Part One

The First Generation: Early Nationalists
1876–1904
In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the first generation of Indian nationalists emerged in British India. During this formative phase of nationalist politics, British liberalism was seized upon by a relatively small number of English-speaking, articulate political spokesmen who organized regional associations and, in 1885, the Indian National Congress. It is to their credit that the steady flame of liberalism still burns in India today.

Their notion of the good polity and the good society was shaped by their idea of what existed in Great Britain. They wanted the same rights, in good time, that citizens of the Mother Country enjoyed. They wanted a parliament where representatives of the people could decide crucial questions of the day. At the same time, they believed in the legitimacy of British rule in India. More than one claimed he was loyal to the Raj to his backbone. They saw no contradiction between the aim of representative government and their faith in British rule. Their leading ideologues, Dadabhai Naoroji, R. C. Dutt, and G. K. Gokhale, marshalled evidence criticizing the drain of Indian resources to Britain, citing a disparity between Indian and British economic interests. They seemed to think that, ideally, British imperial and Indian interests were perfectly compatible. Only late in the nineteenth century did some begin to see the logic of nationalism: that only self-rule offered the possibility of eventually fulfilling national self-interest.

The most successful of the Western-educated, mainly professional men of Bengal in the generation following the revolt of 1857 formed a small, interconnected elite based in Calcutta. The full complement of those who participated in important official institutions and who domi-
nated Indian political and cultural organizations during the period might total a few hundred.

The men I have called Bengali political leaders were almost uniformly Western-educated professional men of a high-caste Hindu background with many particularistic and cross-cutting ties to each other. They represented, inter alia, the first generation of graduates of Calcutta University, and a significant proportion had then furthered their education in England. They felt that because of certain processes at work in the social order, they had been chosen to speak for all their countrymen. They were the "natural leaders," not a hereditary aristocracy but educated middle-class men who represented the public interest whether or not they were elected. They did run in early elections for Bengal Legislative Council seats, for the Calcutta Corporation, the senate of Calcutta University, and local government bodies and often won. However, after the Morley-Minto reforms in the early twentieth century (see chapters 3–4), elections became increasingly difficult and contested. By then, their golden age was over.

They also described themselves as the "influential" men in Indian society. This meant to them that they could get interviews with officials both in India and England. In some cases these interviews and assistance from members of the House of Commons enabled them to make minor accomplishments: the Vernacular Press Act of 1878, Lord Lytton's attempt to limit extreme statements in the Indian press, was repealed; local self-government bills were passed; the Bengal Tenancy Act (see below, p. 31) was passed; the legislative councils were reformed in 1892 and 1909, although not satisfactorily; and the age for the ICS examination was raised. But they did not fully understand that their positions of influence were greatly dependent on the largesse of British officials. In this period, and even later, the recognition of the Raj was forthcoming for politicians who believed in the norms of restraint, tolerance, order, and slow political change.

This group included those who served in the ICS, all judges and practitioners on the Calcutta High Court, Bengali representatives in the legislative councils, the 177 Indians who served in the senate of Calcutta University between 1857 and 1904, leading professors, and businessmen. The total number is drastically reduced by the fact that many of these men held three, four, or five of these positions, often si-
multaneously. A thorough study of the late-nineteenth-century establishment would consider the career patterns, interconnections, activity, and ideas of all these men. For the purposes of this brief account, 13 have been chosen (see table).

Of these 13, 10 are “kulin” (or highest ranking) Brahmans and Kayasthas, one is from a prominent Kayastha family, the last Hindu most likely also high caste, and the Muslim a Syed. None came from extraordinarily wealthy families, although most grew up in comfortable circumstances. Unlike the wealthy members of the British Indian Association, who were from Calcutta, several of these men came from East Bengal and from outlying districts in West Bengal. But their academic and professional achievements were made in Calcutta: 8 attended Presidency College, Calcutta, and 7 had further education in Britain at Cambridge, London University, or one of the Inns of Court. Many achieved academic distinction.

At least half met as young men and in some cases formed lifelong friendships. Ameer Ali knew Surendranath Banerjea and probably most of the others, but in his own memoirs and in the accounts of his life that have so far appeared he seems set apart. He mentioned his contact with Europeans, but no particular work with Bengalis in Calcutta. Many of the others often worked together, the similarity of caste, education, and career pattern contributing to their connections, cooperation, similar outlook and ideology. The Indian elite in Calcutta during the later nineteenth century, although always divided by factionalism, was a small, relatively homogeneous group with multiple personal and professional ties. Their success was a combination of ascription and achievement, with the latter predominating. S. N. Mukherjee and others have described the slow rise of men from lower castes into the elite of Calcutta, but high-caste Hindus clearly continued to dominate. Whether they actively prevented the rise of low-caste Hindus and Muslims is still not evident; assertions have been made that they did.

Throughout the period, Bengali political leaders played an important role in forming and running nationalist political organizations and in agitating for the redress of Indian grievances. Because Calcutta was the capital of British India, Bengali leaders often tried to give and succeeded in giving matters affecting Bengal an all-India significance.

There is one other vital generational theme running through the late
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Academic Achievements</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ali, Ameer</td>
<td>Syed Shiah</td>
<td>Hooghly College, Inner Temple (called to bar, 1873)</td>
<td>state scholarship to England</td>
<td>barrister, magistrate, Calcutta High Court judge, writer</td>
<td>founder &amp; sec. Central National Mohammedan Assoc.; Calcutta High Court judge; member Legal Committee, Privy Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Banerjea, Surendranath</td>
<td>Brahman—K*</td>
<td>Calcutta U., University College, London (?)</td>
<td>college prizeman every year; passed ICS exam</td>
<td>ICS; college lecturer, journalist, politician</td>
<td>Congress pres. (1895, 1902) BLC (1883, 1895, 1897, 1900, 1901)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Banerji, Guru Das</td>
<td>Brahman—K</td>
<td>Presidency College (1865)</td>
<td>gold medal in mathematics (1864)</td>
<td>legal practitioner; Calcutta High Court judge</td>
<td>Calcutta High Court judge; vice-chancellor, Calcutta University; Indian Universities Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Basu, Bhupendranath</td>
<td>Kayastha—K</td>
<td>Presidency College (1879)</td>
<td></td>
<td>solicitor, Calcutta High Court</td>
<td>Congress pres. (1914) BLC (1903, 1905, 1906, 1907)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>College/Institution</td>
<td>Academic Achievements</td>
<td>Professional Achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bonnerjee, W.C.</td>
<td>Brahman-K</td>
<td>Middle Temple</td>
<td>R. J. Jeejeebhaini</td>
<td>barrister, Calcutta High Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1844–1906)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>scholarship to go to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>London to prepare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>for bar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bose, Ananda Mohan</td>
<td>Kayastha-K</td>
<td>Presidency College;</td>
<td>First Cambridge</td>
<td>barrister; tea investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1847–1906)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1863–1868) Cambridge</td>
<td>wrangler from</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>India</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dutt, Romesh Chunder</td>
<td>Kayastha</td>
<td>Presidency College (</td>
<td>school prizes;</td>
<td>ICS, barrister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1848–1909)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1866); University</td>
<td>second in FA exam,</td>
<td>writer and lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College; London</td>
<td>Presidency College;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Middle Temple</td>
<td>second in final ICS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ghose, Lal Mohan</td>
<td>Kayastha-K</td>
<td>Middle Temple</td>
<td>first in entrance</td>
<td>barrister, Calcutta High Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1849–1909)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>exam to Calcutta U.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(in Bengal Presidency)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Caste</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Academic Achievements</td>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1844–1896)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Ghose, Rash Behari</td>
<td>Kayastha–K</td>
<td>Presidency College (1861–1867)</td>
<td>first in FA exam, Presidency College, 1862; first class M.A., English and B.L., Calcutta U.; first Indian to get M.A. in English</td>
<td>vakil, Calcutta High Court</td>
<td>Congress pres. (1907, 1908) BLC pres., faculty of Law, Calcutta University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1845–1921)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1851–?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. Mookerjee, Brahman-K
Asutosh
(1864–1924)

12. Mookerjee, Brahman-K
Presidency College
(1881–1886)
1879, second in entrance exam to Calcutta U.; one of top in FA exam, 1881; paper published, Cambridge Messenger of Mathematics, 1881; first class; first B.A. 1884, M.A. 1885
barrister, judge, educator
judge, Calcutta High Court; vice-chancellor, Calcutta University; BLC (1900, 1902, 1903, 1904)

13. Sinha, Kayastha-K
Satyendra Prasanna
(Lord Sinha)
(1864–1928)

13. Sinha, Kayastha-K
Presidency College
(1879);
one of Inns of Court, London
barrister
Congress pres. (1915)
viceroy’s exec. council;
minister of Bengal government; under-sec. of state for India

* K: “kulin”

nineteenth century, the growth of cultural and religious revivalism, although for the most part politics and religion were not yet intermingled. The main flow of politics was in the direction of sober liberalism. The more chauvinistic, cultural nationalism was still underground.

In long-term perspective, the moderate age marks one stage in the development of political organizations and roles, modes of agitation, and nationalist ideology. This is the period between the politics of a tiny group of aristocratic notables, the British Indian Association, and the politics of mass mobilization efforts which begin in the Swadeshi years after 1905.

The initiative of men from the Calcutta elite, what Karl Deutsch might call the "politically relevant strata," led to the formation of cultural and political organizations in the capital, some of which reached out to the countryside and larger towns across India. The organizations and cultural movements combined selected elements of Indian traditions (as these existed in Bengal) with features of Western culture in eclectic syntheses. The Brahma Samaj, the most renowned of these organizations and one that had considerable influence on a number of establishment men, will serve as a brief example.

The Brahma Samaj grew out of a group founded by Rammohan Roy, the Atmiya Sabha, which in 1828 became the Brahma Sabha. The Brahma Sabha was organized for proper worship of Brahma, who was in Rammohan’s view the one true God of the Hindu scriptures. Rammohan believed that the pure Hinduism of an early golden age had become encrusted with degrading customs, and it was necessary to purge it of these encrustations to shape a purified religion compatible with Western learning. Such a faith was especially needed in Bengal, where religious immoralities, Rammohan thought, had contributed to indigenous weakness in resisting foreign conquerors.

The Brahma Sabha languished until 1839, when it was merged with the Tattwabodhini Sabha, founded by Debendranath Tagore. The new organization was rechristened the Brahma Samaj in 1842 and formed branches in the provincial towns of Bengal. "Samaj" in Bengali often means a group of families connected by caste and marriage ties, and the Brahma Samaj gradually took on a number of caste and educational functions for its members, who were recruited from the high castes of Bengal. From the 1850s branches were organized in the major
cities of northern and western India, recruiting primarily Bengalis who had taken up administrative, professional, and educational positions outside Bengal. The Samaj became associated with social service and a number of Brahmo preachers fanned out as full-time workers and pros-\textsuperscript{elitizers.}\textsuperscript{5}

The Brahmo Samaj split twice in the 1860s and 1870s, so that by 1880 there were three groups: the Adi Brahmo Samaj, with which Debendranath Tagore remained associated; the Brahmo Samaj of India, headed by the ablest Brahmo preacher, Keshub Sen; and an offshoot of the latter, the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. Sen’s abilities attracted much new interest, but his controversial stands on a number of issues and his belief in himself as a prophet of a New Dispensation helped to factionalize the organization. He incorporated Christian and Vaishnava features into the ritual of the organization and announced that India had a spiritual and moral mission in the modern world. He believed that all was sacred in Asia, the land of “introspection” and “flaming faith.” Asia’s spirituality and Europe’s science were matched as the vital, complementary components of the modern world. Thus colonial peoples, particularly the Indians, were raised to the level of their imperial masters by a continental division of cultural labor.\textsuperscript{6}

In carrying out India’s mission, the Brahmo church should be a “source of real usefulness.” Although Sen thought Bengalis were prone to “indolence, lethargy, and aversion to activity and enterprise,” their “native meekness” could be transformed into moral principle worthy of being spread to the world.\textsuperscript{7}

The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj was formed by members who broke with Keshub in 1878, and they were particularly active in missionary and social-service work. Like all the Brahmo organizations, it radiated out from Calcutta, recruiting members from the countryside and sending back trained preachers.\textsuperscript{8} Work in the Brahmo Samaj prepared men for public life, imbued them with the idea of selfless labor, and suggested to them that reformed Indian traditions might have some special role to play in meeting the needs of modern men.

The Brahmo synthesis incorporated some Christian elements, like communal worship and the association of religion and social service, within a generally Indian framework. Other Western ideological currents also had some influence on nineteenth-century Indians, including
positivism, utilitarianism, and liberalism. Indians also borrowed Western organizational structure and political pressure groups and made use of advances in communication and transportation. Many writers have described the phenomenon known as the Bengali Renaissance, which included some of these changes of attitude and technology. In almost every case, Indians selected those cultural elements which they believed to be most valuable and reshaped them in an Indian environment.

THE POLITICS OF THE ESTABLISHMENT MEN

Those Bengalis whom I have called the establishment men engaged in two related forms of political activity during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. First, they participated in officially sponsored institutions like the Bengal and Imperial Legislative Councils, the Calcutta University Senate, and the Calcutta Corporation. Second, they were the organizers and leaders of Indian political organizations, such as the Indian Association and the Indian National Congress. Their activity was based on the assumption that Indians could gain an increasing share in the rule of their country by taking every opportunity to work with the British Raj. Although there were sharp criticisms of the Raj from time to time, and even a wave of resignations from the Calcutta Corporation in 1899, this assumption was left for later generations of nationalists to doubt.

Lawyers were the most active occupational group in early nationalist politics. The phenomenon of lawyers in politics is well known in many developed and developing countries. One writer on the legal profession in India has suggested:

Only the lawyers had the knowledge of the individual rights to which an Indian was entitled, the mastery of the English language, skills, and independence which enable him to “stand up to the bureaucracy of the day.” Lawyers were in a better position to work for the cause of nationalism than were other men of their education level who were in government or government aided services. Their income and positions were independent from government pressure.

They were skilled at negotiation and they had learned how to control aggressive feelings toward their opponents. Many had trained for the bar in England and had witnessed the party system, pressure groups,
and widening political participation. As they gained equality with British barristers, they came to expect that Indians would eventually have equal political rights as well.

Just after the revolt of 1857, the British established the universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras as affiliating institutions. Calcutta University was set up with a strong measure of official control. The government appointed members of the university senate for life; between 1857 and 1904, 388 Europeans and 177 Indians served as members, including officials, judges of the High Court, businessmen, lawyers, and professors. Reforms were instituted after 1904, but official control continued. Members of the senate complained of a feeling of impotence because they knew that decisions could ultimately be reversed by the government.¹¹

Other changes following 1857 included the opening of the governor-general’s, governor’s, and lieutenant-governor’s councils to nominated members. Special provision was made in 1862 for the establishment of a Council of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, which was to include 12 nominated members, of whom at least one-third were to be nonofficials. Under the Indian Councils Act of 1861 the body could discuss legislation; under the Indian Councils Act of 1892, it was enlarged and allowed to discuss the budget, ask questions, and consider and pass bills. The principle of election was indirectly recognized, but the lieutenant-governor still ran the meetings. The nonofficials, directly nominated by the government and after 1892 with tacit government approval, were infrequent guests in the official mansion.¹²

Nonetheless, the Bengal Legislative Council served a number of important functions. Like the senate, the bar association, and the Indian political organizations, the council was a meeting place for establishment men. It was, moreover, the one official forum where Indian spokesmen could confront the government with their recommendations, question administrative actions, and, as they put it, ventilate their grievances—although they might receive little satisfaction in official replies.¹³

Questions and comments in council during these years were revealing. Concern seemed to focus on opening more places in the government services to Indians, raising the salaries of those already so employed, and scrutinizing expenditures for higher education. Asutosh
Mookerjee mentioned during the 1901 budget debate that his special interests were education, law, and justice. In this forum and in the Calcutta Corporation, rural municipalities, and district boards, Indian members said they were setting forth the views and sentiments of the people. “People” meant all the Indians in Bengal, but sometimes meant the Hindus, the educated, or the “middle class.” Muslims said they spoke for the Muslims of Bengal. Once there was a larger council, it was clear that no one man or organization spoke for all the people, or all the Hindus, or all the Muslims; 14 but the rhetoric of populism, borrowed from European politics, was often used.

The council also served as a training course in parliamentary method. Indians sat on select committees that reported on bills, entered the lists of the annual budget discussion, and learned to frame acceptable questions. Their British rulers often judged them on how well they did by the standards of British parliamentarians. The government also used the councils as a source of Indian opinion.15 This worked while all important groups were willing to participate in the councils, but not after significant segments of the Indian political world decided to operate outside them.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century also saw formal advances in local self-government, including the Bengal Municipal Act of 1884 and the Bengal District Board Act of 1885, which provided for greater Indian participation. But as Hugh Tinker has pointed out,

Indian local self-government was still in many ways a democratic façade to an autocratic structure. The actual conduct of business was carried on by district officials, with the non-official members as spectators, or at most critics.16

The impotence of Indian leaders in this period was also revealed by a crisis in the Calcutta Corporation in 1899. Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the lieutenant-governor of Bengal, felt that the corporation worked ineffectually and pushed through a bill reducing the proportion of elected councillors from two-thirds to one-half. Twenty-eight elected Bengali commissioners resigned; but a major reform of the corporation did not take place until 1923, in another era of Indian politics.17

Once we turn from the officially staged scene to the politics of the regional and national associations, we approach the more relevant and interesting questions of the age. Since mid-century, regional associa-
tions had been organized in Bombay, Madras, Calcutta, and a few other centers. An examination of the regional groups and then of the Congress raises questions of Indian national identity: the extent of national consciousness, the relative strength of regional and national allegiances, the ways in which these associations were organized and for whom they spoke.

Charles Heimsath has suggested one definition of nationalism:

an attitude of mind, or set of beliefs, that is shared by a group of people large enough to be influential, and that embodies ideas of the nation and the nation's goals, elevates those ideas to a prime position over other public values, and compels the assertion of the identity and aims of the nation.

Heimsath, following Hans Kohn, emphasizes the configuration of attitudes in the populace involved. Another analyst, Karl Deutsch, points to cluster patterns of political organization, economy, literacy, and communication networks. These cluster patterns, he suggests, are affected by processes of assimilation and disassimilation which help to diminish or strengthen the cohesion of a given nation. The rise of nationalism, Deutsch argues, is related to a change of values, particularly to a new valuing of one's own kind.

The organizational embodiments of growing political interest and consciousness in Bengal during the second half of the nineteenth century were the British Indian Association, founded in 1851, the Indian Association, begun in 1876, and the Bengali contingents in the Indian National Congress and the Central National Mohammedan Association. Throughout the period all these groups were almost totally made up of the urban, educated few.

The British Indian Association was a group of notables representing some of the wealthy and influential families in Bengal, almost all high-caste Hindu. They described themselves as a "middle class," but this term probably meant to them growing wealth, power, and respectability. Their families had come to prominence with the Raj, often by working for it, and they resembled the rajas of the small kingdoms which had once composed Bengal. They claimed to speak for Indian society and were accepted in an advisory role by the government throughout the third quarter of the century. The association's membership was small and exclusive, with members of the Deb and Tagore
families often holding official positions. They stood, virtually unchallenged, at the top of a hierarchical society, and their positions of social and economic power gave them a political role. They were not politicians in any modern sense, but rather amateur patrons whose credo did not dictate extensive organization-building or gathering of supporters. They initiated the politics of petitioning, acting as a small coterie of influentials who reached the men in power when questions arose that were of significance to them. The government of Bengal cooperated by appointing a number of the association's members to the Bengal Legislative Council.22

Their program included protection of their own economic interests (e.g., the unquestioned continuity of the Permanent Settlement) and the abstract support of other native groups on issues that did not interfere with those interests. Thus, they supported the peasants' indigo agitation, which was directed against European planters. They opposed reforms which would have extended education, roads, and other kinds of services to a large portion of Indian society at a cost to themselves. Their loyalist stance made them "government men" in the eyes of new political groups of the later nineteenth century. The government's alliance with urban and rural zamindars became one prop of stable British rule.23

By the 1870s new men came to the fore to challenge these notables. Surendranath Banerjea, the most able and persevering of the younger men, explained that the older association could not do the tasks required of an Indian political organization in a new time. Sisirkumar Ghosh of the Amrita Bazar Patrika was the catalyst in the formation of the short-lived India League, which died of internal strife in 1876 soon after its founding.24 But a year later, Banerjea organized a new Indian Association which was to prove more durable. The younger, mainly professional men who joined this latter group saw themselves as middle-class, educated spokesmen who would represent the interests of all Indians. Their rationale was that the illiterate masses could not speak for themselves and the aristocracy spoke only for themselves. In their three-tiered view of society, only the middle class, strategically placed, could speak for all.25

The Indian Association and the life pattern of their "chief and leader" Surendranath Banerjea mark an advance toward the formation
of a party and a political career. Banerjea played a significant rôle in Indian politics for some fifty years. In his autobiography, *A Nation in Making*, he explained that he was specially fitted to assume leadership by his caste status, education, and personal talents. He wrote that he felt a connection both with his traditional grandfather and with his father, "a modern man" and physician from whom he learned "disinterestedness," "sympathy for the poor," and "abhorrence of sordid means." Elsewhere Banerjea noted that he always liked to build on what went before rather than starting anew. Following Burke, to whom he acknowledged a debt, he said that in politics there was a need for a positive relationship between generations and a continuity of tradition. The families of the early Indian Association and Congress leaders had often had connections to the Raj and Calcutta for two or three generations and were socially and economically interlinked with British Indian Association families like the Debs.

Banerjea's autobiography contains a number of incidents which show he had an image of himself as a competitor, usually winning, infrequently losing, but never daunted. His first rebellion was against his private tutor, who Banerjea felt did not show him the respect due a kulin Brahman. He also believed in striving for social betterment and mentions the Brahma movement, the temperance movement, and Vidyasagar's crusade for widow remarriage as archetypes of movements organized to serve idealistic ends.

Banerjea went to England in the late 1860s to prepare for the ICS examination. Within a short time he was faced with two serious crises. The first was a dispute about his age which would determine his eligibility for the examination. He survived this predicament, with the aid of influential help in Calcutta and London, proving that he was a year younger than officials said he was. As a result, he began to see his own battles as an Indian cause, tied in with the fate of all his countrymen. The second crisis led to his dismissal from the ICS for what many thought inconsequential errors. This ouster closed a number of other career avenues, such as the bar. He was reduced, Indian friends told him, to death in life. But Banerjea transformed his dismissal into a lifelong cause, in which he sought to enlist all his countrymen.

Within a short time Banerjea began to teach at Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution, joined in the work of Anand.. Mohan Bose's Stu-
dent Association, and together with Bose formed the Indian Association. Both a teacher and an extracurricular political guide, Banerjea linked together his educational and political work. He disagreed with critics who said that students should keep out of politics and became instrumental in shaping the role of future political leaders as he guided the students in public activity. In the Indian Association, Banerjea found a role as guru and leader for older men. Working in both areas he also discovered a message to convey.

Banerjea instructed young and old that India was one and needed help, particularly from the devoted young, in rising from her divided and degraded state to new successes. He dwelt on India’s achievements in learning, mathematics, morals, religion, and even war. The past greatness of India was primarily Hindu and Aryan, but the unity of the future would be built by all regions, communities, and religions. He likened himself to Mazzini raising a fallen and degraded Italy.

Bose, who had amassed a modest fortune at the bar and from Assam tea investments, preferred to work behind the scenes, while Banerjea liked to be out front. For fifty years the Indian Association was dominated by a small group of men; like the British Indian Association and the Indian National Congress it was a caucus rather than a mass party. It was the selector of delegates from Bengal to the Indian National Congress until about 1918. The leaders were based in and near Calcutta, but they made efforts to establish branches in mofussil towns. Several were founded in Midnapur, Pabna, Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia, and Jessore.

As conceived by its leaders, the work of the association was petitioning the government and “educating public opinion.” Banerjea was its foremost speaker and toured northern and western India giving his views on ICS requirements, freedom of the press, and representative government. To assist in shaping public opinion, Banerjea also determined to edit a newspaper. He bought the Bengalee with support from friends and began active work as a journalist, which he sustained until 1920. His many different activities, including positions in the Calcutta Corporation, the senate of the university, and legislative councils, were integrated with the roles of instructor, teacher, spokesman. His most critical function was the transmission of ideas, rather than creative thought. He could also be an able organizer and collector of the funds that were the practical accomplishment of his speaking.
PUBLIC ISSUES AT STAKE

A number of public issues emerged in the early 1880s. The Ilbert bill concerned the right of Indian judges to try cases of Europeans in some circumstances. The European community in Bengal vigorously opposed it and together with Bengal's lieutenant governor, Rivers Thompson, they succeeded in rendering its provisions virtually meaningless. The liberal Ripon, then viceroy, could count on the support of all Indian political associations, but this was swept aside by the superior organization, passion, vituperation, and threats of the Europeans. In the course of the debate Rivers Thompson referred to "a want of nerve in the Native... in the presence of public excitement" and claimed that "reports before Government show innumerable cases in which a constitutional timidity had led natives to shirk duty because it is difficult." 37

On a second issue, the Bengal Tenancy bill, Indian political organizations in Bengal were divided. The British Indian Association was opposed, while the Indian Association and Ameer Ali's Central National Mohammedan Association supported it. Like many passed in the nineteenth century, this bill tried to partially compensate the Bengali peasant for the neglect of his rights by the Permanent Settlement of 1793. The bill was passed, but did not significantly change the peasant's lot. By this time the British Indian Association was properly identified as the organ of large zamindars, while the associations of Banerjea and Ameer Ali, with a more populist line, claimed to speak also for the common peasant.38

Soon after the Ilbert bill debacle, Banerjea was arrested and tried for contempt of court; at issue was his attack on a judge who had brought a "salingam," a stone idol, into court. As a Brahman and as a spokesman for his countrymen, Banerjea said he objected. The court held that his language was too strong and he was sentenced to prison. He became one of the first of many nationalists to go to prison willingly; at a time when his popularity was not at its height, he suddenly became a martyr. Expressions of support came in from other parts of the country. As in the Ilbert and Bengal Tenancy bill events, the center of political activity was in Calcutta. The causes of Bengal, Banerjea and others asserted, were the causes of India. Using publicity gained from his court case, Banerjea started a national fund, and national conferences were held in Calcutta in 1883 and 1885.39
But Banerjea’s efforts were too uniformly Bengal-centered to gain national support. Political leaders from other regions, a number of ex-civilians, and some other Bengalis joined in the first Indian National Congress session in Bombay in 1885. This was the beginning of a successful and enduring political organization into which the Indian Association and Banerjea soon knotted themselves.40

The Congress, particularly throughout its first twenty years, was dominated by a small group of men from Bombay, Bengal, and Madras and did not genuinely seek mass support until the Gandhian age. During its first few annual gatherings, resolutions were passed calling for reforms in the legislative councils and ICS and objecting to heavy military expenditures. But thereafter the leaders began to concentrate on defining the rules and membership regulations of the Congress and procedures for choosing leaders. Despite a number of changes and the organization of a kind of executive body, the Indian Congress Committee, in 1899, the Congress remained democratic in appearance and oligarchic in practice.41 Looseness in its organizational procedures coupled with actual control by a number of powerful men did not present the best example from an association claiming to represent all groups in Indian society. Ironically, W. C. Bonnerjee, a wealthy Calcutta barrister, said in the first presidential speech to the Congress, “Surely never had so important and comprehensive an assemblage occurred within historical times, on the soil of India.” 42

The Congress itself did not elect representatives to any officially constituted bodies and did not represent any popular constituency in a direct way. However, it gradually gained recognition from officials both in India and in London as an important voice of Indian opinion, even though some labeled it a “microscopic minority.” This denigrating attitude long continued among some Europeans.43

But the power bases were still in the presidencies, especially in their major cities, and the Congress organization was not yet a power base for its leaders. The Indian Association conducted Congress affairs in Bengal and formed a local standing committee of the Congress. The small group of men who dominated the Indian Association, plus a few other notables like W. C. Bonnerjee, represented Bengal; and from this relatively small circle, Bengal supplied 9 Congress presidents, 3 of whom served a second time. Through the first 32 years of the Congress, Bengalis served as president for 12 of them.44
The official historian of the Indian Association writes of its being "engulfed by Congress." But the organizations continued to be interlocked, assumedly both benefiting from the relationship, until the end of World War I.\textsuperscript{46} The Indian Association organized the first Bengal Provincial Conference in 1888.\textsuperscript{48} Annual provincial conferences began to be held more or less regularly from this period, and the Bengal conference served as a stimulus to other regions. The Congress had provincial bases, and the provincial organizations had a national center to coordinate their efforts with those in other regions. But the Congress was not yet the instrument of mass mobilization it could become. Much attention was still given to lobbying in London.\textsuperscript{47}

The Bengalis' importance in the early leadership of the Congress went with a self-image which placed them at the center of Indian political activity and thought. Surendranath Banerjea told a public meeting of the Students' Association in Calcutta in 1878:

Now, gentlemen, I think I speak the sentiments of my educated countrymen, when I say that we Bengalis do not aspire to occupy the position of leaders. We are only anxious that the light which is in us, that the light under which we have basked for so many long years, should spread over the whole of India and chase away that cimmerian darkness which has settled over the intellectual and moral atmosphere of this great country.\textsuperscript{48}

Writing at the end of the period in which Bengal was seen by its Hindu political leaders as the center of Indian politics, Amvica C. Mazumdar said:

As Europe is unthinkable without France, so India would be unthinkable without Bengal . . . Alert, keen-sighted, enthusiastic, acute, fiery, go-ahead Bengal is the fountainhead of ideas and the centre of patriotic inspiration . . . —where can you find a land so fertile and a people so sharp in intellect, so subtle in perception, so persuasive in eloquence, so cosmopolitan in ideas and so sanguine in patriotic fervour? With all her faults and frailties Bengal has always held the beaconlight to the rest of modern India and marched at the van of all movements religious, social and political.\textsuperscript{49}

It would take a lengthy study to determine how widespread were the sentiments expressed by Mazumdar and his "chief and guru" Surendranath Banerjea. But it is fair to say that many in the politically alive circles felt them. It is equally clear that resentments rose against Ben-
galis and against the European community in Calcutta for what was felt to be their unfairly large voice in Indian politics.  

There were also a few disquieting notes in the symphony of moderate achievements during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. First, almost all Bengali peasants and most Muslims in Bengal were outside the Congress and Indian Association. Second, the politics of Calcutta was already divided into many sniping factions of which the Banerjea-Indian Association was only the most conspicuous. Third, though moderate leaders talked of representing all the people, they did not have a sense of the enormous task of developing from a small caucus party into a mass organization.

Among the Bengalis who took part in Indian Association work from the 1870s to the Swadeshi period there is scarcely a mention of a Muslim. Abdul Kasim of Burdwan enters briefly. The lack of Muslim participation was evident to association leaders. In a speech entitled “An Appeal to the Mohamedan Community” to a Congress meeting in Dacca, 1888, Banerjea argued that the Congress was open to all:

I claim for the Congress that its programme is the most catholic, the most comprehensive, the most admirably suited to the varied requirements of the different sections of the great Indian community. Its concessions are such as will benefit Hindus and Mohamendans alike.

His remarks point to a dilemma which the Congress leadership in Bengal (and elsewhere) never satisfactorily solved: the Muslims, educated or peasant, were not drawn to the Congress in large numbers except during the first Noncooperation movement, which was harnessed to the Khilafat agitation after World War I. There were Muslim members of the British Indian Association’s delegation to the government in 1879 and a few Muslims in the Indian Association, but none in their inner coterie.

Several reasons may be offered here and amplified later. First, as will be evident in the career of Ameer Ali analyzed in chapter 2, many of the aristocratic or middle-class, educated Muslims of Bengal did not consider themselves Bengalis. Their origins lay outside Bengal and they found it easier to join a Muslim organization that included many Muslims from different parts of the country, like Ameer Ali’s Central National Mohammedan Association, than to play a secondary role in an
organization dominated by Bengali Hindus. When Muslim leaders in Calcutta, Bengali or non-Bengali, did turn to politics their first interest was often to secure government help for the slowly developing Muslims of Bengal, who were primarily poor cultivators. This was never an important concern of the Indian Association and only briefly a concern of Bengali Congress members during the 1920s.

Second, from what we do know about Muslim political activity in Bengal, it appears that it was much easier to touch rural and poor Muslims with the cry of "Islam in danger," often in conjunction with a down-to-earth economic program. The Bengali national leaders of the period we are considering said they spoke for all Bengalis, but the symbols they used and the achievements they referred to were predominantly Hindu. There seems little in the words of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Keshub Sen, Bipin Pal, Surendranath Banerjea, or Romesh Dutt that would appeal to Muslims. In fact, to Bankim Chandra and to some of the Swadeshi leaders, the Muslims were foreigners, intruders in India, who would be allowed to stay as the guests of temporary hosts, the British, and their long-term landlords, the Hindus. There is an insensitivity to the Muslims which continues through the nationalist period and is only occasionally dispelled.58

The Muslims had Abdul Latif's Mohammadan Literary Society, established in 1863, and Ameer Ali's Central National Mohammedan Association, founded in 1877; but these were concerned primarily with Muslim interests, although Ali often spoke on broader Indian and Islamic questions.

Bengali peasants as well remained outside early nationalist politics. In the nineteenth century some Bengali cultivators, both Hindu and Muslim, engaged at different times in protest movements which bordered on small-scale rebellions. Among these were the indigo disturbances; a rent revolt in Pabna; and the Fara'idi movement among Muslim peasants and craftsmen in the Faridpur, Pabna, Bakarganj, Dacca, and Noakhali districts in the 1830s to 1850s. In almost all these cases there were economic grievances which either precipitated the disturbances or were utilized by the leaders of the rebellions to marshal support. In the case of the Fara'idis an ideology of religious purity was spread in conjunction with the raising of economic grievances against Hindu zamindars and European planters. Although we now have a
useful study of this movement, it is still not clear how specific economic hardships helped to generate it. The general point to be made about these diverse rebellions is that it was (and is) possible in some areas and at some times to utilize economic distress in building a protest movement.\textsuperscript{54}

There undoubtedly have been and continue to be serious problems in building what some call a "national peasantry," and political leaders in India are still wrestling with this task. In the light of the points made about social organization in rural Bengal, it appears that those who come from the outside in search of support and assistance might encounter a number of difficulties in enlisting peasant support. The process of census-taking in Bengal offers some insights into such problems. Each of the officials in charge of the census, from the first one in 1872, noted that the peasants were suspicious of outsiders, fearing that they might be men sent to make investigations preliminary to raising taxes. In some instances they even rioted to prevent the taking of the census. It is also noteworthy that the number of enumerators needed to carry out the census in 1901 was more than 400,000.\textsuperscript{55} Granted that the ideal of political organizing is the recruiting of local men who will work at enlisting the support of their kinsmen and neighbors, the large number of enumerators points to the magnitude of the population and of the tasks involved in enlisting actual cultivators rather than a few notables in each district.

The first generation of nationalist leaders in Bengal had a grandiose vision of a bright future of representative government within the British Empire. Bengalis, they imagined, would play a significant role in politics and administration, as they had under the rulers' shadow, particularly relative to other regional groups in the nineteenth century.

But the dark side was there too: constant and cutting criticism of the Banerjea group from the \textit{Indian Mirror}, \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, \textit{Banga sabasi}, and from other groups.\textsuperscript{56} The Banerjea group, of course, fought back, and the continual infighting so well known in modern Bengal was under way within and outside the nationalist movement. They were simply a small caucus party of nationalists without power or wide support. Making a national movement that included real participation by even a smattering of other sections of the population was a task not yet envisioned. Some of these problems arise again in a consid-
eration of the Swadeshi period. But before turning to the next generation, consideration will be given to Bengali nationalist and Muslim ideology through an exploration of the lives of their chief articulators, Romesh Dutt and Ameer Ali.
TWO

Identity, History, Ideology: Romesh Chunder Dutt and Syed Ameer Ali

Romesh Dutt and Ameer Ali have usually been seen in separate lines of development in India, Dutt as a Congress ideologue, Ali as a modernizer of Islam and spokesman for the Muslim community. But I suggest that in comparing the groups with whom they identified and the causes and concerns into which they threw their considerable life-energies, we will learn much about Indian and Bengali leadership in the early nationalist period, about Hindu-Muslim relations, and about the ways in which men of that time used historical analysis and cultural traditions for political purposes.

In such an examination it is important to see the total range of each man's activities and the timing of these activities as well as all the groups which were important to him. Therefore, it is necessary to look at Romesh Dutt's novels and school histories as well as his writings on social and economic questions; it is necessary to look at Ameer Ali's writings on law and on general political questions as well as his works on Islam.

It is necessary to note here that Ameer Ali represented one of several cultural and political trends current among Muslims in Bengal during the nationalist period. The trend he embodied was the pan-Islamic one eventually expressed in the Pakistan movement which at a crucial period of Bengal's history (1943–1947) had widespread support among Bengali Muslims. The other major trend, which had little meaning to Ameer Ali, emphasized the distinctiveness of Bengali Muslims both as Bengalis and as Muslims. This second trend, submerged for many years and shunned by the Urdu-speaking, upper-class leaders among the
Bengal Muslims, has now flowered in the creation of an independent nation of Bangladesh. There are many similarities in the life-histories of the two men. Dutt was born in 1848, Ali in 1849, and both had their education in the Calcutta area. Both came from families associated with cultural achievements and with service to the Raj. Dutt went to England in 1868, passed the ICS examination, and was called to the bar in 1871. Ali went to England in 1869 and was called to the bar in 1873. Both read widely in English literature and history, identified with the Liberal Party, and developed a warm, enduring affection for the English. At some point early in life each determined to seek a literary reputation in England as well as in his native country. Dutt returned to India in 1871 and served with distinction in the ICS until 1897. At the same time he pursued a literary career in both English and Bengali. Ali returned to India in 1873 and had a distinguished career as a barrister and judge of the Calcutta High Court until he retired in 1904. Ali too followed a literary career concurrently with his public service, writing on Islam, Muslim law, and Saracenic history. At the end of their public service, both men retired to England. Dutt entered the service of the Gaekwar of Baroda a few years before his death in 1909. Ali lived on until 1928 much concerned with the fate of the Caliphate during his last years.

Both men served in the Bengal Legislative Council; Ali also served in the Imperial Legislative Council. Both of them were active in Indian political organizations, Dutt in the Indian National Congress, of which he was president for one year, Ali in the Central National Mohammedan Association of which he was the founder and long-time secretary. Both saw themselves in tune with the liberal, rational, and scientific trends of nineteenth-century Europe. They took similar positions on a range of political questions, including the Bengal Tenancy bill in the 1880s. Both believed in favoring Indian economic interests over British ones in the shaping of the policies of the Raj, and more extensive use of Indians in the various services of the government of India; they were opposed to those Indians advocating more extreme political actions against the Raj in the early twentieth century. Each saw himself as a man of intelligence and talent who had succeeded primarily through his own talents and hard work, although he had enjoyed advantages
in social status and economic comfort. At times each saw himself as a spokesman for the Indian people, a member of the class most qualified to speak for all, not bound by any narrow class interest.

Again, in moving to the larger intellectual questions to which Dutt and Ali addressed themselves, we find many similarities. Each wrote works of history and studied the cultural traditions of people with whom he identified. Each searched for pasts which were relevant to his people in the present and tried to give an account of these traditions to a popular readership in India and in the West. Writing at a time when cultural apologetics and reform movements were under way in many parts of the non-Western world, Dutt and Ali wrote as selective justifiers and as critics of the past. Both were concerned with what one might call the cultural problem of East and West, or West and non-West: the need for non-Westerners in the age of imperialism to find cultural equivalency, equality of native and European traditions.2

The West and non-West theme may also be seen in the practical aspects of their literary careers. Both published their major works in London and wrote primarily in English. They saw themselves playing link roles; they wanted to bring the essential history of India, Bengal, Islam and the Saracens, to Western readers so that the Western public would confront these essential pasts and come to have greater respect and sympathy for India and for the Muslims in various parts of the world.

After a tour through the careers of each in turn, we will return to the comparison.

R. C. Dutt, ICS: Indian Nationalist

Romesh Chunder Dutt was the leading ideologue and writer among the early congressmen from Bengal. Although an ICS career man, he considered himself a member of the “band of patriotic workers” which dominated the Congress for a generation.3 His novels, translations, histories, and writings on political and economic questions offer an extensive field for investigating the views and values of the early nationalists.

The Dutt family of Rambagan came from Burdwan district in western Bengal. His great-grandfather Nilmoni moved to Calcutta in the second half of the eighteenth century and became acquainted with such powerful Calcutta families as the Debs of Sobhabajar. Sons and
grandsons of Nilmoni were employed in the Bengal Secretariat, the Accounts Department, and the courts. The family was active in the cultural life of the Bengalis in the city as well as in government service, and relatives of Romesh Dutt produced histories, poems, translations.  

Romesh attended the Hare School and then Presidency College, the elite college of Bengal, which both his father and his guardian had attended. He did well, placing second in the first Arts examination, and then traveled to England with his friends Surendranath Banerjea and Bihari Lal Gupta to sit for the ICS examination. The three young men went without parental consent and Romesh later described it as a momentous and difficult undertaking. His last thoughts upon leaving India were gloomy, lonely, melodramatic, but his prospects were good, and he was shortly tied into the Bengali network that bridged Calcutta and England.  

Man Mohan Ghose had helped the young men to go to England and they were friendly with his younger brother Lal Mohan Ghose once they arrived. At Southampton they were met by W. C. Bonnerjee, who took them to London. They were later friendly with Ananda Mohan Bose, then a student at Cambridge. These few contacts give a sense of the close-knit quality of the Bengali establishment men in their young manhood. In numerous cases friendships and alliances were made early in life which survived the decades ahead. The circle described in memoirs and letters includes only high-caste Hindus who had first achieved success in Calcutta and were moving out into the great world. All became establishment men and Congress leaders.

Dutt, Banerjea, and Gupta attended classes in London and passed the ICS examination, Dutt placing second among candidates in the final examination. He also spent eight terms at the Middle Temple and was called to the bar in 1871. During the same period, he read widely in English literature and history, traveled through Europe, and gained an intimate experience of English life and politics. Dutt and his compatriots witnessed the election of 1868.

Every man in this country considers himself as a constituent of a great nation, prides himself on his nationality and the glory of the nation, and therefore keeps an eye on the welfare of his country . . . the people are the Government. Societies are formed by the persons desirous of bringing on some reform, they have their sittings, their lectures,
their pamphlets, they write articles in newspapers, they publish books to support their cause. Thus they go on influencing the public mind and convincing the people that a reform is needed. . . . They know that the will of the people is the law of the land, and if the people show increasing interest in their cause they are sure to succeed, otherwise their cause must of course be given up.\(^7\)

It was during these years that the political socialization of Dutt, and presumably of his young fellow Indiarts, took place. Dutt's goals of national self-government and political participation by the people, the style of petitioning, forming societies, lobbying, and trying to shape public opinion owe much to the observations of these years; so, too, does Dutt's faith in the ultimate justice of the English public and enlightened English leaders.\(^8\)

One might almost suggest that Dutt had an English identity interlaced with his Indian one. His writings, especially in these years, are filled with British literary and historical references. In politics, he supported the liberals against the conservatives. Later in life, he spent many years in England; it had been one of the dreams of his active years to retire to England. Writing of his travels, Dutt suggested that young Indians should all travel to Europe to see the freedom and the equality between men and women evident in the West.\(^9\)

Returning to Bengal, Dutt served in many positions and had a distinguished career in the ICS from 1871 to 1897. He rose to positions which had not often been held by Indians before him. In 1894 he became officiating divisional commissioner of Burdwan and he might have risen even higher but for objections in the Anglo-Indian press to his ruling over Europeans. But his vigorous work in fighting plague and famine in Bakarganj—indeed, his efficiency at every post—belied the stereotype of the Bengali civil servant.\(^10\)

Although he complained that "civilians are not allowed to speak aloud on the subject of politics," he published The Peasantry of Bengal in 1874, and in 1882 a critical assessment of the career of the retiring lieutenant-governor, Sir Ashley Eden. The former was his first substantial contribution to the social and economic history of India. In one way or another, he also publicized his views on the Bengal Tenancy bill, the Age of Consent bill, and the Chaukidari (village watchmen) Act.\(^11\)
While moving from district to district he completed a three-volume history of ancient India, six Bengali novels, numerous translations of Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit poetry, school texts, and a short history of Bengali literature. He gained recognition by becoming a fellow of the Imperial Institute and the Royal Asiatic Society in Britain and by attaining the presidency of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, the leading literary association of Bengal.\textsuperscript{12}

Upon retirement, Dutt returned to England to organize an “Indian party of sympathetic Englishmen” to influence the British Parliament through prominent members and to educate the British public in popular versions and accounts of Indian history and literature. In addition, he lectured in Indian history at University College, London, and wrote extensively on the history of British rule in India. He completed condensations of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* in English verse. He was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and served on the Royal Commission on Decentralization.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1899 an intensive campaign was waged against the Calcutta Municipal Bill by Surendranath Banerjea and Raja Binay Krishna Deb in Calcutta. Dutt was appointed by Deb “the representative of the inhabitants of Calcutta” to oppose the bill in England. The measure, however, was passed; Indian members of the Calcutta Corporation resigned, and Dutt became pessimistic both about the progress toward self-governing institutions in India and about the value of British rule. The style of the Bengali politicians is evident: they held meetings, signed petitions, and tried to influence members of Parliament and public opinion in Britain.\textsuperscript{14}

Late in 1899, Dutt was invited through his friend W. C. Bonnerjee, who was also spending his later years in England, to serve as president of the Indian National Congress. Dutt returned to India for the honor and delivered his presidential address in Lucknow. Shortly back in England, he cooperated with Bonnerjee and Dadabhai Naoroji in lobbying on Indian questions and forming the Indian Famine Union. Dutt debated with government officials on land revenue assessments, which he claimed were too high, and completed his *Economic History of India in the Nineteenth Century*. Finally succumbing to the offer of the Gaekwar of Baroda, he joined the Gaekwar’s service as revenue minister in 1904. In 1908 he was back in England serving on the Royal
Commission on Decentralization and discussing the reforms with officials. The following year he died of a heart ailment.

As a practical complement to his interest in economic affairs, Dutt served as president of the Industrial Conference held in conjunction with the Congress in 1905 and 1907. He supported the Swadeshi movement, but dismissed the Extremists as men of no consequence who would quickly fade from the scene. He supported the Morley-Minto reforms (see chapter 3) in general and discussed them with Morley, but opposed separate electorates for Muslims.15

Through his writing, Romesh Dutt set himself a number of tasks and addressed himself to several audiences. In his prefaces he specifies these audiences and explains how he will edify them. He saw himself performing a number of link roles, providing an entrée to certain traditions which otherwise would be unavailable to these readers.

First he saw himself as a spokesman for enlightened public opinion in India. He felt that he was interested in the prosperity of all Indians, peasants, zamindars, urban educated, princes, etc., and that as a member of the educated and advanced group in the society, he could best suggest what policies and programs would benefit the Indian nation. He would have denied that he represented any regional, religious, or class group. He may be seen in the liberal, utilitarian tradition of the nineteenth century, but a utilitarianism with an authoritarian twist. Dutt wanted the greatest good for the greatest number and felt the enlightened man could, would, and must speak for all. He might have to criticize a section of the population if injustice occurred; he would still retain his detached and impartial position. Later in life he sought to become the Indian, or one of the key Indians, in England to whom all would turn on Indian questions.16

Another role he sought was that of interpreter and transmitter of the "true history of India" and of its poetry, literature, and religious texts to Western readers. To this audience he addressed his works on ancient India, his translations of the epics and Indian verse, and his popularizations of Indian history. For those in search of information about mysterious India, Dutt offered facile condensations, translations, history; they have a simplicity which has led some to argue that they missed completely the essence of Indian traditions. He did no original work on ancient India; he felt it his job to present Indian history, tra-
dictions, and literature in a clear and balanced way, rather than offering erudite scholarship.\textsuperscript{17}

Encouraged by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the most famous Bengali novelist of the nineteenth century, Dutt wrote six novels in Bengali and published translations of Sanskrit religious texts in Bengali. Dutt said he wanted to portray “the glories of our past and the greatness of our national heroes” in these works.\textsuperscript{18} “National” in this context means Hindu: the heroes in the novels are Rajputs, Marathas, Bengali Hindus, and a few North Indian Hindus. These novels were part of the widespread effort in the nineteenth century and since to glorify Hindu courage and the Hindu religion. Others who contributed to the romanticization of the Hindu past were Bankim Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Roy, and B. G. Tilak. One reader described the effects:

The historical romances of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and Ramesh Chandra Dutt glorified Hindu rebellion against Muslim rule and showed the Muslims in a correspondingly poor light. Chatterji was positively and fiercely anti-Muslim. We were eager readers of these romances and we readily absorbed their spirit.\textsuperscript{19}

The translation of Hindu scriptures into Bengali was, Dutt said, “for my countrymen” a political and cultural rather than a religious act. As a Kayastha and as a modern man, Dutt felt some antagonism against the restrictions of caste and the privileged position of the Brahman priests. Offering Bengali versions of religious texts was one part of the reform movement at work throughout the nineteenth century.

Dutt’s school texts were a third set of works for specifically Hindu readers. These included histories of India and of Bengal that were frequently reprinted. In the preface to the first edition of \textit{A Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal for the Use of Schools}, he wrote in 1892:

For a Hindu boy, the History of Bengal should not commence with the conquest of the country by Bakhiyar Khalji. He should know of the cultured Vedehas who cultivated Vedic learning and composed the Upanishads in North Behar and developed those systems of Mental Philosophy and Logic which are still admired in Europe. He should know something of the Magadhas who gave a new religion to the
human race, of Asoka who ruled over the whole of Northern India and sent Buddhist missionaries to Syria, Greece and Egypt, and of the University of Nalanda during the centuries immediately succeeding the Christian Era. He should know of the Kesari and Ganga Kings of Orissa who ruled over the country for over a thousand years, and covered it with temples and edifices which still claim our admiration. And he should know of the Pala and the Sena Kings of Bengal, the former of whom extended their rule for a time over the whole of Northern India. I have considered it necessary to narrate these facts of the Hindu Period in five chapters in order that some recollections of them may live in the minds of educated Hindus long after they have ceased to be students.  

In this book, the author never addressed himself to Muslim students or to English readers, although he spent five chapters on Muslim rule and five more on the British period. He was aiming at the formation of pro-Hindu attitudes in the schools. As with his Bengali translations of Sanskrit scriptures, he was aiming at Bengali Hindus in need of guidance. They were likely to be high caste, like Dutt himself. The unanticipated consequence of these writings was to contribute to anti-Muslim bias.

Dutt wrote for the reading public of the two places where he spent his life, Bengal and Britain. In both places he sought and achieved a literary reputation. Thus, in his version of the Indian past, Dutt concentrated on the ancient Hindu period and the modern British period, writing much more skimpily on the age of Muslim predominance.

As sources for his works on ancient India and on the literature of Bengal, Dutt uses literary and religious texts, apparently guided by the nineteenth-century positivist notion that literature is a mirror of the age in which it was written. His assumptions show that he has taken prescriptions for ideal behavior in such texts to be descriptions of actual life.

Dutt sometimes mentions a belief in the “progress of the human mind.” In large part, his historiography is derived from French writers of the Enlightenment and from British historians of the nineteenth century. Dutt had in common with most of these writers a belief in progress, a tendency to label historical periods in terms of either literary texts or qualities of mind or both, the use of environmental or climatic
explanations of historical phenomena, and a belief that the task of the historian is to describe the conditions of the people, not to be confined to political narrative.  

In *A History of Civilization in Ancient India*, Dutt divided the pre-Muslim history of India into five periods: Vedic, Epic, Rationalistic, Buddhist, and Puranic. When he wrote his brief but more comprehensive book the *Civilization of India* some years later, he called the Rationalistic period the "age of laws and philosophy," divided the Buddhist period into two parts, and added periods of Rajput, Afghan, Mughal, and Maratha rule.

Like Rammohan Roy, Keshub Sen, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo, Romesh Dutt saw Indian history as a great rise followed by a decline. But Dutt differs from these writers in the values he gave to past periods and institutions. Dutt noted the "unique charm" of the Vedas and saw in them the "workings of a simple and manly heart." He paid tribute to the mysteries of the Upanishads, but he did not have the reverence for these early religious texts and truths that was shown by the other Indians mentioned. Although Dutt's own religious beliefs are not clear, he appears to have been an agnostic, for his treatment of religion was perfunctory and concerned primarily with its social implications. Dutt preferred religions which preached equality, and so he nodded toward Buddhism, Christianity, and even Islam, while frowning on Hinduism, especially as it became more intertwined with rigid caste rules. Dutt wrote:

Later religions are free from this weakness which has crept into Hinduism. . . . It is natural for men to seek to improve their position, and the Sudras of India, to whom Hinduism in the past and in the present has been so cruel, have struggled hard to improve their status by accepting Buddhism or Vaishnavism or Islamism or anything else which has offered them a chance. . . . Hinduism with all its noble traditions, its rich moral lessons, and its ancient wealth of philosophy and deep thought, has continuously suffered in the past by its exclusive caste-system. In the future, a catholic and all-embracing love and a brotherly recognition of equality may re-unite and save; an uncharitable exclusiveness will disunite and destroy.

He never suggested that Indian religions had any special value for humanity that other religions do not have. In fact, Dutt's position was
that Hinduism needed an infusion of the egalitarian ethic of other religions to improve it. He viewed Indian religions with only formal respect and occasionally with a tinge of condescension.

Since the Vedas are held in such awe and respect by Hindus, Dutt did cite them both in his history and in controversies over contemporary reform acts to show that they did not prescribe sati or a low status for women, or forbid sea voyages and the remarriage of widows. He claimed that the rules cited by the opponents of reform were later innovations unknown in the Vedic Age.\textsuperscript{28}

Instead of the age of the Vedas and the Upanishads, Dutt thought the "Rationalistic age" (1000–320 B.C.) represented the height of Indian culture. He set a high value on the achievements in science and mathematics, philosophy and drama, that took place in this period.\textsuperscript{29} For the more mystically inclined, this period was the end of the "wonder that was India." Dutt also praised Buddhism as a religion of "love and equality" which was accepted by a "living nation." With the decline of Buddhism, India started going downhill.\textsuperscript{30}

There is another difference between Dutt and the advocates both of India's Upanishadic greatness and of India's mission in the modern world, for Dutt felt that significant shortcomings existed even in India's greatest eras, especially in what he called the "absence of any efforts after popular freedom."\textsuperscript{31} He regretted that one could not rise on his own merits in ancient India and that even in their heyday Indians had shown a "lack of genius in industrial arts."\textsuperscript{32}

In Dutt's history of ancient India, certain negative and positive values were implicit. The positive terms are strength, power, vigor, beauty, simplicity, and "healthy joyousness." The negative ones are weakness, deadness, enervation, decadence. The earlier periods, Vedic, Epic, Rationalistic, Buddhist, were characterized by the first set of terms, while the later periods, especially the era of Afghan and Mughal rule, were described with the negative words. The terms Dutt used are parameters of his own outlook. They all describe surface, almost visible characteristics. Like Vivekananda and many of his English contemporaries, Dutt used strength or power as a measure of quality. There is no special spiritual connotation here. He meant physical force, which was the manifestation of inner strength.\textsuperscript{33}

For Dutt, the Puranic age and succeeding centuries were marked by
decadence and decline. Vigor and creativity ended, new discoveries in mathematics and science and even creative experiments in art and literature were rare. Trade, sea voyages, the high status of women—all these declined. Dutt described these centuries as ones of "political decadence and the ascendancy of priests." 34 In several sections he gave a history of the development of caste and the rise of the priests who enforced the caste structure and who were responsible for imposing "barbarous rules" from the time of Manu. Dutt claimed that Manu's theory of mixed castes had been accepted by superstitious Indians for centuries and never subjected to rational criticism. He noted that

the caste-system, which unduly exalted the powers and privileges of priests, had the inevitable result of degrading all honest trades and industries other than that of priests. We noted this in the pages of Manu himself; we note this still more prominently in the pages of Yajnavalkya. In a passage which we have referred to before, he condemns a large class of professions as impure, and classes physicians, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, dyers, armourers, and oil manufacturers with thieves and prostitutes! Thus the caste-system in its later phase has served a twofold object, as our readers will note from passages like these. It has served to divide the nation and create mutual ill-feeling. And it has served to degrade the nation in order to exalt the priests.35

During the centuries when priests were enslaving the people, Muslims—first Afghans, then Mughals—ruled India. In Early Hindu Civilisation, Dutt wrote that the Hindus spent "seven centuries of national lifelessness under Musalman rule," and in this period such Hindu shortcomings as caste, priest-domination, and loss of creativity in art and science became even more exaggerated.36 Sometimes he discussed the Hindu nation, with the Muslims a stratum set on top, while at other times the Muslims became an integrated part of the nation. Dutt occasionally praised the Muslim rulers because, unlike the British, they sent no tribute out of India, so that there was no drain on Indian resources. Dutt mentioned the greatness of Akbar in the Civilization of India and also said that the self-governing institutions of the people had been left untouched under the Muslims,37 a happier situation than the ruin of village self-government under the British.

Dutt, among others, has been criticized for depicting the village communities as egalitarian institutions, forgetting their inequalities and their ties to the caste system.38 This is a fair criticism of his Economic
History, but it should be measured against Dutt's own descriptions of the priest-dominated society in his ancient history and in The Peasantry of Bengal. In the latter work, Dutt depicts the ruthless exploitation of peasants by zamindars in pre-British India.39

Later in life, Dutt began to see the zamindars as more benevolent and British rule as harsher than he had earlier thought. His affection for Hindu institutions grew as he saw the increasingly destructive effects of British rule. The onset of a new dark age of imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century made the age of the Afghan and Mughal empires look brighter. He wrote in his Economic History:

And the people lived in peace in their ancient village communities, managing their own village concerns, enjoying the most complete autonomy in their village administration, and paying to the king's representatives the tax assessed on every village. These self-governing village-communities existed in India from the dawn of history to the close of the eighteenth century after Christ; they survived the fate of dynasties and empires; they escaped danger and destruction when rival chiefs or races strove for the imperial power.40

Dutt described at length how the interests of the rulers were identical with those of their subjects. They took no wealth out of the country, and "Indian manufactures filled the markets of Europe." 41 But Dutt's accounts of happy days in pre-British India were more anti-British than pro-Muslim.

Dutt scarcely ever forgot that the essential Indian nation was Hindu. In the Civilization of India, he wrote:

The waves of foreign conquest did not weaken the Hindu nation or the Hindu rule. Each new race of invaders from the first to the fifth century after Christ settled down in India, accepted Hinduism or Buddhism, and thus merged into and strengthened the confederation of Hindu races in ancient India.42

The Muslim rulers, like these earlier conquerors, were simply a thin stratum at the top; beneath, the normal current of Hindu economic and religious life flowed on.

The novels deal in great part with the very period of Muslim domination which Dutt neglected in his histories.43 The heroes of Bāṇabijetā (1874) 44 are the Hindu governor of Bengal, Todar Mull; a young Bengali Hindu, Surendra Nath Chaudhuri; and a Hindu priest, Chandra
Shekar; of Mādhabikaṇṭa (1877), another young Bengali Hindu, Noren; of Māhārāṣṭra Jīban-prabhāt (1878), the Maratha general Shivaji; and of Rājput Jīban-Sandhyā (1879), the Rajput prince, Pratap Singh. These are the four historical novels. The main characters and heroes of a later “domestic” novel, Sansar (written in the 1890s and published posthumously), are all Bengali Kayasthas living under a most benevolent British Raj.

The historical novels, rather than the domestic ones, were the more widely known. In these, Hindus are extolled for their martial exploits, bravery, religious motivation, and administrative skill. Here are Hindu heroes who can stand comparison, the writer and readers may have believed, with Muslim or British conquerors of India. For example, Dutt depicts Shivaji as a man motivated by religious and patriotic fervor, devoted to the goddess Bhawani and directed by her call. Shivaji kills his Mughal enemies “by the grace of Bhawani,” for intertwined with Shivaji’s religious feeling is his patriotic and noble ambition to establish a Hindu Raj and restore Hindu freedom. The Muslims are described by one Hindu character as “enemies of our country and our religion.” Although the novelist mentions Akbar’s wise policy of conciliation, he says that Aurangzeb is a dishonoror of the Hindu religion, deceitful, and barren of human emotion. Shivaji’s victories are described at length and his treachery, including lying and murdering an unarmed man to gain a triumph, are explained away as necessary means of fighting Muslims. Such methods, says Shivaji, are not to be used against fellow Hindus.

Dutt gives a much more prominent place to Shivaji’s devotion to Bhawani than do other writers, who mention his temple in honor of the goddess but do not give this religious feeling the centrality in Shivaji’s life that Dutt does. The Maratta devotion to Bhawani has its counterpart in the Bengali worship of Kali or Durga. It is somewhat strange that the seemingly agnostic Dutt of the histories should place such emphasis on religion in his historical novels.

Although Dutt wrote that the Indians opposed revolution and abhorred violence, he himself contributed to the glorification of violence and revolution in his historical novels. It was the example of Shivaji, together with the ascetic revolutionaries of Chatterjee’s Ananda-math, upon which Bengali revolutionaries in part modeled themselves.
Dutt's belief that violence was foreign to the Indian people shows an extraordinary lack of historical and personal awareness.

In the *History of Civilization in Ancient India*, Dutt mentions Western borrowings from ancient Indian culture, especially the use of Buddhist concepts by the early Christians and the spreading of Aryan culture by the Greeks. During the modern age, however, ideas flowed from the West to India. It is for his numerous works on British rule in India that Romesh Dutt has gained most prominence. Even his most severe critic among his fellow Indians, Aurobindo Ghose, had some kind words for these writings:

The best things he ever did were, in our view, his letters to Lord Curzon and his Economic History. The former fixed public opinion in India irretrievably and nobody cared even to consider Lord Curzon's answer. "That settles it" was the general feeling every ordinary reader contracted for good after reading this brilliant and telling indictment. Without the Economic History and its damning story of England's commercial and fiscal dealings with India we doubt whether the public mind would have been ready for the Boycott. In this one instance it may be said of him that he not only wrote history but created it.

We must bear in mind that Dutt's writings about the recent past are propaganda as well as history. It is the combination of apparently impartial historical analysis with clearly nationalist views that have made the *Economic History* such a favorite of Indian readers. Once he retired and came to England in 1897, he spent his time pouring over Blue Books, official reports and documents and accounts by travelers and civilians.

Almost all these writings deal with economic matters—land revenue settlements, trade, tariffs, and industry. Dutt felt that India and England were closely interrelated in the nineteenth century and that developments in England produced effects in India. This perception and his own tastes determined his decision to spend his retiring years in England lobbying and working for what he felt were the best interests of India.

Dutt's volumes on this period assessed British rule in India, its triumphs and failures.

The positive aspects of British rule which Dutt listed include the
unification of the country, the bringing of order and justice and the transmission to Indians of modern trends of scientific and liberal political thought. Dutt judged British rule in India to have been beneficial insofar as the British helped to develop modern Western institutions—for example, a free press, self-governing institutions, and universities—and did not eradicate useful indigenous institutions.61 The British made some initial errors, Dutt wrote in The Peasantry of Bengal, but then brought justice and a general advance in the conditions of the country. For the rule of custom, they substituted the more impartial and impersonal right.62 About the beneficial currents of thought, Dutt said, “All that we wish to indicate is that the Hindu mind in the modern age has, under the influence of new light and progress, travelled once more in the same direction, though with feeble effort, as it did in the days of its ancient vigour.” 63 Describing his native province under British rule, Dutt noted:

The British conquest of Bengal was not merely a political revolution, but brought in a greater revolution in thought and ideas, in religion and social progress. The Hindu intellect came in contact with all that is noblest and most healthy in European history and literature, and profited by it. The Hindu mind was to some extent trained under the influence of European thoughts and ideas, and benefited by it.64

It should be noted that Dutt’s most enthusiastic appreciations of British rule were written as a young man in the 1870s.

A major portion of Dutt’s writing in the Economic History and his letters and papers from 1897 forward is devoted to the land revenue settlements. Years earlier, writing as a young ICS officer of 26, Dutt wrote, “Seldom in the annals of any country has hasty legislation been productive of effects so calamitous as the ill-conceived Permanent Settlement.” 65 This little book is partially a diatribe against oppressive zamindars who Dutt said had rent-racked their peasants from time immemorial. But Dutt did not want to nullify the Permanent Settlement, turn out the zamindars, or make a new settlement with the ryots. He stated that he could not recommend such a revolution in the landholding system of Bengal, which had stood for long centuries and become a part and parcel of the society.66 All that he demanded was some form of permanent restraint on the zamindars’ rent demands. He was not the youthful radical whom Kristo Das Pal of the British Indian Association thought was recommending anarchy.67
His harsh criticism of the Permanent Settlement was blunted and became full-throated praise in the Economic History, but he still utilized the same standards for evaluating the land revenue settlements. He found the Bengal settlement beneficial in its long-range effects because, together with the Tenancy Acts of 1859 and 1885, it brought security to the zamindars and the ryots and shares for both in the rising prices of food grains. That both landlord and peasant shared the profits—in what proportions he did not say—also proved the justice of the Permanent Settlement. "Security" had to do simply with permanency. If the revenue demand could not be raised or could only be raised in proportion to rising prices, then it brought "security" to those on whom it was imposed. If the demand were not permanent, then it would bring "insecurity," the most evil state of life in which man could live. This is Dutt's account of the one ideal land revenue settlement:

The beneficial results of the Permanent Settlement of 1793, which limited the state-demand from landlords, and the Rent acts of 1859 and 1885, which limited the landlord's demand from tenants, are obvious in every part of Bengal at the present day. There is an educated and influential class of landlords, who have identified themselves with the British rule, and have always given loyal help in the cause of good administration. There is a strong and intelligent middle class, holding tenures of various degrees under the landlords, and forming the strongest element in a progressive society. And there is a resourceful peasantry, able to defend their rights, and able also to resist the first effects of a drought and a failure of crops. The rents are light; the cultivators are not under the thraldom of money-lenders; and British administrators can view with a just pride a province where their moderation has ensured agricultural prosperity to a nation.

His idyllic picture of Bengal in the second half of the nineteenth century is important, because it is against the prosperous and progressive condition of his native presidency that he judged conditions in other parts of British India where land revenue settlements were not as wisely handled. This statement about the Punjab is typical:

Lord Dalhousie . . . made the mistake, which has been made again and again by British rulers in India, of ignoring old leaders and old institutions and of trying to substitute the direct and personal rule of British officials. And in removing Sir Henry Lawrence from the Punjab, Lord
Dalhousie virtually uprooted his policy, swept aside the natural leaders of the people, and brought a nation of cultivators directly under the Government. The policy was neither wise in itself, nor has it conduced to good administration during the fifty years which have elapsed since.

National institutions are the results and the outer expressions of national needs. The people of India developed Village Communities, and lived under Polygars and Zemindars, Jagirdars and Talukdars, Sardars and Panchyets, because they needed them. Their social organisation was built up according to their social requirements; they felt themselves secure and happier under their born leaders or within their Rural Communities. It is unwise for any rulers to disturb such arrangements; it is especially unwise for alien rulers to neglect the organised institutions of a people.70

Dutt mentioned the prevalence of village communities in Madras, in Bombay, and in North India.71 His general argument for all these areas was that the land revenue settlements were uncertain and excessive. He suggested that there should be an India-wide permanent settlement at a moderate assessment. It was his contention in the voluminous writings of his last ten years, from 1899 to 1909, that excessive rates and impermanent settlement were the major cause of famines and agrarian disturbances in India. Only in Bengal, he claimed, where the settlement was low and permanent and the ryots were protected did neither of these unfortunate circumstances develop.

Another significant part of Dutt’s Economic History was devoted to questions of trade, industry, and tariffs. His general argument was that policies on all these matters were made in Britain for the benefit of the British. He presented extensive quotations and figures to show that the British had killed indigenous industries like weaving and India’s overseas export of industrial products in order to make India into an appendage of the British economy, a supplier of raw materials and a market for British manufactured goods.72 In several respects, Dutt’s argument and ordering of data parallel Marxist analyses of imperialism, and his data have been used by many later writers on British rule in India.73 But Dutt was no Marxist; he was an Indian nationalist. He was not an opponent of capitalism or parliamentary democracy or even of feudal princes, but an advocate of all Indian interests. He wanted nascent Indian manufacturing protected; he wanted tariffs in favor of Indian producers, not British ones.
Yet another sphere in which indigenous institutions had been partially destroyed and no adequate new ones developed in their place was in the political system. The local village communities and the traditional landlords had been greatly weakened by the British and many areas formerly ruled by native princes had been taken under direct British administration. Dutt was remarkably indiscriminate in the native institutions he was willing to defend in his later years. Anything which had the touch of tradition, or had long been used to suit local needs, was defended. He claimed, for example, that "no part of India is better governed to-day than these States, ruled by their own princes." 74

A theme which was hammered home relentlessly in the *Economic History* is the need for self-government in India, some way of giving "the children of the soil" a voice in how their country was to be ruled. Dutt described those who he felt should represent and help govern India as her natural, influential, educated, and moderate leaders. On the important question of how representation was to be determined, Dutt was vague because he did not have a political theory of representation. He included local zamindars and landlords, native princes, and spokesmen for "native associations," listing the Bombay Association, Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, Madras Native Association, British Indian Association, and the Congress among these. 75 He seemed to accept princes who ruled absolutely as well as the "influential," "moderate," and "educated" men in the associations noted above. He did not advocate parliamentary democracy for India, only self-government. This notion of representation was sufficiently vague to allow him to dismiss the "Extremists" of the early twentieth century as "men of no consequence" —since they were not as "moderate" or as "influential" as he and his fellow leaders of the Congress, and others in the early associations. Dutt stood for and with a generation which believed that men of position should rightfully dominate Indian politics and serve to communicate Indian opinion to officials in India and Britain. 76

Dutt thought that India was faring even worse under the crown than she had done under the company. The drain had increased and regressive measures were being passed in close succession. He was particularly distressed by the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1899 and by the recurring famines which he felt were due to an unjust administration. And he was undoubtedly disturbed by the inability of the so-called "influential" Indians to influence the making of British policies for
India. "Oligarchy" is a term which appears more and more frequently in Dutt's later writings. He thought that unwise policies and the refusal to listen to Indian opinion were undermining the confidence which he always believed Indians had had in their British rulers. His "rational optimism" and faith in British justice and inevitable progress were being shaken. Thus it is perhaps understandable that he entered the service of the Gaekwar of Baroda as Revenue Minister in 1904 in order, he thought, to put some of his ideas into practice in an area in which Indians still had some control over their own government.

Romesh Dutt's conception of India's future is implicit in his view of her past and present. He wrote in his European travel journal in 1891 that the course of modern history was toward representative government and national freedom. India, he felt, must progress as all nations were progressing. She must take her place among the nations of the world by utilizing foreign science, skill in mechanical arts, and medicine. Dutt neither foresees nor preached any special mission for India in the modern world. His vision of the future was an India partially built in the image of the Western countries and using their essential skills.

But, as has already been shown, Dutt wanted to continue "the old order of things" where "they are consistent with modern progress." Many vital indigenous institutions had been seriously damaged or destroyed, but perhaps they could be revived. The village councils, zamindars, and native princes might still play their part in reconstructing India. From his early days, Dutt showed a sensitivity to the need for adapting Western institutions to an Indian setting. Thus he pressed the case for small industry and the development of agriculture in his Economic History, presaging similar arguments by Indians a few years later, and even today. Dutt described experiments in Madras and elsewhere to revive the hand-loom industry and concluded that "a civilised Government has no more sacred duty than to help these submerged classes, and revive one of the most ancient industries of India."

Dutt advocated thrift, self-reliance, energy, and honesty, virtues taught by some of his Victorian contemporaries in England. He advocated gradual change, since he believed that the Indian people were against revolution. The acts of revolutionaries in Poona, Bengal and London beginning at the end of the nineteenth century appalled him:
The cowardly assassination of Lieutenant Ayerst and the attempted murder of Mr. Rand have aroused the just indignation of Englishmen in India and in England. The most searching inquiries are being made, and every friend of peace and order, be he Englishman or be he Indian, hopes that the perpetrators of the foul deed will be hanged amidst the just exultations of loyal Indian multitudes. The suspicion which hangs on Indian communities will thus be lifted.  

Dutt signed himself “Loyal Indian.” Near the end of his life he was very pessimistic, still advocating slow and gradual change. He did not live long enough to understand the “new spirit” of the twentieth century in India, to which he himself unknowingly had contributed. 

Some attention must be given now to his ideas about Bengal and Bengalis. For Dutt, “Bengal” usually meant the Bengali-speaking area of eastern India or the administrative area called Bengal by the British; but in the Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal for students, Dutt included Bihar, Assam, and Orissa as parts of what is often referred to as “Greater Bengal.” 

During its pre-British history, Bengal, Dutt thought, was in the thrall of oriental despotism. In describing the zamindari system of those days, he wrote: 

in a country like Bengal where climatic and other influences have rendered the people so imbecile and incapable of resistance, every official vested with authority is likely to turn oppressive and tyrannical without evoking an active opposition from the people. 

The initial impact of the British caused great disruptions in the society, but the apathetic Bengalis did not rise on that occasion. 

It would have ensued in the shape of a general revolution among any other people than the Bengalis, who are so tenacious to order, so persistent in their inactivity, so strong in passive resistance, that nothing ever produced or shall produce a social explosion among them. 

Dutt may have been influenced by Buckle’s climatic explanations of historical developments and descriptions of the Bengalis by writers like Macaulay and Grant. The image we get is of weak, passive creatures who, we are also told, are “naturally so averse to actual violence and warfare.” He had in great part accepted and reproduced British interpretations of the Bengali and the Bengali past. With the advent of British rule, a renaissance in the world of letters was accompanied by security, order, and justice in society. Dutt was at this time in his most
optimistic and pro-British state of mind. Like many British writers of the nineteenth century, he viewed the Bengali babu as a "weak and inactive creature," an urban man unacquainted with the countryside, although Dutt dissociates himself and his friends from these reactionary and effete babus.

By the time he wrote his Economic History, Dutt had changed his assessment of the state of Bengal. It had now become the most exemplary province in British India and the standard against which to judge developments and progress in all the other provinces. And not only did Bengal have the most intelligent, resourceful, prosperous social groups, including landlords, middle class, peasantry, but she also had the best laws and the least autocratic administration. Among the native associations, Dutt mentioned the British Indian Association of Calcutta most often as deserving commendation. Where Vivekananda saw the Bengalis moving outward to preach the gospel of a new age, Dutt viewed Bengal as a model for Englishmen and Indians alike of just and progressive imperial rule and a happy indigenous society. In both cases, Bengali ideologues called attention to the preeminence of their native province.

Altogether, Romesh Dutt presents a curious combination—analytical historian and passionate nationalist; extoller of martial virtues in romances but antagonist of violence in modern politics; idealizer of ancient village communities and native industry and a believer in the inevitable march of progress toward the institutional forms of the modern West. Dutt was leader of a generation labeled "denationalized" by the succeeding generation of Indian nationalists, but he was a major contributor to the ideology of Indian nationalism, particularly to its economic positions.

**SYED AMEER ALI, BAR-AT-LAW: MUSLIM LEADER**

Ameer Ali, like Romesh Dutt, was a member of the establishment in Bengal, linking the native society and the British Raj in a number of ways. But it must be noted that although Ameer Ali lived in Calcutta and had his direct experience of India almost totally in Bengal, he did not consider himself a Bengali. In his writings he does not identify with Bengal or mention speaking or reading Bengali. He read Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and English, and spoke the latter two. He is first a Mus-
lim, then an Indian. At the same time he is a modern man, identifying with “the men of culture who are growing up in India under western influences.” Ali became a spokesman for the Muslim community in Bengal and in India, and later for the worldwide Muslim community. He was taken as such a representative by the rulers of India. Ali also played an important part in two Muslim political organizations that began in Bengal, the Central National Mohammedan Association and the Muslim League; but he was like the Afghan or Mughal officials sent to Bengal, an outsider at the top with no roots in the soil.

Writing his memoirs at the end of his life, Ameer Ali dwelt on his Persian ancestry, his Syed heritage, and the train of events which led his family to India and later to Bengal. Among the dominant Sunni Muslims in India and Bengal, Ali was a Shahi, following the Mutazalite philosophical and legal school. As a member of the minority Shahi sect, Ali was marginal to the Muslim community of Bengal, in yet another way an outsider. But Ali never felt marginal to the Islamic faith or world community of Muslims.

Ali grew up, he wrote, in “comfortable circumstances,” son of a restless father whose ambitions in life were stillborn. Ali’s older brother Syed Waris Ali was a successful government servant and at his death was much mourned by Ameer Ali as “the guardian of my youth, the dearest friend of my whole life.” Ali’s father was a scholar of Arabic and Persian who had been writing a life of Muhammad just before his demise. The peripatetic father had been persuaded by two British officials to give his sons a Western as well as an Islamic education. English came to be the one language in which Ali wrote, although he mentions speaking Urdu to Muslim audiences later in life. His aim was success in the world of Islam and in the world of English.

Two images stand out in Ali’s account of his boyhood: a youthful organizer of hunts using firearms (like the rural nobility of old) and the ringleader of Muslim boys at school, raiding outnumbered Hindu boys. Although we cannot assess the accuracy of the account, it seems probable that Ali was a leader of his fellow Muslims and one willing to strike out to achieve success. No doubt he had early awareness of his membership in the Muslim community, although he also remembered that communal amity rather than enmity was more common in the nineteenth century.
In his memoirs, he pays tribute to three other influences: his mother; Robert Thwaytes, principal of Hooghly College; and Syed Karamat Ali, Mutawali of the Hooghly Imambara, a Shahi religious institution. The first helped to give him manly confidence after the early death of his father; the second encouraged his Western education and moves into the world of advanced studies; the third gave him an Islamic education, faith in his religious leanings and helped to give him a "glimpse of the Mussulman gentry of the old school." Ali translated a work of the latter into English, a treatise on the origins of science.98

After his early Islamic and Western education, Ali studied for an M.A. at Hooghly College and then was awarded a state scholarship to go to England and sit for the bar there. Through family connections and his Western teachers, he was given introductions to the highest officials of the government of India and to high society in England. During his four early years in Britain, he lived with the family of a Mrs. Chase and was treated as "one of themselves." 99 He frequented the society of the great and powerful, "awed by the galaxy" but shortly paying tribute to the overwhelming generosity and hospitality of the English.100 Before returning to India, he started working for a British legal firm. He was to spend many years residing in England, including the last twenty-four of his life, feeling at home, an equal, and yet different, an eminent Muslim who spoke for the Islamic community. Ali married an English woman and had his sons educated in England. In his account of his visits to England, Ali rarely mentions another Indian. He operated outside the network of Bengali Hindus abroad.

While still in England, provoked by a Christian critic of Islam and encouraged by Henry Channing, Ali wrote his first book, *A Critical Examination of the Life and Teachings of Mohammed*, published in 1873. Ali expanded this work into *The Spirit of Islam* and continued to revise it throughout his lifetime; it became a favorite of Westerners in search of an introduction to Islam and Westernized Muslims in need of a modernist version of their traditions. In the preface to the *Life of Mohammed*, Ali wrote:

the gradual enlightenment of the human mind is shown strikingly in the silent change which is taking place in Christendom towards a more liberal conception of the grand work achieved by the Arabian prophet. . . . Maurice, Stanley, and Carlyle in England, Emerson, Parker, Chan-
ning and Draper in America... have testified as the result of earnest study that Islam, instead of evil names heaped upon it, merits the thanks of humanity.101

This short book represents Ali’s completion of an unfinished dream of his father, a tribute to his teacher Syed Karamat Ali, and the beginning of his career as a Muslim apologist. The feeling of defending Islam against what he later called “Christian assailants” and of trying to guide ignorant and misled Europeans to the truth about Islam became one of the central tasks of Ali’s life. Like Romesh Dutt presenting the Indian past, Ali did not pretend to original scholarship, but felt he was filling a need, writing for a general, educated audience. Ali thought it was incumbent upon him, as one accepted into professional, political, and literary circles in England, to help bring peace between Christians and Muslims.102 The main audience he sought was composed of Europeans; next, he wanted Muslims to learn the true traditions and history of their faith; and, third, a very distant third, he wanted to enlighten non-Muslim Indians. But every one of his works was published in London, except a brief work to guide fledgling Muslim lawyers, Student’s Handbook of Mahomedan Law.

Returning to Calcutta armed with a “wider outlook,” Ali became a barrister of the Calcutta High Court. In his memoirs, he described his hardships as the only Muslim barrister surrounded by distant but occasionally helpful Europeans and by Hindus such as W. C. Bonnerjee. In this period Hindus, too, were struggling for success, but there were a few more of them, and they may have felt a camaraderie for each other which was not reciprocal with Ali. But Ali succeeded. He did well as a barrister and wrote for British-edited periodicals in Calcutta (Calcutta Observer) and London (Nineteenth Century). Later, he served as officiating Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta and as judge of the Calcutta High Court from 1890 to 1904. The image he presents of himself on the magistrate’s bench is that of a tolerant, sensible, and strong man whom no one could intimidate or fool. Ali also served in the Bengal and Imperial legislative councils; he had a distinguished career in the British-Indian establishment in Calcutta and felt that he had had a “blessed life.” His career on the bench and at the bar gave him as full a sense of high life and low life in Bengal as did Romesh Dutt’s civil service.103

Ali also became a scholar of Muslim law and was appointed Lecturer
in Muhammadan Law at Calcutta University. He expanded his lectures into a two-volume work on Muslim law and a briefer version of the same, his Student's Handbook. Again, Ali felt he was filling a crucial link role between alien rulers and Indian subjects. He wrote in 1880:

Owing to an imperfect knowledge of Mussulman jurisprudence, of Mussulman manners, customs and usages, it is not infrequent, even now, to find cases decided by the highest law courts against every principle of the Mahommedan law. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that every miscarriage of justice adds to the long roll of indictment which the popular mind has framed against the British rule in India.\textsuperscript{104}

To fill this knowledge vacuum, Ali offered his works on Muslim law, in which he was particularly concerned to define who the Muslims were, to give some idea of the different sects, and to specify in some detail the laws relating to succession, status, and property for each sect. He felt there would be practical consequences flowing from his volumes: judges of all the courts in India, ignorant of Muslim law and trying cases concerning Muslims, would read them and hand down fairer decisions. There would be a decrease in anti-British feeling among Muslims, and the rulers would be in closer touch with one community of their subjects. A critical concern for his fellow Muslims also filters through these books. Ali was upset that Muslims themselves did not study their own laws or train young men specifically in Muslim law. He felt that the traditions of the Muslim community should be defined and preserved. No profound work of original scholarship would be needed, but rather a codifying, simplifying process he felt suited to by virtue of his skills and experience.\textsuperscript{105}

In addition to numerous essays published during his years on the bench, in 1899 Ali also completed a major work of history, A Short History of the Saracens. Drawing heavily on the last parts of Gibbon's The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, which had been a favorite since childhood, Ali declared he wanted to "enlist sympathy" and "evoke interest" in a great civilization close in time to modern Europe, but virtually unknown in the West and India. He wanted to overcome prejudices and bitterness and demonstrate the contributions of the Saracens to modern civilization. Once more Ali stated that he was filling a need. There was no brief, clear, sympathetic account of the Saracens
Romesh Chunder Dutt and Syed Ameer Ali

“from earliest times to the destruction of Baghdad and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain.” Ali’s part was to simplify and summarize more esoteric works of scholarship and place his version before ignorant or misled Europeans and unenlightened Muslims.106

Pulling together different strands of his work as a writer, we can say that Ameer Ali sought to define the important religious traditions, history, and legal guidelines which would help regenerate the Muslim community in an age of European domination. He wanted to instruct Europeans who had opened an avenue for him into modern civilization and who had offered him their hospitality and an entrée into their society. He was equally concerned with aiding the Muslims, particularly in India but in other parts of the world as well, through his writing and practical works. He stressed that regeneration of the Muslim community had to come from within through hard work, growth, and thoughtfulness, although he also specified ways in which he thought the Raj could assist Indian Muslims.

To help raise the Muslim community, Ali devoted some of his energies from the late 1870s to Muslim politics. Disagreeing with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s view that it was best to stay clear of politics, Ali felt it important that the Muslims organize and make their views known if they were not to lag even further behind the Hindus. He helped to found the National Mohammedan Association, which shortly grew into the Central National Mohammedan Association, with thirty-four branches. Although Ali often claimed that the Muslims of India (and, indeed, Muslims everywhere) constituted a homogeneous community, he learned that there were many Muslim points of view once he founded an organization.107 In this work he was separated from prominent Muslims like Abdul Latif in Calcutta, who ridiculed Ali as a Westernized man ignorant of the religious languages of Islam, cut off from the masses, and out of touch with true religious reform.108

Ali was also in disagreement with Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s concentration on educational work, which interested Ali but to which he gave only secondary importance. At this point, Ali needed all the confidence his Syed heritage, his comfortable childhood, and his successful career could give him. He had to face the problem of what it meant to be a Muslim and an Indian in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, defining his own version of Islamic culture and the proper poli-
tics for an Indian Muslim. Ali gathered a small group of Muslims around him that met at his house in Calcutta and went to work.\textsuperscript{109}

The Central National Mohammedan Association, like the British Indian Association, the early Muslim League, and even the Indian Association, was first of all an organization of notables. It engaged in petitioning, advising top officials of the Muslim viewpoint whenever possible, and claimed to represent all Indian Muslims. The members were mostly non-Bengali, some from Bihar and other parts of India, and often were Shias like Ameer Ali. In 1882 they placed an extensive memorial before the liberal viceroy, Lord Ripon. It was obviously written by Ali, since it reads in long sections, word for word, the same as an article he published under his own name at the same time.\textsuperscript{110} It asked for many more positions for Muslims in government services and for government assistance in providing modern education for Muslims. It mentioned the great days of Muslim rule, current discontents, and the prejudicial treatment by Hindus that often kept Muslims from advancing. Although Ali said that regeneration had to come from within, he made it clear that large-scale government help would be essential.

Like the first generation of congressmen, Ameer Ali remained a conscientious loyalist throughout his life. He was devoted to the Muslim community, but he was also devoted to “the interests of the British Empire.”\textsuperscript{111} He identified with what he called the forces of order during the Swadeshi period and wanted a firmer government hand to be applied to the troublemakers, lest the government’s authority be lost. He went even further than his Hindu contemporaries, since he lavished praise upon Lord Curzon; and when the Muslim League became critical of the government, Ali resigned.\textsuperscript{112} Wilfrid Blunt painted a picture of Ali in the 1880s as fawning before the government and letting down his countrymen.\textsuperscript{113} It may be fair to place Ali somewhere between Blunt’s harsh portrait and his self-image of resolute independence.

In his memoirs, Ali inflated his role in political events between 1880 and the end of his life. For example, Ali claimed a critical part in preventing Ripon’s resignation over the revision of the Ilbert bill, and in shaping the Bengal Tenancy bill so that it more adequately guarded the ryots’ interest. Later, he claimed credit for swinging Morley around to acceptance of separate electorates in the 1909 reform of the legislative councils.\textsuperscript{114}
One feature of his politics from the 1880s through the 1920s is opposition to Muslims working with the Indian National Congress. He felt a growing antipathy toward Brahmanical Hindus and what he called their "mental pliability." 115 He argued that the reforms themselves were the most important cause in furthering communal antipathy. Western democracy, he maintained, could not simply be grafted onto the Indian body politic without rejective tendencies. He wanted political reforms to go at an even slower pace, with more weight given to the interests of Muslim groups than their educational level or percentage of the population might warrant; and he wanted full governmental authority continued.116

From 1908 to 1913, Ali and the Aga Khan were instrumental in setting up and running a London branch of the Muslim League. The league's founding host, the Nawab of Dacca, was an old legal client of Ali's, and the organization's loyalist, conservative cast fitted Ali's political stance in the days of Swadeshi. Ali and the Aga Khan argued skillfully in London for separate electorates, while Romesh Dutt and other congressmen, opposed but less passionately to this particular clause, lost out to the league forces allied with the viceroy, Lord Minto.117 Ali wrote in his memoirs that he could not understand the antipathy of Surendranath Banerjea and the Bengalee.118 But to congressmen, Ali was preventing Muslims from joining their organization, thus dividing the Indian political front in its approach to the monolithic facade of the "bureaucracy" or "oligarchy"—terms which congressmen were using more frequently in referring to the Raj. Ali's inability to understand congressional opposition is the counterpart to the failure of the Congress to show more sensitivity to Muslim grievances, concerns, and interests. Ali said he had always had cordial relations with Hindus; but as the Indian scene grew more politicized and feelings heightened, those who chose the side of Curzon, unquestioned loyalty to the empire, and used derogatory language toward the majority community could not expect to escape attack.

Once he had retired to England, Ali became more interested in larger Muslim causes, particularly the fate of the Khilafat and of Turkey within the crumbling Ottoman Empire. He labored to build the British Red Crescent Relief Society to aid wounded Muslims just before and during World War I, and he wrote frequently in the press
about the history and significance of the Khilafat. He played a small role in the demise of the Khilafat in Turkey; in the end he mournfully reproached the Turks whom he had spent so many years defending in Britain.¹¹⁹

Ali lived on to 1928 in a European milieu, writing articles and serving on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. He had resigned from the Muslim League in 1913, when he said it had been taken over by “extremists,” and by the end of his life was out of touch with the changes occurring within Muslim and Indian politics. In earlier days he had helped to provide religious, historical, and legal guides for a modernized Islam. This legacy lived on among Muslims within and outside India. A Marxist analyst has labeled it an ideology for a class of bourgeois Muslims.¹²⁰ Rather than pigeonholing it so facilely, it may be more useful to analyze his views of the past, suggest some of the apologetic themes, and compare his historical view with that of Romesh Dutt.

For his Western and Muslim readers, Ameer Ali transformed the conflicting sects and teachings, the complex and extensive history of Islam into intelligible accounts understandable to educated everyman. He made extensive use of Christian terms and analogies like established and dissenting church and pontiff for caliph; he also interpreted the Muslim past with concepts like socialism and democracy without undue reflection upon their possible different meaning in another historical context.¹²¹ His general aim was to show the equivalence of Islam, and in some cases its superiority, to other great traditions and to do so using terms and values acceptable to Westerners. He wanted to gain the recognition and sympathy of foreigners and to show his fellow Muslims the glories of their past. If Westerners realized the equivalence of Islamic civilization with their own, then Muslims might gain equality of treatment and a respect that they were not receiving in Ali’s time. If Muslims understood that democracy, socialism, and scientific learning were integral parts of their heritage, perhaps they would feel no inferiority toward the West as they regenerated the life of their fallen community.¹²²

One approach used by Ali, especially in direct answers to Christian critics, was to go on the offensive. If his antagonists listed the barbarities of Islam—slavery, polygamy, degradation of women, intolerance
of non-Muslims, etc.—Ali would respond by listing the barbarities in each category committed by Christians and then minimize the offenses of Muslims in each category. So he claimed that slavery was against Muslim law and had been widespread in the West until the nineteenth century; polygamy was common in many civilizations and was dying out among Muslims; women had a higher position in Islamic civilization, above all in their legal rights, than in other cultures; and Muslims had always shown more tolerance toward others than Christians. He often compared Islamic theory with Christian practice. He also assumed that every reader would agree with his rather puritanical values and with his assumptions that monotheism is obviously superior to polytheism, that idol worship is perforce blasphemous, that a rational rather than a mystical approach to religious experience is preferable. He dismissed Hinduism as a combination of mysticism, pantheism, and fetishism run riot; and he condemned Christian claims for Jesus as the son of God as ridiculous idol worship, further maintaining that Islam was true Christianity. That he gained much sympathy from Hindu and Christian readers by including these assaults is dubious.

The grand theme of Ali’s *Short History of the Saracens* and *The Spirit of Islam* is the rise of a glorious Islamic civilization and its decline. Much of his writing is devoted to charting the rise and heights, savoring the romance of conquest and the spread of earthly power, and explaining the fall. In his two major works, he is concerned with Islamic civilization in the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain; India is neglected since it is out of the main stream. It was and is useful for Western readers to see the Crusades from the other side, to understand the genuine contributions of Muslims to the transmission and extension of the heritage of antiquity, and to widen their sympathies for other peoples. But Ali goes beyond that to claim that it was the Saracens “who had spread culture, given impetus to civilisation, and established chivalry—who had, in fact, created modern Europe.”

Ali wrote in his memoirs that the decline of Islamic civilization was a concern of his for many years. He adhered to no one causal theory, but listed among other factors racial pride, fanaticism, tribal jealousies, the rise of mysticism leading to quietism and lethargy, patristic bondage, the attachment of extraneous elements to the one true faith, and defeats by barbarians like the Franks and the Mongols. It is remark-
able in light of the divisions he chronicled within Islamic civilization itself that he continued to assert in his more political writings to British officials that world Muslim solidarity had always existed. In the Indian context, he would often refer to the “one homogeneous community.” Throughout there is identification with the just and powerful, nostalgia for the great old days, and dismay with present weakness.

Ali wrote no major work on India comparable to his *History of the Saracens* or *The Spirit of Islam*. Although he did compose a few articles on Islamic culture in India near the end of his life, he believed that the glorious achievements of Islam had taken place outside India, and it was with those accomplishments and those Muslims that he identified. Nonetheless, it is possible to extract his views of the Indian past and present from his articles and occasional comments in his books.

He confronted Hinduism with as much open-mindedness as a fundamentalist missionary and as much sensitivity as James Mill writing his history of British India. Ali felt that the spread of the Aryans through India had been a process of enslaving indigenous peoples, that Brahmanism had “deleterious effects,” involving “humiliating and degrading restrictions,” and that Hinduism was “divisive,” “pervasive,” and “conservative.” He was appalled by the sexuality in Indian religious cults of the Mother Goddess and Krishna and could find no fellow feeling for idolatrous Hindus.

In a paper probably written in 1912, Ali announces, “It can hardly be disputed that the real history of India commences with the entry of the Mussulmans.” Elsewhere he wrote in the same vein, “When the Mussulman power seated itself in Delhi a new culture arose in India which had left its mark on every institution existing nowadays in the country.” The Afghans and then the Mughals were bringers of order and culture to a backward, idolatrous, and divided land. His views are like those of the nineteenth-century British writers who saw the British as the new men transforming anarchy into order and beginning to educate the natives. Ali goes through the achievements of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire, but these were not the greatest days for Islam; they were merely the high point of civilization in India. Ali mentions the development of the revenue system, cultural achievements, and the general tolerance which Muslim rulers spread over the land. He also stresses the large role which the Muslim rulers
gave to Hindus in their government. Though there was tolerance and communal amity, except for the reign of Aurangzeb, Ali argues that Hindus and Muslims always constituted two "communities" or "nations." He uses these two terms interchangeably, yet maintained that he was not a separatist. Those who have wanted to show Ali to be an early proponent of Pakistan have stressed his use of the word "nation" and blissfully forgotten that he never anticipated two independent and autonomous nations emerging out of British India. Ali emphasized the homogeneity of the Muslim community, but his own distaste for Sufism may have been one reason why he wrote so little on Islam in India.

The British brought further unification of the subcontinent, but Ali, like a number of European writers in the nineteenth century, felt that British India was an artificial unit, lacking the unity of Western nations. The integration process fostered by the British brought, in time, intensification of rivalries between native communities. At first the rulers assisted those who were most malleable and suitable for the lower ranks of their administration; these turned out to be mostly Hindus. British rule through the nineteenth century, Ali said, benefited "Brahmanical people" and moneylenders, predominantly Hindu.

A special concern to him was the rapid decline of the Muslims since the 1820s. Ali placed most responsibility for this fall upon the shoulders of Lord William Bentinck:

Prior to his time, the Mussulmans occupied the foremost position among the people of India. The cultivation of their law and their literature was encouraged by successive British governors, their traditions were respected, and they themselves were treated with a certain amount of consideration due to the former rulers of the land. All this changed under Lord William Bentinck's administration, and the Indian Mahommedans were relegated into the cold shade of neglect. Their institutions gradually died out, and the old race of Moulvis and Mufis, who had shed a lustre on the reigns of the Marquis of Wellesley and the Marquis of Hastings, became extinct.

This passage exemplifies Ali's style of history: he believed that the ruler was the most important determinant of historical change; he projected guilt onto the British, extrapunitively, rather than placing responsibility upon the Muslims themselves for their fall, and he looked
back nostalgically to the days of Muslim majesty and might. He saw the shift from Persian to English as the language of administration as the crucial turning point in the decline of the Indian Muslims, but he did realize that Muslims could learn English as well as Hindus and might flourish again under British rule. The Muslims would need help from the rulers to combat what he often referred to as the "Hindu juggernaut," the exclusive monopolization of lower administrative positions by Hindus. Here he employed a conspiratorial theory of history, again projecting guilt out onto others for Muslim shortcomings.  

Ali had mixed feelings about many of the changes and reforms under British rule. He criticized government monetary policy for failing to advance Indian interests; he felt that peasants and landlords were inadequately protected, especially the former; and he noted the drain. He blamed the low state of India in 1880 on shortcomings in British policy and he attacked the British and Indian "obsession with democracy," 136 He opposed nationalism as a form of atavistic tribalism and blamed the reforms of 1909 and 1919 for increasing bad feelings between the Hindu and Muslim communities. A modern constitution, Ali thought, could not be imposed on a medieval economy, using this line in his advocacy of separate communal electorates. Too rapid reforms and any weakening of the authority of the Raj would be a disaster for the people of India (meaning the Muslim community). 137 But with this catalog of criticisms, Ali remained the staunchest of loyalists; his phrase, "the necessity of British rule," 138 still lingers. He accepted the reforms of the legislative councils because they were small advances and embodied the principle of separate electorates. But in his writing on India, one feels the ever-present fear of disorder and disaster for the Muslims. British rule never brought him peace of mind.

He called upon the British officials to take action which would benefit the Muslims; the father had a responsibility to help his lagging child. He wanted "denominational universities," help for the ryots against avaricious moneylenders, and full understanding and utilization of Muslim law in Indian courts where applicable. 139 He stressed action from above; this puts him in a class with the early nationalists and authoritarian utilitarians of the nineteenth century. He placed much hope upon a just executive authority.

Ali's writings contain very little about Bengal. There is a sentence or
brief opinion here and there but no particular concern for or identifi-
cation with Bengal. He occasionally accepts the familiar stereotype of
the Bengali babu, contrasting the “mere effervescence in Bengal” with
areas inhabited by “more virile races.” And, although he wonders
whether the Bengali character may not be changing in the Swadeshi
period, he himself never identifies with the people in the region in
which he grew up, attained success, and spent the greater part of his
life. Bengal was as marginal to Ameer Ali as it was central to Romesh
Dutt. Ali had a sense of Indian and Muslim identity, but not of Bengali
identity. Thus he belongs to a large section of the Muslim leadership in
Bengal in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who worked in Ben-
gal but could not be said to be of Bengal or the Bengalis in any signifi-
cant sense. The Hindu leaders of the Congress may have been as de-
tached from the masses, but they were Bengalis, spoke Bengali, and
eventually started to mobilize support lower down in the Bengali social
order. Eventually, some Muslim leaders also sought wide support. The
most successful of these were Bengalis, not Muslims from outside who
were domiciled in Bengal.

Religion, which was of scant importance to Romesh Dutt, was vital
to Ali. Religion and Muslim law were tied to the fate of Ali’s commu-
nity, which was, he felt, in danger of disintegration. Dutt, as a member
of the majority community, was not particularly concerned with speci-
fying who was a Hindu, although he thought it important to recall the
glories of the Hindu past. Dutt is not haunted by imminent disaster.
Ali, the marginal man from the minority sect of the minority religion,
was often fearful about the continuity of his community.

Their views of the Indian past are antithetical. Dutt saw a golden
age in early Hindu and Buddhist India, decay during the Muslim pe-
riod. Ali saw barbarism in ancient India followed by a golden age dur-
ing Muslim rule. Both were influenced by nineteenth-century evolu-
tionism and hoped for greater days ahead. For Dutt, progress to an
ever-higher stage of humanity seemed more likely than it did to Ali.
The latter doubted that there could ever be a Muslim golden age to
compare with the pinnacles reached by the Saracens. There might be a
European or world golden age in which Muslims would participate,
but they would never again dominate, and this he lamented.

Both Dutt and Ali identified with the ruler and with the ruled. They
both participated in the British Raj at fairly high levels and proclaimed their loyalty. They were respected; their advice was listened to, although not necessarily followed. They were praised for their English prose styles, although with an undertone that said, Imagine our natives doing so well. They were criticized by those with more extreme, more religious, or more nationalistic outlooks for their identification with British rule and Western ways. And they each played a variety of link roles between ruler and ruled, making important contributions to the ideologies of their era.