

Bengal Renaissance in Shaping the Trajectory of People's Sovereignty: A Reappraisal

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ABSTRACT

The social reform movements in colonial Bengal, part of the Bengal Renaissance, were pivotal in shaping the trajectory of nationalism and people's sovereignty by fostering a new sense of cultural identity, introducing modern and rational thought, and creating an educated public sphere that became the foundation for political awakening. The struggle for independence in Bangladesh, culminating in the 1971 war, is a profound testament to the assertion of people's sovereignty in the Indian Subcontinent. The paper examines the growth of nationalist sentiments through the Renaissance in colonial Bengal. It centres on the social reformation movements and revolts that transpired during the early phases of colonization. While historical research has extensively covered the independence struggle and the Liberation War, a significant gap exists in understanding the concept of People's Sovereignty within the broader historical discourse. The present work is part of a series of works up to the independence of Bangladesh. It aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation into the unique nature of People's Sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

By encouraging nationalist ideas, advancing social justice and rationalism, and providing the intellectual groundwork for the Indian independence struggle, the Bengal Renaissance profoundly influenced the course of people's sovereignty. By fostering a new sense of cultural identity, introducing modern and rational thought, and establishing an educated public sphere that served as the basis for political awakening, the social reform movements in colonial Bengal, which were a part of the Bengal Renaissance, were crucial in determining the course of nationalism and people's sovereignty (Taylor, 1979). The paper explores the historical context of the Indian subcontinent, tracing its roots back to the era of British rule. The introduction of European concepts, including notions of sovereignty, led to significant political and social transformations during British colonial rule. Previously, the Indian subcontinent consisted of numerous kingdoms and dynasties, but none operated as sovereign entities. Territorial boundaries were undefined, and rulers expanded their domains through war, annexations, and kinship alliances. The paper examines the challenges faced by the Mughal dynasty, once considered a mighty and sovereign ruler, highlighting the fundamental weaknesses that led to their eventual decline. The study seeks to unravel the complex dynamics of political change in South Asia over the 19th century. By examining the historical process of state formation, the paper explores the concept of People's Sovereignty, emphasizing its historical development in Bengal and its broader implications for South Asia (Islam 2007). The study follows a historical method. The research uses primary, secondary and empirical evidence and employs a politico-historical approach to examine the historical foundations that led to the emergence of nationalism in Bengal. It also considers diverse perspectives to gain a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to Bengali Nationalism. These research objectives aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the historical and political dimensions surrounding People's Sovereignty, and the broader context of state formations in South Asia. Through these inquiries, the research endeavors to contribute valuable insights to the existing body of knowledge in historical and political studies.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

BENGAL RENAISSANCE AND PEOPLE'S SOVEREIGNTY

The term "Bengal Renaissance" primarily refers to the social, cultural, psychological, and intellectual shifts that occurred in Bengal throughout the nineteenth century, resulting from interactions between the Hindu elite and sympathetic British authorities and missionaries. Calcutta, a colonial city, served as the backdrop for the Bengal Renaissance (Banglapedia, 2007). Calcutta had a

school system employing European teaching methods and materials before 1830, surpassing any other Asian metropolis. The only European-style university in Asia, Hindu College, was established by the urban elite on their own initiative. Books, magazines, and newspapers were published regularly in both Bangla and English. The city had a European-style public library. Additionally, Calcutta had a native intelligentsia that was knowledgeable about European events, conscious of its own history, and increasingly mindful of its own future in the contemporary world (Dhar, 1987).

Bangali intelligentsia methodically created four facets of the Renaissance movement in the 19th century. First, a new Bangali literature emerged at the same time as the Bengali language was modernized. Second, South Asian civilization was compared to the splendor of Greece and Rome due to the rediscovery and identification with an Indian classical era that was lauded as a golden age. Thirdly, the Protestant Reformation was interpreted by Serampore missionaries, and Indians imaginatively adapted it to their own historical circumstances. Lastly, there was the secular perspective on global advancement, which held that India's best chance was to project the golden age into the future rather than bring back the past.

By the mid-1800s, Calcutta had become Asia's most renowned repository for a diverse range of ancient and contemporary knowledge from around the globe. The dissemination of cultural attitudes, pamphlets, journals, and newspapers contributed to the intelligentsia's sense of cultural identity in this Renaissance setting. A social identity and solidarity among professionals grew alongside the intellectual portion of the Renaissance, mostly due to close European contacts, specialized training, and European-style occupational standing (Ahmed, 2021).

People's sovereignty, also known as popular sovereignty, is the fundamental democratic tenet that a government's authority derives from the consent of its citizens, who are the ultimate source of all political authority. This means that leaders are chosen by and answerable to the governed, which forms the basis of representative democracy and self-governance. In contrast to rule by monarchs or elites, it ensures that the government serves the will of the people through procedures such as voting, elections, and constitutional rights. The reformers subtly promoted the notion that the people themselves, rather than colonial authority or antiquated customs, were the source of acceptable social and political norms by opposing the authority of traditional religious leaders and fighting for individual rights (Gellner, 1993). This created the theoretical foundation for the demand for people's sovereignty, which was subsequently

made clear during anti-colonial uprisings and ultimately led to the creation of independent states. The present paper is a humble attempt to explore how the Bengal Renaissance profoundly influenced the course of people's sovereignty in Bengal by encouraging nationalism, advancing social justice and rationalism, and creating the intellectual foundation for the self-determination.

BENGAL'S SOVEREIGNTY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Throughout history, Bengal and India have sometimes walked on the same path, and at other times, they have walked in parallel. The history of India is, therefore, an integral part of the discussion of Bengal's history from ancient times to the British colonial period. The course of events in one region has influenced the history of another. Especially the political history of Bengal, which is associated with the North India-based empires. Even culturally, Bengal has similarities with the great Indian traditions in many respects. The existence of Bengal, therefore, as a distinct historical unit politically and culturally is not recognized (Khan 2015, p. 8). Richard M. Eaton (1994) named Bengal as the frontier zone of the Indian subcontinent. Although Bengal appears to be the easternmost boundary of India on the map, the region has a certain degree of geographical autonomy. 'On the one side very high mountains; on two other sides hard hills and another side the vast sea, in the middle the evenness of the plains'- historian Niharranjan Ray calls this the geographical destiny of Bengalees (Roy, 1980, p. 71). Rivers and water bodies are key elements of Bengal's geographical features. Satish Chandra Mitra likened the numerous rivers spread throughout Bengal to the veins and arteries in the human body (Mitra, 1922, p. 12). The overall geographical situation and location have made Bengal a distinct entity in its own right (Mohsin, 2007, p. 1). It is assumed that this unique entity created by geographical location and environmental influences has contributed to the rebellious and independent spirit among the region's people. Reviewing the thousand-year history of this land, it becomes clear that local rulers have repeatedly rebelled and attempted to break free from the control of external forces. For example, geographical reasons led to doubts about the success of military campaigns in Bengal by all-India imperial powers such as the Mauryas and Guptas (Mohsin, 2007, p. 33). Additionally, local rulers rebelled against the Delhi Sultanate and declared independence, resulting in more than two hundred years of independent sultanate rule from the 14th to the 16th centuries. That is why historians of Delhi refer to the region as Bulgakpur or the city of rebellion (Ahmed, 2021). Then, during the reign of Mughal emperors Akbar (1556-1605) and Jahangir (1605-1627), there was strong resistance to the Mughal invasion by the local rulers of Bengal, known as the 'Bara Bhuiyans'. However, despite this geographically and historically obtained independent spirit and repeated

rebellions, Bengal and its people had to wait for political sovereignty until the 71st year of the 20th century.

The Bengali civilization that grew up in the Ganga and Brahmaputra basins has a history of more than 4000 years. Throughout this long period, it has been ruled by foreign rulers. Until the beginning of British colonial rule in the second half of the 18th century, Bengal was governed as a province of the Mughal Empire. However, a century after the beginning of the Mughal rule, specifically after the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb, Delhi's central control over Bengal had been relaxed. In 1715 (alternately 1717), Murshid Quli Khan was appointed Subahdar of Bengal. Using his merit and contacts with the provincial elite and leading merchants, he successfully established absolute authority over the subah and ruled almost independently. The weak Emperor was satisfied with the regular gifts and revenue sent by Murshid Quli Khan. The rapidly declining central Mughal government accepted this situation. From his time, Subahdari was no longer under the central government's control. It gradually became the masnad or throne (Islam, 2021). Subahdars were known as independent Nawabs. However, this freedom did not last long. After the defeat of the last independent Nawab Sirajuddaula to the British in the Battle of Palashi in 1757, a new chapter began in the history of Bengal and India - the 'British Colonial Era'.

From ancient times, valuable spices from East and Southeast Asia were supplied to Europe. Arab merchants monopolised this trade. Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese sailor, reached the Indian port of Calicut in 1498, in the late fifteenth century, discovering an alternative route to extract spices from Asia that bypassed the Arab and Venetian middlemen. The first indirect contact of the Portuguese with Bengal was established in 1512-13 AD. Bengal was then ruled by independent Sultans. Although the arrival of the Portuguese was for trade purposes, they gained notoriety from the start for plunder, banditry, forced servitude, and the slave trade. The Portuguese had settlements and trading centers in Chittagong, Satgaon, Hooghly and Sandwip. In 1538, they obtained permission from the Sultan to set up custom houses in Chittagong and Satgaon (Ray, 2021). Following the Portuguese, other European nations came to India and Bengal one by one. The Dutch, Danish, English and French established their own companies to trade in the region. These European merchants set up trading posts and factories in Bengal and other parts of India. Apart from spices, cloth was one of their businesses. In addition to trade, these companies also had well-trained armed forces. They built their fort. From their arrival at the end of the fifteenth century until the establishment of English colonial rule in India, they maintained their position in the region by sometimes compromising with the local rulers and

sometimes using force. Even to spread influence and monopolize trade, these nations engaged in conflicts and wars.

COLONIZATION AND THE IDEAS ON SOVEREIGNTY IN BENGAL

Among the Europeans, the English East India Company gradually strengthened its position through various conflicts and compromises with its commercial rivals and local administrations. After the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the central control of the Mughal Empire in Bengal became much looser. Meanwhile, the company started expanding its business in Bengal. But the then ruler of Bengal, Murshid Quli Khan, imposed restrictions on the various benefits given to the British. In 1756, Sirajuddaula ascended the throne of Bengal as the successor of his grandfather, Alivardi Khan. He imposed some conditions on the company. Notable among the conditions were that the company must destroy the military installations in Calcutta, cease abusing business privileges applicable to the company, and comply with the country's laws. But as the company disobeyed the order, Sirajuddaula raided Calcutta and expelled them. Since then, the British started a conspiracy to oust Sirajuddaula. An anti-Nawab section of the Murshidabad court joined hands with them. This part of the Durbar agreed with the English Company in return for all privileges and compensations, provided that the Nawab would be removed and Mir Jafar would be placed in power. This plan was implemented in the Battle of Palashi on June 23, 1757. Sirajuddaula was defeated and killed by the British forces as a victim of the conspiracy.

Succession conflicts and palace conspiracies among local ruling groups in India were a regular practice. At that time, they began using European companies' military power in their internal power struggle. In addition, local administrations sought military support to discipline disobedient European merchants from their rival nations. This is how these foreign merchants gained the opportunity to influence the region's politics and, in many cases, even policy-making. In this context, it appears that Nawab Sirajuddaula's defeat at the hands of the East India Company in 1757 was not an isolated incident. This was part of a long-standing practice of foreign businessmen interfering in domestic politics. However, the then-Mughal Emperor of Delhi did not consider the incident as foreign interference. He was satisfied with the Company's display of loyalty to the emperor. He even gave the title of 'Sabud Jung' or strong in battle to Robert Clive, the English captain of the Battle of Palashi. The reason for this view of the emperor was the Mughals' cosmopolitan policy. Anyone, regardless of caste, religion, or colour, could live in the Mughal kingdom and even hold state responsibilities. At that time, all European merchants were granted conditional

land grants for permanent residence and trade. It only required loyalty and payment to the Mughal emperor and administration. They never considered the unrestricted stay of foreigners in the country as a threat to sovereignty. Even the contemporary Bengali elite did not regard Sirajuddaula's defeat in the Battle of Palashi as a foreign intervention or a blow to sovereignty. (Islam 1993). A foreign business company had the opportunity to overthrow the political authorities of Bengal and seize power in Bengal, and subsequently, the whole of India, as neither Bengali nationalism nor Indian nationalism nor the idea of regional sovereignty was prevalent among the people of the region. They had no objection to accepting a foreign ruler if the security of religion, caste, lifestyle, and social system was guaranteed (Islam, 1993). It can be understood by analyzing the response of the people of Bengal in the context of various historical changes and the rule of various nations since ancient times.

The direct rule of the English Company in Bengal did not begin immediately after the battle of Palashi. Palashi's villain, Mir Zafar, betrayed Sirajuddaula, thinking he would use the British as a stepping stone to rise to power. But his power did not last long. As he failed to meet various demands and financial expectations, the company removed him and placed his son-in-law, Mir Qasim, on the throne of Bengal. Mir Qasim paid a great deal to the British, but he was an independent-minded individual. He believed that since he had given enough gifts to the company and its officials to secure his position on the throne, they would allow him to rule Bengal independently. Soon, his independent spirit threatened the pursuit of British interests and ambitions in Bengal (Shah, 2021). He clashed with the British, culminating in the Battle of Buxar in 1764. Mir Qasim was supported by Nawab Sujauddaula of Ayodhya and the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, the Nawab's patron, who had been ousted from Delhi by the vizier's conspiracy. But when their combined forces were defeated by the British, Mir Qasim disappeared, Sujauddaula fled, and Emperor Shah Alam II joined the British camp. The victorious British decided to share the revenue of Bengal by placing Mir Zafar's son Nazmuddaula as nominal Nawab instead of taking power directly. Accordingly, through the Treaty of Allahabad, the East India Company acquired the revenue collection powers, or Diwani, of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa from the weakened Emperor Shah Alam. According to the agreement, the company will pay 26 lakh rupees annually to the Emperor and 53 lakh rupees to the Nawab from the revenue collected, and the company will retain the remainder as its own dividend. The Company did not undertake the responsibility of managing the revenue itself but entrusted this responsibility to a deputy Diwan named Reza Khan. He was also entrusted with the responsibility of managing the Nizamat (administration) on behalf of the

minor Nawab Nazmuddaula. In this dual government system, a deputy was entrusted with all the responsibilities of Nizamat and Diwani administration, but he had no actual powers. The company, on the other hand, had all the power but no obligation. The purpose of this civil agreement of the Company was to prevent the emergence of a Nawab like Sirajuddaula or Mir Qasim and to collect the capital of the Company's oriental trade from here instead of bringing it from home.

In 1765, British control was established in Bengal. Initially, this control was not directly with the British government; the colony was established here through the East India Company. It was the first instance of colonization in a civilized country. Because the Court of Directors has discouraged the Bengal Council, the Company's local authority, from establishing a state here. However, if the local authority could succeed in taking the risk, the board of directors did not reject it; instead, they accepted it. This tacit consent led the local authorities and company officials to become careless. Reckless corruption by the Company through double government in the name of Diwani, looting of profits from the food grain market, excessive revenue collection, exploitation, and oppression led to a great famine in the region in 1770, an event known to history as 'Manvantar of Seventy-six' (The Great Famine of 1176 Bangla Year). The British government was compelled to intervene in the Company's operations due to the death of a third, or 100,000 people, in the famine. In 1773, the British Parliament passed the Regulatory Act defining the governance and responsibilities of the Company, specifying a Governor General and a Council to administer the authority of the Port William Presidency in Bengal. Warren Hastings was the first Governor General appointed in Bengal. There was another global reason for the British government's intervention. As a result of America's independence in 1776, the expulsion of the British from there drew their attention to Bengal as a potential new colony. And through this act of 1773, Bengal was officially established as a British colony. The newly appointed Governor General Hastings believed that the British, not the Mughals, possessed the sovereign power of Bengal (Marshall, 2021). This marks the beginning of a significant historical event that changed the sovereignty of the people of Bengal.

COLONIAL RULE IN FOSTERING A SENSE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

Regulating Acts were enacted to establish the foundation of an administrative system in accordance with British policy in the new colony and to regulate the conduct of the Company's employees. Still, it did not bring the desired outcomes. As a result, Pitt's India Act was passed by the British Parliament in 1784. Here, it is clear that not only Bengal but also the whole of

India was included in the British colony under the title of the Act. In this Act, a Board of Control consisting of a Minister and 6 Members of Parliament was formed to control and supervise the activities of the State Management (Islam 2021). Parliament appointed Lord Cornwallis as Governor-General to establish a strong colony by establishing a permanent revenue system and efficient administration. Cornwallis enacted the Permanent Settlement in 1793 as part of a broader land reform initiative. By the settlement, the zamindars were recognized as the sole owners of the land, and the revenue claim of the government on the zamindar was fixed forever. The settlement stabilized the British government's control over land and revenue, creating a loyal and influential landlord class that later preserved British interests. This arrangement cemented British colonial control in Bengal. Cornwallis also laid the foundation for a bureaucratic administrative system with high salaries. British sovereignty in Bengal was established in stages. The British declared absolute sovereignty for the first time through the Charter Act of 1813 after establishing their own loyal landlord class and bureaucratic administration and bringing the situation under control. The Act abolished the Company's exclusive trading privileges, opening India to free trade, and formally handed over the rule of India to the East India Company (Islam, 2021). From the defeat of Sirajuddaula by the Company in 1757 until the Company's rule was challenged during the Great Revolt of 1857, Bengal was under Company rule for one hundred years.

This rebellion was India's first independence movement against the British. Sepoys in Barrackpore, in present-day West Bengal, started this rebellion and it spread across India, including Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore, and Dinajpur. The powerless Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, a pensioner of the British, came forward to lead this rebellion, dreaming of independence. However, the revolt failed due to various limitations. This landmark event in the history of India and Bengal brought significant structural changes in British colonial rule. In 1858, the British government assumed control of India by abolishing the Company's rule. Thus, Bengal became a province of British India from the Company's state. This was Bengal's identity until independence in 1947, when it was divided into parts of Pakistan and India based on religious nationalism.

RISE OF NATIONALISM IN BENGAL

Nationalism, as a modern Western concept, has two theories on its origin. Some believe that nations are born out of anthropological, psychological and cultural ties, while others believe that nations are made (Khan 2015, pp. 5-6). According to Ernest Gellner, cultural identity does not create nationalism; rather,

modern society needs cultural unity to foster nationalism. He cites the spread of education, the transition from agrarian societies and industrialization, and the origins of nationalism (Gellner, 1993). According to Tom Nairn, nationalism arises in underdeveloped societies under threat (Nairn 1977). Many states about the significant role of power and political motives behind the creation of nationalist consciousness. Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm sees nationalism as a tool developed by elites to legitimise their power (Hobsbawm, 1983). According to Paul R. Brass, these elites use various cultural symbols of society to create a political identity (Brass 1979). Finally, in view of Benedict Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community (Anderson 1991).

The concept of nationhood or nationalism was not prevalent in Bengal prior to the onset of British colonial rule in the 18th century. There was no concept of a separate Bengali nation. At that time, various new ideas and institutions were being developed in Europe, including Britain, and revolutionary changes were taking place in society and the state, which had a significant impact on the whole of India, including Bengal. As a result, far-reaching changes in the political, social, and economic life of the region's people began in the 19th century. The government system of the Mughals and Nawabs, who ruled the region before the British, might be described as an unrestricted despotism. Naturally, people were not familiar with the modern system of government based on public opinion. There was a lack of political awareness among the people, and minimal participation in politics. After the British came to power, people began to get acquainted with various Western political ideas, doctrines, and institutions through them. As a result, political awareness began to emerge among the people. The spread of English education and various social reform activities during the 19th century also played a significant role in it, to which Raja Rammohan Roy made a substantial contribution. Along with this, dissatisfaction with British rule also started to make people politically conscious. The proof can be found in various resistance movements against British rule. However, most of these resistance movements in the nineteenth century were led by Muslims (Muhith, 2014, pp. 36-37). However, the revolt of Bengali farmers, irrespective of caste and creed, against forced indigo cultivation, is considered the first manifestation of political consciousness in Bengal. This revolt is even identified as the seed of Bengali nationalism. Various articles were published in favor of farmers in newspapers and literature. At that time, Dinbandhu Mitra wrote the play *Neeldarpan* in response to the revolt. This peasant revolt in Bengal influenced the political consciousness of the Calcutta-centred educated middle class loyal to the British (Kling 1993, 249, 268). At that time, nationalist movements in various European countries, including Germany and Italy, also

began to influence the thought of this class. These individuals, influenced by the neo-nationalist spirit, were primarily Hindus, known as 'Bhadralok' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 169). However, their nationalist spirit was not secular; rather, they believed in Hindu revivalism, which later took communal form (Osmany, 2014, p. 74).

Various organizations were established in the second half of the 19th century to awaken the feeling of nationalism. For example, Jatiya Gaurab Sampadani Sabha (Association for Achieving National Glory) was founded by Rajnarayan Basu in 1866 (Murshid, Rajnarayan Basu 2021). Then, the Hindu Mela was established in 1867, and the National Society in 1770. The organisers of these organisations were educated Hindu 'Vardalok'. The influence of religion on their outlook and actions was noticeable, and the feeling of nationalism they cherished was Hindu nationalism. They could not uphold the secular nationalism of all communities (Ahmed, 2004, p. 169). Even their activities later became communal. Hindu nationalism attempted to spread hatred against Muslims using writings and political platforms (Osmany, 2014, p. 74). The hatred became so intense that in several places, Hindus refused to accept the services of Muslim health assistants (Dhar, 1987, p. 40). The literature of that time also played a significant role in the development of Hindu nationalism and the intensification of communal sentiments. In the writings of writers like Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, poet Ishwarchandra Gupta, Hemchandra, etc., the superiority of Hindus and hatred towards other religions were expressed. Various newspapers, including Amritbazar and Hindu Patriot, also propagated Hindu nationalist ideas. A similar role was played by the Arya Samaj, founded by Dayananda Saraswati in 1875, and the Ramakrishna Mission by Swami Vivekananda in 1897 (Osmany, 2014, pp. 74-75). Not only that, as the Bengali nationalist leader Bipin Chandra Pal points out, Hinduism was so pronounced at the time that Hindus regarded Muslims and Christians as foreigners (Bose, 1960, p. 172). Thus, Hinduism and nationalism became twin brothers, which acted as a hindrance to the participation of other communities in the activities of creating nationalism in the region. The reverse attitude of the Hindu-Muslim communities towards British rule also acted as an obstacle to the formation of a single nationalism (Dhar 1987, pp. 40-41). But there were also some different initiatives. Surendranath Banerjee (1848-1925) played a significant role in fostering nationalism at that time. After being dismissed from the Indian Civil Service as a victim of racism, Surendranath later joined teaching and tried to instil a feeling of nationalism among students through speeches. He founded the Indian Association in 1976. The vision of this organization was not communal; rather, one of its aims was to create good relations between communities. Then, in 1885,

the All India National Congress was founded as a political party. Initiated by a retired English officer named Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), this party of Indians aimed to facilitate the peaceful expression of various grievances against the government, thereby avoiding violent situations. The members of the party were mainly from the upper and upper-middle class. In the early stages, the party consisted not only of Hindus but also had the participation of a considerable number of Muslims, though their numbers dwindled later on. A Muslim barrister named Badruddin Tyabji presided over the party's Madras session in 1887. However, the party could not remain unaffected by the influence of developing Hinduism. The influence of many orthodox communal Hindu leaders, such as Balgangadhar Tilak, the Cow Protection Society, the Ganpati festival, and the Shivaji festival, among other activities, created suspicion and fear among many Muslims towards the Congress (Ahmed, 2004, pp. 169-72). Also, the Congress's demands for constitutional and administrative reforms were in conflict with the interests of Muslims (Osmany 2014, pp. 76-77).

In such a context of expanding Hindu nationalist consciousness, the then-Muslim leaders of India realized the need for a separate identity, the consciousness of rights, and a separate organization of Muslims. Sir Syed Ahmad of North India discouraged Muslims from joining the Congress. According to him, the demands of the Congress would harm the Muslims. To counter the Congress, he founded the United Indian Patriotic Association in 1888. Its general secretary was Theodore Beck, principal of the Aligarh Muslim College, founded by Syed Ahmad (Ahmed, 2004, p. 172). In the second half of the 19th century, Muslim leaders in Bengal distanced themselves from political movements and focused on spreading modern education and raising awareness within their community. They favoured the rights of Muslims while maintaining good relations with the British government. Hindu nationalist leaders criticized their position. Meanwhile, Muslim leaders of Bengal, Nawab Abdul Latif and Syed Amir Ali, established a separate organization for Muslims in Calcutta. The educated middle class and a distinct organizational structure created due to modern education contributed to creating a separate Muslim identity. As a result, the Muslim nationalist spirit emerged in the region at the end of the nineteenth century. The political manifestation of the Muslim nationalist spirit emerged at the beginning of the next century with the formation of the Muslim League in 1906. In this way, nationalism in Bengal began to take shape in two distinct forms, Hindu and Muslim, rather than as a unified Bengali nationalism. The British had a direct role in creating nationalism based on religion by strengthening the Hindu-Muslim divide. The British mainly benefited from this division.

CONCLUSION

The Bengali people, and consequently the rest of India, developed a sense of common identity and self-rule as a result of this intellectual and cultural awakening. The Bengal Renaissance supported people's sovereignty in a number of significant ways, including: Bengalis, who started to recognize themselves as a unique people with a common history and culture, developed a strong feeling of national identification and pride as a result of the movement. The creation of a contemporary Bengali language and literature, together with an emphasis on recovering and honoring regional tradition, all contributed to this. To oppose British colonial rule, this developing sense of cultural and national identity was crucial. This period saw the introduction of Western philosophy, science, and education, which promoted critical thinking and challenged established conventions, practices, and religious dogma. New publications and magazines emerged as a result of thinkers and social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar advocating reason over blind religion. People were able to challenge colonial practices, the legitimacy of foreign subjugation, and social inequalities as a result of this intellectual ferment. The Bengal Renaissance's dedication to social improvement was one of its main characteristics. Leaders fought for a variety of progressive causes, such as women's rights (such as the abolition of sati and the encouragement of widow remarriage and women's education), the eradication of caste prejudice, and the overall improvement of underprivileged groups. Reformers empowered people and increased their awareness of their natural rights—a necessary condition for a sovereign people—by opposing repressive social norms. The later Indian independence movement directly benefited from the socio-political understanding that was created during this period. Institutions for political discourse and the expression of complaints were established, and the concept of self-rule was explored and promoted. The renowned Congressman and political figure of the early 20th century, GK Gokhlay's famous statement, "what Bengal thinks today, the rest of India thinks tomorrow," was made with good reason, referring to the activities and ideas of the Bengal Renaissance.

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