CONCLUSION

Aswinikumar Datta established his basic principles of conduct in life, either religious or political, in his adolescence. Naturally enough, as we might expect from a pure life like his, he did not budge an inch from those principles all his eventful days. He was neither a creative social thinker like Bipinchandra Pal nor a bold religious genius like Vivekananda or Aurobindo. Aswinikumar was unique in the implementation of his ideas. Yet he was not original even in this respect, for his Karmayoga was firmly founded upon the traditional concepts of the Gita. His originality may be seen in his way of living up to tradition under new circumstances. In Bengal the way of synthesis was the most crucial theme of thought in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Aswinikumar's activities as well as ideas can be regarded as a reflection of this general trend. The synthesis of modern and traditional concepts was earnestly attempted by the creative workers of both 'progressive' Brahmos and 'orthodox' Hindus. Aswinikumar took a step forward and tried to synthesize Brahmoism and Hinduism. He saw both to be coping with the same crisis —- crisis of Bharativeda (Indianness) —- in different manners. He ignored outward differences and stuck to the fundamental task of overcoming the common crisis. Aswinikumar reached a solution not through any intellectual pursuit, but through pursuit of religion, which was intuitive and practical by nature. As it was intuitive, his solution could directly reflect the deeper significance of the thought of the times. Being practical, it was not confined only to the domain of abstract thought but was destined to be applied to wider fields of work. Practicability was an essential characteristic of Aswinikumar's personality. Truth was given the first
place in Aswinikumar's philosophy of life, but it had a real significance when it was transmuted into a social force through action. Aswinikumar accepted this world as a place of "an infinite conjugation of the verb 'To Do'." (1) Aswinikumar thought that it was only through practical action that India could be awakened from lethargy and lifted from stagnation. "There is no hope (for us Indians) to rank with any prominent nations so far as we are not ready for work again." (2) His activities, therefore, could not remain confined within a narrow field of specialization. The regeneration of India should cover every aspect of life. Hence Aswinikumar got active in various fields: religious, social, educational, cultural and political. But his greatest contribution lies in the fact that he did all this in his own district with a clear perspective of awakening the whole of India. Aswinikumar built up a base in Bakarganj through hard struggle lasting a quarter of a century.

The Brajamohan Institution was the stronghold from which he trained his men and led his campaigns. Its strict ethical education produced many efficient workers. They left for various places with a mission which Aswinikumar and his staff had inspired in them. The history of the Brajamohan Institution was by no means smooth. It had two rival institutions in Barisal — the Barisal Zilla School and the Rajchandra College (with Collegiate School). The Barisal Zilla School was attended by the sons of high officials and the well-to-do, so its tone was

1. Carlyle's words, quoted in Aswinikumar Datta, Karmavoga, Aswinikumar Rachanasambhar, op. cit., p.5.
2. Ibid., p.11.
conservative as well as loyalist. The Vice-Presidentship of the Managing Committee had been held by Rai Dwarkanath Datta Bahadur since the School was transferred by the government to the Barisal Municipality and the Backergunge District Board (1891) till 1903. (3) Dwarkanath Datta had been holding high places in the Municipality and the District Board for the preceding 15 years. (4) Thus the two schools, the B.M. Institution and the Barisal Zilla School, reflecting two poles of thought, one dedicated to the cause of the people and the other warped in a pro-government stance, had been managed by members of the two branches of the Datta family of Batajore. The fact suggests that there was no definite difference in the social strata of the students of the respective schools. Their urge for education was stimulated by the same motive, i.e. to be better qualified for a profession. That is why Aswinikumar was very sensitive to the results at the annual University examinations. The similar observation can be applied to the rivalry between the B. M. Institution and the Rajchandra School. At the outset the Rajchandra School was financed and staffed better than the B.M. Institution, because the former's proprietor was a big zamindar. Though Biharilal Roy was a Brahmo, his school was established at the request of the conservative Hindu section of Barisal. This queer combination was to result in the discrepancies in the management of the school. It was one of the causes that led the Rajchandra School to ruin. The political attitude of Biharilal Roy was also inconsistent, e.g. he joined a deputation requesting the Lieutenant-Governor to extend self-government to Barisal in 1895, but he was not tired of accusing Aswinikumar's involvement in the Congress politics. On the

3. Bikash, 30 March 1903; RNP(B) for the week ending 11 April 1903.
4. Bikash, 1 February 1903; RNP(B) for the week ending 14 February 1903.
other hand, the B.M. Institution was managed very well by Aswinikumar. He was guided by the same principles in education as in politics. After all, the success of the Brajamohan Institution can be ascribed to a fact that it reflected the aspiration of the middle class (mainly intermediate tenure-holders) in the best and the most healthy manner. Interestingly, in religious aspect, Dwarkanath Datta was an orthodox Hindu, Biharilal Roy was a Brahma and Aswinikumar Datta experienced a return from Brahmaism to Hinduism. As analyzed in Chapter III, however, this 'return' did not mean his violent break-away from Brahmaism. On the contrary, the ideals of Brahmoism permeated the Hindu society gradually without social conflict through the silent efforts of men like Aswinikumar Datta.

The Brajamohan Institution was essentially for the middle class. Aswinikumar Datta regarded the middle class as the leading group which had responsibility for the welfare of the whole society. Therefore, he trained young men not to pursue their own interests, but to promote others' and the welfare of the society as a whole. Aswinikumar's guidance inspired the spirit of parahita-isana (altruism) in young men. Aswinikumar believed that the national awakening could not take place without the awakening of the masses. Politics, as conceived by the middle class should not exclude the welfare of the masses. In this way the rural masses came into the vision of the educated people in Bakarganj. Aswinikumar knew well that illiterate masses were intelligent enough to understand the meaning of any political demand and tried to preach the messages of the Congress among them. During the period of the swadeshi movement, however, the masses were not mature enough to be politically mobilized either by the government or by the swadeshi workers.
The masses were not mobilized to the full but were certainly touched by Aswinikumar.

On the eve of the Swadeshi movement, the political situation in Bakarganj was amorphous, though quickenings were felt beyond doubt. Some discordant notes come to be heard from the newspapers of those days. In 1904, the Bakarganj District Board appointed Beatson-Bell, the then Settlement Officer, as their representative during forthcoming election of a member from the Dacca Division to the Bengal Legislative Council. He was appointed against rules that no official should be allowed to interfere in any such election. (5) The Barisal Hitaishi had paid a compliment to Beatson-Bell a month before: "Such a generous and sympathetic District Magistrate did not come to Barisal for the many years past." (6) The Hitavadi, however, made the following sarcastic remark: "Is there no impartial and independent native in the district who could fitly do the work?" (7) Another example is related to the management of the Barisal Zilla School. The Barisal Hitaishi wrote thus: "The present defects in the working of the school will not be easily removed under its native management. Complete reform can only be hoped for if Government takes it into its own hands again." (8) If Aswinikumar had continued to identify himself with the veteran political leaders of Barisal who were inclined to compromise with the government, the swadeshi movement in Bakarganj would have assumed a less significant proportion. In November 1905, Aswinikumar parted with them without any...

5. Saniyani, 16 June 1904; RNP(B) for the week ending 25 June 1904.
6. Barisal Hitaishi, 11 May 1904; RNP(B) for the week ending 21 May 1904.
8. Barisal Hitaishi, 27 July 1904; RNP(B) for the week ending 6 August 1904.
obvious clash, and acquired a new leadership by taking side with the rising leaders of the younger generation. It was this silent change of leadership which accounts for its effectiveness and extensiveness. In other words, only continuity or accumulation of efforts does not explain the success of the swadeshi movement in Bakarganj, but we must take account of the moment of discontinuity. Yet the origin of discontinuity has to be looked in Aswinikumar's attitude towards politics. He was not satisfied with the agitation confined to a small group of educated people. He had tried to go among the masses and shake them up. Aswinikumar's shift from the Netri-sangha to the Karmi-sangha (i.e. the real birth of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti) was an expression of his wishes to work according to the aspirations of the larger number of people.

The real significance of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti lies in the fact that it combined the old People's Association and the new samiti organization. It affords a key to account for the strength of the swadeshi movement in Bakarganj. In other districts two types of political organizations worked separately without organizational unity. In Bakarganj the two sorts of organizations — the People's Association, which had accumulated political experiences for a long time, and the new organization called samiti, which emerged to respond to the fresh trend of the swadeshi period — were unified under the initiative of Aswinikumar Datta, a distinguished district leader.

But as this organizational unity was fulfilled without drastic conflict, old elements and new elements were juxtaposed in respect of
the principles of the movement. That is to say, unity materialized only in organization, but not in fundamental ideas. This contradiction was reflected, for example, in the question whether the B.M. Institution should be nationalized or not. As the B.M. Institution itself had a definite character corresponding to the political movement in the days of the People's Associations, Aswinikumar could not decide to the last to convert it to a 'national' institution embodying the spirit of swadeshi movement. The delicate political position of Aswinikumar — i.e. difficulty in defining him; he was neither extremist nor moderate but both in part — may be explained from this point of view. In Chapters IV and V we could not but emphasize the limitations of the swadeshi movement in Bakarganj although Barisal had assumed the "first in the Honours' list" of the whole swadeshi movement. The real reason was existence of inconsistencies of conflicting ideas side by side with organizational unity.

On which point was the unity of principles possible? In other words, on which point was the conversion possible — the conversion from the political agitation which aimed at increasing political voice of the educated middle class within the colonial system through collaboration with British authority to the assumption of responsibility for forming autonomous power in opposition to British authority? It would have been possible when the swadeshi movement had succeeded in mobilizing the masses — mainly consisting of cultivators in an agricultural district like Bakarganj. In fact, however, efforts on this line were almost absent as we have pointed out in Chapter I. The swadeshi workers did nothing to rebuild political movement by striking at the
root of the contradiction of interests between landlords and cultivators. Therefore, when the swadeshi movement suffered a setback before the oppression of British authority, radicalism emerged as an inevitable challenge to it. It was in the form of a revolutionary (or terrorist) movement. And the organizational unity of the movement in Bakarganj was violently affected by this new trend. It was just at the time of this crisis that Aswinikumar was deported. It seems, however, that the dissolution of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti would have continued even if Aswinikumar had not been deported. Thus after the disintegration of organizational unity in Bakarganj in 1910's, the old leaders who had belonged to the People's Association returned to the collaboration with the local British administration. This collaboration had no political impact on the national movement. On the other hand, more radical youths engaged themselves in underground activities as revolutionaries.

During this period Aswinikumar was almost invalid due to age and illness, but it is sure that he could not subscribe to either of the two trends we have just mentioned. His ideas are clearly seen in the programme of activities of the District Samiti which attached great importance to sanitation and education of the masses. It appears that Aswinikumar was thinking of approaching the masses not as a political worker but as a social worker. We have already pointed out that national primary education was not organized satisfactorily in the days of the swadeshi movement. The fact indicates only the limitation of the movement but it does not necessarily imply that Aswinikumar neglected the importance of establishing national primary schools. This will be proved by the fact that the District

9. The circumstances of Barisal in 1910's will be understood well from the pages of the column named Sthaniva prasanga (local news) of the Brahmabadi (monthly organ of the Barisal Brahmo Samaj).
Samiti emphasized the spread of primary education. Poet Subrahmanya Bharati, in a short story in Tamil, described old Aswinikumar as a social worker organizing famine relief work in the Namasudra community around 1917. (10) This is a story combining several facts together and it deserves our attention as literature catching Aswinikumar's intention in a proper perspective.

The freedom movement in India did not adopt the way of revolution as in China, yet its evolution can be understood as a process of the growth of the mass movement. We have already pointed out that tenure-holders could not be uniformly identified with the middle class but that they included within their folds the interests of zamindars in upper strata and cultivators in lower strata. Independence struggle, as far as it did not assume the form of revolution, was developed in a manner expanding its basis by descending the ladder of tenures step by step. Taking this tendency into account, we have paid certain attention to Fazlul Haq's political activities. It is difficult to regard Haq as Aswinikumar's successor owing to their differences in political attitudes, but it may be said that Haq was on the line so far as the expansion of the basis of the political movement is concerned. As Aswinikumar rightly observed, the swadeshi movement was not a final struggle, but only the first step towards the subsequent movement for Independence. And Aswinikumar's ethical approach to politics seems to have wielded considerable influence upon the development of the freedom movement --- eg. in the infusion of Gandhism and in providing the spiritual backbone to the revolutionary

10. The story vividly draws a portrait of old Aswinikumar. A set of facts and episodes --- such as famine relief work in 1919(or 1906?) and his stay in Benares, etc. --- seem to be reflected in the story. See Vishnupada Bhattacharya, 'Tamil galpe bangali manishi' in Desh, 26 July 1975, pp.1007-8.
movement. Though not so conspicuous in politics on the surface, the fact that Aswinikumar's ideal inspired grass-root workers will be read in the life of Sureshchandra Gupta, a biographer of Aswinikumar Datta. (11)

Aswinikumar's emphasis on morality based on bhakti was a product of an age and at the same time could characterise the age. The diversification of values which emerged with the advance of the times, however, has pushed away Aswinikumar's ideal to the background. The ideal of bhakti has not been completely lost, but it is also certain that contemporary times do not match well with ardent bhakti emotionalism. A reason why Aswinikumar has fallen into oblivion seems to lie in this fact. Yet it is beyond doubt that Aswinikumar contributed much to the formation of conscience existing at the root of the modern Bengali society. His ideal is still working at the core of the contemporary social life as a silent force.

11. Sureshchandra Gupta lived and worked among the methars (scavengers) for their welfare for many years. His strict morality was well expressed in the fact that he continued to boycott steamers till Independence even after the steamer boycott movement had received a set back. I heard these episodes from Sri Manoranjan Guha who was Suresh Gupta's fellow prisoner for three years since 1942 in the Dum Dum Jail. See also Hiralal Dasgupta and Manoranjan Gupta, Swadhinata Sangrame Barisal, Vol.II, op.cit., pp.105, 109-110.