









## INTRODUCTION

This short pamphlet gives no more than the broad frame-work for a study of the Bengal Renaissance from Rammohan Roy to Rabindranath Tagore.

The author himself—an eminent Marxist intellectual—did not desire its publication at this stage as it is in no sense a detailed study nor is the frame-work indicated here necessarily final or complete.

He has agreed to its publication for discussion because at the present crisis in Indian life and thought, it is urgently necessary to uncover the roots of the Bengal Renaissance which moulded the modern Indian mind. Much of that heritage has been lost and forgotten. Much of it has been repudiated and distorted. But it still remains the most powerful influence in moulding current ideas of all schools of social and political thought.

We are therefore publishing this pamphlet as a contribution towards the efforts to bring about a correct and common understanding of the ideas of our own past ideological heritage so that we may successfully struggle towards new ideas that will help to liberate our land and build a new life for our people.

Bengal was the birth-place of the modern Indian Renaissance. We look to all Bengali intellectuals—irrespective of ideological or political differences—to contribute to the discussion.

Comments and criticism of this draft will be very welcome and should be addressed to Amit Sen c/o the Communist Party Headquarters, Raj Bhuvan, Sandhurst Road, Bombay 4. All contributions, together with the author's reply, will be printed in the **Marxist Miscellany** which is brought out by the People's Publishing House.

P. C. JOSHI.

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# NOTES ON THE BENGAL RENAISSANCE

## I

### Introduction

**THE** impact of British rule, bourgeois economy and modern Western culture was felt first in Bengal and produced an awakening known usually as the Bengal Renaissance. For about a century, Bengal's conscious awareness of the changing modern world was more developed than and ahead of that of the rest of India. The role played by Bengal in the modern awakening of India is thus comparable to the position occupied by Italy in the story of the European Renaissance.

In the broad family of peoples which constitute India, the recognition of the distinctiveness of the Bengalis has been in modern times largely bound up with the appreciation of this flowering of social, religious, literary and political activities in Bengal. And today when disintegration threatens every aspect of our life, it is more necessary than ever to recall our past heritage, to go over again the struggles and achievements which had built up a proud tradition, now in danger of being forgotten.

What is being presented here is merely the sketch of a narrative of events on the surface, culled from well-known books on the subject. But even a survey based on secondary sources and confined to mere external facts has its own usefulness in serving as an introduction. For the convenience of such a preliminary study, the period under review is here divided into five sections, with dates chosen more or less arbitrarily, to demarcate them from each other :

1. 1814-1833—The easiest starting point is, of course, the date 1814, when Rammohan Roy settled down in Calcutta and took up seriously his life's work. His death in England in 1833, obviously ends the period of which he was, indisputably, the central figure.
2. 1833-1857—From the death of Rammohan to the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny.
3. 1857-1885—From the Mutiny to the foundation of the Indian National Congress.
4. 1885-1905—From the commencement of the Congress to the Partition of Bengal.
5. 1905-1919—From the Partition and the great *Swadeshi* agitation to the coming of Non-Co-operation and the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.



## II

### 1814 - 1833

#### R A M M O H A N R O Y 1772-1833

**THE** central characteristics in the life and thought of Rammohan Roy were his keen consciousness of the stagnant, degraded and corrupt state into which our society had fallen, his deep love of the people which sought their all-round regeneration, his critical appreciation of the value of modern Western culture and the ancient wisdom of the East alike, and his untiring many-sided efforts in fighting for improving the conditions around him.

No contemporary ever approached him in the quantity and the quality of achievement or the range of activity. His writings themselves are the best proof of the life-giving spirit of new thought. Recent detractors of his deserved reputation have merely revealed their own failure to grasp the significance of the renaissance in our country.

In his outlook, Rammohan worked out a synthesis of the best thought of the East and the West. As a

**A SYNTHESIS** young man at Benares, he had studied the traditional Sanskrit culture. At Patna, he had delved deep in Persian and Arabic lore. During his travels in distant regions, "in plains as well as in hilly lands," he had acquainted himself with various provincial cultures and even Tibetan Buddhism and Jainism.

Later in life, he mastered English thought and Western culture. He was quite at home with Christian religious literature and earned the esteem of British and American Unitarians. Western radicals like Bentham and Roscoe greeted him as an equal ally. French savants honoured him. And all the time, Rammohan was no thinker shut up in his own speculations, but a champion of his people, engaged in the daily toil of advancing

their conditions with an unflinching vision of their bright modern destiny.

Even as a boy, Rammohan annoyed his parents by his free criticism of irrational orthodoxy. As he grew up, he lived apart from the family because of his altered habits of life and change of opinion. In his thirties he wrote in Persian his *Gift to Monotheists* in which he argued that the natural tendency in all religions was towards monotheism, but unfortunately people have always emphasised their special, peculiar creeds, forms of worship and practices which tend to separate one religion from another.

Having settled in Calcutta, Rammohan drew round him in the *Atmiya Sabha* in 1815, an inner circle of aristocratic and new middle-class liberals and held regular discussion meetings in the manner he had already introduced in his circle at Rangpur, where he was an official for some time.

He took the field with supreme courage against the current perversions of the ancient Hindu religion, which his learned and thoughtful contemporaries tolerated in their contempt and pity for the ignorant multitude. Between 1815 and 1817, he published the Bengali translation of the authoritative text of the *Vedanta* together with an abridgement and also translated five of the principal *Upanishads*, to demonstrate to the general public that the Hindu scriptures themselves preached monotheism. He was plunged, in consequence, in great controversy with the orthodox *pandits* like Sankar Sastri, Mrityunjaya Vidyalkar and Subrahmanya Sastri, between 1817 and 1820, and published a series of polemical tracts in which he very ably defended his ground.

Rammohan pronounced a scathing criticism of priest-craft which inculcated a vulgar religion of superstitious idol-worship for the masses and discouraged translations of the scriptures into the vernacular, in a manner which reminds us of the leaders of the Protestant Revolution. He pointed out that unthinking idolatry had brought about a degradation in the character of the people so that he felt it his duty to "rescue them from impo-

sition and servitude, and promote their comfort and happiness.”

He referred to commonsense and the practice of other peoples when he advocated the rationality and the perfect feasibility of theism and exposed the logical absurdities of idol-worship which “destroys the texture of society” and hinders moral reformation. Any particular scripture was liable to error and there was an inherent human right to depart from tradition, especially if tradition was “leading directly to immorality and destruction of social comforts.” Such was the memorable message of the pioneer of the renaissance in our land.

The new Liberalism of Rammohan was not confined to a re-assertion of Hindu theism, it spread also to his examination of the Christian religion and tradition which had begun to penetrate into our country.

**LIBERAL REINTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY**

In 1820, he published his *Precepts of Jesus* in which he carefully separated the moral message of Christ from the specific Christian doctrines and the reliance on the miracle stories. The moral teaching of Christianity, he said, had a far greater appeal than its metaphysical theology. The missionaries were at once up in arms against the daring heathen. Between 1820 and 1823, Rammohan wrote three *Appeals to the Christian Public* in defence of his position. He protested against the missionary practice of stressing dogmas and mysteries foreign to the people, their habit of dwelling more on the nature of Christ than on his gospel of love which was the main strength of their religion. He singled out for attack what he described as Trinitarian polytheism and thus converted into Unitarianism Adam, one of the Serampore missionaries himself.

In his *Brahmanical Magazine*, 1821-1823, he displayed his deep love for the best traditions of India, and on behalf of his country protested against “encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants” by proselytizing Christian missionaries who instead of relying on reasonable arguments fell back on ridiculing the native religions and on holding out worldly inducements to converts.

Tenaciously defending the intellectual consistency of Hindu theism, he proceeded to expose what he considered to be the fal-

lacies of missionary doctrines in a manner which won him the respect of British and American Unitarians as we see in their correspondence with him, and in the tributes they paid him.

Rammohan was no enemy of Christianity in its best sense which he believed to be a good influence on his countrymen. He had assisted some of the Serampore missionaries in the Bengali translations of the Gospel; he set up the Unitarian Committee in 1821 and helped it to maintain Adam as a missionary and run its own congregational service, school and printing press; in 1830, he even gave material support to the young Scottish missionary Duff in his crusade against "godless" education. But his rational modern mind refused to put up with the metaphysical subtleties of missionary preachings and the unfairness in their propaganda. His deep learning and intellect made him one of the pioneers in the modern humanistic trend within even a foreign religious movement, Christianity.

Nor was the stand of Rammohan merely critical or negative. He was moving towards a universal religion to be based on the best traditions of Hindu theism. In his *Humble Suggestions* (1823), he declared that all believers in One God were his brethren in religion, and he advocated wide toleration in his tract on *Different Modes of Worship*, published in 1825.

Not satisfied with the discussions of the *Atmiya Sabha* or the occasional Unitarian services, he and his disciples organised a new theistic society, the *Brahma Sabha*, on August 20, 1828. A regular church was established in January 1830, as the culmination of Rammohan's religious thought, in the Trust Deed for which were defined the first principles of the famous *Brahmo* movement which worked like a leaven in the life of Bengal for a long time.

But Rammohan was no mere philosopher, critic or religious reformer. He was a stern fighter against social evils and a champion of those suffering from social oppression. This is illustrated by his historic campaign against the inhuman custom of *Sati*—burning of Hindu widows. The British

rulers were partly apathetic and partly nervous about the outcry which would follow the forcible suppression of the rite. Their regulations against the "misuse" of the practice were ineffective and even a tacit approval of the monstrous custom.

A total of about 8,000 burnings were officially recorded between 1815 and 1828. In three tracts, between 1818 and 1829, Rammohan came out in fiery denunciation of this murderous practice. He quoted the authority of the best religious books against the custom of *Sati*, but coupled this with an appeal to reason and good sense of the community. He combined a spirited defence of the maligned Hindu womanhood with a tremendous attack on the lack of compassion on the part of the menfolk.

When Bentinck at last suppressed the rite on December 4, 1829, in the teeth of orthodox protests, it was Rammohan who strengthened the hands of the Government by organising a deputation and an address signed by 300 Hindus and by publishing an *Abstract of Arguments* in 1830 ; also a petition to Parliament was arranged by him to prevent any repeal of Bentinck's order.

Rammohan was also a pioneer in educational reform. He was connected with the talks in 1816 which led to the foundation of the celebrated Hindu College, on January 20, 1817. But the orthodox rich Hindus objected to Rammohan's inclusion in the committee on account of his "heretical" views and close association with Muslims. Rammohan stood down at once in order not to hamper the first substantial effort made in the country to provide for Western education to young men eager for the new light.

#### THE NEW EDUCATION

In his own way, he also helped the cause by running an Anglo-Hindu School, the course of instruction at which included, we are told, mechanics and astronomy, Voltaire and Euclid. He established a Vedanta College in 1825, where he tried to combine the teaching of Oriental learning with Western arts and sciences. He appealed in 1823 to the Church of Scotland Assembly to send out competent teachers ; and when Duff came out to inaugurate the Scottish educational mission in Bengal in 1830, he received the influential backing of Rammohan.

Above all, his well-known letter to Lord Amherst on December 11, 1823, advocating an educational policy was largely accepted as the official programme by Bentinck and Macaulay though only as late as 1835. This was a plea for the teaching of useful Western sciences, in the place of the classical lore of grammatical niceties and metaphysical speculations in the true pre-Baconian fashion, which had been forcing the students to consume a dozen years in wrestling with imaginary learning in dead languages.

This was harsh criticism for the prevalent system of classical education in the State colleges, which confined themselves to Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian, dear to the heart of the Orientalists among whom were included the new European scholars of Indian classics. But Rammohan was trailing the path for the new education from the West which was to shape the modern epoch of our history, and give us a new orientation in life.

Rammohan was also one of the makers of Bengali prose. The work had already started with the efforts of the missionary Carey who, in 1801, had been placed in charge of the Bengali Department at the Government Fort William College which instructed the officials of the East India Company. Carey gathered round him a group of *pandits* in his efforts to lift Bengali from an unsettled dialect to the status of a regular language in the domain of prose expression.

Carey was responsible for a *Book of Dialogues* (1801), for a *Bengali Grammar* (1801), and for a *Dictionary* between 1815 and 1825. He had also set up Bengali types for printing and started the first Bengali newspaper, the weekly *Samachar Darpan* in 1818. One of his *pandits*, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar, experimented with prose styles during 1802-1817.

Yet in this field too, Rammohan came forward as a major force. From 1815, his translations, introductions and tracts, with their clarity and vigour of expression, gave a new dignity to Bengali prose and established its claim as a vehicle of elegant expression in serious subjects. Rammohan's polemics in Bengali were permeated with his care for the enlightenment of the general public and his newspaper articles had the same educative

value. He used Western punctuation and his *Bengali Grammar* published in 1826, has been praised even by modern experts.

Inspired with new ideals of life, Rammohan was breaking away from the tradition of passivity so congenial to feudal times. He held that his movement of reviving public interest in the *Vedanta* was prompted by his desire to promote the comfort of the people and to unite the different groups into which society had split up.

NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE FIGHT FOR REFORM

He considered the forms of direct worship as a liberation from priestly tyranny and a means of realisation of human brotherhood. He protested against the evil effects of idolatry on the structure of society and against the inconveniences of the caste system "which has been the source of want of unity among us."

He felt that his position as a reformer from within made it necessary for him to avoid being legally branded as an "out-caste." Yet he translated the *Bajra Suchi* in 1827, a text highly critical of the caste system, and in a letter of 1828 he held that caste had deprived people of patriotic feeling and that religious reform was necessary "for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort," because the present system of religion "is not well calculated to promote their political interest."

Again and again, there flitted across his vision the prospect of a free India, after a period of British tutelage, and he expressed this view in an interview with the Frenchman Jacquemont, in a discussion with Sandford Merton, in a letter on August 18, 1828, to Crawford. He felt that English rule was creating a middle class in India which would lead a popular movement of emancipation.

Rammohan figured in the first constitutional agitations in our country. We find him drawing up a memorial to the Supreme Court and a petition to the King-in-Council against the Press Ordinance of 1823, in which he defended liberty of free expression of opinion in such noble language that it recalls to mind Milton's *Areopagitica*. He protested against the discrimination involved in the Jury Act of 1827 and against Government attempts to tax rent-free lands in 1830. He was connected with the agitation on the eve of the revision of the East India Company's Charter due

for 1833 and demanded the abolition of the Company's trading rights and the removal of heavy export duties. On behalf of the Delhi Sultan during his dispute with the Company, he appealed to British national faith and sense of justice and also to world opinion at large.

Rammohan conducted a Bengali and a Persian weekly to shape public opinion, the *Sambad Kaumudi* from the end of 1821, and the *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* from the beginning of 1822. He suspended the publication of the latter in protest against the Press Ordinance of 1823. In his papers he strove consistently to educate the people on all the topics of the day.

He was a fearless champion of a cause if he considered it to be just. In a tract on the *Ancient Rights of the Females* (1822), he denounced the contemporary legal dependence of widowed mothers and unmarried or widow daughters on their menfolk and demanded property rights for women. He also attacked the practice of polygamy. As a champion of common law when it was equitable, we find him defending free alienability of property in another tract on *Rights of Hindus over Ancestral Property* in 1830.

He also broke through the orthodox prohibition of sea-voyages by undertaking a daring trip abroad. In England, in 1831, he submitted to Parliament communications on the revenue and the judicial systems, the condition of the *ryots* and Indian affairs in general. We find him protesting against the miserable condition of the peasants and the misrule of the landlords, and demanding a fixed rent roll, a permanent settlement for the actual cultivators and a peasant militia. He put forward a programme of administrative reforms which were to become famous in Indian constitutional agitation, and included items like Indianisation of the services, separation of the executive from the judiciary, and trial by jury.

One of the most remarkable things about Rammohan was his keen interest in international affairs and his understanding of and affinity with progressive movements everywhere. As a young man in Rangpur, we find him keenly interested in European politics. According to his friend

INTERNATIONAL  
SYMPATHIES AND  
CONTACTS



and official superior, Digby, Rammohan started with an adulation of Napoleon but changed his views when he felt that the Emperor was suppressing liberty.

In the twenties of the last century we find his newspapers regularly discussing current problems like the Chinese question, the struggle in Greece, and the miseries of Ireland under the regime of absentee landlordism and the *tithe*. His sorrow at the failure of the revolution in Naples in 1821, led him to cancel his engagements when he received the sad news ; his delight at the revolution in Spanish America in 1823 took the form of a public dinner in honour of the event.

His international links are shown vividly in the fact that a book in Spanish with the new Constitution in it was dedicated to him. "He could think and talk of nothing else" when he heard of the July Revolution in France in 1830. On his way to England, at Cape Town, he insisted on visiting French frigates flying the revolutionary tricolour flag though he had been temporarily lamed by an accident. He contributed to the University funds in the short time he was ashore in South Africa.

His mind was filled with elation when an outward bound ship passing his vessel gave the news of the favourable progress of the Reform Bill in the English Parliament. He greeted the Manchester workers with the cry—"Reform for ever". He considered the reform struggle in England as "a struggle between right and wrong" and contemplated severing his English connections if the great Bill was thrown out.

We find him also an advocate of free intercourse between nations and in the domain of international relations he advanced the idea of a Franco-British Congress to settle disputes. Not for Rammohan was the narrow insularity which has often cast a shadow on Indian national consciousness. His understanding was too clear, his love of liberty too deep for any such vagary

### THE ASSOCIATES OF RAMMOHAN ROY

We have dwelt at such length on Rammohan Roy because of his pioneer position in relation to the Bengal Renaissance, his comprehensive outlook, and the occasional tendency to belittle him in modern times. But even Rammohan was largely the pro-

duct of his times. We are reminded very forcibly of this by the fact that he found from the beginning close associates and comrades to rally round him. The circle at Rangpur, the *Atmiya Sabha* from 1815, the *Brahma Sabha* of 1928, and the agitations for social or constitutional reform did not fail to attract a certain number of enthusiasts from the upper and middle classes which shows that the times were ripe for change.

One non-Indian figures prominently as a comrade of Rammohan in the field of the new education where he has left an imperishable memory. This was **DAVID HARE** (1775-1842) David Hare who came out in 1800 as a watchmaker but made it his life's mission to spread modern education in the country where he lived on till his death, four decades later. With the stabilisation of British rule in Bengal, a demand for education on Western lines was growing up in the country. A few private schools like those of Sherburne or Drummond in Calcutta tried pitifully to cope with the demand. The State maintained only a Sanskrit College or a Muslim *Madrasa* teaching their traditional classical lore, and even the education grant in the Charter Act of 1813 was being diverted by the Orientalist advisors of the Government towards the channel of indigenous classical education.

David Hare thought of organising a lead on new lines from the Calcutta gentry. He got in touch with Rammohan and moved the Chief Justice Sir Hyde East to initiate discussions in 1816 which led to the foundation in 1817 of the celebrated Hindu College which under the present name of Presidency College, continues to this day. David Hare took the keenest interest in the working of this pioneer institution for years to come and was a daily visitor and advisor. He also organised the School Book Society in 1817 to prepare and publish much needed text books and the School Society in 1818 to establish schools of a new type and grant scholarships to deserving poor boys. We hear stories of how flocks of young hopefuls used to besiege Hare's door and run after his palanquin to win stipends from him.

After retiring from the watch trade, Hare devoted his entire time to his life's mission and would go on a daily round to the network of schools he had set up in the city. He would, play

with the boys, feed them, tend them in sickness. An entire generation of educated Bengali young men in the metropolis came to love and adore their great-hearted foreign friend and mourned his tragic death when he died from cholera in 1842.

The School Society took keen interest in women's education in the country and agitated for it. This attracted the attention of the British and Foreign School Society which sent out Miss Cooke in 1821, who organised ten girls' schools with the support of the Church Missionary Society. Later on, a Bengal Ladies' Society sponsored by philanthropic Englishwomen started more schools and won some rich donations from Indian sympathisers. In Adam's *Report* of 1834, we find functioning 19 girls' schools founded in places other than Calcutta, though most of them were under missionary inspiration.

Of the Indian associates of Rammohan Roy, the foremost in social eminence was Dwarkanath Tagore who was afterwards called 'the Prince' and was an ancestor of Rabindranath Tagore. He was educated in Sherburne's School and got his instruction in law by a barrister, Ferguson. He amassed wealth as Dewan to the Salt Agent and then as proprietor of Carr, Tagore and Company ; he represented the new aristocracy linked with business.

Dwarkanath was a close ally of Rammohan, whose associates also included other aristocrats like Prasanna Kumar Tagore who founded the *Reformer* in 1831 and became an eminent lawyer and middle-class men like Chandrasekhar Deb and Tarachand Chakravarti, the first secretary of the *Brahma Sabha*. The city seethed with excitement as Rammohan cast his spell over a large circle of friends and followers.

### CONSERVATIVE CRITICS OF RAMMOHAN

Rammohan, however, could not carry the whole or even the greater bulk of Calcutta Society with him in his daring crusade. His heterodoxy aroused vehement protest and a sharp reaction set in against him. In his own village home, Rammohan was ostrac-

cised by neighbours and relatives turned against him so that he found city life in Calcutta more congenial and spent most of his time in the metropolis. Ribald songs passed current in the city itself against him and were sung, we are told, by even the street urchins. He was sometimes even subjected to insults in the public streets. We have already seen how the orthodox gentlemen forced him out of the Hindu College Committee. The vexatious law suits which dogged Rammohan and took up much of his time have often been attributed to the general feeling against him. He was thus forced by public opinion to be more cautious in his general bearing than would have been the case otherwise.

The orthodox *pandits* in their controversy with the "heretic" found their great patron in Radhakanta Deb, RADHAKANTA DEB (1784-1867) the scion of the House of Sobhabazar and the recognised chief of orthodox society. A famous classical scholar himself Radhakanta began in 1819 the compilation of a Sanskrit encyclopædia which was a monument to his learning. He was associated with the reactionary petition (in 1829) against the suppression of the *Sati* rite. In 1830, he was the leader of the orthodox religious society, the *Dharma Sabha*, which was founded as a counterblast to the Brahmo movement. The conservative rich rallied round him and at the meetings of the *Dharma Sabha* the street would be jammed by the private carriages of such people.

Yet, Radhakanta was no out and out reactionary. He was a great benefactor of the fountain of Western learning, the Hindu College. He was a member of the School Book Society and one of the secretaries of the School Society. He himself wrote a book advocating women's education and was a steady supporter of the movement.

Even in Rangpur, Rammohan's circle aroused the hostility of orthodox critics who were headed by Gauri-kanta Bhattacharyya, the author of a tract, OTHER CRITICS OF RAMMOHAN *Jnananjan*, against the reformers. In Calcutta, the gifted Bhabani Charan Banerji left Rammohan's Bengali paper and conducted in opposition to him a rival journal—the *Sambad Chandrika*. Bhabani Charan

was a master of satire and between 1825 and 1831 castigated the men and women who were inclining to new ways of life and abandoning the traditional simple habits.

Ramkamal Sen, the grandfather of the famous Keshab Chandra, was another orthodox leader, though like Radhakanta Deb, he was connected with new institutions like the Hindu College. The conservative opposition to Rammohan was not blindly reactionary. Thus, Mrityunjaya Vidyalankar who polemised against Rammohan disapproved of the practice of *Sati* as early as 1817. Yet, as a whole, the conservative critics missed, as their modern apologists do even today, the epoch-making significance of the life-work of Rammohan.

### THE RISE OF NEW RADICALISM

In Rammohan's own life-time, however, we have the genesis of a trend of ultra-radicalism, destined to be famous under the name of the Young Bengal movement, which sprang from the precincts of the Hindu College and created consternation for a period, and with which Rammohan himself was out of sympathy. Arising out of the tradition of the French Revolution and English radicalism, this movement had a distinct element of free thought in it which offended Rammohan's sense of decency and theistic idealism. The young men in their turn returned the compliment and their organ the *Enquirer* contemptuously dubbed his movement as "coming as far as half the way in religion and politics." The inspiration of Young Bengal came from one of the strangest figures in the history of Bengal Renaissance—an Anglo-Indian, Derozio.

Derozio was something of a prodigy. He was educated at one of the private schools of the day, in the Dharamtola section of the city, run by a Scotsman named Drummond who had something of the reputation of a poet, scholar, and a notorious free-thinker. From him apparently, the young Derozio got steeped in the intoxicating freedom urge of the French Revolution and a passion for freedom of thought and liberation from the dead-weight of all tradition possessed his soul.

HENRY VIVIAN  
DEROZIO  
(1809-1831)

Even while in his teens, Derozio could criticise Kantian philosophy with competence and blossomed out as a minor poet, his poem the *Fakir of Jhungeera* striking a fervid patriotic note—unique in one from his community. Appointed a teacher of the Hindu College in May, 1826, he at once drew to himself like a magnet a host of boys in the upper classes who began to adore him and drink deep in the fountain of free thought.

Derozio encouraged them to debate freely and question all authority. They had a free run of his house and as a mark of emancipation exulted in forbidden food and drink. Derozio started an Academic Association with a monthly organ—the *Athenium* in which a pupil, Madhav Chandra Mallik, defiantly proclaimed that he and his friends hated Hinduism from the bottom of their hearts.

Round Derozio rallied the best boys of the College who ridiculed old traditions, defied the social and religious rites, demanded education for women, and to flaunt their independence indulged in wine-drinking and beef-eating. The College authorities in great alarm removed—at the instance of Ramkamal Sen—the dangerous corruptor of youth on April 25, 1831. Derozio died from cholera before the year was out, but his memory remained green in the hearts of his beloved disciples.

Derozio's pupils came to be known collectively as Young Bengal.

As early as 1831, we find them coming out with an English and a Bengali organ—the *Young Bengal* with an English and a Bengali organ—the *Enquirer* and the *Jnananvesan*. Some of the Derozians startled the whole of Calcutta society by embracing Christianity. Two of them, Mahesh Chandra Ghosh and Krishnamohan Banerji, announced their conversion in 1832.

### III

## 1833 - 1857

### THE DEROZIAN S

CONTEMPORARY society was shocked beyond measure by the doings of the Derozians, and yet they formed more of a group with a certain outlook than a real sustained movement with a solid basis and growing support.

The Derozians were a band of bright young men who had come under the spell of a striking personality and they created a sensation and a stir. But their stand lacked much positive content and they failed to develop a definite progressing ideology. The concept of the people and their rights which had flowered in the great Western bourgeois-democratic revolution that had awakened them did not take much concrete shape in their mind.

They were brilliant individuals faithful to the last to the memory of their master and close-knit to each other by the bonds of affection and friendship. Yet they did not prove to be a growing school of thought attracting new adherents from wider circles. They made some mark in their day but, nonetheless, they faded out like "a generation without fathers and children."

For several years, however, the Derozians attracted much attention. They conducted their two organs—the *Enquirer* and the *Jnananvesan* ("Search after Wisdom"). In 1834-1835, one of them, Rasik Krishna Mallik delivered in public meetings impressive speeches on the death of Rammohan Roy, the revision of the Company's Charter, and the freedom of the Press. They kept up Derozio's Academic Association upto about 1839 and supplemented it by an Epistolary Association for the exchange of views within their circle.

Radical activities in England seem to have exercised an influence over them for we find them setting up a Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge in 1838, to be followed by a

Mechanical Institute in 1839. The contempt for tradition in their Hindu College days continued to influence their successors. On the one hand, Christianity claimed further converts in the persons of Madhusudan Datta (another promising student of the College who left his ancestral faith in 1843) and Jnanendra Mohan Tagore (the only son of Prasanna Kumar Tagore), on the other hand drinking—which the Derozians had introduced as a symbol of emancipation—began to spread in an alarming manner amongst people who were untouched by the nobler marks of Derozian free thought.

The genuine brand of the Young Bengal mind was, however, being agitated by issues like the treatment of Indian labour in distant Mauritius, the extension of the right of trial by jury, the introduction of English as court language, freedom of the Press and forced labour amongst the coolies employed by Government departments. The Derozians were being drawn towards more active politics though quite a number of them had moved into Government jobs as posts were being opened to Indians under the new Charter Act of 1833

In 1842, the Derozians started a new organ, the *Bengal Spectator*, which turned more towards economics and politics than towards the pure pursuit of culture. The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge tended to become a platform for political discussion as well, in addition to its study of social and general cultural subjects on a variety of which papers were read by the Derozians. In a Society meeting in the rooms of the Hindu College on February 8, 1843, Principal D L Richardson protested against "seditious remarks" by a speaker, but the chairman of the meeting ruled him out. The chairman on the occasion happened to be Tarachand Chakravarti, a slightly older contemporary of Derozio's direct pupils, who was earlier an associate of Rammohan but was now identifying himself with Young Bengal. He edited the *Quill* and the Derozians came to be called after him the Chakravarti Faction

Early in 1843, George Thompson of the anti-slavery agitation reputation addressed several public meetings which were organised by the Derozians who were roused to enthusiasm by his gifts



as an orator. Out of this excitement arose a political association inspired by Thompson and conducted by Young Bengal. This was the Bengal British India Society founded on April 20, 1843, with the object of concerted activity for the protection of the legitimate rights of the subjects, and open to all.

Neither the *Bengal Spectator*, nor the new Society lasted long but they left a taste for politics. One of the Derozians, Ramgopal Ghose, known as an excellent speaker from his student days, became now a regular orator and in 1847 was hailed in the press as the Indian *Demosthenes*. In 1849-1850, the European community was up in arms against the so-called Black Bills which aimed at subjecting the European residents also to the jurisdiction of the local courts in place of the old privilege of trial by the Calcutta Supreme Court alone. Ramgopal became even more famous by his spirited defence of the proposed legislation in a tract called *Remarks on the Black Acts*.

In 1851, the Derozians linked up with the other groups in the foundation of the British Indian Association. The cultural interests of Young Bengal did not disappear in the years of political excitement. Two of them, Peary Chand Mitra and Radhanath Sikdar, founded a little later, about 1857, the *Monthly Magazine* in Bengali which had the distinction of carrying on a crusade for a simple style in Bengali writing, intelligible even to the average women in society. This was a protest against the prevalent passion for a chaste style in prose which tended to be heavily Sanskritised.

The prominent personalities of the Young Bengal group were about ten in number. The seniormost was PROTAGONISTS OF Tarachand Chakravarti (1804-1855) who YOUNG BENGAL was a pre-Derozian student of the Hindu College and a former member of the Ram-mohan circle and the first secretary of the *Brahma Sabha*. He made some name as an editor, a lexicographer and a minor officer of the Government. In 1843, he was considered to be the chief of the Young Bengal faction.

The most imposing was Krishnamohan Banerji (1813-1885) who was expelled from home in 1831 on account of some escapades on the part of his young friends, accepted Christianity next

year and taunted Hindu reaction in his organ, the *Enquirer*. He became a Christian missionary in 1837 but kept up his radicalism. Krishnamohan was very learned and the author of an encyclopaedia. In later life, he was universally respected and was often the first choice as president for a society or at a meeting.

Ramgopal Ghose (1815-1868) became the most famous of the Derozians. He made a great name as a successful businessman but kept himself in the closest touch with his college friends and thus formed the centre of the whole group. He was connected with all the cultural and political activities of Young Bengal and became famous all over the country by his eloquent orations and his protest against European pretensions in the Black Acts controversy.

Rasik Krishna Mallik (1810-1858) was noted for great erudition and thoughtful speech. He had once refused to swear in a law court by the holy Ganges water in the usual manner and he ran away from home to escape from orthodoxy. Later on, as an honest official, he built up a great reputation for personal integrity.

Pearay Chand Mitra (1814-1883) managed in his student days a free school for other students. He was connected with the Calcutta Public Library from its inception in 1835, as a deputy librarian, librarian, secretary and curator successively and he made the Library an intellectual centre of his own group. He was a frequent contributor to all periodicals, an active member in a host of committees and a man of varied interests. His varied gifts were reflected in his editing of the *Agricultural Miscellany* in 1853.

A close friend of Pearay Chand Mitra was Radhanath Sikdar (1813-1870), diarist and mathematician, computator and surveyor in the Government department, whose courageous stand for the rights of the poor coolies under the department freed them from the servitude of unpaid forced labour at the whim of the *sahib*. Radhanath bluntly refused marriage with the child-wife proposed for him in the usual manner. The two friends—Pearay Chand and Radhanath—conducted, towards the end of

this period, a campaign for a simple colloquial style in Bengali prose.

The Derozians also included the saintly Ramtanu Lahiri (1813-1898), beloved and respected by all, even by the common people, though he publicly renounced his sacred Brahmanical thread in 1851, kept pace with progressive thought throughout his long life, and as a mere school master struggled against poverty most of his days.

At the other pole in the group stood Dakshinarajan Mukherji (1812-1887) the bright rich young man of the group, donor of the site for the Bethune College for Women in Calcutta when it was a novel venture for higher education for girls. Dakshinarajan was intimate with the Derozio family, forward in defying every convention and prominent in all Young Bengal activities. But he was forced out of Calcutta society by a social scandal and settled down in Oudh.

Sibchandra Deb (1811-1890) is remembered as a great benefactor of his native town of Konnagar, as an upright official, and as a prominent Brahmo leader in the next period. Harachandra Ghosh (1808-1868) was another Derozian official with a reputation for integrity. Lastly, we find mention of an unnamed Derozian who had turned a *sanyasi*, went to West India and played a part in a struggle of the people against misgovernment in Kathiawar by the local princes.

The flutter caused in Bengal society by the Derozians was, however, in the perspective of history something ephemeral and unsubstantial. They failed to develop any movement outside their own charmed circle and the circle itself could hardly keep any significant form.

Worldly occupations and private interests inevitably claimed the attention of the individual members of the group the majority of whom came from middle-class homes and had a living to earn. Radical politics of a Western type were hardly possible in Bengal a century ago and the rich promise we see in the Derozians never matured into anything solid.

Their only trait which was widely copied in contemporary society was the escape from social conventions, but even here

there was no sturdy revolt or bold defiance but mere evasion. This led to sad corruption in which there was amongst the imitators no trace of the personal integrity and courage of the real Derozians which have such a charm even today.

### MODERATE REFORMERS

The moderate reformers who derived their inspiration from Rammohan and had a contempt for the vagaries of Young Bengal, tried meanwhile steadily to maintain their ground. Rather eclipsed in the first decade of this period, they became more important after 1843 and finally re-asserted their hold. They found a leader in Debendranath Tagore in 1843 and in the fifties the dominating figure of Vidyasagar was their great ally

The Rammohan tradition was at first maintained rather feebly by his former associates of whom the most eminent was Dwarkanath, the head of the House of Tagore. Another Tagore, Prasanna Kumar, conducted the *Reformer*, the moderate counterpart of the radical *Enquirer* in the early thirties. The church founded by Rammohan struggled on amidst difficulties; the chief credit for its preservation going to its minister, Pandit Ramchandra Vidyabagish who is also known as the author of *Nitidarshan* (1841), a book of essays on mild patriotism and civic virtues.

The general moderate outlook, if not the reformed religious views, was reflected by other literary men like Kasiprosad Ghose, an old Hindu College boy who was not exactly a Derozian, who wrote English verses with patriotic sentiments and conducted from 1846 to 1857 a weekly called the *Hindu Intelligencer*. Another ally was Iswar Chandra Gupta (1812-1859), a writer with a distinctive individuality who has a position of his own in the history of Bengali literature. He edited the *Sambad Prabhakar* which soon became the best known Bengali journal and was turned in 1839 into the first Bengali daily; that *Prabhakar* became such a force in educated society of the day was due mainly to its gifted editor.

Iswar Chandra Gupta with his native poetic talent and a genius for satire exercised an important influence on the next

generation of Bengali poets. He is also remembered for his efforts to collect and preserve Bengal's folk poetry for which the average educated person of the day had only contempt.

Like their radical contemporaries, the moderates also tried to set up societies. In 1836, they founded a Society for the Promotion of the Bengali Language and Literature which was not entirely limited to literary activities. In 1837-1838, was organised the Landholders' Association which took up the old agitation against the taxation of the traditional rent-free lands. Its membership was open to all grades of landed proprietors.

Dwarkanath Tagore repeated Rammohan's exploit of going abroad in 1842 and again in 1844 and on the latter occasion took out with him the first batch of Bengali medical students bound for training in England. It was he who brought George Thompson to this country though the orator was quickly captured by Young Bengal who organised his meetings.

The feud against Rammohan gradually died out after his death in spite of bickerings between the *Dharma Sabha* and the *Brahma Sabha*. The followers of Rammohan had hardly kept up his fighting energy and many-sided new thought; they were little of a danger now. Times had also changed and the centre of the stage was held often enough by Young Bengal with its far greater irreverence. The conservative chiefs were therefore relenting in their attitude. Radhakanta Deb and Ramkamal Sen joined hands with Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar Tagore in the Landlords' Association. The old scholar, Pandit Jajgopal Tarkalankar, revised and partly re-wrote the old Bengali versions of the epics and published them between 1830 and 1836 from the Serampore Press.

The revitalisation of the moderate reform attitude which became apparent from 1843 was mainly the work of Debendranath Tagore, Dwarkanath's son. Educated mainly at Rammohan's own foundation, the Anglo-Hindu School, Debendranath sharply differentiated himself from Young Bengal and he had also temperamental differences with

that group. A deeply religious man, his mind developed a fine balance between tradition and new thought. He had Ram-mohan's tenacity and seriousness of purpose, though not his variety of interest and width of outlook.

Young Debendranath turned away rather abruptly from the life of luxury which surrounded him in his princely parental mansion. He drew around him kindred spirits who found their spiritual home in the *Tatvabodhini Sabha* founded by him in 1839. This society held a very significant position in the intellectual life of the mid-nineteenth century Bengal, with its serious ideals in life, dignity of expression and character building.

The *Sabha* started a school in 1840, and in 1843 came out its celebrated organ—the *Tatvabodhini Patrika*. This periodical in its reputation lived up to its proud title which refers to the realisation and inculcation of serious thought. Here was the germ of a new thought movement, less spectacular but more solid than Young Bengal.

Debendranath now proceeded to breathe a new life into the moribund Brahma Samaj. With about twenty faithful associates he himself solemnly initiated into Rammohan's faith this new spirit on the 7th of *Poush*, 1843 (late December)—a date the anniversary of which is still religiously kept at Santiniketan in the institution founded by his world-famous son. Under Debendranath, who in later life came to be universally called the Great Sage, the revived Brahma Samaj took up the cause of reformed religion introduced by Rammohan but with a sharp emphasis on our traditional culture in reaction against the extreme Anglicism of Young Bengal.

The latter aspect attracted much attention in 1845, when Debendranath came forward to organise an intense agitation against the missionary tactics in proselytizing. This anti-conversion campaign of the *Tatvabodhini* group brought them nearer to the old conservatives like Radhakanta Deb. On the other hand, it roused the contempt of the Derozians. Krishnamohan Bannerji in a famous article pilloried the half-way house which was Brahmaism; Ramgopal Ghose called the reformers hypocrites; Ramtanu Lahiri proclaimed that "the followers of *Vedanta* temporise," and falter about the issue of revelation in the scriptures

so that he had a poor opinion of them ; and as for conversion he claimed that there must be perfect equality and freedom of choice for everyone.

The most remarkable of the close associates of Debendranath was Akshoy Kumar Datta who was called to AKSHOY KUMAR Datta the editorship of the *Tatvabodhini* organ. His great educative essays arouse admiration even today in spite of their severe intellectual form. In the early fifties of the last century he was discussing man's relationship with external nature and was writing lessons on modern knowledge for beginners. He was crippled in 1855 by excessive mental strain and yet we find him dictating, twenty years later, a classic account of the religious denominations in India !

Perhaps the most striking thing about him was his intellectual revolt against Brahma orthodoxy. Tacitly at least, the Brahma church still stood by the dogma of the infallibility of the *Vedas* and claimed the *Vedanta* as its sole theoretical basis.

This had aroused the acid comments of the Derozians. The intellectual honesty of Akshoy Kumar Datta made him see the point and gradually he won over Debendranath himself. By 1850, the Brahma Samaj as a genuine theistic movement abandoned the faith in ancient Hindu scriptures as its exclusive theoretical sheet-anchor.

### ISWAR CHANDRA VIDYASAGAR 1820-1891

The steady, solid, moderate reform movement could look as an ally upon the towering personality of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who earned for himself the respect of all Bengal and a great place in history. In the midst of grinding poverty, this young Brahmin boy was educated in the Sanskrit College from 1829 to 1841. From the head-panditship of Fort William College he rose, step by step, to the principalship of Sanskrit College in 1851. A regular classical scholar, he educated himself in English and came to represent a fine blend of the best in both cultures.

Vidyasagar had both, the originality of a genius and the sterling strength of an heroic character. He thought out a new technique of teaching Sanskrit more easily to beginners and wrote a series of primers in the Sanskrit language and literature adapted to modern needs. He also arranged for the collection and preservation of old Sanskrit books. In Bengali prose, Vidyasagar's work was a landmark. He evolved an elegant, although a bit too stately and chaste, style of writing which impressed everybody.

Between 1847 and 1863, he wrote a series of books in Bengali which became classics to the students of literature. In these, he drew his material impartially from Indian epics and popular tales, as well as Western fables and biographies. His *Bengali Primer* for beginners is even today in household use

But Vidyasagar was no mere scholar or man of letters. As an educational reformer he opened the Sanskrit College to non-Brahmin boys and provided for classical scholars some English education as well. As an administrator of vision, he rendered splendid service in his capacity of Government Inspector and in four districts he organised a total of 35 girls' schools and 20 model schools. He was closely associated from its early days with the institution which now bears his name and which under his fostering care became the outstanding example of a non-official, secular and popular institution for higher education with a purely Indian teaching staff. He was equally interested in women's higher education, and was secretary to the Bethune School, for some time.

Vidyasagar revived the splendid tradition of social reform blunted since Rammohan's death and raised once again issues which deeply moved society. He was intimate with the *Tatva-bodhini* group though he did not become a Brahmo. Orthodox in his personal life, austere beyond the dreams of Young Bengal, it was left to this scholar and man of letters to take up the best traditions of Rammohan's social crusade for the oppressed.

He raised his powerful voice against child-marriage as early as 1850 and was campaigning against polygamy in 1871-1873. But his most memorable stand was in 1855, when he caused a sensation by his outspoken advocacy of widow-marriage in the



teeth of the deepest social prejudices. Like Rammohan, he made out his case by a parade of scriptural authority to silence his critics, but undoubtedly, as with Rammohan again, what moved him most was a deep sympathy for the unfortunate and the exploited and his reverence for humanity. The Young Bengal organ, the *Bengal Spectator* had advocated widow-marriage in 1842, but it was Vidyasagar's agitation which made it a real issue. Legalisation was secured for the reform, though upper-class society was hardly convinced of the need of such a reform.

Finally, Vidyasagar left a very deep impression on the public mind of his strength of character and high moral quality. Stories still circulate about how independent he was in his relations with Government, how he threw away his post because of undue official interference, with what generosity he helped the needy and the unfortunate, and how close he was to the common people, including the tribesmen of the locality where he had built a small country retreat to recoup his health.

Associated with Vidyasagar among others, we find his close friend, Pandit Madan Mohan Tarkalankar (1817-1858). He was, like Vidyasagar, connected with the Bethune project of women's education which took shape in 1849. He wrote a powerful advocacy of education for women in 1850 and one of the earliest primers for children in the same year.

In the same circle was Kaliprasanna Sinha (1840-1870) who was almost a prodigy. As a boy he founded and managed creditably the Society for the Promotion of Learning in 1853. He put up a petition with 3,000 signatures in support of widow-marriage in 1856, and offered pecuniary assistance in such marriages to fight social ostracism. He started a theatre in connection with his society in 1856, but much of his career falls outside the period here under discussion.

#### BRITISH INDIAN ASSOCIATION 1851

The "Black Acts" controversy, in which the Young Bengal leader Ramgopal Ghose figured, led to much political excitement and the consequence was the formation, in 1851, of the British

Indian Association in which all groups joined in—radicals, moderates and even conservatives. The British India Society of the radicals and the Landholders' Association of the moderates being now both defunct, the new Association forged a new comprehensive unity for the furtherance of Indian interests and defence of Indian rights. Unlike the two older bodies again, the new institution was exclusively Indian in membership. Debendranath Tagore as the Secretary of the Association sent out a circular letter to other metropolitan towns to take up the work of organised agitation.

In view of the approaching revision of the Company's Charter in 1853, the Association decided to present a general petition formulating Indian demands. The Petition of 1852 was drafted by the young talented journalist Harish Chandra Mukherji, afterwards the editor of the *Hindu Patriot* founded in 1853 as the organ of the Association, and a well known lecturer in English on Brahmoism. The Petition summed up the Indian grievances destined to be, later on, the staple of many an agitation, and demanded among other items the end of the Company's monopoly in indigo and salt production, State aid for Indian industry, admission of Indians to higher posts, creation of an Indian legislature with Indian majority—in short, the first naive political aspirations of the waking bourgeoisie.

In the fifties, the British Indian Association was quite active and was complemented by the historian Routledge as the exact counterpart of similar English organisations. In 1856, it supported a missionary memorial for enquiry into the condition of the tenants. Next year, it held a protest meeting, just on the eve of the Mutiny, against the renewed European outcry at a fresh attempt to bring them under the jurisdiction of the ordinary district courts. Bengal was fast developing the new technique of organised political agitation.

The period, 1833-1857, was marked by quite a number of big changes introduced at the instance of the Government, but quite in response to the OFFICIAL POLICY awakening public opinion. In 1835, we find almost a turning point. Macaulay and Bentinck ended the long controversy over educational policy by

plumping for Western education as Rammohan had advocated in 1823, to the delight of Young Bengal which held that the best learning was embodied in Western culture. Metcalfe conceded full freedom of the Press. The year also witnessed the creation of the first medical college and the Calcutta Public Library.

In 1849, the "Black Acts" attempted in vain equality before the law, but the Bethune School was a success. The Charter Act of 1853 gave concessions though they fell far short of the demands formulated by the British Indian Association. The Education Despatch, 1854, organised the basis of the education system for the next half a century and the Department of Public Instruction was set up in 1856. By 1857, the Mutiny year, universities were being founded in the three presidency towns.



The oppressive aspect of the system was yet undeveloped and little known. By the middle of the century however, the tyranny of the planters reached its peak. In practising forcible production of indigo in the mad search after bigger profits, the English planters and their native agents fell back upon coercion of the peasants. The cultivators were persuaded to take advances and were held down to their promises ; to increase output terrible pressure was brought to bear upon the helpless cultivators ; the planters resorted to physical force against recalcitrants. Illegal beatings, detention, outrages became the order of the day. Even Government officials felt that the planters were going too far, but remonstrances and regulations proved equally unavailing.

The tyranny of the planters provoked a real mass upsurge amongst the cultivators which even the Royal  
 P O P U L A R Institute of International Affairs has noted as  
 U P S U R G E “a landmark in the history of nationalism.”  
 1859-1860 The Government had announced that indigo  
 cultivation was to be on a voluntary basis To  
 assert their right of not growing indigo under the compulsion  
 of the planters the peasants in 1859, in hundreds of thousands,  
 spontaneously refused to produce indigo In a river tour Sir  
 John Peter Grant was appealed to by thousands of men and  
 women, all along his route for protection against compulsory  
 cultivation Yet in the villages the planters backed by the physical  
 force of their own retainers went on putting pressure on the  
 helpless peasants.

The struggle raged in the countryside and the ranks of the people threw up their own leaders The *Wahabi Raffique Mandal*, in North Bengal, stood forth as the champion of the oppressed “fighting every battle to the bitter end” In Central Bengal, the Biswas brothers, Bishnucharan and Digambar, resigned their posts under the planters and stood out as the leaders of the peasants, fighting law suits, at the same time organising resistance to the retainers of the planters on the spot.

Educated Bengal responded splendidly to the mass struggle of the peasants. The *Hindu Patriot* took up their cause and the editor, Harish Chandra BOURGEOIS INDIGNATION Mukherji, sent forth a stream of fiery articles and worked day and night in giving practical advice and aid to the cultivators and their representatives who thronged at his doors. Two young men—Manomohan Ghose and Sisir Kumar Ghose—both destined to future fame, threw themselves into the agitation.

Dinabandhu Mitra, then a Government official, wrote anonymously in 1860 a drama—the *Neel Darpan* which moved the reading public as few books ever do. This depiction of the horrors of planter rule was promptly translated into English by the rising poet, Madhusudan Datta. The planters struck against Rev. Long in whose name the translation was published. An English judge fined Long a thousand rupees, but the fine was paid off on the spot by the young Kaliprasanna Sinha.

Harish Chandra Mukherji was charged with defamation and even after his untimely death in 1861, the planters pursued his family in the courts to financial ruin. But all this turmoil had some effect. The Indigo Commission of 1860 could not avoid the public exposure of planter rule in the countryside. The worst oppression now began to fade out and gradually official restraint became more effective. A generation later the production of synthetic dyes killed indigo cultivation itself.

### CREATIVE LITERATURE AND LEARNING

The post-Mutiny era in the history of Bengal was marked in the next place by a magnificent outburst of creative activity in literature. The flowering of the Renaissance began with the poetry of Madhusudan Datta, the drama of Dinabandhu Mitra and the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterji. The soul of educated Bengal had started to express itself in its own chosen medium. It turned also to modern scholarship and learning.

**Madhusudan Datta** was a brilliant student of the Hindu College in the late thirties and the early forties when the Derozian tradition had not yet died out. He was drawn irresistibly towards the Anglicist current and developed a way of life which was denationalised and outlandish.

**MADHUSUDAN  
DATTA  
(1824-1873)**

He reminds one of a typical Italian humanist indulging in wild free living. He fell also under the spell of D. L. Richardson who imparted to his college pupils an adulation of Shakespeare and romantic poetry.

Madhusudan began to write English verses and shocked Calcutta society by embracing Christianity in 1843 which he did more for private reasons than because of any religious conviction. After his college days and an eight years' sojourn at Madras, he came back to Calcutta in 1856. The educated Bengalis were then turning to their own language for self-expression, encouraged by the powerful writings of Akshoy Kumar Datta and Vidyasagar. Madhusudan with the gift of genius now plunged into the new tide with his characteristic energy.

His first drama, the *Sarmistha*, staged in 1859, was a sensation, for it broke away from the classical conventions, and was followed by two others in the same style. In 1860 came two satirical plays which lashed out with equal vehemence against the vices of Westernised young men and orthodox old rogues. In 1860, he introduced blank verse in Bengali and next year came his masterpiece, the *Maghnadbadh* in the same style.

Madhusudan revealed not merely the potential powers of the new poetry in Bengali which gave him the status of one of its makers and greatest exponents, he also treated the epic themes he took up in the most daring and unconventional way, revaluated old traditional values and glorified the spirit of revolt. Within three years he brought about something of a literary revolution. Later on, he followed this up in 1865-1866 by introducing the sonnet in Bengali poetry. His life followed a tragic path but genius secured for him a permanent place in the history of Bengali literature.

Dinabandhu Mitra presented a totally different picture with his never-failing fund of humour, his respectable life spent in Government service and his more conventional outlook on life. But he too left his mark when he turned from minor poetry to major drama. In 1860, he soared to great heights in his *Neel Darpan* which as a drama of social protest and exposure at the peak of the indigo crisis is still unsurpassed in Bengali. He also excelled Madhusudan in the drama of social satire and carved out for himself an honoured place in literary history of Bengal through sheer talent.

DINABANDHU  
MITRA  
(1828-1873)

One of his intimate friends was Bankim Chandra Chatterji who moulded Bengali prose into a fine literary form which achieved great renown. Indeed, Bankim was one of the giants of Bengali writing and exercised tremendous influence. In 1865 came out his first historical romance, *Durgeshnandini*, which was a revelation to the reading public and started the vogue for romantic novels. In *Bishabriksha* (1873) he made popular the social novel in Bengali.

He founded and edited the *Bangadarshan* for four years from 1872. This was the first great cultural periodical in Bengali and drew to it a group of writers to whom and to the reading public Bankim was now the acknowledged leader.

In his *Kamalakanta*, printed in book form in 1875 he created an unforgettable character and preached his own cherished values of humanity and patriotism. In his *Samya* essays, reprinted collectively in 1879, he showed his sympathy for the common people and the peasantry, leaned towards egalitarianism and betrayed traces of the influence on him of utopian socialism. Then the wave of patriotic revivalism caught him up and in *Anandamath* published in book form in 1882 he gave a classic expression to such sentiments. The famous *Bande Mataram* hymn was included in this novel. Late in life, he turned to religious thought and endeavoured to vindicate the character of Krishna as depicted in our ancient books.

BANKIM CHANDRA  
CHATTERJI  
(1838-1894)



Bankim was the prophet of nationalism in literature and yet Hindu revivalism with an excessive stress on the Hindu character and tradition seemed to speak out through him. His greatest achievement lay, however, in evolving a prose style which chalked out a middle path between the heavy chaste form of Vidyasagar and the vulgar colloquial idiom of Tek Chand Thakur.

The latter was the pen-name of the Derozian Pearay Chand Mitra who along with his friend Radhanath Sikdar introduced a monthly magazine in the popular style of the spoken language in sharp distinction from its literary form. In 1858, Pearay Chand Mitra wrote his *Alal* in the new medium. He was seconded by the *Hutum* in 1862, written by Kaliprasanna Sinha. But the crusade for the popular style fizzled out in the glory of Bankim's language ; its own adherents at best were half-hearted innovators, who did not stick to this path.

Kaliprasanna Sinha himself was quite at home in the medium of heavier styles. His masterpiece was the translation of the *Mahabharata* in bulky tomes between 1860 and 1866. He was a man of varied interests but died when he was only thirty years old. He paid Long's fine in 1851 and also saved the *Hindu Patriot* on the death of its unlucky editor.

Kaliprasanna was a public benefactor. We find him subscribing to the North West Famine Fund in 1861 when Debendranath Tagore made a memorable appeal for relief. He sent Rs. 3,000 in aid of the Lancashire cotton operatives in 1862, when they were hard hit during the American Civil War. He erected at his own cost fountains for the city of Calcutta. As a Justice of the Peace, he was a terror alike to native villains and foreign rogues. His Society for the Promotion of Learning gave public receptions to Madhusudan Datta (1861) and to Rev. James Long (1862).

Apart from Madhusudan, Bengali poetry shone in a subdued manner in this period. Rangalal Banerji (1827-1887) published his *Padmini* with its display of patriotic pride even before Madhusudan blazed out in all his glory. Patriotic verse became indeed an order of the day and inspired Hem Chandra Banerji (1838-1903) and Nabin Chandra Sen (1847-1909) who also wrote epics which had a certain vogue of popularity. Important for the future was Biharilal Chakravarti (1835-1894) who went in for romantic lyricism, which attracted little attention at the time but later inspired the youthful muse of Rabindranath Tagore.

Another remarkable figure of this epoch was Dwarkanath Vidyabhushan, professor at Sanskrit College and an eminent journalist. In reaction against the vulgarities of the Bengali Press, he founded the weekly *Somprakas* (1858) and for two decades wielded his powerful pen in a fearless fight against every injustice, upholding every noble cause, toning up the whole of educated society.

Bengali historical scholarship was inaugurated by Rajendralal Mitra in a parallel line to the creative literary forms. Already in the last decade before the Mutiny, he was assistant secretary and librarian to the famous Asiatic Society founded and fostered by a succession of the great Orientalist scholars from the West who first unearthed ancient Indian history. After the Mutiny, he became its secretary and ultimately its president in 1885. This was worthy recognition of a man who knew a dozen languages and wrote about 50 learned books.

Rajendralal was our first eminent historical research scholar and was recognised as such by international societies and foreign scholars. He was also deeply attached to the Bengali language and culture. He coined technical terms and drew up maps in Bengali. He wrote patriotic text-books and learned essays. The *Saraswat Samaj*, organised in 1882 as a Bengali academy, had him as its president but it failed to take root. In 1851 and in 1863, he

founded two illustrated learned periodicals in Bengali. He took some part in public activities and agitation as well, in his own day, as one of the prominent citizens.

Two other minor efforts may be noted in passing. The Bengal Social Science Association was founded in 1867 to discuss papers on various topics and in 1876, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar, a famous homeopath, established the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science in the first effort to stimulate scientific research. It may be added that the Calcutta University, started during the Mutiny days, was catering to higher education and turning out, year by year, distinguished alumni and ministered to the needs of the whole of Upper India. In the wake of British rule, cultivated Bengalis were carrying the torch of their renaissance to other parts.

## RELIGIOUS REFORM AND REVIVALISM

Next to literature and learning, the period saw the flowering of religious and social reform. Religious revivalism also began to lift up its head and protested against the impact from the West. This was the age of Keshab Chandra Sen and the Young Brahmos on the one hand, and on the other, of the Wahabi unrest, beginnings of Neo-Hinduism, and Ramkrishna Paramhansa.

Keshab Chandra Sen came from a famous family and even as a student showed his deep interest in social service and religious thought. He ran a night school for the needy in 1856, a Goodwill Fraternity in 1857, and became known for his talent as a speaker.

In the year after the Mutiny, Keshab Chandra joined the Brahmo Samaj and within the next few years proceeded to stir it up from the stagnation into which it had fallen after the great days of the *Tatvabodhini* movement. He put such fire into Brahmoism that it became a real power in the land as an organisation, and young men flocked into the church as never before or since. He started a Brahmo *Vidyalaya* or school in 1859, ran

a *Sangat Sabha* for religious discourses from 1860, took up the editorship of the *Indian Mirror* founded in 1861.

In the service of Brahmoism he turned a whole-timer in 1861 and next year the Maharshi himself greeted this dynamic young man as *Brahmananda*. A religious Bengali journal—the *Dharmatatva* came out in 1864 and a Brahma Friends' Society was organised next year.

Keshab Chandra was not content with the passive inculcation of the new faith by its old leaders. In 1864-1865, he launched out in mission tours, breaking new ground and appearing as an all-India figure. In East Bengal, he aroused enthusiasm and alarm and in district towns Brahma groups and individuals lifted their heads, went ahead and faced persecution.

With Keshab as the centre, radicalism within the Brahma Samaj began to take shape and directed its criticism against the old leaders. Debendranath Tagore had abandoned—under the influence of Akshoy Kumar Datta—the belief in the Vedic infallibility. But in ritual and practice he clung to old ways, always afraid of widening the gulf between his movement and the parent Hindu community. Under Keshab, the younger Brahmans demanded that Brahma preachers who had not discarded the Brahma Symbol of the sacred thread should be denied access to the pulpit, that in the church services women should join the congregation, that inter-caste marriages should be promoted.

Keshab organised the Brahma youth in a Council, the Brahma women in a Society. A split became unavoidable and in 1866, Keshab broke away from the original church and founded—the Brahma Samaj of India. His fame as an orator spread and he was honoured and acclaimed in England in 1870.

In 1872, we find him running a commune with his band of co-workers. All-round reform endeavour attracted him still. A Civil Marriage Act was secured in 1872 to legalise unorthodox casteless marriages. A pice daily came out and Keshab issued stirring calls to workers to wake up and assert their rights. Night schools for workingmen were run by his associates.

Keshab Chandra Sen drew round him fiery young men who soon began to outstrip him in forward thinking.

**THE YOUNG BRAHMOS** They included the scholar and man of letters, Sivanath Sastri ; the social reformer, Durgamohan Das from Barisal ; Dwarkanath Ganguli from Dacca, the ardent champion of women's emancipation and downtrodden people ; the gentle but daring Ananda Mohan Bose from Mymensingh.

The Young Brahmos grew more and more critical of Keshab's leadership and his alleged high-handedness in running the church. Their democratic sense was offended by the adulation of Keshab by his devoted disciples, by the trend of mystic sentiment which was growing up in his outlook. The break came when Keshab allowed his own minor daughter to marry the Chief of Cooch-Bihar under the old rites defying the new marriage conventions growing up within the church at his own instance. Keshab's defence of the Cooch-Bihar marriage as a special case angered them even more.

The Young Brahmos revolted and set up the *Sadharan Brahmo Samaj* in 1878. This was given a democratic constitution and its Bengali organ solemnly declared in 1882 that the Brahmo ideals included not merely religious radicalism but also the universal liberation of all peoples under the banner of democratic republicanism.

The Young Brahmos threw themselves whole-heartedly into the political movements of the day ; national leaders like Surendranath Banerji were their close associates. As early as 1876, a band of them under Sivanath's leadership proclaimed their faith in independence, forswore service under the alien Government, but promised to work in a peaceful way in view of the circumstances of the country. Their organ, the *Brahmo Public Opinion*, took its full share in the political agitation of the day.

It is interesting to note that this uncompromising consistent radicalism of the Young Brahmos attracted to them the last representatives of Young Bengal, Sibchandra Deb and Ramtanu Lahiri. But after the Cooch-Bihar split, the followers of Keshab leaned more heavily towards emotionalism and his church took on the

mantle of what was called the New Dispensation or a synthesis of all religions.

A minor issue in social reform was focussed by the untiring zeal of Pearay Charan Sarkar who founded the **TEMPERANCE** Temperance Association in 1863 with two monthly organs. The drink evil was fought back with success and society was largely rescued from the legacy of Young Bengal—the curse which had sent to their death brilliant young men like Harish Chandra Mukherji and Kaliprasanna Sinha, the scandal which was pilloried in the satiric plays of Dinabandhu Mitra and Madhusudan Datta.

The offensive under Keshab Chandra Sen and the Young Brahmos came up in due course against a volume of orthodox resistance. There was of course **HINDU REVIVALISM** an amount of shocked conservative sentiment roused to anger by the encroachment in practice, and not merely in theory, on the cherished customs of respectable society. The Brahmo intransigence was a collective movement, and therefore more dangerous than the individual waywardness of Young Bengal.

Orthodoxy retaliated by social persecution which made many young men drawn to the new faith leave their ancestral homes. In the ranks of the old society there was also some uneasiness at the moral stature of the protestant movement, and this took the form of scoffing at Brahmo puritanism. Orthodox society also tried to rationalise its instinctive resistance, and even Bankim Chandra Chatterji reacted in this manner.

The political awakening was rousing intense pride and self-confidence and in view of the backwardness of the Muslim people it naturally tended to take on a Hindu garb more decisively than before. Patriotic writers invariably glorified not merely the ancient Indian culture with its predominantly Hindu structure, they also began to dwell upon the struggles of the Rajputs, the Marathas, the Sikhs as instances of the freedom urge. As it happened all these peoples had as their adversaries—the Muslims, and the Hindu trend in the national sentiment was intensified with a not very happy consequence.

In Hindu revivalism however, there was one element of great charm, sweetness and grace. This emanated from the Saint of Dakshineswar, Ramkrishna Paramhansa who cast a spell over a myriad of votaries. He was an illiterate Brahmin who by sheer character, personal magnetism and homely wisdom stormed the hearts of thousands and earned the respect of even those who could not agree with his preachings. By teaching the sanctity of all faith, he undermined protestant militancy and reassured the shaken spirit of the traditionalists. A great organisation of social service later on drew its inspiration from him and countless Hindus gave him homage for years to come.

RAMKRISHNA  
PARAMHANSA  
(1836-1886)

In striking contrast we have the Muslim revivalism in the Wahabi movement which had repercussions on Bengal still obscurely known. Wahabism started from Arabia as a puritan upsurge and has been aptly described as Anabaptist in faith, Red republican in politics. A contemporary of Rammohan imported it into India, and Patna became a leading centre of the new cult. It agitated the downtrodden Bengal Muslim peasantry in certain areas.

MUSLIM  
REVIVALISM

A Wahabi was the most important peasant leader during the Indigo Strike. His son, Amiruddin, was imprisoned for sedition in 1871. The Wahabis supplied the first political convicts for transportation. They were the first terrorists. The Chief Justice in Calcutta was murdered on September 20, 1871. When the assassin, Abdullah, was executed, the authorities in a panic would not allow the burial of the corpse but had it cremated. A booklet on the *Wahabi Trials* issued by the movement had a large circulation in Bengal. On February 8, 1872, the Wahabi convict Sher Ali killed Viceroy Mayo while he was visiting the penal settlement in the Andamans.

## NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The flowering of the Renaissance in the realms of literature and religion is naturally in full evidence in the field of national

political consciousness. We see here a vehement assertion of national sentiment with the emphasis on its Hindu tone. There is also the first faint glimmering of a Muslim national consciousness. Noticeable also is the beginning of sustained political agitation. We are at last approaching the Congress era.

On the morrow of the Mutiny, Hindu national consciousness in itself crystallised round the figure of Rajnarayan Bose who was linked up with the conservative Brahmos. In 1861, he founded at Midnapur a Society for the Promotion of National Glory and issued a prospectus for a Society for Stimulating National Sentiment.

**RAJNARAYAN  
BOSE AND HIS  
ASSOCIATES**

In a famous lecture Rajnarayan asserted Hindu superiority as the key-note of his movement. One of his allies was Bhudev Mukherji who for half a century after the Mutiny wrote essays and historical pieces and even advocated Hindi as the language of Indian unity.

The word "national" acquired such charm in those days that an associate of Rajnarayan, Nabagopal Mitra, started a national school, a national press, a national paper and a national gymnasium till his countrymen came to refer to him as "National Mitra." He along with Rajnarayan and Jyotirindranath, a son of Debendranath Tagore, founded the Patriots' Association in 1865. But their greatest achievement was the organisation of an annual fair—the *Hindu Mela*, which for several years was an event of great activity.

It began in 1867 and was organised by Rajnarayan, Nabagopal and the young Tagores. The popularity of

**THE HINDU MELA** the indigenous form of the *mela* or the fair was utilised by the organisers to attract attention and support and succeeded in gathering and stimulating vast crowds of people in annual gatherings. Its main objects were defined by Ganendranath Tagore to be the cultivation of national sentiment and the promotion of the spirit of self-help and it rallied to it a great volume of enthusiastic support.



At the annual sessions, prizes were offered to writers, artists and athletes and big exhibitions were organised to display the varied products of Indian arts and crafts, to encourage Indian producers, to educate the general public about their own country. The patriotic Bengali orations of Manomohan Bose became a feature of such gatherings. Singing of patriotic songs began at the sessions, the first hymn being composed by a son of the Maharshi, Satyendranath Tagore, who had become the first Indian I.C.S. in 1863.

There was a burst of patriotic poetry also, and indeed in the entire range of contemporary literature, including Bankim Chandra Chatterji, the impress of the *Hindu Mela* movement is very clear. For about a decade these annual meetings stirred up all Calcutta.

In contradistinction to the Hindu national sentiment the awakening amongst the Muslims was still very feeble, if we leave out the Wahabi unrest. MUSLIM CONSCIOUSNESS The Calcutta gentry included only a handful of Muslims. A National Mohammedan Association was in existence and its principal figure was Nawab Abdul Latif. These were aristocratic Muslims, but the bourgeoisie growing up under British rule was as yet singularly devoid of a Muslim element.

Wherever we turn, we see no Muslim at all prominent. Characteristically enough, there was no uneasiness on that score in Hindu ranks waking up to national consciousness. Syed Ahmad, however, founded the Aligarh University in 1874 and the repercussion of his movement was bound to be felt later on.

The rather militant Hinduism of the *Hindu Mela* was a little softened in the seventies and the national consciousness took on a wider form to include other elements like the militant Brahmos and their associates. The result was sustained political agitation of a modern type and free use of Western ideas and technique which tended to eclipse the methods of the *Hindu Mela* and were more political. This in its turn led on directly to the emergence of the Congress.

One of the leaders in the transition was Sisir Kumar Ghose, who with his brothers had founded the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* in 1868 to carry on sustained political criticism of the Government. In 1870, he put forward a clear demand for Western parliamentary institutions for India. Later, he agitated for popular representation in the Calcutta Corporation. He tried to link up the people's associations founded in the district towns and campaigned for the democratisation of the membership of the British Indian Association founded in 1851. The other young nationalists, however, disagreed with him in his management of the association and broke away from him.

A new leader was at hand and was destined to rise to great heights in leadership and to be acclaimed later on as the 'Uncrowned King' of Bengal. His tenacity in political agitation earned him from the Englishmen the *sobriquet* of "Surrender Not"—in a pun on his personal name. Surendranath had gone into the Indian Civil Service but was discharged on trivial grounds from the "heaven-born service" by official superiors who were not yet accustomed to have Indians within their close preserve.

By 1875, Surendranath turned to politics. He was very close to the Young Brahmos, one of whom, Anandamohan Bose, had founded a Students' Association. Under the auspices of the Association, Surendranath started his public speaking. His great addresses on the rise of the Sikh Power and Mazzini created a sensation and made him the idol of the youth. He held up before them not merely the freedom struggles in India but the great episodes in the liberation of the West as well, and made his audience thrill in sympathy with the Italy of the *Risorgimento* or Ireland of the Home Rule movement.

Surendranath Banerjee was not merely the unquestioned chief of Bengal for a generation, he became also an all-India leader of the first magnitude. From 1879, he had his organ—the *Bengalee*.

**Surendranath and his friends broke away from Sisir Kumar Ghose and founded the Indian Association in July, 1876. The group included Ananda-mohan Bose, the first Indian wrangler in Cambridge and a barrister, Sivanath Sastri who had resigned from Government service**

**INDIAN  
ASSOCIATION  
1876**

**and was an established man of letters ; Dwarkanath Ganguli, the fiery agitator for human rights—all of whom were leaders in the Young Brahma movement. The eminent veteran chief of Young Bengal, Reverend Krishnamohan Banerji, was chosen as the president of the Association in fitting recognition of the services of a bygone generation.**

**The Indian Association took up consciously the role of organising Indian public opinion. The membership dues were deliberately fixed at a much lower level than the ordinary rate for the lower classes. Branches were opened in the districts and links established with organisations outside Bengal.**

**An agitation for the reform of Civil Service regulations which were capriciously barring the access of Indians to higher appointments led Surendranath Banerjee to undertake tours in different provinces in 1877-1878. The diversion of**

**A SERIES OF  
CAMPAIGNS**

**the famine fund to the Afghan War led to a great outcry in 1878, Government responded with repression ; the Press Act, 1878 gagged the vernacular newspapers and the Arms Act of 1878 prohibited the keeping of arms by Indians. The Association campaigned for the rights of the tenants, encouraged the formation of *ryots'* unions and its orators addressed huge mass meetings in the districts attended by, we are told, from ten to twenty thousand people at some places.**

**Finally, there was the Ilbert Bill issue. When in 1882, legislation was proposed authorising the trial of Europeans by Indian officers, there was a European outcry against it as during the Black Act days, and the Indians counter-campaigned with energy. In 1883, Surendranath was imprisoned for contempt of court amidst popular indignation. The tempo of national agitation**

mounted up steadily. Sustained political pressure combined with the Gladstonian liberalism of Viceroy Ripon led to the Local Self-Government and Tenancy Acts of 1885 and the repeal of the Press Act of Lord Lytton. Ripon earned a deep gratitude from the Indian public thereby.

Out of the turmoil of early eighties arose the idea of starting a National Fund to furnish the sinews of political warfare. A public meeting on July 17, 1883, was addressed by Surendranath on this matter and he toured again in 1884, in this connection.

STABILISED  
POLITICS

Then, the Indian Association called an All-India National Conference which met in Calcutta in December, 1883, and passed resolutions on representative government, repeal of the Arms Act, civil service reform, technical education. The veteran Derozian, Ramtanu Lahuri, presided at the opening. The second session of the Conference met in Calcutta in December, 1885, and unwittingly coincided with the gathering of the National Congress in Bombay.

## V

# 1885 - 1905

## NATIONAL CONFERENCE AND NATIONAL CONGRESS

TEN years of campaigning by the Indian Association under leaders like Surendranath Banerjee following a decade of growing consciousness promoted by the annual sessions of the *Hindu Mela* had formed the prelude to the emergence of an all-India platform for national consciousness. The first National Conference of 1883 was the logical outcome of this process. Yet the first steps in the formation of the Indian National Congress were taken by other circles to the exclusion of popular leaders in Bengal. The Congress came as a surprise to the Bengal nationalists.

Political consciousness had also awakened in other regions in India, notably in Bombay. But the leaders elsewhere were in general more moderate and less vocal. Allan Octavian Hume, a Scottish Civilian, had, after retirement from service, settled at Simla in 1882, and was taking a great deal of interest in politics. He had a sincere love for India and in 1883 urged the graduates of Calcutta University in a famous letter to dedicate themselves to the service of their country

In the same year, he formed an Indian National Union with local committees in the principal cities. He got in touch with moderate Indian leaders and assembled them in a session at Bombay in December, 1885, which constituted itself as the National Congress.

This move had the approval of Viceroy Dufferin who thought that the role of the Congress would be the respectful ventilation of public grievances, that the Congress should be something like "His Majesty's Opposition" in England but, of course, with no chance of getting into power. The prospect of another Mutiny flitted across the Government's imagination now and again, and here was the chance of laying the ghost.

The popular leaders of Bengal were arranging for their second National Conference, when Hume and his friends summoned the Bombay meeting. Surendranath and the "sedition-mongers" were not even invited though the presidentship went to a respectable Bengali lawyer, W. C. Banerji.

The second session of the National Congress was to meet in Calcutta. It was no longer possible to keep out the famous Bengal agitators. Thus in 1886 there was virtually a fusion between the older National Conference and the newer but wider National Congress. As the *Report* put it—"the leading characteristic of the Congress of 1886 was that it was the whole country's Congress." Unlike the first session, elected delegates representing diverse organisations and groups of people came to this meeting. Another feature was the local Reception Committee presided over by the veteran scholar, Rajendralal Mitra.

The widening of the range of the Congress was unpalatable to Government and as early as the Fourth Allahabad Session, 1888, there were signs of official displeasure and obstruction. But the popularity of the Congress was already assured. In the Third Madras Session, 1887, we find small subscriptions from ordinary people swell up the funds of the Reception Committee and a few artisan delegates participate in the meeting.

Bengal naturally took a leading share in the work of the early Congress the way to which had been paved by the growth of Bengali political consciousness in the preceding generation. In the first twenty-one annual sessions of the Congress (1885-1905), the presidential chair went to Bengalis on no less than seven occasions—to W. C. Banerji (1885, 1892), Surendranath Banerjee (1895, 1902), Anandamohan Bose (1898), Ramesh Chandra Datta (1899), and Lal Mohan Ghose (1903).

At every session except the very first, Bengal delegates had their due share in the proceedings. They led the protest, for example, against imprisonment without trial and criminal law

amendments (1897), against Viceroy Curzon's University Commission (1902), against official extravagance at the Delhi Durbar (1903). They had their full share in the Congress Committees, for instance in the Industrial and Educational Committees appointed in 1900.

More remarkable and fitting was the part played by Bengal Congressmen in pressing for the liberalisation of Congress. Some of them protested in the Second Session against the drafting of the resolutions by one or two leaders; and in the Third Session, 1887, Dwarkanath Ganguli and Bepin Chandra Pal—a Young Brahma from Sylhet—forced the institution of an elected Subjects Committee for discussing and drafting resolutions to be placed before the Open Session. The Congress at first shelved the plantation labour problem in Assam as a provincial issue when Dwarkanath Ganguli raised the question in 1887; by the Twelfth Session (1896), it was forced to take the matter up due to the pressure from Bengal.

Another forward demand was for women's representation and the first women delegates in 1889 and 1890 included Kadambini Ganguli, the wife of Dwarkanath and the first lady graduate of Calcutta University. She was the first woman to speak from the Congress platform (1890), as "a symbol that Indian freedom would uplift India's womanhood."

The founders of Congress believed in the periodic presentation of the national grievances in a solemn fashion to the British Government which was expected to yield step by step before public opinion. More and more, Surendranath Banerji and the official Bengal leadership also inclined to the same view and felt instinctively that mere oratory would confuse and confound the rulers. Congress spent a large sum of money year after year in England to publicise its propaganda.

All this formed the famous Moderate trend which dominated the Congress and against this there was a definite opposition which developed into the Extremism of the next period. Along with the Maharashtra and the Punjab, Bengal was a good soil for the

genesis of Extremism. Internal consolidation rather than mere demonstration, self-help rather than petitions, going deeper amongst the people rather than following the routine of the beaten track—such was the mentality of Extremism. One of the earliest Bengali exponents of the new move was Aswini Kumar Datta, the celebrated local leader in Barisal who had a unique hold on his own district and was venerated by an entire generation. As early as 1887, he presented to the Congress a memorial for representative government bearing 45,000 signatures from Barisal.

He campaigned amongst his own people against the Government policy of encouraging unrestricted production of intoxicants in the countryside. In 1897, he protested against the role of the Congress being confined to the annual three days' "*tamasha*." Even more vocal and effective as a critic was Bepin Chandra Pal round whom gathered the nascent Extremist sentiment. He founded an organ, the *New India* in 1902, and had already made his mark in the struggle on behalf of the Assam plantation labourers.

This campaign had been initiated by the indefatigable Dwarkanath Ganguli who had heard about the miserable plight of the coolies in Assam tea-gardens from a Brahmo missionary and proceeded there, in 1886, to collect facts on behalf of the Indian Association. He toured the plantations at the risk of his own life and embodied his findings in a series of articles on the "slave trade in Assam" in the English journal *Bengalee* and the vernacular *Sanjibani* which was conducted by a Young Brahmo, Krishnakumar Mitra. As Congress treated the question as a provincial issue, the matter was taken up by the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1888 when Bepin Chandra Pal was the main speaker.

The ignorant and illiterate labourers from different provinces were being enticed to the tea-gardens and persuaded to enter into agreements or indentures under which they were held down to servitude for years, though such "agreements" were strictly illegal. Conditions in the plantations were a scandal and cases occurred in which recalcitrant coolies were flogged to death. Ordinary



law and justice ceased to operate in the tea-gardens where planters reigned supreme. The agitation, thus unleashed, was like another Indigo Campaign. By 1896, Congress was finally persuaded to take up the problem till Sir Henry Cotton, Chief Commissioner of Assam, was moved to action and the worst evils were eradicated.

Meanwhile political life in Bengal was forging ahead. The Bengal Provincial Conference was organised in 1888 to activate the people of the province, Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar presiding over the first session. It was Bengal's lead which got together, in 1896, the first Industrial Exhibition as an adjunct to the Congress session which in the words of Surendranath heralded "the industrial upheaval that was soon to find expression in the *Swadeshi* movement."

The economic endeavours of the *Hindu Mela* a generation before were now finding their fulfilment and men and women connected with the House of Tagore were prominent again in this direction. Thus the Industrial Exhibition was sponsored by J. Chowdhuri and early in the present century, Sarala Devi opened the *Lakshmir Bhandar*, to popularise country-made products. This *Swadeshi* stores ran a journal—the *Bhandar*.

In 1903 was founded the Dawn Society with its organ in the *Dawn*—an association of patriotic young men led by Satish Chandra Mukherjee. An Association for the Advancement of Industrial and Scientific Education was organised by Jenendranath Ghose to secure scholarships for the technical training of young students to be sent abroad for the purpose. Agitation flared up from time to time provoked by every encroachment on rights or sentiments.

In 1899, there was a great outcry against the ominous reduction of representation in the Calcutta Corporation ; the majority of the elected members led by Surendranath resigned in protest. There was fierce anger at Viceroy Curzon's slandering of the Bengali national character in his Convocation Address in 1905 ; Rashbehari Ghose, the eminent lawyer presided over the public meeting which answered Curzon.

Bengal was indeed steadily approaching the great *Swadeshi* upheaval. It was equally clear that Bengal's individual national consciousness was far developed and was ready to take up any challenge.

The general national resurgence was, of course, not limited to political consciousness and agitation.

<p>SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1862-1902)</p>	<p>National strength, self-confidence, energy and pride seemed embodied in the figure of Swami Vivekananda, a young Bengali disciple of Ramkrishna Paramhansa.</p>
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Vivekananda had turned away from the beaten track of ordinary life and was fired with a burning idealism. He dramatically leaped into fame by his participation in the World Religions Conference at Chicago, 1893, and this was followed by a triumphant mission tour of the West for four years. On his return home in 1897, he was acclaimed as a national hero. At home and abroad, he produced a deep impression.

Like Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen he had added to the stature of his country in the estimation of foreigners ; but unlike them, he was no protestant but an orthodox Hindu and thus stimulated the Hindu revivalist sentiment. Indian self-respect felt reassured when Vivekananda was hailed abroad as the cultural ambassador of an ancient land. To his own countrymen, his message was the cult of self-help ; he told them that they themselves were largely responsible for their own evil plight and the remedy was in their own hands.

Vivekananda was a fiery patriot though politics was not his line. He turned to humanitarian monasticism and proceeded to organise the famous Ramkrishna Mission with its centre at Belur, near Calcutta. Countless young men forsook the world and began to flock into the Mission which emphasised the role of social service and recalled the self-sacrificing ardour of the mediaeval Friars.

And yet weaknesses persisted. Among these was the continued absence of active Muslim support on any considerable scale. Eminent Muslim individuals were with the Congress, but already had begun a distinct turning away of Muslim opinion towards an independent path.

**MUSLIM  
CONSCIOUSNESS** Syed Ahmad was a patriot as his Urdu book on the *Causes of the Mutiny* on the morrow of the upheaval indicates. He also felt deeply the national humiliation and racial discrimination. But more and more he leaned on the view that the uneven development between the two communities involved Hindu domination if political emancipation was unaccompanied by safeguards for the weak. When Congress arose, he tried to counter it with his Patriotic Association. In the Civil Service Commission, 1888, he took his stand against holding simultaneous examinations in India for recruitment to the I.C.S. which Congress was demanding; his argument was that the Hindus would thereby swamp the Service.

Even before this in 1883, Mahommed Yusuf had demanded in the Bengal Council the reservation of seats for Muslims. The Congress Nationalists universally condemned the Muslim moves as reactionary; they were strengthened in their belief by the fact that there were Muslims with the Congress also. Muslim demands were dismissed as religious or communal and the point was missed that while the Muslim divines on the whole were friendly to the Congress, the Muslim slogans expressed the self-interest of those sections of the middle classes which were backward and happened to be Muslim.

As for the masses, the stock argument in Hindu circles was that there was no separatist feeling. Poet Tagore answered the point in 1911: "The lack of separatist feeling is merely negative; it has no positive content. That is to say, it was not because of our genuine unity that we were insensible of our differences—it was only because of a lack of virility in ourselves that we were overwhelmed by a certain insensibility."

#### LITERATURE AND CULTURE

In literature and the life of culture, Bengal's position had already been secured by the previous generation. The flowering

of the Renaissance persisted. The Bengali theatre reached its classic form under playwright-actors like Girish Chandra Ghose. Ramesh Chandra Datta followed the tradition of Bankim and wrote historical romances and social novels, though he earned more enduring fame as an economic historian who analysed the material evils of British domination in India.

The first note worthy woman writer was Swarnakumari Debi (1855-1932), a daughter of Debendranath Tagore, who capably edited for a decade (from 1884) the cultural magazine *Bharati* founded in 1877 by her philosopher-brother Dwijendranath.

One Muslim poet and novelist, Meer Mosharaf Husain (1848-1912), wrote his best work in this period.

Another achievement began with the first efforts of Jagadish Chandra Bose and Profulla Chandra Roy who sent a thrill through the Indian mind by unlocking the closed door of scientific research. But everything was overshadowed by the emergence of the genius of Rabindranath Tagore in the field of Bengali culture.

As a boy, young Rabindranath had attracted attention by reciting his own poems at the *Hindu Mela* (1875, 1877) on patriotic themes, and by lyric poems in the *Vaishnava* style and critical reviews. In the early eighties, he wrote and acted in plays, attacked in an article the opium trade in China, and was hailed as a talented young poet.

RABINDRANATH  
TAGORE  
(1861-1941)

In 1884, he denounced the prevalent practice in political agitation of petitioning to the British, in very strong language. In the next few years, his poems, songs, plays, stories, novels and essays gave him the position of a master writer and added to the glories of Bengali literature. He conducted a high class monthly, the *Sadhana*, and in 1901 revived the famous *Bangadarshan* periodical of Bankim Chandra.

In 1895, Rabindranath tried to collect the nursery rhymes of Bengal; in the previous year he had been elected the Foundation Vice-President of the Academy of Bengali Letters—the *Sahitya Parishad*. His breadth of view was revealed in his sharp polemic against the absurdities of extreme neo-Hinduism and in his essays on woman labour and unemployment.

In 1892, he advocated the introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction in higher educational institutions. He wrote and delivered remarkable political addresses at regular intervals voicing the wounded national sentiment and urging internal consolidation of the national movement. In 1898, we find him assisting the great-hearted Sister Nivedita in the organisation of plague relief in the city.

In 1901, Rabindranath founded his famous school at Santiniketan. In 1904, he stressed the need for constructive nationalism and pleaded for the reorganisation of social life on the basis of self-help with the village as the unit, the fostering of cottage industries, peasant co-operation and Hindu-Muslim amity. He inclined towards the growing extremist trend in national politics and in 1904, he supported the move to celebrate the Sivaji Festival which was to bring together the two most advanced peoples in India ; and yet in the midst of this enthusiasm, he had the good sense to point out that the public worship of the goddess-Bhowani as part of the festival was sure to alienate non-Hindu sentiment.

By 1905, Rabindranath Tagore was universally recognised not merely as our greatest poet but also a worthy representative of our culture with his catholicity, sympathy, strength and sanity.

# VI

## 1905 - 1919

### PARTITION OF BENGAL

BENGAL'S growing national consciousness had alarmed the authorities who now fell back upon a plan to break the back of the movement by partitioning the province into two separate entities. The Muslim people who had not been drawn into the general awakening formed the big majority in the eastern districts. It was presumed that they would welcome the creation of a province which they would dominate. The Hindus, it was expected, would be split up and beaten by this stroke of policy. On July 20, 1905, the Partition of Bengal was announced as an administrative measure to take effect from October 16.

It was a challenge to the national movement and the freedom urge of the Bengali people thrown out by Imperialism and the challenge was picked up at once. Krishna Kumar Mitra gave a call on the same day in his *Sanjibani* which carried as its motto the famous slogan of the French Revolution, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," a call for the boycott of foreign goods with a vow to use *Swadeshi* goods only.

His lead met with immediate response from the people in Calcutta and outside and huge meetings demonstratively abjured the use of foreign cloth. Rabindranath Tagore in his *Banga-darshan* proclaimed the determination of the Bengali people to stand united and rely on their own inherent strength to defy the attack on Bengal's unity. A mammoth demonstration in and round the Calcutta Town Hall on August 7 re-affirmed the national stand. The battle was now in full swing.

The wave of agitation mounted up as never before. The country was flooded with patriotic songs by Rabindranath Tagore, Rajani Kanta Sen and others, with the fiery orations of Bepin Chandra Pal and a host of 'agitators,' with determined articles which covered every news-sheet.

WAVE OF  
AGITATION

Anglicised gentlemen abandoned their rich foreign dress, women came out of their seclusion to demonstrate, students marched out in processions and as pickets, countless homes discontinued foreign luxuries. Famous landlords, big businessmen, leading professional people went with the popular tide, though significantly enough we see no special effort to organise and arouse workers or peasants.

Prominent Muslims, however, joined the struggle including Abdul Rasul, the barrister, Guznavi, the businessman and Liaquat Husain, the popular agitator. The excitement affected Calcutta and the districts equally. New organisations sprang up everywhere to carry on the struggle—the *Brati-Samiti* of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, the *Bande Mataram* group of Sures Chandra Samajpati and the *Santan Sampraday* of South Calcutta young men. Volunteers hawked the coarse country-cloth from door to door.

On the date the Partition took effect, there took place a unique and memorable demonstration of protest.

**THE CEREMONY OF OCTOBER 16, 1905** The leaders adapted the popular practice, of tying the *Rakhi* thread on the wrists of every friend followed on the *Rakhi Purnima* day, for a new use with special purpose. October 16, 1905, was observed with this ceremony and subsequent anniversaries were similarly marked till the Partition was annulled. The tying of the thread was to symbolise the brotherly unity of the Bengali people which nobody can tear asunder. To mark the day as an occasion for mourning, people were called upon to abstain from cooked food. Huge crowds paraded the streets singing a song of Rabindranath specially composed for the occasion.

In the afternoon, the veteran leader Anandamohan Bose was taken to lay the foundation stone of a building which was to commemorate Indivisible Bengal and to be called Federation Hall in memory perhaps of the Federation celebrations during the great days of the French Revolution.

A solemn vow was taken by the multitude which had gathered at the meeting. A huge mass demonstration followed in the evening in North Calcutta where an appeal was made for funds

to run weaving schools and help the handloom industry. Fifty thousand rupees were subscribed on the spot.

The dominant bourgeois trend in the Bengal movement found a natural and useful outlet in the endeavour

**CONSTRUCTIVE** to build up home industries on the slogan :  
**ACTIVITY** "Buy *Swadeshi*." Textile mills, national banks, insurance companies, soap factories,

tanneries and so forth blossomed out—with not much success in many cases, however, Profulla Chandra Roy, the scientist, organised his famous concern—the Bengal Chemical Swadeshi Stores and similar stores of consumers' goods sprang up in large numbers. Another constructive activity developed out of the Government repression of the patriotic students.

Circulars rained down upon the students to force them out of the national agitation. The police clashed with student pickets. Even the veteran Sivanath Sastri issued a call to the students to leave the existing institutions.

In a protest meeting on November 5, 1905. Subodh Chandra Mallik gave a princely donation of a lakh to start National Education and was promptly hailed as a *Raja* by his grateful countrymen. The Mymensingh zemindars followed suit with rich bequests. Next year, on August 15, a Town Hall meeting set up a National Council of Education. One permanent memento of this upheaval stands till today in the Jadavpur Engineering College.

The campaign went on with unabated fury. The students forged an Anti-Circular Society to fight the official decrees and repression which had even indulged in floggings. Districts vied with the metropolis in asserting their defiance. Foremost was Barisal—under Aswini Kumar Datta and his band of helpers—which was 'proclaimed' as a notorious district and where the countryside was enthralled by the popular patriotic songs of Mukunda Das, a poet of the masses.

In Calcutta, on February 27, 1906, there was a bonfire of foreign cloth in College Square, to be followed by similar demonstrations elsewhere.



In April, the Provincial Conference met in Barisal town. The East Bengal Government had prohibited the *Bande Mataram* slogan. In the Conference procession, the young enthusiasts broke the ban and received in consequence a police lathi charge. The Conference dispersed next day without functioning rather than submit to the ban, though it shrank from the suggestion of Krishna Kumar Mitra to continue proceedings and defy the official order.

### EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

The *Swadeshi* movement naturally fanned the embers of Extremism into a blazing flame. In June, 1906, Tilak came to Calcutta and the Sivaji Festival was celebrated with great pomp. Sarala Devi organised the *Beerastami* celebrations as the festival of youth.

The trend of Extremism rapidly crystallised round the figure of Brahmobandhav Upadhyaya who crowned a chequered career as a prophet of militant nationalism. He cast a spell over young minds and drew them towards the gospel of direct action. His organ—the *Sandha* became a power in the land and intoxicated his readers. Charged with sedition, the intrepid monk agitator declined to plead in a court the jurisdiction of which he refused to acknowledge. He died on October 27, 1907, in the midst of his trial.

Others seconded his crusade, like Bepin Chandra Pal—already famous as politician and orator. He started the *Bande Mataram* newspaper, with the motto 'India for the Indians', as the editor of which Arabindo Ghosh appeared like a stormy petrel in Bengal politics.

Arabindo had been educated in England, and had almost gone into the Indian Civil Service. Saved by an accident from this career, he emerged as a powerful writer who preached that nationalism was a divine religion with true poetic fervour.

Other radical papers included the *Nabasakti* and the *Yugantar*, the latter edited by Bhupendranath Datta who is a venerated scholar and progressive thinker even today. Extremist groups of action sprang up amongst the radical youths, for example, the *Anushilan Samity*.

The Congress sessions in 1906 and 1907, in spite of their acceptance of the goal of *Swaraj* in 1906, became the battle ground between Extremists and Moderates. At the Surat Congress, 1907, the tension culminated in a split after which the machine was captured by the Moderates and remained in their hands till the reunion in 1916 and the Moderate withdrawal from the Congress itself in 1918.

In 1907-1908, Government repression was in full swing and mainly directed against the Extremists. The editors of the radical organs were charged with sedition in 1907. Bhupendranath Datta was sentenced, Brahmobandhav Upadhyaya died during trial, Arabindo Ghosh was acquitted. Bepin Chandra Pal was imprisoned for contempt of court. An ordinance gagged 'seditious' meetings. Another dealt with the Press and the Extremist organs were smashed. Punitive police forces realised collective fines from the *Swadeshi* centres and some of the district leaders were jailed.

Furious with this repression, radical young men began to tread the path of violence. An attempt was made to blow up the train of Lieut.-Governor Sir Andrew Fraser ; on April 30, 1908, the Muzaffarpur incident took place when two terrorists tracking Kingsford, who had been the judge in the sedition trials, killed by mistake two English ladies. One of the assailants took his own life, the other was caught and hanged.

On June 2, the police unearthed a bomb factory in Maniktala, Calcutta, hauled in a group of terrorists and arrested Arabindo Ghosh as well. The Alipur Bomb Case followed in consequence and during the trial the terrorists murdered an approver, the Public Prosecutor, and one of the Police Inspectors while a second attack was staged on Sir Andrew Fraser. Arabindo Ghosh was acquitted again thanks to his able counsel, C. R. Das, who became famous in this case. But the Maniktala group was convicted and the leaders transported for life.

Terrorism intensified Government repression. The Central Legislature enacted a series of sweeping coercion acts which suppressed all freedom of the Press, provided for conspiracy trials under special procedure and banned the youth organisations.

Nine Bengal leaders including Aswini Kumar Datta and Krishna Kumar Mitra were deported in December, 1908.

The anti-Partition agitation had drawn many Muslims to its fold, but they were pure nationalist individuals with hardly a solid following of their own people behind them. The Muslim masses were largely neutral during the struggle as befitted their lack of political consciousness.

**MUSLIM  
REACTION**

The specifically Muslim leadership was pleased with the Partition which held out hopes of preferment in the new province but the intensity of the national agitation and the ferocity of repression took it by surprise. This is reflected for example in the *Mussalmans*, the organ Mujibar Rahman founded in 1905. The eminent Muslims led by the Nawab of Dacca gave their approval to the Partition at the Education Conference held in December 1906. Already on October 1, 1906, the Aga Khan had led a Muslim deputation to Viceroy Minto and pressed successfully upon him the safeguard of separate Muslim electorates in the coming constitutional reforms.

The general argument in support of the new move was that in the unavoidable circumstance in which the Indian franchise would depend on educational or property qualifications, the Muslim voters would be swamped in general electorates.

**SEPARATE  
ELECTORATE**

The Education Conference developed in 1908 in the Muslim League. In 1907, communal riots took place here and there. Still, it is by no means certain that the Muslim masses were enthusiastic for the Partition. They were not developed enough even for that. That the *Swadeshi* agitation on the other hand failed to rouse the predominantly Muslim peasant masses in East Bengal was candidly admitted by Rabindranath Tagore in his presidential address to the Provincial Conference at Pabna (January 1908) when he said that the fault lay with the Hindu 'bhadralog class', the gentlefolk who had never cared to be at one with either their Muslim fellow countrymen or the masses of our own common people.

Muslim apathy either way is also illustrated by the absence of any strong opposition to the repeal of the Partition announced by George V in his Coronation Durbar at Delhi, December 12, 1911. The Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909, however, conceded the principle of separate representation to soothe Muslim feeling.

The new Constitution came into operation by the end of 1910 but taking advantage of a new terrorist action, the murder of a Deputy Superintendent of Police, Government renewed its repressive legislation. Under a new Press Law, for example, the next decade saw the forfeiture of several hundred presses, newspapers and books.

**THE EVE & THE  
MORROW OF  
REPEAL OF  
PARTITION**

The leaders deported in 1908 were released, but one of them, Pulinbehari Das, the Anushilan chief was transported to the Andamans for seven years on a new charge. Terroristic activities continued steadily and in the context of the grim struggle which had opened in 1908 between terrorism and repression, even the repeal of the Partition in 1911, failed to restore normalcy.

The removal of the Imperial Capital from Calcutta to Delhi also offended Bengali sensibility. Bengal was raised to the status of a Governor's Province on the re-union of its two parts.

An uneasy situation continued to haunt the Indian scene. In 1912 December, Viceroy Hardinge had a narrow escape from a bomb and amongst the accused was Rashbehari Bose who managed to flee from India. This was an indication of how Bengal terrorism had now its ramifications in other provinces. In 1914, the *Komagata Maru* affair provided a passing sensation and then came the first World War.

The Moderates who dominated Congress loyally co-operated with the Government in the war. The Extremists under Tilak were now anxious for the re-establishment of Congress unity and the Lucknow Congress, 1916, saw the re-union made necessary by the possibility of an early end of the war.

The terrorists clung to their chosen path throughout the war years, tried to smuggle arms from abroad, and in a skirmish near

Balasore, lost one of their chiefs, Jatindranath Mukherji, the "Tiger" who was killed in action. In the Muslim ranks, we find the Muslim League moving closer to Congress. In 1912, the League accepted the Congress ideal of Self-Government as its goal and there was a Congress-League Pact in 1916.

On the other hand, the years after 1911 saw an upsurge of Muslim intransigence which may be taken to represent the penetration of political consciousness deeper down in the Muslim people. The weekly *Comrade* founded in 1911 by Mahomed Ali indicated the new trend of militancy and mass agitation. The plight of Turkey during the Turco-Italian and the Balkan Wars attracted the sympathy of Indian Mussalmans who felt annoyed with Britain's dubious policy in the Near East.

In 1912, Dr. Ansari led his Medical Mission to the relief of Turkey and the Red Crescent collected funds to mitigate Turkish sufferings. In 1914, Britain and Turkey found themselves on opposite sides in the War. The Indian Muslim, if he thought about it at all, was in a dilemma and his resentment against the British increased.

All this helped the growth of an anti-imperialist feeling which led on to the great Khilafat Agitation after the end of the War. Mahomed Ali and his friends were in detention during the War.

Even before the end of the War, Secretary of State Montague and Viceroy Chelmsford held an enquiry and

THE POST-WAR SITUATION recommended constitutional reforms (July, 1918). The Congress Extremists were firmly opposed to the meagre concessions offered

In the Calcutta Congress of December 1917, a split with the Moderates was narrowly averted, but Bengal nationalism rallied decisively round the Extremist banner, under the new leadership of C. R. Das, and isolated Surendranath Banerjee and the old guard of politicians. At the Special Congress in Bombay, August, 1918, the long impending final breach at last took place. The Moderates—hopelessly outnumbered—withdraw from the Congress, formed the Liberal League and supported the reform scheme.

The Congress was now entirely in the hands of the Extremists. Meanwhile the World War had stimulated Indian labour and

its end marked the beginning of a trade union upsurge. The Rowalt Act which tried to perpetuate the war-time coercion laws provoked the post-war issue which rapidly developed into the new crisis of 1919. That was the year when M. K. Gandhi stepped forward and assumed the leadership of the national movement.

### LITERATURE AND CULTURE

The hectic days of the *Swadeshi* movement followed by the uncertainties of the war period formed a framework within which Bengal's cultural life had its own ups and downs which cannot be traced in detail here. Unlike the previous periods, however, politics absorbed a great deal of attention and the situation was often tense.

Rabindranath Tagore was now the unquestioned leader in the literary field. In 1905, he threw himself heart and soul into the *Swadeshi* agitation and was the poet and the prophet of its early phase. His patriotic songs, speeches and essays lit up the whole movement with a peculiar beauty.

But as bitterness mounted up, Rabindranath's sensitive soul shrank from the ugly trends. He felt that his people needed a change of heart and that a radical social programme was absolutely necessary for the attainment of real independence. Disagreeing with the tactics of the movement, he withdrew into the solitude of his school and plunged into literary work which was now extraordinarily creative.

Tagore was also aiming at a mutual understanding between the East and the West and began his famous tours abroad. In 1913, he won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but two years before, on the completion of his fiftieth year, his countrymen had already greeted him as the prince of literary men. In 1914, a high class Bengali periodical—the *Sabuj Patra*—appeared, and issue after issue was filled with the mature writings of Tagore.

In 1916, his lectures on nationalism delivered in Japan and the U.S.A. revealed him as a sharp critic of domineering aggression. His internationalism came in for some adverse criticism from his countrymen, but in reality he had never lost his sympathy

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1905-1919

for forward thought, though he was now politically inactive.

In 1917, Rabindranath intervened in the Bengal Congress on the side of Extremism and in 1919, his celebrated letter to the Viceroy on Jalianwala Bagh massacre gave a lead to the whole country before any other leader had spoken out.

He had encouraged the formation of a significant movement in Bengal's cultural history—the Oriental

**HIS VARIED** School of Art of which the central figure  
**ACTIVITY** was his cousin, Abanindranath Tagore.

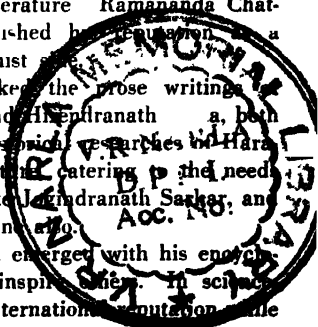
Abanindra and his pupils consciously cultivated a new style of art which recalled the ancient past and stressed national individuality in self-expression. The stage was enriched by an avalanche of patriotic drama of which the highlights were the plays of Dwijendralal Ray whose songs enjoyed tremendous popularity

On most poets however. Tagore's genius had a baneful effect which discouraged individuality and produced a depressing atmosphere of cheap imitation. In prose, we have the new move of Pramotha Chaudhuri to break decisively with the established convention and to introduce into writing the spoken forms of words, especially the verbs which occur in Bengali speech. His journal—the *Sabuj Patra*—was intended to symbolise also the revolt of the spirit of youth against the shackles of tradition

Earlier had come the Bengali magazine, the *Prabasi* which the personality of its editor, Ramananda Chatterji, made into an expression of high class periodical literature. Ramananda Chatterji's famous *Monthly Notes* established by him was a patriot leaning heavily on the Extremist side.

Dignity and thoughtfulness marked the prose writings of men like Ramendra Sundar Trivedi and Abanindranath Tagore, both essayists of distinction; and of the historical researches of Haraprasad Sastri. A new form of literature catering to the needs of children, was introduced by men like Jagadranath Sanyal, and Abanindranath Tagore shone in this line also.

In philosophy Brajendranath Seal emerged with his encyclopaedic knowledge and the power to inspire others. In science Jagadish Chandra Bose added to his international reputation while



Profulla Chandra Ray began to build up a school of research scholars round him who looked up to him as their *Guru*.

In the field of higher education there was the outstanding figure of Ashutosh Mukherjī, who by his devoted service and personality minimised the Government control over Calcutta University, converted the institution from a pure examining body to a partly teaching one, opened the Post-Graduate Teaching Departments, organised the University College of Science and launched the Bengali scholars into sustained research work in science and ancient history.

The Bengal we know today was emerging in these years in all its familiar outline.





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