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Research Foundation

2nd  
Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay  
Memorial Oration



by

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on

**Vision of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat  
in the Bengal Renaissance**

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Perspectives from History & Literature

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**T**hank you, my dear friend Dr. Anirban Ganguly for having invited me. I am particularly honoured because this is only the second Memorial Oration in memory of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. In the title of the Talk, and the mentioned names and expressions, we have Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee (after whom SPMRF is named), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Bengal Renaissance and Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. I will try to touch upon all these individuals and all these expressions, beginning with Bengal Renaissance. I may sometimes slip into a little bit of Bengali. But please be reassured that if I do quote in Bengali, I will do my best to also translate it.

Renaissance of course means rebirth. The expression Bengal Renaissance was coined with an obvious allusion to the Italian Renaissance. The Bengal Renaissance is characterized by almost a revolution in the domains of culture and society and in intellectual and artistic pursuits, such as in literature. How does one date the Bengal Renaissance? In his book, “History of the Bengali-speaking People”, Dr Nitish Sengupta defined the Bengal Renaissance as the period from Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). This is a very long time-frame. Whenever people write about the Bengal renaissance, a lot of emphasis is placed on the Tagore family, which is of course, right. A great deal of emphasis is also placed on Rabindranath Tagore and I do want to make the point that there were other members of the Tagore family, a point I will make again later, who were also important. In descriptions of the Bengal Renaissance, science will rarely be mentioned, entrepreneurship almost never, both vital ingredients of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. To my way of thinking, Swami Vivekananda is as integral part of the Bengal Renaissance. Marxist historians will never mention him. In 1877, Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) wrote a book titled “The Literature of Bengal”.

Though this was before Swami Vivekananda, so far as literature is concerned, I think this was a far fairer representation of what happened in Bengal in the middle of the nineteenth century. Indeed, at the risk of deliberately provoking people, I would argue that depictions by Marxist historians, or by those with links to the Brahmo Samaj, are prejudiced, biased and unfair. In all of its dimensions, I think there is a more representative depiction of the Bengal Renaissance in a Bengali novel known as সেইসময় (Sei Samay), authored by Sunil Gangopadhyay and translated into English as “Those Days”. If you want a sense and a flavour of the Bengal Renaissance, it is my suggestion that this novel is far more inclusive than many of the accounts by historians.

Who was India’s, indeed Asia’s, first female physician, with medicine being interpreted in the modern sense? The answer is Kadambini Ganguly, born as Kadambini Basu. The first women graduates from India were Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Bose. They became graduates in 1883 and had the University of Calcutta’s rules permitted it, Chandramukhi Bose would have become a graduate a couple of years earlier. Why am I mentioning Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Bose? Yes, they were the first women graduates, But what is special about that? Why am I mentioning them? They were the first women graduates not just in India, but anywhere in the British Empire, much before Oxford, Cambridge and London. Every time I mention this, people are surprised. That’s the reason I am mentioning it. As I said, Kadambini Ganguly was the first female doctor. She earned her medical degree in 1886. Had University of Calcutta allowed it, Biraj Mohini Mitra would have become a doctor a few years earlier. There is quite a story about how Manmatha Nath Dutt, Biraj Mohini Mitra’s husband, who was already a doctor, sat along with her at the lectures, so that people did not object to a woman

being taught along with men. However, the University didn't allow Biraj Mohini Maitra to take the examination. But let me not digress too much.

In the Census of 2011, Kolkata had a population of 14 million. The first Censuses in India were done in 1871 or 1881. You can pick either year, depending on how comprehensively you define a Census. There was a Census of Calcutta in 1876 and that gave a population for the city of 430,000. I will come back to this number later.

1857, the First War of Independence, caught the British unawares. Despite Mangal Pandey and the Barrackpore Cantonment, Bengal was left relatively untouched by 1857. This was more than made up later. If one goes through the list of names in the Cellular Jail, number one in that list is Bengal, followed by Punjab. But that came later. Since 1857 caught the British unawares, there was a state of shock. They didn't know how to react. Committees were set up and their recommendations resulted in several things. For instance, every society needs a vent for grievances to be aired. In the absence of a vent, there are explosions. Therefore, let us give Indians their societies and their newspapers. Hence, the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and societies in India are still registered under that. This was a direct fallout of 1857. There was the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867, under which, newspapers and magazines continue to be registered, even today. That too was a direct fallout of 1857. Governing from the plains may be difficult, if there is another 1857. Therefore, the deliberate idea of building hill stations and mountain railways. Every time we travel to Kalka or Darjeeling by train, we should remember that these were a direct fallout of 1857. The architecture of railway stations changed after 1857. Charbagh railway station in Lucknow is an example of this. It has been constructed so that it can withstand a siege. Much later, the

Presidential Estate in Rashtrapati Bhavan has been constructed so that it is self-sufficient in a variety of food products and can easily last out a siege for three months. I decided to mention this because the Societies Registration Act of 1860 and the Press and Registration of Books Act of 1867 had major roles to play in the Bengal Renaissance.

In particular, the Bengal Renaissance was based on the spread of English education. Hindu College, which became Presidency College later, was established in 1817. Today, it is known as Presidency University. Before that, Fort William College was established in 1800 and Srirampur College in 1818. In 1830, there was Scottish Church College. Sanskrit College was established in 1824. Initially, Sanskrit College only accepted brahmana students. However, when Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was the Principal, between 1851 and 1858, non-brahmana boys also came to be allowed. There was an Education Commission in 1881-82, better known as the Hunter Commission. At that time, modelled on the University of London, University of Calcutta was not a place where there used to be teaching. It administered examinations and conferred degrees. There was an Entrance examination conducted by the University of Calcutta, followed by degrees like F.A. (First Arts), B.A. and M.A. The Hunter Commission tells us that between 1857 and 1881, 20,500 students passed the Entrance examination conducted by the University of Calcutta. There were 1,500 B.A degrees and 350 M.A. degrees. That's the reason I said one shouldn't think of a base population of 430,000. The Bengal Renaissance was driven by education and the pool was perhaps of around 10,000 people. I find that remarkable. It was more like a revolution, the defining feature of a revolution being that it is typically driven by a small number of people. Others jump onto the bandwagon later.

It was fundamentally a Hindu phenomenon. It wasn't a brahmana phenomenon. Far from it. A lot of non-brahmanas were admitted to educational institutions and I did specifically mention Sanskrit College. But it was indeed a Hindu phenomenon, by which I mean those who were originally Hindus, though they may have converted later. The Hindu phenomenon can certainly be ascribed to education. Muslims in Bengal weren't particularly educated. We have some results from the 1911 Census. 20.3% of Hindu males were literate, but the figure was 7.7% for Muslim males. The educational differential is clear and its reflection in the Bengal Renaissance is understandable. But there is something to think about. Those who are familiar with Bengal will know that from 1937 to 1947, Bengal, meaning undivided Bengal, had Prime Ministers. Muslims were relatively uneducated and to be part of the political process you presumably needed to be educated. Between 1937 and 1947, the three Prime Ministers of Bengal were A.K. Fazlul Haque, Khawaja Nazimuddin and H. S. Suhrawardy. That should make us think about the political processes in undivided Bengal.

Access to education meant exposure to English education and to Christianity. Therefore, there was a clash of civilizations, though not in a violent sense. Nevertheless, there was a clash and there were those who felt hesitation, those who felt defensive, those who weren't exactly proud of being Hindus. Many young people, identified with the Young Bengal movement in Hindu college, centred around Henry Derozio, actually converted to Christianity. We remember Lal Behari Dey (1824-1892) now for having collated and translated "Fairy Tales of Bengal", stories told to grandchildren by grandparents. He became a Christian missionary, as did Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjee. In protest against the perceived evils of Hinduism, Ramtanu Lahiri gave up his sacred thread. The Brahma Samaj originally evolved through

Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Debendranath Tagore. But it had divisions. There was the Adi (Old) Brahma Samaj, the Sadharan (General) Brahma Samaj and the Naba Bidhan (New Dispensation) Brahma Samaj. Under Keshub Chandra Sen, the rituals of the Naba Bidhan Brahma Samaj were indistinguishable from Christian church practices. There was the Theosophist movement. There were poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutt who aspired to be India's Milton and wrote sonnets with lines like "I sigh for Albion's distant shore, Its valleys green, its mountains high". Needless to say, he hadn't visited England. His first play was in English and was titled "The Captive Ladie". It was about Sanjukta and Prithviraj Chauhan. As the name makes it obvious, Michael Madhusudan Dutt also converted to Christianity. Two of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's Bengali plays depict the nature of the times. একেইকিবলেসভযতা? (Ekei ki bale sabhyata, Is this civilization?) portrayed the excesses of the Western-educated young Bengal, while বুড়োশালিকেরঘাড়েরোঁ (budo shaliker ghade ro, The hair behind the neck of the old Sarika bird) portrayed the decadence of old Bengal.

As this makes it obvious, Michael Madhusudan Dutt turned away from English to Bengali and made his fame in Bengali. Whatever be the attractions of Christianity, the Brahma Samaj and the Theosophist movement, in that clash of civilizations, there were those who returned to their roots and discovered the legacy and the treasure. This self-confidence, Aatmanirbhar Bharat, fed into the Bengal Renaissance. One of Michael's sonnets, in Bengali, addressed to the Bengali language, was as follows.

হেবঙ্গ, ভাণ্ডারেতববিধরতন;  
তাসবে, (অবোধআমি!) অবহেলাকরি,  
পর-ধন-লোভেমত্ত, করিনুভর্মণ  
পরদেশে, ভিক্ষাবৃত্তিকুক্ষণেআচরি।

Loosely translated, “O Bengal! Your treasure house has many jewels. I have foolishly neglected them. Intoxicated at the prospect of someone else’s wealth, I have travelled in other countries, destiny making me behave like a beggar.” And so it goes on. Every time I read this, I am reminded of something Bhratrihari wrote, though I have no idea whether Michael Madhusudan Dutt was familiar with Bhratrihari.

ধ্রান্তং দেশং অনেকদুর্গবিষমং प्राप्तं न किञ्चित्फलं  
त्यक्त्वा जातिकुलाभिमानं उचितं सेवा कृता निष्फला ।  
भुक्तं मानविवर्जितं परगृहेष्वशाङ्कया काकवत्  
तृष्णो जृम्भसि पापकर्मपिशुने नाद्यापि सन्तुष्यसि ॥

Loosely translated again, “I have travelled in many countries, difficult to pass, but have not obtained any fruits. I abandoned the pride of my lineage and my birth and have fruitlessly served in the houses of others, like a crow. I have enjoyed, devoid of honour. O desire, you wicked one, goading me to evil deeds! Yu are belching, still not satisfied.”

That return to the roots made the Bengal Renaissance and made Gopal Krishna say, “What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow.” At least, this is a quote attributed to Gopal Krishna Gokhale. I should tell you that I have searched for the origins of this quote. When did Gopal Krishna Gokhale write this? Where did he say this? I have not been able to find it. Nevertheless, it does sound like the kind of thing



that Gopal Krishna Gokhale could have said.

In the introduction, Dr. Anirban Ganguly mentioned that I am interested in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Let me quickly mention what happened in this field in Bengal in the 19th century. Kaliprasanna Singha, who is the central character fictionalized in Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel that I mentioned earlier, translated the unabridged Mahabharata into Bengali. The eastern edition of the Mahabharata, the Bardhamana edition, was published in Sanskrit, with a Bengali translation. There is a translation of the Mahabharata in English, done by Kisari Mohan Ganguly towards the end of the 19th century. This was originally thought to be by Pratap Chandra Roy, the publisher, who was not actually the translator. Before the English translation, Pratap Chandra Roy published a Bengali translation of the entire unabridged Mahabharata. From Serampur, William Carey and Joshua Marshman produced the first unabridged English translation of the Valmiki Ramayana. Hemchandra Bhattacharya published an unabridged translation of the Valmiki Ramayana in Bengali. There is something else that everyone attending a SPMRF event should note. Dr. Ganga Prasad Mukhopadhyay, Dr. Syama Prasad Mukhopadhyay's grandfather, did his own translation of the unabridged Ramayana. Near Kolkata, there is a place of Sanskrit learning known as Bhatpara. It is part of the broader Kolkata metropolitan area. Panchanan Tarkaratna wasn't a Western educated scholar. He was a traditional Sanskrit pundit from Bhatpara. In the closing decades of the 19th century and early 20th century, he translated the Dharmasastra texts, Valmiki Ramayana, Adhyatma Ramayana and several Purana texts. Remember that at that time copyright legislation did not exist, not in the sense we know it today. So if someone wrote anything or translated it, everyone was free to reprint it. Today if you go to College Street in Kolkata and

you purchase an edition of the Puranas, with the Sanskrit and a Bengali translation, I can guarantee you that it will be an edition originally edited and translated by Panchanan Tarkaratna.

Towards the end of the 19th century, there were the efforts of the Asiatic Society. Asiatic Society, having been established in 1784, went through several name changes. But I will simply call it Asiatic Society. Towards the end of the 19th century, it started the “Bibliotheca Indica” series. An entire range of Sanskrit was edited and published, such as Dharmashastra texts, translations done of the Vishnu Purana into English by Horace Hayman Wilson, of the Markandeya Purana by F.E. Pargiter. Haraprasad Shastri visited Nepal and collected texts, in manuscript form, of the Puranas. People will invariably mention “Sacred Books of the East”, edited by Max Mueller. As the title of the series suggests, this series wasn’t only about Hinduism. The Hinduism texts translated under this series were primarily the Upanishads and Dharmashastras. Most people are unaware that there was another series titled “Sacred Books of the Hindus”. This was a little later and was published by Panini Press, Allahabad. I seem to have extrapolated and appropriated Allahabad into the fold of the Bengal Renaissance. That extrapolation is justified, because many translations published by Panini Press were done by Bengalis. The translation of Matsya Purana is a case in point.

I said earlier that although Rabindranath Tagore was important, the Tagore family had others besides Rabindranath Tagore. Dr. Anirban Ganguly mentioned Tagore’s views on nationalism. But Abanindranath Tagore’s views on nationalism weren’t quite the same as those of Rabindranath Tagore. Abanindranath Tagore was a driving force behind the Bengal School of Art. Generations obtained their sense of nationalism from “Raj Kahini” (Stories of Kings), which drew

on James Tod's accounts from "Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan". How many of you have heard of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, educated in Kolkata and Rabindranath Thakur's niece? She spent most of her working life in Mysore and married Rambhuj Dutt Choudhury later. She is often labelled as a feminist, but there was much more to Sarala Devi Chaudhurani. I am going to go off on a tangent. There are around 17 Sanskrit universities in the country. But unfortunately, in most of them, Sanskrit is not taught in Sanskrit. It is taught in Tamil. It is taught in Bengali. It is taught in Hindi. Perhaps and it is also taught in English. National Sanskrit University in Tirupati is one of the few universities where Sanskrit is taught in Sanskrit. When I visited this university to deliver a talk, the Vice Chancellor told me there were around 200 Bengali students studying Sanskrit there and that they wanted to speak to me. I was puzzled. Why study in Tirupati and not in Kolkata? When I met them, I asked them that question. They said – (a) In Kolkata, Sanskrit is taught in Bengali. (b) In Kolkata, Sanskrit is taught using the Bengali script, not Devanagari. Both of these lead to subsequent career disadvantages. I happen to agree. I digressed because Sarala Devi Chaudhurani wrote her autobiography in Bengali titled – "Jiboner Jhora Pata" which has been translated into English as "Scattered Leaves." If you read her autobiography, published so many years ago, you will find that she advances the same arguments. If you read her autobiography, you will find that her views on nationalism empathized with those of Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay, not with those of Rabindranath Tagore. Therefore, let us not equate Rabindranath Tagore's views on nationalism with those of the entire family. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani set the tune for many of Tagore's songs. And if I am not wrong, she also set the tune for the "Vande Mataram" we sing today.

I should not convey the impression that the Bengal Renaissance was only about art and literature. Indeed, I did say that standard descriptions often ignore science. Here are some names, each a stalwart – Satyendra Nath Bose, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, Prafulla Chandra Ray, Meghnad Saha, Upendranath Brahmachari, Radhanath Sikdar. In the introduction, Dr. Anirban Ganguly mentioned that I am now the President of the Indian Statistical Institute. ISI has a motto - भिन्नेष्वैक्यस्य दर्शनम्. In English, this is translated as “Unity in Diversity”. When I became the President, I went around ISI, asking -Where is motto from? It must have come from somewhere. Which Upanishad is this from? Or is it from some Purana, or Ramayana or Mahabharata? I still don't know where that motto came from and I am convinced that the motto exists nowhere in our sacred texts. Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, who was a statistician, knew enough Sanskrit to write his own motto for the Indian Statistical Institute. The broad point is this is that all these people were polymaths, each and every one of them. One of the defining characteristics of the Bengal Renaissance was this polymath kind of attribute that characterized all these people.

Let me now talk about Aatmanirbhar Bharat. Bengal was divided in 1905 and reunified in 1911. During that period, there was a Swadeshi movement, Swadeshi entrepreneurship and Swadeshi business, much before it was brought to the forefront by Gandhiji. There was the famous Bengal Chemicals. There is a song by Rajani Kanta Sen that the older generation will recollect.

মায়ের দেওয়া মোটা কাপড় মাথায় তুলে নেবে ভাই;

দীন দুখিনি মা যে তোদের তার বেশি আর সাধু নাই।

Loosely translated, “O brother! Accept the rough cloth given by your mother and place it on your head. Your mother is poor and distressed.

She is not capable of anything more than that.”

When was the first fountain pen in India produced? The story goes that it was produced by K.V. Ratnam, a goldsmith who lived in Rajahmundry. When he was introduced to Gandhiji, Gandhiji wanted him to make something useful, not jewellery. That is how Ratnam started to manufacture fountain pens. The initial fountain pen, made in 1932, was refused by Gandhiji, because it had imported components. The subsequent one, produced in 1935, was completely Swadeshi and was accepted by Mahatma Gandhi. Depending on how you date it, the first Indian fountain pen was produced in 1932 or 1935. That’s what record books say and visiting dignitaries are given Ratnam pens, the same model, Ratnam 302. In 1910, a Bengali gentleman named Radhika Nath Saha started “Luxmy Pens” in Varanasi and began to make fountain pens, a year before the Japanese “Sailor” company was set up. A few years later, and one decade before 1935, Phanidra Nath Gooptu started making Gooptu’s pens from Kolkata. These are not familiar names. I don’t think a comprehensive account, despite Sumit Sarkar’s book, of Bengali entrepreneurship during the Bengal Renaissance has been written. Historians rarely mention business, enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Let me now turn to Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay. I was educated in Ramakrishna Mission School, Narendrapur, just outside Kolkata. But that was the second school I went to. The first school was St. Peter’s School in Shillong, a so-called Western Missionary School. We were not allowed to speak in Bengali, or any Indian language. We were supposed to speak in English. We had to recite the Lord’s Prayer every morning. My wife is constantly surprised that I know so much about the Bible, know that the Magna Carta was signed in 1215, know that the Battle of Agincourt was fought in 1415 and know the

names of all the English monarchs till Henry I. Why only Henry I? Because I then moved to the second school in Narandrapur and learnt the names of all the Mughal Emperors instead, with nothing about any other dynasty. Consequently, till the age of ten, though I could speak Bengali, I couldn't read or write it. This sounds like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, with whom I, coincidentally, share a birthday.

My mother read Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay's novels aloud to me – Durgesh Nandini, Mrinalini, Rajasimha, Devi Chaudhurani, Sitaram, Anandamath. These conjured up an image of a proud India. This was nationalism. By the way, the first Indian novel published in English was Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay's "Rajmohan's Wife". When I hear expressions from these familiar novels, I am still thrilled. "পথিক, তুমি পথহারা ইয়াছ?" "O traveller! Have you lost your way?" That's Kapalkundala. লোকে পথমে ভিক্ষাকরিতে আরম্ভ করিল, তার পরে কে ভিক্ষা দেয়! "At first, people started to beg. After that, who would give alms?" That's Anandamath. These phrases seemed into my being. A few years ago, I was supposed to deliver a talk on Sanskrit. I wanted to quote from Jayadeva's Gitagovindam and wanted to say ধীর সর্মাঁরী যমুনা তীরে বসতি বনে বনমালী. Instead, sub-consciously, I said ধীর সর্মাঁরী তটিনী তীরে বসতি বনে বরনারী. A famous danseuse from the audience corrected me. In case you haven't realized what had happened, I was quoting from Ananda Math instead. As I grew up, there was Kapalkundala, Radharani, Chandrasekhar and all the other novels. As a continuation of the same theme, there was Ramesh Chandra Datt and his novels "Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat" and "Rajput Jiban Sandhya", the first about the kings of Maharashtra and the second about the kings of Rajasthan. Understandably, Bankim Chandra influenced others to imitate his themes and his style. One such was a minor novelist named Damodar Mukhopadhyay. As soon as Bankim Chandra wrote a

novel, Damodar Mukhopadhyay wrote a sequel. Once, someone came to Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay and said – ‘‘Bankim Babu, onek din aar upanyas lekhen ni?’’ (Bankim Babu, why haven’t you written any novel for a long time?) Bankim responded – ‘‘Adure dandayaman Damodar. Upanyas likhilei upasamhar likia phelibe.’’(Damodar is standing not far away. If I write a novel, he will immediately write the sequel.)

Those who are familiar with the Bengali language know that it is a very sweet language. It is easy to write delicate poetry in the language, but it is difficult to write powerful prose or powerful poetry in Bengali. In my subjective way of thinking, only two people have written powerful prose in Bengali. They are Bankim Chandra Chattapadhyay and Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda wrote in English. By and large, yes, he wrote in English and he lectured in English. But he also wrote a powerful book in Bengali - Prachya o Pashchatya’ translated into English as ‘East and West’. According to me, there are only two individuals who have written powerful poetry in Bengali, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Kazi Nazrul Islam. But Bankim Chandra isn’t only about novels. He edited Bangadarshan. He was a trained lawyer and his essays, like Kamalakanter Daptar, are phenomenal. Kamalkanta is a harmless person, somewhat addicted to opium. The account of Kamalakanta bearing witness in a trial (Kamalakanter Jabanbandi) is hilarious. Oddly enough, I find this in textbooks in Bangladesh. But I don’t think it features in textbooks in West Bengal. The account of a babu explaining IPC to his wife is also hilarious. Bankim Chandra also wrote serious essays, like ‘‘Vividha Prabandha’’ (Assorted Essays). I once translated one of his long essays, known as ‘‘Samya’’ or ‘‘Equality’’, for Liberty Institute. The translation should be floating around on the Net. When he wrote

this, Bankim couldn't have been familiar with the writings of Karl Marx. That essay has a masterly exposition of Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage. Everyone who believes in Marxism should read what Bankim Chandra had to say about the ideals of equality.

There was his commentary on the Bhagavat Gita. There was Krishna Charitra, or Krishna's Conduct, which has been translated into English. All this adds up to Bankim Chandra's world view on Hinduism and nationalism. The Statesman Newspaper started in 1875. Soon after it started, there was a 'Shraaddha' Ceremony, held in 1882 at the Shobhabazar Rajbari. At that time, the Principal of the General Assembly's Institute, which later on became Scottish Church College, was a gentleman named Reverend William Hastie. In a series of letters to the newspaper, he questioned the holding of the Shradha ceremony. In response to this, Bankim Chandra wrote a letter. He did not sign it as Bankim Chandra, he signed it a Ram Chandra. This exchange of letters went on. One has to read those letters to understand Bankim Chandra's views on Desh, country nationalism, dharma and so on.

অবলা কেন মা এত বলে !

বহুবলধারিণীং

নমামি তরিণীং

রিপুদলবারিণীং

মাতরম্ ।

তুমিবিদয়াতুমিধম্মর[a]

তুমি হৃদি তুমি মম্মর[b]

তব্ং হি পরাণাঃ শরীরে ।

বাহুতে তুমি মা শক্তি,



হৃদয়ে তুমি মা ভক্তি,  
তোমারই পত্তিমা গড়ি মন্দিরে মন্দিরে।  
সপ্ত-কোট-কণ্ঠ-কল-কল-নিদাদ-করালে  
দ্বিসপ্ত-কোট-ভুজৈর্ধৃত-খরকরবালে,  
অবলা কেন মা এত বলে  
বহুবলধারিণী  
নমামি তারিণী  
রিপুদলবারিণী  
মাতরম্॥  
তুমি বিদ্যা, তুমি ধর্ম  
তুমি হৃদি, তুমি মর্ম  
ত্বম্ হি প্রাণা: শরীরে  
বাহুতে তুমি মা শক্তি,  
হৃদয়ে তুমি মা ভক্তি,  
তোমারই প্রতিমা গড়ি মন্দিরে-মন্দিরে॥

It is impossible to understand Bankim Chandra without this. It is impossible to understand the Bengal Renaissance without dharma. The variety of dharma may be different. I said earlier some people turned to Christianity, some to the Brahmo Samaj, some to the Theosophical Society. All had some underpinning of dharma. 'Dharma yah dharyate sahdharma'. What holds up is dharma, without dharma you have nothing. And if I am writing a secular history of the Bengal renaissance, I am doing gross injustice to what the Bengal Renaissance was. If I try to do that and try to write a so-called secular history, I haven't understood what Aatmanirbhar Bharat and the Bengal Renaissance meant. I have read papers that have vivisected Bankim Chandra's

variety of Hinduism from that of Swami Vivekananda's and that of Sri Aurobindo's. By the way, I don't like the word Hinduism. The "ism" suggests some kind of dogmatic ideology. Hindutva, with an etymology based on "truth" is so much better. That vivisection is pointless. And that exorcism of dharma is also futile.

It is because of secular attempts that Swami Vivekananda, often described as a Hindu monk, is kept out of accounts of the Bengal Renaissance. Yet, "Lectures from Colombo to Almora" and "East and West" are about Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. হেভারত, এইপরামুবাদ, পরামুকরণ, পরমুখাপেক্ষ, এইদাসস্থলভদুবরলতা, এইঘৃণিতজঘনঘনিষ্ঠুরতা—এই মাতর্সম্বলেতুমিউচ্চাধিকারলাভকরিবে?.. বলভাই—ভারতেরমৃত্তিকাআমারসব্গর, ভারতেরকল্যাণআমারকল্যাণ .

This is Swami Vivekananda's "Swadesh Mantra", translated into English as "Modern India". I will not try to translate it. The translation is readily available, on-line. But this is nothing but Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Swami Vivekananda was part of the Bengal Renaissance.

The Bengal Renaissance was about a clash of civilizations and about a pride about India's legacy and past. It was about a pride in history, a pride in Sanskrit, a pride in the legacy, a pride in the fact that Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee much later, ensured that a Convocation Address to the University of Calcutta would be delivered in Bengali. In the introduction, Anirban Ganguly mentioned Manmatha Nath Dutt, whose biography I have just published. He was one of India's greatest translators, from Sanskrit to English. The unabridged Mahabharata has been translated from Sanskrit to English by three people, Kisari Mohan Ganguly, Manmatha Nath Dutt and I. Two people have translated both the Valmiki Ramayana and Mahabharata into English, Manmatha Nath Dutt and I. Manmatha Nath Dutt was one of India's greatest

translators, as comfortable translating from Sanskrit to English as he was quoting Shelley, Keats, Mill and Macaulay. That was typical of the Bengal Renaissance.

What were the pre-conditions for such an event to happen? Education is of course a necessary pre-condition. It is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one. There was a curiosity and the breaking down of silos, something that is missing today. As I said, every one of these individuals was a polymath. Today's education system creates silos everywhere. The Bengal Renaissance was about the past blending seamlessly with the present and the future, not excising the past. And it had the underpinning of dharma.

Thank you very much



“...In a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment somebody sang *Bande Mataram*. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself...”

- Sri Aurobindo



Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee  
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by

**Prof. Bibek Debroy**

Chairman  
Economic Advisory Council to the  
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