Chapter 3

Physical Education In Bengal
During First Two Decades of
Twentieth Century (1900-1920)
3.1 USHER IN TWENTIETH CENTURY NATIONALIST MOVEMENT AND PHYSICAL CULTURE

Last two decades of 19th century saw the development of nationalist movement and struggle to make mother land free from British rule and was gaining gradual acceptance by the people. Early 20th century saw the resurrection of nationalist attitude. A number of akhras/clubs/samities developed during this period. The motto of this akhras/samities was two fold - (i) to make youths conscious about the necessity of freedom and to make themselves devoted in the freedom struggle (ii) to develop the moral and physique of the youths so that they may take active role in violent movement. In these clubs, physical exercises and training with various weapons was an essential part of activities along with careful study of European and Indian nationalist and revolutionary literature.

The Shivaji and Binastami festivals which was started by Sarala Devi, created much enthusiasm among the Bengalee youths, with a desire to get rid off the notion that Bengalees were a “non-martial race” - an idea prevalent among the British after the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. At the same time Jatindranath Bondyopadhyay (1877-1930) who was very close to the great revolutionary Sri Aurobinda Ghosh (1872-1950) and were together at Boroda for sometime, returned back to Bengal to start and organise secret revolutionary group by the initiative of Aurobinda (12). Jatindra developed a gymnasium or akhra on 102, Upper Circular Road near Razabazar Tram Dipo, Calcutta in 1902 (20) where young men were trained in various forms of physical culture. Jatindra was particularly interested in military form of activities, so that the Bengalee youths may be more
courageous to take part in arms struggle. Thereby physical culture was spread throughout the Bengal. Almost simultaneously a prominent leading *akhras* or club, called *Anushilan Samity* was established in 1902 (13) by Satish Chandra Basu (1876-1948), who was also the secretary of the organisation and Barrister P.Mitter was president (19). They introduced various forms of physical activity / culture among the members of the club along with the cultivation of patriotic and nationalist ideas to make the members a prospective revolutionary. They felt a strong body was necessary to foster their philosophy. Sometimes after, great revolutionaries like Aurobinda, Jatindra, Barindra and many other prominent activists became associate with this *samity* and worked jointly. *Anushilan Samity* established a number of branches in various districts of Bengal to spread their philosophy-development of physique and strength and cultivate physical culture as an essential component of revolutionary activity for the freedom of country. In these *clubs/akhras*, along with body building exercises, *lathi* and sword play, boxing, wrestling, gymnastic, swimming, cycling, horse riding were also practised by the members. They were also trained by the several experts e.g. Sailendranath Mitra in *lathi* play, Murtaza Saheb in sword, Atul Ghosh in small *lathi* play, Jadu babu in dagger and sword, Nagen Dutta and Suradas in boxing etc. (13).

The partition of Bengal province (1905) by British ruler made a marked change in the activities of the *samities/clubs/akhras*. With the beginning of the *boycott* movement (7th August 1905) branches of *Anushilan Samity* and several clubs/akhras spread up rapidly in West Bengal as well as in East Bengal. Pulin Behari Das (1888-1949) organised a branch of *Anushilan Samity* at Dacca under the supervision of P.Mitter and opened branches of the *samity* in East bengal(19).

Being motivated by the activities of the *Anushilan Samity* in various places in and around Calcutta, many district head quarters, prominent sub divisions and even in villages *akhras/clubs* were started by young enthusiast Bengalees, who had belief with the philosophy of *Anushilan Samity*. The name of these *akhras/clubs* were different in various places e.g. in and
around Calcutta- *Ahiritola Sakti Samity*, Bengal United Club, *Haridas Dutta's Akhars, Kalidas Singha Akhara, Brati Samity, Swadesh Sevak Samity* etc. Prominent *akhras* outside Calcutta were at Howrah, Bali, Chinsura, Shirampore, Chandanagore, Kharda (*Arya Sakti Sabha*), Panihati (*Siraj Samity*) Murshidabad, Krishnagore, Santipur, Ranaghat, Kalna etc.(1).

Almost simultaneously a strong revolutionary centre was opened in the town of Midnapore by the initiative of Aurobinda Ghosh, Sister Nivedita, Barin Ghosh etc. This town about 130 km. away from Calcutta, was a seat of revolutionary activities outside Calcutta. A number of great revolutionary born in this district had devoted their life for the freedom struggle of the country. A number of *akhras/klubs* were also developed through -out the district of Midnapore during the time by Janendranath (1870-1949) and Satyendranath Bose (1882-1908), Hem Chandra Kanungo (1876-1951), Khudiram Bose (1889-1908) etc. Among the important *akhras* of the Midnapore town were *Basantamalati Akhara, Sanatan Samity, Swadesh Samity, Sakti Samity* etc. (3). *Rakshit Barir Akkra* namely 'matrisadan' of Tamluk was also very active. The activities of martyr Khudiram Bose generated enthusiasm among youths and several *akhras/klubs* were developed in rural areas of Midnapore such as Mugberia, Bhupatinagar, Ektapur, Ashnan, Analberia etc. (5). In all these *akhras* body building and physical activities were given prime importance along with other revolutionary works.

*Anushilan Samity* gradually became more involved in political and revolutionary activities and thereby British Govt. was greatly frightened and alarmed. The panicstricken British Govt. introduced the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908 under section 15(2) (6) and thereby activities of *Anushilan Samity* were banned (1). The banned *samity* closed their door and along with this, activities of many *akhras/klubs* were stopped. However, they continued their activities secretly thereafter.

From the foregoing discussion it appears to the researcher that during early part of the 20th century insurgence of nationalist movement was an important aspects of life and culture of Bengal. Further it appears that the various clubs, organisations who were actually devoted to freedom struggle
or nationalist movement, as a camouflage and to divert the attention of the British Govt. they used to practise various forms of physical activity. Not only they indulged into body building and martial art but also used to participate in competitive sports, indigenous games, swimming in the Ganges, rowing, kabaddi (an indigenous small area game) etc., which were very popular among the members of the revolutionary groups. Therefore it may be concluded that these revolutionary groups, by the way of their movement, spread physical culture and enthusiasm for participation in various physical activities among the Bengalee youths. As a consequence, body building and gymnastic were very popular in Bengal. These were the positive steps towards the development of physical education and culture in Bengal.

3.2 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION

With the initiative of some elite social reformers of Bengal and initiative by Government officials physical education/culture was gradually gaining acceptance in educational institutions. During the period of consideration it may be seen that the then British Govt. took some positive steps to spread physical education/culture in educational institutions of Bengal.

Around 1900 in a circular (14) Director of Public Instruction proposed to the Government that drill be made compulsory for all boys in Zilla and Collegiate schools. Moreover it was emphasized that earlier circular where the boys were exempted from drill who used to practise in gymnastics be withdrawn so that everybody be required to participate in drill. Accordingly Govt. accepted the proposal and it was introduced to the Zilla and Collegiate schools (15) and later arrangements were made to introduce into the aided schools (9). Another important development during this period was a book written by Mr. E.E. Sharp -Drill Book and Physical Exercises for Schools in Bengal in 1900. Govt. highly praised the publication of the book and recommended and issued order for its use by
all the Zilla and collegiate schools as a standard book of this subject (16). Later this book was also accepted by the aided high schools and it was subsequently translated into Hindi, Bengali, Urdu and Uriya for use in the vernacular schools in the Bengal province (16). To popularise drill Govt. also appointed drill and gymnastic master in schools. On the basis of the Govt. record it is observed that A.R. Macklin of the Calcutta police was appointed as a gymnastic instructor and drill master of the Calcutta Madrasah in 1908 (7).

For the introduction of drill in school programme arrangements were made for training of the teachers. Before 1910 there were two types of training for the drill masters (i) Deshikasrat (ii) Army methods of drill (2). But these drill had no recreational and moral value of play and its educational value was also limited. From Govt. report it is also revealed that arrangements also made for training at Calcutta Madrasah and Regimental Gymnasium, Dinapore during 1902-03(10) and 1904-1905(11).

3.3 YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN BENGAL

Prior to 1906 the prevailing system of physical training in the educational institutions were neither very scientific nor properly organised. Even the British officers (D.P.I. & others) were not satisfied. Y.M.C.A, Calcutta in their organisation had introduced various forms of physical culture in the pattern similar to Y.M.C.A., U.S.A. D.P.I., Govt. of Bengal in order to systematized the status of physical education was in close association with Y.M.C.A., Calcutta. An agreement was made between Y.M.C.A., Calcutta & D.P.I., Bengal and thereafter in 1907, D.P.I. submitted a proposal to the Govt. of Bengal, (17) justifying therein for the creation of a post of Adviser to the Govt. of Bengal in Physical Education in collaboration with Y.M.C.A., Calcutta. In the proposal it was mentioned that the adviser would be responsible to make physical training more effective and systematic. Moreover the adviser would create appropriate
organisational set up to foster sports and games among Indian men. Accordingly a post was created as Adviser to the Govt. of Bengal in Physical Education and also the Director of Physical Education, Y.M.C.A., Calcutta. Govt. of Bengal's approval was obtained (18) for financial sanction of Rs. 2,760/- per year for three years which was one third of the total cost. The remaining cost i.e. two third, was maintained by the Y.M.C.A. According to the then D.P.I. this was the best cost effective way to assess the scenario relating to physical education under an able and properly qualified person. D.P.I. also observed that if this scheme with Y.M.C.A. proved successful, a regular post of physical director may be created in the Govt. establishment, who will be responsible for the promotion and development of physical education in the province.

Therefore the year 1907 was a significant year in the history of physical education in Bengal. Dr. J.H.Gray (U.S.A.) was appointed for the first time as the Adviser to the Govt. of Bengal in Physical Education and Director of Physical Education, Y.M.C.A., Calcutta (6). The chief duties of Dr. Gray was to instruct school teachers regarding methodology of instruction in drill and physical development. He also used to tour throughout the province to inspect the teaching learning situation in educational institutions and to advise Govt. generally on the promotion of physical development (22). Dr. Gray continued till 1914 and then Dr. C.P. Segard (U.S.A.) took over the charge of the said post (1914-1919). From 1914 Govt. took over one half of the time of the Y.M.C.A., Director of Physical Education and an annual report on physical education was submitted each year since 1914 (21). Under the leadership of Dr. Gray the standard of physical training for school teachers was improved substantially from 1909 onwards. The prevailing drill master training in Deshikasrat, which was organised to train the teachers was not much scientific and its educational value was very limited. The Army method which was an alternative method of training also did not take into consideration the educational and moral value of play. The Y.M.C.A. with its improved facilities at 86, College Street introduced new approach of physical training for the school teachers.
in a very systematic way. The course was of six weeks duration. The contents of the course were:

a) Lectures on physiology, hygiene, theory and practice of teaching, relation of intellectual and physical education, and relation of physical training to school life.

b) Practical work in callisthenics, apparatus and game.

c) Experience in teaching. An examination in both theory and practice was given at the end of the course.

With the opening the Y.M.C.A. hostel and playground at 62, Mechua Bazar Street in 1915 the physical education course was further shifted to that premises for improved training programme. This training programme was continued upto 1918-1919. However, qualification of the school teachers, who were used to sent for training were some what below the average of teacher of other subject. Out of 150 teachers who attended first seven courses of six weeks duration only two had passed the Intermediate Arts (highest qualification) and about ten were appeared in the matriculation examination.

Dr. Gray and Dr. Segard, the two American enthusiasts, did the excellent work for the improvement of physical education in the province. At first Dr. Gray's activities were confined to Calcutta but later he was allowed to tour extensively during the cold weather in the mufassal to encourage physical instruction in Govt. institutions and tour reports were sent to the D.P.I. Dr. Segard (1914-1919) extended his visit in schools and colleges of all grades and submitted annual report of physical education to the D.P.I. By these efforts an atmosphere was created for improved facilities and scope of physical education and activities. The emphasis on drill was gradually replaced especially during and after the First World War-by a demand for a well-thought-out course of physical training supplemented by organised games.
3.4 INITIATIVE OF THE CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

An important decision was taken by the Bengal Govt. in 1918 for introduction of compulsory military drill in Govt. schools and colleges (8). Another significant development during this period was the report of the Calcutta University Commission (1917-1919). This report among many other aspects dealt extensively regarding physical training. The commission accepted many points in this regard that were recommended by the Dacca University Committee. The commission recommended for establishment of Board of Students Welfare who will look after the general standard of health, the aspect of physical instruction and organisation of games and recreation (4). They also recommended that beside the games there should be systematic physical training for all students and that the physical training should be under the supervision of Director of Physical Education who should rank as a professor of the university (4).

From the foregoing discussion we may conclude that early twentieth century was marked by insurgence of national movement and the activities and programmes of revolutionary groups had greatly influence the life and culture of Bengal. Various samities / clubs / akhras provided opportunities to develop physique, though the objectives were different. These clubs created an atmosphere by which young Bengalee youths were attracted and thereby body building, gymnastics, martial art became very popular. These clubs played a significant role towards development of physical education and culture in Bengal.

During this period Government also took initiative to popularise drill and gymnastics. Government also introduced training for teachers of the schools. Young Men's Christian Association took a very positive steps towards development of physical education in Bengal. Y.M.C.A. in collaboration with Government of Bengal introduced systematic physical training for the school teachers. The emphasis on drill was gradually replaced by organised games. Calcutta University Commission also (1917-1919) made a significant contribution by way of suggesting systematic physical training for all students and the physical training brought under the supervision of Director of Physical Education.
3.5 REFERENCES FOR CHAPTER - III

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8. Education Proceeding, B, December, 1918, Nos. 143-144, File No. 11C-95.


14. Letter from Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, to the Secretary Govt. of Bengal, General Department in General (Edn.), January 1900, Proceeding No. 13, File No. 8-D/1 1, Letter No. 36 dated. 4.1.1900.

15. Letter from Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, General Department to the Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, in General (Edn.), January 1900, Proceeding No. 14, File No. 8-D/2, Letter No. 2BT-G dated. 27.1.1900.

16. Letter from Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, to the Secretary Govt. of Bengal, General Department in General (Edn.), March 1907, Proceeding B, No. 41, File No. 8-D/2 1, Letter No. 15982 dated. 21.11.1906.

17. Letter from Director of Public Instruction, Bengal, to the Secretary Govt. of Bengal, General Department in General (Edn.), May 1908, Proceeding Nos. 53-54, File No. 1-G/10, Letter No. 13259 dated. 23.7.1907.

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