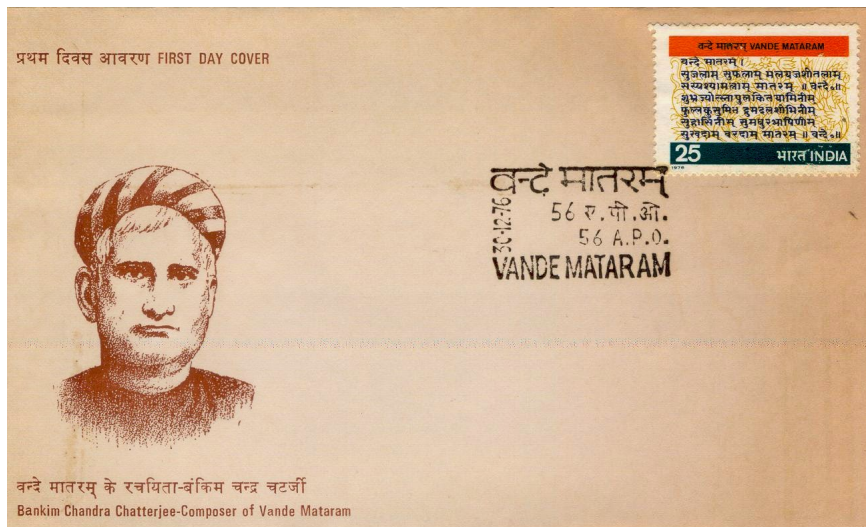


By Sidharth Mishra



"Vande mātaram; sujalām suphalām; malayajaśītalām; śasya śyāmalām mātaram; vande mātaram" – Bankim Chandra Chatterjee The national song is back in news. A few Muslim members of the Meerut Municipal Corporation refused to sing the song some days back, putting Bankim Chandra's timeless creation once again in the news bulletins. The matter has received further attention with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath Yogi speaking on the matter. Addressing the launch of the book 'A Governor's Guide: Role and Duties of the Governor under the Constitution of India' at the Raj Bhawan in Lucknow, Yogi said last week that an objection to singing the national song by some people is a "matter of grave concern".

Now Yogi has signalled the intelligentsia on either side of the ideological divide to make a dash and create a cacophony. However, to understand how unnecessary the controversy around the song is, it would be worthwhile to examine it from a historical perspective.

The 'official' history of the country, written in the pre-NDA period makes specific references to 'Vande Mataram' as a tool employed by the freedom fighters to stir the nation against British imperialism.

Modern India

authored by Bipan Chandra for the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), which then had on the editorial board eminent names from the non-saffron strand -- S Gopal, S Nurul Hasan, Satish Chandra, and Romila Thapar as members, mentions that "The partition (of Bengal) took effect on 16 October 1905. The leaders of the movement declared it to be a day of mourning. There was a 'hartal' in Calcutta. ...The streets of Calcutta were full of the cries of 'Bande Mataram' which overnight became national song of Bengal and which was soon to become the theme song of national movement." In an analysis of the role played by Bankim Chandra's '

Anandmath

' and the hymn "Vande Mataram", Sumit Sarkar in his critically acclaimed book "

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" writes: "The initial and natural form of expression of the patriotism of the intelligentsia was through literature in regional language... The greatest single influence was Bankim Chandra, with his historical novels climaxed by Anandmath (1882) with its Vande Mataram hymn."

Rabindranath Tagore sang Vande Mataram at the Congress session in 1896. More than 100 years later, and evaluating the contribution of the hymn towards motivating masses in the several agitations which followed, there is enough evidence that "Vande Mataram" was adopted as an expression of Indian nationalism from Day One. In this context, it would be fascinating to trace the instances of expressions of Indian Nationalism.

First such recorded event is the unfurling of the Indian Flag at Parsee Bagan Square (Green Park) in Kolkata on August 7, 1906, to mark a year of the launch of anti-partition movement. The flag had Vande Mataram inscribed on it. On August 22, 1907, Madame Bhikaji Cama and her band of exiled revolutionaries hoisted the Indian flag at the International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart in Germany. The flag again had Vande Mataram written on it.

This flag was smuggled into India by the socialist leader from Gujarat, Indulal Yagnik and later displayed in the library of 'Mahratha' and 'Kesari' (the publications started by Bal Gangadhar Tilak) in Pune. The portrait of Madame Cama displayed in Parliament has her holding this flag. The song also became the binding factor for the Indians overseas.

In July 1909 Madan Lal Dhingra assassinated an India Office bureaucrat Curzon-Wyllie in London and went to the scaffold. He kissed the noose with cries of Vande Mataram. "Dhingra's pistol shot has been heard by the Irish cottier in his forlorn hut, by the Egyptian fellah in the field, by the Zulu labourer in his dark mine..." (Bande Mataram, London, 1909). "The Bande Mataram" was an Indian nationalist publication from Paris begun in September 1909 by the Paris Indian Society. Founded by Madam Bhikaji Cama, the paper along with the later publication of 'Talvar' was aimed at inspiring an anti-imperialist movement.

Vande Mataram, as the expression of Indian Nationhood, was soon to travel to the Pacific coast of the United States of America. By early 1920s, a substantive colony of Indian Punjabis had come into existence, which suffered various forms of racial discrimination about which the British Indian government did nothing. In protest, the famous Ghadr Movement began in the US in 1913 with Sohan Singh Bhakna as its founder and later Lala Hardayal as its most famous leader.

Back home in India, it became a practice to sing Vande Mataram at the Congress sessions. However, first murmurs against it rose when Mahatma Gandhi committed the mistake of reaching out to the Khilafists following the Caliph being thrown out from Turkey at the end of World War I. Celebrated historian KM Ashraf had dubbed the Khilafat movement as its leaders Mohammed Ali's and Shaukat Ali's "

Mazhab ki siyasi dukan

", meaning a political trading house founded on religious lines. In 1923 at Kakinada session of the Congress, the first virulent opposition to 'Vande Mataram' arose from Mohammed Ali, who was felicitated at the session after release from incarceration. Thereafter, it was to become an

Keep the song free of dispute

Written by Administrator

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integral part of 'Muslim grievance'. Later, Jinnah, in 1937, was to ask for abandoning the national flag and the national song in his discussions with Jawaharlal Nehru. Thankfully the Congress Working Committee managed to salvage the situation by adopting the first two stanzas of the song, which in fact was written as a hymn much before Bankim wrote 'Anandamath'.

The issue stood fairly settled as "Vande Mataram" reverberated on the midnight of August 14-15, 1947 when the Constituent Assembly met to declare the nation's Independence. As the first item on the agenda, Sucheta Kriplani led the August House in singing the first two stanzas of the song. Thereafter, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru moved the famous resolution, which gave us Independence; "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom."

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