

Sri Aurobindo

Early Cultural Writings

(1890 — 1910)

Part Nine. Bankim–Tilak–Dayananda

Text of Rishi Bankim Chandra

There are many who, lamenting the by-gone glories of this great and ancient nation, speak as if the Rishis of old, the inspired creators of thought and civilisation, were a miracle of our heroic age, not to be repeated among degenerate men and in our distressful present. This is an error and thrice an error. Ours is the eternal land, the eternal people, the eternal religion, whose strength, greatness, holiness may be overclouded but never, even for a moment, utterly cease. The hero, the Rishi, the saint, are the natural fruits of our Indian soil; and there has been no age in which they have not been born. Among the Rishis of the later age we have at last realised that we must include the name of the man who gave us the reviving mantra which is creating a new India, the mantra *Bande Mataram*.

The Rishi is different from the saint. His life may not have been distinguished by superior holiness nor his character by an ideal beauty. He is not great by what he was himself but by what he has expressed. A great and vivifying message had to be given to a nation or to humanity; and God has chosen this mouth on which to shape the words of the message. A momentous vision had to be revealed; and it is his eyes which the Almighty first unseals. The message which he has received, the vision which has been vouchsafed to him, he declares to the world with all the strength that is in him, and in one supreme moment of inspiration expresses it in words which have merely to be uttered to stir men's inmost natures, clarify their minds, seize their hearts and impel them to things which would have been impossible to them in their ordinary moments. Those words are the mantra which he was born to reveal and of that mantra he is the seer.

What is it for which we worship the name of Bankim today? what was his message to us or what the vision which he saw and has helped us to see? He was a great poet, a master of beautiful 836 language and a creator of fair and gracious dream-figures in the world of imagination; but it is not as a poet, stylist or novelist that Bengal does honour to him today. It is probable that the literary critic of the future will reckon *Kapalkundala*, *Bishabriksha* and *Krishnakanter Will* as his artistic masterpieces, and speak with qualified praise of *Devi Chaudhurani*, *Ananda Math*, *Krishnacharit* or *Dharmatattwa*. Yet it is the Bankim of these latter works and not the Bankim of the great creative masterpieces who will rank among the Makers of Modern India. The earlier Bankim was only a poet and stylist — the later Bankim was a seer and nation-builder.

But even as a poet and stylist Bankim did a work of supreme national importance, not for the whole of India, or only indirectly for the whole of India, but for Bengal which was destined to lead India and be in the vanguard of national development. No nation can grow without finding a

fit and satisfying medium of expression for the new self into which it is developing — without a language which shall give permanent shape to its thoughts and feelings and carry every new impulse swiftly and triumphantly into the consciousness of all. It was Bankim's first great service to India that he gave the race which stood in its vanguard such a perfect and satisfying medium. He was blamed for corrupting the purity of the Bengali tongue; but the pure Bengali of the old poets could have expressed nothing but a conservative and unprogressing Bengal. The race was expanding and changing, and it needed a means of expression capable of change and expansion. He was blamed also for replacing the high literary Bengali of the Pundits by a mixed popular tongue which was neither the learned language nor good vernacular. But the Bengali of the Pundits would have crushed the growing richness, variety and versatility of the Bengali genius under its stiff inflexible ponderousness. We needed a tongue for other purposes than dignified treatises and erudite lucubrations. We needed a language which should combine the strength, dignity or soft beauty of Sanskrit with the [verve](#)¹ and vigour of the vernacular, capable at one end of the utmost vernacular raciness and at the other of the most sonorous gravity. Bankim divined our need and was inspired to meet it, — he gave us a means by which the soul **936** of Bengal could express itself to itself.

As he had divined the linguistic need of his country's future, so he divined also its political need. He, first of our great publicists, understood the hollowness and inutility of the method of political agitation which prevailed in his time and exposed it with merciless satire in his *Lokarahasya* and *Kamalakantar Daptar*. But he was not satisfied merely with destructive criticism, — he had a positive vision of what was needed for the salvation of the country. He saw that the force from above must be met by a mightier reacting force from below, — the strength of repression by an insurgent national strength. He bade us leave the canine method of agitation for the leonine. The Mother of his vision held trenchant steel in her twice seventy million hands and not the bowl of the mendicant. It was the gospel of fearless strength and force which he preached under a veil and in images in *Ananda Math* and *Devi Chaudhurani*. And he had an inspired unerring vision of the moral strength which must be at the back of the outer force. He perceived that the first element of the moral strength must be *tyaga*, complete self-sacrifice for the country and complete self-devotion to the work of liberation. His workers and fighters for the motherland are political *byragees* who have no other thought than their duty to her and have put all else behind them as less dear and less precious and only to be resumed when their work for her is done. Whoever loves self or wife or child or goods more than his country is a poor and imperfect patriot; not by him shall the great work be accomplished. Again, he perceived that the second element of the moral strength needed must be self-discipline and organisation. This truth he expressed in the elaborate training of Devi Chaudhurani for her work, in the strict rules of the Association of the "Ananda Math" and in the pictures of perfect organisation which those books contain. Lastly, he perceived that the third element of moral strength must be the infusion of religious feeling into patriotic work. The religion of patriotism, — this is the master idea of Bankim's writings. It is already foreshadowed in *Devi Chaudhurani*. In *Dharmatattwa* the idea and in *Krishnacharit* the picture of a perfect and many-sided Karma Yoga is sketched, the **046** crown of which shall be work for one's country and one's kind. In *Ananda Math* this idea is the keynote of the whole book and [receives](#)² its perfect lyrical expression in the great song which has become the national anthem of United India. This is the second great service of Bankim to [his](#)³ country that he pointed out to it the way of salvation and gave it the religion of patriotism. Of the

new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence, he is the inspirer and political guru.

The third and supreme service of Bankim to his nation was that he gave us the vision of our Mother. The bare intellectual idea of the Motherland is not in itself a great driving force; the mere recognition of the desirability of freedom is not an inspiring motive. There are few Indians at present, whether loyalist, moderate or nationalist in their political views, who do not recognise that the country has claims on them or that freedom in the abstract is a desirable thing. But most of us, when it is a question between the claims of the country and other claims, do not in practice prefer the service of the country; and while many may have the wish to see freedom accomplished, few have the will to accomplish it. There are other things which we hold dearer and which we fear to see imperilled either in the struggle for freedom or by its accomplishment. It is not till the Motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these petty fears and hopes vanish in the all-absorbing passion for the Mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves a doomed nation is born. To some men it is given to have that vision and reveal it to others. It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened; but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of **146** patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no [farther](#)⁴ slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror.

Earlier edition of this work: *Sri Aurobindo Birth Century Library: Set in 30 volumes.- Volume 17.- The Hour of God and other writings.- Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Asram, 1972.- 406 p.*

https://www.aurobindo.ru/workings/sa/37_01/0144_e.htm