

# **An Empire Of Touch: Women S Political Labor And The Fabrication Of East Bengal (Gender And Culture Series)**

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The emergence of women in political labor and its impact on the construction of gender and culture in East Bengal (present-day Bangladesh) has been a significant yet under-explored aspect of South Asian history. This article delves into the pivotal role of women's political activism during the British colonial period in shaping the social, cultural, and political landscape of East Bengal. By examining the experiences and contributions of women in nationalist movements, we can gain a deeper understanding of how gender norms and cultural identities were negotiated and transformed during this transformative period.

## **Women's Political Labor in East Bengal**

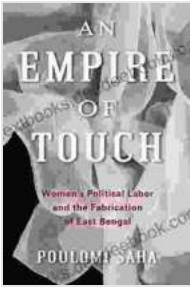
From the early 20th century, women in East Bengal played a vital role in the struggle for national liberation. They participated in mass agitations, organized political rallies, and actively campaigned for social and political reforms. Their involvement in political labor was multifaceted and encompassed a wide range of activities.

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by Davis W. Houck

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English



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Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Print length : 346 pages



- **Networking and Mobilization:** Women formed women's associations and networks, such as the Bengal Women's Association (1913) and the Anjuman-i-Mohammadiya Ladaies' Association (1922). These organizations served as platforms for women to organize themselves, exchange ideas, and mobilize collective action.
- **Political Education and Awareness:** Women engaged in political education activities to raise awareness about the importance of national freedom and women's rights. They published journals and magazines, gave lectures, and conducted literacy programs to inform and empower women.
- **Mass Demonstrations and Civil Disobedience:** Women actively participated in mass demonstrations and nonviolent resistance movements. They organized hartals (general strikes), boycotts, and pickets to protest against British colonial rule and demand political rights.
- **Lobbying and Advocacy:** Women also engaged in lobbying and advocacy activities. They petitioned the government, met with officials, and presented their demands for social and political reforms, including the right to vote, education, and improved healthcare.

## Impact on Gender and Culture

The participation of women in political labor had a profound impact on gender norms and cultural identities in East Bengal. Here are some of the key ways in which women's political activism reshaped social and cultural structures:

- **Challenging Traditional Gender Roles:** Women's participation in public life and political decision-making challenged traditional gender roles that confined women to the domestic sphere. By asserting their political voice, women demonstrated that they were capable of active citizenship and leadership beyond the boundaries of home and family.
- **Redefining Women's Identity:** Women's involvement in political labor allowed them to redefine their own identities and aspirations. They embraced new roles and responsibilities that expanded their sense of self-worth and agency.
- **Promoting Gender Equality:** Women's political activism raised awareness about gender inequality and the need for women's empowerment. It initiated a public discourse on the importance of equal rights, opportunities, and representation for women.
- **Shaping Cultural Narratives:** Women's political contributions led to a re-examination of cultural narratives that had traditionally excluded women from public spaces. They demanded the recognition of their contributions to society and the inclusion of women's perspectives in shaping East Bengali culture.

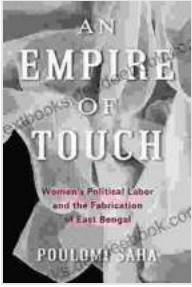
## Case Studies of Notable Women

Numerous women played significant roles in the women's political movement in East Bengal. Two notable examples are:

- **Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932):** An educationist and social reformer, Rokeya was one of the earliest advocates for women's education and empowerment. She established the Sakhawat Memorial Girls' High School in Calcutta in 1911 and the Muslim Ladies' Progressive Society in 1916.
  - **Begum Sufia Kamal (1911-1999):** A poet and political activist, Begum Sufia Kamal was actively involved in the nationalist movement. She joined the Bengal Women's Association and participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921-1922. Her poetry became a powerful voice for women's liberation and national unity.
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Women's political labor in East Bengal, during the British colonial period, was a transformative force that challenged traditional gender roles, redefined women's identities, promoted gender equality, and reshaped cultural narratives. Through their active participation in mass agitations, education campaigns, and advocacy activities, women played a crucial role in shaping the social, cultural, and political landscape of East Bengal. Their contributions continue to inspire and empower women in Bangladesh and beyond, highlighting the importance of women's political agency in creating a more just and equitable society.

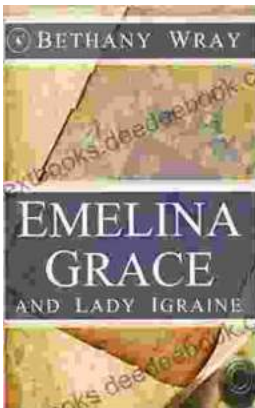
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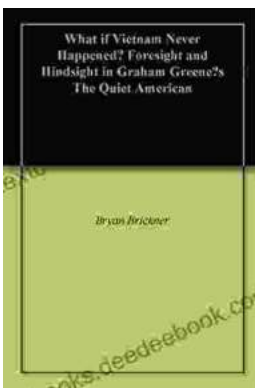
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