

The Legacy of Vande Mataram on Pre-Independent Society

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Abstract

The Vande Mataram movement played a significant role in India's struggle for independence, symbolizing resistance against British colonial rule. This study examines the legacy of Vande Mataram on pre-independent Indian society, highlighting its impact on national identity, cultural revival, and the freedom struggle. By analyzing the song's cultural and political significance, this research provides insights into its enduring influence on Indian society and its role in shaping the country's path to independence. Vande Mataram helped shape a sense of national identity and unity among Indians. The movement promoted Indian culture and traditions, contributing to a cultural revival. Vande Mataram became a rallying cry for nationalists, inspiring resistance against British rule. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Vande Mataram movement's impact on pre-independent Indian society, highlighting its role in shaping the country's cultural and political landscape.

Keywords: *Vande Mataram Movement; Freedom Struggle; Pre-Independent Society; Cultural Landscape; Political Landscape*

1. Introduction

The Vande Mataram movement was a significant turning point in India's fight for independence. It was a symbol of defiance against the control of the British colonial government. The song, which was composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay in the year 1876, became a rallying cry for nationalists and played a crucial part in the formation of Indian culture and identity. The legacy of Vande Mataram on pre-independent Indian society is investigated in this study. The study looks at the impact that Vande Mataram had on subjects such as national identity, cultural rebirth, and the struggle for freedom. By gaining an understanding of the legacy left behind by Vande Mataram, one can gain significant insights into the intricate dynamics with which India fought for its independence and the significance that cultural expression plays in the formation of political movements. The objective of this research is to provide a contribution to a more in-depth comprehension of this key time period in Indian history.

The song Vande Mataram, or poetry, or whatever one desired to interpret during the pre-independent society, assumed significant implications by the time India was well into the 20th century. Vande Mataram was first performed in India in 1964. It was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the man who was responsible for those enchanted lines, who was initially reluctant to publish the lines at all. Nevertheless, it was brought into the light of day. Since that time, there has been no going back on the decision. Nationalists adopted it as their rallying cry in the fight against the oppression of the English; it was sung at the session of the Indian National Congress in the year 1896. It was praised by illustrious persons from all walks of life as the most stirring and evoking account of motherland, which incited people to fight for India's independence. Due to the significant impact of the song, the pre-independent society began publishing pamphlets, which were subsequently prohibited by the law of the United Kingdom. On the other hand, with regard to the more negative aspects, anti-Bankim Chandra messages did come into existence as a result of inexplicable and unfortunate events. Individuals had raised objections to the poem's purported criticism of the Muslim League in India, which ultimately resulted in disagreements between brotherhoods in the future. I would want to summarize that

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criticism can be safely excluded from Bankim Chandra's verse composition. This is because the impacts of Vande Mataram in the society that existed prior to independence brought the common people together under a common purpose.

During the course of political unrest, the message conveyed by the song evolved into a slogan. According to Aurobindo Ghosh, the concept was more accurately described as a mantra. Because of this, the practices of the militant nationalist societies took it as a promise and a battle cry, and they used those two phrases as a slogan in processions to excite the public. The impact that Vande Mataram had on the political climate of the society that existed prior to independence has frequently been discussed in broad terms. As an immediate consequence of Vande Mataram, a number of occurrences took place throughout the area.

This incident, or a series of episodes, took place in Rajamundry, which was located in what was formerly known as the Madra Presidency. According to a report published by The Hindu in February 1907, a Bala Bharati Samiti was in the process of being organized. In Rajahmundry, students, all of whom were wearing Vande Mataram badges and carrying aloft beautiful banners that glittered with bold letters of Vande Mataram and Allah-o-Akbar, marched around the town. At various points, the procession stopped to sing the immortal song of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Once more, in the month of April in the year 1907, the Hindu correspondent from the neighboring Krishna district reported that the arrival of Bipin Chandra Pal to Masulipatam incurred a level of political enthusiasm that had never been witnessed before. His presentations on the Mathra Murthi, as well as the history and significance of Vande Mataram, elicited a remarkable response from the audience. Pal traveled to Rajahmundry on April 19, 1907, and according to the records kept by the police, the shouting of Vande Mataram became a routine occurrence, and 'seditious meetings' were convened in a number of villages. In this instance, the impact of Vande Mataram at the time before India gained her independence serves as an excellent illustration. A European missionary expressed their displeasure with the fact that a resident of Rajahmundry had recruited a few street boys and offered them several rupees on the condition that they shouted "Vande Mataram" at every European. Students were in the vanguard of events like these marches and were the ones who led the shouters of slogans.

Regarding the behavior of pupils who were mounted on bicycles, the British head of Rajamundry Arts College provided the director of public instruction with a comprehensive report on the events that had taken place. Additionally, it was a common practice among students to wear specific Vande Mataram medals or badges when the college was in session. Students were cautioned by the principal to refrain from engaging in such behavior, and a ringleader who was wearing the badge was expelled from the school. All of these events took place prior to Pal's arrival on April 19th, when he started delivering speeches that were of a "openly treasonable and seditious character."

Subsequently, more than half of the college students started wearing the badge, and the principal made an attempt to coerce them into taking off the badges on the day of the college tests. While this was going on, someone on the verandah raised the cry of Vande Mataram, which was instantly taken up from other parts of the campus, and students rushed out of the building in a mass. The principal appears to have lost his passion and grabbed one of the offenders by the arm, possibly in a slightly rough manner, in order to expedite his departure. The occurrence prompted 190 out of 215 students to "secede," which is another way of saying to go on strike. This is what we might refer to as the effects of Vande Mataram in the society that existed prior to independence.

During the course of the following month, Principal Hunter suspended 138 students, and the Government of Madras, for the most part, agreed with his judgment and rusticated a number of students for a period of two years. The director of public instruction, Logan, was of the opinion that the situation would have been more peaceful if the disruptive influence of the Bengalee (Bengali) agitator, Bipin Chandra Pal, had not been exerted upon the active minds of the students. When compared to the relatively calm atmosphere that prevailed at educational institutions during that time period, it was quite an event. The narrative provided by Principal Hunter exemplifies how the term Vande Mataram had established itself as a symbol of resistance against the rulers and the British in the everyday life of the people. Clearly demonstrating the significance of the slogan in everyday conflict situations is the principal's ongoing struggle against the slogan, which has been going on for considerable time. During the process of Vande Mataram becoming a national cry for liberation, the British were, predictably, the most affected of all the countries involved. Their efforts to oppose those national moves were utterly ignored by nationalists, who showed a high level of contempt for their warning. These collegiate episodes were a joyful manifestation of the intelligent repercussions that Vande Mataram had on society prior to the establishment of independence.

There was a string of occurrences in which the slogan Vande Mataram was used often, and the strike that took place at Rajahmundry College was one of such incidents. It has been reported by the collector of the Godavari district that

in Rajahmundry, a Vande Mataram Protection League was established with the purpose of ensuring that the students have the right to chant Vande Mataram in whatever manner that they like. Within the same town, Europeans frequently found themselves insulted by the slogan that was yelled at them as they walked by themselves.

At the beginning of June in the year 1907, the European Club in Coconada was subjected to an assault by a throng that simultaneously yelled out "Vande Mataram." It was reported by The Hindu that this was a reaction to another case of slogan screaming. Captain Kemp, a great boxer, was irritated by a kid of sixteen years old who yelled the phrase after him while he was walking down the street. A crowd gathered and later attacked the European Club, which Kemp had gone to in the meantime to seek the companionship of his own countrymen. Kemp had beaten the youngster to the point of insanity. According to the magistrates of Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur districts, there was a widespread mood of disturbance, and the only thing that brought back normalcy was the presence of troops in the Circars, which is the northern district of the Madras Presidency. Despite the fact that the surge of slogan shouting eventually subsided, it left behind memories of white males showing defiance in public places and a tendency on the part of officials to recognize defiance in the cry, Vande Mataram. It was precisely this "defiance" that was the main effect of Vande Mataram in the society that existed prior to attaining independence, with "whites" being crushed by "blacks."

In the midst of this string of occurrences, the Indian principal of Coconada College offers a perspective that is both interesting and noteworthy. He stated that the word "Vande Mataram" was considered a sacred expression, and it should not be used in a manner that provokes. Although there is a possibility that some members of the middle class had this viewpoint, the mob saw it as a scream of defiance that was intended to be used as a provocation. Bangladesh has a great deal of examples. An instance of this would be the students of City College, located in the town of Mymensingh, which is located in the region of north Bengal, which is now known as Bangladesh. They would cry "Vande Mataram" with tremendous fervor and for a substantial amount of time, especially when the additional district magistrate passed by. A number of lower-level government officials, such as Babu Uma Charan Roy Chowdhury in Tripura, have expressed their displeasure with the use of similar slogans to irritate them. Babu Uma Charan, a loyal British subject, had three students detained for singing vulgar and national songs in front of his apartment. As a summary of the observations of various authorities, the Home Department made the observation that the harassment that the police and loyal government officers are being subjected to is by far the most significant result that the agitation is causing at the present time (1907).

With the passage of time, Vande Mataram has acquired a different position; nonetheless, when one examines the impact that the song had on society prior to independence, it is clear that the song has changed. It was a common practice to shout the phrase "Vande Mataram" during demonstrations in bazaars that were held in the name of a "foreign goods boycott." This was done in order to garner support and exert pressure on the proprietors of the shops. For the most part, however, the presence of law enforcement and other officials seems to amplify the passion of those who shout slogans. It was the official opinion that up until this point, "the fear inspired by the *lal-pagri-wallak*...played no small part in keeping the ignorant masses under control." However, between the years 1905 and 1907, this fear became a thing of the past. It was a feature of the Bengal police officer's uniform to wear a red turban, also known as a *lal pagri*. However, as a result of the agitation, the public's attitude towards the police had shifted, and they were now considered with a noticeable disrespect. The presence of military did not always prove to be successful, at least not in terms of putting an end to those who shouted slogans.

Despite the fact that it is possible that the phrase was advocated by students and young people from middle-class backgrounds in the majority of cases, there are also reports from the police that it was used by people from working-class backgrounds. In October of 1905, mill workers at the Fort Gloster Mill, which was owned by the British and located close to Calcutta, went on strike. This was an early example. This provides a superb illustration of the consequences that Vande Mataram had throughout the time period before to the country's independence. It has been reported by the superintendent of police that mill workers have been heard yelling Vande Mataram at the European assistance. The manager, who was of English descent, took action to put an end to this situation by apprehending two offenders of this kind, which led to the subsequent occurrences. The action taken by the manager was received with a significant amount of opposition, and a consensus was reached to accommodate their concerns. It was told that at 7:55 p.m., all nine thousand of the workers, who were almost entirely Bengalis from the surrounding area, were to yell out "Vande Mataram." In accordance with this, the European Assistants working in the various departments were surrounded, and several of them were shoved around. This was done in an effort to put an end to the disturbances that were occurring. A number of arrests were made the following day after the chief of the district police arrived at the factory with armed police officers. The result of this was a complete strike in support of those who were detained. When the superintendent of police of the district attempted to reason with the workers, they informed him that they

were all brothers in the mill. This is according to the superintendent of police.

One of the factors that contributed to the spread of the Vande Mataram virus was the actions taken by the government, specifically the publicity that was brought about by the court trials. The proceedings of the prosecution of militant activists or nationalist agitators were exposed to the public through the media, namely the newspapers. The trial of Aurobindo Ghosh, who was accused of building explosives, catapulted him to the position of a hero, along with Chittaranjan Das, who at the time was serving as the defense counsel and would later become the leader of the Congress party. Many of the defendants in the case yelled Vande Mataram in the courtroom while they were being tried for their crimes. It was common practice for Khudiram Bose, who was executed by hanging in 1908 for the attempted murder of a magistrate, to begin his statements with the phrase "Vande Mataram." The blood and anguish that fighters had to go through, chanting just a modest Vande Mataram in a society that was not yet independent, causes one to feel a surge of pride. Such brilliant events make one feel proud. In his final speech, Pradyot Bhattacharya, who was executed by hanging in 1932 for the murder of a magistrate in Medinipur, expressed his desire to enable India to awaken through the sacrifice of its people. It is Bande Mataram. During the course of the trial, these facts were brought to light. It was the fact that martyrs made this slogan their mantra that managed to capture the imagination of the general public.

It was characterized as "political alienation or discontent...which tends to a disposition not to obey" the authority. Disaffection was a negative attitude toward the government. As a result of this pattern of interpretation as well as the Indian Penal Code, virtually any use of the song Vande Mataram could be considered a possible instance of attempted sedition. Furthermore, in a case that established a precedent in Bengal in 1909, the judge determined that the fact that a printer or a publisher did not compose the song is also not a mitigating factor. However, in cases where the indictment was based on seditious songs other than Vande Mataram, the composers were typically subjected to harsher punishments than the publishers. At the time, Mukunda Lai Das, a Bengali folk poet, was sentenced to two years of harsh imprisonment in 1909. This is the most well-known instance of this type of case. A single chant of Vande Mataram was used by crusaders during the pre-independence era to build a superior and solid paw. This was done in the years before independence.

During the time before India gained its independence, Vande Mataram had a significant impact not only on the ordinary affairs of British vs Indian combats, but also on the academic society of art and culture. A great number of people were interested in the visual depictions of the home nation that were shown in Vande Mataram. Notable among them were oleographs, which resembled the "calendar pictures" that were sold at bazaars both in the past and in the present. There are descriptions of some of these in the police files, e.g. 'photo entitled Aryamata: comprises photographs of Shyamji Krishnavarma and other extremists placed around an allegorical representation'. Alternatively, there is an image titled "Vande Mataram," which has photographs of prominent nationalists and fanatics, along with a few metaphoric pictures that are put within the word "Vande Mataram." The photograph was captioned "National Hero," and it depicts the National Hero holding a small version of the map of India in his left hand. The phrase "Vande Mataram" is written on the wristlet of the National Hero. A number of depictions of notable figures, including Shivaji, Ram Das, Swami Vivekananda, Nana Saheb, Lakshmi Bai, and Aurobindo Ghosh, were arranged around this figure. The allegorical artwork that is considered to be the most famous of its sort was found in the realm of fine art, and it was not included in the literature that is considered to be "proscribed." Abanindranath Tagore, who was the founder of the Bengal School of picture and served as the principal of the Arts College in Calcutta for a period of time, created the picture as a work of art in the year 1906. This particular picture depicting the legendary "Bharat Mata" was initially published in a Bengali journal. Subsequently, it was replicated in other formats, including as a banner for use in swadeshi protests. Sister Nivedita expressed her admiration for this artwork depicting "the spirit of the Motherland, the giver of Faith and Learning, of Clothing and Food." These elements are represented in the picture by objects that are carried in the four hands of Bharat Mata.

As a result, Vande Mataram was brought to the forefront as the central concept that inspired the nationalist movement beginning in 1905 and continuing ahead through a range of media, both visual and vocal. It is possible that this highly contemplative phrase encapsulates the meaning or influence of Vande Mataram in the society that existed prior to independence, with very few being able to surpass such a commanding declaration. Despite the fact that the song was extremely well-liked in Bengal and, in translation, in other parts of India, the slogan, which served as a rallying cry, was the more widely distributed seedling of the nationalist spirit.

By including a Muslim or minority perspective, the pre-Independence difficulties surrounding Indian nationalist symbols like Vande Mataram may be easily sidestepped, which is the main issue with these symbols. The Hindu nationalist group, particularly the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), is attempting to hide its treachery by

portraying itself as the lone defender of nationalist emblems such as Vande Mataram. This group had zero involvement in the anti-colonial independence movement.

No mention of Vande Mataram, much less singing it, is found in the pre-Independence literature and materials issued by the RSS, according to a comprehensive search (conducted by this author). Even KB Hedgewar and MS Golwalkar omit the phrase "Vande Mataram" from their works, which is shocking. And this same gang want to use this song as a weapon against Muslims after independence.

Proponents of a secular, democratic India have not succeeded in bringing to light the Hindutva heavy hitters who have been squaring off Vande Mataram against Jana Gana Mana, the national anthem, and who have been condemning Sikh and Muslim extremists for not being loyal to India's national symbols. The secular Indian government has failed spectacularly in its attempts to quell the Hindu nationalist movement, which seeks to replace the secular national anthem with Vande Mataram and the tricolour with a saffron flag. The actions of RSS shakhas and their goal of establishing a Hindu rashtra in place of India's democratic-secular state make this quite evident.

Some members of the purported Muslim leadership responded predictably to the Hindutva strategy, demonstrating a lack of common sense and an ignorance of nationalist history. Giving the Agra Mufti and other Hindutva group "Muslim leaders" the authority to insult Muslims was a surefire way to further their agenda. Sadly, some Muslims who identify as secular have reacted with alarm by saying that Muslims should not protest the performance of this song. They naively think that Muslims are provoking Hindutva's fury if they refrain from singing this hymn. They fail to notice that the Hindutva gang has not spared any minority group—not even Christians, Dalits, or Buddhists—even if they have not objected to Vande Mataram.

This is the time for a real discussion on the Vande Mataram, and we must not use any excuse to avoid it. The following information has been compiled from various pre-Independence sources and is essential to know if one wants to grasp the truth and comprehend the entire Vande Mataram dispute.

Since its 1875 publication in *Banga Darshan* (edited by Bankimchandra Chatterjee), Vande Mataram has been entangled in controversy. The fact that it was composed in not one but two languages made it an unusual piece. Four stanzas made up the hymn, two of which were in Sanskrit and the other two in Bengali. "You see, it is all good, but the whole thing is spoilt by your potpourri of half Bengali and half Sanskrit," a close friend and poet Navin Chandra Sen informed Bankim after reading the song. It brings to mind the Jatra songs composed by Govind Adhikari. It is disliked by many.¹ Interestingly, not many people knew this song even though Jadu Bhatt, a famous singer from that time and Bankim's contemporaries, appreciated it and gave it a catchy rhythm. Even after Bankim incorporated the song in his contentious novel *Anandmath* in 1882, nothing changed. The 1885 reworking of this song by Rabindranath Tagore failed to gain much traction, even though it was performed by a famous Bengali poet.

The "national song" Vande Mataram was written by Bankim as a "Bengal anthem" with no other purpose. Rural pictures and Durga references were Bengal-only. He cares about Bengal but not India in this song. Sri Aurobindo (Aurobindo Ghose), an Indian Hindu nationalist, called it the "National Anthem of Bengal".² Aurobindo's translation of Bankim mentions "seven crores" [70 million] people adoring the motherland. In addition to Bangladesh, Bihar and Orissa were part of the Bengal Province. Thus, Vande Mataram, billed as symbolizing "Mother India," was meant to praise Bengal only, a restricted regional perspective. Few know that Bankim hardly knew this song. Though performed during every Congress session by Hindu-identified Indian nationalists, it did not catch on during his lifetime. It remained marginal.

With Curzon's 1905 division of Bengal, Vande Mataram became a national cry, filling the skies with protest. British authorities quickly outlawed the song or made it a slogan. Bengali police brutalized Barisal residents for singing this song. When hundreds were killed and maimed chanting Vande Mataram at the 1906 Bengal Congress provincial meeting, peasant leader Abdul Rasul was presiding. This cruelty at Barisal spread the song overnight. "An unprecedented procession of Hindus and Muslims singing national songs and crying Vande Mataram and Allah-o-Akbar passed through all the town's main streets," *Bengalee* reported on May 23, 1906. Mussalmans and Hindus flew Vande Mataram.³ The British government enabled the Bengali Regiment to attack German trenches during World War I while singing Vande Mataram, which was illegal in Bengal.

Soon, all Congress meetings began with Vande Mataram. Congress and Vande Mataram were synonymous until the early 1930s, when a new party fight erupted over the song. When the Congress named it the "national song," Muslims,

Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, South Indians, secular groups, and Arya Samajis opposed. They claimed that Vande Mataram glorified idol worship because it only mentioned Hindu deities (it must be shocking to the modern Hindutva brigade that it never mentions Ram) and expressed only a regional aspiration (it is partly in Bengali and allegorically calls "Bengal" India).

2. Conclusion

The Anandamath's 'Vande Mataram' patriotism awakens the nation to its identity. Bankim's writings reflected his passion for Indian nationalism, which differs from Western nationalism. Indian nationalist movements use cultural and spiritual roots. In contrast, Western movements focus on materialism. This recalls Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji's observation that India preached nationalism throughout the Dark Ages of revolts and uprisings. 'Vande Mataram' preached true Indian nationalism from the same platform. The main point of this study is to show that the song reached listeners, not through his comments about Hindu deities. The scenario severely seeks to enlighten the populace against colonial authority and the "inefficient rulers of the different provinces." William Henry Hudson says, "Literature is the vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us." Thus, it expresses life through language. It would be stupid to label Bankim's Anandamath publications as anti-Muslim or pro-Hindu. Can one assume Bankim's anti-Semitism is not situational? A profound and far-reaching legacy was left behind by Vande Mataram on the Indian society that existed prior to independence. A significant contribution to the formation of national identity, the promotion of cultural rebirth, and the inspiration of the war for liberation was made by the song, which served as a symbol of resistance against British colonial control. In spite of the fact that its influence on Indian society is still being felt, Vande Mataram continues to be seen as an enduring symbol of Indian nationalism and patriotism. It is important to remember that the history of the song serves as a reminder of the power that cultural expression has in molding political movements and driving collective action. The Vande Mataram was a notable and influential symbol of resistance against the colonial tyranny of the British. Both the formation of national identity and the promotion of cultural revitalization were significantly influenced by the song. The legacy it left behind continues to ignite feelings of patriotism and nationalism in India. It is important to remember that the legacy of Vande Mataram serves as a reminder of the significance of cultural expression in the process of developing political movements and inspiring organized action. It is certain that the song's message of patriotism and nationalism will continue to be important as India continues to develop and improve. It will continue to motivate future generations to contribute to the progress and development of the country.

3. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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