

When Literature Becomes Movement: Vande Mataram and the Making of Sonic Nationalism

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ABSTRACT

Vande Mataram, composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and incorporated into his novel *Anandamath* (1882), occupies a unique position in the cultural and political history of modern India. While extensive scholarship has examined its literary qualities, historical significance, and ideological debates, comparatively little attention has been paid to the dynamic process through which a literary composition evolved into a powerful medium of collective mobilisation. This article examines *Vande Mataram* through an interdisciplinary framework integrating literary criticism, cultural memory studies, nationalism studies, performance studies, and selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). Through a close reading of the text alongside documentary evidence from the Indian national movement, the study argues that the hymn's enduring influence resulted not merely from its literary excellence but from the interaction of literary imagination, musical performance, historical circumstance, and collective memory. The article further proposes the **Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF)** as a heuristic interpretative model for understanding how literary works may contribute to the formation of national consciousness through successive stages of cultural transmission and public participation. Rather than advancing universal claims, the framework is offered as an analytical perspective emerging from the historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram*. The study contributes to literary and cultural scholarship by demonstrating how literature can transcend its textual boundaries and become an enduring force in shaping collective historical consciousness.

Keywords: *Vande Mataram*; Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay; *Anandamath*; literary nationalism; sonic nationalism; cultural memory; Indian national movement; Indian Knowledge Systems.

INTRODUCTION

Few literary compositions have exercised an influence on the public life of a nation comparable to that of *Vande Mataram*. Originally composed by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and later incorporated into his novel *Anandamath* (1882), the hymn gradually transcended its literary context to become one of the most recognisable cultural expressions associated with the Indian national movement (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016). Across several decades, it was recited, sung, translated, and remembered by successive generations, acquiring meanings that extended beyond the fictional narrative in which it first appeared. Its historical significance therefore lies not only in its literary merit but also in the remarkable journey through which a literary text entered the sphere of collective historical experience.

Scholarly engagement with *Vande Mataram* has generally developed along three principal directions. Literary critics have examined Bankim Chandra's narrative technique, symbolism, and linguistic style within *Anandamath* (Sen, 2008). Historians have situated the hymn within the broader political context of the Swadeshi movement and the emergence of anti-colonial nationalism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century India (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973). A further body of scholarship has explored the ideological debates surrounding nationalism, identity, and the cultural politics associated with the song (Chatterjee, 1993). Together, these studies have substantially enriched our understanding of *Vande Mataram* as both a literary work and a historical symbol.

Nevertheless, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to the process through which a literary composition evolved into a shared cultural practice capable of shaping collective historical consciousness. The transformation of *Vande Mataram* cannot be explained solely through literary analysis or political history. Rather, it emerged through the interaction of literary imagination, musical performance, public participation, and cultural memory. This broader process invites an interdisciplinary approach that draws together insights from literary studies, nationalism studies, cultural memory, and performance studies.

The present article adopts such an approach. It combines close textual analysis with historical interpretation in order to examine how literary meaning was reinforced through collective performance and public remembrance. Concepts developed by Anderson (2006), Billig (1995), Assmann (2011), Bohlman (2004), and Eyerman and Jamison (1998) provide complementary perspectives for understanding the relationship between literature, music, memory, and national consciousness. At the same time, selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), particularly those relating to sacred geography and civilisational memory, offer a broader cultural context within which the imagery of *Vande Mataram* may be interpreted (Eck, 2012). These perspectives are employed as interpretative resources rather than as explanatory frameworks imposed upon the text.

The central argument advanced here is that the enduring influence of *Vande Mataram* resulted from the convergence of four interrelated elements: literary imagination, musical performance, historical mobilisation, and cultural memory. The hymn's artistic qualities made it emotionally compelling; its public performance transformed individual reading into collective participation; and its repeated association with significant moments in the Indian national movement enabled it to acquire lasting symbolic authority. The article therefore examines not merely the literary qualities of *Vande Mataram* but the historical processes through which literature may become an active participant in the making of national consciousness.

To explain this process, the article proposes the **Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF)** as a heuristic interpretative framework derived from the historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram*. Rather than presenting a universal theory of nationalism, the framework offers an analytical model illustrating how literary creativity, collective performance, and cultural memory may interact in shaping historical consciousness. Through this perspective, the article seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary discussions on the relationship between literature, music, memory, and nation-building while reaffirming the enduring significance of *Vande Mataram* as one of the most influential literary compositions in modern Indian history.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with *Vande Mataram* spans several disciplines, including literary criticism, modern Indian history, nationalism studies, cultural memory, musicology, and political thought. Although these bodies of scholarship illuminate different dimensions of the hymn, they have generally developed along parallel rather than integrated lines. Consequently, the relationship between literary imagination, public performance, and the formation of collective historical consciousness remains comparatively underexplored.

Literary studies have primarily examined *Vande Mataram* within the narrative structure of *Anandamath*. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel has been recognised as a landmark in nineteenth-century Indian literature for its synthesis of historical imagination, symbolic representation, and linguistic innovation. Scholars have highlighted the novel's portrayal of the motherland, its use of religious and cultural imagery, and its contribution to the evolution of modern Indian literary nationalism (Sen, 2008). The hymn itself has often been appreciated for its poetic richness, rhythmic quality, and evocative natural imagery. While these studies establish the literary significance of *Vande Mataram*, they generally devote less attention to the processes through which the text acquired an enduring public life beyond the novel.

Historical scholarship has situated *Vande Mataram* within the wider development of Indian nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Swadeshi movement following the Partition of Bengal (1905) is widely recognised as a decisive moment in transforming the hymn into a symbol of anti-colonial resistance (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973). Historians have demonstrated that the repeated public singing of *Vande Mataram* in meetings, processions, and political gatherings contributed significantly to its emotional and symbolic authority during the freedom movement. This scholarship effectively

documents the historical prominence of the hymn but understandably concentrates on political developments rather than on the literary mechanisms that enabled such mobilisation.

A third body of scholarship has explored broader theoretical questions concerning nationalism, identity, and collective imagination. Anderson's (2006) concept of the nation as an “imagined community” emphasises the role of shared cultural symbols in constructing national identity. Billig (1995) extends this discussion by demonstrating how nations are reproduced through routine cultural practices and everyday symbolic reminders. Within the Indian context, Chatterjee (1993) argues that anti-colonial nationalism evolved distinctive cultural forms that cannot be fully understood through European models alone. Together, these perspectives help explain why literary texts may become enduring symbols of collective belonging.

Research in cultural memory further enriches this discussion by emphasising the processes through which societies preserve, reinterpret, and transmit shared meanings across generations. Assmann (2011) argues that cultural memory is sustained through texts, rituals, symbols, and institutions that enable communities to maintain continuity with their past. Applied to *Vande Mataram*, this perspective suggests that the hymn's significance lies not merely in its original composition but in its repeated performance, remembrance, and reinterpretation within changing historical contexts.

Performance studies and musicology provide an additional dimension by explaining how artistic works acquire collective social force through performance. Bohlman (2004) demonstrates that music often serves as a powerful medium for expressing cultural identity and national belonging. Similarly, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) argue that music plays an important role in social movements by transforming shared emotions into collective action. These insights are particularly relevant to understanding how *Vande Mataram*, initially encountered as a literary composition, became a participatory cultural practice through public singing during the Indian national movement.

Finally, selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) contribute an interpretative context for understanding the symbolic language of *Vande Mataram*. Rather than treating the motherland solely as a political abstraction, Indian intellectual traditions frequently invest landscape, rivers, forests, and sacred places with cultural and civilisational significance. Eck (2012) illustrates how sacred geography functions as a continuing source of collective cultural identity across Indian civilisation. Read within this broader context, the ecological imagery of *Vande Mataram* acquires meanings that extend beyond aesthetic description to evoke cultural memory and emotional attachment.

Although these scholarly traditions have substantially enriched our understanding of *Vande Mataram*, they rarely examine the complete trajectory through which a literary text becomes an enduring force in public life. Literary criticism often concentrates on textual interpretation, historical scholarship focuses on political mobilisation, and theoretical studies analyse nationalism in broader conceptual terms. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the interaction of literary creativity, musical performance, collective participation, and cultural memory as interconnected stages in the evolution of the hymn.

The present study addresses this gap through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary criticism, cultural memory studies, nationalism studies, performance studies, and selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems. By examining *Vande Mataram* simultaneously as a literary text, a performed composition, and a cultural symbol, the article seeks to explain how literature may move beyond the written page to become part of collective historical consciousness. The **Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF)** proposed later in this article emerges from this interdisciplinary reading and is presented as a heuristic interpretative framework for understanding the historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram* rather than as a universal theory of nationalism.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary research design to examine the historical transformation of *Vande Mataram* from a literary composition into an enduring symbol of collective national consciousness. The analysis combines methods drawn from literary criticism, intellectual history, cultural memory studies,

nationalism studies, and performance studies in order to investigate the relationship between literary imagination, public performance, and historical mobilisation.

The primary text for close reading is Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath* (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016), with particular attention to the narrative context in which *Vande Mataram* appears, its imagery, symbolism, linguistic features, and thematic progression. Rather than examining the hymn in isolation, the study interprets it within the novel's narrative structure so that its literary function may be understood before considering its later historical reception.

Historical interpretation is based on recognised secondary scholarship on the Indian national movement, especially studies dealing with the Swadeshi movement and the cultural dimensions of anti-colonial nationalism (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973). Documentary evidence relating to the public life of *Vande Mataram* is drawn from official records of the Constituent Assembly of India (1947, 1950) and relevant publications of the Government of India. These sources are used to establish historically verifiable milestones in the public reception of the hymn while avoiding reliance on anecdotal or insufficiently documented narratives.

The theoretical interpretation integrates selected concepts from nationalism studies, cultural memory, and performance studies. Anderson's (2006) conception of imagined communities provides a framework for understanding the cultural construction of national identity, while Billig's (1995) notion of banal nationalism helps explain the continuing symbolic presence of national identity through recurring cultural practices. Assmann's (2011) theory of cultural memory illuminates the processes through which literary texts are preserved, transmitted, and reinterpreted across generations. Insights from Bohlman (2004) and Eyerman and Jamison (1998) further clarify how music and collective performance contribute to the formation of shared historical consciousness.

Selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are employed as interpretative resources rather than as independent explanatory frameworks. In particular, the study draws upon Eck's (2012) discussion of India's sacred geography to contextualise the ecological imagery and symbolic representation of the motherland in *Vande Mataram*. This approach seeks to illuminate the cultural resonance of the text without reducing its interpretation to any single philosophical or ideological tradition.

The study therefore combines close textual analysis with historical interpretation and interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives to explain how *Vande Mataram* acquired enduring cultural significance. The **Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF)** proposed later in this article emerges inductively from this integrated reading of literary evidence, historical documentation, and cultural interpretation. It is presented as a heuristic interpretative framework derived from this case study rather than as a universally applicable theory of nationalism.

From Civilisational Memory to Literary Imagination: A Close Reading of *Vande Mataram*

The enduring historical significance of *Vande Mataram* rests first upon its literary achievement. Before it became associated with public movements, political mobilisation, or national symbolism, it existed as an integral part of the fictional world of *Anandamath*. Any interpretation of the hymn must therefore begin with its literary context. Examining the text within the narrative of the novel enables us to understand how Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay constructed a poetic vision that later acquired an independent public life (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016).

Within *Anandamath*, *Vande Mataram* appears at a crucial moment in the spiritual and ideological transformation of Mahendra, one of the novel's principal characters. Hearing the hymn for the first time, Mahendra assumes that it is addressed to a human mother. Bhavananda, however, explains that the object of devotion is the motherland itself, represented not merely as territory but as a living cultural presence (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016, pp. 29–32). This narrative clarification is central to the literary architecture of the novel because it gradually shifts the reader's attention from individual emotion to collective belonging. Rather than presenting patriotism through abstract political argument, Bankim achieves it through dramatic dialogue and symbolic revelation.

The opening lines of the hymn establish this symbolic vision through a sequence of vivid natural images:

Sujalam suphalam malayaja-shitalam

Shasya-shyamalam Mataram

(B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016, p. 30)

The motherland is introduced through images of fertile fields, flowing waters, gentle breezes, and abundant harvests. These are not merely descriptive details but carefully selected poetic images that evoke nourishment, beauty, and emotional attachment. The landscape becomes an object of affection before it becomes an object of political commitment. In this respect, the hymn demonstrates how literary imagery can shape emotional perception more effectively than direct political rhetoric.

The ecological imagery employed throughout the hymn also contributes to its enduring literary appeal. Rivers, vegetation, agricultural abundance, moonlight, and cooling winds are presented not as isolated natural features but as interconnected elements within a harmonious landscape. The resulting picture is one of balance, fertility, and cultural continuity. As Eck (2012) observes, Indian sacred-geographical traditions frequently invest landscapes with meanings that are simultaneously physical, cultural, and spiritual. Read within this broader interpretative context, the natural imagery of *Vande Mataram* functions not merely as scenic description but as an expression of cultural memory and collective attachment to place.

The hymn subsequently develops from descriptions of natural beauty towards symbolic representations of strength, wisdom, and prosperity. The motherland is associated with qualities traditionally represented through the figures of Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Importantly, these symbolic associations emerge within the poetic movement of the hymn rather than as independent theological assertions. Literary symbolism therefore allows multiple layers of meaning to coexist: the motherland appears simultaneously as landscape, civilisation, cultural memory, and moral inspiration. This symbolic richness has contributed significantly to the hymn's continuing literary resonance across different historical periods.

Equally significant is Bankim Chandra's linguistic craftsmanship. The elevated Sanskritised Bengali diction gives the hymn a ceremonial and rhythmic quality that distinguishes it from ordinary narrative prose. Repetition of the invocation *Vande Mataram* creates structural cohesion while reinforcing emotional intensity. The movement from descriptive imagery to rhythmic invocation produces an effect that is both lyrical and performative, enabling the hymn to be remembered, recited, and sung with remarkable ease. These literary qualities later proved especially significant when the composition entered public life through collective performance.

The literary power of *Vande Mataram* therefore lies not in any single image or symbolic reference but in the careful integration of narrative context, poetic language, natural imagery, rhythm, and emotional progression. Long before the hymn acquired political significance, it had already established itself as a compelling literary composition capable of transforming individual feeling into a shared imaginative experience. Its subsequent historical influence becomes intelligible only when this literary foundation is fully recognised. The journey of *Vande Mataram* from the pages of *Anandamath* into the public sphere was possible because its artistic construction had already endowed it with an enduring emotional and cultural vitality.

From Literature to National Movement: Public Performance and Sonic Nationalism

The historical influence of *Vande Mataram* cannot be explained solely by its literary qualities. While its poetic language and symbolic imagery established its emotional appeal, its enduring public significance emerged through collective performance. The transition from a literary composition within *Anandamath* to a widely recognised cultural symbol occurred as the hymn was repeatedly sung, recited, and remembered in public life. Through this process, literature moved beyond the written page and became a shared social experience.

One of the earliest milestones in this transformation was Rabindranath Tagore's rendering of *Vande Mataram* at the 1896 session of the Indian National Congress. By presenting the hymn before a national political gathering,

Tagore introduced it to a wider public audience and demonstrated its capacity to function not merely as a literary text but also as a collective cultural expression (Ministry of Culture, Government of India, 2025). This performance marked an important step in transferring the hymn from the fictional world of *Anandamath* into the emerging public sphere of Indian nationalism.

The significance of *Vande Mataram* expanded further during the Swadeshi movement that followed the Partition of Bengal in 1905. Historical studies consistently identify this period as the decisive phase during which the hymn acquired widespread symbolic authority (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973). Sung in public meetings, processions, educational institutions, and political gatherings, *Vande Mataram* became a recurring expression of collective identity and anti-colonial aspiration. Its repeated performance enabled diverse communities to participate in a shared emotional experience, thereby reinforcing the cultural dimensions of the national movement.

The historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram* illustrates an important insight from performance studies: literary texts often acquire new meanings when they enter collective performance. As Bohlman (2004) observes, music has the capacity to express and reinforce cultural identity through shared participation. Similarly, Eyerman and Jamison (1998) argue that songs within social movements function not merely as artistic expressions but also as carriers of collective memory and shared purpose. In the case of *Vande Mataram*, public singing transformed individual literary appreciation into a communal act of remembrance and identification. The hymn thus became more than a poem; it evolved into a performative cultural practice through which participants expressed emotional attachment to the idea of the nation.

The continued symbolic significance of *Vande Mataram* is also reflected in the proceedings of the Constituent Assembly. During the midnight session of 14 August 1947, the first verse of the hymn was sung by Sucheta Kripalani before the Assembly commenced its historic deliberations (Constituent Assembly of India, 1947). Subsequently, on 24 January 1950, while announcing the adoption of Jana Gana Mana as the National Anthem, Dr. Rajendra Prasad stated that *Vande Mataram*, in recognition of its distinguished place in the freedom movement, would receive equal honour and enjoy equal status (Constituent Assembly of India, 1950). These official proceedings demonstrate that the cultural importance of the hymn had become firmly established within the historical memory of independent India.

The journey of *Vande Mataram* from literature to public life may therefore be understood as a process of cultural transformation rather than simple political appropriation. Its literary qualities created the conditions for emotional engagement; collective performance extended that engagement into public participation; and repeated association with significant historical moments reinforced its place within India's cultural memory. In this sense, the hymn exemplifies what may be described as sonic nationalism—the formation and reinforcement of national consciousness through the shared performance of culturally significant literary and musical expression. Here, "sonic nationalism" is used as an interpretative concept describing the role of sound, music, and collective recitation in shaping historical consciousness rather than as a formal theoretical category.

Accordingly, the historical influence of *Vande Mataram* should be understood neither as the inevitable outcome of literary excellence nor as the product of political circumstance alone. Rather, it emerged through the sustained interaction of literary imagination, musical performance, collective participation, and historical experience. This interaction provides the conceptual bridge to the comparative discussion that follows and prepares the ground for the Literary National Awakening Framework proposed later in this article.

A Comparative Perspective: Vande Mataram and Selected National Songs

National songs and patriotic hymns have played significant roles in shaping collective identities across many societies. Although each emerged within its own historical and cultural circumstances, they frequently share certain characteristics: they preserve historical memory, inspire collective participation, and express shared ideals. A comparative perspective therefore helps to situate *Vande Mataram* within a broader international tradition while also highlighting the distinctive features of its historical development.

Among the most influential national songs is *La Marseillaise*, composed by Claude Joseph Rouget de Lisle during the French Revolution in 1792. Originally written as a revolutionary marching song, it quickly became associated with popular resistance and later served as the national anthem of France. Its language reflects the urgency of political struggle and military mobilisation, illustrating how music can become a powerful instrument of revolutionary identity.

Similarly, the Italian resistance song **Bella Ciao** emerged from the anti-fascist movement during the Second World War. Although its origins remain complex, the song acquired enduring symbolic significance through its association with resistance, freedom, and democratic values. In a different historical context, South Africa's **Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika** evolved from a Christian hymn into a major symbol of the struggle against apartheid before becoming part of the country's post-apartheid national anthem. Likewise, **We Shall Overcome**, associated with the American Civil Rights Movement, became an enduring expression of non-violent resistance, equality, and collective hope.

These examples demonstrate that literary and musical compositions often acquire historical significance through repeated public performance and collective participation. In each case, songs became enduring cultural symbols because they were continuously reinterpreted within changing social and political contexts. Their significance therefore lies not only in their original composition but also in the ways communities repeatedly invested them with shared historical meaning.

Within this broader international context, *Vande Mataram* followed a distinctive historical trajectory. Unlike *La Marseillaise*, which was composed directly within a revolutionary movement, *Vande Mataram* first appeared as a literary composition embedded in the narrative of *Anandamath* (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016). Its political significance emerged gradually as the hymn moved from literary reading to public singing and eventually became associated with the Indian national movement (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989). This transition from literature to collective performance distinguishes its historical development from many other patriotic songs whose original purpose was explicitly political or military.

The comparison also highlights the importance of cultural memory in sustaining national symbols. Whether in France, Italy, South Africa, the United States, or India, songs have endured because successive generations have continued to perform, reinterpret, and transmit them. As Assmann (2011) argues, cultural memory depends upon recurring acts of remembrance through which societies preserve meaningful connections with their past. Public performance transforms artistic works into living cultural traditions, allowing them to remain historically relevant long after the immediate circumstances of their composition have changed.

The comparative perspective adopted here is not intended to establish hierarchies among national songs or to suggest that they share identical historical trajectories. Rather, it demonstrates that while many societies possess songs associated with national identity, *Vande Mataram* occupies a distinctive position because of the sequence through which it evolved—from literary composition to collective performance, from cultural symbol to historical memory. This progression provides the conceptual foundation for the interpretative framework proposed in the following section.

Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF): A Heuristic Interpretation

The preceding discussion demonstrates that the historical significance of *Vande Mataram* cannot be attributed to literary excellence, political circumstance, or musical performance in isolation. Rather, its enduring influence emerged through the interaction of multiple cultural processes operating over time. Building upon this observation, the present study proposes the Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF) as a heuristic interpretative framework derived from the historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram*. The framework is not intended as a universal theory of nationalism but as an analytical model that may assist in understanding how literary works can contribute to the formation of collective historical consciousness under particular cultural and historical conditions.

The framework identifies five interrelated stages through which a literary composition may acquire enduring public significance:

Civilisational Memory → Literary Imagination → Public Performance → Historical Mobilisation → Enduring Cultural Memory

The first stage, Civilisational Memory, refers to the wider cultural traditions, historical experiences, ethical values, and symbolic resources available within a civilisation. Literary works rarely emerge in isolation; they draw upon existing cultural memories, shared metaphors, inherited narratives, and collective patterns of meaning. In *Vande Mataram*, the symbolic representation of the motherland, together with its ecological imagery and cultural vocabulary, reflects this broader reservoir of civilisational memory (Eck, 2012).

The second stage, Literary Imagination, concerns the creative transformation of these cultural resources into an artistic work. Through narrative structure, poetic language, symbolism, rhythm, and imagery, literary imagination reshapes inherited cultural elements into new aesthetic forms capable of engaging readers emotionally and intellectually. As demonstrated in the close reading of *Anandamath*, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay transformed familiar cultural motifs into a literary composition whose emotional appeal extended well beyond its immediate narrative setting (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016).

The third stage, Public Performance, marks the movement of literature from individual reading to collective participation. Public recitation, musical rendition, and communal singing enable literary texts to enter shared cultural life. Performance creates opportunities for collective emotional experience and contributes to the transmission of literary meaning across social groups. In the historical case of *Vande Mataram*, repeated public singing during the Indian national movement enabled the hymn to transcend its textual origins and become a living cultural practice (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Bohlman, 2004; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

The fourth stage, Historical Mobilisation, refers to the interaction between literary performance and significant historical events. Literary works do not automatically influence history; rather, they acquire wider public significance when communities repeatedly associate them with moments of collective action, social transformation, or political change. During the Swadeshi movement and the wider Indian national movement, *Vande Mataram* became closely associated with aspirations for national self-determination, thereby strengthening its symbolic authority (Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973).

The final stage, Enduring Cultural Memory, describes the long-term preservation of literary works within a society's shared historical consciousness. Through repeated performance, institutional recognition, education, and public remembrance, literary compositions may continue to shape collective identity long after the historical circumstances of their origin have passed. As Assmann (2011) argues, cultural memory depends upon continuing processes of transmission and reinterpretation that enable societies to maintain meaningful relationships with their past. The continued cultural presence of *Vande Mataram* illustrates this enduring process of remembrance.

The value of the Literary National Awakening Framework lies primarily in its interpretative rather than predictive function. It provides a structured way of understanding how literary creativity, collective performance, historical experience, and cultural memory may interact in particular historical contexts. Although developed from the case of *Vande Mataram*, the framework may serve as a useful analytical perspective for future comparative research examining the historical trajectories of other literary works that have acquired wider public significance.

Accordingly, the LNAF should be understood as a heuristic framework emerging from this case study rather than as a comprehensive theory of literary nationalism. Its principal contribution lies in bringing together insights from literary criticism, nationalism studies, cultural memory, performance studies, and selected perspectives from Indian Knowledge Systems into a single interpretative model that explains the historical journey of *Vande Mataram* from literary composition to enduring cultural memory.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined *Vande Mataram* as a literary composition whose influence extends far beyond its original narrative setting in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Anandamath*. By integrating literary criticism, cultural memory studies, nationalism studies, performance studies, and selected perspectives from Indian

Knowledge Systems (IKS), the article has argued that the enduring significance of the hymn cannot be understood through political history or literary analysis in isolation. Rather, its historical influence emerged through the interaction of literary imagination, public performance, collective participation, and historical circumstance.

The close reading undertaken in this study demonstrates that the power of *Vande Mataram* lies first in its literary achievement. Through its rich ecological imagery, symbolic representation of the motherland, rhythmic structure, and carefully organised progression from natural beauty to collective strength, the hymn transforms the idea of the motherland into an object of emotional attachment before it becomes a symbol of political aspiration (B. C. Chatterjee, 1882/2016; Eck, 2012). This artistic construction helps explain why the composition resonated so deeply with successive generations during the Indian national movement.

The study has further shown that the historical journey of *Vande Mataram* was shaped by collective performance. Public singing, particularly during the sessions of the Indian National Congress and the Swadeshi movement, enabled the hymn to move beyond the pages of *Anandamath* and enter the shared cultural life of the nation (Bandyopadhyay, 2004; Chandra et al., 1989; Sarkar, 1973). Music transformed literary language into a collective emotional experience, illustrating how artistic expression may participate in broader processes of historical mobilisation and national consciousness (Bohlman, 2004; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998).

The comparative discussion demonstrates that while many societies possess songs associated with national identity, *Vande Mataram* followed a distinctive historical trajectory. Unlike compositions created directly for revolutionary or military purposes, it originated as a literary work and only gradually acquired political significance through repeated public performance and collective memory. This progression from literature to history constitutes one of the defining characteristics of the hymn and distinguishes it within the broader tradition of national songs.

Building upon these observations, the article proposed the **Literary National Awakening Framework (LNAF)** as a heuristic interpretative framework derived from the historical trajectory of *Vande Mataram*. Rather than advancing a universal theory of literary nationalism, the framework provides an analytical perspective for understanding how literary imagination, public performance, historical mobilisation, and cultural memory may interact under particular historical circumstances. It is intended to encourage further interdisciplinary discussion rather than to establish a definitive explanatory model.

Certain limitations of the present study should also be acknowledged. The article has concentrated primarily on literary, historical, and cultural dimensions and has not undertaken a detailed musicological analysis of the various musical settings of *Vande Mataram*. Similarly, questions relating to regional reception, translation, performance traditions, and digital cultural transmission invite further scholarly investigation. Future interdisciplinary research drawing upon archival studies, regional literary histories, performance studies, and digital humanities may deepen our understanding of the continuing cultural life of the hymn.

Ultimately, the history of *Vande Mataram* demonstrates that literature possesses capacities extending beyond aesthetic expression alone. Literary works can preserve cultural memory, nurture ethical imagination, inspire collective participation, and accompany societies through periods of profound historical transformation. The enduring significance of *Vande Mataram* lies not only in its association with India's freedom movement but also in the broader insight it offers into the relationship between literature, music, memory, and nation-building. In this sense, it remains one of the most influential literary compositions in modern Indian history and an enduring example of how literary imagination may become part of the making of history.

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