

# Visual Representation of Bhāratmātā in Print Media Sphere with Special Context to promote the National sentiment (Precolonial era to 1950s)

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**Abstract:** Religious or national icons are frequently used to promote products or services, as an effective tool for media advertisements. It is also a good conductor for religious and political institutions to manipulate the masses' emotions. Bhāratmātā, in this order, has evolved from literature and now became a significant part of Indian nationalist-sentiment. This study examines the precolonial-1950s, visual representation of Bhāratmātā, and the diversified imagery with special context to print media. The transition of the Bhāratmātā's imagery into different dimensions is sometimes controversial due to political discourses and different sorts of notions, but the present study shows merely the visual personification of Bhāratmātā in the favour of Indian visual culture. The study is focused on the available samples only.

**Keywords:** Bhāratmātā, Visual culture, Print media, Icons, Advertisements, Freedom struggle

**Methodology:** Qualitative research methodology with broad range of different approaches and methods has been applied for the study. Basically, newspapers and news debates, research articles and books, interviews and lectures available online etc. Analytical and also critical perspective has been used for conceptualising the idea.

**Introduction:** It has been very common over the decades to use any religious or national icon to promote products or services to customers through the media. It can be perceived as a highly effective medium of the advertisement with a deep, routed connection of sentiments that is convenient to grasp by the masses. It is also an effective tool for religious and political institutions to grab the emotions of the masses in their own favour and ventures. The image of *Bhāratmātā* is one of them. From literature to theatre and movies to slogans like 'Bharat Mata ki Jai', India's visual image as a motherland has evolved dramatically over the last century. At this stage, during the freedom movement, the image of Bhāratmātā was intended to bring together the many communities of the British colony under a single secular canopy. Since then, it is a patriotic as well as integral part of Indian nationalist-sentiment. The concept of motherland is nothing new in Indian subcontinent. Ancient Sanskrit literatures and stories showcase, the moral belief in this concept. The proclamation of the Vedās; '*Mātā Bhūmiḥ Putroham Prithivyāḥ*' (The land is the mother; I am the son of this land.) or Vālmiki Rāmāyana '*Janani Janmabhūmishcha Swargādapi Gariyasī*' (The place of mother or birthplace is higher than heaven) are few of the examples of the notion. Apart from this, in 1936, Shiv Prasad Gupta built the temple of Bhāratmātā in Banaras. In 1983, Vishwa Hindu Parishad built a temple of Bhāratmātā in Haridwar. And recently a new Bhāratmātā temple was inaugurated in Ujjain in January 2018. Movie like *Mother India* (1957) is one of the classic movies, represented the eternal essence of this concept in independent India. But this ancient image and word-synonyms of Bhāratmātā have been changing from time to time.

**Review Literature:** Political iconography, or the study of the development and use of pictures as political instruments, is a relatively fresh discipline at the intersection of social sciences, art, and cultural philosophy. According to philosopher Heidegger, *the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture*. From this point of view, the study is relevant to the present society. Also, according to Assmann, *Icons of all socio-political cultures have one thing in common: they serve as critical components of a 'connective structure' that spans and combines two dimensions of time and social space, which are folded into one in the event of effective iconi-zation*. This connecting structure binds a person to their fellow citizens by acting as a symbolic universe of meaning, that fosters a shared space of experience, expectation, and action. Furthermore,

it connects the past and present by forming and preserving important events and memories. It encloses in a constantly evolving present pictures and stories of bygone periods, bringing about memories of the long past and hope for the future (Assmann, 2007, p. 16). Sumathi Ramaswamy (Indian Scholar) also claimed *the visual turn in modern Indian studies since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century*. He said, it is widely believed that patriotic art - as an integral part of nation-building - has an important argument to make, an argument which may not necessarily repeat the one of the 'official verbal archive'. Icons now play a crucial role in understanding how the abstract nation-state comes to have the presence and power to command citizens' lives and their heroic deaths. (Ramaswamy, 2008, p. 7). All these examples show the significance of the particular area of study in contemporary scenario.

**Birth of Bhāratmātā in modern era:** The concept of modern Bhāratmātā popularly, first originated during the Indian independence struggle in the late 19th century. Banerjee begins his chronology with dramatist Nabogopāl Mitrā's *Hindu Mela* (Hindu fair) in 1867, when a young Rabīndranātha Tagore, together with his elder brothers Dwijendranātha and Satyendranātha, created a song for the '*children of mother India*' to restore the mother's glory. Kiran Chandra Banerjee's drama, Bhāratmātā, was originally played in 1873. The play is set in the 1770s, amid a man-made Bengal Famine, was the initial imagery of Bhāratmātā. Again, in 1882, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's renowned novel *Ānandamath* introduced the hymn *Vande Mātaram*. It was sung by Rabindranath Tagore at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1896, which later became the song of the burgeoning liberation movement in India. The great artist Abanīndranātha first visualised the notion of Bhāratmātā in 1905 (*Image 1*). In this painting Bhāratmātā was visualised as a serene, saffron-clad ascetic woman, the mother carried the boons of food, clothing, learning and spiritual salvation in her four hands. Since then, the visual iconography has varied depending on the social-political context in India. The British Raj also produced the cartographic shape of India through the Geological Survey of India, which Indian nationalists transformed into a nationalist emblem.

**Bhāratmātā in political sphere and media representation:** After Abanīndranātha, visual artists such as P.S. Rāmachandran Rao (1937), Sobha Singh (1950), E. Jesudass (1997), Maqbool Fida Husain (2005), and other anonymous painters painted Bhāratmātā, resulting in significant alterations in its iconography. As her image became more prevalent in popular print images over the next several decades, the motherland as divinity was regularly grafted onto the physical outlines of the map, bestowing additional sanctity on the territorial and administrative unit. While her body became the map and the map her body, Bhāratmātā surrounded herself with other national secular emblems like as the tricolour and the Asokan pillar capital. At times, the landscape displayed remarkable prescience. The number of posters highlighted a political disparity between ideologies and other cultural or gender-based concerns time to time, which is still going on in the Indian scenario. But along with these discussions, a broader spectrum of small and medium-sized manufacturing sectors has regularly been stuck with the imagery of Bhāratmātā, specially during the struggle period. There are a series of products that show the national interest and sentiments towards this imagery of the motherland since that time.

**Description:** On the basis of these viewpoints, we can state that national icons like Bhāratmātā (and others) became an effective tool for popularising patriotic sentiments with products among the masses. A description is given below in which the image of Bhāratmātā, is used in different forms and features.

- I. **Prints and calendars:** Here we would like to mention couple of significant posters, responsible for the major changes in the imagery of Bhāratmātā. **Rao's *Vande Mātaram*:** The poster, namely *Vande Mātaram* (I praise you, Mother) by Rao-brothers (Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu), was released in 1937 and can be considered one of the significant shifts in the imagery. It was a chromolithograph and was painted by artist P.S. Ramchandra Rao. This patriotic visualisation of the pre-Independence period vividly depicts the national map as an anthropomorphic Mother India, who is wrapped in a tri-coloured sari. The sari's role in generating the geographical body of the emerging nation is clear in the poster, which was presumably created to commemorate the Indian National Congress's nationwide electoral triumph. That tricolour was used as the flag of the party, championed by M. K. Gandhi in the 1920s, a variant of which subsequently became the Indian national flag. At a later period, we can see the replication of this

imagery, but with a wide range of imaginations and patriotic emotions, on the products and other materials used by the media (*Image 2*). **Bhāratmātā by Sobha Singh:** A poster published around 1950 (c. 1947) by Sikh painter Sobha Singh shows Bhāratmātā flanked by a lion. Rāmāswamy theorizes that the number of lions flanking a predator associated both with Durga and the British Empire and their ferocity increased as the freedom movement headed towards a successful conclusion. With the passage of time, Mother India was being mapped along with towering figures of the freedom movement such as Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, Nehru and Sardar Patel, paying obeisance, cutting her shackles and often sitting on her lap. This infantilized position is given to both Bose and Gandhi (*Image 3*). Apart from this, a huge section of calendars is available, inspired by the Raja Ravi Varma's style. In contemporary era, it's a very common to keep the calendars like this in patriotic-homes (*Image 4*).

- II. **Official documents & Magazine's cover:** *Vijaya Magazine (1909)* is also a significant example of Bhāratmātā's changing imagery. Cover page (black and white) of this Tamil periodical depicts Bhāratmātā with her various children and the rallying cry of Vande Mataram. In this image we can identify the initial embodiment of female figure and geographical map of India (*Image 5*). Apart from this, a piece of *Messrs Rampal Bhnvarlala, Zareen cloth merchants, and Ajmer (1931)* is available in the record, in which a description regarding money is mentioned to Queen Diggī, Ajmer. The document shows a monochromatic red, sitting posture of Bhāratmātā (*Image 6*). Another piece of evidence, regarding the *Merchant association (Sawai Madhopur, 1950s)* is available. In this piece, a black and white figure of Bhāratmātā is imprinted with holding the national Indian flag (*Image 7*).
- III. **Media advertisements of industries:** Here we will be presenting some significant examples of textile industry. The media advertisements in the form of vintage pieces, show the visualization of Bhāratmātā. **Image 8:** *Kasturchand Mathuradas (Bombay founded in 1912)*; In the image Bhāratmātā is shown, holding a piece of cloth bundle, written with the title 'Made in India' as well as India's map-outline, but female figure's dressing is inspired by the Mughal style of apparel and accessories, which is far different from the present popular imagery of Bhāratmātā. It shows a secular imagery of Bhāratmātā, no doubt, at that time. **Image 9:** *Ranchhodlala Chhotalaal and Company (Shahpur mill, Ahmedabad founded in 1861)*; This image is quite similar to any Hindu goddess with four hands and holding trident with the slogan 'Hindusthan ma banelo maal'. This indicates the thought of *Swadeshi* as well as Hindu nation's dominance. **Image 10:** *Naranlal Jeevanlal and Company (The Ahmedabad new textile mills, cotton mill during 40s)*; Image again showing the Bhāratmātā with four hands and Bhagvā (Saffrone) flag stuck with the rod of trident. The flairs of sārī are composed in the shape of map. Image 9 and 10, from Ahmedabad cloth mills are having the title *Hindmātā*, presently unpopular term referred to Bhāratmātā. **Image 11:** Another image of *Pathak colour and chemical co.* shows the lion and goat together, drinking water underneath the mother's feet. Mother put on sārī and typical Bhagvā flag. The core idea of image indicates the brotherhood and peace amid the humanity and more secular approach rather than today's visual representation. Another important point, there is no restrictions of colours and gesture-postures, rigidly used to apply for the identification of Bhāratmātā.
- IV. **Safety Matchboxes and smoking wrappers:** We frequently see the image of Bhāratmātā during pre-independence era on safety matchboxes as well as Bīdī wrappers, (local smoking product). According to Gautam Hemmady (a retired architect in Delhi who began collecting matchboxes in 2012), first safety match box was made in 1932 in India. *Wimco* started its operations here as a unit of the multinational Swedish Match Company in c.1924. At that time early labels depicting unknown goods were replaced with motifs from Indian mythology, art, religion, and architecture. Gandhi and Bharat Mata (Mother India) emerged as a result of the nationalist movement with other patriotic symbols such as the flag, spinning wheel, and images of nationalist leaders were used until independence, when they were replaced by maps and the Ashok Chakra. In *Wimco* the image title was also given as *Hindmātā (Image 12, 13)*

V. **Critical analysis:** If we start with Abhinranātha's imagery (painting), the study of this figure's imaginations reveals important ideological and discursive factors that shape its semiotic configurations. Interestingly, according to Neumayer and Schelberger (2003), Bhāratmātā was originally known as *Bangamātā*, she was personified as the Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati and is dressed as a Vaishnava Sādhvi, rather opposite to Simhavāhini Bhāratmātā (sitting on lion). Also, according to Sugata Bose, (Grand-nephew of Neta ji Subhash Chandra Bose, Gardiner Chair of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University, Director of the Netaji Research Bureau in Kolkata, also served as MP from the Jadavpur Constituency in West Bengal) the earliest "visual evocation" of painted Bhāratmātā, is far different from today's imagery. He said in his book *The Nation as Mother and Other Visions of Nationhood*, published in August 2017 by Penguin Books India; "*A conscious creation of an 'artistic' icon of the nation, Abanīdranātha tells us in a memoir that he had conceived his image as Bangāmātā and later, almost as an act of generosity towards the larger cause of Indian nationalism, decided to title it Bhāratmātā*". Sumanta Banerjee also argues that the first attempt to depict India as a mother-goddess in nationalistic terms was made in 1827 by a young Eurasian Christian born in Bengal who associated with Bengalis' patriotic inclinations. "*Henry Louis Vivian Derozio...*".

Another idea is supposed to be inspired by the *Mother Britannia (Image 14)*. According to some academicians, the concept of Bhāratmātā derivates from this visualization (*Sharma, Kiran. 2017*). During the 16th and 17th centuries, nationalism had yet to develop as a political force in Europe; therefore, group identification was still mostly organised around religion; individuals cared less about being "German" or "French" than about being Protestant or Catholic. However, following the destruction of the Thirty Years' War, the Peace of Westphalia, the solidification of state boundaries, and the rise of vernacular print culture, the 18th century saw a profound shift in the organisation of European identities. This trend deemphasized community religious ties in favour of links between language, vernacular culture, and a common civic identity, sometimes known as nationalism." It was in Great Britain that a "national" identity was first clearly expressed, as evidenced by the proliferation of national symbols in the 18th century; these include a national flag (the Union Jack), a national song/anthem ("Rule Britannia," which glorifies Britons as a nation rather than merely the British monarchy, was first sung in the 1740s), and, most importantly for our discussion, one or several national personification(s). Lady Britannia served as a personification for Britain. One of the first images of Lady Britannia was in the picture *The East Offering its Riches to Britannia* (commissioned by the East India Company and painted in 1778), in which a dark-skinned Indian woman presents her wealth to the feminine personification of Britain. Lady Britannia quickly came to be viewed in the figure of a classical goddess, who, with her plumed helmet, trident, and shield embroidered with the Union Jack, displays more than a passing similarity to the great Roma herself, as the accompanying photographs demonstrate. Lady Britannia resembles not just ancient Roman deities but also Bhāratmātā, a figure from a later time. As previously noted, this figure emerged during the late nineteenth-century Indian "nationalist" movement, and it was particularly connected with Bengal.

**Conclusion:** The concept of Bhāratmātā was the result of two ideological forces at work in India: the legendary setting of India's past and the colonial environment in which the conception was developed. Bhāratmātā, like any other such figure, arose as a result of a complicated political landscape. Interestingly, the entire process of creating the shot was partly inadvertent. While anti-colonial sentiments were communicated to the people through poems and plays, no concerted attempt was made to establish an image of a mother goddess for popular consumption. It was a gradual process that leaned on both political changes and common Bengali religious traditions. We presently have access to a huge variety of posters, images, and other papers; it is not feasible to see them all. The quotations that have been provided suggest that Mother India's shape has developed over a long period of time in several dimensions, inspired by a variety of beliefs. The samples we have examined make this reality quite evident. Over time, print media has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the strengthening of the Indian identity and Mother India. The research mentioned above, makes it abundantly evident that the modern perception of Mother India is not the product of a single organisation or political party, but rather is the result of popular imagination combined with historical accounts, folklore, literature, theatre, cinema, songs, and music. Emotions have had a significant impact. One may argue that the public's patriotic sentiments, together

with the media's assistance, have elevated the image of Mother India to such a degree that, in the present day, different political factions are using it for their own ends.

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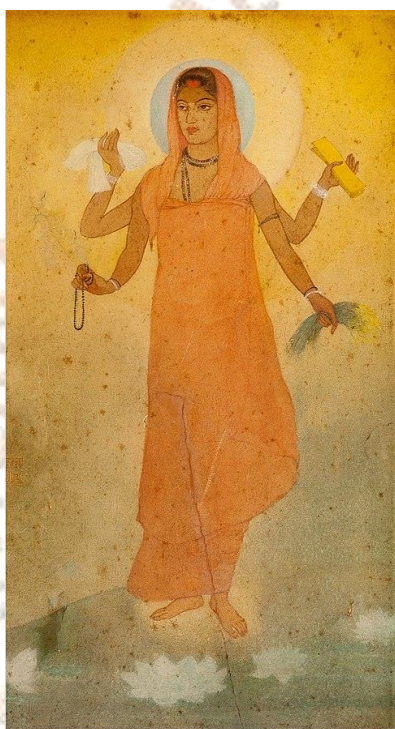


Figure 1 *Bhāratmātā* by Abanīndranātha

[https://hschool-hindustantimes-com.translate.google.com/editorsdesk/knowledge-vine/the-true-story-behind-abanindranath-tagores-bharat-mata-painting?x\\_tr\\_sl=en&x\\_tr\\_tl=hi&x\\_tr\\_hl=hi&x\\_tr\\_pto=tc&x\\_tr\\_hist=true](https://hschool-hindustantimes-com.translate.google.com/editorsdesk/knowledge-vine/the-true-story-behind-abanindranath-tagores-bharat-mata-painting?x_tr_sl=en&x_tr_tl=hi&x_tr_hl=hi&x_tr_pto=tc&x_tr_hist=true)

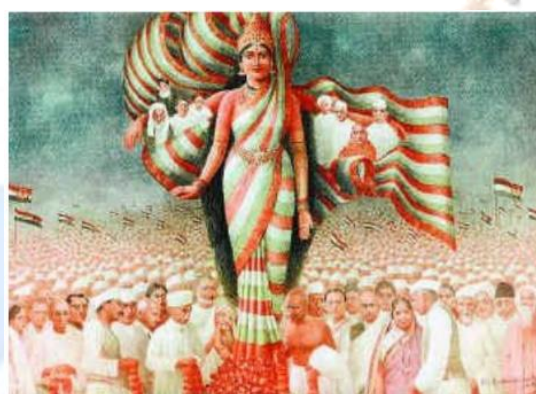


Figure 2 *Bhāratmātā* by P.S. Rāmachandran Rao <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/557461260125869077/>



Figure 3 *Bhāratmātā* by Sobhā Singh [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Shobha-Singh-Bharat-Mata-c-1947-Source-Neumayer-and-Schelberger-2008-p-45\\_fig7\\_263156251](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Shobha-Singh-Bharat-Mata-c-1947-Source-Neumayer-and-Schelberger-2008-p-45_fig7_263156251)



Figure 4 Bhārati mā

[https://www.google.com/search?q=bharat+mata+images+old&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEWjJ1a6Ax52EaxVmmWMGHX9aAhUQ2-cCegQIABAA&ogq=bharat+mata+images+old&gs\\_lp=EgNpbWciFmJoYXJhdCBtYXRhIGltYWdscyBvbGRiRRQxgNYqA9wAHgAkAEA-AEAAoAEAgqEAuAEDyAEA-AEBigILZ3dzLXdpei1pbWlBge&](https://www.google.com/search?q=bharat+mata+images+old&tbm=isch&ved=2ahUKEWjJ1a6Ax52EaxVmmWMGHX9aAhUQ2-cCegQIABAA&ogq=bharat+mata+images+old&gs_lp=EgNpbWciFmJoYXJhdCBtYXRhIGltYWdscyBvbGRiRRQxgNYqA9wAHgAkAEA-AEAAoAEAgqEAuAEDyAEA-AEBigILZ3dzLXdpei1pbWlBge&)



Figure 5 Vijaya Magazine cover

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1909\\_magazine\\_vijaya.jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:1909_magazine_vijaya.jpg)

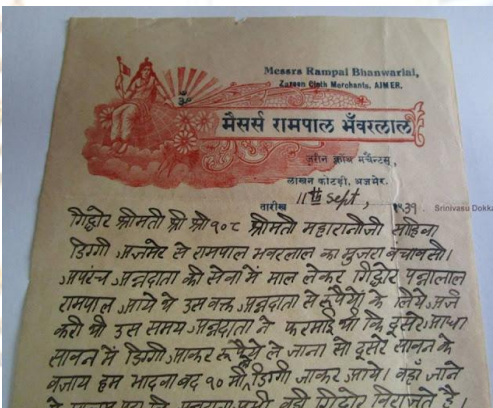


Figure 6 <https://indian-heritage-and-culture.blogspot.com/2018/08/bharat-mata-image-printed-vintage.html>



Figure 7 <https://www.collectorbazar.com/item/indian-old-label-year-1950-bharat-mata-photo-1-one-anna-303852>



Image 8 <https://twitter.com/wh0mi/status/1089074266836918273>



Figure 9 <https://goodshoppin.top/ProductDetail.aspx?iid=639517501&pr=60.88>

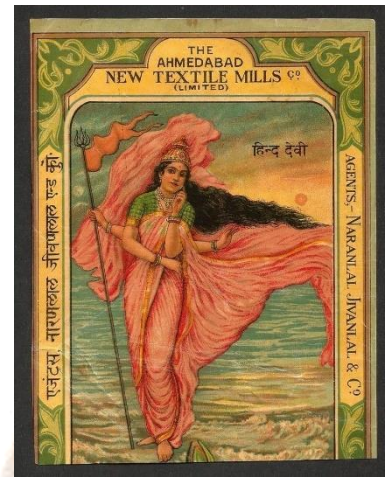


Figure 10 <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/627267054332155004/>



Image 11 <https://indian-heritage-and-culture.blogspot.com/2018/08/bharat-mata-image-printed-vintage.html>

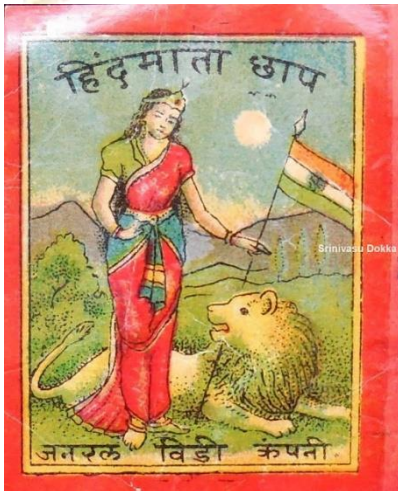


Figure 12 <https://indian-heritage-and-culture.blogspot.com/2018/08/bharat-mata-image-printed-vintage.html>



Figure 13 <https://www.collectorbazar.com/item/vintage-match-box-matchbox-label-hind-mata-wimco-bharat-mata-stuck-on-paper-1121-533185>



Figure 14 <https://worldwarera.com/products/side-by-side-britannia-britains-day-poster>