

## Chapter-Two

### BAKARGANJ BACKGROUND

Reconstruction of the Geographical, Topographical, Economic and Social Conditions of Bakarganj during the First Decade of Twentieth Century-- Emergence of Aswini Kumar Dutta as the supreme social and political leader in Bakarganj-- Local issues which aggravated the conflict between the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj and the British administration-- The development of education in Bakarganj during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century-- The Anti-Partition Agitation in Bakarganj-- The Decline of the Anti-Partition Agitation and the Rise of Militant Nationalism.

Reconstruction of the Geographical, Topographical, Economic and Social Conditions of Bakarganj during the First Decade of Twentieth Century.

The district of Bakarganj was one of the deltaic districts fringing the Bay of Bengal. It lay between 21 54" and 23 2" N. latitude and between 89 58" and 91 2' E. longitude. It was bounded on the south by the Bay of Bengal and on the north by the district of Faridpur, from which it was separated by a series of rivers and streams. On the west over old streams of the Baleswar river lay the district of Khulna; on the east was the Meghna estuary, which was divided between Noakhali and Bakargang, the line of division being the main stream of the Meghna until that river opened like a fan, from where it followed the main stream of the Sahabazpur channel. The area within these boundaries, including water, was 4891square miles; but excluding the Meghna estuary and the rivers, which form the district boundary, the area was 3,840 square miles. (1)

The name of the district was derived from a certain Aga Bakhar; a prominent person in the Mughul court at Dhaka in the first half of the eighteenth century. He was owner of the Buzrugumedpur pargana, which was the largest pargana in Bakarganj and in the centre of the district, and also *wadadar* of the pargana of Selimabad. His headquarters which included a flourishing market was fixed at a place which he named Bakarganj, and which afterwards became for a short time the headquarters of the district when it was first formed into a majisterial jurisdiction.

The headquarters and principal civil station of the district during the period under review was Barisal, which was situated in 21N. and 90 E. (2)

The Census of 1901 reveals that 2,291,752 persons, the total population of Bakarganj, were scattered over 3,645 square miles. Its population density was 628 persons per square mile, which was almost same as that of Mymensingh (618 persons per square mile), another district belonging to the Dhaka division, while two other districts of the same division were more densely populated. Dhaka with 952 persons per square mile and Faridpur with 849 persons per square mile. Muslims of the district numbered 1,565,024(68.3%) and Hindus 713,800 (31.1%). (3)

The district consisted of two sharply defined parts. On the west was the great mainland block of a stiff clay soil, which disappeared for three months each year under floodwater. On the east was a series of alluvial islands, usually well raised and formed of the characteristics of Meghna silt. Some of the islands were still uncultivated and uninhabited , but the largest, Sahabazpur, was sufficiently large and populous to form a subdivision. Many of the other islands were of no mean size.

#### Importance of the river system in facilitating communications, trade and commerce and the economy of Bakarganj:-

The river system of Bakarganj was very important from the economic aspect, from the

aspect of communication and from the aspect of administration. In the first place, there was the river Meghna, which separated the district effectually from its neighbour on the east and which also threw out a channel, the Ilsa (or Tentulia) river, which separated the island of Sahabazpur as effectually from the rest of the district. In the second place, the Baleswar (or Madhumati) divided the district completely from its neighbour in the west. Within the mainland block of the district there were seven large rivers which flowed generally north and south: four, the Tarki river, the Arial Khan, the Safipur and the Noabhangani rivers, in the north-east of the district; and three, the Biskhali river, the Bighai river and the Lohalia river, in the south of the district.

It may be mentioned that all these rivers were tidal, but fresh water came down at all times of the year. All the rivers mentioned had a very great width. The Meghna was eight miles wide where it entered the district, and although the mainstream flowed under Noakhali yet the two Bakarganj channels, the Ilsa and the Sahabazpur, were three miles wide. The Baleswar had an average width of half a mile above the junction of the Kacha and two miles below it. The Tarki, the Arial Khan, the Noabhangani and the Safipur rivers were nearly a mile wide and the Arial Khan after the junction of them all was over two miles wide. The Lohalia, the Bighai and the Biskhali were each more than a mile wide.

From the point of view of communications the river system made the district easily accessible from other districts and to the important metropolis of Calcutta. This enabled the district to emerge as an important steamer junction of Eastern Bengal. The river system greatly facilitated the trade of the district as well. The district's easy accessibility with the metropolis enabled Jhalakati to emerge as an important trade centre. Jhalakati town which was situated where many rivers met, consequently became the largest centre of inland trade in the province after Goalundo, Chandpur and Narayanganj. As communications is a vital part of infrastructure, the district was able to leverage this advantage to export its surplus agricultural produce. It must be mentioned here that the exports of this produce came to play a key role in the economy of the district as it was largely responsible for ushering in prosperity to the agricultural classes of Bakarganj

which constituted more than 80% of its population. The abundance of deep and wide rivers ensured that every part of Bakarganj (save the extreme south towards the sea and the *bil* area in the north-west) remained accessible which greatly enhanced the internal trade of the district and consequently made the local traders prosperous as well.

As far as communications was concerned it was natural in a district which was as rich in wide rivers deep enough for steamers as in shallow streams suitable for small boats, that all transport of produce was by water. Rice and other agricultural produce were borne to the local market by the small boat, which every household kept, from where it was conveyed by country boat to the foreign market or to a neighbouring steamer station. The import trade in manufactured goods, oil and salt was almost monopolised by the steamer companies, from whose stations it was distributed by retail traders in their own boats to the local markets in the interior. In the south where the markets were few, some traders spent the winter in their boats selling or bartering their goods to the villages on the river banks. The export of rice and other country produce took place chiefly in February and March, when the large rivers were full of spacious country boats sailing in companies with the tide. At other times of the year few of these boats were seen and the betelnut and other autumn crops were moved by steamer.

Of the Steamer Companies there were five in the district; but the two largest, the India General and the River Steam, had a joint management. These companies first came to Bakarganj when the northern rivers silted too much to allow steamers to reach the Brahmaputra. The Sundarban route was then opened and remained for some time the only service which passed through Bakarganj. Subsequently a new route to Calcutta was opened via Khulna in 1884, while Barisal itself gradually became a steamer centre of great importance as the terminus and headquarters of the branch from Chittagong, Noakhali and Madaripur besides several others in the interior of Bakarganj. Apart from these main lines every part in Bakarganj remained well connected by steamers of the joint companies, except the extreme south towards the sea and the great *bil* area in the north-west. In addition to the joint Companies, there were three small Indian companies whose steamers called for cargo as they passed through Bakarganj; but they were unable to

establish any regular services and they did not compete severely with the joint Companies. (4)

It must be mentioned here that the importance of steamer companies in Barisal made this important to nationalism too—‘economic nationalism’ tried to make it a part of its agenda. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century some Bengali entrepreneurs like Jyotirindranath Tagore were inspired by conscious patriotism which led them to establish indigenous business enterprises. Thus Jyotirindranath launched a major venture in 1884 with his Inland River Steam Navigation Service. Rabindranath has left a moving account of what followed. (5) Five ships (6) were bought at enormous cost, to carry passengers between Khulna and Barisal and cargo upto Calcutta; but soon Jyotirindranath had to face a cut-throat competition from the Flotilla Company, a British-owned concern. This steamer service was received with much enthusiasm by the educated *bhadralok* and the press in Bengal. (7) The service also created lot of enthusiasm among the common people and students of Barisal. The latter composed songs in its honour and even recruited passengers for it. But events turned out to be disastrous as far as Jyotirindranath’s steamship service was concerned. The rate-war led to passengers enjoying virtually free rides (with free meals to boot), an accident at the Howrah Bridge proved the final blow, and Jyotirindranath’s shipping concern was ruined. Nevertheless the venture left a lasting legacy of a swadeshi enterprise. (8)

#### Importance of agriculture in the economy of the district:-

The most important agricultural produce of Bakarganj were--rice and orchards. According to the survey figures, the total area under cultivation was 1,553,376 acres, of which 89% was cropped and 11% or (172,751 acres) covered by fruit-bearing orchards. An area of 228,571 acres was returned as bearing more than one crop, so that the gross cropped area amounted to 1,609,196 acres of which 90% produced rice.

The winter rice (*aman*) was so universal that 95% of the cropped area was sown with it. *Boro* rice was a small crop, but *aus* or autumn rice was grown on 16% of the cropped

area, usually either mixed with or preceding it. The other crops of the district were of small importance and were treated by the cultivator as cash crops.

Bakarganj rice was famous in the markets of Calcutta and Bengal, where it was known as *balam* rice from the *balam* country boats in which it was generally moved. Only the *aman* crop was exported, as *aus* rice was coarse and was little sold. The finest rice was grown in the north of Bakarganj thana and was sold at Charamaddi *hat* (market). The rice of Bauphal and north Patuakhali was also of fine quality. In the southern thanas the rice, though very plentiful, was coarse.

Next to the rice crop the agricultural wealth of Bakarganj lay in the orchards. Almost every part of the district grew fruit bearing trees of considerable variety and in great profusion. Yet the neighbouring districts had no such fortune. Khulna and Noakhali did not possess the orchard wealth of Bakarganj. In Dhaka the coconut occurred, but the areca palm was not found.

It was estimated by the Survey and Settlement authorities that the money value of the orchards of Bakarganj to the growers was a little less than a crore of rupees annually. The export value of the betelnut crop alone was 70 lakhs a year. But the value did not consist in the mere amount only. The yield remained constant and varied little from year to year. The fruit was sold by the cultivator in the dull season, when no other crop was on the ground and when without it he would need to go to the moneylender to buy seed for the winter crop. Money was in fact poured into the district at the time when the cultivator most needed it as the fruit never failed. The orchards were of exceptional value in those occasional years which produced a lean crop of winter rice. One of the principal factors which made the Bakarganj cultivator prosperous was the secure income which he obtained from the orchards. (9)

The exports of Bakarganj had always far exceeded the imports in value and the export trade in rice and betelnuts remained in the hands of foreign merchants. The district exported rice and betelnuts on a large scale, but also timber mats and fish to a small

extent. The principal imports were salt, kerosene oil, European piece goods, cotton twists, coal, sugar, molasses, corrugated iron oil, tobacco and flower. Rice was exported chiefly to Calcutta, 24-Parganas, Dhaka and Mymensingh and paddy to Calcutta. The trade of the district was chiefly carried on by country boat and steamer, the country boats carried a large proportion of the rice crop. The only sea borne trade was between Barisal and Chittagong. The chief centres of general trade were on the main route to Calcutta. The favourable balance of trade, it must be pointed out here, was responsible for bringing prosperity to the agricultural classes of the district.

#### Occupations and manufacturers:-

Bakarganj was essentially an agricultural district, 82.2% of the population being dependent upon agriculture for livelihood, including 18,605 rent receivers and 491,102 rent payers while the agricultural labourers aggregated 38,131. Of the persons engaged in occupation other than agriculture, more than ninth were found in the 5 municipalities and 378,358 in the rural areas who were not dependent solely on agriculture. Of the latter only 4.03% followed agricultural pursuits to a certain extent. Only 5.4% of the population was supported by industries, 5.1% by commerce and 6.8% by various professions. Of the industrial population 40% were actual workers and 60% dependents. Among them 16,707 were fishermen, 22,604 weavers, 6365 potters, 4610 basket and mat makers, 6395 boat builders, 963 tanners, 2705 gold, silver and iron smiths, 15396 food stuff sellers beside numerous tailors, masons, ceramics numbering 57,445 in all. Of the professional classes 39% were actual workers including 5,704 priests, 2733 teachers, 3978 medical practitioners, 1085 lawyers and 3626 public administrators. Among those engaged in other occupations were 5481 domestic servants, 30,905 general labourers. (10)

The statistics of occupation clearly shows that Bakarganj was in no sense a manufacturing district. The only industry of any importance other than agriculture was fishing, which supported 16,707 people, chiefly on the banks of the Meghna and Arial Khan. Fishes were exported to Chittagong and to some extent to Calcutta, but generally speaking the fishes were caught for purely local consumption.

There were only four factories in the district and one of these was purely a repairing workshop maintained by the steamer company at Barisal. The only manufactured article which was exported from the district was oil for which there were two mills at Jhalakati, employing 123 persons. The fourth factory was for *Surki* and brick-making and was located at Barisal where it gave employment to 143 men and 13 women.

Material condition of the agricultural classes:-

It would now be proper to mention the material condition of the agricultural classes of Bakarganj. The district was one of the chief rice exporting districts in Bengal. At the time of the settlement operations a detailed enquiry was made into the circumstances and economic condition of every family over a wide area embracing all the thanas in the west of the district and including the two least prosperous thanas of Pirozpur and Bhandaria. Keeping in consideration the population of the district dependent on agriculture, the daily dietary requirements of such a population and the proportion of rent in comparison to the income paid by the average agriculturist of Bakarganj, the Survey and Settlement authorities came to the following conclusion regarding the material condition of the agricultural population in the district:- Estimating the agricultural population in 1901 at 1,800,000, the average crop in a normal year at 16 *maunds aman* and 10 *maunds aus* and the amount of rice required for the daily subsistence of the average inhabitant at three-quarters of a *ser* and for seed of 20 *ser*s an acre, the surplus of rice available for sale by the agricultural population remained 10 million *maunds* or 44 per cent of the total crop, while after satisfying the requirements of every inhabitant of the district there was a surplus for export of nearly 7 million *maunds* or 30 per cent of the crop. The gross value of the agricultural produce of the district at average prices at the period of the settlement operation (1900-08) was about 9.5 crores of rupees. The total rental of the district at that period was 90 lakhs of rupees. Thus the average rent paid by the Bakarganj *raiyyat* was very moderate and did amount to no more than one-tenth of the net value of the crop. As a result of these factors, it could be safely concluded that in every five agricultural families one was in affluent circumstances, three in comfortable circumstances and one in

struggling circumstances. The latter however, always had sufficient food and shelter. The district harboured no mendicants, unless solitary old men and women, who had been turned out by their families for personal reasons and who lived on charity, could be described as so. Widows with young families formed probably the only class whose circumstances were really hard, although broken men and fugitives from justice drifted with their families to the Sunderbans and the marshes to snatch a livelihood. Apart from such men there were no agricultural poor in the south of the district; and there were none at all in the Sahabazpur island. Moreover the comfort of all classes was greatly enhanced by the fish which could be caught by any family in the innumerable streams of the district or purchased at a nominal price in the local market and by the various fruits which the homestead garden so generously supplied. (11)

Material condition of the landed and other non-agricultural classes:-

Of the Bakarganj population 22.5% was non-agricultural, but of these no small part was constituted by landlords or intermediate tenure-holders. The Principal Survey and Settlement Officer of Bakarganj, J.C.Jack informs us that it was the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Baidyas, commonly referred to as the *bhadralok* in official sources, who owned most of the estates, almost all the middlemen's tenures (intermediate tenure-holders) and were employed as the landlord's agents in all the estates of the district. It was from these three Hindu-upper castes (they constituted 6.5% of the population of the district according to the Census of 1901), we come to know from Jack that all the professions of the district were also recruited. He further informs us that the effect of the rise in prices from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and growing unemployment (this was especially the case with the semi-educated and uneducated *bhadralok*) had such a disastrous effect upon the *bhadralok* that a large section among them had been living "on the very margin of starvation". (12) Jack's observations were crucial as they reflected the distress among the *bhadralok* in the district at the time of the anti-Partition agitation. This was so because the period of Settlement Operations in Bakarganj (1900-08) coincided with that of the movement. In 1918 the District Gazetteer found this *bhadralok* community concentrated in the thanas of Gaurnadi, Jhalakati, Swarupkati, Barisal and Nalchiti. (13) The social

composition of the volunteers who participated in the anti-Partition agitation in the district indicate the link with land, the close connection of the movement and the intermediate tenure-holders. Thus “in Swarupkati nearly half of the volunteers are said to be talukdars, that is to say, persons with a tenure-holding interest in land”. (14) Official sources point out that there existed economic distress among the tenure-holders, whose inelastic incomes were being eroded by the rise in prices from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and narrowing down of white-collar employment opportunities during the same period. (15) However, it remains a significant fact that the major strongholds of swadeshi in the mufassil—areas like Bakarganj and Madaripur,—tended to be regions where a marked concentration of intermediate tenures (primarily owned by the *bhadralok*) coincided with a relatively high level of English education. The factor of ideology nurtured through education was no less important than economic distress in making the *bhadralok* youth anti-British.

The other sections of the non-agricultural classes were the traders, professionals and people supported by industry. The traders and professionals were well off. Of the industrial population the fishermen, weavers and boatmen were reported to be generally not in such comfortable circumstances as the agriculturists. (16)

### Emergence of Aswini Kumar Dutta as the supreme social and political leader in Bakarganj.

#### The man with a moral mission

In the case of Bakarganj the ideological motivation in making the colonized intelligentsia adopt an anti-British stance at the time of the anti-partition agitation was crucial and was provided by a single individual—Aswini Kumar Dutta. He left a profound impact on the social and political life of the common man in the district of Bakarganj. The eldest son of Brajamohan Dutta (who retired as a Small Court's Judge in Krishnanagar) and Prassanamayi Debi, Aswini Kumar was born on 25th January, 1856. He was a kind of a person who by the dint of his moral virtues tried to destroy the age old superstitions,

corruption and dishonesty which afflicted the common man in public as well as in private life. Through his ethical preachings he became successful in bringing about a considerable change in the lives of the people of the district. Though he remained first and foremost an educationist, when he emerged as a political leader his politics was characterized by the same moral idealism upon which was based his educational activities.

Since it was Aswini Kumar who gradually emerged as the central figure in representing the people of Bakarganj after 1880, a brief analysis of the influences which contributed in forming the unique personality of the man is in order. It was from his very childhood, at the tender age of five years that Aswini Kumar felt a strong attachment to God, a tendency which was to become stronger as he matured. Issues of faith were quite central to the debates which agitated nineteenth century Bengal. The concerns of religion became a major preoccupation with many. An anguished spiritual yearning, evident in the life of men like Keshab Chandra Sen and Sibnath Sastri was shared by many idealistic young *bhadralok*. In the case of Aswini Kumar, the same spiritual yearning could be seen. By the time when he turned thirteen, devotion to God was thoroughly imbued in him. It was from this time that Aswini Kumar along with his childhood friend called Bhuvanewar Gupta, a boy sharing his religious tendencies engaged in discussions about the nature of God and remained engrossed in devotional prayers. From this time onwards it gradually became clear that Aswini Kumar's foremost objective in life was his total dedication to and faith in God.

After passing the Entrance Examination from Rangpur he went to study for the First Arts Class at the Presidency College in Calcutta. It should be mentioned here that at the time of appearing for the Entrance Examination the minimum age of a candidate according to the rules of the Calcutta University was 17 years, but when Aswini Kumar appeared at the above exam his age was only 14 years. It was here that under the instruction of others he gave a false undertaking to the University that his age was 17 years and thus appeared for the Exam. But as a person in whom the faith in God became stronger as the years progressed, this particular incident became a constant source of lamentation and

repentance during the next few years of his life.

At college in Calcutta his devotion towards God increased profoundly. It was during this time i.e. the 1870s that Bengal witnessed the activities of Keshab Chandra Sen; the youth of the country became highly enthusiastic towards religious philosophy. While reading in the First Arts Class in the year 1873, Aswini Kumar along with Triguna Charan Sen, Priyanath Roy and Janardan Das, who were his classmates, established a prayer hall at Sobharam Basak Lane. At this hall where many of his classmates joined, it was either Priyanath Roy or Aswini Kumar who conducted prayers. On many occasions Aswini Kumar along with his classmates went to the Brahma temple established by Keshab Chandra Sen to participate in the devotional songs and prayers performed there. It should be remembered that it was this faith in God which characterized his future activities as an educationist as well as a political leader. (17)

When Aswini Kumar was a student of the B.A. class he came across a book called the *'Book of Martyr'*, from which he came to know that on many occasions pious Christians had received such severe oppression at the hands of religious apostates that it had even cost them their lives but still they could not be deviated from their religious beliefs as true Christians. After reading this book Aswini Kumar realized the extent to which man could endure suffering for a noble cause. But when he judged himself in the light of these above qualities, he found himself lacking honesty. It dawned upon him that the false declaration of age which he had given at the time of the Entrance Examination was a dishonest act, which would continue to hurt his conscience throughout his life. He came to realize that it would become impossible for him to continue studies for his graduation exams until he attained the right age. After taking such a decision he went to Jessore where his father was posted and spent the next one and a half years of his life learning and discussing religious philosophy. Eventually when he attained the right age he appeared for his B.A.Final Exams from the Krishnanagar College in the year 1878 and passed it. He enrolled for the M.A.and B.L. courses simultaneously from the same college. In the year 1879 he passed the M.A. as well as the B.L.Examinations. (18)

After completing his education Aswini Kumar accepted the position of Head Master at the Chatra High English School near Srirampur in the Nadia district. It was at this institution that he displayed his remarkable qualities as an educationist. He completely changed the traditional image of the absolutely authoritarian personality of the teacher, who by intimidating his students tried to bring them under his control. Aswini Kumar proved to be a complete exception to this and changed the relationship between the student and the teacher in a novel way. Hitherto even the sight of the teacher was enough for the students to stop playing, but in his presence the students remained completely at ease because he dissipated the fear factor which the latter had for the teachers. The students became so much attached to him that Aswini Kumar even joined them while they played, sang devotional songs, shared their meals and went for excursions together. Within a short period of time it was noticed by the wards of the students that a new principle of welfare of the people and society had been imbued among their children. After serving as the Head Master of this school for seven months when Aswini Kumar decided that he would work as a lawyer in Bakarganj and resign from the above post a wave of sadness engulfed the students. During the farewell party which was organised by the school association the students of the school presented him with a memorial which reflected their deep respect towards Aswini Kumar and their indebtedness to him for moulding their characters as students who would use their education for the welfare of the society. (19)

It was the year 1880 when Aswini Kumar came back to his native district and started practicing as a lawyer in Barisal. The years he worked as a lawyer he became so successful that he never earned less than three hundred rupees a month. It was believed by the lawyers themselves that had Aswini Kumar devoted all his energies in this profession and practiced from a place like Calcutta he could have achieved the success that a renowned lawyer like Rashbehari Ghosh had achieved. This was mentioned by Bhupendranath Bose during the Madras Session of the Congress. (20)

After his arrival in Barisal, Aswini Kumar who had been attracted to the Brahmo Samaj since his days as a student, joined the Barisal Brahmo Samaj in 1882. The Barisal

Brahmo Samaj was established in 1861. But the activities of the Samaj remained quite limited in Barisal. Here a mere twenty-two families, all high-caste Hindus and well educated were open adherents of the Samaj. (21) The Samaj in Barisal endeavoured social reforms like the re-marriage of Hindu widows. For such activities, the Brahmos had to face severe social persecution by the orthodox Hindu community. Excommunication of the severest kind was practiced against them. Their servants deserted them, ordinary cooks would not accept service under them; washermen would not wash their clothes and even boatmen would not take the Brahmos in their boats. The severity of the persecution persisted for a considerable period of time, and it was witnessed by Sivanath Sastri when he visited Barisal in 1879. On this occasion Sastri was refused the services of Hindu boatmen because he was accompanied by Girish Chandra Majumdar who was a prominent Brahmo of the local Samaj. (22)

The resentment of the orthodox Hindu community against the Brahmos for the latter's contempt of the traditional social and ritual conduct practiced by the former has already been mentioned. The Hindu revivalist movement which emerged from the 1870s became a powerful movement. In this context it must be mentioned that the Brahmo Samaj's rejection of irrational codes of social and ritual conduct had a very limited impact for a long time. Conformity to rather than deviation from the prescribed codes was almost certainly the rule so far as the majority of the *bhadralok* was concerned. The Hindu revivalist movement as conducted by men like Sasadhar Tarkachudamani and Krishnabihari Sen and their followers while declaring the superiority of Hinduism over all other faiths bolstered up the wounded self-esteem of the *bhadralok*. The spirited defence of every Hindu practice ranging from child marriage and *suttee* to popular beliefs in the occult implications of untimely sneezing or the clicking sound produced by house lizards, as preached by men like Pundit Sasadhar had immense appeal for the Hindu *bhadralok*. Bakarganj also came under the sway of the Hindu revivalist movement. As the social reform activities of the Brahmo Samaj increased in Barisal, a Hindu revivalist wave swept across the local Hindu population in the district. Barisal was visited by men like Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachuramani, Krishna Prasanna Sen and Pandit Krishnadas Bedantabagis and in their lectures they defended the ancient Sastras and the customs

which were in vogue in the Hindu society. As a result of their activities the *Dharma Rakshini Sabha* which had almost become extinct as a society got a fresh lease of life. The orthodox speeches delivered by Pandit Sasadhar became immensely popular and the people thronged the premises of the *Dharma Rakshini Sabha* from which they were delivered. These conservative speeches had such an effect that a considerable number of educated people after hearing a spiritual explanation of the caste system as well as traditional ritualist practices became averse to the beliefs of the Brahmo Samaj as well as the Samaj itself. (23)

Under such circumstances Aswini Kumar realized that his connections with the Brahmo Samaj would prevent him to remain intimately associated with the Hindu society in Bakarganj. As he was concerned with the political aspirations as well as the grievances of the common people of the district he wanted to act as their representative. Since Aswini Kumar's involvement with the Brahmo Samaj raised the issue of his acceptability as a leader of the people, he gradually detached himself from the activities of the Samaj.

Under the impact of Hindu revivalism the Brahmo movement rapidly disintegrated in Bakarganj. During the mid-eighties a man appeared to accelerate this process of decline of the Brahmo movement in the district. This man was Bijay Krishna Goswami who through his '*yoga-dharma*' addressed the spiritual yearning of the *bhadralok* while remaining within the confines of the traditional Hindu society. Aswini Kumar was initiated into this new creed by Bijay Krishna Goswami during April 1886. One of the characteristics of the latter's *yoga-dharma* lay in his assertion that a way to *sadhan* (realization of the Supreme Being) was open to everybody, irrespective of his caste or community.

It appears that the initiation by Bijay Krishna Goswami was necessary for Aswini Kumar to reconcile himself with the local society in general and the Hindu society in particular. In fact after the initiation he began to detach himself from the Brahmo Samaj. He even started persuading young applicants for Brahmoism to stay within the confines of their own community. For such actions Aswini Kumar had to face the severe criticism of

Manoranjan Guha Thakurta (a convert to Brahmoism) and some young Brahmos. However, when this matter was placed before the Executive Committee of the Brahmo Samaj, many Brahmos sided with Aswini Kumar. Anyway, after this incident, Aswini Kumar out of his own accord stopped delivering sermons from the Brahmo Samaj. (24)

With the help of the extraordinary capabilities which Aswini Kumar possessed he wanted to bring out the masses of his district from the age old retrogressive beliefs with which they were afflicted, he wanted to destroy the superstitions, corruption and the dishonesty which were prevalent in them and wanted to impregnate them with the principles of 'truth, love and purity'. To achieve this objective he composed lucid songs titled '*Bharatgiti*' to address the masses. Finding that he was too busy in his daily routine as a lawyer, he started writing these songs while walking to the Bar. With the help of a musician and a singer these songs composed by him were sung in the streets of Barisal as well as other places of the district under his direction. For the moral development of the masses Aswini Kumar himself specially addressed the shopkeepers, boatmen, lawyers as well as milk men. The songs composed by Aswini Kumar and his speeches were so inspiring that hundreds of people gathered to listen to them and they were so effective that people who had adopted dishonest means surrendered to him, appealing to him to show them the way to lead an honest life. The success which these speeches of Aswini Kumar achieved was such that during his old age also he instructed the new generation of patriots to deliver speeches of the same kind. It was his pious wish that with the help of his songs and speeches he would inspire the masses to lead a life based on ethical principles. Being a pragmatist he realised that for the proper dissemination of his songs and speeches the most effective way was to perform them on the roads of the district since he knew that if he organized an assembly and delivered from that platform, the common people would remain unwilling to attend them. (25)

As the profession of a lawyer necessitated the suppression of facts to safeguard the interest of his client, it became gradually unacceptable to Aswini Kumar and he decided to quit as a professional lawyer. The life of a person like him who had taken morality as the guiding principle of his life, the profession of a lawyer which necessitated a deviation

from such principles, started hurting his conscience so much so that he stopped going to the Bar and eventually bade farewell to the profession which he followed for a period of nine years. (26)

### Brajamohan School and College

It would now be proper to consider the genesis of the Brajamohan School and College, the institutions established by the untiring efforts of Aswini Kumar. The students of these institutions played a pivotal role in transforming the lives of men ethically and instilling in them the spirit of patriotism, the reasons which enabled Bakarganj to become the bastion of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal. Western education using English as the medium had become popular with the *bhadralok* in Bengal because it was the language of the ruling class and any Indian desirous of finding an attractive employment under the Government had to learn English for this purpose. For the same reason a Government High English School was established in Barisal in the year 1854. The desire to learn English became so profound among the people of the district that by the year 1884 the number of students studying in the High School reached six hundred. Ramesh Chandra Dutta who was then the Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka district was the President of the School Committee in the year 1884. On the occasion of an important session of the Committee in which the President was absent the Vice-President sent a written request to the Government that the existing land belonging to the school should be increased. In reply the Government wrote back to the Committee that though the increase in land area of the school would not be possible, anyone desirous of opening a private school would receive grants and other necessary assistance from the Government. Consequently in another session of the Committee during which the President Ramesh babu was present a request to establish a new school was made by him to another member of the Committee who was a local Zamindar called Bihari Lal Roy. But Bihari babu due to certain personal reasons could not accept the request. By that point of time the social activities undertaken by Aswini Kumar had already made him a popular figure throughout the district. President Ramesh babu then asked Aswini Kumar to start a new school. In reply the latter said that he was willing to establish a school but had to take permission from his father to

do so. Aswini Kumar then wrote elaborately mentioning the request of Ramesh babu to his father Brajamohan Dutta who after his retirement was on a pilgrimage to Hardwar. Immediately on receiving this letter Brojomohan Dutta expressed happiness at such a request made by his son and asked the latter to establish a new school.

Eventually on the auspicious day of 27 June, 1884 the Brajamohan School was established. The school was opened on the private premises of one Mr.Hari Ghosh and on its first day started its functions with 84 students. The number of students of the B.M. School went on increasing and by the end of 31st March 1885, it reached 375. By the end of the second year of its foundation the student strength of the school reached 442. During the year 1885 a new school premise consisting of five large rooms was built which was located near the Dutta residence. Mr. Purnachandra Chakraborty was appointed as the first Head Master of the new school. Within one year of the establishment of the school Brajamohan Dutta expressed his desire to convert the school into a second grade college. In reply Aswini Kumar said that the school was only one and a half years old and its upgradation till the F.A class would require the minimum functioning for at least a period of five years. On hearing this from his son, Brajamohan Dutta asked him to do this exactly after five years. Accordingly, on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1889, a request was made to the Calcutta University to grant permission for the establishment of a college. Eventually, after much deliberation, the Senate of the Calcutta University as well as the Viceroy of India gave their approval to establish a college to Aswini Kumar. Thus in the year 1889 the Brajamohan College was established in Barisal as a second grade college (till F.A. class). After nine years of its foundation the need to upgrade the B.M College into a first grade college (till the B.A class) was felt by Aswini Kumar and consequently he made a request for this to the Calcutta University. This request was also approved by the Senate as well as the Viceroy of India after deliberation. After receiving the letter of approval from the Viceroy, the B.M. College was converted into a first grade college in the year 1898. In the same year the B.L. and Pleadership classes were also started in the B.M. College. (27)

The real objective of Aswini Kumar behind the establishment of the B.M School and

College was to produce genuine human beings in whom the spirit of social service was instilled from a very early age. To create enthusiasm for the service of the masses not only through instructions and speeches but also by deeds, Aswini Kumar established social service societies called 'Little Brothers of the Poor', 'Band of Hope', 'Band of Mercy', and the 'Friendly Union' with the co-operation of the students and teachers of the B.M School and College.

The students of the B.M. Institution went to the interiors of the district to spread an ethical message and by doing this they created a new wave of humanist thought among the general populace of Bakarganj. The students of the B.M.Institution established libraries and welfare societies in the interiors of the district for the purpose of instilling in the common people certain moral principles. The philanthropic activities of the students included social service for the poor, foundation of schools, the spread of female education, nursing the sick, declaring a courageous war against all sorts of corruption, as well as discarding luxury. The members of the Little Brothers of the Poor also started undertaking another important social service, whenever a house caught fire they reached the spot immediately and extinguished the fire. In those days if ever a house caught fire, though there emerged curious spectators to witness the devastation, nobody bothered to come forward and help the inhabitants to extinguish the fire. In the face of such heartlessness, the service conducted by the students of the school created a new sense of duty among the common men and inspired them to undertake such acts themselves. The students remained alert to crime as well and if at the market place, roadside, jetty, or fair any oppressive act was committed, the common man awaited relief from the students and the miscreants remained in perpetual fear of the latter. From those days the good influence of the students on the life of the common man remained undisputed throughout the district. The power of the student community became such that on any occasion where a student was wrongly insulted he received the sympathy and support from the entire student community. The student community in fact received their strength and inspiration from the all embracing love which permeated from the hearts of their mentor Aswini Kumar and his associates.

Aswini Kumar realized that to instill among the students of the B.M.Institution an ethical way of life which would also provide them with the inspiration to serve the society, a novel method of learning must be devised. For this purpose the school authorities composed a rule book which consisted of twenty guiding principles which every student of the institution had to follow in their daily life. A perusal of these principles indicates that the method of learning practiced at the B.M.Institution was essentially a religio-ethical one. It was felt by Aswini Kumar that the character-building of the students must be made on a spiritual basis, if the latter were to be inspired to serve the society in a selfless way. For this purpose he established the *Balya ashram* under the auspices of the *Dharma Rakshini Sabha*. The activities of the *ashram* was kept confined to spiritual discourses and it was made mandatory for the Hindu students of the B.M.Institution to attend the lectures organized by the *ashram*. It was Pandit Kalish Chandra Vidyavinod, who inspired an entire generation of students of the institution to work tirelessly for the welfare of the society, was made the *Acharya* of the *ashram* from its inception. It must be mentioned here that it was especially due to the efforts and spiritual-ethical teachings of Pandit Kalish Chandra which provided the ideological basis of the students of the B.M.Institution to dedicate their lives for the welfare of the society.

The social welfare activities conducted by the students of the Brajamohan Institution did not result in the complete destruction of social evils like factionalism in Bakarganj, the corruption which afflicted society was not fully destroyed, indelicate conversation and songs not yet ceased completely; but the ethical ideals of Aswini Kumar which were disseminated by the students of the B.M.Institution, at least made the people realize that a sinful act was shameful and a dishonest person instead of taking pride in his acts at least felt embarrassed to go around freely in society. The social service undertaken by the students of Aswini Kumar in epidemic prone areas and their undaunted courage in nursing such patients and also feeding the poor left such a rich legacy that philanthropic acts came to be accepted by the common people to be normal social acts which a person must do for another. The spirit of social service was instilled in the hearts of the common men to such an extent that in a village where there were only a few educated people, it was the unlettered men who formed small associations and contributed money in order to

carry on the philanthropic activities. Bakarganj actually underwent such a metamorphosis that men belonging to rich upper-caste families in whom the pride of their lineage forbade them to mix with common men hitherto, came forward to make provision for food and shelter for the poor, started nursing people belonging to lowest castes and even the untouchables. These startling acts of social service which was unimaginable before the arrival of Aswini Kumar, henceforth became so common that the people started to feel that they were normal acts which a person must do for another while living in society. (28)

The way the religio-ethical method of learning practiced at the B.M.Institution and the spiritual discourses of the *Balya ashram* instilled among the students the ideal of social service came to be reflected in the life of a student of the institution called Heramba Chandra Chakraborty. Heramba Chandra while studying in the Third Class was the Secretary of the Little Brothers of the Poor. The latter society nursed poor patients. Heramba Chandra untiringly nursed the patients and while doing so he experienced immense happiness. Heramba Chandra dedicated his service to the society to the altar of Goddess Kali, to whom he is said to have prayed--"Mother, if there is no love in my heart how would I be able to nurse the patients? You have destroyed my pride, now give me love...". While nursing very ill patients Heramba Chandra even forgot to take care of his own bare physical necessities and still then he felt, "did I work with all my heart?" and further felt, "I do not nurse the patients with all my heart". Heramba Chandra had a conviction that he was not born to think about the physical pleasures of his own self but had a mission in life to work tirelessly for other's welfare. This was the kind of complete dedication for a noble cause which Aswini Kumar was able to instill among hundreds of students of the Braja Mohan Institution. (29)

The spirit of complete devotion to the service of the nation which Aswini Kumar was successful in instilling among the students of the B.M.Institution and which played such a crucial role in transforming the behavioural nature of the people of the district, as well as the development of a completely new kind of relationship between the students and teachers which he was able to establish went on to create a new generation of students

imbued with the spirit of patriotism.

The Brajamohan Institution was established in Barisal by Aswini Kumar to carry forward the great ideals of the nation. The social activities of the various societies formed with the co-operation of the students of the institution included among other things, helping the destitute, building homes for the homeless, instilling in the common people ethical principles, upliftment of the low-castes, dissemination of education, instilling the spirit of patriotism among the masses as well as waging a battle against social evils. The principle of honesty was inculcated among the students of the B.M.Institution so much so that when during an inspection tour the Registrar of the Calcutta University visited the school he was astonished to find that examinations being conducted without the provision of guards. It must be mentioned here that as far as the standard of education and the academic performance of the students in major examinations were concerned, the B.M.School excelled even in that aspect. When an assessment was conducted by the Calcutta University during the year 1889 to ascertain the success rate of candidates in the Matriculation Examinations from its affiliated schools, it was found that during the previous forty years the average pass percentage of students belonging to all the schools was only 22% whereas the results of the students of the Brajamohan School showed a pass percentage of 82 from the third year of the foundation of the school. The Invigilator of the Calcutta University in charge of educational institutions belonging to the Dhaka Division observed in the year 1897-98, "The school is unrivalled in point of discipline and efficiency. It is an institution that ought to serve as a model to all schools, Government or private."

The B.M.College was able to realise the objectives of Aswini Kumar because he was careful enough to select a person who had the requisite qualities to be appointed as its Principal. After much deliberation Aswini Kumar selected Brajendranath Chatterjee, who had stood First in the M.A.Examinations as a student of the Presidency College, as the Principal of the B.M.College during the second year of its foundation. It was under Brajendra babu's tenure as Principal that the college attained the standard of discipline and academic quality which Aswini Kumar demanded from his teaching staff as well as

his students. It was Brajendra babu who became the mentor of his students and it became his policy to become a constant companion of his students. Demonstrating such qualities of leadership Brajendra babu gradually turned the dream of Aswini Kumar, to establish an ideal student community, a reality. The college was able to attain such heights of academic excellence that the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Woodburn, observed, "This mofussil College promises some day to challenge the supremacy of the Metropolitan (Presidency) College." About the college he further observed that it was "a remarkable monument of private enterprise". (30)

### To the fore of national politics

However, even before the establishment of the B.M.School, with his characteristic incisiveness Aswini Kumar realized the basis that had made his country materially impoverished. He came to the conclusion that the reason for the all-embracing impoverishment was the use of foreign made articles which had flooded almost every home of the country as well as the long subjection to foreign rule. At a time when the exploitative character of the foreign-made goods was realized by only very few people it was Aswini Kumar who took upon himself the responsibility to disseminate this message among the people of Bakarganj. He composed lucid songs titled '*Bharatgiti*' and delivered them through speeches and songs on the streets of the district in order to reach the masses. '*Bharatgiti*' was composed by Aswini Kumar and was published in the magazine called '*Satya Prakash*' by Kalimohan Chakraborty in the year 1885 at a time when the foundation of the Indian National Congress had not yet taken place. The songs were published under the pseudo name 'Servant of the Nation'. (31) The main theme of his songs was to make the common men realize the way the nation had been materially drained year after year by the policy of the colonial regime. In a simple language the songs described the methods adopted by foreign rule which had transformed this nation of manufacturers into a nation which only exported raw materials to the foreign nations and was reduced to the position of a mere consumer of foreign-made goods. Through his songs Aswini Kumar even made a fervent appeal to his countrymen to use locally produced goods in place of the goods produced in Manchester and other places in

England, as this was the only way which could re-employ the local weavers and manufacturers who had to remain in poverty due to the arrival and use of foreign goods.

Aswini Kumar was pragmatic enough to realize that without the co-operation of the Muslims who constituted 70% of the population of the district, any movement organised against the powerful British administration would end in failure. Thus the need for Hindu-Muslim co-operation was emphasised several times in his songs titled '*Bharatgiti*'. He composed songs which specially addressed the Muslim population of the district and the central theme of these songs was to invoke among the latter the spirit of patriotism alongside the Hindus, to make the Muslims feel that they were not foreigners but belonged to this country as much as the Hindus. By making clear the reasons which had impoverished the country he asked the Muslim brethren of Bakarganj to display the spirit of *swadeshi* as well. (32)

After his arrival in Barisal, Aswini Kumar established the People's Association during the early 1880s. The purpose of the Association was to voice the aspirations as well as the grievances of the people of Bakarganj. Whenever the interests of the general public were affected by some Government measures or otherwise, the Association took up the cause of the people and presented memorials and deputations to the local administration. The Barisal People's Association was instrumental in creating public opinion in the district. Pyarilal Roy who was a leading lawyer of the district, became the first President of the People's Association and Rakhal Chandra Roychaudhuri its first Secretary. After the death of Rakhal babu, Aswini Kumar served in the capacity of the Secretary of the Association. Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Ugrakantha Roy, Harakanta Sen, Kalish Chandra Bandopadhyay and Bihari Lal Roy were some of the leading members of the Association. Efforts were made by the association to coordinate the activities of the different villages and turn them into a coherent unit. The Association also established branches in the interiors of the district. It was through these branches that an attempt was made to ascertain the population of each village, the number of schools in them and their student strength, the overall condition of the people as well as that of the roads. Within the second year of the establishment of the Indian National Congress, the Barisal People's

Association was made an affiliated branch of the all India body. (33)

During the year 1885, though in many districts of Bengal Local Boards and District Boards came to be established, Bakarganj was yet to receive these institutions. Consequently Aswini Kumar organized a movement in the district through the People's Association. A deputation representing the people was sent to the Governor of Bengal. It consisted of Aswini Kumar, Maulvi Wajed, Biharilal Roy, and the noted Barrister of the district Pyarilal Roy. As a result of these efforts in the year 1887 the Local as well as the District Boards were established in the district. At that point of time the Chairman of the District Board remained the District Magistrate. The post of the Vice-Chairman remained non-official and was elected by the people. Due to his stature as a public leader, the influence of Aswini Kumar remained profound in the working of the Local as well as the District Board. He served in the capacity of a member in the District Board and as Chairman of the Local Board. (34) The influence which Aswini Kumar had in the working of the above two boards ensured that economic development reached even to the remote corners of the district. Due to the immense respect which he commanded Aswini Kumar was even nominated by the Government as the Invigilator of the Prisons in the district. It was under his tenure as Prison Invigilator and due to his recommendations that jail reforms regarding the prisoners' daily activities were undertaken. (35)

The district of Bakarganj was integrated with the activities of the Indian National Congress within two years of its establishment. Aswini Kumar was one of the first leaders of the people who took the message of the Indian National Congress to the masses. From the time of the very inception of the Congress in 1885, a demand to appoint a permanent working committee of the Congress began to be made by some of its members. For the fulfilment of this objective Aswini Kumar toured many districts of East Bengal and addressed many assemblies and prepared a memorial for the forthcoming Congress Session in Madras in 1887 for the purpose of which he was successful in collecting fifty thousand signatures from the common people. The influence of Aswini Kumar did not remain limited to his native district only but reached all the districts of East Bengal about this time.

After the foundation of the Congress, every year a delegate to its annual session was elected and sent from Bakarganj to represent the district. A donation of one rupee per head was raised from the people of the district to enable the elected representative to bear his travel expenses. The election of the representative was undertaken amidst a lot of fanfare among the people of the district. A meeting was organized which was attended by the masses of Bakarganj. During the meeting firstly, the objectives of the National Congress were made clear to the people and then a representative was elected from among the people who would represent the district at the Congress. At the time of the departure of the representative to the Congress session a farewell was organized by the people of the district. A similar celebration was organized at the arrival of the representative from the Congress session. After his arrival the people's representative addressed a mass meeting where he explained to the people the ideology as well as the resolutions adopted by the Congress. It was only in Bakarganj where a process to democratise the district level Congress was thus practised. Aswini Kumar himself was elected representative of the people and was sent to the Congress sessions on several occasions. (36)

It was realised by Aswini Kumar much before it dawned upon the elitist leaders of the early Congress that unless the spirit of patriotism was instilled among the masses by painstaking efforts of the Congress leaders, the state of the country remaining under foreign subjection would not change. Since Aswini Kumar himself worked among the common people of Bakarganj for their all-round welfare throughout the year, it became his fervent desire that the Congress should not function for three or four days in a year during its annual sessions. Thus during the Berar session of the Congress in the year 1897, when Aswini Kumar addressed the national body he observed, "If the message of the Congress does not reach the peasants living in rural India, the activities of the Congress would remain as a three day *tamasha*. For the realisation of the above purpose a powerful committee needs to be established by the Congress which would work among the masses throughout the year." But unfortunately for the nation, the early elitist Congress did not pay heed to the beliefs of Aswini Kumar. (37)

As far as Bakarganj was concerned Aswini Kumar played a crucial role in the development of the Local Self-Government in the district. On several occasions when it was decided by the Government to increase the road tax of the district, it was Aswini Kumar who protested against such measures and even sent memoranda and deputations to the Government requesting the latter not to raise the tax. A movement was launched in the district in the year 1892 in which a leading role was played by people like Aswini Kumar, Ugrakantha Roy, Harakanta Sen, Pyarilal Roy as well as Dinabandhu Sen who protested against the proposed increase in road tax. As a result of this movement the road tax was fixed at one and a half paise per family instead of two paise as proposed by the Government. (38)

It can thus be seen that the nature of the political leadership provided by Aswini Kumar remained throughout the nineteenth century within the confines of what might be termed as essentially loyalist politics in relation to the colonial regime. It was not before the advent of the anti-Partition agitation that Aswini Kumar assumed an anti-British stance in his politics. We have seen that during the nineteenth century the *bhadralok* were not yet ready to contend for political sovereignty with the British. The counter-racism of the *bhadralok* nevertheless helped them to overcome their fear of the mighty British to some extent and initiated them into a politics of protest, paving the way for a more fundamental oppositional politics. And by the last quarter of the century as the racial malice of the *bhadralok* deepened, it fed anti-colonialism, and gradually started converting their pro-British nationalism into an anti-British one.

A similar process of change also took place among the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj. The latter must have been subjected to racial abuses from Europeans and such behaviour on the part of the English was almost a daily experience for the *bhadralok*. Thus living amid a colonial situation that looked rigidly structured between the domination of white men and the subordination of Indians, any sensitive child would develop the sentiment of counter-racism quite early in his life. Within a short period of time after the foundation of the B.M.School in 1884, the news of an incident of racial oppression in Assam, where a

female labourer working in the plantations was subjected to violent physical abuse by an European, sharpened the counter-racism of the students of the institution as well as the educated elite in the district. This particular incident initiated Aswini Kumar into a politics of protest. It was under his leadership that people like Manoranjan Guha Thakurta, Kali Prasanna Das and Barada Prasanna Roy organized protest meetings in different parts of the district and pointed out the deplorable state of affairs to the common people. Lalit Mohan Das who was a student of the B.M.School and later went on to become the *Acharya* of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta, reminisced that it was this particular incident of racial oppression in Assam that roused the counter-racism of the students of the institution. (39)

It must be mentioned here that incidents of racial oppression which were rampant in the indigo producing areas of Bengal similarly aroused the indignation of Aswini Kumar. Brajendranath Chattopadhyay who was the Principal of the B.M.College recounted in an article in the journal *Barisal*, the assistance he received from Aswini Kumar and the people of Bakarganj in fighting against the racial atrocities inflicted upon the cultivators of indigo. Brajendra babu whose ancestral residence was situated in the indigo plantation areas mentions that once he went on a visit to his native village and heard about the physical oppression inflicted upon an indigo cultivator and his entire family by the henchmen of the white indigo planters. As Brajendra babu found this incident to be intolerable he resolved to take the signatures of the affected people and send a memorial to the Government, requesting the latter to stop such inhuman practices of the planters. But as he raised his voice against such practices he was himself physically assaulted by the planter's men. When Brajendra babu informed Aswini Kumar about the state of affairs at his native place, the latter advised him to seek justice from the law. Brajendra babu recounts that Aswini Kumar delivered speeches in Bakarganj protesting against such racial abuses and financially assisted him to fight the case in the court of law. Eventually as a consequence of these measures the planters gave an undertaking that such practices would be stopped. Brajendra babu mentions that due to the diminution of oppression, gradually the indigo plantation decreased substantially and finally stopped. (40)

For Aswini Kumar politics was rather a variation of social service. Apart from being an educationist and a leader of the people of Bakarganj, he was also an active social worker. The social service and relief activities conducted by Aswini Kumar throughout the year through the students and teachers of the Brajamohan Institution enabled him to create a mass base for himself among the general populace of Bakarganj. At a point of time when the tradition of social service was not yet established among the people, the philanthropic activities organized by the students of the above Institution like nursing the poor and the sick, taking care of patients suffering from fatal diseases like cholera and typhoid in times of epidemics, feeding the poor, building homes for the homeless, upliftment of low castes, building schools in the rural parts of the district, the spread of female education, benefited a large number of people. The economic development activities conducted by Aswini Kumar through the District and Local Boards once they were established similarly benefited the common people. His leadership was instrumental in taking care of the grievances of the people which was reflected in the campaign against the proposed increase in road-taxes by the local administration which was organized by him successfully. Further, Aswini Kumar was in the habit of touring the various parts of Bakarganj to ascertain the conditions of the people. Whenever the people faced difficulties on any matter like sanitation or the condition of roads, as a representative of the people in the District or Local Boards he did his best to ameliorate such problems. An important aspect of his leadership was that he remained in constant touch with people of all classes and thus kept himself informed with their necessities and worked tirelessly to alleviate their difficulties. It was essentially due to the untiring social service organized by Aswini Kumar for more than twenty years that enabled him to establish himself among the common people of Bakarganj.

It is true that as far as the nationalist leadership in Bengal was concerned, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century onwards there were conflicts between various political groups engaged in a tussle for establishing primacy. The conflict between the group headed by Surendranath Banerjee and the Amrita Bazar Group as well as the constant tussle for supremacy between the Indian Association and the British Indian Association

are prominent instances of such conflicts. But as far as conflicts for supremacy for political leadership in Bakarganj was concerned, the incessant and tireless social welfare activities organized under the auspices of Aswini Kumar as well as his charismatic leadership enabled him to control his district efficiently and almost completely. He was accepted and supported by the people of Bakarganj because he loved them and genuinely cared for them. The stature he reached as a political leader assured that there emerged no individual or political faction which was capable of commanding the same respect and acceptance of the people of the district. As Muslim separatist politics gradually started emerging as a major force in the politics of Bakarganj from the mid-1920s, it can be said that at least during his lifetime, Aswini Kumar remained the undisputed leader of the people of his district including the Muslims. The mass base which he created for himself enabled Bakarganj to emerge as the bastion of the anti-Partition agitation in Bengal.

Local issues which aggravated the conflict between the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj and the British administration.

Bakarganj had a history of lawlessness throughout the nineteenth century. This was due to the peasant combinations which were formed to resist the illegal enhancement of rent on part of the landlords. The peasants who were already burdened with the imposition of the *abwabs* (illegal cesses) by the landlords (the *abwabs* amounted to not less than 20 lakhs of rupees at the end of the nineteenth century, which was more than the entire Government land revenue) formed several combinations to resist the excessive enhancement of rent or the exorbitant demand of the *abwab*. The tension between the landlords and the peasant combinations was so severe that riots and affray, associated with murder were frequent in the district. For instance during 1908-12 there was an average of 39 murders and 88 riots each year, compared with 40 murders and 147 riots in 1896-1900. In fact, gunshot murders in the district reached such proportions that it had to be disarmed by the administration in 1896, though this did not help much. Under these circumstances the District Collector, Mr. Beatson-Bell and the Divisional Commissioner, Sir Lancelot Hare had strongly urged in 1896 that survey and settlement operations of the whole district should be conducted as soon as possible. Eventually the intricacy of the

tenurial system and the fierce agrarian riots resulted in compelling the administration to conduct a survey and record of rights for the entire district of Bakarganj which began in the year 1900 and ended only by the year 1908. (41)

The official reason behind the settlement operations reveals that in Bakarganj the land tenures were excessively intricate, the people turbulent and disputes about land, terminating frequently in murder, were of constant occurrence. So a record of rights were proposed to be undertaken "mainly from political and administrative considerations and meant for restoring peace to the agricultural classes". (42) In fact, the disarmament and the survey and settlement operations of the district, were the two official measures to reduce the number of crimes in the district, which were mainly due to agrarian disputes. (43)

Meanwhile, by the end of the 19th century there emerged a noticeable difference of attitudes towards the Permanent Settlement between the Government and the educated Bengalis. The General Administration Report of the Dhaka Division noted in 1895: The Permanent Settlement is an impediment to the improvement of water supply as to most other improvements. Le Mesurier, the Collector of Bakarganj, wrote on the subject as follows: "The District Board cannot do so much as it might on account of the short sighted greed of the village *maliks*, who not only refuse to give rights for tanks even when old tanks are near to land, but obstruct their acquisition and demand enormous prices". (44)

On the other hand the educated Bengalis (mostly connected with land as landlords or intermediate tenure-holders) were favourable to the Permanent Settlement. As Prof. Amalendu De pointed out, they ascribed the prosperity of Bengal to the beneficence of the Permanent Settlement. (45) The same idea was clearly expressed by a Barisal paper in 1905: "In Bengal, which enjoys the blessing of the Permanent Settlement, a large number of middlemen, zamindars, talukdars etc, divide among themselves a large portion of the produce of the land." (46) In 1905, the year of partition, a rumour was circulated in Bakarganj that the Permanent Settlement was to be abolished. (47) In Bakarganj as most

of the *bhadralok* were connected with land and hence beneficiaries of the Permanent Settlement, it was quite natural that the spread of such a rumour would have an adverse effect upon them.

However, this was not the real cause of friction between the *bhadralok* and the British administration. It arose especially due to the spirit with which the settlement operations were conducted in Bakarganj. The policy of settlement operations supervised by two successive Settlement Officers viz-- N.D.Beatson-Bell and J.C.Jack, gave enough reasons for the *bhadralok* to feel bitter against the administration. The Settlement Operations in Bakarganj (1900-1908) conducted by the former was motivated by two ideas i.e. sympathy with the cultivators and aversion towards the landlords and middlemen (intermediate tenure-holders). More precisely, the dispute was focused on the treatment of the middlemen. At one part of his Settlement Report, Jack declared thus: "The tenure-holders were in fact a useless burden, which both the Government and the cultivators would be happier without." (48)

The latter period of the Settlement Operations coincided with the Swadeshi movement. Since the latter was the political movement carried out mainly by the Hindu *bhadralok* (most of whom were closely connected with land as intermediate tenures-holders) against the British authority, there was constant strain between the two. The following two cases will provide us with a more vivid picture of the relation between the Settlement Operations with the Swadeshi Movement.

(1) Strike in the settlement office: The strike of the *mukabela muharrirs* (comparing clerks) occurred between 23rd and 25th October 1905, out of a complaint against the office work set up by Jack. (49) But it was really an outburst of grievances which had to do with their injured pride. They wrote to Jack thus: "... we who are exceedingly poor but belong to respectable families are generally treated unsympathetically and often in insulting tone by your Honour's Assistants. (50) As the *Bengalee* pointed out, the strike would have been disposed of amicably if the Settlement Officer had not been Jack. (51) Jack took a strong measure--All the 63 clerks who did not attend office on 25th October

were dismissed from service and proscribed by name from re-employment in any capacity under the Government. (52) Jack was very angry due to the long continued laziness of the clerks. Another reason which led him to take such an extreme measure was that he regarded the strike as 'the product of the hot spirit of swadeshi unrest.' Actually Bakarganj was a hot bed of this swadeshi spirit. Jack's measure was apparently taken in view of the Swadeshi Movement, though the strikers were not supported by the local swadeshi leaders. But many of the dismissed clerks consequently, became swadeshi workers. (53) About half of them, petitioned the Lieutenant-Governor of East Bengal and Assam to withdraw the order of proscription several times during the middle of 1906 and 1907. They complained of their great hardship and helpless condition. (54)

(2) Commutation problem in the Gaurnadi thana: Produce rents were paid in 5% of the total *raiya* area in Bakarganj. While they hardly existed in the Sahabazpur island and were rare in Patuakhali subdivision apart from the Galachipa thana, they covered 10% of the raiya area in Pirozpur subdivision and 8% in the rest of the Sadar subdivision. They were found chiefly in the area where the *bhadralok* lived. (55) Isolated cases of commutation occurred in every thana but the cases were numerous only in two, Gaurnadi and Mehendiganj. In Gaurnadi the landlord was a *bhadralok* and had let the land at a rent in kind to supply rice for his household. The Settlement Officers found that in these tracts produce-rents were a recent development and had arisen as a result of the increase in the price of rice since 1870. Petty landholders who found it difficult to buy their rice turned to their tenants to supply it; then some, not content with supplying their own wants, set up a trade in paddy. Where there was land available it was leased at a produce rent; but in many cases existing money rents were converted arbitrarily into produce rents. Thus if a tenant was in arrears or owed money to his landlord, the debt was not collected by suit but the tenant was told to pay henceforth in kind and the landlord went to the land where the land was reaped to see that he got his share. This share the landlord usually fixed at a half, and sometimes at a third and came to be known as the *borga* system. Owing to the difficulties in measuring the crop and to the fluctuations in its amount with the varying seasons, the landlords subsequently devised a new system, the *dhankarari*, in which the rent was fixed at a definite amount of the produce and by which measurement and

fluctuation were equally avoided. Ordinarily in this system none of the expenses of cultivation were supplied by the landlord: he did not supply the seed nor the plough and the cattle so that both the burden and the hazard of cultivation were taken by the tenant.

The Settlement Officers found that with the cultivators *borga* tenancies were unpopular and *dhankarari* tenancies were detested. At the time of the Settlement Operations the cultivators made verbal applications for commutation in large numbers in Gaurnadi. By section 40 of the Tenancy Act commutation from produce to money rents could be made on the application of an occupancy *raiyat* by an officer making a settlement of rents under Chapter X. The landlords objected somewhat strongly to any commutation, but the Settlement Officer (Mr. Beatson-Bell) in a tour of inspection made it clear to them that commutation was the legal right of an occupancy *raiyat*. When faced with such a situation some of the Gaurnadi landlords, who were not perhaps a very scrupulous body, then sued the tenants whose rents had been commuted, for three year arrears of produce rent. The Settlement Officers however, found out that in the case of rent in kind the custom was for the landlord to appraise the crop on the ground and to arrange to remove his share when the crop was harvested. It was therefore exceedingly unlikely that such arrears existed. In the locality no secret was made of the fact that this course was adopted by the landlords to frighten those tenants who had not yet applied for commutation and to compel those tenants whose rent had been commuted to continue paying in kind as before. The Settlement Officer attempted to meet this move by directing attestation officers to note in the records that the old produce-rent had been fully paid up to date when such in fact was the case. Most of the suits for arrears of produce-rent were however, decreed in favour of the landlords. In one of these the Munsiff held that an officer making attestation was an officer "recording" rents and not an officer "making a settlement of rents under Chapter X" and, as such, any order of commutation passed by him was ultra vires. The District Judge agreed to this view. This decision at one stroke rendered invalid every commutation made by the attestation officers in the district. (56)

The matter was at once referred to the Board of Revenue and the Board realizing the mistake accordingly deputed Radha Krishna Goswami as a special officer under Section

40 of the Bengal Tenancy Act for the commutation of rents. The special officer was at work from June to August 1908. The number of applications for commutation received was roughly 1305. Of these 1160 was disposed of and in all except about 30, commutation was allowed. Thus nearly all the applications were granted but the money rent fixed was much below the value of the produce which hitherto fell to the landlord's share. The result was a great and sudden reduction of the rent-roll which the landlords bitterly resented. The landlords among whom were a large number of pleaders and Brahmin priests presented a memorial to Mr. Savage, Hon'ble Member of the Board of Revenue, on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1908, against the commutation of rents. Taking note of the memorial presented to him, the Hon'ble Member directed that no further commutation should take place until the methods and rates should have been revised after an enquiry by the Commissioner of the Dhaka Division. Exhaustive enquiries and a long correspondence followed, which came to an end only in 1913. The ultimate outcome was a very small change in the methods of commutation and in only 235 cases were the orders of the special officer modified. (57)

It would be worthwhile to consider the correspondence which took place between the Government Officials and the affected parties in order to have a clear understanding of the problem.

The landlords who presented a memorial to the Member of the Board of Revenue, while citing various reasons against the commutation of rents done by the special officer deputed by the Government, reminded the Member several times in their memorial that the commutation proceedings would adversely affect the poor who were dependent entirely upon the produce rents for their subsistence. They also informed the Member that the proceedings would affect most disastrously many widows and priests attached to temples, who depended entirely for their support and maintenance upon the produce-rents which they obtained on account of small areas set apart for the purpose.

It must be mentioned that the Settlement Officers in Bakarganj, though they generally acknowledged that a large number of *bhadralok* were living in distressful conditions,

believed at the same time that the poverty of the *bhadralok* were to a large extent due to their aversion to trade and industry. They also believed that the *bhadralok* as middlemen were living like parasites on the labour of the *raiyat*, extracting the maximum amount of rent which could be taken from the latter. The officers were convinced as well that the devise of the produce rents were an aggressive and extremely unjust measure which the *bhadralok* landlords of Gaurnadi had imposed on their tenants after 1870 to tackle the rise in prices of agricultural commodities especially rice. As a result the position of the cultivator had drastically deteriorated in Gaurnadi which was among the poorest areas of the district. Hence the Settlement Officers while addressing the commutation problem in Gaurnadi, though they acknowledged the strained conditions under which the *bhadralok* lived, were genuinely sympathetic to the condition of the *raiyat*.

Thus J.C.Jack, who was the Settlement Officer in the district, in a correspondence to the Commissioner of the Dhaka Division dated 13th January 1909, in reference to the commutation of rents in Gaurnadi, observed "the produce rents prevalent in Gaurnadi are a curse to that country". In the same correspondence Jack gave a general description of the system of produce rents which prevailed in Gaurnadi. He observed that produce rents was a very exceptional feature of the land tenure system in Bakarganj. Beyond a few cases in thana Mehendiganj and round Banaripara, they were found very rarely in the other parts of Bakarganj, and were created very recently. In the case of Gaurnadi they were found in large quantities. The portion of the thana in which produce rents prevailed was estimated to be 130 square miles, being that portion in which large quantities of *bhadralok*, Kayasthas, Baidyas and Brahmins, had settled. In 1901 the population of this area was 162,000, of whom 23,000 were *bhadralok* who depended upon their maintenance upon produce rents. The density of this area was 1,250 to the square mile. In 1872, the population was 105,000, of whom 15,000 were dependent *bhadralok*. It will thus be observed that that the 100 acres which supported in 1872, 128 inhabitants, of whom 110 were cultivators and 18 idlers (Jack referred the *bhadralok* tenure-holders as such as they did not cultivate themselves), had to support 196 in 1901, of whom 168 were cultivators and 28 idlers. The average size of farm had also decreased from 5 acres to 3 acres.

Thus the conclusions will be simply as follows:- First, the average farm size was reduced in 30 years and so the material condition of the cultivators presumably deteriorated. Secondly, *bhadraloks* also were supposedly impoverished, as 10 more members had to be supported by the rent from the same 100 acres of land.

The effect that the commutation proceedings had on the material condition of the *bhadralok* becomes clear when one goes through another official correspondence in reference to the commutation of rents in Gaurnadi in which the Collector of Bakarganj, Mr.W.J.Reid addressed the Commissioner of the Dhaka Division and observed, "It seems to me that on whatever principles commutation may be, the effects are bound materially to alter the present position of the landlords. The effect on comparatively large landlords, and, for instance, on poorly paid clerks in Government service are however, very different. The former has only to face a diminution of profits, while a landlord of the latter class may find his whole domestic balance-sheet upset. He must have rice to feed his household, and of this he was assured under the system of produce rents. Again the purchasing power of money varies while paddy is always the ultimate measure of other commodities. I feel, however, very strongly the force of Mr.Jack's contention that sympathy for the impoverished landlords must not blind us to the burdens that press on the *raiyyat*". (58)

The ultimate result of the commutation proceedings in Gaurnadi was that in more than thousand cases the produce rents were commuted to money rents. In the cases of appeal by the landlords for a revision of the commutation orders only 235 orders of commutation were modified. Thus one can see that in majority of the cases the commutation orders of the special officer were kept intact. It must be mentioned here that in more than thousand cases in which the rents were commuted it was generally accepted by the Settlement Officers themselves that the commuted rents were much below the value of the produce they had been accustomed to receive, and this was also accepted by a person no less than Jack who being the Settlement Officer in the district had a genuine dislike for the *bhadralok* landlords when he observed,"... the commuted rents are unjust, in so far as

they cut down the profits of the landlord suddenly without giving them any time in which to meet their altered state". (59)

Thus the landlords who regarded the entire commutation proceedings as the most unjust and iniquitous measure that could ever be introduced and enforced by the Settlement Department, acquired a great dislike and apathy towards the British administration which threatened to deprive them of their principal means of livelihood.

Sumit Sarkar has pointed out recently that during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century he noticed a shift to sharecropping in districts like Bakarganj and Faridpur. This was particularly marked among landlords, intermediaries, and occupancy ryots who let out their lands to sharecroppers rather than to tenants. The prices of agricultural produce was rising in this period (in fact from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Instead of receiving rent in cash it made more sense now to collect it as produce. This was the reason which made the Gaurnadi landlords to shift their demands for payments from money to produce rents during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rise in the prices of agricultural commodities also made it sensible for peasant producers to try and shift from produce to money rent payments. This was exactly the reason why the tenants of Gaurnadi applied for commutation from produce to money rents at the time of the settlement operations in Bakarganj. The choice of giving lands to cultivate to the sharecroppers rather than to the tenants must have been due to the rights of the latter (a tenant was an occupancy ryot) to apply for commutation from produce to money rents as laid down by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885. In Bakarganj these sharecroppers were primarily Namasudras who started an agitation for commutation of rents from 1907 which lasted till 1909, but as they had no occupancy status in land it was not possible for the Government to consider their wish. However, as mentioned above the tenants applied for commutation and they received a favourable response from some lower-level European officers. With their help a considerable amount of commutation was done at Bakarganj and Faridpur. A prominent local *bhadralok* nationalist newspaper of the time—the *Barisal Hitaishi*—immediately expressed much indignation at such commutations: what does the government think it is doing? It is inciting the peasants, it is playing a dangerous game. Sarkar points out that

the class interests pushed some *bhadralok* nationalists to rally behind the colonial government on the issue. They sought the government's intervention against the lower level officials who had obliged the peasantry. Strangely, this happened at a moment when anti-colonial militancy was at its peak, especially among the *bhadralok* of Barisal. The higher ranking colonial authorities sharply pulled up those among their European subordinates who seemed to be sympathetic to the commutation demand. The commutations were abruptly halted for this reason. (60) Similar conflicts between the *bhadralok* superior landlords and tenants on the issue of sharing of the agricultural surplus has been described in detail in the latter part of this chapter.

Another significant measure which hurt the *bhadralok* (intermediate tenure-holders) dearly was the increase in the land revenue of the district, achieved by the Settlement Officers by squeezing the swollen profits of the proprietors and tenure-holders. The Settlement Officers cited the following reasons which justified the increase in land revenue of the proprietors and tenure-holders. First, in former assessments increases in revenue had been obtained only from the cultivators. This had resulted in the increase in profits of the proprietors and tenure-holders. Second, 70% of the tenure-holders were absentees and had neither invested in the reclamation of land nor helped the cultivators at their times of distress. Third, the tenure-holders and proprietors had repeatedly enhanced rents which had increased their profits. Fourth, the levy of the *abwab* by these two classes of landlords again increased their profits at the expense of the cultivators. Fifth, as the *abwab* amounted to be more than the entire Government land revenue, it had been a heavy burden on the cultivators. The cultivators throughout the district expressed their desire to pay the land revenue directly to the Government officials and not through the medium of the tenure-holders.

Thus in accordance to the spirit of sympathy with the cultivators which had characterized the entire settlement operations, the Settlement Officers at least on this particular occasion decided not to increase the rent given by the cultivators. The entire increase in land revenue was thus passed on to the proprietors and tenure-holders whose excessive profits from land the Government wanted to reduce. The resultant increase of land

revenue drastically reduced the profits of the proprietors and tenure-holders from Rs.2.5 lakhs to Rs.31,000. This increase by one stroke must have deteriorated the financial condition of the *bhadralok* tenure-holders who were already going through severe economic distress. This measure of the Government also reflected the antipathy of the former towards the tenure-holders. The Government seemed to be bent upon the extinction of the latter. Jack's observation in this regard was pertinent, "the tenure-holders were in fact a useless burden, which both Government and the cultivators would be happier without. It was therefore in accordance with fitness of things that such increase as was justifiable in the revenue should be obtained at their own expense and not at the expense of the cultivator. The day of the middlemen had gone". (61) The reaction of the *bhadralok* against such a policy of the British Government was naturally bitter. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* commented: "In Bakarganj, the trend of the official mind seems to be to save the *raiya*s at any cost from the oppression of their landlords". (62)

The revision of the land revenue which affected the middlemen and proprietors of land as a result of the Settlement Operations were as follows:- The revenue resulting from the revision was Rs.7,87,472 against a previous revenue of Rs.4,64,385 or an increase of Rs.3,23,087 or 70%. Middlemen of all classes, who had held an area of 249,636 acres at a rental of Rs.4,04,080 and with a surplus of Rs.2,47,955 over the rents paid to them by *raiya*s were assessed at Rs.6,39,313 on an area of 259,190 acres and their surplus was reduced to Rs.30,960. The allowances granted to proprietors was reduced from Rs.31,815 to Rs.26,653. (63) Thus it becomes evident that the *bhadralok* (intermediate tenure-holders) who were severely hit by the rise in the price of rice after 1870 were further affected by their decrease in income from land as a result of the increase in land revenue obtained primarily by the administration at their expense.

The District Gazetteer of Bakarganj confirms that after 1870, the rise of prices was substantial not only in the case of rice but also in the case of other agricultural commodities. (64) Several factors contributed to make the economic position of the *bhadralok* tenure-holder precarious. Firstly, the rise of prices severely hit the *bhadralok* and the severity became pronounced because the sources of income of the *bhadralok*

rent-receivers not only became stagnant but also declined after 1870. This was especially due to the fact that enhancements of rent did not generally keep pace with the rise in prices since 1870. Moreover, the very great rise in prices which occurred in the first ten years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by little or no rise in rents. As a result the *bhadralok* tenure-holders were unable to increase their income from their landed possessions which could enable them to tide over the crisis of increased prices. Secondly, the aversion of the *bhadralok* to cultivate their own land and to trade and industries also contributed to make his financial position untenable. Thus in his Settlement Report Jack observed, "had it not been for their characteristic aversion from manual labour, they could easily have been supplied with land to cultivate, sufficient to provide them with a comfortable subsistence". Jack further observed, "the only industry with a future in Bakarganj is boat-building, to which it might be possible with state-control to direct the *bhadralok's* attention. It is extraordinary with such waterways as the only means of communication that more and better boats should not have been provided and that motor haulage, so admirably adapted to the conditions of the district, should not even have been introduced. Had the more intelligent *bhadralok* any mechanical or industrial aptitude, this would certainly not be the case". (65) Thirdly, the population of the *bhadralok* dependant on rents received from land had also increased considerably as the case of Gaurnadi thana had shown. If one considers the example of Gaurnadi where the concentration of the *bhadralok* population was significant it will be seen that the latter population had increased by 54% between 1872 and 1901. Hence it becomes evident that a substantial increase in population of the *bhadralok* had to depend on a stagnant rent from land. As a result it was bound to weaken the financial condition of the *bhadralok*. The case of Gaurnadi can be taken as a general rule for other thanas of Bakarganj like Nalchiti, Swarupkati, Jhalakati and Barisal where the *bhadralok* rent-receivers population remained significant. Fourthly, the effect of the commutation proceedings in Gaurnadi, where in more than thousand cases produce rents obtained from the tenants were converted to money rents, also resulted in having a significant impact in the earning's of the *bhadralok* landlords who were already going through distressful conditions. It was primarily due to the fact that the *bhadralok* landlords who were dependant on the produce rents for the supply of rice to their household had in the altered state of receiving money rents from

their tenants not only to tackle the problem of supply of rice to their household, the price of which had increased substantially after 1870, but also to contend themselves with money rents which were far below in value to the produce rents. This diminution in income must have further deteriorated the condition of the *bhadralok*. Finally, the increase in the land revenue of the district at the expense of the profits of the middlemen (intermediate tenure-holders) and proprietors and bringing down the profit margin of the former drastically, again contributed to worsen the economic position of the *bhadralok*.

Economic distress among the *bhadralok* tenure-holders in Bakarganj did play a part in turning them against the British rule in the country. Arun Chandra Guha (a member of the Barisal Party) informs us that he came from a poor middle-class family and that his father was an ordinary clerk in the local collectorate. (66) Similarly, we come to know from Guha's bosom friend Manoranjan Gupta (a member of the Barisal Party as well) that he also came from a very poor family and that the financial condition of their family was such that they had to reside in a thatched or tin-roofed mud-house. (67) Both Guha and Gupta were educated men (both were Bachelor of Arts of the Calcutta University) and as such they must have felt it repugnant to explain their turning anti-British due to their financial distress. Though Guha and Gupta does not mention that they came from tenure-holding families, as far as Bakarganj was concerned, Tapan Raychaudhuri has shown that the majority of *bhadralok* held minute shares in land in the form of intermediate-tenures and thus had to supplement their income as rent from land with various professions and services available under the colonial regime. (68) Hence at least in Guha's case whose father worked as a clerk, in all probability their family was in possession of some small share in a landed estate, on which it would be impossible to support life. It was due to this reason that the urge for an English language education assumed such importance among this class. Thus Gupta mentions that after passing the Entrance Examination in 1909, he left his native village and went to Barisal town to study for the Intermediate and B.A. Examinations. He further mentions that he was able to appear for these exams only by doing private tuitions for five years. (69) The painstaking efforts of Gupta to pursue his studies till the graduation level clearly shows the urge for education among the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj. It remains a significant fact that in the major strongholds of swadeshi in the

mufassil—areas like Bakarganj, Madaripur, Vikrampur, Kishoregunj— a marked concentration of intermediate tenures (primarily owned by the *bhadralok*) coincided with a relatively high level of English education too. Economic distress could lead to nationalist politics only via the ‘mediation’ of an ideology. And as it was only through the spread of English education among the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj that they could have been imbued with such an ideology, it would be proper in my opinion to give a brief account of the development of English education in Bakarganj during the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The development of education in Bakarganj during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It has been mentioned earlier that the traditional learned castes in Bengal, prior to the establishment of British rule, had settled for generations in their *bhadrasthanas* (ancestral household and landed property), lived in Mughal times under the big territorial magnates like the Rajas of Burdwan, Bishnupur, Nadia, Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Jessore, and were dependent on their favour. By virtue of their knowledge of Bengali and Persian, they manned the government and zamindari establishments as clerks, writers and officials (mainly Kayasthas) and supplied the personnel for the literate professions which had developed in pre-modern Bengali society—priests and pundits (Brahmans), and physicians (Vaidyas).

As British rule opened up new avenues of employment especially for those who had an advanced English-education, the traditional learned castes of Bengal were the first in the province to make a switchover from Persian to English education. From the perspective of the British Government too, there was a pressing need for clerks and public servants who could be hired at rates which the Government could afford. Consequently, Lord Bentinck, the British Governor-General in India, and Thomas Macaulay, the Law Member of the Governor-General’s Executive Council, in 1835 took the momentous decision to back higher education in India through the medium of English. The latter decision brought other changes in the train: English was made the language of administration, and increasingly the new education became the pass to employment in

public services.

But the impulse behind these educational changes did not flow from the calculations of the British alone. As early as 1817 the Hindus of Calcutta were so enthusiastic for the new learning that they founded Hindu College at their own expense. In 1823 when the Government established the Sanskrit College in Calcutta, Rammohun Roy had pleaded eloquently that European science and the English language should be taught there. The demand for western education was so strong among the *bhadralok*, that after 1835 when the Government began to set up western-style schools and colleges of its own, it could not cope with the demand. So in 1854 the role of private enterprise was recognized by Wood's grants-in-aid system, and this led to a remarkable expansion of privately-run schools staffed by Indians.

In Bakarganj also, there was great demand for an English-education especially among the *bhadralok*. Though initiative in the development of western-type schools came initially from the Government and the Serampore missionaries, it was primarily the *bhadralok* residing in thanas Gaurnadi, Barisal, Nalchhiti and Jhalakati of the Sadar sub-division and thanas Pirozpur and Swarupkati of the Pirozpur sub-division, that utilized Wood's grants-in-aid system to establish an extensive network of Anglo-Vernacular schools and middle English schools. The movement in favour of western-type schools began in the 1830s and within the next four decades it developed at a steady pace. In March 1874, there were in the district 2 higher English schools, 18 middle English schools, 37 middle vernacular schools and 304 lower vernacular schools. Of the 12,008 students reading in these various institutions not less than 7,416 students belonged to the high-caste Hindus, the rest were Muslims the bulk of whom read in the lower vernacular schools. (70) The demand for an English-education was so strong among the *bhadralok* that most of the educational institutions in the district owed its establishment to private enterprise which applied for Government aid. Till 1870 out of 361 educational institutions in Bakarganj 280 were privately managed and staffed primarily by Indians and were Government aided. The district achieved such an advancement in English language education that in 1870 the Educational Inspector observed it as, "one of the most forward educational

tracts in East Bengal, both in the number of boys at school and in the number of minor and vernacular scholarships which it carries off. It supplies an unusually large number of pupils to the medical profession". (71)

In the subsequent period the demand for an advanced English-language education continued to grow at a rapid pace and this was reflected in the figures of the number of students; it grew from 12,008 in 1874 to 75,859 in 1892 and 103, 421 in 1911. The number of educational institutions also grew in this period from 361 in 1870 to 3,088 in 1911. (72) That the movement for an English-education in Bakarganj was primarily dominated by the Hindu upper-castes was confirmed in 1918 by the District Gazetteer when it noted that literacy was much more widely prevalent in the Sadar sub-division and in the Pirozpur and Swarupkati thanas; and this was largely due to the number of *bhadralok* resident in these areas. (73)

In her book *The Sentinels of Culture*, Tithi Bhattacharya has provided a material framework for studying the importance of education and culture in the lives of the *bhadralok*. In this work she has shown that the ideology of education and culture was subscribed by two social groups which became the basic adherents of the *bhadralok* community and which began to emerge by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Bengal. The first group among the *bhadralok* were the men who belonged to the comfortable middle class. The families of this class had made their fortunes as dewans and *banias* to the Company and with the change in the structure of the economy by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, they invested their accumulated wealth in various urban and rural properties. The rent from these investments allowed the scions of this class a life of comparative ease, if not excessive affluence like before, living them free to pursue culture and the arts. It was this group which owned substantial amount of land in Bengal from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The second group among the *bhadralok* were the salaried men, the lower rungs of a petty bourgeois class. The majority of the salaried class had some small share in a landed estate, on which it would be impossible to support life. It was due to this reason that the urge for an English language education assumed such importance among this class. The

important point was that this was the only avenue of survival for the entire petty bourgeoisie from the 1850s onwards. As the Calcutta University Committee noted: it is not from the agricultural classes, nor any more than from the commercial or industrial classes, that the eager demand for educational opportunities has come...The classes whose sons have filled the colleges...are the middle or professional classes, commonly known as the *bhadralok*; it is their needs and their traditions, which have more than any other cause, dictated the character of university development in Bengal. (74) Bhattacharya has also shown the diverse composition of the salaried masses. Although the sole avenue of survival for this class was an English education, access to higher education was strictly differentiated according to class. The bottom rung of the petty bourgeoisie thus became the *kerani*, while the top layer was recruited to the slightly higher rungs of the colonial state. In 1833 the office of Deputy Collector was created for Indians, in 1837 that of Principal Sudder, and in 1843, the Deputy Magistrate. A large section of the intelligentsia, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Shibchandra Deb, Vidyasagar, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Rangalal Bandopadhyay formed a part of this layer. While part of the same class, Deputy Magistrates like Bankim, with their annual incomes ranging between 480-600 Pounds were of course placed differently in life than the junior clerks in government or private offices who barely earned Rs 30 a month.

Bhattacharya has also shown that it was primarily the 'comfortable middle class' that gave rise to the educational ideology and it was the lower rungs of the petty bourgeois class (the salaried class), who had been forced into higher education that became a part of it. The *bhadralok* thus did not belong to a homogenous category. It was essentially an ethic, or a sentiment, held for various reasons by individuals from different class positions. (75)

As far as Bakarganj was concerned the *bhadralok* held minute shares in land in the form of intermediate-tenures and thus had to supplement their income as rent from land with various professions and services available under the colonial regime. (76) The majority of the *bhadralok* who utilized Woods-grants-in-aid to establish private educational institutions in Bakarganj were thus petty landholders who under duress went to work in

the city or other district head-quarters as white collar employees. In the context of the *bhadralok*'s urge for an English language education in Bakarganj the examples of Arun Chandra Guha and Manoranjan Gupta has already been given earlier. The financial condition of Aswini Kumar Dutta's paternal grandfather was similar to that of Guha and Gupta's family. It was acute financial distress of his father which compelled Braja Mohan Dutta (Aswini Dutta's father) to go to Calcutta as early as 1840 to acquire an English language education. It was due to this education that Braja Mohan Dutta acquired the posts of Deputy Collector, Deputy Magistrate and Small Court's Judge during different periods of his professional career. (77) Aswini Kumar thus came from a family of the salaried class. As both Aswini Kumar and his father Braja Mohan Dutta realized the demand for an English language education among the people in Barisal, the former took untiring efforts in the establishment of the Braja Mohan School and College as mentioned earlier. In Bakarganj it can thus be deduced that it was primarily the petty bourgeois class (small landowners who supplemented their income from services and professions) who took to the ideology of education.

It was actually this western learning that made the educated *bhadralok* to emerge as the first group in Bengal to acquire political consciousness. A relevant question which arises here is what made the English-educated youth of Bengal to respond to the ideology of nationalism? In this context it can be said that the politically active groups in the early stages of Indian nationalism may be referred to as an 'intelligentsia', since what most distinguished them from the rest of the Indian society was not class or caste consciousness but education. It may be pertinent here to mention the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the formation of the role of the 'traditional', as distinguished from the 'organic' intellectuals; men of learning, not directly connected with the production process, who for that very reason may be swayed by new cultural or ideological forces. The English-educated elite of Bengal, who came principally from the traditional learned castes, and remained virtually unconnected after the 1850s with commerce or industry or even with agriculture (as they were traditionally known not to take part in the production process directly), may be regarded perhaps as a 'traditional' intelligentsia in Gramsci's sense, responding readily to world ideological currents such as

liberalism, nationalism and eventually in part even socialism.

It was this responsiveness of the educated youth of Bengal that made them active participants in the nationalist struggle to end the colonial rule in the country. During the anti-partition agitation in Bengal the responsiveness of such youth was used first by the samitis which grew up in Bakarganj and elsewhere in the province. This is confirmed by the Bengal District Administrative Committee which observed that “all through, the anti-Government movement in Bengal has recruited its forces principally from Anglo-Vernacular schools and colleges”. (78) As far as Bakarganj was concerned it was the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti established in Barisal which was principally responsible for the organization of the movement in the district. To conduct the anti-partition agitation in the district the Samiti had to enroll volunteers who came to be known as the “National Volunteers”. In Bakarganj also, the role of the students as well as the educated elite was significant as they were the principal volunteer recruits of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. Thus the District Magistrate of Bakarganj stated that the volunteers consisted chiefly of students, ex-students and young Hindus who had found no employment. (79)

It was among these educated youth of Bakarganj who enrolled themselves as “National Volunteers” and worked on behalf of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, that the theory of British economic exploitation became one of the most decisive factors in turning them against the colonial rule in the country. The Bengal District Administration Committee Report testifies to this effect. (80) The theory of the ‘drain of wealth’ which was propounded by some of the early Congress intellectuals like Dadabhai Naoroji and Ramesh Chandra Datta during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was continuously preached by the nationalist newspapers and orators during the anti-partition agitation and met with wide acceptance in days of rising prices. Arun Chandra Guha informs us in this connection that after studying the ‘theory of drain of wealth’ and the causes of the mass poverty of Indians which were highlighted in works like William Digby’s *Prosperous British India*, Dadabhai Naoroji’s *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, R.C.Dutt’s, *Economic History of India* and S.G.Deuskar’s *Deshar Katha*, the militant nationalists of Bakarganj felt a very strong urge to end the colonial rule in the country and hence this

became a major factor in turning them anti-British. (81) It was principally this ideological factor that made the educated youth of Bengal adopt an anti-colonial stance during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal and of course, the racist attitude practiced by the European residents in Bengal, evoked in the colonial intelligentsia a hostility that may be termed counter-racism. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this counter-racism of the *bhadralok* gradually turned their pro-British nationalism into a militant anti-British one. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the economic distress that the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj (who were mostly intermediate-tenure holders of land and were dependent principally on the rental incomes from their land) underwent during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, did play a part in making them realize the exploitative nature of British rule (though they remained strangely insensitive about their own exploitation of the peasants). It would be pertinent in this regard to mention the observations of Prof. Amales Tripathi, who is of the opinion that economic distress among the colonized intelligentsia was responsible in turning them against the British rule at the time of the anti-partition agitation in Bengal. Prof. Tripathi held the view that the areas most affected by Extremism like Bakarganj had been the greatest sufferers from the rise of food prices. (82) Prof. Sumit Sarkar corroborates the findings of Prof. Tripathi, and finds a similar connection between the economic distress of the *bhadralok* tenure-holders in Bakarganj, which was especially due to the rapid increase in the price of agricultural commodities, and their adoption of an anti-colonial stance, which came to the fore during the anti-Partition agitation in the district. This is despite Sarkar's recognition of ideological factors playing a big role in the Swadeshi Movement. The District Gazetteer found this *bhadralok* community concentrated in the thanas of Gournadi, Jhalakati, Swarupkati, Barisal and Nalchiti. (83) Official sources point out that these five police stations had supplied more than 1500 out of the district's 2000 odd volunteers in 1907—a coincidence too close to have been accidental. (84) However, as the discussion of the importance of the ideological factor—British economic exploitation and the consequent impoverishment of the Indian masses--which weighed heavily on the mind of the educated *bhadralok* in Bakarganj has shown, economic distress among the latter could lead to nationalist politics only via the 'mediation' of this particular ideology.

### The Anti-Partition Agitation in Bakarganj.

The decision for partition of Bengal was made on 19<sup>th</sup> July 1905. The most decisive step among various protests against the partition scheme was taken by the '*Sanjivani*', a weekly organ of Krishna Kumar Mitra, which on 13 July asked the Bengali people to boycott all the English goods and shun all contact with officials and official bodies until the partition scheme was withdrawn. (85) Referring to the '*Sanjivani*' proposals the '*Barisal Hitaishi*' wrote: "Will the Bengalis be able to imitate the Chinese in their boycott of foreign goods? If they can, the path lies clear before them". It further demanded that the zamindars and wealthier classes should not pay any subscription for the reception of the Prince of Wales and that they should resign all honorary official appointments that they held. (86)

On 26<sup>th</sup> July 1905, the '*Barisal Hitashi*' published within black-borders the details about the administration of the new province (Eastern Bengal and Assam). It was reported that a large meeting would be held in the courtyard of the Brajamohan Institution on 26 July to protest against the partition scheme. (87) The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported that in this meeting the Hindus and the Muslims attended in thousands while Dinabandhu Sen presided over the meeting. In his address Aswini Kumar in a choked up voice gave a thrilling description of the situation, urged all to be men and show a united front. Mohammed Ismail Chaudhuri, a leading zamindar and other Muslims delivered speeches against the partition. Delegates were appointed for the Town Hall Meeting to be held in Calcutta on the 7th August, 1905. (88)

### The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti

The organization which was to attain so much fame for conducting the Swadeshi and Boycott Movement in Bakarganj with a lot of vigour was the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti which was established on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August 1905. The Central Samiti in Barisal town started with 18 members in August 1905, this rose to 41 in 1906. (89) It organized meetings, usually at the Raja Bahadur's haveli (twenty-five of them in the course of the

first year of the movement, plus some fifty street lectures) till these were stopped for a time by the Seditious Meetings Ordinance and Act; administered collective swadeshi vows to groups of barbers, washermen, boatmen and other humble folk (90); had at its disposal four paid and twenty-five unpaid swadeshi preachers for the countryside (91); brought out pamphlets; and financed and controlled a weekly newspaper (the *Barisal Hitaishi*, edited by Durgamohan Sen) as well as Mukunda Das's jatra party. (92) It also ran a swadeshi store, a weaving school and a gymnasium. (93)

The Swadesh Bandhab developed an impressive network of village branches, and groups of volunteers were attached to both the Central Samiti and the local units. After the establishment of this samiti in the town of Barisal, its branch samitis were started at each subdivision, and at each village or a group of small villages for carrying out the work according to its object. The branch samitis were 159 in number by the year 1908. For carrying on all work, the Swadesh Bandhab had an Executive Committee and a General Committee, and the *mufassil* samitis had also Executive Committees under them.

The swadeshi movement was launched with so much vigour in Bakarganj that '*Sanjivani*' reported: 'Barisal has set a noble example which is worthy of imitation all over the province. The non-official members of the Local District Board have set up a resolution to Government, protesting against the partition scheme. A similar resolution has also been forwarded by the local municipality under the guidance of their Chairman, Babu Rajani Kanta Das. If Government does not see its way to act according to the request of these members, they will of course do the needful, to preserve their self-respect.' (94)

The impact of the Swadeshi movement was the deepest on Bakarganj. There were certain reasons for this and these are mentioned below.

Firstly, the social composition of the volunteers indicate that most of them belonged to the *bhadralok* class and earned their living at least in part through their tenurial rights over land. Official sources emphasize a link between the volunteers and the intermediate tenure-holders of the district. Thus a source points out that "in Swarupkati nearly half the

volunteers are said to be talukdars, that is to say, persons with a tenure-holding interest in land". (95, 96) The numerical strength of the volunteers (2,649—the number of volunteers in the district were the largest in both the new and old province of Bengal) indicate that the *bhadralok* in Bakarganj were mobilized during the movement like no other district in either of the old or the new province of Bengal. This can be accounted partly to the fact that the percentage of the *bhadralok* population in the total Hindu population of the district was 20 (according to the 1901 Census), which was the second largest in Eastern Bengal, the largest being Chittagong. (97)

Secondly, though the reasons for the mobilization of the *bhadralok* had been discussed earlier, the significant role played by Aswini Kumar Dutta in this regard should not be under-estimated. Having realized the cause of the material impoverishment of his country quite well, the latter in order to propagate the message of the exploitative character of colonial rule to the masses of his native district, composed a series of lucid songs titled '*Bharatgiti*', which were sung in the streets of Barisal and other places in the district with the help of a musician and a singer. The realization of material drain of the country due to colonial rule was thus disseminated among all sections of the people in Bakarganj for more than twenty years before the commencement of the anti-Partition agitation in the district. In Bakarganj a remarkable feature of the latter movement was that a significant section of the lower class people as well as merchants and traders (the lower class people as well as the uneducated merchants and traders were not *bhadralok*) were mobilized. In this mobilization among the latter classes of people and also of the *bhadralok*, the theory of drain must have provided a powerful ideological factor.

Thirdly, the factor which really added to the depth of the Swadeshi Movement in Bakarganj, was the participation of the lower class of people. The latter class amounted to almost 1.5 lakh people. (98) In this mobilization of the lower orders of society, the factor which played a crucial role was the sustained, unostentatious humanitarian work carried on from the middle of the 1880s by the students of the Braja Mohan Institution under the direction of their mentor Aswini Kumar Dutta. Such kind of constructive activity which touched the lives of the masses of the district and made a difference to their lives must

have instilled a sense of patriotism among them (this is applicable for the *bhadralok* as well) and eventually resulted in their mobilization. This was also true in the case of the merchants and traders who participated in the movement and as they constituted more than 5% of the district's population (i.e. almost 1.5 lakh people) their support added to the depth of the anti-Partition agitation in Bakarganj. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in its Second and Third Annual Proceedings presented during the District Conference held in August 1908, gratefully acknowledged the support of many merchants in the important trading centre of Jhalakati who did not import British cloth and goods throughout the movement. (99)

Fourthly, as far as the participation of the peasants of the district was concerned, it is true that the humanitarian work of Aswini Kumar Dutta touched their lives equally. The social service activities of Aswini Kumar carried on for a considerable period of time and also the famine-relief operations conducted by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in 1906 under the auspices of the former resulted in breaking the apathy of the peasants at least to a small extent. The latter no doubt came to deeply respect and love Aswini Kumar—"the 'babu' who protects us in times of trouble, who sent us food during the famine and medicine at the time of cholera....If we displease him at the Nawab's command, Allah too will forsake us". (100) The peasants of the district must have attended swadeshi meetings and it is probable that some of them participated in the boycott of British goods during the initial stages of the movement. However, as there existed genuine peasant discontent which was due to the conduct of the landlords, their agents and the tenure-holders (it was the *bhadralok* which comprised of all the three classes), the peasants did not participate whole-heartedly in the movement.

On the whole, it can be safely claimed, that the impact of the Swadeshi movement was the deepest on Bakarganj as contact with the masses were maintained and established by the persistent constructive work of Aswini Kumar Dutta.

During the anti-partition agitation in Bakarganj the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti realized that the participation of the masses in the movement could not be attained only by an

appeal to their emotions through patriotic songs, speeches, jatras and patriotic festivals (this was of course so because the man at the helm of the Samiti was Aswini Kumar Dutta) . What mattered to the common people was the redressal of their problems which they faced in their day to day lives. Thus the Samiti resolved that it needed to continue the humanitarian work of the students of the B.M.Institution with renewed vigour. The Samiti realized rightly that the best possible technique of mass contact was to touch the lives of the common people by making a positive difference.

A perusal of the objectives and work of the Samiti indicates that it resolved to continue the legacy of the constructive social work in Bakarganj. The objectives of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti were clearly spelt out in the Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Samiti. It stated that the object of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was to remove the wretched financial condition of Barisal and to teach it self-help. The objectives of the Samiti as stated were as follows:-

(1) To decide village disputes and quarrel as far as possible by self-chosen arbitration courts without taking the shelter of the courts of justice. It must be noted here that in Bakarganj the peasants were in need of arbitration on trivial matters which the existing courts were quite unable to fulfill as they were distant and expensive. The peasants in such cases turned to their landlord's agents or to the tenure holders to arbitrate on such matters. This system provided a great opportunity to the landord's agents and tenure holders to benefit their pockets. As the peasants needed arbitration urgently the landlord's agents and tenure holders exploited them by extracting heavy fines from the peasants. Under such circumstances when a neutral arbiter like the village branches of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti set up arbitration courts it did benefit the peasants of the district. These courts of the Samiti during the course of the movement arbitrated in more than 1,000 cases.

(2) To explain to the general public the necessity and utility of using swadeshi articles and of boycotting the foreign goods, and to encourage them to obey the vow. To improve and foster such industries in the circle, such as weaving cloth, preparing pots and mats.

To start such industries in the circle if not already existing in it. The promotion of swadeshi goods and the boycott of British merchandise must be seen as an attempt by the Samiti to revive the indigenous crafts of the district and re-employing the people engaged in the production of such crafts as well as the weavers.

(3) To improve the health of the village, to try to increase the strength of the boys, to prevent the use of intoxicating drugs, and to spread female education.

The Reports further stated that for carrying out all these objects four preachers were permanently appointed by the Samiti. These preachers went through villages and requested the people to give effect to the objects of the Samiti. Besides these, the members of the Samiti occasionally toured the mufassil and encouraged the people. (101)

In order to enlist the support of the masses in the Swadeshi Movement the leaders of the Samiti realized that alongside the constructive work carried on by the organization and its affiliate branches (102) it could appeal to the emotions and imagination of the people through songs, plays, jatras, kathakatas and patriotic festivals. In Bakarganj the platform and the press were also used extensively to propagate the message of swadeshi and boycott among the people.

The leaders of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti also remained ready to respond to ideas from nationalist leaders and intellectuals of Bengal to develop new techniques of mass contact. Such an opportunity arose on the eve of the anti-Partition agitation, when nationalist leaders and intellectuals of Bengal were contemplating methods to establish contact with the masses. The debate on new techniques was resumed in the pages of the first number of Rabindranath Tagore's monthly *Bhandar* (Baisakh 1312—April-May 1905). Surendranath Banerjee posed the problem—"how popular interest could be maintained in present-day public endeavours"—and replies came from Nagendranath Ghosh, Hirendranath Dutt, Ashutosh Chaudhuri, Jogesh Chandra Chaudhuri, Ramendrasundar Trivedi, Prithischandra Ray and Bepichandra Pal. Pal pointed out that that the problem was really to establish—and not just maintain—contact with the people, and suggested a

twofold programme. Village life should be rejuvenated through a variety of concrete self-help efforts, he suggested, and “patriotism must be converted into a religion, with its symbols, images, vows and ceremonial”.

As to the first method suggested by Pal, at least in the case of Bakarganj, it was already an established tradition which was effectively maintained by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. The leaders of the Samiti were quick to use the latter suggestion of Pal in the district as well, but only in a qualified way. In its techniques of mass contact the Samiti simultaneously implemented all the above mentioned methods.

It must be mentioned here that orthodox religion remained overwhelmingly predominant during the swadeshi age. It became in fact the primary communication medium through which the leaders sought contact with the masses. The leaders of the Bandhab Samiti in Bakarganj did not prove an exception to this norm. The use of religion became prominent as the movement got into its stride from July 1905 onwards. The *Bengalee* reported prayer meetings from several East Bengal districts. From Bakarganj also the journal reported that special prayers were offered at the “new mosque” in Barisal, indicating some Muslim response in the district. (103)

Aswini Kumar Dutta was not averse to make religion a useful communication medium through which to enlist the support of the masses during the movement. Thus on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1905 a mahajan sabha was held at Barisal, in which Aswini Kumar made a fervent speech for the purpose of inducing the assembled merchants to join the boycott cum swadeshi movement. He went on exhorting all of them to support him in the agitation. His appeal was accepted with enthusiasm. Pledges to indent for country-made goods as much as possible and not to import foreign ones, were taken on the spot in the name of Sri Krishna by Hindu mahajans and Allah by their Muslim counterparts. Aswini Kumar concluded his speech with a prayer to Thakur(Lord) for awakening the country through the swadeshi movement. (104)

The partition proclamation was published in the Gazette of India on 1 September 1905.

As soon as the news spread all over the town, the shopkeepers of the bazaar closed their shops which were covered with black flags as a sign of sorrow. All the people including drivers, coolies and labourers stayed away from their work. Such events were never reported to have occurred before in the town of Barisal. A procession composed of all sections of the people of the town, about 10,000 heads (population of Barisal town was enumerated as 18,978 in the 1901 Census Report), paraded the streets of the town in silence. All the people marched bare-footed and the sentiment ran so high that the people ignored the rains. They carried black flags on which slogans such as "The calamity of Bengal", "Do one's duty", were written in white. This procession ultimately converted itself into a meeting of about 12,000 people in an open space in front of the B.M.Institution. Two resolutions were adopted. The first one was worded thus: 'Resolved that in view of the calamity that has just overtaken the province of Bengal by the publication of the partition proclamation by the Government of India, this meeting of the residents of Bakarganj solemnly pledge itself to abstain from taking part in any public festivities at least for the remaining portion of the Bengali year'. The second ran as follows: 'Resolved that the present agitation in the lines hitherto conducted be continued with greater vigour till the desired goal is reached'. After the meeting was over, many people got together at the Hindu Dharmarakshini Sabha and prayed to God for the welfare of the country. (105)

Vows in the name of religion were particularly useful in persuading the lower orders to stick to swadeshi. Thus a local journal '*Kasipur Nibashi*' reported two interesting meetings held at Barisal on 10 September 1905. One was a meeting of the washermen and barbers of Barisal town in which they resolved thenceforth to use only swadeshi goods. Another was a meeting of the coolies having a similar objective held at the old premises of Peary Mohan Bose, Assistant Settlement Officer. (106)

The *Bengalee* of 21<sup>st</sup> September 1905, similarly reported that numerous groups of people in Barisal like big-cloth merchants, shoe sellers, stationers, sweet meat vendors, grocers, cobblers, washermen, barbers, and Oriya servants and cooks took a vow not to sell foreign goods. Referring to the Barisal example as something that ought to be

followed by every other district of the province, the *Bengalee* observed," In fact the movement has been so deeply rooted here that you will not find a single peasant in Bakarganj who is not extremely anxious to join the swadeshi movement. In Bakarganj the movement has stirred the masses." (107)

### The Barisal Episode

During the winter of 1905-06, the building-up of the organization of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti proceeded side by side with the preparations for the annual session of the Bengal Provincial Conference scheduled to be held in Barisal during April 1906. Meanwhile, during December 1905 to March 1906 the agitation showed signs of flagging. Reports from different districts indicated that picketing had slackened and imported articles were selling freely. (108) However, the Barisal affair of April 1906 further revived the agitation in favour of Extremism. The occasion was the annual session of the Bengal Provincial Conference. For this particular event Aswini Kumar Dutta recruited 200 volunteers in Barisal town itself from the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. (109) In addition to these local volunteers, Surendranath Banerjee's party brought from Calcutta a large number of volunteers belonging to the Anti-Circular Society. The local Reception Committee headed by Aswini Kumar Dutta was compelled by the District Magistrate to make an undertaking not to take out a procession with the shouting of *Bande Mataram*. (110) However, leaders like Surendranath Banerjee and Krishna Kumar Mitra did not feel themselves bound by the undertaking of the Barisal leaders. But in order not to embarrass the local leaders they agreed, before landing from their steamers on 13<sup>th</sup> April to abstain from processions and singing *Bande Mataram* 'for that day'. (111) The procession to the conference *pandal* started on 14<sup>th</sup> April from a private building. The police tried to stop the procession, but the delegates tried to force their way and were *lathi*-charged. The official reports do not mention that they shouted *Bande Mataram*, but they 'seemed determined to court an assault by their defiant manner'. (112) Banerjee also wrote that they shouted *Bande Mataram* after they had been attacked by the police. (113) The *lathi*-charge of the police on the procession, it must be mentioned here, assumed a brutal form and there were several volunteers {belonging to the local as well

as of the Anti-Circular Society (114) who received severe injuries. Among these volunteers Chittaranjan Guha Thakurta (son of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta), was perhaps the one who received the most severe *lathi*-charge from the police. Hiralal Dasgupta tells us that due to the intensity of the blows Chittaranjan fell in a pond adjacent to the road, but he continued to shout *Bande Mataram* in spite of receiving repeated blows. (115) Sukumar Mitra (the son of Krishnakumar) also remembers volunteers with scars and bandages acquired at the Barisal Conference, reaffirming their determination while singing the song of Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod “to let life end, if need be, working for the Mother amid the strains of *Bande Mataram*” (*Ma go jaye jena jiban chale Shudhu jagat-majhe tomar kaje Bande Mataram Bole Amar jaye jena jiban chale*)—(116, 117) The conference went on while Banerjee was taken to the District Magistrate and fined. The conference met again on the 15<sup>th</sup> when it was dispersed by the police, the delegates having declined to guarantee that they would not shout *Bande Mataram* in the streets after the conference was over. (118)

The Barisal affair, besides making Banerjee a national hero overnight, and at a time when the agitation was flagging, gave a handle to the Extremists. Surendranath’s martyrdom was exploited by the Extremists and the militant nationalists to further their own cause and to mount the agitation which had been languishing after the first flush of swadeshi and boycott. Extremist propaganda was resumed in full force. The *Sandhya* wondered whether the time had not arrived to wield *lathis* in return for *lathis*: ‘Revenge is the one unfailing healer of national humiliation’. (119) Shyamsundar Chakrabarti, who was Aurobindo’s assistant in the *Bande Mataram*, cried for vengeance at indignation meetings held in Calcutta: ‘To die for your country should be your motto. I warn you again of the motto and say unto you go and do likewise’. (120) Banerjee was seen soon afterwards by two revolutionaries with plans to kill Fuller, the Lieutenant-Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam. (121) As Hemchandra Kanungo of the Maniktala group wrote, ‘The Barisal episode made it easier for us to preach revolution. Even many respectable Moderates...looked forward to hearing the news of Fuller’s assassination; some of them promised a few thousand rupees to the would be assassin...One paid Barin a thousand rupees as an advance’. (122)

### Famine in Bakarganj

It remains true that the Barisal affair provided a fillip to the activities of the revolutionary terrorists and created the atmosphere for the establishment of secret societies, but as far as Bakarganj was concerned it was not until 1908 that there emerged such secret organizations. The embers of the Barisal fiasco were yet to die when Bakarganj was caught in the grip of a dire famine in the summer of 1906. The forecast of a famine was made by the autumn of 1905. As early as 1<sup>st</sup> October, a local journal, *Bikash* expressed apprehensions about the possibility of scarcity of food 'in the house full of rice' (i.e. Bakarganj). On 6<sup>th</sup> January the *Daily Hitavadi* reported the scarcity in Bakarganj for the first time. (123) By the end of May 1906 the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported that the distress in Bakarganj had assumed the proportions of a famine. (124)

Under such circumstances Aswini Kumar Dutta took it upon himself to provide relief to the distressed people of the district. To conduct the Swadeshi Movement in the district at that point of time he delegated his entire responsibility to his colleague Prof. Satish Chandra Chatterjee to provide leadership to the activities of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. Aswini Kumar wasted no time and immediately sent out an appeal to the people in the various provinces of the country for assistance. His appeal had such an effect that Rs.80,000 was collected as subscriptions for famine relief work in Bakarganj in a very short period of time. The Swadesh Banhab Samiti had already more than 150 branches throughout the district, Aswini Kumar converted them into famine-relief centres as well and eventually there were 161 such centres throughout the district. (125) With the assistance of the volunteers of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Aswini Kumar started famine-relief work on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1906. Each famine-relief centre had under its area of operation 6 to 12 villages. These relief centres distributed Rs.31,162 in cash, 5,766 *maunds* of rice, 3510 pieces of cloth among 4,80,301 affected people of the district. When the famine conditions were over only then after six months of relief operations the famine-relief centres ceased their activities on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1906. (126) The famine-relief operations conducted by the Swadesh Banhab Samiti under the auspices of Aswini

Kumar Dutta were conducted with such devotion and organizational skill that it greatly enhanced the prestige and popularity of both.

Sister Nivedita who visited Bakarganj to see first-hand the relief operations was much impressed by the efforts. She dedicated an article in the journal '*Modern Review*' describing the relief operations in Bakarganj. In that article she observed, "Apart from the Government run relief centres, the voluntary associations which exists in the country for the welfare of the people, none were established so rapidly as the famine-relief centres in Barisal, none are so obedient to their leader, none are run in so effective a manner...In my opinion it is the greatest thing ever done in Bengal. With the assistance of students a school-master in Bakarganj had performed such a remarkable feat—In fact the greatest identity of Aswini Kumar is that of a school-master". (127) The article highlights the image of Aswini Kumar as essentially a school-teacher turned politician who in the latter capacity remained completely focussed to the needs and welfare of his people and acted accordingly.

### The Agitation Continued

It must be mentioned that throughout the period of famine, political work was not suspended. Famine-relief operations and the Swadeshi Movement invigorated each other. During the first half of August in 1906, there were organized several big political meetings in Barisal town. Surendranath Banerjee who arrived in Barisal on 11<sup>th</sup> August to attend the District Conference scheduled for the next day was received at the steamer *ghat* by 5,000 people. The fortnightly report for the first half of August mentioned the agitation to be quite active. (128) The first annual report of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti mentioned the following activities undertaken by the organization during the first year of the movement:- Under the auspices of the samiti, 79 political meetings were held during the year. Of the 56 shops selling foreign liquor in Bakarganj, all but one existed by August 1906. The samiti set up 89 arbitration committees and settled 523 cases through them. It also claimed for its village branches no less than 346 cases of social boycott. (129)

The Samiti adopted the technique of social boycott of those persons who were persistent sellers or buyers of foreign goods. An official report described social boycott to have been “the favourite coercive weapon” of the Swadesh Banhab Samiti; it included boycott by Brahmins for the performance of religious rites, the Brahmins who disobeyed were themselves boycotted; exclusion from *pujas*, prevention of marriages and withdrawal of the services of barbers, washermen, servants, legal practitioners even doctors (in a few cases)--and prostitutes. (130) The rules of the Samiti enjoined volunteers to set up a watchman over every ten to twelve householders to detect violators of the swadeshi vow and organize social boycott of such families. (131)

The agitation started gaining real momentum by the beginning of 1907. During the first two months of the year the District Magistrate reported that the principal manifestations of the agitation consisted of the weekly meeting at the Raja Bahadur’s Haveli in Barisal town and some isolated instances of boycott in the interior. From March onwards the agitation began to assume a more serious character. The volunteers of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti were instrumental in enforcing a severe boycott of British goods from the various marts of the district. The boycott was so successful that the District Magistrate had to confess that, “as a result of their (volunteers) boycotting and high-handed interference with trade there was a danger of the total disappearance of British goods from the marts of the district”. (132) From April ensued, what the District Magistrate described as the “long fight for Jhalakati”, between the volunteers and the local administration. Almost hundred volunteers “occupied” that very important mart at the end of April. Jhalakati it must be mentioned here was the principal trading mart in Bakarganj. Similar attempts were made by the volunteers at the Amua, Kaukhali and Baufal marts about this time. (133)

From the beginning of the agitation onwards the weekly speeches at the Raja Bahadur’s Haveli at Barisal had been a prominent feature of the movement. As the platform could be used to directly appeal to the vast multitude of uneducated people, the Samiti used it extensively during the movement. The swadeshi age influenced public oratory in the

district in at least in two ways. The number and size of meetings vastly increased; and there was an obvious change in content in the direction of a militancy undreamt of before. Thus describing the tone of a large number of these speeches, the Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka Division observed them to be, “aggressive, inculcating the more objectionable forms of boycott and hatred of the English and of the existing Government”. (134)

It remains true that in the case of some East Bengal districts the tempo of the movement was kept up by the frequent lecture tours by Calcutta leaders; Surendranath Banerjee and Bepinchandra Pal were the most prominent among them. The former’s tour in Bakarganj during August 1906 has already been referred to earlier; as to Bepinchandra Pal who really created a sensation by his powerful speeches in Bengali, his thunderous style no doubt swayed vast audiences; also visited Barisal during the beginning of 1907. (135) However, as far as Bakarganj was concerned the movement was not dependent on the city orators at all. The Swadesh Bandhab engaged its own local agitators, on a paid basis. Thus the Samiti during the first year of its existence organized 25 big rallies and 50 street lectures in Barisal town; it employed several permanent swadeshi preachers for the countryside, and claimed that 12 meetings on an average had been held during the year in each village having a branch of the Samiti (there being 300 such branches, of which 16 had sent reports. (136)

These meetings no doubt produced what social psychologists would describe as a collective mind. They acted as a cementing force, moving many to meet on a common ground. Large meetings, a feature hitherto unknown in Bengal, worked a sure spell on the audience and generated an electric atmosphere in which men could be easily led away from rules of debates and peaceful swadeshi to the burning of British goods and violent picketing, and, if that too failed, to the even more violent terrorism. The Government sensing such a fall-out in Bakarganj, armed itself with the Regulation of Meetings Ordinance which was applied to the entire district from the month of May 1907. On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1907, the ordinance was replaced by the Seditious Meetings Act, which was immediately applied to Bakarganj—and a Swadesh Bandhab Samiti Report admitted that

these restrictions had dealt a severe blow to the movement: “Those who sometimes doubt about the necessity of these speeches will now understand what an amount of inconvenience has been caused by the stoppage of meetings”. (137)

The boycott seemed to have entered the violent phase by June. During this month the volunteers appeared in the Amua mart and in the course of picketing the bazaar, did a considerable damage to European goods. The offenders were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment by the Additional Sessions Judge. Cases of violent swadeshi came to be reported from several places in the district, and among them the Kalaskati, Baufal and Babuganj incidents were prominent. The former occurred in July and was a case of destruction of salt by the *amla* of Bisheswar Rai Chaudhuri, a wealthy zamindar. In Baufal the incident was one of assault upon the re-inforcement of police temporarily settled there. In Babuganj it was an instance of oppression by the *Naib* and *Mridhas* of the Chakravarti's of Bakarganj on a trader who ventured to sell Manchester cloth. In all the three incidents mentioned, the Government however, was able to secure convictions for the boycotters. (138)

As violent boycott started resulting in landing up the boycotters in prosecutions which often ended up in convictions, the emphasis gradually shifted to the more subtle method of social boycott. Social ostracism was the traditional weapon of the Hindu Samaj against nonconformists and rebels. The case of the Brahmos in their role as social reformers in Bakarganj during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they were severely persecuted has been mentioned earlier. The swadeshi leaders of the district welcomed the technique of social boycott on pragmatic grounds. For while picketers could be easily identified and brought to trial on charges of intimidation, no one surely could be prosecuted for breaking off all social ties with an unpatriotic citizen.

Thus the leaders of the Samiti in Bakarganj realized that the best possible method to enforce the boycott of European goods could be achieved by adopting the method of social boycott. Describing the methods used by the volunteers to enforce the boycott the District Magistrate reported, “Volunteers do not go out into the bazar openly. They

quietly collect information, and watch the movements of dealers in European goods. They go out into the villages, have conversations with the village headman, and advocate the social boycott of anyone discovered using or buying European goods”. Emphasizing the efficacy of such methods and the administration’s inability to stop them, the DM further observed, “This peaceful method of boycotting European goods is very difficult to reach, while the social boycott imposed upon people who have incurred the displeasure of the swadeshi party is beyond our reach altogether. Such methods are more insidious than open picketing and possibly equally effective”. (139)

As the middle of the year witnessed widespread and vigorous boycotting, in the battle for the hats raging in the countryside, the district officials in Bakarganj feeling concerned about the decrease in imports of European goods, started making proposals for a direct intervention in trade. Thus the District Magistrate proposed in early June to set-up Muslim traders from outside of the district, such as the Boras of Bombay, and made them start trade in European goods which would be guaranteed protection from the Government. (Ibid). Again during the end of the month the DM further proposed to set up a foreign liquor shop under official auspices at Pirozpur, and had to be pulled up by a hasty telegram from Simla. (140) It would be pertinent here to mention that as a result of the boycott, imports of British goods in Bakarganj already fell from 42,000 to 26,000 *maunds* by March 1907. (141) It is not for nothing that Barisal became known as ‘Bengal’s Boston’ during the Swadeshi period.

The Regulation of Meetings Ordinance applied to the district in May 1907, muzzled the agitators and they were compelled to find new means to spread the message of swadeshi and boycott. The channels adopted were:- The Press, Pamphlets, Jatra Parties, Swadeshi Songs, Kathakatas and Patriotic Plays.

(a) The Press:- At the time of the Bengal Provincial Conference held in Barisal in 1906, Aswini Kumar Dutta felt the need of a swadeshi organ to propagate the message of swadeshi and boycott among the people of the district. For this purpose Aswini Kumar and Upendra Nath Sen (a zamindar of the district who was completely devoted to the

swadeshi cause) handed over a press belonging to them to Durga Mohan Sen (an ex-student and afterwards a teacher of the Braja Mohan Institution). From this press under the Editorship of Durga Mohan Sen, the local extremist journal *Barisal Hitaishi* was published henceforth. The articles that it published were of such an inflammatory nature that the Commissioner of the Dhaka Division attributed it to be facilitating the unrest in the district to a great extent. (142) The *Barisal Hitaishi's* militancy earned for it the distinction of being the first mufassil journal to be prosecuted for sedition. Proceedings were started against its printer-publisher Asutosh Bagchi and Editor Durga Mohan Sen in September 1907, and eventually the former was sentenced to four month's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.200 and the latter was sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.1,000. (143)

(b) The Distribution of Pamphlets among the masses:- It was realized by Aswini Kumar and the leaders of the anti-Partition agitation in the district that as the Muslims constituted almost 70% population of Bakarganj unless they were won over to the cause of the movement they had little chance in making the agitation a complete success. It is true that the social service activities of Aswini Kumar which was carried out by him for more than twenty years through the students of the B.M.Institution made him extremely popular among the Muslim residents of Bakarganj. (144) The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, in fact, made a most sustained effort to gain the support of the Muslims, who were mainly agriculturists during the anti-Partition agitation in the district. The Muslims were induced to attend meetings and were promised social and other favours if they participated in the movement. The Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka Division reported that paid preachers were engaged by the Samiti to win over the Muslims and that the tours made by Aswini Kumar Dutta during the rains of 1907 were largely devoted to this end. He also mentions the organization of the village samitis for the same purpose. (145) Aswini Kumar Dutta was also instrumental in procuring the services of Leakat Hussein and Abdul Ghafur, the two noted Muslim swadeshi agitators to come to the district and spread an anti-British message to the Muslim community in the district. Thus during the month of June 1907, both Hussain and Ghafur arrived in Bakarganj and started distributing a pamphlet among the Muslim masses. The pamphlet written by Hussain in

Urdu, declared that loyalty to a Christian Government could not form part of the duty of a good Muslim. (146) This particular pamphlet alarmed the district officials to a great extent. The cause of their anxiety was that such anti-British preachings among the Muslim masses could result in unity of ideas and action between the Hindu and Muslim communities, which from the Government's point of view was highly dangerous politically. It must be remembered in this connection, that the possibility of unity of ideas and action between the two communities remained the greatest cause of concern of the British Government in India since the Sepoy Mutiny. Thus the District Magistrate of Bakarganj posed the "two alternatives" facing the Government—"should the Muhammadans stand aloof from the Hindus, there is the constant fear that the pinprick prosecution of the boycott will lead to acts of violence and civil commotion, as had happened elsewhere... On the other hand, should the fanaticism of the Muhammadans be excited by preachings from Liakat Hussain and such itinerant preachers brought here by the agitators, neither I, as district officer, nor the government can contemplate the possible results with equanimity, and there is no knowledge to what extent the infection may eventually spread". (147)

During August 1907, two men Jadu Gopal Dhar and Debendra Nath Goswami distributed copies of pamphlets entitled "*Arya Bhumi*" (land of the Aryas) in the north-west of the district. The nature of the pamphlet according to the District Magistrate was "of an exceedingly rebellious character". (148)

(c) Jatra Party:- These parties consisted of performers who travelled throughout the district giving theatrical performances in the course of which national songs were sung. The plot was mainly based on the necessity of making sacrifices for the cause of swadeshi and the misfortunes of those who were loyal to the British Government. But the person who really made the jatra popular among the people not only in Bakarganj but in various districts in Bengal was Jogneswar De, popularly known as Mukunda Das. An ex-student of the Braja Mohan School and a Saivite minstrel, Mukunda Das during the swadeshi days, quite spontaneously, turned to composing jatras filled with patriotic themes and songs, of which the most famous was the *Matri puja* (1906) (149) The

country is being plundered by foreigners, this jatra declared: “Matangi, the goddess of war, is eagerly preparing herself for war...Mukunda advises people who wish to fare well to give up a service in which they are no better than slaves”. (150) The Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam of 24<sup>th</sup> January 1907 stated—“Babu Aswini Kumar Dutt of Barisal is the patron of a theatrical or jatra party that is now touring the districts of Faridpur and Backergunj. This party enacts pieces written in support of the swadeshi movement and in ridicule of the government, and in their repertoire there is a play which caricatures the resignation of Sir Bamfylde Fuller, and another representing the gradual conversion of an Anglicised Deputy Magistrate to the swadeshi cause”. (151) The Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka Division also noted that the jatra party of Mukunda Das performed a song called “White Rat” (composed by Das) in Bakarganj and in several districts in both the provinces. The nature of the song was found to be so objectionable by the authorities that prohibitory orders under section 144, Criminal Procedure Code, had to be passed by District Magistrates of several districts in both the provinces. (152) The District Magistrate of Bakarganj noted that particularly after the Regulation of Meetings Ordinance of May 1907, the jatra became “an effective substitute for a swadeshi meeting as it reaches all classes and spreads seditious doctrines among them. At the same time it is very difficult to deal with”. (153)

(d) Swadeshi Songs:- The Swadeshi Movement’s greatest claim to immortality lay perhaps in the realm of patriotic poetry and song. That patriotic songs had an unparalleled emotional appeal among all sections of people was realized quite well by the Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh and the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in Bakarganj. As a medium for reaching illiterate villagers patriotic songs were used by Aswini Kumar Dutta from the mid 1880s, and its efficacy among the common folk has already been mentioned earlier. Hence during the anti-Partition agitation in the district efforts were made by the Bandhab Samiti to bring out songs in local dialects, suitable for village audiences. Thus in Barisal Aswini Kumar Dutta persuaded the Muslim folk poet Mofizuddin Bayati to compose swadeshi songs in village dialect, utilizing the traditional form of the *jari-gan*. (154) Mukunda Das in Barisal seems to have specialized in composing patriotic songs in local dialects. His songs became so popular that villagers in obscure hamlets in the district

were thrilled to the assertion of the poet of the people, that “the cause of the motherland would be as eternal as the sun and the moon and the stars above”. (*Mayer nam niye bhasana taree jedin dube jabe Shedin rabi-chandra-dhruba-tara tarao dube jabere Shedin tarao dube jabe*. (155) To arouse the people, Das in fact visited nearly every district in Bengal performing jatras and swadeshi songs; his visit to Noakhali in March 1907, we are told, had a tremendous impact even upon the hitherto apathetic Muslim masses, and it became “a common sight to see the rustic Mahomedans pass the streets of the town with one of Mukunda Babu’s songs upon their lips”. (156) The efficacy of patriotic songs among the masses is also corroborated by official sources. Thus a Police Report from East Bengal dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1907 observed—“A new method of appealing to the people is reported from the Tippera district where a band of young men is going about singing patriotic songs which are said to be far more effective than speeches... (157) The effect of such songs on the common people of Bakarganj must have been very similar.

Realizing the usefulness of patriotic songs the boys of the B.M. Institution also composed songs which were sold to the general public in the form of booklets. The content of the songs according to the DM was “disloyal in almost every case”. (158)

(e) Kathakata (Recitals):- As an effective communication medium for the audience in villages and mufassil towns, the open-air folk entertainments along with the jatra was the ‘kathakata’ and it was fully used by the leaders of the Bandhab Samiti. In Barisal, Aswini Kumar Dutta inspired Hemchandra Kabiratna Kabyabisharad to compose kathakatas of a new type, intermingling recent patriotic ideas with traditional stories taken from the epics or religious texts. (159)

(f) Patriotic Plays:- A large number of patriotic plays had been written during the 1860s and 70s—the most notable of them being Dinabandhu Mitra’s *Nil-darpan* (1860), Manomohan Basu’s *Harishchandra* (1875), Jyotirindranath Tagore’s ‘historical’ plays, and the violently anti-British *Sarat-sarajini* (1874) and *Surendra-binodini* (1875) of

Upendranath Das which served as the immediate provocation for the passage of Lytton's Dramatic Performances Act in 1876. But then for about 20 years the political interest was swamped almost entirely by the religious, and the earlier plays of Girischandra Ghosh—the dominant influence from about 1880 onwards—concentrate on preaching orthodox values through Puranic themes or sentimental domestic dramas. (160)

The swadeshi movement brought about a sudden swing in fashion back to patriotic-cum-historical plays. A spate of 'historical' plays appeared between 1905 and 1908. Some of the important among these plays were Girischandra Ghosh's *Sirajuddoulah* (1905), *Mir Kasim* (1906) and *Chatrapati Shivaji* (1907); Dwijendralal Roy's *Pratapsingha* (1905), *Durgadas* (1906) and *Mebar-Patan* (1908); and Khirodeprasad Vidyavinode's *Pratapaditya* (1906), *Padmini* (1906), *Palasir prayaschitta* (1907), and *Nandakumar* (1908). The members of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in Bakarganj performed some of these patriotic plays like *Pratapaditya*, *Sirajuddoulah* and *Prithviraj*, to show that their countrymen had fought for the motherland before the British took possession of their country. These plays were performed in several places throughout the district to appeal to the common people and enlist their support in the movement. (161)

The agitation in Bakarganj after the ban on meetings in May 1907, was quite ably propagated through the medium of the press, distribution of pamphlets, jatra parties, patriotic songs, kathakatas and patriotic plays during the rest of the movement.

#### Social Boycott of Merchants and Police:-

The method of social boycott adopted by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti since the beginning of the anti-Partition agitation in the district against the buyers and sellers of British goods, after a period of violent boycott during April to June 1907, was again vigorously applied against the offenders to the swadeshi cause by the Samiti.

The social persecution that the violators to the swadeshi cause were subjected to by the Samiti volunteers is amply illustrated when one considers the case of the boycotted Saha

merchants of the district. The most famous example of social boycott in Bakarganj was the “crucial one” of the Saha merchants, who controlled “a considerable portion of the cloth-supply of the district”. (162) Brindaban, Radhakanta, Durgacharan and Madanmohan Saha had joined a swadeshi-sponsored Mahajan Samiti after the Barisal Conference, promising not to sell Manchester cloth any more; they however, broke the pledge at the end of the year. Madhusudhan (the son of Brindaban Saha) later related to the District Magistrate of Bakarganj the persecution undergone by them for more than two years. Their festivals were boycotted—only 31 turning up for instance out of the expected 5000 at a puja in the Sahas’ home village of Samsuddi in February 1907: “Then I came back to Barisal and found that my Kaviraj, doctor, washermen and barber had all been induced to boycott me. I could not leave my house as I was always jeered at in the streets...The volunteers used invariably to make a sound as if they were spitting whenever they passed my shop. All through the district zamindars would not allow my boats to be moored at their ghats”. The employees of the Sahas were abused and assaulted, nitric acid was poured on bales of English cloth indented by them, and they occasionally received threatening letters. (163)

From the Government’s point of view, the social boycott was particularly dangerous since it badly affected the morale of the policemen posted in the district. The Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka Division noted that the favourite weapon of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was to intimidate and harass the police officers. As social boycott was implemented against them, they complained bitterly of the sufferings which they had to endure while performing their duty. Police officers were insulted and assaulted in the streets. They were harassed by threatening letters and by anonymous notices. Civil suits were brought against them and they complained that they were even made the accused in false cases of rape. In one incident the house of a Sub-Inspector was set on fire, at the instance of the agitators. The Commissioner emphasised that this incident, coupled with letters threatening incendiarism and murder in other cases, created great alarm in the minds of the police officers of the district. (164) The District Magistrate of Bakarganj corroborated the views of the Divisional Commissioner, and in this regard pointing out the role of the volunteers observed, “every conceivable device has been employed and

nothing has been too dirty for them". (165) He noted that threats of personal violence and even death were used against Mano Mohan Chakravarti, the Deputy Superintendent of Police and against the Sub-Inspectors of Baufal and Sarupkati. Attempts were made to prevent the marriage of the daughter of the Bhola Sub-Inspector, and rumours were spread that the girl was suffering from a contagious disease. Insults were heaped during the *sradh* ceremony of the wife of the DSP of Police. False rape cases and other false cases were instituted against the Jhalakati and Wazirpur additional police. The *thana* and additional police at Baufal were also harassed with civil suits. Describing the impact of the social boycott on the police officers, the District Magistrate observed, "the power of the social boycott is shown by the fact that even the Sadar Inspector of Police was obliged to return British cloth bought for his daughter's wedding". (166)

Official sources confirmed that the social boycott used against the district police officers genuinely demoralized them. Thus the Fortnightly Report of August 1907 observed, "It is stated that in consequence of the persistent annoyance to which they are exposed, the police deputed from Bengal to this district (Bakarganj) are dissatisfied, and at one time actually talked about resigning. An assurance has been given to the Government of Bengal that they will not be detained beyond the six months for which they were lent, and the DM is taking the necessary measures to secure the men's being able to procure supplies". (167) The extract from the above Report reveals that the social boycott employed against the district police officers demoralized them to such an extent that they considered resignation from Government service; and also point out that due to the anti-Partition agitation and the methods used during the movement, actually made Bakarganj a punishment posting for the police officers in Eastern Bengal and Assam, so much so that that they could not be posted in the district beyond a period of only six months.

Effective as its use often was, reliance on boycott meant that the movement was coming to depend to an unhealthy extent on the forces of religious and caste orthodoxy, which were naturally stronger in the countryside than in the towns. Thus it was not surprising that social boycott was largely a failure in more sophisticated and urbanized West-Bengal. (As Aurobindo Ghosh admitted in his article *Doctrine of Passive Resistance*, first

published as a series of articles in the *Bande Mataram*, 9-23 April 1907). The *Daily Hitavadi* of 23 February 1908 candidly admitted that while it was “easy to convert illiterate and half-educated villagers to swadeshism, subjecting them to social control and threatening them with social boycott”, things were tougher in the towns due to the decline of the traditional samaj. (168) Similar was the case in Barisal town as well. The power of this particular form of boycott does not seem to be omnipotent as far as the towns in Bakarganj were concerned. Thus the Bandhab Samiti regretfully acknowledged that “social boycott was not so firmly made use of in towns as in the villages. It is for this reason that Brindaban Saha’s shop is yet standing ...the town people should therefore be ashamed before the village people”. (169)

In the case of the villages of the district however, the method of social boycott proved to be quite effective (the district had only 5 towns, but 5,009 villages. (170) Thus the Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Sammilani presented before the District Conference of August 1908, reported that the number of persons using foreign articles were very small among the Hindu residents of the district (the method of social boycott, it must be mentioned here was used against only the Hindu residents of the district) and consequently there was not much necessity of social boycott; during the second year of the movement only some seventy to eighty persons had to be socially boycotted. (171)

#### The Chief Agents:-

The anti-Partition agitation was carried out with vigour in Bakarganj especially due to the role played by the following chief agents as identified by the District Magistrate :- (a) Zamindars and their *amla*. (b) Volunteers. (c) Samitis. (d) School masters. (e) Pleaders.

#### Zamindars and their amla :-

It was quite conventional in the swadeshi period to assume that the zamindars were the natural leaders of the community and particularly of village society. That this reflected

social reality is indicated by official as well as nationalist sources. (172) Both these sources point out the importance of the role of the zamindar and his agents in enforcing the boycott. They testify that boycott and political agitation had been most intense in those places where the former was involved and to have been lukewarm in the areas where they had remained apathetic. As far as Bakarganj was concerned though the movement derived its principal power from the numerous small landholders as well as the intermediate-tenure holders (which was amply reflected in the strength of the volunteers), official sources confirm that the role played by the zamindars and their agents in enforcing the boycott was crucial.

In the early days of the boycott agitation Aswini Kumar Dutta wrote to the local zamindars, asking them to stop the sale of foreign goods, in the *hats* within their estates. (173) The District Magistrate noted that the zamindars and their agents played a vital role in forwarding the cause of the agitation. This was especially due to the power and influence they had over their tenants. Among the principal zamindars who participated in the movement were Upendra Nath Sen of Basanda, the Dasses of Bansbunia, the *amla* of the Hindu zamindars of the estate at Baufal, Baikunta Nath Biswas of Jalabari, Braja Kanta Ray and Bisweswar Rai Chaudhuri and their *amla*, of Kalaskati; the zamindars of Bhowal, Amrajuri, Kowkhali, Golachipa and Goila. (174) The majority of the incidents of violent boycott during 1907 was due to the influence of the zamindars and their agents. The exertion of zamindari influence also came to imply in practice a considerable degree of intimidation and coercion of the lower orders of the village society. Thus several incidents of burning of foreign cloth and destruction of Liverpool salt in possession of people intent on selling them at the local *hats*, by the agents of the zamindars were noted by the District Magistrate of Bakarganj. (175) The *Naib* used their powers to exclude British goods from his master's *hats* and at the same time kept a watchful eye in the neighbouring *hats*. The *Naib* thus compelled the tenants to buy Indian goods and ensured that their *hats* were stocked with swadeshi goods only. In some cases where the total exclusion of European goods was not possible the *Naib* was instrumental in putting the price of European goods at a higher figure than that of the Indian goods. (176)

### Volunteers:-

Volunteers were enrolled to conduct the anti-Partition agitation in Bakarganj by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti and came to be known as the “National Volunteers”. The Divisional Commissioner of the Dhaka Division noted that incidents of boycotting and picketing were largely the work of the volunteers. The siege of the most important trading centre of the district, Jhalakati was also organized by them. (177) The DM stated that the volunteers consisted chiefly of students, ex-students and young Hindus who had found no employment.

### Samitis:-

The whole volunteer system was in reality closely interwoven with the system of village samitis or committees of which there were reported to be 200 throughout the district at the time of the agitation. Most of these samitis remained affiliated to, and took orders from and send subscriptions and reports to the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in Barisal town. The village samitis controlled the local ‘volunteer company’, and employed them for patrolling *hats* and bazaars, enforcing the social boycott and spreading swadeshi principles in every way. (178)

### School masters:-

School masters of the district came to be identified by the district administration as one of the most active agents in furthering the cause of the agitation. Their anti-British sentiments became so pronounced due to their activities during the agitation that the District Magistrate described them to be “anti-Government to a man” who were instrumental in instilling the principles of swadeshi and swaraj into their pupils. Consequently the students grew up systematically trained to hate and despise the colonial Government. The schools which took a most active part in the agitation came to be identified as the Braja Mohan Institution and the High English Schools at Jhalakati, Bhola and Baisari. (179) So prominent a role was played by the B.M.Institution in the

agitation that R.Nathan regarded it as the centre of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. The institution took a prominent place in every political meeting and in every political demonstration in Barisal, and it was reported that its students were taught to regard agitation and boycott as part of their duty. Other high schools in the district came to follow this example closely. It was reported that the branch of the Samiti at Jhalakati was practically the organization of the local high school which was instrumental in taking possession of the market during April 1907. Nathan noted that the other schools of this class became a “foci of boycott and agitation”, and out of the 15 schools of this class in Bakarganj there were only three schools not known to have participated in the movement. Organized volunteering, picketing, spying, reporting victims for social boycott, collecting funds for these purposes and participating in anti-Partition demonstrations became an ordinary part of high school life in the district. (180) Sashi Kumar Acharji a master at the Jhalakati High School was identified as the most active participant of all the masters of that school. He raised subscriptions for the local National Fund, sold Indian made salt below market price in order to oust Liverpool salt, helped to arrange the boycott of a Kali Puja Mela (because the mela used foreign made goods) and was even instrumental in destroying Manchester cloth. Similarly Ram Charan Charavarti, the Head Master of the Bhola High School, participated in the movement as the captain of the local volunteers. Rajani Kanta Guha Thakurta, the Head Master of the Banaripara High School, came to be identified as an indefatigable swadeshi worker. He assisted Jadu Gopal Dhar in August 1907 in the distribution of the *Arya Bhumi* pamphlet and also served in the capacity of President of the local branch of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. (181)

The Pleaders:- The pleaders and the *mukhtears* of the district were reported to be at the head of the agitation in all the four sub-divisions of Bakarganj, viz. Barisal Sadar, Pirozpur, Sahabazpur and Patuakhali. Their influence was considerable and early in 1907 some of them in Sahabazpur and Patuakhali, made a practice of extorting an extra fee from their clients to be devoted to the local National Fund which was raised by the Bandhab Samiti. It came to be known to the district authorities that any one notoriously anti-swadeshi or any one bringing a case against a prominent agitator stood little chance of finding any one to accept his brief. On the other hand, in cases against the police in

boycott and sedition cases, pleaders and *mukhtears* were found to offer their services against Government gratis. The prominent role which they played in conducting the anti-Partition agitation in Bakarganj made the District Magistrate describe them to be “for the most part thoroughly disloyal”. (182)

#### Promotion of Indigenous goods and National Education:-

During the anti-Partition agitation the adoption of *swadeshi* or Indian made products constituted an important programme of the movement. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti made sincere efforts to promote the manufacture of local made products. The fillip provided by the Samiti in this regard saw a revival in the manufacture of indigenous crafts in Bakarganj. Indigenous products like weaving cloths, preparing thread, linen frocks, socks, handles, nibs, buttons, finger-rings, knives, scissors, etc., old and new industries were started in several places of the district. (183) In fact local crafts flourished from the time of the commencement of the movement, and the Hindu weavers of Gournadi informed the Sub-Deputy Collector “that they had no need of Government help”, saying that as long as they had the support of Babus Aswini Kumar Dutta and Bipin Chandra Pal they needed no assistance. (184)

The efforts of the Samiti in the promotion of local made products apart from the ones mentioned above were noted in the Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Sammilani in August 1908. They are as follows:-

(1) To decrease the sale of *bilati* salt, *Karkach* was sold at a lower price on behalf of the Samiti. In consequence of this attempt, the sale of salt decreased in many ports and the sale of *Karkach* largely increased.

(2) Since many years ordinary *bilati* ornaments made of tin-foils were used for the decoration of the Durga Puja idols. Every material used in the preparation of the tin-foiled ornaments were of foreign manufacture. Through the efforts of the Samiti no one defiled the pure idols of Gods and Goddesses (at the time of the anti-Partition agitation in

the district) by dressing and decorating them with foreign cloths and ornaments. In consequence of this the skill of the potters and *malakars* (makers of artificial garlands and flowers) in decorating the idols gradually improved. During the years 1906-07 the potters prepared such excellent dresses and ornaments with art and colour and decorated the idols that the ordinary tin-foiled ornaments acknowledged defeat before them. It was hoped that these ordinary tin-foiled ornaments would not be used in any of the households.

(3) The attempt which was made on behalf of the Samiti in matter of the use of country-made sugar was so successful that the use of *bilati* sugar almost stopped in the town of Barisal. Then although, on the whole, the import of *bilati* sugar decreased considerably, yet on account of the dishonesty of the dealers, purchasers were on many occasions deceived. Shop-keepers prepared *batashas* (a kind of sweetmeat) with *bilati* sugar mixed up with molasses and tried to sell them as prepared from country sugar. When all attempts to put a stop to dishonesty failed, *batasha* was altogether boycotted, the result was that, though in some places its consumption decreased it was not altogether stopped. It was hoped that the people of this country in order to keep their vows intact, would boycott such doubtful sugar and *batashas*. (185)

The revival in the production of indigenous goods must have created employment opportunities to a substantial number of people. Apart from this the Bandhab Samiti tried to make a positive difference in the lives of the common people as well. The Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Samiti reported 500 cases of successful arbitration. It was also reported that two suits of the value of Rs.90,000 and Rs.65,000 was settled. (186) The village samitis which started the arbitration samitis proved to be immensely beneficial to the Namasudra peasants of the district. Thus the report of the Samiti after the second year of the Swadeshi Movement, cited the example of a predominantly Namasudra inhabited village called Terachar which “was saved from the dreadful jaws of litigation. They have even given up registering their documents. They execute documents by putting the thumb impressions in the presence of five mandals of the village. If anybody denies the execution of the document, he is subjected to social

discipline and punished''. (187)

The Samiti also came to the rescue of the common people in times of natural calamities. After the famine of 1906, there occurred an outbreak of cholera and small-pox during 1907 at some places in Bakarganj. The Samiti on the latter occasion distributed medicines among the poor patients and also sent four doctors for treatment of the patients in the villages. Many lives were saved by their treatment. Of the 257 persons who were treated for cholera, 207 were cured. A specialist was also sent by the Samiti to the villages to treat patients afflicted by small-pox. By his careful treatment 34 out of 37 patients were cured. It was due to the lack of good drinking water in several villages of the district that there occurred outbreaks of diseases like cholera and small-pox. In order to alleviate the problem, Aswini Kumar Dutta decided to make a grant of Rs.300 every year to excavate tanks for the provision of safe drinking water. (188) The Samiti thus carried on the constructive work in the villages of the district and continued to make a positive difference in the lives of the common people.

Aswini Kumar Dutta took initiative in the establishment of an Indian owned financial organization which could provide Indians with the requisite capital to start their own industries. As a result of his efforts, the Co-operative Hindusthan Bank was established in 1908, with an authorized share capital of Rs 2 crores and Aswini Kumar became one of its patrons and Directors. (189) To break the stranglehold of foreign navigation companies which had almost monopolized internal shipping, Aswini Kumar was also instrumental in the establishment of Co-Operative Navigation Limited in 1908. In the latter venture some of the leading zamindars of Bengal joined hands with Aswini Kumar to start the navigation company. The zamindars along with Aswini Kumar were Manindra Nandi, Suryakanta Acharya and Brojendra Kishore Raychaudhuri. (190)

The development of National Education became another programme during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. The proliferation of national schools was quite widespread in the new province of Eastern Bengal. An official report, dated 8<sup>th</sup> June 1908, grouped national schools in Eastern Bengal into two classes. In the first category it placed the bigger

schools, generally situated at the “comparatively important places”. By 1909, Bakarganj had 9 national schools belonging to this category. Schools of the second type were those established at more obscure places in the mufassil away from the towns. (191) Attempts were made to extend these schools to the villages and get hold of the primary education. This movement to nationalize primary education in the villages developed first in Bakarganj. Aswini Kumar Dutta at one time was in communication with the National Council in connection with some 200 primary schools apparently controlled by the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. (192) However, the ban on the Samiti in early 1909 came as a big blow to such schools and eventually their numbers diminished quite rapidly. Yet a detailed account of primary national schools published in the *Dawn* of January-May 1910, listed 15 such schools as still functioning in Bakarganj, with an estimated student strength of 650. (193)

Aswini Kumar Lording it all.

In fact, what had alarmed the authorities was the extent of mass support the Swadesh Bandhab seemed to be acquiring. At one time the agents of the Samiti made the villagers in certain parts of the district believe that they were no longer to pay the *chaukidari* tax. Consequently the levy of the tax was resisted and it required police action to raise them from the villagers. (194) The success with which Aswini Kumar Dutta and the Samiti conducted the boycott and thus undermined the prestige and moral authority of the local officials, and also by the ‘real hold’ he had on the people, including Muslims who were found ‘unlikely....to give evidence’ against him in a law court were sufficient reasons for the Government to consider his deportation. (195) The Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam while urging the deportation of Aswini Kumar in July 1907 stated—“In two years endeavour Babu Aswini Kumar Dutta and his band of agitators have succeeded in instilling a spirit of hostility to government and hatred of the Europeans into the great majority of the Hindus, and they are now making deliberate efforts to excite similar feelings among the ignorant and turbulent Mahomedan peasantry, by appealing to their fanaticism and lawlessness”. (196) In the previous month District Magistrate Hughes-Buller had reported that Aswini Kumar was “associating himself closely with low class

Musulmans in his present tour” of the district. (197) The efforts of the Samiti to win over the Muslims of the district to the cause of the agitation and the distribution of an anti-British pamphlet by Liakat Hussain and Abdul Ghafur in June 1907 among the Muslims in the district had already been mentioned above. The District Magistrate almost panicked that the spread of such messages among the Muslim masses might result in violent action on the part of the illiterate Muslims against the local authorities.

In fact the stature as a political leader which Aswini Kumar attained by his untiring social welfare activities since his arrival in Bakarganj in 1880, ensured that there emerged no political leader or faction which could rival his position as the supreme and undisputed leader of Bakarganj, and this could be said to be so as long as he was alive. Such was Aswini Kumar’s influence among the masses during the Swadeshi Movement that the District Magistrate had to confess that his authority as a political leader was supreme in Bakarganj. (198) It was noted by the District Magistrate that on one occasion near Jhalakati the people had the idea that Aswini Kumar had defeated the “Sircar” in a contest about the realization of agricultural loans, and that as a result of his victory the debtors would not have to pay anything. And when the Deputy Collector went on a tour for the realization of the loans the people asked his right to ask for such repayment (199) Such undisputed was his leadership that the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti remained completely dependent upon him and when in October 1907, he visited Kurseong for a month’s vacation, for the government it was a time of “peace and quietness”, as “in his absence the other leaders were like a ship without a rudder”. (200) The District Magistrate’s views were corroborated by Hemchandra Kanungo. The latter during his visit to the district in 1906, found out that the Samiti remained dependent completely upon Aswini Kumar’s leadership. (201)

Eventually during 1909, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was banned and Aswini Kumar Dutta along with eight other Bengali political leaders were deported under Bengal Regulation III of 1818. However, there were signs that by the end of 1907 itself the anti-Partition agitation was gradually declining.

## The Decline of the Anti-Partition Agitation and the Rise of Militant Nationalism.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1907 the Seditious Meetings Ordinance which was in vogue since May of that year was replaced by the Seditious Meetings Act, for another period of six months, and was applied to Bakarganj. It must be mentioned here that Bakarganj was the only district in the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam that was considered to be brought under the provisions of the Act. The administration felt compelled to do so because it believed that the speeches delivered in the district by the swadeshi agitators were to a large extent responsible for providing a fillip to the boycott and inculcated a feeling of hatred of the English and the existing Government. The impact that the enforcement of the Act had on the agitation was quite considerable and the District Magistrate observed that it was a "great blow" to the agitators. (202)

It is true that the boycott of British goods remained quite effective in Bakarganj almost throughout 1907, yet there were signs that it could not be maintained beyond a certain point of time. Thus by the beginning of July 1907, it was reported by a Deputy Magistrate, that European goods were on sale at the Kowkhali bazaar and that several shopkeepers expressed their intention of indenting for cloth at the Puja. (203)

The position of Jhalakati was decisive in the Swadeshi movement in Bakarganj, since Jhalakati was the largest centre of trade in the district. Moreover, the effect of boycott there exerted a direct influence on Nalchiti and other adjacent marts since the merchants of Nalchiti had said that they would follow the example of anything the Jhalakati people might do. (204) However, by the end of January 1908 the D.M. triumphantly observed, "The long fight for Jhalakati has come to a close. The merchants have found that agitation does not pay them and stopped their subscriptions to the High English School, the masters of which, have been the cause of all their trouble. British goods are also being imported in large quantities and as all the traders in the district take their cue from Jhalakati the effect everywhere will be enormous". (205) The observation of the District Magistrate, regarding the state of boycott at Jhalakati mentioned above was reiterated by the Fortnightly Report for the second half of January 1908, which noted, "Affairs at

Jhalakati appear to have improved. It is said that the embargo on foreign goods has been to a great extent removed, and that the merchants in this large bazaar have now begun to import all classes of goods freely." (206)

During the first half of the month of February 1908 the District Magistrate of Bakarganj reported that the boycott was failing in the district. (207) At the beginning of the same year, the DM had made an incisive analysis of the decline of the boycott of British goods in Bakarganj. He observed that Bombay cloth was more expensive, both to tradesmen and customer, and did not last as long as English cloth and this was perceived by the people after a year or two of wear. English salt was much superior to native or Karkach salt. Foreign sugar was more palatable than native sugar. These were the reasons he believed that there was a strong insistence among the people to purchase foreign goods. He also pointed out that the large profits made by the boycotted Dhaka Sahas, whose Manchester cloth was sold as fast as they could import it, had roused the envy of the other merchants. For these reasons he strongly believed that the sale of European goods would shortly be revived throughout the district. In other words, the DM pointed out that the market forces would eventually have their sway. (208)

It is true that the boycott of British goods achieved a notable success in Bakarganj, but it could not be sustained because the Muslims and low-caste Hindu residents of the district remained opposed to the boycott. The district of Bakarganj was a Muslim majority district, 70% of the district's population being Muslims. (209) Bakarganj was primarily an agricultural district as well, 80% of its population dependent upon land for a living. In occupation the Muhammadan was almost always an agriculturist. Few were engaged in industry and fewer in any profession. There were certain Hindu low-castes in the district who were agriculturists. The most numerous among these were the Namasudras, the latter constituted 14 per cent of the total population of the district and 44 per cent of the Hindu population. Apart from the Namasudra the most numerous agricultural castes were the Kaibartta, Kapali and the Barua. All the three latter castes were low-caste Hindus. (210) There were several reasons which made the Muslims and low-caste Hindu cultivators of the district remain opposed to the boycott.

First of all, the crucial aspect which made the boycott of British goods unacceptable to the peasants of the district was that these goods were cheaper than the Indian made swadeshi goods. Hence it can be said that the boycott of cheaper British goods was self-defeating. The poor Muslims and low-caste Hindu peasants could not accept the swadeshi goods, which were costlier than the foreign made goods. These were the reasons that the agents of the Hindu zamindars had to coerce and intimidate the lower classes of village society to buy swadeshi goods instead of the cheaper foreign made products. It is true that when the boycott of British goods were on a full swing in Bakarganj during 1907, it became difficult for the Muslims and low caste Hindu peasants to procure the cheaper British goods as the agents of the Hindu zamindars ensured that the *hats* owned by their masters were stocked only with swadeshi products. The zamindars' agents also kept a watchful eye on the neighbouring hats that they also did the same and even kept the prices of the British goods artificially higher than the Indian made goods, so that the peasants were compelled to buy the latter. The technique of social boycott of the buyers and sellers of foreign goods also ensured that there remained only a few people who dared to indulge in these practices. The system of social boycott which was applied only on the Hindu residents of the district was so successfully enforced that by the second year of the movement, there remained only a few recalcitrants among the community who dared to deviate from the path of swadeshi. However, the method had its own limitations for the Muslim residents remained outside the purview of the social boycott. And as the District Magistrate pointed out that such a situation could not be sustained for a long period of time as the majority of the residents of the district insisted on buying cheaper foreign made products.

The far more deeper reason which made the agricultural classes of the district to remain opposed to the boycott was the fact that there existed genuine peasant discontent due to the oppressive habits of the landlords, his agents and the tenure-holders, all these three classes of people primarily belonging to the high-caste Bengali Hindus. (211)

However, in order to understand the discontent of the peasants their relationship with

their superior landlords needs to be probed more deeply.

In Bakarganj at the time of the Permanent Settlement the local gentry were already in possession of innumerable taluks. The traditional rural community of Bengal was stratified, in terms of social esteem, into two socially distinct estates of *grihasta* and *chasi* (cultivator). The status group of *griastas* consisted of Brahmans, Vaidyas, Kayasthas, Qazis, Maulvis, Khondkars etc., who however, humble in their circumstances considered it derogatory to their honour to hold the plough. The *chasis* in all case were agriculturists, though in each village there would be families of rich peasants whose heads might imitate neighbouring agricultural *griastas* by confining their role in agriculture to supervision and direction. The *chasis* proper (excluding Brahmin or Kayastha agriculturists) were either Muslims of agricultural stock or Hindus of semi-clean or unclean caste, such as Kaivarta, Namasudras, Sadgops, Rajbangshis and Pods.

From the time of Mughal rule the bigger zamindars (territorial magnates) could seldom bypass the local gentry in the collection of tribute from the villages. By virtue of their literacy, the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Vaidyas manned indispensable services and professions. They staffed the Nizamat and zamindari establishments as officials, clerks and writers (mainly Kayasthas), and filled the various professions as priests (Brahmans), teachers (Brahmans and Kayasthas) and physicians (Vaidyas). Naturally they claimed a share of the tribute from land and without making terms with them neither the Mughal state nor the territorial magnates could collect it. They obtained their share in the tribute of the land in three forms: (a) taluqs which contained the property features of the zamindari but were smaller in size and which paid the revenue to the state through a big zamindar; (b) farms (*ijaras*) and sub-farms (*dar-ijaras*) of revenue given by the zamindars to their own dependents and officials and influential local people; and (c) small rent-free holdings (*devottar*, *brahmottar* etc.) and large jotes with under-rated assessments which were granted by the state or the territorial magnates. (212)

The Permanent Settlement (of 1793) did affect the local gentry in a significant way. Though by this measure the zamindars were declared the proprietors of land, what the

government could actually confer on them by statute was the perpetual rights in revenue management. The government could only give away to the zamindars what it possessed: the right to collect revenue. It could not seize and give away what it did not possess: the land occupied by the village landlords who were given the status of tenants. The Permanent Settlement actually brought about a large circulation of titles (the right in perpetuity in revenue management subject to the payment of government dues), but not of lands. In the districts of Dhaka, Faridpur and Bakarganj, where the local gentry were already in possession of innumerable taluqs, an exceptionally large number of existing properties (rights to collect revenue) were confirmed by law at the Permanent Settlement, and a great number of mahals sold for arrears of revenue seemed to circulate within the small taluqdar class. But, on the whole, this class gained at the expense of their social heads—the bigger local rajas who had formerly been ruling over them from forts (dismantled by the British after 1760). Not only did the smaller taluqdars gain freedom from the rapacious supervision exercised over them by zamindars appointed or confirmed by the Mughal government but they also succeeded in buying up many of the mahals of the Rajas offered for sale, since often they were officials of the bigger zamindars and advantageously placed to exploit their position in zamindari administration. In Bakarganj most of the local gentry who acquired the proprietary rights confirmed by the Permanent Settlement were high-caste gentry (there were also a number of immigrant Muslims families of high birth who were confirmed of such rights by the Permanent Settlement) who had never taken part in agriculture, and were therefore, easily disposed to create sub-tenures. And since there was plenty of reclaimable forest southwards they gave out permanent leases for reclamation to the prosperous Muslim and Namasudra cultivators who constituted the principal land holding class in the villages under their taluqs. (213) In this way a very complicated chain of subinfeudated tenures arose in Bakarganj which virtually shut off the gentry, already precluded by caste from agriculture, from the newly available land. (214)

It was the prosperous Muslim and Namasudra cultivators (known as *haoladars* in Bakarganj), who were hardy and enterprising agriculturists possessing men and money, who brought the Sunderbans and the *chars* of Dakshin Shahbazpur under cultivation.

These cultivators were assisted in the task of forest clearance by their relatives, friends and neighbours and in many among the Muslim cultivators Islamic revivalist movements were strong. These cultivators were organized into the Faraizi sect led by Dudu Mian who caused great alarm among Hindu zamindars by organizing peasant resistance to the exactions of the high-caste Hindu gentry. The task of forest clearance was arduous and dangerous and demanded unity and discipline among the bands of Muslim cultivators, so the sectarian organization of the Faraizi movement fulfilled a genuine local need. The attempt of the Hindu zamindars and taluqdars, recognized by the Permanent Settlement as 'landlords' of lands where there had never been any cultivation, to enhance rates on new lands as soon as they were brought fully under cultivation, naturally created severe resentment among the prosperous and enterprising leaders of the Muslim bands along the rivers who regarded the land as theirs by right. The ideology of the Faraizi movement was tailor-made to the needs of Muslim agricultural entrepreneurs who were determined to retain the fruits of their labour, by violent action if necessary. (215) The ready resort to violence in order to protect or promote their land rights was especially evident among the Muslim agriculturists of the Faraizi sect, who were noticeably 'more vigorous and less tractable than ordinary Mahomedans'. (216)

The attempts of the landlords (217) to repeated enhancement of rent created severe resentment among the primary landholding classes in Bakarganj who were known as *haoladars* and also the under-tenants in possession of secure tenancy rights in land in the form of *osat haolas*, *nim haolas* and *osat nim haolas*. The prosperous Muslim and Namasudra agriculturists known as *haoladars* who initiated the reclamation of forests clubbed together neighbours, friends, relatives to clear the forest, but as the cultivation advanced, he was obliged, since he could not cultivate more than a certain amount of land, to let out portions in *nim hoalas* to his partners or his dependents employed in the enterprise. (218) In such a way secure tenurial rights were secured by other Muslim and Namasudra cultivators. The resentment of the tenants of the district was further aggravated by certain practices of the superior landlords, his agents and tenure holders all of whom were high-caste Hindus.

Firstly, the prevalence of the illegal cesses known as “*abwab*” and the refusal of granting rent receipts was a major reason for discontent. At the time of the Permanent Settlement all *abwabs* were consolidated with the rent and the imposition of fresh *abwab* was forbidden. But it was a prohibition which the Bakarganj landlord consistently and flagrantly disobeyed. *Abwabs* were realized by a system of overt and covert intimidation by the landlords. (219) In the larger estates of the district, landlords retained *latials* or clubmen, who were instrumental in extracting the illegal levies from the peasants. The more general method by which the payment of these charges was enforced was by the threat of a suit for arrears of rent, the success of which was maintained by the universal refusal to grant rent receipts. In no private estate in Bakarganj were receipts granted for a part payment on account of rent and in few for a full payment. It was thus the case that the tenant was left with no defence against a suit for arrears even when the rent had been paid. When a payment was tendered, the landlord credited the sum first against the *abwab* and the balance only against rent. The tenant had accordingly no option but to pay the exaction, unless he was prepared to withstand a suit for arrears without any documentary support for his plea of payment. (220)

Secondly, in Bakarganj the peasants were in need of arbitration on trivial matters which the existing courts were quite unable to fulfill as they were distant and expensive. The peasants in such cases turned to their landlord’s agents or to the tenure holders to arbitrate on such matters. This system provided a great opportunity to the landlord’s agents and tenure holders to benefit their own pockets. It was almost universal in Bakarganj that the agents received wages which were nominal and hence grabbed every opportunity to supplement them. In many of the larger estates fines were imposed for offences after trial by the landlord or his agent. Where the tenants went voluntarily to their landlord for the decision of petty quarrels and complaints, there could be no objection to the system which undoubtedly relieved the criminal courts of much vexatious litigation. But when the landlord’s agents tried the cases, the latter obtained for himself a part or almost the whole of the fines which were imposed, then it becomes clear that the practice was open to grave abuse. In the better managed estates there was little of which tenants complained in this respect, but where the landlord was under the control of

his own agents, the oppression to which the system gave rise to was terrible. Malicious complaints were encouraged, interference in village quarrels and social matters was extensive, fines for the most trivial offences were enormous and often extended to a year's income of the tenant. (221)

Thirdly, in addition to the *abwabs* another measure called *beggar* or forced labour was obtained by the Hindu landlords of the district. The 'services' usually required were to clear jungles in the landlord's grounds, to plough his arable, to supply fish and fuel to him and his agents, to keep up his fruit gardens, to erect all temporary buildings, to dig tanks and drains and to carry bricks for permanent buildings and offices. It was reported by the Settlement authorities that *beggar* was very unpopular with the tenants and provoked complaint even from those who paid the severest *abwab* without protesting. (222)

The *haoladars* of Bakarganj like their counterparts in other districts of Bengal were men of influence in their villages—influence which they had acquired by lending money, seed and grain. (223) In general, the hold of the cultivating *haoladars* over their under-tenants and share-croppers was absolute. The opportunities of leadership at the village level were thus considerable for the *haoladars*. The attempts at repeated rent enhancements by the superior landlords (high-caste Hindus) in those areas of the district where the lands had been reclaimed from forests and brought under cultivation (from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century) by the enterprise and ardour of the Muslim and Namasudra agriculturists and many among the former were organized into the Faraizi sect naturally created severe resentment among the them. The refusal to grant rent receipts which exposed them to a suit for arrears and the high rate of *abwabs*, the practice of *beggar* or forced labour (this was a custom the burden of which must have felt squarely on the Muslim and Namasudra under-tenants and share-croppers) and other practices described above compelled the *haoladars* of Bakarganj to form numerous peasant combinations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century to resist the exactions of the superior high-caste Hindu landlords. The latter it must be mentioned also employed *lathiyals* to enforce the exactions and this spurred the Faraizi peasants to resist such attempts by resorting to violence.

It was this ready resort to violence that gave Bakarganj a bad reputation throughout Bengal for turbulence. The lawlessness of the district had shown itself chiefly in murders and fierce agrarian riots. Gun-shot murders were so common in the district that it had to be disarmed in 1896. During 1908-12 there was an average of 39 murders and 88 riots each year compared with 40 murders and 147 riots during 1896-1900. (224) The murders and agrarian riots were actually instigated by the land hunger of the landlords or provoked by his intolerable oppression. Many of the murders were the result of agrarian riots and many more the result of lynch law. The prevalence of *abwab* and the refusal of rent receipts made it clear that the cultivators were unable to assert his rights. Severely oppressed by his landlords and his agents, the Bakarganj cultivator often resorted to lynch law by murdering *naibs* and *mriddhas* (village headmen who acted as *latials*). As the cultivators realized that the murders went unpunished and no serious attempt was made to cope with rioting, they freely engaged themselves in committing such crimes. (225) Numerous peasant combinations were formed to resist the enhancement of rents by landlords. The enhancements were in all cases illegal, but the riots which were a result of the combinations were really due to the employment of *latials* to suppress them. It remains significant that in every single case these combinations were suppressed and the enhancement, although illegal, obtained. (226)

The oppression of the superior landlords over the ryots is also corroborated by Tapan Raychaudhuri. The latter's ancestral home was at Kirtipasha, a village situated at a distance of sixteen miles from Barisal. The Raychaudhuri's were the landlords of Kirtipasha. Raychaudhuri recounts that at the estate office in his native village there were some *andhariya kothas* (dark rooms), which were principally used to punish and torture local peasants. The reason for this must have been the latter's reluctance to pay the *abwabs* or the illegal rent enhancements. Raychaudhuri further tells us that there was a 'purpose-built' shoe, about a cubit and a quarter long, which was used to beat the ryots. The peasants were imprisoned in the *andhariya kothas* and tortured to such an extent that some even died due to severe injuries. Raychuadhuri candidly informs us that the memory of the long shoe endures in the folk songs of the region. Evidently, the superior

landlords of Bakarganj were feared and even hated by the local peasants. (227)

The cultivators of Bakarganj, who principally belonged to either the Muhammdan community or the Hindu low-castes were oppressed by the landlords, his agents and tenure holders, all of whom were high-caste Hindus, in a variety of ways. The repeated rent enhancements, the failure to resist payment of the ubiquitous *abwabs*, the refusal to pay rent receipts by the landlords, the frequent use of the *latials* by the former, the unscrupulous ways of the landlord's agents in imposing heavy fines upon the cultivators while arbitrating trivial disputes, and the *beggar* or forced labour obtained from the peasants by the Hindu landlords, all these methods of forceful extraction from the cultivators were the causes of severe discontent among the peasantry of the district.

The case of a particular *thana* Gaurnadi, where the peasants were compelled to pay produce rents to their *bhadralok* landlords which proved to be an enormous burden upon them must be mentioned as well. Produce rents in Gaurnadi was charged by the *bhadralok* from the peasants from the 1870s in place of money rents which were in vogue in other parts of the district. These rents especially under the *barga* and the *dhankarari* tenancies were much higher in value than the money rents and therefore proved to be extremely baneful for the cultivators. Produce rents were responsible to a large extent in reducing Gaurnadi to one of the poorest thanas in Bakarganj.

When such were the attitude of the landlords, their agents and the intermediate tenure-holders towards the peasants, it was natural therefore for the latter to have severe discontent. Reiterating the methods and the flagrant disregard of the law by the landlords of the district J.C.Jack observed, "in no other district do the *latial* and the *abwab* flourish to the same extent, while elsewhere the elementary duty of giving a rent receipt for the payment of rent is recognized". (228)

It must also be mentioned here that Hindu society in Bengal treated the Namasudras (originally known as the *chandals*) with contempt and this low ritual status was severely resented by them. But in the case of the Namasudras their low ritual status coincided with

an unusual amount of spirit and independence which did not make for tame submission. They were a virile, industrious and martial-spirited people who inhabited the healthy swamps of East Bengal (as in Bakarganj) and carried on a flourishing agriculture. In Bengal the intelligentsia's indifference to peasant problems did not result merely from immediate material interests, behind it lay the long *bhadralok* tradition of contempt or at best condescension for the men who worked with their hands, the sense of alienation flowing from education through a foreign medium, as well as by the fact the line of demarcation between *bhadralok* landholder and peasant commoner tended in some districts to merge with that separating high-caste Hindus from low-castes and Muslims (the district of Bakarganj was such an example).

This attitude of the superior landlords, his agents and tenure-holders towards the peasants was also shared to a very large extent by the educated *bhadralok* throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they displayed remarkable apathy towards all peasant upsurges and were severely opposed to them. At the time of major peasant upsurges in Bengal during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, be it the Wahabi movement against zamindars and white indigo planters, the Faraizi movement which was also organized against the zamindars and white indigo planters and also the Santhal rebellion which was aimed against the mahajans, zamindars, white indigo planters and railway officials, the educated *bhadralok* displayed nothing but contempt towards such peasant upsurges. The peasants definitely organized such movements because they were facing severe oppression from the hands of the classes of people mentioned above, but still they received no sympathy from the western-educated intelligentsia in Bengal. As the *bhadralok* had vested interests in land as superior landlords and intermediate-tenure holders, the rights which were conferred upon them by the Permanent Settlement, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and even during the 20<sup>th</sup> century) they defended the Settlement ardently. As they were profoundly loyal to their British rulers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they also supported the Permanent Settlement with all their might during that period. The oppression of the peasants at the hands of the superior high-caste Hindu zamindars which attained such notoriety during this century were also overlooked by the *bhadralok*. Peasant unrests generated insecurity among the *bhadralok* because very often they were ranged against the zamindars and whenever they took a

violent turn it created severe panic among them. They even urged the British Government to take adequate measures to suppress such revolts. In contemporary newspapers edited by the *bhadralok*, the leaders of Wahabi and Faraizi movements, Titumir and Dudu Mian were branded as a “dacoit” and “scoundrel”. Such newspapers mirrored the *bhadralok*’s contempt and indifference towards peasant upsurges. (229, 230)

When the attitude of the landlords, their agents and tenure-holders (all high-caste Hindus) of Bakarganj towards the Muslim and Namasudra peasants of the district consisted of habits of habitual extortion, indifference and even hatred, it was quite natural that the former classes would remain deprived of the latter’s support at times of any movement against the colonial rule in the country. This was exactly what happened in Bakarganj during the anti-Partition agitation. Though the impact of the Swadeshi Movement was the deepest on Bakarganj, the leaders of the district were still not able to mobilize the peasantry on the issue of boycott. However, it must be mentioned here that the success of the boycott movement (which lasted at least till the end of 1907) was due to the fact that a substantial section of the lower-class people (barbers, cooks, sweet meat vendors, washermen, boatmen etc.) as well as merchants and traders were mobilized by Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. As these classes of people were not dependent on agriculture for their livelihood, they were not subject to the exploitative practices of the *bhadralok* superior landlords, their agents and intermediate tenure-holders and consequently could be mobilized in the movement. It is also true that in this mobilization the constructive humanitarian work of the students of the B.M. Institution and the ideology of drain under colonial rule as propagated by Aswini Kumar Dutta played an important role.

The Bandhab Samiti was primarily an organisation composed of the high-caste Bengali Hindus, hence the leaders of the Samiti realized the need to have the active co-operation of the Muslim and low-caste Hindu peasantry (the Muslim and Namasudra peasantry constituted almost 82 per cent of the district’s population) if the anti-Partition agitation were to achieve complete success in the district. The sincere efforts of the Samiti to enlist the support of the Muslim and Namasudra peasants of Bakarganj has already been mentioned earlier. But in spite of all the efforts made by the leaders of the Swadesh

Bandhab Samiti to enlist the support of the Muslim and Namasudra peasants of the district, ended in failure.

The reasons for this failure remained the inability of the leaders of the movement in Bakarganj as well as in the entire province of Bengal, to develop a radical agrarian programme for the benefit of the peasants. The *bhadralok* in Bakarganj who formed the backbone of the nationalist movement were very often holders of intermediate tenures in land, and thus had a stake of their own in the security of their rentals. The price-rice and the threat to outside employment opportunities must have heightened the consciousness of the *bhadralok* tenure-holder of the value of his rent income from land. This was the reason why they failed to develop a radical agrarian programme, and their inability to integrate the nationalist cause with the economic demands and aspirations of the peasant masses. (231) The peasants of the district no doubt came to deeply respect and love Aswini Kumar Dutta, and they must have attended swadeshi meetings as well. But there is no evidence at all of any more direct participation, of peasants as Samiti activists. The limits of the *bhadralok* community had not been transcended even in Bakarganj. The village samitis, were not peasant associations, they consisted of the *bhadralok* of the village. (232) It is true that due to his philanthropic activities Aswini Kumar Dutta was loved by Muslim villagers, however, his influence over the high-caste zamindars of the district also could not convince them to restrain from those practices which had created severe resentment among the Muslim and low-caste Hindu cultivators, a fact which becomes evident when one considers that even during the years after the Swadeshi Movement i.e., 1908-1912, there was an average of 39 murders and 88 riots each year (the cause of these agrarian riots and many of these murders were the attempts to resist the repeated enhancements of rents by the Hindu zamindars). Thus as far as Bakarganj was concerned the failure to evolve a radical agrarian programme and the oppressive ways of the landlords, his agents and tenure holders, all of whom belonged to the high-caste Hindu community, resulted in alienating the peasant masses of the district from the anti-Partition agitation.

The agrarian discontent in Bakarganj was also responsible in worsening Hindu-Muslims

relations during the anti-Partition agitation as it had done in districts like Mymensingh and Tippera; in the latter districts there were outbreaks of communal clashes during 1906-07 as well. Senior British administrators put the blame largely on the swadeshi movement; Hindu zamindars in their eagerness to enforce the boycott had coerced the Muslim tenants and shopkeepers, and this, it was argued, had led to the violent reaction. Thus Hughes-Buller, the DM of Bakarganj, pointed out to the vigour of the boycott enforced by the district's zamindars and their agents as the principal cause which led to the worsening of relations between the Hindus and Muslims of the district. (233) However, the reports of junior administrators, Muslim newspaper accounts, and, most convincing of all, nationalist Hindu sources—all testify to the fundamentally agrarian character of the Mymensingh riots. (234) The same sources also point out that mulla propaganda and the distribution of communal leaflets was largely responsible in fomenting the riots in Mymensingh. In the case of Bakarganj though there was no evidence of mulla propaganda, the notorious *Lal Ishtahar* of Ibrahim Khan was circulated several times during 1907 among the peasants. (235) The anti-zamindar tone of the leaflet combined vitriolic abuse of the Hindus with a direct appeal to the Muslim peasants: “....in one day we can send all Hindus to hell. In Bengal, consider, you form the majority; you are the peasant, from agriculture comes all wealth. Where did the Hindu get his wealth from? He had nothing, he had stolen it from you and become wealthy...Through the swajati movement we shall develop ourselves”. (236) The pamphlet also contained a poem recalling the glories of Arab conquests, and another calling on Muslims to shun the Hindus and no longer surrender their wealth to them. (237) Such anti-zamindar and anti-mahajan preaching must have resulted in the ‘awakening’ of the Muslim peasants in Bakarganj which had been achieved in districts like Tippera and Mymensingh through mulla propaganda. This resulted in worsening Hindu-Muslims relations in Bakarganj and for sometime during the summer of 1907, the DM reported that there was every possibility of outbreak of communal clashes. The feeling of apprehension among the Hindus made them organize the ‘National Volunteers’ into a force of defence, armed with lathis and swordsticks; the latter even patrolled the streets of Barisal and other places. The situation became so tense that the spread of a rumour of a possible Muslim attack upon the Hindus of Barisal on the night of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1907, led hundreds of Hindus of the

town to form a defensive force armed with lathis; the volunteers also patrolled the streets on that particular night. But nothing actually happened as there took place no Muslim attack. (238)

The worsening of Hindu-Muslim relations had a direct impact upon the anti-Partition agitation in the district. The heightened consciousness of oppression and wrong among the Muslims and Namasudra peasants (as cultivators it must be remembered that the Namasudras were subjected to the same unjust treatment as the Muslims by the Hindu upper-caste landlords, tenure-holders and landlord's agents) resulted in the alienation of both communities from the Swadeshi Movement to such an extent that in March 1908 a Namasudra Conference held in the district demanded "freedom of trade", and by the summer of that year, Muslims and Namasudras of Barisal were reported to be buying foreign cloth and salt even where these were more expensive than their swadeshi counterparts. (239) Thus it can be seen that in a swadeshi stronghold like Bakarganj also, the support of the peasant masses who constituted the majority of the district's population could not be enlisted to the nationalist cause. It was no wonder therefore, that the District Magistrate reported with satisfaction that the Muslim residents (most of them being agriculturists) remained loyal and the lower class Hindus were indifferent and regarded the anti-Partition agitation merely as "something that the Babus are doing". (240) Hence as far as the boycott of British products were concerned, although it achieved notable success in Bakarganj it could not be sustained beyond 1907.

At another level, the creation of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam created a new consciousness among the educated Muslims and stimulated a new hope in them because as a majority community they hoped to benefit most from the British administration. At the same time most of the Muslim leaders remained loyal to the Raj owing to the favourable reception by Minto of their separatist deputation in October 1906. Consequently the Muslim League was established three months later at Dhaka as a pro-Government political organization. Nawab Salimulla of Dhaka who initiated the move for the establishment of the League as a Muslim political organization, needed it especially to popularize the issue of partition among the Bengali Muslims. The majority

of the educated Muslims lent their support to the League because they shared the belief of Salimulla that the Government of the new province would provide them with a much larger proportion of educational and employment opportunities than they had in the old province. The expectations of the educated Muslims were met by the Government of the new province as the latter laid down the policy of providing greater employment opportunities for the Muslims in Government service and raised the number of scholarships and hostels for the Muslim students. (241) Thus the prospect of better employment and educational opportunities as well as the lure of political influence in the new Muslim majority province (the Muslims, it must be remembered, were granted with separate electorates by the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909) made the educated Muslims remain either politically indifferent or hostile to the anti-Partition agitation.

It is true that as far as upper class Muslim participation in the Swadeshi Movement in Bakarganj was concerned, there were instances of such support from some Muslims in the district. Abdur Rasul a barrister by profession who hailed from Comilla, emerged as a front ranking Muslim agitator, and was made the President of the Bengal Provincial Conference of 1906 held at Barisal. In the first wave of the meetings which followed the announcement of the partition decision in July 1905, the Muslim Zamindar of Banoripara in Bakarganj, was again made the President. (242) Chaudhuri Ghulam Ali Moula, a Zamindar of the district signed the rakhi-appeals of 1906 and 1907. (243) Syed Motahar Husain another Zamindar of Bakarganj, presided over the first anniversary celebration of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in August 1906. (244) And in sheer energy and zeal there were few Hindu orators who could match Abdul Gafur, the ex-teacher of Persian of Batajore (the home-village of Aswini Kumar Dutta in Bakarganj). Gafur addressed meetings in several places in both the provinces of Bengal and exhorted the peasants of Bakarganj to rally to the swadeshi cause. (245) Gafur's speeches were so militant that they caused alarm in the official circles. Gafur referred to the British ill-treatment to the Sultan of Turkey and urged his audiences "to learn lathi-play as they would not be allowed to use guns"; he even reportedly spoke of driving "those uneducated foreigners back to the other side of the seas". (246)

However, the attitude of the bulk of the Muslim upper classes to the anti-Partition agitation in Bakarganj or elsewhere in the new province was either one of indifference or hostility, and no one on the swadeshi side could really match in social stature or influence of men like Nawab Salimulla of Dhaka, Nawab Ali Chaudhuri of Mymensingh and Amir Husain of Calcutta.

The failure to win Muslim and low-caste Hindu support who constituted the majority of the population in Bakarganj, objectively necessitated a shift from methods of mass action to elite action. The decline in the boycott movement in Bakarganj was thus accompanied with the emergence of revolutionary terrorism in the district. By the end of March 1908 the district Superintendent of Police, F.E.Kemp reported to the District Magistrate, that the Anushilan Samiti had started enrolling members in the district. He feared that if the number of members increased, the Anushilan Samiti was likely to open a branch in the district. (247)

As mentioned earlier, the Bakarganj District Conference was held at Barisal in August 1908. From its proceedings P.C.Lyon, who was the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, reached the conclusion that the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was undoubtedly collaborating with the revolutionary societies and was an agent for the dissemination of sedition, though it outwardly professed admirable objects. The Anushilan Samiti of Barisal was reported to have been referred to in the Conference. (248)

By the month of September 1908, due to the reports sent by the police authorities, the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam began to suspect that the diminution in the agitation and unrest apparent on the surface was accompanied by increased vigour in the secret organisation of samitis and bands of volunteers and in the accumulation, by gang-robbery and other methods, of arms and ammunition and of funds, and that preparations were being vigorously made for more active measures.

That the suspicion of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam was based on facts

was proved when on the 15th of September 1908, a theft of arms was reported from Barisal, the weapons stolen being 5 rifles and guns belonging to a certain Mr. Meyer. Though the local police authorities remained in the dark as to whether this was an ordinary crime or an act of revolutionary terrorism, the truth remains that this was the first act of revolutionary terrorism committed by members of a local terrorist society which came to be known as the 'Barisal Party'. (249)

On the 30th November 1908, J.C.Bhaumick, Inspector, Criminal Investigation Department, Barisal, reported to the District Magistrate, Bakarganj, that two secret Gita Societies in Barisal one at the house of pleader Baikuntha Nath Guha and another at the Braja Mohan Student's Mess, where the Head-master Jagadish Chandra Mukherjee lived, had been established. It was further reported by the Inspector, that a branch of the Anushilan Samiti had been established at Kashipur village in the district, where even a house was erected by the Anushilan Samiti members. (250)

The fortnightly report for the second half of December 1908, confirmed that the enquiries made into the two so-called "Gita" samitis previously reported showed that they were an inner organisation of the Anushilan Samiti. It was further reported that notices threatening Europeans with death were found posted near the B.M.College on the 17th December. (251)

The Commissioner of the Dhaka Division reported to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam during the month of December 1908, that the Branch of the Anushilan Samiti established in Barisal had a close relationship with the Bandhab Samiti and observed, "It looks as though Pulinism (252) was taking root at Barisal with the decline of Aswini and the rise of the more violent Satish." (253) It may be mentioned here that Satish Chandra Mukherjee was the leader of the local revolutionary society in Bakarganj known as the Barisal Party.

Apart from the branches of the Dhaka Anushilan Samiti which came to be established in Bakarganj during the year 1908, another revolutionary group was formed in the district,

which was a local group. This latter group came to be known as the 'Barisal Party' and was formed in Bakarganj in the year 1908. At the beginning of its operations the leadership of the Barisal Party was provided by a teacher of the Braja Mohan School called Satish Chandra Mukherjee (later Swami Prajnanananda Saraswaty). Satish babu also occupied the position of Assistant Secretary of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. (254)

Thus the revolutionary movement in Bakarganj originated within the principal organisations of the Swadeshi-cum-Boycott movement in the district. The members of the above mentioned revolutionary groups were greatly influenced by the personality of Aswini Kumar Dutta. (255) But it must be mentioned that Aswini Kumar never supported or facilitated the formation of revolutionary societies in the district. Hem Chandra Kanungo mentions that Aswini Kumar fervently discouraged the formation of revolutionary societies in Bakarganj. Hem Kanungo further gives an interesting account of Barin Ghose's visit to Barisal after the Bengal Provincial Conference which was held there in the year 1906. Barin strongly believed that after the fiasco of the Barisal Conference the students and youth of the district would readily accept their revolutionary ideas and that would facilitate the establishment of a revolutionary society in the district. Barin even had a long discussion with Aswini babu for the fruition of this purpose but could not win over the latter. In this conversation Aswini babu clearly told Barin that he would follow his own political ideology in which armed revolt against the British administration did not have any place. Hem Kanungo further mentions that when Aswini babu came to know that another purpose of Barin Ghose's arrival in the district was to assassinate the local European Officials who had played a part in the Bengal Provincial Conference held in the district, he immediately compelled the latter and his associates to leave the district. (256) Hiralal Dasgupta who was a prominent revolutionary of the 'Barisal Party' also acknowledges that Aswini babu was opposed to political murders and reiterates Hem Kanungo's anecdote that during a private conversation between Barin Ghose and Aswini babu the former failed to convince the latter of the necessity of establishing a revolutionary society in Bakarganj. (257) At a meeting held in Bakarganj on 6th December 1908, in which Aswini Kumar addressed the audience, he strongly deprecated revolutionary acts of violence and the *dakaitis* of the past few months which

were taking place in the district. (258)

Though Aswini Kumar had no direct relationship with the revolutionary societies that came to be established in Bakarganj, the rich legacy of patriotic fervour and social welfare efforts that was created by the students of the Braja Mohan Institution was carried forward by the members of these societies. The activities of the revolutionary societies that were established in the district will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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80. B.D.A.C.R., p-4

81. Arun Chandra Guha, op.cit., pp-91-92.

82. Amal Tripathi, The Extremist Challenge: India Between 1890 and 1910, Orient Longman, 1967, p-144.

83. B.D.G.B., p-94
84. Cited in Sumit Sarkar, The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908, New Delhi, 1973, p-390.
85. Sanjivani, 13 July 1905, RNP for the week ending 22 July 1905.
86. Barisal Hitaishi, 19 July 1905, RNP for the week ending 29 July 1905.
87. Barisal Hitashi, 26 July 1905, RNP for the week ending 5 August 1905.
88. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 28, July, 1905.
89. "First Annual Report of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti" published in the Bengalee, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1906
90. Home Public A, April 1907, No-207-10. 4) Abstract of Reports from East Bengal and Assam, during second half of January and first half of February 1907, Home Public A, April 1907, No-207-10
91. Sarat Kumar Ray, op.cit., p-130
92. R.Nathan's Note on Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Home Political, Deposit, April 1909, No-2
93. Bengalee, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 1906.
- (94. Sanjivani, 3 August 1905, RNP for the week ending 12 August 1905.
95. "Memorandum on the National Volunteer Movement in Bengal and Eastern Bengal"

and Assam”—Home Political Deposit, October 1907, No-19.

96. That the tenure-holder was a *bhadralok* was testified by the Principal Survey and Settlement Officer of Bakarganj.

97. In Chittagong according to the 1881 Census, Bengal, the percentage of the Brahmans, Kayasthas and Vaidyas in the total Hindu population was 35.7, cited in Anil Seal, *op.cit.*, p-43.

98. B.D.G.B., p-79.

99. Supplementary Report on “Samitis” in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

100. Such we are told, was the Barisal peasants’ reply to the agents of the Nawab of Dhaka. Sarat Kumar Roy, *Mahatma Aswini Kumar*, 1926, pp-138-39.

101. Supplementary Report on “Samitis” in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

102. In February 1909, Police listed 175 local branches attached to the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

103. *Bengalee*, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1905.

104. *Barisal Hitaishi*, 16 August, 1905.

105. '*Banga Bibhag*', *Barisal Hitaishi*, 6<sup>th</sup> September 1905.

106. *Kashipur Nibashi*, 13 September 1905, RNP for the week ending 23 September 1905.

107. *Bengalee*, 24 September, 1905.

108. Hiren Chakrabarty, *Political Protest in Bengal: Boycott and Terrorism\_1905-1918*, Calcutta, 1992, p-95.

109. Home Political Deposit, October 1907, No-19). The Memorandum on the National Volunteer Movement in Bengal and Eastern Bengal and Assam—Home Political Deposit, October 1907, No-19.

110. Hiralal Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal*, Calcutta, 1972, p-49.

111. Surendranath Banerjee, *A Nation in Making*, Calcutta, 1963, pp-204-12.

112. Telegram of Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to the Home Secretary to the Government of India, dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1906, cited in Hiren Chakrabarty, op.cit., p-96.

113. S.N.Banerjee, op.cit., p-204-12.

114. An educational boycott was in the air from within a few weeks of the announcement of the partition decision on 19th July 1905. From August of the same year organized band of students began to parade the bazaars in order to enforce the boycott of British goods. Their success in this matter frightened the Governments of the two Bengals into issuing the Carlyle and Lyon Circulars (October 1905). The Carlyle Circular threatened withdrawal of grants and scholarships and disaffiliation of institutions which failed to prevent student participation in politics, and the Lyon Circulars in East Bengal banned the Bande Mataram slogan and added the rider that boys of recalcitrant schools and colleges could be debarred from Government service. The Anti-Circular Society was formed by students of different Calcutta institutions to defy the Circulars which had been issued by the Governments of Bengal and Eastern Bengal advising students to devote

their time and energy to study and not to picketing.

115. Hiralal Dasgupta, op.cit., p-52

116. Kaliprasanna Kabyabisharod quoted in Sumit Sarkar, op., p-293.

117. Sukumar Mitra, "Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh", *Masik Basumati*, Magh, 1358, cited in Ibid, p-292.

118. Hiralal Dasgupta, op.cit., p-58.

119. *Sandhya*, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1906

120. History sheet of S.Chakrabarti, cited in Hiren Chakrabarti, op.cit., p-97.

121. S.N.Banerjee, op.cit., pp-212-18.

122. Hemchandra Kanungo, *Banglay Biplab Prachesta*, Calcutta, 1983, pp-73-74, 117-21.

123. *Daily Hitavadi*, 6<sup>th</sup> Janaury 1906, RNP for the week ending 13<sup>th</sup> January 1906.

124. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1906, RNP for the week ending 6<sup>th</sup> June 1906.

125. Hiralal Dasgupta, op.cit., p-62.

126. Sarat Kumar Ray, op.cit., pp-183-184.

127. Article written by Sister Nivedita in *Modern Review*, quoted in Ibid, p-183.

128. Fortnightly Report of the First Half of August 1906, Home Public B, October 1906,

No-13.

129. "First Annual Report of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti", published in the *Bengalee*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1906.

130. R.Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Home Political Deposit, April 1909, No-2.

131. Rules of Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, Ibid.

132. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, by Mr.R. Hughes-Buller, the District Magistrate of Bakarganj, Home Political A, April 1908, No-24.

133. Ibid.

134. R.Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, op.cit.

(135. Jadugopal Mukherjee recalls the electrifying effect of Pal's Bengali speeches—*Biplabi Jibaner Smriti*, Calcutta, 1956, pp-223-224

136. Annual Report of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti—*Bengalee*, 14<sup>th</sup> September 1906.

137. History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

138. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.

139. Confidential Diary of the District Magistrate of Bakarganj, for the week ending 1<sup>st</sup> June 1907, Home Political Deposit, July 1907, No-65.

140. Confidential Diary of the District Magistrate of Bakarganj, for the week ending 29<sup>th</sup>

June 1907, Home Political A, August 1907, No-108-09; Telegram from Home Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1907, stated that the Government of India “strongly deprecate” such direct official intervention in trade, No-1862, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p-331.

141. Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam of 14<sup>th</sup> March 1907, Home Public A, April 1907, No-208.

142. Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti by R.Nathan, op.cit..

143. Home Political A, January 1908, No-27-33 (file name not available).

144. Suresh Chandra Gupta, op.cit., pp-391-392.

145. R.Nathan’s Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, op.cit.

146. The pamphlet written by Liakat Hussain, was entitled *Musulman dunya ka waste mustad aur kafir mat ho* (Muslims don’t go astray and don’t turn infidels for the sake of the world). Prosecution of Liakat Husain and Abdul Ghafur under Sec.124 A, Indian Penal Code--Home Political A, February 1908, No-42.

147. Memorandum on Aswini Kumar Dutta , 20<sup>th</sup> June 1907, quoted in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p-388.

148. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.

149. Suresh Chandra Gupta, op.cit., p-476.

150. Note by C.J.Stevenson-Moore, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1907, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp-301-302.

151. Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1907, Home Public A, February 1907, No-154.
152. R.Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, op.cit.
153. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.
154. Surendranath Sen, *Aswinikumar Dutta*, n.d., p-39; Saratkumar Roy, op.cit., p-130.
155. Suresh Chandra Gupta, op.cit., p-477.
156. *Bengalee*, 30<sup>th</sup> March 1907.
157. Abstract of Report from East Bengal and Assam...during first half of December 1906, Home Public A, February 1907, No-265, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p-291.
158. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.
159. Saratkumar Roy, op.cit., pp-131-32.
160. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, Volume II, 1943
161. Supplementary Report on "Samitis" in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.
162. R.Nathan's Note, op.cit.
163. Home Political Deposit, May 1909, No-15 (file name not available).
164. R.Nathan's Note, op.cit.

165. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.
166. Ibid.
167. Home Political A, September 1907, No-65 (file name not available).
168. RNP for the week ending 29<sup>th</sup> February 1908.
169. History of the Second Year of the Swadeshi Movement, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.
170. B.D.G.B., pp-30-31.
171. Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.
172. Conduct of the Zamindars of Gauripur in connection with the political agitation in the Mymensingh district, Home Political A, February 1908, No-102-3; "Swadesdhi at Faridpur", *Bengalee*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1906.
173. Sarat Kumar Ray, op.cit., p-128.
174. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.; R.Nathan's Note on the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, op.cit.
175. Confidential Diary of the DM of Bakarganj for the week ending 27<sup>th</sup> July 1907, Home Political Deposit, August 1907, No-35.
176. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.; Confidential Diary of the DM of Bakarganj for the week ending 1<sup>st</sup> June 1907, Home Political Deposit, July 1907, No-65.
177. R.Nathan's Note, op.cit.

178. Resume of affairs, op.cit.

179. Resume of affairs, op.cit.

180. R.Nathan's Note, op.cit

181. Resume of affairs, op.cit..

182. Ibid.

183. Supplementary Report on "Samitis" in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

184. Confidential Diary of the DM of Bakarganj, for the week ending 6<sup>th</sup> July 1907, Home Political A, August 1907, No-110.

185. Supplementary Report on "Samitis" in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.

186. Ibid.

187. Ibid.

188. Ibid

189. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p-132.

190. Ibid, p-133.

191. Report on National Schools in the Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, from

H.Sharp, Director of Public Instruction, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp-177-179.

192. G.C.Denham's Note on the National Council of Education and National Schools in Bengal, cited in Ibid, p-179.

193. Dawn, February 1910, cited in Ibid, p-180.

194. R.Nathan's Note, op.cit.

195. Memorandum on Aswini Kumar Dutta, 20<sup>th</sup> June 1907, cited in Hiren Chakravarti, op.cit., pp-157-58.

196. Letter from Government of East Bengal and Assam, proposing the deportation of Aswini Kumar Dutta. No.206C, 3 July 1907, Home Political A, August 1907, No-106.

197. Memorandum on Aswini Kumar Dutta, op.cit.

198. Confidential Diary of the DM of Bakarganj, for the week ending 1<sup>st</sup> June 1907, Home Political Deposit, July 1907, No-65.

199. Ibid

200. Resume of affairs, op.cit.

201. Hemchandra Kanungo, op.cit., p-150.

202. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, op.cit.

203. Confidential Diary of the District Magistrate of Bakarganj for the week ending the 13th July 1907, Home Political B, September 1907, No-3-5.

204. Confidential Diary of the D.M. of Bakarganj, for the week ending 1st June 1907, Home Political, Deposit, July 1907, No-65.

205. Confidential Diary of the D.M. for the month of January 1908, Home Political A, April 1908, No-24.

206. Fortnightly Report for the second half of January 1908, Home Political A, March 1908, No-13.

207. Fortnightly Report for the first half of February 1908, Home Political A, March 1908, No-45.

208. Resume of affairs by the District Magistrate of Bakarganj, for the year 1907, Home Political A, April 1908, No-24.

209. Bakarganj District Gazetteer, op.cit., p-31.

210. S.S.B., para-40, 41, 42.

211. Ibid, para-43, 205.

212. Ratnalekha Ray, Change in Bengal Agrarian Society 1760-1850, New Delhi, 1979, pp-27-31.

213. During J.CJack's survey and settlement of Bakarganj from 1900 to 1908, 64% of the land was held and cultivated by ordinary occupancy tenants, and 27% of the land was in possession of prosperous cultivators who held tenures for the lands which they cultivated.

214. Ratnalekha Ray, op.cit., pp-74-78, pp-254-255.

215. Ibid., pp-239-240, pp-244-245.

216. H.Beveridge, The District of Bakarganj, Its History and Statistics, London, 1876, pp-254-255.

217. The Principal Survey and Settlement Officer of Bakarganj, J.C.Jack confirms that most of the estates in the district were owned by the high-caste Hindus (S.S.B., p-88).

218. Ibid., pp-239-240

219. It has been estimated that in Bakarganj as a whole they amounted to one quarter of the rent. (S.S.B., pp-73-74).

220. S.S.B., para- 200.

221. Ibid., para-197.

222. Ibid, para-195.

223. Commissioner of Chittagong Division to Private Secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1875, cited in Rajat Kanta Ray, Social Conflict and Political Unrest in Bengal 1875-1927, OUP, 1984, p-58.

224. S.S.B., para-201.

225. Bakarganj District Gazetteer, op.cit., p-38.

226. S.S.B., para-204.

227. Tapan Raychaudhuri, The World in Our Time: A Memoir, Harper Collins, 2011, p-65.

228. S.S.B., para-203.

229. Anuradha Roy, Gramer Manush Sangramer Aitiya, Calcutta, 2005, pp-2-17.

230. It was only the indigo rebellion of 1860 that received the support of the Hindu intelligentsia and this was also due to the fact that the British Government were withdrawing their support for the white indigo planters. Apart from this peasant disturbances in Pabna during the 1870s received qualified support from the *bhadralok*.

231. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp-334-335, p-514

232. Resume of affairs by the District Magistrate of Bakarganj, for the year 1907, Home Political A, April 1908, No-24.

233. Ibid.

234. R.Nathan's analysis of the Mymensingh riots-Home Political A, December 1907, No-57-63; Mihir o Sudhakar, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1907-RNP for the week ending 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1907; and the Bengalee's analysis of the Iswargunj riots, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1906, all the reports have been cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp-80-81.

235. Ibid

236. Bengalee, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1907.

237. Ibid

238. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for 1907, by Mr.R.Hughes-Buller, District Magistrate of Bakarganj, Home Political A, April 1908, No-24.

239. Bengalee, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1908; Rabindranath Tagore, Sadupay, Prabasi, July-August

- 1908, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., pp-330-31.
240. Resume of affairs in Bakarganj for the year 1907, op.cit.
241. Minto Papers, No-127, L.Hare to Minto, 31<sup>st</sup> October 1906.
242. Bengalee, 21<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> July 1905, cited in Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p-425.
243. Ibid, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1906; Bande Mataram, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1907, cited in Ibid.
244. Supplementary Report on "Samitis" in Dacca Division, Home Political Deposit, July 1909, No-13.
245. Home Public Deposit, September 1906, No-5 (file name not available).
246. Fortnightly Report from Eastern Bengal and Assam, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1907, Home Public A, May 1907, No-155.
247. Report of F.E.Kemp, Superintendent of Police, Bakarganj to the District Magistrate, Bakarganj, dated 27th March 1908, Home Political, Deposit, April 1909, No-2.
248. Report of the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, dated 15th September 1908, Fortnightly Report for the second half of August 1908, Home Political A, October 1908, No-104.
249. Fortnightly Report for the second half of September 1908, Home Political A, January 1909, No-59-60.
250. Report of J.C.Bhaumick, Inspector, C.I.D, to the District Magistrate, Bakarganj, dated 30th November 1908, Home Political, Deposit, April 1909, No-2.

251. Fortnightly Report for the second half of December 1908, Home Political A, February 1909, No-32.

252. The Dhaka Anushilan Samiti was established on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1905, and Pulin Behari Das was made the leader of this famous secret society in Eastern Bengal. The taking root of 'Pulinism' meant the emergence of militant nationalism in Bakarganj after the decline of the boycott movement.

253. Report of the Commissioner of the Dhaka Division to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, dated 9th December 1908, Home Political, Deposit, April 1909, No-2.

254. Hiralal Dasgupta, *Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal*, Calcutta 1972, p-110.

255. Arun Chandra Guha, *First Spark of Revolution*, New Delhi, 1971, p-60

256. Hemchandra Kanungo, op.cit., p-97.

257. Hiralal Dasgupta, *Jananayak Aswini Kumar*, Calcutta, 1969, p-77.

258. Fortnightly Report for the first half of December 1908, Home Political A, January 1909, No-104.