

The Swadeshi Movement



Subject: History

Unit: Nationalism: Trends up to 1919

Lesson: The Swadeshi Movement

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8.3: The Swadeshi movement

The Swadeshi movement of Bengal (1905-1908) is seen as an important historical event in the episodic narrative of the Indian Nationalist Movement, which takes the story forward to its eventual climax in 1947. Lord Curzon's unpopular decision to partition the province of Bengal in 1905, led to this popular movement, which was organized around the effective use of 'swadeshi' and 'boycott' as methods of agitation, under Extremist leadership. The subsequent unification of Bengal in 1911 came to be regarded as a marker of the movement's success.

In this lesson, an analysis of the period between 1905 and 1908 will be used to understand and take stock of larger historical trends that characterized the first decade of the 20th century. A close study of the Swadeshi movement will provide the opportunity to not just examine these trends, many of which were sought to be consolidated in the course of the movement, but also to understand their interplay within the national movement.

The partition of Bengal

The decision to partition the large province of Bengal (undivided Bengal, Orissa, Assam and Bihar), avowedly for greater administrative convenience, was one that had been worked on by H. H. Risley (Secretary to Government of India, 1903) and Fraser (Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, 1903), and finally sanctioned by Curzon, the Viceroy. But as rightly suspected by nationalist leaders of Bengal, Curzon had distinct political motives behind this move, which were clearly stated in the run-up to the partition on 16 October, 1905.

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Figure 8.3.1: Lord Curzon

Source: http://dp.mariottini.free.fr/carnets/inde/tigre/lord_curzon.jpg

By the turn of the century, the figure of the upper caste, Hindu, Bengali bhadralok had become an object of derision for many sections of British opinion. He was ridiculed for his 'mimicry' of British lifestyle and his alienation from the poor of his own country, whose interests he claimed to represent. He was constructed as weak and effeminate, and his political activism was trivialized as cunning 'intrigue'. This reaction undoubtedly masked colonial anxiety about the tenor of the nationalist agitation in Bengal. The partition, it was hoped, would prevent the consolidation of the 'Bengali element' in the province, by dividing the Bengali-speaking areas. Moreover, the partition would separate Muslim-majority areas of Assam and eastern Bengal from the rest of the province, which was largely Hindu. This would isolate and undermine the 'Hindu nationalist agitation' in the politically active eastern districts by uniting the Muslims of eastern Bengal, who had been "inactive so far".

The government may not have anticipated an organized and sustained reaction to their decision, because they were familiar with the severe limitations of Moderate politics. But the partition of Bengal came at the end of twenty years of disappointingly unsuccessful agitation by the Congress, increasing disillusionment with the pace and style of Moderate politics, and a growing dislike of Viceroy Curzon who had already tried to increase official control over universities, curb press freedom and reduce the elected element in the **Calcutta Corporation**. The partition offered a context for all these discontents to come to the fore and was used as an opportunity by Extremist leaders to consolidate and

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demonstrate their politics and effect decisive changes in the working of the Congress by assuming a new dominance within it.

What colonial authorities did not realize was that Bengali speaking people had enjoyed a sort of cultural unity and autonomy since pre-British times, a unity that had been enhanced by the efflorescence of Bengali literature in the 19th century, within the *bhadralok* milieu. Therefore in 1905, an invocation to one's Bengali linguistic identity provided a broad, tenuous, over-arching sense of unity to a movement that contained highly diverse groups and interests.

Political methods and visions

In the previous lesson we have already familiarized ourselves with the differences that had cropped up within the Congress. The Swadeshi movement was the opportunity Extremist leaders were looking for, to test the efficacy of their methods and to modify the goals of the nationalist movement. You would recall that the Extremist agenda was to invoke and/or manufacture a feeling of cultural nationalism while the Moderates chose to view the nation as a political category, above cultural **parochialism**. It was in the course of the Swadeshi movement that the Extremist leadership evoked and defined such a 'national culture' that would, as they believed, help further the national movement. Sumit Sarkar has noted four distinct forms of political agitation during this period, differentiated by their objectives and methods.

Old-style Moderate politics

Surendranath Banerji led this group and it was comprised of men with diverse and varying ideas: Krishnakumar Mitra, Jogeshchandra Chaudhuri, Bhupendranath Bose, Prithwishchandra Ray. They worked ceaselessly from 1903 to intensify the agitation through press campaigns, meetings, petitions, conferences in the Town Hall and political correspondence with mufassil leaders. Newspapers like the *Bengalee*, the *Hitabadi*, the *Sanjibani*, *Indian Mirror*, and *Ananda Bazar Patrika* carried Moderate arguments and ideas.

While there was some talk of seeking the support of the 'masses' by writing and speaking in Bengali rather than English, this section included many loyalist zamindars and upper-caste Bengalis who belonged to liberal professions, and it was largely their interest that was represented. In accordance with their usual style, they put forward logical arguments in their pamphlets to argue against the decision to partition Bengal. Primarily most of these lamented the partition because it would lead to a contraction of employment opportunities in the government and disadvantages for zamindars who had permanently settled lands on both sides of the divide.

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The actual enforcement of the partition in 1905 led them to step up their attack. They did not object to the Hindu religious vocabulary used by Extremists to draw in mass support. While Swadeshi was enthusiastically preached by Moderate leaders, and many of them also argued for the boycott of Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt, most Moderate leaders did not endorse an extension of the boycott to educational institutions, administration and official posts and titles. In fact passing the resolution on boycott became one of the causes for the eventual split in the Congress. Ultimately their campaign demonstrated a greater faith in the conscience and well-meaning intentions of the British rather than in the efforts being made by their own countrymen to bring about reforms.

Positive self-development or 'constructive swadeshi'

Swadeshi referred to a politics of building national self-reliance through constructive work, seen as a necessary pre-condition to ultimately and effectively challenging British rule. It was an initial reaction to the ineffectiveness of Moderate 'mendicancy', and was mostly introspective and non-political. 'Constructive Swadeshi' included a positive programme of setting-up of Swadeshi enterprises, spreading vernacular education and social work in the countryside, and reaching out to the masses through traditional folk institutions like the mela.

Much of this argument about self-reliance was derived from the works of Moderates like Naoroji, R. C. Dutt and Gokhale who had drawn connections between India's forced dependence on British manufactures and its poverty. Extremist leaders duly acknowledged the Moderates for this intellectual debt. People like Tilak in Maharashtra and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab were working towards building 'atmasakti' since the 1890s. But it acquired a new lease of life within the movement, and Rabindranath Tagore and a quiet school teacher from Barisal, Aswini Kumar Dutta, were crucial proponents of this form of agitation that stressed patient reform and growth before concerted political action was undertaken.

Swadeshi enterprise

Swadeshi as a form of agitation was directly derived from the indictment of British colonialism by leaders like Naoroji, R. C. Dutt, Digby and Ranade. Their writings produced an optimism that economic regeneration would be the solution to all social ills that plagued the colony. The swadeshi programme developed along two lines – of reviving traditional crafts that had been destroyed by competition from British goods and of building indigenous industrial enterprise on modern western lines. Such attempts had started early, and the notable initial efforts in this regard were Prafullachandra Ray's Bengal Chemicals started in 1893, and Rabindranath Tagore's Swadeshi Bhandar in 1897. But after 1905, swadeshi was popularized with a new energy and sense of purpose. Volunteer organizations or samitis would promote swadeshi sales through shops, exhibitions along the lines of the traditional Hindu mela and cost-price hawking.

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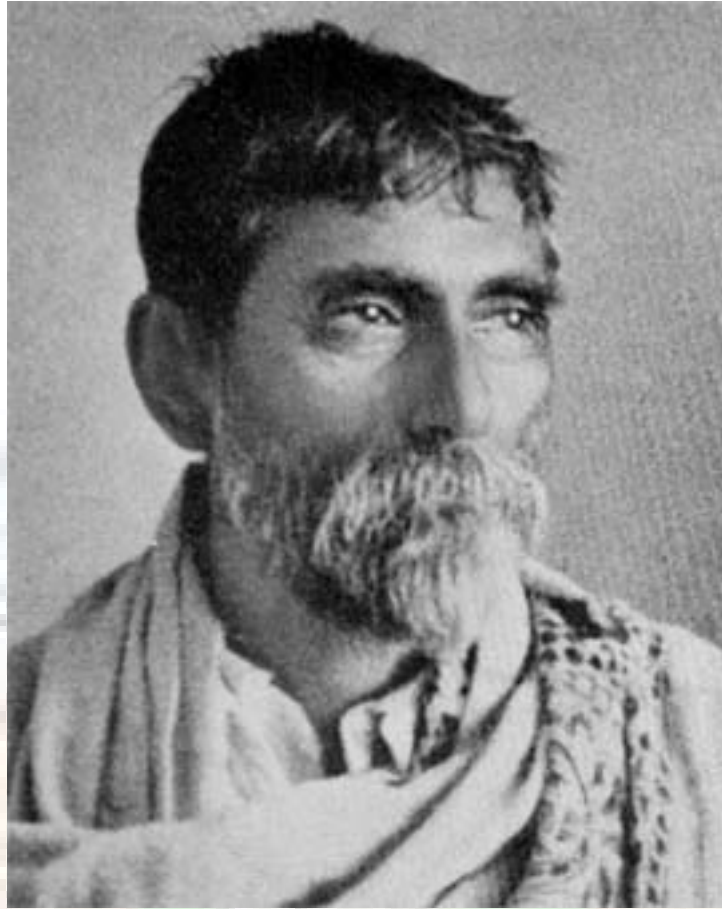


Figure 8.3.2: Prafulla Chandra Ray

Source:

<http://www.caluniv.ac.in/About%20the%20university/Distinguished%20Teacher/Prafulla%20chandra.jpg>

The revival of Indian crafts and a rise in demand created by the Swadeshi movement did provide an important stimulus to handloom-weaving, a sector which had been all but destroyed. Educated young men were taught the art of weaving and the **fly shuttle loom** was popularized through training centres. There was also a partial revival of silk-weaving in Murshidabad and Pabna. The programme of reviving indigenous crafts fit rather well within an ideological agenda of cultural revival. While Moderate leaders in their critique of colonial economic exploitation, had envisaged a modern industrial growth trajectory for the country, revivalist trends within the movement were derived out of a critique of the evils of the western industrial model of growth and therefore rejected western-style development. Instead, they encouraged building upon traditional forms of production – small scale units based on family labour.

Amongst the larger-scale industrial enterprises, textile mills like the Mohini Mills of Kushtia, The Calcutta Weaving Company, the Tripura Company etc. made important contributions. Developments also took place in the leather industry as Dr. Nilratan Sircar founded the National Tannery, where new technologies of tanning were introduced. A number of consumer articles were developed in swadeshi enterprises – soap, matches, cheap cigarettes, buttons, candles, paper and sugar, but for machinery such industries had to depend on imported iron and steel, although the beginnings of an iron and steel

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industry had been made in the Sibpur Iron Works, in 1867. The focus soon shifted from industrial production to banking, insurance and inland trade. The opening of the Bengal National Bank in 1908, the National Insurance Company in 1906 and the establishment of the Bengal Steam Navigation Company in 1905 by Muslim merchants, gave tremendous impetus to the project of self-reliance advocated by the Swadeshi movement. However, while the achievements of swadeshi were significant, it made only a marginal dent on the hold of British capital, and didn't even venture close to fulfilling the dream of self-sufficient industrial growth.

Furthermore, coupled with boycott, the focus of the movement remained confined to discouraging people from using British consumer goods by reasserting the importance of indigenous tastes and austere living. Thus, the movement also became a symbolic attack on the Bengali elite which had embraced western lifestyles and tastes.

Unfortunately, swadeshi came with its own set of problems. The products of swadeshi enterprises were expensive and of poor quality. For instance, the coarse cloth produced was unaffordable for the common man, unless cheaper imported yarn had been used in its manufacture. Additionally, many people were coerced by Swadeshi volunteers to buy indigenous goods and volunteers also had to check excessive profiteering. These complex questions were raised by Rabindranath Tagore in his novel 'Ghare Baire'. Ultimately, swadeshi and boycott, as modes of agitation seemed to have benefitted the small bourgeoisie over all others, and tended to foreclose leadership roles for the poor, as it placed those with adequate capital at the forefront of the movement.

National education

The other aspect of this programme was the building up of a parallel and independent system of 'national education', which used vernacular languages, instead of English, as the medium of communication. Early nationalists had welcomed the spread of western education through English, initiated on a limited scale by the British government. However, the Swadeshi movement was more closely associated with an Extremist criticism of this system, because it neglected vernacular languages and 'indigenous values' in education. Some sections of the leadership attacked English education because they believed it cultivated subservience to British authority in the minds of students. Thus, the programme of 'indigenous education' was also tied up with encouraging more radical forms of politics. Sometimes a critique of western education took the form of a simplistic desire to return to the early **toils** complete with their system of caste-restrictions within education. This was seen in the Hindu Hitarthi Vidyalaya, 1845 and Satishchandra Mukherjee's Bhagavat Chatuspathi, 1895. Rabindranath's Shantiniketan had also started on similar revivalist lines, but later broadened its vision and became Viswabharati, a progressive university. For Tagore, educational reform was a crucial form of political activism in itself, because it would ensure that the movement reaches the masses.

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Figure 8.3.3: Tagore, Gandhi and Kasturba Gandhi in Shantiniketan in 1940

Source:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhi-Tagore.jpg>

However, not all aspects of this programme were revivalist. A number of national institutions were set up to encourage technical education and this indicated an acknowledgement of the importance of western science and technical knowhow within education. A National Council of Education was set up in Calcutta in 1906 which designed primary, secondary and collegiate courses, which would combine literary and scientific education with technical training. The most important educational institution of the movement was the Bengal National College and School, 1906, with Aurobindo Ghosh as its principal. However, what is most noteworthy is the proliferation of national schools in districts and mofussil areas. These schools were far more politically active than those of Calcutta and caused great anxiety to the government as well. Aswini Kumar Dutta, a school-teacher of Barisal, for instance, through consistent social-work built up a strong mass-following for the Swadeshi-boycott movement in his district.

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Figure 8.3.4: Aswini Kumar Dutta

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashwini_Kumar_Dutta

The programme of national education wasn't as idyllic as one might have hoped. Most of the grants from the National Council was concentrated in Calcutta and didn't find their way into the mofussil schools. The leaders in the council were also fearful of police repression and thus, curbed grants to institutions that were suspected of having links with samitis or revolutionary organizations. For the similar reasons, the mofussil schools, which were politically active, also lost out on funding. Since the knowledge of English determined employment opportunities, vernacular languages were used only in the early school years, and the use of English dominated higher education. Furthermore, the project of 'national education' tended to neglect primary education, where it could have contributed decisively. Instead the Council busied itself with setting up a parallel university, which met with very little success as no Indian-owned national college broke ties with the Calcutta University.

Boycott and passive resistance

In some ways, 'constructive swadeshi' followed from the more popular form of agitation – the boycott of British goods, which had a greater symbolic than real impact on the use of British goods. Manchester piece goods, Liverpool salt and foreign sugar were the main targets. While the boycott of sugar was quite unsuccessful and most other imports were marginally affected, sharp dips were noticed in the import of cotton cloth, apparel, tobacco and liquor. However, 1907 was also a period of depression in world trade against which we need to qualify the evidence of a fall in imports. Boycott was carried on by strong volunteer groups or samitis which used picketing and social ostracism to enforce it. Its success was sometimes limited because indigenous substitutes were not available in adequate supply and they were often much more expensive than British goods.

Extremist agitation led by Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh propagated complete political independence as their goal for the first time, and their agitational techniques were directed towards decisively ending British rule in India. While never ruling out a possible violent struggle to this end in the near future, they used 'passive resistance' as

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a method to ensure mass participation in the nationalist agitation, which had been, thus far, an elite preserve.

Passive resistance meant an extension of boycott beyond British goods to include the boycott of schools and colleges, law courts, government service and legislative posts. According to Pal, it entailed a refusal to render any service to the British government. Passive resistance worked through the new organizational format of samitis that undertook active propaganda through songs and **jatras** on religious festivals, magic-lantern marches, social work during epidemics and famines, the setting up of swadeshi crafts, schools and arbitration courts, and social boycott of those who refused to heed their exhortations.

Revolutionary terrorism

In spite of having developed techniques of mass agitation, the Swadeshi movement never became a successful mass movement, and by 1908 young elite nationalists turned to revolutionary terrorism instead. This revolutionary activity was not undertaken by organized groups but by young men who would commit individual acts of heroism in an attempt to arouse others to emulate their example. They undertook assassinations of colonial officials and 'swadeshi dacoities' to raise funds for their agitation.

Physical and moral training was part of conspiratorial 'secret societies' that operated through akharas or gymnasia from the 1860s and 70s. Such societies proliferated by the turn of the century, and the Midnapur Secret Society, the Atmonnyati Samiti and the Anushilan Samiti (founded by Pramatha Mitra) were all founded in 1902. By 1905 akharas mushroomed all over Bengal, recruiting and training young men in revolutionary action. Militant nationalists often dominated the working of Swadeshi samitis, like those of Dacca and Midnapur. Important leaders who translated this militant theory into action include Barindrakumar Ghosh, Upendranath Banerji and Hemchandra Kanungo. Aurobindo and Charuchandra Dutta started the revolutionary weekly *Yugantar* in 1906. Khudiram Basu and Prafulla Chaki, the early martyrs of this period came to occupy legendary positions within the collective memory of the nationalist struggle in Bengal.

One must remember, however, that militant nationalism in the period between 1905 and 1908 was strongly Hindu revivalist in its tone and rhetoric, and most of this activity remained confined to very elite young men. While they tried to forge alternative routes to freedom from the British, the nature of their movement evoked heavy repression from the government. Nevertheless, revolutionary terrorism survived beyond its humble roots in the Swadeshi movement, and continued as a distinct form of nationalist agitation till the 1930s.

Value addition: what the sources say
On the two reactions to 'mendicancy'
"One, thoughtful, philosophic, idealistic, dreamed of ignoring the terrible burden that was crushing us to death, of turning away from politics and dedicating our

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strength in the village and township, developing our resources, our social, economic, religious life, regardless of the intrusive alien; it thought of inaugurating a new revolution such as the world had never yet seen, a moral, peaceful revolution, actively developing ourselves but only passively resisting the adversary”

About the second way:

“... the conviction that subjection was the one curse which withered and blighted all our national activities... The resolve was to rise and fight and fall and again rise and fight and fall waging the battle for ever until this once great and free nation should again be great and free.”

Source: Editorial in the *Bande Mataram*, 22 June 1907.

Limitations of the Swadeshi movement

Gap between the elite and the masses

Sumit Sarkar's *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908*, gives us the most exhaustive historical survey of the movement, and his arguments have come to dominate most scholarship on the issue. One of issues that Sarkar is preoccupied with is the failure of the mass agitation to turn into a full-fledged mass movement, of the kind we see later under Gandhi's leadership. This difference in the success of mass mobilization during Swadeshi and under Gandhi is particularly interesting since many Gandhian techniques of agitation were anticipated during the Swadeshi movement.

What stands out most, as an inadequacy in the movement, is the superficial relationship between the elite leadership and the masses. The early Moderate leadership was almost averse to mass participation in the nationalist movement, and believed that the educated elite were the 'natural leaders' of society. Extremist leaders however, wanted to arouse mass support and participation for their agitation, and fell out with the Moderates over this issue. In fact the success of techniques like boycott and passive resistance was predicated on mass participation. However, in spite of having developed effective techniques, the Swadeshi movement could not transcend its elite character, an extension of its elite leadership.

Techniques of mass agitation

Swadeshi leaders took to speaking and writing in vernacular languages, leaders like Pal and Surendranath Banerji toured the countryside to make speeches, samitis carried on constructive social work in periods of famine and epidemics – much of this was directed to popularizing the movement amongst the masses. Virulent campaigns were carried out both in the English and vernacular press as well as through periodical journals and pamphlets, where the issue of poverty was regularly taken up for discussion by the intelligentsia that contributed to these. To reach out to uneducated masses songs, plays, jatras, melas, patriotic festivals and rites like raksha-bandhan were used to spread the swadeshi spirit. But most of this cultural discourse was couched in a strongly Hindu-revivalist vocabulary, which, it was believed, would have greater appeal for stirring the imagination of the masses. Bipin Chandra Pal, in the context of village-work, said:

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“patriotism must be converted into a religion, with its own symbols, images, vows and ceremonies”.

Ineffectiveness of the mass programme and alienation of the masses

Extremist leaders seem to have assumed that religious rhetoric would draw in the masses while the ‘high’ politics of logical arguments about economic issues would only appeal to elite groups. This supposition was possibly a flawed one and what in fact seems to have been missing in the leadership’s vision of mass participation was any genuine incorporation of the economic grievances of the peasantry, and contact with the countryside remained confined to humanitarian work by samitis and national volunteers. While a number of labour strikes in Bengal coincided and occasionally intersected with the Swadeshi movement, except for a few leaders like Aswinicoomar Banerji, most others had, at best, a tenuous relationship with workers’ protests, when they did not actively criticize them.

The reason for this distance may be sought in the fact that many Congress nationalist leaders themselves had interests in land and industrial production, and focusing on the condition of the peasantry or labour would mean empowering them to recognize the relationship of subservience they had with Indian employers or landlords as well. The techniques of boycott and swadeshi also tended to alienate the poor. Only the affluent could set up swadeshi enterprises, and this discouraged the emergence of a leadership from amongst the masses. The boycott of British goods meant that the poor were often forced to buy indigenous goods which were far more expensive. Moreover, the recalcitrant were punished through social ostracism enforced through the use of mechanisms of power inherent in traditional caste hierarchies in the countryside.

Sectarian animosity

Even though the theme of Hindu-Muslim unity was a small but constant part of Swadeshi thought, and many leaders spoke about its importance, the growing distance between the two communities in Bengal jarringly interrupted the story of nationalist arousal during the Swadeshi Movement. Not only was the movement characterized by very limited participation by Muslim elites, its euphoria was tempered by sectarian riots that broke out in the countryside in eastern Bengal.

As mentioned earlier, references to orthodox religion remained an important part of Swadeshi propaganda, and the dominant symbols and motifs used were Hindu ones, both as a mode of communication with Hindu masses and to inspire national volunteers. Prayers were offered and swadeshi vows were taken in temples, pundits or Brahmin priests were persuaded to campaign for swadeshi and, as leaders of Hindu caste society, to show the way by boycotting British goods used in religious ceremonies. The cult of Kali or Bhowani and **neo-tantric** rituals became very important to maintain hierarchical discipline in revolutionary secret societies and to inspire the very young volunteers. At the turn of the century, even Rabindranath Tagore was guilty of critiquing British rule through a simplistic glorification of the traditional Hindu samaj with its own distinct hierarchy in the caste system. After 1907, he modified these views sharply. Other leaders like Hemchandra Kanungo, Prithwischandra Ray and Sibnath Sastri attacked the

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aspect of Hindu revivalism in Swadeshi thought, especially the uncritical defense of the regressive side of the traditional village samaj – caste, epidemics, famine, poverty.

Muslim elite politics

The more tragic result of Hindu revivalist politics was the alienation of Muslims and a parallel development of revivalist and separatist movements among them. Orthodox, revivalist trends in Islam represented by the **Wahabis** and **Deobandis** were being preached by maulvis in the countryside, supported by Nawab Salimullah of Dacca. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan stood for a different sort of elite Muslim politics which encouraged loyalism amongst educated Muslims to garner greater employment in the colonial government. Differential treatment meted out to the elites of both communities by the colonial government created a hostile and competitive situation. The partition of Bengal, part of such divisive politics practiced by the colonial state, held out the prospect of a Muslim-majority province where educated Muslims would enjoy greater privileges, and this idea appealed to some sections of the Muslim educated elite.

Grievances of the Muslim peasantry

For the Muslim peasantry, the situation was far more complex. In most districts of Bengal the peasantry was largely Muslim and almost all zamindars including smaller **qanungos** were Hindu. In a situation already vitiated by communal propaganda spread by **mullas** in the countryside, Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Mymensingh, Tippera and Pabna over 1906 and 1907. Most of these riots were the result of peasant grievances over rising rents and additional cesses to be paid to landlords, zamindars and moneylenders in a situation of rising prices, which pushed the peasants to desperation. Most members of the rural exploitative class were Hindus, and the riots thus assumed a religious character. At Bakshigunj the targets were Shaha moneylenders because in addition to the high interest rates, they had started to levy an Iswar britti for the upkeep of Hindu idols. During the riots, therefore, idols were attacked and destroyed. Some cases of violence were also provoked by the actions of Swadeshi volunteers who forced poor Muslim peasants to buy expensive Swadeshi products. In a riot in Comilla in 1907, Hindus called in Swadeshi volunteers from surrounding areas to be able to hit back, pointing to greater complexity in the relationship between the Swadeshi movement and a recalcitrant Muslim peasantry fighting against oppression from multiple quarters.

Cultural swadeshi

After a thorough enumeration of the limitations of the movement, it seems difficult to fathom why it continues to be such a celebrated episode in Indian history. As we have mentioned earlier, the Swadeshi movement was crucial because it helped imagine the nation as a cultural category, which would then be mobilized in a political movement against imperialist Britain. The Bengali elite was in search of a national identity. As it became clear that nationalism could only flourish after a complete breach with the British had been achieved, this search invariably led some of them to revive pre-British traditional religious or linguistic loyalties.

Therefore this period was uniquely characterized by a dynamic intellectual and cultural efflorescence. This cultural upsurge articulated itself in literature, theatre, songs, poetry,

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art and contained within it the tensions of the age and a desire to explore indigenous artistic and aesthetic traditions. Besides the numerous essays that were written in newspapers and journals on the theme of swadeshi, Rabindranath Tagore's novels *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire* are seen as critical literary material to grasp the complexities of the age. An interest in folk traditions and Bengal's literary history was also revived. In *Thakurmarjhuli*, for instance, Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar compiled numerous fairy tales. Historical and scientific research progressed in the colleges burgeoning with bright young graduates. Akshoykumar Maitra wrote biographies of Sirajoddoula and Mir Kasim and founded the journal *Aitihāsik Chitra* and the Varendra Research Society. The scientific achievements of P. C. Ray and J. C. Bose's discoveries in *Plant Response* became the source of great patriotic pride. Indian art in the late 19th century had come to be characterized by Victorian naturalism. However, artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose made a conscious break from Western aesthetics by borrowing from Japanese artists and exploring indigenous Mughal, Rajput and Ajanta traditions. A lot of this art was also often overtly political in content.

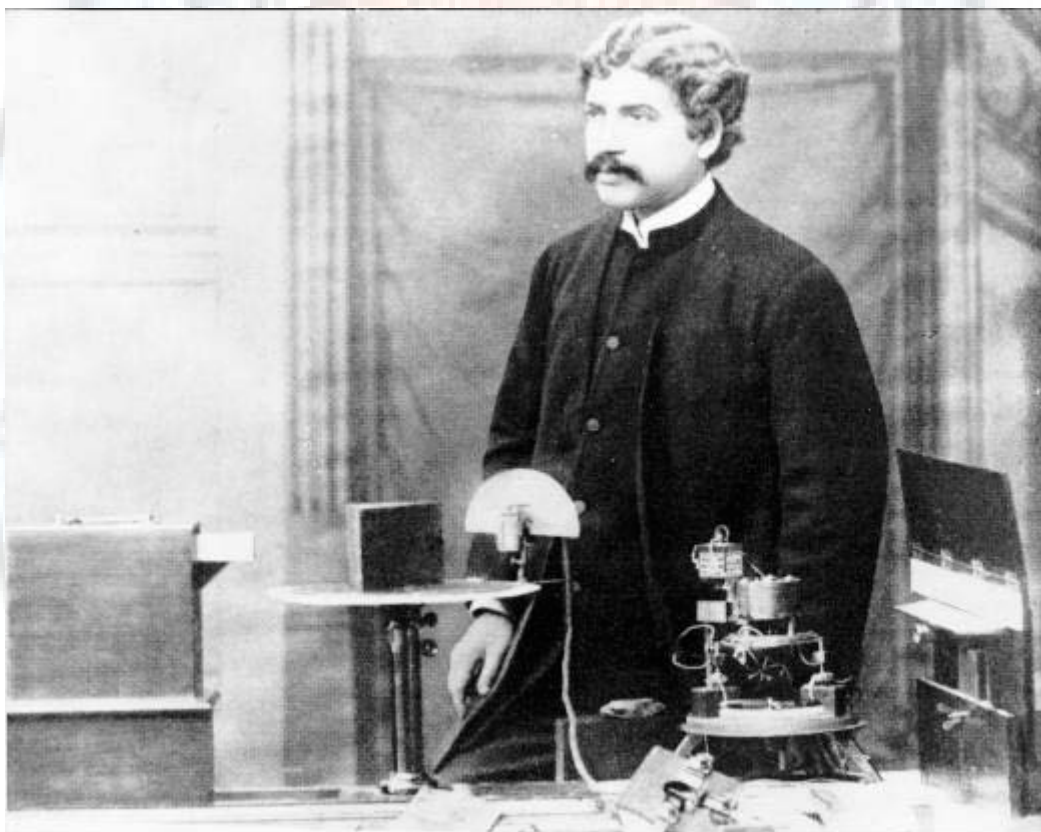


Figure 8.3.5: J. C. Bose at the Royal Institution, London, 1897

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jagadish_Chandra_Bose

Value addition: life story
Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937)
J. C. Bose was born to Brahmo parents in Munshiganj district, now in Bangladesh, where he studied in a local vernacular school. He studied at Calcutta University and then at Cambridge, and came back to join as a professor of Physics in Presidency College. In the college Bose refused to accept his salary for three

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years, because his European counterparts were paid more than him. Besides such racial discrimination he also had to deal with very poor infrastructure in the college. He carried out his experiments in a 24 square-foot room.

Within a decade he had made pioneering discoveries in the field of wireless waves. While in his lifetime he was credited with demonstrating the electrical nature of the conduction of stimuli in plants, he has only recently been given credit for inventing the first wireless detection device, earlier attributed to Marconi. He also discovered millimeter length electro-magnetic waves. One of the reasons for this late recognition is that Bose was opposed to all forms of patenting on moral grounds, and never patented his inventions. Bose was also the first science fiction writer in Bengali.

Source: Original

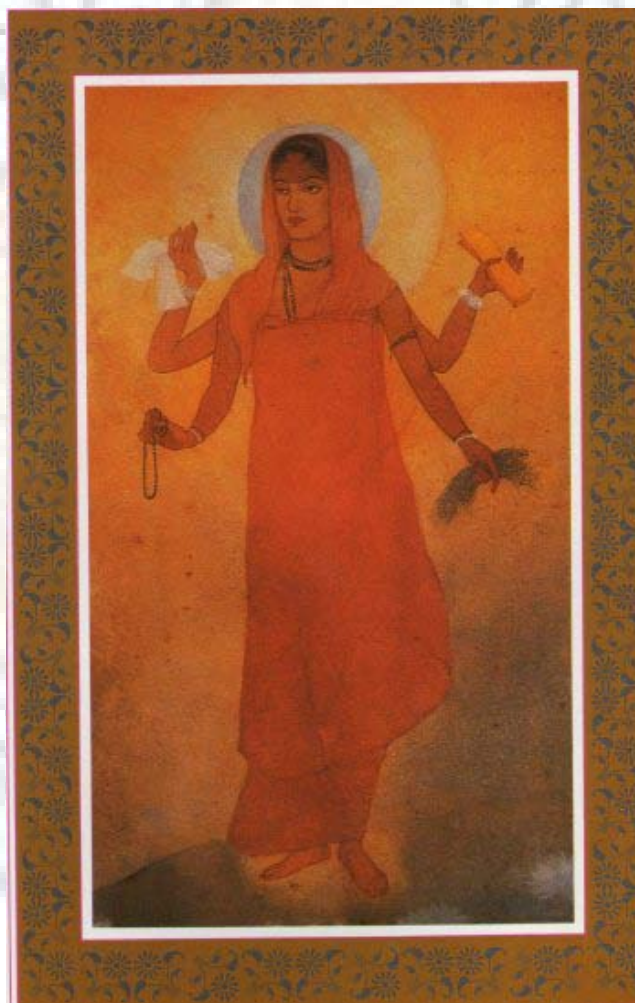


Figure 8.3.6: Abanindranath Tagore's 'Bharat Mata'

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bharat_Mata

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Figure 8.3.7: 'Portrait of a Lady' by Rabindranath Tagore

Source: <http://fineartamerica.com/images-medium/portrait-of-a-lady-rabindranath-tagore.jpg>

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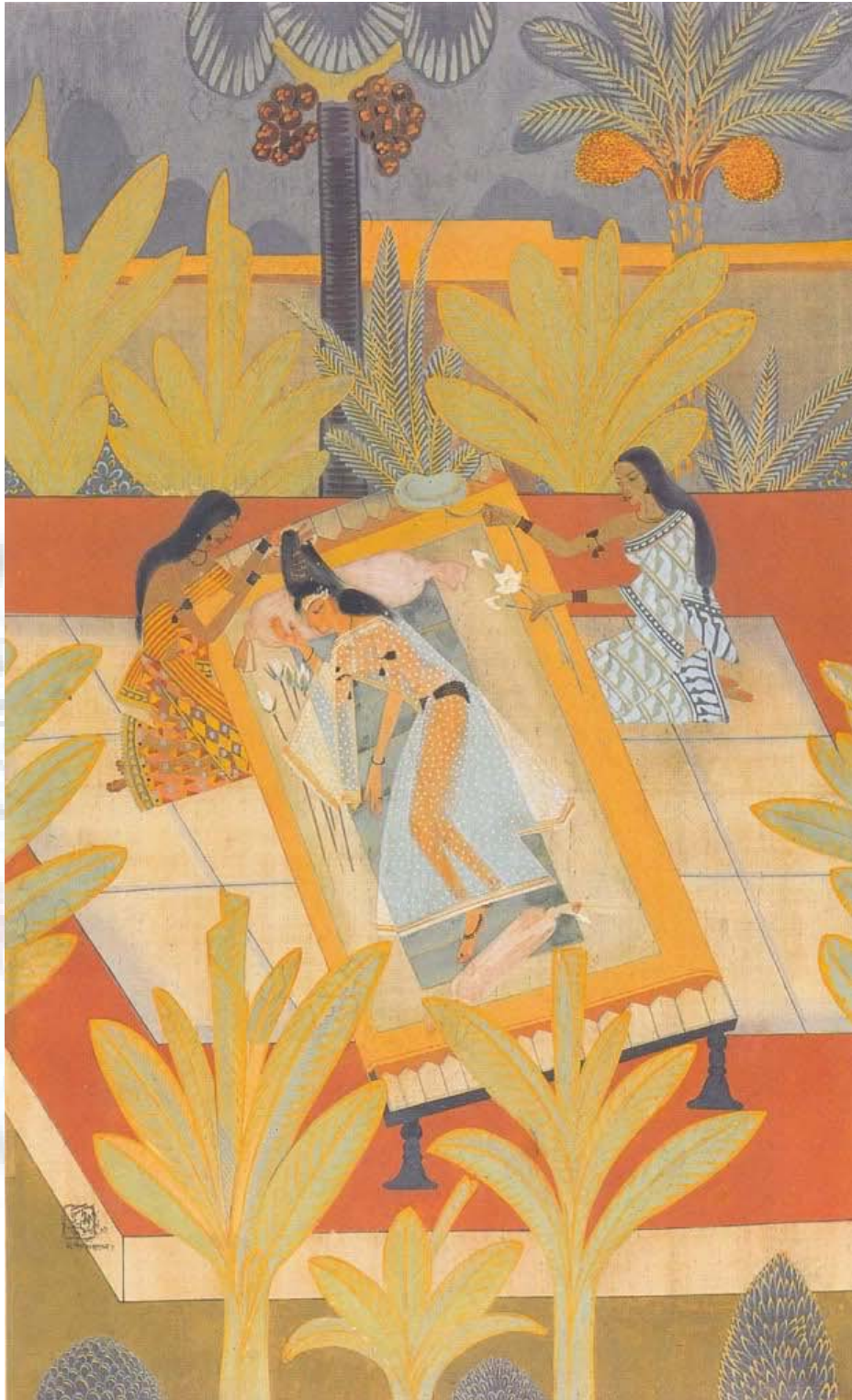


Figure 8.3.8: 'Radha's Viraha' by Nandalal Bose

Source:

<http://i921.photobucket.com/albums/ad53/chitrogupto/Art/Nandalal%20Bose/RadhasVirahaNationalGalleryofMod-1.jpg>

However, the relationship between a cultural efflorescence in Bengal and the project of Indian nationalism was a tenuous one. Firstly, most of these cultural achievements belonged to an elite cultural realm, and thus they sought to define a cultural identity which had greater appeal to the *bhadralok* than to the peasant or the worker. And

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secondly, these developments also fed into a sense of Bengali **chauvinism**, which may have had a divisive effect on the collective imagination of Indians as belonging to one nation. Although Bengali intellectuals didn't see any contradiction in propagating nationalism for a region and for the country as a whole, this Bengali chauvinism may have intensified the existing rivalry between Bombay Moderates and Bengal Extremists within the Congress, eventually leading to the split in 1907, in Surat.

Conclusion

The social composition of the Swadeshi movement was such that it belies easy characterization on the basis of class. While sympathy from zamindars or landlords was much talked about, it was the mid-level tenure holder who was more active. Historian R. P. Dutt has argued that Swadeshi was reflective of the grievances of the petty bourgeoisie, but Sarkar has shown that trading communities and the industrial bourgeoisie were in fact indifferent or hostile to the movement. The movement did belong to the Bengali middle class, but this middle class had no links with capitalist industry or agriculture, unlike its British counterpart. The only element that distinguished the early nationalist leadership was western education, and consequently their attraction to nationalist ideology. The category of bhadralok was therefore more of a social category referring to men of education rather than a particular class and yet they were mostly well-off. Their nationalist ideology was one which sought to reach out to the masses, but its limitations were determined by their class position, and that constituted the failure of the movement.

In his enormously influential monograph on the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, Sumit Sarkar has argued that as the first nationalist mass-movement, Swadeshi was clearly a failure. This is borne out by the fact that mass agitation had stopped by 1908, and anti-imperialist protest now took the form of revolutionary acts of violence carried out by small groups of educated young men. Mass politics would however reappear in a more effective way under Gandhi's leadership in the 1920s. In fact, Gandhi went onto revive and give a new lease of life to tactics like non-cooperation, passive resistance and civil disobedience that had been the backbone of the Swadeshi movement. This may lead us to conclude that perhaps the socio-political context wasn't ripe for a successful mass movement in 1905. One might even argue that the tactics and lessons learnt during the Swadeshi movement paved the way for future successful mass politics in a later stage of the national movement.

8.3 Summary

- In 1905, Lord Curzon decided to partition the province of Bengal for administrative convenience, but this was seen as an attempt to divide people on religious lines and to weaken the nationalist movement in Bengal.
- The partition led to the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, in which Extremist leaders of the Congress tried out new techniques of mass agitation, and also acquired greater prominence within the Congress.
- Extremist methods of agitation like boycott, swadeshi and passive resistance were tried out in Bengal with a reasonably high level of success among students

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and the middle class, but the agitation ended in 1908, without developing into a mass movement.

- The Movement was characterized by a strong Hindu revivalist streak which alienated Muslims from participating in it in large numbers and also intensified communal hostilities.
- The rich cultural achievements of the period in the form of literature, poetry, music, and art is unique and not witnessed in any other period of nationalist agitation.
- The movement was largely elite in its character, and failed to draw in the masses, but it anticipated and paved the way for the success of later Gandhian techniques.

8.3: Exercises

Essay questions

- 1) What led to the Swadeshi movement in Bengal in 1905?
- 2) Critically analyze the methods of agitation that were used in the Swadeshi movement in Bengal.
- 3) Why did some sections of Muslims feel alienated from the Swadeshi movement?
- 4) Would you say that the Swadeshi movement in Bengal was a failure? Give reasons for your answer.
- 5) What were the achievements of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal?
- 6) Was the Swadeshi movement a 'mass-movement'?

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	True or False	1

Question

Which of the following statements is false about the partition of Bengal?

- a) It was undertaken for greater administrative convenience.
- b) It was aimed at weakening the nationalist movement in Bengal.

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- c) It was undertaken to divide the province on linguistic lines.
d) It was undertaken to divide the province along religious lines.

Correct Answer / Option(s) c)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The partition would split the Bengali speaking community into two, on religious lines.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

a), b) and d): these intentions have been clearly referred to in official discussions in the run up to the partition in 1905.

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	True or False	2

Question

Which of the following statements about Extremist methods used in the Swadeshi movement is false?

- a) Those who resisted the boycott campaigns popularized by volunteer groups were socially ostracized.
b) The British parliament was flooded with petitions against the partition of Bengal.
c) Humble beginnings were made in establishing indigenous institutions for technical education.
d) Mass contact was made through traditional public gatherings in melas and jattras.

Correct Answer / Option(s) b)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Petitioning was part of the politics of 'mendicancy' that Extremist leaders accused the Moderates of.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

a), c) and d): these were all methods tried by extremist leaders as part of their agenda to take the agitation to the masses, a flaw in Moderate politics that they set out to correct.

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	True or False	1

Question

Which of the following statements are false about the project of national education?

- a) Politically active mofussil schools in Bengal attracted the largest part of the funding from the National Council for Education, set up for the purpose.
- b) Most Indian-owned private colleges rushed to be part of the parallel university that was sought to be set up as a national initiative.
- c) Primary education was neglected by the leaders of the Movement as an area of nationalist reform.
- d) There was an attempt to go back to indigenous forms of education, as it was felt that western education in English alienated students from their own country.

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a) and b)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

- a): The National Council was so wary of police repression that it sought to curb the funding to politically active mofussil schools.
- b): No Indian-owned private owned colleges broke with Calcutta University as they were skeptical about the quality of the parallel university.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

- c): The focus of nationalist reform in education remained largely confined to higher educational institutions, clearly betraying an elite bias in the thrust of the movement.
- d): This emphasis fit in well with the strong revivalist trend within Swadeshi ideology.

Reviewer's Comment:

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
4	True or False	1

Question

Which of the following conclusions about the Swadeshi movement are false?

- a) While a policy of Hindu revivalism may have attracted mass support to some

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extent, it was very detrimental to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity in the long run.

b) The cultural achievements of the period were unprecedented but it further emphasizes for us the elite character of the movement.

c) The techniques of boycott and passive resistance, which were evolved during the movement, were flawed as techniques of mass agitation.

d) The movement did not evoke the same enthusiasm in nationalist circles in other regions of the country.

Correct Answer / Option(s)

c)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The same techniques of boycott and passive resistance were used very effectively by Gandhi to organize successful mass-movements in the 1920s and 30s. In 1905, the larger context wasn't ripe for a successful mass mobilization to be accomplished by nationalist leaders.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

a): Hindu revivalism alienated Muslims from the mainstream nationalist movement and strengthened loyalist and separatist tendencies amongst some sections.

b): Devoting time to cultural pursuits was a luxury mainly enjoyed by the well-off sections of society alone.

d): Bengali enthusiasm for the Swadeshi movement was treated with some amount of exasperation, especially by Bombay Moderates, who were already alienated from the Bengal Extremists within the Congress.

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
5	Match the following	2

Question

a) Rabindranath Tagore	i) <i>Plant Response</i>
b) Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar	ii) <i>Radha's Viraha</i>
c) J.C.Bose	iii) <i>Ghare Baire</i>
d) Akshoykumar Mitra	iv) <i>Thakurmarjhuli</i>
e) Nandalal Bose	v) <i>biography of Sirajoddoula</i>

Correct Answer / Option(s)

a) and iii), b) and iv), c) and i), d) and v), e) and ii)

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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

These are all works of the respective individuals.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
6	Match the following	2

Question

a) Pramatha Mitra	i) National Tannery
b) Prafulla Chandra Ray	ii) Swadeshi Bhandar
c) Rabindranath Tagore	iii) Anushilan Samiti
d) Dr. Nilratan Sirkar	iv) Bhagavat Chatuspathi
e) Satishchandra Mukherjee	v) Bengal Chemicals

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a) and iii), b) and v), c) and ii), d) and i), e) and iv)
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Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

These are institutions/enterprises associated with the respective individuals.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Reviewer's Comment:

8.3 Glossary

Calcutta Corporation: the municipal corporation for the city of Calcutta

Parochialism: narrowness in outlook

Atmasakti: self-reliance

Fly shuttle loom: an innovation made by John Kay on the earlier handloom, which could be operated by a single weaver. Its use speeded up production and enabled the weaving of wider pieces of cloth.

Tol: traditional school attached to a temple

Neo-tantric: a new revived form of a Hindu philosophy organized around the worship of Shakti (Durga) and her union with Shiva

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Wahabi: an 18th century movement to purify Islam of 'distortions'

Deobandi: a late 19th century movement for progressive reform within Islam

Qanungo: a mid-level hereditary land revenue official

Mulla: a person learned in Islamic sacred law

Chauvinism: aggressive glorification of and devotion to one's own group

Jatra: a traditional form of theatre from Bengal

8.3 Further readings

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