

Chapter IV

IN RAJSHAHI CENTRAL JAIL

The massive gates of the Rajshahi Central Jail opened and took me inside its walls. There was no European there. I was taken to the jail office. After I sat down the officer-in-charge of the state prisoners came near me. He was very gentle and courteous. He sent for the barber, gave me a clean towel for washing, and then with great hesitation raised the question of my food. He said, "You are not taking food for seven days and so the Superintendent instructed us to give you a cold drink." I said, "Yes, I would relish a cold drink." I then told him that I had already broken my fast at Sealdah Station as our main demand had already been conceded. At this he seemed to be much relieved.

I entered the jail with the officer and on reaching the corner of the hospital I found other state prisoners waiting there to receive me. I had known none of them before. But as revolutionaries we were friends, known or unknown. So far as I remember at this distant date after 47 years, they were five, Satish Pakrashi, Rasik Sarkar, Purna Das, Girin Banerjee and Naresh Chaudhury. They had heard that I was on hunger strike and therefore

thought that I would continue the strike. They said that because of this they were allowed to receive me outside the cells.

Purna Das and Girin Banerjee were transferred to the Rajshahi jail after their hunger strike in the Midnapore jail. Shortly after my arrival the hunger strikers of the Alipore New Central Jail who had been transferred to the different jails of U. P. and Madhya Pradesh started arriving at the Rajshahi jail one after another. Thus Suresh Das came from the Agra Jail and Bhupen Dutta came from the Bilaspur Jail.

Like the 44 cells of Presidency Jail, here also the state prisoners were kept in the condemned cells. Professor Jyotish Ghosh turned lunatic because of the inhuman conditions in which he had to live in this jail and had to be sent to the Lunatic Asylum. Naresh Chaudhury was also almost on the brink of losing his mental balance due to the hard confinement in the cells of this jail. But by the time I arrived at the Rajshahi Jail hunger strikes in other jails had led to a slackening of the tortures of confinement and this saved Naresh Babu.

Prabodh Das Gupta, who escaped from the Dullanda House and while absconding participated in the Gauhati encounters with the police, was arrested and sent to this jail. It may be mentioned here that this Das Gupta, a few years after his release was sentenced to 5 years' R.I. in a currency note forgery case in 1925. He attempted this for-

gery to help the revolutionary party. Pratul Ganguli came from Raipur Jail. Another person who joined us was Mani Choudhury. So this jail earned the reputation of being the prison for "all dangerous." Therefore the jail authorities were more cautious in their behaviour. The Governor of Bengal had called a conference at Darjeeling of all those jailors where state prisoners were detained and there it was decided that they should be given better treatment. The Government realised that the revolutionaries would retaliate against any ill-treatment and that might cause a county-wide ferment. So the plight of the political prisoners changed everywhere for the better ; but in Rajshahi jail it became really good. We were allowed to play badminton outside our enclosures and were permitted to walk on the lawns.

No Indian newspaper was allowed in the jail. But we managed to smuggle in a copy of Amrita Bazar Patrika everyday. The smuggled newspaper was delivered to Purna Das who used to give the same to Pratul Ganguli. Pratul Ganguli and I sat in his cell with a slate. Ganguli used to read and I used to take notes. Then the paper was returned. After lunch we used to sit in one cell where Pratul Babu with the slate in hand used to tell the daily news to all. This was done everyday, regularly. For our smuggling work we had to distribute various articles to the petty officials. We had to part with cheese, oil, sugar, flour, clothes, shoes,

shirts, soaps, tooth powder, tooth paste, etc. But we were getting good service in return.

For our demands, we first used to think over the matter thoroughly. Then we placed our demand before the authorities and we did not stop till it was conceded. We were cautious and because of this grievances were invariably redressed in the Rajshahi jail.

In the summer cellular confinement at night was a painful thing. We had disturbed sleep because of the extreme heat. Government had made it a rule that we would be kept confined in cells at night. The cell in the European Ward in the Calcutta Presidency Jail was quite good and even in hot weather it was not trying. But the cells of Rajshahi Jail were worse than even those of the 44 Cells of the Presidency Jail. 44 Cells had a broad yard in front but here the yard was very narrow and hence there was no proper ventilation. For this reason cellular confinement in this Jail was a genuine grievance and we placed this before the authorities again and again but nothing happened.

A TRAGEDY IN THE JAIL

Rasik Sarkar of Mymensingh district, a member of the Dacca Anushilan, was in this jail. His family was not very well off financially. Though not much educated he was a good worker in violent activities. He participated in the murder

of Sarat Bose, the Headmaster of the Zilla School, Comilla, in broad day light. He also murdered a C.I.D. officer in Mymensingh along with a child who was in the officer's lap. In the jail he remembered these things.

After serving one year R.I. in Dacca Jail, he was transferred to Hooghly Jail, where he was confined in a cell. The front side of the cell was kept covered with a gunny cloth. Nothing outside was visible to him. He could only look at the empty walls of his cell. On top of all this frequent questioning by the C.I.D. officials were continued. All this caused terrible mental disturbance to him, so much so that he lost his mental balance.

At this stage he was transferred to Rajshahi Central Jail. As members of Anushilan, Pakrashi and Sarkar were naturally more close to me. Rasik Sarkar became more intimate with me because he had a great craving for knowledge. He did not know English. Books in English I had to read and explain to him in Bengali. Even today I distinctly remember that I read out Rousseau's Social Contract and explained to him word by word in Bengali. He did not talk much and often remained in a pensive mood. In the afternoon during our permitted walks he very rarely walked together with others. He used to sit in the lawns alone. Though young and robust his hair had grown grey in jail.

An interned detenué, Das Gupta, had committed suicide in an internment camp in North Bengal and he left a statement which was published in the papers months ago. Sarkar one day asked me whether I remembered what Das Gupta had written. I told him that he should not think of these things in jail. I tried to distract his mind from morbid thoughts. From his behaviour I knew he was always brooding and most of it was centred round his family. He could not get out of the jail by betraying his revolutionary friends. But from inside the jail he could not do anything for his family.

So he applied for the grant of a family allowance. That was rejected. He received a post card from home that his family was suffering from financial difficulties.

One afternoon Sarker played badminton as my partner very enthusiastically. After the games he walked a little in the lawns and then went inside his cell. Long after, when I reached my cell I saw his cloth and towel spread for drying in my ante-cell. This was a bit unusual but I did not think it was serious. When we were being locked up, he came in front of my cell and addressed me with folded hands and I came to know later that he did so that day in front of every cell. We could not even imagine that he was bidding good-bye to us for ever.

At midnight the duty of guards changed. Rasik shouted to Girinda and Pratulda that it was a late hour of the night and that they should go to sleep. Girinda told him that he was going to bed at about 1 A.M. About half an hour after this flames were visible in Sarkar's cell. I clearly saw the reflection of the flame on the wall in front of Rasik's cell. One guard tried to shout : "Chabi" (Key) but out of fear his voice was choked. We shouted : "Chabi", "chabi". The Gurkha guard was not talking. Later we came to know that he was trying to throw mugfuls of water on the fire. But the fire was behind a cot fitted with a mosquito curtain. The guard of the hospital told our guard to whistle and as soon as he whistled other whistles rang from all sides and the jail gong also went in action. The Jailor, Upen Mukherjee, came and was so nervous that he sat down on the ground outside our ward and the doctor and the Chief Head Warder took the keys from him and opened the door of the cell. So long Rasik was standing but he dropped on the cot when the doctor caught hold of him. When the cot reached the hospital Sarkar was dead. The District Magistrate came for enquiry and all that we could do was to give him which Rasik had received from his home in which his brother wrote about his family's economic hardship.

We said to the Magistrate and every other officer that we would like to have a last look at the

body of our departed friend. That was not granted, though the officials told us that they would allow us to see the dead body. It was stated later that the body was so much disfigured that we would have been pained to see it. I came to the Rajshahi Jail in May, 1918, and this happened on the 16th of June.

The next day Mr. Stephenson with Rai Bahadur Bhupendranath Chatterjee came from Calcutta. No body had the least inclination to have any talk with Chatterjee. Our spokesman, Girin Banerjee, told Stephenson that had we been put together in a barrack such a tragedy could have never happened. Our suggestion was that a portion of the first floor of the hospital building could be set apart for our night accommodation. The jail authorities' opinion was that would be unsafe. The war was over by that time and we assured Mr. Stephenson that the Government could depend on our words. Stephenson turned to Prabodh Das Gupta and said, "What has Prabodh got to say?" Prompt was the reply of Prabodh, who, after his escape from the Dallanda House, had remained underground for nearly two years, "Did you believe me?" But on his going back to Calcutta Stephenson telegraphed to the Superintendent: "Keep state prisoners in hospital building upstairs and tell them that I depend on their honour."

Another serious thing happened in the Rajshahi Jail. Girin Banerjee was the oldest person among us. After we were locked up, Banerjee was talking to the officer who came with the Jamadar for locking us in. The Gurkha Guard roughly said, "Don't talk." In the same way Girindra said, "Keep quiet ; you have nothing to do with this." Next morning this guard entered Girindra's cell and roused him from sleep with his kukri drawn. It was a terrible sight for him. He jumped up from the bed with a shout and ran to the lawns where we were. The guard was after him with the open kukri in his hand. We surrounded the guard and asked the hospital Warder to whistle. With great reluctance he complied. The Chief Head Warder came and ordered him to sheath the kukri and he did so. We lodged a complaint. But the guards and warders said that our complaint was a piece of fabrication. In protest we started a hunger strike. We gave in writing that unless this practice of giving duty with kukri was not stopped, we would take no food.

One evening, before lock up time, when we were shouting slogans on the lawns, the Jail Superintendent came there. But we did not even look at him. He came near me and putting his hand on my shoulder said, 'You are too young to go on hunger strike.' Bhupen Datta reminded him that I was transferred to Rajshahi Jail because of hunger

strike. Then he laughed and said, "You all take your food. I have already sent this batch of Gurkhas to Dacca and have written to the Commander of guards that the next batch should give duty here without kukris." So we went to our cells satisfied and welcomed food after lock up.

Through Rasik Sarkar's death we gained another thing. The Magistrate, Mr. Cassels thought highly of us. When in his presence the witnesses to the enquiry whom he had brought with him from the city expressed doubt that Rasik's death could not be a case of suicide as the dying man did not even stir while being burnt, we ourselves told him that there was no foul play. Cassels knew that we could easily put the jail authorities into difficulty by making the allegation that Sarkar had been killed and then burnt. That could create a great agitation in the whole country. We did nothing of the kind as falsehood and deceit were never our forte. So he was very pleased and at our request he asked the Principal of the Government College, Rai Bahadur Kumudini Banerjee, a great educationist, to supply us books from the College. This was a great privilege to us. We wrote to Banerjee and he himself selected the books and sent them to us. In this way we were borrowing about 25 books per month from the College Library.

I was immensely benefitted by my transfer to

Rajshahi Jail. Almost all the prominent revolutionaries of Bengal had been to this jail during the two and a half years of my stay there. Their constant association was a boon to me in many respects. I mixed with all irrespective of party affiliations. Because I had no prejudice in my mind I respected all the revolutionary leaders deeply and they also in their turn had good feelings towards me. My main objective was to acquire as much knowledge as was possible and the opportunity was limitless. When we could not get good books from outside I learned history from Girin Banerjee. His knowledge of history was so good that even without any text book he taught me the history of India and of modern Europe. Besides Girin Banerjee, Pratul Ganguli, Bhupen Datta and Basanta Banerjee of French Chandernagore, took a good deal of personal interest in my studies. Sometimes I studied economics with Monoranjan Gupta. Then French Language Class started and I joined it.

We were not only reading for hours and hours but also we had lively discussions on interesting subjects. Very often we carried our discussions into the night. And the discussions were so lively that we lost all sense of time till someone told us that the sun was rising. We were so absorbed in our studies and discussions that very often we thought that we were the members of a residen-

tial university.

We got the news through the magazine "Twentieth Century and After" that there had been a successful revolution in Russia and Czarism had been replaced by Socialism. Before this we read only a little about Socialism in books on economy. We wrote to Principal Banerjee to supply us some books on Socialism. But unfortunately there was only one book on Socialism in the College Library—Sombart's Socialism. In the introduction it was stated that this book had been translated into 26 languages of the world. So it became more attractive to us. We read it again and again and took extensive notes.

We also read classical books of famous authors in the original as well as in translation. Once it struck us that we should study the cooperative movement of Europe and we read some books on this as well. Previously, while we were not in jail, we read the Economic History of British India and Victorian Age by R. C. Dutt, the Prosperous British India by William Digby and Poverty and un-British Rule in British India by Dadabhai Naoraji.

I remember one day a Muslim Deputy Magistrate came to visit us. He saw a book on economics by Gide with Pratul Ganguli. He asked what was his academic qualification and when he learnt that he was not even a graduate he remarked that Ganguli would not understand a book like that.

Girin Banerjee retorted that Ganguli possessed so much knowledge that he could teach an ordinary graduate for many years and it was really so.

I utilised my time in the jail to the best of my ability. All were helpful to me in my efforts. The jail at this period was a place of learning. Our confinement was not very rigorous as before and we were reading and writing. So we prepare for the next stage. We were more busy in acquiring knowledge than were the post graduate students who carry on research work for the preparation of their thesis. The advantage here was that we had no other preoccupation.

My elders helped me in the choice of books that I should read. Books in connection with revolutionary movements in other countries we read very attentively because this was the subject nearest to our hearts. History of India, ancient and modern History of Europe and of Asia, particularly of China and Japan I also read. In economics Marshall and Gide we read and took exhaustive notes. We also read general literature in English and Bengali and the classics of different European nations in translation.

I was the youngest among the State Prisoners in this jail but later a younger friend came, Jiten Chaudhury of Lamchar, Noakhali district. I did not come from Calcutta or Dacca, the two big centres of culture, and my experience of revolutionary

activities were mostly confined to the district of Tripura with its headquarter at Comilla, although I had connections with some neighbouring districts of East Bengal. Therefore, the association in Rajshahi jail with the veterans had a very beneficial effect on me.

Pratul Ganguli, Purna Das, Girin Banerjee, Rabi Sen, Manoranjan Gupta, Hemendra Prashad Acharya Chaudhury of Muktagachha, Mymensingh, Bhupen Datta, Bhupati Mazumdar, Satish Pakrashi Prabodh Das Gupta, Mani Chaudhury, Suresh Das, Basanta Banerjee and many others were there. Pratul Ganguli was the most important leader of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti. He was sentenced to 10 years' transportation by the lower courts in the Barisal Supplementary Conspiracy Case but was let off by the Calcutta High Court along with Ramesh Chaudhury, elder brother of Naresh Chaudhury, who was in the Rajshahi Jail. The credit for the release of these two leaders of Anushilan goes to C. R. Das, who defended them. Both were made state prisoners on their acquittal by the High Court. They were both taken out of Presidency Jail gate and told, "You are released and reafrested" and taken to the Alipur New Central Jail as state prisoners.

Purna Das was the leader of the Faridpur Conspiracy case. He was described in a Government Commission Report as the "notorious student of the Bangabasi College." He had his own

Faridpur group and worked with the Jugantar party since the outbreak of World War I. Chittapriya, Monoranjan and Niren were his men. Chittapriya died in the fight with the police on the bank of the Muribalam in the Moubhanj district, and Monoranjan and Niren were hanged. Purna Das had a grievance that three of his best men died with Jatin Mukherjee.

I had very good relations with Girin Banerjee and Bhupen Dutta even after our release. Rabi Sen was a leader of the Anushilan. He showed us the Ghany, where he was pressing oil as a convict in 1911. That was the way political prisoners were treated when the revolutionaries started their Movement. No distinction was made between the ordinary criminal and the political prisoners. He is still alive and holds an annual gathering of Anushilanites in Calcutta. Bhupati Mazumdar was arrested in a ship on his way to America and was kept in Singapore fort from where he was sent to Rajshahi Jail. He was a Minister of Bengal Government in Independent India. Satish Pakrashi suffered imprisonment in 1911 when he was a minor. He was an absconder for seven years before he was arrested and sent to the Rajshahi Jail as a state prisoner. Hemendra Prasad was a big zamindar and a group leader. He sent his brother to England as a revolutionary to learn the techniques of revolution and contact the India revolutionaries abroad but he returned with an English

wife. Our Jail Superintendent, Dr. Ashe, was a family doctor of the Muktagachha family when he was the Civil Surgeon of Mymensingh. So once when Sir Walter Buchanan, the I.G. of Prisons, came to visit the jail the Superintendent introduced Hemendra Prasad to him as a big zamindar of Muktagachha. Sir Walter said, "Yes, being a big zamindar he had ample opportunity of doing mischief." Another co-prisoner in the Rajshahi Jail was Basanta Banerjee of Chandernagore. He was devoted to literature from his student life when he wrote the life of Guru Govind Singh in Bengali. He helped and encouraged our reading and writing habits.

REVOLUTIONARY CONVICTS IN RAJSHAHI JAIL

One thing used to worry us, we were getting such good treatment while there were others in the same jail, our convicted friends, who were suffering as ordinary C class prisoners. A half shirt and a short were their dress. They had to carry an iron ring round their necks which passed through a wooden plate hanging on their chest in which were inscribed their numbers and the dates of sentence and the dates of release. An iron saucer was the only utensil supplied to them for all purposes, for taking food, storing drinking water, for washing, for taking bath, etc. Some coarse rice, dal (lentils) and vegetables were their daily food.

What a tragedy. We were living in such good conditions while in the same jail so many intimate associates of our were passing their lives in misery. It was very very painful to all of us. But there was no remedy. We were detained without trial and they were kept in separate wards at a distance and we could not even see them. They themselves were kept in separate wards in such a way that they could not come in contact with one another.

My friend and an important member of Anushilan, Prafulla Roy of Sylhet, was sentenced to 12 years R.I. At Dacca when C.I.D. officials followed him to the Railway Station, he fired at the police men, ran away and while doing so his legs were caught in some iron wirings, he fell down and was arrested. He was sent to the Rajshahi Jail. Naren Banerjee of Banaras, an absconder of the Banares Conspiracy Case, who fought with the police when they surrounded the Gauhati house where he was living, was another important person who was undergoing his conviction in the Rajshahi Jail. He was sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment.

Prafulla did not like the idle life in the jail. He was eager to escape from it. I managed to give him my woollen wrapper so that he could use it for scaling the wall and for covering himself up. But the Warder, who promised to help him, betrayed him at the eleventh hour and he was locked in the Cubical Ward.

There was some other political convicts. They were being ill treated. They resented this and went on a hunger strike. In the face of deliberate oppressions they had no other alternative but to resorting to hunger strike. The news reached us and we also went on hunger strike.

Prafulla Roy was transferred to another jail and others were given opportunities to mix with their fellow convicts and better treatment followed. But we did not give up our hunger strike till we got the formal news. Next morning when the jailor entered our ward he had to face a very awkward situation. All were in a fighting mood and abused the jailor bitterly. But the ever gentle Girin Banerjee came to his rescue. Soon we got the news of the improvement of the lot of the political convicts formally and our hunger strike ended.

At this time there were new arrivals of state prisoners. Khetra Sen, Charu Ghosh, Sarat Guha, Kuntal Chakravarty, and others joined us. The District Magistrate, Mr. Cassels was transferred and the new D. M. Mr. Stork was a different sort of man. Letters were our only source of information about our friends and relations. The C. I. D. censor of our letters was very irritating. They cut and disfigured the letters to such an extent that some letters were so thoroughly spoiled that no meaning could be made out of them. Most of us had grievances against this. So we complained to

the authorities. The D. M. came with a file of our complaints. He came to our ward and asked about a certain application. I said it was mine. He said that if I wrote such applications against the police, they would not only be not considered, but would be thrown into the waste paper basket. When he was asked under what rule this could be done, he did not reply but made an about-turn and went away in the midst of various questions. An application complaining against the behaviour of the D. M. was sent to the Government of India. In the afternoon the jailor requested us to withdraw it. Our protest had its effect. For contrary to the rules, Mr. Stork did not come to our ward for many months. He was transferred and Mr. Reed came as the D. M.

After Dr. Ashe, Major Goel came as the jail Superintendent. He was a weak person and so he was very submissive to his superiors and very troublesome to his subordinates. Once he ordered that the state prisoners must return their old clothes before new ones were given. An application to the Government of India stating all the wrong things that were being done in the jail was submitted. The Jailor tried to mediate so that the application was withdrawn. This was done when the Superintendent agreed that he would not disallow any article indented for through the Indent book. We made it a point that we would not make unreasonable demands but that we would not tolerate any

cut in our indents.

Our jail experiences demonstrated that to suffer silently any wrong was improper. If the Government were allowed to do what they pleased, the valuable lives of revolutionaries would have been ruined in the jail. To suffer tyranny lying down without any protest or resistance is cowardice. The revolutionaries were not cowards. They adopted the only possible means of resistance by resorting to hunger strike resolutely. This means of resistance brought about a change in the general situation. The authorities bowed down to our demands creating better circumstances for us which helped us to enhance our cultural and educational knowledge.

We started a hand written monthly paper in the jail. The name was "Bhanga Kula" (Broken Cleaner). Most of us contributed articles. The most notable feature used to be the short stories by Kuntal Chakravarty who was a brilliant young man and a good short story writer. He had a rare capacity of grasping the ideas of the books he read. He had also a very loveable character. Charu Ghosh also had a very tender heart full of nice human qualities. After release Charu Ghosh developed tuberculosis and Kuntal looked after him. He also somehow caught the contagion and met the sad end shortly. The revolutionaries lost a brilliant man with an inexhaustible store of human sympathy. Charu Ghosh survived a few more years.

Bhupen Dutta left him at Comilla sometime in 1922 for a month or so and I looked after him there. But soon he left Comilla. The last time I met him was at Banaras in 1923. His mother was with him. They stayed there for a few days on their way to Chunar. His condition was very critical. I sat beside his bed to relieve his mother. Charu objected to my sitting very near him as he was apprehensive of my getting the fatal disease, so deep was his concern for others. One day they left for Chunar and I accompanied them up to Moghal Serai station. This was our last parting. Charu died shortly after this.

CLASH OF IDEAS IN RAJSHAHI JAIL

I have already stated that Girin Banerjee was the oldest among us and he was well read as well. Surendra Nath Banerjee was his grand father through his mother's side. Yet he was extremely conservative in his ideas. He was a great supporter of the caste system. Even in the jail he was not ready to take food prepared by a non-Brahmin, It was a peculiar mentality for a man who knew practically all that was to be known international politics. There were also some others who were conservative in their attitude. Purna Das, Suresh Das, Mani Chaudhury could be counted among them. Pratul Ganguli, Bhupen Datta, myself, were the liberals. We did not find any justification for the caste system, untouchability or unequal status of women. Satish Pakrashi took much interest in

the changing ideas in Russia and other countries but rarely expressed any opinion in discussions.

Owing to the constant difference in outlook and in thinking there arose among us a difference of a lasting nature. We were called free lovers by the conservatives and we in our turn, christened them as Achalayatan, 'the immobile' taken from the name of Tagore's satire.

Girin Banerjee told me that his grand father Surendra Nath Banerjee's daily diet consisted of two chickens. But he himself was such a staunch vegetarian that he could not think of taking any meat. He had no objection if others took it. But if a Hindu ate chicken, he felt disturbed. We could never propose that chicken be cooked in our kitchen. So we prepared chicken outside our ward and ate it there. When the news reached him he was very much displeased with us. He asked me if I ever ate chicken before coming to the jail. When my reply was in the negative, he cross-questioned me as to why I ate chicken at all. I said that I had no objection to eating chicken even before coming to the jail, but I had no occasion to do so. The attitude and views of men like Girin Banerjee were exceptions rather than the rule among the revolutionaries. However by some curious socio-cultural logic the Hindus of Bengal thought that chickens 'could only be eaten by non-Hindus.'

DURGA PUJA IN RAJSHAHI JAIL

We did not ask for any grant for religious purposes. Now it struck us that we should ask for a grant to celebrate Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bengalees. We applied for a grant. The Jailor persuaded the Superintendent to write to the headquarters recommending the proposal, pointing out that as the jail officials observed the Puja ceremony every year, the state prisoners also could be allowed to join the same, provided an amount of money was sanctioned for the purpose. The Chief Secretary of the Bengal Government, Sir Hugh Stephenson, sanctioned some money with the remark that proper security arrangements had to be made.

Though many of us had no faith in the Puja, yet we wanted it to be celebrated as it would mean a little change in our jail life, and the jail rigors also would be slackened.

The mandop (pandal) was erected on the right side of the compound in front of the jail gate. The gate was opened in the morning for us. In the afternoon we all sat in the compound where chairs were arranged. We thus freely mixed with the outsiders. One significant point may be mentioned in this connection that the goat offered to the Goddess was a white goat, symbolic of the white man with whom the Indians identified the British.

In the night a cinema show was arranged. The Elphinstone Company was called from Calcutta for

this purpose. The screen was fitted up just in front of the jail gate. Chairs were arranged inside the jail gate on the space between the inner and outer gates. In the midnight we were taken out from our barracks and seated in the chairs between the gates, with our faces towards the screen. The Jail Superintendent also occupied a chair.

Mainly the war documentaries were shown. The war was over and everybody knew that our release was not far off. The authorities, therefore, were not very strict. But a deep sorrow soon befall us.

Along with the rest of India, the revolutionaries had a great respect for Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The entire nation mourned his sudden passing away in a Bombay hotel on 1st August, 1920. We were all in mourning for 10 days in the jail as is done when a near relative dies.

The daily "Statesman" of Calcutta wrote editorially: "By his death India is purged of a much maligned and degraded character." This editorial note on the demise of the most respected son of India was so much resented by the people of Bengal that an agitation started for the boycott of the Anglo-Indian paper. The campaign was so strong that its circulation among Indians in Calcutta dwindled into insignificance and the paper was compelled to come out with an apology.

When after the World War Indians were to select three representatives to the Peace Conference at Marseilles, the first choice was Tilak, second

Gandhi and third Hussan Imam. Mrs. Anne Besant wrote in her paper that Tilak should not be the representative of India, because he did not know English. But Bipin Chandra Pal replied that Mrs. Besant wanted to say that the author of the 'Orion' and the 'Arctic Home of the Vedas' did not know English. This was one of the reasons why during the special session of the Congress in Calcutta in 1920 Mrs. Besant was not allowed to speak even after the request of Pandit Malavya, although 3 years earlier in 1917 she was the President of its Plenary Session held in Calcutta.

One day a C.I.D. Inspector came to see me from Calcutta. He showed me a list of certain properties, mainly a box full of books and other articles stated to have been recovered from 39 Pathuriaghata Street, Calcutta. He said that he had come to deliver these articles to me. After hearing all this I told him that I was not arrested at 39 Pathuriaghata Street and so I could not take delivery of the articles. Had I accepted the articles it would have been a clear proof of my being arrested in that dangerous house. My denial had a good effect. Four persons were arrested in connection with this house. But no name of the persons was mentioned although the Sedition Committee report devoted nearly two pages on this house.

King's Proclamation for the release of political prisoners was made not long after. Many leaders

were released. Even many of the leaders of the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case, Barin Ghosh, Upen Banerjee, and others were released from the Andamans.

Two C.I.D. officials, one European and one Indian, had seen me once and told me that they could slacken the rigors of my confinement if I gave them a verbal undertaking that I had changed my views. I left them stating that I had not changed at all.

A few months after that we were called to the jail office. The Jailor informed us that Mr. Nelson, Additional Secretary and Mr. Dixen, D.I.G., C.I.D. had come to interview us. We had earlier learnt from Kuntal Chakravarty that these two officials invited him once the Dacca Jail office, but did not offer him a chair to sit. So he had refused to talk to them. We, therefore, told the Jailor that we must be assured of civil behaviour. Reluctantly the Jailor conveyed our message to them. They went away and we came back to our ward.

This news came out in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* with strong editorial comments in which the questions of how and for what reasons the officials were sent to Rajshahi jail and drew their travelling allowances for their journey were raised.

The Governor was at that time at Dacca for a Council meeting. The Chief Secretary, Sir Hugh Stephenson came in the Commissioner's motor launch to Rajshahi and met us individually in our

respective cells. He came to my cell and discussed with me my course of action after my release.

DAYS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

I have stated how the revolutionaries tried their utmost to avail of the opportunity offered by the War. After Bengal Partition agitation the political life of the country took a new turn and the energy of the secret revolutionaries burst out through large scale violent attempts and court-cases. Ultimately they were subjected to detention without trial under the Defence of India Act of 1915 and the Regulation III of 1818. This was done to avoid the propaganda that open trials might have created. The other object was to detain those persons who were suspects but could not be brought under the grip of law. Detenues were kept in camps in remote places under strict vigilance of the police. The important leaders were lodged in the jails under Regulation III of 1818.

As I have stated elsewhere the revolutionaries inside the country and abroad were deeply engaged in the single task of ousting the Britishers from India. For this purpose, immediately after the war started, the revolutionaries abroad established contact with the German Government and succeeded in getting some substantial help. Inside India they established wide contact with the army. Though they were not successful in India, they achieved success in capturing Singapore temporarily.

THE ROLE OF THE CONGRESS

After the war started Gandhiji and other top Congress leaders helped the Britishers in their war effort. Among the top leaders only Tilak was of the opinion that Congress should not help in the war effort till Britain's promises were fulfilled.

S.P. Sinha, as the President of the Congress at its Bombay Session in 1915, stated in his written address that India was not fit for self determination. That clearly showed the pro-British stand of the Congress during the war period. The role of the Congress till that time was ultra-moderate. They were not ready even to bargain with the Government. The demand put forward by Tilak was opposed by Gandhiji himself who was of the view that Great Britain should be supported unconditionally in its war efforts as he was confident that if the British won they would not forget the services rendered by India.

But revolutionaries kept the flame of the spirit of freedom burning. Even in schools and colleges their propaganda literature found their way. The principal of our college used to warn us that students who had anything to do with the revolutionaries degrade themselves by such activities and that they should have the courage to come forward and confess. He used to look at the faces of students. Those who were trained to observe secrecy, how could they be affected by such

lectures ? I rather helped the revolutionaries in their recruitment,

The principal did so, because being a very loyal person, he used to go to the District Magistrate with the pamphlets which we distributed to the students. Naturally the D.M. must have asked him to detect such students. This was beyond his power, because the revolutionaries were no fools, neither had he the courage to do any harm to them. He knew too well the result of such an action.

The revolutionaries carried on their propaganda mainly through their secret pamphlets. But their actions were more successful as propaganda. Though not very big in number, yet many of the best students joined them, attracted by their pamphlets and actions. A political money action was always a different matter than an ordinary dacoity committed by the criminals. Even the persons in whose house a political dacoity was committed were often a bit happy as they thought that the money would be utilised for the country's cause. In fact, I know of a young man who made efforts to come in touch with us after a dacoity was committed by our party in his village home in the district of Mymensingh in East Bengal. Thus political dacoity served two purposes—it gave us the much needed fund and it acted as a propaganda. It also served as a training ground for making us dare-devils, a thing which we thought would be much needed in the ultimate fight.

The other methods of propaganda were the big actions, like the throwing of the bomb by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki at Muzaffarpur and the throwing of the bomb on the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge in Delhi, the open fight with the police as at Baripada in Orissa by Jatin Mukherjee and others, the fight with the police at Gauhati, at Atgharia, Pabna, and Kalta Bazar, the murder of Saunders by Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad and Rajguru, or the killings of high English officials in Bengal beginning with the Chittagong armoury raid, etc. Events like these shook the country from one corner to the other and roused the patriotic feelings in the hearts of innumerable Indians. Most of them were not active but they had sympathy and a good number of them also helped directly or indirectly in revolutionary or other patriotic activities.

GENERAL FEELINGS DURING AND AFTER THE WAR

The Partition Agitation in Bengal was a mass movement, but since its annulment there was no mass movement in the country. Anti-British feeling, however, continued. Then the war broke out and the patriotic feeling was manifest through the happiness of Indians in getting the news of British setbacks during the war.

People used to read papers with interest for war news and they appeared to be jubilant to read

about the reverses of Britain and the British gains in war made them unhappy. The disgust of the people for British rule was the source of sympathy for the revolutionaries in India, because the revolutionary movement was the only active movement in the country which was carrying on an all out fight for India's freedom. In Bengal and the Punjab it was fought more fiercely. The feeling of a revolution was most intensified in Bengal from the Partition days and in the Punjab it was inspired by the Ghadar Party. Prosecutions and persecutions were also more severe in these two provinces. Thousands of houses were searched and thousands were thrown into prison or sent to detention camps.

The suppressed feelings of the people burst out to oppose the Rowlatt Act of 1919 when it was brought forward after the war to curb the activities of the revolutionaries. It took its most acute form in the Punjab and the result was martial law and the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre.

Britain promised substantial reforms after the war. But before the reforms were introduced the British Government brought forward the Rowlatt Act to curb the activities of revolutionaries. The Rowlatt Act was followed by the Government of India Act, 1919, based on the Montague-Chelmsford report of 1918. These reforms came into operation in 1921.

It is an undeniable fact that the countrywide

agitation against the Rowlatt Bill was the expression of the people's love for the revolutionaries because of their sustained sufferings and sacrifices for the country's independence. For this very reason the Britishers suppressed the agitation so ruthlessly. But the harvest was reaped not by the revolutionaries, but by the Congress. In fact Gandhiji took up the leadership of the country along with C.R. Das and Moti Lal Nehru just after the Jalianwala Bagh Massacre.

Chapter V

ABOUT FIVE DEAD FRIENDS

1. Tarini Prasanna Mazumdar

The zamindars of Kashipur of Tippera district were a family of revolutionaries. Basanta Mazumdar and his wife Hemaprabha Mazumdar were Congress leaders of Tripura and had sympathy for the revolutionaries. His younger brother Sashi Mazumdar, his cousins, Kali Prasanna Mazumdar and Bagala Mazumdar were all very important and active members of Anushilan. Their nephew Tarini Prasanna Mazumdar laid down his life in the Kalta Bazar fight of Dacca along with Nalini Bagchi, another brilliant Anushilanite.

Tarini was not only an intimate friend of mine, but also shared equal status with me in the Tripura district organisation. We both started shooting practice together, both became circle leaders and sub-division supervisors at the same time. I was looking after the Chandpur Organisation and Tarini looked after Brahman Baria sub-division. We both absconded together in 1916. On many occasions we travelled to distant villages in the night. In our day to day life also we were very often together. We used to go out for morning walks in batches of 3 or 4. The first to rise used to

sing from the street and on hearing the song others knew that the time for morning walk had come. We walked 2 or 3 miles away from our home. Our walk terminated at the newspaper agency shop. We used to collect the papers, read them sitting at a ghat and then go back home.

That was our routine work. In the evening we used to walk in batches as a part of our training as secret revolutionaries. This sharing of the common things of life made our group cohesive.

Tarini was 6 feet tall and well-built. His arms were stout and long. He was always cheerful and even in a difficult situation his mood remained unchanged. As an absconder for two years he had many exploits to his credit. Once when the house where he took shelter was surrounded by the police, he went up on the roof and jumped for the next roof, but missed it. One of his ankles was dislocated, yet he managed to escape. His health improved even as an absconder.

When I was transferred to Rajshahi jail, Satish Pakrashi told me that the present leader of our party was a person the like of whom he had never seen before. He said that the leader was of gigantic stature and had a long beard. He did not know his antecedents or real name. But he knew his secret party name. When I wanted to know the name Pakrashi said it was "Star". I told him that he was from Comilla and was an intimate friend of mine. His real name was Tarini Prasanna Mazumdar. Pakrashi told me that Mazumdar was

a very daring and heroic person. That he performed many daring and arduous tasks in those bad days of the party. Shortly after this we came to know in the jail about his martyrdom in Kalta Bazar fight on the 15th June, 1918.

After our release I heard the details about the fight at Kalta Bazar house from an eye witness named Aswini Kumar De. He also had a history behind his simple life. He had no relative on earth except a maternal uncle. He was working at Comilla as a domestic servant for some time and served in our house also. He was not only a reliable man but also was intimate with us even in our secret activities. Tarini knew him and took his help when he was absconding. That was how Aswini was living in the Kalta Bazar house as domestic servant under the assumed name of Hari Chaitanya.

After the fight he was arrested from this house, tortured and then given a heavy sentence. He put up with all these things as a revolutionary does. After the King's proclamation he was released and met us at Comilla. He was hard pressed even after his release, because we were not in a position to help him. He told us how, after the Kalta Bazar house was surrounded by the police, Tarini rushed from the latrine, took out the Mauser pistol from a box underneath the wooden bedstead and started fighting bravely along with Nalini Bagchi and others. They seriously injured two C.I.D. inspectors and one Havildar was killed. At last Tarini fell

dead having received seven bullets. Nalini Bagchi also received several bullets and died in the hospital.

2. Prabodh Bhattacharya.

As I have already stated, Tarini and I was to go to an action some 28 miles away from our hide-out. Owing to my high fever Tarini had to go alone. A decoity at Laliteswar was the purpose. Tarini joined it, with the rest. Krishna Saha led the group. It was a rainy night and when one of them, Prabodh Bhattacharya, was taking out money burried in the ground, he was bitten by a poisonous snake.

It was a critical situation. The group consisted of a small number and Bhattacharya was losing consciousness and so he had to be carried away without any delay. When the villagers saw them in this plight, they challenged and tried to attack them with lathies and other weapons. In self defence they had to open fire. Several died and many were wounded. Bhattacharya breathed his last. The group left him under a big tree in a bush and escaped.

Next day the dead body was exhibited in Comilla but nobody could identify it. Later police came to know that it was Prabodh Bhattacharya of Rajshahi district. He was the only son of a widow. While a B.A. student, he was arrested and interned. He absconded from internment and shortly after came to Comilla.

3. Bipin Bihari De.

My boyhood friend and classmate, Bipin Behari De, also sacrificed his life at the alter of r volution. As a school boy he tried to persuade me not to be a revolutionary and after two years' close watch he was convinced and then formally joined the party. He was not only a meritorious student but also a staunch moralist. There was a warrant to arrest him and hence he had to abscond. When circumstances became hard for him in Bengal due to police vigilance, he shifted to Bihar. He lived there as a Bihari. One day he fell down from the roof of a building accidentally and died in hospital after three days. Khetra Sinha was in charge of the Bihar Branch of the party and he arrived at Monghyr after he expired. The Bengali Civil Surgeon told Khetra Sinha that from the utterance of the deceased in delirium he came to know that he was a Bengali, though dressed as a Bihari.

4. Rebati Nag.

He was a brilliant student and a zealous worker of the party. As an absconder when the situation in Bengal became very critical for him, he, too, had to go to Bihar as a student. He showed his capacity as an organiser. This is how even the Sedition Committee Report mentioned him as the most prominent organiser of the Anushilan Samiti in Bihar. Party discipline at the time had reached such a rigid point that for a minor lapse the party decided to murder him and it was executed. This news shocked us in jail. His elder brother also was

a leading Anushilan worker, who worked in Bengal and Burma but died of T.B. His only surviving younger brother was drowned in a pond.

5. Pulin Mukherjee of Comilla.

He was Dr. Abinash Banerjee and Ramesh Banerjee's sister's son. He was also an important member of the Comilla Anushilan. Though Pulin did not play any important role in organisational work and in violent activities, he had to abscond when the first World War started. As an absconder he came in touch with the Jugantar Party, and took leading part in their violent activities. He even led many of their taxi decoities in Calcutta. Unable to get hold of the son, the police terminated his father's Government services. After his arrest, Pulin faltered and confessed to the police and his father was reinstated in his services. The demoralising effect of this incident was visible in him after his release from detention. He could not survive long after release.