

## CHAPTER I

### MY VILLAGE SURROUNDINGS

Home is sweet to all. But to me it is only a dream now. I shall never again see the place where I was born and spent my childhood with my friends and relatives, villagers and all others with whom I enjoyed living. My grandmother, mother and many others lived and breathed their last in our village.

I was born in the year 1895 in Gaodia, a village in the hinterlands of Bikrampur, noted as the birth-place of a number of scholars, humanists and political leaders, in the District of Dacca now in East Pakistan. My father, the late Babu Bipin Chandra Chatterji, was a businessman at Daulatkhan in the District of Barisal and one of my uncles was a Teshildar there in the Court of Wards. Another uncle of mine worked as an assistant in his brother-in-law's business at Gauhati in Assam. I remember how eagerly we waited for their homecoming during holidays. They always brought presents for us and the days they stayed with us took the colour of festivals. Good food, tolerance of our childish pranks and relaxation of the usual

routine left memories of their visits, then as now.

The man who influenced my childhood most was a cousin of my father who lived with us in the village. He was a Naib in a Zemindary estate and his office was very near our village. He was a well-informed man and was fully conversant with new ideas and events. It was from him that I first heard of the Russo-Japanese war ( 1904 ) a year before the Bengal partition movement began. We heard with rapt attention when he narrated how Japan captured Port Arthur and how Japanese Admiral Togo destroyed the Russian Fleet. Japan's victory created a great enthusiasm in our minds. We felt that at last some Asian nation had shown that the Europeans were not invincible.

The intellectual alertness and zeal for social reform which my uncle evinced was, however, not a unique phenomenon in our village. Bikrampur had a cultural tradition of its own. It is believed that Dipankar Atish, the man who preached Buddhism in Tibet, was born in Bikrampur. In more recent times persons of hallowed memory like Dr J. C. Bose, C. R. Das, Dr Aghornath Chatterji ( father of the late Sarojini Naidu ) and many others came from this area. The area was known as a centre of learning from the earliest days of the history of Bengal. And despite the apathy of the Government towards the educational development

of the region, even in 1922 Bikrampur could boast of at least 32 High schools affiliated to the University of Calcutta and 13 National Schools of high school standard. Besides these there were a number of primary and middle schools for children.

During my childhood the Government found that the schools of Bikrampur were the centres of what they used to call seditious activities. Because of this they looked askance at them. Police raids on the houses of teachers and students became more and more frequent. Even the women of our village evinced a type of social awareness unheard of in many parts of India of those days. I vividly remember an incident of how they stood against the superstitions of the time.

Rajani Nath Roy, a great son of Bikrampur, about whom Bipin Chandra Pal has written in his *My Life and Times* married a Kulin girl named Bidhumukhi and became a Brahmo. Roy topped the list in almost all the University Examinations, joined the Finance Department of the Government, rose to the rank of Accountant General of Bengal and died in 1906.

Bidhumukhi was a kulin girl from Bikrampur. To save the customs of the Kulins she was to be married to an old Kulin Brahmin who already had a number of wives. The kulin men believed that if they could marry a hundred times, they would go directly to heaven and the Kulin families had to

marry their girls to another Kulin failing which they usually forced their girls to remain spinsters. For Bidhumukhi, however all this was too much to stand. She was secretly helped to get out of the clutches of her superstition ridden family by two brothers who were her distant relatives. One of the brothers was Barada Nath Haldar who later became the father-in-law of C. R. Das. Bidhumukhi was sheltered in Bharat Ashram in Calcutta. Soon she was enabled to get the help of Durga Mohan Das, father of C. R. Das, who brought her up with his own daughters.

Roy was initiated to Brahmo Samaj by Keshab Chandra Sen. He married Bidhumukhi in accordance with the Civil Marriage Act. This caused a consternation in our village as well as in the surrounding areas. Roy came with his wife to his village home. One day some people were invited to dine with the Roys. While the dinner was in progress, Bidhumukhi happened to come under the canopy where the dinner was being served. At once there was turmoil. Some village elders and other guests present asked everybody to leave their seats without eating any food. But there were others who objected to this type of unseemly behaviour. My mother and aunt were also present at this dinner. After having accepted the invitation they did not want to insult their hosts. They said that they were honoured by the invitation from Bidhumukhi, a

lady of great learning and courage, hence they would continue their dinner. Thanks to their courageous stand, the dinner went on.

Such courage and clear-headedness were unheard of in those days when people could not differentiate between the Hindu reform movements and Christianity. Any one who wanted to reform the Hindu society was called a Christian and a heretic. To cross the seas was a travesty of religious and social morals. People suffered the village ostracism which even deprives a man of the barber's and washerman's services for such offences. But even so the essential humanism which is the heritage of Bikrampur triumphed. My mother and aunt and many other ladies of the village proved again that the vital humanistic current was not dead in Bikrampur.

Whenever I think of Bikrampur and its people one thing comes very vividly to my mind -- the abundance of water in the area. I do not know what connection water has with progressive and humanistic ideas. Yet I feel that the soft and at the same time terrible nature surrounding us in Bikrampur has somehow or other influenced the lives and aspirations of the people of the area.

Bikrampur is criss-crossed by rivers and canals and during the rainy season the entire area looks like a vast sea with innumerable islands. The nearest business centre from our

village was Lohajang on the bank of the mighty Padma. At Lohajang there was also a steamer station which connected our area with the world outside. There were no roads, and boats were the only means of communication in those days. But in the winter when the canals dried up we could walk from village to village.

Each house of our village was a symbol of the peace and openness of village culture. There were no walls at that time round the houses. A middle-class or a rich family had a pond or two in the yard. During the rainy season even house-to-house contact had to be maintained by boats. And when market places were inundated during the rainy season, big boats were used as shops.

As a result of the yearly inundation the soil was fertile and every year there were rich crops of jute and rice. The people developed an aesthetic conception of living by being sensitive to the bounties and hazards of Nature. Living in such a place we had to learn swimming as soon as we stopped toddling. Boating came naturally to us. The abundance of fish in the rivers, canals and ponds allured us to fishing and many times we had narrow escapes when our boats were caught in storms.

The rains brought us plenty and the children heard the stories of the great classics of Ramayana and Mahabharata sitting round their grandmothers.

I wonder whether the children of the present generation hear the same set of stories or not. Possibly their grandmothers are too busy in other preoccupations and do not find time to tell them stories.

Every month there was a religious function and the chain of monthly celebrations was climaxed by the Durga Puja. During the Pujas we were treated with presents and sweets and the usual routine of attending to our studies was temporarily forgotten. Like all children we counted the days for the coming festivities. Going to school, interrupting our games, was very often disliked by us. But coming from Bikrampur we could not avoid the school.

The school had also its own charm. By the time I went to school the nationalist movement fired the imagination of the people. And the school teachers of Bikrampur stood in the vanguard of that movement, spread the spirit of the movement for national freedom to their students, worked for the amelioration of the suffering people and were living examples of dedicated life before us.

I think it was in the year 1904 or 1905 that the sudden appearance of a big boat in our village surprised and perplexed us. The grey-haired Headmaster of the neighbouring village school was in it. He was clad in Khaddar. With him was a group of boys also clad in Khaddar. All of them

got down in our village and proceeded towards our village school. I followed them with immense curiosity. They were singing "Bow to the coarse cloth as our poverty-stricken unhappy • Mother India cannot afford to give us anything better.....". The Headmaster and other teachers of our village school received them. A meeting was held. The speakers preached swadeshi and boycott of British goods.

The meeting left a lasting impression on my childish mind. I could vaguely see the connection between the meeting and my father's refusal to send Manchester clothes during the next Puja which was held soon after the meeting. Many children, however, did receive new foreign-made clothes during the Pujas. But this did not distress me. I was so stirred by the speeches which I heard in that meeting, that I thought that I would be able to bring peace and tranquility to Mother India by refusing to put on foreign clothes. I even refused to join the Puja festivities as I thought that I had no right to enjoy when Mother India was in chains. The meeting was the beginning of my quest for the freedom of my country and of my people.

### BARISAL CONFERENCE OF 1906

A political Conference was held at Barisal, in 1906. It was specially important because of the recent partition of Bengal and also because the

Lieut. Governor of Bengal had already started repression. The President of the Conference was Barrister A. Rasul. The Conference was broken up by the army, and men like Surendranath Bannerjee were grossly insulted. The heroic boy, Chittaranjan Guha Thukarta, was brutally assaulted for shouting "Bande Mataram". Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the Lieut. Governor, influenced the Nawab of Dacca to form the Muslim League in persuance of the policy of divide and rule. The consequences were the Hindu Muslim riots at Comilla and Jamalpur. These incidents gave a new turn to the Swadeshi Movement. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti gradually went underground.

There was no open police activity in our village but the Anushilan members were instructed to be alert. Any new comer entering the village was looked upon with suspicion. In this way an atmosphere of secrecy was created by our elders, who were members of the Samiti. This was perhaps an index to what was happening in the rest of East Bengal. I do not recollect anything associated with secret activities in our village. But I came to know later that one member of the Roy family of our village had joined the secret Anushilan Samiti. On his information the Gaodia dacoity was committed by the Anushilan Samiti in 1911, in which many important members of the Samiti participated. This decoity has been described by the late

Pratul Chandra Gangooli in his articles published in the Bengali monthly *Prabasi*.

#### AT DAULATKHAN IN BARISAL

I had to leave home and go to Daulatkhân in Bhola sub-division. The year was, possibly, 1907. Like the place of my birth this was also an interesting place. Bhola sub-division, like Bikrampur, was a low-lying area not far off from the sea. Daulatkhân was on the bank of the river Meghna. On the other side of the Meghna was Hatia Island in Noakhali. Even river water in this area was salty. People had to use water from the ponds. The vast majority of the population was Muslim. They had good relations with the Hindus in those days. The soil was very rich and rice of good quality grew in abundance. Some coconut also was produced, but betelnut was the main product. Betelnuts from this area and Noakhali almost monopolised the markets of Northern India. The rich soil made the economic condition of the people quite good.

I lived in Daulatkhân for nearly two years and was a student of the Middle English School there. Politically the place was very dull. The Muslims were not interested in the partition agitation. Though influential, the Hindus were very limited in number and they spent their time in their respective avocations. Most of the businessmen in the big bazar were Hindus from Bikrampur.

The only interesting things there for me were

the two weekly newspapers, the *Hitabadi* and the *Bangabasi*. Soon after my arrival, very interesting news came in these papers. The Muzaffarpur Bomb Case was a matter in which everybody became very interested. My father and uncle also read the news with great care. In fact these papers generated such a hunger for news that a group of people would rush to our big business house as soon as they noticed the paper being delivered by the postman.

The Muzaffarpur Case really shook the country from one corner to the other. It was followed by reports of arrests at Maniktola and the Court proceedings of the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy case. Thus mentally I was in touch with the sensational cases of the revolutionaries who even while in jail killed the approver Naren Gosain. The martyrdom of Kanailal Dutta and Satyendra Nath Bose, the two accused in the Gosain murder case, thrilled my boyish heart.

I also came in contact with a person in the bazar who was an expert lathi player. He took much interest in teaching me lathi and I used to go to him every afternoon. My father was very happy about this as lathi exercise improved my health.

As regards my education, I did not progress much from what I had learned in my village school. My father realized this and worried about my proper studies. That is why after about two years I had to leave Daulatkhan and come to Comilla.

## CHAPTER II

### AT COMILLA, NEAR ASSAM

My father accompanied me to Comilla in 1909 and left me there under the guardianship of my uncle, the late Bisweshwar Chatterjee. He was a pleader in the Comilla Court. I was fortunate to get the opportunity of living with him. He was by nature very generous and a man of strong moral character and intensely patriotic. People of the town had the highest respect for him. Any stranger to the town was sure to get food and shelter at his house. His house was something like a free students hostel, because even unknown students from different districts stayed in his house like intimates of the house-hold.

Had I not come here at this stage, I do not know what would have happened to the feelings I had gathered in my tender heart at Gaodia and Daulatkhan.

### COMILLA ORGANISATION

Biren Chatterjee, the famous revolutionary, used to come to the house of my uncle often. I knew him from my childhood as a relative and it

was also known to me that he was a revolutionary. He used to carry me on his bicycle to different places and used to sell clothes but I could not understand the object of his doing so except that it was his means of livelihood. Biren Chatterjee often visited the house of Ramesh Banerjee who was the agent of the Singer Sewing Machine. I could not understand the purpose of these frequent visits either.

Two years later things were crystal clear to me when one night Ramesh Banerjee and nine others were arrested in a midnight police raid, tried and sentenced to 7 years R. I. for attempted dacoity. Sarada Chakravarty was the first District organiser of Comilla Anushilan Samiti. By the time I came to the Committee Purna Chakravarty had replaced him. Sarada Chakravarty was later murdered by the Party because he betrayed the revolutionaries by his failure to stick to the ideals of the Samiti. One of the oldest members of Comilla Samiti was Pulin Gupta, who was later sent to Pabna as District organiser. But eventually he came back to Comilla and became Assistant to Purna Chakravarty.

Under Purna Chakravarty's leadership the district organisation of the Tippera district grew by leaps and bounds. Comilla, Brahmanbaria and Chandpur centres were strengthened. Organisation among students became very strong and consequently village units also developed.

## ANUSHILAN SAMITI

Immediately after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 in which the English educated people of the country took scarcely any part, a new type of national consciousness came into being. The birth of this Indian Association and the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 brought into force an aspect of this new consciousness. But the other aspect of this consciousness which is to be found in Dinabondhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* and other books some of which were even proscribed by the British Government had to wait 11 long years to find an organisational shape.

Anushilan Samiti, a secret revolutionary organisation, which played a very big part in the revolutionary movement of India of which I was a part and parcel throughout my revolutionary life, deserves a few words.

This organisation was started in Calcutta in 1902 with Barrister Pramatha Nath Mitra (generally known as P. Mitra) as its founder President, Aurobindo Ghose and C. R. Das as Vice presidents and Jatindra Nath Banerjee as Secretary. Many extremist leaders, including Sarala Devi, Bepin Pal and Sister Nivedita were its supporters.

In 1905, P. Mitra with Aurobindo and Bepin Pal toured some Bengal districts in order to establish branches of the Anushilan Samiti. On such an occasion, Pulin Behari Das was picked up as the

fittest person to take up the charge of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti. P. Mitra was so much impressed by his new disciple that he ceremoniously gave him the initiation at his residence in Calcutta.

It was Pulin Behari Das, the iron man, who really organised the Dacca Anushilan Samiti in every district of East and North Bengal. According to the Sedition Committee Report of 1919, within a few years this dynamic personality established 500 branches of the Samiti.

The idea of Anushilan was taken from the book 'Anushilan' written by the great Bengali intellectual and author Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. The ideal was the attainment of perfection of life. For this purpose it was thought that the four stages of life, described in the Sanskrit texts of the Hindus, were to be gone through. Each stage had to be cultivated to its perfection. And for this the most necessary thing was believed to be self-development and self-fulfillment. The way to achieve these ends is called Anushilan. A member of the Anushilan Samiti had a mission for the fulfillment of which he was to lead his life. Bankim's ideas of rebellious sannyasins given in his book 'Ananda Math' were religiously translated into action by Pulin Behari Das and his trusted men. They gradually spread the organisation far and wide and in course of time it assumed the character of somewhat an All-India organisation. The organisation's

activities spread even among the Indians living overseas.<sup>1</sup>

In the West Bengal branch of the Samiti, Barindra Kumar Ghose, the younger brother of Aurobindo, was too eager for speedy militant activities ; and it is likely that in this he was influenced by his elder brother Aurobindo Ghose. But P. Mitra and the majority of the Samiti were not in favour of getting involved into immediate revolutionary activities. They were pleading for organisational strength and patience till the opportune moment came. This led to the separation of Barindra and his group from the Samiti. Barindra

1 Regarding the ramification of the organisation we may mention here a few facts. Dr. Charu Chandra Ghose went to the North West Frontier Province as a missionary of the Anushilan Samiti as early as 1908. He became not only one of the top public leaders of the province, but also inspired many youths to revolutionary activities.

Dr. V. V. Athalye of Satara was drawn into Anushilan Samiti when he was a student of the National Medical College in Calcutta. He started a secret revolutionary organisation in his state and was given a heavy sentence as a leader of the Satara Conspiracy Case in 1910.

Dr. Hedgeware of Nagpur became a member of the Samiti when, like Dr. Athalye, he was a student of the National Medical College in Calcutta. He led a life of mission and later started the Rastriya Swayang Sevak Sangha, a physical culture organisation.

In foreign countries, besides many others, two missionaries of the Anushilan Samiti became well-known figures. One was Dr. Tarak Nath Das, who became well-known in international affairs. The other was Mr. Abani Mukherjee, who was sent to India from Japan by Rashbehari Bose with a notebook containing about 400 addresses of revolutionary sympathisers in India. He was arrested at Singapore with that notebook, but later escaped to Soviet Russia. He came back to India incognito in the 1920's and returned to Russia when he married. He is possibly dead now.

and his associates started a newspaper called *Jugantar* and also a bomb factory at Maniktola Garden in Calcutta. For some time the *Jugantar* played a significant role in rousing the people's interest in revolutionary activities. But Barindra and his associates thought that was not enough. In order to give an additional fillip to their activities and propaganda, a bomb was thrown at Muzaffarpur by Kshudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. This created a stir in the entire country. Soon even the village minstrels started singing about the heroic deeds of Kshudiram. In the sequel, the bomb factory was discovered by the police ; and Barindra, Aurobindo and others were arrested. They were tried in the Alipore Conspiracy Case ( 1908 ) and all the important persons, except Aurobindo, were sentenced. C. R. Das, the most promising barrister of the Calcutta Bar defended him. The court proceedings were published in the papers and the people read them eagerly.

From the name of their paper *Jugantar* Barindra's group came to be popularly known as the Jugantar group. The Jugantar group became practically defunct after the Alipore Conspiracy Case. But it soon came into prominence under the able leadership of Jatin Mukherjee, the immortal leader of the now famous Indo-German conspiracy of the first World War days. After Jatin Mukherjee's martyrdom, the Jugantar group

disintegrated and different groups in different parts of Bengal, led by different individuals were popularly known as Jugantar. Between these different groups there was hardly any cohesion and there was no centralised leadership to control the activities of the different groups in Bengal which went by the name of Jugantar. Sometimes the top leaders of the different groups used to co-operate on the basis of some specific actions. Thus there was Jibanal Chatterjee's group in Vikrampur, Surendramohan Ghosh's group in Mymensingh, Purna Das's group in Faridpur, Monoranjan Gupta and Arun Guha's group in Barisal, Bipin Ganguli's group in Howrah, besides many other local and localised groups of revolutionaries which used to call themselves as Jugantar. But Anushilan Samiti had a different history.

The Anushilan Samiti, led by Pulin Behari Das under the guidance of P. Mitra, maintained a steady progress and in the long run it developed into more or less a countrywide organisation for an armed revolution. Discipline and secrecy were strictly observed and consequently the police vigilance had hardly any information on the ramifications of the organisation. The Samiti felt the necessity of some propaganda organs. And for this purpose they used to publish and distribute secretly two papers—*Swadhin Bharat* in Bengali and *Liberty* in English.

Anushilan Samiti became a secret, centralised

organisation of iron-disciplined men of strong moral character. Its members were not after name or fame ; they only worked for the good of the people and the country. Complete self-effacement for the cause of the people and the nation was what the Samiti demanded from its members.

The Anushilan Samiti very easily attracted the attention of a group of young men who were working at Chandannagore, a French possession near Calcutta, with similar ideas under the leadership of Matilal Roy and his associate Rashbehari Bose. The Dacca Samiti and the Chandannagore group merged together and soon Chandannagore became the virtual headquarter of the Anushilan Samiti. And it was because of this that Girija Babu, an important leader of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, became a most trusted lieutenant of Rashbehari Bose in Northern India. Sachindra Nath Sanyal and Girija Babu bade adieu to Rashbehari Bose when he left Calcutta for Japan in a Japanese ship from the Outram Ghat in 1915. Rashbehari wrote very feelingly about Girija Babu from Japan, as he did about Sanyal. He also wrote that the expenses for his journey to Japan were borne by the Anushilan Samiti.

After Pulin Behari Das was sentenced and sent to the Andamans Jail, the real leadership of the Anushilan Samiti came to Narendra Mohan Sen and Pratul Chandra Ganguli. I had

the privilege of working under them during the years I spent in Bengal and it was Pratul Chandra Ganguli who, as the leader of the Anushilan Samiti, sent me in 1923 to U. P. to work as the representative of the Samiti. But let me write about the Comilla organisation first.

The late Birendra Nath Chatterjee, veteran revolutionary of Bengal, was a relative and co-villager of my uncle, Bisweswar Chatterjee. He was one of the early followers of late Pulin Behari Das, the leader of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, and was the first person to be sent to Comilla to organize a branch of the Anushilan Samiti. His first recruit was late Surendra Nath Maulick, one of my cousins. Maulick recruited the brothers, Ramesh Banerjee and Dr. Abinash Banerjee who figured during the Comilla riots of 1907.

My uncle's house played a very big part both in the revolutionary movement as well as in the Gandhian non-cooperation movement. I shall come to that later. Shri Janakinath Sarkar, the well known headmaster of the Iswar Pathshala, who, as a student, was living in the house of Bisweswar Chatterjee, was also a recruit to the Party. He was a classmate of Maulick. The great philanthropist of Comilla, late Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya, established the Iswar Pathshala and chose Sarkar as the Headmaster of the institution. Sarkar was a brilliant scholar and had been a class-mate of the only son of Bhattacharya, who died when he was a student of the B. A. class.

## DISCIPLINE IN COMILLA ORGANISATION

Our District organiser had the over-all charge of the three districts of Chittagong Division, namely, Tripura, Chittagong and Noakhali. He was appointed by the Central Organisation and was directly responsible to it. Every worker of the district acted according to his direction. In the district he was independent, but he had to be cooperative. Central representatives had no freedom to move with the members of the district without the knowledge and permission of the district-in-charge.

The District Organiser had an assistant who knew all about the district. When the D. O. was arrested by the police, his assistant used to take charge till some other D. O. was sent to the District from the centre.

The D. O. had no authority to organise any murder or dacoity in his district. These had to be sanctioned by the Centre. The D. O. had to keep himself informed of the places in his district from where money could be available. The Centre maintained a list of persons who were experts in certain types of actions like dacoity or murder and one person was in charge of the Violence Department. The leaders of the Violence Department could not move in a district without the permission of the D. O. of the district. He generally knew the experts

personally. Before a dacoity was committed for money, the person in charge of the Violence Department went to two or three districts, heard of the possible places from the D. O.s and then selected one place in one district. If it was a boat dacoity, expert boatmen were requisitioned. If an iron safe had to be broken open, the in-charge of the Violence Department requisitioned persons accordingly. If, say, 12 men were required in a dacoity, the leader of the Violence Department, would, in collaboration with the Centre and the D. O. of the district assembled these men from different places at a pre-arranged place after night-fall so that they were unable to recognise one another in the dark. They would then reach the place under the leader's direction and different persons would perform their assigned work and as soon as a bugle or a whistle would ring, they would stop their work, stand round the leader, who counted them and ordered them to march on. After reaching a specified place the booty and the arms would be handed over to new men, who in their turn would carry them to safer custody. Every individual was searched to ensure that nothing was left with any one of the group which committed the dacoity. And the actionists went back empty-handed to their own places. If they were somehow caught they could not be prosecuted for lack of evidence.

The same was the procedure for murder. If

three persons went for the action, one would actually shoot and two would be on guard. After the action the revolvers or pistols and cartridges would be handed over to another custodian and they themselves would go empty-handed.

When a member left a district and went to another, he was introduced to the new D. O. through the Centre. If there was any letter of introduction from the previous district, it was channelled through the Centre. He could not keep any contact with any member of his former district. Correspondence also was not allowed.

Arms were all under the Central Organisation and were kept in the custody of unsuspected persons.

The address of a person not known to many was used for correspondence. He had to hand over the letters unopened. And the letters were destroyed after they were read. Even burnt letters could be read out if not reduced to ashes. Blotting paper was not used, because this could be read out and deciphered. Persons who had committed a decoity or a murder together, were not to talk about it even amongst themselves.

The D. O. had to reveal all information to the Central Organiser or his Deputy who could meet any member even in private if deemed necessary. Once a D. O. left a district he could not maintain any more connection with that district.

As a part of discipline the members were

distributed into batches of not more than five persons including the Batch leader. Over a number of batches were the Circle Leaders, who had to submit daily reports to the D. O. or his Deputy every evening.

The batch leaders were responsible for the entire well being of the members of his batch.

Recruiting was another difficult task for the secret organisation. Before a member was recruited detailed information about him was collected. A man of character with strong patriotic feelings was recruited after due scrutiny.

Detailed information was sent to the Centre by the D. O. So the Centre knew, or was in possession of the necessary information about the district.

A secret semi-military organisation was not an easy task at a time when the country was under the mighty British imperial rule. Therefore Mantra-Gupti ( secrecy ) had to be observed very rigidly. That was really the life line of our organisation. A betrayal could easily make our life impossible. Hence the adherence to the Pratijnas (Vows) :

“I shall not disconnect myself from the Samiti.”

“I shall always observe strictly the discipline of the Samiti.”

“Wherever I may be, I shall present myself before the D. O. whenever asked for.”

“Always I shall engage myself for the good of

the Samiti.”

“I shall observe secrecy. Whatever I shall know or learn from the Samiti, shall not be given out to any outsider.”

“I shall not discuss Samiti affairs unnecessarily. I shall keep aloof from argumentations and talkativeness.”

“Whenever I come to know of any conspiracy against the Samiti, I would at once try to suppress it and report it to the D. O.”

“I shall always speak the truth to the D. O. and shall not keep anything secret from him.”

“I shall keep my moral character spotless.”

“I shall do good to my country and the world at large.”

These were the essential points taught to the members. Every member knew them thoroughly well and observed them strictly. Our D. O., Purna Chakravarty, was a personification of these Vows. Every member had deep respect for him and loved him very dearly. As the basis of the Samiti had a religious orientation, every member looked upon himself as a servant of God. It may be mentioned here that Pulin Behari Das, the leader of the Dacca Anushilan Samiti, was intensely religious ; and so was Barrister P. Mitra, the Founder of the Anushilan Samiti.

We were Karmayogins. Our Karma ( action ) was a part of the Yoga ( salvation ). We would work as duty but were not to be perturbed

if the result was not forthcoming. Our object was political. We thought that without making ourselves men of sterling character we could not achieve our political objective. To serve the country was the religious duty of the members of the samiti. Anushilan's main task was the formation of character of high order and this required a faith. It is not surprising that the founders and leaders of the Samiti found this faith in religion. For the Indian educated public did scarcely accept positivism as a faith to live by. Politics was infused with religion and the idea of a secular politics was still not attractive. It is not surprising that often independence was translated as " Mukti ", a term signifying blessedness.

We read and discussed the *Bhagavad Gita*, books of Swami Vivekananda, *Desher Katha* ( Affairs of the country ) of Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar, poems and writings of Rabindranath Tagore, writings on Nihilism of Russia, Carbonari Movement of Italy, Irish Rising, American War of Independence, besides French Revolution. We read books on the Sepoy Mutiny, and the lives of Shivaji, Guru Govinda Singh, Rana Pratap, etc. and the two *Jugantar* articles *Mukti kon Pathe* ( Which ) *Way Salvation Lies* ) and *Bartaman Rananiti* ( Tactics of Modern Warfare ).

Before we went to commit a dacoity we used to make offerings to ( Goddess ) *Kali* and we carried the offered Prasad and flowers with us, so that

the Mother's blessings be with us in our performance of the sacred duty for the fulfilment of the great mission of our life, that is, to free the motherland from alien bondage. Because of all these rituals and our faith we became fearless and inspired as if possessed by the idea of the great mission to which we dedicated ourselves. And hence there was a great difference between us and the ordinary run of men.

A number of young men of character and education were attracted to the Anushilan Samiti. To give a random idea of the type of youth the Samiti attracted to itself it may be stated that in the year 1915 alone six of its members secured scholarships in the Matriculation examination from the Comilla Zilla school, all the four divisional scholarships, one district scholarship and one special scholarship of standing first in the University in Additional Sanskrit.

Anushilan training produced iron men. The Anushilanites have proved through their activities that they were extra-ordinary men. Though many of them later left the Party, they were never ordinary men. Some have turned Sanyasins, but even there they have very earnestly taken up the work of social welfare. Some joined the Ramakrishna Mission. Even those who have not been able to attain anything outstanding in life, have maintained their high character, have not submitted to greed or bowed down before anything they thought to be

wrong. It is a pity that after independence these men have only been ignored and pushed to the background.

The Samiti in Comilla was very important in many respects. In this district we had the two centres—Belonia and Udaipur Farms for training in shooting, etc. as well as for sheltering the leading absconders of the party. There were some very earnest members in the different villages of the district. Sometimes a whole family was our sympathiser. They suffered terribly. The Sarker family of village 'Korpai' was one such family. Their house and all other property were seized by the police because all three brothers of the family were absconding. The police drove out even the women and children from their ancestral home. Yet they never bowed before the oppressors.

Another house, the house of the District organiser, Purna Chakravarty, was like a fortress. The leaders from outside and prominent local members used to visit it but the police knew nothing of it although it was in the central part of the town. Another rendezvous of ours was a homœopathic dispensary in the Kandirpar centre of the town facing to Town Hall. Everybody visited this dispensary day and night but nobody, including the police informers, suspected anything. So well-knit was our organisation.

The revolutionaries had their own open and secret literature also. The *Sandhya* and the

*Jugantar*, well-known open organs preached the ideas of revolution publicly and had wide reading clientele. Let me quote a few sentences from the *Sandhya* to show the trend of thought of the founder revolutionaries. "We want complete independence. The country cannot prosper so long as the last shred of the Firinghi's Supremacy over it is left. Swadeshi, boycott, are all meaningless to us, if they are not the means of retrieving our whole and complete independence. Rights granted by the Firinghies as favour, we shall spit at and reject, and we shall work out our own salvation." The *Jugantar's* articles, "Which Way Salvation Lies", were inspiring articles stating the object of the revolutionaries which was nothing short of independence. The revolutionary movement was the direct action movement for independence and hence the organs preached that.

As I said before, the Anushilan Samiti had two secret organs: *Liberty* in English and *Swadhin Bharat* in Bengali. These secret papers were distributed dramatically on the same day throughout the country and even abroad. Of course *Swadhin Bharat*, was for Bengal only. The distribution of *Liberty* secretly on a certain day throughout India and abroad was a proof of the ramification of the organisation. This created a great impression on the public as a concrete proof that the organisation though secret was widespread. During the First World War an issue of

the *Liberty* declared “ Our object is not to gain a few privileges but to create a nation of men free and independent ”. The very names *Liberty* and *Swadhin Bharat* indicate clearly that the revolutionaries wanted independence and nothing short of independence.

The British Government disliked the people of India reading revolutionary literature and they extensively proscribed such books, but the revolutionaries continued to print and circulate them.

Lokmanya Tilak, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Mohan Malviya and Rabindra Nath Tagore, the giants of Indian nationalism, were also great admirers of the revolutionaries. These and a host of other public leaders preached nationalism but revolutionaries translated that into action. The mass and public leaders could not keep their eyes closed. They knew the nation was seething with discontent and that the tide of revolution would sweep them away if they failed to radicalise themselves. As a result the radicalisation of the Indian National Congress followed. From an organisation of mere professionals, the Congress became as it were, over night an organisation of the masses. Tilak came forward as the first leader of the masses. He was so much stirred by the activities of the revolutionaries that he courted six years of jail at a very advanced age admiring the Muzaffarpur bomb outrage by Khudiram Bose and Praphulla

Chaki. Indeed these were the first great inspiring events not only for Bengal but for the whole country. It was a turning point in our fight for Freedom, for we did a lot of preaching but it was a practical action by revolutionaries which came as a challenge to the alien rulers with a view to forcibly oust them from our land.

The next great event also followed in logical sequence. Because of the activities of the death-defying revolutionaries, the Bengal partition was annuled in 1911 and the capital was transferred from Calcutta to Delhi. The next year the Viceroy Lord Hardinge, was making his state entry into the new capital in a procession with much imperial pomp and grandeur. The revolutionaries were not idle onlookers. Basanta Biswas, disguised as a woman, was sitting there on the roof of the Punjab National Bank amidst women. When the procession reached Chandni Chowk all attention was on the Viceroy, seated on a big elephant. Biswas saw the opportunity and quietly dropped the bomb. All was smoke. Lord and Lady Hardinge were wounded and the Mahout died.

Silent jubilation was observed in the country. India and the world at large realised that the spirit of Khudiram was fully alive. Khudiram's was a feeble challenge but this was a mighty one.

To come back again to Comilla, the arrest and conviction of Ramesh Banerjee and 10 others in 1912 was due to the betrayal by the party member,

Deven Ghose, a well-known wrestler. Ghose had to pay heavily for this. One evening he was murdered by Biren Chatterjee. So the people of Comilla came to know that to betray the party was a serious affair. This was a good lesson for the party man as well. The revolutionary ferment in Comilla continued unabated.

The Bengal provincial political conference was held in 1913 at Comilla. Barrister B. Chakravarti was the President and among others was Surendra Nath Banerjee. We dragged Banerjee's carriage from the Railway Station to the house where he stayed. There was a general order from the Government that no student should participate in it. We did not care for this prohibitory order and did everything for the success of the conference. Basanta Kumar Majumdar was the Captain of the volunteers, galloping all over the town, sitting on his white horse in military attire. Though we did everything, we were not allowed to enter the conference because of police vigilance. The ordinary students did not dare to enter the conference, but we, the secret party men, entered through the back side of the pandal where Majumdar himself made an opening for us. The speech delivered by Banerjee at this conference was one of his best. I have never in my life heard a greater orator. This and many other such incidents show how the revolutionaries availed of every opportunity to further their cause—the freedom of the country.

The world war in 1914 offered the revolutionaries a grand opportunity for the fulfilment of a long cherished ambition, of making an end of the British Government in India. We were up and doing. Revolutionaries in India and abroad made a combined and vigorous effort to do away with the British rule in India. The Sedition Committee has given a comprehensive account as to how with the help of the Germans the Indian revolutionaries made a magnificent attempt to free India from the yoke of alien rule.

### HOW THE BENGAL PARTITION AGITATION TOOK A SERIOUS TURN

Muslim rule did not exercise any centralised authority in India for various reasons which need not be traced here. Governors were semi-independent and revenue collectors wielded great influence as feudals. But self-contained villages were indifferent to these things. They had neither the education nor the means of communication to think of things beyond their villages. They had their miseries of life but that was thought to be God-ordained.

When the Britishers came even then the villagers were indifferent. But when after the industrial revolution in Europe, the artisans of India lost their avocations, their life became extremely miserable. Millions of people died in famine in different parts of India. Alien rulers became harder in adminis-

triation and extortions increased. "India must be bled" were the words of a Secretary of State for India. Oppressions and, at the same time, introduction of the railway system, mineral and jute industries, brought about a great change. Textile industries also grew in Bombay. But introduction of industries failed to bring about a revolution as it did in Europe.

The books of Dutta and Digby revealed that the Indian peasantry did not have a bellyful even once in a day and half of the Indians did not get two meals a day. But things continued as they were.

Bengal was very prosperous and consequently the exploitations also became greater. But at the same time a middle class population sprang up there. Britishers required English knowing men and Bengal supplied many. Britishers were acquiring new states and the Bengali Babus followed them. They were the Chhota Sahibs. Thus Bengali colonies sprang up in the different cities and towns outside Bengal. English education gave the Bengalis greater knowledge of Western civilization and of scientific developments. This aroused in them the idea of their rights as equals of the masters. Similar was the awakening in Maharashtra. Bengal and Maharashtra were the first two regions of India where the impact of the West stirred the intellectuals. Reformation movement after reformation movement followed and soon

spread throughout the length and breadth of the country.

This was the process of awakening. This process worked through conscious efforts of some exceptionally gifted person. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the man who gave the first shaking. There were also a galaxy of writers who contributed to the great awakening. With the turn of the century, Surendra Nath Banerjee came to focus the rising political consciousness of the people. His oratory was so powerful that the entire country felt that the Britishers were at the root of all our miseries. The picture of a United India - united in its suffering gradually took shape. An immotional togetherness emerged. India became a nation.

Revolution was in the air. The Boer War had ended. Japan came out victorious against the mighty Czarist Russia. In Russia itself there was the rising of the revolutionists against the Czarist Government. The Irishmen were fighting against the Britishers for their independence. Dr. Sun-yat Sen was making considerable headway in China against the ruling Manchu regime. There were risings in the Muslim countries. These things had natural repercussions on the thoughtful Indian leaders.

Phadke became a martyr by fighting against the British and Lokmanya B. G. Tilak and his followers clashed several times with the British high officials even by the end of the 19th century. The

Chapekar brothers were hanged on the charge of murdering two British officials ; the Natu brothers were given transportation for life. The tallest and most respected public leader of India till 1920, the year of his death, was Tilak. He was an extremist and a revolutionary. He was the first Indian to declare publicly "Swaraj ( independence ) is our birth-right".

Revolutionary fervor in India started from Bengal and gradually engulfed the entire country. A real fight for freedom began. Bengal Partition—a settled fact—was unsettled. The revolutionaries had their first real success.

Divide and rule is a common maxim and that became the objective of Lord Curzon ever since he became the Governor General of India and as early as 1903 he gave vent to his voice against it and next in 1904 in Bombay also emphatically advocated for the partition of Bengal. The announcement of the 3rd December, 1903, was condemned by the entire population of Bengal, Hindus and Muslims alike. In July 1905 it was announced that the partition was to take effect from the 16th October that year. Swadeshi and Boycott were decided upon in the public meeting of Calcutta on the 7th August, 1905.

This was the turning point in the history of the freedom movement in India. Three British observers of Indian affairs foresaw the activities which were brewing inside Bengal in particular and

India in general. Wrote Andrew Carnegie in June 1906 that the home rule sentiment was in recent years growing rapidly and commenting on Lord Kitchner's activities in strengthening the British military position in India, this shrewd observer of Indian affairs commented thus "If all were known, it is not Russian or any foreign attack that the military officials dread. It is the growing home rule sentiment they consider dangerous to British control. It is against the people of India not against the foreigner, that the legions are to be moved. It is within, not without India, that the wolf turns".

Sir Henry Cotton wrote, "There is now a party of Indian Nationalists who despair of constitutional agitation advocate the establishment of an absolutely free and independent form of national Government. These men are the shadow of a cloud which casts itself over the future. A few years ago there was no prospect of the rise of such a party. They are the product of a policy of reaction, which has led to discontent and unrest and impatience of the British connection with the country. Their numbers are increasing, but they are not yet in a position of popular leaders. The recognized leaders of Indian thought and the original pioneers of the national movement, are still unaffected by these symptoms of alienation from the British Government. They are men of moderate

views.”

Sir Valentine Chirol wrote, “The question of Partition itself receded into the background, and the issue until then successfully veiled and now openly raised, was not whether Bengal should be one unpartitioned province or two partitioned provinces under British rule, but whether British rule itself was to endure in Bengal or, for the matter of that anywhere in India.”

The partition agitation was a unique expression of Bengal's disapproval to this act of dividing and disintegrating the province. Once the lead was given from Calcutta it was taken up by the entire population. It was confronted from every angle of public opinion and total condemnation was expressed through meetings, processions, writings and songs in every nook and corner of Bengal.

This was the occasion when the idea of composite nationalism came into being. As Dr. S. C. Roy observes. “In fact between Aurobindo, Bipin Chandra and Brahmabandhab, they created a new nationalist movement and philosophy in the country to which Rabindranath supplied the genius of his poetic muse. Before this there was certainly politics but there was no ideal of composite nationalism, and it is the one special contribution of the Bengal School of Political thinkers, who made their mark in 1905.”

When the partition did not yield the desired result of dividing Hindus and Muslims, the

Governor of Bengal and the Nawab of Dacca tried to create artificial communal hatred, by provoking the Muslim masses against the Hindus. As a result there was communal riot in Comilla in 1907. The beginning of the riot is a sordid story. The Nawab of Dacca visited Comilla. One morning while the Nawab was passing through the market and a big number of Muslims were following him, a Hindu merchant's servant was sweeping the shop. The passing sight attracted the servant and he stood at the door of the shop with the broom in his hand. Some one of the Nawab's followers shouted that the Hindu was showing a broom to the Nawab to insult him ( a customary insult in Bengal ). At once the shop was attacked and it turned into a big communal riot. A Muslim was shot down and the riot subsided.

At Jamalpur, district Mymensingh, the agitated Muslim mob attacked the Hindu Goddess Basanti's image and broke it. Basanti Puja is one of the biggest ceremonies of the Hindus in Bengal and attack on the image extremely enraged the Hindus. And it resulted in a large scale communal riot. A Muslim was fired at and the riot stopped. Later it was known that this shooting was done by revolutionaries who came from Calcutta.

As the result of these communal riots and Government repressions the Hindu youths became very much excited and the more zealous among them added to the number and strength of the sec-

ret activities of the revolutionaries. These riots like the anti-Partition movement indirectly helped to accentuate the underground anti-British activities. Thus the motive behind the Partition as well as the riots miserably failed.