



# **NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Under Graduate Degree Programme  
Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)**

## **SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**

**HISTORY  
[HHI]**

**GE-HI-31**

## PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, general, discipline specific elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits.

UGC Open and Distance (ODL) Regulations, 2017 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Bachelors Degree Programme (BDP) level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Material (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

**Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar**  
Vice-Chancellor

**Netaji Subhas Open University**

**Under Graduate Degree Programme**

**Choice Based Credit System (CBCS)**

**Subject : Generic Elective Course in History**

**Course Code : GE-HI-31**

**Eastern India (with special reference to Bengal): (1757-1947)**

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**Subject : Generic Elective Course in History**

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**Eastern India (with special reference to Bengal): (1757-1947)**

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**Netaji Subhas  
Open University**

**Generic Elective  
(History)**

**Eastern India (with special reference to Bengal): (1757-1947)  
Course Code : GE-HI-31**

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# Module 1 : Ecology and Demography

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## Unit 1 □ Ecology and Demography

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## 1.0 Objectives

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- Ecology of Eastern India plays an important role in its history
- Land formation in Bengal
- The Consequences of change of course by the Ganges
- Impact of Bengal's ecology on its rural society
- The relationship between agrarian production and demography of Bengal

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## 1.1 Introduction

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Iftexhar Iqbal in his work *The Bengal Delta Ecology, State and Social Change, 1840-1943* states that in the past few decades, in spite of the focus on the study of Environmental



History, ecological analysis in History is still limited to forest, hills and other peripheral regions. Iqbal points out that research on the ecology of plains, which is essential to understand the politics and society of the plains is conspicuously missing and the same lacunae is also obvious while studying the ecology of Eastern India. Iqbal opines that all “spatial specificities” of the Bengal deltaic region like high mountain peaks, the plains and the vast coastline of the Bay of Bengal should be taken into consideration to understand the ecology of Bengal.

## 1.2 Process of Land Formation in Bengal

Maps of Bengal drawn throughout the colonial period, testify to a continuous process of land formation (Eaton 1993, pp. 24–7). It is significant to note that the big rivers of Bengal — Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna and their various branches empty into the Bay of Bengal. Together they form the largest delta on earth and also carry the highest proportion of sediment in the world (25 per cent) as compared to any other river system (Iqbal 2010, p. 1). Over time, approximately 40,000 million cubic feet of silt was deposited by these rivers to create enormous areas of new land, known as *chars* and *diaras*.

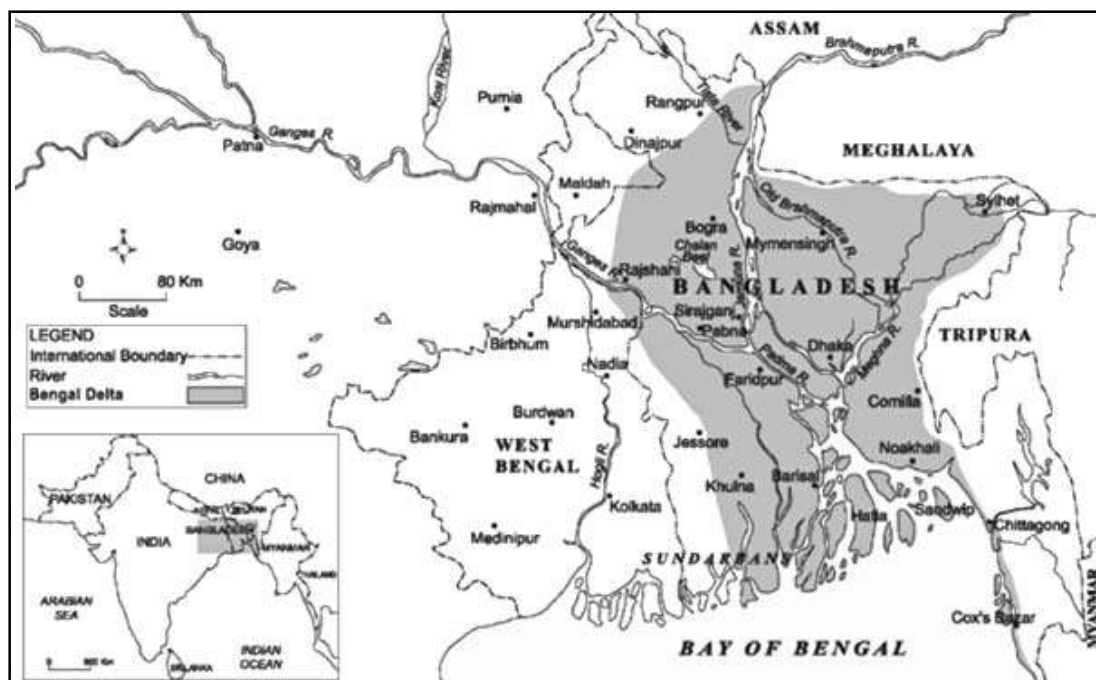
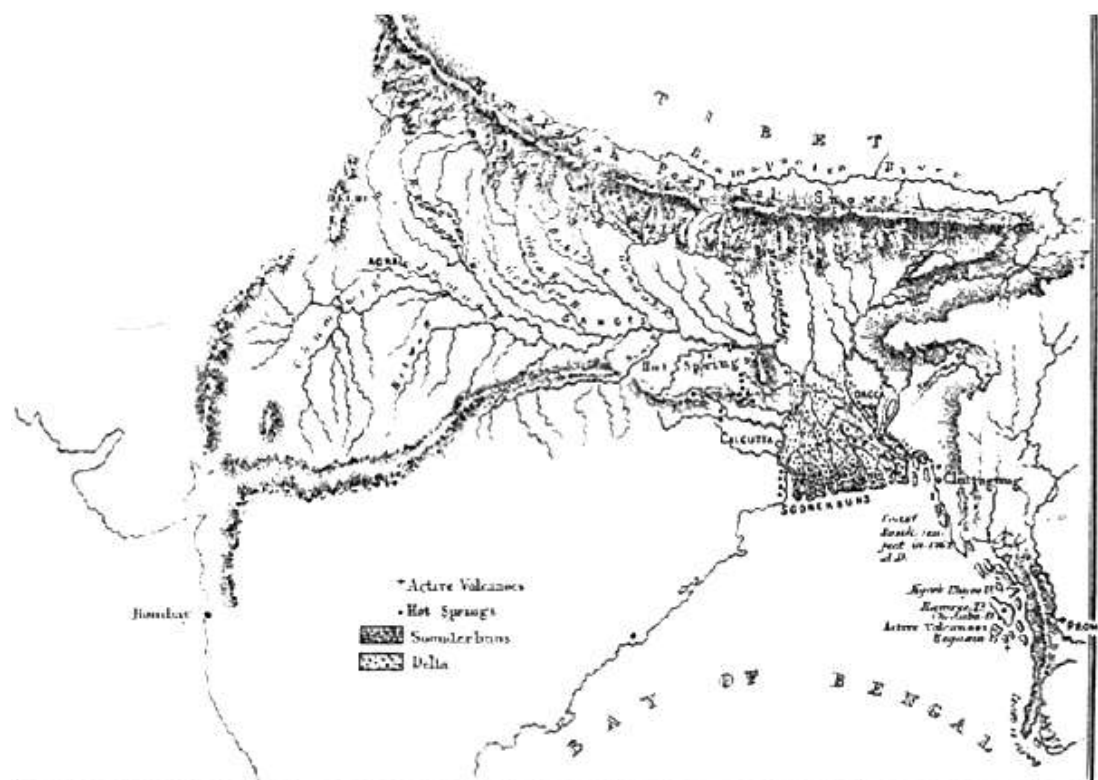


Figure 1.1 Map of Bengal and neighbouring territories

“*Diaras* and *Chars* often first appear as thin slivers of sand. On this is deposited layers of silt till a low bank is consolidated and it becomes cultivable (Haroun 1991, p. 18).” Naturally, this process of sedimentation increased every monsoon, during the heavy rains. At the same time, the ocean currents obstructed by the rising water levels deposited huge amounts of sand in the coastal regions of Bengal.

**Figure 1.2 Map showing the geological setting of the Bengal Delta**



*Source: The Calcutta Review, March 1859.*

“Thus a double process of land-making continued amidst the mutual confrontation of silt-laden rivers and the sand-carrying sea” (Iqbal 2010, p.3). This process of formation of new land was encouraged by mangrove trees which helped in the consolidation of the shoreline through natural succession. Soon vegetation and trees appeared on this new land. This was how the Sunderbans were formed between the Bay of Bengal and the borders of deltaic Bengal. (Iqbal 2010, p.3)

### 1.2.1 The Eastward Swing of the Ganges and its Consequences

During the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the Ganga gradually started to move eastwards though the process had started earlier. The Bhagirathi flew through the heart of Rarh or western Bengal and became economically viable in the Mughal era upon the dwindling fortunes of the Bhairab and Saraswati. But slowly it declined in importance, particularly so when Damodar, its distributary, began moving southwards around 1770. In the early seventeenth century the Ganga came closer to the Padma river which provided water to a huge area of east Bengal including Faridpur, Dhaka and Bakarganj. This eastward swing of the Ganges continued till the nineteenth century till the river met the Brahmaputra river in Dhaka (Webster 1911, p. 41). Thereafter the two mighty Himalayan rivers, the Ganga and the Brahmaputra, poured into the Meghna near Chandpur in Tippera (Ganguli 1938, p. 206). It was as a result of this ecological change that Padma and Meghna henceforth became two names etched deeply into east Bengali rural identity (Bose 1993, p.11). However, though the general eastward swing of the Ganges river system and the westerly flow of the Brahmaputra resulted in the increase of land in the east, the erstwhile flourishing western part of Bengal (Rarh) suffered greatly.

### 1.2.2 Effects of Ecological Changes in Eastern and Western Regions of Bengal

The earthquake of 1762 and the floods of 1769-70 and 1786-88 created new rivers or presented old rivers in completely new forms as in the case of the rivers, Teesta, Jamuna, Jelanghi, Mathabhanga, Kirtinasa and Naya Bhangini (Mukherjee 1938, p.9). This ecological context affected the agrarian society in both the regions but in different ways. In striking contrast to the active delta in eastern Bengal, a moribund delta emerged in western Bengal. The eastern region of Bengal came to be known as the land of the new alluvium while the western region due to the slow decay of its rivers became the land of the old alluvium. In the western region, in the later nineteenth century the superior winter *aman* rice was replaced by the inferior autumn *aus* variety. Moreover, the production of sugarcane and indigo in Murshidabad and Nadia also came down alarmingly.

On the other hand, due to the ecological transformations, the eastern region i.e. mostly present Bangladesh continued to be ecologically active (Bhattacharya 1982, pp. 270-71). The fertile eastern region produced rich golden paddy, earning it the name 'Sonar Bangla' (Golden i.e. Prosperous Bengal). In addition jute started becoming important as a cash crop in Mymensingh, Dhaka, Faridpur and Tippera. The possibility of intensive double cropping increased and it helped sustain high densities of population in the eastern region.

Besides the moribund delta there were two other ecological zones in Bengal which are worth mentioning. Firstly, a narrow area of elevated land in the western part of Bengal and secondly, the foothills of the Himalayas in north Bengal. The former area around the Chotanagpur plateau, depended totally upon rainfall for the cultivation of rice in this region (Bose 1993, pp.11-12).

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### **1.3 Ecology and Bengal Rural Society**

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Mahesh Rangarajan is of the opinion that ‘the “ecological” half of environmental history would only make sense if it is tied with the broader enterprise of the new social history’ (Rangarajan 1999, p.206). Hence ecology can help us to understand social history better. In particular it is possible to see how ecology affects the rural society. The people of East Bengal have continuously faced the problem of coastal cyclones and flooding which has constantly risked their life and property. However, they have also learned to harness these floods for their productive use. There is no doubt that the flooding of the rivers in the monsoon renewed the soil with silt and fresh water making the land suitable for cultivation. This in turn lowered the mortality rate due to disease when compared to the western part of Bengal.

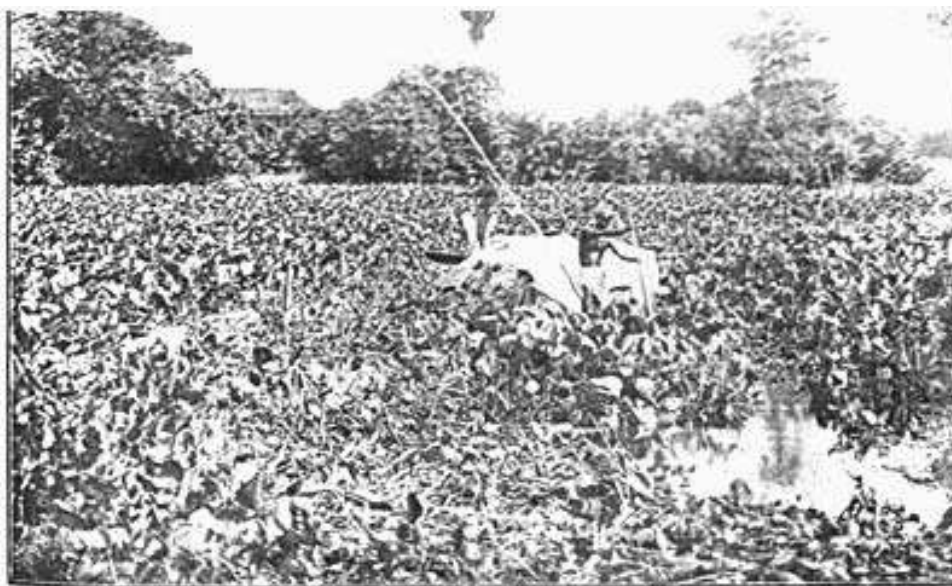
Change in the environment is not always a natural phenomena. The role of human agency in affecting changes in the ecology need to be taken into consideration too. In the mid nineteenth century the construction of roads and railway embankments displaced the existing drainage pattern and unfortunately hurried the process of shrinking up of rivers in the moribund delta. As the construction of railways spread from western Bengal to eastern Bengal in 1890s it criss- crossed the Bengal Delta, dividing it into many small and ‘innumerable compartments’ (C.A. Bentley, *The Times*, 13 October 1922, p. 11) and obstructing the deposition of silt over a vast area. Further, this criss-crossing of rivers created many stagnant pools which became the breeding grounds for anopheles mosquitoes, causing malarial epidemics in the second half of the nineteenth century.

A further hindrance was provided by the choking effect of a Brazilian water hyacinth in the water bodies and paddy fields of Bengal from 1910 onwards. Both these factors caused a serious decline in agricultural production and led to a substantial increase in water-related diseases between 1900 to 1930. Stagnant pools became the breeding-ground of anopheles mosquitoes, the carrier of waves of malaria epidemics in the second half of the nineteenth century. The areas where railway and road networks were most

extensive had the highest incidence of malaria (Bentley 1925, pp. 27-32). Yet the colonial state failed to check these adverse changes in the agrarian process.

**A peasant struggling to ply a boat through the water hyacinth**

*Source: Kenneth McLean, 'Water Hyacinth', Agricultural Journal of India, XVII(1922).*



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## 1.4 Demography

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It was probably the catastrophic cyclones, earthquakes and torrential rains and the hot and humid climate that made the people resign to their fate. The longing to be safe and home was expressed in this popular song, “Hari din to gelo, shondhe holo, par karo amare” (The day is done and the evening come, pray my God, take me over in the ferry). In 1770, a great famine broke out in rural eastern India resulting in huge deaths with one third to one fifth of the population of Bengal and Bihar dead (Shore 1812). W.W. Hunter suggested that out of 30 million population of Bengal, 10 million died (Hunter, Reprint 1975, p.45). Sugata Bose has divided the study of relationship between population and agrarian production into three phases: 1770 to 1860, 1860 to 1920 and 1920 to 1990 (Bose 1993, p.14) Here we will consider the first two phases in toto and the third phase upto 1947.

### 1.4.1 Demography: First Phase (1770-1860)

The Bengal famine of 1770 resulted in an unprecedented decline of population and loss of cultivation. In the western districts of Bengal the fear of *Bargi* raids from 1740 to 1751 resulted in scarcity of labour. However statistics show that even in the districts like Chittagong in the east which did not feel the impact of the famine, population was sparse and only 25% of the land was under agriculture (Firminger ed. 1926, Vol.1, 53; Serajuddin 1971, Ch.5). Many factors led to reduced money supply in the 1760s. At the same time the indigenous zamindars faced financial difficulties as the Company replaced them as creditors in the later 1750s and 1760s. The crop failures of 1768 and 1769 added to the difficulty of the rural population. Prof. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri has pointed out that reduced production did not justify the 'violent upswing' in prices which was caused when the Company entered the rural market as a big buyer. According to Prof. Chaudhuri approximately 120,000 maunds of grain were bought to feed the Company's army in Bengal and Bihar (Chaudhuri 1976, p. 294-95). Credit market in grain ceased to exist as the Company and their gomastas monopolised the grain market, complained Mohammad Reza Khan, the *Naib Diwan* and Richard Becher, the Resident at Mursidabad. The situation was not likely to improve, for the Company paid only Rs. 40,000 for relieving distress while it earned in 1768-69 approximately 8000 pounds more than their earnings in 1770-71 (Campbell ed. 1868, pp. 36, 60). Thus the Company's Government was to a large extent responsible for turning the 'dearth into a famine' (The phrase is from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of the Nations*, cited in Sinha, 1970, p.58). In June 1770, Richard Becher opined that about 6 inhabitants out of 16 had perished. The various reports on the tragedy were corroborated by Warren Hastings too. In 1778 the Amini Commission published a report which gave many graphic details of the famine's impact on population and production in the districts of western Bengal which were the hardest hit by the famine of 1770. In Birbhum which was the worst hit district of Bengal, huge areas of land were deserted till 1771-72 and the number of villages went down from 6,000 in 1765 to 4,500 in 1770-71 (Campbell ed. 1868, p.79). It is obvious that the small holding peasantry were the worst affected. The famine brought in its wake starvation and famine related diseases in every part of Bengal. Besides the peasantry, many other social groups also suffered like weavers, fishermen, boatmen and others.

However, in the decades after 1770 there was a marked improvement in population and agricultural production. By 1800 the population of Bengal was 27 million as compared

to 22 million in 1789 and by 1822 it was 37.6 million. Both H.T. Colebrooke and Francis Buchanan-Hamilton testified that the population had increased in the first few decades of the nineteenth century (The various population estimates are critically evaluated in Chaudhuri, 'Agricultural Growth' 1976, pp. 323-330). In this period of extensive growth in the Bengal presidency the increase of population was a major cause of increase in the area under cultivation. By an estimate the acreage under cultivation rose to 70 million in 1857 from 30 million in 1793 (W.N. Lees, Chatterjee et al 1982, p. 6). In the districts of western Bengal, short-distance migration by *paikasht raiyats* (temporary and migratory peasants) played an important role in the process of recovery in 1820. In these districts like Birbhum and Midnapur, tribals migrants formed the *paikasht raiyats*. In other places, middle class Hindu peasants and Muslim peasants took a major part in the reclamation of land. In this period the density of population in the districts also increased rapidly. As Ira Klein pointed out, the densities in Burdwan and Hooghly were twice of Belgium which was the most urbanised and densely populated country at that time (Klein, 1972, p.156). This density in population was sustained to some extent by switching to cashcrops like cotton, sugarcane, mulberry although indigo cultivation was mainly forced on the peasants. By the middle of the nineteenth century new intensive strategies for cultivation were being explored. Some open spaces in eastern Bengal were taken up as a challenge by the hardy Muslim and Namasudra peasants. But the main benefits of this extensive cultivation went to the zamindars who collected rent from the peasants and to the colonial state who appropriated the land revenue.

#### **1.4.2 Demography: Second Phase (1860-1920)**

The rural population of Bengal accounted for 93-94% of the total population of Bengal and it rose by 27.6% from 1891 to 1921 as per the Govt. of India Census of 1921. However, it is important to note that this rising trend was not for the whole of Bengal but only true in the eastern part of Bengal. In the western districts malaria took an epidemic form leading to an arrest in the population. Compared to the rest of India, although Bengal escaped the high famine mortality of the 1890s or the influenza epidemic of 1918-19 in other parts of India, the recurrent waves of malarial epidemics in west Bengal kept the population of Bengal in check. In 50 years from 1921, the population in the districts of west and central Bengal remained stagnant. Depopulation reduced acreage and yields and gross output in western Bengal declined between 1860 and 1920. In eastern Bengal, on the other hand, except for a brief period during the big cyclone of 1876 and the earthquake of 1897, the population continued to expand especially in the active delta where it

increased to approximately 60%. Sugata Bose has noted that by the second decade of the twentieth century all land that could be cultivated on the basis of the technology available was cultivated in eastern Bengal. In Noakhali every inch of land which was fit for cultivation was growing crops and in Dacca officers were compelled to think what land measures they could take to provide employment to the ever growing population (Bose 1993, p.27). From the 1870s cultivation of jute became important. From 1906-07, 10% to 20% of area under cultivation in east Bengal was taken over by jute production. In the first three decades of the twentieth century nearly a million peasants from east Bengal migrated to neighbouring Assam in search of jute lands. This migration signified that even the intensive margins were being intensified.

In the northern part of Bengal the social relations and demographic movement were different from east and west Bengal and need to be elaborated separately. After the repression of the Santhal revolt in 1855, tribal labour force from Bihar migrated to the western parts of North Bengal. The Santhals, Munda and Oraon tribal labour played an important role in clearing the forests and the tea plantations in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri also recruited immigrant labour as coolies on a large scale. The census of 1901 showed a sharp increase of immigrants from 143,922 in the last census to 188,233 in the new one, of which most were tea garden coolies from the Santhal Parganas and the Chhotanagpur.

### **1.4.3 Demography: Third Phase (1920-1947)**

This last phase of the demographic cycle in Bengal witnessed a decrease in per capita output in the context of surplus labour force. In this period the population of the western part of Bengal also came more or less at par with eastern Bengal due to a dramatic decline in mortality rates in the west after 1920. The general rise in the population of Bengal began in 1920s, increased in 1930s and there was a sharp decline in the 1940s due to the famine of 1943. According to Amartya Sen, the famine was responsible for excess mortality between 1943 and 1946 of up to 2.7 to 3 million people (Sen 1998, pp. 195-216). Paul Greenough pointed out that if the figure of average mortality in 1941-42 is taken into account the number of famine-related deaths rose between 3.5 to 3.8 million (Greenough 1982, pp. 299-315). Between 1920 and 1945, the population increased at an annual rate of 0.8% but the total agricultural output grew at a mere 0.3% per annum while the food crops output became stagnant. Burdwan, at the heart of rural west Bengal showed a negative output of – 1.08% while Chittagong in east Bengal recorded a negative output of – 0.7%. Even in areas of aggregate agricultural growth, there was decline in the per capita output.



The famine was different from earlier periods of starvation in terms of the degree and extent of casualties. Low productivity or lack of productivity does not in itself explain famine. The greater extent of death and devastation could be explained by the specific concurrence of events and policies between 1941 and 1943: boat denial, rice denial, cyclone, hoarding, mismanagement of the administration and the basic problem of entitlement to land.

Of about 1.714 million people who died in eastern Bengal due to famine or famine related diseases, most were landless agricultural labourers and the members of other vulnerable groups, including fishermen, artisans, and the permanently workless destitute and beggars. In the light of the particular suffering of the landless and the land-poor, the Bengal famine of 1943–44 has been rightly considered a ‘class famine’ (Iqbal 2010, p. 160-169). Some historians are of the opinion that the majority of the symptoms of rural decline relate to the activities of the ‘rich peasants’ in the countryside. The process of empowerment of the rich peasants began during the depression of the early 1930s, when the *bhadralok* started to leave rural areas and started engaging in non-agricultural activities. Amartya Sen argued that food was available but certain groups of people did not have access or entitlement to the food (Iqbal 2010, p.172).

According to Partha Chatterjee, “The traditional landlord-money lender was forced to move out and was replaced by new suppliers of credit from among the better-off section of the cultivators themselves. The usual dynamics of indebtedness leading to the transfer of small-peasant holdings was then set into full motion, helped on by the grant of full rights of transferability in raiyati lands in 1939 ... between 19 and 36 per cent of the total occupancy holdings in the districts of Noakhali, Tippera, Bogra, Dacca, Mymensingh and Pabna were sold between 1930 and 1938, much higher figures than any other district in Bengal in this period... most of these were sales from indebted small peasants to richer cultivators ... the famine of 1943 struck what was virtually the final blow”. (Chatterjee, 1997, pp. 61-4).

In the decades preceding the famine there was hardly any difference between the sharecroppers and landless wage labourers, who had emerged from the class of under-raiyats and sharecroppers. On the other hand, the majority of the ‘non-cultivating owners’ were well off enough to avoid selling or mortgaging their land. Some scholars have drawn attention to the role of the city and town dwellers in the making of the famine. Mahalanobis calculated that out of 710,000 acres of rice land changing hands during the famine only about 290,000 had been purchased back in the villages. This meant that roughly 420,000 acres of rice land passed on to what Mahalanobis called ‘non-cultivating owners’ residing

in urban areas. (P.C. Mahalanobis, 'The Bengal Famine', p. 313). It was not surprising therefore that during the famine, Cornelia Sorabji, India's pioneer female lawyer, asked the *bhadralok* to 'put their stores of Bengal rice at the service of the poor'. (Iqbal 2010, p.174). In the Bengal Delta, malaria, in concert with cholera, smallpox, diarrhoea and dysentery, took the greatest toll during and after the famine of 1943 (Maharatna 1993). The Bengal famine struck when the condition of public health in India was the worst in all Asia and public health in Bengal was the worst in India (Casey to Amery, 24 Feb 1944, p.2).

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## 1.5 Summary

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- Research on the ecology of plains, which is essential to understand the politics and society of a region is conspicuously missing.
- Maps of Bengal drawn throughout the colonial period, testify to a continuous process of land formation.
- Over time, approximately 40,000 million cubic feet of silt was deposited by the big rivers of Bengal to create enormous areas of new land, known as *chars* and *diaras*, a process which increased during the monsoons.
- At the same time, the ocean currents obstructed by the rising water levels deposited huge amounts of sand in the coastal regions of Bengal.
- In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the general eastward swing of the Ganges river system and the westerly flow of the Brahmaputra resulted in the increase of land in the east, while the erstwhile flourishing western part of Bengal suffered greatly.
- After a major earthquake in 1762 and floods in 1769-70 and 1786-88, in striking contrast to the active delta in eastern Bengal, a moribund delta emerged in western Bengal thus affecting the crop pattern..
- Besides the moribund delta there were two other ecological zones in Bengal which are worth mentioning. Firstly, a narrow area of elevated land in the western part of Bengal and secondly, the foothills of the Himalayas in north Bengal.
- Railways and other man-made factors also changed the ecology of Bengal.
- Ecology can help us to understand the social history of Bengal better.
- The relationship between agrarian production and demography of Bengal has been divided into three phases by Sugata Bose:

- The first phase (1770-1860) initially resulted in an unprecedented decline of population and loss of cultivation due to the Great Famine of 1770. However, in the decades after 1770 there was a marked improvement. However, the main benefits of this extensive cultivation went to the zamindars and the colonial state, not the peasants.
- In the second phase (1860-1920), there was a rise in rural population by 27.6% but in the eastern part of Bengal only while the population in the western region declined. From 1906-07, 10% to 20% of area under cultivation in east Bengal was taken over by jute production. This phase was also a period of migration of labour from east Bengal to Assam and from Bihar to North Bengal.
- In the third phase there was a general rise in the population of Bengal that began in 1920s, increased in 1930s and there was a sharp decline in the 1940s due to the famine of 1943 with its far-reaching consequences.

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## 1.6 Model Questions

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1. How did ecology help in the process of formation of an active and a passive delta in the eastern and western regions of Bengal respectively?
2. Do you think the ecology of Bengal can help us to understand the social history of Bengal better? Elucidate your answer.
3. Critically analyze the natural and man-made factors which affected the ecology of Bengal over the years.
4. Discuss the first two phases of relationship between agrarian production and demography as described by Sugata Bose.
5. How did the famines of 1770 and 1943 affect the agrarian socio-economic relations in Bengal?
6. What was the relationship between agrarian production and demography from 1920 to 1947 with special reference to the Great Famine of 1943?

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## 1.7 Suggested Readings

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Bentley, C. A. *Malaria and Agriculture in Bengal*. Calcutta, 1925, pp. 27-32.

Bentley, C.A. *The Times*, 13 October 1922, p. 11.

Bhattacharya, S. 'Eastern India', in Dharma Kumar (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. II. Cambridge, 1982, pp. 270–71.

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# **Module 2 : Transition towards Colonialism and Foundation of Colonial State**

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## **Unit 2 □ Consolidation of Colonial Rule**

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### *Structure*

#### **2.0 Objectives**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

#### **2.2 Consolidation of British Power after Plassey (1757)**

##### **2.2.1 Consolidation of British Political Power under Governor Clive**

##### **2.2.2 British position under Governor Vansittart**

#### **2.3 Nawab Mir Qasim and the East India Company (1760-1765)**

##### **2.3.1 Conflict between Mir Qasim and the Company**

##### **2.3.2 English Victory at the Battle of Buxar (1764) and their Gains**

##### **2.3.3 Significance of Battle of Buxar (1764)**

#### **2.4 Foundation of Colonial State: A Brief Analysis**

#### **2.5 Summary**

#### **2.6 Model Questions**

#### **2.7 Suggested Readings**

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## **2.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The new phase in the History of Bengal in the eighteenth century
- East India Company's gains in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey (1757)
- Consolidation of British power by Clive
- The overthrow of Mir Jafar and the British expectations from Mir Kasim
- The causes of conflict between Mir Qasim and the East India Company
- The Significance of the Battle of Buxar (1764)
- Reasons for foundation of the colonial state

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## 2.1 Introduction

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The history of Bengal witnessed a new phase from the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Delhi Sultans had tried to establish their authority over Bengal but the distance of Delhi from Bengal, the geographical terrain of Bengal and the traditional independent identity of Bengal had always encouraged the rulers of Bengal to break free from the central authority of Delhi and establish their independent rule. From the reign of Akbar to that of Aurangzeb, Bengal was under the Mughal rule. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, inspite of remaining legally under the Mughals, a new era of the independence was ushered into Bengal in the eighteenth century. In 1717, when Murshid Quli Khan (1700-1727) was appointed as the *Subedar* of Bengal, the *subah* became free for all practical purposes and thus began the rule of the independent Nawabs of Bengal. With the coming of the European merchants to India and Bengal, a new factor came into play. The English East India Company gradually took advantage of the political weakness and conspiracies in the court of the Bengal Nawabs and catapulted themselves to political power after defeating Nawab Siraj-ud-daula in the famous battle of Plassey on 23 June, 1757. The Company's servants gradually ceased to be outsiders. They became more involved in the Bengal administration as a political power. This process was completed by 1772 and involved momentous changes in the administration, economy and society of Bengal (Sinha, 1967, p. 22).

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## 2.2 Consolidation of British Power after Plassey (1757)

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Robert Clive placed Mir Jafar on the throne of Bengal after Plassey. But he did not trust Mir Jafar completely and formed alliances to keep a cheque and balance on the new nawab and ensure that the Company's trade privileges continued uninterrupted. As Verelst(member of Fort William Council) pointed out, the conflict with Siraj had taught the English a lesson, i.e. to render the Nawab ineffective from the further 'destruction of English' (Sinha, 1967, p. 24).

### 2.2.1 Consolidation of British Political Power under Governor Clive

Robert Clive's position in his own Company was strengthened in June 1858 when he was elected by the Calcutta Council as the Governor of Bengal which was ratified by the Company (1946. 4th edition., p. 362). He prevented Mir Jafar from ruining some notable

officials like Rai Durlabh, the Diwan and Ram Narayan, the Governor of Bihar and won over their allegiances. A clause prevented the Nawab from making any new fortifications near the Ganga, below the Hooghly; hand over French possessions to the English and to treat the enemies of the English as his own enemies thus preventing any future French intrigues with the nawabs. The Company also acquired the right to mint coins, a right earlier enjoyed by the house of Jagat Seth only. The Nawab was also forced to accept Scrafton, as the English resident stationed at his durbar in Murshidabad.

The dependence of the new Nawab on the English was chiefly due to his miserable financial position. After the battle of Plassey as Spear observed, “The financial bleeding of Bengal had begun” (Spear, 1979 Reprint). After winning the war the English army and navy were given huge sums of 275,000 pounds. Mir Jafar also gave the Company’s officials 22.5 million pounds. Clive alone was granted a personal jagir worth 34, 567 pounds. This has been referred to in history as the “Plassey plunder”.

The revolution of 1757 definitely established the military supremacy of the English in Bengal (Majumdar, 1946. 4th edition., p. 660). This was illustrated in many ways. For instance it was only with Clive’s intervention that Mir Jafar could suppress anti-state rebellions of Hazyr Ali Khan, Achal Singh of Purnea and Raja Ram Singh of Midnapur. When Ali Gauhar, later Shah Alam II, who was driven away from Delhi, decided to try his fortunes in Bengal in 1759, Mir Jafar was able to avert this crisis only with the military help of Clive. Similarly, when the Nawab’s army revolted due to non-payment of salaries and the Nawab could not curb the resulting discontentment, Clive came to his rescue.

Holwell accused Mir Jafar of disloyalty to the English inspite of their help, and for entering into anti-English intrigues with the Dutch at Murshidabad and Chinsura. In November 1759, Clive defeated the Dutch military forces despatched from Java at Bedara. Clive also dealt with the French with a strong hand. Taking advantage of the absence of Lally in Hyderabad, Clive sent Colonel Forde to defeat the French in the Northern Sarkars in 1759. Thus by 1760 both the Dutch and the French had lost their positions in Bengal to the English. In 1760 Clive returned to England, a powerful and wealthy man.

### **2.2.2 British position under Governor Vansittart**

The new Governor, Vansittart was right in believing that after 1757 there was a gradual transformation of the East India Company from a commercial body to a military and political body (Riyazu-S-Salatin, 2010). Vansittart kept up the financial pressure on Nawab



Mir Jafar. However, the latter was not interested in any more pay-off to the British since he was totally heart-broken by the recent death of his young son, his heir to the throne of Bengal. As a result, Vansittart entered into a secret pact with Mir Jafar's brother-in-law Mir Qasim promising the throne of Bengal to him in return for financial gains including the revenues of Burdwan, Mednipur and Chattagram. According to the secret pact, Vansittart and his Council received money and gifts to the tune of two lakh pounds from Mir Qasim. Thus Bengal was literally sold by the English again, this time to Mir Qasim while they used many false pretexts to dispose off their old benefactor, Mir Jafar from the *masnad* of Bengal as he was in no position to meet their growing greed any more. The forced replacement of Mir Jafar by Mir Qasim as the Nawab of Bengal was but a testimony of the fact that auctioning the Nawabship of Bengal to the highest bidder had become a profitable business for the East Indian Company.

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### **2.3 Nawab Mir Qasim and the East India Company: Deteriorating Relations (1760-1765)**

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Mir Qasim was able to resolve the financial crisis of the East India Company's authorities initially and the relations between them were cordial at first. Mir Qasim fulfilled his promises to Vansittart by granting the Company the right to collection of revenue of Burdwan, Midnapore and Chattagram. He also gave them a sizeable amount for use during the Carnatic wars. He allowed them to enforce their monopoly trade in saltpetre and purchase *chunam* or cement from Sylhet. However, in the course of time, the relations embittered leading to the overthrow of Mir Qasim at the Battle of Buxar in 1764.

Mir Qasim was a good administrator and was keen to reorganize his administrative bureaucracy, finances and military. For this purpose he did not hesitate to remove Ramnarayan from his seat of power in Bihar, although Ramnarayan had absolute support of the British since Clive's times. In order to put his finances in order, Mir Qasim wanted Ramnarayan to submit his accounts but the latter not only refused to do so but entered into an alliance with Major Carnac and Colonel Coote who as B.B. Chaudhri has pointed out made no secret of their anti-Nawab feelings (Sinha, 1967). The Nawab reorganized his army and put it to test by an extravagant plan of the conquest of Nepal. In his new army he employed Armenians and European generals to train his soldiers. He welcomed the Tatars, Afghans and Persians, known for their military skills to join his army, to make his army a fierce force to be reckoned with. The English watched these developments with

great suspicion. Verelst believed, “It was impossible that Meer Cossim should rest the foundation of his government upon our support. Self-defence taught him to look for independence” (Sinha, 1967).

### 2.3.1 The Issue of Inland Trade

Historians are engaged in debates regarding the cause of deterioration of relations, centering around two main arguments, namely, the question of private inland trade by the Company’s servants and the political ambitions of the Nawab to be free of foreign intervention. Ascribing to Verelest’s (member of Fort William Council) thoughts on this both Dodwell and Nandalal Chatterjee believe that the Nawab deliberately engaged into a conflict with the English because he wanted to be free of their control and drive them out of Bengal. However, Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri has refuted this view on the grounds that the question of liberation of Nawab did not arise because the English were not in total control of Bengal. But the Nawab was definitely against the private inland trade of the Company’s servants which was resulting in a loss of revenue to the Bengal treasury (Sinha, 1967).

Many historians believe that it was the question of inland trade and issues related to it that brought the matters to a head between Nawab Mir Qasim and the Company. The British had always claimed that the *farman* of 1717, granted to them by Emperor Farrukhsiyar, allowed them duty free trade in Bengal. However, Murshid Quli and all subsequent Nawabs had never accepted this interpretation of the *farman*. Yet the servants continued to trade duty free and emboldened by their victory in the Battle of Plassey they threw caution to the winds during the reign of Mir Jafar and their private trade continued to grow during the reign of Mir Qasim. (Sinha, 1967, p. 35). Vansittart had tried to control the private inland trade of the Company’s servants by proposing a policy of accepting the Nawab’s interpretation of *dastaks* (trading passes) and due payment of customs to him. However, his policy was never implemented since he was not able to get it endorsed by the Calcutta Council.

The local merchants were faced with unequal competition from the British officers indulging in private inland trade. The manufacturers and artisans were also adversely affected. The Nawab lost payment of custom duties to the tune of 25 lakh rupees annually. Local unrest loomed large and a solution to this increasing problem became imminent for Mir Qasim. He finally decided to charge no custom duty from the local merchants for a period of two years to bring them on par with the East India Company’s officers. This

move by the Nawab obviously frustrated the English who lost their profitable and advantageous position in the market and began questioning the Nawab's decision, insisting that only the Emperor of India had the right to waive off custom duties. B.B. Chaudhuri has shown that they started spreading rumours against Mir Qasim accusing him of stopping production of mulberry and cotton. Ultimately they were forced to appeal to the Nawab to withdraw his decision and offered to pay 2 ½ % of custom duty on salt. But the Nawab was in no mood to trust the British and accept any of their demands. In reality, in spite of knowing that their men were at fault, by failing to control their private trade, the East India Company had brought the matter to a head by not paying their financial dues to Mir Qasim and by creating unrest among other traders and the local population. In fact, Ellis, the chief of the English factory at Patna, asserted the privileges of the Company and tried to seize the city of Patna. However, he was defeated and his garrison was destroyed.

### **2.3.2 English Victory at the Battle of Buxar (1764) and their Gains**

Matters came to such a head that a war between the East India Company and Mir Qasim became inevitable and in 1763 the Company clashed with Mir Qasim. Although the Company's garrisons were numerically inferior, they defeated the Nawab repeatedly at Katwah, Murshidabad, Giria, Sooty, Udaynala and Monghyr. The latter fled to Awadh and formed an astute diplomatic alliance with the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-daula and more importantly with the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II, who had left Delhi and sought refuge in Awadh. The Confederacy met the Company's forces at Buxar in Bihar and were routed by the English General, Major Hector Munro at Buxar on 22 October, 1764. The *Badshah* abandoned his allies and concluded peace with the English. Nawab Shuja-ud-Daula fled to Rohilkhand, while Mir Qasim went into hiding and died in abject poverty in Kotwal near Delhi in May 1777.

Clive returned from England for a second term as Governor of Bengal and in 1765 he signed two treaties at Allahabad with Shuja-ud-Daula and Shah Alam II. As a result, the Emperor of India became a mere figurehead under English tutelage in the fort of Allahabad. The Company acquired the *Diwani* (right of revenue collection) of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa from Badshah Shah Alam. This acquisition put a foreign power in permanent and legal command of the richest province of India in lieu of Kara and Allahabad and an annual payment of 26 lakhs rupees only.

Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula was compelled to pay 50 lakhs rupees as compensation. Awadh with the exception of Kara and Allahabad was returned to him and the Company's garrisons were posted in the province apparently to provide protection to the Nawab from outside attacks. For all practical purposes Bengal became a buffer state, providing protection to newly acquired Bengal from Maratha incursions.

In Bengal Mir Jafar was placed on the throne again. He rewarded the Company officials by showering them with lavish gifts. He overturned Mir Qasim's order of blanket withdrawal of custom duties from all merchants, thus benefitting the Company's trading activities again. After his sudden death his son Najm-ud-Daula signed a treaty with the Company by which it was decided that the Company would collect the revenue as the new Diwan of Bengal through the Nawab's Naib-Subedar or Naib-Najim as the Company did not have the experience in these matters.

### **2.3.3 Significance of Battle of Buxar (1764)**

Peter Marshall has regarded the British victory in Buxar as a watershed in the history of Bengal with far-reaching consequences. In his words, "...the year 1765 when the East India Company became the Company's Diwan, has come to be seen as the dividing line between Mughal and the British Bengal" (Marshall, 1990. Reprint.). It has been said that Plassey was a cannonade but Buxar was a decisive battle. R.C. Majumdar et al in *An Advanced History of India* have pointed out "The engagements with Mir Qasim established the claims of the English as conquerors of Bengal in a much more real sense than did the battle of Plassey. They also reveal that the establishment of British rule in Bengal was due as much at least to the irresistible logic of facts as to the element of chance or accident" (Majumdar, 1946. 4th edition.) So far the British had received various rights and privileges for trading in Bengal but as the Diwan they were catapulted to the position of commanding an administrative section of Bengal. It was not possible for the Nawab to carry on administration by ignoring the Company who were in control of its revenues. Moreover, since the Nawab of Bengal was a virtual puppet in their hands, the British became the de facto rulers of the rich province of Bengal. The Battle of Buxar (1764) proved the military weakness of the Indian rulers including the Mughal Emperor. The English, on the other hand, established their military supremacy. Their ability to defeat the *Badshah* and make him their dependent brought them immense self-confidence and glory. The defeat of Nawab of Awadh and Shah Alam paved the way for the British political domination of northern India and ultimately the rest of India.

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## 2.4 Foundation of the Colonial State: A Brief Analysis

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In P.J. Marshall's opinion until the passage of the Pitt's India Act of 1784, the British did not have any planned or consistent policy for establishing a colonial state. He believes that the British government did not take any deliberate policy decisions for territorial expansion. The English only responded to the changing circumstances in eighteenth century Bengal and India following the political instability caused by the decline of the Mughal empire. In other words, the East India Company merely exploited the opportunities that came their way (Marshall P. J., 1989). C.A. Bayly argues that even after the 1780s, the driving force behind imperial expansion was not the trade interests but rather the fiscal and military needs of the English in India (Bayly, 1989). This theory of "sub-imperialism" cannot be completely rejected but it is also important to understand that East India Company's trade policy was always aggressive and involved armed trade. Both Charles II and James II purposefully promoted an aggressive commercial policy abroad to acquire wealth and independence for the English monarchs. This involved the use of English naval power for trading purposes as well as fortifying their bases and factories, justified in Philip Lawson's words as "the moral economy of English gunnery in these local markets" (Lawson, 1993). As Sekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out, the naval guns possessed by the English acted as a deterrent for the Indian rulers from attacking English trading activities in their local markets (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). The English military and naval prowess won important battles for them as we have seen in the case of Bengal where the foundation of the future British empire was laid.

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## 2.5 Summary

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- The history of Bengal witnessed a new phase from the beginning of the eighteenth century when the English catapulted themselves to political power after defeating Nawab Siraj-ud-daula in the famous battle of Plassey on 23 June, 1757.
- The East India Company benefitted economically as did Clive personally.
- British power was consolidated by Governor Clive and Nawab Mir Jafar became completely dependent on the Company militarily.
- By 1760 Clive suppressed the Dutch and the French in Bengal.

- After Clive, Vansittart kept up the financial pressure on Nawab Mir Jafar and when he could not meet the Company's greed, Mir Qasim was placed on the throne of Bengal.
- However, the relations between the new nawab, Mir Qasim and the Company deteriorated mainly because Mir Qasim was not willing to be subservient to British interests and tried to introduce many reforms not beneficial to the Company.
- Historians are engaged in debates regarding the cause of deterioration of relations, centering around two main arguments, namely, the question of private inland trade by the Company's servants and the political ambitions of the Nawab to be free of foreign intervention.
- The immediate cause of the battle of Buxar (1764) between the Nawab and the Company was the Nawab's decision to abolish the custom duty for all local merchants for a period of two years, thus bringing them on par with the East India Company's servants.
- Mir Qasim formed an astute diplomatic alliance with the Nawab of Awadh, Shuja-ud-daula and more importantly with the Mughal Emperor, Shah Alam II.
- The Confederacy met the Company's forces at Buxar in Bihar and were routed by the English General, Major Hector Munro at Buxar on 22 October, 1764.
- Shah Alam and Nawab of Awadh had to sign humiliating treaties with the English. The defeat of the Mughal emperor at the hands of the English proved to be a watershed in history.
- The Company received the Diwani of Bengal from the Mughal Emperor. Mir Qasim was replaced by Mir Jafar as the Nawab of Bengal.
- The defeat of Nawab of Awadh and Shah Alam paved the way for the British political domination of the rest of India.
- According to P.J. Marshall, the English only responded to the changing circumstances in eighteenth century Bengal and did not plan to establish a colonial state. However, there is no doubt that the Company had the full support of the British crown in following an aggressive trade policy which had expected consequences.

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## 2.6 Model Questions

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1. What gains were made by the English East India Company after the Battle of Plassey?
2. How did Clive benefit politically and financially after Plassey?
3. How did Clive try to keep Mir Jafar under his control after 1757?
4. How did the Dutch and the French lose their positions in Bengal to the British?
5. How did Vansittart keep up the financial pressure on Mir Jafar?
6. Do you think auctioning the Nawabship of Bengal to the highest bidder became a profitable business for the East India?
7. What causes led to the deterioration of relations between Mir Kasim and the Company?
8. Do you think the question of inland trade was central to the conflict between Mir Kasim and the Company?
9. Describe the events leading to the Battle of Buxar.
10. What did the Company gain by its treaties with Emperor Shah Alam and Shujaud Daula of Awadh?
11. How did the Company benefit by placing Mir Jafar on throne again?
12. What was the political significance of the Battle of Buxar?
13. Do you agree with P.J. Marshall's view that that the British did not plan for political power but merely exploited the opportunities that came their way in Bengal?

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## 2.7 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 3 : Colonialism and the Economy**

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### **Unit 3 □ Colonialism and Agrarian Social Structure**

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#### *Structure*

- 3.0 Objectives**
- 3.1 Introduction**
- 3.2 Dual System of Government**
- 3.3 Consequences of Grant of Diwani: Rural Economy of Bengal**
- 3.4 Company's Revenue Policy from 1772 to 1793**
  - 3.4.1 Panchshala *Ijara* system**
  - 3.4.2 *Eksala Bandobast***
  - 3.4.3 *Dashsala Bandobast***
  - 3.4.4 Permanent Settlement**
  - 3.4.5 *Patni* system**
  - 3.4.6 Adverse Effects of the Permanent System**
- 3.5 Summary**
- 3.6 Model Questions**
- 3.7 Suggested Readings**

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### **3.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The changes in Bengal social and economic structure after Grant of Diwani to the East India Company
- The complexities involved in the Dual system of Government
- Condition of Bengal peasants and zamindars
- The Bengal famine of 1770
- Company's changing land revenue policies from 1772 to 1773
- The Permanent Settlement and its adverse effects on Bengal's society and economy

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### 3.1 Introduction

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After the battle of Buxar (1764) the East India Company acquired the right of Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the Treaty of Allahabad on 12 August 1765 from Emperor Shah Alam II. The Company hoped to gain financially in its new role as revenue collector of an entire province. Since the Nizamat or right of maintenance of law and order was retained by the Nawab, there was an apparent division of power between the two wings of the provincial government, Nizamat and Diwani. However, in reality this was not the case. It was the Company which had the upperhand in matters related to both Diwani and Nizamat.

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### 3.2 Dual System of Government

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In the Mughal era, especially during Akbar's reign, the official work of the government was divided into two main categories Nizamat and Diwani. Diwani involved collection of revenue and matters related to diwani. The office of Nizamat was concerned with maintenance of law and order and faujdari issues. The division of power was rational and deliberate to ensure that power was not concentrated in one hand. However, the Dual system of government introduced in Bengal in 1765 was skewed from the beginning. The Nawab had the administrative responsibility but no power of implementation in the absence of requisite finances at his disposal. The Company, on the other hand, was in charge of the revenues but had no administrative responsibility towards the province. Although power was apparently divided, in reality it was concentrated in the Company's hands since the Nawab was reduced to a mere pensioner of the English after the Battle of Buxar (1764). The Nawab's Naib Subedar, Muhammad Reza Khan was also placed in charge of actual collection of revenue in Bengal by the Company's officials and owed allegiance to them instead of the Nawab Najm-ud-Daula. Out of the total revenue, the Company had to pay only twenty six lakhs to the Emperor and only thirty two lakhs (originally fifty three lakhs) to the Nawab for administrative expenses. The rest was pocketed by the Company. Clive favoured this system on two grounds. Firstly, by controlling the Nawab's purses the Company ensured that the Nawab would not be able to plot any conspiracy to oust them from Bengal. Secondly, the position of Diwan would be certainly advantageous in trading and investments in Bengal.

However, the Dual system of Government had many adverse effects. Dodwell was of the opinion that the Dual government was the creation of a foreign military with the help of merchants and they had no experience in matters of governing a province. He pointed out that the Company acquired the Diwani mainly to ensure that its trading interests were not challenged and it was not interested in establishing political authority as such. However, the Dual system of government definitely weakened the political power of the Nawab and this had far reaching consequences not only on the polity but also the society and economy of the province. Binay Bhushan Chowdhury (1976) has shown that there was a gradual decline in the revenue during the Dual system of government, this was because the Company had no control over the *zamindars*. To ensure maximum revenue collection the Company officials had to depend on Reza Khan so they kept pressurizing him and he in turn put pressure on the zamindars through the amils or revenue collectors. Ultimately, the brunt of the pressure fell on the poor peasants.

Firminger (1962) was of the opinion that the Company was not willing to take over administrative responsibility because it was ignorant of these matters as also the manner of revenue collection in the province. B. B. Chaudhuri has pointed out that lack of experience was not the only reason rather the officials were well aware that the conditions for revenue collection were not conducive and it might entail unnecessary complications for the British.

Peter Marshall (1987) has opined that the internal political crisis in Bengal was exploited by the British. If Plassey and the decline of Mir Jafar were the first and second steps in consolidation of English, the gain of Diwani was the third important foothold of British political expansion in Bengal.

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### **3.3 Consequences of Grant of Diwani: Rural Economy of Bengal**

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The grant of Diwani proved disastrous for the rural economy of Bengal. The Company was only interested in extracting the highest amount of revenue possible and it doubled the revenue demand. This put pressure on the entire system down to the lowest rung. To acquire maximum revenue Reza Khan gave a free hand to the Amils who in turn gave Ijara for revenue to the Zamindar who promised the highest revenue to the company. These Zamindars exploited the peasants at will to extract the maximum amount of revenue from

them. In May 1769, Richard Becher, the Company's Resident at Murshidabad admitted that the condition of the people of Bengal had worsened after the Company assumed the ownership of Diwani.

The grant of Diwani did not prove advantageous for the British also. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri has opined that the collection of revenue actually declined instead of increasing. He has shown that in the area under Company's direct control 24 Parganas (given by Mir Jafar) and Bardhanman, Mednipur and Chattagram (given by Mir Kasim) revenue collection was more than the area under the Dual government. As the defects of the system became apparent the Company decided to change its stance. In 1769 the company introduced the Supervisor system under its Governor-General Verelst.

This new system was introduced to curb the malpractices of the amils and to give relief to the peasants. The role of the supervisors was to report to the higher authorities about the economic condition of the land in the districts and the amount of revenue to be collected from the peasants. However, the supervisors who were ignorant about the system could not check the corruption of Reza Khan and the amils who summarily rejected this system. Though the Supervisor system was withdrawn it was an important step in the withdrawal of the Diwani.

The English collectors or Supervisors could not reform the system. Indian merchants, craftsmen and artisans suffered greatly due to unequal competition from the Company's servants who carried on with privileged trade and forced the local merchants to sell their raw materials at reduced prices leaving them with no profit and hand to mouth existence. Drain of wealth became a common feature and many economic historians believe that the huge capital investment in Industrial revolution was a result of the huge wealth that the British plundered from Bengal. As a result of the Dual system of government the Company had no responsibility towards the people of Bengal. The people suffered greatly due to the Famine of 1770 (1776 B.S.) known in Bengali as the 'Chhiatorer Manontar'. However, there was no let off in the revenues to be paid and relief measures undertaken were horribly inadequate. Approximately one third of the land of Bengal went uncultivated while one-third of the population perished in the famine and the resultant epidemic. William Hunter stated that half of the total number of peasants died.

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## 3.4 Company's Revenue Policy from 1772 to 1793

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The terrible famine of Bengal compelled the Company to reconsider its position and in 1772, the Court of Directors took over the direct control of Diwani in its own hands. Under the new Governor-General, Warren Hastings, the Company took direct responsibility of collection of revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The posts of Naib Diwan of Murshidabad and Patna were abolished and Md. Reza Khan and Shitab Roy were respectively removed from these positions. Five regional councils were set up in Kolkata, Dhaka, Murshidabad, Dinajpur and Bardhaman to manage affairs related to land revenue collection, usually with the help of a local diwan.

### 3.4.1 Panchshala *Ijara* system

A Committee of Circuit was formed from among the members of the Council. The function of this Committee was to give *ijara* or offer land on sale to the highest bidder of land revenue. This system was introduced in all the districts and was known as the *Ijara* system. This system was also called the *Panchshala* system since the land was auctioned for five years. Although in some areas the old local zamindars became *ijaradars* but there were other regions also where the zamindars lost out to the rich merchants from Calcutta, who as city people, had little knowledge about land management. All they cared about was extracting the highest amount of revenue from the peasants so as to pocket a profit after paying off the agreed amount of revenue to the Company. Subsequently this system created immense pressure of payment on the poor ryots and crime and violence became rampant in the rural society of Bengal. The old zamindars, who in spite of their exploitative tendencies, bore a paternal attitude towards the ryots and helped them in time of need were wiped out by this system, when they could not compete with the rich trading community from the city. According to an estimate, before the Famine of 1772, the amount of land revenue in the Nadia district was fixed at 8 lakhs but during the *Panchsala* system it rose to more than 10.5 lakhs. It is obvious that the *Ijara* system did not alleviate the miseries of the peasants but enhanced them further. One should understand that the only objective of the East India Company was to maximise its revenue collection and all experiments made by it in the land revenue system was guided by this motive only. As a result even big *Ijaradars* like Ramjai Singh and Iyasimuddin suffered greatly for not being able to pay their dues to the Company. The poor ryots suffered more than the rich ryots who took advantage of their position and struck a deal with the *Ijaradars* to reduce their revenues.

### 3.4.2 *Eksala Bandobast*

In 1776 the Amini Commission was set up to look into the matter of revenue collection from each district and in April next year Hastings terminated the agreement with the Ijaradars and entered into a one year settlement with the zamindars known as the *Eksala Bandobast*. However no attempt was made to estimate the capacity of the zamindars and the peasants to pay the revenue. They had to pay the revenue of the last three years also. Needless to say this system collapsed too and in 1781 all the provincial committees were abolished and a regional Committee of Revenue was formed. Sir John Shore, an important member of the Committee, proposed decentralisation of the land revenue system by appointing an European collector in each district. Ultimately none of the experiments worked and with its increasing cost of war and administrative duties the Company was in dire need of a system of land revenue which would meet all their needs.

### 3.4.3 *Dashsala Bandobast*

The Pitts India Act of 1784 proposed recommended a more permanent arrangement with the zamindars. The new Governor General Lord Cornwallis applied himself to the task of data collection from 1786 to 1789 and on this basis entered into a ten year settlement with the zamindars known as the *Dashsala Bandobast* or the Decennial Settlement, with the rider that the settlement may soon become permanent.

### 3.4.4 **Permanent Settlement**

A major step taken by Lord Cornwallis in the final settlement of land revenue was the Permanent Settlement. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay (2004) has opined that being a member of the landed aristocracy of Britain, Cornwallis himself believed that the zamindars were the rightful owners of the land. The Company's officials had for a long time been recommending to fix the 'jama' (amount of revenue) of the respective zamindars permanently. At a time of introduction of the *Panchshala* Settlement by Hastings there was a similar demand. Ranajit Guha (1963) has pointed out that it would be wrong to assume that the Permanent Settlement found preference due to the failure of earlier land revenue settlements introduced by the Company. He has emphasized the role of certain political and ideological influences. Philip Francis, first brought this issue to the political forum and insisted that the Company should enter into a settlement with the zamindars who were the actual owners of the land. The British Prime Minister, Pitt was also in agreement with Francis' views as was the head of the Company's Board of Control, Henry Dandas. Philip Francis derived his

understanding from Alexander Dow, the leading economist who propagated mercantilism. Dow believed that if the land revenue arrangement was settled permanently, it would be beneficial to agricultural production that in turn would lead to the growth of trade and commerce. Henry Pattullo, an advocate of the Physiocrat tradition also believed that private proprietorship of the land should be a permanent notion best suited to the advance of agriculture. Cornwallis entered into long debates and analytical discussions on the issue with James Grant and John Shore. Finally, the Decennial Settlement was replaced by a Permanent Settlement with the Zamindars in 1793.

Some historians opine that the Permanent Settlement was introduced to prevent political unrest and rebellion. Peter Marshall (1987) believes that the main aim was to create a class who would act as collaborators in Company's political rule. Many nationalist historians have also propounded this theory of Collaborators. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri (1982) has shown that Company was powerful enough to suppress the peasant revolts in Rangpur in 1783 and Birbhum in 1788-90. The chief motive behind introducing the Permanent Settlement according to Chaudhuri and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (1971) was the Company's foremost need to acquire a fixed and stable income from land revenue which it had not been able to achieve even after taking over the Diwani of the province. Company's officials believed that acceptance of the permanent rights of the zamindars on land would act as an incentive to them to increase agricultural production. Cornwallis hoped that the newly endowed zamindars would bring forest, fallow and uncultivated land under cultivation.

By the terms of the Permanent Settlement the zamindars were made the permanent owner of his land. He was required to pay the requisite amount of revenue to the East India Company before sunset of the scheduled date, failing which his land would be confiscated by the Company and auctioned to the highest bidder. This is infamous in history as the dreaded 'Sunset Law'. Between 1794 to 1797 there was no increase in agricultural production; as a result the zamindars could not pay the required land revenue. Due to the strict enforcement of the sunset law almost half of the old and powerful zamindars such as Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Nadia, Birbhum, Bishnupur, Chandradeep lost their lands which were auctioned by the Company. Historian, Narendra Krishna Sinha (1962) has blamed the unusually high rate of revenue for this debacle of the old and big zamindars. According to Binay Bhushan Chowdhury after the Permanent Settlement, between 1793-94 and 1806-07, maximum amount of land was lost by the old zamindars of Bengal and Bihar and

approximately 52% land of the traditional zamindars was confiscated in Orissa between 1804 to 1818.

James Mill (1817) had opined that the auctioned zamindari land was purchased by traders and merchants who became the new landed class and many historians have since then held this belief. It is true the family of Dhaka's Nawab, Mandal and Nandi family of Dinajpur, Pal Chowdhury family of Ranaghat, Prasanna Kumar Thakur's family of Kolkata and Joy Krishna Mukherjee's family of Uttarpara and others were associated with trade and commerce. However, Sirajul Islam has shown that most of the new zamindars were not merchants, rather they were the officials of the old zamindars or the Company, professionals or other zamindars. For instance, the Dwarkanath Tagore family, the Sinha family of Kandi, Nandi family of Kasimbazar, Deb family of Shobhabazar and others were originally in employment under the zamindars or were officials of the Company. They became zamindars after purchasing the land auctioned by the company. Many rich merchants like Ramdulal De, Radhamadhab Banerjee and the Seths and Basaks of Kolkata were not interested in purchasing zamindaris. In Orissa the land confiscated from the old zamindars was bought in auctions by officials in the revenue or legal departments who had a good idea about the cost of these landed properties.

### **3.4.5 *Patni* system**

In order to fulfill their revenue commitment to the Company, the zamindars developed a unique system, known as the *Patni* system. They divided their land and put middlemen in charge of the land. The main function of these middlemen was to collect revenue. The big zamindars entered into a similar contract with these *Patnidars* and accepted their permanent and hereditary right on the lands. The *Patnidars* were also allowed to divide their land further and put sub-*Patnidars* in charge of smaller portions of the land. The *Patni* system also acquired legal status in 1829. After having sub-let their lands, the Zamindars and *Patnidars* were free to reside in luxury in the city of Kolkata. This created the phenomenon of Absentee landlordism, with these landlords who were not interested either in the improvement and development of their respective lands or in the welfare of the ryots residing on them. The *Patni* system only succeeded in further exploiting the poor peasants.



### 3.4.6 Adverse Effects of the Permanent System

It is obvious that the Permanent System was not beneficial to the peasants who were exploited at will so that maximum revenue could be extracted from them. However, Bipan Chandra (1989) has pointed out that in spite of the poor condition of the peasants of the province, they were better off than the peasants under the Ryotwari settlement who had to pay an even higher rate of land revenue. Romesh Chunder Dutt (1874) has praised the Permanent Settlement on account of the fact no major famine took place after its introduction.

However, the demerits of the Permanent Settlement far exceed its advantages if any. Binay Bhushan Chaudhuri is of the opinion, by transforming the zamindars into mere subjects of the landlords, the English created a feudalistic system as existed in Europe. Pramath Chowdhury in his essay 'Rayoter kotha' has narrated the miserable condition of the Bengali ryots and has pointed out that at a time when the French peasants had ended the feudalistic regime in France, around the same time the peasants of Bengal had lost their rights to their land for ever. The *patni* system created a number of middlemen who exploited the peasants. According to an amendment in the permanent settlement in 1799, the ryots unable to pay their dues to the zamindars, were liable to be evicted by them. Historian Sirajul Islam has referred to this law as the first black law of India. The zamindars could evict the *khudakhast* or permanent ryots and replace them with *pahikast* or non-permanent ryots. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay has shown that the traditional rights of the peasants in the land were completely overlooked. Moreover, besides the burden of land revenue, a number of illegal taxes were imposed on them.

As a result of this exploitation the condition of the peasants grew worse. This disgruntlement resulted in peasant revolts during the colonial period. We will discuss this further in Module 6, Unit 15.

The East India company also did not benefit from this system. With the increase of agricultural production there was an increase in the land revenue. But this extra income was confiscated by the zamindars and the middle men. The company could not reap its benefits. Thus when the Company introduced the Ryotwari Settlement in Bombay and Madras, it tried to enter into direct settlement with the ryots instead of the landlords or middlemen. In the Mahalwari Settlement in the northwest also the Company entered into a direct settlement with the Mahal or the village.

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### 3.5 Summary

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- After the battle of Buxar (1764) the East India Company acquired the right of Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the Treaty of Allahabad on 12 August 1765 from Emperor Shah Alam II.
- The Company on the other hand was in charge of the revenues but had no administrative responsibility towards the province. The Nawab had the administrative responsibility but no power of implementation in the absence of requisite finances at his disposal.
- The Dual system of Government had many adverse affects.
- The grant of Diwani proved disastrous for the rural economy of Bengal. The Company was only interested in extracting the highest amount of revenue possible and it doubled the revenue demand. This put pressure on the entire system down to the lowest rung.
- The grant of Diwani did not prove advantageous for the British also.
- In 1769 the company was forced to introduce the Supervisor system though it was withdrawn too later.
- The people suffered greatly due to the Famine of 1770 (1776 B.S.) known in Bengali as the 'Chiatorer Manontar'. However, there was no let off in the revenues to be paid and relief measures undertaken were horribly inadequate.
- The terrible famine of Bengal compelled the Company to reconsider its position and in 1772 under the new Governor-General, Warren Hastings, the Company took direct responsibility of collection of revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.
- Under the *Panchshala* system, the land was auctioned for five years to the *ijaradars*. The Ijara system did not alleviate the miseries of the peasants but enhanced them further. Even big *Ijaradars* like Ramjai Singh and Iyasimuddin suffered greatly for not being able to pay their dues to the Company.

- In 1777, Hastings terminated the agreement with Ijaradars and entered into a one-year settlement with the zamindars known as the *Eksala Bandobast*. Needless to say, this system collapsed too.
- The new Governor General Lord Cornwallis applied himself to the task of data collection from 1786 to 1789 and on this basis entered into a ten-year settlement with the zamindars known as the *Dashsala Bandobast* or the Decennial Settlement with the rider that the settlement may soon become permanent.
- Historians have interpreted the reasons for introduction of the Permanent Settlement in different ways.
- By the terms of the Permanent Settlement the zamindars were made the permanent owner of his land. They were required to pay the requisite amount of revenue to the East India Company before sunset of the scheduled date failing which his land would be confiscated by the Company and auctioned to the highest bidder. This is infamous in history as the dreaded ‘Sunset Law’.
- In order to fulfill their revenue commitment to the Company, the zamindars developed a unique system, known as the *Patni* system. They divided their land and put middlemen in charge of the land.
- The demerits of the Permanent Settlement far exceed its advantages if any. Historians have discussed the adverse effects of the Permanent Settlement.

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### 3.6 Model Questions

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1. Explain the complexities of the Dual system of Government
2. What were the adverse effects of the Dual system of Government?
3. Was the Supervisor system able to resolve the problems relating to revenue collection?
4. Briefly discuss the Famine of 1770.
5. What was the Ijara system? Did it benefit the peasants and the old Zamindari class?

6. Discuss the Eksala and Dahsala Bandobast.
7. Why was the Permanent Settlement introduced? What were its terms?
8. How did the Permanent Settlement affect the society and economy of Bengal?
9. What was the Patni system?
10. Did the East India Company benefit from the Permanent Settlement?

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### 3.7 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 3 : Colonialism and the Economy**

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### **Unit 4 □ Colonialism, Trade and Industry**

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#### *Structure*

#### **4.0 Objectives**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

#### **4.2 The Drain of Wealth from Bengal**

#### **4.3 De-industrialization**

#### **4.4 Dearth of Capitalist Development in Bengal under Colonialism**

#### **4.5 Summary**

#### **4.6 Model Questions**

#### **4.7 Suggested Readings**

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### **4.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The meaning of Drain of Wealth
  - Historical context of Drain of Wealth from Bengal
  - Various means of Drain of Wealth
  - How Colonial rule led to deindustrialization
  - Historical debates on deindustrialization
  - Reasons for lack of capitalist development in Bengal under colonial rule
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### **4.1 Introduction**

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The colonial rule had an adverse effect on the trade and industry of Bengal as well as the rest of India. In this context the major issues of deliberation are Drain of wealth, Deindustrialization, and dearth of capitalist development in Bengal.

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## 4.2 The Drain of Wealth from Bengal

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A peculiar and salient feature of Bengal's economic history in the second half of the 18th century was the drain of wealth. Before the battle of Plassey both the Europeans and the Indians were engaged in a fair competitive trade and Commerce. However, after Plassey the balance of trade tipped in favour of English East India Company, completely leading to a drain of wealth from India beginning with Bengal. Drain of wealth can be described as the use of political power to extract wealth from the colony and send it abroad, in this case to Britain instead of using it for the development of Bengal and later India as a whole.

The drain of wealth started from Bengal in 1757 by two means: firstly, through the investments of the Company. Before the Company's victory at Plassey, its officials used to get bullion from England. However, after Plassey they acquired abundant enough wealth and did not require bullion from the mother country for their investments. The Company purchased lots of goods from the revenue they confiscated from Bengal and send it to England. However, no wealth from England was send to Bengal. James Grant tried to justify this drain of wealth by pointing out that Bengal sent *nazrana* to the Mughal emperor traditionally. As this role was taken over by the Company, it had full right to the wealth of Bengal. One cannot accept James Grant's logic because he himself has admitted that no wealth was sent to Delhi between 1746 and 1765. Rather bullion was sent from Bengal to Bombay and Madras for Company's trade and in the 1760s, 24 lakh bullion was sent to China.

The second means of drain of wealth was via the private servants of the Company. As king-makers of Bengal the company earned plenty wealth, twice from Mir Jafar and once from Mir Qasim before and after the battles of Plassey and Buxar respectively. According to estimates the Company acquired approximately 5,00,00,000 in this manner. Clive himself acquired huge sums of money from the nawabs.

By abusing the *dastak* for their private trade, the Company's servants literally plundered Bengal. This was one of the main issues of contest between the company and the nawab especially Siraj-ud-Daula and Mir Qasim. The English residence of Murshidabad. Sykes earned 12 to 13,00,000 in two years by indulging in private trade. At the time of Hastings impeachment in England the main accusation against him was granting contracts to his personal favourites and thus acquiring personal wealth by granting military and non-military contracts as he willed. The servants of the Company also acquired large amounts

of illegal wealth by forcing the poor peasants and artisans to sell their products 20 to 30% below the market value.

The Company's servants also devised innovative methods to send this wealth home. Many of them converted this wealth to diamonds which were purchased from Delhi and South India. It was easy to ship diamonds stealthily growing without drawing much attention. Another way of sending this wealth to England was by purchasing Armenian and French Bills of Exchange.

The Christian missionaries of Sreerampur, Raja Ram Mohan Roy and others alerted the Company of the ongoing drain of wealth. Brooks Adams has referred to the Plassey plunder. Later 'Drain of wealth' which affected the entire country was explained and criticised by Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chunder Dutt in their famous works on this theme, namely, *Poverty and Un British Rule in India* (1901) and *Economic History of India* (1904) respectively.

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### 4.3 De-industrialization

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As in England there was a decline of traditional Indian artisan products once the use of machine became rampant with the Industrial revolution. However, in England this was counterbalanced by massive rise in employment and income in the factories. On the other hand, there was no such growth in Indian industries, income or employment till 1850s and 60s and the growth when it came was negligible compared to the rapid growth of industries in England since the Industrial Revolution. The Indian handicrafts suffered in a major way due to the collapse of local demand by courtiers and princes who lost their status and money to the British. The external market on which the Indian indigenous artisans depended also felt sharply. The demand for the luxurious high-quality silk and cotton handicrafts of Dhaka and Murshidabad used by the urban rich was badly hit. Although the village crafts survived till the spread of railways in the rest of India, in eastern India the village artisans were also badly affected, a price they paid for the consolidation of British rule in Bengal first. However, the traditional village *jajmani* system by which the artisans used to supply their products to peasants in lieu of harvest continued to prevail in the interior villages of Bengal.

Morris D. Morris (1968) has claimed that this theory of deindustrialization of India is a myth. According to him, there was a huge demand for Indian textiles inspite of the large imports from Lancashire. However, this view has been challenged by Tapan Raychaudhuri



(1968), Bipan Chandra (1968) and others. Toru Matsui has rejected Morris' interpretation by arguing that the decline of cost in spinning and weaving greatly benefitted the Lancashire manufacturers only. The Indian weavers might have gained somewhat from the use of cheaper yarn imports but the weaving costs did not decrease. Rather they had to face unequal competition from cheap imported cloth. There is no doubt that deindustrialization did take place as proved by the British official records like regional industrial survey, Census and Famine reports. Nationalist economic historians have insisted that the sharp decline in export of Indian handicrafts and increase of Lancashire imports are proof enough that Bengal and India suffered deindustrialization. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal was in part an attempt to revive many of these traditional crafts. Amiya Bagchi (1976) has in his research shown that in Bihar there was a big decline in the population dependent on industries from 18% to 8%. Similarly, the number of cotton spinners and weavers fell hugely.

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#### **4.4 Dearth of Capitalist Development in Bengal under Colonialism**

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The general dearth of capitalist development in Bengal is conspicuous by its absence during colonial rule. It has been often pointed out that this was due to the lack of interest shown by the Bengali bhadralok class towards industry and trade. But then it cannot be denied that the Bengali upper class were actively involved in business till 1840s. Traditionally many historians have maintained that the Permanent settlement attracted indigenous urban capital to land. However, this theory does not hold ground in light of recent researches.

In reality the colonial state promoted European enterprise at the cost of Indian entrepreneurs. For example, huge tracts of land was allotted to White tea planters in Assam by the British government. The Railway contracts were also granted to the Europeans under the guarantee system. Before the First World War there were only two Indian banks while the money market was chiefly controlled by the Europeans. This White monopoly was particularly pronounced in eastern India where the easy availability of cotton, indigo, tea etc. was much sought after by the European capitalists. The traditional business communities like the Marwaris expanded into eastern India in the second half of the nineteenth century but here too they merely acted as *baniyas* of the big British firms like Shaw Wallace, Andrew Yule etc. Compared to Maharashtra and Gujarat, indigenous

enterprise in Eastern India could not grow after the 1840s due to the establishment and penetration of colonial rule especially in Bengal where it had its roots.

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## 4.5 Summary

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- A peculiar and salient feature of Bengal's economic history in the second half of the 18th century was the drain of wealth.
- Drain of wealth can be described as the use of political power to extract wealth from the colony and send it abroad.
- The drain of wealth started from Bengal in 1757 by two means. Firstly, through the investments of the Company. The second means of drain of wealth was via the private servants of the company.
- The Indian handicrafts suffered in a major way due to the collapse of local demand by courtiers and princes who lost their status and money to the British. The external market on which the Indian indigenous artisans depended also felt sharply.
- Morris D. Morris (1968) has claimed that this theory of deindustrialization of India is a myth. However, this view has been challenged by Tapan Raychaudhuri (1968), Bipan Chandra (1968), Toru Matsui and others.
- The general dearth of capitalist development in Bengal is conspicuous by its absence during colonial rule. This is because the colonial state promoted European enterprise at the cost of Indian entrepreneurs.

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## 4.6 Model Questions

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1. How can you describe 'Drain of Wealth'?
2. How did drain of wealth start from Bengal?
3. Why did the Company not require bullion from England after Plassey?
4. How did the Company's officers plunder Bengal?
5. What innovative methods were devised by the Company's servants to send their wealth home?

6. Why did Indian handicrafts decline under colonial Rule?
7. Do you agree with Morris D. Morris that the theory of deindustrialization is a myth? Give reasons for your answer.
8. What were the causes of the lack of capitalist development in Bengal under colonialism?

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## 4.7 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 4 : Social and Cultural Development**

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### **Unit 5 □ The Spread of English Education**

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#### *Structure*

- 5.0 Objectives**
- 5.1 Introduction**
- 5.2 Initial lack of Company's interest in spread of education**
- 5.3 Initial attempts to promote education**
  - 5.3.1 Efforts of the Christian Missionaries**
  - 5.3.2 Contribution of individuals**
- 5.4 Change in the Role of the Colonial Government**
  - 5.4.1 Charter Act of 1831**
  - 5.4.2 Orientalist-Anglicist controversy**
  - 5.4.3 Macaulay's Minute (1835)**
  - 5.4.4 Wood's Despatch (1854)**
  - 5.4.5 Hunter Commission (1882)**
- 5.5 Disadvantages of western education**
- 5.6 Summary**
- 5.7 Model Questions**
- 5.8 Suggested Readings**

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### **5.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The reason for the initial reluctance of the East India Company's Government to promote education among Indians
- The role played by Christian missionaries to spread education in Bengal
- The role played by private individuals to set up schools and colleges in Bengal

- The intervention of the colonial government and its consequences in Bengal with special reference to the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy

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## 5.1 Introduction

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When the East India Company established their rule in Bengal, a type of traditional educational system was in vogue. In the *tols*, *pathshalas* which operated at the local levels the Brahmin pundits provided education in Hindu religion, philosophy, logic etc. chiefly to students of upper castes in the medium of Sanskrit. The *maktabs*, *madrasas* etc. offered education to Muslim students and in this case also education was based on Islamic law and rituals. Besides the Muslim Ulemas, many Hindu teachers who had knowledge of Arabic and Persian were also employed in the *maktabs* etc.

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## 5.2 Initial lack of Company's interest in spread of education

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In spite of obtaining political power and executing land revenue settlements, the authorities of East India Company took no interest in the prevailing educational system. There were chiefly two reasons for this indifferent attitude. Firstly, the Company considered any spending on the education sector as waste of their money. Secondly, a group of Englishmen maintained that any attempt by the Company to interfere in the existing traditional system would be looked upon by suspicion by the Indian religious authorities who controlled learning and would lead to a revolt against the foreigners.

As a result, the fund for education was dependent on donations by the local zamindars. Most of the children were deprived of higher studies if they could not pay the requisite fees to the school masters. Although the children received a smattering of education in this traditional system it was not in keeping with the changes of the growing modern world. The number of females taught in the schools was negligible compared to the male students.

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## 5.3 Initial attempts to promote education in Bengal

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Some attempts were however made by the British in Bengal to promote education though it was not for the Indians. Governor-General, Warren Hastings, for one, believed that in order to administer properly it was first essential for the British to educate. It was with this purpose that in 1781 he founded a *madrasa* in Calcutta. Further, with his support, Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society in 1784.

In 1800, Governor-General Lord Wellesley established the Fort William College so that the newly recruited civil servants could gain knowledge about Indian law, language, customs and history etc. European scholars like William Carey, John Gilchrist, H.Colebrooke taught in the college along with Indian scholars like Mrityunjay Vidyalankar, Srihari Vidyaratna and others. Although David Kopf has referred to the college as the ‘Oxford of the East’ it could not operate very long. However, the scholars brought to light old Hindu culture and civilization which found much appreciation among the Orientalists. Bengali grammar and literature also developed under these scholars.

### **5.3.1 Efforts of the Christian Missionaries**

In spite of opposition from the East India Company’s Government, the Christian missionaries played a leading role in the spread of education in Bengal. Although the main objective of the Evangelists was the spread of Christianity and proselytization in order to create a conducive atmosphere for the same, the missionaries established a number of educational institutions to promote learning among the locals. In 1800 William Carey with the support of Joshua Marshman and William Ward founded the Baptist Mission in the Dutch colony of Serampore. This mission set up a number of elementary schools and used their printing press to publish books in the Bengali language. In 1818 an English school was also set up by the Mission, which is the present Serampore College. Carey also translated the *Bible* in the vernacular and at the same time translated the *Ramayana* into English. A *Grammar of the Bengal Language* written by Nathaniel B. Halhead was also printed by the missionaries.

The first Bishop of Calcutta, Middleton, established the Bishop College at Shibpur. The Scottish missionary Alexander Duff emphasized the significance of western science and rationality to attack the superstitions prevalent in the contemporary Hindu society. The General Assemblies Institution established by him in 1835 has taken the form of the present Scottish College. In the same year the St.Xaviers College was started by the Jesuit missionaries.

### **5.3.2 Contribution of Individuals**

Private efforts to support education were also made at the initial stage by individuals influenced by Bentham’s utilitarianism. In this context English schools were set up at

Bhawanipore and Chinsura in 1800 and 1814 respectively. Many famous philanthropists and scholars, Indians and Europeans like Radhakanta Deb, Dwarkanath Tagore, Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay, David Hare, Hyde East played a leading role in the establishment of the Hindu College (1817), present-day Presidency University. Raja Rammohan Roy was also associated with the establishment of the college in the initial stages. Radhakanta Deb and David Hare founded the Calcutta Schoolbook Society in 1817 to open up new schools and provide quality text books to the students. David Hare also set up the Potoldanga Academy/Hare School. Gourmohan Addy is credited with establishment of the Oriental Seminary school in 1828.

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## **5.4 Change in the Role of the Colonial Government**

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Meanwhile, there was a marked change in the Company's hitherto indifferent attitude towards education. There were probably many reasons for a positive shift in the Company's policy. Historians have opined that with the expansion of Company's territories many officials were required to help the British administrators especially in the departments of revenue, law and order. Since it was not possible to keep on appointing highly paid English civil servants, an increasing need was felt for educated English speaking Indians, who could do the same work at lower wages as well as act as a liaison between the British rulers and the illiterate Indian masses.

Charles Grant, a high ranking official of the Company, did not think very highly of contemporary Indian society and was probably the first to suggest in his book, written in 1792, that only education and primarily English education could uplift the Indians. He also followed up this matter with the members of House of Commons in London.

Moreover, public sympathy in London for the missionaries and the acknowledgement of their work was also growing with time. The British merchants and industrialists also felt that greater number of English educated Indians would ensure a permanent market for British manufactures.

### **5.4.1 Charter Act of 1813**

The Charter Act of 1813 passed by the Parliament addressed these issues. The Crown's Sovereignty over the Company was asserted. The missionaries were allowed to



propagate Christianity. It was stated that the British authorities were obliged to promote Indian people's "interests and happiness" and "religious and moral improvement" and after meeting other needs could set aside an annual sum of one lakh rupees for educational purposes. However, it was only ten years later in 1823 that one lakh was allotted by the Company for this purpose and a Committee of Public Instruction was created to disburse the amount. This was the beginning of a controversy between the Orientalists and the Anglicists.

### **5.4.2 Orientalist-Anglicist controversy**

Two famous Orientalist scholars, H.H. Wilson and A.H.T. Prinsep were appointed as members of the Committee of Public Instruction. Another member, Holt Mackenzie proposed the establishment of a Sanskrit College. Thus, the members wanted to use the funds to promote oriental learning and philosophy.

However, the Anglicists were not in favour of promoting oriental learning. Some of them like Rammohan Roy believed that Sanskrit learning would not be able to lead India out of the darkness of socio-religious superstitions and rigid regressive thinking. Rammohan wrote a letter to Lord Amherst in 1823, recommending in strong terms, the promotion of western science and knowledge to liberate Indian society from centuries of conservative and inhuman customs.

### **5.4.3 Macaulay's Minute (1835)**

Governor-General Lord William Bentinck was a believer in the utilitarian philosophy. He wanted to promote welfare of Indians by exposing them to English education and western rational thinking and science. He appointed Thomas Babington Macaulay, a strong advocate of western education as the head of the Committee of Public Instruction. Many points raised by the Anglicists were noteworthy but Macaulay famously considered the entire collection of Sanskrit and Arabic literature and learning as no match to one bookshelf on English literature. In his famous Minute of 1835, he advocated the creation of a class of Indians who would be Indian only in colour and blood but European in thought and attitude. On 7 March, 1835 Macaulay's proposal was officially accepted and it was resolved that the English literature and western science would be taught to the Indians through the medium of English.

The amount set aside for educational purposes was inadequate for mass education. Therefore, Bentinck suggested that in keeping with the 'filtration theory', education must be first provided to the upper and middle class so that they could percolate the same to the Indian masses.

#### **5.4.4 Wood's Despatch (1854)**

Most significantly, Wood's Despatch of 1854 proclaimed the determination of the colonial state to directly ensure the spread of education. Until this time, there had been little direct effort by the colonial state to establish schools on a large scale and create an integrated system of instruction. It had relied mostly on existing institutions, or those established by other parties to carry on the actual task of instruction. The connections between classes were not strong enough to ensure that knowledge would filter down (Viswanathan, 1990).

Wood's Despatch proposed to commit government funds to support higher education in English and primary education in the vernacular. At both of these levels, there were also efforts now made to centralize authority. Centralization was most directly obvious in the creation of a bureaucratic structure for administration. A Department of Public Instruction was established in each of the five provinces. For the first time, the village *pathshala* was to teach a systematic curriculum and the need to making the teacher in the village *pathshala* a paid employee were also envisaged. However, in order to be eligible for this, he would have to submit to a system of regular inspections. A system of Normal schools was established to train teachers to instruct in the new curriculum. At the level of higher education, a university system was established after the Universities Act of 1857. Colleges were now to be affiliated to various universities which were established in the Presidency towns.

#### **5.4.5 Hunter Commission (1882)**

In many ways, the proposals of Wood's Despatch set a broad direction, without actually ensuring a wider spread of education. The Hunter Commission, set up in 1882, consolidated the direction of colonial policy established by Wood's Despatch. The Hunter Commission introduced the system of centralized examinations for primary schools. It was in the aftermath of the Hunter Commission that a large number of schools, colleges and institutions of higher learning emerged especially private ones. The Hunter Commission also

took note of groups that were educationally backward. In particular, it mentioned the fact that more emphasis needed to be placed upon education of Muslims and women.

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## 5.5 Disadvantages of Western Education

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Western system of education in the medium of English did not spread to the rural areas and the common man did not reap any benefits from it. It was limited to the cities and the upper classes. As pointed out by Sumit Sarkar, “the alienating and divisive effects of education through a foreign medium were evident enough from the beginning, and have persisted right up to the present day”. However, western education was significant in the impact it had on Indian nationalist thinking and social reform movements led by the Indian educated classes.

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## 5.6 Summary

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- In spite of obtaining political power and executing land revenue settlements, the authorities of East India Company took no interest in the prevailing educational system.
- In 1800 Governor-General Lord Wellesley established the Fort William College so that the newly recruited civil servants could gain knowledge about Indian law, language, customs and history.
- In spite of opposition from the East India Company’s Government, the Christian missionaries played a leading role in the spread of education in Bengal.
- Many famous philanthropists and scholars, Indians and Europeans, played a leading role in the establishment of schools and colleges in Bengal.
- Charter Act (1813) stated that the British authorities were obliged to promote Indian people’s “interests and happiness” and “religious and moral improvement” and after meeting other needs could set aside an annual sum of one lakh rupees for educational purposes.

- In the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy, the Anglicists were not in favour of promoting oriental learning.
- Macaulay's famous Minute of 1835 advocated the creation of a class of Indians who would be Indian only in colour and blood but European in thought and attitude.
- Bentinck suggested that in keeping with the 'filtration theory', education must be first provided to the upper and middle class so that they could percolate the same to the Indian masses.
- Wood's Despatch proclaimed the determination of the colonial state to directly ensure the spread of education.
- The Hunter Commission, set up in 1882, consolidated the direction of colonial policy established by Wood's Despatch.
- Western system of education in the medium of English did not spread to the rural areas and the common man did not reap any benefits

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## 5.7 Model Questions

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1. What was the traditional education system in Bengal when the English East India Company began its rule there?
2. What were the chief reasons for East India Company, initial indifference towards spread of education?
3. Why did Governor-General Lord Wellesley establish the Fort William College?
4. Name some Indian scholars who taught in Fort William College.
5. Who established the Baptist missionary in Serampore? What were the significant activities of this Mission?
6. Which college was started by the Jesuit missionaries in Bengal?
7. Who was Charles Grant?
8. Discuss the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy.
9. What was the importance of Wood's Despatch in spread of education?

10. What was the famous Macaulay Minute of 1835?
11. What was the basic idea of the 'filtration theory'?
12. Did Hunter Commission ensure a wider spread of education?
13. What were the disadvantages of the western system of education?

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## **Module 4 : Social and Cultural Development**

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### **Unit 6 □ The Rise of the Middle Class**

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#### *Structure*

- 6.0 Objectives**
  - 6.1 Introduction**
  - 6.2 Indian Middle Class Political Advantage**
  - 6.3 British denunciation of Indian Middle Class**
  - 6.4 Upper Caste Status of Middle Class?**
  - 6.5 Socio-economic Roots of Middle Class in Bengal**
  - 6.6 Summary**
  - 6.7 Model Questions**
  - 6.8 Suggested Readings**
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### **6.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The definition of ‘middle class’ in the colonial era
  - How the early nationalists used the term to their advantage
  - Why the British denounced the intelligentsia as a microscopic minority
  - The term ‘elite’ used for the middle class is debatable
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### **6.1 Introduction**

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In its most general form, the concept of “westernized middle class” is simple enough. It refers to Indians who, acquired an education based on English language and western culture during the colonial era. This trend was especially visible since the 1820s and 1830s. The concept itself has an illustrious pedigree, as it can be traced to Thomas Babington Macaulay’s famous Minute of Education (1835) and the hopes expressed there that,

through a diffusion throughout India of English language and culture, “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect” would come into being. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the period of the rising nationalist movement, theorists of the movement, like Surendranath Banerjea, popularised the concept of a “new middle class” which was created by the impact of western culture on Indian society and which was the carrier of “enlightenment, freedom, progress and prosperity”.

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## **6.2 Indian Middle Class Political Advantage**

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Sumit Sarkar has pointed out how the use of the term ‘middle class’ served the interest of the first Indian nationalists especially in Bengal. The Indian members of the modern middle class, the westernized Indians could now claim, that like their English counterpart, and in true English political tradition, they too were entitled to take a growing role in the government of their own country, following the path already taken by the white dominions. J.R. McLane has pointed out the number of those studying English went up rapidly from 298,000 in 1887 to 505,000 in 1907.

English education gave the middle class a unique capacity to establish contacts on a country-wide scale. English educated government employees, lawyers, teachers, journalists or doctors were able to work outside their home regions. This also allowed them to forge political alliances with other communities and nationalists all over India. However, regional disparities in English education also caused provincial tensions among the Indian middle class since English became the sole path to good jobs.

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## **6.3 British denunciation of Indian Middle Class**

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This emerging social group enjoyed an importance far in excess of its size. Only 1 per cent were English literate in 1911. No wonder the British denounced them as a ‘microscopic minority’. The British rulers scorned the westernized Indians and pointed out that far from being a new class, they actually formed an elite group whose high caste members traditionally filled the bureaucracies of existing Indian states. Besides the British claimed that after all the westernized Indians were not as westernized as they made out themselves to be and anyway, certainly not westernized enough to be able to wield power



according to true British-standards of fairness and justice. At the same time and rather contradictorily the British rulers asserted that the westernized Indians, being westernized had cut themselves out from the traditional society, namely from “true” India. This meant that they represented only themselves, thus in the words of Viceroy Lord Dufferin the westernized middle class formed “a microscopic minority”.

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## 6.4 Upper Caste Status of Middle Class?

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Early works by Anil Seal and John Broomfield considered the English-educated as ‘elite groups’ who belonged to the upper-caste status. It is certainly true that the traditional ‘literary’ caste tended to take more easily to the new education. In 1883-84, 84.7 per cent students of Hindu College came from the three *bhadralok* castes of Brahman, Kayastha or Vaidya. However, the value of this whole approach seems untenable today. Later in 1973, Seal admitted that in making such generalizations the official categories had been taken into account which did not always give the true picture of the Raj. For example, not all Bengali brahmans like the brahman cook or *purohit*, could be considered as *bhadralok* by any means.

The term ‘elite’ itself is debatable in this context, given the Whites were the only genuine and truly exclusive elite in colonial India. The English educated Bengali’s worldview was rarely one of intentional protection of their privileges, whether educational or caste-based, as one might expect of a true elite, and as one observes with the Englishmen in India. Rather, some of them made significant personal sacrifices in social reform campaigns that were often directed directly or indirectly at upper caste privileges, and many more tried their best to expand education by founding private schools and universities in their hometowns or villages. With the government’s budget being slashed in 1882 for higher education, private endeavour was the primary means by which education spread in India. Between 1881 and 1882, the number of private unaided colleges rose from 11 to 53.

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## 6.5 Socio-economic Roots of Middle Class in Bengal

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A study of the socio-economic roots of the intelligentsia and the emergence of the middle class is significant. It reveals a marked contrast between growing awareness of bourgeois ideals derived from contemporary developments in the West, and a predominantly non-bourgeois social base. Sumit Sarkar comments that this contrast was perhaps the clearest in Bengal. The Bengali intelligentsia of the nineteenth century cultivated the self-image of *madhyabritta-sreni* or the 'middle class', placed below the zamindars but above the toilers. The Bengali middle class found its model in the European 'middle class'. They were inspired to learn that by means of western education, its rational thought and scientific knowledge, Europe had emerged from the dark medieval ages and heralded the modern times through movements such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and democratic revolution or reform.

The social roots of the Bengali middle class lay not in industry or trade, for these were increasingly controlled by British managing agency firms and their Marwari subordinates. Rather their roots lay in government service or the professions of law, education, journalism and medicine. They often had some connection with land in the shape of the intermediary tenures which were rapidly proliferating in Permanent Settlement Bengal. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 9 December 1869, vividly expressed this dualism: 'Middle class' (*madyabritta*) people are always considered the most useful group in any society. Our country's welfare depends to a large extent on this class. If there is ever to be a social or any other revolution in this country, it will be by the middle class. All the beneficial institutions or activities that we see in our country today has been started by this class...the livelihood of the middle class eople comes from landed property and the services...middle class people are often, 'gantidars' (intermediate tenure).

It must be noted that the Bengali intelligentsia, the *bhadralok* were not averse to business or trade. In fact middle class journals throughout the nineteenth century were constantly urging their readers to take to independent industry or trade. However, the link with a semi-feudal land system did inhibit, radical thought and action when it came to agrarian issues. This limitation as pointed out by Sumit Sarkar later had momentous consequence in Bengal where there was a large Muslim peasant population.

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## 6.6 Summary

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- The Indian members of the modern middle class claimed that like their English counterpart, they too were entitled to take a growing role in the government of their own country.
- The concept of “westernized middle class” is simple enough. It refers to Indians who, acquired an education based on English language and western culture during the colonial era.
- English education gave the middle class a unique capacity to establish contacts on a country-wide scale.
- The British rulers scorned the westernized Indians and pointed out that far from being a new class, they actually formed a small elite group in India’s large population.
- The term ‘elite’ used for the middle class is debatable given the Whites were the only genuine and truly exclusive elite in colonial India.
- The roots of the middle class lay in government service or the professions of law, education, journalism and medicine. They often had some connection with land which influenced their politics.

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## 6.7 Model Questions

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1. How will you define the westernized middle class in the colonial era?
2. Which Indian nationalist popularized the concept of the ‘middle class’?
3. How did the term middle class serve the advantage of the first Indian nationalists?
4. Why did the British consider the intelligentsia a ‘microscopic minority’?
5. Do you agree that the English educated were an elite group belonging to the upper castes?
6. Discuss the socio-economic roots of the middle class in Bengal.

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## 6.8 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 4 : Social and Cultural Development**

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### **Unit 7 □ Socio-Religious Reform Movements**

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#### *Structure*

#### **7.0 Objectives**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

#### **7.2 Definition of ‘socio-religious movements’**

#### **7.3 Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahma Movement**

##### **7.3.1 Brahma Samaj after Rammohan**

#### **7.4 Derozio and Young Bengal Movement**

#### **7.5 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**

#### **7.6 Ramakrishna Paramhansa**

#### **7.7 Swami Vivekananda**

##### **7.7.1 The Ramakrishna Mission**

#### **7.8 Summary**

#### **7.9 Model Questions**

#### **7.10 Suggested Readings**

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### **7.0 Objectives**

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At the end of this unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The eighteenth and nineteenth century socio-religious movements in Bengal paved the way for such movements all over India
- Raja Rammohun Roy was the pioneer of this movement and is known as the ‘Father of Modern India’
- Development of the Brahma Samaj during Rammohun’s time and thereafter under other leaders
- The socio-religious reform movements like sati were opposed by the conservative section of the Hindu society who were in the majority

- Henry Vivian Derozio spread radical ideas through his teaching and his disciples started the ‘Young Bengal’ movement
- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar’s contribution to the upliftment of Indian womanhood
- Ramkrishna Paramhansa spread the message that service to man was service to God. His followers came from all stratas of society
- Ramakrishna’s message was spread by his most famous disciple Swami Vivekananda. He was the first Indian to take the Hindu philosophy to the West

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## 7.1 Introduction

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The British conquest of India during the 18th and 19th century exposed some serious flaws and drawbacks of Indian social institutions. The response was varied but the need to reform social and religious life was definitely felt and acted upon. It also brought in a completely new sets of ideas and social world. The exposure to post-Enlightenment rationalism, which came to represent modernity, influenced the outlook of a select group of Indians.

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## 7.2 Definition of ‘socio-religious movements’

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In ‘The New Cambridge History of India; Socio-religious reform movements in British India’ Kenneth W. Jones proposed a definition of ‘socio-religious movements’. He explained that the term “socio” refers to an attempt to reorganise society in terms of social behaviour, custom, structure, or control. All socio-religious movements demanded changes, ranging from the relatively limited approach of orthodox groups to radicals who articulated sweeping changes in socio-religious matters. The term ‘religious’ refers to the kind of authority used to legitimize a given ideology and programme. This authority was based on the claim that original religious scriptures were no longer being properly observed, or that a reinterpretation of doctrine was required or the need for codification of a new religious leader’s message.

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### 7.3 Rammohun Roy and the Brahma Movement

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Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) has been rightly called the 'Father of Modern India'. He played a central role in the socio-religious awakening of nineteenth century Bengal and India. He knew several languages and was an erudite scholar of his times. A multi-faceted personality he touched upon nearly every aspect of social life and promoted the regeneration of the Indian nation.

In his first philosophical work, *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin*, published in 1805, he analysed the major world religions in the light of 'reason'. He rejected religion as a matter of faith outside reason and criticised the unnecessary rituals associated with it.

Rammohun's reform efforts were accelerated after he relocated to Calcutta in 1814. He founded the Atmiya Sabha and has been a consistent opponent of religious and social injustices. He condemned idolatry and advocated for monotheism. He held the Brahman priests responsible for perpetuating religious evils by keeping people ignorant of the true teachings of indigenous scriptures. To educate the people he published the Bengali translation of some of the scriptures and profusely wrote in defence of monotheism. His translations into and writings in the vernacular promoted the growth of Bengali language.

Rammohun Roy remained a rationalist during the entire period of his intellectual life. In *Tuhfat* his rationalism was in full bloom. Even in his later writings reason retains its rightful place as the touchstone of reality. Although later he sought the support of the scriptures, that too was to promote the reform of the Hindu society.

In 1828 he established a new society, the Brahma Sabha which later came to be known as the Brahma Samaj. His primary purpose was to rid Hinduism of its evils and to preach monotheism. It incorporated the best teachings of other religions and acted as a powerful platform for the advocacy of humanism, monotheism and social regeneration.

Rammohun was extremely pained at the prevailing social degeneration. In particular he was concerned with the pitiable plight of women in the society. His main goal was to purge Hinduism of its vices and to preach monotheism. He launched a crusade against the evil practice of sati the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her dead husband. His agitation bore fruit finally in 1829 when Lord William Bentinck, the Governor General of India, enacted a law against the practice. However, the solution which he put forward for the living widows was not widow-remarriage but ascetic widowhood.

Rammohun criticized polygamy, early marriage, and he opposed the women's subjugation and inferior status in society. He condemned polygamy and early marriage, and he opposed women's subjugation and inferior status in society. He linked their problems to the underlying cause, which was a lack of property rights. Female education, he believed, was another effective way to lift Indian society out of social stagnation.

He advocated for the introduction and spread of modern education, which could serve as a major vehicle for the dissemination of modern ideas throughout the country. He enthusiastically supported David Hare, who, along with many Indian notables of Calcutta, founded the famous Hindu College in 1817. He also ran an English school on his own dime in Calcutta. In 1825, he established the Vedanta College, which provided both Indian and Western education.

Rammohun laid stress on India's need for Western scientific knowledge, Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, Chemistry, Anatomy and other useful sciences. He understood the causes of Western intellectual progress and desired for Indians to reap the benefits of Europe's progress. His goal was the fusion of the best in the East and the West.

Every social and religious reform effort he made was aimed at nation building. Through his reform, he hoped to lay the groundwork for the unification of Indian society, which was divided into disparate groups. He was particularly critical of the rigidities of the caste system, which he saw as a source of discord among Indians. On the one hand, he claimed that the monstrous caste system created inequality and division among the people, while on the other, it "deprived them of patriotic feeling."

Rammohun addressed not only social and religious issues, but also political and economic concerns of the time. Rammohun's political leanings were internationalist, libertarian, and democratic.

Whatever his limitations, Rammohan Roy was the nineteenth century's first luminous star on the Indian intellectual firmament. This great Indian died in 1833, leaving behind his ideas and the message of modernization for others to follow.

### **7.3.1 Brahma Samaj after Rammohun**

According to Kenneth W Jones, the Brahma Samaj, an acculturative movement among Bengali Hindus, was led and supported by members of the English-educated elite. It began in Calcutta's colonial environment and spread to other cities, then towns, following



a line of Bengali emigrants north-west to the Punjab. Brahmo leaders also carried it to the South and West.

Following Roy's death in 1833, Debendranath Tagore assumed leadership of the Brahmo movement, providing it with a better organisational structure and ideological consistency. However, in the 1860s, Bijoy Krishna Goswami and Keshab Chandra Sen took the movement beyond the limited elite circles of Calcutta literati and into the district towns of east Bengal. Goswami bridged the gap between Brahmoism and the popular religious tradition of Vaishnavism, whereas Sen's specific focus was to reach out to a larger number of non-Westernised Bengalis in the eastern Gangetic plains and to expand the movement beyond Bengal to other provinces of India.

According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, if missionary activities were one of Keshub Sen's major contributions to the Brahmo movement, the other was a renewed emphasis on social reforms. He introduced radicalism into the movement by criticising the caste system, focusing on the issue of women's rights, promoting widow remarriage and inter-caste marriages, and so on. However, this radicalism caused the first schism within the Brahmo movement. As Meredith Borthwick has demonstrated, there was a schism between Keshab's followers, who valued social progress and reform above all else, and Debendranath's followers, who preferred to maintain their identification with Hindu society. The former founded their Brahmo Samaj of India in 1866, while the latter sought to preserve their identity under the banner of Adi (original) Brahmo Samaj.

The Brahmos reinterpreted Hinduism. They formed western style voluntary religious association with congregational meetings, officers, preachers, printed literature and bank accounts. Through the travel of their leaders, they also reached the far South and the West coast. As a result, the Brahmos offered a new Hinduism and a model of religious organisation to others in the colonial milieu. Their own movement split into three distinct sections. The Adi Samaj returned to the parent religion, the New Dispensation focussed on a cult centred around Keshab Chandra Sen and focusing on elements of bhakti, while the Sadharan Samaj adhered to Rammohun Roy's original teachings.

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## **7.4 Derozio and Young Bengal Movement**

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During the late 1820s and early 1830s, there was emergence of a radical and intellectual trend among the youth in Bengal, which came to be known as the 'Young Bengal Movement'. A young Anglo-Indian, Henry Vivian Derozio, who taught at the Hindu

College from 1826 to 1831, was the leader as well as inspirer of this progressive trend.

He gathered around him the best boys from the college, whom he constantly encouraged to think freely and to challenge all authorities. Derozio spread radical ideas through his teaching and the organisation of a debate and discussion group on literature, history, philosophy, and science. Derozio's students, collectively called the *Young Bengal*, ridiculed all old social traditions and customs, debated the existence of God, defied social and religious convictions and demanded freedom of thought and expression and education for women. The Derozians established the Academic Association(1828) and the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge(1838) to propagate their views.

However, the social conditions were not conducive to the development of their ideas. To demonstrate their independence, the Derozians frequently drank wine and ate beef. The radical views of this group, as well as their unconventional practices such as not paying respect to religious idols, alarmed the orthodox Hindus of Calcutta. They believed that Derozio's teachings was the root cause of the young boys' unorthodox beliefs and put pressure on the Hindu College's administration to dismiss him. Derozio's dismissal and sudden death in 1831 did not end the Young Bengal Movement. Despite the loss of leadership, members of this group continued to preach radical views through teaching and journalism. Derozio was possibly Modern India's first nationalist poet. 'To India—My Native Land,' is his most famous poem.

Surendranath Banerjea described the Derozians as "the pioneers of the modern civilization of Bengal, the conscript fathers of our race whose virtues will excite veneration and whose failings will be treated with gentlest consideration."

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## 7.5 Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar

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The next towering personality to appear on the Indian scene was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the great scholar and reformer. Born in 1820, in a very poor family he struggled through hardship to educate himself and in the end rose in 1851 to the position of the principalship of the Sanskrit College. Despite being a great Sanskrit scholar, his mind was open to the best of Western thought, and he came to represent a happy blend of Indian and Western culture. He opened the gates of the Sanskrit College to non-brahman students for he was opposed to the monopoly of Sanskrit studies that the priestly class enjoyed in contemporary society. He evolved a new technique of teaching Sanskrit and by his writings helped in the evolution of a modern prose style in Bengali.

Above all, Vidyasagar is remembered fondly by his countrymen for his contribution to the empowerment of India's oppressed women. Here, he proved himself to be a worthy successor to Rammohan Roy. He fought for widow remarriage for a long time. The sufferings of the Hindu widows sparked his humanism to the fullest. In 1855, he raised his powerful voice in support of widow remarriage, backed by the weight of immense traditional learning. Soon after, a powerful movement in favour of widow remarriage arose, which is still going on today. Later that year, in 1855, a large number of petitions from Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Nagpur, and other Indian cities were presented to the government, requesting that an act legalising widow remarriage be passed. This campaign was successful, and such legislation was enacted.

The first lawful Hindu Widow Remarriage among the upper castes in our country was celebrated in Calcutta on 7 December, 1856 under the inspiration and supervision of Vidyasagar. Between 1855 and 1860, twenty-five widow remarriages were performed thanks to his efforts, which included the provision of monetary assistance to needy couples. Widows of many other castes already had this right under customary law in various parts of the country.

Vidyasagar also protested against child marriage. He spent his entire life campaigning against polygamy. He was also very interested in women's education. He organised thirty-five girls' schools as a government inspector of schools, many of which he ran at his own expense. As Secretary of the Bethune School, he was a forerunner of women's higher education.

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## **7.6 Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa**

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Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was one of modern India's greatest saints. Ramakrishna was born into a poor Bengali Brahmin family. From his childhood, he displayed a religious bent of mind. He had no formal education, but his speeches were filled with wisdom. He was the chief priest of the Kali temple in Dakshineswar, which was near Calcutta. People from all walks of life came to Dakshineswar to hear his lectures.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa was a liberal thinker. He was convinced that all religions shared an underlying unity and that only the methods of worship differed. Any form of worship could be offered to God as long as it was done with complete devotion. He believed that service to man was service to God, because man was the earthly manifestation

of God. Man-made divisions made no sense because man was God's creation. Ramakrishna Paramhansa was a great teacher who could express complex philosophical ideas in simple language that anyone could understand. He believed that religious salvation was possible through renunciation, meditation, and devotion.

Sumit Sarkar describes Ramakrishna Paramhansa as the saintly Dakshineswar priest who, through his eclecticism and rustic simplicity, enchanted Calcutta's sophisticated intellectuals. Jones suggests that Ramakrishna did not teach a structured set of ideas. However, two themes ran through his discussions: the universality of all religions - all were true and led to God and the logical conclusion that there would be no need for criticism or conversion if all religions were true. Keshab Chandra Sen popularised Ramakrishna's teachings after the two met for the first time in 1875. The message of Ramakrishna was spread throughout India by his most ardent and beloved disciple, Narendranath Datta, who became known around the world as Swami Vivekananda.

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## 7.7 Vivekananda

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Swami Vivekananda, also known as Narendra Nath Datta, was Sri Ramakrishna's most illustrious disciple. In January 1863, he was born in Calcutta. He attended Scottish Church College and was well-versed in Western philosophy. Vivekananda was a brilliant thinker with a sharp critical and analytical mind. Vivekananda met Sri Ramakrishna when he was eighteen years old. This encounter completely changed his life. After Sri Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda became a 'sanyasi,' and devoted his life to preaching and spreading Ramakrishna's message to the people. His religious message was adapted to meet the needs of contemporary Indian society.

Vivekananda declared that all religions are fundamentally one. He was an outspoken opponent of the caste system, religious rituals, ceremonies, and superstitions. He had a thorough understanding of Hindu philosophy and travelled extensively to spread its message. Vivekananda spoke comprehensively about Hinduism at the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893. His brilliant Hindu philosophy speech was well received. He was dubbed a 'Orator by Divine Right' by American newspapers. He gave a series of lectures in the United States, England, and several other European countries. Vivekananda used his speeches to explain Hindu philosophy and dispel misconceptions about the Hindu religion and Indian culture that were prevalent in Western countries. 'He was the first Hindu

whose personality garnered demonstrative international recognition for India's ancient civilisation and her newly born claim to nationalism,' writes Valentine Chirol. According to Sumit Sarkar, Vivekananda was far from an obscurantist or revivalist in any way.

Vivekananda was, indeed, a patriot from the core of his heart, with faith in the evolution of Indian civilisation, an intense zeal to revive all that was good and great in her civilisation and to serve it in all possible ways for her onward march, emphasises K.K. Datta. His vision of Hinduism was torn between a magnificent past and a degraded present. In this he shared the perceptions of Rammohun Roy and other Hindu thinkers of the nineteenth century. Vedanta, an expression of Hindu spiritual supremacy, was the one universal religion for Vivekananda. He related this idea to a dualistic division of the world into East and West. Vivekananda characterised the West as materialistic and contrasted it with a spiritual East, referring to India and Hinduism. The restored Hinduism that Vivekananda desired was based on selfless action by Ramakrishna's dedicated followers, who would find salvation through social service while proving the superiority of their beliefs. This socio-religious movement, which began with the teachings of a traditional sanyasi, drew into it young members of the English-educated elite, resulting in an acculturative movement. Under Vivekananda's leadership, it was also successful among non-Hindus in the West, making it the first Hindu movement to explore a completely new source of support. When Vivekananda died, he left behind his ideas, as well as Ramakrishna's less structured teachings and a social service organisation. According to Jones, the major pieces existed, but it was not until the twentieth century that they came together to form a successful socio-religious movement.

### **7.7.1 The Ramakrishna Mission**

Vivekananda's primary role in India was that of a social reformer rather than a religious leader. He spread Ramakrishna's message of peace and brotherhood, emphasising the importance of religious tolerance as a means of establishing peace and harmony in the country. He believed that it was the social responsibility of those in positions of power to care for the oppressed, or 'daridra narayan.' Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission in 1896 to promote social welfare. It promoted social good and social service over personal salvation. The Ramakrishna Mission advocated for religious and social reform based on India's ancient culture. The essential spirit of Hinduism was emphasised rather than rituals. The primary goal of the Ramakrishna Mission was to provide social service. It considered serving a human being to be the same as worshipping God. The Mission started a chain of missions all over India and the world.

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## 7.8 Summary

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- 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century socio-religious movements demanded changes, ranging from the relatively limited approach of orthodox groups to radicals who articulated sweeping changes in socio-religious matters.
- Rammohun Roy (1772-1833) has been rightly called the ‘Father of Modern India’. He played a central role in the socio-religious awakening of nineteenth century Bengal and India
- After Roy’s death in 1833, the leadership of the Brahmo movement was taken over by Debendranath Tagore. The movement was taken to district towns of East Bengal and outside Bengal by Bijoy Krishna Goswami and Keshab Chandra Sen
- The radical ‘Young Bengal Movement’ was led by a young Anglo-Indian, Henry Vivian Derozio
- The next towering personality to appear on the Indian scene was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, the great scholar and reformer. Above all Vidyasagar is remembered gratefully by his countrymen for his contribution to the uplift of India’s down-trodden womanhood
- Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, the chief priest of the Kali temple in Dakshineswar was one of modern India’s greatest saints. He was convinced that all religions shared an underlying unity and that only the methods of worship differed

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## 7.9 Model Questions

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1. How can you define the socio-religious movements?
2. Why is Rammohun Roy called the ‘Father of Modern India’?
3. What was the significance of *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhidin* ?
4. What was Rammohun’s role in the field of education?
5. How did the Brahmo movement develop after Rammohun’s death?
6. What were the teachings of Derozio?

7. What steps did Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar take to empower the oppressed women?
8. What was the message of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa?
9. What do you know about Vivekananda's early life?
10. What was Vivekananda's message to the world?
11. Why was the Ramakrishna Mission established?

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## 7.10 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 4 : Social and Cultural Development**

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### **Unit 8 □ The Bengal Renaissance: Issues and Interpretations**

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#### *Structure*

- 8.0 Objectives**
- 8.1 Introduction**
- 8.2 Renaissance in Bengal**
- 8.3 Supporters and Opponents of the term ‘Bengal Renaissance’**
- 8.4 Westernism and Traditionalism in Bengal Awakening**
- 8.5 Religious, Social, Political and Cultural Renaissance**
  - 8.5.1 Religious Renaissance**
  - 8.5.2 Social Renaissance**
  - 8.5.3 Political Renaissance**
  - 8.5.4 Cultural Renaissance**
- 8.6 Conclusion**
- 8.7 Summary**
- 8.8 Model Questions**
- 8.9 Suggested Readings**

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### **8.0 Objectives**

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At the end the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- The meaning and definition of Renaissance in Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Historical debate on Bengal Renaissance
- Western and traditional elements in the Bengal awakening
- The features of religious, social, political and cultural renaissance



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## 8.1 Introduction

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The concept of the Bengal Renaissance refers to a second birth, or more precisely, a re-birth, awakening, or rejuvenation of society and culture following a period of ‘decline’ or ‘stagnation’ in the pre-colonial period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. British and Indian scholars maintain that renaissance Bengal paved the way for Indian Renaissance in general. There are many interpretations regarding the term and concept, as well as the essence and content of the historical period. According to Subrata Dasgupta (2012), “The debates have centred almost entirely on economic, social, and cultural issues: whether there was a renaissance at all, whether it was comparable to the Italian Renaissance, and its significance (or lack thereof) from social, political, and cultural perspectives”.

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## 8.2 Renaissance in Bengal

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The term “renaissance” first appeared in connection with the onset of Indian modernization, when Calcutta and other cities became the economic, social, and cultural centres of new native elites in colonial Bengal. From the early nineteenth century, the concept of renaissance appeared in conversations and works by first reformers who had come into contact with Western civilization and culture. They compared the process of awakening in culture and society, and changes in the thoughts of Bengali educated elites to the period of the Italian Renaissance. Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), known as the “Father of Modern India” and “Father of the Bengal Renaissance,” was a philosopher and reformer who recognised the importance of Bengal in the advancement of Indian cultural and social development. In an interview with Rev. Alexander Duff, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary, Rammohun said, “I began to think, that some similar to European Renaissance might have taken place here in India” (Quoted in Smith 1879, I, 118). Rammohun’s spiritual heirs, from Krishnamohan Banerjea and Debendranath Tagore to Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore, referred to their epoch as a “renaissance” and “regeneration.” Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay also called his own time ‘renaissance’. Aurobindo began ‘the epoch of our Renaissance’ from Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore and acknowledging the roles of other outstanding figures like Devendranath Tagore, Rajnarayan Bose, Aksay Kumar Datta, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rajendralal Mitra, Dinabandhu Mitra, Keshab Chandra Sen and other. Aurobindo stated:

Our Renaissance was marked, like its European prototype, by a thawing of old moral customs, though not to the same extent. With impatient energy, the calm, docile, pious, and dutiful Hindu ideal was pushed aside, and the Bengali, free of the iron restraint that had formed a frosty line on his warm blood and sensual feeling, escaped joyously into the open air of an almost Pagan freedom... ..This is usually the moral note of our nascence, a burning desire for life. (Ghose 1997, 95)

Many key figures in social-cultural processes spoke of renaissance (*nabajagaran*, or *udbodhan*) as a goal of reformist activities of educated elite (Krishnamohun Banerjea, Surendranath Banerjea), as a literary renaissance (Bipin Chandra Pal, Rabindranath Tagore), as religious and spiritual activity (especially associated with the Brahma Samaj). According to David Kopf therefore, “the concept of the Bengal Renaissance was not invented by twentieth-century Indian historians evaluating their nineteenth-century heritage” (Kopf & Joarder 1977, 4).

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### 8.3 Supporters and Opponents of the term ‘Bengal Renaissance’

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In the twentieth century, two groups of researchers emerged—ardent supporters and vehement opponents, of the term “Bengal Renaissance.” Their methodological approaches and positions were what distinguished them.

The opponents reject the possibility of labelling Modern processes in India as ‘renaissance’, and defend the renaissance character of Indian Middle Ages culture. These authors like Chelyshev and Konrad use the term “Enlightenment” to describe the tone of cultural processes in nineteenth-century India. Later scholars also contended that the epoch had no impact on Modern India’s society, politics, economy, or culture. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Arabinda Poddar, Susobhan Sarkar, K.S. Bhattacharjee and others focussed on the elitist and thus incomplete character of the Bengal Renaissance.

There are two main conventional groups among supporters of the term ‘Bengal Renaissance’. Literary historians like J.S. Ghosh, Suniti Kumar Chatterji and others believe that Indian culture possessed renaissance characteristics in 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This group highlights a new renaissance that arose from historical events in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as the establishment of British colonial rule,

interactions between Indian and Western cultures, and the rise and growth of new educated elites, among other things.

Scholars like R.C. Mazumdar, Kali Kinkar Datta, A. Panicker and others refer to 'renaissance' as a means of the awakening and development in traditional societies that had resisted modernization. The term 'Indian Renaissance' refers to the pan-Indian nature of socio-cultural processes derived from regional movements in social, scientific, literary, political, and cultural spheres.

Indian authors associate the beginnings and grounds of the Renaissance with reformist activities in Bengal by Rammohun Roy and his Brahma Samaj. As a result, the Bengal Renaissance is considered the origin and centre of the Indian Renaissance as a whole. Regional renaissances began in the mid or late nineteenth century in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Tamilnadu, Kerala, etc.

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## **8.4 Westernism and Traditionalism in Bengal Awakening**

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Susobhan Sarkar described the Bengal awakening as a reaction to "the impact of British Rule, bourgeois economy, and modern Western culture." There was a complex interaction of Westernism and traditionalism, liberalism and conservatism, reformism and radicalism, religious and secular components in the search for an adequate path to modernity by Bengal intellectuals from Rammohan Roy's "epoch-making" lifework to Rabindranath Tagore's. The epoch's main goal was to bring together Indian and Western societies. The authors of the monograph *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* painted a multifaceted picture of the phenomenon of Bengal-European contact, which arose from Christianity and European rational and free inquiry. Religious and rationalist aspects of the epoch stimulated the mind's awakening and roused its creative activities.

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (1960) examined the Bengal Renaissance within the larger context of the Indian Renaissance as a powerful secular movement that created new national consciousness, patriotism, social reforms, and new political ideas unknown in India prior to the nineteenth century. The main trends of the epoch are the advancement of English education, the rise of social and political ideas, reforms, and organisations, as well as religious aspects.

According to Arabinda Poddar's Marxist perspective, the Bengal Renaissance is not the rediscovery of India's past in the present, but the awakening of the social mind, the

overcoming of conformism, social stagnation, and the closed, introverted character of Indian society. According to Poddar, the typical Renaissance figure was a Bengal intellectual who, as a result of English education, was oriented towards rationalism and free-thinking values and was confronted with old traditional values and surroundings. The first period of the Renaissance was represented by the intellectual mood of anglophilism; the second (after 1857) was represented by the search for identity and the discovery of united India based on Hindu mythology and Puranic literature in opposition to a secular civil identity.

In his recent work, Subrata Dasgupta, regards renaissance as a genuine cognitive revolution created by a 'small, but remarkable community of individuals, the intellectual and creative vanguard of a cultural time in history, and he writes: "...The emergence of the Bengal Renaissance's creative mentality represented such a cognitive revolution – that it represented a sharp transformation in the cognitive identity of a specific group of people, primarily in Bengal."

There were some nationalists like Derozian, Maheshchandra Deb who rejected traditional values and institutions as incompatible with a rationalist approach to reality. Maheshchandra Deb criticised Hindu sastras for enslaving women and proposed the abolition of traditional institutions such as seclusion, the custom of parents' privilege to provide matches for their sons and daughters and early marriage, polygamy (particularly kulinism), the "most detestable crime adultery," eternal widowhood, and so on.

However, others like Bhudev Mukhopadhyay were in favour of prevalence of traditional values, as well as the removal of some unsuitable norms and institutions for modernity. He praised the British for their economic, political, educational, and scientific achievements, but he believed that traditional Hindu values such as caste social differentiation, other-worldly orientation, working in accordance with dharma, joint family and joint-ownership of property, and even child marriage were important for societal harmony and self-development. Thus, only if the Hindus remained true to their values would society survive.

The best combination of Western innovation's positive achievements and Indian tradition's positive ones can be seen in Swami Vivekananda's dialectical position that exemplified a synthetic and qualitative variant:

Of course new things have to be learnt, have to be introduced and worked out; but is that to be done by sweeping away all that is old, just because it is old? What new things have you learnt? Not any — save and except a jumble of words! What really useful science or art have you acquired?

European Renaissance was based on Humanism. In Bengal, social reform movements were sparked by the perception of human suffering as a social evil. Unlike European humanists who sought the human right to happiness, Bengal thinkers and reformers Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Sivanath Sastri, and others saw relief from suffering as the primary condition for attaining happiness. According to Rammohun Roy's writing on sati rite,

... These are facts, occurring every day, and not to be denied. What I lament is that, seeing the women this dependent and exposed to every misery, you feel for them no compassion, that might exempt them from being tied down (to funeral pyre of husbands) and burnt to death.

In the Reformation sphere, Bengal intellectuals responded to a new set of questions—on the true essence of Hindu religion, on the proper relationship between its spirit and form, on human-God relations, on the role of priesthood and mode of worship, and on the social meaning of religion including ethics. The answers were sought in the inter-religious dialogue between Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam in the minds of thinkers. Reformation involved the establishment of monotheism (Brahmo Sabha) and moral values as the essence of Hinduism, as well as the development of social services for those oppressed by the caste system.

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## **8.5 Religious, Social, Political and Cultural Renaissance**

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We can distinguish four traditional aspects of the Bengal Renaissance—religious renaissance, social renaissance, political renaissance, and cultural renaissance.

### **8.5.1 Religious Renaissance**

In opposition to orthodoxy and the de-humanisation of socio-religious life, the religious renaissance represented a search for true faith and humanity. It was a significant effort to

create a religious synthesis of Hindu, Islamic, and Christian ideas and values, based on humanity's universal connection with God, personal freedom, and dignity. Liberal thinkers of the time, primarily the Brahmos (members of the Brahmo Samaj), attempted to reform Hinduism and reinterpret it as a monotheistic and ethical faith. Conservative thinkers proposed a revised version of dharma based on the concept of 'unity in diversity' (Swami Vivekananda). As a result, they created a humanistic image of Hinduism, portraying it as a religion of love, charity, happiness, and resistance to social evils.

### **8.5.2 Social Renaissance**

A social renaissance based on the existence of social problems arose from the collision of ethical norms and human behaviour. For a worthy life for the populace, Bengal reformers fought against various forms of social alienation – legal (discrimination), economic (poverty), social (caste and gender inequality), and others. Furthermore, based on the idea of civil society as an ideal, an analysis of the current state of society, and the practise of social reformist activity, Bengal thinkers from Rammohan Roy onwards formed a social development project with an all-Indian content and value because it was concerned with all strata regardless of religion, caste, or gender. The main foundation of that project was a civil society with equal rights and freedoms for all citizens, as well as the ability to defend those rights and freedoms, public control over state power, self-rule in society, the rule of law, and citizen cooperation. Changes in society must be based on the rejection of traditional dogmas and rules, as well as the preservation of Indian culture's high values, creative social innovation, and sense of justice. Gender equality was an integral part of the social project. Bengal thinkers wanted to give women their rightful place in society, both in social life and in the family.

### **8.5.3 Political Renaissance**

Political renaissance was manifested in the political and legal activities of a new social group and stratum. Bengal intellectuals developed a new political philosophy after being influenced by Western political values and institutions, while also being harsh critics of British colonial rule in India. From Rammohun Roy, who saw in the British Raj the cause of poverty, alienation, and oppression of the Indian population and predicted future Indian independence, to Surendranath Banerjea, who proposed that the British implement their values and principles in governing India for the benefit of its people – all of them

contributed to the creation of an independent and democratic India. However, the condition of a modern democratic state in India is the overcoming of a people's inertia and the development of political consciousness. Furthermore, the Bengal political project established the concept of a nation-state in which an all-Indian identity coexisted with a diversity of religious, regional, and ethno-cultural identities.

### **8.5.4 Cultural Renaissance**

Cultural renaissance was the process of developing modern Bengal culture based on a synthesis of national and universal, regional and pan-Indian, indigenous and ancient traditions, and modern ideas. The humanistic culture arose from a deep India–West intercultural dialogue that drafted the main cultural vectors in independent India. These vectors are the advancement of education and people's enlightenment; the integration of Western scientific knowledge and the development of social and natural sciences in India; and the creation of Modern Bengali literature from Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Pearychand Mitra to Rabindranath Tagore.

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## **8.6 Conclusion**

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In conclusion it can be said that the various issues and interpretations of the Bengal Renaissance allowed for a detailed examination of the epoch's processes – intellectual, religious, social, political, cultural etc. Finally, these debates enable the possibility of describing the synthetic, multifaceted, religious and secular character of Bengal Renaissance thought and culture, its problems, achievements, and heritage, as well as estimating its significance for contemporary India and the country's social development.

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## **8.7 Summary**

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- There was a complex interaction of Westernism and traditionalism, liberalism and conservatism, reformism and radicalism, religious and secular components in the search for an adequate path to modernity by Bengal intellectuals from Rammohun to Rabindranath Tagore.

- Religious Renaissance was a significant effort to create a religious synthesis of Hindu, Islamic, and Christian ideas and values, based on humanity's universal connection with God, personal freedom, and dignity.
- As a part Social Renaissance the Bengal reformers fought against various forms of social alienation – legal (discrimination), economic (poverty), social (caste and gender inequality), and others. Gender equality was an integral part of the social project.
- Bengal intellectuals developed a new political philosophy after being influenced by Western political values and institutions, while also being harsh critics of British colonial rule in India. The Bengal political project established the concept of a nation-state.
- Cultural renaissance is the process of developing modern Bengal culture based on a synthesis of national and universal, regional and pan-Indian, indigenous and ancient traditions, and modern ideas.

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## 8.8 Model Questions

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1. When did the term “renaissance” first appear in the Indian context?
2. Which two great figures represent the beginning and completion of the Bengal Renaissance?
3. Name some of the outstanding figures of the Bengal Renaissance?
4. What was David Kopf's view on the Bengal Renaissance?
5. What is the crux of the debate between the supporters and the opponents of the term 'Bengal Renaissance'?
6. How did historian Susobhan Sarkar describe the Bengal Awakening?
7. What were historian R.C. Majumdar's views on Bengal Renaissance?
8. Evaluate the Marxist view on Bengal Renaissance.
9. To what extent were the views of Maheshchandra Deb and Bhudev Mukhopadhyay different from each other?
10. How did the views of the Bengal reformers differ from the European humanists?



11. What was the meaning of 'religious renaissance'?
12. What did the term 'social renaissance' imply?
13. How did a renaissance in polity visualize India?
14. What was the process of 'cultural renaissance' in Bengal?

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## 8.9 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 4 : Social and Cultural Development**

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### **Unit 9 □ Growth of Nationalist Consciousness and Nationalism**

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#### *Structure*

- 9.0 Objectives**
- 9.1 Introduction**
- 9.2 Defining Nationalism**
- 9.3 The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Historiographical Debates**
  - 9.3.1 The Nationalist School**
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  - 9.3.3 The Cambridge School (Neo-Traditionalists in Anglo-American Academia or Cambridge-Canberra Cluster of Historians)**
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- 9.4 The British Imperial Policies in Post-1857 Phase**
- 9.5 The Rise of Middle Class Intelligentsia and The Politics of Associations in Bengal, Bombay And Madras Presidencies**
- 9.6 The Social Reform Movement and Its Connection to the Nationalist Awakening**
- 9.7 The Foundation of the Indian National Congress: Myth And Reality**
- 9.8 The Economic Critique of British Imperialism and Its Connection to the Nationalist Awakenings**
- 9.9 The Tide of Hindu Revivalism and Its Connection to the Development of Nationalist Awakenings**
- 9.10 The Politics of Free Press and the Idea of Nationalism**
- 9.11 Growth of Nationalism in Form of Constitutional Politics**
- 9.12 Conclusions**
- 9.13 Summary**
- 9.14 Glossary/keywords**
- 9.15 Model Questions**
- 9.16 Suggested Readings**

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## 9.0 Objectives

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The objectives of the present unit are to understand the following aspects of the growth of nationalist consciousness and nationalism in India:

- a. To study the different theories proposed by notable Social and Political Scientists on the emergence and development of the ideas like 'nation', 'nationalism', 'nation-building'.
- b. To study the historical contexts in which the idea of nation and nationalism emerged and developed in India
- c. To study about various social classes who took the initiatives of propagating the ideas of nation and nationalism in India
- d. To study on various political manoeuvres that those classes involved in the nationalist projects that followed
- e. To study the historiographical literature and the debates among the Historians and Social Scientists regarding the rise and growth of nationalist awakenings in India

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## 9.1 Introduction

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In the nineteenth century, certain changes in the political arithmetic of the three presidencies, namely, Bengal, Bombay and Madras, resulted in the emergence of Indian nationalism. Some factors like the rise of professional intellectual middle class, the political cultures within the political associations, British policies in form of political concessions to include Indians in the lower echelon of government institutions contributed to the process of nationalism that, somehow, was confined to the arenas of constitutional moderate politics of Indian National Congress and the other associations in those presidencies. In the twentieth century, the arena of Indian nationalism was drastically expanded when the agitational mass politics became the dominant trend in particular under the Gandhian leadership. Historians belonging to the different schools of opinions, as of now, had a little disagreement on the argument that Indian nationalism confronting to the British imperialism celebrated its victory in the formation of independent Indian nation-state. But they differed mainly on other aspects of Indian nationalism:

- a. What were the major political changes in the subcontinent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century?
- b. What were the most decisive territorial units- the subcontinent, the province and the locality-in which these changes have taken place?
- c. What were the groups that took the initiatives of shaping, in one way or other, these political processes of change?

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## 9.2 Defining Nationalism

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Since the late nineteenth century, various Historians and Social Scientists have tried to explain the origin and development of nationalism as a modern political ideology with particular emphasis on factors like political attitudes, capitalism, cultural inheritance, geographical varieties, language and many more. In a way, different theories on nationalism in the modern academia came into existence, among which the following studies are worthwhile to mention:

- Ernest Renan, *What is a Nation* (1882)
- Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (1917)
- Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (1960)
- Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983)
- Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983)
- Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (1991)

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## 9.3 The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Historiographical Debates

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### 9.3.1 The Nationalist School

The Nationalist historiography did not emerge until the 1950s although its root lay in the initiative taken up by the early nationalist leaders, such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Romesh Chunder Dutt, since the 1870s while providing an economic critique of colonialism. Since the major form of constitutional politics of those early

nationalists had been the moderate style of protest, they eventually undertook a process where an important feature was the use of bold, hard-hitting and colourful languages. The major works in this trend include-

1. Dadabhai Naoroji- *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901)
2. R. C. Dutt- *Economic History of India, 2 Vols.* (1901-04)

The early nationalists raised the basic questions regarding the nature and the purpose of the British rule.

They traced the process of the colonization of Indian economy and concluded that the main obstacle to India's economic development was the British colonialism.

In order to show how the British colonialism destroyed the Indian economy that ultimately helped the English industrialization, they delineated the colonial structure in all its three aspects of domination through **trade, industry** and **finance**.

They highlighted the progressive decline of Indian traditional handicraft industries in colonial structure whereas, at the same time, the British manufacturers were encouraged to industrial establishments and capital investments.

The focal point of the nationalist critique was the '**Drain Theory**', as a large part of India's capital and wealth was being transferred or drained to Britain in the form of salaries and pensions of British civil and military officials working in India, interests of loans taken by the Government of India, profits of British capitalists in India and the Home Charges or the expenses of Indian Government in Britain.

Criticizing the colonial pattern of finance, tariff policy and capital investment the early nationalists focussed on the assertion that the genuine development was possible if Indian capital itself initiated the process of industrialization.

- Apart from the economic critique of colonialism, the early nationalists had also imagined the Indian nation in their own way, distinct from the imperialist rulers and administrators. They were aware of the fact the India as a nation, in terms of western sense, was yet to develop but the process had been started. A major breakthrough in this regard is Surendranath Banerjea's *A Nation in Making: Being the Reminiscence of Fifty Years of Public Life* (1925), which is, on the other hand, considered as a classic account of early nationalist movement in India.

- Since the late 1940s and 1950s, the nationalist historians, apart from demonstrating an awareness of economic exploitations of colonialism, tried to argue that the national movement was the result of the spread and realization of the idea or spirit of nationalism and liberty.
- They also focussed on the process of India's journey to become a nation and considered the national movement as the movement of the people.
- The standard nationalist interpretation suggested that the sense or spirit of nationalism had been getting stronger day by day, compared to its previous phases, that ultimately paved the way for India's independence. Focussing on the history of large scale agitations and various aspects of popular politics or mass nationalism, they asserted that the nineteenth century urban intellectual nationalism existed in the minds of the people, whereas in the twentieth century it managed to penetrate within the reaches of the masses.
- The standard or notable works in this trend include-
  1. Pattavi Sitaramayya- *History of the Indian National Congress, 2 Vols.* (1946-47)
  2. Tarachand- *History of the Freedom Movement in India, 4 Vols.* (1961-72)
  3. R. C. Majumdar- *History of Freedom Movement, 3 Vols.* (1962-63)

### 9.3.2 The Marxist School

M. N. Roy in his '*India in Transition*' (1922) tried to set the Indian national movement in the universal Marxist framework of the development of human society.

He posed a challenge to Lenin's thesis that India was under a **feudal system** and the **national bourgeoisie** would lead the revolutionary movement.

According to Roy, India was not under any feudal system but was already within the orbit of capitalism and was moving towards a capitalist mode of production. In this connection, the **national bourgeoisie** had a stake in developing the capitalist mode of production. Thus, it would not lead a revolutionary movement for subversion of the existing order.

According to this analysis, only the **workers** were the new social forces which would push the national movement to its logical conclusion.

Other Classical Marxist works on Indian nationalism include:

- R. P. Dutt- *India Today* (1940)
- A. R. Desai- *Social background of Indian Nationalism* (1946)

- I. M. Reisner and N. M. Goldberg (ed.)- *Tilak and the struggle for Indian Freedom* (1966)

Following the theory of economic determinism, the Marxist historians argues that:

- a. After the consolidation of colonial rule in India, changes in the structure of the economy produced new social relationship, where the society had been transformed **from a status-based to a contract-based one**. It set in motion a large scale of social mobility that had never taken place in India before.
- b. The penetration of British trade in the interior and the British land settlements which made land a saleable and alienable commodity, helped **the growth of a market economy** in India. As a result, new social classes such as **traders, merchants, subordinate agents of the Company, private British traders, middlemen and moneylenders** sprang up.
- c. Due to the growth of **market economy** and **contract-based society**, the old social and economic orders were disrupted.
- d. The new social forces, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, **struggled for finding a new identity**. The political struggle for freedom was the culmination of these social and economic changes.
- e. In this regard, the **bourgeois leadership** led and directed the movement to suit their own class interests and neglected the interests of the masses and even to some extent betrayed them.
- f. Soviet historians, in particular, considered **the foundation of the Indian National Congress as an inseparably connected event to the rise of indigenous capitalist industry**. On the other hand, the Congress, according to them, did split into two factions when the moderates represented the native capitalist class tied to foreign economic interests and the extremists represented the petty bourgeoisie.
- g. As far as the leadership of the nationalist movement was concerned, Marxists like R. P. Dutt categorised all of them as the bourgeoisie, whereas A. R. Desai or the Soviet historians focused on **petty bourgeoisie, educated middle class** and the **intelligentsia**. According to Desai, with the coming of new industries, new classes of modern bourgeoisie and working class came into existence, along with the professional class. The intelligentsia, derived from the professional classes, developed before the industrial bourgeoisie and led the national movement in each phase.



The classical Marxist approach towards Indian nationalism, of late, had been revised in details. For instance, Bipan Chandra, in his '*The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian national Leadership, 1880-1905*' (1966), has given the Marxist interpretation a distinctly nationalist orientation.

- Bipan Chandra has credited the **Indian intelligentsia** to the formulation of ideology of nationalism. The Indian intelligentsia, according to Bipan Chandra, realised the real nature of British imperialism and how it contradicted to the true interests of all classes of Indian people. As a consequence, they propagated an **anti-imperialist ideology** that represented the common interests of all classes in India.
- Bipan Chandra's intellectuals were not **the middle classes but they represented the nation as a whole**. Although they considered the foreign capital within the free capitalistic framework as a genuine path for India's development, they did not represent, at all, the Indian capitalist class. Indian intelligentsia did not receive any support from the leading men of commerce and industry until the First World War.

Almost similar approach has been undertaken in '*India's Struggle for Independence*' (1989) by Bipan Chandra and his colleagues, where they try to argue that the Indian nationalist movement was a popular movement of different classes, not exclusively controlled by the bourgeoisie.

- They demonstrate that the colonial India had **two types of contradiction**. The **primary contradiction** was between the interests of the Indian people and that of British rule; apart from that there were several other **secondary contradictions** within the Indian society, between classes, castes and religious communities.
- With the progress of anti-colonial struggle, the secondary contradictions were compromised for the sake of primary contradiction. In this way, the hegemony of a nationalist ideology was established.
- The Indian nationalist movement was not the movement of a single class or caste or community. Leaders like Gandhi or Nehru recognised that India was not a structured nation but a nation in the making.
- There were various groups with conflicting interests and thus constant compromises to avoid class, caste or communal conflicts and to bring all them under one, umbrella-type leadership was needed.
- As a result, Indian nationalist movement became a people's movement, though all the secondary contradictions were not satisfactorily resolved.

Sumit Sarkar expresses doubts about 'the simplistic version of the class approach' used by the earlier Marxists like R. P. Dutt and other Soviet historians. In '*Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*' (1973), Sarkar has shown the non-bourgeois background of the Indian educated class. He argued that the educated class in India acted more as traditional intellectuals.

- They were largely unconnected to the processes of production and responding to world ideological currents like liberalism and nationalism.
- He also emphasised on the ideological basis of the Swadeshi movement, where Rabindranath Tagore and other Bengali intelligentsia had provided a great impetus that, apart from the economic dimension of the movement, made the movement impactful.
- In '*Modern India*' (1983), Sarkar has warned us that "...class and class-consciousness are analytical tools which have to be used more skilfully and flexibly".
- Sarkar recognises the legitimacy of nationalism but does not ignore the internal tensions within it. According to him, there were two levels of anti-imperialist struggles in India, the elite and the populist. Neither of these two types can be ignored but complex interaction between these two levels that produced 'a pattern of continuity through change' has to be considered as well.

### **9.3.3 The Cambridge School (Neo-Traditionalists in Anglo-American Academia or Cambridge-Canberra Cluster of Historians)**

The Cambridge cluster of Historians in their analyses on Indian nationalism emphasised two factors:

- a. The personal ambitions and interests of nationalist actors (the leaders)
- b. An inter-connectedness of various local (and provincial and national) material interests.

The beginning of the Cambridge-Canberra Clusters of Historians on Indian nationalism can be traced to the late 1960s when the following three books were published in 1968:

- David Anthony Low, *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*.
- Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in Later Nineteenth Century*.

- John H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth Century Bengal*.

Some took their inspirational drive from the neo-traditional approaches of the Imperialist historiography and tried to revise it in their own works. Hence, in order to understand the basic arguments propounded by this group of historians, a brief glimpse on the emergence of Imperialist historiography could be pertinent.

Some prominent works in the Imperialist historiography category are:

1. John Strachey, '*India*' (1888)
2. Valentine Chirol. '*Indian Unrest*' (1910)
3. Verney Lovett, '*A History of the Indian Nationalist Movement*' (1920)

Salient features of Imperialist Historiography:

- It derived its inspiration from the famous dictum of Rudyard Kipling, "East is East and West is West."
- Imagining India as a mere geographical location.
- No possibility of India to become a nation, in the western sense of the term, with the growth in political and cultural westernization of its society.
- India consisted of religions, castes, communities and interest groups.
- The national movement, in their terminology **political movements with pseudo-national colour**, initiated by the small elite groups of traditional society tended to serve the interests of their very community instead of the general interests of the people.
- This movement had its root in traditional anti-western sources, namely, in particular, one or other form of Hinduism as these elites had a high ritual status in the caste hierarchy of Hindu society.
- According to Chirol, in particular, the material interests of these small high-caste English educated groups were fulfilled by pursuing their old aims of caste domination through new methods of adjustments in British rule. In that case, Chirol showed how the Chitpavan Brahmans in post-1818 Maharashtra have made structural adjustments in the new situation and by the end of the nineteenth century dominated the political, economic and administrative as well as legal sectors.

Before 1947, the imperialist approach towards explaining the Indian nationalism was further theoretically developed by Bruce T. McCulley, an American Scholar, when his

‘*English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism*’ was published in 1940, where the author has tried to assess the role of the English educated elite in spearheading the national movement. It, later, also influenced some of the pioneering works in Anglo-American academic circles in the 1960s.

The other studies that influenced the Cambridge cluster of historians the most include:

- Lewis Bernstein Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (1929)
- John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’ (*Economic History Review*, 1953)
- Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: the Official Mind of Imperialism* (1961)

Namier in his study focussed on the individual vested interests of the leading politicians of England in order to explain the structure of British politics during the time of accession of George III. On the other hand, Gallagher and Robinson mainly argue that the African elites played a key role in the establishment and expansion of British colonialism in Africa, where they functioned as the middle men or collaborator in this process. But, after reaching a stagnation point in their economic profits derived from this collaboration with the British colonial administrators, they became the competitors as their due interests were not fulfilled. This particular shift in the attitude of African elites from collaboration to competition finally led to the emergence of nationalism in Africa. In explaining this transformation, Gallagher and Robinson refuted the ideological considerations that motivated the African nationalist leaders and emphasised the personal ambitions of African nationalist leaders.

The first breakthrough in explaining the Indian nationalist movement in terms of ‘Namierite model’ or ‘competition-collaboration’ binary came with the publication of Anil Seal’s book, *the Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in Later Nineteenth Century* (1968). According to him, British raj could not be established without the help of certain sections of Indian elites. He identified those elites like Bengali bhadralok, Chitpavin Brahmans or Iyer or Iyengar Tamils who actually helped the British to settle down in terms of administration, land revenues and other sectors of governance. But when they realised that the colonial rule was not able to fulfil their material interests, they started to become competitors of the British Raj. In this context, argues Seal, the ICS like Surendranath Banerjea realised the futility of the British imperialism and became nationalist. He started questioning the racial discriminatory measures taken by the

British authority in India. Bankimchandra Chatterjee, after the denial of the promotion to deputy magistrate, also became a nationalist. This shift started in the late nineteenth century as these Indians within the colonial structure could no longer gain additional advantages through collaborating with the British rule. In this way the competitive mind towards the colonial authority resulted into the emergence of nationalism.

In 1973, with the publication of *'Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940'* edited by John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal, Cambridge historians argued that the political structure as it emerged in India had three levels-(a) Level of nation, (b) level of province and (c) level of locality. In the colonial world certain attempts were made to link the nation to provinces and provinces to localities. A pan-Indian administration was developed and India was to be ruled by a coherent set of rulers, laws, administrations, facilities. Unlike the Mughal times, the British government established a centralised power structure and no autonomy was to be given to the provinces. As far as the British colonial administrative link between the locality, province and nation was concerned, it mainly happened through political conquest in order to set up link with the Indian subjects. In post-1857 era, the British authority realised that the cost of administration had highly increased and it was reduced by appointing Indians in the lower ranks. The Cambridge group of historians argue that the appointment of the Indian people in the colonial administration resulted into (a) factionalism and (b) the rise and growth of nationalist movement. The factionalism initially developed in locality, then in provinces and then in national politics. According to the Cambridge historians, the politics of associations, formed by the various associations in Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidency came together and formed the Indian National Congress in 1885 but the subsequent phases of the Congress politics was frequently affected by the factional politics. On the other hand, those who could not secure privileges within the local-provincial-national networks as developed by the British Raj, developed a parallel network. As a result of these two networks, nationalism emerged.

This theoretical framework was used by the other Anglo-American historians in their subsequent works;

- Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress, 1880 to 1915* (1973)
- C. A. Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Nationalism: Allahabad, 1880-1920* (1976)
- C. J. Baker, *The Politics of South India, 1920-1927* (1976)

- D. A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics: The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920* (1976)

In all these studies, the common arguments are as follows:

- a. The national political activities in India were guided by the economic and material interests of the nationalist leaders.
- b. The nationalist politicians due to their self seeking nature wanted to fulfil their certain material and political interests.
- c. The Congress politicians were involved in a prolonged contradiction regarding the fulfilment of their political interests.

As far as the Gandhian politics is concerned, Judith Brown in her two seminal works *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics, 1915-1922* (1972) and *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: the Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-1934* (1977) used a particular model, concentrating on two questions:

- (a) Which sections of Indian politicians followed Gandhi?
- (b) Why did these politicians accept Gandhian leadership?

According to Judith Brown, there were different groups within the Indian society and various angers against the British rule. Regarding the new strategy of nationalist movement, as Brown shows, local issues were brought at provincial and national level by Gandhi irrespective of any ideologies. Gandhi skilfully used to project the three satyagrahas on the local agrarian and industrial issues of Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad at provincial and national level. In 1919, Rowlatt Satyagraha transformed Gandhi from a local to a national leader. Judith brown argues that Gandhi succeeded in recruiting a number of political personalities through whom he could link the local issues to the national platform. Brown call them 'sub-contractors', who were identified by Gandhi in certain local or regional levels. Earlier nationalists failed to identify those local or regional leaders through whom the local issues could have been brought at national politics, the task which was, without any ideological underpinnings, Gandhi successfully performed.

D. A. Low in *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle, 1917-47* (1977) advanced the thesis of Brown by emphasizing the link between the peasantry and Gandhi through the initiatives of those 'sub-contractors' or the local or regional leaders (here the big peasants or the village elites or village headmen). B. R. Tomlinson in *The Indian national Congress and the Raj, 1929-1942: the Penultimate Phase* (1976) argues that Congress politics, since the late 1920s, started to get transformed from

agitational politics to electoral politics, debarring two movements, i.e. the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-31 and the Quit India Movement in 1942. This transformation was evident right after the Government of India Act of 1935 and the subsequent provincial election after which the Congress came to power in eight provinces out of eleven provinces of British India. The domination of the central committee of the Congress leadership over the regional and local subordinates took place after the election and the internal contradiction also started to develop afterwards. The lack of ideologies on part of Congress politicians who were driven by the personal interests and political ambitions was also evident during the provincial election in the United Provinces on the issue of joint election contestation between the Congress and the Muslim League and the subsequent denial of providing two portfolios to the League members after the election results came out. In this way, Tomlinson focussed on the internal contradiction within the congress organisation as well as the lack of cohesion between the Congress and the other political parties during the nationalist period.

Hence, the Cambridge cluster of historians tried to explain the emergence of nationalism in India in terms of material and personal interests of the Indian elites where the relevance of political ideologies seemed to be completely absent. They also neglected the class and caste factors of the Indian society in order to furnish their arguments. Their 'power-theory' was not proven adequate to explain the long and complex phenomenon like the nationalist awakenings and the nationalist movements in India. But the Cambridge scholars initiated the trend of regional history and the area studies in the modern Indian historiography.

### 9.3.4 The Subaltern School

Ranajit Guha, as the founding father of the Subaltern studies group of historians, took the initiative of providing an analysis of the nationalist struggle from the perspective of the lower strata of the Indian society by refuting the elitist historiography with the publication of two seminal works:

- *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (1982)
- *Elementary Aspects of the Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983)

Ranajit Guha argues that the history of Indian nationalism until the Subaltern Studies' initiatives was written from the perspective of elite historiography, viz. colonial elitism and bourgeois elitism and the role of the common people was neglected. On the other hand, the Subaltern historians focus on the subaltern people of the Indian society while analysing the nature of the nationalist movement. In both the cases of colonial and bourgeois elitism,

vertical mobilization was emphasised whereas the horizontal mobilization was not mentioned. The main objective of the Subaltern historians was to reverse the trend and highlight the role of the subaltern people in the nationalist movement. According to them, during the colonial rule, the arena of political activities had two different fields:

- a. The organised political movements led by the nationalist leadership, mostly under the Indian National Congress.
- b. Other spheres of political activities that was beyond the organised politics, e.g. peasant movement, working class movement, student movement, tribal movement, dalit movements.

Guha identified that the Subaltern people directed their movement against the established power structure with much more consistency and militancy in nature. During the colonial period, the idea of nationalism was multidimensional in nature and various classes, communities had influenced the course of nationalism. Since, every group or class had their own role during the nationalist movement, the organised and unorganised politics had certain complementary relationship with each other. In this context, the Subaltern historians made differences between the nationalist movement and the national liberation movement. So far as the nationalist movement is concerned, their political objective was to remove the foreign ruling class. But in case of national liberation movement the main objective was to achieve social and economic changes as well as political freedom. But the unorganised or un-institutionalised movements by the subaltern groups were not capable enough to transform nationalist movement into a political liberation movement by developing a full-fledged class struggle along with their participation in the nationalist politics. Hence, the autonomous subaltern militancy remained a fragmented part of the mainstream nationalist politics.

In later phases, the Subaltern studies had undergone several paradigmatic shifts from their primarily emphasis on class to community, from material analysis to the culture, mind and identity. In this stage, two seminal works were the attempts to redefine the nature and the pattern in which nationalist thoughts and consciousness emerged in colonial India:

- a. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (1986)
- b. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (1993)

Chatterjee has identified three distinct stages in the formation of nationalist thought in India which was essentially different but a derivative discourse from the West:



1. The moment of departure: when the nationalist consciousness was constructed through the hegemonising influence of the post-Enlightenment rationalist thought
2. The moment of manoeuvre: when the masses were mobilised in its support
3. The moment of arrival: when it became a discourse of order and rational organisation of power.

Chatterjee advanced his thesis in his later researches, where he identifies two arenas of activities on part of intelligentsia in Indian society;

- a. The Outer Material Domain: the institutions under the colonial state characterised the western model of nation-state and it was hard on part of the intelligentsia to avoid this model. In this context, they were contesting the colonial rule of difference.
- b. The Inner Spiritual Domain: the intelligentsia tried to fashion a modern national culture that is nevertheless not western. Here they refused to allow the colonial intervention. Here, the nationalism was already sovereign. In this domain, they sought to homogenise the Indian society by producing consent and dominating the subaltern dissents.

Thus, Chatterjee argues that the two domains of elite and subaltern politics should be studied not separately but in mutually conditioned historicities.

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## **9.4 The British Imperial Politics in Post-1857 Phase**

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The political history of India in post-1857 period provided an initial background for the development of nationalist awakenings. After the Revolt of 1857, the colonial policies took a conservative turn by empowering the positions of landed aristocracy, who were considered as the natural leaders of the Indian society. When the Imperial Durbar took place in 1877 in order to announce Queen Victoria as the Empress of India, the native princes were also given special precedence in the new imperial order. During this phase, the zamindars also started to play a dominant role in the colonial administrative set up. They founded the British Indian Association in Calcutta in 1851 in order to represent the interests of the landlords in local levels. The Indian Council Acts of 1861 provided for the Indians the limited representation in the legislative councils, but it was a very limited number of non-official Indian members in the governor-general's council. They were not able to introduce any bills without the prior sanction of the governor general. The income tax was withdrawn

in 1865 under a strong protest across the various areas of the subcontinent but reimposed again in 1867 in the guise of certificate tax for all professions and trades. It was again imposed in a formal manner in 1870 with a rate of 3.12 per cent. On the other hand, the colonial government on 31 March 1870 announced a fund cut in the English education in Bengal and channelized the fund in mass education through vernaculars. It was at that time, the colonial government continued to spend excessively on army, the home charges and the other public works serving the imperial needs.

Lord Lytton came to India as the Viceroy in 1876 and his tenure was full of enactment of different laws and policies that eventually made an ambience of discontents and dismay among the Indians. In 1876, the maximum age of the Indian Civil Service examination was lowered down from 21 to 19 and the demand of simultaneous examination in London and India still remained unfulfilled. In 1878, the Viceroy passed the Vernacular press Act in order cease the Indian press from criticizing the colonial policies.

The act was severely criticised by the educated Indians across the country as well as by the liberal sections of the British parliamentarians especially under the leadership of E. E. Gladstone.

In the same year, Lytton had passed the infamous Arms act which introduced the licensing system throughout India for possessing firearms, but exempted the Europeans and Eurasians from its coverage. In 1880, the liberal victory in the British parliament resulted into the resignation of Lord Lytton and the coming of Lord Ripon in India as the new viceroy. But the conservative attitude on part of the British administration still persisted during the time of Ripon as well. Although Ripon himself was very keen to introduce the liberal measures like the Local Self-Government in India in 1882 as well as repealing the Vernacular Press act and modifying the Arms Act by eliminating the racial discriminatory factors between Indians and the Europeans, his measures were challenged throughout the time; but the climax reached when Courtney Ilbert, the law member of the Viceroy's council, introduced in 1883 the controversial Ilbert Bill, where the Indian juries were given the power to go for the trial of Europeans. The conservatives as well as a section of British liberals also vehemently opposing the bill, arguing that the effeminate Indians were not able to try a masculine Englishman and they were also not in a position to realise the pride and chastity of an English women, when they themselves did not respect their own womenfolk inside their household. The pressure from the conservative block was so immense that Ripon ultimately revoked the bill with a slight modification that added a provision of trial by a mixed jury in cases where the Europeans were involved. By the end of the Ilbert Bill

controversy, the Indians started to realise that the liberal promise of racial equality as enshrined in the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 was not expected outcome from the attitudes of the colonial government.

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## **9.5 The Rise of Middle Class Intelligentsia and the Politics of Associations in Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies**

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The post-1857 phase in Indian history also witnessed a considerable change in the organised political life in the subcontinent, when the previous associations dominated by the landed aristocrats started to get replaced by the new associations regulated by the western educated middle class professional intelligentsia. The British Indian Association which came into existence in Calcutta in 1851 was by the end of the 1860s was heavily affected by the internal factionalism and its importance in the Bengal public life started to diminish especially when the Indian League in 1875 in Calcutta and finally the Indian Association by Surendranath Banerjee in 1876 came into existence. These new political associations were dominated by the western educated middle class professionals who claimed to be the representative of the people. Contemporary to the British Indian Association of Calcutta, the Bombay Association and the Madras Native Association were also established in the early 1850s before the renewal of the Charter Act in 1853. These three associations of the early 1850s held the exclusive Indian membership and they sent the separate petitions to London but with interestingly identical demands like the greater participation in the government and revision in the unjust systems of the colonial government like 'dual system' of governance, expensive and incompetent administration, hostile legislations towards the people of India, high taxation, salt and opium monopolies and the neglect of education and public service. Although they were not against the colonial rule, they contributed a great deal to the evolution of a modern sector in Indian politics. But their dominance in the public life started to evade when the arena of politics expanded to the middle class professionals in the newly formed associations. Like in Bengal, the Bombay presidency and the Madras Presidency also witnessed the development of new associations. In 1876, Dadabhai Naoroji and Naoroji Ferdunji returned from England and took the initiative to re-establish the importance of the Bombay association in the public life. But their initiatives were not gone unchallenged. The short lived Western Indian Association and the younger leaders in Bombay like P. M. Mehta, M. G. Ranade or K. T. Telang and above all the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, which was established in 1870. The Poona Sarvajanaik Sabha was efficiently performing in order to propagate their representative character as an organisation

of the masses. On the other hand, the Madras Presidency witnessed comparatively a slow development than the other two Presidency areas. The Madras Native Association ceased to function after 1862 and it was not until the foundation of Madras Mahajan Sabha in 1884 that a vibrant political culture emerged and developed in this region. Outside the Presidency areas, the notable associations include the Lahore Indian Association in Punjab and the Allahabad People's Association in the United Provinces.

This new trend in political culture led the middle class professional intelligentsia to place new demands which were having local or regional characteristics but of national significance. These political demands include:

- Indian representation in the legislative council
- Separation of the Executive and the Judiciary within the government administration
- Indianisation of the Civil Services and simultaneous Indian Civil service examination in India and England
- Imposition of import duties on cotton goods
- Reduction of the 'Home Charges' and warfare
- Rationalisation of the financial relation between India and England
- Extension of the permanent Settlement in other parts of British India

Apart from these demands they also protested against the imposition of the Income tax, the Vernacular Press Act or the Arms Act. Some of these associations had taken into consideration the affairs of the peasantry as well. They were involved in the Indigo riots in Bengal, the Deccan Riots in Maharashtra or in a variety of social work among the peasantry. Due to their activism as well as creating a new awareness in the public domain, the colonial government recognised the political importance of this new middle class and those political associations under their leadership by the end of the nineteenth century.

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## **9.6 The Social Reform Movement and its Connections to the Nationalist Awakening**

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Although the politics of associations with the predominance of the middle class professional intelligentsia was the latter half of nineteenth century phenomenon, some historians argue that the nationalist awakenings in India had also its root in the social reform movements in the nineteenth century. The colonial culture and knowledge started to flourish with the British conquest in India. And this led the indigenous intelligentsia to reconsider the

strengths and weaknesses of their own cultures and institutions. The search for this cultural inheritance that the Indian civilization stood for started with the initiatives of the newly emerging middle class and the traditional as well as the western educated intellectuals. The beginning of this regeneration process started to take place with the formation of the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 by Raja Rammohan Roy in Bengal. Soon it became an organisation with several branches all over India, but other prominent social reform movements among the Hindus took their shapes in form of:

- the Paramahansa Mandali and the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra
- the Arya Samaj in Punjab and North India
- the Kayastha Sabha in United Provinces
- the Sarin Sabha in Punjab
- the Satyasodhak Samaj in Maharashtra
- the Sri Narayan Dharma Paripalana Sabha in Kerala

On the other hand, the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Parsees also started their journey in this regard with the initiatives like the Ahmadiya and Aligarh movements, the Singh Sabha, the Rehnumai Mazdeyasana Sabha respectively.

The religious reformation was the main concern of these movements but these movements were not strictly religious; the intellectual trends that characterised those movements were the approaches towards rationalism and religious universalism. People like Raja Rammohan Roy or Akshay Kumar Dutt emphasised the demonstrability and the rational mechanism of the world system in order to evaluate the contemporary socio-religious practices from the perspectives of social utility. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar refused to participate in any discussions about the supernatural questions but was interested to serve the people on earth. Bankimchandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda identified a secular dimension of religion in order to explain the material condition of the human lives. On the other hand, Syed Ahmed Khan considered the role of religion in the progress of society. In Maharashtra, G. H. Deshmukh advocated the necessary changes in religious structure, if it was not fitful to the contemporary relevance.

The agenda of the social reform movements was two-fold:

- a. The cultural-ideological struggle with against the backward elements of traditional culture like idolatry, polytheism, priestly monopoly of the religious knowledge, the complex religious rituals, the caste system etc.
- b. The cultural-ideological struggle against the colonial culture and ideology

The early social reformers were well aware of the negativities of the caste system in the Indian society and recognised this arena of social system to be reformed on urgent basis. Rammohan Roy initiated the process but not in practice but in ideas. Ranade, Vivekananda or Dayananda denounced the existing system of caste in no uncertain terms. But the most virulent criticism against the caste system came from the lower caste movements led by Jyotiba Phule and Narayan Guru.

Apart from these agendas, the women questions were also highlighted in the early social reform movements because the reformers soon realised that the country and the society's progress largely depended on the condition of women and the domestic households as well. On the other hand, the reformers were not merely imitating the western cultural norms but laid emphasis on the process of modernisation in a balanced interconnection between the indigenous traditions and western thoughts and ideas.

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the balanced attitude was replaced by an approach towards defending the indigenous culture simultaneously with the colonial conquest. This process made its impact in every sphere of life like language, rituals, art, culture, religion and philosophy. The emphasis on vernacular languages, indigenous education system, regeneration of Indian art and literature, Indian food and fashion, the traditional medicine, pre-colonial technology and reconstruction of the traditional knowledge led to the creation of an alternative cultural-ideological system vis-a-vis the hegemonic colonial ideology and institutions.

This cultural-ideological struggle between the colonialism and indigenous traditionalism in form of social reform movements contributed towards the development of nationalist awakenings since it was a part of the resistance against colonial cultural and ideological hegemony.

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## **9.7 The Foundation of the Indian National Congress: Myth and Reality**

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The formation of the Indian National Congress in December 1885 in Bombay in presence of seventy-two members including W.C. Bonnerji as the President of the Organisation is considered as a defining moment in the emergence and development of Indian nationalism. Two years back, in 1883, the almost similar initiative was taken up by Surendranath Banerjee in Calcutta in form of Indian National Conference but the Indian National Congress subsequently had been able to become the main torch-bearer of

nationalist politics in the years to come. However, the historians until the 1950s believed that the Indian National Congress was the brain-child of one civil servant named Allan Octavian Hume with the consultation of the then viceroy, Lord Dufferin in order to channelize the upcoming country wide discontent into a sophisticated manner by providing a platform to the rising western educated middle class intelligentsia, professionals, zamindars and the ruler of the princely states. This Safety-Valve theory was accepted in due course by the Congress extremist politicians like Lala Lajpat Rai or the Hindu Nationalists like M.S. Golwalkar or the Left intellectuals like Rajni Palme Dutt in order to defame the credibility of the Indian National Congress. But since the 1950s onwards, the historians started to argue that the foundation of the Indian National Congress was not a sudden event but a culminating process of the political developments that took place in the Presidency provinces in 1860s and 1870s. The year 1885 was a landmark year in this process since the Indians, after realising their capability of being representatives of the national interests vis-a-vis the foreign rule, started to get organised under the platform of a national party which they named the Indian National Congress.

A.O. Hume played a key role in organising the first convention of the Indian National Congress due to his close contacts with the educated Indians, but had he not played the role as well, the formation of the organisations like the Congress was in the process in India the 1870s and 1880s. Following the tradition of political agitations in the previous decades over a range of issues from Lex Loci Act to Ilbert Bill to Plantation Labour and Inland Emigration Act, there was an all-India effort to raise a National Fund for promoting political agitations in India and England. Although this initiative was mainly coming from the Bengal Presidency under the leadership of S. N. Banerjea's Indian Association, but the agitation was not confined to the Presidency towns but other provincial towns like Lahore, Amritsar, Meerut, Kanpur, Aligarh, Poona, Ahmedabad, Surat, Patna or Cuttack as well. Here, the western education and the English language played the key role to remove the regional barriers and to form a bond among the regional elites.

The Indian National Congress since its inception was dedicated to eliminate the regional differences. According to the declaration of the first session of the Congress, the major objective would be the development of the national unity. As a part of eliminating the regional barriers, they decided to organise the each year's session in different parts of the country with different presidents from different regions. In 1888, it was decided that the passing of any resolution was supposed to secure at least a considerable amount of support from the delegates, whether Hindu or Muslims. The organisation of the Congress

was meant to follow the way of a parliament where the session was democratically conducted.

The Congress organisation also had certain limitations and weaknesses as far its organisation was concerned. There was a problem of uneven representations and the non-elites of the Indian society were completely excluded. The delegates of the first session included professionals like lawyers, medical practitioners, journalists, educationalists and on the other hand, merchants, bankers, religious teachers and the landed aristocrats. Soon the western educated middle class intelligentsia took the lead over the landed aristocrats as far as the political culture within the associations was concerned. On the other hand, the regional variations also became evident since the inception of the Congress. As far the regional distribution of the delegates in the first convention of the Indian National Congress was concerned, thirty-eight delegates were from Bombay, whereas twenty-one from Madras, four from Bengal, seven from the North-Western Provinces and Awadh and three from Punjab. Regarding the social composition of the the Congressmen, they were predominantly coming from the higher caste Hindus and this pattern remained unchanged in the early years of the Congress.

The Congress in its early years was not an organisation with the radical outlook. The primary approach of the Congress members was not conspiratory or disloyal towards the British Empire. Their methods include sending prayers, petitions and memoranda in order to get some limited reforms within the colonial structure. In a way, the Congress started its journey with all its limitations but opened a new arena of political culture by the end of the nineteenth century.

The politics of the early Congressmen was very limited in terms of their objectives and methods. They were involved in their respective professions and hardly had a time for the full time politics. They functioned through an annual conference, preferably in the end of every year in a particular city in India under different elected presidents. They were not in favour of total eradication of the British rule since they had a faith on the British Constitution but their main objection was towards the ‘un-British rule’ in India that had been unleashed by the colonial government. Their demands towards the British Government were as follows:

- The limited self-government within the imperial structure
- The abolition of the India Council which prevented the Secretary of State to take any liberal measures towards India



- Greater participation in the legislature on part of the Indians and expansion of the imperial and provincial legislatures with the introduction of 50 per cent elected representatives from the local bodies, chamber of commerce, universities etc.
- New councils for North-Western provinces and Punjab
- Two Indian members in the Viceroy's Executive Council and one such members in each of the executive councils of Bombay and Madras.
- Reference of Budget in the legislature, subject to interpellation
- Right to appeal to the Standing Committee of the House of Commons against the Government of India
- Indianisation of the Indian Civil Services
- Decrease in the military expenditure and sharing the war expenditure with the British Government
- Recruitment of Indian in the higher ranks of military department
- Extension of trial by jury
- Repeal of the Arms Act
- Extension for the Permanent Settlement in other parts of India and a check on the over-assessment of land revenue
- Abolition of salt tax
- Improvement the living and working conditions of the indentured labourers at various plantations

It is evident that most of their demands under the aegis of Indian National Congress were similar to the demands placed by the various political associations which functioned in the provincial level in pre-Congress phase. The Congress leaders functioned during their early years, as most of the historians argue, in a moderate political orientation.

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## **9.8 The Economic Critique of British Imperialism and its Connection to the Nationalist Awakening**

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Apart from the demands for the administrative reforms, the Congress politicians also developed a critical understanding for the mechanism in which the colonial government started to exploit the indigenous economy of India since the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth century. According to some historians, this economic criticism of the colonial government contributed a great deal towards the shaping of nationalist consciousness in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The Indian intelligentsia was hopeful, in the early half of the nineteenth century, about the British rule in India. They thought that the Britain as the most advanced nation at that time in the world would take the initiative to modernise India. But by the end of the nineteenth century they started to get disillusioned about the British rule and carefully tried to understand the intention of the colonial government. The early nationalists, as they were providing an economic critique of the colonial rule and contributed towards the nationalist awakenings, are also referred to as the economic nationalists. Their primary task was related to connect Indian poverty to the British rule. Prominent among these early economic nationalists were figures like Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Romesh Chandra Dutt, G. V. Joshi, G. Subramaniam, G. K. Gokhale and many more. Analysing the process of the colonial rule in India, they identified the colonialism as the main obstacle to the economic development of India. They argue that the British economy had subordinated the Indian economy in three aspects of domination through trade, industry and finance. They were able to analyse the process of how the colonial economy functioning in its early phase through mercantile activities and plunder had transformed into a more sophisticated operating system of exploitation through free trade and capital investments. The early economic nationalists were able to organise a programme of agitation against the important official economic policies, mainly through writings. Some of the prominent works in this regard are as follows:

1. Dadabhai Naoroji- *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901)
2. R. C. Dutt- *Economic History of India, 2 Vols.* (1901-04)

Apart from organising a consciousness among the Indians regarding the impoverished state of Indian economy during the colonial time, the early nationalist put great emphasis on the necessity of industrialisation in India on the basis of Indian capital instead of foreign capital. Other areas of Indian economy that the early nationalists highlighted include the decline and fall of India's traditional indigenous handicraft industry, the role of railways in the colonial economy, tariff policy of the British Government towards India but the most popular explanation that also shaped the coming years of the nationalist perception as provided by the economic nationalists were the 'drain theory' or simply the connotation of 'Drain of Wealth'. They equivocally attacked the way a large part of India's wealth had

been transferred or 'drained' to Britain in the form of salaries, pensions of the British officials in civil and military sectors, interests on loans by the Indian Government, profits of the British capitalists in India and the Home Charges of the Indian Government in Britain. Dadabhai Naoroji, as the pioneer figure in promulgating the drain theory, identified this Drain of Wealth process was the fundamental evil of the British rule that was actually 'bleeding' India and blamed the British economic policies for the destruction of India's economic structure. The other economic nationalists including R. C. Dutt actually followed the footsteps of Naoroji. By attacking the drain of wealth, the nationalists started to question the economic essence of British imperialism in India. Inevitably, this drain theory provided one of the main staples in later phase of nationalist movement in India in the early twentieth century including the era of Gandhian politics.

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## **9.9 The Tide of Hindu Revivalism and its Connection to the Development of Nationalist Awakenings**

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The early moderate Congress politicians were mostly Hindus with a few exceptions. Until the early decades of the twentieth century, mostly Hindus used to attend the Congress sessions and among them the predominant were the caste Hindus like Brahmans, Baidyas and Kayasthas. During these years, only 5.5 per cent delegates were the Muslims. This social composition led to a Hindu social orthodoxy among the Congress ranks and Muslim leaders like Syed Ahmad Khan feared of the probable Hindu majority dominance in the nationalist struggle in India. In the years 1888-89, some resolutions were passed in the Congress sessions in order to provide the Muslim delegates an important place within the organisation but the Congress was silent during the cow-killing riots of 1893 that made the Muslims more apprehensive towards the Congress policies in the upcoming years. As a result, the Muslim participation in the Congress session started to decline since 1893 onwards and there was no considerable effort to incorporate the Muslims in more numbers within the fold of the Congress. The Congress politicians also did not consider this low rate of Muslim participation as no Muslim political organisation equalled to the importance of the Indian National Congress came into existence until the establishment of the All India Muslim League in 1906.

The social orthodoxy among the Hindu Congress politicians was an outcome of the long tradition of the Hindu revivalism that took a coherent shape since the mid-nineteenth

century in various parts of India mainly as a consequent development of the social reform movement within the Hindu religious sphere. This tide of Hindu revivalism was mainly based on an attempt of defining Indian nation primarily in terms of Hindu religious symbols, myths and history. Religion, although a matter of private space, was not separated completely from the political culture in India. Some of the moderate politicians were involved in an effort to bring changes within the Hindu social organisation and practice in order to make the Hindu religion conform to the Western rationalist ideas. Although the Congress was not equivocal about the social issues until the early twentieth century, they indirectly promoted the Hindu causes on various occasions like the controversy of the Age of Consent Bill of 1891, the cow-killing riots of 1893. In latter case, the Congress even went further to patronise it indirectly. After the Nagpur session of the Congress in 1891, the Gaurakshini Sabha held a large meeting within the Congress pavilion where the Congress delegates and visitors attended. Prominent cow protectionists like Sriman Swami attended the Allahabad session of the Congress in 1893. On the other hand, other well known Congress leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak were closely associated with the local gaurakshini sabhas. This type of political culture ultimately resulted into the alienation of the Muslims from the Congress politics. Subsequently, this trend of Hindu revivalism also broadened up the scope of nationalist politics in the upcoming years that acquired the extremist orientation within the nationalist project of anti-colonial struggle. This led to a sharp departure from the moderate phase of the nationalist struggle within the Indian National Congress.

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## 9.10 The Politics of Free Press and the Idea of Nationalism

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During the early phase of the origin and development of the nationalist awakenings, the main political agendas include not the mass struggle but towards the politicization of the Indian society through propaganda and the formation of the nationalist ideology. The chief medium of instrument in this regard was the Press in order to consolidate the nationalist public opinion. The Congress politics were covered by the contemporary press with a great enthusiasm and a large section of the Congress delegates in its formation was coming from the profession of journalism. Some of the prominent and dauntless examples of the early nationalistic journalism include:

- a. *Hindu* and *Swadesamitran* by G. SubramaniyaIyer
- b. *Kesari* and *Maratta* by Bal Gangadhar Tilak

- c. *Bengalee* by Surendranath Banerjea
- d. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* by Sisir Kumar Ghosh and Motilala Shosh
- e. *Sudharak* by Gopal Krishna Gokhale
- f. *Indian Mirror* by N. N. Sen
- g. *Voice of India* by Dadabhai Naoroji
- h. *Hindustani* and *Advocate* by G. P. Varma

The press also played its part not as a business enterprise but as a medium of national service. Eventually, the press became an important institutional opposition to the Government. Since the early years of nationalist awakenings, the freedom of the press vis-a-vis the colonial measures to curtail it down became one of the major concerns. In this way, the freedom of the Press ultimately became synonymous to the nationalist struggle for political freedom. In the 1870s, the Indian newspaper started a vehement attack on the administrative measures taken under the Viceroy, Lord Lytton, especially the attitude of the government towards the famine stricken population during 1876-77. As a result of this uncompromising criticism on part of the Indian press, the Lytton Government issued the Vernacular Press Act in 1878 that led to the confiscation of the printing press, paper and other materials of a newspaper in case of suspecting the publishable article having a seditious orientation towards the government. The nationalists throughout the country firmly opposed the Act through campaigns, meetings and public gatherings that resulted into the repeal of the Act in 1881 during the time of Lord Ripon. During the early years of moderate nationalism, Surendranath Banerjee also played a key role with his editorship of *Bengalee* where he criticised the government measures in almost every sphere of public life, be it administration, role of judiciary, economic policies etc. Banerjea was even the first nationalist leader who was sentenced to put behind the bars for his critical role in the field of nationalistic journalism. On the other hand, Bal Gangadhar Tilak with his *Kesari* and *Maratta* also propagated his understandings and thoughts on nationalist ideology that eventually took an opposite turn from the moderate trend of nationalist struggle and promoted the ideology of political extremism within and outside the congress role. Thus, the early nationalist journalism played a key role in the awakenings of the nationalist thoughts in India in a very constructive manner.

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## **9.11 Growth of Nationalism in Form of Constitutional Politics**

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Despite the limited representations until the end of nineteenth century for Indian members in the Viceroy's Executive Council (or Imperial Legislative Council), the Indians used this platform in shaping and propagating the nationalist ideology in the early phase of nationalism. The Indian Council Act of 1861 enlarged the Viceroy's executive council with six to twelve members where half of these nominations had to be non-officials, Indian or British. The Government decided to include the Indian members in the legislature, especially in the post-1857 phase in order to become aware of the Indian views about the British rule. But in reality, this purpose was not fulfilled since the years between 1861 and 1892 witnessed only a handful number of Indians among which the majority section comprised of the rulers of the princely states or their employees, big zamindars, merchants or the retired high government officials. Only a handful of political figures and independent intellectuals like Syed Ahmed Khan, Kristodas Pal, V. N. Mandlik, K. L. Nulkar or Rasbehari Ghosh were nominated. During the legislative sessions in the Council over the issues like the Vernacular Press Bill, the reduction of Salt tax or the Bengal Tenancy Bill, the nationalist opinion or the presence of the Indian representatives was very few. The early nationalists, despite their desire for self-governed India, put their political demands very cautiously in order to avoid the Government repression after being branded as the seditious and disloyal. Until the end of nineteenth century, their demands were very limited to the expansion and reforms of the Legislative Councils in form of wider participation of the elected Indian members in order to discuss the financial budget and to question the administration.

The nationalist agitation forced the Government to make changes with the implementation of the Indian Council Act of 1892 where the number of additional members in the Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils was increased. Some of the elected would be indirectly elected from municipal committees or district boards. The members were given the right to discuss the budget but they were not allowed to make any changes or to amend it. Till 1909, this reformed Imperial Legislative Council met on an average for thirteen days a year and the number of unofficial Indian members present was only five out of twenty-four. The nationalists were not at all satisfied with the Indian Council act of 1892. They now demanded their right to amend the budget if objectionable and raised the slogan 'no

taxation without representation'. Dadbhai Naoroji, Gokhale or Tilak in the early years of the twentieth century started to demand for the self-government on the model of Canada or Australia.

The British officials, along with the Viceroy, were just keen to give the Indian politicians a platform where they could channelize their frustration against the British rule but they strategically gave the Indian members of the Councils no such power to make any considerable difference in the law making process. But the nationalist leaders were strategically using the platform of the Councils to channelize their grievances against the Government by emphasising the defects and the shortcomings of the bureaucratic administration, government policies mostly public finance. In this way, the platform of the Council was transformed into a major channel for nationalist propaganda. When the newspapers started to report about their speeches in the Councils, the public interest in the legislative proceedings started to increase. In this early nationalist phase, the prominent leaders who came out very effectively through the politics inside the legislature were Surendranath Banerjea, Kalicharan Banerjee, Ananda Mohan Bose, Lal Mohan Ghosh, W. C. Bonnerji and Rash Behari Ghosh from Bengal, P. Ananda Charlu, C. Sankaran Nair and Vijayaraghavachariar from Madras, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Ayodhyanath and Bishambhar Ram from U.P., Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Pherozeshah Mehta, Chimanlal Setalvad, N. G. Chandravarkar, Gopal Krishna Gokhale from Bombay.

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## 9.12 Conclusion

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Therefore, the nationalist awakening in India in the late nineteenth century was a culminating end of a series of simultaneous developments that took place in the political, cultural and social spheres mostly in the three presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras and sometimes outside the presidency areas. The colonial government initiated the process of western education in India in order to create the cadre of clerks, necessary for the lower echelon of the administrative work in India. But the subsequent development was beyond the imagination of the colonial rulers as the western educated Indians did not only participate in the lower echelon of the administration, but also created an intellectual class who were associated with mainly different middle class professions like the law, medicine, education, journalism etc. Initially, this middle class intelligentsia started to participate in social reform projects and subsequently took interests in political activities in form of

participating in the associations with their limited demands of concessions from the government within the British administrative structure in India. Apart from that, they also appeared as the critic of the British state structure in India and propagated the shortcomings and the negativities of the British Raj through the press and the newspapers. In this way, the common masses were getting more interested in the general political trends of the Indian Subcontinent. In this context, the middle class intelligentsia played a prominent role in spreading the consciousness among the masses that actually led to the nationalist awakenings in India. Initially their methods were moderate with the politics of prayer and petition towards the British authority, but within this trend the possibility of the future trends of extremist and the mass politics were laid.

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### 9.13 Summary

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- In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the idea of nationalism originated and developed in India under the colonial rule.
- Historians had debated over the nature and the causes of the emergence and development of nationalism in India that ultimately led to the division among them under the broader rubrics like the Nationalist School, the Marxist School, the Cambridge School and the most recently, the Subaltern School.
- Some historians argue that the emergence of Indian nationalism was the end result of the introduction of the western education under the colonial rule in India.
- Due to the development in the western education sector during the colonial rule, a group of urban middle class intelligentsia emerged who eventually became the torchbearers of the nationalist thoughts and anti-colonial movement.
- Some historians put emphasis on the social reform movement of the early nineteenth century in order to analyse the development of the nationalist awakening in India. The Indians started to get organised under associations since the days of the social reform movement that finally transformed the public domain and this helped to the subsequent establishment of various political organisations and associations.



- The political associations started to come into existence since the 1850s onwards but initially they were represented by the zamindars, big merchants and the native rulers. Since the late 1860s and the 1870s, some new political associations started to function mainly in the presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and these new associations were being dominated by the urban middle class intelligentsia. So, there was a shift from the big zamindars, merchants and the princely rulers to the urban middle class intelligentsia in the formative years of the nationalist awakenings, as far as the leadership was concerned.

- The Imperial and the Provincial Legislative councils became the platform of the early moderate trends of the nationalist politics and various newspapers became the main instruments of propaganda in this regard.

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## 9.14 Glossary and Keywords

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Political associations, Drain of wealth, Indian National Congress, Economic nationalism

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## 9.15 Model Questions

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1. How do you explain the political arithmetic of the three Presidency towns, namely Bengal, Bombay and Madras during the late nineteenth century that paved the way for the growth of nationalist consciousness?
2. How do you explain the emergence of political associations in the 1860s and 1870s in Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies?
3. Do you think that the emergence of Indian National congress in 1885 was a British precaution to safeguard the imperial rule in India? Discuss with references to the Safety Valve Theory and its limitations.
4. What were the basic arguments of the Nationalist school of historians in analysing the growth of nationalist consciousness in late nineteenth century India?
5. In what ways did the Marxist historians and sociologists try to explain the development of nationalism in India?
6. Do you think that the Cambridge school of historians on Indian nationalism is an extended version of the colonial rendition?

7. Discuss how the Subaltern Studies challenged to the existing notions of the history of Indian nationalism.
8. To what extent did the western education play a crucial role in the growth and development of nationalism in India?
9. How did the modern journalism in India prepare the ground for the growth of nationalist consciousness?
10. To what extent was the socio-cultural reforms of the nineteenth century connected to the national awakenings in this period?
11. Analyse how the economic critique of the British colonialism led to the growth of nationalist consciousness in India.
12. Write a note on Surendranath Banerjea and the Indian Association in the development of nationalism in Bengal Presidency.
13. How do you explain the rise of the urban middle class intelligentsia and its connection to the nationalist awakenings in the nineteenth century India?

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## 9.16 Suggested Readings

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## Module 5

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### Unit 10 □ Colonialism Challenged—Institutional Approach

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#### *Structure*

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Prelude to anti-colonialism
- 10.3 Age of Associations
- 10.4 Congress Politics
- 10.5 Extremism within Congress
- 10.6 Emergence of the Revolutionaries
- 10.7 Emergence of Gandhi
- 10.8 Conclusion
- 10.9 Model Questions
- 10.10 Suggested Readings

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#### 10.0 Objectives

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At the end of this unit the learners will understand :

- The prelude to anti-colonialism and the ' Age of Associations
- Rise of Extremism within the Congress as an opposition of moderate Congress politics.
- Rise of Revolutionary Movement.
- Emmergence of Gandhi in the Indian Political area.
- Role of C.R.Das in Congress politics.

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#### 10.1 Introduction

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Colonial rule in India began institutionally from 1773. But after the Nawabi defeat in battle of Plassey in 1757, the British East India Company almost became the ruler of

Bengal. Battle of Buxar gave them more strength. Roughly up to the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was not any institutional opposition to the colonial rule. Rather Bengali Hindu upper strata were busy in reshaping and reforming the socio-religious situation. For them it was a blessing instead of things to be opposed. Even during the Great Rebellion of India they did not participate.

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## 10.2 Prelude to anti-colonialism

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First anti-colonial challenge from upper strata of Bengali populace came during the Indigo Rebellion of 1859. Although the issue was related with peasants but the Bengali intelligentsia reacted actively in this rebellion. Vernacular press played a very important role in spreading of anti-colonialism among the Bengali intelligentsia. Two oppressive acts were passed by the colonial government. Lord Northbrook passed Dramatic Performances Act in 1876 and subsequently Lord Lytton passed Vernacular Press Act in 1878 to control the press and media in spreading anti-colonial ideologies. Ilbert Bill controversy spreads more anti-colonial mentality in the upper strata.

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## 10.3 Age of Associations

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Anti-colonial challenge took proper shape after the birth of the Indian National Congress. But it was not the first political association to be established in India. A number of political associations like Landholders' Society, Bengal British Indian Association, Indian Association, were already been established before the INC. Among these associations the most significant name was Indian Association. Surendranath Banerjea, Ananda Mohan Basu and the young nationalists of Bengal founded it. The Association set before itself the aims of creating strong public opinion in the country on political questions and the unification of the Indian people on common political programme. In 1883-85, the Indian Association organized popular demonstrations of peasants to get the rent bill changed in favour of the tenants. It also led agitations against the Arms Act and Vernacular Press Act. The Indian Association worked hard to make the national movement broad based. In 1883 CE, the Association sponsored an all India national conference at Calcutta. The aim to organize this conference was to give a concrete shape to the idea of a stronger and broader political body which could discuss all political and economic issues of national importance. Thus to a large extent the Indian Association prepared the ground of the emergence of the

Congress Era.

Understanding the growing political discontent the British government resorted to oppressive policies. Lord Lytton took an anti-Indian stance and sought to implement policies inimical to Indian interest. The Indian Association took up the issue and launched an agitation over the issues in the country. All these generated a lot of anti-British feelings among the Indians. Lord Ripon succeeded Lytton in 1880 and his friendly approach to Indians was welcomed by the Indian intelligentsia. During the early 1880s the idea of a national organization had become an important topic for discussion in the Indian press. The Ilbert Bill controversy appeared to reinforce this need. The controversy had strongly influenced the circumstances leading to the emergence of an all India political organization. The Indian press also began to emphasize the impending need for national unity, greater organization and self-reliance. At this historical juncture, the Indian Association invited prominent public men and associations in different parts of the country to meet and deliberate questions of common concern. Such a conference was held in 1883. But it was not a real representative gathering. However it provided an opportunity to the educated and nationalist leaders to meet and exchange views. Thus it had rightly been considered as the precursor of the INC.

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## 10.4 Congress Politics

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With the foundation of the INC in 1885, the institutional challenge to the British rule took proper shape. Freedom struggle started though in a small way but it was of organized manner. In fact the anti-colonial challenge was largely synonymous with the Congress movement since then. Although there was not a single all India anti British movement until Non-cooperation under the direct banner of INC, but it played a very important role to unify a large section of local leaders. Early Congress politics was largely dominated by the Bengal group of leaders. Even after the rise of extremist politics Bengal played dominant role. But with the rise of M.K. Gandhi this role shifted towards west. Thus in Bengal a large section of people was reluctant to accept Gandhi as their leader at first. Until 1940s the anti-Gandhi spirit was very much present in Bengal among some sections of the nationalists. After 1940, a group of Gandhi followers emerged in Bengal and by this time Bengali political identity declined largely in national political scenario.

According to Charles E. Trevelyan since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century two models of political current were in Bengal. First model was the indigenous model involving

both the Hindus and the Muslims by hatching plots to oust British from India. The second model was introduced as a result of western education. It involved only a generation growing up in the metropolitan towns of India. These people dreamt to revive the condition of India through constitutional means and their aim was to attain ultimately self-government only. The early congress politics was the ideal example of this second category. They were non-violent but their procedure was largely different from Gandhian nonviolence. During the anti-partition movement extremism emerged and it gained popularity very quickly. Another stream of ultra-extremism had also developed by this time. This was followed by the revolutionaries. Nripendra Chandra Banerjee later explained why passive politics of moderates and nonviolence of Gandhians were not accepted largely in Bengal. According to him Shaktism was the most prominent and popular worshipping cult of Bengal since long. This inheritance of extremity created difficulty for the Bengalis to accept and follow passiveness and Gandhian model of nonviolence. This psychological background paved the way of the emergence of the revolutionaries.

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## 10.5 Extremism within Congress

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Moderate Congress politics came to be looked upon as unsatisfactory by a group of young congressmen in the closing years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lajpat Rai were the most prominent among them. Aurobindo Ghose strongly supported them. This new activist group within the Congress was known as the Extremist. They described the moderate Congress politics as “begging politics”. They believed that there could be no real self-government for India under the supremacy of the British Crown. Extremists had good contacts with the revolutionaries. Aurobindo Ghose himself was a revolutionary leader. The Swadeshi movement in Bengal strengthened the Extremists. In 1907, at the Surat session of INC the extremists tried to secure leadership of the Congress from the Moderates, but failed. In 1908 the Moderate leaders framed a new constitution which kept the Extremists out of the Congress till 1916.

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## 10.6 Emergence of the Revolutionaries

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In Bengal the revolutionary movement took an organised form in 1902 when the Anushilan Samiti was founded. Later another society known as Yugantar was established. The revolutionary movement became powerful force during the Swadeshi movement. They

derived their inspiration from the Gita as also from the ideas of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Swami Vivekananda. The revolutionaries of Bengal generally came from the Hindu educated middle class. Their political goal was complete independence for India. Here lay their fundamental difference with the Congress which did not accept the goal of complete independence till 1929. During the World War I many revolutionary activities took place. Even after the emergence of Gandhian non-violent mass movement the revolutionary movements went parallel. In Bengal the revolutionaries were unusually active in the early 1930s. The Chittagong armoury raid, battle of Buribalam etc. took place in this time. The revolutionaries were not terrorists nor were they anarchists. They believed to answer violence with violence. Their sole aim was to liberate our motherland and form a national government. The activities of them covered almost six decades from late 19<sup>th</sup> century to around 1946. However unlike the Congress leaders they made no attempt to mobilize public opinion in support of their activities as well as did nothing to organize the workers and the peasants to start any mass movement against the British government. Thus the revolutionaries never could establish a good connection with a large section of population.

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## 10.7 Emergence of Gandhi

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Emergence of Gandhi in national politics marks an epoch in Indian history. Bengal was no exception but it showed a long run conflict with the Gandhian model. Thus the anti-British movements took new form in Bengal during the Gandhian era. Gandhi faced opposition from the leaders in Bengal before starting the Non-Cooperation movement in 1921. The Bengali leaders were particularly apprehensive about Gandhi when he told in a meeting of Muslims in early 1920 ‘you must accept my conditions, you must accept dictatorship and the discipline of martial law.’ This was somewhat outside the purview of the Indian nationalists.

The leaders of Bengal were not at all ready to accept the personal dictatorship of Gandhi in the nationalist movement. Bipin Chandra Pal wrote clearly ‘blind reverence for Gandhiji’s leadership would kill freedom of thought and would be paralyzed by the dead weight of unreasoning reverence of their individual conscience.’

Psychologically the Bengali mind differed from Gandhian thought. Gandhi coming from a Gujarati trading caste had been strongly influenced by Vaishnavism and Jainism and was firm in applying the principle of nonviolence to politics. He advocated self-abasement and self-denial. The Bengali leaders were not ready to accept this. They had been familiar with



the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda who advocated self-assertion.

Before the Non-Cooperation movement began Surendranath Bannerjea wrote 'we were non co-operators before the rest of India thought of it.' The effects of the anti-partition agitation had been serious in Bengal as it faced the repression and retaliation. Bengalis were not ready to repeat such a movement again and were in a way opposed to Non-Cooperation as they feared that mass agitation would lead to violence and that violence against the British would lead to violence against themselves, the socially elite and privileged class. Thus Gandhi was opposed by C.R. Das, B.C. Pal, Motilal Ghosh to the idea of Non-Cooperation. However, C.R. Das came to a settlement with Gandhi on the basis of an agreement. The agreement included C.R. Das's terms such as making 'Swaraj' or self-rule as the goal of the impending struggle in addition to the narrow and sectarian goals of the redressal of Punjab and Khilafat wrongs as suggested by Gandhi. In addition, mobilisation of workers and peasants under Congress leadership was another among Das's terms. C.R. Das had opposed the programme of boycott of councils. Gandhi agreed to drop for the time being the programme of council boycott. Under this condition C.R. Das agreed to support the programme of Non-Cooperation. Gandhiji's promise of Swaraj to the Bengali youth owns them over to the Non-Cooperation movement within a year. Thus in 1920 for INC adopted the programme of Non-Cooperation involving all sections of the people.

Among the revolutionaries the Anushilan Samity decide to oppose the Non-Cooperation movement but only some of its members joined C.R.Das. They gave Gandhi one year time as a chance for carrying on a non-violent struggle. Up to this Bengal hold their strong position. But ultimately Bipin Chandra Pal's resolution for an amendment was rejected in the Subjects Committee in September, 1920 and Gandhi's resolution was supported by a large majority. C.R. Das as a leader of the Bengal group had no option but to accept Gandhi's programme of non-Cooperation.

With the establishment of Swaraj Party by C.R. Das, the Non-Cooperation movement soon showed a slow withdrawal. The Swaraj Party soon acquired complete control over the Congress machinery so that it seemed that the Congress in Bengal was the Swaraj Party. C.R. Das with his able leadership qualities was able to bring under the Congress the revolutionaries and separatist Muslim. The unity of all these people was essential for a unified struggle against the strong imperialist British power. Das's proposal of alliance with the Muslims would have yielded a solid foundation in the national interest. But due to some

members of the Congress Working Committee Das's proposal was rejected. However in later years the congress had no other option but to grant separate electorates to the Muslims.

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## 10.8 Conclusion

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It is clear from the present unit that colonialism faced critical questions from the various points of views. The institutional politics emerged in Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries could be considered as a part of these views. The western educated middle class was the harbinger of the institutional agitation against colonial ideology and politics. It is also explained in the unit that the evolutionary pattern of institutional challenges to the fact of colonialism was not a unitary process; on the contrary, it experienced shifts and changes over the years. The politics of association was replaced by politics of confrontation: the radicalization of politics was the principal feature of the period. The rise of Gandhi was a new dimension in the history of institutional protest and challenge against the Raj. Therefore, it was a multifarious and multidimensional historical trajectory.

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## 10.9 Model Questions

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1. Briefly describe the politics of association in colonial Bengal.
2. What were the basic features of the Congress politics during the period under review?
3. Write a short note on the role of the revolutionaries in the history of protest movement against the Raj
4. Review the rise of Gandhi in the Indian politics.

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## 10.10 Suggested Readings

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Bipan Chandra and Others: *India's Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*, New Delhi

Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*, New Delhi

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## Module 5

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### Unit 11 □ Colonialism Challenged: The Revolutionary Approach

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#### *Structure*

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 The Context of Revolutionary Challenges towards Colonialism
- 11.3 The Revolutionary Organisations: The Early Phase
- 11.4 The First World War and the Revolutionary Movement
- 11.5 The Revolutionaries: India and the Abroad
- 11.6 Revolutionary Movement in the Inter-War period
- 11.7 Bengal and the Revolutionary Movement: the 1920s and Thereafter
- 11.8 The Congress and the Revolutionaries
- 11.9 Conclusion
- 11.10 Summary
- 11.11 Glossary/Keywords
- 11.12 Model Questions
- 11.13 Suggested Readings

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#### 11.0 Objectives

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- a. To study the parallel voices of Indian nation in the anti-colonial struggle apart from the Congress politics and the Congress led nationalist movement
- b. To study the ways in which the colonial government executed the repressive measures as far as their state machinery is concerned
- c. To study how the Indian revolutionaries developed a global network of anti-colonial forces in order to challenge the imperial government
- d. To study how the Indian as well as the foreign literature has made an influence over the revolutionaries in India and shaped their ideas of radical resistance

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## 11.1 Introduction

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The Colonial state in post 1857 period took a conservative approach towards the system of governing Indian people. The good old days of Benthamite Liberalism during the period of Lord Bentinck were a bygone era. Now the Imperial structure was much more rigid and hostile towards the Indians, especially during the time of Lord Lytton (1876-1880), when some of the basic rights of the Indian people had been curbed. In this context, another development in form of the emergence of political associations started to take place mainly in the Presidency towns like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, especially with the initiatives of the western educated middle classes that ultimately transformed the political arithmetic of the Indian subcontinent by the end of the nineteenth century. The members of those associations started to develop connections and co-ordinations among each other that ultimately resulted into the formation of all India bodies like the Indian National Conference in 1883 in Calcutta and finally the Indian National Congress in Bombay in 1885. Initially, these associations started to negotiate with the colonial government in order to achieve their greater participation in the Imperial structure. But sooner it was proved that their politics of prayer, petition and mendicancy was not enough to achieve their desired aims. A section of the Congress members started to seek the alternative way out to achieve their political objectives and this gave birth to the rise of political extremism in late nineteenth century primarily in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab regions. As a subsequent stage of political extremism, the Revolutionary 'terrorism' started to develop in form of different organisations that primarily emerged as gymnasiums or study circles. Prominent among them were Anusilan Samity and Jugantar group that made a significant contribution so far as challenging the colonial state by means of revolutionary approach is concerned.

Historians like Amal Tripathi or Sumit Sarkar have shown that the public agitation against the Partition of Bengal or the split within the Congress into two wings of Moderates and Extremists or the rise and growth of revolutionary activism went hand in hand as simultaneous developments in early twentieth century India, or in Bengal particularly. The challenges to colonialism through revolutionary activism were contextualised by this train of events, which included the public debates between the moderates and the extremists over the nature of Swadeshi, the proposal of Morley-Minto Reforms and the subsequent discussions between the British Government and the moderate Congressmen.

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## 11.2 The Context of Revolutionary Challenges towards Colonialism

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The process of challenging the colonial state through revolutionary programmes and activities had undergone various stages during the early twentieth century. The early history of revolutionary approach of nationalist movement defying the imperial machinery was associated with the structure of colonial rule and the nature of Indian resistance in late nineteenth century on the one hand, and the early nationalist debates between the moderate politics and the politics of extremism within the Congress circle.

The root of revolutionary challenges was found in the rise and growth of extremism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Extremism in Indian politics owes its debt to the factionalism among the elite politicians mainly in the three presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. The failure of the moderate liberalism led to the rise of the extremist politics in India. In addition, the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Aurobindo Ghosh contributed towards shaping the ideological background of the revolutionary extremism. The early revolutionaries also received their ideas from the history of American Independence War, the French Revolution, the history of secret societies in the Italian unification movement (especially the Carbonaries under Mazzini), the Irish nationalist movement, the Nihilist, anarchist and populist movements of Imperial Russia.

The Colonial structure under the Viceroy Lord Curzon took an authoritarian turn with various measures, in effects, like:

- a. The Calcutta Municipal Amendment Act of 1899 which reduced the elected representatives
- b. The Indian Universities Act of 1904 placed Calcutta University under the most complete governmental control
- c. The Indian Official Secrets Amendment Act of 1904 further restricted press freedom.

Curzon also opined that the highest ideal of truth was exclusively a western ideal. This address was delivered at the convocation of the Calcutta University and this hurt the sentiments of the people of India, especially the educated Indians. At the same time Swadeshi extremism also started to get off the ground, owing to various ideological underpinnings. The *Swadeshi Samaj* lecture by Rabindranath Tagore was one among

them. Although, Tagorean ideals of Swadeshi society had nothing to do with the extremist politics, but focused on the concepts like 'Constructive Swadeshi', it provided the ideological impetus towards perceiving the nature of extremist politics in form of making Indian society free from the influences of British colonialism. Tagore, on the other hand, ended up in seeking solutions of Indian problem in his school at Santiniketan, after a short stint of political enthusiasm, aroused by the Swadeshi demonstration on the day of the Partition of Bengal. He stood apart from the extremist politics organised by the Congress leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh or Chittaranjan Das.

The early revolutionary movement was confined in running the secret societies and organising the political assassination of the British officials and their Indian aides. The early instances include the Chapekar brothers of Maharashtra, who were hanged for assassinating Walter Rand, the notorious Bombay Plague Commissioner, and his assistant, Lieutenant Ayerst, in 1897. The Plague murders inspired the formation of various underground societies like Milan Mela and later the Abhinav Bharat by V. D. Savarkar in the opening years of twentieth century.

After 1905 several newspapers and periodicals started preaching revolutionary action openly. In 1907, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal was attempted to be assassinated but somehow he managed to escape the target. Later in 1908, the young Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki tried to assassinate the unpopular notorious judge of Mujaffarpur, Douglas Kingsford, who later became the Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, but accidentally killed two British women who were riding in a carriage, which, they assumed, was carrying the British judge. Prafulla committed suicide in order to avoid the police arrest but Khudiram was caught behind the bars, tried and hanged subsequently. Soon, their martyrdom occupied a strong sensation in the nationalist emotions. In 1909, Madanlal Dhingra was arrested in London and executed subsequently for the murder of Sir Curzon Wylie, who returned to England few years back after serving for along time as a high rank British official in India. Dhingra plotted the assassination partly in response to the Government of India's determination in hanging the teenaged Khudiram.

Thus, the activities of early revolutionaries took two forms predominantly—(a) the assassination of the notorious British officers on the one hand, and the traitors or informers from their own rank, on the other; (b) to raise necessary funds and cashes by means of loots and dacoities, which became popularised as the Swadeshi dacoities.

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### 11.3 The Revolutionary Organisations: The Early Phase

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Comparing to the Congress extremists, the revolutionary wing, in their turn, had separate aims and objectives, though they had important connections with the Congress extremists. On the all-India level, they concentrated upon building up their organisations mainly at local level that would be independent of Congress extremist politics. The Surat Split of Congress had been proved a watershed in the history of revolutionary extremism in India. Barindra Kumar Ghosh, the younger brother of Aurobindo Ghosh, sent the letter to his elder brother, stating: “Dear Brother—Now is the time We must have sweets (bombs) all over India ready-made for emergencies. I wait here for your answer. Your affectionate, Barindra K. Ghosh.” Thereafter, in 1908, the Muzaffarpur bomb incident, the Maniktala raid and the Alipore Conspiracy Case had been followed.

So far as the early developments of revolutionary wing is concerned, different organisations came into existence since the early years of the twentieth century that functioned mainly as underground secret-society. In the initial years, different schools and colleges became the centre of revolutionary extremism. On the other hand, opening of gymnasiums in different localities was another development in this regard. Most of the members of those gymnasiums were youths, primarily school and college students, coming from Hindu Bhadrakalok upper caste background. All these gymnasiums later turned out to be different revolutionary organisations, where physical exercises (mainly wrestling and boxing) and literary discussions were the main activities. Out of these active initiatives, the foundation of the first revolutionary organisation, Anusilan Samiti, came into being, but there are differences of opinions about the actual date of its establishment. Historians like David M. Laushey have shown that between 1897 and 1902, Satishchandra Basu, a student of General Assembly’s College (later known as Scottish Churches College), along with Pramathanath Mitra, a barrister by profession, took initiatives to establish the Anusilan Samity, but the British Government suspected Aurobindo Ghosh and his brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh as the main organiser behind the Anusilan Samity. On the other hand, Rajat K Ray has shown that the year of 1900 had witnessed the initiative behind the establishment of this secret revolutionary organisation mainly with enthusiasm of Pramatha Nath Mitter, Sarala Devi Ghosal and Okakura Kakuzo, a mysterious Japanese gentleman. The main objective was resolved to be the assassination of officials and supporters of the government. During this time, Aurobindo sent Jatindra Nath Banerjee of the Baroda army to Calcutta as his emissary. He opened a cell in Medinipur under the local supervision of

Satyen Bose, the uncle of Aurobindo. Jotindra Nath's visit was followed by Aurobindo's own brother Barindra that ultimately led to a faction within the ranks of Anusilan Samity. Pramatha Mitter emphasised the physical culture where as Aurobindo prioritised political propaganda.

The figures like A.C. Banerjee, Sarala Ghosal, B.C. Pal or Jotindranath joined the physical culture party, distinct from Aurobinda's party, under the supervision of P. Mitter. Due to the lack of Barindra's coordination skills and power-hungry attitude, Aurobinda's party did not stretch its organisation until it received financial assistance of Raja Subodh Chandra Mallik after 1905.

Aurobindo, after the initial failure in organising there volutionary extremism, was eager to give this movement are ligious orientation, and that too was due to get persuaded by his own brother, Barindra. This religious orientation secured substantial support for the revolutionary movement among high-caste Hindus, it restricted the mass character of the movement from the beginning. Aurobindo failed to realise the the Hindu-Muslim and the Caste problem of Indian society. On the other hand, the Dacca Anusilan Samity of Pulin Behari Das made some efforts to gain the low-caste support in rural Bengal. But, the Muslim populace was completely alienated from this movement, partly because of the religious orientations that the ideologues had given and partly because of the role played by the Samiti in the communal tensions in Dacca and other towns. In different manuals of the organisation it had been clearly stated that the Muslims were not to be admitted within their ranks. In addition, the lower-caste ranks were not associated at all with structure of command and leadership.

The revolutionary movement received the support of nationalist barristers such as C.R. Das, who were members of the extremist group in Calcutta, and also of the wealthy zamindars and pleaders of North Bengal, but these classes withdrew from the field when the actual assassinations started in 1908. The cadres of the revolutionary movement were drawn mainly from the smaller landed gentry of East Bengal, who either depended solely on land or took up other pursuits in order to supplement their incomes from land. The students, who formed the second major group in the revolutionary movement, also came mainly from landed families of limited means in the mufassils. These people came mainly from the three traditionally literate castes of Bengal.

Although the British administration identified the revolutionary terrorism in accordance with the activities of two or three organisations, this great deal of initiatives was taken up



by many smaller groups concentrated in local or district levels throughout Bengal, and in Punjab, Maharashtra, in few cases. For instance, the Dacca Anusilan Samiti of Pulin Behari Das had been able to hold control over hundreds of branches across the eastern part of Bengal. On the other hand, the Calcutta based Anusilan Samiti had exercised its control in a loose, decentralised manner over the western part of Samiti's branches.

During and after the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the Indian officials and the witnesses were also killed as a part of political assassinations undertaken by the revolutionaries. Naren Goswami, a convict under Alipore trial, turned out to be a government witness, and his life came to an end when he was killed by the revolutionaries inside the Presidency Jail in Alipore. Realising the limitations of the existing law and enforcement, the British Government issued a handful of ordinances and acts to make arrest effective if some one is being suspected, or to make imprisonment without any trial, if necessary, or to consist the special tribunal without Juries to end the trial quickly. With the passing of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908, the Governor General was empowered to ban the revolutionary organisations, and subsequently, the major revolutionary wings went underground throughout Bengal and India.

During the post Alipore Conspiracy phase, the Anusilan Samiti was identified officially as an east Bengal organisation, where all the revolutionaries concentrated in the western part were tagged under the banner of Jugantar. As a result, with this particular categorisation, all the small, independent groups of western part of Bengal came to be regarded as the wings of a new organisation called Jugantar. Like Anusilan, the foundation date of Jugantar has not been distinctly recorded. Historians have their differences of opinions too. Historians like Gopal Halder in his discussion on Bengal terrorism showed that the British officials branded one group as Jugantar, who were originally associated with the Howrah Conspiracy Case. Later, on the basis of this assumption, Leonard Gordon argues that prior to 1914-15, the organisation of Jugantar was well in shape. David M. Laushey also seconded the opinion that the revolutionary activism during the First World War led to the formation of the Jugantardal.

The organisation of Jugantar in the eastern part of Bengal was not at all well-knit, comparing to the Anusilan Samity. Mean while, these two organisations continued their activism in collaborative manner with each other, sometimes autonomous and sometimes even in a competitive way. This division prevailed during the later phases of revolutionary activism when many of them were attracted to Marxism.

Initially, Barin Ghosh and Ullaskar Dutta were sentenced to death, but later reduced

to the life imprisonment under the Alipore Conspiracy Case. Arabinda Ghosh was released but later landed at Pondicherry. Thereafter, the revolutionary activism continued as underground phenomenon. The popular perception of revolutionary terrorism began to change and it has been started to be considered as an alternative to moderate politics.

After the Morley-Minto reforms, Lord S. P. Sinha was appointed as the first Indian member of Viceroy's Executive Council in 1909. Many believed that the Government was compelled to do so out of pressure, as felt by the revolutionary activism. In 1911, the Partition of Bengal was annulled and the British Indian capital was transferred to New Delhi from Calcutta. As a result, the dominance of Bengali politicians in pan-Indian level started to get fade away. But the annulment of the Partition Plan did not result into the end of revolutionary terrorism in India.

Among the British officials, the Viceroys were no way exceptions in case of being the targets of the revolutionaries. The most significant act of revolutionary attack in pre First World War period was the attempt on the life of Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy of India, on the day of 23 December 1912. Rashbehari Bose and Sachindranath Sanyal made an attempt on the life of Viceroy, who was on the back of an elephant during the state procession in Delhi on the occasion of the transfer of capital from Calcutta. The attempt was unsuccessful since the viceroy was wounded by the bomb thrown at him, but not killed.

During this time, a well-connected network had been initiated between the Punjabi, Indian and other revolutionaries. Rashbehari Bose appeared as the main leader of this network.

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## **11.4 The First World War and the Revolutionary Movement**

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The First World War provided the Indian revolutionaries a ground to make a unified network among them. Although the Jugantar groupe merged with a loose organisational structure, their later activities had more logically coherent orientations with well executed plan of actions. During the war-time, they were able to establish a collaborative relation with the Anusilan Samiti of eastern part of Bengal. This collaborative attitude did not only exist within the different groups of Bengal revolutionaries, but those who were active in other parts of India and even abroad. Their combined plan of actions included: (a) to motivate the Indian army based in India and Burma; (b) to spread the Gadarite revolutionary ideologies among the Punjabi Sikh immigrants of the United States of

America and to make their way back to India; (c) to import German arms and ammunitions for the Indian revolutionaries, especially for the Bengali revolutionaries; (d) to build a coherent network among the different revolutionary organisations working in India with an increasing membership and proper training. But, they were not able to achieve their desired ends, partly because of the lack of proper communication and partly because of the fact that the British Government took no chances to maintain the internal security of Indian empire especially when they were involved in a bloody warfare back to Europe.

The years between the First World War was not marked by continued actions on part of Indian revolutionaries, in spite of their activism in different phases in previous years. In Bengal, the only remarkable instance of revolutionary action was the robbery of 50 Mouser pistols along with 46,000 round bullets at the Rodda and Company in Kolkata. By the time, the revolutionary activism did spread in Punjab and the other parts of north India, where the Bengali revolutionaries were accompanied by the Punjabi Sikh revolutionaries coming from the United States. These groups continued their action across the northern part of India mainly in form of armed robberies. In September 1914, the Punjabi Gadarites stuck in a Japanese steamship called 'Komagata Maru', anchored near Budge Budge, Calcutta, got involved with the police forces that ultimately led to a riot with an estimated death of twenty people.

The Indian revolutionaries, mostly the Gadhar Party, exploited this event to rally the support to achieve their plan of action to overthrow the British Government with an armed struggle. Prominent Ghadarites like Barkatullah, Tarak Nath Das, Sohan Singh referred to this incident in a number of meetings in California and other places inhabited by the Indian immigrants in the United States.

It was during the First World War when the Indian revolutionaries planned to execute this armed revolution with the help of Germany or Japan. Rashbehari Bose, based in Lahore at that time, planned this armed struggle which would be executed across north India, ultimately escaped to Japan when he received no reciprocation from the Indian armies. At the same time, the Bengal revolutionaries under Jatin Mukherjee (popularly known as Bagha Jatin) took a similar plan to execute an armed revolution as well. During January-February of 1915, they managed to raise a fund of 4000 rupees by executing two armed robberies in Calcutta. In April, 1915, Narendranath Bhattacharya (popularly known as M. N. Roy in his later life) went to Java to send a huge shipment of arms and ammunition imported from the United States. Meanwhile, the British Government in India passed the Ingress into India Ordinance on 5 September 1914 (a) to delimit the Punjabi

immigration from abroad to India, (b) to control their activities after coming to India and (c) to make a hold on war-time emergency situation in terms of law and order. This was followed by the passing of the Defence of India Act in March 1915 in which the Imperial Government was given special power to arrest any suspect and start trial in a specially comprised tribunal. The revolutionary activism started to diminish to a larger extent in Bengal and other parts of north India because of the increased nature of official repression after this act. Almost 1600 people were under trial by this Defence of India Act, where most of them were in house arrest.

After the end of First World War, all the provisions of the Defence of India Act prevailed up to six months. Thus, the British Government was getting worried to take controls over the revolutionary activism in future. They were increasingly bothered about the possible anarchist nature of state after the annulment of the Defence of India Act, followed by the release of almost 800 to 1000 revolutionaries. In this context, a committee was set up by the Viceroy with S.A.T. Rowlatt as his president on 10 December 1917 to investigate the nature and development of revolutionary conspiracies in India. Along with that, this committee was appointed to advise the Government to enact and execute laws and ordinance to cope with the possible problems that might arise out of those revolutionary conspiracies.

On 15 April 1915, this committee submitted and published its report, which would be known as Sedition Committee 1918 Report or Rowlatt Report, which recommended the legal provisions to repress the terrorist activities, to arrest without any trial and to make special tribunals to try the suspects without juries. These provisions were ultimately passed in form of the Revolutionary and Anarchical Crimes Act on 21 March 1919.

The years between Swadeshi movement and the First World War also witnessed the eminence of Manabendranath Roy (1887-1954) into a leadership role. At the age of twenty, he was recruited in the ranks of Anusilan Samiti and went to work in a relief camp in the famine stricken area of Orissa in 1907. He also started writing journalistic pieces in Jugantar, by the same time. He was involved at least two dacoits case. The trial proceedings of the Howrah Conspiracy Case (1910) charged him and forty-three others 'to deprive the King Emperor of the sovereignty of British India'. After a year, Roy and others were released due to the lack of sufficient evidence. He established contact with the German Consul to obtain arms supplies but could not continue because of the outbreak of World War. In February 1915, Roy was one of the gang that looted cash from the British managing agency Byrd and Company in Calcutta. He was subsequently arrested but

jumped bail. Soon after, in April 1915, and again in August of the same year, Roy went to Batavia as an emissary, disguised as Revd. C.A.Martin, to obtain German arms. He failed and was informed about the death of Jatin Mukherjee, who he considered as his mentor. Later, he sailed to San Francisco and took fame in the Communist International.

The years between 1908 and 1918 had witnessed numerous cases of political dacoities. The composition of the dacoit gangs was distinct from professional criminals and mostly the Bengali bhadraloks comprised these gangs. The objective was also political in the sense that the loot collected was to be used for procuring explosives and arms for terrorist actions. According to police reports there were eighty-four such political dacoities in Bengal between 1908 and 1917 and about two thirds of these occurred in the eastern part of Bengal. In the western part of Bengal, the arrest of Ghosh brothers, the raid at Maniktala Muararipukur house and the Alipore Conspiracy Case proved to be a severe blow to the revolutionary activism. Along with the political dacoities, there were also a number of political assassinations, most often targetting minor officials and suspected traitors or police informers. Altogether forty-seven such cases were recorded between 1908 and 1918.

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## 11.5 The Revolutionaries: India and the Abroad

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The revolutionaries also established and developed their foreign establishments and connections. Some of the notable revolutionaries active in Europe and America included Shyamji Krishnavarma, V. D. Savarkar, Har Dayal, Madam Cama, Ajit Singh etc.

The Punjabi immigrants, mainly from Jullundar and Hoshiarpur districts started to flock down to the western coast of North America since the early twentieth century in order to find better means of livelihood. But they were the unexpected guests to the new lands because many of them were denied entries either into Canada or the United States of America and the others who somehow managed to stay were facing racial discriminations. On the other hand, the British administration was getting worried about the interactions and close connections between the whites of North America and the immigrant Indians as well as the growth of socialist ideas in that continent and the chances of getting influenced by those radical ideas on part of Indians. These factors, for instance, led to an effective restriction on Indian immigration into Canada in 1908. During this time, Taraknath Das, an Indian student started a news paper *FreeHindustan* and eventually became the first Indian leader in North America due to his opposition to the British Government and their policies

of Indian immigration to North America. He adopted through his newspaper a very militant nationalist tone.

G. D. Kumar set up Swadesh Sevak Home in Vancouver on the lines of the India House in London and also began to bring out a Gurumukhi paper called Swadesh Sevak which advocated social reform and also asked Indian troops to rise in revolt against the British. In 1910, Tarak Nath Das and G.D. Kumar, by now forced out of Vancouver, set up the United India House in Seattle in the US, where every Saturday they lectured to a group of twenty-five Indian labourers.

The United India House group emerged with the radical nationalist students. The Khalsha Diwan Society also consisted of similar members from the Sikh immigrants. Bhagwan Singh, a Sikh priest who worked in Hong Kong and the Malay State, visited Vancouver in early 1913 and started preaching openly the violent overthrow of the British Government. He adopted *Bande Mataram* as a revolutionary salute. He stayed back in Canada for three months. Lala Har Dayal, a political exile from India, soon took the leading role to organise their revolutionary ideology. He arrived in California in April 1911, taught at Stanford University and engaged in political activities. In the following years, he lectured among the radical intellectual groups about anarchism, syndicalism rather than highlighting the day to day problems and issues that were closely connected to the Indian immigrants in the USA. But the attacks on Lord Hardinge made him feel the necessity of a violent revolutionary overthrow of the British rule in India. Thereafter, he issued a Yugantar Circular praising the attack on the Viceroy.

Soon, the Hindi Association was set up in Portland in May 1913. Har Dayal in his plan of action emphasised the necessity of utilising the relatively free atmosphere of the United States, comparing to that of British India, to organise the revolutionary movement for India's independence. The working committee was set up and the decision was taken to start a weekly news paper, the Ghadar, for free circulation, and to set up the head quarter in San Francisco. The proposed name of headquarter would be 'Yugantar Ashram'. The Ghadar movement began with a propaganda of revolt in their mouth piece of the similar name which also contained the reports on the nature of British rule in India or the writings of Tilak, Aurobindo, Savarkar, Madame Cama, Shyamji Krishna Varma, Ajit Singh, Sufi Amba Prasad or the reports of the heroic deeds of Anusilan Samiti, Jugantar Dal or Russian Secret Societies.

In 1914, three events influenced the course of the Ghadhar movement: the arrest and escape of Har Dayal, the Komagata Maru incident and the outbreak of the First World War. Meanwhile, Ramnath Das, a political exile at the West Coast, issued a circular entitled Circular-e-Azadi (Circular of Liberty) in which he also pledged support to the Swadeshi movement.

The First World War provided a much awaited opportunity to the revolutionaries, among which the Ghadarites was the most significant one. A special meeting of the Ghadar Party was held to discuss the way to seize the opportunity as well as the strategy to convince the Indian soldiers and win their confidence over the Ghadarite causes. The Proclamation of War of the Ghadar Party or Ailan-e-Jung was issued and circulated widely. Mohammed Barkatullah, Ram Chandra and Bhagwan Singh organised and addressed a series of public meetings to exhort Indians to go back to India and organise an armed revolt. Prominent leaders were sent to persuade Indians living in Japan, the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Malay, Singapore and Burma to return home and join the rebels. The British Government in India, fully informed of the Ghadar plans, issued the Ingress into India Ordinance. Meanwhile, the Punjabi masses were not very much enthusiastic to join the Ghadar movement. Then the Ghadarites turned their attention to the army and made a number of attempts in November 1914 to get the army units to mutiny. But the lack of an organised leadership and central command made no difference in this regard too. Thereafter, they made contacts with the Bengali revolutionaries and Rash Behari Bose, as corresponded through Sachindranath Sanyal and Vishnu Ganesh Pingley, finally arrived in Punjab in mid-January 1915 to assume the leadership of the revolt.

Rashbehari's instructions to contact army units in different centres was followed by the date for the mutiny having fixed first on 21 February 1915 and then for 19 February 1915. But the Criminal Investigation Department succeeded to intercept their plan of actions and took the pre-emptive measures. The major leaders and the workers were arrested, but Rashbehari managed to escape. Conspiracy trials were held in Punjab and Mandalay, forty-five revolutionaries were sentenced to death and over 200 to long terms of imprisonment.

Some Indian revolutionaries, operating from Berlin continued with the German help to make attempts to organise a mutiny among the Indian troops stationed abroad. The Berlin Committee had connection with the Ghadar leader Ram Chandra in America. Raja Mahendra Pratap and Barkatullah tried to enlist the help of the Amir of Afghanistan. They set up the Provisional Government in Kabul, but these and other attempts failed to record any successful breakthroughs.

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## 11.6 Revolutionary Movement in the Inter-Warperiod

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From 1919 to 1923, there were few revolutionary actions. The Non-cooperation Movement generated the hope of an alternative path. There was a tacit understanding that the revolutionaries would give the Gandhian way a chance. A sort of agreement was explicitly discussed between Gandhi and Bhupendra Nath Dutta in Nagpur in 1920 Congress session. Datta promised Gandhi, on behalf of revolutionaries from all ranks, that they would follow his leadership, work for the Congress. But after a year or so, the revolutionaries began to go back to their own ways because the Congress failed to achieve Swaraj under the leadership of Gandhi. By 1923, the second wave of political dacoities started to a great extent; two in Chittagong and two in and near Calcutta in 1923.

Since the 1920s onwards, the events like Russian Bolshevik Revolution or the Marxist ideas began to be an influential factor, so far as the intellectual foundation of revolutionary ideologies in India was concerned. At the same time, the erstwhile revolutionary M.N.Roy established the Communist Party of India in Tashkent during the second COMINTERN (Communist International). Later, in Kanpur, the Communist Party of India (CPI) began to function with a steady organisation since 1925 onwards. CPI's later political programme was not at par with the revolutionary organisations like Anusilan or Yugantar group, but there was a link between the Communist movement and the revolutionary activism in colonial India, to some extent. It was M.N.Roy who sent emissaries to India to spread the idea of Marxism among the revolutionaries who were, at that time, interested to procure foreign aids in form of either money or arms and ammunitions. Later, the members of Anusilan and Jugantar groups became interested in Marxism and sent their members to the Soviet Union.

The passing of Rowlatt Act had very limited effect. The Defence of India Act of 1915 had already curbed their revolutionary activism during the First World War. Most of the revolutionaries were behind the bar when the Rowlatt Act was passed. The Indian nationalist movement took a new life after the enactment of this act which was followed by the first nation-wide agitation under Gandhi. Later, the scope of Gandhian movement expanded during the Non-cooperation movement, when the revolutionaries also restructured their organisation by participating in the Gandhian movement. But the call off of the movement after the Chauri-Chaura incident had been a severe blow to their initiative to remain stand by with Gandhi.



In the following years of the First World War, all the revolutionaries, imprisoned under the Defence of India Act, were released with effect of the provision of Royal Amnesty under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms. This made the way to participate in the Gandhian movements on part of those revolutionaries as well. Comparing to Jugantar, the Anusilan Samity had a little support for Gandhi and they published pamphlets with criticism of Congress policies. In post-Non-cooperation days, they were all on their way to previous stand points, once again. The Chittagong conference of Bengal Provincial Congress in April 1922 had been packed with a large number of revolutionaries who had discussions on their future strategies of actions. The situation was also ripe for their activism as well. All those repressive acts to curb the revolutionary terrorism were repealed as a part of Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. By 1922, the Rowlatt Act and the Indian Press Act of 1910 had also been withdrawn. It gave the opportunity to all the revolutionary organisations to propagate their thoughts, ideas, and strategies to the common masses through writings. As a part of it, revolutionary pamphlets like *Bijoli*, *Atmasakti*, *Sarathi*, *Muktikam* made a huge impact on youth, especially the students of Bengal. During this time, a new revolutionary organisation, the Hindustan Republican Association was formed in the United Provinces. The Anusilan cadres played a prominent role behind its foundation, but surprisingly it was not at all active in Bengal. In Bengal, the Jugantar group had organised most of the revolutionary actions. Towards the end of 1923, the Jugantar group under Surya Sen looted 17000 rupees from the Assam Bengal Railway office. Some suspects were arrested but subsequently released due to the lack of substantial evidences. As the Indian officials were the targets of those revolutionary actions, the British Government took no such repressive measures. But the situation changed when Gopinath made attempt at the life of Charles Tegart but mistakenly killed Mr. E. Day in January 1924. Three months later, again a British gentleman, Mr. Bruce had been killed in place of Tegart. These two events made the British administration in Bengal concerned about enacting some repressive laws like the erstwhile Defence of India Act. But the Imperial Council was not in favour of repeating their mistakes as happened in form of Rowlatt Act that ultimately swept the country with anti-colonial nationalist movement under the Gandhian leadership. Now, the British Government in India placed this matter to the Labour Government in London which passed the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance on 25 October 1925 for the next six months duration. Again, this ordinance made the police effective with the power of arresting any suspicious and detained without trial, not even under any special tribunal. Many revolutionaries were imprisoned in this phase, prominent among them being the figures like Subhas

Chandra Bose, who had been interned to Mandalay, Burma for the next two years. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal with his special power also passed the Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act on 25 March 1925. Between 1924 and 1927, around 183 people were arrested out of whom mostly Swarajists of C.R. Das's party.

As mentioned, the foundation of Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) was formed with the initiative of two Anusilan members, Sachindranath Sanyal, who was from Benaras branch of Samiti, and Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee who was from Dacca branch. Apart from the Gadhar Party of Punjab, the HRA was another significant organisation, out of Bengal. The HRA had a close connection with the Punjabi Gadhar Party and Anusilan Samity of Bengal. In India, the HRA was the first organisation which was heavily influenced by Marxism and the Russian Revolution. Both Sanyal and Chatterjee had been the members of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti and Sanyal opened a branch of Samity in Benaras. The HRA came into existence as a part of this plan of organisational expansion among the existing revolutionary groups active in the United Provinces. In October 1924, this initiative resulted into the formation of HRA along with a constitution of the organisation where the main objective was set to form the Federal Republic of the United States of India. A central executive committee was also formed comprising the members from all the provinces of British India, whose main responsibilities were to coordinate between the different branches of HRA within the territory of British India and to communicate with the emissary revolutionaries working outside India.

In addition, the HRA aimed at (a) publishing in vernaculars and in English the articles in which the Crime Investigation Department's activities were criticised; (b) making the masses sympathised towards revolutionary movements; (c) finding and executing the spies appointed by the CID; (d) procuring the arms and ammunitions; (e) raising funds; (f) sending the qualified ones to Russia or Germany to get military, navy and air-force trainings. M. N. Roy's role in regard to secure the financial and military aids from Russia were crucial. On the other hand, Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee outlined a five-point programme for HRA in a meeting of United Provinces Provincial Committee including (i) counter-propaganda of the CID, (ii) criticism of the repressive laws and measures of the Government, (iii) evaluation of the activities of Indian National Congress, (iv) propaganda of revolutionary and Communist ideas, and (v) collection of writings for publication.

The Dacca Anusilan Samiti's influence over HRA got faded away when Jogesh Chandra Chatterjee and Sachindranath Sanyal had some serious differences of opinions

with the chief organiser of the former organisation, Nagendra Sen. Meanwhile, three faction groups under Nalini Dutta, Charubikas Dutta and Suresh Bharadwaj came out of Anusilan Samity and one group under Surya Sen from the Jugantar Dal. The HRA, between 1923 and 1925, successfully organised three dacoities, although their primary targets were the indigenous rich businessmen and money lenders, in place of the British officials and Indian subordinates under them. But the organisation and the activism received a severe set back when Sachin Sanyal and Jogesh Chatterjee – both of them – were arrested. Subsequently, other members of the HRA were also caught and imprisoned after the Kakori incident under the leadership of Ramprasad Bismil, which was a part of their plan of fundraising activities in form of dacoities (August 9, 1925-Kakori, in which Rs. 4500 was stolen and a passenger on the train killed). The only member who managed to escape the police arrest was Chandrasekhar Azad. The Calcutta branch of HRA put more emphasis on manufacturing bombs that attracted the attention of police. The organisation of HRA in Bengal came to a standstill when the Dakhineswar raid took place and eleven members got arrested.

The prosecution of the Kakori Conspiracy Case took two years, and in 1927, four members—Ashfaqullah Khan, Ramprasad Bismil, Roshan Singh, Rajendra Lahiri— were condemned to hang. Five were transported for life imprisonment, further eleven awarded jail sentences.

Although north India based Hindustan Republican Army (HRA) in its formative stages owed much to the Bengali activists based in the United Provinces, particularly to fringe members of the Anushilan group, several elements of cross-fertilisation between activists in Bengal and north India, such as the sharing of bomb making techniques and periodic consultations on strategy were also the dominant factors during the 1920s. Sachindranath Sanyal wrote in 1924 the constitution of HRA with an aim to establish a 'Federated Republic of the United States of India by an organised and armed revolution. The writings of Sanyal (*Bandi Jeevan, A Jailed Life*) and the sacrifices of the Kakori prisoners inspired the next generations of the revolutionaries.

Bhagat Singh in the post-Kakori phase attempted to reorganise the revolutionaries across India by calling for a meeting of representatives from different provinces in Delhi at Ferozshah Kotla on 8-9 September, 1928. Representations from different organisations of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Punjab agreed to form one organisation and they were motivated by the growing influences of trade unionism and communism, determined to undermine the British, to work towards the establishment of socialism. The organisational activities of Bhagat Singh and his comrades ended up in the formation of the Hindustan

Socialist Republican Association (HSRA), after that meeting of revolutionaries at Feroze Shah Kotla, Delhi. Bengali revolutionaries were invited too but they did not attend. The contemporary Bengali organisations like the Jugantar and Anushilan Samities active in different districts of Bengal, had established a pattern of working independently, which neither was prepared to renounce. The HSRA constituted an ideological departure from Bengal revolutionary groups, which had from the late 1910s been strongly affiliated with 'caste and communal categories'.

The organisation took relentless attempt to make a positive impact on public opinion so far as the image of the revolutionaries was concerned. They had clear propaganda objectives in their mind that led to calculating and planning for future 'actions' or strategic attacks on select public officials.

On 17<sup>th</sup> of December 1928, the first of these kinds of attacks under the initiative of the HSRA was attempted against the Senior Superintendent of Police in Lahore, J.A.Scott, who ordered a lathi charge against the peaceful non-violent protestors during the anti-Simon Commission demonstration under the leadership of Lala Lajpat Rai at Lahore Railway Station. The Simon Commission was set up with all-white parliamentary delegation in order to provide some constitutional concessions to the Indians. Lajpat Rai died on 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1928 and the HSRA took this opportunity to respond in form of taking revenge against the British administration.

However in a case of mistaken identity, Bhagat Singh and Rajguru, the party's marksmen, gunned down John Poyantz Saunders, a twenty-one year old Assistant Superintendent of Police. They managed to escape and Chandrasekhar Azad shot an Indian constable, Chennan Singh during this action. Saunders took an active part in the lathi charge on Lajpat Rai, so they felt satisfied with their action of achieving their objective of avenge the martyrdom of Lala Lajpat Rai.

The new organisation sought to over ride both of these problems. On the other hand, the HSRA leadership decided to propagate among the common masses about their changed objectives and the necessity of participation of the masses in organising pan-Indian level revolution. On 8 April, 1929, Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutta had thrown bomb in the Central Legislative Assembly against the passages of the Public Safety Bill and the Trade Dispute Bill. In their opinion, these two bills were designed to curb the civil liberties of citizens in general and of worker in particular. Their objective was not to kill anyone, but to warn the British government, as declared in the leaflets they threw along with the bomb

in the Assembly Hall. Also, they wanted to use the court room as a platform to propagate their ideologies and aims of their movement to the masses.

Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt were tried in the Assembly Bomb Case, where later they were joined by Sukhdev, Rajguru and ten other revolutionaries. With their dauntless and defiant attitudes during the trial, as reported in the newspaper, the revolutionaries won the mass support and sympathy across the country. The trial was followed by a prolonged hunger strike in jail against the mal treatment of the prison authorities inside the jail premises, where they demanded that they must be treated as political prisoners, not as ordinary criminals. Once again, the public emotions wept the length and breadth of the subcontinent.

None the less, there were many Bengali activists in the HSRA, most notably Jatindranath Das who died after following a hunger-strike in jail in 1929 and B.K. Dutt, born in Kanpur but with roots in Burdwan, who would be arrested with Bhagat Singh in April 1929. On 13 September 1929, Jatin Das died on the 64<sup>th</sup> day of epic fast. The entire country rallied behind the hunger-strikers and the people attended at every railway stop when the train carrying Jatin Das's body was passing through, on its way from Lahore to Calcutta.

A large number of revolutionaries were convicted in the Lahore Conspiracy Case and other similar cases and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. Many of them were sent to Andamans. Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were sentenced to be hanged and they were subsequently executed on 23 March 1931. Before the hang sentences, their comrade Chandrasekhar Azad died in a shooting encounter in Alfred Park, Allahabad in February 1931.

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## **11.7 Bengal and the Revolutionary Movement: the 1920s and There after**

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The revolutionary activism received a fresh life after the appointment of Simon Commission in 1927-28. By the time, a handful of revolutionary organisations were influenced by the ideals of Marxism. The HRA under the leadership of Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad transformed their aims and objectives along with the name of their organisation. Now, the party was called Hindustan Socialist Republican Association.

In Bengal, until the end of 1926, the flow of revolutionary violence was less. Since March 1927, the Bengal Government decided to release all the prisoners, put behind the

bars under Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Ordinance of 1924 and Bengal Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1925. During this time, two other organisations apart from HSRA emerged in Bengal: (a) **Shree Sangha** and (b) **the Bengal Volunteers**. The Anusilam Samiti came also under the influence of Marxism by this time, mainly due to the initiatives taken up by Satish Pakrashi. Other organisations like the Revolt Group of the Advanced Party were founded where most of the members were already ideologically inclined to Marxism. Organisers like Satish Pakrashi, Dharani Goswami preached the ideals of mass movement, at the same time. On the other hand, Hemchandra Ghosh and his Shree Sangha and Subhas Bose's Bengal Volunteers' challenged the hegemony of Anusilan and Jugantar Dal. Since 1912, Hemchandra Ghosh was active with his organisation, the Revolutionary Fraternity, out of which the Shree Sangha and the Bengal Volunteers came into existence. During 1921-22, Dacca University graduate student Anil Roy laid the foundation of Shree Sangha. Later, he established the Social Service League, which later merged with the Dipali Sangha, a Dacca based women organisation.

In addition, the underground activities of the previous Anusilan Samiti and Jugantar Dal started to reorganise their plan of actions. Many of them, though, were working till then under the Congress organisation, hence getting access to the huge mass base of the Congress. Many of them also cooperated with the Swarajist work of C. R. Das. After his death, the two wings of Bengal provincial Congress under Subhas Chandra Bose and J.M.Sengupta were joined by the forces of Anushilan Samity and that of Yugantar Dal respectively.

So far as the assassinations of notorious British officials were concerned, the name of Charles Tegart topped the hit-list of the revolutionaries. Several plan of actions were attempted at the hated Police Commissioner of Calcutta throughout the 1920s. One such attempt was taken up by Gopinath Saha in January 1924. But the initiative was not successful, and another Englishman named Ernest Day was killed. This incident was followed by government repression in form of arrests of suspected revolutionaries and their supporters. Newly promulgated ordinances were passed to make the repression move effective. Leaders like Subhas Chandra Bose were arrested and Gopinath was hanged, in spite of mass opposition.

The Saha case was followed by detection and exposure of several bomb-manufacturing workshops in Calcutta and some district towns during 1925-26 and the conspiracy at Kakori, near Lucknow, in which nine revolutionaries from Bengal were involved.

The government repression, on the one hand, and the Anusilan-Jugantar rivalry on the other resulted into a phase of stagnation in revolutionary activism at least for a while. In this context, the spirit of revolution had once again been reignited by the Chittagong Revolt Group under the banner of Indian Republican Army.

The leader of this revolt group was Surya Sen, who had actively participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement. He became a teacher in a national school in Chittagong. This made him earn the title 'Master da'. Between 1926 and 1928, he was arrested and imprisoned for revolutionary activities, but he continued to work in the Congress. In Chittagong, he and his groups were closely associated with the Congress organisational works. In 1929, Surya Sen was the secretary and five of his associates were members of the Chittagong District Congress Committee.

Surya Sen was a brilliant and inspiring organiser. He was very fond of poetry, especially those of Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam. His humane approach in revolutionary ideology was reflected in his quote: "humanism is a special virtue of a revolutionary." A large band of young revolutionaries like Ananta Singh, Ganesh Ghosh, Lokenath Bal, Kalpana Dutta (later Joshi) gathered around him. In order to challenge the mighty British Empire, they decided to organise an armed rebellion with a plan to attack two main armouries in Chittagong. To achieve this, they destructed the telephone and the telegraph system of the town and dislocated the railway system between Chittagong and the rest of Bengal. The day of action was planned to be executed on 18 April, 1930. Under the banner of Indian Republican Army, sixty-five young revolutionaries were involved in this plan of action, in which a group of six revolutionaries under the leadership of Ganesh Ghosh captured the Police Armoury and another group of ten under Lokenath Bal took over the Auxiliary Force Armoury along with its Lewis guns and 303 army rifles. Unfortunately, they could not locate the ammunitions. Their war-cry during those actions included: *Inquilab Zindabad*, *Down with Imperialism* and *Gandhi Raj has been established*. They also proclaimed a Provisional Revolutionary Government based in the town of Chittagong.

Because of the army base in Chittagong, the revolutionaries, after their actions, decided to leave their own and marched towards the Chittagong hill ranges, looking for a secured place. Their move was followed by a fierce fight between them and the British troops who surrounded them on the Jalalabad hill on the afternoon of 22 April, mere four days later after their raids on government armouries. Around eighty British soldiers and twelve revolutionaries died in this fight and the leader of this revolt group, Surya Sen, decided to disperse into neighbouring villages and there after, conducted raids on

Government property and personnel. Despite several repressive measures and search operations, the villagers, mostly Muslims, gave food and shelter to the revolutionary outlaws and enabled them to survive for three years. A small unit from the latter group made a terror attack on the Chittagong European Club in September 1932 under the leadership of Pritilata Waddedar who committed suicide after completion of the mission. Surya Sen was betrayed to the police by a Hindu zamindar, finally arrested on 16 February 1933, tried and hanged on 12 January 1934. This was followed by arrests of many of his co-fighters and their long sentences of imprisonment.

In popular parlance and nationalist imagination, the impact of Chittagong Armoury Raid was immense, and followed by a steady rise in the recruitment of different revolutionary organisations throughout Bengal and India.

The Chittagong Armoury Raid followed and was followed by political violence in many fronts. In August 1930, Inspector-General of Police F.J. Lowman was assassinated in Dacca and his colleague Eric Hodson was wounded. While doing rounds, Benoy Bose, a medical student, came to know that the women would be at Dacca Hospital visiting an ill friend. Dressed in disguise, the students evaded and escaped arrests. Later in August, another assassination attempt was made on the life of Charles Tegart, the notorious Police Commissioner of Calcutta in Calcutta's central administrative district, the Dalhousie Square. In suspect, Dinesh Majumdar was arrested but managed to escape from jail. On 8 December 1930, Benoy Bose, Badal and Dinesh Gupta (of Bengal Volunteers Group) stormed the Writers' Building, offices of the Government of Bengal in central Calcutta, and killed N. A. Simpson, Inspector General of Prisons, who had also been in favour of preventive detention. Benoy Bose was identified as the medical student who had been behind the assassination of Lowman. Benoy and Badal committed suicide at the scene, and Dinesh Gupta, who had been seriously injured, was executed a year later after a special tribunal convicted him.

Between 1930 and 1933, revolutionary assassinations had been successfully executed at nine British officials and attempted at numerous Indian-born government officials and informers: three District-Magistrates in Midnapore district, one after the other; a judge in Calcutta; the Magistrate of Comilla Districts (killed by two schoolgirls, Santi Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, the first incident of this kind). The most famous-yet-unsuccessful attempt during this time was that made by Bina Das at the life of Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson while he was attending the Calcutta University convocation in 1932 as



Chancellor. During this three year period, twenty-two officials and twenty non-officials were killed.

The frequency of these acts increased across Bengal, from Calcutta to Darjeeling. The young boys and girls of university ages were involved. The attacks at the places like British owned spaces like clubs, race courses or sporting grounds indicated that the revolutionaries and their organisations continued to pose a threat to the security of the British government in India, in spite of repressive legislations.

To conclude: with the death and life imprisonment of HSRA revolutionaries, the revolutionary movement in Punjab, the United Provinces and Bihar came to an end. On the other hand, with the death sentence of Surya Sen in Bengal, the revolutionary activism also took a halt. A large number of revolutionaries, while in jail, turned to Marxism and the idea of socialist revolution by the masses. They, subsequently after their release, mostly after 1937 election and the formation of the Provincial government by the Congress and the other Indian regional parties, joined the Communist Party of India, Revolutionary Socialist Party of India and other Left-wing organisation. Some of them also joined the Gandhian wing of the Congress as well.

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## 11.8 The Congress and the Revolutionaries

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Since the early days of revolutionary movement in India, the Indian National Congress had been linked to the revolutionaries, in one way or the other. The nature of Swadeshi movement and the politics of extremism among two different wings within the Congress—the Moderates and the Extremists—indicated the important role that the revolutionaries played in influencing the Congress policies as well as the ways in which revolutionary politics overlapped and interacted, sometimes intimately and mostly clandestinely with the Congress

In the 1920s, Gandhi found himself pleading for acceptance of non-violence even if for reasons of expedience and pragmatism, on the basis that India was ill-equipped for an armed struggle. The Congress and the HSRA came together in three key sites of activities—Lahore, Delhi, Cawnpore (Kanpur)—during the late 1920s. In addition, radicalism was to be expected of the young Jawaharlal, whose ‘history sheet’ compiled by the Scotland Yard in 1927, noted his unenviable record in Indian revolutionary (as in leftist) affairs’ in India and in the Continent, a record marked by his meetings with an array of

extremists and exiles, his support for the convicts of the Kakori Conspiracy Case and for 'suspect bodies' such as the 'League Against Imperialism'. There were numerous evidences that proved the linkages between the revolutionaries and Motilal Nehru during the Swarajist Party's heydays. Many nationalist leaders accompanied revolutionary sympathies and Congress membership in the years 1928-31 without extensive ideological dilemma.

In 1931, in the aftermath of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact and the Karachi Congress, it fell to Gandhi to insist upon tightening Congress organisation and to redefine non-violence in utterly unambiguous terms. In 1933, the Government of India produced 'A Note on Terrorism in India (except Bengal), with a comparably sized volume detailing political violence in Bengal from 1905. By 1934, all the major revolutionaries were either sentenced to death or life imprisonment. It was only after the formation of provincial government by the Congress, and other regional parties, following the 1937 election, all the political prisoners, including the revolutionaries had been released. By then, most of the revolutionaries were attracted to Left ideologies or the Gandhian politics.

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## 11.9 Conclusions

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Through out the early decades of twentieth century, there revolutionary extremist politics challenged the colonial authority in numerous manners. Firstly, they were involved into the direct attacks on British officials and those Indians who were in some way or the other attached to the British rule in India. Actually, the revolutionaries in the pre- Gandhian phase first speculated a nation without any imperial authority, i.e. the Indian nation free from the British rule. The early nationalists (or moderates) never imagined India without the British rule, but they were in a process to wrestle for the negotiation as far as their participation and representation in the imperial administrative structure was concerned. On the other hand, the revolutionaries were in any way against the British rule and they wanted to overthrow the colonial system by armed revolution. Their perception of over throwing the British government from Indian subcontinent was itself revolutionary at that point of time. However, they started to take different initiatives in form of murder of the British officials, attacks on the government properties, armed robbery in order to terrorise the imperialist government. In this way, they were being labelled as revolutionary 'terrorists' in the official discourse of the colonial authority. In recent times, those revolutionary terrorists have been also described as revolutionary nationalists due to their contributions in the national movement. Earlier also, they were labelled as militant nationalists as well. But the terms

like 'militant' or 'terrorist' have acquired different connotations and are derogatory by meaning. These revolutionaries in colonial India, whether labelled as terrorists, militants or nationalists, have contributed towards the making of Indian nationalist struggle although due to their extremist activism, they received a little support from the masses. Thus, the revolutionary challenges towards the colonialism was not a mass movement but confined to a certain section of the society.

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## 11.10 Summary

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- Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the politics of extremism ultimately resulted into the emergence of revolutionary movement in India.
- The early revolutionaries were heavily influenced by the writings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati or Aurobindo Ghosh. The history of European and American revolutionary struggles also influenced their ideological underpinnings.
- The mainstream Indian National Congress politics had been influenced by the revolutionary activism on different occasions.
- The revolutionaries after the Non-Cooperation Movement were inclined towards the Marxist ideologies.
- Throughout the period since the early years of twentieth century until the mid 1930s, the revolutionary activism included political assassinations of British officials and their Indian subordinates, along with informers, spies or traitors within their organisation. In addition, their fundraising activities were relied upon the acts of robberies as well as on the foreign aids.
- The organisational side of different revolutionary groups remained limited since these organisations did not succeed to achieve the level of mass mobilisation as demonstrated by the Indian National Congress or other Left or non-Left political organisations working in the peasant, workers or dalit fronts.
- The Government of India, through out the time, passed numerous ordinances and laws to curb the revolutionary activities. The revolutionaries had succeeded, at least for a short period of time, to create a panic in the official minds. Thus, they were in contemporary official documents were referred to as the 'revolutionary terrorists'.

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## 11.11 Glossary/keywords

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Swadeshi, Bharat Mata, Bhawani Mandir, Atmasakti, Anusilan Samity, Jugantar, Revolutionary Terrorism, Revolutionary Nationalism, Hindustan Socialist Republican Association

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## 11.12 Model Questions

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1. Discuss the political context of late nineteenth century India that paved the way for the growth of revolutionary extremism?
2. Trace the ideological background of the emergence of political extremism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century India?
3. Discuss the limitations of moderate nationalists of the early years of Indian National Congress? Do you think that these limitations were playing dominant factors behind the rise of political extremism in colonial India?
4. Discuss the trends of Swadeshi Movement in Bengal in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Do you think that the official announcement of the Partition of India in 1905 accelerated the movement further?
5. Discuss briefly the political programmes and activities of the early revolutionary organisations in Bengal.
6. Do you consider the revolutionary terrorism as an ultimate stage of political extremism that became evident in the early years of twentieth century in India and abroad?
7. Discuss the role of Ghadar Party in the Indian nationalist movement.
8. How do you explain the relation between Gandhi and the revolutionaries in the context of Indian national movement?
9. To what extent did the doctrines of Marxism make an appeal to the revolutionaries in the 1930s? Do you agree that the apparent failure of Gandhian movement made the way for Marxism as far as the ideological inspiration of the revolutionaries was concerned?
10. Discuss how the Russian Revolution transformed the Indian national movement with special reference to the re-emergence of revolutionary terrorism.

11. Discuss the role of Hindustan Socialist Republican Association in the nationalist struggle in India.
12. How do you explain the relation between the Congress and the revolutionaries during the inter-war period in Indian nationalist politics?
13. To what extent did the colonial government become successful in curbing the revolutionary activism through legislations, trials and repressive measures in early decades of twentieth century?
14. 'Revolutionary activism in colonial India had no uniform pattern but acquired regional variations'—explain.

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### 11.13 Suggested Readings

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## Module 5

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### Unit 12 □ Colonialism Challenged – The Subaltern Approach

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#### *Structure*

12.1 Objectives

12.1 Introduction

12.2 Definition of Subaltern

12.3 The Subaltern Resistance Movements against Colonialism

12.3.1 Santhal rebellion

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12.3.3 Paika Revolt

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12.3.5 Sannyasi-Fakir Rebellion

12.3.6 Rangpur Uprising

12.3.7 Pabna Uprising

12.4 Conclusion

12.5 Model Questions

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### 13.0 Objectives

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At the end of this Unit the learners will understand:

- The different subaltern resistance movements against colonialism
- A detailed analysis of Santhal, Indigo, Paika, Chuar, Sannyasi - Fakir rebellion, Rangpur and Pabna uprising

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## 12.1 Introduction

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The great defeat at Plassey and subsequently at Buxar marked the beginning of the British colonial rule in Bengal. This new era witnessed a number of resistances from various parts since its establishment. Interestingly these early resistances came mostly from the lower strata of the society. Until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century no anti-colonial movement took place in Bengal from the upper strata of the society. Rather upper strata especially the Hindu upper class society was happy to surrender before the British colonizers as for them it was a blessing.

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## 12.2 Definition of Subaltern

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Before entering into the main theme of the chapter a quick look is necessary to understand what comes under the pale of the term 'Subaltern'. The term subaltern indicates the lower strata of the society. It includes the voices comes from marginal groups. Subaltern concept is an outcome of Post colonial theory. This theory describes "Subaltern" as people in the lower social classes and the 'Other' social groups that are displaced and marginalized while also living in an imperial colony. If there is little access or no access at all to the cultural imperialism then one is described as subaltern. According to Antonio Gramsci Subaltern means the cultural hegemony that excludes and displaces specific people and social groups from the socio-economic institutions of society, in order to deny their agency and voices in colonial politics. This section includes maximum number of population.

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## 12.3 The Subaltern Resistance Movements against Colonialism

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The first resistances against the colonial rule came from this large section of British India. Resistance forms against any exploitation. British colonial rule undermined largely rights, status and economic position of Indians. The early protest and resistance was mainly offered by the erstwhile displaced ruling classes, peasantry and tribal people.

### 12.3.1 Santhal rebellion

Santhal Uprising was one of the most impactful and important tribal movements in India. Its importance can be understood from the fact that Karl Marx (in *Notes on Indian*



*History*), Rabindranath Tagore and many other prominent authors described this movement in greater detail. It provided a great impact on future tribal and National Movements. It was the first Movement which set the Swaraj as the ultimate goal of the movement. Santhals started settling down in the foothills of Rajmahal in around 1780s. Santhals were given land and persuaded by local Zamindars, Moneylenders (Mahajans and Sahukars) and British administration to settle down in region and to push Pahariyas (local tribal group) out from the lower hills of Rajmahal. Santhals successfully pushed Pahariyas into deep forest in Rajmahal Hills and captured their lands. The land on which Santhals were living was declared as Damin-i-Koh (the land of Santhals).

Initially they were supportive to local Zamindars, Mahajans, Sahukars and Britishers (collectively called as 'Dikus' or outsiders by Santhals). But soon the situation started changing and Santhals found that the land they have cleared and brought under the cultivation was slipping away from their hands. The state was levying heavy taxes on the land that the Santhals had cleared, moneylenders were charging them high rates of interest and taking over their land on failure of repayment and Zamindars were asserting control over the Damin-i-Koh area. Hence Santhals found themselves trapped in a conspiracy by Dikus. Santhals usually taken loan for sowing seeds and for other purposes from local Sahukars and Mahajans at very high interest rates and on the failure of repayment of loans Sahukars and Mahajans tend to capture the land. The area of Damin-i-Koh region started decreasing. And in the process, British officers and police always supported Sahukars, Zamindars and Mahajans.

New Forest Policy brought by Britishers for using forest resources restricted the authority of Santhals over the forest resources. This created much disappointment among Santhals. They were forcibly used for laying down of railway track between Bhagalpur and Burdwan without any pay.

In the month of June, 1855, in a minor incident of theft many Santhal peoples were arrested by local police and brutally beaten up. In response of this incident the inspector of the police station was killed by a mob of Santhals. On 30th June, 1855, under the leadership of Sidho and Kanho, a group of 6000 Santhals were gathered in Bhaginidih and took up traditional armours such as arrow and bows and bowed to established Swaraj. Sidho and Kanho promised new revenue policy and natural justice based on their traditional system of justice. To stir religious sentiments among the revolutionaries, he said

that the *Singh Bonga* (Santhal god) came into their dreams and ordered to fight against Dikus and establish Swaraj over Damin-i-Koh region.

During the uprising, Santhals were attacked on police and the British Authorities. Besides these they also looted and murdered Mahajans and Sahukars. In a short span of time it spread all across the Damin-i-Koh region as well as Dhanbad, Bhagalpur, Singhbhum/Birbhum areas. The number of revolutionaries increased almost 10 times from 6000 to 60000.

Seeing the scale of the revolt, British administration immediately ordered for the Martial Law in Damin-i-Koh region. Major Baro was sent with 10 battalions of Army to contain the revolt but they remained unsuccessful in their attempt. After the failure of Major Baro and his Battalions, British administration sent a big unit of Army under the leadership of Captain Alexander and Lieutenant Thomson to suppress the revolt. This time they became successful to contain the revolt. During the process more than 15000 Santhals including Sidho and Kanho were killed and many were arrested. The revolt hence finally declined.

### **12.3.2 Indigo rebellion**

The British established commercial cultivation and production of Indigo in India as early as 1777. By 1788, most of the production of Indigo originated in Bengal. The system became highly exploitative when the planters were accorded permission to own the land.

At that time, there were two systems of cultivation of Indigo viz. Nij system and Ryoti System. Under the *Nij system*, the European planters produced indigo directly on land which they directly controlled. They either owned the land or took it on hire to cultivate indigo with hired peasants. Under Ryoti system, the planters forced the ryots or peasants to sign an agreement, so that they could get loans / advances called *Dadon* from planters to grow Indigo. However, one term of this agreement was that the Ryot would cultivate Indigo on at least 25% of the land. The loan made the people indebted and resulted in a rebellion in 1859-60 in Eastern Parts of Bengal.

The exploitation of the farmers made them understand that the planters had slowly got them into debt traps. They started losing land holdings due to poor output.

The revolt began as the peasants stopped paying rents. In March 1859, the revolt

became more organized when thousands of Ryots in Bengal refused to grow indigo. They attacked the Indigo factories with whatever weapons they had. Women joined the revolt and fought with pots, pans etc. The resistance was met with pressure from planters but farmers took pledge that they would not take advance and would not be bullied by the *lathiyals* of planters.

The key leaders of this revolt were Digambar Biswas and Bishnucharan Biswas. They were known as Biswas brothers of Nadia. Other than them Kader Molla of Pabna, Rafique Mondal of Naida etc. were also prominent leaders.

The revolt began from Govindpur village in Nadia district of Bengal where Biswas brothers gave up indigo cultivation. This was followed by a struggle with the lathiyals and revolt spread in many parts of Bengal. Strikes, legal actions, violence, social boycott of planters etc. were some of the tools used in the revolt. Peasant organization to some extent, Hindu Muslim Unity, support from Bengal intelligentsia made the revolt more effective. Finally, Indigo Commission was appointed which held the planters guilty, and criticized them for the coercive methods they used with indigo cultivators. The company asked ryots to fulfil their existing contracts but also told them that they could refuse to produce indigo in future. This was a big relief for the peasants and gradually the plantations of Indigo came to an end in Bengal.

### **12.3.3 Paika Revolt**

The Paika revolt took place in Odisha, but it had deep impact on Bengal especially on present day Midnapore region too. Paikas were peasant Militia of the Gajapati rulers of Odisha. These people offered military services to the kings and during peace time they took up cultivation as their occupation. The Paikas were organised into three ranks distinguished by their occupation and the weapons they wielded. These were the Paharis, the Banuas and the Dhenkiyas. Paharis were the bearers of shields and swords. The Banuas led distant expeditions and used matchlocks. The Dhenkiyas were archers who also performed different duties in Odisha armies. With the conquest of Odisha by the East India Company in 1803 and the dethronement of the ruler of Khurda, the power and prestige of the Paikas began to decline. The attitude of the company to the Paikas was expressed by Walter Ewer, on the commission that looked into the causes of the Rebellion, stating that “now there is no need of assistance of Paikas at Khurda. It is dangerous to keep them in the Presidency armies. Thus they should be treated and dealt as common Ryots and land

revenue and other taxes should be collected from them. They must be deprived of their former Jagir lands. Within a short period of time the name of Paika has already been forgotten. But still now where the Paikas are living they have retained their previous aggressive nature. In order to break their poisonous teeth, the colonial Police Force must be highly alert to keep the Paikas under their control for a pretty long period, unless the Paika community is ruined completely Company rule cannot run smoothly.

The Paika Rebellion was led by Bakshi Jagabandhu, the former *bakshi* or commander of the forces of the Raja of Khurda. Jagabandhu's familial estate of Killa Rorang was taken over by the East India Company in 1814, reducing him to penury. When the rebellion broke out in March 1817, the Paikas came together under his leadership. Raja Mukunda Deva, the last King of Khurda was another leader of the Paika rebels. The rebellion enjoyed widespread support in Oriya society with feudal chiefs, paikrays' zamindars and the common people of Odisha participating in it. The zamindars of Karipur, Mrichpur, Golra, Balarampur, Budnakera and Rupasa supported the Paikas. While the rebellion started from Banapur and Khurda, it quickly spread to other parts of Odisha such as Puri, Pipili and Cuttack and to several remote villages, including Kanika, Kujang and Pattamundai. The Rajas of Kanika, Kujang, Nayagarh and Ghumusur aided Jagabandhu and Dalabeher. Mir Haidar Alli of Jadupur was an important Muslim rebel.

The uprising spread rapidly across Odisha, and there were several encounters between Company troops and Paik forces, including at Cuttack, where the latter were quickly defeated. By May 1817, the East India Company had managed to re-establish their authority over the entire province, but it proved to be a significant period of time before tranquillity finally returned to the region.

#### **12.3.4 Chuar Uprising**

The Chuar uprising was a series of peasant rebellions against the East India Company that took place between 1771 and 1809 in the area around the villages of Midnapore, Bankura, and Manbhum. The rebels rose in revolt in response to the East India Company's oppressive land revenue policy, which endangered their economic survival. Chuar Uprising is also called Jungle Mahal Revolt.

The first Chuar uprising erupted in response to the jungle zamindars' increased earnings. The money was difficult to generate because the forest region produced little. In

1767, the British residents of Midnapur were ordered to demolish their mud forts, which infuriated the zamindars. In 1768, Jagannath Singh, the zamindar of Ghatsila (or the monarch of Dhalbhum), led a rebellion with thousands of Chuar supporters. The Company's government surrendered. The Chuar sardars, Shyam Ganjan of Dhadka, Subla Singh of Kaliapal, and Dubraj, rose in revolt in 1771. However, the uprising was put down this time. Durjan (or Durjol) Singh led the most major revolt in 1798. The East India Company's tax and administrative policies (including the Permanent Settlement), as well as the police restrictions enforced in rural Bengal, rendered the practice of employing local paiks obsolete since they were eventually replaced by professional police. In the Chuar uprising of 1798, disgruntled paiks and common Chuars banded together with the jungle zamindars. Durjan Singh was the zamindar of Raipur, which he lost due to the actions of the Bengal Regulations. In May 1798, his supporters, a group of 1,500 Chuars, engaged in violent operations in Raipur to prevent the auction of Raipur's estate. In 1799, the British violently repressed the insurrection. Other Chuar chiefs were Madhab Singh, the raja of Barabhum's brother; Raja Mohan Singh, zamindar of Juriah; and Lachman Singh of Dulma. The individuals involved in the uprisings were all connected to the land in some way: zamindars, paiks, and common Chuars. It may be said that there was a collision of lifestyles. The rebels had previously lived an agricultural lifestyle, in a small community. The invasion of colonial armies into their territory introduced them to a new circumstance that disrupted their way of life. They were also unwilling to accept foreigners (or non-Adivasis). Some historians believe the epithet 'Chuar' to be disparaging, and instead, refer to this as the Revolt of the Jungle Mahal.

With the assistance of local landlords, the British were able to quash the uprising with maximum severity and deception. In the process, around 200 insurgents were executed. Some historians oppose the name "Chuar" being used to describe this uprising since it was a disparaging epithet employed by the ruling class.

### **12.3.5 Sannyasi-Fakir Rebellion**

Sannyasi Fakir Rebellion was an armed resistance of the combined body of Muslim fakirs (sufis) and Hindu sannyasis (yogis) against the dominance of the English East India Company in Bengal. This resistance began in 1760 and continued for more than four decades. The most striking point in this prolonged resistance of the mendicants is the cause behind the movement. The reason is still left obscure. It seems that the regulations of the East India Company seriously disturbed the ways of life of the Muslim fakirs and Hindu sannyasis thereby pushing them to make common cause and to take resort to armed

resistance.

The resisting fakirs belonged to the Madaria tarika, a sufi sect which flourished in Bengal under the leadership of Shah Sultan Hasan Suriya Burhana in the second half of the seventeenth century. The sannyasis were the Vedantic Hindu yogis belonging to the Giri and Puri groups of ek-dandi sannyasism. Both the fakirs and sannyasis were armed bands living in khankas and akhdas respectively. In rituals and practices there was good deal of affinity between the sufi fakirs and yogi sannyasis and that contributed to their common alliance against the alien rule.

The Fakir-Sannyasi Resistance movement was organised and led by Majnu shah, a sufi saint of Madaria sect. He succeeded Shah Sultan Hasan Suriya Burhana to the leadership of the Bihar based Madariasufi order in the mid-eighteenth century. He had his lieutenants in the persons of the sufis like Musa Shah, Cherag Ali Shah, Paragal Shah, Sobhan Shah, Karim Shah etc. Bhabani Pathak, a Bhojpuri Brahmin, who had discourse with Majnu Shah and also had communication with a petty zamindar Devi Chaudhurani, led the sannyasi rebels. By the late 1790s, the revolt began to be subsided only to wither away in the form of stray resistance in the subsequent decade.

### **12.3.6 Rangpur Uprising**

The East India Company was intent on squeezing out maximum revenue from the peasants. At that time, the Ijaradari system was in place according to which the ijardar/izaredar (revenue farmer) was contracted by the Company to pay revenue that was fixed either annually or every 5 years on a piece of land. The company would auction off the land to the highest bidder (who became the ijardar). The ijardar was not interested in the welfare of the farmers who cultivated the land under him or in the development of the land. His sole aim was to squeeze out maximum revenue from the farmers so that he could pay the company and also earn some profit for himself. Agrarian economy suffered a lot under the various 'experiments' by the British on the land revenue system. Famines became commonplace and rural indebtedness surged. The farmers became mired in deep poverty. The tax rates were so high that the farmers found it almost impossible to pay the revenue. The zamindars also suffered under this system since the revenue demands were placed on him and he stood to lose his zamindari if he defaulted. The ijardars resorted to oppressive means to extract the revenue. Debi Singh, who was the ijardar of Rangpur and Dinajpur was especially severe. Debi Singh practised extremely harsh measures against the peasants. When the peasants sent a petition to the company asking for relief, it did not pay any heed

to the farmers' grievances. This led to the farmers taking things into their own hands.

The uprising started on January 18, 1783, when peasants and zamindars took control of the Parganas of Kakina, Kazirhat and Tapa in district Rangpur. They attacked the courts, looted grains and released prisoners. For a whole five weeks, these areas were under the control of the rebels who appointed a nawab and other officials for running a parallel government. One of the main leaders of the revolt was Kena Sarkar. They forbid all revenue payments to the company. The uprising spread to Dinajpur also. Ultimately, the uprising was put down by the British and many rebels were killed. This uprising brought to light the weaknesses of the ijardari system. Though the rebellion was suppressed, the government brought about some reforms in the farming system. It paved the way for a more permanent system of land revenue.

### **12.3.7 Pabna Uprising**

Pabna Peasant Uprising a resistance movement against the oppression of the zamindars. It originated in the Yusuf shahi pargana, which is now the Sirajganj district within greater Pabna. The zamindars routinely collected money from the peasants by the illegal means of forced levy, abwabs (cesses), enhanced rent and so on. Peasants were often evicted from land on the pretext of non-payment of rent. The immediate background of the present rising in Pabna was a case filed by zamindars against 43 leading raiyats of Urkandee village. These raiyats refused to pay the enhanced rent, which they claimed to be illegal. The raiyats had deposited the rent with the court. In support of their demands, the zamindars produced documents and claimed that the raiyats had been paying the rent demanded of them for one decade. The Munsiff of Shazadpur Court decreed in favour of the zamindars in April 1872, but the Civil Judge of Rajshahi reversed the decision in December 1872, believing that the zamindars had 'concocted' the documents. The Judgement of the appellate court was looked upon by the raiyats as their moral victory over the zamindars. The Pabna Raiyats' League came into existence in May 1873, and gradually spread its influence over a large part of the district. One of the leaders of the League was Ishan Chandra Roy, commonly known as Ishan Raja. Koodi Molla and Shambhu Nath Pal were prominent among his followers. They declared their parganas independent of zamindari control and fancied setting up a local government. They even set up a 'rebel army' to fight the zamindari lathials (clubmen). Trusted deputies were placed in charge of various departments. Several persons were in charge of the 'rebel army', and were stationed at different strategic parts of the

district. The Pabna movement, in its formative phase, was lawful and non-violent, but as the League grew stronger, it became more violent. When the League activities threatened public peace, the government intervened to restore peace. In a proclamation of 4 July 1873 Sir George Campbell, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, declared his determination to protect the people from all coercion and extortion, and advised the zamindars to assert their claims by legal means only. The movement subsided in the face of police action and a famine that broke out in 1873-74.

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## 12.4 Conclusion

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Subaltern movement against the British rule carried in their own way. Most common causes of these movements were threat to their livelihood as a result of colonial rule. The British rulers applied brutal force to combat these resistances. Thus most of these uprisings witnessed bloodshed. After the rise of Gandhi in Indian politics, the Indian National Congress made attempt to accommodate the subaltern consciousness and rebel activities within the fold of the Gandhian ideology of nonviolence in order to strengthen the anti-colonial movement. Despite the effort of the Congress leaders, the rebel consciousness of the subaltern classes was not fully incorporated within the ideological and organizational framework of the Congress. The subaltern voices were never blended with the mainstream nationalist ideology completely. The subaltern classes were successful both to retain and upheld their own voices.

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## 12.5 Model Questions

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1. What were the factors behind the Indigo Revolt?
2. Why did the subaltern classes offer resistance against colonialism?
3. Discuss briefly the fundamental features of the subaltern resistance against the British colonialism.
4. Write a short note on Pabna uprising.
5. Write a note on Rangpur uprising.



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## 12.6 Suggested Readings

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নরহরি কবিরাজ, স্বাধীনতা সংগ্রামে বাঙলা, কলকাতা।

সুপ্রকাশ রায়, ভারতের কৃষক বিদ্রোহ ও গণতান্ত্রিক সংগ্রাম, কলকাতা।

সুপ্রকাশ রায়, ভারতের জাতীয়তাবাদী বৈপ্লবিক সংগ্রাম, কলকাতা।

গৌতম ভদ্র, ইমান ও নিশান, কলকাতা।

## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 13 □ Communalism or ‘Different Nationalisms’? The Debate**

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##### *Structure*

- 13.0 Objectives**
- 13.1 Introduction**
- 13.2 Community and Nation**
- 13.3 Swadeshi movement and its impact on ‘different nationalisms’**
- 13.4 Emergence of other perspectives of nationalisms in the Muslim community**
- 13.5 The Khilafat movement and Rising Tensions**
- 13.6 Congress’ Claim to Single Nationalism and its Impact**
- 13.7 The Bengal Pact**
- 13.8 The Hindu Anxiety at Muslim Growth**
- 13.9 Muslim alienation**
- 13.10 Conclusion**
- 13.11 Summary**
- 13.12 Model Questions**
- 13.13 Suggested Readings**

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### **13.0 Objectives**

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At the end of this Unit the learners will understand:

- Community consciousness is important in a nationalist consciousness and not necessarily contradictory to it
- In colonial Bengal the regional identity was important to both the Hindus and the Muslims
- The significance of the Bengal Pact proposed by C.R. Das

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## 13.1 Introduction

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Between the partition of Bengal in 1905 and partition of India in 1947, Bengal witnessed a unique experience of imagining ‘nations.’ There were numerous competing visions of nationhood and various frameworks for realising them, resulting in a lively debate. The concept of ‘difference,’ which originates within each recognised nation and contradicts the ambitious claims from within any conceivable nation, was the lynchpin for all of these opposing nationalisms. Even if the dominant nation-state rhetoric seeks to label them as such, alternative nation-imaginings are far from anti-national. According to modern researchers, many nationalisms existed in Bengal during various periods of the country’s history, just as they did in the rest of the country.

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## 13.2 Community and Nation

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It is often argued that it is rather uncharitable to relegate all references to community as ‘communal’ ideology or to dismiss them as antithetical to nationalism. Ayesha Jalal argues that the problem of difference in South Asia cannot begin to be addressed without forsaking the dichotomies between “secular” and “religious” as well as “nationalism” and “communalism”.

Semanti Ghosh in *Different Nationalisms: Bengal 1905-1947* claims that community consciousness need not rise above nationalist consciousness, nor must it be collapsed into it. In colonial Bengal among both the Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslims in the strands of national imaginings, ‘region’ was of critical importance. The region of Bengal with its linguistic and cultural particularities provided a common space for the different communities. The regional identities, the multiple articulations, resulted in a number of parallel nationalistic perspectives. This linguistic–regional spirit was later co-opted by the all-India singular nationalism.

The Muslim identity in Bengal was not purely religious in nature. Historians have noted that the Muslim identity in South Asia is too complex and has too many internal variations to be neatly termed as ‘communalism’. It was thus not a mere religious identity that led to the Partition. The Bengali Muslims did not rule out the possibilities of negotiating with ‘regional’ or broader ‘national’ identities. However, this perspective of history has not been seriously addressed like it should have been.

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### 13.3 Swadeshi Movement and its Impact on ‘Different Nationalisms’

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The Swadeshi movement began in Bengal in 1905 as a protest against the partition of Bengal proposed by Lord Curzon. It was opposed by both the Hindus and Muslims as an attempt to divide the nationalist strength of the Bengalis. The Rakshabandhan programme initiated by Tagore as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity became immensely popular. The boycotting of British goods agenda, on the other hand, was fiercely opposed at the local level, as it jeopardised the interests of the poorer classes in the countryside. Due to the boycott of relatively cheaper British goods, they had great difficulty promoting their own produce and obtaining daily provisions at more competitive costs. *Ghare Baire*, one of Tagore’s post-swadeshi disillusionment novels, vividly depicted the dynamics of local tensions and conflicted class interests around the swadeshi programme of economic boycott. During this time, Muslim writers frequently highlighted the same challenges faced by the local population as a result of the swadeshi movement. In pre-partition Bengal, where Muslims made up the bulk of the rural population, swadeshi and boycotting served to make their daily lives more difficult. The lower caste Hindus also felt alienated to some extent and it is interesting to note that the Congress Barisal District Conference of August 1908 was not attended by the Namasudras of the region.

The majority of the upper and middle class Hindus were however not affected economically. They came up with large number of artistic portraits of the nation, evoked in swadeshi songs, poems, and idioms, gave rise to a distinct cult of *Bangajanani*, Mother Bengal. The image of Mother Bengal soon became linked to the image of the nation suggested in the final verse of Bankimchandra’s song ‘Bande Mataram’, a key national hymn by this time. The celebration of the Pratapditya and Shivaji Utsavs and the rise of such politico-cultural exercise failed to impress many Muslims who could not identify themselves with idol worship and often felt neglected and offended. In 1907, the emergence of Extremists within the Congress and revolutionaries outside the mainstream Congress movement played a significant part in reinforcing and popularising this tendency of self-aware and purposeful Hindu nationalism. The Muslims often criticized the Congress as a Hindu organization.

The foundation of the All India Muslim League in 1906 has been always been highlighted in history. But what has been overlooked is the fierce debate over the language issue, or the medium of instruction for Mohammedan education in Bengal, at the All-India

Mohammedan Educational Conference in Dacca in 1906, which preceded the formation of the All India Muslim League (December 1906). The Muslims of Bengal were in favour of adopting Urdu as the medium of instruction.

The Morley-Minto Act of 1909 provided Muslims a non-official majority exclusively in the Bengal Legislative Council. It was heavily criticised by the nationalists for infusing the “communal poison of distinct electorate”. The annulment of partition in 1912 was a welcome relief for Hindus but for the Bengali Muslim aristocracy and burgeoning Muslim middle class, it meant an immediate loss of income for professionals in the mofussils and loss of social and economic opportunities. Nawab Salimullah despatched Syed Ali Chowdhury and Fazlul Huq to Viceroy in January 1912 demanding a new and independent Dacca University for Eastern Bengal’s disadvantaged Muslims so that their interests could be protected.

Bengali Muslim leaders such as Abdur Rasul and Abdullah Khan Suhrawardy pondered the possibility of forming an independent organisation for the province of Bengal, believing that the League was confined within narrow limits and an active affiliation to the AIML would be detrimental to the interests of the Bengali Muslims’. Nawab Salimullah averted the ‘crisis’ for the AIML by his masterly intervention in the Amalgamation Conference in Calcutta in 1912. A brief period of compromise also followed with the Congress with the signing of the Lucknow Pact in 1916, which recognized the Muslim demand for separate electorates.

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### **13.5 The Khilafat movement and Rising Tensions**

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Gandhi paved the way for unprecedented Hindu-Muslim cooperation by backing the Khilafat movement, which employed a pan-Islamic emblem to promote pan-Indian Muslim unity. However, by 1924, the movement had died out owing to internal strife and, finally, the overthrow of the Caliphate through a republican revolution in Turkey led by Kemal Pasha. The Khilafat movement, on the other hand, contributed to the building of Muslim identity in Bengal. The enthusiastic ulama who were driven into service frequently used religious symbols, emphasised the Indian Muslims’ Islamic identity.

Christophe Jaffrelot (1996) claimed, this Muslim mobilisation under the banner of Khilafat created a sense of inferiority and insecurity among Hindus, who began counter-mobilization in imitation of their hostile ‘other’. In 1924, the Arya Samaj began a militant

*suddhi* campaign in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, while the Hindu Mahasabha began its drive toward Hindu *sangathan*. The Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, an overtly aggressive Hindu organisation, was also born in the same year.

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### **13.6 Congress' Claim to Single Nationalism and its Impact**

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There were several reasons for the dramatic deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations since the Khilafat movement. According to Gyanendra Pandey, the Congress's understanding of nationalism shifted dramatically in the 1920s. There was now a clear inclination to delegitimize religious nationalism by relegating religion to the private sector. In public speeches, Congress leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru emphasized the Indian nation's secularist position, which was seen as superior to community interests.

According to Jaffrelot (1996), there was a constant war inside the Congress between two opposing concepts of nationalism: one based on composite culture, i.e., nation above community, and the other based on Hindu racial domination, particularly Muslim subordination. Furthermore, the protagonists of the former regularly surrendered to or made compromises with those of the latter, giving Muslims ample reason to be suspicious of the genuine motives of Congress politicians.

As Ayesha Jalal points out, the Muslims at this point needed a political framework capable of accepting cultural variations. They sought "shared sovereignty," and were not against a united India, but challenged Congress' claim to indivisible sovereignty. On the Muslim side, leaders like Muhammad Ali, who favoured communal harmony and once saw India as a federation of faiths, were now marginalized; and leaders like Dr Kirchlew, who were once staunchly in favor of Hindu-Muslim unity, now turned uncompromisingly against any communal reconciliation after the withdrawal of Non-cooperation, when Congress reverted to constitutionalism. Jinnah was enthusiastic about working with the Swarajists. He did, however, wish to renegotiate the Lucknow Pact with Congress. The Mahasabhites were not willing, despite the fact that the swarajists were.

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### **13.7 The Bengal Pact**

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The strong Muslim support behind the Swaraj Party was key to its extraordinary political success and 'domination' of the Council and the Calcutta Corporation about 1924.

Das was almost alone responsible for this unique social bridging. No other Bengali politician, before or after him, had been able to garner such widespread support from the Bengali Muslim population. Under his leadership, the professional Hindu *bhadralok* society was forced to work together with rural leaders, revolutionaries, labor leaders, and, most importantly, Muslim commercial and professional sections.

In December 1923, Das proposed a historic Hindu–Muslim partnership for bearing the municipal responsibilities. This was later developed into the Bengal Pact.

According to this Pact, representation in the Bengal Legislative Council was suggested on the basis of population ratio with separate electorates. In the local bodies the proposed proportion was 60:40 (60 for the majority community, and 40 for the minority community) in every district. Moreover, 55 per cent of the government posts were to be earmarked for the Muslims.

The Pact drew vehement criticism from educated Bengali Hindus and enthusiastic support from urban professional Muslims, as one might expect. Das' experiment revealed a hopeful vision of the nation, one that was inclusive in its goal and ambition, eager to embrace differences instead of dismissing them. In publications like *Bande Mataram*, *Hindustani*, *Bengalee*, and, of course, Das' newspaper *Forward*, the Pact was applauded and seen as a bold step forward. After the inequitable stipulations of the Lucknow Pact, which denied Bengal Muslims their right to equal treatment, the Bengal Pact boldly divided the province among its members based on their numerical strength.

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## 13.8 The Hindu Anxiety at Muslim Growth

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According to Semanti Ghosh, the third decade of the century saw a great spurt in Hindu anxiety. The reason as the conservative sectarian discourse suggested was that the Hindus were worried that the Muslims overtaking the Hindus in Bengal resulting in the latter's marginalization. At the same time they believed large numbers of low-caste people were being converted to Islam.

Outside the arena of institutional politics, mobilization of Hindus came to be centred around the claim of the right to play music before mosques and this demand gathered momentum in various parts of the country including Bengal and it was used to consolidate Hindu solidarity. Shekhar Bandyopadhyay has pointed out how within the Congress,

Swarajists like Motilal Nehru were increasingly sidelined and they gave way to pressure to nominate pro-Mahasabha candidates. Congress did not appoint even one Muslim candidate in 1926 and in other regions, all Congress Muslim candidates lost. Shaukat Ali criticized the Congress as an adjunct of Hindu Mahasabha in 1929.

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### **13.9 Muslim alienation**

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Muslim alienation from Congress politics was reflected in their large-scale abstention from the Civil Disobedience and the Quit India Movements. The Muslims were not a political community yet, and even in late 1930s Muslim politics remained caught in provincial dynamics, as their interests in Bengal and Punjab, where they were a majority, were different from those of others in the minority provinces.

The Krishak Praja Party, led by A.K. Fazlul Huq, mobilized both Muslim and lower caste Hindu peasants in Bengal on class-based objectives, and battled with the Muslim League after its resurrection in 1936. In the election of 1937, both regional parties did well in gaining Muslim votes, whereas the Muslim League had a poor showing across India. The Congress's tremendous victory in this election, as well as the arrogance that it produced, eventually pulled all of these disparate groups together under the banner of a rejuvenated and revitalised Muslim League led by Jinnah.

Finally, the Muslim League's Lahore resolution in March 1940 proclaimed the Muslims as a nation separate from the Hindus. There was no reference to Pakistan but there was a statement regarding Muslim majority provinces constituting independent states in future. Soon these sentiments were accepted by the wider Muslim population. The path from this declaration of nationhood to its actual realization was long and bitter.

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### **13.10 Conclusion**

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Just as the proponents of the infamous 'two-nation theory' were completely averse to admit any other interests or identities within their perceived boundaries of two mutually exclusive nations, the protagonists of the 'one nation vision' were equally dismissive of any rights or claims emerging from within their projected self-defining and centralizing imaginary.



All this makes clear that the ‘other’ identities like region and religion did not always necessarily impede the cause of nationalism in an absolutely antagonistic manner. In fact, they often assisted the realized experience of the nation at key moments of its articulation.

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### 13.11 Summary

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- According to studies, many nationalisms existed in Bengal during various periods of the country’s history, just as they did in the rest of the country.
- In colonial Bengal among both the Bengali Hindus and the Bengali Muslims in the strands of national imaginings, ‘region’ of Bengal was of critical importance.
- During swadeshi due to boycott of relatively cheaper goods the majority rural poor suffered greatly as reflected by Tagore in *Ghare-baire*.
- The Khilafat movement, on the other hand, contributed to the building of Muslim identity in Bengal.
- Congress’ claim to single nationalism was questioned by the Bengal Muslims.
- Muslims backed the Swaraj party under C.R. Das and C.R. Das developed the Bengal Pact.
- The Bengal pact of 1923 was a bold step forward placing Muslim population in Bengal on an equitable footing in Bengal .
- According to Semanti Ghosh, the third decade of the century saw a great spurt in anxiety of Hindu conservatives.
- Even in late 1930s Muslim politics remained caught in provincial dynamics.
- Both the protagonists of ‘two-nation theory’ and ‘one nation vision’ dismissed the other identities .

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### 13.12 Model Questions

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1. How was the region of Bengal important in the imagination of Hindu and Muslim Bengalis?
2. Why was boycott opposed by the lower rung of society during the Swadeshi movement?
3. How did the All-India Muslim League suppress the regional voices of the Muslims?

4. How did the Khilafat movement contribute to the building of a Muslim identity in Bengal?
5. Was the Congress claim to single nationalism justified? Give reasons for your answer.
6. What was C.R. Das' Bengal Pact? Why was it significant?
7. Why were the Hindu conservative anxious about the growing political consciousness of the Muslims?
8. Why did the Muslim League fail to win over the Muslims during the elections of 1937?

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### 13.13 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 14 □ The Forging of Class Consciousness I; Trade Union Movement and Working-Class Consciousness**

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##### *Structure*

- 14.0 Objectives**
- 14.1 Introduction**
- 14.2. Nature of working class in Bengal**
  - 14.2.1 Recruitment through jobbers or Sardars**
- 14.3 Stages of Development of the Working-Class Movement in Bengal**
  - 14.3.1 Early stage**
  - 14.3.2 Swadeshi movement and afterwards (1905-18)**
  - 14.3.3 First World War stage: Non-Cooperation movement and afterwards**
  - 14.3.4 Working Class Movement from 1922 to 1935**
  - 14.3.5 Working Class Movement from 1935-39**
  - 14.3.6 Working class movement 1940-45**
  - 14.3.7 Last phase: Working class movement 1945-47**
- 14.4 Conclusion**
- 14.5 Summary**
- 14.6 Model Questions**
- 14.7 Suggested Readings**

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#### **14.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will understand:

- The general nature of working class in colonial Bengal
- The different stages in the development of working-class consciousness in Bengal

- The demands and problems of the working-class movement
- Development of trade unionism during the nationalist movement

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## 14.1 Introduction

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The gradual industrialization of India did not only bring the India capitalists into the foreground of public life, it also created an industrial working class. The working class in India as well as Bengal had certain features peculiar to them, very different from the European situation. These features were responsible to a large extent in the failure of the full development of a working class consciousness and successful trade unionism in Bengal. However, compared to the other regions of India, the labour movement in Bengal was relatively strong especially due to the lead taken by the Communists.

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## 14.2 Nature of working class in Bengal

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According to some historians the rural poor were pushed out of their villages because the rural agrarian economy could not support a growing labour force. Ranajit Das Gupta has pointed out that the ruined artisans, labourers and agriculturalists with limited employment opportunities at the village level constituted the majority of the working class in the jute mills. He has also stated that many of them belonged to the land-holding peasant groups. Arjan de Haan believes that the push factor was not the only reason for labour migration from the villages to the cities of eastern India. The attraction of urban living and industrial employment also served as major factors. Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has shown that though the workers migrated to the cities they consciously retained their connection to their villages often visiting the latter during harvest season and family ceremonies. This cultural dual self of a peasant and an industrial worker was a deterrent in developing working class consciousness.

Caste inequalities persisted in the industrial areas as they did in the villages. Thus the upper castes got better jobs and were better paid than the lower castes. Gender inequities can also be identified in eastern India labouring class. Samita Sen has shown that in the Bengal jute mills particular jobs were earmarked for women which were considered suitable for them due to their prime roles as mother and wife. In such circumstances the payment given to them was lower than the men. The Talia riot in Calcutta in June 1897 between Hindu and Muslim workers implies that the workers were more motivated by

community interests than by class consciousness. According to Dipesh Chakrabarty this lack of class consciousness was a key feature of the precapitalist culture. This is also evident in the dearth of trade unions, which as bourgeois democratic organizations had no place in the cultural space and hierarchical structure of the workers.

### **14.2.1 Recruitment through jobbers or Sardars**

Recruitment through *sardars* or jobbers was a major feature in understanding the nature of the working class in colonial Bengal. In India there was no open recruitment of labour as in Europe. Rather recruitment of workers was in the hands of jobbers who were known as *sardars* in eastern India. Morris has argued that the *sardars* not only hired the workers to work in the factories but also exercised great powers in matters of labour discipline. However, recent researches have pointed out the workers might have depended on the *sardars* for recruitment but they also defied their authority if the *sardars* went against their interests such as in Calcutta jute mills in 1919-20. Again, there were also instances of *sardars* preferring to support the workers rather than the employers. In the Calcutta jute mill agitations of 1929 and 1937 the *sardars* themselves were the organizers of the working-class movements.

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## **14.3 Stages of Development of the Working-Class Movement in Bengal**

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The development of the working-class movement, working class consciousness and trade unionism in Bengal, can be discussed in the following stages:

### **14.3.1 Early stage**

Before 1900 working class consciousness in Bengal was in its nascent stage and the movement of the workers was unorganized and spontaneous. It involved breaking down of machines, attacking officials and leaving mills to take up employment elsewhere.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a few socialists tried to work for the welfare of the workers such as the jute mill workers of Baranagar were supported by Brahmos like Sashipada Bandopadhyay. However, these philanthropists had no political bearings. The Indian National Congress was established in 1885 but as long as the Moderates dominated the Congress no particular enthusiasm was shown towards the welfare of the workers.

### **14.3.2 Swadeshi movement and afterwards (1905-18)**

During the Swadeshi movement of 1905 the nationalists tried to associate themselves with the workers' movement. But at this workers' consciousness was limited to a few jute mills, press and railways. This time a large number of non-Bengali workers from Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh started coming to Bengal. These workers did not get involved in any protest movement. However, the Bengali workers who protested looked to the nationalists for help and once their demands were met, they withdrew their strike. There was no permanent trade union in this phase, after the end of the Swadeshi movement the workers movement also died down abruptly. Outside Bengal the workers movement in the cotton mills of Bombay was more organized. During the First World War (1914-18) all workers' protests were completely suppressed due to British repression.

### **14.3.3 First World War stage: Non-Cooperation movement and afterwards**

Although the workers did not have any chance to protest like other Indians, they also greatly suffered during the First World War due to rising prices and currency inflation. At the end of the war many lost their jobs. This provided the economic background for the workers' movement in the changed political circumstances after the war.

The arrival of Gandhi on the Indian political scene mobilized different strata of society to join the mainstream Congress movement against imperialist rule. The workers were also initially attracted to the Gandhian movements. The Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation movement (1919-1920) brought a different dimension to the workers' movement. It moved beyond the jute mills of Bengal to include the coal mines of Bihar and Bengal and the tea plantations of Assam and North Bengal. Over all workers in Calcutta and Bombay Presidencies were more class conscious than those in Madras presidency. The establishment of All India Trade Union Congress in 1920 was a watershed in the history of workers' movement. However, with the sudden withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation movement in 1922, the workers' movement also faced a setback.

### **14.3.4 Working Class Movement from 1922 to 1935**

From the middle of the 1920s, the working-class movement took a new turn. The spread of socialist and particularly Marxist ideas in India after the formation of the Soviet Republic greatly influenced the workers. The newly formed Left parties also made it an agenda to work for the welfare of the workers and ensure their demands were met. As

a result, the working-class movement gradually took a revolutionary turn after the failure of Gandhian movements to take forward their demands like better living conditions, increase in wages and limiting their working hours etc. A number of strikes of the workers took place in this phase including Kharagpur workshop strike of Bengal Nagpur railway workers in 1927, the strike of the railway workers of East India in Liluah, the general strike of the jute mill workers of Bengal in 1929, the strike of the workers of Tata Iron and Steel in Jamshedpur in 1928 and others.

The trade union movement however suffered a big blow after the arrest of the Left leaders in 1929 in the Meerut conspiracy case in the same year. The moderate trade unionists in the AITUC, accused it of Communist leanings and broke away to form the Indian Trade Union Federation, which was later called the National Trade Union Federation. In July 1931 the Communists themselves broke away from the AITUC and formed the Red Trade Union Congress. These divisions between the Trade Union movement proved detrimental to the interest of the workers.

In the meantime, the Great Economic Depression adversely affected India as the rest of the world in 1930. Numerous factories were shut down, and thousands of labourers were thrown out of their jobs. Even those who were retained had to suffer severe wage cuts, But the workers were too powerless to protest. On one hand they were leaderless and divided, on the other hand, any attempt to protest served as an excuse for the owners to oust them.

### **14.3.5 Working Class Movement from 1935-39**

From the middle of 1930s the adverse effect of the Depression waned and there was a spurt in economic growth. In these circumstances the workers were able to demand better wages and living conditions. The political scenario also changed in favour of the workers. The Government of India Act was passed in 1935. Accordingly provincial assemblies were formed in 1937 which for the first-time reserved seats for the workers. This prompted the political parties to take interest in the workers. After 1922 the Indian National Congress had strayed away from the workers but with the rise of Left-wing leaders and pressure groups within the Congress the party took renewed interest in the workers and the Congress manifesto listed proposals for workers' upliftment and welfare. At the central and provincial level, Congress Labour sub committees were formed.

Meanwhile in its seventh party Congress, the Comintern or the Communist party organization proposed that the Communist groups in the colonial countries should work in



tandem with the nationalist groups in their countries and defeat the imperialists. Thus, the Communists in Bengal who had shunned the Congress way in 1928 came back into the mainstream nationalist movement to work with the AITUC and other political organisations. The Communist party was banned by the government in 1934 but they continue to work with the workers secretly.

Besides the Communist party many other parties like the Congress Socialist party, Communist League, Labour Party, Forward Bloc, Workers' League, Bolshevik Party and others tried to organize the workers within and outside the Congress resulting in strengthening the trade union movement. However, the working-class movement continued to be restricted to economic demands mainly. A historic labour strike occurred in the jute mills of Bengal from February to May 1937. There were similar strikes in Jamshedpur in 1938 and in Burnpur in 1939 by the steel workers.

The Second World War broke out in September 1939 and towards the end of the same year there arose a huge demand for wage increase among the workers. Most of these demands were hurriedly dealt with by the administration as the British wanted to keep production running, so as not to hamper war requirements.

#### **14.3.6 Working Class Movement, 1940-45**

In the years of the Second World war from 1939 to 1945 there was unprecedented rise in prices and currency inflation. The Government tried to ameliorate the condition of the peasants by raising wages and providing them with daily necessities but this was not enough to solve their problems in any way. However, their movement dampened to a large extent in 1940-41. In 1941 there were only 359 cases of workers' strike all over India. In Bengal too, the general strikes were less but the workers were involved in temporary and spontaneous protests. In 1942 during the Quit India movement the working-class movement was limited to Jamshedpur in Eastern India. In the eyes of the critics of the Quit India movement, these general strikes were more in the nature of 'Factory Closed' for temporary period. The owners of these factories were mainly Indians.

#### **14.3.7 Last phase: Working Class Movement, 1945-47**

In the last two years before independence the anti-imperialist struggle had reached a boiling point. In this period the British came down heavily on the workers, slashing their wages arbitrarily and firing them without notice. The workers in turn stepped up their protests with renewed vigour. The tram workers of Calcutta went on a famous 100 days' strike from 10 January to 16 April, 1947. The port workers also went on a long strike from

5 February to 3 May, 1947. General strikes were also led by the workers in engineering factories, jute and cotton mills. The Communists led an aggressive movement in the tea gardens of Darjeeling and Duars.

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## 14.4 Conclusion

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There is no doubt that the working-class movement was a cause of anxiety to the colonial government. However ultimately the workers could not challenge their imperialist and capitalist owners because their movement was neither well-organized nor could they present a united front to their exploiters. In spite of the efforts of the Communists the workers did not develop a political consciousness. Their demands were mainly economic and once they were met partially, the working-class movement slackened. Legislations like the Bengal Factory Acts of 1881 and 1911 were flouted by the employers openly.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that it is not that the workers were not conscious of their poverty and exploitation but their sense of belonging to one class i.e. the working class was often superseded by their conflicting narrow identities.

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## 14.5 Summary

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- Before 1900 working class consciousness in Bengal was in its nascent stage and the movement of the workers was unorganized and spontaneous.
- During the Swadeshi movement of 1905 the nationalists tried to associate themselves with the workers' movement.
- The end of the first world war provided the economic background for the workers' movement.
- From the middle of the 1920s, the working-class movement was influenced by Leftist ideas.
- The establishment of All India Trade Union Congress in 1920 was a watershed in the history of workers' movement.
- The trade union movement however suffered a big blow after the arrest of the Left leaders in 1929 in the Meerut conspiracy case.
- After the Great Economic Depression of 1930, there was a spurt in the working-class movement from 1935 to 1939.

- In 1942 during the Quit India movement the working-class movement was limited to Jamshedpur in Eastern India.
- In the last two years before independence the British government came down heavily on the workers.

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## 14.6 Model Questions

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1. How was the nature of the working class in Bengal a deterrent to the development of full working-class consciousness?
2. To what extent did the *sardars* help the cause of the working-class movements?
3. Describe the earliest stage of the working-class movement?
4. How did the working-class movement develop in Bengal after the Swadeshi movement?
5. How did the Khilafat and the Non-Cooperation movement (1919-1920) bring a different dimension to the workers' movement?
6. Elucidate the development of working-class movement in Bengal from 1922 to 1935.
7. In your opinion was the period from 1935 to 1939 the best phase of development of working-class consciousness in Bengal?
8. How did the working-class movement in Bengal develop from 1945 to 1947?

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## 14.7 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 15 □ The Forging of Class Consciousness II : Krishak Sabha and Peasant Movements**

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##### *Structure*

- 15.0 Objectives**
- 15.1 Introduction**
- 15.2 Early Revolts against British rule**
  - 15.2.1 Rangpur, Sanyasi-Fakir, Pangalpanthi Rebellion**
  - 15.2.2 Titu Mir's Wahabi revolt**
  - 15.2.3 Faraizi revolt**
  - 15.2.4 Kol uprising**
  - 15.2.5 The Santhal *hool* (1855-56)**
  - 15.2.6 Early peasant political consciousness**
- 15.3 Later Peasant Movements and Peasant Consciousness**
  - 15.3.1 Indigo Rebellion**
  - 15.3.2 Munda *ulgulan***
- 15.4 The Kisan Sabha Movement**
- 15.5 Krishak Praja Party**
- 15.6 Tebhaga Movement**
- 15.7 Summary**
- 15.8 Model Questions**
- 15.9 Suggested Readings**

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#### **15.0 Objectives**

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At the end of this Unit the learners will understand:

- The peasant movements became endemic during the colonial rule

- With the change in land revenue settlements, the peasants revolted against the oppression of the Company's revenue contractors
- Early rebellions demonstrated the political consciousness of the peasantry in various ways
- At a later stage the peasants displayed a heightened understanding of colonial policies, laws, and institutions. They were also supported by the middle class
- The Kisan Sabhas played an important role in forging peasant consciousness

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## 15.1 Introduction

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While the urban intelligentsia initially welcomed the British rule, the rural society in contrast opposed the new British settlements which were detrimental to their interests and exploitative in nature. The peasant revolts were not unknown in Mughal India, but with the establishment of the British colonial rule they became endemic.

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## 15.2 Early Revolts against British rule

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The revenue reforms of the eighteenth and nineteenth century by the colonial government changed the nature of the Indian rural society to a large extent. At the beginning of the British rule the dispossessed zamindars or officials of the Mughal period like the zamindars of Awadh, Nawab of Awadh and Raja Chait Singh organized revolts from 1778 to 1779. Kathleen Gough has referred to these revolts as “restorative rebellions”. In the south the local chiefs or poligars revolted against the madras government. Many revolts led by local zamindars were supported by the peasants.

The peasants themselves came together in many regions against the oppression of the revenue contractors and revolted against the Company's government when their demands were not met.

### 15.2.1 Rangpur, Sanyasi-Fakir, Pangalpanthi Rebellion

In the Rangpur rebellion of 1783 Hindu and Muslim peasants refused to pay revenue and attacked the local courts (*cutcheries*) and grain stores. Religion played an important role in many of these early peasant revolts such as the Sanyasi-Fakir rebellions from 1760s till 1850s in northern Bengal and Bihar. In Mymensingh district of east Bengal the

Pagalpanthis of Tipu Shah led a religious movement of the Hindu tribals of Garos, Hadis and Hajangs and other aggrieved peasants who were adversely affected by the Permanent settlement.

### **15.2.2 Titu Mir's Wahabi revolt**

In 1830s Titu Mir who was influenced by the Wahabi movement led the poor oppressed Muslim peasants to revolt in northern part of 24 Parganas district of Bengal. His followers established their own regime and began collecting taxes in the region in defiance of the Company's authority. Titu Mir erected a bamboo fort in Narkelbaria, where he trained his supporters in armed warfare and terrorised the Company rulers. On November 19, 1831, British commanders stormed Syed Mir Nisar Ali Titu Mirfort's at Narkelbaria, where he died of injuries in 1832.

### **15.2.3 Faraizi revolt**

At the same time another religious movement called the Faraizi movement was led by Haji Shariatullah among peasants in east Bengal. After Shariatullah's death in 1839 his son Dudu Mian took a moral stand that paying taxes was against divine law as land belonged to God. Both the movements under Titu Mir and Dudu Mian targeted the indigo planters whose exploitation knew no bounds.

### **15.2.4 Kol uprising**

In 1832 there was an uprising of the tribal people Kol in Chota Nagpur and Singbhum areas of Bihar and Orissa. After the imposition of British law the Raja of Chota Nagpur farmed out his land to merchants and moneylenders whom the tribals referred to as suds. Many of the tribal people were evicted from land and in a matter of weeks they attacked the authorities and took control of Chota Nagpur.

### **15.2.5 The Santhal *hool* (1855-56)**

The Santhal *hool* (rebellion) of 1855-56 was the most prominent tribal movement of this time period. The Santhals were dispersed over many regions in eastern India. They were driven away from their territory and settled in what they called *Damin-i-koh*, the name given to the area surrounding the Rajmahal Hills. Under the British rule, the non-Santhal zamindars and moneylenders (*diku* or outsiders) were given leases on the land. As tribal territory was encroached upon, the Santhals were eventually pushed into a precarious predicament and took up arms against their oppressors.

### 15.2.6 Early peasant political consciousness

All the above movements were put down by the Company's government with great brutality. In the Santhal rebellion for instance approximately twenty thousand rebels were killed by the Company's army. Although D.N. Dhangare has regarded the peasant and tribal uprisings of the early colonial period as "pre-political", Ranajit Guha (1994) has pointed out these rebellions demonstrated the political consciousness of the peasantry in various ways. They were well aware of the political authorities who exploited them and refused to render justice. That is why they attacked the houses of the zamindars, their grain stores, the moneylenders, merchants and the British. The rebels organized meetings and public conferences and the insurrections were planned with the objective to redress their grievances in the only way they knew, violent attacks with traditional weapons. Their leaders also emerged from their ranks. In these rural societies religion acted as a binding factor and rebel leaders were assumed to have divine powers against the enemies and revolt against exploiters was considered a moral act.

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## 15.3 Later Peasant Movements and Peasant Consciousness

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The peasant movement at a later stage acquired some new interesting characteristics. As Sekhar Bandopadhyay (2004) has pointed out, the peasants displayed a heightened understanding of colonial policies, laws, and institutions during this time period. Both the tribal and non-tribal peasants even welcomed these institutions, such as the law courts as a legitimate forum to seek justice. The increased involvement of the educated class in the second half of the nineteenth century was also a significant characteristic. The *Bhadralok* class emerged as the spokesmen for the peasants and indigenous people.

### 15.3.1 Indigo Rebellion

A significant rebellion of this period was the Indigo Rebellion in Bengal 1859-60. The peasants refused to take advances for growing indigo and organized social boycott of the planters' agents. They were supported by local zamindars and village headman who resented the planters for encroaching upon their traditional authority in the villages. When the magistrates tried to force the peasants to sow indigo in turn many of them took their cases to the law courts demanding occupancy rights under Rent act X of 1859. Dinabandhu Mitra at this time published a Bengali play *Neel Darpan* describing the exploitation of the planters. This play was translated into English by Michael Madhusudan



Dutt. Rev. James Long, a missionary published it and circulated in London political circles and was punished and imprisoned. Thereafter newspapers like the *Somprakash* and *Hindoo Patriot* (under editorship of Harish Chandra Mukherjee) took up the cause of the peasants. The British Indian Association also supported the peasants. Thus the involvement of the Bengali middle-class pressurized the planters and the pro-planter lobby in Calcutta to step back and soon other factors ensured that by 1863 indigo cultivation in Bengal disappeared.

The formation of the Agrarian League in Pabna district was a significant step in the development of peasant consciousness. The substantial as well as the lower peasants got together to protest against the attempts of the landlords to deny them occupancy rights. This movement was largely non-violent and the peasants founded the Agrarian League to take recourse to the justice system and sue the zamindars. This movement spread to other areas of Bengal such as Dacca, Mymensingh, Faridpur, Rajshahi etc. where the landlords had threatened the occupancy rights of the peasants and imposed high rents and *abwabs* on them. The mounting pressure on the government compelled them to introduce the Bengal Tenancy Act in 1885. The role of the Bengal press in this context was very interesting. The newspapers like *Hindoo Patriot* who had been highly critical of the British indigo planters shied away from denouncing the indigenous landlords.

### **15.3.2 Munda *ulgulan***

In the period after the Great Revolt various tribal revolts also occurred like the peasant revolts. An important revolt of the tribals was the Munda *ulgulan* of 1899-1900. The Munda tribal peasants of Chotanagpur, Bihar were led by their charismatic leader Birsa Munda. He organized huge meetings promising to deliver the Munda territory (*disum*) from the foreigners (*dikus*), namely the landlords, moneylenders, Christian missionaries and British officials. Birsa's followers attacked police stations, churches and other symbols of the regime of Queen Mandodari (Ravana's wife), probably alluring to the British Queen. The Munda objective was to destroy the British Raj and replace it by Birsa Raj and Birsa religion.

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## 15.4 The Kisan Sabha Movement

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Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, founded the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in 1929 to mobilise peasant discontent against the zamindari's infringements on their occupancy rights. Initially as admitted by Swami Sahajanand, the BPKS was created to foster class peace in order to alleviate the growing landlord-tenant conflict, so that the nationalist wide front was not jeopardised. Kisan Sabhas was set up in Madras Presidency and Andhra districts. The Utkal Kisan Sangha was established in Orissa in 1935 but their demands were more radical and included abolition of Zamindari. The BPKS resurfaced in 1933, was strongly influenced the socialist ideology and more radical demands.

Finally in April 1936, the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) was formed in Lucknow with Swami Sahajanand as its first elected President.

The bold proposals of the Kisan Manifesto, which was adopted in August, included the abolition of zamindari, income tax on agricultural revenue, granting occupancy rights, and reducing interest rates. The AIKS movement soon spread to Bengal where a provincial Kisan Sabha was established. A number of leaders from the Congress Socialist Party joined the movement. With the Comintern's decision to pursue a "united front" approach in 1935, many members of the Communist party also joined the AIKS and contributed to the movement's consolidation. Since the Congress Committees maintained a close-tie with the Kisan Sabhas it was natural for the congress to adopt a radical agrarian programme in the Faizpur session of the Congress in 1936. The formation of the Congress ministries in eight provinces raised rural expectations. In 1938-39 peasants in Bihar under the umbrella of the Kisan Sabha led a militant movement across all sections of the rural society for restoration of *bakasht* land (land where short-term tenancies were introduced in place of permanent tenancies). However, the right-wing Congress leadership entered into agreements with the landlords thus defeating the movement under the provincial Kisan Sabha. In Orissa too the right wingers accepted pro-landlord amendments to the much debated tenancy legislation much to the frustration of the socialists.

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## 15.5 Krishak Praja Party

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For a brief moment in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal was a powerful political force. The Krishak Praja Party was a spin off from the 'Nikhil Banga Praja Samiti' (All Bengal Tenants' Association). The KPP was founded by Fazlul Huq in Dhaka in 1936. Fazlul Huq, as the leader of rural society, was fully aware of the potential of an agrarian programme and its appeal to the public in the upcoming elections.

The KPP programme included abolition of the zamindari system, making peasants absolute land owners, lowering rent rates, releasing indebted peasants from *mahajan* class bonds, providing interest-free loans to peasants, digging irrigation canals across the country, making river navigation free by eliminating engulfing water hyacinth, and introducing free primary education, among other things. Huq's oratory was as appealing to the peasantry as his political platform. Because of his non-communal stance, he was able to gain support among the Hindu peasantry of the scheduled castes.

Despite being founded only a year ago, his political party came in third place among contesting political parties in terms of seats won in the elections. Ironically, the KPP's collapse began almost immediately after its stunning electoral victory. With the backing and participation of the Muslim League and a few other minor groups and independent members, KPP leader Fazlul Huq created a coalition ministry. However, as Chief Minister, Fazlul Huq appeared to be more concerned with power politics than with keeping his party afloat. Only two of the eleven ministers in his cabinet were from the KPP, including Huq, while the others were from the Muslim League and other factions. The League's rise was so swift that when the Huq Ministry fell in 1943, the KPP was almost non-existent.

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## 15.6 Tebhaga Movement

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However, a significant movement of the peasants broke out in Bengal as India prepared for independence. This was the Tebhaga movement which was spearheaded by the Communist-led Bengal Provincial Kisan Sabha who organized a mass movement of the peasants in Bengal countryside to implement the Floud commission's recommendation for the sharecroppers (*bargadars*, *adhyars*) to get *tebhaga* or two-thirds of the crop instead of half or less as was the tradition. The movement became popular in North

Bengal, Midnapur and 24 Parganas. The countryside roared with chants of *nij-khamare dhan tolo* where the sharecroppers harvesting the paddy in November 1946, carried it to their own threshing floor instead of the house of the *jotedars* as was the previous system. However, south east Bengal remain untouched. Among other factors, increasing *jotedar* and police violence led to the suppression of the movement. Sumit Sarkar has pointed out in spite of the communal riots at this time many Muslim peasants participated in the Tebhaga movement.

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## 15.7 Summary

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- The peasant revolts were not unknown in Mughal India, but with the establishment of the British colonial rule they became endemic.
- Important peasant revolts in the early stage of colonial rule were Rangpur Rebellion (1783), Sanyasi-Fakir rebellion (1760s to 1780s), revolt of Pagalpanthis, Titu Mir's wahabi revolt, Fairazi revolt in 1830s, Kol revolt(1832) and the Santhal revolt (1855).
- Ranajit Guha has pointed out these early rebellions demonstrated the political consciousness of the peasantry in various ways.
- At a later stage the peasants displayed a heightened understanding of colonial policies, laws, and institutions. They were also supported by the middle class.
- A significant rebellion of this period was the Indigo Rebellion in Bengal 1859-60.
- An important revolt of the tribals was the Munda *ulgulan* of 1899-1900 in Chotanagpur under their leader Birsa Munda.
- Swami Sahajanand Saraswati revive the Kisan Sabhas in eastern India in the 1930s.
- In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Krishak Praja Party in Bengal became a powerful political force under Fazlul Huq.
- In 1946, the Tebhaga movement of Bengal demanded for the sharecroppers (*bargadars, adhyars*) to get *tebhaga* or two-thirds of the crop instead of half or less.

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## 15.8 Model Questions

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1. Was the early nature of peasant revolts restorative?
2. To what extent was religion an important factor in strengthening the early peasant revolts against colonial rule?
3. What was the importance of the Sanyasi-Fakir and Rangpur rebellions?
4. Describe the peasant movements led by Dudu Mian and Titu Mir.
5. Explain the cause and effects of the Santhal *hool*.
6. In your opinion were the early rebellions in the colonial period “pre political” in nature?
7. According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay what changes took place in the nature of the peasant revolts after 1857?
8. How did the Bengali *bhadralok* class support the Indigo Rebellion of 1859-60?
9. Why did the Munda *ulgulan* take place?
10. How did Swami Sahajanand Saraswati revive the Kisan Sabhas in eastern India in the 1930s?
11. What was the significance of the emergence of the Krishak Praja Party in the third and fourth decade of the twentieth century?
12. Discuss the peasant mobilization in the Tebhaga movement of 1946.

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## 15.9 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 16 □ The Caste Question and Politics of Depressed Social Classes : the Alternative Vision**

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##### *Structure*

##### **16.0 Objectives**

##### **16.1 Introduction**

##### **16.2 Early Dalit Protests against Caste System**

##### **16.3 Seeking Higher Political and Economic Status**

##### **16.4 Bengal Partition in 1947 and the Caste Question**

##### **16.5 Conclusion**

##### **16.6 Summary**

##### **16.7 Model Questions**

##### **16.8 Suggested Readings**

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#### **16.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will understand:

- Importance of caste politics in colonial Bengal
  - Initial protest movements to alleviate so-called lower castes in Hindu society
  - Formation of depressed class associations and their role in providing an alternative vision of Bengal society and polity
  - The partition of Bengal in 1947 and its impact on the depressed classes
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#### **16.1 Introduction**

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Many scholars are of the opinion that caste has never been important in Bengal politics. However, researches by Chatterjee (1997), Chandra and Nielsen and others have

shown that in popular consciousness and day to day village life in Bengal, caste has remained relevant in Bengal society and polity. Sarbani Bandyopadhyay (2012) is of the opinion that even in the formal institutional politics of Bengal, the caste question has always been significant. In fact, according to her 'lower' caste politics made itself felt in such a dominant matter in formal politics that the *bhadralok* became anxious to suppress it. The upper castes developed the myth that caste was marginal to Bengal.

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## 16.2 Early Dalit Protests against Caste System

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After the British took over Bengal, the Christian missionaries promoted education among the Dalits and the government also sponsored educational institutions especially for the lower castes. This resulted in the creation of an elite section among the Dalits. Many of these elites groups developed their own ideology against the exploitative caste system and began protest movements like the Namasudras of Bengal. There were many forms of initial protest. For instance, in 1872 the Namasudras boycotted work on the land of Kayasthas for six long months in four districts of eastern Bengal, when they refused to attend the funeral ceremony of a Namasudra. The Matuas, a sect of the Namasudras questioned the Hindu varna system and preached the message of social equality and simple devotion. The untouchable Hadis of Bengal also imagined a hierarchy where they were located at the topmost level while the Brahmans occupied the lowest rung in the Hindu social structure. Although these movements were short-lived they played a significant role in uniting the Dalits and voiced their protest against the unfair and exploitative varna system (Bandyopadhyay, 2004).

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## 16.3 Seeking Higher Political and Economic Status

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In colonial Bengal, the caste movement began with the exploited castes seeking higher varna status in the hierarchy of the Hindu society. But soon they also began demanding better economic and political status from the British administration so that they could move up the social ladder in the Hindu society. Bandyopadhyay (2011) has pointed out that the Swadeshi movement proved to be an eye-opener for the elites when the lower castes stayed away from the movement and even resisted it actively.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Manindra Mandal established the Bangiya Jana Sangha (BJS) in 1922 to protect the interest of the oppressed castes against the dominance

of *bhadralok* politics. The association even threatened to launch an agitation on the lines of the Muslim League. The BJS was short-lived but the All Bengal Depressed Classes Association was formed in 1926 and one of its main objectives was to support separate electorates. Although M.C. Rajah, the leader of the All India Depressed Classes Association entered into a pact with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Bengal association insisted on separate electorates and stood by Ambedkar in this regard (Bandyopadhyay 1990). According to Manindranath Mandal, the Hindu Mahasabha leader and Congressite, Dingindra Narayan Bhattacharya should have been given the same status as Rammohan, Vidyasagar and Vivekananda because he worked with the 'untouchables' to reform the caste system.

By the 1930s the claim of Hindu identity on an equal footing with the 'upper castes' provided a complex situation. On the one hand the 'lower' castes were clamouring for higher caste status in the Hindu society, on the other they insisted that the government grant them 'Depressed Classes' status. The colonial government also found it to their advantage to favour the dalit cause. This obviously did not go down well with the *bhadralok* community in Bengal as they found their position threatened by the Dalits.

However, the lack of unity among the leaders and their conflicting ideological positions ultimately weakened the dalit movement. Before independence they were either co-opted in the Hindu Mahasabha or the Congress.

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## 16.4 Bengal Partition in 1947 and the Caste Question

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According to Dwaipayan Sen (2012), the partition of 1947 was the "Nationalist resolution of the caste question". In 1943, Jogendranath Mandal and others established the Bengal Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation (BPSCF) as a branch of Ambedkar's All India Scheduled Castes Federation (AISCF). The objective of the Bengal branch was to ally with those who supported the cause of the Depressed classes, especially the weaker section. Although Jogendranath Mandal was suspicious of the Muslim middle classes and the radicals, he believed that the political and economic interests of the Muslims and the Dalits were aligned. He believed that the Hindu *bhadralok* who felt threatened by the 'others' had conspired to divide Bengal. In case of Partition, he favoured a united Bengal. Along with Congressites, Sarat Bose and Kiron Ray he also pushed for the same. In the 1946 elections Jogendranath was the only person from the depressed classes who was elected to the Bengal Assembly. He also ensured that Ambedkar was elected to the Constituent Assembly from Bengal.



However, the leaders received no support from the British government in this period as the latter wanted to make a hasty exit and no longer required the support of the scheduled castes. In fact, the British government did not involve the Depressed classes associations in discussions on the transfer of power. After the Direct Action Day launched by the Muslim League in 1946 and the subsequent communal riots in Bengal, the Depressed Classes came closer to the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. Thus the demand of including scheduled class areas in West Bengal was never realized. During partition and later they fled from eastern Pakistan and became refugees in West Bengal. Many dalit associations regard the partition as the most significant political event that suppressed dalit voices for a long time to come.

Before 1947, majority of the dalit population resided in eastern Bengal. Partition of India and Bengal therefore actually served the interest of the Hindu bhadrak in West Bengal.

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## 16.5 Conclusion

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The protest movements of the Dalits in eastern India suffered greatly due to disunity among their leaders and their absorption in Hindu Mahasabha and Congress politics which were dominated by the higher castes. The attempt of Jogendranath Mondal to form an alliance with the economically poor Muslims also failed due to communal violence. The partition of Bengal in 1947 reduced the Dalits to the status of refugees and added to their sufferings. During the Communist rule in Bengal the lexicon of caste disappeared from the politics of West Bengal as the Left ideology was more concerned with the question of 'class'. Although always existent, the caste issue has surfaced again in Bengal politics to challenge the hegemony of upper castes.

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## 16.6 Summary

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- In popular consciousness and day to day village life in Bengal, caste has remained relevant in Bengal society and polity and it is a misnomer that caste has never been important in Bengal politics.
- The early protest movements of the Namasudra, Matuas, Hadis for higher status in Hindu society though short-lived, played a significant role in uniting the Dalits.
- But soon they also began demanding better economic and political status from the British administration.

- The establishment of BJS in 1922 and All Bengal Depressed Classes Association in 1926 were important milestones.
- In 1943, Jogendranath Mandal and others established the Bengal Provincial Scheduled Castes Federation (BPSCF).
- Mandal believed that the Hindu *bhadralok* who felt threatened by the ‘others’ had conspired to divide Bengal in 1947.
- The British government did not involve the Depressed classes associations in discussions on the transfer of power.
- Many dalit associations regard the partition as the most significant political event that suppressed dalit voices for a long time to come.

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## 16.7 Model Questions

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1. Do you think caste was not relevant in colonial Bengal?
2. What were the early forms of dalit protests of the Hindu caste system?
3. How did the depressed class associations in Bengal try to protect the interest of the so-called lower castes in the first three decades of the twentieth century?
4. Estimate the role of Jogendranath Mandal in trying to uplift the depressed classes. Was he successful?
5. How did the partition of 1947 adversely affected the Dalits in Bengal?

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## 16.8 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 17 □ The Women Movement and the Gender Question: Struggle for Equality and Liberation**

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##### *Structure*

##### **17.0 Objectives**

##### **17.1 Introduction**

##### **17.2 Western Critique and Indian Response to Women's Question**

##### **17.3 Stereotyping of Indian Women**

##### **17.4 Nationalism and Women's Question**

##### **17.5 Conclusion**

##### **17.6 Summary**

##### **17.7 Model Questions**

##### **17.8 Suggested Readings**

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#### **17.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the Unit the learners will be able to understand:

- How the Western observers justified their mission of civilization in India through the Women's Question
- The Indian intellectuals imagined a golden period of Indian history where women were treated with dignity and honour.
- There existed a "broad degree of consensus" between the colonial state and the nationalist male elites.
- Purity and seclusion of women was emphasized not only for upper caste women but lower castes also emulated it for climbing up the social ladder
- Both the Congress and the Communist party gave a secondary role to the women in the freedom movement.

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## 17.1 Introduction

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There were many other voices to the nation in the contemporary socio-political milieu, like the involvement of women in the nationalist movement. However, the women's question did not get the importance it deserved. The poor condition of women in India was seen by the British rulers as an indicator of their need to civilize the Indian men while the nationalists used women to define Indian honour, and reforms and education were mainly aimed at making them good mothers and wives.

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## 17.2 Western Critique and Indian Response to Women's Question

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The discourses of Western observers like James Mill and others on India were gendered right from the beginning. It provided a "civilizational critique of India". The colonised society was considered 'effeminate' in comparison to the 'masculinity' of the colonial master thus justifying their loss of independence. The degraded condition of women in India was considered as an indicator of India's inferior status in the hierarchy of civilisations.

In the nineteenth century, in response to this critique of the West, a section of Indian intellectuals imagined a golden era in which women were treated with dignity and honour. They advocated reforms of those customs, which they considered oppressive and consequently female infanticide was outlawed, sati became illegal while widow remarriage was legalised. However, reforms were always justified by citing the *sastras* and other sacred texts. Moreover, the women themselves were not involved in these reform movements. Rather a number of restrictions were put on women in the Hindu as well as the Muslim communities. If the women stepped out of their houses, whether elites or commoners, they were expected to cover themselves fully and conduct themselves like 'ideal Indian women'.

As the women's question became a part of the discourses of progress and modernity, the colonized males felt it necessary to encourage female education. Geraldine Forbes has shown how initiative was taken in this context by three groups, namely the British rulers,

Indian male reformers and educated Indian females. In Bengal the lead was taken by men like Radhakanta Deb and the School Book Society and later by Keshub Chandra Sen and the Brahmo Samaj. Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's name is well known among the educated women in Bengal. Gail Minault has argued that just like their Hindu counterparts, the goal of the Muslim educators was to produce better wives, mothers and better Muslims.

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### **17.3 Stereotyping of Indian Women**

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Rosalind O'Hanlon argues that it was in this stereotyping of Indian womanhood that there existed a "broad degree of consensus" between the colonial state and the nationalist male elites. Just like Victorian England privatized women's spheres, the British rulers preferred to confine women to domesticity and upheld the Hindu and Islamic personal laws that restricted the freedom of Indian women. Most of the educated women also accepted this female stereotype as the ideal woman.

It is assumed that the lower caste women in villages and urban industrial areas enjoyed more freedom than their upper counterpart. However, from the early nineteenth century the middle and lower classes started to emulate the upper classes. Purity and seclusion of women became necessary for social mobility of the lower castes in Bengal as well. Thus many women from peasant families were not allowed to work in farms and lost their economic freedom. With the introduction of larger number of machines, women in Bengal employed in rice-husking lost their jobs to male machine operators. Tanika Sarkar has pointed out that women were absent in the nineteenth and early twentieth peasant movements. Women workers in the jute mills of Calcutta were stereotyped as lacking in skills that men possessed. Thus women workers were given lower wages and easily retrenched. Even women's popular culture, the folk songs, dances, farces, theatres were all relegated to the realm of banal and distasteful, encroaching upon their personal space of expression and enjoyment.

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## 17.4 Nationalism and Women's Question

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Partha Chatterjee has shown how Indian nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century treated the women's question. The nationalistic construction of a public and a private space considered the public space as a male domain and private sphere as feminine. While the public space was the area of struggle and negotiation with the colonial state, the inner domain of the woman was considered as the epitome of Indian identity unsullied by western colonial influences.

The early nationalists in Bengal equated the country with motherland, an embodiment of the all powerful goddess of Shakti, the destroyer of evil forces. In his novel *Anandamath* (1882), Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote the song *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother/Motherland) which became very popular with the nationalists. During the Swadeshi movement Aurobindo Ghosh also used this imagery to create patriotic fervor. The Congress leaders also used the 'mother in the nation' concept and Gandhi's appeal to women to participate in his movements yielded rich dividends. In the initial stage during the Non Co-operation and the Civil Disobedience Movements their role was limited to swadeshi and boycott. During the Quit India movement when all male leaders were imprisoned women did play a greater role. The Congress in Bengal planned to take over the Midnapore district police stations and other government offices as part of the Quit India Movement. This was supposed to be the first step toward deposing the British authority and establishing an independent Indian state in the district. Matangini Hazra, who was 73 at the time, led a parade of 6,000 followers, the most of them were women volunteers, to take over the Tamluk police station. The Crown police ordered the march to dissolve as it reached the outskirts of town, citing Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. Matangini Hazra was shot once as she took a step forward. She had apparently taken a step forward and was pleading with the officers not to shoot her.

In 1920s and 30s middle class women joined the communist movement and were involved in mobilizing the working class in the urban as well as rural areas. In 1941 there were 50,000 members in the female wing of the All-India Students Federation. Sucheta Kripalani and Aruna Asaf Ali led many revolutionary activities against the wishes of Gandhi.

The leftist women leaders of Bengal established the Mahila Atmaraksh Samiti which played a prominent role in providing relief to famine affected rural Bengal in 1943. During the Communist-led Tebhaga movement in 1946 the women in Bengal formed their own brigades, *nari bahini* against the police and many perished at the hands of the latter. During the Telengana movement too the women led from the front against the feudal oppression of the Nizam of Hyderabad and formed women revolutionary units, *dalams*. However, the Communist party too preferred women in a secondary role and as some scholars have pointed out, some Communists also blamed the females for diverting the attention of men and the lack of discipline in the ranks.

Lebra argues that it was perhaps only Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose who allowed the all-women Rani of Jhansi regiment of the INA to participate in combat operations along with the male soldiers.

During the Pakistan movement the Muslim League tried to involve the Muslim women too and this was a new and liberating experience for many. However, the partition once again forced women into the patriarchal fold where women's honour (Muslims as well as Hindu women) became a territory of contest between Indian and Pakistani males, a yard stick of their victory or loss as a community. However, figures reveal that the women received no protection either from their government or their societies as thousands were kidnapped and raped. Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Butalia's researches have analysed the atrocities faced by women during the partition.

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## 17.5 Conclusion

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On the whole the participation of women in the mainstream Congress movement was by and large a middle class phenomena. The men felt safe to allow their women to participate in Gandhian non-violent programmes where their public role was an extension of their role in their houses and did not breach the accepted image of an Indian woman's dignity. The women in the Communist led movement too found themselves unable to transgress their traditional roles. The question of women's rights was neither seriously broached nor was it



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## 17.6 Summary

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- The Western observers considered, as an indicator of India's inferior status in the hierarchy of civilisations.
- In response to this critique of the West, a section of Indian intellectuals imagined a golden era in which women were treated with dignity and honour.
- In this stereotyping of Indian womanhood that there existed a "broad degree of consensus" between the colonial state and the nationalist male elites.
- Besides the upper castes, purity and seclusion of women became necessary for social mobility of the lower castes in Bengal as well.
- The early nationalists used the imagery of the mother for the nation. Both the Congress and the Communist party gave a secondary role to the women in the freedom movement.

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## 17.7 Model Questions

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1. How were the discourses of the Western scholars gendered right from the beginning?
2. What was the Indian male response to the Western critique?
3. Do you think the response of Indian males to Western Criticism benefitted the Indian women?
4. Why did the women participate in the Gandhian movement in large numbers?
5. Did the nationalist agenda benefit the poor and low caste women?
6. How did the Communists deal with the women question in the colonial period?

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## 17.8 Suggested Readings

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## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 18 □ Society at Crossroads and Crisis: War and Famine**

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##### *Structure*

- 18.0 Objectives**
- 18.1 Introduction**
- 18.2 The Second World War**
- 18.3 Role of Communist Party in India**
- 18.4 The Role of the Congress**
- 18.5 The Great Bengal Famine of 1943**
- 18.6 The Bengal Famine of 1943: The Role and Responsibility of the Colonial Government**
- 18.7 Epidemic**
- 18.8 The Cloth Famine of 1944-45**
- 18.9 Flesh Trade**
- 18.10 Collapse of Education**
- 18.11 Conclusion**
- 18.12 Model Questions**
- 18.13 Suggested Readings**

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#### **18.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the present Unit, the learners will learn the following aspects of the history of eastern India with special reference to Bengal:

- The crisis in the political economy of late colonial Bengal
- The impact of the crisis on the social structure
- The long-term effect of the Second World War on the society of Bengal
- The nature, extent and impact of the Famine of 1943 on the social structure of late colonial Bengal

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## 18.1 Introduction

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Due to the Second World War, the late colonial Bengal experienced unprecedented waves of crises in the domain of economy, politics, society and culture. The principal objective of the colonial government was to ensure all sorts of supply for the British military force in the various war front. It affected the supply and demand curve of the food stuff in Bengal. The immediate result was the creation of abnormal deficit of rice in the market, which was responsible for the Famine of 1943. This famine was the direct result of the colonial policy, and did not have any relationship with the environmental factors. It was a man-made humanitarian crisis. In the domain of politics, the Indian National Congress was in opposition to the Raj utilizing the opportunity created by the War. The Communist Party of India (CPI) faced a difficulty in 1942 when Germany invaded the Soviet Union: it transformed the 'imperialist war' into 'people's war'. The CPI decided to cooperate with the British power in the greater interest of the fight against fascism. In this unit, we will study all these complicated aspects of the history of late colonial Bengal. It needs to be pointed out that the major humanitarian crisis will be the significant issue of the analysis.

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## 18.2 The Second World War

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Within a period of just twenty-five years of the outbreak of the 1<sup>st</sup> world War, another devastating war on a global scale began in Europe. As far as brutality, barbarity and destructions were concerned, it surpassed the 1<sup>st</sup> World War. In the second World War civilian populations became the strategic targets and systematic genocide took place as a part of the war effort.

On 1 September, 1939 when Hitler attacked Poland, Britain and France immediately declared war against Germany, which sparked the beginning of Second World War. On 3 September 1939, President Roosevelt declared America's neutrality in the European war. On 3 September, the Viceroy without consulting any representative of Indian people declared India a belligerent. A government of India amending act was hurried through the British parliament in 11 minutes, empowering the viceroy to override the working of the constitution also in respect of provincial autonomy. The Defense of India Ordinance of 3 September established the power of central government to rule by decree. On 11 September, the Viceroy announced the suspension of all preparations for federation.

Indian political leaders and people protested against this imperialist war. Bipan Chandra showed that the Indian National Congress fully recognized that the future of India was closely interlinked with the coming struggle between fascism and the forces of freedom, socialism and democracy. The emerging Congress approach to world problems and the awareness of India's position in the world were clearly enunciated in Jawaharlal Nehru's presidential address to the Lucknow Congress in 1936.

The Indian National Congress was in full sympathy with the victims of fascist aggression. It was willing to help the forces of democracy in their struggle against fascism. Therefore, they demanded that India must be declared free or at least effective power put in Indian hands before it could actively participate in the war. The British government refused to accept this demand and tried to pit the religious minorities and princes against the Congress. The Congress therefore asked its ministers to resign. In October 1940, Gandhi gave the call for a limited Satyagraha by a few selected individuals. The aims of this movement were explained as follows by Gandhiji in a letter to the Viceroy:

*“The Congress is as much opposed to victory for Nazism as any Britisher can be. But their objection can not be carried to the extent of their participation in the war. And since you and the Secretary of State for India have declared that the whole of India is voluntarily helping the war efforts, it becomes necessary to make clear that the vast majority of the people of India are not interested in it. They make no distinction between Nazism and the double autocracy that rule India.”*

Vinoba Bhave was the first to offer Satyagraha. Within May 1941, more than 25,000 Satyagrahis had been jailed. Two major changes in world politics occurred during 1941. Hitler's Germany attacked Soviet Union in June 1941. In December 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and that brought the United Nations into war. General Mac Arthur was made the Supreme Commander in the Pacific and Lord Mountbatten was given the command of South-East Asia with his headquarters at Delhi. Japan quickly overran the Philippines, Indo-China, Indonesia, Malay and Burma. With conquest of Rangoon in March 1942, the war came close to India's door-step.

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### **18.3 Role of Communist Party in India**

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Communist Party of India (C.P.I) opposed the war and warned people against it even before its official declaration which was evident in National Front's different articles and

pamphlets published by CPI and lectures delivered by Communist leaders. In October 1939, the Polit Bureau of CPI adopted a very important political resolution, entitled "Statement of the Polit Bureau on CPI Policy and Tasks in the period of war" which was published in the November 1939 issue of the Communist (Vol.II.No.I) the underground central organ of the illegal party. According to it, "the war that is raging in Europe today is not a war of democracy against fascism. It is an imperialist war, the second imperialist war, the heir and successor of the last Great War of 1914-18." CPI conducted massive anti war campaign throughout the whole of India under the slogan – '*Na ek pai, na ek bhai*' (neither a pie, nor a brother) in this imperialist war.

A new turn in the war came with Hitler Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941. With the invasion of Russia by Nazi Germany, the position of Soviet Union in the international scene-the prime determinant of world communist policy was altered discriminately. The USSR was flung into a struggle for survival together with France, Britain and the other 'capitalist states'. The question of India was finally taken up in September. Russian and British communists' declaration made it clear that notwithstanding India's colonial status the Indian Communists were to support the British imperial government as long as it fought side by side with USSR.

Despite such clear instruction from abroad, the question of cooperation with the British government touched off controversy between the two fragments of CPI-the inner core of the party's leadership arrested in 1940-41 and confined at Deoli detention camp in Ajmer-Merwara including S.A.Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, B.T.Randive and disorganized underground party led by P.C.Joshi. According to Deoli thesis, Stalin did not describe it as a war in the interest of government but of the 'PEOPLE'. In that case, 'If it is a people's war for the people of Soviet, Europe and America, it is one for us.'

But the underground party declared that they must intensify their struggle against British imperialism because only then they can render effective aid to the Soviet Union as a free people. Till November this inner party debate was going on. Finally on December 15, 1941 the Polit Bureau formally embraced the 'People's war policy'. While discussing the activities of the CPI during this period, it would be clear that CPI did not at first agree to the conversion of 'imperialist war into people's war'.

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## 18.4 The Role of the Congress

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In December, the Congress Working Committee, defying Gandhiji, passed a resolution offering full cooperation with British war efforts provided Britain agreed to grant full independence after the war. As the war situation worsened, Britain was determined to win Indian public support. Hence, Lord Linlithgow offered the plan of setting up a constitution-making body after the war but assured the minorities that the British government would not agree to any system of government whose authority was directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life.

In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India. He had parleys with the representatives of the Congress, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Harijans, the native rulers and the liberals and came up with some resolutions on 30 March, 1942. The proposals of Cripps Mission were not accepted by the Indian leaders. The Congress was dissatisfied with the scheme but its demand of complete independence was not agreed to by the British. The Muslim League also rejected it by saying that the British government had not accepted the theory of the partition of India on the communal basis. Cripps had told the Sikh leaders that their position in the new constitution would be decided by agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League.

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, there was a feeling of frustration among all sections of the people. Gandhiji now started his campaign for 'orderly British withdrawal' from India. The phrase 'Quit India' to denote this move somehow came into vogue. The Congress working Committee on July 14, 1942, in a resolution demanding withdrawal of British power from India. The All-India Congress Committee meeting at Bombay on August 8, 1942, while approving of and endorsing the resolution of the Working Committee, expressed the opinion that, 'events subsequent to it have given it further justification and have made it clear that immediate ending of British rule in India is an urgent necessity both for the sake of India and for the success of the cause of the United Nations. The continuation of that rule is degrading and enfeebling India and making her progressively less capable of defending herself and of contributing to the cause of world freedom'.

As a consequence, early next morning Gandhiji and all the members of Congress Working Committee were arrested and Congress was declared an illegal organization. Now the people who were having no leader, themselves resorted to strikes, organized public meetings and reacted in any manner they could. They attacked the symbols of British

authority. Quit India movement was in fact short lived. Its importance lay in the fact that it demonstrated the depth that nationalist feeling had reached in the country and the great capacity for struggle and sacrifice that the people had developed. It was evident that the British would no longer find it possible to rule India against the wishes of the people.

The Second World War brought an era of rising prices and lagging behind wages. The year 1940 witnessed many strikes. In September 1940, the AITUC adopted a resolution disavowing any sympathy for imperialism or fascism. At the same time Kisan Sabhas launched movement for the abolition of zaminadari and vesting of land in the tiller of the soil. In 1936 agitation started against Bakasht (self –cultivated land) movement in Bihar; Hattola movement and Andhiar movement in Bengal also took place during this period. Middle class people were also under pressure due to World War II with rising unemployment, inflation and price rise.

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## **18.5 The Great Bengal Famine of 1943**

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Bipan Chandra stated that a major characteristic of British rule in India, and the net result of British economic policies, was the prevalence of extreme poverty among its people. British economic exploitation, the decay of indigenous industries, failure of modern industries to replace them, high taxation, the drain of wealth to Britain and a backward agrarian structure leading to the stagnation of agriculture and the exploitation of the poor peasants by the landlords, princes, moneylenders, merchants and the state gradually reduced the Indian people to extreme poverty and prevented them from progressing. India's colonial economy stagnated at a low economic level.

A great catastrophe fell upon the Bengali people from early 1943. The famine of 1943 was worst ever in Bengal in extent of death and devastation. The total number of deaths exceeded 35 lakh, 30 lakh families faced total ruin when normal death rate in Bengal was about 7 lakh. 11 lakh faced destitution. But the famine did not affect all sections or districts equally.

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## **18.6 The Bengal Famine of 1943: The Role and Responsibility of the Colonial Government**

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Poet Jyotirindra Moitra stated in his historic reminiscences about the Famine of 1943:

*“Then came 1943. Whole of Bengal, especially Calcutta became dark with cloud*



*of famine. It was not possible for me to stay inside, so I took to roads. On one side Esplanade, Kalighat, Lake Market crossing, on the other side Sealdah and Shyambazar crossing – everywhere the same scene was witnessed. Hundreds of human skeletons were asking for rice water! What a dishonor of humanity! People used to fight over food with even animals and fight between dog and men over rotten food in dustbin. People died like insects. One day a mother was found lying dead on the street and her nipple was pulled by the hungry baby weeping.”*

In this unprecedented calamity, it was the women and children who had to suffer most. The famine of 1943 left its deepest and longest scar on human society. The Hindusthan Standard correspondent reported from Chandpur on October 11, 1943 that, ‘a report has reached from cooked food distribution centre at Asta-Mahamaya within P.S.Faridgunj, opened by the Bengal Relief Committee there, that a starving mother with her child in her lap was taking food, distributed in the centre. Meanwhile, the child died in her lap. The mother did not stop to take her food and after finishing her meal she left with dead child’. Here mention might be made of an extract from statement of Mrs. Vijay Lakshmi Pandit on the condition in flood and famine affected areas in Midnapore. “One dead woman clutched pathetically to a filthy rag and an earthen pot- her sole belongings with which she seemed loot to part even on her journey to another world.” But all these pales into insignificance in comparison with what happened in more remote villages.

The famine of 1943, worst ever in Bengal in extent of death and devastation was created artificially as the shortage of food was only for 3 weeks. The total number of deaths exceeded 35 lakhs; 30 lakh families faced total ruin when normal death rate in Bengal was about 7 lakh. 11 lakh faced destitution. More than 75 % of the farmers lost their ability to earn a living from land.

World War II came to Asia in December 1941; the Japanese troops came close to Indian border. The allied forces retreated to set up camps in Assam and Bengal. Meanwhile streams of refugees arrived from Burma, thus increasing pressure on Bengal. The scorched earth policy and stoppage of free export of food along with buying of all boats and rice as precaution worsened the situation more. All resources were diverted to war efforts so the people had to face extreme hardship. In the words of writer Gopal Chandra Halder:

*“rice disappeared from the market overnight. The news spread through letters, telegraphs, newspapers....Barishal had no rice; a couple of days ago rice came from*

*Tripura, now it just was not there. Pabna had no rice; all over Bengal the same story was repeated. Within 48 hours rice disappeared and not a single grain could be found anywhere. It was swept clean from market”.*

The administration proved itself to be a total failure in dealing with the crisis. Other factors responsible for famine were lack of a definite food policy, exploitation of British imperialist, obsolete method of rice procurement, black market and profiteering by businessmen, inefficient bureaucracy, lack of foresighted planning, corruption in high places, rivalry among different political parties and ‘Denial policy’-leading to an accurate shortage of essential commodities, price rise and finally famine but the situation resulting in famine was entirely man made.

From the enquiry commission led by Sir John Woodhead, it was clear that government was well aware of impending famine. The plan to kill 35 lakh people was very consciously chalked out to make a profit of Rs 150 crore. It was strange that export of rice from India continued even during famine. Though N.R. Sarkar, Food Member, Government of India, made it clear in first week of July 1943 that not a single grain of corn would be exported. But strange enough, from commission, it was evident that in 1941-42, 55,000 tons of rice were exported from India which was raised to 3, 70,000 tons in 1942-43 out of which 60% was taken from Bengal. It clearly showed that India government violated its own policy. Again R.H. Hachings, Secretary, Food Department, Government of India in a telegram on 2 August 1944 to Gopalswamy, Secretary, Enquiry Commission, wrote that supply of food grain for soldiers posted in Italy and Middle East was still continued; 1,01,340 tons in 1943 and 59, 133 tons in 1944 were sent to soldiers abroad.

Apart from supply to abroad even Government of India also participated in corrupt practice when it purchased wheat from the Punjab and sold it to Bengal at a higher price, thereby made a profit of Rs 1 crore. Again, it was clear from evidence of E. Wood, Director General of Munitions Production, Government of India, that Bengal government too participated in same corrupt practice when it purchased food grains from Government of India and sold it to public at a higher price thereby made a profit of Rs 75,000/- per month. At the same time, justified demand of Calcutta Corporation to open rationing for Calcutta was ignored by govt.

Some shocking facts came from L.G. Pinell, special officer, Government of Bengal when he confirmed that – ‘a businessman in order to cultivate more crops for next harvest

season, lent money to the peasants when investment was not at all secure in 'Denial area' and that money comes from foreign source'. According to Mcenes's evidence, this person was nobody but Ispahani whom the then Food and Supply Minister S.H.Suhrawardy of the then League ministry gave monopoly right to buy rice. Ispahani bought rice from different districts in the names of different people and sold it to Government of Bengal at higher price.

Like ruling party, opposition parties also took part in same corrupt practice. Hindu Mahasabha and Congress made great uproar over black marketeering of Ispahani but not so much in case of Ranada Prasad Saha or H.Dutta. According to Mcenes, Ranada Prasad Saha bought large amount of rice from 'Denial Area' but failed to submit accounts. Communalism was one of the weapons of the then politics but throughout the period of 1943-1944 those black marketeers who made large profits at the cost of the lives of 35 lakh s of people, did not belong to any caste /community. The attempt to identify them with any particular community/caste was not only irrelevant but misleading as well.

According to Nanavati, member, F.E.C, out of 2,02,000 tons of food grains made available to the state, 1,40,000 tons were reserved for Calcutta and only 62,000 tons were sent to districts, though the people were leaving Calcutta in panic after the bombing. L.G. Pinell commented; "Thanks God! Bombing in Calcutta solved food crisis". Bengal government set up Bengal Chambers of Commerce Food Staff Scheme in order to provide food to employees of government, non-government and essential services. The rice was stored in innumerable godown. In an average about 1,20,227 mounds were supplied to different factories and business organizations from rice so stored. Again minister P.N.Banerjee stated before commission that rice, withdrawn from "Denial Area" amounted to 4,76,000 tons. Out of these, only 86,848 tons were distributed to east Bengal and 52,716 tons for flood relief. Out of the balance 3,36,436 tons of rice 52,716 were exported to Ceylon. Balance was spent for the people of Calcutta and suburban industrial areas and soldiers.

That meant food grains were very much available there but only to feed the people of Calcutta; the interest of greater Calcutta had highest priority because around the city grew 50% of war industry. That was why not a single citizen of Calcutta died of starvation. Nanavati described this as a consequence of clash between urban and rural interest. It was the policy of the government to let the unorganized rural section bear the brunt of famine so that the urban middle class and labourers could remain untouched. The argument was that the rural people were used to starving, but the cities on the other hand were full of

explosive possibilities of rebellion. It should be noted that there was no dearth of food in hotels in Calcutta and at the same time, according to the evidence of Professor Heel, rice stored at Botanical Garden for essential services became rotten, started emitting foul smell when people died in thousands in the streets of Calcutta.

Again, no steps were taken to defend Bengal from possible Japanese attack. L.G. Pinell, Special Officer, Government of Bengal, while deposing before commission stated that he could not make out as to why the Japanese did not attack India. There was none to check the advance of the Japanese. In such a critical situation, part played by government was very meager and whatever it did, not beyond criticism. It was a cruel irony of fate that even during World War II, when London was being bombed, nobody starved to death there. But in Bengal, millions died without protest of any sort without Bengal getting directly involved in war.

Mortality in Calcutta in 1943 according to Famine Enquiry Commission showed different trends. The proportionate increase in male and female deaths were reversed, former being 52.7 percent in excess of quinquennial average and latter 72.2 percent. The great excess mortality in Calcutta was recorded in age groups 1 to 5, 5 to 10 and over 60, the percentage increase in mortality in groups being 223.1, 85.1 and 192.6 respectively. The mortality statistics thus confirmed that women, children and old people were in majority among famine-stricken people which sought food and relief in Calcutta.

The study had revealed that the effect of the food crisis in case of all the types was the same in quality, the variation being only of degree. Everywhere, in all cases, the food crisis had economically ruined the people, bringing many of them to total destitution. Biologically it had led them to extinction at a tremendous speed and socially it had disrupted their normal family ties and ruined them into callous beings bereft of human sympathy and feelings.

Famine not only brought the conservative women of our country out of the safe shelter of their houses, but their families were also shattered. Mahila Atma Raksha Samity, AIWC, PRC all plunged into action when the city was overwhelmed by streams of famine-stricken people. In this context, Ashok Mitra, ICS, wrote, “ the sight of women in rags with babies in their arms, going from door to door in Calcutta piteously waiting for a ladle of gruel, shook me, a husband and now a father badly.”

In such a dangerous situation, part played by government was very meager and whatever it did, not beyond criticism. The government ran 2,678 kitchens directly and subsidized another 1,079 (September-Oct, 43). The SDO, Munshigunge told the press in December 1943 that the government supply was very inadequate for 9 lakh people of whom 7 lakh needed relief. In Chandpur in December 1943, the government distributed relief to 25,000 when 10 lakh needed relief. Those famine-stricken people, who survived, had swelled ranks of nomadic beggars, without home and ties and society.

From the reports of fifteen worst affected subdivisions, it could be safely said that in every subdivision 7 percent of the families on an average, earned their livelihood by begging. Besides total effect of food crisis on the villages could also be assessed. The centre of gravity of village life was for a time completely upset and people who normally carried on the productive life of the village first crowded the village market and then as their health became worse and the village market failed to employ them; they became semi-paupers. As semi-paupers, they could not get a living inside the village and went from village to village in search of food or job. This disruption of family life had created another big social problem for the people. The Mahila Atma Raksha Samity, People's Relief Committee along with other unofficial relief organizations were trying their best to deal with the situation. Their primary objective was to save the lives of the people for which they operated community kitchens and forced the government to open a number of community kitchens.

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## **18.7 Epidemic**

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As an inevitable consequence of famine, malaria, small pox and cholera came in an epidemic form. The death toll exceeded that of the famine. In this context, mention might be made to the report prepared by Lt. Col. K.S. Fitch, late Deputy Surgeon General (Famine Relief), Bengal then and later, about various stages among very worst cases of the starvation. Medicine too could not be found like other essential commodities. As during the famine, so during the epidemic, the government remained almost a silent spectator. The situation was so critical that all medical relief organizations merged together to form Bengal Medical Relief Co-ordination Committee under the leadership of Dr. B.C. Roy.

From the report of Dr. B.C.Roy, it was known that 2 crore of people were affected by epidemic. The diseases caused more deaths than the famine. Bengal Medical Relief Co-ordination committee treated more than 13 lakh cases and sent out 55 medical units to different parts of Bengal. Besides different relief committees under its direction had sent out 150 medical units. Medical Relief Week was observed from 20 to 26 August, 1944. Mahila Atma Raksha Samity, People's Relief Committee along with other organizations, in this situation also, came forward and co-operated with the Bengal Medical Relief Co-ordination Committee. They got involved in other preventive measures as well and set up many first aid centres in different areas including bustees of Calcutta, inoculating the people against small pox, cholera and typhoid, bringing the affected people to hospitals etc. They sent deputations to the local circle offices for better relief measures. The hospital for orphans in Chittagong which was the only hospital of its kind in eastern India languished for want of money.

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## **18.8 The Cloth Famine of 1944-45**

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In the wake of food famine and epidemic, burst a cloth famine unprecedented in the history of the country. Previously it was seen that among the village craftsmen, the condition of weavers was far better. There were 2 lakhs of weavers in Bengal, who with their families would form a community of 12 lakh. They supplied Bengal's total requirement of cloth. But they were the worst sufferers of famine. While a cloth famine hit everybody in Bengal, 80% of the productive capacity of handloom remained fallow and weavers on a mass scale were on the verge of destitution. A new kind of economic relationship had come into being in which black marketers reduced common weavers to the level of bond slaves.

Bengal's handloom industry was on the bank of utter ruin. In district after district, thousands of looms were lying idle for lack of yarn. Amidst such conditions, different cotton mills were closed due to coal shortage. However, enquiry made in authoritative quarters in Bombay, revealed that in spite of such poor condition of handloom weavers, there could not be such a terrible cloth crisis because of cloth supply which was more than her quota.

It was because the disaster was clearly man made, as was sure for the 1943 famine. Like crops, medicines, kerosene, almost all the necessary commodities, yarn, dye stuffs and all other requirements of the weavers practically vanished from the open market. A new period had seen in which black market had become all pervasive. In fact, inefficiency to

handle the situation on one hand and corruption on the part of government itself on the other hand, intensified the crisis. To aggravate the cloth crisis into a cloth famine, the bureaucrats openly sheltered the profiteers and hoarders.

Thus, a new crisis of tremendous proportion immediately gripped Bengal once again. As during 1943, it was the women who were the worst victims of the cruelty. They could not go out for want of cloth and passed days by fasting. In 1943, there were at least the arrangements for gruel distribution with the opening of kitchens. But in 1944-45, there were no arrangements for cloth distribution. Those who were not driven to such deaths swarmed in their thousands into the numerous towns of Bengal. Thus, the exodus of the emaciated from the villages was repeated, though on a larger scale. Immortality was raging in Chittagong where women were forced to sell their bodies for cloth. As during famine and epidemic, the government remained a silent spectator.

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## **18.9 Flesh Trade**

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After the famine, harvesting of new crops began. The city of Calcutta was back to its old glory but a slow erosion of moral and social life of Bengal had already started. As mentioned by Tarak Das in his *Bengal Famine*, the average of desertion by husband was 19.85 per cent and that by wives was 50.42. When the community kitchens and work houses were closed, these helpless women had no place to go back. Malnutrition affected their fertility. Famine caused a considerable fall in birth rate.

Sheer urge for survival forced the women to take up prostitution. From the lecture of Dr. Souren Bose it was seen that the number of prostitutes jumped in 1944 more than twice than it was in 1938 !

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## **18.10 Collapse of Education**

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Throughout the period, since famine, the collapse of education in the countryside became self-evident. Large number of school teachers left the profession because it could not feed them. The prevailing cloth famine was also responsible for large percentage of absenteeism. For 150 years, the patriotic leaders in Bengal tried hard under an alien rule to create a network of educational institutions in the province and created for Bengal the

foremost place in culture and education in India. Two years of crisis had taken away the basis of that culture. Education was black out. 25, 000 of rural teachers, according to the estimate of Director of Industries, had become destitute. A new generation was being reared up in hunger, misery and begging amidst widespread corruption and helplessness without education to grow into a generation of barbarians.

The country has been turned into a charnel house. Standing on the dead ground the peasants realized that the major cause of the death is 'bargadari' system. So, the crowds of lakhs of beggars transformed into a crowd resisting it. Within only three years in 1946 peasant agitations began to coalesce all over Bengal. The most massive, most widespread Tebhaga agitation of Bengal began – the owner will get not half of the crops but only one third; two third crops will be taken by the 'bargadar'.

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## 18.11 Conclusion

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The last years of the colonial rule in Bengal, especially between 1939 and 1947, were truly painful as well as catastrophic for the people of Bengal. Colonialism started its career in Bengal with famine in 1770; it ended its lifespan with another famine in 1943. The gravity and extent of the Bengal Famine of 1943 were so massive that it is difficult even for the professional historians to judge it precisely. It was characterized by the declining standard of living, the abnormal price hike, the shortage of rice and other foodstuff, the indifferent attitude of the colonial government and high death rate due to starvation. People lost their entitlement in the market. Only a section of the Indian society, that is, the grain dealers and hoarders, were able to accumulate huge amount of profit at the cost of the lives of the common people. The traditional prosperity of Bengal was completely ruined and the province was never able to recover from this grave crisis even after independence.

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## 18.12 Model Questions

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1. Assess the role of Indian National Congress during World War II.
2. Assess the role of Communist Party of India during World War II
3. Do you agree with the view that the Bengal Famine of 1943 was man made? Draw a pen picture of It.
4. Assess the role of Government in 1943-44.



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### 18.13 Suggested Readings

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Bipan Chandra: *History of Modern India*.

Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*.

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay: *From Plassey to Partition and After*.

Suranjan Chatterjee and Siddhartha Guha Ray: *History of Modern India, 1707-1964*.

Siddhartha Guha Ray: *Modern Europe*.

Bratati Hore: *Women's Participation in Communist Movements; A Case Study of Bengal 1942-47*.

F.M. Bedi: *Bengal Lamenting*.

B.M. Bhatia: *Famines in India 1860-1965*.

N.K. Bose: *My Days with Gandhi*.

Tarak Das: *Bengal Famine 1943, As Revealed in the Survey of Destitute in Calcutta*.

K. C. Ghosh: *Famines in Bengal 1770-1943*.

T.K. Ghosh: *The Bengal Tragedy*.

A. Jalal: *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* .

N. Mansergh and E.W. Lumby: *Transfer of Power, Vol. IV-VIII*.

V.P. Menon: *Transfer of Power in India*.

P. Moon: *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*.

## **Module 6 :** **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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### **Unit 19 □ Communal Politics in Late Colonial Bengal**

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#### *Structure*

- 19.0 Objectives**
  - 19.1 Introduction**
  - 19.2 Communalism and Indian Freedom Struggle**
  - 19.3 Communal Politics and Bengal**
  - 19.4 Communalism: Two Communities and Election**
  - 19.5 Cabinet Mission**
  - 19.6 Direct Action Day**
  - 19.7 Communal Riots: Some Observations**
  - 19.8 Conclusion**
  - 19.9 Model Questions**
  - 19.10 Suggested Readings**
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### **19.0 Objectives**

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At the end of the present Unit, the learners will understand:

- The growth of communalism with special reference to Bengal
  - Election politics between the two communities Hindu and Muslims
  - The significance of the Cabinet Mission
  - The Direct Action Day and Communal Riots
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### **19.1 Introduction**

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The historical evolution of the Indian history under colonial rule could be marked by the interplay of three distinct factors: colonialism, nationalism and communalism. When the

Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, the leading and educated Muslim leaders were reluctant to join it. Since then, the gulf between the two communities, that is, Hindus and the Muslims, became wider. The Gandhian movement, the attempt of C. R. Das and Subhas Chandra Bose, the role of the liberal Congress politicians (both Hindu and Muslim) and the Communist Party of India were organized efforts to address the tension between the Hindus and the Muslims. Nevertheless, the colonial government always tried to exploit the division between the two countries using the so-called 'divide and rule policy'. It resulted to the growth of communal tension in Bengal, where the eastern part of the province was Muslim majority. It needs to be pointed out that besides the growth of Muslim communalism, there was development of Hindu communal consciousness in the late colonial Bengal. Both communities – at least a section of it – were trying to dominate the situation as much as possible. The colonial government was taking advantage of the situation. It resulted to the riots and finally partition of the country. In this unit, we will study all these aspects of the Indian history.

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## **19.2 Communalism and Indian Freedom Struggle**

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Communalism means the narrow and fanatic spirit of a particular religion or race for its own existence. Communalism is just contrary to the spirit of liberal nationalism, rationalism and progressive thinking and its chief aim is to flame the racial and religious feelings so that the followers of other castes and creeds be suppressed ruthlessly. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the day when India attained her freedom, a span of almost five decades have seen communal strife, bringing shame to this unified Hindu-Muslim land.

The division of Bengal in 1905 probably did not affect the Bengali Muslims, as it did to the Bengali Hindus. To the Hindu Zamindars, the consequences of the division was losing their authority and control in East Bengal; while on the other, it meant a Muslim dominated country for the Muslim middle class. Monetary interests were the main walls between a unified Hindu-Muslim entities fighting against alien forces for one unified country.

The British propaganda, that the new province would mean more jobs for Muslims, did achieve considerable success in swaying upper and middle class Muslims against the Swadeshi movement. At the same time when swadeshi movement was at its peak; when prayers for the unification of Bengal were being uttered in patriotic songs, Mymensingh and its adjoining areas witnessed quite a few riots. Next step taken by the British Raj which

contributed to communal cleavage was the legislative council's reforms of 1909 which included the provision for separate Muslim and General or Hindu electorates – surely led to sharper communal division in long run. Another development in which the British rulers played a controversial role was the founding of the Muslim League at a meeting of upper-class Muslims in Dacca during 1906.

The 1916 Congress –League or Lucknow Pact marked the honeymoon period of Hindu-Muslim relations which lasted until the mid -1920s. During this period, the rise of A.K.Fazlul Huq was a sign of a larger social, economic, and cultural trend; the slow, but continuing development of a Bengali Muslim middle class and their entry into politics. The Non-cooperation and Khilafat movement brought the Hindus and Muslim together under one banner during 1920s but its base proved to be too weak. Just a few years after the premature end of the movement, serious riots broke out in Calcutta and in some areas of east Bengal following a protest against playing music in front of mosque.

The strained relationship between the Hindu Zamindars and the Muslim farmers was doubtlessly one of the main reasons behind communal clashes. But recent researches have shown that the equations had begun to change even before the 1920s – the stress was much more on education and job facilities for the ever-growing Muslim middle class.

The Muslim society, backward in comparison to the Hindus, had given birth to a fast-increasing Muslim middle class community. As the sense of self respect and the desire for establishment grew in the middle-class community, so it was well reflected in the politics of communal riots. Paying due importance to the Muslim middle class, C.R. Das proposed that they be represented in the Bengal State Legislative Council on the basis of their numerical strength but the proposal went with him to his grave when he died in 1925; a series of communal riots had broken out in various districts.

Here mention must be made as was pointed out by Leonard A. Gordon that the differences in perspective between Urdu Muslims in Bengal and Bengali Muslims continued to be expressed in large and small ways through the pre-partition period. The Urdu Muslims, with more of an all-India perspective in which the Muslims were a considerable, but small minority, insisted upon separate electorate. Some Bengali Muslims worked in the Congress or were affiliated to the Congress and called themselves nationalist Muslims. Though their number was small, their continued activity indicates a larger potentiality: the possibility for a strong Hindu-Muslim alliance in Bengal to work against the British Raj.

However, affiliation snapped completely in the space of three years following Das's death in 1925. Many Muslim leaders left the Congress at this point. According to Partha Chatterjee, the final blow was delivered in 1928 when an amendment was passed to the Bengal Tenancy Act. The entire Congress bloc in the legislature spoke and voted in support of the rights of landlords (it is well known feature of the social character of the peasantry that whereas Muslims formed the overwhelming bulk of the peasantry, the landlords were mainly Hindu), while most Muslim members put up a futile fight in favor of the tenants. From this time onwards organized politics among the Muslim masses of Bengal moved decisively away from the Congress. On the other hand, the All-Bengal Praja Samiti was formed in 1929 and in 1931 it resolved to participate in all government institutions, legislatures, municipalities and union boards.

Again, in an all-Indian perspective, the Congress-League relationship almost broke down by the end of 1928, during the debate created by Motilal Nehru's report, when the Congress under pressure from Hindu interests denied the Muslims their 33% representation in the Legislative Council and their reserved seats in Bengal and the Punjab. Jinnah announced the end of Congress-League relationship. In March 1929, the League presented its 'Fourteen Points' demands. This was also rejected by Congress. The League was successful in claiming an independent election council from the British. The communal rift was literally legalized by the action.

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### **19.3 Communal Politics and Bengal**

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As the Muslims were the majority in Bengal and in Punjab, so Congress felt no need for reservation of seats for them. But League, on the other hand found it very necessary. The Government of India Act 1935 introduced provincial autonomy, which was to come into full force from 1 April 1937. Qualifications for inclusion in the electoral roll for the 1937 election was made dependent on taxation, property and education. However, the Act granted separate electorate to the Muslims. This meant that they would vote as a distinct political community and they were allotted 119 out of the 250 seats. In Bengal the principal contestants in the election were the Congress, the Muslim League and the Krishak Praja Party. The Krishak Praja Party was formally started in July 1929 by those Muslim workers in the Congress who left under the leadership of Maulana Akram Khan and established Nikhil Banga Praja Samity in July 1929. They were subsequently joined by other Muslim

members of the Legislative Council led by Abdur Rahim and A.K.Fazlul Huq. Huq actively participated in the Union Board elections of 1935-36. The Krishak Praja Party firmly resolved to stand in the Legislative Council elections and oriented its organization accordingly. At the Dacca conference in April 1936, the Krishak Praja Party drew up and published the Krishak Prajar Chaudda Dapha (Fourteen Point Demands of the Krishak Praja). Its demands were : -

1. Abolition of the Zamindari system without any compensation.
2. Reduction of rates of rent
3. Abolition of the Zamindar's rights of nazar and salami rights of pre-emption.
4. Adequate measures for agricultural credit to meet the cultivator's current needs.
5. Remission of old debts and interests.
6. Enactment of a moneylending act for adequate protection to the tenants and cultivators.
7. Formation of a debt conciliation board.
8. Resuscitation of the dead and dying rivers of Bengal.
9. Establishment of compulsory primary education for all.
10. Free and compulsory primary education for all.
11. Fully fledged provincial autonomy for Bengal.
12. Reduction of administrative expenditure.
13. Fixation of ministry's salary at one thousand rupees.
14. Release of all political prisoners.

The election manifesto was primarily pro-peasant and anti-zamindar, but it contained very little concrete promise to settle the status of the various categories of peasants. The Congress won all the territorial and general seats. Of the reserved seats scheduled caste seats Congress claimed only three or four seats. But in most of the reserved seats non-Congress candidates succeeded. The Congress however won both of the seats reserved for women.

The communal composition of the new house was 96 Hindus and 123 Muslims. None of the Muslims contested on the Congress platform. However, the Congress was still numerically the largest party, having secured 54 seats in the Assembly. Srilata Chatterjee

in her book *Congress Politics in Bengal, 1919-1939*, analyzed that poll results showed that in urban areas the Muslim League was dominating the Muslim vote, while the Krishak Praja Party held sway in the countryside, especially the rural sector of Eastern Bengal. The Muslim League had secured 39 seats and Krishak Praja Party 40 seats. Since the Congress refused a coalition with Krishak Praja Party, under the circumstances a Krishak Praja Party – Muslim League coalition government became inevitable with Fazlul Huq as Prime Minister; first step to realize Muslim League's goal of ruling Bengal. Huq himself joined the League, splitting his own party. He moved the Pakistan Resolution at the Lahore session of the League in 1940.

Gordon showed that although provincial autonomy was another step to self government, its implementation by a Muslim League dominated government in a province with Bengal's demographic and economic structure encouraged the communalization of almost every issue. The Muslims as mentioned, had a population majority, but still lagged in all spheres of public, professional and economic life. They wanted to use their political position favouring Muslims, and the reservation of government positions of all kinds for Muslims. They did make headway, but also aroused a Hindu backlash that made communal cooperation tortuous. Fazlul Huq's coalition ministry could achieve little in terms of implementing the KPP's original programme. From 1937 he wanted to escape the clutches of a Muslim League and the discipline of Jinnah as well as the control of Urdu-speaking Muslim businessmen whom he called 'these up-countrymen in Calcutta'. In three years' time, Huq himself had to go into a coalition with the Hindu Mahasabha in order to save his ministry. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee joined the ministry to protect the rights of the Hindus. On the other hand, this gravely weakened the ministry because the Muslim members could not have much confidence in someone with his view.

The second Huq ministry continued until April 1943, but was subjected to extraordinary pressures by the Raj, the Muslim League and by having to deal with the Congress rebellion on August 1942. Jinnah and his Muslim League supporters in Bengal campaigned against the ministry and the British Governor, Sir John Herbert worked for the dissolution of it. In early 1943 Huq's second ministry fell. Their cause got an even bigger impetus when League was given the sole power to form the government in Bengal in 1943 under Nazimuddin. Several Hindus served in this ministry, but they were men with no following, who joined in hopes of personal glory. With a League ministry in power and Congress

leaders imprisoned or outmanned, the Muslim League organization in Bengal was built up for the first time into something approaching a mass movement under the direction of its General Secretary Abul Hashim, a Bengali Muslim leader from Burdwan district. Through the years 1943 to 1946, Hashim and other League workers brought the Muslim student community and many Muslim intellectuals, based in Dacca and Calcutta, into the League for the first time. Muslim politicians who had been independents or in the Krishak Praja Party shifted to the League. Hashim tirelessly toured the province finding men to organize the league in every district.

In national level, it was seen that the Congress had contested 1161 seats in general constituencies and won 716. The provinces remaining outside the Congress orbit were the Punjab, Sind and Bengal. Although these provinces had a Muslim majority, but in none of them the League fared well. According to Anita I. Singh, the Muslim League obtained only 4.8% of the Muslim vote, and won only 43 out of 272 Muslim seats in the Muslim majority areas. In none of the Muslim majority provinces, the Muslim League was able to form a government. The Congress, on the other hand, won only 28 out of 56 Muslim seats contested. It did not secure a single Muslim seat in the U.P., Bengal and the Punjab. It was clear from the election results that neither the Congress, nor the Muslim League represented the Muslim opinion. Most important, according to A.I.Singh, there were no signs of Muslim unity, which Jinnah tried to build since 1934 as the provincial Muslim leaders of the League were showing no interests in a united Muslim front.

Although the Congress had won, Jinnah wanted Congress-League coalition ministries, particularly in Bombay and U.P., where the Congress had set up very few candidates in seats reserved for the Muslims and were defeated in each of them. But the Congress refused, because they wanted Muslims to resign from the League and join the Congress. The Viceroy, Lord Wavell, later recalled that, "Pakistan was the creation of the Congress for it was the refusal to establish coalition governments in the provinces that alarmed the Muslims and drove them to extremes."

Jinnah lashed out at the Congress in the Lucknow session of the Muslim League in October 1937, after Congress ministries had sworn in: "The present leadership of the Congress, especially during the last ten years, has been responsible for alienating the Mussalmans of India more and more. Wherever they are in majority and wherever it suited



them, they refused to cooperate with the Muslim League and demanded unconditional surrender and signing of their pledges.” It was at Lucknow that, Jinnah gave the call of complete independence in which the rights and interests of Mussalmans and other minorities are adequately and effectively safeguarded. It was from this time onwards that the Muslim League could master strength. Jinnah wanted the Congress leaders to accept the Muslim League as the sole representative of the Muslim. The Congress turned down Jinnah’s demand on the ground that it could not give up its national character.

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## **19.4 Communalism: Two Communities and Election**

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Meanwhile in the month of March 1940, the proposal for; ‘Pakistan’ was endorsed. The League campaigned with the aim of preaching people that Pakistan was the only way to Muslim development and prosperity. During election in March 1946, the league secured 114 of 119 Muslim seats using only ‘Pakistan slogan.’ The dream of their own free country and the sense of self-establishment had by now reached its peak among the Muslims.

In analyzing League’s activities, Gordon showed that in the decade and a half before the great swing to the League, its programme had been gradually changing. In the late 1920s and the 1930s the League’s resolutions demanded ‘safeguards’ for the Muslim minority within India. But slowly in the 1930s and rapidly from 1940, the line changed; the Muslims in India were not a minority, but a nation, a nation called ‘Pakistan’ which insisted on equality with the Hindu nation. Muslims were asked to identify only as Muslims, no longer as Bengalis, Biharis, Punjabis etc. The Muslim nation would be established in those territories where the Muslims were a majority, but the basis of nationality was membership in the religious community of Muslims, not residence.

On the other hand, the seed of communalism had sprung its roots within the Hindu community also. The fear of Muslim domination after League came into power was high among the Hindus. The difference between the two communities over the ‘Bengal Secondary Education Bill’ took an ugly turn in 1940. The Hindus objected to the proposal of an increase in Muslim representation in the secondary education council, claiming that it was they, the Hindus who were responsible for spreading education and culture throughout Bengal. On the other hand, the Muslim complained that the education was heavily Hindu influenced as the later had complete control over the education system.

Since the end of 1930's an effort to make Hinduism-a sort of 'military religion' had been going on. By the middle of 1940's Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangha (RSS) had nationwide followers of 76,000 people. Side by side, with the claim for Pakistan, ran the campaign for a militant Hinduism. The communal feeling grew stranger with the publication of the Cabinet Mission plan in May 1946.

Hardy said war contracts to Muslim given by Muslim provincial governments or by governments eager to mollify Muslims heightened their aspirations for a Muslim state. Before the provincial elections, Muslim business families such as the Ispahanis, Dawood, Haroon and Habibs had been persuaded to contribute to Muslim League funds. In 1944, a Federation of Muslim Chambers of Commerce was founded. W.C.Smith, who was closely surveying the situation, said that the slogan of Pakistan had conquered the professional, clerical and salaried middle class. M.A.H Ispahani, a Muslim businessman from Calcutta, said to the Bengal governor, Casey, that the slogan of Pakistan was primarily economic. Muslim League fought the elections on the sole issue of Pakistan.

Election results showed that the League was now a mass movement. It won all 30 Muslim seats in the Central Legislative Assembly and 439 out of 494 seats reserved to Muslims under separate electorates in the provincial assemblies. In Punjab and Bengal, it emerged as the largest single party. In Bengal the League won 113 of 119 seats; in the Muslim minority provinces like United Provinces, Bombay and Madras, the success of the League was phenomenal. In UP, it won 54 of the 64 reserved seats and in Bombay and Madras in all the seats where the League contested. According to Hardy, the League's success in the United Provinces was most significant. It was from here that Jinnah acquired the status of a national leader. United Provinces provided education, wealth and cultural identity to the zealous Muslims.

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## 19.5 Cabinet Mission

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Siddhartha Guha Roy and Suranjan Chatterjee showed that the election result of 1946 was a defeat for the ulemas of Deoband, who were opponents of partition and of 'Pakistan' and supporters of Congress. Hardy has correctly argued that the slogan of 'Pakistan' was 'a panacea for the ills of Muslims of each and every class. Its slogans were unity, discipline and faith .... Jinnah deliberately kept not only the future character and

constitution of Pakistan in heaven, but its very boundaries too.’ Muslim voters voted not for the truncated Pakistan of 1947, but for a haven for Muslims and for Islam. Both, the Muslim League and Congress were willing for an early settlement of the issue of transfer of power. Meanwhile mention must be made of post war upsurges.

To check the floods of mass movement, the British government decided to send the Cabinet Mission in March 1946. It spent more than three months in India negotiating with Indian leaders for an agreed solution of the constitutional problems. On 16 May 1946 the Cabinet Mission published its own plan for a three-tiered Indian Union in which provinces would be free to form sections and to determine what subjects should be under the jurisdiction of a section government. A Constituent Assembly would be formed of representatives drawn from the existing provincial assemblies. Each section would decide both upon the constitution of each of its provinces and upon a constitution for the section as a whole. It was also declared that no province could opt out of its section before the provincial and sectional constitutions have been drawn up.

On June 1946 the Council of Muslim League accepted the Cabinet Mission plan, after Jinnah had obtained an assurance from Wavell that if the Congress rejected it, the League would be brought into the new interim government. Jinnah was particularly impressed by the fact that the plan included the clause that the Muslim majority in Section B (N.W.F. Province, Punjab, and Sindh) and C (Bengal and Assam) would be in a position to obtain safeguards for the Muslims of the Hindu majority provinces (i.e., Section A, which included Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces, United Provinces and Bihar).

In the meantime, the Congress accepted the Mission plan on 24 June fearing that anymore objection from their side could see the League forming the government under the Mission plan. Though Congress adhered to their objection against compulsory grouping, it said that they were ready to draft the constitution only for the sake of a free democratic India. After the Congress gave its consent to the Mission plan, the Mission’s stand towards the League changed. Besides League’s objection towards the selection of Muslim representative by the Congress would not be accepted by the Mission.

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## 19.6 Direct Action Day

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The fact that the League was not asked to form the interim government, even after they accepted the Mission plan before the congress did, was a major blow to the League. In

these circumstances came the call for 'Direct Action Day'. The League wanted to strike back and show exactly how much power they held. On 29 July 1946, call for 'Direct Action' was announced in a meeting of All India Muslim League Council in Bombay. It was said that this call was to protest against the indifference shown to the Muslims and to gain an independent state of Pakistan for them.

In general, an atmosphere of distrust, fear and anxiety prevailed in Calcutta anticipating Muslim League's announcement of direct Action Day. The action of Bengal government in declaring 16 August a holiday was severely criticized. The description of preparation for riot, referring to different secret sources, was mentioned in the book of Dr. Suranjan Das. Communal riots had broken out on an unprecedented scale where more than 4000 were killed 15,000 were wounded.

Attacks on property, forcible conversion and incidents of rape were also prominent. From Calcutta, riots spread to Chittagong, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Barisal, Pabna, Noakhali, Tippera, Bihar. Civilization itself seemed to have been murdered for those days. This was not riot. It needed a word found in medieval history, a fury. Undoubtedly the goondas took the leading part, hired from outside for this purpose. However, the middleclass also took direct part in the riot.

It was not true to show riot as a conspiracy of the British. Conspiracy was certainly there but at the same time, there was inner conflict between the two communities. British imperialism exploited and gained from this conflict. It could not be accepted that vested interest was responsible for riot and people joined the riots as puppets. There were certainly some vested interests behind the riot; but when the common people joined the riot and killed their neighbor, then it could not be said to be ignorant madness. For that time being he thought that what he was doing was necessary for the interest of his religion, family and community. There was difficult cruel ideology behind this conscience which grew up after a long time. No life could ever be but in the brutality of those days, the guarantee quickly changed its allegiance to death.

Communal riots had broken out on an unprecedented scale. From Calcutta, riots spread to Chittagong, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Barisal and Pabna. In September 1946, 162 Hindus and 158 Muslims were killed in Bombay city. In Noakhali and Tippera attacks on property and incidents of rape were prominent besides forcible conversion. As in case of Calcutta, here too no damage was done to public property such as post offices, schools

or government buildings. The brutalities here partly reflected Muslim discontent at Hindu economic domination. Many of the shopkeepers attacked by the mob had made fortunes during the famine of 1943 at the expense of the Muslim peasantry. Hindu peasants rose against Muslims in the riots in Bihar, leaving at least 7000 killed. In Garmukteswar in UP, Hindu pilgrims slaughtered a thousand Muslims. Large scale riots broke out in Lahore, Amritsar, Multan, Attock and Rawalpindi. The main targets were Sikhs and Hindu traders and money lenders. P. Moon said, approximately 1,80,000 had been killed. Meanwhile, in August 1946, Nehru changed position and agreed to form an interim government. This was what the British government wanted. Wavell had written to the Secretary of State on 31 July that the Congress should be kept busy in constitutional politics to thwart any mass movement. On 2 September a congress dominated interim government was sworn in. The League agreed to join in October. The Missions's endeavour was a complete failure, because Jinnah was unwilling to participate in a constituent Assembly under the Cabinet Mission plan and Congress rejection of grouping provinces into sections.

We must analyze different sheds of communalism as was reflected in different periods in Indian history. Bipan Chandra in his book *History of Modern India* discussed that various communal groups shared was their tendency to adopt pro-government political attitudes. It is to be noted that none of the communal groups and parties, which talked of Hindu and Muslim nationalism, took active part in the struggle against foreign rules. They saw people belonging to other religions and the nationalist leaders as their real enemies. The communal groups and parties also shied away from the social and economic demands of the common people which, as we have seen above, were being increasingly taken up by the nationalist movement. In this respect, they increasingly came to represent the upper class vested interests.

The national movement firmly opposed the communal forces, for its commitment to secularism was always deep and real. Yet it was not able to fully counter the communal challenge. In the end, communalism succeeded in partitioning the country. How is this failure be explained? One answer that is often given is that nationalist leaders did not make enough efforts to negotiate with and conciliate the communal leaders. Bipan Chandra opposed this view. From the beginning, the nationalist leaders relied too much on negotiations with the communal leaders.

But it was not possible to conciliate or appease communalism. Furthermore, efforts to appease one communalism invariably led to the growth of other communalisms in the form of a backlash. Between 1937 and 1939 the Congress leaders repeatedly met Jinnah to conciliate him. But Jinnah would not make any concrete demands. Instead, he put forward the impossible demand that he would negotiate with the Congress only if the Congress first accepted that it was a Hindu party and represented only the Hindus. The Congress could not possibly have accepted this demand, for it meant giving up its basic secular nationalist character. The fact is that the more communalism was conciliated the more extreme it became.

What was required was not further appeasement but an all out ideological political struggle against communalism. What was required was a massive campaign against communalism, a massive campaign of the kind that was carried on against colonial ideology since the 1880s. But the nationalist did not do so, except sporadically. However, the success of secular nationalism should not be underrated. Despite the partition riots and the resurgence of communal forces during 1946-47, India did succeed after independence in framing a secular constitution and in building a basically secular polity and society. Hindu communalism did make deep inroads in society and even in the ranks of the nationalists. It remained a minority force among the Hindus. While many Muslims were swept away by the tide of religious fanaticism and communalism during 1946-47, others stood like a rock against communalism.

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## 19.7 Communal Riots: Some Observations

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Again, it is necessary to analyze the psychology of communal riots. Sandip Bandopadhyay in his book *Deshbhag Smriti o Swatta* in Bengali showed that the main difficulty in discussing communal riots and their resultant violence and killing lies in the fact that we do not know (a) the manner in which we are to look at the violence and (b) whom we are going to mark as the perpetrator of the killing. If we look at the entire sequence of events as the mechanizations of a colonial power, it is quite easy to arrive at a simple solution.

The very unpleasant but very true fact that the communal riots and the post-partition violence in India was a situation where all the three religious communities were engaged in

trying to destroy each other, can also be kept in the dark. We have read countless narratives describing fascist atrocities. But we have not been able to write a really accurate account of the Indian holocaust that happened hardly three to four years later. There are other problems too. If a particular community continuously keeps on narrating the disasters and atrocities it has had to face, then automatically and naturally, the general line of thought veers against the other communities. Neighbours will therefore become ‘enemies’ and the human society of a particular area will be divided into ‘we’ and ‘they’. When the ‘we’ faction will speak, they will keep unsaid all matters of the ‘they’ faction. The narrative will be totally one sided and incomplete. For example, if the Hindus go on writing about Noakhali, it would be extremely one-sided because in any diary of 1946, after Noakhali came Bihar and Garh Mukteswar. This allegation can be brought against the other communities too, if, for example, the Muslims keep on concentrating on Bihar and a few areas in Calcutta or the Sikhs mention only the incidents in Shekhupura without referring to the happening in Patiala.

Almost everyone agrees in admitting that all the communal riots that have flared up both before and after independence, are quite different from partition –centric communal violence. Post-partition violence is a chapter in the life of our sub-continent when, as Ashish Nandy said that the very foundation of civilized life had shattered into fragments. For the state, there is one method by which it can explain this violence. Since mass-violence, whatever the reason behind it, is in the eyes of the state, mass-hysteria, violence emerging and evolving out of partition, too, has been explained away as mass-hysteria by the state. Thus, the state has exonerated itself from the responsibility of all the incidents of violence and killing. In fact, the state has defined mass –violence as illegal hysteria, thereby legalizing the inherent violence present in its own structure and method of operations.

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## 19.8 Conclusion

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It is difficult to deny that the tension between the Hindus and Muslims was the greatest challenge before the Indian nationalism, the protagonists of which wanted a unified secular modern liberal democratic nation in post-independence period. In the present unit, we have analysed these complex societal crises in the late colonial Bengal. The growing communal violence, riots and hatred created not only the preconditions for partition of the country but also it was deeply associated with one of the greatest crises of humanity in modern era.

The innocent people suffered mostly, whether they were Hindus or Muslims. It must be noted that the women of both the communities were the worst sufferers. The nationalist leaderships failed to offer a robust anti-colonial anti-communal policy in this critical juncture of the history of Bengal as well as India. The nation paid the price of it in the form of erosion of humanity on the one hand and partition of a long socio-cultural unity on the other hand.

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## 19.9 Model Questions

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1. Assess the role of Muslim League politics from 1925 to 1947.
2. Write a short note on Fazlul Huq and Bengal politics.
3. Write a note on 'Direct Action Day'.

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## 19.10 Suggested Readings

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Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*.

N. Mansergh and E. W. Lumby: *Transfer of Power, Vol.-VIII*.

Anita Inder Singh: *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-47*.

A. Saida: *A Nation Betrayed*.

A. Jalal: *The Sole Spokesman; Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*.

Shila Sen: *Muslim Politics in Bengal 1937-1947*.

V. P. Menon: *The Transfer of Power in India*.

Bipan Chandra: *History of Modern India*.

S. Bandopadhyay: *Deshbhag Smriti O Satwa* (in Bengali).

Bratati Hore: *Women's Participation in Communist Frontal Movements, Case Study of Bengal, 1942-19*.

Leonard A. Gordon: 'Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in 1947 Partition' in *India's Partition – Process, Strategy and Mobilization* edited by Mushirul Hasan.

Partha Chatterjee: 'Bengal Politics and the Muslim Masses, 1920-47' in *India's Partition–Process, Strategy and Mobilization* edited by Mushirul Hasan.

Peter Hardy: *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge, 1972.



## **Module 6 :**

### **Political Development: The Other Sides**

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#### **Unit 20 □ Partition and Independence: A New Society?**

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##### *Structure*

- 20.0 Objectives**
- 20.1 Introduction**
- 20.2 Nature of Independence**
- 20.3 Some Major Problems before Newly Independent India**
- 20.4 Refugee Problem**
- 20.5 Proposal for Greater Bengal**
- 20.6 West Bengal Politics: - Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Dr. B. C. Roy, Two Chief Ministers**
- 20.7 Problems in West Bengal**
  - 20.7.1 Women Agitation to Release Political Prisoners**
  - 20.7.2 Refugee Movements, 1949-50**
  - 20.7.3 Movements against Increased Tram Fare**
  - 20.7.4 Movements of the Teachers**
- 20.8 Conclusion**
- 20.9 Model Questions**
- 20.10 Suggested Readings**

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#### **20.0 Objectives**

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The objective of the present unit is to understand the interplay of the partition and independence in the Indian society in general and the Bengali society in particular in 1947. The following points will be elaborated in this unit:

- The nature of independence of India
- The formation of ministry in West Bengal
- The problems faced by the ruling authority
- The popular unrest in West Bengal in late 1940s and early 1950s.

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## 20.1 Introduction

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In the present unit, we will study the critical years of the Indian history immediately before and after 1947. This particular year witnessed the independence of India; however, the Indian independence came at the cost of partition. A new nation state, namely Pakistan, emerged in the Indian subcontinent. The partition of India affected the two provinces of India: Bengal and the Punjab. The social structure and economy of Bengal were at crossroads in 1947. On the one hand, there was growing refugee crisis in Bengal; on the other hand, there was hope for better future in a newly liberated country. There was admixture of hopes, anxiety and apprehensions in the collective psychology of the Bengali society (or for that matter the Indian society) in the decades of 1940s and 1950s. In this context, we will also explore the question: was it a new society after 1947?

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## 20.2 Nature of Independence

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India achieved independence on 15 August 1947 after a long uninterrupted struggle and two independent states by names India and Pakistan came into being. While whole country became bewitched much more delightedly out of ecstasy due to liberation, Communist Party of India raised a slogan under the leadership of B.T. Randive in the year 1948 in second congress of Communist Party, held in Calcutta from 28 February to 6 March in accordance with decision, approved there. They went on saying, ‘This independence is false. Never forget’. (It may be mentioned here that at the second congress of the CPI held in Calcutta in 1948, it was argued that India’s independence was a betrayal; the Indian bourgeoisie had compromised with imperialism and that it was time to discard the policy of co-operation with the Nehru government. As a consequence of this, militant peasant movements were launched in Malabar, parts of West Bengal, Assam and Telengana. The Nehru government also banned the party under the Defence of India Act. It will be an

exaggeration to say that such accusation was true. Rather, it's better to say that this was half truth. According to Dr. Amalesh Tripathi, "although this independence is not false but it is crippled by birth."

Independence came but the country was divided. Two prosperous provinces of India, Bengal and the Punjab played extremely glorious role in freedom struggle. But both these provinces were bisected. East Bengal and West Punjab got inserted into Pakistan and West Bengal and East Punjab retained left in India. Partition of the country brought inexplicable problems in life of the nation. On the basis of this respect, independence of India is truly crippled or retarded.

Partition of the country brought with itself miserable distress in the lives of the Indian people. All along the country, especially in two segregated Punjab and Bengal, there started the most brutal riot, forcible snatching, and plunder, oppression to women and forcible conversion to different religion. Hundreds of thousands of people became destitute. Panic stricken men and women, started to come to India from East Bengal and West Punjab. Similarly Muslim families made their way towards Pakistan from India. Such kind of migration from one country to settle into other, undertaken by all of these uprooted lakhs men and women created huge problems in two newly states of which socio-economic and political significance must never be ignored. Communal holocaust gripped India and Pakistan accompanying unprecedented atrocities. The situation was brought under control by the employment of army to break the back of communal violence. The police were allowed to shoot at any level of communal riots.

According to Paul Baran, by the time British imperialism withdrew from India, they had systematically destroyed all the fibres and foundations of Indian society. Siddhartha Guha Roy and Suranjan Chatterjee showed that in 1947, above 50 percent of the population lived in poverty; 22 percent of the rural household owned no land and 25 percent owned less than one acre, while 13 percent of big farm households owned two-thirds of the total land area. Though the zamindari system was abolished in the legal sense after 1947, the 'owners' were compensated for what was taken from them, thus leaving their power base in the rural areas unaffected and making it possible for them to effect a re-entry into agricultural operations in different ways.

At the time of transfer of power, foreign capital had substantial control over India's resources and markets. The extractive and plantation industries, processing for export,

international trade and ancillary services were almost fully controlled by foreign managing agencies. For instance, in 1949-50, the foreign companies controlled 85 percent of tea plantations and more than half of the paid up capital in plantation industries. Besides this, 70-95 percent of jute production, 70 percent of coal mining and 73 percent of all mining including gold and magnesium were controlled by foreign capital. The total foreign capital investment in India in 1948 was Rs. 250 crores.

Naturally, in spite of having political independence, economic freedom till then was not tasted by them. Poverty, lack of adequate food, unemployment, illiteracy, diseases as well as superstitions got seated like an immovable heavy stone on daily routine lives of Indian people. Here political independence stood to be abruptly meaningless. Due to these reasons, it may never be an unprincipled action if independence of 1947 is called 'false Independence'.

On the other hand, it must be judged that independence of 1947 is the threshold of a new era in national life and extremely significant event in Indian history. That is why, it is illogical to refer to independence as false. Indeed, at this time, Communist Party became totally isolated from plebeians. There is no doubt that truly gaining liberation is not at all meaningless. Superfluous and unprecedented gaiety and vivacious enjoyment causing to achieve independence was noticed all round the country. General masses were filled with new consciousness and excitement and exaltation. All around the country, one national atmosphere got condensed. Therefore, this independence was not entirely falsified.

Since Battle of Plassey in 1757 slowly India went on bowing to the feet of the British. During this colonial period, there was no right of the Indian people – not the least right of economic freedom. So, on the basis of argumentative consideration, was it not significantly important to achieve many other freedoms apart from economical independence in the year 1947?

Attaining independence is one desired goal to any nation. India achieved its independence. Everything, good and evil of our country is governed today by the countrymen. That is why, in spite of having variety of limitations, the independence of India should have never be irrationally addressed to be false or falsified.

The Indian Constitution came into force on 26 January 1950. Since then, this day has been celebrated as Republic Day. It may be pointed out that it was left upon an elected Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution for India. The 'soul' of the Indian Constitution was expressed in the Preamble: -

“We, the people of India” aspire to create ‘justice social, economic and political : liberty of thought, expression, faith, belief and worship ; equality of status and of opportunity ; and to promote among them all fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.’”

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### **20.3 Some Major Problems before Newly Independent India**

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Factually, India achieved independence on 15 August 1947. But this new state had to face various complications. For newly constituted state, these problems were not only horrifying but also in a true sense, could have annihilated the very existence of the said state. In the foresight of worldwide celebrated poet, Rabindranath Tagore all these complications of new India were captured in a view of vivid picture. In an essay, written by him viz *Sabhyatar Shankat* Tagore referred to all such problems as ‘nasty dint of mischievous indigence or wretchedness’ and he called the immensely voluminous land of India as ‘one wide-spread muddy bed’.

Gandhiji remarked, ‘one, who will take charge to rule over this country, must have to be worn a thorny crown’. This obviously is deserved enough to mention that all these related remarks are appropriate. Dr. S. Gopal entitled this critical time at the dawn of independence as- ‘dismal dawn’.

Since long before the partition, there were taking place in a full swing the communal riots among Hindu-Muslim and Sikhs. Partition sharpened this problem to be more aggravated and fearful. Massive killing, plunder, rape and religious conversion were being continued unpreventably. There was no accurate account how many men and women had been killed. The number of this large killing might be in between 2 lakhs to 6 lakhs. Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation was assassinated by the cruel hands of such men believing in this ideology. Therefore, the prime function of newly formed state was to provide security to lives of general masses, setting up peace in places, distressed by riots.

Partition created a new class of people in Indian subcontinent – ‘refugee’. At the result of partition, communal riots became more and more aggravated. Hindus and Muslims, who had lost everything, migrated to India and Pakistan. In this way, two sections of men and women, diversified in two different and opposite direction ran towards Delhi and Lahore. Although 50,000 thousand Indian soldiers were deployed in East Punjab with an object to

cease such fraternal riots and massive massacre of invaluable human lives, yet no active measure came into effect. Under this circumstance, 50 to 70 lakhs Sikhs and Hindu refugees took shelter in India. At this time, nearly 10 to 15 lakhs Hindu refugees were compelled under crisis of situation to come to West Bengal, Assam and Tripura from East Pakistan. According to ILO report, 'from 1946 to mid-1970, 4-2 million people from East Pakistan registered as refugees in West Bengal, the annual influx reaching peaks of 9,25,000 in 1950 and 6,67,000 in 1964....by 1955, there were 2.2 million refugees in West Bengal, the advent of such huge numbered refugees created more and more complications on politics, society and economy of India. The problem, related to their lives, livelihoods and rehabilitations was looked upon as one largely extensive 'challenge' by the newly constituted state.

In the post independence period, another main problem was food crisis. As a result of partition, widely extended agricultural lands of India was encompassed by Pakistan dominion. Terrible dearth of foodstuffs was seen in the country which had been complicated more and more by the advent of largely numbered refugees. The government resolved to be self-dependent to mitigate food crisis in the year 1949. Productivity of food grains was affected due to natural calamities in 1950. In 1951, Nehru assigned the food crisis to be the major problem and in that year 37 lakhs tonns food grains were planned to be imported in India from foreign countries though that amount was too meager to meet the needs.

In order to form stock yards of food-stuffs collection, cost was increased. In different provinces, distribution strategy was hampered. Levy regulation was introduced. In different places of the country, starved processions were arranged. Firing was opened there too. All in total, food crisis created one gigantic problem. In first Five –year-planning major importance was given on refugee problem and food crisis. It can be said that economic development denotes fundamental changes in society, in ways of life, in political and institutional patterns and in the grasping of new sets of values.

Increasing unemployment problem was added to it. Due to partition, economy was divided which was harmful for both the states. Pakistan was mainly agriculture-based country and almost all industries were structured on Indian territory, resulting of which two states were harmed in respect of economic flourishing. Supply of jute, wheat and cotton was stopped of which the result was abrupt blockage of industries in working periphery. Industrial retro gradation was observed. Then started the unemployment all round the

country. Due to partition and advent of innumerable refugees this unemployment problem took horrid shape.

When India obtained freedom, there were 601 independent princely states in India. It was said in India Act of 1947 that these princely states would have been allowed to sustain their independence or they might have been inserted into any country like India or Pakistan according to their own will. However, Sir Hartley Shawcross, Attorney General, England and Prime Minister of England clearly announced that the British Government would never recognize the independent existence of these princely states. The volume of these princely states was 48 part of Indian mainland and total population of it was round about 9 crores. These princely states were wide-spread in different places and their independent existences were very much perilous for India. Therefore, it was necessary for these princely states to be added to India. The problem of inclusion of these princely states to India was a matter of deeper vexation for India for a long time.

Apart from these problems, the central problem of India was to keep its territorial unity intact. Independent India was diversified into different castes, creed, religions, languages, colors, communities, regionalisms and cultures and it, of course, was more arduous task indeed to keep unity in diversity in India having the country been incited with nationalism. Under the leadership of the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, India successfully passed out this stern ordeal. Strong central government was formed adopting federal ruling system in one hand and at the same time, in other hand, adequate power was handed over to provinces and by the way, much more importance was enlightened on regional individuality too. Under bold leadership of Pandit Nehru, Indian government tried to resolve all these problems and consequently India was drawn forth towards progressive development. The parliamentary democracy under the able guidance of Nehru was nurtured very carefully.

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## **20.4 Refugee Problem**

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Due to partition, East Bengal, West Punjab, N.W. Frontier, Baluchistan and Sindh – all these regions were included into Pakistan. Communal riots went on continuing in these two bordered provinces and its adjoining regions. Riots, plunders, burning and rapes created a dreadful situation all round the country.

In this context, Dr. Amal Tripathi said, before ecstatic scream of joy be stopped to hear any more causing to independence, the pugnacious shout for summoning warfare, raised by lakhs after lakhs Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims along with their loud agonizing scream just penetrated the azure canopy of western border, General Achinlek did not divide the army; he even did not form the peace keeping force. 50,000 thousand soldiers of General Rees got over flooded with huge tide of anger and panic, possessed by one crore restless Punjabi refugees.

Two isolated streams of people losing everything went on floating towards Delhi and Lahore in two opposite directions. Repetition occurred in the border area of West Bengal at the end of 1949, Dr. B.C. Roy mentioned about 16 lakhs refugees. Among them 6 lakhs were dead, 1 crore and 40 lakhs were homeless and 1 lakh women were abducted. By statistics, such massive melancholy may never be expressed. Problem became aggravated at the beginning of 1950. Almost every Hindu wanted to forsake East Bengal because of lack of security there.

Due to pressure of refugees, the relation between India and Pakistan deteriorated. The enlightened conscience of India, Gandhiji started fasting in order to stop this riot. Not only this, he started fasting for days together again when India declined to pay to Pakistan back the due sum of money at the time of partition. India paid to Pakistan back its dues. It was not possible for communal Hindus to accept all these facts with a liberal mind. On 30<sup>th</sup> January 1948, Gandhiji was assassinated by bullets, fired by one Hindu communal person by name Nathuram Godse. The assassination of Gandhiji was of course one darkest blemish to the nation.

It was also a fact indeed that the advent of refugees to India did not get reduced after the assassination of Gandhiji and even communal problem too. In this situation, the prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru started discussion with the prime minister of Pakistan, Liyakat Ali Khan and finally on 17 April, 1950 Nehru-Liyakat pact or Delhi pact was signed between two countries. It was decided through this agreement that the i) minority people would be obedient to the country in which they resided and they would have to demand remedies to that country. ii) If anyone would want to be refugee to other countries from East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam, then he/she would be aided. iii) Both India and Pakistan would have to form enquiry committees for finding out the causes behind this present critical crisis and for determining its measure and also minority commission must



have to be set up. iv) In the cabinet of East Bengal and West Bengal, minority representative must have to be included. This pact could not satisfy many people. That is why, Dr. S. P. Mukhopadhyay and Dr. Khitish Chandra Neogy resigned from Nehru's cabinet. In spite of adopting entrepreneurship adequately enough by central government to lessen the menace caused by advent of refugees from West Pakistan, identical measure for refugees of East Pakistan was not taken. The refugees from West Pakistan came only once in 1947.

But, the streaming advent of the refugees from East Pakistan remained uninterrupted till 1971. It was a much harder task indeed to arrange something constructive for relief and rehabilitation continuously for such uprooted homeless distressed people. The Hindu and Sikh refugees, coming from West Pakistan occupied desolated lands and properties of the Muslims who had abandoned the country and in such they arranged something for satisfying their self interests in the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Same thing did not happen in Bengal. The Punjabi and Sindhi refugees from West Pakistan had no problem on language and therefore they were able to take shelter in Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. But Bengali refugees whose mother tongue was Bengali were not able to take shelter anywhere else apart from West Bengal, Tripura and Assam. As a result of this circumstance, the economy of West Bengal was terribly pressurized and due to this effect, the society and politics of West Bengal got adversely affected. Moreover, grant allotted for refugees in West Bengal was much lower than that of East Punjab. Mention must be made of a letter written by Chief Minister Dr. B.C.Roy to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in this regard. "I do say that the grant so far given is insignificant for 2 lakhs displaced people because it works out at about Rs 20 per capita spread over two years. Will you call it magnificent?"

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## 20.5 Proposal for Greater Bengal

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Mention may be made here regarding a relatively unknown episode in Bengal politics. After it became apparent that the division of India on the basis of the Two Nation Theory would almost certainly result in the partition of the Bengal province along religious lines, Bengal provincial Muslim League leader Suhrawardy came up with a new plan to create an independent Bengal state that would join neither Pakistan nor India and remain

unpartitioned. Suhrawardy realized that if Bengal was partitioned, it would be economically disastrous for East Bengal as all coal mines, jute mills would certainly go to the western part including Calcutta. Suhrawardy floated his idea on 24 April 1947 at a press conference in Delhi.

However, the plan directly ran counter to that of the Muslim League's, which demanded the creation of a separate Muslim homeland on the basis of the two nation theory. Bengal provincial Muslim League leadership opinion was divided. Burdwan's League leader Abul Hashim supported it. On the other hand, Nurul Amin and Md. Akram Khan opposed it.

On the Congress side, only a handful of leaders agreed to the plan. Among them was the influential Bengal provincial Congress leader Sarat Chandra Bose and Kiran Shankar Roy. However, most other BPCCL leaders and Congress leadership including Nehru and Patel rejected the plan. Although the chances of proposal seeing daylight without Congress Central Committee's approval was slim, Bose and Suhrawardy continued talks to reach an agreement on the political structure of the proposed state. Like Suhrawardy, Bose also felt that the partition would severely hamper Bengal's economy and almost half of the Hindu population would be left stranded on the Pakistani side. The agreement was published on 24 May 1947.

The proposal had hardly any support at grassroots level, particularly among the Hindus. Muslim League's continuous propaganda on the two-nation theory for the previous six years combined with the marginalization of Hindus in Suhrawardy ministry and the vicious riots of 1946, which many Hindus believed was state sponsored, left little room for trust in Muslim League among Bengali Hindus. Soon afterwards, division arose among Bose and Suhrawardy on the question of the nature of the electorate; separate or joint. Suhrawardy insisted upon maintaining the separate electorate for Muslims and non-Muslims. Bose was opposed to this. He withdrew and due to lack of support of any other significant support from Congress's side, the United Bengal plan was discarded. Still, this relatively unknown episode marked the last attempt among Bengali Muslim and Hindu leadership to avoid the partition.

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## **20.6 West Bengal Politics: Prafulla Chandra Ghosh and Dr. B. C. Roy, Two Chief Ministers**

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Radcliffe's line split Bengal, which historically was always a single economic zone, single cultural and ethnic zone, into two halves. The fertile East produced food and raw materials which the West consumed and the industrialized West produced manufactured goods which were consumed by the East. This mutually beneficial trade and exchange was severely disrupted by the partition. Rail, road and water communication routes were severed between the two.

Prafulla Chandra Ghosh was the first Chief Minister of West Bengal. He was the Chief Minister in two West Bengal governments, first in the Indian National Congress government from 15 August 1947 to 14 August 1948, then in the Progressive Democratic Alliance Front government from 2 November 1967 to 20 February 1968.

West Bengal, at that time was plagued by communal violence, shortage of food, unemployment and a large flow of refugees from East Pakistan. He was succeeded by Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy.

Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy was an eminent physician, educationist, philanthropist, freedom fighter and politician who served as the Chief Minister of West Bengal from 1948 until his death in 1962. After independence, Dr. Roy was appointed as the Governor of the United Provinces, the largest state in India, but he declined the appointment. In 1948 the Congress Legislators of West Bengal chose him as their leader. It was then that Dr. Roy got ample scope to prove his mettle as the Chief Minister of West Bengal. In 1950, the princely state of Cochin merged with West Bengal after King Jagaddipendra Narayan had signed the instrument of accession with India. In 1955, the former French enclave of Chandernagar which had passed into Indian control after 1950 was integrated into West Bengal.

He continued to this position till his death in 1962. His tenure constitutes a brilliant chapter in the history of West Bengal. The abolition of the Zamindari, imposition of ceiling on land holdings, protection of actual tillers and provision of irrigation, fertilizers and improved seeds brought about a remarkable change in agriculture. Dr. Roy is often considered the maker of modern West Bengal due to his key role in the founding of several

institutions and five eminent cities—Durgapur, Kalyani, Bidhannagar, Ashoknagar and Habra. Under his guidance were formed Calcutta State Transport Corporation, Haringhata Dairy and Digha a tourist spot, irrigation networks like DVC and Mayurakshi project and Saltlake City. The people of West Bengal voted the Congress back to office under his leadership in three consecutive general elections. Dr. Roy was elected thrice, in 1952, 1957 and 1962.

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## 20.7 Problems in West Bengal

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But the newly achieved independence was losing its glory fast. The decade of late 40s and 50s manifested severe problems of food crisis, black-marketing, hoarding, corruption, social and individual immoralities. West Bengal was no exception and the entire scenario was enough to breed an absolute mass discontent. The state was ruthless in repressing the discontent and the police was the main instrument in state's hand. The ruthless oppression increased the mass displeasure towards the elected government. Some of the incidents like lathi charge on processions organized by youth organizations on INA Day in 1947, firing against dock workers in September 1948, killing of four communist women activists on 27 April 1949, may be recalled in this context. These portrayed that the government of West Bengal heavily depended on the state machinery, viz the police force. Thus, very soon West Bengal earned the character of a police state. At the same time some of the rural areas of West Bengal witnessed agitations on a large scale. In the middle of 1948, the Tebhaga movement in Kakdwip by the then underground Communist Party spread to Howrah and Hooghly against the eviction of the Bargadars. The police ruthlessly killed peasants in different villages of Kakdwip, Hooghly and Howrah in November-December of 1948. Out of about 75 people murdered by the police during this struggle, at least 25 were women. The movement continued till 1950. At the same time in East Pakistan, the state repression also did not cease to suppress peasant movements in Nachole by the Communist Party and the subsequent state oppression on Ila Mitra in jail in Pakistan created a stir in West Bengal also. Not only this, many leaders and workers including women were also imprisoned without trial for a long time.

### **20.7.1 Women Agitation to Release Political Prisoners**

The democratic women's movement of the post-independence period entered into a new phase of struggles. On 27 April 1949, Mahila Atmaraksha Samity (Women's self Defence Squad) held a meeting in Calcutta and organized a women's demonstration demanding the release of the political prisoners. The police fired on the processions, killing four women activists—viz, Latika Sen, Pratibha Ganguly, Geeta Sarkar and Amiya Dutta.

### **20.7.2 Refugee Movements, 1949-50**

After partition a large chunk of the Hindu community migrated to India from what was the then East Pakistan. After the riots in 1950, the Hindus once again began to leave the country in large numbers. An incident in Khulna district triggered off riots. In Kalshira village of Khulna district, the police and the Ansars came to arrest a communist activist from his secret hideout and tried to rape a girl. The villagers protested against this tyranny. Making an excuse of this incident, the police and Ansars provoked a communal riot in this area. As soon as the news of riots in Khulna reached Calcutta, retaliatory riots started there immediately. The result was monstrous riots in both Bengals. Within one year of independence more than 10 lakhs Hindu refugees were compelled to come from East Bengal and reached an astonishingly high figure of 40 lakhs. Among them about 5 lakhs people helplessly shuttered in the refugee camps, though any such full-fledged movement for the demand of these homeless people was not yet launched. Some stray movements in the urban areas mainly by the middle-class youth were only representations of its kinds. An organized movement by the refugees took shape with the formation of UCRC under the leadership of Ambika Chakroborty, Anil Sinha, Jibanlal Chattopadhyay, Pran Kishore Chakraborty and others. The prime focus of this movement in the initial stage was to establish refugee colonies and to achieve recognition for those settlements. The nature of the movement became aggressive in 1951 when the state government proposed a legislation unauthorising these settlements. Later the state was duly pressurized by the vibrant movements and finally agreed to give recognition to the colony settlements in 1954. A number of movements to fulfill the demands of refugees took shape during early 1950s.

### **20.7.3 Movements against Increased Tram Fare**

The British Tram company in Calcutta announced a hike in second class tram fare by one paise in 1953 with effect from 1 July. The second-class fare was three paise then. The

magnitude of the mass movement which was called “fight for one paisa” against the price hike unsettled the urban life, viz. Calcutta for more than a month. When the hike was announced, the political parties in opposition then promptly formed a committee and decided to disobey the hike. The tram company correctly assessed the scenario and opted for police support to run the service. Next few days witnessed almost an open war between the police and the public on the streets of Calcutta.

The movements of 1953 against this fare hike can be precisely characterized into different periods – the first one comprising of boarding in trams without paying fare; then to boycott fare, a ‘new tactics’ in the words of *The Statesman*. The post July periods showed street fights between the police and the people. People threw stones, bombs, acid bulbs etc. and finally setting trams and buses on fire. The police, on the other hand first charged lathi and then firing with arrest in mass level.

#### **20.7.4 Movements of the Teachers**

In the early 50s a primary school teacher in rural West Bengal used to get Rs. 37 per month, while the urban fellow teacher was more fortunate for they used to get Rs 40 and 12 annas per month. A secondary school teacher earned Rs. 60 per month of which Rs. 10 was accounted for D.A. Though the conditions of primary school teachers were more exposed to poverty, an organized movement was initiated among the secondary school teachers, under the leadership of ABTA. The organization demanded for the pay scale proposed by the Board of Secondary Education and Rs. 35 per month as D.A.

With these demands the teachers declared an indefinite strike on 10 February 1954 and on the next day, they organized a protest demonstration at the east side of Governor’s residence. Around 30,000 teachers joined the protest on the first day. It was declared that if the government did not meet their demands, they would continue their protest indefinitely and would proceed to the Assembly on 15 February. On that day, thousand of teachers joined the protesters. Students, workers and people from various social backgrounds joined the protest. ABTA wanted to give it a shape of the mass movement.

The movement gradually became aggressive. Teachers were arrested during the protest demonstration; the number of arrested teachers reached four hundred. In the meantime, the Chief Minister proposed that the government increase DA from Rs. 10 to Rs. 17 and 8 annas and the respective authority would need to meet the same so that the demand of the teachers would be fulfilled. Opposition leaders agreed to the proposal.

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## 20.8 Conclusion

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It is clear from the discussion that there was a nation-wide anxiety as well as mood of celebration for newly achieved independence. However, the story of West Bengal was different because of the direct impact of partition. The Indian National Congress formed the ministry in the state, while the Communists were the principal opposition. Though the Communist Party of India (CPI) was at first reluctant to accept the independence as a real one, nevertheless it finally participated in the parliamentary democratic system offered by the Indian Constitution. The state also experienced sporadic mass agitation under the Communist leadership against the various policies of the state government. The frontal role was played by the peasants, the students, the workers and the women. It created unrest in a newly liberated state, and the government took stern repressive measures to bring the situation under its control. Indeed, all these were expressions of anxiety and apprehensions created by freedom and partition in an underdeveloped socio-economic setting. The possibility of the emergence of a new society was rooted in these contested visions of freedom.

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## 20.9 Model Questions

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1. Discuss some major problems before the newly independent India.
2. How did the 'refugee' problem shape the politics of West Bengal?
3. Write a note on the popular unrest in West Bengal in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

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## 20.10 Suggested Readings

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Prafulla Chakraborty: *The Marginal Men*.

Sandip Bandopadhyay: *Ranakshetra Rajpath (In Bengali)*.

Dr. C. Palit: *Bengal Before and After the Partition*.

Bipan Chandra: *History of Modern India*.

Sumit Sarkar: *Modern India, 1885-1947*.

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay: *From Plassey to Partition and After*.

Sekhar Bandyopadhyay: *Decolonization in South Asia. Meanings of Freedom in Post-independence West Bengal, 1947-52*.

Siddhartha Guha Roy and Suranjan Chatterjee: *History of Modern India, 1707-1964*.

Bratati Hore: *Women's Participation in Communist Frontal Movements: a Case Study of Bengal 1942-1947*.

Mushirul Hasan (ed): *India's Partition – Process, Strategy and Mobilization*.





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— রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর

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— Subhas Chandra Bose

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