truth. It is the duty of the modern cultivated Hindu to restore it to its primitive purity. So Bankim wants a restoration of primitive Hinduism, not a revolutionary change in its definition or content. Pantheism is also a feature of Hindu religion. Sankaracharya developed it and preached it with an amount of learning and eloquence unrivalled in India. The Bhagvat purana and the Bhagvat Gita are pantheistic literature, which derive their philosophy from the Vedanta. But the God of pantheism is an impersonal God, who has no moral attribute which can be worshipped. Pantheism therefore fails as a religion.

"Moral attributes imply personality, we must worship a personal God in order that we may worship the highest form of excellence, that our worship may not be a barren and crushing worship of pitilessness and power, but one of love and hope and an exalting influence leading man to the highest ideal of life." (Chatterjee 54,55)

The belief in a personal God is of the very essence of the creed of Hinduism. Iswara, Parameswara, Jagadiswara, these are words commonly used to denote a personal God, Bankim believes that in the great storehouses of the traditional religion of the Hindus, the Itihasas (History) and puranas the belief in a personal God co-exists with that in an impersonal God co-extensive with the universe on the one side and tritheism and polytheism on the other.

Much has been written on Bankimchandra's Anushilan Dharma. Bipinchandra Pal found it similar to Brahma Dharma. Other writers have regarded this as a major aspect of neo-Hinduism. But Bankim-chandra did not regard Anushilan as anything new or basically different from Puranic Hinduism. This is evident from a passage in the Darshitva.

"Disciple : The Europeans and Pandit Dayananda Saraswati regard the vedic religion as the best and the Puranic or modern Hinduism as an inferior religion. But now I see this is extremely incorrect. The religion which is devoid of Bhakti is an incomplete or inferior religion. So the vedic religion is inferior as the vedas have no place for



Bhakti. Puranic or modern Hinduism is the best religion. Those who try to revive vedic religion and abolish modern Hinduism are mistaken.

Preceptor : Your view is entirely correct. But it cannot be said that there is no place for Bhakti any-where in the Vedas." (Ray)

Bankim has repeatedly emphasized in the Dharmatattva his contention that "puranic Hinduism is the best and complete form of religion. This is the reason why it could not be defeated or replaced by any foreign religion." (Ray)

In the course of this discussion Bankimchandra writes that the substance of religion is culture. This culture consists in a development of the various faculties in man, physical, mental, aesthetic. Perfection can be reached by man in this life. As a matter of fact, perfection has been reached by the superior men, the Avatars. Sri Krishna is the greatest Avatars, according to the author of the Dharmatattva. A pioneer in spiritual psychodynamics of India Deep Trivedi also believes Krishna's life and Bhagavad Gita are the precious gift to the mankind. He thinks

"Krishna is the greatest psychologist in history. He teaches us management, how to focus on work, build an empire, turn situation in our favor ,effectively deal with people and things and do reverse calculation to achieve goal" (Bureau)

The Avatars represents the ideal of the devotee. The purpose of of worship is to imbibe the qualities of the personal God. The Aryan saints believed that by imbibing the virtues of a personal God one can attain salvation,

"Salvation is nothing but the attainment of God through the cultivation of godly qualities. It is then possible to get relief from sorrow and attain happiness. No nation other than the Hindus understood better the meaning of worship (Upasana)". (Ray)

Human faculties (Vritti) relate to knowledge, work, physique and aesthetics. The cultivation of these faculties results in the growth of a full man. Sri Krishna, according to Bankim is the ideal or full man.

Bankimchandra's idea of Hindu religion was nothing new. He has made it clear that he has no new principle to preach, no new religion to uphold. The Dharmatattva shows his faith in the old religious tradition.

"Religion is old, not new. Where shall I get a new religion ?.....I am following the footsteps of the ancient Rishis in my understanding of religion. The central part of Hinduism is immortal; it will continuous for all time... But certain customs or rites should change with the times or even abandoned in some cases. This is the main thing in the regeneration of Hinduism." (Ray)

The source of Anushilan Dharma is the Hindu scripture. Bankim's idea in places resembled those of Comte, Spencer and Spinoza. But Bankim emphatically maintains that such ideas are sanctioned in the Hindu sculptures and they should not be abandoned simply because they resembled European ideas. Comte thought that education was part of religion. That is no

reason why this idea should be abandoned by the Hindus. Similarly the idea of worship cannot be abandoned simply because the Christians also cherish the idea of worship. If there is some similarity between Vedanta and the idea of Spencer and Spinoza then Vedanta cannot be abandoned. Hinduism is an all embracing religion. "To the Hindu there is nothing which is outside his religion. Religion is a part of his life. God, man, the temporal world, the spiritual world-these are all parts of the Hindu religion. So Hinduism is a complete religion; other religions are incomplete and imperfect." (Ray)

From the above discussion it is clear that Bankimchandra was convinced of the superiority of Hinduism. On this point he had full agreement with Rajnarain Basu, who in 1872 delivered a lecture on the superiority of Hindu religion. Rajnarain and Bankimchandra sharply differed as regards the nature of Hinduism which they intended to revive. But both of them strengthened the movement for the revival of Hinduism. This naturally leads to another question: Bankim's attitude to other religions, like Islam and Christianity. Bankim's criticism of the Muslim has been extremely harsh. This may be established by numerous reference to his writings, particularly Debi Chowdhurani, Anandamath and Sitaram. Some writers have tried to play down this criticism by pointing out that "Bankim's target was not the upright Muslim but the decadent tyrant" (Tripathi). One writer has mentioned that Bankimchandra was primarily a novelist and wherever "he has attacked the Muslims he has done so in the interest of his novels." (Karim)

### **Chapter: (III)**

#### **Bankim's trilogy: Anandamath, Devi Chowdhurani and Sitaram, propagation of the theory of superiority of the Hindu religion.**

If we read the works of Bankimchandra closely we are generally inclined to accept him as a zealous Hindu who championed the cause of a revived Hinduism. In one of his letters on Hinduism he mentions that monotheism could be found in spheres of lower culture, among Mohammedans for instance (Chatterjee 45). The novel Anandamath, which is closely connected with the rise of national sentiment makes disparaging reference to Muslim rule and the general character of the Muslims. In Bandematharam one can find a very fine symbol of patriotic literature. But the mother conceived by the hero Satyananda smacks of idolatry. Satyananda is a bitter critic of Muslim rule, and is determined to destroy the Muslims. Ultimately Satyananda is assured that Muslim rule has been destroyed and Hindus can prosper only under British rule. The English are well versed in practical knowledge. The spread of English education would remove the ignorance of the people. "There will be no hindrance to the spread of Sanatan Dharma. Then true religion will be revived on its own." (B. Chatterjee, Anandamath 117,118)

The revival of religion is also the theme of Devi Chowdhurani. Bankim has mentioned two principal mottoes of the Novel. (1)The substance of religion is culture. The fruit of it the higher life (Natural Religion by the author of Ecce Homo, Seeley). (2) The general law of man's progress whatever the point of view chosen, consists in this that Man becomes more and more religious. (August comet, Catechism of Positive Religion. English translation of Congreve 1st edn. p. 374).

A close study of the novel shows that Bankimchandra has consistently tried to propagate his views on Anushilan Dharma through this novel. In the end Prafulla has been regarded as an Avatara who appears from age to age for the establishment of religion, for the protection of the saints and for the destruction of the evil doers. Like in Mahabharata Sri Krishna Said

*yada yada hi dharmasya*

*glanir bhavati bhārata*

*abhyutthanam adharmasya*

*tadatmanam srijamy aham* (Thedivineindia.com)

(Whenever and wherever there is a decline in religious practice, O descendant of Bharata, and a predominant rise of irreligion—at that time I descend Myself.)

It does not appear from the novel that Prafulla actually represents these ideals. Moreover, the emphasis on religious propaganda has considerably marred the qualities of the novel.

Sri Krishna is the ideal man in Debichowdhurani possessing as he does infinite beauty, infinite wealth and infinite youth. The author suggests that Sri Krishna is the personal God of Hindus, a God can be imagined and worshipped. The Hindus are conscious of the fact that God is infinite, but they prefer to worship a personal God, who is limited. This is the way of approach to the infinite. The central figure of the Novel, Prafulla is taught the principal ideas of Anushilan Drama (B. C. Chatterjee). Bhabani Pathack teaches Prafulla to do work without any attachment (or Asakti) as we find Krishna Advice Arjuna .

“tasmādasaktaḥ satataṁ kāryaṁ karma samācara,  
asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣaḥ” (Aurobindo)

Therefore without attachment perform ever the work that is to be done (done for the sake of the world, lokasangraha, as is made clear immediately afterward); for by doing work without attachment man attains to the highest. (Aurobindo)

Non-attachment means control of the senses, abandonment of pride, Surrender of all results to God. Ultimately it would be possible to realize God in one's mind. It appears that Prafulla has realized the substance of religion i.e. culture. The result was higher life. Bankim's has described this as the motto of the Novel, Debichowdhurani. (B. C. Chatterjee)

Sitaram, the last novel in Bankim's trilogy is devoted to the propagation of the theory of superiority of the Hindu religion. Bankim regarded the revival of Hinduism as a great task. In the success and failure of Sitaram Bankimchandra has delineated the strong and weak points of contemporary Hinduism. Sitaram was a Bengali chief ; he was able to establish an independent kingdom by force of arms. But ultimately he failed to maintain his kingdom as

he sought for his own pleasure. The Hindu Ideal of non-attachment, of doing good to others was abandoned by Sitaram. The reasons are stated in the novel:

"The Sitaram who had staked everything for the protection of Hinduism now abandoned his administration and sought for Sree, ... one who was devoted to the good of the people now became devoted to self." (B. Chaterjee, Sitaram 118)

Bankim's passion for Hindu glory can be seen in the pages of Sitaram. This intense love for Hinduism has not been liked by some critics. But Bankimchandra was firm in his ideal. He reminded the Hindus of their past glory and denounced their decay and moral weakness. Sitaram's story illustrates the strong and weak points of Hinduism.

In Bankim's description of Lalitgiri we find his intense pride in the Hindu tradition. "Then I was the Hindus. The Upanishads, Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kumarasambhab, Shakuntala, Panini, Katyana, Sankhya, Patanjale, Vedanta, Vaishesika, all these are works of the Hindus. This idol is nothing in comparison." (B. Chaterjee, Sitaram)

Bankim regarded the revival of Hinduism as a great task. A statement of Chandrachudra to Sitaram deserves notice. "If you are pleased towards the Muslims, who will protect the Hindus from the Muslims? Where will Hinduism stand? It is your good fortune, as one who revives Hinduism is worthy and fortunate among men" (B. Chaterjee, Sitaram 99)

## Conclusion

A brief discussion of three novels of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay shows that he was keen on reviving Hindu glory and often denigrated the Muslim. I have already mentioned that authors try to play down the communal overtones in Bankim's novels. References have been made to his article *Bangadesher Krishak* and the conclusion in the novel *Rajsingha*. In *Rajsingha* Bankim writes at the end of the novel:

"No reader should think that the object of the book is to find a difference between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindu is not necessarily good and the Muslim is not necessarily bad, ... Good and bad elements can be found among both" (B. Chaterjee, Bankim Rachana Samgraha 661)

This explanation was necessary as the principal object of the novel was to establish the superiority of Hindu might. *Rajsingha* is an example of Hindu power and Aurangzeb of Muslim degeneration. This part has been overplayed in *Rajsingha*, which Bankim claims to be a historical novel. Aurangzeb has been depicted as a prisoner in the hands of women in the harem, which he was not in fact. In *Rajsingha* Bankim has exaggerated the virtues of *Rajsingha* and the power of the Hindus. Aurangzeb has been completely denigrated in an unhistorical manner. This explains why Bankim had to add an explanation at the end.

Prof Amal Tripathy in *The Extremist Challenge* maintains that Bankim was a critic of the decadent tyrant, not of the upright Muslim. In *Bangadesher Krishak* Bankim speaks of the misery of the peasants in general. The Ramchands and Shyamchands had the same kind of

life under the Muslims as well as under Sitaram. These however, do not lead us to think that Bankim was not communal. On the other hand his works generally leave the impression that he was a zealous Hindu revivalist and he was generally contemptuous of the Muslim rule, In Anandamath he welcomes the British rule, In Sitaram's Hindu Rajya there is no place for the Muslim. There is no need to play down Bankim's communalism. This was a general attitude of the leading men of the 19th century. Their nationalism was Hindu nationalism and they preferred British rule of law to Muslim tyranny. If we keep this mind we can understand how the author of Bandemataram could be a strong Hindu revivalist. The following observation of a Marxist writer deserves our attention "Bankim was the prophet of nationalism in literature and yet Hindu revivalism with an excessive stress on the Hindu character and tradition seemed to speak out through him". (Sen 43,44)

Bandemataram later found acceptance by Indians of other provinces as a model of a patriotic poem. But initially Bankim thought of Bengali nationalism and Hindu revivalism

"Bankimchandra understood that essential to nationalism was the close identification of the individual with a particular community and the differentiation of the interests of the particular community from other communities. He realized that the basic problem of Indian politics was the lack of social solidarity." (Heimsath)

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