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National Seminar Brochure

Department of Political Science

In collaboration with

Department of History, Department of Philosophy, Womens' Cell

&

IQAC, Sitananda College

Organizes

Two Days National Seminar

On

'Contemporary Relevance of Political Thought of Bengal Renaissance'

&

'Gender Inequality & Discrimination in India and the Need of Understanding Women's Role in
Reforming Society: Self-confidence matters'

Dated: 7th May & 8th May 2025

Concept Note

1. Title: Contemporary Relevance of Political Thought of Bengal Renaissance

The Bengal Renaissance, spanning from the late 18th to the early 20th century, was a dynamic socio-cultural and intellectual awakening that reshaped the political, moral, and spiritual outlook of Bengal and broader Indian society. Pioneered by thinkers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore, this movement produced a rich tapestry of ideas that challenged orthodoxy, advocated reform, and laid the foundation of Indian nationalism. Their political thought was not shaped solely by Western liberalism, but by a creative synthesis of indigenous values and modern rationalism, forming a unique and enduring legacy.

In the contemporary world, where Indian democracy confronts challenges such as communalism, identity politics, social inequality, erosion of moral-political values, and environmental degradation, revisiting the political philosophy of the Bengal Renaissance has become increasingly important. The movement's emphasis on rational inquiry, religious tolerance, human dignity, education, gender justice, and social reform holds significant relevance in navigating present crises.

For instance, Raja Ram Mohan Roy's advocacy for civil liberties, religious reform, and abolition of social evils remains vital in today's struggle against religious orthodoxy and caste-based discrimination. Vidyasagar's fight for women's rights, widow remarriage, and education offers guidance for addressing persistent gender inequality. Swami Vivekananda's vision of nation-building through spiritual humanism, character formation, and upliftment of the marginalized aligns with modern aspirations of inclusive development. Tagore's critique of aggressive nationalism and his advocacy for cosmopolitanism and cultural pluralism offer a crucial counter-narrative in an age of rising hyper-nationalism and global conflict.

Moreover, the political thought of the Bengal Renaissance presents a model of ethical public engagement, where intellectuals did not merely theorize but actively participated in reform and institution-building. This intellectual-moral commitment is essential in reviving democratic values and civic responsibility in contemporary public life.

This concept note proposes a thematic exploration of the political ideas of Bengal Renaissance thinkers in light of contemporary political dilemmas. It aims to trace their impact on modern Indian political thought and evaluate how their ideas can contribute to reimagining politics in the 21st century. Through academic seminars, publications, and student engagements, this initiative seeks to create critical awareness about the enduring relevance of Bengal's political intellectual heritage.

In conclusion, the Bengal Renaissance was not just a cultural awakening but a profound political and philosophical movement whose legacies transcend time. Reflecting on its thought is not an exercise in nostalgia, but a necessary intellectual return to a moment in history when moral courage, reason, and reform laid the groundwork for a more humane and just society — a vision that continues to inspire contemporary democratic aspirations.

2. Topic: Gender Inequality & Discrimination in India and the Need for Understanding Women's Role in Reforming Society: Self-Confidence Matters

Gender inequality and discrimination remain deep-rooted challenges in India despite constitutional guarantees, legal frameworks, and growing awareness. Women in India continue to face disparities in education, employment, political representation, property rights, and access to health and safety. Patriarchal structures, social customs, and systemic marginalization continue to hinder the full realization of gender justice. This has far-reaching implications not only for women's empowerment but also for the nation's holistic development.

In this context, it is critical to shift the discourse from victimhood to agency, from protection to empowerment. A central factor in this transformation is the self-confidence of women. Women must not only be seen as beneficiaries of reform but as active participants and architects of change. Their participation in education, governance, economy, and civil society must be encouraged and valued—not as tokenism, but as integral to sustainable reform.

Historical and contemporary experiences show that wherever women have asserted their agency, transformative change has occurred—be it in movements for social reform, environmental justice, rural self-help groups, or leadership in local governance. However, their potential remains underutilized due to persistent stereotypes, lack of opportunities, and the absence of a supportive ecosystem that fosters confidence and self-worth.

Understanding and supporting women's role in reforming society requires a multidimensional approach: promoting gender-sensitive education, creating safe and equitable work environments, enabling political participation, and ensuring access to justice. But most importantly, it requires nurturing self-confidence in women from all walks of life—especially in marginalized and rural areas—so that they can challenge injustice, make independent choices, and lead change within their communities.

Self-confidence is not merely a personal trait—it is a political and social necessity. It shapes how women see themselves and how society perceives their role. Confidence allows women to speak up against injustice, to claim public spaces, to innovate, and to inspire others. Therefore, any agenda aimed at reducing gender inequality must include programs that invest in building confidence through leadership training, mentorship, legal literacy, and skill development.

This concept note proposes an initiative that addresses gender discrimination by focusing on the role of self-confident women in reshaping society. Through workshops, community engagement, case studies of women leaders, and awareness campaigns, the project will aim to highlight and support women's voices in reform narratives. Special attention will be given to youth, grassroots women leaders, and educators to ensure sustainability.

In conclusion, gender equality in India cannot be achieved by policies alone. It requires a shift in mindset—one that acknowledges women as change-makers. And at the heart of this shift is self-confidence. Empowered and self-assured women are not only essential for their own liberation but are catalysts for social, cultural, and political reform. Understanding and investing in this transformative power is the need of the hour.

Seminar Schedule

Day 1

07.05.2025

11:30 am: Inaugural Song , Lighting of Sacred Lamp and Planting of Sapling

11:40 am: Introduction by HOD Department of Political Science

11:50 am: Introductory Speech by the Principal, Dr. Samu Mahali

12:15 pm : Dr. Afzal Hossain, Ex-Principal, Sitalkuchi College, Coochbehar : Contemporary Relevance of Political Thought of Bengal Renaissance

12:45 pm: Dr. Khaybar Ali Miah, Associate Professor in Political Science, Berhampur Girls' College, Berhampur: Gender Inequality & Discrimination in India and the Need for Understanding Women's Role in Reforming Society: Self-Confidence Matters

1:15 pm: Dr. Shehnoor Shan, Faculty Member, Department of English, Women's College, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (Online from Aligarh University): The Memory & Legacy of Begum Hazrat Mahal. How her role as a female leader has been remembered & interpretation over time

1:45 pm: Lunch

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Seminar Schedule

Day 2

08.05.2025

Only Online through Google Meet

Technical Session 1: Contemporary Relevance of Political Thought of Bengal Renaissance

11:00 am to 12:30 pm

All paper presenters will be allowed to speak on their respective presentation for 10 minutes

Technical Session 2: Gender Inequality & Discrimination in India and the Need for Understanding Women's Role in Reforming Society: Self-Confidence Matters

1:30 pm to 3:30 pm

All paper presenters will be allowed to speak on their respective presentation for 10 minutes

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