POLITICAL IDEAS (1833-1905)

Political thought, freed from the trammels of ancient shashtric conventions and shackles of mediaeval pattern and understood as a modern concept, is one of the several remarkable products of the revolutionary transformation, commonly known as the Renaissance. The Indian Renaissance, generally speaking, was less a revival of the past and more an adaptation of the old to the pattern of state and society which had begun to emerge and take shape on the soil nurtured with the seeds of western learning and culture. Bengal was the first to draw upon herself the light that emanated from the west, and this marked her out as the sponsor of new and well-defined political ideas and ideals which made their influence steadily felt over other parts of the country and helped her to become 'a path-finder and a light-bringer to the rest of India.'

But then a word of caution needs be uttered at the outset. Historically speaking, political thought, as a modern concept, is not a phenomenon to be studied solely in terms of the newly imported western outlook. Men's thoughts and actions are largely conditioned by inherited characteristics which date back to remote past and as such, in a study of the growth of political ideas, within a given time, one can ill afford to ignore or neglect the background prepared, over ages, by physical, biological and mental environments of its people. So far as Bengal is concerned, these were certainly influenced and quickened by the 18th century contact with the western world, but it was not (and indeed could not be) entirely divorced from the context of beliefs, ideals and convictions which had invariably cast their spell on the pattern and thought of the leaders of the people. Political thought such as may be traced during the period commencing with the battle of Plassey and ending with the death of the 'first modern Indian' Raja Rammohan Roy, may be characterised as modern in that it was an adaptation of essentially Indian thoughts to the form or technique of western political theories and practices, in modification, but not in total rejection, of ancient and mediaeval concepts.

It is customary to deny the existence of any sense of patriotism and nationalism in the days of the advent of the British in India. It has been observed that "political thought in the modern academic sense is a development possible only in a free state working out its destiny, or in a new state in process of formation out of the chaos of political strifes. In a country like ours, amongst a people who have for ages been ruled over by a succession of foreigners no other political development is normally possible except acquiescence and encrusted conservation in self-defence." To deny the existence of a sense of patriotism and nationalism or to suggest the impossibility of political development other than that of "acquiescence and encrusted conservation in self-defence" is to deny the development of a systematised-political thought, understood in the modern
sense of the phrase, but not the existence of political ideas as part of inheritance from the past.

To Raja Rammohan Roy belongs the credit of sponsoring political thought in its modern and systematised form, based on definite theories and creeds, largely derived from the school of western political thought. It has been said that "his political ideas developed on the lines laid down by Montesquieu, Blackstone and Bentham, with whose writings he appears to have been quite familiar." The consolidation of British rule and the resultant elaboration of the administrative machinery provided him with an opportunity of focussing on them the searchlight of his criticism, enriched by his intimate acquaintance with the trends of contemporary political thought of the western world. He was by no means a theorist or a doctrinaire. A believer in the inductive and historical method, Ram Mohan was essentially a practical constitutional reformer. Being conversant with the attitude and outlook of his countrymen, for centuries subjected to foreign domination, and devoid of political training and initiative, he refrained from thinking in terms of political freedom and contented himself with demanding what amounted to an honourable partnership between the government and the governed, assuring to the latter the enjoyment of full civil rights and individual liberty, while conceding to the former the rights and prerogatives of sovereignty. With his faith firmly implanted on British justice and enlightenment, the Raja thanked "the Supreme Disposer of the Universe, for having unexpectedly delivered this country, from the long continued tyranny of its former Rulers and placed it under the Government of the English, a nation who not only are blessed with the enjoyment of civil and political liberty, but also interest themselves in promoting liberty and social happiness as well as free enquiry into liberty and religious subjects, among those nations to which the influence extends." Similar sentiments eloquently emphasising the good fortune of the Indian people in being "fortunately placed by Providence under the protection of the whole British nation," find expression in his Memorial to the Supreme Court, March 1823.

But within the framework of the sovereign rule of the British Raj, Ram Mohan was politically progressive and liberal enough to visualise a rule of law, deriving its moral sanction from "the influence of the intelligent and respectable classes of the inhabitants, and by the general will of the people, and not any longer stand isolated in the midst of its subjects, supporting itself merely by the exertion of superior force." His refreshingly liberal and enlightened outlook induced him to champion the cause of the freedom of the press. The Press Ordinance of 1823 prescribing that no one should publish a newspaper or other periodical without having previously obtained a license from the Governor-General-in-Council evoked from him emphatic protest. In a memorial submitted to the Supreme Court in March 1823 Ram Mohan wrote: "Every good ruler, . . must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire; and therefore he will be anxious to
afford every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained Liberty of publication is the only effectual means that can be employed. And should it ever be abused, the established Law of the Land is very properly armed with sufficient powers to punish those who may be found guilty of misrepresenting the conduct or character of government which are effectually guarded by the same Laws to which individuals must look for protection of their reputation and good name. " In his Appeal to the King-in-Council submitted to King George IV, through the Board of Control in 1825, he emphasised the effective role that a free press was expected to play as a link between the legislative body and the Indian people. He dwelt upon the need of encouraging the growth of a free press so that it could ventilate and even redress such grievances as the governed might reasonably suffer from. A free press, he added, would enable "the Court of Directors to ascertain correctly whether the systems introduced in their possessions, prove so beneficial to the natives of the country, as their authors might fondly suppose or would have others believe, and whether the Rules and Regulations which may appear excellent in their eyes, are strictly put in practice." As a means of eliciting 'impartial information' he suggested the adoption of one of two methods viz. (a) "The establishment of Newspapers in the different districts under the special patronage of the Court of Directors and subject to the control of law" and (b) the appointment of Commissions "composed of gentlemen of intelligence and respectability, totally unconnected with the Governing Body in this country, which may from time to time, investigate on the spot, the condition of Your Majesty's faithful subjects, and judge with their own eyes regarding the operation of the systems of law and jurisprudence under which they live". The Raja made no secret of the fact that he preferred the first to the second method. A third alternative hinted by the Raja for ascertaining public opinion by sending a copy of the proposed legislative measure "to the principal zamindars" of Burdwan, Bihar, Banaras etc. and the Muftis of Sadar Dewani Adalat and the head native officers of the Board of Revenue for their opinion on each clause of the Regulations" has been cited as "hopelessly antiquated," obviously judged by the modern standard. It would be well to remember that the Raja was a reformer and not a Revolutionary, a practical statesman and not a doctrinaire, and innovator not without obvious limitations.

The same liberalism of outlook was at work in encouraging him to oppose the proposed formation of Legislative Council on the eve of the expiry of the Charter Act of 1813 on the grounds that (a) its composition, as conceived, would reflect the majority of the Company's servants who there was reason to fear, would "contract prejudices against individuals of classes of men which ought not to find shelter in the breasts of the Legislator." and (b) it would violate the theory of separation of powers (which he is supposed to have derived from Montesquieu) by enabling
the Executive to add law-making to its functions. He welcomed the British parliament, representing the enlightened public opinion of England, as the supreme governing authority of the country in preference to a bureaucratically organised legislature.

In 1827 Ram Mohan raised his voice of protest against the Jury Act which conferred on the Christians (including native converts) the right of being tried with the aid of a jury composed exclusively of their coreligionists—a right which was denied to the Hindus and the Muslims, who, in addition to this, were declared ineligible for serving as Grand Jurors. Ram Mohan characterised the act as "unjust and oppressive, 'serving to degrade (other than the intended beneficiaries) in the scale of the society." Two years later in 1829 Ram Mohan sent in a strong protest against Regulation III of 1828 for the resumption of rent-free land. The progressive make-up of Ram Mohan's mind and intellect as well as his political liberalism were also manifested in his efforts aimed at securing, within certain limitations, the separation of executive and judicial functions, the improvement of the existing judiciary by providing for native assessors in the civil court, the right of trial by jury and the appointment of qualified Indians to higher posts at the disposal of the government.

However circumscribed the political outlook of the Raja might appear to the modern mind, in so far as his implicit faith in the enlightened character of the British rule, "the impartial justice of the British government and in the acknowledged wisdom which governs and directs all its measures in the just spirit of an enlarged and liberal policy," or the mode of ascertainment of public opinion is concerned. A refreshing feature of his political philosophy is its cosmopolitan approach. It reflects no small credit on his political acumen that he was able to use a canvas broad enough to encompass the struggling nationalities of the world. His love of liberty was by no means conditioned by the geographical limitations of the country in which he was born. Living in an age in which the plant of nationalism was yet to grow in India, he could conjure the vision of a world bound together by a spirit of international amity. He was deeply pained on receipt of the news of the collapse of the Neapolitan movement aimed at liberation in 1821, though he did not lose his faith in its ultimate and inevitable victory. "Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism," he wrote in a letter to Buckingham, August 11, 1821, "have never been and never will be ultimately successful!" He celebrated the triumph of the party pledged to constitutional government in Spain with illuminations and public dinner, "at the Town Hall. The revolutionary upheavals in Europe in 1830 stirred his heart to its depths and brought out congratulatory messages on the success of the July Revolution in France and the enactments of the First Reform Bill in England.

Ram Mohan was far ahead of his age not only by reason of his cosmopolitan outlook transcending all barriers of race, creed, colour and country, but also by virtue of his appreciation of the need of an international
organisation to which disputes among nations could be referred for peaceful settlement through arbitration. In a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France, Paris, seeking permission to visit the country, the Raja wrote: "On general grounds I beg to observe that it appears to me, the ends of constitutional Government might be better attained by submitting every matter of political difference between two countries to a congress composed of an equal number from the Parliament of each; the decision of the majority to be acquiesced in by both nations and the chairman to be chosen by each nation alternately, for one year, and the place of meeting to be one year within the limits of one country and next within those of the other .... By such a congress all matters of difference, whether political or commercial, affecting the Natives of any two civilized countries with constitutional Government, might be settled amicably and justly to the satisfaction of both and profound peace and friendly feelings might be preserved between them from generation to generation." ²⁰

Ram Mohan's political activities conducted in India till 1830 were continued with sustained vigour in England till his death there three years later (September 1833). His work survived his death. An objective, impartial, historical judgment will have little hesitation in claiming Ram Mohan as the precursor of the liberal constitutional political movement which was destined to leave its impress on the course and character of political development in India during at least half a century that followed his death. He was the first link in the chain that interconnected the various phases of political thought and movement in India enabling her to reach the destined end in a little over a century since the death of the pioneer among the political thinkers of modern India.

The flame lit by Ram Mohan not only continued undimmed but added to its lustre through the untiring efforts of the succeeding generation. The first in the field were the youthful products of the Hindu College, most of whom had come in contact with the Raja towards the closing years of his career in India. A correspondent of the Englishman writing in May 1936 observed: "In matters of politics, they are all radicals and are followers of Benthamite principles."²¹ Their ideas and thinking were influenced by the American and French Revolutions, the stirring struggle between Reaction and Revolution which convulsed western and central Europe in the decades after the overthrow of Napoleon and the writing of the political thinkers of the West like Voltaire, Hume, Locke, Reid, Tom Paine, and others. They learnt their lessons at the feet of the great 'animating, enlightening' teacher, H. L. V. Derozio, a high-priest of intense patriotism and an ardent lover of liberty. They expressed their unbounded rejoicings at the success of the July Revolution (1830) in France and some enthusiasts among them were responsible for hoisting the tri-colour flag on the top of the Ochterlony Monument on the Christmas Day, 1830, following a banquet in celebration of the Revolution held two weeks earlier (Dec. 10). They gave free expression to
their ideas welcoming in Bengal a revolutionary upheaval similar to the one which had occurred in France. One of them Kashiprasad Ghosh (1809-1873) composed a poem which has been described as "the first cry of patriotic fervour ....which found its most brilliant expression in the Bande Mataram song of Bankim Chandra."²²

It would be a mistake to suppose that the youthful products of the Hindu college, the Derozians (more commonly called Young Bengal) were mere sentimental windbags or impractical idealists. They focussed the search-light of their criticism on problems of specific nature to which Raja Ram Mohan had already drawn the attention of the enlightened section of his countrymen. They organised meeting at the Town Hall to record their protest against the Press Regulation²³, the export of coolies to Mauritius²⁴ and demanding extension of jury system.²⁵ One of the most prominent among the Derozians was Rusik Krishna Mallik (c. 1810-1858) who edited a bi-lingual journal, jnanaavveshan with the laudable object of disseminating instruction in 'the science of government and jurisprudence.' In a speech delivered at a public meeting held at the Calcutta Town Hall (January 5, 1835) he criticised the Charter Act of 1833 which completely ignored the interests of the people of India. He wrote articles condemning the existing police organisation, pleading the cause of fair and impartial justice and demanding the appointment of an increasingly large percentage of qualified Indians to responsible offices under the government. His criticism of the judicial and general administration was surprisingly bold and outspoken, revealing lack of faith in British justice. "The administration of justice in British India," he wrote, "is so much characterised by everything that is opposed to the just principles of government, that we offer no apology to introduce it to the notice of our readers.......................... The Administration of British India must necessarily be composed of a council of merchants, whose principal aim as such will be to promote their own interests and to manage their affairs with as little expense as possible. In a word, they will try to make their government subservient to the one ignoble principle of gain."²⁶

Another shining star in the galaxy of Young Bengal was Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay (1814-1878). His paper on "The Present state of the East India Company's criminal judicature and police under the Bengal Presidency", read at a meeting of the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge on February 8, 1843, is a bold and lucid exposition of the views of an enlightened and patriotic Indian on the evils associated with the prevailing system of justice. He was a vehement and uncompromising critic of all forms of inequality, political, economic and social and he accused the government and vested interests like those represented by the priestly class of denying to the people "their birth right to equality." While he declared that "he was no enemy to British rule," he did not hesitate to condemn foreign rule as, in his opinion, its main purpose was "the gratification of their love of gold" and since it did not act up to the maxim that "governments are for the good of the many and not
the few." He raised his voice in protest against corruption in the administration of justice and pleaded for Indianisation of services on the one hand and the organisation of public opinion on the other, as measures calculated to tone up the character of the administration. Dakshinaranjan even formulated a plan providing, for each province, a legislature to be composed of equal numbers of government nominees and representatives of the people, empowered to "check and examine the accounts to be furnished to them by all the departmental heads of the provincial governments and to advise government as to the proper mode of levying taxes, when the exigencies of the state may absolutely require it."27

Another member of the circle, fides et audax, was Tarachand Chakravarti (c. 1804-1855), a senior contemporary of Rasik Krishna and Dakshinaranjan. In the columns of the 'Bengal Spectator' he gave free expression to his political views, extolling the ideals which an enlightened government should aim at—"the protection of rights, the prevention of wrongs and the consequent promotion of happiness", among others, advocating the Indianisation of services and condemning the maintenance of the civil service as a monopoly of the Englishmen, as a system which "represses the expansion of talent and genius among the different classes of the people and prevents industry, merit and character from being duly remunerated."

Other prominent members of the group were Ram Gopal Ghosh, Peary Chand Mitra and Krishna Mohan Banerjee, each of whom contributed much to the growth of political consciousness of the people among whom they moved and worked. While Ram Gopal (1815-1868) followed the foot-steps of Ram Mohan in demanding the extension of the jury system, the employment of a larger number of Indians to public offices and the removal of all distinctions based on colour and race in the award of justice, Peary Chand Mitra (1814-1883) wrote thoughtfull articles dealing with the origin and functions of government and tried to impress on the ruling authorities that they could not properly and adequately discharge their legitimate functions without consulting the opinion of the governed and that "it shall be the duty of the ruling authority, to protect equally all classes of its subjects, but the opulent and powerful do not require so much of its constant care and anxiety as the poor and the helpless."28 Even Krishnamohan, much of whose time and energies were taken up by his work as a scholar and an evangelist, in his later years29 became actively interested in politics both as a member of the Indian League and as President of the Indian Association.

While the Derozians have come in for a good deal of criticism30 on account of their lack of reverence for the social and religious institutions of the country, not unoften, carried to excesses, the importance of their political role certainly deserves to be appreciated. In many respects they carried on the political programme laid down by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and some of their efforts, viz. those directed against the Press Regulations and the virtual exclusion of Indians from responsible posts under the Govern-
ment met with qualified success. But there was a fundamental difference between their outlook and that of the Raja. So far as their reaction to the problem of the ryots and the plan European colonisation in India, as conceived of by Ram Mohan is concerned, they represented more progressive views. Some of them were clearly disillusioned about the British rule and were convinced that its foreign character rendered it inherently incapable of serving the interests of India and her people. Unlike Ram Mohan, the Derozians, at least during the earlier phase of their activities, did not attempt any synthesis between the tradition of India's past and the trends of contemporary western political thought. They deluded themselves into believing that it was possible to radically reconstruct India's society and government in accordance with the principles of Western Radicalism. In wishing for the outbreak of a Revolution in Bengal similar to the French upheaval of July 1830 they allowed their enthusiasm to outturn their discretion. In later years the fire-brand element in them tended to fade out and through their writings in the columns of their periodicals like the Parthenon, Hesperus, Jananveshan, the Quill, the Hindu Pioneer, the Bengal Spectator, the Reformer and the Inquirer and through their speeches before learned societies like the Academic Association, Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, the stalwarts of Young Bengal "made great efforts to rouse the political consciousness of the people of Bengal."

But neither Ram Mohan nor the Young Bengal did (or possibly could) direct their efforts to build up a sustained movement on an appreciable scale or even develop a systematised philosophy or ideology.

Apart from the Derozians there were others who, under the inspiration of Ram Mohan's political ideas, had begun to take an increasingly active interest in contemporary political problems. The most well-known among them were the two Tagores—Dwarkanath and Prasanna Coomer, Akshoy Kumar Datta, Editor of the Tattvabodhini Patrika and Girish Chandra Ghosh, the founder-editor of the Bengalee. Dwarkanath and Prasanna Coomar exerted themselves strenuously to carry on the movement started by Ram Mohan for political reforms, through constitutional methods and by appeal to enlightened public opinion in India and England. Both of them were actively associated with the Press—Prasanna Coomar as the Editor of the Reformer and Dwarkanath as owner of the India Gazette later amalgamated with the Bengal Chronicle and the Bengal Harikar. While positive evidence of Prasanna Coomar's association with the Bangabhasa-Prakashika-sabha, founded towards the close of 1836 and described as "the first political association to be established in Bengal" is lacking, he was one of the founders of the Zamindary Association, later known as the Landholders' Society, with a better claim to be regarded as "the first organisation of Bengal with a distinct political object". Its first meeting held on November 12, 1837 laid down that "the Zamindary Association is intended to embrace people of all descriptions, without reference to caste, country or complexion and rejecting
all exclusiveness, is to be based on the most universal and liberal principles, the only qualification to become its members being the possession of interest in the soil of the country." The *Bengal Harukar* in its issues of December 14 and 16, 1839 refers to a speech 8 delivered before the Society by Mr. Turton, which judged by the mid-nineteenth century standard, reflects extraordinarily liberal views of the speaker on the status of the Indian subjects, claiming for them the status of brethren in every respect, as constituting a part of the kingdom of Britain, as fellow subjects and the same feeling, the same interests and objects and the same rights as the British-born inhabitants of England.

Another noteworthy feature about the landholders' Society was that since its inception, it took cognisance of the common problems that bound the provinces of India as a whole, and decided to establish 'branch Societies in every district of the British Indian Empire.' While the avowed object of the Association was 'to promote the general interest of the landholders,' it did not neglect, as Rajendra Lal Mitra claimed, the rights of the ryots. In his opinion, it gave to the people first lesson in the art of fighting constitutionally for their rights and taught them manfully to assert their claims and gave expression to their opinions."

Dwarkanath gave an impetus to the cause of political movement along progressive lines by causing George Thompson, an eminent English orator, widely respected for his liberal views, to accompany him to India on his return from England (January 1843). Thompson created unprecedented enthusiasm among the youths of Bengal by his discourses on topics of public interest delivered with the aid of persuasive eloquence. For some time prior to his arrival, the Landholders' Association seemed to have been lulled into inaction and the *Friend of India* in its issue of February 23, 1843 observed: "If we are not mistaken it is the arrival of Mr. George Thompson which has broken its long sleep." 9 It was at Thompson's suggestion that a new political association, known as the *Bengal British India Society* was formed (April 20, 1843). Its object, among others, was "the collection and of the dissemination of information, relating to the actual condition of the people of British India, and the laws and institutions, and resources of the country, and to employ such other means of a peaceable and lawful character, as may appear calculated to secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow-subjects." 10

While the sponsors of the two associations—the Landholders' Society and the Bengal British India Society—were aristocratically inclined to be conservative and loyalist in sentiments, they were not averse to the anomalies in the prevailing system of administration. Within the limitation inherent in their political and social outlook, they were progressive enough to demand the abolition of restrictions on Press, the introduction of trial by jury, Indianisation of Public Service, separation of executive and judicial powers etc.

*The Tatva Bodhini Sabha* founded on the initiative of Debendranath
Tagore on October 6, 1839 also had to its credit distinctive service in quickening, in its own way, political consciousness among the educated middle-class. The Sabha was by no means a political association. But its sustained activities in literary, social and religious spheres invariably helped to foster a sense of patriotic self-respect and national consciousness. It was perhaps more than an accident that Debendranath was called upon to serve as the first Secretary of the British Indian Association founded within twelve years of the inauguration of the Tattvabodhini Sabha. His role in drafting the memorandum presented on behalf of the British Indian Association to the British Parliament upholding therein the advisability of introducing a modified form of self-government is often lost sight of in the context of his remarkable contributions to the cultural resurgence of India.

Apart from political associations, the Indian press too rendered appreciable service in quickening political consciousness in Bengal. The service rendered in this connection by the Tattvabodhini Patrika and its erudite Editor Akshoy Kumar Datta (1820-1886) deserves to be specially mentioned. By reason of his intimate acquaintance with the leaders of western political thought, Akshoy Kumar was an ardent advocate of Rationalism and a believer in the organismic theory of society. He stressed the maxim that the right enjoyed by the government enjoined upon it proper fulfilment of duties to the governed. In his view government, as the representative body of the subject, is under legal and moral obligation not only to protect life and property of citizens, but also to promote their all-round prosperity — physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual. He boldly attacked the failure of the British Indian administration in fulfilling these primary obligations especially in regard to the ryots living in the midst of poverty and exposed to the oppression by the indigo-planters among others. To him belongs the credit of being the first Indian to plead for the helpless ryots through the columns of his journal.

But neither the Derozians nor the political disciples of Raja Ram Mohan Roy made any conscious efforts to rouse political consciousness on a large scale affecting even a substantial section of the mass of their countrymen. The two political associations of those days too were essentially aristocratic, being confined to 'the aristocracy of wealth and aristocracy of intelligence.' In its issue dated 2nd March 1852 the Samvad-Prabhat° lamented the failure of the two societies in rousing any sustained or organised political consciousness or in rendering any permanent contribution to the well-being or advancement of the people, apart from mobilising opinion in regard to topics like resumption of rent free lands, press laws etc. and through the political exhortations of George Thompson. The same source also refers to efforts undertaken without success to revitalise these associations.

The urge for bringing a more effective and representative association was felt all the more since 1849 principally for two reasons. (1) The determined opposition of the European communities to the proposal of Drinkwater
Bethune, the then Law Member of the Governor-General's Council, recommending that the British born subjects of the crown should be brought under the jurisdiction of all courts (and not merely of the Supreme Court whose jurisdiction alone extended over them so long), operating in British India and the subsequent withdrawal of the proposed measure emphasised the urgency of organising political opinion in India on a more effective basis. (2) The urge towards mobilising Indian public opinion through representative organisations was felt to be imperative in the context of the impending termination of the Charter Act in 1853.

This prepared the background of the new venture—the foundation of the British Indian Association on October 29, 1851. Its aims and objects, as defined by its promoters, among others, were "to promote the improvement and efficiency of the British Indian government by every legitimate means in its power and thereby to advance the common interests of Great Britain and India and to ameliorate the condition of the native inhabitants of the subject territory,... to remove the existing defects in the laws and the civil administration of the country and to promote the general welfare and interests of its people and to memorialise the authorities here and in England for removal of existing and prevention of proposed injurious measures or for the introduction of enactments which may tend to promote the general interests of all connected with this country." The Association acted up to its professed aims, took active interest in all proposals of legislative and administrative measures, organised public meetings in Calcutta and in mofussil towns, adopted measures calculated to educate the public on current political and social problems and sought redress of individual grievances involving questions of general principles. Unlike its predecessor, the Association was cast in a wider mould as the principal organ of Indian political opinion. Other elements of progress were derived from the fact that the British Indian Association encouraged, from the very beginning, the establishment of similar institutions in other parts of India and of Branch associations operating in several districts of Bengal, and its initiation in effecting a coordination of activities on questions of national importance.42

Two decades intervene between the death of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and the inauguration of the British Indian Association. The progress in the development of political ideas and activities was by no means inconsiderable and the hope expressed by Dwarkanath Tagore in 1839 that the Youths should "organise themselves into a compact band of patriots for the assertion or preservation of their political rights and redress of their grievances" seemed to have been substantially fulfilled. The memorandum sent by the British Indian Association to the Parliament in 1852 has justly been regarded as "the first political document of constructive statesmanship emanating from an Indian public body."43 Attempts were made to extend the activities of the Association beyond the geographical limits of Bengal. The middle classes too had begun to take share in political activities through public bodies which were no longer
the monopoly of the land-owning aristocracy. It has been even suggested that "politics had by now left its purely feudal moorings and had started dealing with the problems of the common man," for the Association, at the instance of its first Secretary, Debendranath Tagore, had demanded revision of the Chowkidari system and protested against the existing tax on salt.

But, generally speaking, the progress achieved by 1850's was not in all respects indicative of any fundamental or radical change since 1830's. The approach and attitude associated with the mid-nineteenth century trends of political thought indicate change in degree rather than in kind. During these years the same belief in regard to efficacy of appeal to British justice and enlightenment persisted, the conviction of petition as an effective remedy remained unshaken and, as before, greater importance continued to be attached to impressing enlightened public opinion in England than to quickening or organising political opinion in India through mass contact. The criticism that "constructive policy they had none, and seldom, if ever, they laid down any programme of systematic action for the political advancement of the country" is hard to refute convincingly. Bipin Chandra Pal was perhaps less justified in observing that none of the political associations, not excluding the British Indian Association, "had an all-India outlook." But even granting that this Association was in close contact with similar other organisations like those in Madras and elsewhere, and that it worked through several branches in Bengal districts, it can hardly be refuted that the concept embracing India, as a whole, was yet to make its influence actively felt in the sphere of India's political thought. An interesting speculation would perhaps suggest that such a concept, properly organised and propagated, would possibly have spared India the violent outbursts of 1857 or at any rate have given them a different complexion altogether.

The post-mutiny era in Bengal saw an unmistakable tendency towards the growth of bolder political philosophy deriving its main inspiration from nationalism. The final and inevitable trend of India's political evolution found its first and unequivocal expression in the columns of the Hindu Patriot. In its issue of January 14, 1858 occur the memorable words from the pen of its editor, Haris Chandra Mukherji, in connection with the proposed transfer of the government of India from the Company to the Crown: "Can a revolution in the Indian Government be authorised by Parliament without consulting the wishes of the vast millions of men for whose benefit it is proposed to be made? The reply must be in the negative.... The time is nearly come when all Indian questions must be solved by Indians". The era, referred to by Sir Charles Trevelyan (1838) in which amongst those who had received English education "the most sanguine dimly look forward in the distant future to the establishment of a national representative assembly as the consummation of their hopes—all of them being fully sensible that these plans of improvement could only be worked out with the aid and protection of the British government"
was definitely over. The rapid spread of liberal education through the recently set-up universities, the growth of a reverential attitude towards India's past, effected as a result of extensive researches by the Orientalists, improvement in the means of communication, the influence of movements in various parts of Europe towards reconstruction of government and society on the models of nationalism and democracy and the flare up against what Aurobindo described as 'the pox of Indigoism'—all these helped to impart a new character to the political thought and movement of the post-mutiny years. Under its impact the advanced among the political thinkers, unlike the leaders of the preceding generation, refused to regard a scheme of administrative reform as adequate enough. As Surendranath Banerjea wrote: The efforts of the last few years had stirred a strange and hitherto unfelt awakening among our people, and had created new hopes and aspirations. It was not enough that we should have our full share of the higher offices, but we aspired to have a voice in the councils of the nation". It is possible to discern two distinct approaches in regard to contemporary political thought: (1) National-Democratic School advocating the reconstruction of government and society in accordance with the principles of nationalism and democracy, a school to which belonged such stalwarts as Raj Narain Bose, Dwarkanath Vidyabhusan and Sisir Kumar Ghosh and (2) The National School which welcomed reconstruction on the model of nationalism, but was not prepared to concede the demands of democracy as being 'unrealistic' in the context of the vast illiterate mass in the country's population. The chief among the sponsors of this school of thought were Nabagopal Mitra, Akshay Chandra Sircar, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Rajendra Lal Mitra.

If the rise of an educated middle class—the product of the newly established universities—was the most remarkable feature in the social and cultural life of the country in the sixties of the last century, one of the most distinctive elements in the political thought of the sixties and seventies of the 19th century—an inevitable product of the new phenomenon—was the definite demand for a representative and responsible government of Home Rule, voiced among others by W. C. Bonnerjee, Ananda Mohan Bose and Kristodas Pal. The last named wrote in an article in the Hindu Patriot: "Home Rule for India ought to be our cry, and it ought to be based upon the same constitutional basis that is recognised in the colonies." In the context of the change in the direction of increasingly progressive ideas held by the newly-sprung educated middle-class, need was felt for the formulation of a more representative political association. The British Indian Association had done and was still doing splendid service, but it was largely dominated by the well-placed and aristocratic elements. The desire for establishing a more representative, progressive and central
institution, linking up the educated middle-classes of Calcutta with those of the mofussil led to the foundation of the Indian League on September 25, 1875. The Indian League and the Indian Association founded on July 26, 1876 which followed and superseded the former as a more effective political organisation, mark the advent of a new phase in the evolution of political thought.

The primary objects of the Indian Association, as defined by Surendranath were (1) the creation of a strong body of public opinion in the country; (2) the unification of the Indian races and peoples under the basis of common political interests and aspiration; (3) the promotion of friendly feeling between Hindus and Muhammedans and lastly (4) the Inclusion of the masses in the great public movements of the day. In his opinion "The Indian Association supplied a real need. It soon focussed the public spirit of the middle class and became the centre of the leading representatives of the educated community of Bengal". It roused to an unprecedented pitch the political feelings throughout the country over the issue of the age qualification of candidates at the I.C.S. Examination. It was important not only for what it was, but also for what it did. It strengthened the bond of unity bringing the people and provinces of the vast country to such close quarters as had never been experienced before. It did much to broaden the basis of political activities as well as the outlook from which they emanated. Prior to 1870 no sustained efforts were made with a view to organising public opinion on a large country-wide scale. Referring to pre-1870 politics wrote Bipin Chandra Pal: "Politics did not involve in those days any sufferings or sacrifices. The political authorities in the country did not take our infant political movement seriously. They saw no menace to their authority in it. The whole thing was more or less, a pastime, though certainly the more serious-minded of our youthful intellectuals did not consciously purpose it as such". From after 1870's, the influence of the educated middle-class began to be more increasingly and effectively manifest.

The progress in the direction of political ideas in Bengal of this period is linked up with the reaction caused by a series of unfortunate decisions of the Government of Lytton, and the equally, if not more unfortunate, reactions of the European communities against attempts at partial removal of discrimination in the matter of criminal law and justice. The Vernacular Press, the Arms and Licence Acts of 1878 on the one hand and the organised opposition of the Europeans to the Albert Bill (1882-1883) on the other, carrying it to excessive and even absurd lengths, did much to intensify political opposition of the Indians, as a whole, and of Bengal, in particular, to the demoralising nature of foreign rule. Another event, following in quick succession, viz. the incarceration of Surendranath (1883) on a charge of contempt of court, was yet another link in strengthening the bond of political unity.

To keep up with the trend of progress the Indian Association felt the urge of intensifying nationalist efforts on an all-India scale and accordingly
convened an All-India National Conference, the first of its kind to be summoned till then (December 1883). Its object, as Surendranath explained, was "to bring the national forces, so to speak, into a focus; and if possible, to concentrate them upon some common object calculated to advance the public good." Within a couple of years of the first session of the National Conference, the Indian National Congress, destined to outshine it, held its first session in Bombay (December 1885) with Mr. W. C. Bonnerjee as its President.

The sustained work put forth by the Indian Association for ten years at a stretch (1875-1885) towards the creation of a well-defined public opinion towards political questions and the unification of the Indian people on a common political platform facilitated the task of the promoters of the Indian National Congress. The unanimous election of W. C. Bonnerjee to the presidency of the first session of the Congress was partly a recognition of the role of Bengal in Indian politics. While in England, as early as 1867, young Bonnerjee addressed the East India Association, emphasising the need of introducing "representative and responsible government" in India. Later in his Presidential address Mr. Bonnerjee anticipated the off-repeated British gibe of 'microscopic minority' and claimed for the Congress an entirely representative character. As Times of India (December 29, 1885) reported: "It was true, that judged from the standard of the House of Commons, they were not representatives of the people of India......... But if community of sentiments, community of feelings and community of wants enable any one to speak on behalf of others, they were representatives of the people of India."

A survey of the origin and working of the political ideas and associations in Bengal of the period 1837-1885 form the birth of the Zamindary Association to the rise of the Indian National Congress would reveal the continuous predominance of the Western liberal thought. The leaders of the political thought of this period were but intellectual children of the liberals of the west. They thought in terms of the permanence of the British rule: the ideal of national self-determination did not find whole-hearted acceptance with most of them. The concept of an India united on the secular foundations of economic and political interests no doubt appealed to their imagination, but it is doubtful if they fully grasped the philosophical and sociological implications of the concepts of liberty and equality. Their approach towards these concepts was, however, more progressive than their political views. They propagated comparatively bold economic theories which carried them far ahead of the Western Liberal dogma of Laissez-faire. They freely advocated that it was clearly the duty of the government to extend protection to indigenous industries and to help, in as many ways as possible, all round economic development of the country.

Such a survey, in itself, is important in as far as it records the political activities in Bengal during a formative period of her history. But more
important still is an enquiry into the nature and trends of political ideas emanating from representative thinkers of the age and destined to leave indelible impression on the succeeding years. Between 1885 and 1905 political thought and theories in Bengal and of India underwent a remarkable transformation. Much effort and the effort of many contributed to the growth of a new outlook, conveniently described as the New Spirit. Curiously enough, the background of this changed outlook was, in the main, the work of one who was not actively associated with political movements. He was Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894), by profession a government employee and by conviction a free-thinker and political philosopher. Without denying or belittling the importance of the contributions of the generation belonging to half a century that intervened between the death of Ram Mohan Roy (1833) and the birth of the Indian National Congress (1885), it is possible to claim that no one had helped to bring about a transformation in the political, intellectual and spiritual outlook of his countrymen more deeply and decisively than Bankim Chandra. In the Bengal that he lived in, the prevalent political spirit was based on a somewhat servilely English model. Leaders of those days could not think beyond representative assemblies and Legislative Councils. But politics had outgrown that stage. Need was felt for a programme bolder and more radical than the Anglocentric one hitherto pursued on the model of gradual constitutional progress. A bold programme can emanate from a bold thought and it is to the formulation of this thought that Bankim rendered the most distinctive contribution. He provided awakening and stimulating influence for the national mind. He gave to nationalism an inspiring slogan and to nationalists a militant programme and an unblurred vision. The leaders of the Indian political thought, beginning with Ram Mohan, found in the west their main, though not exclusive source of inspiration. It is not surprising, as such, that the earlier political efforts should have been directed towards reconstructing society and government in accordance with theories propagated by the Liberal school of the west. But with Bankim regarded as 'the greatest figure of the second phase of the Bengal Renaissance,' dates the dawn of a new consciousness which was not content with merely thinking in terms of imitating the west, but attempted to discover and re-interpret our own past heritage and to effect a synthesis between the East and the West, thereby providing Indian thought-movement with a foundation not entirely borrowed from extraneous sources, but solid and stable on account of the roots going deep into her own forgotten but splendid past. One of the first two graduates of the Calcutta University, Bankim came into close contact with the master-minds of the western political thought—Bacon, Rousseau, Kant, Hume, Bentham, Mill, Darwin and Comte, besides others. We are told by the author of Bankim-Prasanga that he continued the habit of diligent and sustained study even after he started on his career as a government official. He thus came to imbibe the very best that
the modern western political discourses as well as the ancient Indian political philosophy were capable of imparting—leading to a blending between Rationalism and reverence for India's past. It is possible to discover in his writings the influence, to some extent, of utilitarianism propounded by Bentham and Mill, or of Comte's exposition of Religion of Humanity. But Bankim's thinking was by no means tied to the moorings of western political philosophy. His deep study of the ancient literature opened out to him the vision of a new and, what he was convinced, a better and more pervasive region of thought and ideology. The teachings of Gita moulded his outlook and convictions more powerfully than the exposition of western philosophers. His zeal for the concept of Lokasamrajaha as elucidated in the Gita took him far beyond the scope of Benthamite philosophy. He carried the doctrine of manvasyaptita to a much higher plane than the ideal of 'the greatest good for the greatest number' could possibly reach. In his view love of humanity was synonymous with devotion to God.

Bankim's stress on Dharma, as he understood it, led him to lay emphasis on the role of society or community in the life of a people. Community, and not government, in his opinion, was the real law-giver and protector. As such, he was unwilling to place much value on efforts towards political reform without first invigorating the people with a sense of loyalty to community and love of fellow-men. He had little or no faith in government as an agency for promoting general welfare. He had little sympathy or support for political agitation as carried on by a few educated men on western technique. He felt that social sentiment, roused and organised through an appeal to reason and conscience of the individual, was far more important than compulsion by law enforced through governmental machinery. The victim of his attack was not the government so much as the traits and defects of his own countrymen. His numerous essays published in the Banga-darshan (1873-1875) show clearly that the unlettered mass of his countrymen and not the educated few were the objects of his deep interest. He felt unhappy about the widening gulf between the western-educated few and the unlettered millions in the country. He did not spare the Babus who, completely oblivious of the grave social and economic tensions threatening the integrity and organic unity of the society, lived apart, in a carefree manner, in a world of their own. He was convinced that no good could result from approaching the ruling authorities with the beggar's bowl. The moderate policy of mendicancy was ridiculed and mercilessly exposed by him in loka-rasayana. Nor did he believe that abuse of the English any how was the highest form of politics. He wanted his countrymen to rely more on their own power and less on the favour of the ruling class.

It need not, however, be supposed that Bankim singled out the lapses of his countrymen as solely responsible for their sufferings and degradation. He was painfully conscious of the basic evils of foreign rule, even though he was aware of some practical benefits conferred by the
British on India. He condemned the imperial arrogance of the British and the deadweight of bureaucracy under which the country was supposed to be governed. That he had no illusions about the British Raj is also evident from his comic discourse on Bransonism composed in the days of Hibbert Bill controversy.

It is hardly a profitable speculation to ask if Bankim was a politician in the accepted sense of the term; obviously he was more than that. An enquiry as to what extent he followed the views of Mill, Bentham, Comte and other western political philosophers in so far as his concept of liberty, individual rights, relation between individual and community, nature and scope of functions of state and Religion are concerned, can be little more than an academic excursion. It is idle for critics to suggest that his pilgrimage was a retrograde step from the heights of socialism to the valley of nationalism. It is futile and unbalanced judgment to dub him as a Hindu reactionary or landator temporis acti.

But it is necessary to examine at least one important aspect of Bankim's philosophy in so far as it relates to patriotism. It has been claimed that his greatest achievement was that he raised patriotism to the status and dignity of a religion — 'the religion of patriotism' as Aurobindo describe it. Dr R. C. Majumdar echoes the sentiment as he claims that Bankim converted 'patriotism into religion and religion into patriotism.' It would be doing Bankim less justice than he deserves if we accept the suggestion that with him patriotism and religion were synonymous. His love for his country was a partial manifestation of his zeal for an all pervasive love of humanity which transcended all artificial barriers of race and geography. Bankim, as such, was more a humanist than a patriot. He viewed with grave concern the cult of patriotism as practised in the west and was by no means agreeable to its importation to India. There was nothing parochial about him or his views. The best Dharma, according to him, was undoubtedly love for all animate beings, but as this is difficult to practise on account of the imperfect state of human civilisation, swadesh-praj should be accepted as the highest possible religion.

To many Bankim was the apostle of neo-Hinduism and the source of religious revivalism. Such views are but half truths and hence misleading. Others have sought in his writings the source and justification of militant nationalism or political extremism. Writing in 1907 Aurobindo described him as 'the inspirer and political guru' of the 'new spirit which is leading the nation to resurgence and independence.' While it is to be admitted that Aurobindo and his compatriots were largely influenced by their understanding of Bankim's image of Anandamath, there were, as shown by Dr. Amalendu Tripathi, in an illuminating article, striking differences between Bankim's philosophy and the cult of the Extremists and that 'the idea of Bhavani, the patron-saint of Shivaji, and perhaps with Parthenon, the temple of Athena, for whom the Athenians fought against the Persians.'
Leaving apart the Extremists, the Bande Mataram song, now justifiably a national song of India, had an irresistible appeal for all. Through that immortal song, sustained by a rich imagery, Bankim held up the vision and shape of a great Divine and Material power, robed in ennobling beauty, full of majesty, grace and power which not only captured the imagination of his countrymen but made ineffaceable impression on their minds and thoughts and taught them to worship the motherland as a permanent deity of national adoration.

Commenting on the tremendous transformation accomplished by this song in the attitude and thought of the people, Aurobindo wrote in the issue of Bandematram dated April 16, 1907.

"It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote his great song and few listened: but in a sudden moment of awakening from long delusions the people of Bengal looked round for the truth and in a fated moment some body 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. Once that vision had come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple had been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."

While Bankim's ideology has been interpreted in different ways and almost all conceivable labels from communalism to socialism have been requisitioned for the purpose, it is heartening, in the midst of murmurs of criticism, faltering with doubts and hesitation, to listen to the high-pitched voice of certainty—the voice of one who initiated himself and hundreds of others in the mantra of Bandematram:

"As when posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a peace-hunting politician nor the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does, and just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him, able to create a language, a literature and a nation."

The seeds of neo-politics based on nationalism sown by Bankim Chandra found in Bengal of the latter half of the 19th century a congenial soil and were, before long, impregnated with the ideal of spirituality by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who, like his senior contemporary, without being a political figure, had to his credit, remarkable contribution to the growth and development of political consciousness and national awakening among his countrymen. A high-priest of national resurgence, a prophet of the socialist order, dedicated to the service of the low and the down-trodden and a vehement denouncer of the politics of beggary, the great Humanist and Vedantist missionary was the source of inspiration to many active workers in the political field. One is not likely to
accept the suggestion that 'the Swamiji's primary motivation was the uplift of the masses and that to achieve this he had once sought to form a revolutionary group to overthrow foreign rule'.

But there will hardly be any hesitation in agreeing to the claim that Vivekananda was the fountain-head of aspiration for a new emphasis "on individualism, on persons, in his attempt to harness energism to their thoughts and activities." More spontaneous still will be the acceptance of Romain Rolland's observation: "If the generation that followed, saw three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi, if India today has definitely taken part in the collective action of organised masses, it is due to the intitial shock, to the mighty Lazarus. Come forth! of the Message from Madras."

The gospel of nationalism preached by Raj Narain Bose and sustained by his followers, the teachings of Bankim Chandra, the exhortations of Keshab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, the rapidly growing abstract love of liberty, a passionate desire for freedom from bondage of all sorts,—social, economic and political,—and an innate hatred of foreign rule made their influence steadily felt on the minds of the ever-widening circle of Bengal intelligentsia from towards the close of the last century. It was a feat of noble gesture and an instance of supreme self-abnegation on the part of the sponsors of the Indian National Conference to have merged the Conference into the Indian National Congress which held its first session in Bombay almost immediately after the second session of the National Conference had been over in Calcutta. Soon, however, it became evident to the discerning political leaders of Bengal that the Congress held out little prospect of the fulfilment of their aspirations. It did not take them long to be disillusioned. The Congress appeared to them to be little more than an organ for petitioning the government or for drafting pious resolutions which were greeted with deliberate indifference on the part of the ruling authorities, as was clear from the lamentably inadequate reforms introduced in 1892. It also seemed to them that the Congress made little or no efforts to develop mass contact to the extent that extent that was desirable. Such attitude and activities (or rather lack of activities) came as a rude shock and disappointment to the widely-awakened political conscience of Bengal with a much older record of political ideas and activities to its credit. It is, as such, little surprising that Aswini Kumar Datta of Barisal condemned the Congress session of 1897 as a "three days' tamasha." More vehement still had been the attack hurled earlier by Sri Aurobindo in the columns of Indu Prakash. "The Congress in Bengal" he wrote, "is dying of consumption; annually its proportions sink into greater insignificance, its leaders, the Bonerjis and Banerjis and Lal Mohon Ghoshes have climbed into the rarefied atmosphere of the Legislative Council and lost all hold on the imagination of the young men. The desire for a nobler and more inspiring patriotism is growing more intense."
Apart from Aswini Kumar and Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak too drew pointed attention to the need of supplanting the beggarly attitude hitherto indulged in by a bold, assertive and radical programme with the object of attaining Swaraj or self-government. And very soon Bengal and Maharashtra were drawn inseparably closer together by ties of common political outlook and aspirations.

In its early years extending over two decades since its inception the Congress broke no new grounds. Its leaders clung to prayer and petition as remedies or for the solution of their grievances. By and large, they could think of no radical or fundamental deviation from the frame-work of the British Indian administration. With the exception of a limited few, they were unable to grasp the basic clash of economic interests between alien rule and nationalist aspirations. Referring to the year 1887 wrote Bipin Chandra Pal: "We all believed that England was conscientiously and deliberately working for the political emancipation of India. We believed that she would take us up by the hand and gradually set us in our proper place among the nations of the world. We believed that by the gradual expansion of the principles and organisation of self-government, that had been introduced by Lord Ripon, by the reform and expansion of the Legislative Councils, by the introduction of large number of people of this country into our public services, by opening out to us the gates of the military services, by granting us the charter of free citizenship and investing us with the right of organising national militia,—we hope, we believe in 1887, that by these means England would gradually train us up to become a free nation and take our place among the free states of the world........... and we believed that if only we depended on England for our political emancipation, followed her guidance, accepted her discipline, placed ourselves in her hands for our training, then the day would come when under her guidance, and with her help, we would be able to realise our highest, noblest and deepest political aspirations and be a free nation among the nations of the world." As late as 1902, as President of the Indian National Congress Surendranath Banerjea proclaimed: "We plead for the permanence of British rule in India." He emphasised the constitutional nature of the movement sponsored by the Congress and said, "In the constitutional struggle in which we are engaged, we need the co-operation of Englishmen and the sympathies of civilised mankind. It is England which had created in us those political aspirations, the fruition of which we now claim ...... we have no higher aspiration that we should be admitted into the great confederacy of self-governing states, of which England is the august mother. We recognise that the journey towards the destined goal must necessarily be slow and the blessed consummation can only be attained after prolonged preparation and laborious apprenticeship."  

An analysis of their political creed would show that what they were interested in was the fulfilment of four basic political demands which may be summarised as "(1) Indianisation of the services; (2) expansion of
Legislative Councils; (3) removal of restriction on the press and (4) the extension of the rule of law by taking such steps as the separation of the judiciary from the executive."

Apart from holding comparatively circumscribed political views inherent in implicit faith in British Liberalism, the leaders of the early Congress were also averse to discussion of matters which, in their opinion, were not of an all-India character. To redress these deficiencies, the leaders of the progressive political ideas and movements in Bengal intensified their efforts through provincial conferences. Since 1895 such conferences were regularly held in the district head-quarters, so as to bring the leaders and the masses closer together. In 1897 the third session of the Bengal Provincial Conference, held at Nator, took a momentous step by deciding to change the medium of speeches and discussions from English to Bengali. The important decision, calculated to give the conference an increasingly representative and popular character, enabling a larger number of people to participate in its deliberations, was primarily the work of Rabindranath Tagore.

Like Bankim, Rabindranath wielded his pen with a view to stimulating national resurgence. Like him he contributed immensely to the political awakening of his countrymen without identifying himself with any group of active political participants. A versatile genius is invariably greeted with acclamation which often taken the shape of a general or even sweeping adoration. It is not unoften uncritical and, on account of this, is incapable of properly isolating and emphasising the separate trends which go to the making of an integrated personality. In the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that our adoration for the poet and the creative artist has blinded us to the need and importance of enquiring into the extent to which Rabindranath's political ideas have entered into the consciousness of the Indian intelligentsia. This is not the place to investigate in details into the stages of the evolution of Tagore's political philosophy. But so far as our period is concerned, it is necessary to emphasise some general trends of his political ideas. Tagore placed the greatest emphasis on the dignity, freedom and equality of the individual, but at the same time emphasised the obligation of the individual to the society of which he is an integral part. He was consistently inclined to invest sovereignty in society rather than in state. He upheld the view that the government which governs the least is of all governments the best. He made vehement attacks on the reactionary policy of the government and the attitude of the white arrogance from which it proceeded. He accepted the western concept of democracy with its attendant principle of popular sovereignty, which Ranke describes as "the perpetually mobile ferment of the modern world", but took care to add to it the individual's obligation to serve the society. He was convinced that our political subjection was merely an outward expression of an inner or mental weakness. Self-reliance, he said, was the only effective means which could lead India to her destined goal. In his opinion it was far more desirable that
we should take out the weeds from our own field than wait and beg at the
door of the rulers in England. Constructive nation-building services rather
than political agitation would serve the interest of India better—he said.

The political efforts of the Provincial Conferences on the one hand and
the sustained province-wide activities of the Indian Association in the social
field on the other, kept alive the progressive character of the movement in
Bengal. It found expression in a vigorous agitation conducted on behalf of the
labour employed in the tea-gardens of Assam, exposed to the merciless
exploitation of the plantation-owners. Journals and periodicals like Bangadarshan,
Sadharani, Bandhab, Samadarshi, Bharati, Sanjibani, Hitavadi, Sadhana,
Amrita Bazar Patrika, New India and Bande Mataram carried the message of
political, social and economic liberation to the doors of the general public.

Slowly but steadily in Bengal the unappeased political aspirations of the
progressive school led to the formulation of a new and well-defined approach
called by the name of the New Spirit. It was based on the gospel of self-help
and self-reliance eloquently expressed by Rabindranath in his famous discourse
on Swadeshi Samaj. "Let our rulers govern our country in their own way", he
wrote, "but we must stand on our own legs and do things ourselves according
to our choice and needs." Bipin Chandra Pal claimed that 'it called out the spirit
of India to come to its own, to stand upon its inner strength and to put forth
its native efforts for the realisation of its true native life.'

In its broader aspects, the New Spirit implied the rejection of the old-style
mendicant methods of prayer, protest and petition, the grant of swaraj or
independence which alone could mean the fulfilment of the nationalist aspira-
tions of the people, reorganisation of education on national lines, the adoption
of an economic programme based on the boycott of British and other foreign
goods and the promotion of Swadeshi articles. Its political technique was that
of Passive Resistance. In elucidating this technique Bipin Chandra wrote : "If
you ask me to state in general terms what are the methods and the means, what
are the instruments that will further this ideal of Swaraj in this country, my reply
shall be that these means and methods are included under what is known in
political science as the methods of Passive Resistance. It means not resistance
that is not non-active but resistance that is not aggressive. Passive resistance
is not active but non-aggressive resistance. We stand within the limits of the
law that we have still in the country. We shall respect that law as long as the
law shall respect our primary rights which constitute the authority of every
government—whether that government be a despotic government or constitu-
tional government—rights which no government can create and which therefore
no government can destroy. As long as the laws of the government shall respect
our primary rights of all life and person, of property and similar primary rights,
so long we propose ourselves to be within the bounds of law; and passive
resistance means resistance offered by a people from within the limits of such a law." 85

Sri Aurobindo, another exponent of this technique, explained its main features as follows: "The first principle of passive resistance, which the new school have placed in the forefront of their programme, is to make administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which shall help either British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it—unless and until the conditions are changed in the manner and to the extent demanded by the people . . . . We are dissatisfied with the fiscal and economical conditions of British rule in India, with the foreign exploitation of the country, the continual bleeding of its resources, the chronic famine and rapid impoverishment which result, the refusal of the Government to protect the people and their industries . . . . We are dissatisfied also with the conditions under which education is imparted in this country, its calculated poverty and insufficiency, its anti-national character, its subordination to the Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and the inculcation of loyalty. 86

In referring to Sri Aurobindo's discourse on Passive Resistance which appeared in the columns of Bande Mataram in April 1907 we are obviously guilty of over-stepping the limits and scope of this chapter. Our purpose in tracing down to 1907 the trends of the New Thought as reflected in the writings of Bipin Chandra, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath, among others, is to emphasise that the New Spirit was more than a mere counter-challenge to the specific Curzonian move in regard to the partition of Bengal. Just when theory and practice alike seemed to presage a new path and programme, came, largely to block its fulfilment, the challenge of imperialist reaction. The New Thought was more than a reply to that ill-conceived, sinister move of British imperialism. It had a much earlier beginning. It was but the consummation of an outlook and programme which had its origin in the radical transformation of thought-pattern initiated, in general accord with the genius of the people and the tradition of the country, by Bankim Chandra and Swami Vivekananda (to name the most outstanding among the authors of this transformation). Since the thirties of the last century the intellectuals had begun to see the vision of a new horizon promising the dawn of liberalism and constitutional reforms. In the sixties and seventies their thoughts attained maturity within the pattern of western liberal ideology. The eighties and nineties saw radical transformation of political ideas and ideals, the liberation from the fetters which half a century of liberalism had imposed and the birth of a refreshingly vigorous outlook based on the ideals of self-reliance, 'religion of patriotism', Swaraj and the overthrow of all sources of extraneous interference, political, social and economic.

It will amount to a denial of historical justice to characterise the new outlook as a mere phase of Hindu Revivalism or Traditionalism. It is of
course possible to detect elements of weakness in the new cult. Its political philosophy made its adherents ardent advocates of the doctrine of political equality without making of them whole-hearted converts to the complementary doctrine of economic equality with all its logical implications. Their disapproval of the glaring economic disparities and of exploitation of man by man was little more than theoretical, for socialism, as conceived by them, was partly an academic approach, partly a sentimental attitude. The criticism that "their ideals did not form a consistent whole; they were never logically worked out as a systematic political thought. Often they varied from one individual to another and in the case of some individuals from one period of time to another...... They were absorbed in the immediate question of evolving a strategy and tactics for conducting political agitation with the purpose of attaining freedom from foreign domination" cannot be entirely refuted. On the whole, however, their positive contribution to the evolution of political ideas easily outweighs their limitations. Their philosophical defence of the right of national self-determination is a remarkable contribution to the development of political thought in the country. In 1905 Bengal pointed to an invigorating political doctrine, a dynamic programme and a glorious vision, which though largely deriving its inspiration from the past, was alive to the progressive tendencies of the age; but what is more important, was destined to contribute effectively to the fulfilment of the India's aspiration at no very distant date in future.

REFERENCES

5. Raja Ram Mohan Roy: English Works, p. 784.
11. Ibid, p. 266.
15. Works, p. xxiii.
16. Asiatic Intelligence, April 1830.
17. Petition of Ram Mohan Roy to the Rt. Hon’ble Lord Minto, dated April 2, 1890.
19. "What?" replied he (upon being asked why he had celebrated by illuminations, by an elegant dinner ...... and by a speech composed and delivered in English by himself. .... on the arrival of important news of the success of
the Spanish patriots), "Ought I to be insensible to the suffering of my fellow-creatures wherever they are, or however connected by interests, religious or languages? Edinburg Magazine, September 1823.

20. Quoted in Modern Review, October 1929.
21. Quoted in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 79.
22. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 85. The following couplets occur in the poem:
   "Land of the Gods and lofty name;  
   Land of the fair and beauty's spell.  
   Land of the bard's of might fame,  
   My native land! for e'er farewell!"

26. Quoted from India Gazette, April 12, 1833 in B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 100-101.
29. B. B. Majumdar (op. cit., F. N. p. 114) draws attention to an article signed by 'K' (apparently Krishnamohan Banerjee) published in the Bengal Spectator, 1842 wherein the writer put up a convincing case for opening judicial and fiscal offices to competitive examinations.
30. Even a leader like Raj Narain Bose, 'the pedagogue of Midnapore', widely respected for his sober judgment, speaking of the Derozians wrote, "The light from the west had turned their heads."
32. An article of which the extract quoted below forms a part deserves more than a cursory notice (quoted in B. B. Majumdar—op. cit. p. 90-91). "The Government of India (under the English) is purely aristocratical; the people have no voice in the council of legislature: they have no hand in framing the laws which regulate their civil conduct. We need not expatiate on the monopoly of the state service, the law's delay, the insolence of office, the heavy expenses of Government, the retirement from India of all those who acquire wealth, and the enormous taxation to which the country is subjected—evil too well-known in India... The violent means by which foreign supremacy has been established, and the entire alienation of the people of the soil from any share in the government, nay, even from all offices of trust and power, are circumstances which no commercial, no political benefits can authorize or justify."
33. B. B. Majumdar, op. cit. p. 79.
34. "Many of Young Bengal's true limitations were not peculiarly its own but shared by our entire Renaissance. The educated community of the 19th century failed to understand the exploiting character of the alien British rule in India, looking mainly at its immediate benefits; the protagonists of our 'awakening', had little contact with or understanding of the toiling masses who lived in a world apart; the obsession with Hindu traditions and life kept at a distance the community of our Muslim fellow-citizens. Such aspects of our Renaissance heritage have seriously handicapped the democratic progress of the country." S. C. Sarkar, Derozio and Young Bengal, Studies in Bengal Renaissance, Jadavpore 1958, p. 30-31.
35. R. C. Majumdar. History and Culture of the Indian People, Vol. X, Part II, p. 444. For a detailed study of the discussions held under the auspices of the

42. The two Presidency Associations of Bombay and Madras were established mainly through the British Indian Association. Soon after its foundation, the British Indian Association in order to secure national support for its petition to Parliament on the occasion of the renewal of the E.I.Co's charter sought to enlist the cooperation of the leading citizens of Bombay and Madras, and to induce them to establish similar organisations, to work as branch societies of the parent body in Calcutta. Thus the initiative of the British Indian Association led to the establishment of the two Presidency Association with exactly similar objects and rules. But also the Presidency Association of Bombay and Madras agreed to work in close cooperation with the British Indian Association and to lend full support to the latter's petition to Parliament, they refused to be affiliated as Branch Societies and insisted on maintaining their independent status. This was not taken by the British Indian Association with a bad grace.—Sujata Ghosh, Bengal Past & Present, Vol. 77, Part II, Serial No. 144.
45. A. C. Majumdar, Indian National Evolution, p. 7.
46. Indian Nationalism: Principles and Personalities, p. 94.
47. Sir Charles Trevelyan, On the Education of the People of India (1838) p. 197.
51. C. H. Heimansh's observation (Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform p. 64) that 'the Indian League was the first political body in India to seek more than casual ties with political groups outside the province' does scant justice to the outlook and activities of the Indian Association.
53. Ibid, p. 42.
55. In a speech delivered in pre-congress days Surendranath said: 'Is India's greatness possible unless we are thoroughly welded together into a compact mass? And the whole of India comes to be bound in this treble chain of love, sympathy and esteem, the day of India's greatness would not be distant.' Speeches, p. 2-3.
57. Sri Aurabiado, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, p. 7.
59. p. 216.
60. Dharmatattva, Chap. VIII, Saririki Vritti, Chap. XXII, Atmapritti, Vividha-prabandha, Part II, Chittasuddhi.
61. Vividha-prabandha, Bangadesher Krisak O Lokasikha.
62. Lokaharyas—Igraj-strotra; Babu.
63. Kamalakander Patra 2—Politics.
64. Vividha-prabandha—Bharatvarsher Swadhinata O Paradhinata.
65. Vividha-prabandha—Bangla Sasaner Kal.
66. Lukarashayya.
68. Vividha-prabandha—Bharat-kalanka; Dharmaattva, Champ. XXIV, Swadeshpriti.
69. Dharmattva, Chaps. XXIV, XXVIII.
70. Bandemataram, April 16, 1907.
73. A suggestion has been offered to the effect that Bankim's political philosophy which found its first expression through discourses on 'Samya, communism and the political philosophy of the founders of the First International', at a later stage, underwent a sort of transformation when he veered round the theory that the liberation of the country could be accomplished by a 'puritanically trained and secretly armed guerilla band' only (Sri Gopal Haldar, Revolutionary Terrorism, Studies in Bengal Renaissance, p. 231). Such a suggestion presupposes Bankim's acquaintance with the teachings Karl Marx whose Das Kapital was not translated into English when Bankim wrote his discourse on Samya and takes for granted what may be termed at best a hypothesis, by no means proved, that the author of Anandamath was out to prove that the country's liberation could be effected by a chosen band of selfless workers alone.
74. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, p. 41.
77. Romain Rolland-The Life of Vivekananda, p. 125.
78. Kashub Chunder Sen was not a political propagandist; but his personal indictment of certain moral results of British rule, particularly in regard to temperance, which he brought before crowded English audiences during his visit to the country, reacted upon India and helped to a large extent to undermine the superior moral plea upon which the British rulers of the country sought to justify their position."—Bipin Chandra Pal, Writings and Speeches, p. 174.
79. Published from Bombay serially from July 16 to August 27, 1894 and reproduced in Sri Aurobindo—Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, p. 38.
82. K. P. Karunakaran (ed.), Modern Indian Political Tradition, Introduction, Delhi, p. 12.
86. The Doctrine of Passive Resistance, p. 36.