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**BANKIM CHATTERJI'S ANANDMATH: A THEMATIC STUDY**

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**Abstract:**

*The present research paper attempts to analyse the major themes in the selected novel Anandmath by Bankim Chandra Chatterji. It discusses about what is meant by theme, the background of the novel. In addition, it analyses the major themes like Famine, Freedom Struggle, Brotherhood, Bhakti (love) of Mother India, Feudal System, Patriotism, Nationalism, Sacrifice, and Violence viz. Rabindranath Tagore remarks, "The novel is the legend of the struggle for the freedom, and passion behind it seems to reflect Bankim's vision of free India."*

**Keywords:***Famine, Freedom Struggle, Brotherhood, Bhakti (love) of Mother India, Feudal System, Patriotism, Nationalism, Sacrifice, Violence, etc.*

Bankim Chandra Chatterji is the most creative genius of Bengali Literature noted for his imaginative power, twist of informality and intimacy, romance, subtle humour etc. We should know, what is meant by theme. Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines, "Theme is a recurring or pervading idea in a work of art or literature"(Soanes, 1494). The major themes of the present novel are useful to understand the novel more clearly to readers. It is essential to understand the political, social, and economic background of Bengal in that era.

Bengal was one of the most economically developed regions of the Mughal Empire before the victory of eighteenth century. This region had not been directly involved in the political struggle of the feudal lords surrounding the Mughal throne. The peasants of this region cultivated various sorts of rice, cotton and sugarcane. The Zamindars began to give their power with no thought for principles and legal norms. They collected taxes and administered justice. They measure out punishment to the local population who bribed the Government officials. The Zamindars and farmers depend on MurshidQuli Khan, the first Nawab of Bengal. They began to pay sums in the Nawab's treasury. The Peasant's rebellions prevailed during the early years of British rule in India. The Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 regarded as the first war of Indian Independence. The hungry peasants of Bihar and Bengal revolted against East India Company. They were victims of Bengal famine in 1770.

The selected novel, *Anandmath* set in eighteenth century Bengal, ruled by Muslim Nawab with political backing of the British. The effects of terrible drought and consequent famine are stalking the land in the year 1770. The rich and poor, city and village people are afflicted by famine. The plot of the novel based on Sanyasi rebellion that occurred in North Bengal in 1773. The song *VandeMatram* used in the background of the novel. The novel is dedicated to the memory of his dead friend DeenabandhuMitra.

We discuss the theme of famine. The *Anandmath* commences with the descriptions of Padachina village. The effects of terrible drought and consequent famine are stalking the land in the year 1770. Mahendra and his wife were at house facing famine and deeply absorbed in thought. The land revenue was increased by Government Collector. We observed the impact of famine on the lives of Padachina villagers. They were attacked by diseases. The starvation is observed in these lines. "So

people began to starve again. At first they lived on one meal a day. Soon, even that became scarce, and they began to go without any food at all. The crop was too scanty, but the government revenue collector sought to advance his personal prestige by increasing the land revenue by ten per cent. And in dire misery Bengal shed bitter tears” (Roy,24). The impact of famine was also on the lives of beggars in Bengal. It is a horrifying condition reflected by Chatterji. “Beggars increased in such numbers that charity soon became the most difficult thing to practice” (Roy,24). Here, at the time of famine in the novel, Mahendra and Kalyani, a rich couple are forced to run away from their mansion along with their daughter in search of a home in the Calcutta. Kalyani was kidnapped by robbers. The condition of the robbers is quoted here. One of the robbers said, “What can we do with gold and silver? Will someone here give me a handful of rice for this jewel? I am hungry-I’m about to die of hunger! For the last few days I have eaten only leaves from the trees.” (Roy,28). Bankim painted the life of robbers who killed their leader and were ready to eat meat. People used to eat meat of jackals and dogs at the time of famine.

The selected theme to discuss is freedom struggle. The freedom struggle is depicted by Pre-Independence Indian novelists like Bankim C. Chatterji, Chaman Nahal, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh etc. This is the struggle to get freedom against the Britishers. The Britishers ruled over India for one hundred and fifty years. To highlight this, the creative characters sketched by Bankim like Mahatma Satya, Jiban, Bhavan, Mahendra, Shanti Gowardhan and Santans (children). They have a craze to get freedom struggle. The song *Bande Matram* always inspires them to work more actively and creates a spirit of Patriotism and Nationalism. Here, the writings of Chatterji have become the gospel of India’s struggle for political Independence. The prologue of the novel talks about dialogues between Mother India and Mahatma. Mother India needs devotion of children.

The portrayal of struggle for freedom presented by Mahatma Satya and his Santans (Children), Kalyani and Sukumari rescued by Mahatma. Mahatma said Kalyani, “This is the temple, the mosque, the *Thevihar*, and the *gurudwara* of Mother India. Cast aside all fear from your heart” (Roy,30). These lines are very significant talks about not only recognizing all the inhabitants of India as the true children but also pointing out crucial dimensions of Indian history. The song *Bande Matram* creates a spirit of Nationalism and Patriotism towards Mother India. It is repeated in the novel. The song makes this book special which had become the national song during Indian freedom struggle. The scene of showing three pictures of Mother India to Mahendra by Mahatma plays an important role in the novel. It talks about the portrayal of India in the past (prosperity), present (famine, disease, death, humiliation, destruction) and future (full of glory and dignity). The characters like Mahatma Satya, Bhavan, Jiban, Dhiran, Mahendra, Shanti, Gowardhan fought against Britishers to get freedom. Mahendra decided to serve for the nation (Mother India). The Santans have renounced their families to try to devote themselves fully to Mother India. Bhavan shows his feeling about Mother India, “The Mother land is our only mother. Our motherland is higher than heaven Mother India is our Mother” (Roy, 38). Shanti is disguised as a holy man to dedicate the nation. She played the role of a detective to bring out information from the Britishers. Mahatma leads Mahendra to build a fort at Padachina. Mahatma was on an expedition to collect workers to make artillery. At the end of the novel, Bhavan’s rage against Britishers is focused here. Bhavan said, “Kill the enemy, Kill the English soldier” (Roy,111). Victory was celebrated by children on the banks of the *Ajai* river against Britishers. K.R.S. Iyengar writes, “In his lifetime Bankim became the literary dictator of fiction in Renaissance Bengal. He was the master of Romantic as well as Historical novels” (Iyengar, 412).

The selected novel *Anandmath* speaks about the importance of Brotherhood to get the independence. Simply, Brotherhood means a group or organization of people who have the same interest, aim, work. It is revealed among characters like Jiban, Bhavan, Mahatma, Mahendra, Gowardhan and Santans. It shows them the way of getting Independence. It creates unity, co-operation, fraternity, and love for Mother India. The novelist is successful in focusing the *Bhakti* (love) of Mother India. It is presented by Bhavan. Bhavan sang softly to himself, “Mother hail! Though with sweet springs flowing, Thou fair fruits bestowing, Cool with Zephyrs blowing, green with corn-crops growing, Mother, hail!” (P. 37). The scene of showing three pictures of Mother India plays an important role in the novel. So, the pages of the novel are fulfilled with *Bhakti* (love) of Mother India.

It is found in *Anandmath* that there was a feudal system. The landlords were exploiting farmers, workers and common man. They were taking taxes and revenues from people. The result is that the

economic valley created between rich and poor. Its impact was on the life of Mahendra, Kalyani, Santans, robbers, farmers, workers. Bhavan's anger Britishers repeated here. Bhavan said, "Victory, victory! Kill the sepoys, kill sepoys" (Roy,36). Jiban looted the treasure of Britishers. The rage of Santans against Nawab and Britishers presented in the novel. The third part of the novel speaks about farmers could not pay taxes to the landlords holdings. The owners of the land became poor. People began poverty stricken. People became poverty stricken. Men lived by looting. Thieves and bandits were active again. Children began to loot English treasuries.

Novel imbued with the spirit of Nationalism and selfless Patriotism. The selected novel continuous to speak to people today and stimulated an idea of Nationalism in past, and continuous to be thought-provoking in the present. So, Chatterji's voice is still worth listening to, still resonant and live. I observed that nationalists unifying different religions to overthrow the colonial rule in India.

Bankim's *Anandmath* fulfilled with the spirit of Patriotism and Nationalism with the use of portraying characters like Mahatma, Bhavan, Jiban, Shanti, Mahendra, Gowardhan. Mahendra was escaped by Bhavan who explained the philosophy of militant organization of the children of the Mother. The Santans have renounced families tries to devote themselves fully to the Mother. The life of Mahendra transformed by Bhavan and understood real meaning of song. The scene of showing picture of Mother India in past, present, future creates feelings of Nationalism and Patriotism. Bhavan said to assembled children, "Let us now get together to crush the British rule in India under our feet. Let us burn their scepter into ashes, and then scatter the ashes to the winds. Brothers sing BandeMatram again" (Roy,64). It shows spirit of Patriotism and Nationalism. Shanti plays role of detective to bring out information from Britishers. Shanti said Mahatma, "Is it a sin for a wife to join her husband in order to help him in his nation duties" (Roy,81). Mahatma and Santans made plan to kill Captain Thomas of England. The children were chanting BandeMatram after victory.

The violence is important part of *Anandmath*. The novelist sketched the life of robberers who killed the leader and ready to eat his meat. People used to eat meat of jackles and dogs at the time of famine in the first part of the novel. The Children attacked city jail, killing guards and triumphantly freeing Mahatma and Mahendra. They were defeated by British soldiers. It was violence against Indian Santans. The Santans were surrendered by Hey and Watson. They attacked by two directions. The children want to cross the bridge. The hundreds of children died. Bhavan, Jiban, Dhiran captured cannon to kill Britishers.

Bankim is successful to present how a life is sacrificed by Jiban, Shanti, Mahendra, Kalyani and Santans for Mother India. At the beginning of the novel, Mahendra and Kalyani left home. Mahendra dedicated his life for Mother India who lived away from family. Jiban's main aim was the freedom. Shanti also sacrificed her marriage life and took active participation in freedom struggle against Britishers. The Santans have renounced families tries to devote themselves fully to Mother India. Here, the love of Mother India is vital for children than families.

To conclude, we have discussed about what is meant by theme and the background of the novel. It brings out thematic analysis of the novel *Anandmath*. It revolves around themes like famine, freedom struggle, brotherhood, love for mother India, feudal system, patriotism, nationalism, violence, sacrifice etc. The novel suggests fine way to modern readers to think about Patriotism, Nationalism, and love for Mother India. It deals with central idea of the novel.

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