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Gender, Culture, Politics : Bengal in the 20th Century -  
Open Distance Initiative

The twentieth century Bengal occupies an interesting position in the history, culture and politics of India. In recent years, it has also emerged as a major site of debate and deliberations among the scholars', sociologists, historians and experts' of other fields of social sciences. Recent historical interpretations have made significant contributions and more imaginative micro-study in the realm of gender, culture and politics to locate and identify the specificities of regional historical experiences. The Bengali society witnessed long-term transformation in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a result of the introduction of colonial rule. As a result of this transformative process, the women questions had emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century India as distinctly articulated discourse. The most interesting point is that it was a public discourse. In 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal, the women penetrated in the male dominated public life more strongly. The presence of the women was felt not only in the political sphere of nationalism, but also in the wider arena of left politics. Most interestingly, the women also appeared as a strong social force beyond the circle of the organized politics. It was in the subaltern politics of resistance, the women played most critical role in radicalizing the protest movement. The higher caste elites were able to monopolize the nationalist politics of Bengal in the first two decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They however had lost their domination in mass nationalists' movement during the 1930s. The emergence of the caste movement constituted an important watershed in the history of nationalism in Bengal in the decades late 1930s and 1940s. The Bengal Partition was also an extremely important event which produced new social, political and cultural processes in the state. The transition towards a decolonized political form brought new groups in to the public sphere of newly constituted state, that is, West Bengal. The introduction of universal adult franchise also created new types of dynamism and popular participation in the political perspectives of West Bengal. The politics of protest also took new turn in the decades after independence. It generated new research questions in the academic circle.

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