

Some Special Thinkers of Bengal

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Abstract—The history of Bengal and the Bengali nation is quite ancient. The lives and works of many renowned Bengalis have advanced the lifestyle and culture of Bengalis. The economic prosperity of the people of Bengal, which is abundant in natural resources, has allowed them to play a pioneering role in solving various everyday life problems and earning a livelihood. Multiple regions of Bengal, full of rivers, trees, and fruits, have been prosperous for a long time. Since crops grew easily, people became skilled in many tasks. For the peace of the human soul, many Bengali thinkers have introduced new ideas and paths in their thought processes. They initiated the mantra of renunciation, and have shown people the path to a happy and peaceful life. In a sorrowful world, they have preached ideologies that make social life extremely delightful and have inspired others with noble thoughts of world welfare.

Keywords: Bengal and Bengali Community in History, Some Special Personality of Bengal, They can be Spiritual Teacher or others, Who are special for their work and activity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bengali and Bengal's history is intertwined with a myriad of stories, enriching both Bengal and India's historical narratives. Let's talk about a few notable Bengalis. Firstly, the one that comes to mind is Nimai, or Sri Chaitanya Deva, the son of Jagannath Mishra and Sachi Devi. Under the influence of the Bhakti movement, he managed to shake the foundation of contemporary society. His contributions to reforming Hinduism and promoting Hindu-Muslim harmony are undeniable. When the foreigners, captivated by Bengal's wealth, seized and exploited Bengal, impoverishing it, the skies over Bengal began to darken. The history of Bengal plunged into darkness under colonial rule. We learn about this era's Bengal through the writings of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay. As the saying goes, "Don't fear seeing clouds, for the sun laughs behind them; the smiling moon returns even through the darkness." The doors of Western education and culture opened to us as a silver lining of colonial rule. Modern education through English, encompassing the history of Europe's and America's independence struggles, literature, geography, science, etc., profoundly influenced Bengali intellect. Assimilating both Western and Eastern education, a class emerged among Bengalis who became partakers in the global human consciousness. We received personalities like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Through his solitary efforts, he exemplified such a service ideal that remains rare in global history. The addition of a great thinker like Rabindranath Tagore to Bengali intellect, a writer, essayist, lyricist, playwright, poet, social and humanist advocate, and global humanist, brought recognition to Bengali literature on a global platform with the Nobel Prize. During this era, writers like Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay, Sukumar Ray, etc., enriched Bengali literature. With the birth of a great personality like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal, the soil of Bengal became sacred and blessed. His extraordinary literary prowess also enriched Bengali language and literature. An ocean of kindness, knowledge, and compassion, Ishwar Chandra Bandopadhyay. Under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, Naren transformed into Swami Vivekananda. In the Chicago Parliament of Religions, he won everyone's hearts with his sincere and sharp speeches. His spiritual disciple Subhas Chandra won everyone's hearts.

II. PLAN OF THE STUDY/RESEARCH

The event that is considered very significant in the thousand-year history of Bengal is the advent of Sri Chaitanya Deva. Nimai, or Chaitanya Deva, was born on February 18, 1486, in Nabadwip, Nadia district, and passed away on June 14, 1534, in Jagannath Puri, Utkala, or Odisha, at the age of 47. Although his death is surrounded by much controversy. After the death of his first wife, Lakshmi Priya Devi, he married his second wife, Vishnu Priya, and shortly thereafter renounced the world and left his home.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu was a notable Bengali religious and social reformer of the 16th century. GaudiyaVaishnavas consider him to be a full incarnation of Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna Chaitanya was a prominent proponent of the Vaishnava Bhakti yoga philosophy based on the BhagavataPurana and Bhagavad Gita. He particularly promoted the worship of God in the form of Radha and Krishna and popularised the Hare Krishna Mahamantra. The literary works about Mahaprabhu's life inaugurated a new era in Bengali literature. Several poets of that time composed poetry based on the life of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, notably Krishnadasa Kaviraja Goswami's Chaitanya Charitamrita, Vrindavana Dasa Thakura's Chaitanya Bhagavata, and Lochana Dasa Thakura's Chaitanya Mangal.

Chaitanya Deva's birth name was Vishvambhara Mishra. In his early youth, he was a renowned scholar. NimaiPandit of Nabadwip was indisputably famous in the field of logic. His attraction to recitation and the chanting of Krishna's name had been strong since childhood, as known from various stories of his life. However, his primary interest was in reading Sanskrit texts and acquiring knowledge. After the death of his father, while performing Pind Daan in Gaya, Nimai met his guru, Ishwar Puri. Ishwar Puri initiated him into the Gopala mantra. This event deeply influenced Nimai's later life. Upon returning to Bengal, his unexpected transformation from a scholar to a devotee amazed the local Vaishnav society led by Advaita Acharya. He soon became a leading figure in the Vaishnav community of Nadia.

The main goals of the Bhakti movement were twofold: 1) Reforming Hinduism and 2) Promoting harmony between Hindus and Muslims. Although caste discrimination could not be eradicated, its adverse effects were significantly reduced. On the other hand, the term Chaitanya Renaissance has been introduced to highlight the limitations of the 19th-century Renaissance. However, he was not a mediaeval "Liberator" or a "Renaissance-man." Because a Renaissance man does not claim or is not attributed with divine powers. He is established as a human being.

After being initiated into the renunciation vow by Keshava Bharati, he adopted the name Sri Chaitanya and left his homeland, Bengal, to travel to various pilgrimage sites in India for several years. During his time, South India was a major centre of the Bhakti movement. From Puri, he travelled to South India, where he met the great scholar and devotee Ramananda. Later, he went to some regions of South India to preach the Bhakti doctrine. During this time, he constantly chanted the name of Krishna. He spent the last twenty-four years of his life in Jagannath Dham, Puri. The Suryavanshi Hindu king of Odisha, Gajapati Maharaja Prataparudra Deva, considered Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to be the incarnate form of Krishna. Maharaja Prataparudra became a patron of Chaitanya Deva and his Sankirtan group. According to devotees, in the final phase of his life, Chaitanya Deva was immersed in Bhakti and would often perform Harinama Sankirtan, being mostly absorbed in a divine state. His famous disciples included Rupa Goswami, Raghunatha Bhatta Goswami, Raghunatha Dasa Goswami, Sanatana Goswami, Gopala Bhatta Goswami, Jiva Goswami, and others.

For Bengali Hindus, Loknath Brahmachari is a highly revered name. He is best known as Baba Loknath. The compassionate Baba Loknath provided various teachings to his disciples and devotees, only parts of which have been preserved. Some teachings are passed down through disciples, while others are found in the book "Dharmasara" by one of his notable disciples, Yamini Kumar Mukhopadhyay. It is believed that with Baba Loknath's blessings, no danger can approach. His famous saying is, "In times of crisis, whether in battle, forest, water, or jungle, remember me, and I will protect you."

Baba Loknath was born in 1137 Bengali year or 1730 AD in Chakla village, near Barasat in the then Jessore district, now North 24 Parganas district. His father was Ramnarayan, and his mother was Kamaladevi. Ramnarayan was a devout Brahmin. Baba Loknath was the fourth child of his parents. At that time, it was believed that if a son was initiated into the renunciant order, the family would be redeemed. To initiate Loknath into the renunciant order, his father completed Loknath's Upanayan ceremony at the age of 11 and entrusted him to the nearby village's renunciant, Bhagwan Ganguly. During this time, Loknath was accompanied by his childhood friend Benimadhab. Bhagwan Ganguly took his two disciples, Loknath and Benimadhab, on a journey. After crossing various villages, cities, rivers, and forests, they first arrived at Kalighat, where they began practicing yoga. By following his guru's instructions and practicing various forms of yoga and vows, Baba Loknath attained Brahmajnana (knowledge of the absolute). After achieving Brahmajnana, he began travelling the country.

Baba Loknath travelled westward through Afghanistan, Mecca, and Medina, reaching the Atlantic Ocean coast. Over time, his guru aged to 100 years, and his disciples to 50. Guru Bhagwan Ganguly handed over the two disciples to Sri Trailanga Swami and passed away. Afterward, Loknath, along with Benimadhab, first reached Kabul, Afghanistan. There, they discussed

various scriptures, including the Vedas and the Quran, with a Muslim named Molla Sadi, gaining insights into Islam. During his travels in Arab lands, the learnt Muslim community of Mecca showed special respect to him. There, Loknath Brahmachari met a learnt individual named Abdul Ghafoor.

Afterward, they travelled through Persia, Arabia, Mecca, Medina, Turkey, Italy, Greece, Switzerland, France, China, and other countries before returning to India. After staying for some time at Chandranath, they both went to Kamakhya and Baba Loknath to Baradi. After arriving at Baradi, Baba Loknath's fame and miraculous qualities spread everywhere. From that time, he became known as the Brahmachari of Baradi. The zamindar of Baradi, Nag Mahasaya, was so impressed by Baba Loknath's greatness that he donated land for the construction of a temple. Hearing of Loknath Baba's ashram, devotees began flocking to Baradi from distant places. In this way, Baradi became a pilgrimage site blessed by Baba's blessings. During his stay at Baradi, the Maharaja of Bhawal took a photograph of Baba Loknath. Today, copies of this photograph are worshipped in our homes. While at Baradi, Baba Loknath displayed numerous miraculous powers. And so, one day, the time came for Baba Loknath's great departure. That day was the 19th of Jyeshtha in the Bengali year 1297 (June 1, 1890). Baba Loknath himself had foretold about his departure. Loknath Brahmachari left his mortal body at the age of 160. He left us with his holy memories and numerous immortal sayings: "Let reverence be your refuge, let reverence be your friend, and that supreme abode your goal." "Where there is ignorance, there is sin and suffering; in knowledge, that is in wisdom, sin and suffering do not exist."

Sri Sri Harichand Thakur and Sri Sri Guru Chand Thakur were legendary figures: famous religious leaders, philosophers of Bengal, dual avatars of Gautam Buddha and Sri Chaitanya Deva, opponents of caste divisions, sages, great men, supreme gurus, founders of the Matua sect, and saviours of the Dalit Namasudra community.

About 200 years ago, in the month of Falgun in the Bengali year 1228 (March 13, 1846), Sri Sri Harichand Thakur was born in the village of Safaladanga, in Orakandi, under the Kashiari police station in the Gopalganj district. His parents, Yashwant Thakur and Annapurna Devi, belonged to the Namasudra community. Yashwant was quite well-known as a Vaishnav devotee. Harichand Thakur was born at a propitious time. At birth, he exhibited 32 different signs on his body, which are special signs of an avatar according to Hindu scriptures. These signs were also present on Gautam Buddha's body. Many believe that Harichand Thakur was, in fact, a combined avatar of Buddha and Sri Chaitanya Deva.

Harichand Thakur led a very simple life. He did not have the opportunity for formal education. In his early life, Harichand Thakur grazed cows in the fields. With his miraculous powers, he performed various welfare activities, including healing devotees from diseases. Gradually, the number of Harichand Thakur's devotees increased. Devotees of Harichand Thakur are called Matua. The devotion of the Matuas and the power of Harichand Thakur made Orakandi increasingly known across the country and beyond. Today, Orakandi has become a pilgrimage site.

Harichand Thakur mentioned that one of the reasons for his incarnation was to provide a path to salvation for the fallen. Additionally, it can be said that he was particularly influenced by the cause of raising the self-respect and socio-economic liberation of the lower caste people. His main advice to his devotees was - "Hand in work, mouth in name (of God)."

This far-sighted sage left this world at the age of just 66, on the 23rd of Falgun, 1877. For the Matua community, Thakurbari in Bongaon, West Bengal, and Matuadham have now become important pilgrimage centres. In Thakurnagar of India and Orakandi in the Gopalganj district of Bangladesh, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist devotees come together, flying red flags, beating victory drums, and blowing conch shells to celebrate the occasion. Harichand Thakur remains a shining example of humanity.

Guru Chand was born in Safaladanga village, adjacent to Orakandi, under the Kashiari police station in the Gopalganj district (Faridpur district). His father was Harichand Thakur, the initiator of the Matua movement. Due to social discrimination, Guru Chand could not get admitted to any school, so his father Harichand enrolled him in a madrasa and advised him to improve education in the future. After his father's death, Guru Chand took up the responsibility of this social movement. Guru Chand Thakur particularly emphasised expanding education and improving the living standards of the underprivileged classes. Overcoming social and caste Hindu barriers, he established the first school in Orakandi in 1880. Encouraged by him, it was upgraded from a primary level to a high school within 18 years. He initiated a mass movement to eradicate untouchability and promote education. During his 90-year life, he established 1,812 schools in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

In 1881, under his initiative and leadership, the first Namasudra conference was held in Datta Danga, Khulna. He led the movement to upgrade the Chandal caste to the Namasudra caste. Through his efforts, a delegation submitted a report to the Governor General of Bengal and Assam in 1907, leading to the recognition of the Namasudra name in 1911. After his death, politician and parliamentarian Pramath Ranjan Thakur took over the movement. After the country's partition, the main centre of the Matua Mahasangha was established in Thakurnagar, West Bengal. Guru Chand Thakur worked not only for the backward Hindu caste but mainly for humanity. He saw everyone as human beings, without any caste distinction. Hence, his most devoted follower was Tinkari Mia of Khulna. His grandson Jalaluddin became a Matua leader. The foreign couple, Dr. S.S. Mead, called him the religious father. Through the Matua religion, Harichand Thakur united the neglected. A common man of the Dalit community, thinking about his community, set an unprecedented example by establishing a school on his own initiative. He introduced the first student scholarship in this school. Therefore, he took the help of the Christian missionary Dr. Mead and, with government assistance, turned the Middle English School into a High English School in 1908.

In 1881, a Namasudra conference was held in Ishwar Gayen's house in Datta Danga, Khulna. There, he gave the best speech of the century about the necessary means to spread education in the Dalit community. From then on, he continued to establish one school after another. In 1932, Guru Chand Thakur established the 'Sri Sri Hari Guru Mission.' Through this mission, he arranged for roads, schools, and hostels to be established in villages. In addition, with Mrs. Mead's co-operation, an educational centre for girls and a maternity and childcare centre, named Matrimangal, were established in Orakandi in 1908, which stands as a witness to time today. About 200 years ago, the modern thoughts of this sage continue to be relevant in human society today.

In 1919, a new Government of India Act was introduced recognising the political rights of untouchables. As a result, his follower Bhishmadev Das became the first representative to get an opportunity to represent the Bengal Legislative Council. In 1921, out of 139 members of the Bengal Legislative Council, only two were from the untouchable community. The peasant revolt of 1858 and the indigo revolt of 1859-60 among lower-class peasants occurred during this time. The powerful landlords brutally oppressed the farmers. Guru Chand Thakur led this revolt. From 1872 to 1876, the farmers organised and attacked the landlords and their followers in various regions of East Bengal. Guru Chand Thakur led the movement. Guru Chand Thakur was primarily a pioneer for the downtrodden, backward society. He illuminated the path of education for this backward society and made it progressive. Through his tireless efforts, he spread the light of education not only in Gopalganj but also among many backward people across India. He taught these Dalit people to think of themselves as human beings.

However, even after two hundred years, we have seen that Guru Chand Thakur's dream has not yet been fulfilled, and the Kashiari region still hasn't touched development as a lower caste district. In 1938, as the President of the All India Congress Committee, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose referred to Guru Chand Thakur as a great man. Mahatma Gandhi called Guru Chand Thakur a great guru. Every year, during the Madhukrishna Trayodashi of the Chaitra month, a three-day Baruni fair is held on the birth anniversary of Harichand Thakur. In Thakurnagar of India and Orakandi, red flags are hoisted, victory drums are beaten, and conch shells are blown, with Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist devotees joining the celebration.

Guru Chand Thakur remains a shining example of humanity. In 1932, Ambedkar and Rasiklal Biswas together formed the "All India Depressed Classes Association" in Nagpur. As a result, a broad unity was created among the underprivileged and Dalits across India for protest programs. All of this was made possible through the efforts of Sri Sri Guru Chand Thakur.

In the thousand-year-old social structure of the Bengalis, we are blessed to have the World Guru, Sri Sri Ramakrishna. He was the one who, moved by the sorrow of living beings tormented by worldly sufferings, emerged in the 19th century in human form from the undivided and ineffable divine power source to enlighten the two banks of human life with abundant spiritual harvest and lead it towards fulfilment, just like the flowing stream of the Mandakini river.

His father was Khudiram Chattopadhyay and his mother was Chandramani Devi. He was born in Kamarpukur, Hooghly district. His father was devout and a great devotee. His mother was the epitome of simplicity and kindness. Previously, they lived in a village called Dere, one and a half krosch away from Kamarpukur. Khudiram was forced to leave the village with his family and settle in Kamarpukur because he refused to testify for the landlord of that village. Sri Sri Ramakrishna's childhood name was Gadadhar. Winning everyone's heart with his simple village life, he came to Kolkata with his elder brother at the age of 17-18 years. He was born on February 18, 1836.

He was simultaneously a yogi, philosopher, and religious guru. He can be considered one of the leading figures of the Hindu Renaissance in the 19th and 20th centuries. Among his disciples and even his followers, he is worshipped as an incarnation of God. According to him, "My religion is correct and another's religion is wrong—this view is not good; God is one and not two. People call him by different names. Some call Him God, some call Him Krishna, some call Him Allah, some call Him Shiva, and some call Him Brahma. Just as there is water in a pond, people call it Jal at one ghat, Water at another ghat, and Pani at a third ghat. Hindus call it Jal, Christians call it Water, and Muslims call it Pani. But the substance is one. Although there are many paths, they all lead to the same goal."

In other words, the goal of all of us, to attain God, is helped by every path. Just as different rivers meet in the same ocean, his famous saying was, "As many opinions, so many ways." During his lifetime, he gradually formed a unique type of association by selecting some youths and providing them with a different kind of education from the household devotees, suitable for a life of renunciation and monasticism. When this youth group at Kashipur Garden House gradually became endowed with great spiritual power through renunciation, austerity, and serving their Guru under Sri Ramakrishna's discipline, it was not understood by the householder devotees that these youths would, in the future, completely follow Sri Ramakrishna's life and form a large association.

Most of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees accepted him as an incarnation of God. Sri Ramakrishna taught the great mantra of life. Under the banner of Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual practice, groups of devout men and women came. People of the world became blessed by listening to Thakur's words and advice. Sri Ramakrishna's wife, Saradamani, came to Dakshineswar. She did not go to the mountains to practice austerities, did not give lectures, and did not write books. She never spoke directly with many of Sri Ramakrishna's devotees or even some of his renounced disciples, yet she left a great ideal of life hidden from public view. Others, like Narendra Nath, who later became the world-conquering Vivekananda, and monks like Brahmananda, Premananda, and Saradananda, came.

Famous people of that era also came to Sri Ramakrishna, including Keshab Chandra Sen, Shibnath Shastri, and Bijoy Krishna Goswami. Many household devotees came, as well as playwright Girish Ghosh, who saw Sri Sri Ramakrishna as extraordinarily beautiful. In his words, "I did not know that an old man could look so beautiful while dancing." Sage Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay also visited. Thakur told everyone to "stay on the righteous path. Be enlightened." And always with him was his ideal wife, the great nature Sri Sri Maa Sarada mani, everyone's mother Sarada, mother of all. The greatness of her contributions and deeds cannot be fully described. Thakur never even touched money or valuables. To him, everything except Mother Kali was like ordinary soil. Finally, the last days approached. Thakur was bedridden with cancer. Before his final departure, he called his beloved disciple Vivekananda and said, "Naren, all my boys are here. You are the wisest among them. Look after them." On August 16, 1886, Thakur merged into Mahasamadhi. The Bengali intellect of the 19th century was glorified by his majesty.

Now, let's discuss a man who stands unparalleled in history—Swami Vivekananda, the most beloved disciple of Sri Sri Ramakrishna, deeply devoted and blessed by him for the welfare of the world. He was one of the leading figures of the 19th-century Renaissance in India. Many scholars have called Swami Vivekananda the creator of modern India. Indeed, he had a massive influence on every field of India's renaissance.

Subhas Chandra Bose, the exceptionally talented son of an expatriate Bengali lawyer's family, was inspired by Swami Vivekananda's burning patriotism during his adolescence. This influence was coupled with the impact of his teacher, Benimadhab Das. In his youth, Subhas Chandra was initiated into the principles of patriotism, nationalism, and sacrifice. Consequently, his activities dedicated to the welfare of India and the world continued to liberate the oppressed, deprived, exploited, and humiliated in silence and solitude, flowing towards true global welfare and human welfare. We still earnestly seek him from the depths of our hearts today. We believe he is still with us. In the words of the poet Rabindranath, "Your seat is empty today, O hero, fill it."

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