

History of Bangladesh



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History of Bangladesh

- Civilisational history of Bangladesh previously known as East Bengal, dates back over four millennia.
- The country's early documented history featured successions of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms and empires, vying for regional dominance.
- Islam arrived during the 6th-7th century and became dominant gradually since the early 13th century with the conquests led by Bakhtiyar Khalji as well as activities of Sunni missionaries such as Shah Jalal in the region.
- Later, Muslim rulers initiated the preaching of Islam by building mosques.
- From the 14th century onward, it was ruled by the Bengal Sultanate, founded by king Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, beginning a period of the country's economic prosperity and military dominance over the regional empires.

- Which was referred by the Europeans as the richest country to trade with.
- Afterwards, the region came under the Mughal Empire, as its wealthiest province.
- Bengal Subah generated almost half of the empire's GDP and 12% of the world's GDP, larger than the entirety of western Europe, ushering in the period of proto-industrialization.
- Following the decline of the Mughal Empire in the early 1700s, Bengal became a semi-independent state under the Nawabs of Bengal, ultimately led by Siraj ud-Daulah.
- It was later conquered by the British East India Company at the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

- Bengal directly contributed to the Industrial Revolution in Britain but led to its deindustrialization. The Bengal Presidency was later established.
- The borders of modern Bangladesh were established with the separation of Bengal and India in August 1947, when the region became East Pakistan as a part of the newly formed State of Pakistan following the end of British rule in the region.
- Proclamation of Bangladeshi Independence in March 1971 led to the nine-month long Bangladesh Liberation War, that culminated with East Pakistan emerging as the People's Republic of Bangladesh.
- After independence, the new state endured famine, natural disasters, and widespread poverty, as well as political turmoil and military coups.

Europeans in Bengal

- In 1517, the Portuguese installed an outpost at Chittagong. A Portuguese settlement was also created at Satgaon.
- In 1579, with a land grant from Akbar, the Portuguese created another station at Hooghly.
- The Portuguese traded and proselytized until 1632 when they were expelled by Shah Jahan, who allowed them to re-enter in the next year.
- The hostility towards them was a consequence of piracy by the Portuguese and Maghs.
- By 1651 the British obtained control of Hooghly. The Portuguese presence came to an end.

- The Portuguese had traded through the government but other European powers traded through companies instead.
- A Dutch station was established at Chinsura but the Dutch directed their interests to Ceylon and Southeast Asia.
- In 1825, they exchanged Chinsura with the British for posts in Southeast Asia. In 1755, a Danish station was established at Serampore.
- In 1845, the British bought it.
- The French Company lasted longer. Their position was second to the British.
- The French enclaves were Pondichéry, Karikal, Yanaon (Andhra Pradesh), Mahé on the Malabar Coast and Chandernagor in Bengal.
- The first British factory was established in 1608 in western India. Soon afterwards the British entered Bengal.

- The British founded factories in Balasore, Cossimbazar, Dhaka, Hooghly and Patna.
- In 1681, a "presidency" was established.
- In 1690, Job Charnock established Calcutta. During this time the British came into conflict with Bengal's Mughal governors.
- In 1652, the British had been exempted from customs payments in exchange for giving yearly sums to the nawab. But the nawab foisted fees upon them, which the British opposed. The British met the nawab Shaista Khan in Dhaka in 1652 and secured the exemption again.
- British trading activities expanded during Shaista Khan's administration.

- Alivardi Khan disliked the British and French plans to secure their possessions.
- Alivardi Khan disputed the British application of Emperor Fakukhshiyar's order which had allowed the British unfettered trading privileges in the Mughal empire.
- Alivardi Khan was perturbed by the stipulation in the order which provided the British with tax exemptions on the transportation of goods.
- Alivardi's successor Sirajuddaulah set about eliminating the foreign presence.
- In 1756, he seized Calcutta and incarcerated the resident British population.

- Robert Clive and his troops took Calcutta back in January 1757.
- Clive compelled Sirajuddaulah to assent to a treaty which would restore Emperor Fakukhsiyar's order allowing the British to trade unrestricted.
- Clive then conspired with Sirajuddaulah's relative, Mir Jafar, and obtained the support of a major banker, Jagat Seth.
- Robert Clive and Sirajuddaulah's troops battled each other at Plassey in June 1757.
- Mir Jafar abandoned the nawab during the battle, who suffered defeat and was killed.
- Many historians see this battle as the start of British colonialism in the subcontinent which would last until 1947.

- After their triumph at Plassey the British transformed Bengal into the center of their growing Indian colony.
- The British could fully obtain financial authority in Bengal if the diwani was given to the East India Company in place of the Nawab.
- The Emperor Shah Alam implemented that transfer.
- This guaranteed British authority in the province, while a semi-feudal association was maintained with the Mughal empire.
- The diwani was used with the approval of the Mughal ruler.
- While the British East India Company was nominally a diwan, it was practically independent of the Mughals.

- Indian nationalist historiography pinpoints the battle in Plassey as the start of a foreign and exploitative colonialism which ended in 1947.
- But the Bangladeshi perspective is that the people of Bengal had been used to fleecing administrations run by foreigners before the rise of the British authority.
- Bangladeshi historians also contend that colonialism persisted during the post-colonial period when the region was included in Pakistan.
- The Battle of Plassey did not mark an end to native rule in Bengal.
- It marked an end to the Mughal system.

British Rule

- The British goal was to increase the productivity of the Bengali economy.
- They experimented on Bengal's administration and economy.
- The results of some of the experiments were not always successful.
- The increased taxation in Bengal's unstable climate was a calamity. The taxation was not eased even during the drought and floods of 1769–1770.
- Along with unmonitored exploitation this caused a severe famine, in which it is believed ten million residents of Bengal died.
- In the mid-eighteenth century, the border of Cooch Behar was marked the northernmost limit of British Territory.
- Cooch Behar survived as a princely state, until the British expedition in 1772, when it invaded and conquered the territory.

- Capital amassed from Bengal by the East India Company was invested in various industries such as textile manufacturing in Great Britain during the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution.
- Company policies in Bengal also led to the deindustrialization of the Bengali textile industry during Company rule.
- The famine disaster made British officials look for viable methods of tapping into the colony's resources.
- In 1790, the British introduced "permanent settlement".
- It was a framework for taxation on land.
- It was an agreement between the British and the zamindars who were effectively given landholdings in exchange for timely payment of taxes.

- The aim of the permanent settlement was that the zamindars would eventually invest in the development of agriculture and improve the economy of Bengal.
- The aim did not materialize because the zamindars did not have state backing for agrarian growth and because of newfound ways of generating wealth.
- The increasingly rich zamindars moved away from agrarian and taxation activities. They appointed intermediaries.
- A multilayered form of landholdings developed, which benefited from the land's revenue.
- This structure was most pronounced in the southern areas of modern Bangladesh.

- The permanent settlement scheme deprived peasants of any proprietary rights over the land.
- While Muslims had comprised most of the landlord class during Mughal rule, Hindus became prominent during the colonial rule.
- Another change during British rule was the system of cash cropping.
- The cash cropping was organized and produced for international markets.
- Cash crops generate greater incomes than food crops since they are grown mainly for sale and not for consumption.
- It was significant because of the links it created between the Bengali countryside's economy with markets in Asia and Europe.
- Because of cash cropping the eastern region of Bangladesh emerged as the centre for jute cultivation, western portion produced silk and sugar, northern areas produced tobacco.

- The British abandoned the former official language, Persian, in the 1830s and English medium educational institutions prepared a small part of the Bengali elite for jobs in the lower and middle tiers of government.
- Muslims took up the British improvements more slowly and lagged behind the Hindus educationally and commercially.
- Hindus comprised most of the college students.
- The population growth during colonial rule was because people had more knowledge of hygiene and increased access to hospitals and medication.
- Transport became less reliant on the rivers with the construction of bridges and railways.
- Improvements in technology aided communications.

- Despite the government's authoritarian form, the British tried out limited democratic systems in later part of their rule due to political constraints.
- A vital development under British rule was the rise of Calcutta to political and cultural prominence.
- From 1757 to 1931 It became colonial India's capital.
- Aspiring Bengalis migrated to Calcutta and obtained education and government employment.
- They are known to historians as the "bhadrolok" and high caste Hindus comprised most of them.
- Old centers such as Dhaka and Murshidabad declined while the trading class became concentrated in Calcutta.
- The authoritarian regime functioning in alliance with the rural elite was susceptible to resistance and revolts happened frequently during British rule.
- However, British rule in Bengal faced no threat by the second half of 1800s.

Bengal Renaissance

- The Bengal Renaissance was a movement characterised by a sociopolitical awakening in the arts, literature, music, philosophy, religion, science, and other fields of intellectual inquiry.
- The movement questioned the existing customs and rituals in Indian society – most notably, the caste system, the dowry system, and the practice of sati – as well as the role of religion and colonial governance.
- In turn, the Bengal Renaissance advocated for societal reform – the kind that adhered to secularist, humanist and modernist ideals.
- It was taking place from Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1775–1833) to Satyendra Nath Bose (1894-1974).
- The movement saw the emergence of important figures, whose contributions still influence cultural and intellectual works today.

Bengal Renaissance

- It is one of the most creative periods in Indian history.
- Although the Bengal Renaissance was led and dominated by upper caste Hindus, Bengali Muslims played a transformative role in the movement, as well as the shaping of colonial and postcolonial Indian society.
- Examples of Bengali Muslim renaissance include Kazi Nazrul Islam, Begum Rokeya and Sake Dean Mahomed.
- Some Muslim figures significantly influenced the development of the various national identities across the Indian subcontinent.
- When it came to cultural and religious reform, the Freedom of Intellect movement was established in 1926 to challenge the social customs and dogmas in Bengali Muslim society.

Revolutionary movement

- The Revolutionary movement was part of the Indian independence movement comprising the actions of violent underground revolutionary factions.
- Groups believing in armed revolution against the ruling British fall into this category, as opposed to the generally peaceful civil disobedience movement spearheaded by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.
- The revolutionary groups were mainly concentrated in Bengal, Maharashtra, Bihar, the United Provinces and Punjab.
- More groups were scattered across India.
- Apart from a few stray incidents, the armed rebellion against the British rulers was not organized before the beginning of the 20th century.
- The revolutionary philosophies and movement made their presence felt during 1905 partition of Bengal.

- Arguably, the initial steps to organise the revolutionaries were taken by Aurobindo Ghosh, his brother Barin Ghosh, Bhupendranath Datta, Lalbal Pal and Subodh Chandra Mullick,

Anushilan Samiti

- Established by Pramathanath Mitra, it became one of the most organised revolutionary associations, especially in eastern Bengal, where the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti had several branches and carried out major activities.
- In the 1920s, the Kolkata faction supported Gandhi in the Non-Cooperation Movement and many of the leaders held high posts in Congress.
- The Anushilan Samati had over five hundred branches.
- Indians living in America and Canada had established the Gadar Party.

Jugantar

- Jugantar was initially formed by an inner circle of the Kolkata Anushilan Samiti.
- Barin Ghosh was the main leader.
- Along with 21 revolutionaries including Bagha Jatin, he started to collect arms and explosives and manufactured bombs.
- Some senior members of the group were sent abroad for political and military training.
- One of them, Hemchandra Kanungo, obtained his training in Paris.
- After returning to Kolkata he set up a combined religious school and bomb factory at a garden house in the Maniktala suburb of Calcutta.
- However, the attempted murder of district Judge Kingsford of Muzaffarpur by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki on 30 April 1908 initiated a police investigation that led to the arrest of many of the revolutionaries.
- Bagha Jatin was one of the top leaders in Jugantar. He was arrested, along with several other leaders, in connection with the Howrah-Sibpur Conspiracy case.

- Jugantar, along with other revolutionary groups, aided by Indians abroad, planned an armed revolt against the British rulers during the First World War.
- This plan largely depended on the clandestine landing of German arms and ammunitions in the Indian coast.
- This plan came to be known as the Indo-German Plot.
- However, the planned revolt did not materialise.
- After the First World War Jugantar supported Gandhi in the Non-Cooperation Movement and many of their leaders were in the Congress.
- Still, the group continued its revolutionary activities, a notable event being the Chittagong armoury raid.
- Benoy Basu, Badal Gupta and Dinesh Gupta, who are noted for launching an attack on the Secretariat Building – the Writers' Building in the Dalhousie Square in Kolkata, were Jugantar members.

Muslim Movements

- There had been prominent Hindu reformist movements in the early 1800s but no equivalent Muslim movement.
- A departure from this rule was the **Faraizi** movement which Haji Shariatullah started in 1828.
- It was a conservative Islamic movement grounded in Wahhabi ideology.
- It opposed the exaltation of saints and the repression by landlords and indigo traders.
- Shariatullah regarded India as a dar al-harb and thus believed that festivals and Friday prayers should cease.
- His heir, Dudu Mia, expanded the movement and claimed that the landlords did not possess permanent land rights.

- The Faraizi movement eventually ended after his demise.
- Titu Mir led another Wahhabi campaign at same time as Faraizi movement.
- This movement was violent and opposed to the British presence.
- He died in 1831 during a confrontation with the British.
- Two years later his followers supported indigo farmers in a clash against the European planters and Hindu landlords.
- The protest was ultimately muted by 1860 when the peasants were granted more security.
- But not all rural rebellions were inspired by religion.
- In late 1800s parts of the elite and peasants became politically connected.
- The movement for self determination joined communist and nationalist movements, several of which were associated with all-India organizations.

Partition of Bengal, 1905

- The decision to effect the **Partition of Bengal** was announced in July 1905 by the Viceroy of India, **Lord Curzon**.
- The partition took place **on 16 October** 1905 and separated the largely Muslim eastern areas from the largely Hindu western areas.
- The former province of Bengal was divided into two new provinces "Bengal" (comprising western Bengal as well as the province of Bihar and Orissa) and Eastern Bengal and Assam with Dacca as the capital of the latter.
- Partition was promoted for administrative reasons: Bengal was geographically as large as France and had a significantly larger population.
- Curzon stated the eastern region was neglected and under-governed.

- By splitting the province, an improved administration could be established in the east, where subsequently, the population would benefit from new schools and employment opportunities.
- The Hindus of West Bengal who dominated Bengal's business and rural life complained that the division would make them a minority in a province that would incorporate the province of Bihar and Orissa.
- Indians were outraged at what they recognised as a "divide and rule" policy.
- The British regarded politically active Muslims as their supporters and the partition created a Muslim-dominated province.
- The Muslims universally reacted to the division with approval. Hindus denounced it.

- The partition highlighted the flaw in the political unity of the members of different religions in Bengal.
- Hindus and Muslims became distinct political groups. This was due to several reasons:
- **First**, the Muslims comprised the majority in the new eastern province.
- Muslims anticipated careers in the province's administration.
- **The second** reason was that the initial enthusiasm of some Bengali Muslims for protest against the partition diminished because of the protest's culture.
- The predominantly Hindu **Bhodrolok** led the anti-partition campaign and connected it with Hindu revivalism.

- They identified their homeland as **Ma** and selected **Bande Mataram** as anthem, which Muslims opposed.
- **The third reason** was that Bengal's Muslims identified themselves as members of a community.
- The British had promoted religion as a grounds for political identification.
- This had been difficult because the Muslims of Bengal had not perceived themselves as a separate community.
- Muslim unity had been hindered by significant internal differences.
- Most Bengali Muslims had been more a member of a religiously diverse Bengali community than a Muslim one, until the end of the 1800s.

- The Islam they practiced had a significant foundation in the culture of the Bengali countryside.
- The elite Muslims identified themselves as ashraf (of foreign descent) and sought to copy North Indian Islamic culture and they saw themselves as the protectors of the true Islam in Bengal.
- To them, the Islam practiced by the local peasants and craftsmen was contaminated by un-Islamic associations.
- While a large number of well-taught Muslims remained hesitant to accept the peasants who practiced Bengali culture, the idea of a single Muslim community had come to exist just before partition.
- Economic issues increased Hindu-Muslim conflict in Bengal.

- The Muslim occupants began to demand their rights against the mainly Hindu landed and moneylending class.
- Middle class Muslims were unable to achieve their political goals because of the Hindu elite's contemptuous attitude.
- Hindus and Muslims clashed in Comilla and Mymensingh in 1906 and 1907.
- The violence boosted religious identities and supported stereotyping.
- Hindu elite regarded the countryside Muslims as British agents and inferior.
- To Muslims, the Hindus were cunning exploiters.
- The British reversed the partition in 1911 and declared they would move India's capital to Delhi.
- New Delhi was inaugurated after two decades of construction in 1931.

Pakistan Movement

- Dhaka was the scene of a meeting of Muslim leaders in late 1906.
- They created a party for Muslims and declared its loyalty to the British, believing that the British could best protect the interests of Muslims.
- The late 1800s had seen the introduction of a system of elections based on limited franchise.
- The franchise was broadened later to increase the number of voters.
- However, universal franchise never materialized but the Muslim leadership did secure a separate voting system for Muslims in 1909.
- In Lucknow Pact (1916) the Muslim League and Indian National Congress accepted both separate electorates and provincial weightage for minorities.

- This reduced Bengali Muslim seats to forty percent in a Muslim majority province. The Muslim League regretted this decision.
- Until 1920, the elections happened on a non-party basis.
- When party candidature was introduced the independent candidates maintained their importance.
- They won a third of seats in Bengal in the 1937 elections.
- Congress had been the main contestant for the general seats while the Muslim League vied with Fazlul Huq's Krishak Praja Party (KPP) for the Muslim seats.
- 1937 elections showed that no party could establish a ministry on its own.
- The Krishak Praja Party established a ministry with the Muslim League.
- The League could not win the three other Muslim provinces.

- Muslim prime ministers who were not members of the Congress agreed to support the League nationally even as they would keep control of their provincial matters.
- Fazlul Huq was a member of both the KPP and the Muslim League.
- Congress ministries resigned to protest the declaration of war against Germany by viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, which he had done so without seeking the opinion of the provincial governments.
- The Muslim governments in Punjab, Bengal and Sindh did not resign.
- But a rift emerged between Fazlul Huq and the League when the viceroy created an advisory council, thus Huq's ministry fell.

- According to Fazlul Huq, who resigned from the party, the Muslim League represented the interests of Muslim minority provinces more than the Muslim provinces.
- Fazlul Huq had advanced the Lahore Resolution in 1940, before resigning. The resolution had used the word "states" which indicated that a united Pakistan was not intended by this resolution.
- In 1941, Fazlul Huq recreated his government, without the Muslim League.
- Muslim League members led by Khawaja Nazimuddin and Suhrawardy campaigned against Fazlul Huq.
- Huq resigned in 1943 under pressure from the governor.

- On 24 April 1943 Nazimuddin inaugurated his own ministry at the governor's invitation.
- Nazimuddin's ministry was seen unfavourably by both the viceroy, Lord Wavell, and the governor.
- The Viceroy was disturbed by Nazimuddin's response to the famine.
- Bengal experienced a great famine during the second world war.
- Approximately 3 and a half million died in the countryside of east Bengal.
- The 1945-1946 elections restored a responsible provincial government.
- In the 1946 elections the politics was dominated by two organizations, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League.
- The Congress was never able to win Bengal.

- The 1946 election was mainly contended over the question of creating a Muslim homeland: Pakistan. To many it represented a plebiscite.
- Bengal's Muslim League ignored local matters in its campaign over partition.
- The KPP of Fazlul Huq was defeated.
- The Muslim League captured 110 out of the 117 seats for Muslims.
- Out of all Muslim provinces, Bengal was the biggest supporter of the Muslim League.
- The majority of East Bengal's peasantry saw Pakistan as a good way of eliminating the feudal system.
- More than religious reasons, it had been because of economic factors they supported the Muslim League and Pakistan.

- In 1946, the British government sent a mission, which ultimately advanced a scheme for a united India.
- The scheme encapsulated a loose union. A key point for Bengal was the maintenance of its unity under the scheme.
- The plan was agreed to by Jinnah but Nehru negated it.
- The Muslim League declared Direct Action Day on 16 August.
- Rioting followed in Calcutta and many died.
- The Bhodroluk decided that dividing Bengal would be better than accepting the rule of Muslims.
- The Muslim League did not want Bengal to be divided, and wanted it fully included in Pakistan.

- However, the Congress demanded the partition of the province.
- A few leaders of the Muslim League and Congress started advocating an independent United Bengal.
- While some politicians like Jinnah and Gandhi supported this idea, the national Congress rejected it in favor of partition.
- Eastern Bengal was to join Pakistan while Western Bengal would join India.
- Most of Assam's mainly Muslim Sylhet district opted for Bengal in a plebiscite.
- The rest joined India with Assam.

Direct Action Day

- The Muslim League had demanded since its 1940 Lahore Resolution for the Muslim-majority areas of India to be constituted as 'independent states'.
- Consequently, in July 1946, the Muslim League announced a general strike (hartal) on 16 August, terming it Direct Action Day, to assert its demand for a separate homeland for Muslims after the British exit from India.
- Calling for Direct Action Day, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of the All India Muslim League, said that he wanted 'either a divided India or a destroyed India'.
- This day also known as the 1946 Calcutta Killings, it was a day of nationwide communal riots.
- It led to large-scale violence between Muslims and Hindus in Calcutta.

- While there is a certain degree of consensus on the magnitude of the killings (although no precise casualty figures are available), including their short-term consequences, controversy remains regarding the exact sequence of events, the various actors' responsibility and the long-term political consequences.
- Controversy still rages about the respective responsibilities of the two main communities, in addition to individual leaders' roles in the carnage.
- The dominant British view tends to blame both communities equally.
- In the Congress' version of the events, the blame tends to be laid on the Muslim League and in particular on the Chief Minister of Bengal, Suhrawardy.

- The view from the Muslim League is that Congress and the Hindus in fact used the opportunity offered by Direct Action Day to teach the Muslims in Calcutta a lesson and to kill them in great numbers.
- Thus, the riots opened the way to a partition of Bengal.
- Against a backdrop of communal tension, the protest triggered massive riots in Calcutta.
- More than 4,000 people died and 100,000 residents were left homeless in Calcutta within 72 hours.
- The violence sparked off further religious riots in different regions of India
- The events sowed the seeds for the eventual Partition of India.

Noakhali Riots

- The Noakhali riots were a series of semi-organized massacres, rapes and abductions, combined with looting and arson of Hindu properties, perpetrated by the Muslim community in the districts of Noakhali in October–November 1946, a year before India's independence from British rule.
- It also affected the areas under present Cumilla and Chattogram.
- The massacre of the Hindu population started on 10 October, on the day of Kojagari Lakshmi Puja and continued unabated for about a week.
- It is estimated that 5,000 were killed, hundreds of Hindu women were raped and thousands of Hindu men and women were forcibly converted to Islam.
- Around 50,000 to 75,000 survivors were sheltered in temporary relief camps in Comilla, Chandpur, Agartala and other places.
- Around 50,000 Hindus remained marooned in the affected areas under the strict surveillance of the Muslims, where the administration had no say.

- In some areas, Hindus had to obtain permits from the Muslim leaders in order to travel outside their villages.
- The forcibly converted Hindus were coerced to give written declarations that they had converted to Islam of their own free will.
- Sometimes, they were confined in others' houses and only allowed to be in their own house when an official party came for inspection.
- Mahatma Gandhi camped in Noakhali for four months and toured the district in a mission to restore peace and communal harmony.
- However, the peace mission failed to restore confidence among the survivors, who could not be permanently rehabilitated in their villages.
- In the meantime, the Congress leadership accepted the Partition of India and the peace mission and other relief camps were abandoned.
- The majority of the survivors migrated to West Bengal, Tripura and Assam.