

## CHAPTER ONE

# INDIA'S REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

### GENESIS OF THE SECRET SOCIETY IN BENGAL

Towards the end of the nineteenth century when the leaders of the Indian National Congress such as Pherozshah Mehta and Mahadev Govind Ranade were conducting the nationalist movement in India along legal and constitutional lines pinning much reliance on the native generosity and liberal professions of Britain, a minority of ardent Indian patriots headed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak were preparing the mind of the people for an acute struggle with the alien Government. The latter believed not in the efficacy of a wordy battle with the bureaucracy but in action and extreme sacrifice for the country. If the credit for the promulgation of Boycott or Passive Resistance as a weapon of India's Freedom Movement belongs to Bengal, Maharashtra deserves to be congratulated on being the pioneer of the physical force movement for attaining India's Independence. It is from Maharashtra that the new impulse was brought to Bengal by Aurobindo Ghose and Jatindra Nath Banerjee at the beginning of the present century.

Aurobindo Ghose destined to play a foremost role in India's Freedom Movement was mentally and spiritually more allied to the temper of Tilak than to that of any other Indian leader of the time. In his serial articles on "New Lamps For Old" written shortly after his return from Cambridge in 1893, he gave a clear and powerful expression to his early

political thought. It was a vigorous attack on the then unnational Indian Congress about which he observed "that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders;—in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed".<sup>1</sup> His main complaint against the then Congress was that it aimed at an "isolated predominance" of one class of people—the middle class of India, leaving the vast proletarian mass entirely off the board. "Yet the proletariat," he observed, "is the real key of the situation. Torpid he is and immobile; he is nothing of an actual force, but he is a very great potential force, and whoever succeeds in understanding and eliciting his strength, becomes by the very fact master of the future".<sup>2</sup> In the field of practical work, he found the record of the Congress to be a very poor show, its activities being confined merely to the passage of a few pious resolutions annually at its sessions. He also rejected the petitioning policy of the Congress and clearly suggested that it is not by prayer and petition but by "purification by blood and fire" that a nation's liberty could be achieved. He asked his countrymen not to adopt England as their political exemplar, but France which "blotted out in five terrible years the accumulated oppression of thirteen centuries". It was in this mental background that Aurobindo, while living in Baroda, came into touch with one Thakur Sahib who initiated him into the secret society in Maharashtra.<sup>3</sup> At the Ahmedabad Congress he had also an

1. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee: *Sri Aurobindo's Political Thought* (Calcutta, 1958, p. 75).
2. *Ibid* p. 120.
3. About Thakur Sahib referred to above Sri Aurobindo states that he was a noble of the Udaipur State with the title of Thakur.

exchange of views with Tilak whom he considered to be "the one possible leader for a revolutionary party". Thanks to Tilak, already a party of action had grown up in Maharashtra and secret societies were flourishing there. The murder of Mr. Rand, the Plague Commissioner, and Lieut. Ayerst by the Chopekar brothers in Poona (1897) set the first example of political murder, and it has been ascertained later that both the Chopekar brothers and their club were inspired by Tilak's ideas and methods. The Marathas were thus the pioneers in the field of secret societies and in spreading revolutionary doctrines all over India for the overthrow of British power.<sup>4</sup>

Both official and unofficial sources reveal that Aurobindo Ghose even before he plunged himself directly into Bengal politics tried to influence the political life of Bengal from his distant base at Baroda. About the year 1901 he had sent from Baroda Jatindra Nath Banerjee, a soldier in the Gaikwar's army, to organize secret societies and preach the cause of freedom in Bengal.<sup>5</sup> This was followed by the despatch from Baroda of Barindra Kumar Ghose, Aurobindo's younger brother, on the same political mission (1902). Jatindra Nath on his arrival in Calcutta founded an *akhra* or gymnasium at Upper Circular Road with the ostensible object of imparting physical training to the young men including

"The Thakur was not a member of the Council in Bombay; he stood above it as the leader of the whole movement while the Council helped him to organize Maharashtra and the Mahratta States. He himself worked principally upon the Indian Army of which he had already won over two or three regiments. Sri Aurobindo took a special journey into Central India to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments." Vide *Sri Aurobindo On Himself And On The Mother* (Pondicherry, 1953, pp. 28-29).

4. *Note On The Growth Of The Revolutionary Movement In Bengal* (L. No. 47) as preserved in the I. B. Deptt., Govt. of West Bengal.
5. *An Account Of The Revolutionary Organizations In Bengal Other Than The Dacca Anusilan Samiti* (L. No. 54) preserved in the I. B. Office, Govt. of West Bengal.

boxing, wrestling, riding, swimming etc., but the underlying motive being the organization of a secret society within this innocent outer shell. Barin Ghose on his coming to Bengal joined hands with Jatin Banerjee who had found in Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya of Arabalia (24 Parganas) another enthusiastic worker.<sup>6</sup> While Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya looked after the financial aspects of the society such as the collection of subscriptions etc., Barin Ghose took upon himself the work of propaganda by extensive tours all over Bengal. His efforts bore fruit in the foundation of various *akhras* and samitis, particularly in Cuttack, Bankura, Ranchi, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Mymensingh, Dacca, Krishnagore and Basirhat. The root idea behind these formations was "to stir up young people to take part in revolutionary work and to free the country from foreign yoke".<sup>7</sup>

It has been recorded by Aurobindo Ghose that shortly after the foundation of Jatin Banerjee's *akhra* in Calcutta, the former tried to unify the revolutionary forces in Bengal under the leadership of Barrister Pramatha Nath Mitter. An executive committee was soon formed consisting of P. Mitter as President, C. R. Das and Aurobindo Ghose as Vice-Presidents and Surendra Nath Tagore as Treasurer. Facts on record do not show that Sister Nivedita actually joined this executive committee.<sup>8</sup> Jatin Banerjee's society came to be patronized and financed not only by the

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6. The statement of Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya on the history of the initial phase of the revolutionary society as incorporated in the *Appendices* to Bhupendra Nath Datta's *Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinatar Itihas* (Calcutta, 3rd edn., 1949).

7. The statement of Barindra Kumar Ghose before the Deputy Supdt. of Police, Bengal, on May 3, 1908.

8. Vide the article written jointly by Uma Mukherjee and Haridas Mukherjee on *Sister Nivedita And The Revolutionary Movement In Bengal* published in *Sunday Jugantar* on October 15, 1961. Also see in this connection *Jatiya Andolane Satis Chandra Mukherjee* (Calcutta, 1960, pp. 128-146) by the same authors.

above-mentioned figures but also by Gaganendra Nath Tagore, Abinash Chandrā Chakravarty, Surya Kanta Acharya Choudhury, Jogendra Chandra Vidyabhusan, Subodh Chandra Mallick, Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar and others. Aurobindo Ghose in particular regularly sent a large sum of money for the maintenance of the society from the very beginning. Jatin Banerjee made provisions in his society for teaching manly physical exercises to the general body of its members, while political knowledge regarding revolutionary movements in various countries was also disseminated to a select few of dependable character.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of this hopeful beginning the first secret society of Bengal as founded by Jatin Banerjee died a premature death mainly due to the conflict that arose between Jatin Banerjee, on the one hand, and Barin Ghose, on the other. After doing some preliminary political work in Bengal up to the middle of 1903 Barin returned to Aurobindo Ghose, his elder brother, in Baroda. Shortly afterwards Jatin Banerjee also, in view of his differences with other members, left the society in disgust and disappointment at the failure of his mission. Thus the society virtually collapsed.

In 1904 Barin Ghose again came back to Calcutta to resume his work and push vigorously the cause of secret societies in Bengal. His immediate object was to form around him a band of self-sacrificing young men who would devote themselves whole-heartedly to the work of the country's liberation even by a resort to physical force. He toured through many districts of Bengal, opening *akhras* or samitis in various places and infusing a new spirit into the people. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya, Debabrata Bose and Bhupendra Nath Datta became his closest associates and comrades and formed the inner ring of a bigger circle. Aurobindo

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9. Abinash Chandra Bhattacharya's statement included in B. N. Datta's book.

Ghose also came to Bengal once or twice in 1904 following the break-up of Jatin Banerjee's *akhra* and tried in vain to effect a union between Jatin Banerjee and Barin Ghose. For some time he was then putting up at Grey Street jointly with Barin Ghose, Jatin Banerjee and Abinash Bhattacharya who were later joined there by two Maratha young men too. It was from this place that Aurobindo wrote out an anonymous leaflet under the caption "No Compromise" which vigorously advocated the ideal of no compromise with the British bureaucracy unless and until the Indian soil was free.<sup>10</sup>

The next important work of Aurobindo Ghose was the publication of another anonymous leaflet entitled *Bhawani Mandir* towards the end of 1905 sketching the ideals and methods of revolutionary work. The Intelligence Branch Records repeatedly affirm that Aurobindo was prudent enough to perceive that the only hope of success of a national movement was to spread the doctrine of discontent against England and to unite the people of all provinces in one feeling of hostility towards foreign rule. He also realized that "the surest and the safest ground to proceed on would be religion. He first conceived the idea of training missionaries to be sent as sannyasis to all parts of India to preach the new religion—the worship of Motherland".<sup>11</sup> The contents of *Bhawani Mandir* were nothing but revolutionary doctrines preached under religious garb.<sup>12</sup> Thus Aurobindo Ghose played a most formative role in the genesis of secret societies in Bengal.

#### THE ANUSILAN SAMITI OF CALCUTTA

Parallel to these activities of Aurobindo-Jatin-Barin group, another momentous development was

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Note On The Growth Of The Revolutionary Movement In Bengal.*

12. *Sri Aurobindo And The New Thought In Indian Politics.* pp. XXIV-XXVI.

taking place during this period, and that was the foundation of the Anusilan Samiti in Calcutta. Brought into being as a club of physical exercises in March, 1902 by Satis Chandra Bose, it was shifted in 1905 to 49 Cornwallis Street, Calcutta. For some time Jatin Banerjee's *akhra* and Satis Bose's *akhra* functioned simultaneously under the patronage of Barrister P. Mitter. Satis Bose records in a written statement<sup>13</sup> that on P. Mitter's initiative and direction the two societies were amalgamated, giving rise to a bigger organization under the presidentship of P. Mitter. P. Mitter was a staunch nationalist and strove hard to inspire the Bengali youths with ideals of physical prowess and bravery. Secret revolutionary plottings and resort to violent methods for political purposes were not, however, much to his liking.

With the outbreak of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905 which stirred the country to its inmost depths, the activities of the Anusilan Samiti began to develop rapidly, drawing new recruits and spreading out its branches in the mofussil—at Hooghly, Belghoria, Panihati, Nataghar, Ghola, Fuleswar, Harinavi, and Alka (Khulna district). In Calcutta its branches were opened also at Garpar Road, Parsee Bagan, Behala, Tala, Chetla and Pataldanga.<sup>14</sup> At first they were all physical and moral culture centres but gradually they began to acquire a political complexion. At the end of the year 1905 the Dacca Anusilan Samiti was founded with Pulin Das as Secretary and P. Mitter as President, and it was affiliated to the parent organization in Calcutta with Satis Bose as Secretary. About the objects and activities of the Anusilan Samiti the

13. The statement of Satis Chandra Bose on the origin of the Anusilan Samiti as incorporated in the *Appendices to B. N. Datta's Bharater Dwitiya Swadhinatar Itihas*.

Also see *Anusilan Samiti Sankshipta Itihas* by Jibantara Haldar (1956 3rd edn.)

14. Intelligence Branch Records of the Govt. of West Bengal. F. N. IV/209 of 1908.

following account has been furnished by Mr. J. E. Armstrong, Supdt. of Police, which is in general agreement with the information derived from other sources:

“The ostensible objects of the Samiti”, writes Mr. Armstrong, “were declared to be ‘the physical, moral and mental development of its members, boys and young men of the country, and to infuse a feeling of amity, fraternity and mutual sympathy among the people’, and as in the Dacca Samiti so here, philanthropy was made a special object and members were sent out to beg for rice (*musti-bhiksha*) and distribute it to the poor, nurse the sick, volunteer their services at festivals and so forth. But physical culture and lathi-play were by far the most important business and the activities of the Calcutta Anusilan in this respect were by no means confined to Calcutta but extended to various districts of West and East Bengal. Bands of young men went about the country giving displays of sword and lathi-exercise, engaging in friendly rivalry with the boys of the places visited and founding branches, very much in the manner of the Dacca organization”.<sup>15</sup>

A secret Police Report submitted in 1909 to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, states:

“The Anusilan Samiti was first heard of by the Bengal Special Branch in October 1905. . . One of the original vows of the Society was that when any Indian woman was offended by any European in the presence of a member of the Samiti, that member would be obliged to take revenge even at the cost of his own life”. The same report goes on to state further that there was a secret circle within the Samiti, to which only Graduates and First Arts students were admitted. “Two to six students were to be taken from each college, their antecedents were verified and they were put to

15. Mr. Armstrong's Introductory Note to the *History Of The Dacca Anusilan Samiti*, dated April 25, 1917.



a period of probation on the expiry of which they went through an initiation ceremony taking their oath lying flat on a human skeleton with a revolver in one hand and a Gita in the other . . . It is probable those initiated into the inner circle separated themselves from the more public body and formed one of the societies from which the anarchists have sprung".<sup>16</sup>

Following the Anti-Partition agitation of 1905 the activities of the Calcutta Anusilan Samiti grew by leaps and bounds and the society became a most important recruiting agency of Bengali youths for secret work. The outward activities of the Samiti ceased from September, 1909 when it was declared illegal, but its inner spirit continued to influence the Bengali youths for more daring acts. After its formal dissolution, many of its members gradually clustered round the personality of Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee, a born leader and organizer.

#### *Jugantar* AS A REVOLUTIONARY ORGAN

There is still today a misconception among writers and scholars as to the relation of the *Jugantar* band of revolutionary workers of that period with the Anusilan Samiti. It is a gross mistake to conceive of the two groups of workers, ordinarily labelled as Anusilan and *Jugantar*, as representing two distinct political parties of a revolutionary character. Dr. Bhupendra Nath Datta who was the first editor of the *Jugantar* weekly (organ of the revolutionary party) has repeatedly stated both verbally and in writing that during 1905-1906 there was only one central revolutionary organization in Bengal with its local branches in various places under the general presidentship of P. Mitter. With the expansion in the size and activity

16. F. N. IV/209 of 1908 in the I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal.

of the revolutionary organization a differentiation of functions, inevitable in the course of evolution, began to take place. While the larger body remained content with physical culture together with doses of political thought, a small band of workers belonging to the same organization addressed their mind to systematic political propaganda through a fit medium. Barin Ghose led this group which included Abinash Bhattacharya, Debabrata Bose, Bhupen Datta and others. Dissatisfied with the political propagandism of the existing nationalist papers in Bengal, they together founded in March, 1906 the Bengali weekly *Jugantar* to give voice to their revolutionary doctrines.<sup>17</sup> They believed that freedom is the birth-right of each nation and that a subject people must wade to freedom through a welter of blood. Their supreme object was to drive out the British from this country even by the most extreme methods. 'Kabuly medicine is the best medicine' was their constant cry. The following quotations from the *Jugantar* unmistakably reveal the unflinching candour with which the revolutionary doctrines were preached in this paper:

1. In an article published on April 7, 1907 the *Jugantar* observed: "In almost every country the people come to be divided into three parties before a revolution. One party turns traitor to the country and helps the established Government, the second party (and this consists of the majority of the population), though hankering after freedom and prepared to make some little sacrifice for attaining it, are unwilling to plunge into war for its sake, and the third party consists of men to whom life without freedom is a burden and who are willing even to sacrifice themselves for the sake of their ideal. It is gradually becoming necessary

17. U. and H. Mukherjee: *Swadeshi Andolan O Banglar Nabajuga* (Calcutta, 1961, Chapter VI).

to form a third party like this in every town and every village and link them together”.

2. In its issue of May 5, 1907, the paper described the Englishmen as demons or *asurs* and characterised Minto and Hare as dangerous persons having no equal in the art of demoniac duplicity and finally observed: “Who calls you a tiger? Who calls you the British Lion? There are no tigers or lions in your country which contains only moles, jackals and dogs. In childhood we read of only these animals in your books and to-day in the field of politics, too, we are being acquainted with the self-same animals”.

In an article of June 9, 1907, the *Jugantar* gave direct incitement to violence by writing: “If it be lawful for an individual to use physical force for self-preservation, why should it be unlawful for a nation to do the same? If it be not a sin to commit manslaughter in order to defend oneself against thieves and dacoits, why should it be a sin to kill a few men in order that a nation might become free? War and similar things may or may not be good. But in the present state of man he has no escape from them. When war is necessary, it is cowardice to refuse to enter upon it”.

Again, in an article entitled “Lathi As Remedy”, the *Jugantar* observed on June 16, 1907 that the English bureaucrats did not understand the language of petition and peaceful agitation and that the people must be ready to apply the remedy which is always applied to fools. “The Kabuly medicine is indeed the best of medicines”.

In another article on “Dispelling Of Fear” the *Jugantar* observed on June 16, 1907: “In the course of the conversation a respected pandit said the other day that this vast British Empire was a huge sham, that it was a house without a foundation or a garland strung without a thread; that though it glittered and

looked so nice with its crimson hue, a slight pull or a little push would bring it down to fragments. But that it does not fall is due simply to our foolishness".<sup>18</sup>

Week after week the *Jugantar* began to pour out such revolutionary ideas as the above, and its language became more and more vituperative and violent. The alien bureaucracy raised its threatening fist to kill that paper. Within a short span of thirteen months (July, 1907—August, 1908) six prosecutions, one after another, were started against this journal.<sup>19</sup>

But prosecution and persecution failed to stop its publication. Finding the existing laws too inadequate for the purpose, the Government of India ultimately passed the new Press Law in June, 1908 to gag the voice of seditious journals among whom the *Jugantar*, in official estimation, stood the first and foremost. While introducing the Press Bill in the Legislative Council on June 8, 1908, Sir Harvey Adamson, the Law Member, made special reference to the subversive work carried on by the *Jugantar* when he said: "In spite of five prosecutions *Jugantar* still exists and is as violent as ever. The type of sedition has been incitement to subversion of British rule by deeds of violence, has been to court prosecution to create pseudo-martyrs . . . I have up to this point confined myself to the *Jugantar* because it has already obtained so great notoriety that nothing that I can say can make it more notorious. But writings of a similar type abound in other newspapers not only in Calcutta but throughout India. I will not give any of these disreputable papers an advertisement by mentioning their names. . . . The only way to deal with such newspapers is to put an end

18. The above extracts from the *Jugantar* are taken from the articles which were exhibited in the first *Jugantar* prosecution in July, 1907. Vide *Bande Mataram* dated July 26, 1907 and July 28, 1907.

19. Home Poll. A Proceedings of the Govt. of India, June, 1908, Nos. 126-129 and Aug. 1908, Nos. 99-104.

to their existence, and this we propose to do in the Bill. . . . ”<sup>20</sup>

#### THE MANICKTOLA GARDEN HOUSE

Side by side with the organization of the *Jugantar* weekly Barindra Kumar Ghose laid the foundations of a secret society (1907) at the Manicktola Garden House in North Calcutta (a property belonging to the four sons of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose, father of Barin Ghose) where, apart from imparting moral and religious training to its members, the cult of revolutionary nationalism, patriotism and so forth was also preached, the ultimate object being the preparation of the country for entering into an armed conflict with the alien Government. Knowledge of history and politics of various countries was also disseminated among its members regularly. In the literature of the society the greatest place was occupied by *Bartaman Rananiti* (a Bengali work by Barindra Kumar Ghose analysing the armed strength of the enemies and the methods to fight them out), *Mukti Kon Pathe* (comprising the most important articles of the *Jugantar* weekly) and a Bomb Manual (describing the formulae of bomb-making)—all being unearthed at the time of the search at the Garden House in May, 1908.<sup>21</sup> In the practical field, the society applied its mind to the collection of explosives, guns, revolvers, bombs, dynamites and various acids and chemicals as well as to the manufacture of bombs, particularly by Ullaskar Datta and Hem Chandra Das. Ullaskar Datta first started

20. The *Bengalee*, June 9, 1908 and *Bande Mataram* (Weekly Edition), June 14, 1908.

21. A copy of the same bomb manual was also discovered by the police during their search of the house of Ganesh Savarkar, brother of V. D. Savarkar, on March 2, 1909. Mr. Ker, I.C.S., who had been P. A. to the Director of Criminal Intelligence, Govt. of India, during 1907-13, refers to it in his *Political Trouble In India: 1907-1917* (Calcutta, 1917) as “60 pages of closely typed matter in English, which proved to be a copy of the same bomb manual of which a cyclostyled copy was found in the Manicktola garden. Savarkar’s copy was more complete, as it contained 45 sketches of bombs, mines and buildings to illustrate the text”.

this sort of preparation secretly in his own house but soon a centre was opened for the purpose at 15, Gopi Mohan Datta Lane in North Calcutta. Hem Chandra Das soon imparted to the society his expert knowledge of bomb manufacture on his return from France in 1907. In the latter part of that year the early band of the *Jugantar* workers dissociated themselves from the management of the paper, devoting themselves wholeheartedly to secret plotting and conspiracy. By this time more than a dozen young men had clustered round Barindra Kumar at Manicktola. Between November, 1907 and April, 1908 these men were busy weaving their schemes of outrages for taking the lives of select officials who had made themselves notorious and obnoxious to the revolutionaries. Besides the two attempts at blowing off Sir Andrew Fraser's special trains near Chandernagore (November-December, 1907), a third attempt was also made to wreck his train at Narayangarh near Kharagpur (December 6, 1907).<sup>22</sup> In each of these instances bombs and mines of Ullaskar's make were used. Two bombs of Hem Das's make were also used in April, 1908--one directed at the Mayor of French Chandernagore, and the other misdirected at two innocent English ladies at Muzaffarpur causing their deaths. Their actual prey was, however, Mr. Kingsford who escaped unhurt as if through providential intervention. This attempt to take the life of Mr. Kingsford was preceded by another futile attempt made by Barin Ghose's party in or about January, 1908 through the despatch to him of a book-bomb in the form of a parcel which was not opened at that time as Mr. Kingsford

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22. The rail damaged in explosion on December 6, 1907 was brought to the Kharagpur Railway Workshop for preservation and is still lying near the Railway Test House, Kharagpur Workshop, bearing the following tablet:

"Rail Damaged In Explosion Near Narayangarh  
Under The Special Train Of  
H. E. Sir Andrew Fraser K C I E  
Lieut-Governor of Bengal on 6-12-07".

was then out of Calcutta, and afterwards the matter was forgotten until its memory was revived in 1909 in course of the Alipore Bomb Case. It was discovered exactly in the book long lying unopened in the house of Mr. Kingsford and has been described by Muspratt-Williams, Chief Inspector of Explosives of the India Govt., as "a most destructive bomb, had it exploded".<sup>23</sup>

Following the Muzaffarpur bomb outrage the revolutionary centres in Calcutta came under bureaucratic fire and thunder. The nest of revolutionary conspiracy at Manicktola was broken and the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy Case<sup>e</sup> was vigorously set on foot by the Government. Although Aurobindo Ghose was ultimately acquitted by the British Judge as the prosecution could not prove his guilt, yet the fact remains that his was the master brain behind the whole revolutionary campaign in Bengal. Official records of the time repeatedly affirm this view.

#### THE DACCA ANUSILAN SAMITI

The Dacca Anusilan Samiti was founded on November 3, 1905, at first as a branch of the Calcutta Anusilan Samiti, but soon it developed into an independent parallel institution. Its birth was the direct sequel of the fiery speeches of Barrister P. Mitter and Bipin Chandra Pal at Dacca and their exhortation to the young men to form a society of service and sacrifice. About eighty young men headed by Pulin Behari Das readily responded to the call and took the vow administered by P. Mitter. Mr. Armstrong in describing the occasion writes thus: "The manner of administering the vow was full of significance. P. Mitter held a sword with the point resting on the forehead of the postulant as he knelt and solemnly swore that if it were demanded of him, he was prepared to sacrifice even his life for

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23. I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, File No. IV/1085/1909.

the independence of the country. In this one act the whole mission and purpose of the Samiti is at once revealed and symbolized". Pulin Behari Das was appointed the 'Captain-General' of the Samiti for the sterling qualities of leadership which he abundantly possessed.

The Samiti had a humble beginning. On the first day when Pulin Das started his work, he found to his surprise that only one member had turned up.<sup>24</sup> But under his leadership the Samiti having its base at 50 Wari, Dacca, began to make rapid strides, enlisting new members and setting up branches all over Eastern Bengal and Assam. Speaking of its rapid development, Mr. F. C. Daly, Offg. D. I. G. (Police), Bengal, observed in 1909 that "the Dacca Anusilan Samiti was founded and carried on with the same ultimate object as the Calcutta Anusilan Samiti, though the former was more rapid in its advance, more business-like in its organization, and more daring in its deeds, perhaps owing to the fact that the young Bengali of E. B. and Assam is generally ahead of the young Bengali of this province in natural audacity and physical courage".<sup>25</sup>

As regards the numerical strength of the Samiti, it has been reported that Pulin Das on his release from deportation informed Mr. Denham of the Intelligence Branch "that he had 1,000 members in Dacca town and between 20,000 and 30,000 members in various districts of East Bengal". About 600 branches were then in existence.

#### ITS ORGANIZATION AND ITS ACTIVITIES

The objects of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti were the same as those of the Calcutta Anusilan Samiti,

24. *Biplabir Jiban-Darshan* by Pratul Chandra Ganguli. See *Prabasi, Baisakh*, 1368 B. S.

25. Mr. Daly's letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, dated September 11-12, 1909.



physical exercises, moral regeneration and philanthropic work forming a great part of its curriculum. But by far the greatest object of the Samiti was to subvert the British rule in India by a violent and terror-striking policy. This alone explains, according to the Intelligence Branch reports, "the ascetic training" of the members of the organization, "the laboriously practised *lathi*, dagger, and sword-play, boxing and jujitsu, the military drill and training, the mock fights and competitions", in which prizes and medals were also distributed. Pulin Behari Das, who himself inspected the branch samitis, "instructed volunteers in archery and had discovered a formula for a deadly poison to be applied to arrow-heads".<sup>26</sup>

To the members of the Samiti two important vows were administered, viz., *Adya Pratijna* or the initial vow and *Anta Pratijna* or the final vow. "The former consisted of 21 separate promises, the most important being that the member would never sever his connection with the Samiti, would report any probability of harm to the Samiti and any case in which a member broke his vow, would obey the orders of the authorities and conceal nothing from them, and would never neglect gymnastics or drill or teach them to any non-member." There was no secret about this vow, as printed copies of it were posted up at the various samitis for the information of the public. After having fulfilled the terms of the first vow a member was required to take the middle and then the final vow.

The final vow was concerned with serious matters and was not meant for publication. It contained six clauses :

"I. I will not disclose any secret matter of the Samiti to any one, and will never discuss these matters unnecessarily.

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26. The I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal. F. N. 1270/1913.

2. I will never act contrary to the system of work of the Samiti. I will always remain subject to the head of the Samiti. I will instantly and thoroughly carry out whatever orders he may pass from time to time.

3. I will never change my place of residence without informing the head about it. I will not keep secret from the head where and how I am at a particular time. I will instantly inform the head should the existence of any conspiracy against the Samiti come to my knowledge, and under his orders try to remedy it.

4. I will come back in obedience to the head's command, no matter in what state I may happen to be at the time. But if any serious physical or natural cause prevents me from turning up at the proper time, I will at once apply to the head, bringing the matter to his notice, and return as soon as the impediment is got over.

5. I will not consider any kind of work disgraceful . . . I will entirely rid myself of the fear of public censure. I will not cherish even a grain of the desire of attaining celebrity . . . . Caring neither for fame nor opprobrium and quite giving up wrangling and loquacity, I will go on discharging my duties with seriousness, patience and perseverance, and never shrink from exhibiting self-abnegation, self-sacrifice and liberality for the work of the Samiti.

6. I shall not be at liberty to teach those subjects with respect to which I may receive instruction in this Samiti, being bound by oath, to anyone save to those persons who are bound by oath as regards those subjects".

Besides these, there was a special vow too which was administered only to a select few who would take part in some daring act. The members took this vow before the goddess Kali, the symbol of *Shakti*.<sup>27</sup>

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27. J. C. Ker: *Political Trouble In India: 1907-1917*, Chapter VI..

The Dacca Anusilan Samiti, with its headquarters at Dacca and a number of subordinate samitis in the mofussil, was a highly centralised organization. Pulin Behari Das was the life and soul of the Samiti with supreme command over the entire organization. "In the Central Samiti", write the Intelligence Branch reports, "nothing could be done without his orders. All correspondence had first to be read, guards were posted day and night, and severe punishments were inflicted for the least breach of the rules . . . It had elaborately drawn up forms for recording in the minutest detail the strength and degree of training of every village Samiti, the population, natural features of the village, and a map. It was believed that the Society was intended to work very secretly and quietly without any collision with the authorities until the deeply-laid plans were fully matured".<sup>28</sup> These topographical details were needed, writes Mr. Ker, "not only as a preparation for the guerilla warfare which the leaders hoped to set on foot, but for the less ambitious scheme of armed dacoities which they actually practised". Altogether 944 printed forms for recording the above details were discovered by the police. Three of them were found to have been filled in with carefully drawn maps attached to them.

In the literature of the Samiti the District Organization Scheme written by Naren Sen and Pratul Chandra Ganguli found a great place.<sup>29</sup> The scheme envisaged the idea of District Organizers working in districts with batch leaders under them, under the general command of the supreme head in charge of the entire administration of the Samiti. Copies of this document and of another entitled Rules For Member-

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Also see Sri Trailokya Nath Chakravarty's *Jete Tris Bachar O Bharater Biplab Sangram* (Calcutta, 1963, 2nd edn.), pp. 13-15.

28. The I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, F. N. 1270/1913.

29. *Biplabir Jiban-Darshan* by Pratul Chandra Ganguli as published serially in the *Prabasi*, 1368 B. S.

ship were seized by the police in connection with the Barisal Conspiracy Case (1913).<sup>30</sup> Besides this, another important document of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti was the *Paridarshak*. As Mr. Ker writes : "To keep the village samitis up to the mark paridarshaks (inspectors) were appointed, and five copies were found of a document called the *Paridarshak* in which their duties were laid down. Apparently it was too confidential to print as the copies were all in manuscript, one being in the handwriting of Pulin Behari Das himself. Those who were appointed inspectors received a formal authority under the signature of Pulin Behari Das . . . The *Paridarshak* indicates clearly how the Samiti was to be managed". In the third place, another essay in Pulin Behari's own handwriting and bearing on the subject of the 'total surrender of one's personal independence in the hands of a leader' was seized by the police. The essay emphasised the need for unity and cohesion as contributory to the growth and success of an institution and was intended to develop the Samiti into a militant body.<sup>31</sup> Thus from all sources it is clear that the Dacca Anusilan Samiti presented a picture of highly centralised organization with Pulin Behari Das as its supreme leader and commander.

During 1907-1908 the Dacca Anusilan Samiti committed and/or attempted to commit a number of violent acts including the attempt on the life of Mr. Allen at Goalundo (December 23, 1907), the District Magistrate of Dacca, the murder of Manasha Chakravarty who was originally a member of the Samiti but later turned out to be a spy (November 12, 1908) as well as the English Bazar dacoity (October 20, 1908) and the Naria Bazar dacoity (October 30, 1908) ; but by far the most daring

30. The I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, F. Nos. 9/1914 and 1268/1915. These files preserve these two documents even to this day.

31. The I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, F. N. 1270/1913.

act in the period under review was the Barrha dacoity (June 2, 1908) which was planned by Pulin Das but executed under the leadership of Ashutosh Das Gupta.<sup>32</sup> The skill and boldness displayed by the party in the operation of this dacoity proved to be a terror to the enemies. Not merely a sum of Rs. 26,000 was looted but also four men were killed and seven others wounded in the ensuing clash that took place between the party, on the one hand, and the villagers and the police, on the other. A graphic description of this dacoity has been furnished in *Jele Tris Bachar* by Trailokya Nath Chakravarty (*alias* Maharaj).

Towards the close of 1908 the Dacca Anusilan Samiti acquired special notoriety in the eyes of the Government which soon raised its mailed fist against it. Not merely the Samiti was soon banned under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, but also its Commander-General was deported under Regulation III of 1818 (December, 1908). But repressive acts instead of extinguishing lit new fire in the soul of its members who mostly went underground and continued to work from behind the scenes in silence. The release of their leader, Pulin Das, from jail in February, 1910 came to them as a mighty stimulus. Pulin Das soon reorganized the Samiti secretly and infused a fighting spirit into it. But before long the Government again directed its attack on it and tried to bind down most of its important members on charges of conspiracies.<sup>33</sup> Following the arrest of Pulin Das in the Dacca Conspiracy Case, the leadership of the Samiti passed for a brief period (1910-1911) into the hands of Makhan Lal Sen who without disapproving the "direct action" scheme of the Samiti was trying to reconstruct

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32. Pratul Ganguli's *Biplabir Jiban-Darshan*.

33. The Dacca Conspiracy Case (July, 1910-April, 1912) and the Barisal Conspiracy Case (1913-14) followed by the Supplementary Barisal Conspiracy Case (1915) convicted altogether thirty men of the Samiti including Pulin Behari Das.

the Samiti after the model of the Ramkrishna Mission. The "Scheme Book Of The Revolutionary Organization In Bengal" written by him was a Bengali MSS covering about 100 pages, with headings of Dharma, Shiksha, Sebabrata, Naisa Sangeet, Naisa Vidyalaya, Gymnastic Club & Brahmacharya Ashram, and was described by the Intelligence Branch of Bengal as one "of a moral nature throughout". From Makhan Lal Sen the leadership soon passed into the hands of Naren Sen (later Naren Maharaj of the Ramkrishna Mission), after whom Pratul Ganguli, Trailokya Chakravarty, Ramesh Choudhury, Anukul Chakravarty, Nagen, Datta (*alias* Girija Babu), Nalini Kanta Ghose etc., assumed the command of the Samiti at different stages. In their line of action they all stuck close to the tradition of Pulin Das.

At the beginning of 1912 the activities of the Anusilan Samiti got a new lease of life with the foundation of a centre of work in Calcutta. Supported by "ample funds" and "a well-equipped technical and intelligence department", the Samiti spread out its offshoots all over Bengal and even in Bihar, U. P. and Madhya Pradesh.<sup>34</sup> It forged an alliance with the Chandernagore group of revolutionaries then headed by Moti Lal Roy (1912) and also came into contact with the Benares group led by Sachindra Nath Sanyal (1913). Besides, the Anusilan Samiti established its links with the Delhi and Punjab revolutionaries also

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34. During the World War I Chandi Charan Nag and Bhabani Prasad Datta of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti went to Rangoon for organizational work. According to Sri Dinesh Biswas, an old member of the Anusilan Samiti who went to Burma in 1920-21 with the same end in view, Sanjeeb Mukherjee, Sumati Majumdar and others worked among the Burmese, and Kedareswar Bhattacharya, a school-master of Rangoon, had correspondence with Rash Behari Bose. Among the Burmese who joined the Anusilan Samiti the important were C. I. Khin Maung and U. Tin Maung. Dr. Ba Maw, Thakkin U Su and U. Saw had separate organizations aiming at freedom of Burma through violence and they were in intimate touch with the Anusilan Samiti.

through the medium of Rash Behari Bose whom Mr. Denham of the Intelligence Branch described as the "up-country agent" of Srish Chandra Ghose of Chandernagore. Thus a common net-work of revolutionary conspiracy was laid from the Punjab to Bengal in which the Anusilan Samiti formed an important link. It is not for nothing that Mr. Hughes Buller, I. G. of Police, wrote to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal (January 6, 1914) : "The Maulvibazar case takes one to Dacca and Dacca leads to intimate association with Calcutta, and the occurrence at Lahore completes the circle of connection back to Sylhet again. And if the Lahore bomb is to be attributed to Bengal men, it is but a short step, in view of recent revelations, to connect East Bengal men through Calcutta with the Delhi bomb".

It is worth while to observe in this connection that except the manufacture of bomb shells through iron casting by Amrita Lal Hazra at his Rajabazar centre (296|1 Upper Circular Road), the Dacca Anusilan Samiti had no bomb manufacturing agency of its own and so it had to depend in the main on Chandernagore for the supply of bombs and revolvers. The main attention of the Samiti was focussed not on the manufacture of firearms but on the propagation of the cult of violence as well as on the actual commission of overt acts through its far-flung and well-knit organization. Political leaflets under the name of *Liberty* and *Swadhin Bharat* were issued by the Samiti from time to time. An issue of *Liberty* of 1913 declared the ideal of the Samiti in the following language:

"The *Liberty* has taken its birth at the present moment for the fulfilment of a Mission, ordained by the Almighty, and the ultimate object of it is to secure the independence of Mother India. . .

"Therefore, O, brothers, Bharats, throw off the lethargy of the thousand years and come sharp under

the banner of the Mahashakti, so that you may become Suddha, Siddha and Mukta. And God's will can then be performed through you like those of the Delhi, College Square and the Mymensingh Lilas". The *Swadhin Bharat* (first edition) sent a call to Indian youths to come forward and face death to extirpate the blood-sucking demons from the mother country. Those police and C. I. D. men, or *tiktikis* as they were called by the revolutionaries, standing as impediments to this great work must be removed from the scene by the extreme method. The leaflet eulogized secret murder as a holy act on the part of an enslaved people. The occasional publication of such seditious leaflets drew the serious attention of the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, who in his letter to the Secretary to the Government of India (Home Deptt.), thus commented (February 6, 1914): "Their appearance has been persistent and unabated; and throughout the past year they have been circulated in the Bengal Presidency and have been found so far afield as the Punjab, the United Provinces and the Central Provinces. Publication work forms one of the basic features of the present movement, and the seditious leaflet continues to be one of the most dangerous weapons systematically employed against the Government".

The important overt acts committed by the Dacca Anusilan Samiti during 1912-1918 is furnished in the following table:<sup>35</sup>

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35. The above list has been prepared with the help of different charts provided in the I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, *Index To Notes On Outrages Compiled In 1917* by J. C. Nixon, I.C.S., Vol. VIII as well as with the help of the information supplied by some members of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti such as Sarbasri Anukul Chakravarty, Amrita Sarkar, Nalini Kanta Ghose, Manindra Nath Roy etc. Published books and essays like *Jele Tris Bachar*, *Biplabir Jiban-Darshan Biplabi Jiban*, *Banglay Biplab-bad* etc., have also been drawn upon for the same purpose.



<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of occurrence</i>	<i>Nature of the Act</i>
1. Sept. 24, 1912	Goalnagar, Dacca town	Head Constable Rati Lal Roy shot dead by a party consisting of Trailokya Chakravarty, Pratul Ganguli and Biren Chatterjee.
2. Nov. 14, 1912	Nangalbandh, Dacca	Dacoity: Rs. 16,000 looted.
3. Jan., 13, 1913	Comilla, Tipperah	Murder of Debendra Kumar Ghose, a political suspect, by revolver.
4. Feb. 3, 1913	Bharakair, Dacca	Dacoity: Rs. 3,400 looted.
5. Feb. 4, 1913	Dhuldia, Mymensingh	Dacoity: Rs. 9,046 looted. Amrita Sarkar wounded by shots from Jogendra Bhattacharya's revolver.
6. March 27, 1913	Maulvibazar, Sylhet	Attempted assassination of Mr. Gordon, S.D.O. Jogendra Chakravarty died by bomb explosion. The party consisted of Amrita Sarkar, Lal Mohan De and Tara Prasanna Bal and Jogen Chakravarty. Chandernagore bomb used. Amrita Sarkar and Tara Prasanna Bal were also injured.
7. Sept. 29, 1913	College Sq., Calcutta	Murder of Head Constable Haripada Deb by revolver. Participants—Pratul Ganguli, Rabi Sen and Nirmal Roy.
8. Sept. 30, 1913	Mymensingh	Bankim Choudhury in the employ of the police killed by bomb explosion. Party consisted of Amrita Sarkar and Anukul Chakravarty. Bomb thrown by Amrita Sarkar.
9. Nov. 16, 1913	Banglabazar, Dacca	Basanta Bhattacharya, a police officer, shot dead by a party

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of occurrence</i>	<i>Nature of the Act</i>
		consisting of Anukul Chakravarty and Aditya Datta. Anukul Chakravarty fired.
10. Jan. 19, 1914	Grey Street and Sovabazar junction, Calcutta	Inspector Nripendra Nath Ghose shot dead by Nirmal Kanta Roy.
11. June 19, 1914	Sadar Ghat Road, Chittagong town	Nagen Roy, an informer in the Dacca Conspiracy Case, aimed at, but Satyen Sen instead died by revolver shot by Pratul Ganguli and helped by Nalini Kanta Ghose and Jogendra Bhattacharya ( <i>alias</i> Jyoti).
12. July 19, 1914	Buckland Band, Dacca	Informer Ram Das, originally a member of the Anusilan Samiti and later joining Purna Das's party, shot dead by Amrita Sarkar, assisted by Anukul Chakravarty, Girija Babu and Biren Chatterjee. It was before sunset when a number of police men in plain dress along with Ram Das were loitering on the Buckland Band to detect the 'marked' Anusilan Samiti men that the murder took place. Basanta Chatterjee with a large police force was waiting in a boat on the <i>Buriganga</i> . Just at that time the party of four, all armed, appeared on the Band. Ram Das missed their sight and turned about when Amrita Sarkar shot at him from the side. B. Chatterjee and his men jumped into the river. It was a most daring act, as the Band was very much crowded at that time.
13. Nov. 2, 1914	Greer Park, Calcutta	Naren Sen and Biren Chatterjee arrested by the police after

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of occurrence</i>	<i>Nature of the Act</i>
14. Nov. 25, 1914	Mussalmanpara Lane, Calcutta	<p>offering tough resistance. The wrist of Lowman was broken by Biren Chatterjee.</p> <p>Two bombs thrown into the house of Dy. Supdt. Basanta Chatterjee. A Head Constable killed and two constables and a relative of B. K. Chatterjee dangerously wounded. Nagen Sen found lying in Akhil Mistry's Lane seriously wounded by a bomb explosion, with a loaded Webley revolver by his side. The plan formulated by Trailokya Chakravarty and to be executed in two stages. The first batch would kill Basanta Chatterjee which would force Tegart on the scene, and the second batch would then kill him. Chandernagore bombs and Mauser pistols secured for the purpose. In practice, the first batch consisting of Nagen Sen, Kali Maitra, Satis Pakrasi (<i>alias</i> Barin), Prafulla Biswas and another man went with bombs, but as they missed the target, injuring Nagen Sen, Kali Maitra and Satis Pakrasi, the second part of the scheme was abandoned. Kali Maitra was treated at Atul Krishna Ghose's house at 2, Chidam Mudi Lane by Jadugopal Mukherjee, then a medical student. Satis Pakrasi received wounds on his right ankle.</p>
15. Feb. 20, 1915	Dharait, Rajsahi	Dacoity with murder: Rs. 25,000 looted.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of occurrence</i>	<i>Nature of the Act</i>
16. Oct. 9, 1915	Mymensingh	Dy. Suptd. of Police Jatindra Mohan Ghose shot dead. His son also killed.
17. June 30, 1916	Sambhunath Pandit Road, Flowanipore, Calcutta	Murder of Dy. Supdt. Basanta Chatterjee by a party of five, viz., Suresh Chakravarty, Probodh Biswas, Atin Roy Choudhury of Comilla, Sisir Ghose and Mohini Bhattacharya by means of revolver and Mauser pistols. Firing done by Suresh and Atin, the other three keeping on guard. B. K. Chatterjee's guard also succumbed to his injuries.
18. Sept. 11, 1916	Laliteswar, Tipperah	Dacoity with murder: Rs. 530 looted. Clash with villagers: five villagers killed and five wounded. Probodh Bhattacharya, according to Mr. Nixon, captured by the villagers and beaten to death. Probhas Lahiri of the Anusilan Samiti states that Bhattacharya died of snake biting.
19. Jan. 9 and 11, 1918	Gauhati, Assam	Armed fight between the Anusilan Samiti men and the police party at the Atgaon house and near the Nabagraha Hill at Gauhati. Nalini Kanta Ghose, Probhas Chandra Lahiri, Manindra Nath Roy, Narendranath Banerjee (of Benares Consp. Case) and another member arrested while Nalini Bagchi, Probodh Das Gupta and Amarendra Nath Chatterjee escaped. Casualties found on both sides.
20. May 8, 1918	Bogra town	Murder of S. I. Haridas Maitra by Nikunja Pal.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Place of occurrence</i>	<i>Nature of the Act</i>
21. May 27, 1918	Atgharia, Pabna	Armed resistance by Nikunja Pal to the police. Nikunja Pal arrested.
22. June 15, 1918	Kalta Bazar, Dacca	On the morning of June 15 armed police officers and men raided No. 28 Kalta Bazar. Tarini Majumdar and Nalini Bagchi offered armed resistance with Mauser pistols, but were overwhelmed by the police. Tarini Majumdar killed on the spot, while Nalini Bagchi fatally wounded and he died in hospital. The third man Hari Chaitanya De was arrested. S. I. Basanta Mukherjee seriously wounded and the Head Constable succumbed to his wounds.

#### CHANDERNAGORE AS A CENTRE OF REVOLUTIONARY CONSPIRACY

After the break-up of the Manicktola revolutionary centre (1908) and the proclamation of the Calcutta Anusilan Samiti as unlawful (September, 1909) Chandernagore became the focal point of revolutionary conspiracy in Western Bengal. As early as 1902 a society for physical, mental and moral culture, called the Bandhab Sammilani, was founded at Gondalpara through the initiative of Narendra Nath Banerjee, Upendra Nath Banerjee and Basanta Kumar Banerjee. Srish Chandra Ghose of Fatakgora, who later acquired the distinction of being the most daring and dangerous of the Chandernagore revolutionaries, was also connected with the Sammilani almost from the outset. When the Swadeshi Movement began to stir the country, the activities of the Bandhab Sammilani naturally expanded, drawing new followers like

Jyotish Chandra Ghose of Cinsurah, Amarendra Nath Chatterjee of Uttarpara and Hrishikesh Kanjilal of Serampore. Among the young men who had joined the Sammilani Upen Banerjee occupied a very important position. He had some literary talents and used them in the service of the motherland. He contributed several interesting articles to the *Jugantar* weekly and was also connected, at one stage, with the *Bande Mataram* daily as an assistant Editor. Gradually he developed intimacy with Barindra Kumar Ghose and joined the Manicktola secret society (1907) of which the latter was the guiding spirit. He belonged to the inner circle of the Manicktola revolutionaries and was mainly in charge of imparting religious and moral training to its inmates. At about the same time an inner circle also grew within the Bandhab Sammilani with its headquarters at the residence of Narendra Nath Banerjee. Its members received lessons in revolver shooting from Professor Charu Chandra Roy of the College Duplex, who had done much to inspire the Chandernagore people with the spirit of Indian nationalism. It was in this *milieu* that these young men picked up intimacy with Kanai Lal Datta, a pupil of Charu Roy and also a member of his majlis.<sup>36</sup>

It is well to remember that Kanai Lal Datta, before he had left Chandernagore after his B. A. Examination in 1908 to join the Manicktola centre, had also organized an *akhra* of physical exercises in his own house with a number of young men associated with it. Murtaza, a Turko-European of Calcutta, came to this *akhra* from time to time to teach sword-play to the boys of the club. Gradually provisions were also made under the chairmanship of Moti Lal Roy for moral and intellectual discussions every Sunday.<sup>37</sup>

36. Narendra Nath Banerjee: *Rakta Biplaber Ek Adhyay* (Chandernagore, 1954), pp. 10-40.

37. Vide Prabartak Sangha's fortnightly organ *Nabasangha*, October

After the arrest of Kanai Lal Datta in connection with the Manicktola conspiracy, his work at Chandernagore was earnestly taken up by Moti Lal Roy who, in collaboration with Srish Chandra Ghose, Amarendra Nath Chatterjee and Baburam Paradkar (nephew of Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar) founded the nucleus of another secret society at Borai Chanditola in May, 1908.<sup>38</sup> Srish Ghose functioned from the beginning as the liaison between the Gondalpara and Borai Chanditola revolutionary centres.

The first important act of the Chandernagore revolutionaries was the supply of two revolvers to the Alipore Jail at the request of Kanai Lal Datta for the object of ending the life of Narendra Nath Gossain, the approver. Moti Lal Roy, on being supplied with two revolvers by Srish Chandra Ghose at Chandernagore, deposited them at Basanta Kumar Banerjee's house in Calcutta, and they were delivered in due course to Kanai Lal Datta and Upendra Nath Banerjee in the jail by Srish Chandra Ghose and Basanta Kumar Banerjee respectively.<sup>39</sup> The intended object of killing Naren Gossain was carried through successfully in the Alipore Jail Hospital (August 31, 1908) by Kanai Lal Datta of Chandernagore and Satyendra Nath Bose of Midnapore. Both of them were hanged eventually on charge of murder.

Another great service rendered by Chandernagore to the cause of revolution was the offer of an asylum to Aurobindo Ghose, an exile from British India in February, 1910 following the issue of a warrant of arrest against him on account of his signed article "To

9, 1964, for Sri Arun Chandra Datta's article entitled *Sangha-Mandire*. Sri A. C. Datta, Kanai Datta's cousin brother, was a member of Kanai Lal's *akhra*.

38. Moti Lal Roy: *Amar Dekha Biplab O Biplabi* (Calcutta, 1957), pp. 26-27.

39. The writer's interview with Sri Basanta Kumar Banerjee at Chandernagore on 18.8.1965. Also see *Rakta Biplaber Ek Adhyay*, p. 41.

My Countrymen" published in the *Karmayogin* on December 25, 1909. Aurobindo came to Chandernagore suddenly and without notice. "Moti Lal Roy received him first in his own house, then arranged in other places, allowing only a few to know".<sup>40</sup> Aurobindo lived at Chandernagore in complete secrecy for about a month and a half (February 15—March 31, 1910), and then he decided to leave for Pondicherry, the headquarters of the French settlement in India. While Moti Lal Roy arranged to escort him from Chandernagore to Ariadaha-Agarpara, Amarendra Nath Chatterjee had him escorted from that place to Calcutta where in collaboration with Sukumar Mitra and Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy he managed to have Aurobindo board s. s. *Dupleix* which steamed off from the Calcutta port on April 1, 1910.<sup>41</sup>

40. Vide *Sri Aurobindo On Himself And On The Mother*, p. 105. Also see *Smriti-Katha* by Suresh Chandra Chakravarty (March, 1962), pp. 34-43.

41. For the details of Sri Aurobindo's escape from Chandernagore to Pondicherry see *Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo* by Nagendra Kumar Guha Roy (Calcutta, 1963, Ch. VI) and the MSS of *Bharater Swadhinatar Itihas* by Amarendra Nath Chatterjee (pp. 27-28). Sri Guha Roy's statement finds corroboration in the following extract from the Weekly Report of the I. G. (Police), Bengal, to the Director of Criminal Intelligence, Govt. of India, dated April 17, 1910 (Vide Home, Poll. A. Proceedings of the Govt. of India, Nos. 14-42. of December, 1910): "On the 31st of March the Special Branch Officer of the Calcutta Police who supervises arrivals and departures of Indians by sea reported that two native passengers who gave their names as J. N. Mitter of Uluberia, and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik of Nilphamari, Rangpore had reserved berths on this steamer for Pondicherry. The Health Officer's inspection for this ship was held on the evening of the 31st. The Calcutta Police Officer who was present at the Health Officer's inspection reported that neither of these two passengers had turned up for inspection. On the 4th instant a letter was received from the Messageries Martimes Company to the effect that these two persons had actually sailed on the *Dupleix* for Pondicherry, but that as they boarded the steamer at the last moment, they had not been seen by the Calcutta Police Officer. On enquiry it was ascertained from the Health Officer that at about 9-30 P.M. on the night of the 31st ultimo, 2 Bengalis giving their names as J. N. Mitter and Bankim Chandra Bhowmik came to his private residence and requested to be furnished with health certificates to enable them to sail on the *Dupleix*. The Health Officer granted them the necessary certificates. On a photograph of Aurobindo Ghose being shown to the Health Officer, he stated that this was probably the



After Aurobindo's departure from Chandernagore an important overt act committed under the influence of Chandernagore secret societies was the throwing of a bomb at Mr. Cowley (but actually meant for Mr. Denham) at the Writers Building (March 2, 1911) by Nani Gopal Mukherjee who was a recruit of Prof. Jyotish Ghose and who had earlier shot dead Head Constable Srish Chandra Chakravarty on February 21, 1911. In connection with this bomb outrage Nani Gopal was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation while Srish Ghose, Naren Banerjee and Jyotish Ghose were released after initial arrest. It was Srish Ghose who had supplied the bomb made by Suresh Datta, and it was Naren Banerjee who accompanied Nani Gopal to the Writers Building. As Srish Ghose was the principal brain behind the Dalhousie Square bomb outrage and as Jyotish Ghose was a 'corruptor of youths', Mr. Morshead, the then I. G. of Police, recommended for their deportation under Regulation III of 1818 to the Government of Bengal and requested the latter to move the matter with the Government of India.<sup>42</sup>

From 1910-1911 the organization of Moti Lal Roy began to acquire greater importance on account of its intimate link with the wider revolutionary movement now going on in the country. Before long it became the chief centre of bomb manufacture in Bengal. There were five centres of bomb manufacture and stock-piling in Chandernagore, viz., Rash Behari Bose's house at Fatakgora, Moti Lal Roy's house at Borai Chanditola, Manindra Nath Naik's house in

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individual who gave his name as Jatindra Nath Mitter. The Health Officer further stated that he was struck by the fluent English which this gentleman spoke". Needless to say, the persons who went to the Health Officer's residence to get health certificates were Aurobindo Ghose and Bejoy Nag, Aurobindo's attendant during his journey.

42. Letter of Mr. Morshead, I. G. (Police), Bengal, to Mr. Stevenson Moore, the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, dated April 1, 1911.

Jadu Ghose's Lane, Sagar Kali Ghose's house in Majumdar Garh, and the northern portion of Arun Shome's residence which was adjacent to the wooden godown of Moti Lal Roy. The last mentioned one (that is Arun Shome's house) was the main centre both for bomb manufacture and stock-piling. The northern wall of that house had hidden chambers specially made for the purpose. The bomb manufacture in its later phase was started by Suresh Chandra Datta in Calcutta; it was continued by Nagendra Nath Ghose for a short period and then taken up by Manindra Nath Naik in right earnest. Manindra Nath Naik, be it noted, was the principal bomb manufacturer in the Chandernagore circle. A gold-smith Ashutosh Neogi generally supplied to the Chandernagore party Sulphuric and Nitric Acid for bomb manufacture, Carbolic Acid being purchased from Calcutta. Ashutosh Neogi who had his workshop at Kankinarah on the eastern side of the Ganges used to supply acid every day on his return to Chandernagore at night. Sagar Kali Ghose, an employee in the Anglo-India Jute Mill, supplied the jute carding pins to the party from his office.<sup>43</sup> Besides, Chandernagore was a great stock centre of other arms and ammunition too.

Although Moti Lal Roy did not take any active part in these acts, yet he was the spiritual guide and moving spirit behind the Chandernagore movement, and he was, moreover, a link between Aurobindo Ghose at Pondicherry and the wider revolutionary movement in India. Having no news from Aurobindo Ghose at Pondicherry, Moti Lal Roy sent to him Sudarshan Chatterjee towards the end of April, 1910. Sudarshan returned from Pondicherry in early May, 1910 with news from Aurobindo Ghose, and afterwards Moti Lal himself called on Aurobindo at Pondicherry in

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43. The writer's interviews with Sri Manindra Nath Naik of Chandernagore. Also see *Amar Dekha Biplab O Biplabi* in this connection.

December, 1911, and again during September-November, 1913. He kept up correspondence with Aurobindo on revolutionary matters through the post-box of Sanmukham Chetty for some time. Even the Intelligence Branch officers did not fail to notice this link between Aurobindo Ghose and the Bengal revolutionaries through Moti Lal Roy. As Mr. Denham writes in his third Report on the Rajabazar Case: "From Chandernagore to Aurobindo Ghose, the leader and Guru of the whole society, is but a short journey, for we know that in November last year Moti Lal Roy, Srish Ghose's first companion, paid a secret visit to Pondicherry, where he resided for twenty days, closetted with his leader Aurobindo Ghose."

During this period Aurobindo Ghose was spending his days in utmost financial difficulties and this is clearly revealed in the letters written by him to Moti Lal Roy at that time. In one of these letters not yet published, Aurobindo Ghose, under the signature of Kali, wrote to Moti Lal Roy the following:

"Our position here now is at its worst, since all efforts to get some help from here have been temporarily fruitless and we have to depend on your Rs. 50/- which is insufficient. We have to pay Rs. 15/- for rent, other expenses come to not less, and the remaining Rs. 20/- cannot suffice for the food expenses of five people. Even any delay in your money arriving makes our Manager 'see darkness'. That is why we have had to telegraph." In another letter Aurobindo similarly wrote to Moti Lal Roy: "I should be glad to know if there is any prospect of your being able to increase the amount now or shortly. Up till now we have somehow or other managed to fill in the deficit of Rs. 35/- monthly, but, now that all our regular sources being stopped we have to look to mere luck for going on". Moti Lal Roy used to send to Aurobindo at Pondicherry some regular contributions, a substantial

portion of which was donated by the Dacca Anusilan Samiti.<sup>44</sup> Aurobindo received a large sum of money also from his friend Barrister C. R. Das for translating the latter's Bengali poetical work *Sagar Sangeet* into English.

Apart from associating themselves with the general scheme of revolution in India under the leadership of Rash Behari Bose and Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee, the Chandernagore revolutionaries led by Moti Lal Roy rendered a signal service to the cause of revolution by providing asylum from time to time to a large number of Anusilan and Jugantar workers until the Amnesty was declared in December, 1919.<sup>45</sup> With reference to Moti Lal Roy Mr. Tegart wrote in 1917: "This man is an important revolutionary leader, who generally controls and advises both the Eastern and Western Bengal Sections and also keeps in touch with the sister organisations in other parts of India, particularly the United Provinces and the Punjab".<sup>46</sup>

Another important episode connected with the

44. Both Sri Anukul Chakravarty and Sri Nalini Kanta Ghose testify to the regular payment of money by the Anusilan Samiti to Moti Lal Roy for disbursement to Aurobindo Ghose in Pondicherry. Even Mr. Armstrong in his *History Of The Dacca Anusilan Samiti* has stated in 1917 that "Aurobindo in his retreat in Pondicherry is to the present day in receipt of funds specially provided by the Dacca Anusilan Samiti for his support".

45. The terms 'Anusilan' and 'Jugantar' have been used here in the sense of the Dacca Anusilan Samiti and the most of the non-Dacca Anusilan groups in Bengal. Mr. Armstrong in 1917 wrote in this context the following:

"The Dacca Anusilan Samiti had acquired such great influence and numerical strength and was so well organized and disciplined that, although its leaders and those of 'the other party', both in Calcutta and the mufassal, have been in constant touch, it has continued to retain its separate individuality and organization more or less unimpaired.

Broadly speaking, therefore in the revolutionary society in Bengal there are two main divisions—the Jugantar and the Dacca Anusilan. The generic name 'Jugantar' is now seldom heard, but it seems appropriate and historically justifiable, and if found to be of general application to all non-Dacca Anusilan organizations in Bengal, its wider use would perhaps simplify matters and provide a satisfactory nomenclature".

46. Vide F. N. 2210/16 in the I. B. Records (W. B.).

Chandernagore revolutionaries was the despatch of Volunteers during the World War I to the battle-field in France under the inspiration of Moti Lal Roy. After the Government of India had gone back upon their earlier invitation of 2000 Bengalis to serve as an Ambulance Corps in the war (August, 1914), Chandernagore set the stage for the Bengalis for fighting in open battle-field in Europe. In response to the French Government's notification dated December 30, 1915 Chandernagore sent Bengali Volunteers, numbering twenty-five, led by Haradhan Bakshi and Shidheswar Mallick, to France, *via* Pondicherry and Tunis for military training. The excellent military talent which they exhibited in the battle-field of Verdun brought for them very high appreciation even from the French General.<sup>47</sup>

#### THE THEFT OF RODDA'S ARMS

Of all the overt acts committed by the Bengal revolutionaries during the World War I nothing seems more daring and dramatic than the theft of Rodda's arms effected on August 26, 1914. The revolutionaries of the time had to carry on their activities under certain basic limitations, particularly the shortage of funds and that of arms. To make up the deficiency of the first kind political dacoities were often resorted to. But money alone was not sufficient; what they needed most to carry through their project was armed strength. After the dissolution of the Manicktola centre difficulties for the revolutionaries were augmented all the more. French Chandernagore now remained the only centre of bomb manufacture, but even there the watch dogs of the bureaucracy were making the situation more and more difficult. Besides the manufacture of

47. Moti Lal Roy: *Jiban Sangini* (Calcutta, 2nd edn., 1952) pp. 334-36 and 397-98.

bombs, the revolutionaries were secretly engaged in securing revolvers and pistols generally from individuals through forcible seizure or by theft, or from the Anglo-Indians or the Chinese or the Italian and other sailors and crew through purchase. Two other sources of which mention has been found in the I. B. Records, were one Nur Khan of Chetla, a dealer in firearms, from whom revolvers were purchased by Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee through Charu Ghose of Chetla, and Kishori Mohan Sapui, an important businessman of Chandernagore who used to import revolvers regularly from France, a portion of which went to the hands of the revolutionaries.<sup>48</sup> Notwithstanding all these, the supply of arms for the revolutionaries was hopelessly inadequate for their ambitious projects. The outbreak of the World War I opened up before them new opportunities of work, and they were now up and doing in securing arms by any means whatsoever. It is in this psycho-political background that a consignment of arms from Messrs Rodda & Co., one of the most important dealers in arms in Calcutta, was dramatically stolen by the revolutionaries in broad daylight from the streets of Calcutta. The episode was not only interesting but important too. The arms thus secured strengthened the hands of the revolutionaries to a very large extent and played a great role in their activities of the future. The successful theft gave them the possession of a large number of Mauser pistols which, when fitted with their wooden cases, worked as good as rifles and were much more powerful both in range and potency than the ordinary revolvers used by the police at that time.

The chief actor in the Rodda conspiracy was Srish Pal *alias* Naren who found valuable collaborators in

<sup>48</sup>. See the I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal (F. N. 757/13) and *Amar Delaha Biplab O Biplabi*, p. 100.

Haridas Datta of the Mukti Sangha as well as in Anukul Mukherjee, Harish Sikdar, Bipin Ganguli, Bhujanga Dhar and Srish Mitra *alias* Habu of the Attonnati Samiti<sup>49</sup>. It is because of this closeness of relation between the Mukti Sangha and the Attonnati Samiti that Mr. Tegart writes in his report on Rangpur in 1915: "Our enquiries showed that the members of Hem Ghose's party had amalgamated in Calcutta with the remnants of the old Attonnati Samiti".<sup>50</sup>

By the middle of 1914 these two parties came under the sharp notice of the police, particularly after the attempted murder of Mr. O' Brien, an engineer of the Alexandra Jute Mill of Jagaddal on the eastern bank of the Ganges (just opposite to Chandernagore), who had kicked to death an employee of the Mill and had received in return a nominal fine of Rs. 50. The insult was too much for the revolutionaries to stand without offering a fit counter blow. Hem Ghose, Srish Pal, Harish Sikdar and Anukul Mukherjee, after consultation among themselves, deputed Haridas Datta of Rangpur and Khagen Das of Comilla, both belonging to the Mukti Sangha, to avenge the death of the unfortunate clerk referred to above by killing Mr. O' Brien. With this object in view these two men secured jobs in beam in the Alexandra Jute Mill at the monthly rate of Rs. 22/- each and also became the *majhis* of the boat of Mr. O' Brien taking him every night to and from Chandernagore. But at the final stage the conspiracy fell through as the I. B. Watchers could sense the plot and get some of the conspirators arrested.

The failure of the O' Brien murder conspiracy (March-May, 1914) was followed by the Rodda's arms theft conspiracy (August, 1914). On information

49. For the genesis and early organization of the Attonnati Samiti and the Mukti Sangha see the *Appendices*.

50. Tegart's printed note on the revolutionary movement in Rangpur, dated March 1, 1915.

being supplied by Srish Mitra (*alias* Habu), Custom's Sircar of Messrs Rodda & Co. and a follower of Anukul Mukherjee, that a large consignment of German Mausers had arrived at Calcutta for Rodda & Co., Srish Pal (*alias* Naren) and Anukul Mukherjee summoned a secret meeting of the various groups of revolutionaries on August 24, 1914 at a small park in the *Chatowala Gali* between 9 and 10 P. M. Besides the conveners, others present in the meeting were Haridas Datta, Khagen Das, Naren Bhattacharya (*alias* M. N. Roy), Naren Ghose Choudhury, Srish Mitra, Biman Ghose (who later became Doctor at London), Jagat Gupta, Suresh Chakravarty (Barisal) and Ashu Roy (Pabna).<sup>51</sup> Considering the plot to be an obvious absurdity, Naren Bhattacharya and Naren Ghose Choudhury could not approve the design and left the meeting soon after its commencement. Others present gave their consent whereupon Srish Pal allotted to each his share of work on the date of occurrence scheduled for August 26, 1914. Suresh Chakravarty, Biman Ghose, Jagat Gupta and Ashu Roy were entrusted with keeping watch over the I. B. personnel in the vicinity of the Dalhousie Square, and if any danger from them was remotely sensed, Suresh Chakravarty, Biman Ghose and Jagat Gupta would then immediately supply information to Ashu Roy who, an adept in singing, would communicate the warning to Srish Pal, Khagen Das and Haridas Datta by singing. After this the meeting dispersed, and the ringleaders, viz., Srish Pal, Anukul Mukherjee, Haridas Datta and Khagen Das, assembled at Srish Mitra's house in Srinath Das's Lane at Bowbazar. The plan was then finalised. The role

51. Of these Srish Pal, Haridas Datta and Khagen Das belonged to the Mukti Sangha, Anukul Mukherjee, Srish Mitra, Biman Ghosh, Jagat Gupta and Ashu Roy belonged to the Attonnati Samiti, Naren Ghosh Choudhury and Suresh Chakravarty belonged to the Barisal party and Naren Bhattacharya to the party led by Jyotindra Nath Mukherjee.



assigned to Anukul Mukherjee was to supply a cart driven by a stout up-country bullock. Haridas Datta, assuming the role of a dumb Hindusthani *Garwan*<sup>52</sup>, would take the cart to the Dalhousie Square at about 12 noon wherefrom Srish Mitra would catch it after scolding the *Garwan* for his delay, as if it had been hired by Srish Mitra beforehand. Srish Mitra, it was so planned, would then escort the cart to the Custom's House along with six other carts driven mostly by buffalos, would take delivery of arms and ammunition and load the carts with them, the particular one to be loaded to its utmost capacity by Mauser pistols, ammunition and other spare parts. Srish Pal and Khagen Das would go on both sides of Haridas Datta giving guard to him all along the route.

According to plan, next day after dusk Haridas Datta cut his hair after the fashion of a Hindusthani, wore an unclean short cloth and a genji and also had a brass locket on a black car fastened round his neck, thus visibly appearing as a typical Hindusthani *Garwan* (driver).

In the morning of August 26, 1914, about 9 o'clock, Anukul Mukherjee, Srish Pal, Srish Mitra, Haridas Datta and Khagen Das again met in the house of Anath Kaviraj at Malanga Lane (near Anukul Mukherjee's house at 39, Malanga Lane) to have their last-minute talks and to give finishing touch to their preparations. Haridas Datta, Khagen Das and Srish Pal were then supplied with three loaded revolvers. A cart was brought by Anukul Mukherjee and a *Sabal* was put on it to meet any untoward event. It was decided that if they were detected and opposed by the police, Srish Pal and Khagn Das would start firing, and in the

52. Haridas Datta was an expert cart-driver from his very boyhood. His family at Rangpur owned two carts for the conduct of its business. Although he could speak Hindi well, yet his dumbness was necessitated lest his pronunciation and accents should give clues to the enemies.

meantime Haridas Datta would open a packed wooden box of Mausers by means of the *Sabal* and provide Srish Pal, Khagen Das and himself with three Mauser pistols. The mechanism of Mausers had already been explained to Haridas Datta by Srish Pal. After this Srish Mitra left the meeting in order to appear in office in right time.<sup>53</sup>

Mr. Tegart in his note, dated August 29, 1914, has written the following :

“Rodda & Co. cleared 202 boxes of goods from Customs godown ex. s. s. ‘Ta Ctician’. They were taken delivery of by Rodda’s Customs Babu Srish Chandra Mitra on 26th and laden on 7 carts at Jetties : 6 carts arrived, 7th cart containing 10 packages is missing . . . Rodda’s Custom clerk S. Mitra has absconded since Wednesday 26th”.

In another note, dated September 1, 1914 written to Mr. Colson, Mr. Tegart reveals further information:

“8 cases Kynoch’s Mauser cartridges marked RBR, Nos. 396-403, each box contains 5,000 cartridges; 1 case marked RBR, containing 6000 cartridges. 1 case marked RBR 828, containing 50 Mauser pistols, large size, stolen on Wednesday the 26th.

“The gang responsible for this theft is connected with Hem Ghose’s party in Dacca. . . The cartridge boxes measure (small boxes) 2’ 6” by 1’ 6”, and weigh 1½ mds. each. (big boxes) 4’ by 2’ 6”, and weigh 2½ mds. each.<sup>54</sup>

As to the conspiracy leading to the theft Tegart writes further :

“The conspiracy which culminated in this theft commenced in March 1914, when we received information from a confidential source to the effect that two prominent members of Hem Ghose’s party, named Haridas Datta and Khagen Das, had been sent to

53. The writer’s interview with Sri Haridas Datta in February, 1966.

54. The I. B. Records of the Govt. of West Bengal, F. N. 1030/1914.