CHAPTER - II

Genesis

George Orwell once remarked that “keeping the past up to date is a full time job”.\(^1\) This insight seems particularly telling as a result of the startling rush of events during the last few years. Dramatic advances in historical scholarship have cast new light on old problems and have placed into prominence subject matters that historians previously all but ignored. This chapter offers an episode an evolving account in which a human being organized life in response to changing environment and persistent needs. Indian national movement and popular politics in modern India focuses on the lesser known facets of the struggle at the village, regional and provincial levels.

Early 20\(^{th}\) century resistance movement is to be understood in the fascinating context of social, economic, cultural condition. Wide ranging understanding of the literatures and archival research focuses on slow emergence of nationalism and its local and regional dimensions. Major changes occurred in this period. The tension between the people and the British Raj as a consequence of the partition of Bengal (1905 A.D.) coalesced into a political movement that gathered momentum immediately after the political declaration.\(^2\) The passion unleashed by the movement continued to resonate across the province of Bengal through Boycott and Swadeshi. The whole idea of Boycott and Swadeshi can be linked to the extremist politics emerging from the 1890’s. “From the beginning of the 1890’s opposition began to coalesce against the current leadership of the Congress, against the kind of organization it had become and the ideas which it represented.”\(^3\) By the early years of the 20\(^{th}\) century a distinctively strong nationalist strand of thought become apparent in Maharastra, Punjab and Bengal. Man like Swami Vivekananda, Arobindo Ghosh and Bipin Ch. Pal reflected changes and moulded the direction of that change. This new orientation was unmistakable in the waves of emotion that rocked Bengal and other

3. Ibid, p. 92
parts of the country resultant to the various fiats imposed by the Vice Roy Lord Curzon, at the turn of the century.  

**The Emergence of extremism in Indian National Congress:**

The emergence of Extremist dissent can be seen in two fold critique of the moderate Congress- for its mendicant technique of appealing to British public opinion, felt to be both futile and dishonourable, and for its being no more than a movement of an English educated populace alienated from the common people. The elements inherent in extremism were varied in nature. On the one hand was the existing pattern of established leadership within a region and of the environment, social and political in which it operated. On the other was the climate of ideas and the emergence of new responses that reflected a change in the preoccupation and attitudes of rising dissident leaders as well as of social groups whom they sought to lead. Ideas were manipulated to bring a change in the political balance.

Burton Stein, a prominent Indologist observes this in the following words: “The first generation of Congress took pride in the moderation of their programmes and the elite character of their leadership; they had no desire to make the reform of British rule a popular cause, even when a younger set of westernized political leaders began to voice their dismay.”

He further writes “The earliest meetings even enjoyed the official patronage of the Viceroy. They met as loyal subjects mildly stating their modest objectives.”

On the contrary some of the leading personalities loulded their voices against this policy of loyalty and gradually a cumulative change in the perspective on nationalist politics in India was getting reflected in the extremist dissent. The first of these voices came from Aurobindo Ghosh one of the early extremist who launched a critique of Congress mendicancy in 1893-94 in a series of articles entitled ‘New Lamps for Old’. What these writings amounted to was an impassioned accusation of the way that the moderates conducted the Congress. In calling for a new strategy for the Congress, Aurobindo advised an unequivocal demand for Indian independence,

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4. Ibid, p.105
the mobilization of mass support and the adoption of the doctrine of change through revolutionary cataclysm.\(^7\)

The beginning of the 1890s witnessed an opposition against the current leadership of the Congress that failed to strike deep roots in Indian society. The fear of inducing an open confrontation with the British Raj coupled with the necessity of developing nationalist unity cutting across the lines of class, had made the Congress into almost the exclusive property of the educated and bourgeoisie.\(^8\)

In Maharashtra immediate impact of Aurobindo’s writings was felt significantly as the shape of politics was beginning to assume forms conducive to the strategy expounded by Aurobindo. Here Bal Gangadhar Tilak spearheading a Hindu revivalist movement through Deccan Education Society and subsequently editing two papers *Maharatta* and *The Kesari*, and the deployment of religious and historical festivals and celebrations as a means of mobilizing support for the policies he advocated represented the spirit of radical Indian nationalism.\(^9\) In Punjab Lala Lajpat Rai joined Ghosh in advocating the formation of secret societies to oppose the partition of Bengal, which was then being prepared. These young radicals successfully brought tactical change within the Congress by shifting direction and style of politics and by condemning what they termed ‘Congress mendicancy.’

The attack against the elitist and moderate element of Congress was mainly internal, nevertheless it did not represent any unleashing of new social force or rising social group striving for a political expression hitherto denied them. The opposition usually came from younger men, from a second generation of graduates and other educated members of the middle class.\(^10\) A relatively small and amorphous group at first, their numbers grew as did their coherence until they were able with some vitality to describe themselves as a party, ‘the new party’ and were in turn described by others as the ‘Extremist’.\(^11\) They were mostly driven by a sense of opposition to British rule

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8. Ibid, p.93.
and their attitude to the presence of the British was more radical than was usual among moderate congress leaders and they were more impatient to see it ended.

The Vice-royalty of Lord Curzon:

By then there was a change in the style and substance of the British Raj, just as there was in Congress. In 1899 Lord Curzon of Kedleston had assumed the Vice regal office as if it were a throne, full of confidence about British power in Asia. Late years of the 19th Century witnessed, ‘the tentativeness’ of the most enthusiastic of utilitarian minded mind changing in to an authoritarian brooking neither advice from that small British public concerned about India nor dissent from Indians could change it.”

By 1904 Curzon had completed his first term of office. With general approval he was appointed for a second term, but this sequel proved to be a disastrous one. The issues concerning Curzon in this sequel were the Bengal administration and army reform. Curzon’s most unpopular measure– the partition of Bengal aroused the most controversy among historians with imperialists citing administrative convenience as the prime motive against contemporary and later nationalist charges of deliberate ‘divide and rule’. Down to 1903 administrative considerations were certainly predominant in official circles. The Bengal presidency had long presented a difficult problem to administrators resulting in a number of proposals to reduce its size dating back to 1874. “In 1874 his burden was lightened by the withdrawal of Assam under its own chief commissionership. This was followed by William Ward’s proposal in 1896-97 to attach Chittangong division, Dacca and Mymensing to this province (Assam). Behind this transfer plan was not something abstract administrative convenience but, ‘to give its officers a wider and more interesting field of work’ and provide a maritime outlet in order to develop its industries in tea, oil and coal.”

Lord Curzon’s regime as has rightly been said “is a great land mark in the history of the freedom movement in India”, the viceroyalty of Lord Corzon marked the apogee of the imperial system which had been built by Dalousie and his post mutiny successors. The most controversial of his administrative measure, the partition of

13. Sumit Sarkar, as cited in Modern India 1885-1947, p. 106.
Bengal, which he carried through by riding roughshod over the feelings and sentiments of more than 40 million of people called forth all latent forces of nationalism which had been gathering strength for years. Anti partition movement which later took the shape of Swadeshi movement at the turn of the century was a major step forward in the Indian national movement. Ward’s revived proposal for partition referred by Bengal’s new Lt. Governor Andrew Fraser in an official note of 28th March 1903 accepted by Curzon in a minute on territorial redistribution in India (1st June 1903) and was announced for the first time in Home secretary Risley’s letter of 3rd December 1903. The new Viceroy Curzon showed dangerous hubris in rejecting the opposition of his council (consisting of experienced civil servants) to the way he planned to partition Bengal in order to improve the management of that very large and pompous province.

Much has been said in the official argument in favour of partition, “The backward areas had been separated from the rest and given special administrative attention. The Hindu west was neatly balanced by the Muslim east; the special needs of both the communities could be separately considered.” Between December 1903 and the formal announcement of 19th July, a transfer plan was transformed into a full-scale partition by Fraser, Risley and Curzon completely ignoring the national feeling which he did not believe to exist, “My own belief “, he had written in 1900 is that the Congress is tottering to its full and one of my great ambition while in India is to assist it to a peaceful demise.”

Even before the partition was to take effect Congress organized numerous large meetings in Calcutta at which petitions against partition were gathered and presented to indifferent officials. The ineffectuality of petitions was admitted by the old Congress leader Surendra Nath Banerji and as the day of partition approached, he acknowledged that sterner measures, such as the refusal to buy British goods, were justified. He and others preferred to call this by the term Swadeshi (of own country) rather than boycott, but agreed that the ban should go beyond British goods to include

17. Ibid, p. 759.
others targets. Government schools began to be shunned (National School scheme) and Curzon’s much quoted speech at Dacca in February 1904 offered east Bengal Muslim the prospect of “unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Mussalman Viceroy and Kings.” Home secretary H. H. Risley summed up with clarity and frankness in two notes dated 7th February and 6th December 1904 while analyzing the arguments of the critics of the partition. “Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. One of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.”

The shock that spread through Bengal with the announcement of partition was sparked off mainly by Bhadralok (gentleman) elements central in Calcutta and the larger provincial towns. However it could touch the heart of all including “the moderates and the extremists, the educated and the land owners, the rich and the poor to share a common view that the British Raj had inflicted a deep wound on the unity and greatness of Bengal.”

When partition finally came into effect much of Bengal was in a state of frenzy, with public demonstrations held on regular basis protest marches by students and other organization and the singing of Bande Mataram as a show of patriotic defiance of the British Raj. In the wake of this clamour, the new movements like Boycott, Swadeshi and national education were also gaining popularity. Home secretary Risley miserably failed to estimate the opposition for he interpreted it entirely in terms of elitist interest groups. To prove his assumption wrong immediately “after July 1905 the movement broke away from traditional moorings, developed a variety of new and militant techniques, attracted large numbers than before and broadened into a struggle for Swaraj.”

The sense of unity among the Bengalis was clearly underestimated by the British which had its root in a long history of regional independence and greatly fostered at least among the literature by the cultural movements of the 19th century. Calcutta being the hub of all activities, attracted teachers, lawyers, doctors and clerks.

all over the province and beyond it. Hindu revivalist movement led by personality like Vivekananda, international events like British reverse in the Boer war, and the Japanese victory over Russia in 1904-05 sent a thrill of pride through Asia and largely highlighted by the Bengal Press.

In this atmosphere of strong regional unity and growing self confidence and pride Curzon’s partition plan, “a virtually behind the scene partition decision” was regarded as a deliberate attempt to strangle the renaissance Bengali people. “Curzon proved Olympian in his detachment and adamant in his disregard of public clamour.” Analyzing the impact historian Percival Spear writes, “reasoned protests grew into a heated popular agitation led by Surendra Nath Benerjee, monster meetings led on to a Swadeshi movement and the Boycott of foreign cloths, while in the background lurked the menace of terrorism.” Curzon’s partition termed as a national insult invariably associated with political disappointment over the achievements of twenty years of moderate agitation which perhaps affected only a limited circle, but with more widely felt grievances about racial discrimination and white arrogance. The Diary of Gyan Chandra Banerjee vividly reflects all these: a munsiff getting Rs. 200 as against the white district judges Rs. 2000 a distant whistle brings to him memories of racial discrimination suffered abroad steamers and trains and he finds solace in signs of national awakening.

Growing poverty of India explained in terms of the drain of wealth making it increasingly difficult to maintain British connection. The strengths of the reaction might have been gauged by the initial opposition to the first scheme of partition put forward in 1903. Down to July 1905 Bengal witnessed an intensive use of the conventional “Moderate” methods of press campaigns numerous meeting etc. and the evident and total failure of such techniques led to a search for new forms – Boycott of British goods (first suggested by Krishna Kumar Mitra’s weekly Sanjivani on 13th July 1905) and accepted by established leaders like Surendra Nath Benerjee after considerable discussion at the town hall meeting of 7th August. Press called for a Boycott of British goods until the partition was rescinded. Fired by slogans of ‘United Bengal’, ‘Unity is strength, ‘no partition and Bande Mataram’, the protest meetings

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held formally resolved to oppose partition and the procedure adopted by the authorities in bringing about it. The public meetings continued and gradually rose to crescendo as the time neared for the implementation of the scheme. “Sentiment of injured pride and grave discontent with the tendencies of Curzon’s general administration combined with fears of a possible loss of influence and a disruption of the interlocking economy of an area that was now truncated - all these elements joined together in stocking the fires of opposition.  

The Partition of Bengal and its aftermath:

Thereafter, development followed thick and fast. Out of the complex of events, there emerged a powerful movement which, as R. C. Mazumder has noted, had the character of an incipient rebellion. The elements of the Bengali opposition were diverse in character, the most popular being the wide spread Boycott of British goods- cloth, sugar, salt and enamel. Its essence was the hatred of the British, its aim to coerce the British to undo partition while its method was to deploy the most effective and easiest weapon, that of money. Boycott gradually developed wider implications than the mere non-purchase of goods; it came to embrace the whole field of Govt. and sought to make the existing administration of the country impossible. The idea of National education was promulgated and schools independent to the Government were established.

Behind these aspects was the idea of the political regeneration of the country with the goal, distant or close according to the specific radicalism of the individuals involved, of Swaraj or self-rule. As it evolved, Boycott promoted an attachment to things Indian and this positive aspect was ultimately crystallized in the idea of Swadeshi, the use of goods and things of at one’s country i.e. India. Swadeshi lacked the emotive coercive connotation of Boycott and was consequently, as a term, preferred by many Bengalis, of whom the most prominent was the great poet, Nobel Laureate Rabindra Nath Tagore. But Swadeshi whose historical antecedents can be traced as far back as the 1870s in Bombay and Bengal, grew out of Boycott; it represented a later stage in the movement and was not a new departure, merely a change in emphasis.

Bengal perceived as the nerve centre of rising Indian nationalism was to be partitioned by this move. The attempt in the words of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy was to dethrone Calcutta from its position as the centre from which the Congress party is manipulated throughout Bengal and indeed, the whole of India, the centre of successful intrigue and divide the Bengali speaking population. Genesis of Swadeshi was the anti-partition movement started to oppose the British decision to partition Bengal. Curzon’s partition scheme published in 1904 led to an almost instant fur-ore raised by politicians, land lords and even the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, representing European traders. In East Bengal alone 500 protest meetings were held. Pamphlets and leaflets opposing the scheme and pointing out the grave evils arising from it were issued in hundreds, probably in thousands.

Lord Curzon undertook a tour in East Bengal ostensibly with the object of ascertaining public opinion, but really to awe it. He was convinced of the strength and solidity of public opposition to his partition scheme. Being confirmed in his views about the strength of Bengali nationalism and the danger it spelt to British rule in India. Reacting sharply to the opposition raised over the partition proposals Curzon wrote to the secretary of state, “if we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying a force of increasing trouble in the future. Partition was meant to foster a religious divide by propping up Muslim communalists as a counter to the Congress and the national movement. Curzon’s speech at Dacca betrayed his attempt to ‘woo the Muslim’s’ to support partition. With partition, he argued, Dacca could become the capital of the new Muslim majority province (with eighteen million Muslims and 12 million Hindus), which would invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity. The Muslims would thus get a “better deal” and the eastern districts would be freed of the ‘pernicious influence of Calcutta’. Lord Minto’s statement arguing for the partition as a good political strategy transpired motives other than political. “Clear from a political point of view alone, putting aside

27. R.C. Mazumder, Op cit, p.11.
30. Tara Chand, Op cit, p., 311
of the administrative difficulties of the old province I believe partition to have been very necessary."\(^{31}\) All these were evident of a sinister plan initiated by the British authority to strike at the party which was becoming increasingly a voice of a larger section people from what it had been in the words of Lord Dufferin ‘a microscope minority’. The first centre of political action was the eloquent and volatile world of Calcutta where discussion on ethics and social reforms easily passed on into politics. The political movement unleashed by partition of Bengal and its spread across the country has to be understood in the wider context of increasing politicization of the people.

The resolution for the partition of Bengal appeared on 3\(^{rd}\) December 1903 resulting in a spate of protests at various levels and on 19\(^{th}\) July 1905 the details of the partition were published. The new province named as the Eastern Bengal and Assam was set up. It included besides Assam, the Chittagong, Dacca and Rajshahi division of Bengal. Its total area was 106,540 square miles and its population 31 millions of which 18 million were the Muslim and about 12 million Hindus. Lord Curzon forwarded to the Secretary of state that there was an almost unparalleled unanimity on the subject of partition.

To the excited public opinion it was a deliberates attempt at breaking the political unity of the province, an attempt at playing Hindus against the Muslims and at disrupting the new and surging spirit of nationalism. Viceroy’s high handed acts seems to prove this statement and regarding this Lovat Fraser writes, “His sojourn in Eastern Bengal, his harangues of Muslim meetings, explaining the benefits of the scheme to obtain communal support for it, were methods of a political agitator and derogatory to the dignity and prestige of the viceroy himself.\(^ {32}\) And it is further proved as Frazer continuous by the foolish utterances of Sir Bampfylde Fuller, the Governor of the newly created province, who declared that he had two wifes, Hindu and Mahommddan but that the Mahommadan wife was the favourable wife.\(^ {33}\) The united voice of the whole nation against partition of Bengal could not deter Viceroy from proceeding with the scheme administration division. The day of the official

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32. Lovat Frazer India under Curzon and after P. 380-96.
33. Ibid.
inauguration of the partition was observed as the day of national mourning in Bengal the people fasted and went to the Ganges on that day. They had *rakhis* on each others wrists as a bond of unity and the cries of *Bande Mataram* was raised, vows were taken to Boycott English goods. The agitation writes Frazer, “made the Viceroy bitter, his contemptuous was in difference heightened public resentment, numerous were the public meetings held and petition addressed to him but in vain. The agitation, was condemned as an action of the interested wire pullers among the pleaders of Bengal. That was a time in the history of British India when public feeling and public opinion were so little regarded by the supreme government.

Daily news of London appealed to Mr. Brodrick to call a halt in the matter of partition Lord Macdonnel declared it the hugest blunder committed since the battle of Plessey. The Congress made it an all India issue. And the more moderate party supported by a section of Liberalism in England and a minority in the civil service argued that whatever the abstract merit of the scheme it should have been abandoned when it was found to be repugnant to national sentiment.

There could have been an alternative method of dealing with this controversial issue by placing Bengal under the rule of a Governor assisted by an executive council. Historically this could have been more convenient had efficiency been the main concern as P. E. Robert writes the Charter Acts of 1833 and 1853 had actually authorized such a government the act of 1853 had merely legalized the appointment of lieutenant governor’s unless and till this change could conveniently be made.

Within days of the Government pronouncement numerous protest meetings were held in mofussill towns such as Dinajpur, Pabna, Faridpur, Tangel, Jessore, Dacca, Birbhum and Barisal. As an alternative to moderate Congress technique, boycott and *Swadeshi* as weapon of resistance were accepted in these meetings. Formal proclamation of the *Swadeshi* movement was made on the 7th August 1905 in a public meeting held at Calcutta Town Hall and the famous Boycott resolution was passed. This resulted in a series of protest meetings almost every day in Bengal.

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34. Frazer cited PP.380-96.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
“Some of the meetings like the one in Barisal drew crowds of ten to fifteen thousands. The day of partition was observed as a day of mourning.” Calcutta streets became resounded with the cries of *Bande Mataram*, as protectors, walked bare foots, bathed in the Ganga almost spontaneously.\(^{38}\)

It was apparent that the character of the movement in terms of both its goals and social base has begun to expand rapidly. As Abdul Rasul, President of the Barisal Conference put it, April 1906, “what we could not have accomplished in 50 or 100 years, the great disaster, the partition of Bengal has done for us in six months.”\(^{39}\) Its fruit have been the great national movement known as the *Swadeshi* movement. The great wave of emotion did not entirely depend on negative factors of opposition to the rule of an alien power. Positive factors were also at work. Priests and other holy man in Bengal supported the movement and at larger meetings in temples led the gathering in taking vows to serve and defend the motherland and the mother by adhering to *Swadeshi*.\(^{40}\) The anti-partition agitation marked the emergence of new leaders in Bengal using to an extent greater than before popular emotions and attitudes and manipulating religious symbols with a fire and enthusiasm that soon left man like Surendranath Benerjee away behind. Not only did the agitation bring these men into prominence and for a time given the leadership, it also popularized their intensely belligerent attitude to the British connection and their desire for *Swaraj*.

In Bengal after 1905, the extremist acquired a dominant influence over the *Swadeshi* movement. Several new forms of mobilization and techniques of struggle now began to emerge at the popular level. The trend of ‘mendicancy’, petitioning and memoranda was on the retreat.\(^{41}\) Numerous meetings were held all over the country in which Boycott was preached and the assembled people took solemn vows or pledges to eschew foreign goods and buy indigenous goods alone. The militant nationalists put forward several fresh ideas at the theoretical, propagandistic and programmatic plane. The sort of propaganda that was carried on by the nationalists may be judged

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\(^{38}\) Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for independence 1857-1947*, p.127.

\(^{39}\) Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, *India’s fight in freedom or the Swadeshi movement 1905-06* Calcutta,1958 – p.162 as cited in Bipan Chandra, p.127.

\(^{40}\) Jim Masselos, Op cit, p. 111.

\(^{41}\) Burton Stein, Op cit, p. 291.
from an appeal issued to the people of Barisal over the signature of Aswini Kumar Dutta and other leaders. Its main ideas may be surmised as follows:–

(i) One *Swadeshi* cloth would ultimately sell cheaper than foreign goods.

(ii) The cloth we now wear was, after all ‘made of our cotton and jute’.

(iii) Indigenous cloth production would mean employment for our coolies and skilled laborers.

(iv) To fulfill this and other objects and for the good of our motherland there should be a people’s association in each village. Attempts were being made to enlist the sympathy of all classes and to engage them in the movement.

Political independence was to be achieved by converting the movement into a mass movement through the extension of Boycott into a full scale movement of non co-operation and passive resistance. The technique of extended Boycott was to include, apart from Boycott of foreign goods, Boycott of government schools and colleges, court, titles and government services. The most visible and successful form of struggle thrown up by the movement was the Boycott of foreign goods. A confidential official report refers to attempts made by the leaders of Foridpur and Barisal to popularize the movement among the lower classes (Namasudras) to the Boycott and Swadeshi movement. This official report gives a clear idea of how the movement was broad based, ‘Not to speak of the participation of Zaminders and pleaders, students and youths, peasants and shopkeepers, even medical man and native army, Brahmins and Priests, barbers and washer man played an important part in the extension of the Boycott - Swadeshi movement.’ It is reported that on the refusal by three regiments of sepoys of Barrackpore and Fort William to wear uniform made of foreign cloth, they were disarmed and sent off to distant military stations in North West India. Again, at a washer man’s meeting at Baolia, the participants took the solemn vow of not washing foreign cloth on pain of excommunication. “At Baidyabati a meeting was held in the temple of Kali before whom solemn pledges were taken to make the movement a success, each contributing his quota to his mite.”

43. R. C. Mazumder, Op cit, p.41.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid, p.42.
46. Ibid, p. 43.
Religious sentiments of the people were largely exploited to make the movement a success.\footnote{Ibid, p.42.} Bengali vernacular papers like the \textit{Sandhya} and the \textit{Bangavashi} began to preach that by using Liverpool salt, foreign sugar, which were refined by the use of blood and bones of swines and cows, the people would run the risk of losing their Dharma, Pandits of Nawadwip and Bhatpara also sent their support to the movement and sent out two of their members as \textit{Swadeshi} missionaries.\footnote{Ibid.}

The ideas of \textit{Swadeshi} and Boycott were kept alive and brought home to every door by articles in newspapers, processions, popular songs, enrolment of volunteers to keep vigilant watch and by occasional bonfires of foreign cloth, salt and sugar. The influence of nationalism is clearly seen in the rapid extension of the original concepts of Boycott and \textit{Swadeshi}, and of the purposes underlying them.

Repressive measures adopted by the British authority brought about a phenomenal development of the ideas of \textit{Swadeshi} and Boycott formally inaugurated on 7\textsuperscript{th} August, 1905 a historic day in the struggle for Indian independence. Will Durant’s observation in this regard is worth mentioning, “It was in 1905, then that the Indian revolution began”\footnote{Will Durant, \textit{The case for India}, P. 123.*} Shifting the focus on the public sphere from a different perspective brings forth trend of Political extremism as against the constructive \textit{Swadeshi}- the rejection of futile and self-demeaning ‘mendicant’ politics in favour of self-help through \textit{Swadeshi} industries, national schools and attempts at village improvement and organizations.

This idea of political extremism propounded through journals like Bipin Pal’s ‘\textit{New India}’, Aurobindo Ghosh’s ‘\textit{Bande Matarm}’, Brahmo Bandhav Upadayay’s ‘\textit{Sandhya}’ and ‘\textit{Yugantar}’. This group of excited educated youths from Bengal was clamouring for a struggle for Swaraj. In a series of articles in \textit{Bande Matarm} was visualized a program of organized and relentless Boycott of British goods, officialized education, justice and executive administrations, (Backed up by the positive development of Swadeshi industries, national schools and arbitration courts), and also looked forward to civil disobedience of unjust laws, a ‘social Boycott’ of loyalists and
recourse to armed struggle if British repression went beyond the limits of endurance.\textsuperscript{50} The same views echoed in 21\textsuperscript{st} November, 1906 issue of the \textit{Sandhya}, “If… the chowkidhar, the constable, the deputy and the munsiff and the clerk, not to speak of the sepoy all resign their respective functions, feringhee rule in the country may come to an end in a moment”. This was quite explicitly the entire future political program of Gandhi minus the dogma of non-violence.

Political Extremism prevailing in Bengal did build up an impressive chain of district organizations or Samities and called elite action terrorism challenging the mass movement perspective. The agitation against the Bengal partition from 1905-1907 marked a strengthening of radical and at times violent propensities among those committed to the Indian national cause.

Another significant aspect of the whole issue of Boycott and Swadeshi was the debate over the method and the controversy over cultural ideas between modernistic and Hindu revivalist trends. In general the Swadeshi mood was closely associated with attempts to combine politics with religious revivalism, which was repeatedly used as a morale booster for activists and a principal instrument of mass contact. Surendranath Banerjee first used the method of Swadeshi vows in temples. National education plans often had a strong revivalist content. Extremist leaders insisted in May 1906 on a Sivaji Utsava complete with image worship. Radical politics and aggressive Hinduism often got inextricably combined in the pages of \textit{Bande Mataram, Sandhya} and \textit{Yugantar}. On the other hand Brahmo-edited journals like \textit{Sanjivani} or \textit{Prabasi} were critical of obscurantism and bluntly declared that “the patriotism which glorifies our past as ideal and beyond improvement and which rejects the need for further progress is a disease.\textsuperscript{51}

What is needed here is a closer look on the strength and major components and different trends related to the movement. Effects of the Boycott movement on the import of foreign goods in Bengal as it appeared in contemporary journals and confidential official reports it did achieve limited success. Calcutta collector of

\textsuperscript{50} Sumit Sarkar, Op cit, p. 113.
customs in September 1906 noted a 22% fall in the quantity of imported cotton piece goods, 44% in cotton twist and yarn 11% in salt, 55% in cigarettes and 68% in boots and shoes in previous months as compared to August 1905. It is significant that the sharpest decline was in commodities like shoes and cigarettes, where as the collection of customs pointed out, the demand was mainly from “Indian gentleman of the middle class, such as clerks, pleaders etc.\textsuperscript{52} The Anglo Indian press’ continuous campaign to minimize the effect of Swadeshi is a pointer to the effect of Boycott as it appears from this statement of the Indian Daily News of Calcutta. “On all sides there is evidence that the \textit{Swadeshi} movement is rapidly disappearing.” The reports and views appearing in statesman give some idea of the impact of the Boycott, “The bazar is bad, Nobody wants to buy English clothing” (The statesman referred to a dealer as reported by its representative). The market reports of the capital in September 1905 revealed the same gloomy picture for British manufacturers in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{53}

On September 1\textsuperscript{st} 1905, the Marwari Chambers of Commerce sent an urgent cable which reads as follows “we appeal to you to intervene and persuade the Secretary of state to prevent the partition of Bengal which has created a great tension of feeling here. The Bengalis have resolved in numerous public meetings to Boycott British goods. The sale of Manchester goods has been particularly stopped. We shall be ruined and shall not be able to make future contracts unless the secretary of state withdraws the partition and the Boycott ceases. The matter is very urgent. Unless the cause is removed in three or four days by counter manding the partition, goods for the Puja will remain unsold and the ‘\textit{Lucky Day}’ sales will become impossible pray help us\textsuperscript{54} the following extracts from confidential official reports indicate the situation prevailing from chief secretary to the Government of Bengal to the secretary to the Government of India, Home department dated 27\textsuperscript{th} June 1908. “The market in piece goods is duller and dealers are not anxious to indent, as prices show weakness in Lancashire and many mills are working short time or closing for a period.”

\textsuperscript{52} Govt. of India Home political Bengal, October 1906.
\textsuperscript{53} Mukherjees’ Magazine, Op cit, as cited in R. C. Mazumder pp.54-55.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p.56.
smaller European firms have begun to feel the pinch of the Boycott movement. Importers of miscellaneous goods are complaining of a particularly dull year.\textsuperscript{55} The British export trade returns for the month of December 1908, as published in the \textit{Times} of 22\textsuperscript{nd} January recorded a sharp decline in cotton piece goods export (18.6\%).\textsuperscript{56} The \textit{Swadeshi} mood did bring about a significant revival in handloom, silk weaving and some others traditional crafts as pointed out by two official industrial surveys in 1908. Indian’s share of the market in textiles increased proportionately. Sales of handloom products increased possibly as a result of the encouragement from \textit{Swadeshi} committees, who were aware of the political advantages of assisting family based artisanal production and thus anticipated Gandhi’s later campaign for the use of \textit{Khadi} as a political tactic.

There was also a related, near Gandhian, intellectual trend glorifying handicrafts as the Indian or oriental way to avoid the evils of large scale industry. Parallelly a number of attempts were seen to promote modern industries. For instance the Banga Lakshmi cotton Mills was launched in August 1906 with equipment bought from an existing Serampore plant some other fairly successful ventures were in porcelain (Calcutta Pottery Works of 1906) chrome taunting, soap, matches and cigarettes. The patrons and entrepreneurs included a few Zamindars (like Manindra Nandi of Kasim Bazar) but most of them were from professional intelligentsia (Bengal Chemical).\textsuperscript{57}

The sudden emergence of the Samities or ‘national volunteer’ was one of the major achievements of the Swadeshi age. Sometimes these Samities are equated with incipient terrorist societies. Actually down to the summer of 1908, most Samities were quite open bodies engaged in a variety of activities: physical and moral training of members social work during famines, epidemics, preaching the Swadeshi massage through multifarious forms organizing crafts, schools, arbitration courts and village societies and implementing the techniques of passive resistance. Apart from Calcutta with 19 Samities reported by the police in 1907, the main strength of the movement was in East Bengal and this included a central block consisting of Bakargunj, Faridpur

\textsuperscript{55} R. C. Mazumder, Op cit, p.57.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
Dacca and Mymensing district. (where originated the five principal samitis Swadesh Bandhav, Brati, Dacca Anushilan, Shurid and Sadhan) strong organizations in Rangpur, Tippera, Sylhet and the part of the old province lying to the east of the Hooghly river and some societies in all districts except Sibsagar, Goalpara and Garo hills. There was a lot of interesting varieties within the Samiti movement, the Calcutta based Anti Circular society due to its believe in secularism stood out with important Muslim Associates.

One important aspect of the Swadeshi movement was the great emphasis given to self-help and constructive works at the village level envisaged as a means of bringing about the social and economic regeneration of the villages and of reaching the rural masses. In actual terms this meant social reforms and campaign against evils such as caste oppression, early marriage, the Dowry system etc. One major plank of the programme of self reliance was Swadeshi or national education. Aurobindo Ghosh claimed that national education was needed to give back to India ‘the long lost treasure of her race, the passion for self -knowledge and combat the affliction of westernization like industrialism, commercialism and imperialism’


Amidst the changed atmosphere Bengal searched for explicit schemes of industrial enterprise. In the words of Sumit Sarkar, “the air was full of Swadeshi schemes textile mills and imported handlooms, river transport concern, watch and
soap factories earthenware’s and tanneries.”60 Actions were taken on several fronts simultaneously. The anti partition movement in Bengal were also complemented by a redefinition of the goal of Indian nationalism itself, the faith in the ultimate achievement of self-government. Within the British empire, as had been explained by the moderate leadership in the Congress, was now abandoned in favour of full and complete freedoms or *Purna Swaraj*.

**Impact of Swadeshi Movement in Assam and role of Ambikagiri:**

The heightened political atmosphere of Bengal, the tempo of resistance unleashed by the partition of the province created a somewhat ripple effect in the Bramhaputra valley. In the backdrop of the momentous happenings in Bengal, repercussion in the valley need to be understood in a broader context, where man like Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, a firebrand revolutionary of Assam played a role under the influence of *Swadeshi* workers like Gobindo Lahiri, proprietor, Assam Valley Trading Company.61 Official report of Eastern Bengal and Assam recorded the happenings in Assam as follows: “At the instance of the local Mirasders a Swadeshi meeting of no great importance was held at Munshi Bazar in South Sylhet, on 25th November. Some pleaders and Mukhtears of Maulavi Bazar attended.62 The inspector of Sunamganj reports that Aghor Ch. Kaya of Sunam Ganj informed him that the Mirasders of Charnarchar had forbidden the people of Patheria Quzar to buy or sell ‘belati cloths’, and that the people have been compelled to return certain cloths which the Kaya (Marwari) sold them on credit, the same thing is reported at Madhyanagar Bazaar in jurisdiction of Dharmaprata police station, where Babu Jadu Nath Sen, Superintendent of the Estates of the Gauripur Jamindar, to whom the Bazar belongs, has forbidden the people to sell foreign cloths. The Bazar dealers are now trying to return the cloth purchased from the Kaya on credit.63

The tempo of political resistance increased following the official announcement of the partition of Bengal and the heightened political atmosphere in Bengal stimulated a series of action in Assam, both Surma and Bramhaputra Valley. District wise report (official) suggests a slow rise of Swadeshi sentiments which is

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62. APAl Eastern Bengal and Assam Sylhet 15-12-2006.
63. Ibid.
evident in the initiatives taken by people inspired by the Swadeshi spirit. For such an indominating spirit of Swadeshi a number of persons went a long way from Tezpur to Calcutta to an Industrial Exhibition. Some of the participants were: (i) Babu Man Mohan Lahiri. (ii) Babu Amlya (Amulya?) Ch. Banerjee. (iii) Babu Girish Ch. Das and (iv) Babu Raj Kishore Chatterjee. Moreover a shop has been started by a certain native gentleman called’ Swadeshi Bhandar’ and country made goods were sold.  

The S. P. reports from Darrang district that Babu Man Mohan Lahiri, a pleader has purchased a Hattersely loom and started a business. The capital of the concerned industry was 1,000/-“thus the influence of Swadeshi led to the launching of the first textile mill in Assam the report further says, “shares have been offered to the public as it is purely a private concern for the manufacture of cloth, and the machine is kept in a room belonging to the Assam valley trading company. One significant aspect of these official’s report are the contradiction revealed, for instance the Kamrup S. P. reports that no industrial concern has been started as a result of the Swadeshi movement, but the Kotwali sub-inspector reports that the following shops of the town have commenced selling Swadeshi articles, more than formerly. They were: (i) Munshi Taibali (ii) B. N. Dey & Co. (iii) Brojo Nath Pandit. (iv) Assam Valley Trading Company. The last named it is further reported, deals in Swadeshi articles exclusively if available, but are still selling their old stock of foreign goods. Its share holders are mostly pleaders with a sprinkling of amola and others. The attitude taken by the above mentioned shops have not had any effect on the market at present.

In Darrang following persons are the Principal share holders of the shop called “Swadeshi Bhandar.” (i) Babu Mahendra Nath Das, Pleader (ii) Babu Chandra Kanta Das, Pleader (iii) Babu Anukul Chandra Mukherjee Merchant. In Kamrup the following persons were active in pleading Swadeshi in Palasbari : (i) Bisto Prasad Mukherjee, of village Jirat, Balagan police station, District – Hughli. (ii) Lal Madhab Das, of village, Bali Ghuguria Police station Sajatpur, District – Pabna. (iii) Jaladhar Das Kaibarta, of village Jaina P.S- Manikganj, District- Dacca. As the report

64. APAI Darrang 5-1-1907
66. APAI Kamrup 19-01-07.
67. APAI Darrang 26-01-1907
68. APAI Kamrup 2-2-1907.
suggests they were basically merchants and along with business were preaching Swadeshi as the movement was gaining momentum in Maharטרה, Punjab etc.

Home Deptt. reports from a number of districts reveals the spread of Swadeshi cult having a strong connectivity with Bengal. From Sibsagar the S.P. reports a person calling himself Narendra Nath Mukherjee has started jute cultivation near Sonari outpost in this district. His capital was about Rs.500/- and he hoped to start Swadeshi enterprises. He states that he was an ex- 2nd grade sub-inspector of the Calcutta police.69 The Inspector of Barpeta reports that on the 28th March 1907, in the local theatre of Barpeta, a Swadeshi meeting was held. The meeting was convened by Rajendra Ch. Das and Ambika Charan Das, the two students in the first class of local Entrance school and was attended by students, teachers and some local persons. Lecturers were delivered by Kandarpa Ch. Das seventh master of the Entrance school and by Babu Ram Das. The second pandit, on Boycott of foreign goods. Srijut Hari Prasad Das, B.A. son of Babu Ram Das, Deputy Inspector of school of Barpeta and who is a candidate for an extra Assistant Commissionership presided. It was proposed to hold another meeting next Sunday.70 This is an official report suggesting an initiative taken by the educated class including Govt. official to create an awareness regarding Boycott of foreign goods. Sibsagar report records the arrival of Sri Nibasastri as Gokhel’s representative to Jorhat to hold a meeting.71

Exploration of the records available in the archive (Police Abstract, Home Political deposit etc.) brings to the fore the absence of a mass social base of the movement in Assam which failed to engage the large section of society as compared to the happenings in Bengal. Nevertheless impact of the movement can not be denied which even confidential official reports substantiate. Intensified anti-partition activities talking place in Surma Valley gets confirmed by official reports.72 A Swadeshi mission was started at Sylhet to propagate the message of Swadeshi amongst the masses in rural areas. Here Zamidar played a very significant role, calling their tenants to give-up sale and purchase of foreign goods even going to the

69. APAI Sibsagar 16-2-1907
70. APAI Kamrup 30-3-1907.
71. APAI Sibsagar 2-2-1907.
72. HPB, January 1908, Nos 48, 552-3.
extent of coercion through social ostracism to propagate Swadeshi. Inspector of Habibganj writes – He (B. Pal) was glad to hear that scarcely any ‘bilati’ goods were procurable in the Habibganj Bazar. He explained the Swadeshi movement and said that by the word ‘Boycott’ to which he applied the Bengali term ‘Bahiskaran’ he meant not only that ‘Bilati goods’ were to be avoided but the very idea of using them should be driven from the mind. By doing this the next generation would find the path to their goal of self Govt. made easy and that goal could only be reached by firmly adhering to the policy of Boycott.

A continuous campaign through meetings and lectures by Swadeshi leaders from Bengal resulted in a sort of interaction between the local Swadeshi workers and the leaders mostly from neighboring Bengal. Another report from Sadr inspector Kamrup (23-2-1907) substantiates the growing connectivity between Assam and the rest of India with regard to the resistance movement against the British authority. The inspector reports that he met at the house of Babu Mohendra Mohan Lahiri, pleader, Gauhati, two members of the servant of India society. These two persons were Srinibas Sastri of Madras, a graduate of that university and Babu Amulya Prasad Bose of Calcutta. They appear to be touring with the objective of obtaining information.

What was happening in the public sphere was a slow process of political awakening through various organizations and activities. Samities like Suhrid Samities of Mymansingh inspired by samities in Bengal took different measures like propagating Swadeshi song. Report from Sylhet says the report concerning the Bande Mataram Samiti has been submitted by a native gentleman. The same report says, Māyer Gan (i.e. mother’s song a book published by the Swadeshi samiti of Mymansingh. It’s price is one anna. The members of the committee brought two copies of this book. It contains a large number of Swadeshi songs. In Lakhimpur something different was initiated and this could be viewed from the perspective of economic self-reliance as brought forward by the Swadeshi movement. “A meeting was held in the tenth instant under the auspices of the local committee of the “Association for the advancement and industrial education of Indians” at Dibrugar.

74. Eastern Bengal and Assam Police Abstract of Intelligence 23-2-1907.
75. SB Eastern Bengal and Assam Sylhet 9-3-1907.
About 25 parsons were present... Umesh Ch. Mukherji the local Swadeshi leader is the local secretary of the association.76

The two districts of Kamrup and Barpeta witnessed intensifying activities in the form of meetings as evident from official records. Contrary to the popular perception that Swadeshi could not make much of an inroad in Assam a different picture of the political activities centered on Boycott and Swadeshi emerges. The inspector of Barpeta reports that, on 30th March at the local theatre another meeting was held under the presidentship of Jagannath Ch. Das and in the meeting Kandarpa Ch. Das and some students and shop keepers spoke, asking those present to give up buying foreign goods if country made things are available.77 The inspector of Barpeta reports that 150 people were present at the meeting presided over by Jagannath Ch. Das, the inspector is of the opinion that this person is the originator of the two meetings lately held in Barpeta town. Jaganath is a resident of Barpeta but was a student of the Rajshahi College, from where he appeared of the last F.A. examination. “There is every possibility of this Barpeta student getting influenced by heightened political activity in Rajshahi.”78

In western Assam, Goalpara district according to official report was not very much influenced by Swadeshi agitation but the subsequent report of (27-4-1907) did mention some student political activity on “on 21st April some boys of the Dhuburi High School distributed printed copies of a leaflet among the people who assembled at Dhuburi for the purpose of bathing in the Brahmaputra, requesting them to Boycott foreign goods. It has been ascertained that a Boy, named S.C. Ganguly, had the leaflet printed at the Parijat Press.”79

A very significant elite effort was made by a small group of people from Assam for the amalgamation of Eastern and Western Bengal. The S.P. Kamrup reports that a memorial is being circulated for signatory having for its object the amalgamation of Eastern and Western Bengal under a Governor and the administration of Assam under a Chief Commissioner. The following persons were

76. APAI Lakhimpur 16-3-1907.
77. APAI Kamrup 6-4-1907.
78. APAI Kamrup 13-4-1907.
79. APAI Golpara 2-3-1907.
reported as having signed it:-(i) Raja Prabhat Ch. Baruah of Gauripur. (ii) Manik Ch. Baruah. (iii) Lalit Ch. Naik. (iv) Kamala Kanta Das. (v) Ram Prasad Das. The last three were pleaders from Barpeta. 

At another level district of Goalpara witnessed some activity in respect of self defense “from the 5th instant about 15 boys of the Dhuburi High School (one of whom is a Mohamedan and the rest are Hindus) are having taught lathi khel in the premises of Dina Nath Sarkar, a contractor. The teacher is Romoni Mohan Sen, B.A. son of Babu Rojoni Kant Sen, a medical practitioner.”

British repression consequent to Boycott and the preaching of Swadeshi resulted in intensifying the movement. What began as a localized protest assumed a national dimension and became a powerful instrument of opposition against British imperialism. The attitude of mendicancy was given up. This changing attitude gets expressed in Tilak’s speech on 2nd January 1907 at Calcutta, “This is Boycott and this is what we mean when we say Boycott is a political weapon. We shall not give them (the English) assistance to collect revenue and keep the peace, we shall not assist them in fighting beyond the frontier or outside India with Indian blood and money. We shall not assist them in carrying on the administration of justice. We shall have our own courts and when the time comes we will not pay taxes.”

Bengal was in ferment consequent to the partition. “To the people of Assam the proposed amalgamation with the districts of Bengal was a bolt from the blue ever since British occupation it may be remembered Assam failed to receive adequate justice in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal overburdened as he was with the responsibilities of an extensive province.”

The situation eased to a great extent when status of Assam enhanced with the Granting of Chief Commissioners province in 1874. This resulted in a general improvement of the province as necessary measures were initiated by the Chief Commissioner in the field of education communication administration etc. In his presidential address of the Bombay session of Indian national Congress 1904 Sir Henry Cotton denounced the proposed scheme as “the most arbitrary and unsympathetic evidence of irresponsible statesmanship”.

80. APAI Kamrup 11-5-1907.
81. APAI Kamrup 18-05-1907.
this backdrop joining the province to the much advanced districts of Bengal would “nullify the good that has been derived at the hands of Chief Commissioner.”\textsuperscript{85} He further expressed his fear that if amalgamated with Bengal eventually Assam proper would have to meet a keen and unequal competition of highly educated, enterprising and advantageously situated districts because of which they are not prepared for the same.\textsuperscript{86}

The Assam association, the first broad based political organization established in 1903 at Jorhat representing the wishes and aspiration of the people expressed its apprehension regarding the partition as follows, “the historic name of Assam will be obliterated for ever, her language (will) suffer and the removal of the seat of the Govt. to a place outside Assam proper and further away from the geographical centre will necessarily make her lose the amount of care and attention which it (has) at precedent received from Government.”\textsuperscript{87} The Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha, another political organization led by people like Jagannath Baruah, Manik Ch. Baruah argued, “when the Govt. of India do not propose to separate Orissa from Bengal owing to a political association for a century, there is certainly very much less ground for cutting up Bengal proper into two portions, the people of both portions having been not only politically associated from the earliest historical times, but also forming one people both by language and race.\textsuperscript{88}

In the public sphere according to newspaper reports numerous activities were carried out and on the whole the attitude of the people of Assam towards Swadeshi and partition movement was favourable. One correspondent of the Bengalee who made an extensive tour of the Principal towns of Assam valley reported about the enthusiasm among the buyers for the purchase of Swadeshi goods.\textsuperscript{89} At Guwahati he found the enlightened Bengali and Assamese people were using Kurkutch instead of

Liverpool salt, Benaras Sugar instead of foreign sugar, deshi cloth instead of Manchester cloth. The head priest of the Kamakhya Temple appealing to the Pandas, the grocers and sweet met sellers not to except foreign goods or indulge in their sale, purchase in the Nilachal hills were reported by the same correspondent. The shops started for selling Swadeshi goods is confirmed by official reports.  

The concept of national school was also closely related with the Swadeshi movement as these were used as centre for the spreading the agitation “students and children formed the bulk of audience at anti partition meetings and were organized into noisy processions that paraded the streets of mofussil towns shouting Bande Mataram and interfering with trade” Anti British activities of these schools stirred the government into taking stern measures against such institutions. R.W. Carlyle the officiating Chief Secretary to the government of Bengal had to send a confidential circular to district magistrates and collectors to take actions against educational institutions followed by other circulars. One such circular for instance prohibited even the shouting of Bande Mataram. Government repressive measures included imprisonment fines and expulsion from institutions and deportation of political leaders etc.  

The English rulers realized that the students because of their large numbers, their zeal and impressionable nature, were a grave threat. R.W. Carlyle before Fuller’s assumption of office as Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam issued circular to the district magistrates directing them to have scholarship and grants-in-aid withdrawn from those institutions if the students of which were found taking part in Swadeshi, Boycott and picketing. The Director of public instruction issued orders for expulsion of such students. The pupils of such schools were debarred from government service. These repressive measures evoked a storm of protest and indignation. By and large teachers stood by their students. The question of

90. News item the Bengalee, 8 September 13 & 19 October 1905 as cited in H.K. Barpujari (ed.), Political History of Assam p.187.
91. Abstract of Intelligence, Eastern Bengal & Assam Police 26th January, 1907; Kamrup 19 January.
92. Home deposit October 1907 No -19.
94. HPB, 1910 January No. 83
95. HPA, June 1906 Nos 169-86
establishing national school was taken up by the Indian leaders and led to the inauguration at the Anti-circular society and the Dawn society. The anti-circular society was founded by Sachindra Prasad Basu.\textsuperscript{96} It arranged for education of those students who were expelled from government institutions or punished for taking part in the \textit{Swadeshi} campaign. It also promoted the cause of \textit{Swadeshi} and supplied home spun cloths at the cost price to users in both towns and villages. The Dawn society run exclusively by students under the guidance of Satis Ch. Mukherji revolutionized the concept of education, by making it moral religious and meaningful.\textsuperscript{97} Later on this society endeavored to impart education through the medium of vernaculars with English as a compulsory subject, and give it a national tinge. Another society established at the same time was the society for the promotion of Technical education.\textsuperscript{98} Both the institutions continue to provide educations to Indian students so that they had not to depend on government colleges and face the wrath of the British, \textit{Swadeshi} was certainly a powerful force in the struggle for freedom. Boycott and \textit{Swadeshi} eventually became strong weapons in the future Congress battles against the British.

Dacca Gazette commented on the repressive measures of the new government as follows: “The past three years of its existence is a dismal record of repression waging was against school boys, prosecuting Swadeshi workers, quartering punitive police and indulging in sensational house search.”\textsuperscript{99} Along with there measures government resorted to its most favoured policy of divide and rule. Fuller sought to detract a large section of the Mahamadans who had willingly participated in the movement.\textsuperscript{100} The new administration openly favoured the Muslims. Fuller said with reference to the two main section of the population the Mussalmans and the Hindus, that they were like the two queens of the Indian legend, the first being suo (favored) and the second duo (neglected)\textsuperscript{101} government’s partisan handling of the whole issue eventually led to a rift between the two communities resulting in worst possible communal riots in parts of Eastern Bengal.

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96. R. C. Mazumder, Op cit, p.69.  
99. HPB, January 1910 No. 83  
\end{flushright}
Another significant aspect of the anti partition movement was the organization of volunteers some of whom having extreme radical ideas about the salvation of the motherland reflecting the widening rift between the Moderates and the Extremist in the Indian National Congress. While the Moderates preferred gradual constitutional methods the extremist had their faith in revolutionary measures desiring complete independence. They firmly believed in revolutionary methods through secret organization and activities including shouting and intimidating reactionary officials and looting of government arms and treasure. Prominent among them were Sevak Samiti, Anusilan Samiti, Suhrid Samiti etc. mobilizing large number of youths and establishing branches in different parts of the province. According to government intelligence Suhrid Samiti of Sylhet operated a gun factory in the North of Sylhet on the boarder of the Garo Hills. Some members of the Samiti, it was believed by the official circles, were involved in the Alipore conspiracy case and three of its members were arrested in this connection.\(^{102}\)

Evidently official records of this period were full of concerns of the growing influence of volunteers and their activities, E.C. Rayland officiating D.I.G. crime railways and rivers Eastern Bengal and Assam in a note entitled, *National volunteer* with which the movement developed in that year indicated that the several volunteer Samities that had been started in Calcutta and the glowing account of their doings published in the native press together with the preaching of B. C. Pal, S.N. Banerjee and other itinerating agitators had gained a firm grasp on the minds of the Bengali youths, Samities were started all over the province, and in 1907, with the exception of Sibasaghr, Goalpara and the Garo hills every district had volunteer organization. He further writes. “It may surely be assumed that even so far back as 1902 its organizers had in view the training of youths as volunteers to assist in the general movement.”\(^{103}\) J. N. Banerji an accused in the Alipore case started the first school for the physical development of Bengali youths in Calcutta in the year 1902. Youths were taught riding and by cycling. Politics were discussed in the volunteer samities are known to exist in several districts of the province. Many of these are branches of samities started in Calcutta others were started in this province under the auspices of Sarala

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102. Home Political deposit 1909 report by DIG Eastern Bengal and Assam, 6th November 1908.
Debi (Mymansingh), Aswini Kr. Dutta (Barisal) and Annada Roy (Dacca). The first use made of volunteers was in connection with the Boycott of foreign goods, in preaching the Swadeshi cult and the usurping of the duties of the police in maintaining law and order at fairs and festivals. Not only were the volunteers utilized for these purposes within the district to which they belonged but they were deported to other district. Realizing the grave danger from the volunteers he further writes, “Volunteering has had a most demonstrating effect, edu (education) has been neglected and the authority of the parents set at defiance till gradually lieutenants of the agitators have assumed complete control over the boys. These lieutenants are in most cases unprincipled loafers.” This official note is self contradicting on the one hand volunteers are mentioned as ‘un principled loafers’ on the other they are powerful and influential, the power and influence volunteers seem to exercise over the Hindu gentry generally is perhaps the most unsatisfactory phase of the movement. “We find well-to-do and advanced Hindu gentleman carried away by the cry of Bande Mataram and joining the disturbances started by volunteers.”

Complete rejection of partition by the people Bengal was exemplary for the whole nation in a domino effect as is evident from the protests and revolutionary activities carried out. The goings on in Surma Valley consequent to the partition indeed have its impact in Bramhaputra valley also. It was essentially a part of the larger political movement but there is a clear distinction between the political mobilization of the two valleys. In the Surma Valley we see an active elite response to the movement with Zamindars calling upon tenants to give up foreign goods and even going to the extent of coercion through the more effective and subtle weapon of social ostracism whereas in the Bramhaputra Valley the movement had an urban element with a feeble elite response to revolutionary activities. In most cases Swadeshi and Boycott were initiated by Bengali’s in the Bramhaputra Valley as shown by official papers.

As has already been referred to anti-partition movement in the Bramhaputra Valley had an urban orientation. Stray references made in some of the official records

104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
108. HPB, January 1908 No. 48.
suggests the existence of a centre of disaffection at Guwahati as suspected by the police when inflammatory literature of the Yugantar type was found in some hostels and the notice board of the cotton college Gauhati.\textsuperscript{109}

\section*{Anti-partition movement and Ambikagiri:}

It is in this context of Brahmaputra Valley that Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury needs to be analyzed, a firebrand revolutionary eventually turning into a full time political activists always advocating the cause of Assam and the Assamese people. In fact it was the time when revolutionary ideas were getting moulded and shaped as has been described in his autobiography ‘\textit{Mor Jiban Dhumuhar Esati}’. Anarchism as a political concept had its origin in Russia propagated by philosopher Bakunin. In India in the aftermath of the partition of Bengal a section of the radical minded youth got inspired by anarchism and consequently formed anarchist party as underground organization. Emergence of the Anarchist party consequent to anti partition movement according to Ambikagiri was the result of localized discontent especially in Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab.\textsuperscript{110} His interpretation omits the larger issue which Congress made a national issue. He made a categorical statement that impact of the anti partition was felt only in Guwahati but even official records suggests sporadic activities and organization in other parts of the Brahmaputra valley\textsuperscript{111} He explained this limited impact on account of the absence of a railway network connecting different places of the valley except Guwahati. This was the time when Assam Valley Trading Company Manager Govind Lahiri was playing the most active role initiating some students to the ideas of Swadeshi and Boycott including Ambikagiri. He himself mentioned that the ideas of Swadeshi and Boycott of this (anti-partition) movement touched their (some student of Gauhati) heart through Govinda Lahiri. Roy Choudhury further writes, “following his advice we enthusiastically involved ourselves in groups in preaching Swadeshi in the streets of Gauhati, in door to door selling of canvass like dhotis of Banga Lakshmi cotton mills of Calcutta, encouraging Assamese sisters and mothers for spinning and weaving requesting Bengali sisters and mothers to learn wearing and spinning.\textsuperscript{112} Ambikagiri whole heartedly embraced the ideal of Swadeshi as his subsequent activities like establishing Aruna Press.

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\item \textsuperscript{109} HPA, July 1910 Nos. 112-3
\item \textsuperscript{110} S. N. Sarma, (ed.), Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury Rachanavali, p.656.
\item \textsuperscript{111} APAI, Goalpara 27-04-07.
\item \textsuperscript{112} S. N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.656.
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Launching Kamrup Mayabini chemical works as an entrepreneurial venture clearly proves this point.

Regarding their active involvement in the movement Ambikagiri writes, “we don’t see the level of enthusiasm now, that we had at that time except in the Congress non co-operation movement and 1942 mass movement." Ambikagiri Roy Chaudhury was greatly influenced by Govinda Lahiri at that can be explained by the fact that he was the centre of the happenings in Guwahati and Assam Valley Trading Company was the leading Swadeshi enterprise, as has been proved by official record. Ambikagiri and a group of young students of Guwahati formed a voluntary organization named the *Seva Sangha*, “with the objective of serving helpless people with Sri Nidhiram Das as captain Secretary and with late Govinda Lahiri as treasurer.” All members of the Sangha were very much enthusiastic about doing something unique and they started working in the rail station and steamer dock. The porters of the Gauhati Rail Station and Steamer Ghat responded positively by allowing them to work every Sun Day. But the Seva Sangha was basically a political organization. “The voluntary organization and under the leadership of Ambikagiri it developed into a terrorist organization on the lines of the *Anusilan Samiti* for which even personal contacts were made with some revolutionaries of Bengal. The members of the Sangha used to have regular drill and physical exercise including training in wrestling, Jujutsu, Lathi, Sword and dagger plays besides swimming and riding.” Bibhabananda Choudhury, famous gymnast from Panbazar trained Ambikagiri and his friends in physical exercises and others sports. This group included Bisnuram Medhi, Late Kumud Borah, Pushpa Ujir, Ganesh Barnha, Raktim Borah etc. Later on the Sangha got more politicized with more intensified activities They left school colleges and minded up to form an anarchist party. An official report suggests in this regard that Babu Govinda Lahiri in charge of the Gauhati Branch of the Assam Valley Trading Company applied for permission to go out on procession in the streets.

113. Ibid P.657.
114. APAI, Kamrup 19-01-07.
119. Ibid p -657
of the town in morning and evening of the 16th October, 1906. Permission was granted the sub inspector in-charge of the procession reports that the procession was well attended by the students of the Sonaram School Govt. High school vernacular school and college. The procedure was singing of nationalsongs with loud shouts of Bande Mataram at intervals. Two or three cloths of foreign manufactures were burnt" This report is also evident of the student involvement in Swadeshi movement, as we go through the activities of students like Ambikagiri and others.

Later on many of the Sevā Sangha members left the organization as it involved hard work remaining only Sri Nidhiram Das, Captain and seven others including Ambikagiri. Dr. Hari Krishna Das worked as the Medical officer of the Sangha. Ambikagiri and his group took the responsibility of door to door selling of Swadeshi cloth imported through Assam valley Trading Company from the textiles mills of Calcutta and Bombay. Some were appointed by Seva Sangha as salesman and this led to an incident of stealing, causing estrangement of relation with Mr. Lahiri prompting Ambikagiri to do some significant activity.

The next episode is Bandini Bharat, Ambikagiri’s first creative work inspired by Swadeshi. In his own words it is described “we decided to stage play on the auspicious occasion of Saraswati Puja in Government High School. But where is the play ?” Therefore Ambikagiri performed an astonishing task, thought over a plot and completed a revolutionary play overnight entitled “Bandini Bharat”, distributed the roles and started rehearsing the play in the hostel room of normal school boarder Binanda Baruah. His first revolutionary act, the staging of Bandini Bharat was a fascinating episode as Ambikagiri himself writes, “Apprehending trouble the dialogs were distributed among the actors and the manuscript kept secretly by one of the group. On the auspicious occasion of Saraswati Puja the play got enacted. British Indian police attended the show and declared it illegal. The manuscript of the play was confiscated and disappeared while in police custody. But according to the reference in ‘Mor Jiban Dhumuhar Esati’ (the autobiography of Ambikagiri) the manuscript was not confiscated, as it could not be found only some parts of the

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120. 20-10-06, Eastern Bengal and Assam Police abstract of intelligence.
122. Ibid p.658.
123. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury, Makers of Indian Literature, p.3.
dialogs were confiscated.\textsuperscript{124} There was no further reference of \textit{Bandini Bharat}, (manuscript). Never the less the manuscript or parts of it could not be traced anywhere. After this Ambikagiri and his group came under strict police vigilance. Keshab Sen, another Swadeshi worker son of a Guwahati Police Officer Bireswar Sen told them to be careful about police.\textsuperscript{125}

As has already been mentioned Ambikagiri felt an intense urge of forming anarchist party in Assam. The emerging secret revolutionary societies and the cult of terrorism in the wake of the anti-partition movement had its ramification in Assam, K. N. Dutta writes, some Bengali anarchists came to Assam also and tried to secure a hold over its youth. Ambikagiri Raichowdhury, Bisurem Medhi, Triguma Baruah,, Raktim Bora and some other young man, seem to have come under the spell of anarchism for some time\textsuperscript{126} The C.I.D. were busy tracing anarchists in Assam and raiding suspected hideouts. The Swadeshi cult spread to Guwahati and Ambikagiri became one of its loyal adherents. The cult had its ramifications in various kinds of socio economic activities, gymnastics clubs, programme of popular patriotic songs, Boycott of foreign goods and organization of terrorist acts. Ambikagiri became involved in all these activities.\textsuperscript{127} In the midst of all these activities Ambikagiri and his Swadeshi friends finally decided to form anarchist party in Assam mainly at the initiative of Govinda Lahiri who one evening told Ambikagiri to meet Barindra Ghosh, Ullaskar Dutta and Khudiram Bose who were coming to Gauhati to form an anarchist party.\textsuperscript{128} Whether those Bengal revolutionaries came to Assam at that time no evidence is found in official records. But finally an independent anarchist party was formed in Guwahati in 1905 against the amalgamation of Eastern Bengal with Assam and started working as an anti-British organization.\textsuperscript{129}

Ambikagiri shouldered the responsibility of leading the Anarchist party this time and left \textit{Sevā Sangha} captain Nidhiram Das out side the ambit of the party since he was not so much enthusiastic about anarchist ideas.\textsuperscript{130} The first activity launched

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{124} S. N. Sarma, Op cit, p.658.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Ibid p.658.
\item \textsuperscript{126} K. N. Dutta, \textit{Land marks of the freedom struggle in Assam}, p. 48.
\item \textsuperscript{127} B. K. Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p.3
\item \textsuperscript{128} S. N. Sarma, Op cit p.659.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid. p. 659.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid , p.659.
\end{itemize}
by the party was to set ablaze the European recreation hall, the *Adda Bangla* which they considered as a symbol of British authority. How they proceeded to implement this plan and how it was finally done has been discussed in detail in his autobiography ‘*Mor Jibon Dhnuhar Esāti*’.131 Leaving aside other things the sheer magnanimity of their courage to burn the reaction hall going against the Assamese elite denouncement of terrorism is highly significant in the history of Bramhaputra Valley revolutionary movement. Nothing has been referred in Police record about this incident but Ambikagiri and other actors came under strict police vigilance. Even Gobinda Lahiri was not spared. However this could not deter Ambikagiri and his party from their revolutionary activities as the party got well organized. “Binanda, Raktim and Triguna took the responsibility of spy and Pitambar had the responsibility of distracting the police”.132 The party maintained complete secrecy and carried out their activities. With complete dedication Ambikagiri engaged himself with the task of collecting arms and ammunition and became successful to acquire the technical know how about bomb making. However a contradictory view has been expressed in an article entitled “*Roy Choudhury Aru Teonr Madhur Unmadanā*” published in the “souvenior Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury”. Here Sadananda Chaliha mentions about his frequent meeting with Ambikagiri. “I asked him one day why he is so anti Bengali. He immediately replied I am not anti Bengali.133 He further writes that Ambikagiri was first initiated to Swadeshi by the Bengali Gurus and became a disciple of Barindra. He got more inclined to terrorist methods and became an active member of the *Anusilan Samiti*. This is quite contrary to what has been described in his autobiography. Barin Ghosh decided to kill Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the then Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal, the most hated British official for his repressive measures. Ambikari was entrusted with the task of planting a dynamite on the Shillong Gauhati road. The idea was to kill Fuller who was to travel by that road on that particular day (1905)134. Surendra Das Gupta another terrorist came from Bengal to assist him in the task. On the Bamfylde Fuller was traveling Ambikagiri placed the explosives as directed but somehow it failed to reach the target. This was followed by

132. Ibid P.661.
133. Sadananda Saliha, “*Roy Chowdhury Aru Teor Madhur Unmadanā*” in Jogesh Das and Others (ed.), *Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury*, p.143.
* The date has not been mentioned. Nothing of Barin Ghosh is referred to either.
search operation and Das Gupta was arrested, Ambikagiri fled from the scene and adopted a pseudonym, Dighai Kalita.\textsuperscript{135} Surendra Das Gupta confessed everything after his arrest and turned government witness. The police registered case against Ambikagiri and three other members of the \textit{Anusilan Samiti}.

The \textit{Sevā Sangha} formed by Ambikagiri and a group of Assamese youth did constitute a significant aspect of the anti-partition and subsequent movement. They could not impact the larger society as the Assamese elite had little faith in the cult of violence. Moreover, the inherent weakness of the organization, paucity in the number of members and above all strict vigilance of the police prevented the Sangha from making much head way in its activities.\textsuperscript{136} Since it is difficult to sustain terrorist activities for a longer period without a popular support system like the press and the people it could not continued for long. Lakshminath Bezbaruah in his article ‘\textit{Bom}’ published in \textit{Kripabar Bar Baruar Bhābar Burburani},\textsuperscript{137} had totally disapproved the cult of violence. Syed Muhammad Sadullaaha, member of the Assam Legislative Council expressed in the house the general disapproval of the method of violence by both the Hindu and Muslim population of the Surma Valley.\textsuperscript{138}

Similar views were echoed in the local press although response to the movement was very much supportive, hailed as a potent remedy for combating the alleged growing poverty in India, but it condemned the violent activities of the extremists.\textsuperscript{139} \textit{The Times of Assam}, a well circulated English daily remarked “the votaries of Swadeshi and Swaraj can never expect the people to follow their lead so long as their programme is bloodshed, violence and disorder.\textsuperscript{140} The Assamese Press whether English or vernacular were moderate in tone with some exception like, \textit{The Advocate of Assam} (1904-07) edited by Mathura Mohan Baruah and \textit{Assam Bilasini}

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\textsuperscript{135} Jogesh Das and Others (ed.), Op cit, p.151.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid p.196.
\textsuperscript{137} This is a series of satire composed by L. N. Bezbarua in his magazine Bāhi from to
\textsuperscript{138} ALCP vol – v, 10 April 1913.
\textsuperscript{139} HPB August 1911, No-64 (confidential) see report on the Native-owned and vernacular News papers, for the year 1910
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, June 1910 Op. cited for the year 1908.
\end{flushleft}
edited by Krishna Kanta Bhatacharya. In such an atmosphere Ambikagiri and his anarchist friends had to face the repressive measures passed by the government of India to combat the spurt of terrorist activities. Acts like seditious meetings act 1907, the explosive substance Act (1908) the criminal law Amendment Act (1906) Indian Press Act (1910) ordinances and enactment were freely exercised by the authority.

In Assam the Criminal Law Amendment Act was freely exercised by local authorities to prohibit staging of dramas and jatras with seditious tendencies\footnote{141} In exercise of the provisions of this act singing of the patriotic songs and performance of operas of Makunda Das was prohibited. Besides, under the dramatic performance Act certain plays were prohibited in Eastern Bengal and Assam on the ground that the plays if performed in a public place are likely to excite feelings of disaffection towards the government established by law.\footnote{142}

Besides restrictions on the press and stage, extremist leaders of prominence were deported or sentenced to long term imprisonment. Bipin Chandra Pal, one of the prominent extremist leaders of the Indian National Congress was imprisoned in October 1907. Aurobindo Ghosh another extremist Swadeshi worker of the early phase of Indian National Congress had to suffer prosecution on charge of waging war against the king.\footnote{143}

Police could not prove Ambikagiri’s involvement in the Fuller incident but in view of his earlier activities he was expelled from Gauhati and interned in Barpeta for a number of years.\footnote{144} It is interesting to refer to an article written by Prasanna Lal Choudgury entitled, ‘Ambikagirik Moi Jenekoi Jano’. Here the writer mentioned about his first encounter with Ambikagiri as a shop keeper at Panbazar most probably the name of the shop was Chatra Bhander or some thing else. The shop was near the Panbazar Mosque. Choudhry returned to Barpeta after some days shared his experience with Bolo Bhadra Pathak, who warned him not to visit that shop again as it

\footnote{141} HPB August 1910 No-106.  
\footnote{142} No-80 18th January 1911 – Home Confidential  
\footnote{*} Under this Act plays prohibited were Chatrapati Sivaji by Girish Ch. Ghosh. 2. Durgasur by Haripada Chatterjee. 3. Karmafal by Manmohan Das 4. Matripuza by Kunja Behari Ganguly. 5. Mirkasim by Girish Ghosh.  
\footnote{144} Jogesh Das & others (ed.), Op cit, p. 151.
had been searched by police. Suddenly it came to my mind that he must be Swadeshi.145

Ambikagiri’s involvement in Swadeshi and his various activities are referred to by many of his contemporaries and this is very much significant in the history of freedom movement in the Bramhaputra valley. Ambikagiri was a full time Swadeshi worker being the leader of the Seva Sangha and subsequently anarchist party and this involvement ended his school carrier abruptly. He never went back to school. In fact Ambikagiri was under police surveillance right from the staging of the play Bandini Bharat (Imprisoned Bharat).

In order to understand Ambikagiri as a revolutionary his other activities need to be analyzed as it would provide different perspectives of how his political ideas were getting moulded which eventually led him on a path of relentless work and thinking. Here in this regard two incidents of his Swadeshi days are memorable and these revealed his active compassionate nature. In the first incident he saved a teenaged girl carried away by the swift Brahmaputra current, while he was swimming. After putting up a brave fight with the current he reached the drowning girl and rescued her. On another occasion, he rescued a sick boy abandoned by unknown inmates of a passing boat on the bank of the river Bhramaputa. The boy suffered from Cholera which was then a highly infectious disease having no cure. Ambikagiri nursed the abandoned boy, arranged for his proper treatment in hospital. The boy recovered after due treatment and nursing. Both these incidents are narrated in detail in the autobiography.146 These were highly satisfying experience for him. In fact to serve the helpless people was one of the objectives of Sevā Sangha. It was a display of his humanitarianism at its best. This humanitarianism is at the core of his ‘Final goal of man and Lasting peace on earth’ written at a later stage of his life expressing his matured political thinking and universality concerning the entire human race.

Ambikagiri’s love affair with Indumati, a Bengali girl of Gauhati, had an almost mythical character which according to Birendra Kumar Bhattachraya the editor

of the epoch making Assamese periodical *Ramdhenu* and a Jnanpeeth awardee, had a Van Goghian ardour to it.\(^{147}\) He cut the tip of his little finger and put it in a silver casket (given earlier to him by Indumati as a token of love) along with a letter written as a proof of his loyalty to her. These words written in his blood were equally fantastic.

In the contemporary Assamese society, orthodox as it was love and marriage rarely concur or coincide. But this affair, Ambikagiri transcended to another level, symbolizing the girl as the queen of beauty transforming it into a sort of platonic love. According to Assamese literary critiques this love affair is the inspiration behind “*Tumi*”,*(You)* one of Ambikagiri’s great literary works. This affair also reveals him as an honest and open minded personality, and the openness with which he narrates the episode is really appreciable. Atul Ch. Baruah referred to this openness in an article entitled “Ambikagirir Smritisāran”\(^ {148}\) Banikanta Kakati, a former president of the Asom Sahitya Sabha also wrote this love story in the journal of the Gauhati University.\(^ {149}\)

Ambikagiri was interned in Barpeta from 1906-14. This is the formative stage of his life marked by intense literary and cultural activities. As is well known Ambikagiri was always a relentless worker engaged in work with a collective interest. This collective interest is the interest of the people of Assam and his guiding spirit as revealed in various activities of his Barpeta days. His radical political activities had to be curbed partly due to the police vigilance and partly due to the fact that terrorism lost its popular appeal in Assam but in other parts of India terrorist outrage increased by leaps and bounds\(^ {150}\) Lord Minto, successor of Lord Curzon had to deal with this legacy of terrorist movement, Now it appeared in western India, Bengal and the Punjab. In western India it was connected with B.G. Tilak’s cult of patriotic orthodoxy, in Bengal it was a highly emotional cult linked with the goddess Kali and

\(^{147}\) B.K. Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p -5.  
\(^*\) The first poem *Tumi* written by Ambikagiri in Barpeta and published in 1915 is one of his greatest literary creations ‘You’ in the poem is the ultimate reality.  
\(^{149}\) Ibid, p. 25.  
\(^{150}\) R. C. Majumdar, Op cit, pp 329-330.
clearly the outcome of partition strains and stresses, in the Punjab activity seems to have linked with agrarian grievances stimulated by man from down country.\textsuperscript{151}

With the advent of Morle Minto Reforms the terrorist movement gradually died away, its last attempt being the attempted assassination of Lord Hardinge on his state entry into Delhi 1912. “The movement naturally caused alarm, but it was in fact the work of very small bodies un-supported by the main mass of Political India. But its real significance lies in the fact that it was considered as a symptom of the increasing self-consciousness of political India and of the danger of neglecting to provide a safety valve of public institutions for the new device for public self-expression.\textsuperscript{152} Under these circumstances Ambikagiri also changed his way to reach the same goal.

Ambikagiri had wider knowledge of music. Being a singer, composer and lyricist he had been well acquainted with Bargit from his very childhood. During the Swadeshi days in Guwahati Swadeshi songs were widely used by some Bengali youths to spread the message of Swadeshi and they were well-appreciated by the audience. Ambikagiri was greatly inspired by these songs. Another source of inspiration was the patriotic songs of nationalist Mukunda Das. Subsequently his songs were banned by Criminal Law Amendment Act.\textsuperscript{153} A dancer called Parbhavati from Manipur caused a stir among the youth of Assam singing patriotic songs of Mukanada Das. These efforts by Das and others were highly inspiring for Ambikagiri and the songs became one of his mediums chosen to educate the masses and inculcate in them the ideas of national unity and progress. Khudriam’s Bosse sacrifice inspired Ambikagiri to write a song paying homage to Khudiram Bose.\textsuperscript{154} The meaning of the song goes like this, “O my friend, do not cry at the death of Khudiram. There are 30 Crores of people in India, do not be afraid of death” This formative period of his life saw his mind being shaped to inaugurate an era in revolutionary songs later on. His first song was composed in 1905 in Gauhati.\textsuperscript{155}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{151} Percival Spear, Op cit, pp 771-772.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid, p -772.
\item \textsuperscript{153} HPB August 1910 No p. 106.
\item \textsuperscript{154} B.K. Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p.6.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Ibid p. 6.
\end{itemize}

* The text of the song was: “Sun sun bandhugan, Sok kar akāran, Ek Khudiram jāi, Ase tris koti bhāi, Bhoi nāi bhoi nāi.” Vide B.K. Bhattacharyya, \textit{Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury}, p. 6.
His intern period at Barpeta from 1906-1914 were marked by intense literary, cultural and social activities. He used to stay with his brother Girish Chandra Roy Choudhury who was a teacher of Barpeta Government High School. Prasannalal Chowdhury writes a very interesting account of his Barpeta days. Right from anti-partition movement in 1905 to the anti imperialist movement led by Mahatma Gandhi Ambikagiri was one of the pioneering freedom fighters of Assam. As a school student Ambikagiri prepared himself mentally to stand against the British authority and that abruptly ended his pursuit of education.\(^{156}\) Regarding his intern years Satish Ch. Kakati writes that its started from 1908 and ended in 1915. But according to Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya it started in 1906 and ended in 1914. Ambikagiri himself in his autobiography writes that he reached Dibrugarh in November 1914 by the time he had composed ‘Tumi’ and ‘Bina’ and took the manuscripts for publication in Dibrugarh.\(^{157}\) Since he was interned for seven years it must have started in 1907.

By this time Ambikagiri ventured into an untraded path. That Ambikagiri and his group were under the police scanner since the staging of Bandini Bharat has been substantiated by the fact that he was interned at Barpeta after the Fuller incident although his involvement could not be proved. Fuller incident has been referred to by Jugal Das in an article published in the souvenir published by Assam Publication Board.\(^{158}\)

Ambikagiri’s home coming as an intern is equally important to understand him as an intense socio-political worker as the stage had been set for multifarious activities which brings forth the entire social sphere of erstwhile Barpeta. Life moved into fast forward mode for Ambikagiri as he engaged himself in numerous activities. Prassanna Lal Choudhury writes how he had quickly developed a circle of his own at

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Barpeta, “His place had become a meeting place of Brahmins, Ganaks and other illiterate people of Dakshin Hati. We saw him giving speech on Sankar Dev’s Tithi (death anniversary) organized at High School”,\(^{159}\) Here Choudhry mentioned about an interesting incident where he severely criticized the so called university degree holders for not paying due attention to Sankar Dev’s religion, literature etc. Anticipating trouble president of the meeting Ram Prasad Das told him, “Ambika make it short (the speech) and do not attack any one.”\(^{160}\) Here Ambikagiri’s fearless attitude comes to the fore. By this time his revolutionary fearless image had attracted a group of young students of Barpeta and Prasanna Lal Choudhury was one of them. Keshab Choudhury, Ganesh Lal Choudhury, Hemkanta Das, Ambika Patowari and Radhika Choudhury were members of this group. As usual this group was very much engaged in activities ranging from sports to culture. Obviously coming of Ambikagiri stirred them to go for body building, theatre, football etc. This group had a football team called ‘champion’ as referred to by Prassana Lal Choudhury. He was not a very good foot ball player but he could work very hard.\(^{161}\) He encouraged youths of Barpeta to learn dumb – belling, jujutsu, wrestling, the act of handling of small arms like sword, dagger and lathi for self defense and other forms of physical sports that he had already learnt in Guwahati and also introduced some indigenous methods of wrestling.\(^{162}\) Thus this restless worker was never sitting idle although he was always under the watchful eyes of police and C.I.D. Later on he moved to Jatra Gaan.\(^{163}\)

How Ambikagiri delved into the field of play and theatre is a long and interesting narrative of his autobiography. On the occasion of the coronation ceremony of George V at Delhi (1911), festivity gripped Barpeta also, Sri Radhanath Phukan was the then S.D.O. of Barpeta. Ambikagiri along with a group of art lovers were invited by the S.D.O. and requested them to celebrate the occasion by staging a play.\(^{164}\) It was the time when Ambikagiri pushed for the idea of Assamese play but everyone laughed it away as absurd. Their argument was that Assamese language was not appropriate for dramatic expression. Then Ambikagiri, as usual, revolutionary in

\(^{159}\) Ibid, p. 28.  
\(^{160}\) Ibid, p. 8.  
\(^{161}\) Ibid p.30.  
\(^{164}\) S. N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.663.
every act, proceeded to write plays himself and promised to do something innovative.\textsuperscript{165} There were two drama groups at Dakhinhati\textsuperscript{*} of Barpeta in those days who mostly staged Bengali Jatra. Ambikagiri convinced both these groups to act in Assamese play. In fact he did not like the accented pronunciation of Assamese actors as mentioned in his autobiography.\textsuperscript{166} So Ambikagiri delved into the vast store house of mythology to churn out plays inspired by them. Barpeta days are specially noted for writing of his three mythological or semi historical plays \textit{Jayadrath Badh, Bhakta Gaurav and Kalyan Moyee}.\textsuperscript{167}

Ambikagiri recalls the activities of this period in a manner reflective of his enthusiastic and determined nature, “from 1908 to 1915, I was in Barpeta. During this period, I wrote seven books simultaneously though not necessarily at a stretch and thus I was launched into a literary career.”\textsuperscript{168} Some of his songs, verses and essays written during his Barpeta days are not available now. May be some of his works got destroyed in the search operation of his house conducted by CID as he had been under scanner all the time. His long poem \textit{Tumi} was hailed by Banikanta Kakati in 1916 as a harbinger of new trend in Assamese poetry.

Some critique claim that his first experimental play \textit{Jayadrath Badh} was enacted in 1910 in Barpeta as a popular Jatra\textsuperscript{169} But the fact is that the play was composed in 1911 as Roy Choudhury mentioned in the autobiography how he got inspired to write Assamese play\textsuperscript{170} Harish Ch. Bhattachrya also writes that the play was composed probably in 1911\textsuperscript{171} The same author writes that only three plays were written by Ambikagiri, first \textit{Bandini Bharat} (written in 1908) second a mythological

\textsuperscript{165} How anti-British hard worker Ambikagiri made up his mind for a dramatic performance in Assamese on the occasion of the coronation of George V in Barpeta seems intriguing. Perhaps it was the mission in his mind to make an endeavour for the projection of play in Assamese. Being well aware of the fact that Assamese language is quite capable of dramatic expression he moved on to implement the idea. Then the whole issue of the occasion probably appeared secondary. More over having seen the flourishing state of Bengali Jatras he expected the same for Assamese play and himself pioneered into the project.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid, p. 663.

\textsuperscript{167} Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p.6.

\textsuperscript{168} S. N. Sarma (ed.), Op cit, p.668.

\textsuperscript{169} Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p.7.

\textsuperscript{170} S. N. Sarma (ed.), Op cit, p.663.

\textsuperscript{171} Harish Ch. Bhattachrya, \textit{Asomiya Natya Sahityan Jilingoni}, p.241.

* Chokra Nach is a popular dance form mostly used in Bengali Jatra to provide dramatic relief as also enhancer effect that was an integral part of Ambikagiri’s plays.
play called *Jayadrath Badh* (written probably in 1911). *Bandini Bharat* must have been written before 1908, probably in 1906. Considering chronological events this patriotic play was composed in 1906. Backgrounds behind the writing of both these plays are mysterious according to B. K. Bhattacharya but Roy Choudhury has clearly explained the background in his autobiography.

At this point a closer look into the cultural sphere of Barpeta is required to understand the emergence of Ambikagiri as a playwright. The erstwhile Barpeta was much more advance in comparison to other places of Assam in many fields. Barpeta was not lagging behind in bringing *Bangla Jatra Gan* (play) and *Chokra Nach*. Tithiram Bayan has been considered as the first to import Bangla Jatra to Assam. In the meantime towards the end of 1911 Ambikagiri formed *Dakhinhati Jatra Party* with an idea to promote *Jatra* in Assamese language with Ambikacharan Patowari and Harendra Narayan Puzari. Paucity of standard Assamese play prompted him to venture into this field. It was not an easy venture to popularize Assamese play in view of the immensely popular Bengali Jatra but Ambikagiri determined as he was to establish firmly Assamese plays on Barpeta stage did it with ease.

Towards the end of 1911 his first experimental play *Jayadrath Badh* (slaying of Jayadrath) was enacted in popular *Jatra* form in the *Satra* campus and it was a great success. His other two plays; *Kalyanmoyee* and *Sikhidhawajar Dān Parikshā (Bhakta Gaurav)* were also got immensely popular. His plays conquered Barpeta and were able to end the strong grip of Bangla Jatra in Barpeta. His effort resulted in receding the influence of Bangla *Jatra* not only from Barpeta but also from Assam. Not only did he produce a body of dramatic works well received by the people he simply prepared the way for others to follow. Prasanna Lal Choudhury mentioned about his getting inspired by Ambikagiri to write mythological plays. There is no doubt that he successfully promoted Assamese play.

“Ambikagiri made those people act and dance who were novice in theatre, played the harmonium and mesmerized the audience”. Of all his dramatic works

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Jayadratha Badh has an importance of its own. As has already been referred want of good enactable plays induced him to write Jayadratha Badh. In view of the popularity of the Jatra (musical play) form Ambikagiri composed the play in unrhymed metre and had five acts and sixteen scenes which was based on the Dronaparva of the Mahabharata. He infused new elements into the story and used traditional devotional and folk songs as interludes or enhancer of effects.

Passionate as he was in every endeavour he did become fully involved in dramatic venture after the successful staging of Jayadrath Badh. “While the nationalist in Ambikagiri relished in reviving the traditional Assamese cultural forms and initiating a modern trend, the artist in him grappled with the problem of presenting a mythological story in an artistically cogent form” 176. Whatever musical and histrionic talent he had he put at the disposal of the local theatre group. The well known story of Mahabharata was slightly modified to give coherence to the plot. While directing the play Ambikagiri used elements of traditional music to give the Jatra from an indigenous look. The centrality of the play is Bhakti (devotion) and the delineation of the plot and behaviour of the major characters are all directed towards establishing the supremacy of Krisna.

The seven years Ambikagiri spent in Barpeta as an inturn, a spurt of activities over took him. A study of the environment he lived in makes it quite clear that the stage in Barpeta was dominated by Bengali Jatras and this is the time that witnessed a development of Assamese play which astonish us both by its rapidly and variety initiated by Ambikagiri.

On the occasion of King George’s coronation ceremony a group led by Hari Prasad Bramachari enacted a play called Hariraj at Barpeta although it was opposed by Ambikagiri and some others. Probably this was the last Bengali play staged in Barpeta. 177 Immediately after that Barpeta witnessed something new in its cultural sphere, the enactment of Assamese play. Ambikagiri himself writes at the preface of Jayadrath Badh, “all reached the ‘mel’ as invitees. Those who were present mentioned 4-5 Bengali plays. I raised the point of Assamese play. Others laughed at

the very idea of Assamese play citing the dearth of enactable play in Assamese. I felt insulted and walked out". 178

Another mythological play which he composed and staged in Barpeta was *Bhakta Gaurav* or *Sikhidhawajar Dan Pariksha* based on the story of king Sikhidhwaj taken from the ‘Asvamedha Parva’ of the ‘Mahabharata’. The story also occurs in the *Jaiminiya Asvamedha* version. 179 The third major dramatic contribution of Ambikagiri is *Kalyanmoyee* (1913-14) and with this he moved from mythology to history. Kalyanmoyee cannot be considered a purely chronicle play. The plot is imaginary—though the Assamese king mentioned in the play is a historical character.

Besides these three major dramatic works of Ambikagiri there are a few short plays to his credit written subsequently. No clear date can be assigned to his short plays, *Biplavar Sesh* (End of revolution) *Sri Rāmchandra Aru Tarā* (Sri Ram Chandra and Tarā) and *Visva-Nātya* (The drama of Universe) *Biplbar Sesh* inspired by non-violent freedom struggle of Mahatma Gandhi was published in *Chetana* in the name of his nephew Ramesh Chowdhury. 180 So it must have been written during or after the non-cooperation movement as the theme is an eulogy of non-violent resistance to injustice.

Ambikagiri’s stage plays were immensely popular in his younger days. Always big crowd pullers but subsequently there were decline of interest in his plays. Moreover he himself was not a careful preserver of his manuscripts and devoted his energy to other works. Literary value of his plays must be considered in the context of the environment he worked in. But the fact remains that his prose writing and poem has got much greater literary value than his plays. He showed great promise as a playwright trying his hand in mythological play as well as allegory (a sub genre of drama) that proved his dramatic sense, but he did not pursue it for long. Why he lost interest in drama is not very difficult to explain. It is a fact that he ventured into the field of drama with a mission and that was to give a foot hold to Assamese plays replacing Bengali Jatras, and he successfully achieved it.

178. Ibid, p.4.
179. Ibid, Preface p. 0.35
Ambikagiri’s plays were mostly experimental and not his sole medium of expression.\textsuperscript{181} It was a mission for him that he achieved successfully. However they have two historical values. Firstly his full length plays nourished the incipient modern Assamese stage at a time when it did not yet muster enough strength to stand on its feet. Secondly, he was the first writer who made patriotic sentiment a subject matter of drama.\textsuperscript{182}

Ambikagiri processed a kind of restless energy which he devoted to various activities with a collective interest. \textit{Jayadratha Badh} was staged in the first part of 1912 on the occasion of Sri Sri Madhab Deva’s death anniversary. It was an instant success. A huge crowd assembled and enjoyed the performance. \textit{Jayadratha Badh} and \textit{Bhakta Gaurav} were being enacted in marriage ceremonies at the rate of Rs. 60 per night. If he himself played violin then rate is Rs. 80.\textsuperscript{183} This drama group called, \textit{Dakhinhati Jatra Party} successfully performed Assamese plays in Guwahati, Dhuburi, Dibrugarh, Jorhat on different occasions and received wide popular response. Manuscripts of these two plays were in custody of Sri Harendra Puzari, Vice president, Santan Dharma Samaj.

His experiment with theatre started much earlier in 1904 as a dancer with Purna Sarma from Uzan Bazar on Arya Natya Ranga Mancha. On the same stage he gave another performance under the supervision of Nabin Chandra Bordoloi, Bipin Bordoloi, Jogen Barua etc. in the play ‘\textit{Chandrahas}’. He played the role of Murla and it was well appreciated.

Another memorable experience of Ambikagiri as a dancer has been referred to in the autobiography. Towards the later part of 1904 he enrolled himself as a student of Sibasagar Government High School. Durga Puza was celebrated with much fun fare at Amolapatty and a play \textit{Meghnad Badh} by Chandradhar Barua was staged on the occasion in Amolapatty Namghar (community prayer hall). In that play Ambikagiri along with Naba Kumar Barua brother of Dr. Prassana Barua performed a

\begin{flushright}
\text{\textsuperscript{181}} Ibid, p. 53.  \\
\text{\textsuperscript{182}} Maheswar Neog, \textit{Asomiyar Sahityar Ruprekha}, p. 295.  \\
\text{\textsuperscript{183}} S. N. Sarma (ed.), \textit{Op cit} p.665.
\end{flushright}
duet fairy dance. Everyone present there including Kuladhar Chaliha and Haresh Rajkhowa (Mouzadar) was fascinated by the performance.

While he was creating a cultural wave in Barpeta in 1912 through his immensely popular plays, the then CID officers of Barpeta Hafiz Uddin Ahmed and Tarini Dutta Gupta reported that Ambikagiri was secretly planning to form an Anarchist party in Barpeta and had illegal arms in his house. So a search warrant was issued against him and his house was thoroughly searched. They even dug out his courtyard in search of weapons. Some of his writings got destroyed in the search operation. Fortunately the scripts of *Jayadrath Badh, Bhakta Gaurav* and *Kalyanmoyee* were kept somewhere else for rehearsal and thus got saved. One operation was conducted by 50-60 constables under the command of the then Barpeta additional S.D.O. Phukan Ali, police officer Khira Kanta Baruah and Someswar Bhuyan. No illegal arms had been found in the search for which the officers had to apologize for causing inconvenience to Ambikagiri. Remembering the incident Prasanna Lal Chowdhury has written “One day a lady gave us a news that police had searched Ambika Rai’s house. We were surprised. Suddenly I remembered *Bala Bhadra Pathak’s warning.*”

Roy Choudhury was a man who passionately worked for every thing that he felt necessary in the interest of the Assamese people. Probably this was the reason behind the launching of Sankar Dev circus party in Barpeta. Not much is known about the performance of this Circus party. Even in his autobiography “Mor Jivan Dhumihar Esati” nothing has been mentioned about the circus party. Only in the chronology of events of Ambikagir’s life given after the preface of his collected works Sankar Dev Circus party is mentioned as being launched in 1910.

As compassionate human being Ambikagiri is well known from his early life and it is revealed through number of works he did for the helpless people as in 1908 Ambikagiri felt that the poor students of Barpeta are in need of financial help to

184. Ibid p.669.
185. Ibid.
186. Ibid.
*friend of Prasannalal Choudhry.
pursue their education. Accordingly to discuss this issue a meeting was convened with the leading students of Barpeta High School at Ambari. In that meeting Praneswar Das, Janardan Das, Kameswar Das and some other students of higher class were present. In that meeting Bani Kanta Kakati then a student of Barpeta High School was also present. According to chronology of his life poor fund was opened in 1910 and the meeting discussed in detail the proposed poor fund. In this venture probably he was influenced by the ‘Hati Puji’ of Barpeta Satra. In 1910, Ambikagiri started a poor fund in Barpeta and spread the message of socialism here.

In the field of culture apart from the plays that he wrote, directed and performed. As a musician he played very significant role in popularizing music, especially Borgit. Ambikagiri himself was a talented singer, lyricist and composer. He belonged to a family with a very strong cultural tradition. His elder brother Girish Roy Choudhury was renowned musician, educationist and over all a dedicated personality. Both these Roy Chowdhury brothers (Ambikagiri and Girish) were initiated to Brahmo Sangit through Barpeta Hit Sadhini Sabha a socio cultural organization of Barpeta established in 1893-94. First session of the Sabha was inaugurated by a chorus sung by Girish Roy Choudhury, Jadab Das and Radha Das. As a student in Guwahati Ambikagiri participated in cultural activities like drama and music. Ambikagiri seriously made an effort to create an atmosphere of music and this resulted in the establishment of music school in Barpeta, Guwahati and Dibrugarh. He has an in depth knowledge of music and it gets reflected in two articles –


189. Hati is a geographical expression it means residential area of the Bhakatas(disciples)and Puji means the fund created by the Bhakatas for themselves. Thus the Puji was built up in each Hati and was utilized for giving soft loans to the Hatiya or Bhakatas irrespective of their caste or community and economic standard. Ph.D. Thesis (unpublished) entitled: Religious Institution and Social Devolopment in Assam 1826-1952. Rahul Sankritayan Mazumder pF.172-173. Hati Puji has also been discussed in the “Coins of Assam Vol- II by Nicolas Rhodes and S.K. Bose”
190. Dinabandhu Talukdar, Asom Kesari Ambikagiri , p. 52.
In 1908 Sanatan Sangit Samaj was established at Barpeta and Ambikagiri was the music teacher. Ambikagiri was the man who firmly placed Borgit as a popular genre of music. The first song he wrote was a patriotic one and part of the play Bandini Bharat. Ambikagiri was greatly influenced by Prabhavati Devi, a Manipuri dancer. As a student he himself participated in singing Swadeshi songs. His two songs “Even at the cost of your life, bring then captive and bind then in the noose (Jāi Jāba Prān ān dhari ān phāndat sumāi la) from Bandini Bharat and hear the call of conch for union the voice replenished with spirit of martyrdom (Mātise Mātise Milan Sankha, Mrityu Bharowa Mātere) already inaugurated an era in revolutionary political songs.

Ambikagiri composed a number of songs for the three plays he wrote in Barpeta. He called both Jadydrath Badh and Bhakta Gaurav dance drama. Obviously these plays included number of songs which he wrote and composed. He carried on rigorous rehearsal of music, dance and acting to make it a success and as expected all these plays were great success in Barpeta, Janaki Sharma, Harendra Sharma, Jadab Das, Girish Chowdhury’s performance was really praiseworthy.

One characteristic feature of his plays is the inclusion of songs. Long, passionate dialogues dominate this kind of play (Jatra). As emotional intensity increases dialogue gets longer so Ambikagiri infused new elements and used songs as interludes or enhancer of effects. Chokrar git is an integral part of Jatra and act as enhancer of effect. Ambikagiri made appropriate use of this chokrar git in an innovative way which is a necessity in mythological play as audience is more or less familiar with the storyline. He was very much successful in making his plays attractive to the audience and one reason behind it is the chokrar git*beautifully composed and sung.

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198. Ibid p. 668.
* Mostly inserted in Jatra Plays for providing dramatic relief to the audience. These songs are light in content and composed for dance performance.
* Translation of the songs courtesy B. K. Bhattacharyya.
Whatever has been discussed above is a glimpse of activities, Ambikagiri kept himself involved with larger nationalistic ideas in mind. All these have to be understood not only in terms of future significance in his life but also as a consequence of contemporary Indian politics marked by a revolutionary consciousness. These cultural activities had a wider social context and were also closely bound with the world of local politics as can be seen in his assertive attempt to stage Assamese Jatra.

Analyzing his activities in Barpeta, a redefinition of public taste and style, a sort of cultural movement is seen. These developments can be perceived fully through the appreciation of the performances recorded by many at that time. Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury started a drama group called *Barpeta Sanatan Sangit Samaj*. Near about 50 persons were actively involved in this group. Ambikagiri was the manager of this group and be very successfully steered this group of people trained them in music, dance and drama. Ambikagiri as the playwright, director, music director and lyricist led the group in various cultural activities mostly in Barpeta and some other parts of Assam. By their sense of discipline, manners, skills in acting the group was able to curve a niche for themselves in the cultural sphere of Barpeta. Some active members associated with the *Sangit Samaj* as mentioned by Rai Choudhury were Sarbeswar Ojha, popularly known as Sarbe Mistry (carpenter) Kalicharan Ojha (Kaila Mistry) Ojha brothers were regular actors in *Jadaydrath Badh* and *Bhakta Gaurav*. First rehearsal of this play was held at the courtyards of Harendra Narayan Puzari. Puzari himself an active member of the Samaj, was a very good actor of his time. It became a ritual to stage these plays in marriage ceremonies in Barpeta, and for these performance they used to get Rs. 60 - 80. There are instances of two shows in one night. This is undoubtedly a measure of great success.

Roy Choudhury started a trend that continued for a long period. These two plays were staged at 1926 Dhuburi session of *Asom Sahitya Sabha*. “First show was enjoyed by thousands of people and Ambika Charan Patowari (Bhim), Pawan Dutta (Subhadra) and singer Phatik Bayan received a medal each in that show.”

201. Ibid p.84.
202. Ibid p. 84.
was an increasing dissemination of the work started by Ambikagiri leading to a responsiveness, in the field of music, the musical world was becoming more public, as is evident from the popularizing efforts for Borgit and other songs and dances used also as integral part of the plays. Increasing interest in plays and music encouraged a popular consciousness as expected by Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury. He may be regarded as a theatrical entrepreneur seeking to raise group of workers who would expand these activities and make it comprehensive among the general populace. He was also moved by the idea of a nationalist struggle which he clearly mentioned while recollecting the success of Kalyanmoyee.\textsuperscript{203} This also reflects his sense of the role of a national culture and literature for the emerging Assamese nationalism that he anticipated. All the cultural and other institutions helped to create a cultural climate in Barpeta shaping and interpreting popular taste and Barpeta still has a very active cultural life. It seems that Roy Choudhury was rejoicing in the success of his efforts.

The outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) forms a convenient starting point of another episode of Ambikagiri’s life as it finally ended the period of his intern at Barpeta. Heightened imperialism of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Europe inevitably led to the “First World War, a cataclysmic war, a conflict never experienced before that enmeshed so many different countries and peoples. It was the century’s first Total War, during which England, one of the major protagonists mobilized virtually her whole population and resources including her colonies. The First World War forms the portal through which India entered modern world from the hall of Victorian India.”\textsuperscript{204} It was an enormously consequential war for India as well as Great Britain.

Enormity of the conflict led to a massive mobilization of resources and recruitment drive. The outbreak of the War in August 1914 called forth an outburst of loyal sentiments among both the political classes and the princes. Lord Hardinge, the then Viceroy reaped the fruits of the existing good will to his government as well as the accumulated prestige of the British. He made an appeal to all Indians willing to join the allied forces.\textsuperscript{205} In this atmosphere of good will 12,000,000 men 80,000 of whom were combatants were recruited. \textsuperscript{206} It was at this time Ambikagiri wrote a

\textsuperscript{203} S. N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.668.
\textsuperscript{204} Percival Spear, \textit{The Oxford History of India}, p. 779.
\textsuperscript{205} S.N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.669.
\textsuperscript{206} Percival Spear, Op cit, p. 779.
letter to Viceroy Hardinge expressing willingness to join the war. Hardinge acknowledged the letter. “To remove the tag of anarchist I wrote a letter to Hardinge that I am ready to join the War”.\textsuperscript{207} Ambikagiri himself offered an explanation of the letter.

The Congress led by the moderates had pledged its all out support and cooperation to war efforts by Britain in the hope of radical changes in the political situation after the war which would strengthen its demand for self govt. In a changed political atmosphere even Tilak, the extremist leader declared that “it is the duty of every Indian be he great or small rich or poor, to support and assist His Majesty’s Government to the best of his ability.”\textsuperscript{208}

Meanwhile the \textit{Sevā Sangha} which he had established in Guwahati ceased to exist. The inherent weakness of the organization, and strict police vigilance prevented the Sangha from playing a much more active role. Government’s repressive measures inflicted a severe blow to the revolutionary movement. Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury kept himself actively involved in various socio-cultural activities during his stay in Barpeta, but always under police scanner. All these resulted in a change of mindset, got disillusioned with the cult of violence propagated by the anarchists that never had a wider popular base and got more and more inclined towards constructive activities. But he was always committed to the nationalist cause and subsequently followed the path of non-violence. This change of mind is to be understood in the wider political context that took him to a different path.

Finally anarchist Ambikagiri was able to detach himself from that tag and transported himself to Dibrugarh in search of a livelihood. But it was not so easy for a radical political activist like Ambikagiri and could move out of Barpeta after showing Hardinge’s reply to Kanaklal Baruah, the then S.D.O. of Barpeta and other police officers. A copy of that letter was also published in Times of Assam.\textsuperscript{209}

Leaving Barpeta, he came to Guwahati and after a brief sojourn there, went to upper Assam (Dibrugarh) in search of a congenial work suited to his restless nature.

\textsuperscript{207} S.N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.669.
\textsuperscript{209} S.N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.669.
But Ambikagiri has not mentioned about this brief ‘Gauhati sojourn’in his autobiography. He worked as a manager of a rice mill at Guwahati for a time.\textsuperscript{210} May be he worked only for a brief period as manager.

Ambikagiri reached Dibrugarh in November, 1914. In the meantime he had composed ‘\textit{Tumi}’ and ‘\textit{Bina}’ and was then looking for a publisher. He offered a proposal to Sibanath Bhattacharya to sell the rights of both the collections at rupees forty. Bhattacharya offered rupees twenty. Since Roy Choudhury was in dire financial strain agreed at rupees twenty. His friend Dr. Umesh Ch. Das advised him not to sell the right at that rate. Next day he took back his script. Finally with the financial help of Dr. Umesh Ch. Das and Kirtinath Sarmah and his small earning as a music teacher 1000 copies of ‘\textit{Tumi}’ was printed from Dibrugarh Railway Press in 1916.\textsuperscript{211} This was his first publication. Ambikagiri himself did door to door selling. ‘\textit{Tumi}’ won instant favour with the public and he rejoiced in the wider recognition from different quarters. He made a good start as 200 copies of ‘\textit{Tumi}’ were instantly sold by Jadab Ch. Das, a student of Cotton College from Barpeta in the hostels.\textsuperscript{212} In Dibrugarh he spent some time working as a typist in railway and teacher in a vernacular school. He also kept himself busy in various cultural and literary activities to devote his restless energy. His relentless effort resulted in an increasing interest for \textit{Borgit}. Students and teachers of Dibrugarh Govt. School used to learn \textit{Borgit} from him. He wrote and composed a song \textit{Bolā Bhāi Aguāi} (Let’s come forward)on the occasion of prize distribution meeting of Dibrugarh Government High School and a group of students performed it under his guidance. Among the groups of students were Naba Kumar Dutta, Jiten Baruah etc. He was then working as a temporary teacher of Dibrugarh Government High School. Like Barpeta, in Dibrugarh also Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury left an indelible mark in its cultural life. Being an active cultural worker from 1915 till the end of 1917 he participated in every play staged at Amolapatty theatre hall along with Jagat Bordoloi, Sristi Duwara, Ratna Bordoloi etc. Songs written by Ambikagiri was an integral part of all those plays. Very often he was seen dancing on the Amolapatty stage. Commenting on the performance somebody wrote a

\textsuperscript{210} Poet and visionary, article by P. C. Goswami published in Assam Tribune 4th January 1967.
\textsuperscript{211} S.N. Sarma, (ed.), Op cit, p.670.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid, p. 670.
letter to Times of Assam calling Ambikagiri a dancing girl.²¹³ But he ignored these remarks.

Ambikagiri ventured into journalism during his Dibrugarh days. He joined the Assamese journal Assam Bandhav as an assistant editor.²¹⁴ That was a critical period as the war (First World War 1914-1918) gripped the whole world and in that critical juncture Roy Chowdhury moved into journalism. Tezpur Bandhav Samiti launched Assam Bandhav in 1910 as a non political journal published and edited by Maheswar Dev Goswami and Taranath Chakroborty, Vidya Vinod respectively. From the very beginning Assam Bandhav followed one principle to uphold the distinct identity of Kamrupi dialect in modern Assamese language.²¹⁵ Subsequently the publication of Assam Bandhav was transferred to Dibrugarh. Gangaram Chowdhury took the responsibility of publisher. Dr. Harekrishna Das, Kaliram Medhi, Sarat Ch. Goswami, Bharat Ch. Das and other distinguished citizens promoted the journal.

It is worth mentioning here that there was constant debate between Bahi edited by Lakshminath Bezbaruah and Assam Bandhav regarding some issues and one such issue was the spelling. Continuous debate between these two journals created an atmosphere of bitterness in the history of Assamese literature and journal. Later on Harekrishna Das entrusted him the responsibility of editing Assam Bandhav. That was the period when Assam Bandhav and Bahi were engaged in a war of words on the issue of language. To end this bitter controversy Ambikagiri proposed a formula and the formula was to publish write up of renowned writers as it is without any correction of spelling. Dr. Harekrishna Das opposed this idea. With Assam Bandhav, Ambikagiri started his career as a journalist during his stay in Dibrugarh from 1915 to 1917. Assam Bandhav was then propagating the use of Kamrupi words in Assamese language and Bahi under the editorship of Lakshminath Bezbaruah continuously opposed. Kaliram Medhi, Dr. Harekrishna Das, Bharat Ch. Das, Pandit Taranath Chakroborty, Kabya Binod accepted this challenge through Assam Bandhav while

Ambikagiri was the assistant editor of this monthly journal.\(^{216}\) Since Dr. Harekrishna Das did not agree to this proposal Rai Choudhury resigned from the post of assistant editor and expressed his desire to launch a paper of his own from Guwahati with the same principle.\(^{217}\)

Thus Ambikagiri acquired the experience of running a journal in Dibrugarh. Two years in Dibrugarh proved to be an enriching experience preparing him for the launching of *Chetana*. Besides this Ambikagiri as usual kept himself culturally engaged in Dibrugarh. In 1916 a very influential student organization, the *Assam Chatra Sanmilan* came into existence on 25\(^{th}\) December 1916. Guwahati session of Assam Association witnessed the formal inauguration of *Asom Chatra Sanmilan*. Lakshminath Bezbaruah presided over the session and Chandranath Sharma, an active political worker proposed a wide ranging role for the Sanmilan not limiting itself to literature only. Eventually Lakshminath Bezbaruah also supported this view and wrote *Asom Chatra Sanmilan* in his written speech.\(^{218}\)

The students conference was not however a political association and politics was none of its business.\(^{219}\) Inaugural session of the Assam students conference was opened with *Tejare Kamalā Pati* (Borgit) performed by Ambikagiri Raichowdhury. His soulful rendering was appreciated by people like Lakshminath Bezbaruah and his daughter, Aruna Bezbaruah hesitated to perform after Ambikagiri.\(^{220}\) In the first session of *Asom Sahitya Sabha* Rai Choudhury represented Dibrugarh and was elected as a member of the executive. Then onwards he was associated with the sabha.

Nalbari Gordon High School (H.S.) was also formally opened with a song composed by Ambikagiri. Before P.C. Baruah Ambikagiri was the most prominent singer and dancer in Assam in those days and he performed in every public occasions. When university Saddler commission visited Guwahati Jnanadabhiram Baruah

\(^{217}\) Ibid p.681.  
\(^{218}\) Atul Ch. Hazarika (ed.), Bhasanmala , p. 12.  
\(^{220}\) S. N. Sarma (ed.), Op cit p.666.
requested Ambikagiri him to felicitate the commission at the Earl Law College tea party with his song. \(^{221}\)

So these are the instances which established Ambikagiri as the most culturally engaged personality and involved him in the major political and other activities in Assam. Guwahati session of Assam Association was also opened with a chorus written by Ambikagiri Raichowdhury. This was the song, composed in the tune of a Borgit and performed on a public occasion. \(^{222}\) Dibrugarh session of Assam association (1915) was another great occasion where two songs written and composed by Ambikagiri were sung by Rai Choudhury himself and a group of students. \(^{223}\)

A closer look at his activities in Dibrugarh makes it quite clear that Ambikagiri was closely associated with organization like the Assam Association, the Assam Students Conference. The Assam Association, the first broad based political organization of Assam proved its worth by forging a national forum for the people of this province as against sectarian and communal organizations, giving them a voice of unity and strength. \(^{224}\) The years he spent in Dibrugarh Ambikagiri was searching for a livelihood and was engaged in very many works like typist, teaching etc. \(^{225}\) Whatever was happening in the public sphere, he was a part of it, but his role in this period is cultural rather than political. Nevertheless he was well acquainted with the happening and gradually became more focused on it. As has already been mentioned Ambikagiri was editing Assam Bandhav while in Dibrugarh, but subsequently there were some differences of opinion with Dr. Harekrishna Das and his job turned out to be an unsatisfactory one for a restless, passionate personality like him. He soon found out that the institutions and organizations in which he was working were of conservative nature and could not allow him enough freedom to think and work independently. \(^{226}\) Finally he decided to part with Assam Bandhav mentally preparing himself for something new that is to launch a journal of his own. In fact he expressed this desire

\[^{221}\text{Ibid, p.666.}\]
\[^{222}\text{Ibid p.489.}\]
\[^{223}\text{Ibid p.492.}\]
\[^{224}\text{K. N. Dutta , Op cit, p. 42.}\]
\[^{225}\text{S. N. Sarma , (ed.), Op cit, Preface, p.45.}\]
\[^{226}\text{B. K. Bhattacharyya, Op cit, p.9}\]
to Dr. Hari Krishna Das. But the problem was the press. Assam Bandhav was published from Railway Press Dibrugarh and in Guwahati there was no such press.\textsuperscript{227}

At this juncture he met Lakshinath Phukan, former editor of \textit{The Assam Tribune}. Phukan was then working as an instructor at George Institute. Rai Choudhury discussed the matter with Phukan and Phukan agreed to help him during his stay in Dibrugarh working as the assistant editor of \textit{Assam Bandhav}. It is likely that he acquired some experience of journalism and with that background he moved on to establish a press in Guwahati.

Why Rai Choudhury left \textit{Assam Bandhav} the reason he had explained in his autobiography. But according to Prassana Lal Choudhury \textit{Assam Bandhav} was really facing hard time before non-cooperation movement, and then Rai Choudhury launched \textit{Chetana}. It is less likely that he left \textit{Bhandav} for this reason only. It is true that \textit{Assam Bandhav} was passing through a crisis and in fact it made an appeal to the readers – For the last seven years you will understand how much effort we put to run \textit{Assam Bandhav}. Even facing a loss of Rs.300 to 400 annually we have not been able to improve the condition of ‘Bandhav’. So we had to open \textit{Assam Bandhav} fund (\textit{Assam Bandhav} 7\textsuperscript{th} year 11\textsuperscript{th} Issue)\textsuperscript{228} Rai Choudhury had already decided to start a press of his own as differences arose between him and Dr. Hari Krishna Das. With the idea of launching a journal of his own Rai Choudhury left Dibrugarh in May 1917\textsuperscript{229} and another interesting chapter unfolded in Ambikagiri’s life. Here in the context of the emerging nationalistic ambience in the Bramhaputra valley Rai Choudhury’s establishment of \textit{Aruna Press} and the role played by \textit{Chetana} is very very significant to understand the political culture at a critical period of the history of Assam.

\textsuperscript{227} S. N. Sarma (ed.), Op cit, p.681.

Though Phukan came with Rai Choudhury by train he denied t have opened a press with Rai Choudhury as mentioned by the latter, Ramdhenu18th year 4th issue pp.383 -384.

\textsuperscript{228} As quoted in the introduction of \textit{Asamar sambad Patrar Sanikkhâmultmak Adhyaan 1864-1986} by Prasanna Kr. Phukan p.8.