








## Module 5: Postcolonial Translation

### Lecture 17: The Making of a Nation – A Case Study of Anandamath

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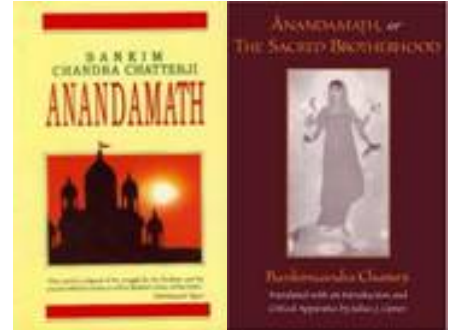
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## Module 5: Postcolonial Translation

## Lecture 17: The Making of a Nation – A Case Study of Anandamath

**Introduction**

We have seen how translations played a role in the development of the nationalist consciousness in India. In this lecture we shall look at one representative case or multiple translations of a single novel, *Anandamath*. These translations are also markers of a growing nationalist consciousness which is linked to the movement for Indian independence. Only three English translations of the novel are being considered here, by the Ghosh brothers Aurobindo and Barindrakumar in 1909, by Basanta Koomar Roy in 1941 and by Julius Lipner in 2005. In this lecture we shall place these texts side by side and analyse them.



*Anandamath* was published in serial form in Bankim's own journal *Banga Darshan* from 1881 onwards till the year 1882. It was published in book form in 1882, and by 1892 the novel's fifth edition had been printed. These editions differed from each other in minor particulars. Translations into various Indian languages like Marathi and Telugu and into English soon followed. The earliest English translation was Nares Chandra Sen-Gupta's *The Abbey of Bliss: A Translation of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's Anandamath* published in 1906. Aurobindo started the translation of the novel in 1909 and finished the first 13 chapters including the song *Vande Mataram*, but left the rest to his brother Barindrakumar Ghosh. It was published in *Karmayogin*, a journal edited by Aurobindo between 1909 and 1910, retaining the original Bengali title. Basanta Koomar Roy's translation was named *Dawn over India* and published in 1941 in Washington, later to be republished as *Anandamath* by Orient Paperbacks in 1992. Julius Lipner's translation has yet another title, *Anandamath or The Sacred Brotherhood*. This is a scholarly publication, with an exhaustive introduction that is bigger than the original text and locates the text within the contemporary context of postcolonial debates and translation theories.

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**Aurobindo's translation**

Aurobindo Ghosh's translation is a product of the turbulent times after the partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon. The concept of militant nationalism that Bankim espouses in the novel agreed well with Aurobindo's revolutionary politics of that day. Critics and commentators are unanimous about the visionary nature of *Anandamath*. Tanika Sarkar calls it a “performative speech act”, because the novel is actually performing a deed which is “the foundation of a Hindu nation, or of a Hindu political will that would realize the nation.” (3959). *Anandamath* was Bankim's answer to what he thought was a defect in the history of Bengal – the lack of valorous native kings who were capable of putting up a spirited defence of the land and its honour in the face of foreign onslaught. He felt the Bengalis to be effeminate, weak, incapable of powerful military exploits and lacking pride in their unique intellectual inheritance. He therefore felt compelled to invent a role model which was a blend of the past and the future. He wanted to bring back a past that was culturally superior and looked forward to a future that would see a mix of native culture and western rationality.

Aurobindo used *Anandamath* to propagate his ideals of militant nationalism. He was largely instrumental in popularizing the slogan of *Vande Mataram*.

Aurobindo was attracted to this vision because his politics at that time was militant nationalism. In 1905 there were numerous revolutionary groups in Bengal and Aurobindo belonged to one of them, the Yugantar party, which in turn was an offshoot of the Anushilan Samiti. These groups also believed in Bankim's concept of a Hindu nation and like the Santans of *Anandamath*, believed in the principle of a healthy mind in a healthy body. Aurobindo also launched a newspaper called *Bande Mataram* with a slogan “Our Policy – India for Indians”. It was consistently critical of British rule and Aurobindo was charged with sedition and jailed in 1907. His revolutionary groups were involved in numerous violent incidents throughout Bengal especially in the first decade of the twentieth century, leading eventually to the imprisonment of Aurobindo in the Alipore Central Jail. It was but natural if Aurobindo felt it his patriotic duty to translate *Anandamath* in the attempt to propagate the concept of a resurgent nation that realizes its own strength after centuries of oppression.

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**Basanta Koomar Roy**

Aurobindo's translation is true to the original and is unapologetic about it. There is not even an attempt to explain the militant Hindu sentiments expressed in the novel. But Basanta Koomar Roy's translation is very different because he removes all the derogatory references to Muslims that Bankim had in the source text. He also states that his translation is an 'adaptation' from the original Bengali. He wrote an introduction in which he went to great lengths to describe the revolutionary influence of Bankim, *Anandamath* and Aurobindo. But he did not explain the changes he had made to the text. His translation of the title was also interesting – *Dawn over India*. He was careful to avoid

Roy has a sanitized secular version of *Anandamath* which was closer in spirit to an India on the verge of independence.

any religious connotation because '*math*' of *Anandamath* could be translated only as temple or as abbey as Nares Chandra Sengupta had done before him. Roy's choice of title as *Dawn over India* is in keeping with the secular discourse of the nation that was being propagated in the 1940s. He has also completely done away with the final chapter of Bankim's text where a Healer enlightens Satyananda about his mission, which was to destroy Muslim rule in Bengal. He exhorts Satyananda to let the British rule India for as he explains: "Unless the English rule, it will not be possible for the Eternal Code ( *sanatana dharma* ) to be reinstated" (229, Lipner). The novel ends with Satyananda following the Healer or the Great One to the Himalayas, satisfied in the knowledge that he has accomplished his mission of ousting Muslims from Bengal. Roy avoids this as this would not have suited the nationalistic ideals of India in the 1940s when the anti-British sentiment was peaking. Besides, it would also have been detrimental to the carefully formulated secularist discourse of the future nation. Dr. William L. Jackson in his Preface explains: "The following translation of *Anandamath* by Basanta Koomar Roy was first published in 1941, during a critical period in India's history when the independence movement had to take a decisive stance rejecting foreign rule. Hence, the mysterious physician's suggestion was deleted." He goes on to state rather hesitantly: "We can only conjecture that if Chatterji had been alive he would have approved of this omission" ( Roy 7).

Roy has also successfully decontextualised the story by completely suppressing its time frame. While Aurobindo and Lipner begin with the year in which the narrative unfolds ("It was a summer day in the Bengali year 1176"- Aurobindo; and "It is summer one day in 1770 in the village of Padachinha" – Lipner), Roy's translation begins with "It was hot at Padachinha even for a summer day" (24). By taking away all references to the year 1770, Roy has removed all associations that can be made with the Sanyasi Rebellion of 1770 on which Bankim's narrative is based, thus giving his translation a secular flavour. Both

Aurobindo and Lipner have retained Bankim's reference to Muhammad Reza Khan, the king's revenue officer who is callous to the plight of the starving people of Bengal, while Roy has blotted this out. While these translations speak about low caste people and forest dwelling people eating dogs, cats and mice out of desperation Roy says: “People of certain castes began to eat cats, dogs and rats” (24).

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## Postcolonial translation

Julius Lipner's translation has an extensive introduction that deals with the life and times of Bankim, the making of the novel, its place in history, and the making of the translation. His choice of title is *Anandamath or The Sacred Brotherhood*; Lipner explains that Anandamath is actually a monastery where monks acquire the name of Ananda and “anandamath” actually means nothing more than a fraternity of Anandas. The nationalistic rhetoric has changed yet again as Lipner states: “We must now inquire into a matter of central importance for our appreciation of Bankim's ideological project: the status of the Muslim in his re-visioning of history ... Further, as we shall see, with reference to the slogan Vande Mataram and the song from which it emerges—...the role of the Muslim in Anandamath as well as Muslim perception of the novel are of crucial import for ongoing relations, troubled as they are, between Hindus and Muslims in the India of today. Nothing can be gained by sweeping the matter under the rug, and allowing innuendo, ignorance, misrepresentation and recrimination to hold sway” (61). Lipner argues that Bankim is making a distinction between the Muslim as *jaban* or foreigner and the Muslim as *desi* or native. Bankim had a high regard for Islam as a religious faith and had on numerous occasions written about the plight of the ordinary Hindu as well as Muslim peasant of Bengal. Lipner contends that Bankim was even-handed in his judgement of Muslims but was unfortunately not perceived to be so. This argument comes in the wake of the revival of the Vande Mataram debate at the national level when the song was seen as blatantly anti-Muslim. It did not help matters that it was championed by Hindu rightwing groups.

Lipner's translation is politically correct and is informed by the various postcolonial debates about nation, otherness and nationalist discourse

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The tumultuous history of the song and the slogan reflects that of the novel itself. Vande Mataram was initially written by Bankim in the 1870s before he wrote *Anandamath* and later incorporated into the novel. It soon became popular as a patriotic slogan with no religious overtones. Lipner has cited an instance in 1906 when Congress workers marching towards their meeting venue chanting Vande Mataram were lathi charged by police. Even Gandhiji had stated his objections to treating the song as one meant only for Hindus. The problems with the song, then as well as now, are related to the stanzas that follow after the first two that are sung as our national song today.

Vande Mataram was taken out of the novel's context and used as a secular slogan by nationalists. Today only the first two stanzas of the poem are sung as our national song.

Vande mataram is written in a combination of Bengali and Sanskrit. The first two stanzas in Sanskrit draw the picture of land as fertile and gracious Mother bestowing blessings on her children. The next stanza questions the concept of the powerlessness of the Mother. How can she be powerless, asks the poet, when her sons who are seventy million in number, are armed with swords and ready to lay down their lives for her? She is visualized as the many-armed goddess worshipped in every temple in her benign and terrible forms. Aurobindo translates:

“Every image made divine  
In our temples is but thine.  
Thou art Durga, lady and Queen,  
With her hands that strike and her swords of sheen,  
Thou art Lakshmi lotus-throned,  
And the Muse a hundred-toned.”

Mother India here is very much like a Hindu goddess who is both Preserver and Destroyer. Lipner too retains the religious terms, while Roy has:

“Thou sole creed and wisdom art,  
Thou our very mind and heart,  
And the life-breath in our bodies ...” (39)

Roy has not only erased all Hindu overtones, but also identified the land as India by adding geographical

particulars that Bankim had not even thought of:

“Himalaya-crested one, rivalless,  
Radiant in thy spotlessness,  
Thou whose fruits and waters bless,  
Mother, hail!” (39)

It is very clear that Roy 's translation is meant to overcome the objections raised against the song regarding its idol-worshipping religious bent. He circumvents the necessity to bow before the goddess by translating Vande Mataram as “Mother, hail!”. Aurobindo has “Mother, I bow to thee!” and Lipner has “I revere the Mother!” (145) In this context it is interesting to compare the hugely popular A. R. Rahman version of Vande mataram: Ma tujhe salaam! The choice of the Urdu ‘salaam’ with Vande mataram is a beautiful blending of two religious ideologies.

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### Mother India or Mother Goddess?

The song in the novel is immediately followed by Mahendra being inducted into the Anandamath by Satyananda where he is taken to one room after the other to see different images of the Mother. In the first he sees her in the lap of Vishnu. In the next room he is shown the “Mother as she was”; Aurobindo calls her “jagaddhatri” while Lipner has “Goddess as Bearer of the earth” (149). In the room after that Mahendra is brought face to face with “Mother as she is”, in the image of the terrible Kali, stripped bare and naked but for a skull garland. Satyananda explains that the glorious Mother as she was has been reduced to this state. Mahendra is again led through another passage to confront yet another image of the “Mother as she will be” as the golden ten-armed Goddess. She has crushed all her enemies and is glitteringly resplendent.



Roy replaced the image of the goddess by a map of Mother India: “gigantic, imposing, resplendent, yes, almost a living map of India ” in the first room. His guide the ascetic explains that “This is our Mother India as she was before the British conquest”. This is followed by a “map of India in rags and tears” in the next room. A sword hangs over this Mother India and it is explained as the representation of the sword by which the British keep India in subjection. The final glorious picture is of a “map of a golden India — bright, beautiful, full of glory and dignity!” (43) Mother India is a concept that entered the discourse of the nation at a much later stage than Bankim's. When Bankim's identification of the nation with the goddess became problematic, Roy gave it a more acceptable secular image to go with the nationalistic ideals. The Muslim as enemy has been replaced by the British in the Roy translation, thus making it a perfectly patriotic anti-British text.

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#### Translations for the nation

The examples show how the translators were making use of the same text to come up with translations that suited the receptor culture at a particular point of time. Aurobindo's translation in 1909 was meant to motivate his countrymen into militant political action. The differences in the translations of Aurobindo and Roy are indicating the change that Indian nationalist ideology had undergone. The nation-in-the-making was acutely conscious of the Hindu-Muslim divide and wanted to promote the ideal of secularism. By 2005 when Lipner translated the novel, postcolonialism had made its mark on literature and translation studies. It is a post-9/11 scenario where communal differences are a problem not just for India but also for the world as a whole. So Lipner's translation has a lot of paratext, with preface and introduction that places the text in context. It also tackles the issue of communal differences honestly. So the change we see is also a mirror of the change that has come over India – Aurobindo is not very sensitive to religious or cultural plurality, Roy is aware of the differences but cautious about mentioning anything that might worsen the situation and Lipner is similarly aware, but tries to celebrate the difference in a postmodern fashion. Thus we see how these translations contribute to the generally prevailing concept of the nation at different periods of time.

These translations indicate how the translator's ideology and the receptor culture can influence the translation strategy, and help in building up the idea of a nation.

#### Assignments

1. How have Anandamath and its translations contributed to the making of the nation?
2. Keeping in mind all that you have read about equivalence and translation, what is your assessment of these various translations?

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