

## Bankim Chandra Chatterjee Biography

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (June 26<sup>th</sup> 1838-April 8th 1894) was an Indian novelist, poet, Essayist and journalist. He was the author of the 1882 Bengali language novel Anandamath, which is one of the landmarks of modern Bengali and Indian literature. He was the composer

of Vande Mataram, written in highly sanskritized Bengali, personifying Bengal as a mother goddess and inspiring activists during the Indian Independence Movement. Chattopadhyay wrote fourteen novels and many serious, serio-comic, satirical, scientific and critical treatises in Bengali. He is known as Sahitya Samrat (Emperor of Literature) in Bengali. Born into the family of a government official under the British rule of India, he was one of the first to graduate from the University of Calcutta and later obtained a degree in law. He worked in government service for 20 years, after coming into conflict with the authorities. Bankim believed that true reform could

only be achieved through an internal reform of Hinduism and strove to lay the foundations for a spiritual revival of Bengal. His writings awakened in the Bengalis a spirit of self-confidence and

pride in their religion and history. He is widely regarded as the 'Father of the Modern novel in India' because his works wrote his first poem. He was educated at the Hooghly Mohsin College and later at Presidency College, Kolkata, graduating with a degree in arts in 1859. He later

attended the University of Calcutta and was one of two candidates who passed the final exam to become the school's first graduates. He later obtained a degree in law in 1869. Following his father's footsteps, Bankimchandra joined the Subordinate Executive Service. In 1858, he was appointed a Deputy Magistrate (the same type of position held by his father) of Jessore. After merging of the services in 1863, he went on to become Deputy Magistrate & Deputy Collector, retiring from government service in 1891.

### WRITINGS

Bankim is widely regarded as the "father of modern novel in India." He was not the first to write historical and social novels in Bengali, but he established the novel as a major literary genre in India.

Kapalkundala (1866) was Chattopadhyay's first major publication. The heroine of this novel, named after the mendicant woman in Bhavabhuti's Malatimadhava, is modelled partly after Kalidasa's Shakuntala and partly after Shakespeare's Miranda. He chose Dariapur in Contai Subdivision as the background of this famous novel.

His next romance, *Mrinalini* (1869), marks his first attempt to set his story against a larger historical context. This book marks the shift from Chatterjee's early career, in which he was strictly a writer of romances, to a later period in which he aimed to simulate the intellect of the Bengali-speaking people and bring about a cultural revival, through a campaign to improve

*Days of Pompeii*. *Krishnakanter Uil* (*Krishnakanta's Will*, 1878) was Chattopadhyay's closest approximation to a Western novel. The plot is somewhat similar to that of *Poison Tree*.

The only novel of Chattopadhyay's that can truly be considered historical fiction is *Rajsimha* (1881, rewritten and enlarged 1893). *Anandamath* (*The Mission House of Felicity*, 1882) is a political novel which depicts a Sannyasi (Brahmin ascetic) army fighting Indian Muslims who are in the employ of the East India Company. The book calls for the rise of Brahmin/Hindu nationalism but, ironically, concludes with a character accepting the British Empire as a necessity. The novel was also the source of the song, "Vande Mataram" ("I Worship the Mother"), which, set to music by Rabindranath Tagore, was taken up by many secular nationalists. The novel is loosely based on the time of the Sannyasi

Rebellion; however, in the actual rebellion, Hindus sannyasis and Muslim fakirs both rebelled against thChattopadhyay's next novel, *Devi Chaudhurani*, were published in 1884. His final novel, *Sitaram* (1886), tells the story of a Hindu chief rebelling against Muslim rule.

Chattopadhyay's humorous sketches are his best known works other than his novels. *Kamalakanter Daptar* (*From the Desk of Kamalakanta*, 1875; enlarged as *Kamalakanta*, 1885) contains half-humorous and half-serious sketches, somewhat on the model of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* British East India Company. The novel first appeared in serial form in *Bangadarshan*.