

# The Vande Matram Movement at Barisal and the Response of the Student Community of Nagpur, Vidarbha 1906-1907

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## Abstract

The title of the song Vande Mataram means "I praise the Motherland, worship Motherland" has become a popular marching song of political activism. The song Vande Mataram played a vital role in the Indian independence movement, became a symbol of national resistance against British imperialism, ignited the passion of the people for their country. The origin of the Vande Mataram movement was in Barisal, a small town in Bengal. The Barisal episode had a great impact on the student movement in Vidarbha and other parts of India. The utterance of the words 'Vande Mataram' gave strength to the students to fight for their motherland. The Nagpur Chief Commissioner issued the Risleys Circular banning the utterance of "Vande Mataram" in public. Despite the ban, the students used slogan to strengthen the movement and paralyze the administration. The students from Nagpur and Vidarbha were clearly influenced by the "Vande Mataram" movement in Barisal.

**Methodology:** The Descriptive, Interpretive, and Analytical Research Methodologies are used to undertake the present research paper.

**Keywords:** Vande Mataram, Risleys-Circular, Grants-in-Aid, Gorkha Contingent, Swadeshi

## Introduction

The Vande Mataram poem was written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1870 and was included in his Bengali novel "Anand Math", the poem was set to tune by Rabindranath Tagore and sung for the first time before the gathering at the 12th annual session of the Indian National Congress held in 1896 in Calcutta, it was presided over by Rahmutulla M. Sayani. The poem was translated into English by Aurobindo Ghose, later known as Sri Aurobindo. The Vande Mataram's song was proclaimed the National Song in 1937. Because of its immense contribution to India's freedom movement, it possesses the same status as the National Anthem. The title 'Vande Mataram' means "I praise my motherland" and this poetical line symbolizes the purity of the thought dedicated to the glory of the motherland. The words "Vande Mataram" became a slogan of power that inspired the whole part of India during Independence, this magic words became an expression of nationalism for patriots and revolutionaries who launched numerous movements and agitations against oppressive British rule. There were countless

Patriots who have died by chanting the Vande Mataram Mantra, it was the main mantra of the Swadeshi Andolana. This paper analyzes the origins of the Vande Mataram movement in Barisal, the response of the student community in Nagpur, and the impetus it gave to the freedom movement of Vidarbha.

## Partition of Bengal and Swadeshi Agitation

Swadeshi agitation was launched against the partition of Bengal in 1906 by Indian nationals. It was one of the campaigns against British rule that was most successful. Bengal was the capital and has always been an important center for British India. There was widespread political unrest in the province after Lord Curzon announced the partition of the province, People saw through the British authorities' policy of divide and rule because the main goal of a partition was only to create a rift between the two communities and impede unity and nationalism. Many people in Bengal regarded this partition as an insult to their motherland. The agitation had started much before the date of the partition itself. On the date of the partition,

people observed a day of mourning. As a form of protest, Ravindranath Tagore asked Hindus and Muslims to tie Rakhis to each other. It allowed the mass population to release its energy through the Swadeshi agitation. Meanwhile, to suppress the Swadeshi movement, the Government imposed a ban on the singing of Vande Mataram, despite this Bengal people led a great struggle to overturn the ban. The intensity of this movement in Bengal was significant in triggering the entire country, which in turn sparked the whole country's response.

### **The origin of Vande Matram Movement at Barisal**

The origin of the Vande Matram Movement was at Barisal, which is a small town in Bengal. It was the fortress of the freedom movement in Bengal. Ashvini Kumar Datta, a local leader who had built up a strong Youth organization at Barisal. He had decided to have the provincial session of the Political conference at Barisal on 14 April 1906. Meanwhile, to suppress the Swadeshi movement, the Government imposed a ban on the singing of Vande Matram. When this ban order came to know to the people of Bengal, they decided to oppose it. During this period Vande Matram song was the symbol of patriotism, any meeting or conference was not complete without the slogan Vande Matram. The slogan was widely published in the Newspaper and bulletins, even the clothes with the words 'Vande Matram' imprinted. Under these circumstances, the British government increased its repression. A District Magistrate, Mr. Emerson, issued an order to the organizers of the Political conference, prohibiting them from raising the slogan Vande Matram in public places and during processions. He had already taken sufficient measures to suppress any opposition from the organizer of the conference; he posted a contingent of 600 Gorkha soldiers at Barisal. On such a tense background, the day of the conference dawned. All the delegates were flaunting badges with the words 'Vande Matram' on their chests and shoulders. The program was scheduled to commence with a procession. Babu Surendra Nath Banerjee, the convener of the convention, and other local leaders started the procession as per the scheduled program. Suddenly and without warning, the police opened fire with a lathi on the crowd. The Gorkha contingent beat

brutally the unarmed, peaceful citizens, this merciless attack of police injured and maimed thousands of patriots without sparing even women and children, no discrimination was ever made between young and old, man and woman. The police used all their force on innocent people. The patriots unmindful of heavy blows raised full-throated slogans which reverberated at every blow. Several bodies fell to the ground including the leaders. Even respected leaders like Surendra Nath Banerjee, Motila Ghosh, and Bipin Chandra Pal were injured in the attack. Surendra Nath Banerjee was arrested along with several people, due to police atrocity, the organizer decided to dissolve the convention. The Barisal episode had done great service in rousing the nation to new heights of patriotism. Barisal triggered the spark of Vande Matram. It exploded with a bang throughout the country. Vande Matram had become an expression of nationalism for the patriots and revolutionaries who launched several movements and agitation against the oppressive British rule drawing inspiration from the magic words of Vande Matram. It became the symbol of India's freedom struggle. It aroused feelings of Nationalism. Its soul-stirring words reverberate the streets, schools, and every part and portion of India. The congress session at Calcutta of 1906 started with Vande Matram song. The Honorable Dr. Rashbehary Ghose, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, condemned the police atrocity at Barisal.

### **The Barisal Episode and Student Community of Vidarbha**

The Barisal episode had a large impact on the student community of Vidarbha. On the background of the Vande Matram movement in Bengal, a similar movement was launched by students of Nagpur in Vidarbha. Under the leadership of Dr. Moonje, students started the Vande Matram movement and established a student organization named 'Vidhyarthi-Samaj'. The students in Morris College greeted their European professors in the class with Vande Mataram. The founder of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was expelled from school in Nagpur due to Vande Matram agitation. The situation in Nagpur grew quite tense. To suppress the movements of

students, the chief Commissioner Sir Rojinald Kraddok issued a circular known as Risley-Circular. During this period, students took an active role in politics. In June 1906, national leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak visited Nagpur and addressed the people in the Benegir theatre at Nagpur on the subject of Swadeshi. Meanwhile, Another meeting was addressed in Nagpur by famous local political leader Dadasaheb Khaparde at which the students made a bonfire of their foreign caps. The students of Nagpur were at the forefront of the agitation for collecting signatures on the Swadeshi Pledge, shouting slogans of Vande Mataram and singing national songs, taking part in processions and meetings, etc. Due to the growing involvement of students in political events, the Government tried to keep separate students' community from any anti-government movement. For this purpose, in 1907, Sir Herbert Risley issued a circular on behalf of the Home Department of the Government of India, about the political behavior of schoolboys, teachers, students, and professors. It ordained that "where schoolboys associated themselves with political movements, grants-in-aid should be withdrawn from the school and the privilege of competing for scholarships withheld; universities were not to recognize the school, nor to admit its candidates to matriculation. Schoolmasters were allowed by the Circular, to have a right to their own opinions as much as anyone else, but should be visited by disciplinary action, if their utterances endangered the orderly development of the boys, or were subversive of their respect for authority. In the case of colleges, students were allowed to attend meetings, but if they became active in politics, the privileges of affiliation should be withdrawn. Professors were permitted more latitude, but if they encouraged students to attend political meetings, the university or the Government should intervene" According to these circulars students were prohibited from attending the meetings of the nationalist leader or from boycotting, picketing, and other political activities associated with the Swadeshi Movement. The circular clearly said that the use of students for political purposes was subversive of discipline; it created a sensation all over the country. Students took up the challenge and numerous meetings were organized to oppose the government. The political leaders of

Vidarbha also came forward to condemn these circulars. Dadasaheb Khaparde organized huge meeting at Amravati on 11 August 1907. Veer Wamanrao Joshi, Y.G. Deshpande, and Moropant Joshi gave extremist speeches to protest the Risley Circular. The students of Calcutta established the Anti-circular society to protest it. Sachindranath Basu and Ramakanta Roy were their leaders. Up to October 1906; the Anti-Circular society had set up 75 centers for selling swadeshi clothes. Again in 1917, the ill-famous Rislav Circular was issued when the Home Rule movement was in full swing, and the students took up the challenge. Agitations throughout the province were organized under the guidance of Bar. Abhyankar. The student association of Morris and Hislop colleges also kept their stand and organized a meeting on this issue, they passed one resolution against the government. "We the college students of Nagpur after due and thorough consideration emphatically declare in the meeting assembled of about 1000 students that we will attend all Public Meetings, Political or non-political despite the prohibitive orders of the college authorities to prohibit us from attending the meetings under the name of discipline". This resolution clearly described the state of the student movement. They did not compromise the situation and determine to oppose the British government on any condition. Hence, the government decided to close down Hislop and Morris Law College and rusticated nine students, namely S.V. Vartak, V.G. Puranik, M.A. Deshpande, V.M. Badhe, A.A. Hamid Khan, G.B. Khaparde, L.R. Dubey, K.V. Nakade and M.A. Bari. Meanwhile, Advocate Mangalmurti came forward to negotiate the matter and appealed the students to go back to classes, on such condition colleges were reopened on 21 November 1917. This student movement influenced everyone in Nagpur. As a result, a sense of patriotism was aroused in minds of common people, they began to greet each other with the words "Vande Matram" rather than "Namaskar".

### Conclusion

Barisal episode had done great service in rousing the nation to new heights of patriotism. On the background of the Vande Matram movement in Bengal, similar

movements were launched by students of Nagpur in Vidarbha. It has a profound impact on the minds of the whole generation of young men of the day. Vande Matram was the spark that ignited a number of student and youth organizations in Vidarbha during the National Movement, total 38 student organizations were established in Vidarbha but Nagpur and Amravati were the main center of student's activism. This student organization led several movements against oppressive British rule, drawing inspiration from Vande Matram's words. Indian National Congress was largely supported by the youth, who asked students to stand aloof from government policies and work, student organization of Vidarbha responded this call and participated in the freedom movement in a large number. During all national movements serious breaches of discipline were noticed among the students. Strikes, picketing, boycotts, and political meetings were part of the student's daily routine, the utterance of the words ' Vande Matram' gave students the strength to fight for the motherland, sparked a powerful flame of patriotic sentiment in the minds of the people, and it ignited defiance against the British government. Schools and colleges became cradles of political ideas and centers of political activity. The Vande Matram movement played an integral role in the Indian independence movement, contributing to the expansion of Indian nationalism through the involvement of students. There has always been a place in history for the students of India who have been remembered as dynamic, enthusiastic members of the nation. They provided a crucial contribution to the mass movement and made their motherland proud.

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