CHAPTER IV
The Swadeshi Movement in Bakarganj (I) (1904-1906)

The 'Swadeshi Movement' in Bakarganj began in the year 1904. The Association for the Advancement of Scientific and Industrial Education of Indians (popularly called the Silpa-Biyan Samiti) was founded in March 1904 in Calcutta by Jogendrachandra Ghosh. The aim of the Association was to send Indian students abroad for the study of science and technology and to use their knowledge for the development of scientific and industrial activities of the country without depending on the favour of the British. A fund for the purpose was raised through donations and collections from the masses. In response to the call of the Association, Aswinikumar Datta opened its branches in Bakarganj. A Muslim zamindar, Sayid Mir Moazzam Hossein of Sayestabad, became the president and Aswinikumar controlled the practical activities as secretary. The branches were founded in three subdivisions and in the principal villages. The number of annual subscribers amounted to 1083. Several students were sent abroad from Bakarganj, for which most of the fund was raised from the district, while only a small amount was assigned by the Calcutta centre.

A reason why the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was established so quickly with many village-branches in 1905 can be ascribed generally to Aswinikumar's political activities for many years and directly to the foundation of the above-mentioned Association which preceded it.

The Shivaji festival, as we have just referred to at the end of

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1. Sumit Sarkar, op.cit., p.112.
2. Suresh Chandra Gupta, op.cit., pp.219-220.
   Aswinikumar's song No.39 was composed on the occasion of the foundation of this Association.
   Aswinikumar referred to this Association in his speech given at the Shivaji festival in 1904, Barisal Hitaishi, 12 Ashwin 1311 B.S. (28.9.1904).
the third chapter, was held in that year (1904) to invigorate national consciousness. It was also a definite sign of Aswinikumar's political standpoint being directed towards the more radical sect in the Congress.

During his visit to Chittagong, Dacca and Mymsingh, in February 1904, Curzon, in reply to the addresses he received, made it clear that he was not unwilling to consider a larger scheme of the partition of Bengal which he tentatively alluded to. The whole partition scheme, however, was prepared by the bureaucracy entirely behind the public during 1904 and the early part of 1905. Rumours about the partition of Midnapore district and that the partition scheme had already been settled and only awaited the formal sanction of the Secretary of State haunted the Bengali press in early 1905.

On the other hand, Curzon's convocation speech (11 February 1905) caused a storm of indignation and protest all over India. Rebutting Curzon's allegation that "undoubtedly truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East," the Barisal Hitaishi wrote: "India was the very home of truth before it came in touch with the polluting contact of the West. If there has been


4. Medini Bandhab (Midnapore), 4 January 1905 RNP(B) for the week ending 14 January 1905.
   Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 January 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 14 January 1905; Hitavadi (Calcutta), 13 January 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 21 January 1905. The actual date of the partition despatch to the Secretary of State was 2 February 1905.

change from that condition of things, then it is this class of officials who are responsible for it."(6)

The news that the Secretary of State had already despatched his final consent to the partition of Bengal first appeared in the Calcutta papers on 6 July 1905.(7) The most decisive step among various protests against the partition scheme was taken by the Sanjivani, a weekly organ of Krishnakumar Mitra, which, in an editorial on 13 July, asked the Bengali people to boycott all English goods and shun all contact with officials and official bodies until the partition scheme was withdrawn.(8) Referring to the Sanjivani's proposal, the Barisal Hitaishi thus wrote; "Will the Bengalis be able to imitate the Chinese in their boycott of foreign goods? If they can, then the path lies clear before them."(9) It further demanded that the zamindars and wealthier classes should not pay any subscription for the reception of the Prince of Wales and they should resign all honorary official appointments that they held.

The decision for partition of Bengal was formally announced on 19 July 1905. In the afternoon on the next day, a silent procession was organized in Barisal. It went round the town and everybody walked barefooted. "After

6. Barisal Hitaishi, 1 March 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 11 March 1905, For the general reaction to the Curzon's convocation speech, see Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, India's Fight for Freedom or the Swadeshi Movement 1905-1906 (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 25-27.
8. Ibid, pp. 35-36, Sanjivani, 13 July 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 22 July 1905.
9. Barisal Hitaishi, 19 July 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 29 July 1905.
that," wrote Rajanikanta Guha, "there was a flood of samitis and speeches."(10)

On 26 July 1905, the Barisal Hitaishi published within broad black-borders the details about the administration of the new Province (Eastern Bengal and Assam). It also noticed that a large meeting would be held in the court-yard of the Braja Mohan Institution on 23 July to protest against the partition scheme,(11) The Amrita Bazar Patrika reported that in this meeting the Hindus and the Muslims attended in thousands while Dinabandhu Sen presided over the meeting. In his address Asvinikumar "in a choked up voice gave a thrilling description of the situation, urged all to be men and show a united front." Mohammad Ismail Chowdhury, a leading zamindar and other Muslims delivered speeches against the partition. Delegates were appointed for the Town Hall Meeting of 7 August.(12) In the meantime, the meetings to protest against the partition were held independently by the Muslims at Musalman Musjid, Barisal as well as others in places outside Barisal (e.g. at the house of Asutosh Chaudhuri, zamindar of Gocharay, Jhalakati thana).(13)

On 6 August 1905, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was established with two objects: self-dependence and the removal of the pecuniary difficulties of the people of Bakarganj. To attain these ends, it took up six-point practical programme of works: (1) arbitration, (2) swadeshi and boycott, (3) improvement of the condition of health of the villagers, (4) physical

11. Barisal Hitaishi, 26 July 1905, RNP(B) for the week ending 5 August 1905.
13. Daily Hitavadi, 1 August 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 5 August 1905.
culture for the boys, (5) temperance and (6) female education.(14)

On 7 August, the famous 'Town Hall Meeting' was held in Calcutta, in which altogether five resolutions were adopted. The first one was moved against "the Resolution of Government on the partition of Bengal," and the second one against "the procedure adopted by the authorities in dealing with the partition question." The continued efforts for the withdrawal of the partition was pledged in the fourth resolution and the fifth dealt with the disposal of the first two resolutions. In the third resolution, boycott of British manufactures was formally adopted "as a protest against the indifference of the British public" and the British Government in regard to the Partition. It is all the more important to note that this resolution was passed in the form of sympathising "with the resolution adopted at many meetings held in the mofussil."(15)

The mofussil took the lead in the whole movement on its practical side. As for Barisal, the Sanjivani thus reported: "Barisal has set a noble example which is worthy of imitation all over the province. The non-official members of the Local District Boards have set up a Resolution to Government, protesting against the Partition scheme. A similar Resolution has also been forwarded by the local municipality under the guidance of their chairman, Babu Rajani Kanta Das. If Government does not see its way to act according to the request of these members, they

The period between the Town Hall Meeting and the Partition-day (16 October 1905) was characterized by popular enthusiasm which succeeded in organizing many meetings in favour of the swadeshi movement. Immediately after the 'Town Hall Meeting', the Sanjivani reported that notices were published for holding meetings in favour of the boycott of English goods in Barisal as well as in Pabna, Senhati (Khulna), Tangail, Cownpur, Kishorganj and Serajganj. (17)

On 9 August 1905, a mahajan sabha (meeting of wholesalers) was held at Barisal, in which Aswinikumar Datta made a fervent speech for the purpose of inducing the assembled merchants to join the 'boycott-swadeshi' movement. He went on exhorting all of them to be mad with him in the agitation. His appeal was accepted with enthusiasm. Pledges to indent for country-made goods as much as possible and not to import foreign ones, were taken on the spot in the name of Madan-mohan (Krishna) by Hindu mahajans and Allah by their Muslim counterparts. Aswinikumar concluded his speech with a prayer to Thakur (Lord) for awakening the country through the swadeshi movement. In the process of appealing, some interesting observations were made by him. All Indians, according to him, had degenerated into the state of sudra but a chance came at last of their transforming themselves into vaishyas by engaging in commercial enterprise. In another place, he pointed out that the futility of appeals to the government had been exposed by the partition and emphasized the need for self-reliance. In this connection, he recommended the cultivation of potatoes because of

16. Sanjivani, 5 August 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 12 August 1905.
17. Sanjivani, 8 August 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 19 August 1905.
its profitability. (18)

Swadeshi meetings spread rapidly into the interior of the Bakarganj district. The Barisal Hitaishi published the notices of such meetings held at Batajore (Gourmadi thana), Eholo (Bhola), Jhalakati (Jhalakati), Basanda (Jhalakati) and Kirtipasa (Jhalakati)(19), at Goila (Gourmadi), Navagram (Jhalakati), Bankati, Gabha (Jhalakati), Kulkati, Ponabalia (Jhalakati) and Raipasa.(20) The Sanjivani also contained the reports of the meetings held at Jhalakati (20 August), Eholo (20 August), Daoat (23 August)(21) and Barisal.(22)

The Partition Proclamation was published in the Gazette of India on 1 September 1905. The news was sent from Calcutta to Aswinikumar by telegram on the following day. Aswinikumar was out of Barisal at that time. In the early morning on 3 September (Sunday), leaders like Dinabandhu Sen and Rajanikanta Das assembled and decided to have a silent parade in the afternoon. As soon as the news spread all over the town, the shopkeepers of the bazar closed their doors, which were then covered with black flags and cloths as a sign of sorrow. All the people, including drivers, coolies and labourers stayed away from their work.

Such events were never reported to have occurred in the town of Barisal. A procession composed of all sections of the people of the town, numbering about 10,000 heads (population of Barisal town was enumerated as 22,473 in the 1911 Census Report), paraded the streets of the town in silence. All the people marched barefooted and the sentiment ran so high that the

18. 'Aswini Babur baktrita', Barisal Hitaishi, 16 August 1905, 30 August 1905, 6 September 1905. We find an article titled 'Alur chas' on potato-cultivation (dated 15 November 1905) left in his paper-cuttings.

19. Barisal Hitaishi, 24 August 1905; BNP(B) for the week ending 2 September 1905.

20. Barisal Hitaishi, 30 August 1905; BNP(B) for the week ending 9 September 1905.

21. Sanjivani, 24 August 1905; BNP(B) for the week ending 2 September 1905.

22. Sanjivani, 24 August 1905; BNP(B) for the week ending 2 September 1905.
people ignored the rains. They carried black flags on which slogans such as "The calamity of Bengal," "Do one's own duty," "Unity, spiritedness and valour," "Do Mother's Puja" and "Sacrifice yourself" were written in white. Anyone who met the procession, either stood on the side closing his umbrella or was absorbed into it. Even policemen asked everybody to close his umbrella. This procession ultimately converted itself into a meeting of about 12,000 people in an open space in front of the Brajamohan Institution. Two resolutions were adopted in that meeting. The first one was worded thus: "Resolved that in view of the calamity that has just overtaken the Province of Bengal by the publication of the Partition Proclamation by the Government of India, this meeting of the residents of Backergunge solemnly pledge itself to abstain from taking part in any public festivities at least for the remaining portion of the Bengali year. Proposed by Babu Hibaranchandra Das Gupta, M.A., B.L. seconded by Babu Sureecharan Sen, pleader." The second was run as follows: "Resolved that the present agitation in the lines hitherto conducted be continued with greater vigour till the desired goal is reached. Proposed by Babu Saratchandra Guha, M.A., B.L. Supported by Babu Abinash Chandra Sarkar, B.A." After the meeting was over, many people got together at the Hindu Dharma Rakshak Sabha and prayed to God for the welfare of the country. (23)

The Kashipur Hibasi reported two interesting meetings held at Barisal on 10 September 1905. One was a meeting of the washermen and barbers of Barisal town in which they resolved thenceforth to use only swadeshi goods. Another was a meeting of the ladies with a similar object held at the old premises of Peary Mohan Bose, Assistant Settlement Officer. (24)

23. 'Banga-bibhag', Barisal Hitaishi, 6 September 1905.
24. Kasipur Hibasi, 13 September 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 23 September 1905.
The Barisal Hitaishi on 13 September 1905 was almost entirely taken up with notices of meetings in favour of the swadeshi movement. (25) The Dacca Gazette, deploring that the city of Dacca which gave no sign of life, reported the contrasting picture of Bakarganj: "Looking at Barisal, one sees that the whole district seems to be dancing on the waves of agitation at the mere beck and call of an individual (i.e. Aswinikumar Datta)." (26) In this connection the Bikash gives vivid picture of Aswinikumar as a district leader in a column entitled 'Silpa pradarshani (an industrial exhibition):" A great man has today fermented the whole Bakarganj district at his beck. Aswinikumar has today been revered at every house of Bakarganj. The impossible has turned out to be possible in this country by his orders and instructions. He has become old and he is ill --- but his enthusiasm and his capacity to work have become neither old nor ill ... The student community of Barisal is Aswini Babu's immortal exploit. Aswinikumar, devoid of his own son, has today set thousands of sons in the field of work. Just hear, those who finished their studies in the Brajamohan College and working and has arranged for an exhibition of wonderful kind within a short time." (27) Many meetings were held in September and early October at various places mostly situated in the northern and western parts of the.

25. Barisal Hitaishi, 13 September 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 23 September 1905.

26. 'Daka ki jagiyache?' Dacca Gazette, 18 September 1905.

27. Bikash, 1 October 1905. The Silpa pradarshani (industrial exhibition) was held on 28 and 29 September 1905 at the Brajamohan College Hall. Altogether 550 kinds of things manufactured in the district were exhibited there, among which there were daily necessaries like soap, buttons and scissors, knives etc. and stationery like fountain pen, nibs, hand-made blotting paper, slate, ink, pencil etc.
district where the bhadralok population was dense. (28)

Barisal town was, certainly, a centre of the agitation of Bakarganj district, where numerous meetings were organized. Aswinikumar's leadership over the whole agitation was undoubtedly established in this district which also influenced the neighbouring areas. In August or September 1905, an effigy of Curzon was burnt in the compound of the Brajomohan Institution. (29)

The Samay, a weekly of Calcutta, published in September a song composed by Aswinikumar in support of the swadeshi movement. (30) In the same month, four of Shahas, big cloth-dealers in the district, took a vow not to indent for or sell any European clothes for two months -- Aswin and Kartik, the

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28. So far as several newspapers reported, meetings were held during this period in the following places: Sayestaganj (1 September), Pirojpur (Pirojpur thana, 5 September), Jalabari (Swarupkati thana, 4 September), Fayerkati (Pirojpur thana, 4 September), Lata (Bhola thana, 5 September), Sarwaval (Nalchiti thana, 6 September), Banaripara (Swarupkati thana, 7 and 25 September), Kirkandi (Gaurnadi thana, 8 September), Dehergati (Barisal thana, 10 September), Armananj (Barisal thana, 10 September), Bhola (Bhola thana, 11 September), Baytopur (11 September), Sohagolal (Swarupkati thana, 15 September), Sheker Hat (16 September), Basanda (Patiala thana, 16 September), Parerhat (17 September), Madhabpasa (Nalchiti thana, 17 September), Sabeganj (17 September), Kirtipasa (Jhalakati thana, 23 September), Kasipur (Barisal thana, 24 September), Nazipur (There are 5 Nazipur in the district; Sarupkati, Bakarganj, Nalchiti, Barisal, Gaurnadi respectively, 24 September), Chandai (Gaurnadi thana, 9 October), Keta (Jhalakati thana, 15 October). The meetings at following places were during this period, but undated: Uzirpur (Jhalakati thana), Sehibganj (Bhola thana), Nabaganj (Jhalakati thana), Golachipa-Ratnadi (Golachipa thana), Gabha (Jhalakati thana), Dhamaru-Sopra (Gaurnadi thana), Nalchiti (Nalchiti thana), Shidhakati (Nalchiti thana), Muninag (Swarupkati thana). (By Village Directory of the Presidency of Bengal XXI, Bakarganj)

Above list is compiled from Daily Hitavadi, Sanjivani, Pasumati, Fangsbasi, Parisa Hitashi, Samay, Dacca Prakash, Kasipur Nibasi, Hitavadi; RNP(B).

29. 'Memorandum on Babu Aswini Kumar Dutta' dated 20 June 1907 by R. Hughes-Buller, District Magistrate of Barisal. Home (Pol) A.106, August 1907.

30. Samay, 22 September 1905, RNP(B) for the week ending 30 September 1905.
most profitable months for the Puja sales. Not only big cloth-merchants but also various other merchants and workmen such as shoe-sellers, stationers, sweetmeat-vendors, grocers, cobblers, washermen and barbers took a vow either not to sell foreign goods (especially Manchester cloths) or to use only country-made articles. Moreover, the Uriya servants and cooks decided not to use foreign articles as well as not to serve in those families where foreign goods were purchased. It is noteworthy here that the boycott movement took the form of a social boycott, too. Referring to this Barisal example as something that ought to be followed by every other district in this Province, the Bengalee concluded, "In fact the movement has been so deeply rooted here that you will not find a single peasant in Backergunge who is not extremely anxious to join the swadeshi movement. . . . In that district if anywhere, the movement has stirred the masses." (31)

In the interest of the district, Jhalakati mahajans decided on 9 September 1905 to stop selling foreign clothes for seven days. When this period was over, Aswinikumar Datta went to Jhalakati accompanying Tarinikumar Gupta (medical practitioner), Upendranath Sen (zamindar), Mathuranath Sen (pleader), Sharatkumar Ray (teacher of the B.M. Institution), Priyanath Guha (editor of the Bikash) and others. They were enthusiastically welcomed. A written pledge, dated 22 September 1905, was signed by 35 mahajans in their general meeting. It says that they promised, in conformity with the request of Aswini Babu of Barisal, not to sell foreign clothes from that very day onwards without obtaining his permission.

In the afternoon, on the same day, a meeting attended by about 3,000

people was held at the nat-mandir situated in the precincts of Kali-badi. Two resolutions were passed in this meeting: (1) protest against Partition and petition for appointing a Governor with Council, (2) legitimacy of using swadeshi goods.

Aswinikumar then went to Kirtipasa (a large village, 4 miles to the north-west of Jhalakati) at the invitation of local zamindars. About 4,000 people assembled from 60 neighbouring villages. Resolutions to the same effect as those of at Jhalakati were passed. On the following day, a procession marched from Kirtipasa to Jhalakati, where a joint meeting was held. In both Kirtipasa and Jhalakati, school-boys' activities drew the attention of the editor of the Bikash, a paper published from Barisal.

Kaukhali, a market place in Pirojpur thana, had been a stage for swadeshi preachers from Jhalakati, among whom Kaminikumar Saha and Binodibhori Pal, wealthy mahajans, were eminent. The cloth merchants of Kaukhali took the same pledges as those of Jhalakati mahajans. Thus, the swadeshi movement in Bakarganj district spread its roots deeply in the interior by the combined efforts of Aswinikumar, as the indisputable leader, pleaders, teachers, zamindars and wealthy merchants as the competent lieutenants and school-boys as active voluntary workers.(32)

Thus, in October, "the shopkeepers of Barisal refused to sell European goods to anyone. When asked the reason, they replied that they were under a vow not to sell such goods and could not break this vow

32. 'Emni chai (Such is desirous)', 'Desher Kaj (Service to the country)', Bikash, 1 October 1905.
without the consent of Aswini Babu."(35) As we have seen, this was not confined to Barisal. Since Aswinkumar's visit, according to an official view, Jhalakati "has been in a ferment, boycott has been in (Sic) rife, and there has been a general feeling of uneasiness and commotion."(34) In this connection, the Amrita Bazar Patrika reported the situation of Barisal thus: "The Swadeshi agitators have almost succeeded in boycotting everything foreign. They are using karkach, country-sugar, and country-made dhootis, but there is apprehension that supply of these articles will not meet the demands."(35)

The Partition of Bengal took effect on 16 October 1905. In Barisal, as in every important place in Bengal, a monster procession was formed and people paraded the principal thoroughfares of the town.(36) During the puja holidays, however, Aswinkumar went round the interior of the district to raise funds in favour of the Provincial Conference which was to be held at Barisal in April 1906. On 1 November, the 'national proclamation' composed by Anandamohan Bose on the occasion of the Partition day was read out in a big meeting. People knew that Aswinkumar had not yet returned from his tour even when the procession started. But surprisingly enough, on the way, people discovered that Aswinkumar was walking silently behind the volunteers. A maulvi put forward the resolution praying for the repeal of the Partition and it was seconded by Nibaranchandra Das (Gupta),

33. 'Memorandum on Babu Aswini Kumar Datta', op.cit.
34. Ibid.
35. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 5 October 1905; RNEP.B) for the week ending 14 October 1905.
36. Note by the Executor of the Barisal Anjuman, Govt. of E.B. & A., (Chief Secretary's Confidential Branch), File No.476 of 1907, No...103.
a pleader who was frequently styled as the "greatest snake in the district" because of his remarkable sharpness. (37) After the resolution was adopted, Aswinikumar delivered a speech on the situation surrounding the swadeshi movement for an hour and then he read out the 'national proclamation'.

On that day at the end of the meeting, Dr. Tarinikumar Gupta, and Upendranath Sen (zamindar of Basanda) collected contributions for the National Fund, which amounted to Rs. 275. (38)

As Bakarganj, under the effective leadership of Aswinikumar Datta, was in the forefront of the whole swadeshi movement, it has to confront the repressive measures of the newly created Eastern Bengal and Assam Government under the Lieutenant-Governorship of Bampyld Fuller. During the last few months of 1905, there occurred some frictions, between them, and the impatient measures adopted by Fuller turned out to be responsible for the unusual shortness of his administration. (39)

On 16 October, 1905, F.C. Lyon, the Chief Secretary to the new provincial government, issued a circular to the Commissioners of the three divisions of Eastern Bengal, stating (1) the undesirability of students being employed in political agitation, especially that of an anti-British implication, and (2) the duty of the Commissioners to report any such case and take necessary measures to suppress it, in which "formal and public barring of the pupils of the college, or school, from all service

37. History Sheet No. 67 of Nibaran Chandra Das.
38. 'Barisol shahare paila November', Bikash, 5 November 1905.
39. Richard P.Cronin, op.cit., pp. 57-52, esp. pp. 54-73. Incidents in Bakarganj during this period, i.e. October and November 1905, were fully described in Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, India's fight... (op.cit.), pp. 111-120.
under Government" was suggested to be applied. It was followed by Lyon's Educational Circular and the Bande Mataram Circular, both being issued on 8 November 1905. The former was mainly the repetition of the aforesaid Lyon's circular but the prohibition was extended to "the active participation of students in promoting the boycott of the foreign goods." (41) The latter prohibited the shouting 'Bande Mataram' in the streets or other public places. (42) The Barisal Hitaishi, in reply to Lyon's first circular, displayed the determination of Barisal by quoting a few lines of a song of Tagore: "The more they tighten their bonds, the more will the bonds break --- the more will the break on us./ The more they redder their eyes, the more will our eyes open --- the more will our eyes open." (43)

The strain was first felt in the interior of the district. At the end of October 1905, a golmal (row) took place at Gournadi in connection with the landing of English goods, salt, etc. On receipt of the news, Streatfield, the District Magistrate rushed to the scene. (44) In the second week of November, Streatfield went to Banaripara (a thickly

40. Circular letter, dated 16 October 1905, from Govt. of E.B. & to Commissioners of Rajshahi, Dacca and Chittagong. Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons) Vol. 81 (c. 3242), 1906, p. 888

41. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 12 November 1905; quoted in Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, India's Fight: (op. cit), pp. 96-99. The comments on the circulars appeared in the same paper; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 16 November 1905; 'RN(B)' for the week ending 25 November 1905.

42. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 14 May 1905.

43. Barisal Hitaishi, 8 November 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 11 November 1905.

44. Kasipur Nibashi, 1 November 1905; RNP(B) for the week ending 11 November 1905.
populated village in thana Swarupkati, famous for the kulin kayastha of the highest class) for the purpose of publishing of the circular relating to the students and the popular movement. On the night of the Magistrate's arrival there was some kind of a disturbance in the village, and the District Magistrate, who had reason to believe that certain students were mixed in it, ordered the expulsion of three boys and teachers from the school. This was resented on the grounds that the punishment had fallen on the wrong shoulders, and a crowd of boys ran after the Magistrate intermingling an appeal for a reconsideration of the order with the cries of "Bande Mataram". Mr. Streatfield, however, allowed it to be known that he could not reopen the question, whereupon some clods of earth, or other missiles were thrown in his direction. (45) The outcome of the affair was the despatch of the Gurkhas to Banaripara. In this connection, a biographer of Aswinikumar suggests that the repressive step was attributed not to Streatfield, who was regarded as a gentle officer, but to the wirepulling of J.C. Jack, the Settlement Officer (46) who was unpopular among the middle class (intermediary tenure-holders) due to his hostile attitude towards them in the course of settlement operations.

Finally Fuller himself went to Barisal, with Gurkhas on 15 November 1905. Before that, on 7 November, Aswinikumar and four other leaders (47)

45. 'The situation in Eastern Bengal', Statesman, 2 December 1905.
46. Sureshchandra Gupta, op.cit., p.369.
47. The names of these four leaders are as follows: Dinabandhu Sen, president of the Bar Library and the People's Association, Upendranath Sen, Zamindar of Basanda (thana Jhalakati), Kaliprasanna Guha, zamindar and Rajani Kanta Das Gupta, pleader, chairman of the Barisal Municipality and Vice-Chairman of the District Board. See Sureshchandra Gupta, op.cit., p.368, and Haridas and Uma Mukherjee, India's fight... (op.cit) p.225. Originally signatories were 7 in all. The other two were 'well-known Muslim gentlemen, who, however, were not called up by Fuller. See 'Aswini K.Dutt vs. J.C. Jack' Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 May 1907.
had issued an appeal in support of Swadeshi throughout the district. 
For clear understanding of the spirit contained therein, the appeal 
deserves to be quoted in full: "There is no reason to doubt that 
our cloth will ultimately be sold cheaper than foreign cloth. For 
the cloth we now wear is, after all, made of our cotton and jute. 
These materials are now carried in ships to England, where English 
coolies and skilled labourers are employed to make cloth out of 
them, and the finished products have again to be carried back to this country 
in ships. If the raw materials are used in our own country, it will mean 
a saving to us at least equivalent to the double shipping involved in 
the other process. Besides it is our coolie and the skilled labourers 
who will find employment instead of foreign labourers. You have only to 
be patient for a while. Already people are so earnest about your needs 
that we have no doubt as to the ultimate success. What harm if we remain in 
tatters for a short period of time, if it is only to keep a solemn 
vow? The proclamation issued by the Government leaves the option to us to 
purchase what we like, so there is no objection to our buying indigenous 
goods. We have all taken the vow. We must remember that if the vow 
is broken, our glory — the little we have had — will be extinguished 
forever. There may be some people who for selfish purposes will 
endeavour to create dissension among us, or who are interested in our 
breaking the vow. May we not depend upon it that in such case our people 
will prove too strong for all temptation? We are all united — all 
brothers, and may depend upon each other's cooperation. Only we must 
see to it that in making people take this vow no one may exercise 
force and violence nor in any other way violate the existing law.
No zamindar or his servants should impose any fines on those who refuse to take the vow or are unable to keep it. Our duty is not to force, but to persuade people on our knees. There is, however, one thing we may do. If there are men who refuse to listen to the voice of reason and are determined to act against wishes and sentiment of all their neighbours, there is nothing to prevent us from excommunicating them.

Let there be no false rumours. If there is any rumour current to the effect that Government has forbidden the use of foreign goods, let the rumour be at once contradicted. Let it be distinctly understood that the vow is a self-imposed vow and that no extraneous authority has anything to do with it. He who seeks to persuade people by spreading false rumours is an enemy to our cause. There is no progress except righteousness. Our history will prove no exception to this general rule. May we keep this vow and persuade people to adopt it, not by resorting to untruth but through an appeal to their patriotic feelings.

So, God help us. To fulfil this and other object and for the good of our motherland, there should be a people's association in each village. And our humble request is that the names of the Secretaries to these associations should be communicated to Aswini Kumar Dutt. (48)

(Emphasis added.)

The appeal is becoming of Aswinikumar Datta who had done his best to develop a political movement on the strict principles of "satya, prem, nishitata (truth, love and purity)". Yet it can also be observed from the appeal that the movement was liable to go beyond

48. Statesman, 2 December 1905. (op.cit.)
his ethical orientation and there was every possibility of excesses which would produce tensions at the edge where the movement touched the masses. The appeal, as a matter of course, was unbearable to Fuller. As soon as he arrived at Barisal (where he did not get any cordial reception), he called up the five persons to his ship who signed their names on the appeal. He demanded that it should be withdrawn at once as it was a proclamation which only the Sovereign or his representative was empowered to issue. The proposed "People's Associations" were also condemned as "Committees for Public Safety", the appointment of which was none but impertinence. The leaders, sitting before Fuller who was with a cane in his hand, looked like school boys before a teacher. Fuller, being deaf to any explanation, wrenched their consent for withdrawal of the appeal. Seeing the four colleagues say 'yes' to Fuller's demand, Aswinikumar told him that he had no objection to their consent. Barisal people, waiting anxiously on the bank for their return were not satisfied when the whole matter was disclosed to them. This event was certainly a turning point in the Swadeshi movement of Bakarganj as will be discussed a little later.

After the interview the five leaders addressed the following note to the Lieutenant-Governor's Private Secretary: --- "We have the honour to state that as His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor is of opinion that our appeal of the 21st Kartic 1312 B.S. (7 November 1905) contains certain expressions that may tend to lead people to commit breaches of peace, we withdraw the same and request the favour of communicating it to His Honour." (50) Jack, who ultimately succeeded Streatfield as

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50. Statesman, 2 December 1905 (op.cit.)
District Magistrate on 16 November (51), issued a notification in Bengali on the following day alleging that Aswinikumar Datta and others had withdrawn the appeal because they had realized its seditious and provocative character. (52) On 20 November, Aswinikumar acquainted Jack that the reason for the withdrawal of their appeal was only deference for Fuller and requested Jack to correct the mischievous imputation made in his notification. This letter was ignored. Thereupon, after giving due notice to Jack, Aswinikumar Datta brought a suit of defamation. In May next year (1906), the First Subordinate Judge of Barisal delivered the judgment in favour of Aswinikumar and imposed nominal fine of Rs. 101 on Jack. (53)

The imposition of the Gurkha punitive force on the Barisal area caused another tension. In the latter half of November, Bengali-owned newspapers wrote much about "the reign of terror at Barisal". The complaints against the Gurkhas were that they raided the bazar, refusing proper payment for the goods taken and in some cases, assaulting the shopkeepers; they entered the precincts of private houses and hit innocent persons, in some cases inflicting dangerous injury; and that, on the night of 23 November, on an order from the Magistrate, the Gurkhas were let loose and they went through the town like a tornado. The shops with 'Bande Mataram' signs were the targets of their attack. The leading men of Barisal town were asked by the Magistrate not to convene any

51. The sudden retirement of Streatfield and subsequent assumption of Magistratesship by Jack were regarded as Fuller's resolution to set about unreserved repressions. See 'Asvini K. Dutt vs. J.C. Jack', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 May 1907 (op.cit.); Sureshchandra Gupta, op.cit., p.394.

52. The full notification issued by Jack was reproduced in English translation in the Daily Hitavadi, dated 24 November 1905; NIP(B) for the week ending 2 December 1905.

53. 'Asvini Kumar vs. Jack', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 24 May 1907 (op.cit.), 1 June 1907.
meetings within the following 15 days and six men were asked to leave Barisal for a fortnight. (54) Regarding these six men, even the Statesman reported thus: "Mr. Jack warned them with the remark that their names were known to the police and that 'if the Gurkhas oppressed them he could not be responsible.' If this is true --- and it was supported by the testimony of several persons at first hand --- it is highly improper." (55) Then, in the early morning of 10 December 1905, one Gurkha attempted to rape a municipal sweeper woman. The woman refused to identify her assailant to the Superintendent of Police and her husband claimed that the "babus" had persuaded his wife to lodge a false complaint. Though it was only an instance of the Gurkhas oppressions, Puller's intervention ended in the mishandling of the affair. This, according to Cronin, was "the first incident leading to Puller's fall" (56), because both Morley and Minto knitted their brows over Puller's tactlessness in dealing with the case.

It will be necessary to consider problems before organizations in Bakarganj through the history of the swadeshi movement. After the interview of five Barisal leaders with Puller on 15 November, the Sandhya commented on the event as follows: "Aswini Babu has lost a golden opportunity. If he had not withdrawn the proclamation while he was on board Mr. Puller's steamer, he would have been arrested. Then a conflagration would have broken out in the country." (57) People of Barisal, as we have seen, also expressed dissatisfaction for the weak attitude of their leaders.

54. Bengalee, 21 November 1905; RN3P(B) for the week ending 23 November 1905.
55. Statesman, 2 December 1905 (op. cit.)
57. Sandhya, 24 November 1905; RN3P(B) for the week ending 2 December 1905.
Yet they knew well what complications forced Aswinikumar Datta to comply with Fuller's demand. It is next to impossible to imagine that Aswinikumar would have taken a defiant stance, and his consequent arrest would have made him a national hero. In fact, he was the last person that would take the opportunity to exploit a stray incident for agitating people without any sound organizational basis. Therefore, the attitude of Aswinikumar on this occasion was nothing but an expression of the organizational weakness. Though the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was established to carry on the swadeshi-boycott movement on 6 August 1905, the responsibility lay with the veteran leaders who had been connected with the People's Association at Barisal. Their interview with Fuller, however, revealed that their leadership would not avail under the repression of Fuller's Government. Since the beginning of the agitation against partition, there were two groups in the Barisal town to carry on the movement. One was the Netri-sangha (leaders' association), consisting of the established leaders like Tarinikumar Gupta, Haranath Ghosh, Upendranath Sen, Dinabandhu Sen, Rajanikanta Das Gupta, Kaliprasanna Guha and Aswinikumar Datta. The other was called the Karmi-sangha, composed of 18 younger workers most of whom were pleaders or the staff of the Brajamohan Institution. Nishikanta Bose, a Brahmo and a homeopathic practitioner, was its first secretary.

Aswinikumar was the adviser of this group. As a result of the aforesaid

53. Bipinchandra Pal's interpretation of Aswinikumar Datta's attitude on the occasion is interesting enough to quote here. Pal explains one aspect of Aswinikumar's decision. "The arrest of Asvini Kumar at that time would have resulted in serious riot, which even Sir Bamfylde's (sic) hundred Gurkhas would have found it impossible to quell. Asvini Kumar saw the prospects of all this carnage, and decided to be adjudged a coward rather than, however indirectly, be the cause of a blood riot in his own town. No demagogue even thinks in this way. Few politicians in the position of Asvini Kumar in any part of the world would have exercised such forbearance and sacrificed their public character for the sake of public peace. A self-assertive man would have defied the Lieutenant-Governor and would have earned cheap martyrdom by going to prison for his refusal to withdraw an absolutely legal circular, though such a refusal might lead to bloodshed among the reckless and excited populace. Asvini Kumar saved the situation in Barisal by his forbearance." Bipinchandra Pal, Character Sketches (op.cit.) p.55.
interview, the Netri-sangha lost control over the movement as an independent group. Aswinikumar joined the Karmi-sangha (59), and thus was established a stronger unified organization. According to Sharatkumar Ray, the Karmi-sangha was identified with the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti.(60) The transfer of controlling power from the Netri-sangha to the Karmi-sangha can be explained as a setback of the 'moderate' trend and furtherance of 'extremist' ideas in Bakarganj.

It is obvious from the appeal of 7 November 1905, in which the establishment of a people's association in each village and the apprising of its secretary's name to Aswinikumar Datta were requested, that the village samitis emerged spontaneously and owing to their multiplicity those samitis remained almost beyond the control from Barisal. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was feeling the financial pinch. The subscription collected in a small town would be limited and gradually even that amount diminished. In such a situation, the Bikash appealed that the surplus amount of money collected by village workers should be sent to Aswinikumar Datta for necessary activities.(61) After the integration of commanding bodies at Barisal, the work to bring village samitis under the control of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was promoted rapidly. During the first year, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti received reports from 163 mofussil associations, while there were many other associations which did not send in their reports.(62)

60. Sharatkumar Ray, op.cit., pp.172. "The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti or 'Society of the Friends of the country' was established on the 6th of August 1905, with 18 members." Punjabi, 19 September 1905.
61. 'Swadeshi Andolan', Bikash, 5 November 1905.
62. 'Swadeshi in Bakarganj', Punjabi, 19 September 1906. (op.cit.)
It engaged two permanent itinerant preachers to diffuse the message of swadeshism to the interior of the district. (63)

A salient feature of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti lies in the fact that it was a unique combination of the two types of organizations, viz. People's Association and Samiti. Other samitis in Eastern Bengal like the Anushilan Samiti (Dacca), the Suhrid Samiti (Mymensingh) and the Sadhana Samiti (Mymensingh) were founded a few years before the partition, with the aims and objectives such as (1) physical improvement of the members, (2) religious and moral improvement of the same, (3) social service and humanitarian work and (4) unity and organization. The first three points were mentioned in the programme of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, too, but they were actually carried on by other organizations. The first two tasks had been already attained to a considerable extent in the Brajamohan Institution, so far as Barisal centre was concerned. The activities of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti can not be considered without taking the Brajamohan Institution into account, not only because the latter supplied the former with several efficient workers out of its staff, but also because the latter undertook educational programmes which other samitis had to promote from within. The third point was also taken over by another organization. In Bakarganj, the old 'People's Association' ceased to be a political organization after the fall of the Netri-sanga. (64) Aswinikumar Datta utilized 'People's Association' as an organization for

63. 'What a glorious record!', Bengal, 16 August 1906.
64. "By the way, I don't understand why the report was sent to the People's Association, which does not budge an inch in those matters." A letter from Satishchandra Chatterji, Secretary to the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti to Rajanikanta Guha Thakurta, the Head-Master of the Benaripara High School, dated Barisal, 29 April 1906, F.R. Home (Pol) A. 76, October 1907.
social service and humanitarian work. At the time of 'Barisal Famine' in 1906, he engaged himself in the relief works as the secretary of the People's Association. The Brajamohan Institution played a role as a wing (or core) of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti, while the workers of the People's Association engaged in famine relief were none but those of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. The Swadeshi Bandhab Samiti was, therefore, the sole political association recognized as such in the district. And the samitis in other districts could not obtain such public character as the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti did.

The relation between Barisal centre and mofussil branches, however, was rather loose. The village associations were entitled to choose their names at will. They were called, for example, the Swadesh Sebak Samiti (at Banaripara) or the Swadesh Hitaishini Sabha (at Dhamura). By August 1908, the number of branch-samitis increased to 159. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (at Barisal) had an Executive Committee and a General Committee, and the mofussil samitis had also Executive Committees under them. On 11 April 1907, a sub-committee was set up for framing rules for forming the District Samiti. Aswinikumar Datta (B.M. Institution), Satishchandra Chatterji (B.M. Institution), Nibaranchandra Das Gupta (pleader), Saratchandra Guha (pleader), Upendranath Sen (zamindar), Tarinikumar Gupta (doctor),

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65. "In this (i.e. famine relief work in 1906) the members of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti untiingly laboured and helped the famine stricken people." 'Second and Third Annual Proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti', Part II No. 10, Home (Pol) Deposit 15, July 1909.


67. A letter from the members of the Swadesh Hitaishini Sabha, Dhamura, to the President of the Swadesh Sebak Samiti, Banaripara, dated Dhamura, 8 July 1906. F.R. Home (Pol) A.76, October 1907.
Durgamohan Sen (editor of the Barisal Hitajshi) were selected to be its members. The Swadesh Bandhab Samiti consisted of 74 members altogether. They can be broken up as follows: 17 staff members of the Brajamohan Institution, 23 legal practitioners, 8 zamindars, 5 medical practitioners, 2 paid preachers, 2 journalists, 6 employees and 11 others. The composition of the above-mentioned sub-committee — 2 staff members of the Brajamohan Institution, 2 pleaders, a zamindar, a doctor and a journalist — represented the General Committee of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti in a very well-balanced manner. The President of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti was Aswinikumar himself, and its Secretary was Satishchandra Chatterji (up to the second half of July, 1908). Both of them were connected with the Brajamohan Institution. It is obvious that the Barisal leaders felt it necessary to organize a more tightly-knit District Samiti as a developed organization of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. The absence of a District Samiti was pointed out as early as November 1905 as a defect of the movement at Bakarganj. Four preachers were permanently appointed to spread the objects of the Samiti over the villages.

At the Bakarganj District Conference held on 17 and 18 August 1908,

69. Saratendran Guha (pleader) succeeded him. But according to the report of LeMesurier, Aswinikumar Datta allowed Satishchandra Chatterji "to perform the functions of Secretary of the Samiti in his own presence." From H. LeMesurier to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, Home Dept., dated 10 December 1908. Home (Pol) Deposit 6, November 1909.
70. Bikash, 5 November 1905. (op.cit.)
an important resolution regarding the formation of the district-level samiti was carried. Gunadacharan Sen, vakil (High Court) and translator of Aswinikumar’s "Bhaktiyoga", moved the 16th resolution, which ran as follows: "To perform patriotic works there should be a District Samiti formed by election and the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti should be entrusted with the formation of such District Samiti. They (the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti) will settle the matter in consultation with (the members of) the three subdivisions and Jhalakati." Upendra Nath Sen further explained the details of the matter: "In every village there should be village Samitis with representatives of every caste. The members will have to pay a minimum subscription of four annas a year. With the representatives of these village Samitis and members from the subdivisional headquarters, there will be a Subdivisional Samiti. The District Samiti will again be formed from the representatives of the Subdivisional Samiti and members from the district town."(72)

Though it was widely admitted that "the organization of the agitation in the interior of Bakarganj is far superior to that which has been observed in any other District of the Province"(73), the whole structure of the samitis had not been fully developed as yet. In the other words, the representative system to be constructed from the primary level of the village samitis upwards through successive regional samitis had not been established yet. The predominance of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti as a central command over the moffusil samitis was not the result of a formal procedure, but came naturally because of its


73. From P.C.Lyon, Chief Secretary to the Govt. of E.E. & A. to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, dated Shillong, 15 September 1908(Conf’d). Home(Pol) A.104, October 1908.
geographical position and the reputation of Aswinikumar Datta and his lieutenants. The circumstances were by no means favourable for the swadeshi movement. "Very little has been heard", runs the Fortnightly Report of first half of July 1908, "of agitation during the early part of this month."(74) In the second half of the same month, the Lieutenant-Governor observed that there was reason to believe that many of the better class of educated Bengalis were tired of the agitation.(75) And there was a new trend in the movement. In East Bengal,"the diminution in the agitation and unrest apparent on the surface is accompanied by increased vigour in the secret organisation of samitis and bands of volunteers and in the accumulation, by gang --- robbery and other methods, of arms and ammunition and of funds, and that preparations are being vigorously made for more active measures."(76) Under this kind of atmosphere, it was quite difficult to "agitare constitutionally"(77). The formation of a District Samiti, which was to consolidate the village samitis, was needed to tide over the difficulties arisen from the increasing despondency and the emergence of secret samitis. Therefore, J. Khamuk, Police Inspector, who reported the proceedings of the Bakarganj District Conference, commented on the resolution regarding the formation of a District Samiti by election, with much alertness: "If the political agitation be carried on through these Samitis, then Government will not be able to ignore it as the work of a

74. F.R. for the first half of July 1908. Home (Pol) A.38, September 1908.
75. F.R. for the second half of July 1908. Home (Pol) A.42, September 1908.
76. F.R. for the second half of September 1908. Home (Pol) A.59-60, January 1909.
77. Speech by Aswinikumar Datta, on 18 August 1908 at the Bakarganj District Conference. Home (Pol) A.104, October 1908.
During the two or three months preceding the deportation of Aswinikumar Datta (13 December 1908), it was observed that "Pulinism was taking root at Barisal with the decline of Aswini and the rise of the more violent Satish." (i.e. Satishchandra Chatterji) (79) In fact, Aswinikumar "deprecated the outrages and the dakoities of the past few months and admitted that there were faults to be found with the conduct of the volunteers." (80) In these circumstances the blueprint of the District (Zilla) Samiti was circulated in the district in early December. (81) Before the District Samiti itself appeared on the stage, however, Aswinikumar Datta had been deported. The Fortnightly Report states: "Much discussion appears to have taken place more or less secretly in regard to the effect of the provisions of the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act regarding associations and there are grounds for believing that the principal "samitis" are going through the form of breaking themselves up, though there is evidence that most of the more dangerous numbers are reforming themselves into smaller and more careful selected bodies." (82) Ultimately on 5 January, 1909, a proclamation was issued

78. Report of Inspector J. Bhaumik on the proceedings of the Bakarganj District Conference (op. cit.).
79. From R. Nathan to R. Lemuerier, dated Dacca, 9 December 1908, Home (Pol) Deposit 2, April 1909.
by the Government of India under the section 16 of the Indian Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1908, declaring the Swadesh Bardhab Samiti and four other samitis in East Bengal to be dangerous associations. The Swadesh Bardhab Samiti went through "the process of declaring itself dissolved." Printed notices to this effect were issued to the members and the Samiti building was sold.(83)

"During the days of deportation, several co-workers of Aswini-kumar Datta established the District Association or the Zilla Samiti under the leadership of late Upendra Nath Sen."(84) The information about the Zilla Samiti is scanty. On 31 March 1909, a small meeting of the Barisal People's Association was held. Upendranath Sen proposed "that, as practically all the samitis had ceased to exist, it was incumbent on them to receive the working of their Association, but the proposal was not warmly received."(85) This indicates that the Zilla Samiti was not in a position to take over the activities of the Swadesh Bardhab Samiti and the People's Association was completely out of tune with the difficult political situation at this time. The Englishman wrote on the Barisal District Conference held at Jhakatki on 19 June 1909: "The National Volunteers who seemed to have disappeared are again springing up under other names and cryptic dark sayings, of which it is altogether impossible to trace the author, are once more in

84. Sureshchandra Gupta, op. cit., p.317.
85. History Sheet No.67 of Nibaran Chandra Das (Gupta).
vogue. For example, 'sanitation', which may be defined as 'the removal of offensive matter,' is one of the ideals that is being set before Bengali youths. "(86) In the same Conference, J. Chaudhuri addressed the audience thus: "The central idea before the Conference was, no doubt, political regeneration of the country. But they must not forget that social regeneration of the masses, the reform of the Hindu society, the development of arts and industries, trade and commerce, were matters which did not affect them less vitally. The existence as a nation depended as much on their educational, social and industrial advancement as on their political. The delegates present, who represented the cream of Hindu society, must lift up the lower classes to the status of the regenerate classes..." (87) We have a reference to a meeting of the Zilla Samiti held on 22 August 1909. There Nibaran Chandra Das Gupta "declined to accept the office of Secretary of the Samiti, which was offered to him." (88) The formation of the Zilla Samiti had a hard going even at Barisal, but the line of its work seemed to be what was suggested at the District Conference. In fact, after his return from deportation (February 1910), Aswinikumar Datta took the Presidentship of the Zilla Samiti and paid much attention to the work for education and sanitation. The preachers were sent from the Zilla Samiti and the efforts to establish lower primary schools in villages were put in hand. (89) The Zilla Samiti went on working till it merged into the Congress Committee.

86. 'The "Englishman" on the Barisal Conference', Bengalee, 25 June 1909.
87. 'Barisal District Conference Mr. J. Chaudhuri's address', Bengalee, 25 June 1909.
88. History Sheet No. 67 of Nibaran Chandra Das (Gupta).
which was established as a result of the Non-Cooperation movement (1920). (90)

Let us turn back again to the political situation at the end of 1905. Despite the formal denial of Gurkha oppression (December 1905), the Government of India could not but be concerned about it. Minto, who succeeded Curzon in November 1905, telegraphed to Fuller on 15 December 1905: "I hear you visit Barisal 17th. If you see no possibility of bad results, I suggest that the Gurkhas might be withdrawn, and employment of special constables, particularly those enrolled with view of keeping them quiet, might be discontinued. Such action, in view of Prince's (the Prince of Wales) visit to Calcutta, might have most beneficial effect. . . . " (91) Fuller responded on the same day to the effect that he hoped to be able to withdraw Gurkhas from Barisal in accordance with Minto's wish. (92) Minto duly expressed his gratitude (93) and Fuller informed that he had decided to remove the Gurkhas to Dacca and had communicated the decision to the public on 20 December 1905. (94) But it was only in early March 1906 that the punitive police was withdrawn from Madhabpasa (a village in Barisal thana, about 7 miles north-west of Barisal). And the punitive police was still stationed at Banaripara. (95)

The imposition of punitive police tax was a serious burden on the people of Banaripara. Fuller declared that the cost of punitive police quartered on Banaripara and Narottampur would be borne by the Hindus alone. It was

90. Ibid, p. 110.
91. Minto to Fuller (Telegram), 15 December 1905, Minto Papers Vol. I (National Archives, Microfilm Reel 1)
92. Fuller to Minto (Telegram), 15 December 1905. Ibid.
93. Minto to Fuller, 18 December 1905. Ibid.
94. Fuller to Minto, 20 December 1905. Ibid.
95. Fuller to Minto, 12 March 1905. Ibid.
severely criticized by the Sandhya as Puller's trick; since no Muslims lived in those villages. (96) Puller's justification for this step was that Banaripara was inhabited mainly by the babu class of people, who had taken a very leading part in illegal boycotting. (97) The Bengali papers denounced it as an unnecessary measure because criminal cases were practically absent in those villages owing to the fact that the most of the inhabitants belonged to a very high caste, Bangiya Kayastha, "who were the most innocent, quiet and law-abiding people and that there was no Muslim inhabitants there." (98)

A large public meeting was held at Farisal on 2 March 1906, protesting against Morley's confirmation of the partition. (99) Aswinikumar Batta presided over the meeting and delivered a fiery speech, in course of which he urged the people to renew the swadeshi vow. "Thousands," reported the Amrita Bazar Patrika, "promised to boycott British goods and support the swadeshi movement. Mr. Morley's reply has given fresh vigour to our cause." On the following day 17 meetings were held in Calcutta to the same purport.

Meanwhile as a result of the repressive measures adopted by the government since October 1906, the number of swadeshi-sufferers grew. The first meeting to honour them held on 14 February 1906 at the Grand Theatre in Calcutta, where Narendra Nath Sen, editor of the Indian Mirror, said in course of his speech: "Among the gentlemen we see before

96. Sandhya, 5 January 1906; RNP(B) for the week ending 13 January 1906.
97. Fuller to Minto, 12 March 1906, op.cit.
98. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 19 February 1906. RNP(B) for the week ending 24 February 1906.
99. In Calcutta, Surendranath Banerjee and others convened a meeting to protest against Morley's confirmation of the partition on 27 February 1906. See Fraser to Dunlop Smith, 5 March 1906, Minto Papers, op.cit.
100. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 15 March 1906.
us today, may I mention in particular, without meaning to make any individual distinction, the name of Babu Aswinikumar Dutt of Barisal than whom there are few sincere, self-sacrificing patriots known in all Bengal both old and new. I am told Babu Aswinikumar left Calcutta and is not with us this evening. . . "(101) On 15 March 1906, a large number of Hindus and Muslims assembled at the Raja Bahadur's Haveli, (in Barisal town) to honour the Muslim convicts of the Jhalakati Salt Case. They were released because their fine amounting to Rs. 100, was paid off by the Hindus. Aswinikumar Datta garlanded the convicts and appealed to the Muslims to join hands with the Hindus. Other speakers also put stress on the Hindu-Muslim unity while pointing out the falseness of the official propaganda about the strained relationship between the two communities.(102)

During this period the workers of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti went round the district to collect funds for the coming Bengal Provincial Conference,(103) which was held in Barisal on 14 and 15 April 1906. There are plenty of information available regarding this


102. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 15 March 1906.

In the Mymensingh session of the Provincial Conference, Surendranath Sen (105) proposed on behalf of the inhabitants of the Bakarganj district that the 1906 session be held in Barisal. It was for the first time that Barisal played host to a session of the Provincial Conference. Aswinikumar Datta, who was the last leader to allow any political conference to degenerate into a 'tin din tamasha' (three days' merriment), was deeply involved in a propaganda campaign, sending workers to the interior of the district to explain the objects of the conference, distributing printed material. In early 1906 was convened a big public meeting, and Aswinikumar was formally elected Chairman of the Reception Committee. It was also decided that the preparation would be made through four departments, i.e. (1) news and correspondence, (2) pavilion and accommodation, (3) food and supply, and (4) reception. Many

104. Some important books dealing with this historical Barisal Conference are as follows.

i) Priyanath Guha, Jajna-Bhanga (Calcutta, 1314 B.S.).
ii) Jogendranath Bandyopadhyay (pen name of Kaliprasana Kayavisharad), Lanchiter Samman (Calcutta, 1315 B.S.), pp.55-80.
iii) Surendranath Banerjee, A Nation in Making (op.cit.), pp.204-211.
v) Sureshchandra Gupta, Aswinikumar (op.cit.), pp.452-467.
vi) Sharatkumar Ray, Mahatma Aswinikumar (op.cit.), pp.176-211.
vii) Haridas and UmanMukherjee, India's Fight for Freedom (op.cit.), pp.156-186.

The most detailed and reliable description is obtainable from Priyanath Guha's work. As for the tone of journalistic criticism of this Conference, see Report of the Native Papers in Bengal and Report of the Native-owned English Newspapers in Bengal; for the weeks ending 21 April, 28 April, 5 May 1906 respectively.

volunteers were needed for these services and a large number of them were expected to come from the student body in the town. Disregarding the prohibitions of Lyon's circulars, Aswinikumar chose from the students of the Brajamohan Institution, saying that he would not be sorry even if his Institution was closed down as a result of this decision. Surendranath Mitra, professor of Philosophy (the Brajamohan Institution), supervised the volunteers as captain. (106)

Since the beginning of 1906, "the apparent failure of all constitutional agitation to move the Government and bitterness due to anti-swadeshi measures (had) increased the impatience of a section of people and leaders." (107) Bipinchandra Pal preached against constitutional agitation at a meeting held in the compound of the Field and Academy Club on 23 January 1906. (108) "... the leaders would do well," said he, "to take the opportunity offered by the forthcoming Barisal Conference to decide whether the people should adhere to the present mendicant policy or rely on the strength of their 'strong right arm' to bring about the realization of their national aspirations." (109) The 'moderate' group was led by Surendranath Banerjea and the 'extremists' were led by Bipinchandra Pal and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. (110) However,

108. Ibid.
109. Indian Empire, 10 April 1906. KNEP(B) for the week ending 21 April 1906.
110. Memo on history of the Bomb Affair by the editor of the Telegraph. Home (Pol) Deposit, No. 6, November 1909.
The Barisal Conference did not turn out to be the arena for the two opposing views. Far from that, a strange scene of exchange of positions was enacted. It appears that the so-called 'moderates' took a defiance, stand and the 'extremists' more or less flinched, when the local authorities took strong measures towards the Conference.

The drama of the Conference began when the two steamers carrying delegates from various parts of Bengal reached the Barisal steamer ghat around 9 p.m. on 13 April 1906. The delegates on board shouted 'Bande Mataram' to the utmost voices, while the people assembled on the bank to receive them remained silent. Aswinikumar Latta and other leaders of Barisal had been forced to give their words to the Magistrate that they would neither make procession or shout 'Bande Mataram' on the river-bank at the time of welcoming the delegates. Aswinikumar went to the steamer to explain their silence. Sureniranath Banerjea understood the situation and asked the delegates to abide by the decision taken by the Barisal leaders. Krishnakumar Mitra and the members of the Anti-Circular Society were dissatisfied with the course of affairs and went to the house of Rajanikanta Guha, a Brahmo and Principal of the Brajamohan College, without staying in the house allotted by the Reception Committee as lodging. In the early morning on the following day, leaders assembled and after heated discussion came to a decision that they would shout 'Bande Mataram' on the streets. Aswinikumar and other Barisal leaders made it clear that since the promise with the Magistrate was kept on the previous night, they were willing to comply with the decision reached at the meeting.

In the afternoon (14 April 1906), when the delegates began to march in ranks for the pavilion, a portion of the procession, consisting
of the members of the Anti-Circular Society, who put on their red coloured 'Bande Mataram' sashes from shoulder to side, was attacked by a band of police armed with regulation lathis. Some were beaten severely and wounded. Chittaranjan Guha Thakurta (son of Manoranjan Guha Thakurta) and Brajendralal Ganguly (prominent member of the Suhrid Samiti of Mymensingh) were among them. Amidst the confusion, Surendranath Banerjea was arrested on the spot. After this, the first day's proceedings commenced. The address of Aswinikumar Datta on behalf of the Reception Committee, however, was read out by Nibaranchandra Das Gupta, a pleader and Assistant Secretary of the Committee, since Aswinikumar had accompanied Surendranath Banerjea to the residence of the Magistrate, T. Emerson. There was a tremendous excitement in the pavilion on every occasion which took place in quick successions, such as --- the wounded young delegates were brought in, Manoranjan Guha Thakurta made a heart­rendering speech with his son Chittaranjan and Brajendralal Ganguly on his sides, and Surendranath Banerjea appeared after depositing the fine amounting to Rs.400.

On the second day (15 April 1906), the Conference was forcibly broken up by the pressure of the local authority. In the midst of the meeting, the Magistrate's order stating that "the public or any persons are not to meet in the Pandal or elsewhere" for holding the Conference(111) was handed over by F.E. Kemp, District Superintendent of Police to the Reception Committee. Then, Kemp himself appeared in the pavilion and offered a compromise formula to the effect that if the leaders promised

111. Order of T. Emerson, District Magistrate of Bakarganj, under Sec.144, C.P. Code, dated 15 April 1906.
The whole order is reproduced as Appendix (4) in Priyanath Guha's "Jaiya-Bhangar".
not to shout 'Bande Mataram' in the streets after the end of the Conference, the meeting might be permitted to continue. When the leaders refused to be bound by such a promise, Kemp ordered the dispersal of the meeting under the threat of use of police force. There arose opposing opinions as to what to do. Dinabandhu Sen, a veteran pleader of Barisal and Bipinchandra Pal expressed their views in favour of breaking-up. Krishnakumar Mitra and Bijaychandra Chatterji, Barrister, were vehemently against it. Ultimately the meeting dissolved.(112)

From the aforesaid series of events, we know that the difference between 'moderates' and 'extremists' appeared mainly on the aspect of a course of policy and was not necessarily related to the behaviour of the men of each group at the time of the actual clash with the armed authorities. Bipinchandra Pal, who was one of the most radical leaders at that time, was submissive enough on the occasion. Arabinda Ghosh, though he participated in the Conference as a delegate, had not at this time come into prominence, and his conduct was not called in question. As for the position of Aswinikumar Datta, who was later regarded as a leader belonging to the 'extremist' camp, Bipinchandra Pal commented thus: "Asvini Kumar's anxiety to avoid, almost at any cost, any kind of physical conflict with the authorities was seen again when the Provincial Conference met ... at Barisal. ... The processionists were not even summoned to disperse peacefully and voluntarily. Asvini Kumar had simply to raise his little finger and excited populace of the town would have crushed the small band of police and all the executive officials like dry leaves in the

hollow of a man's hand. But he was determined that the movement with which he was connected should never be identified with any form of lawlessness and his forbearance, misinterpreted by many ardent young men at that time as cowardice, saved the situation in Barisal once more again on that day."(113) This explanation of Pal was certainly a kind of his own self-defence, too.

On the other hand, the 'moderate' group saved its crucial position, so to say, by taking advantage of the confusion in and ultimate the dispersal of the Conference. Surendranath Banerjea succeeded in maintaining, and to a great extent enhanced, his prestige as 'uncrowned king of Bengal' for some time following the Conference by his arrest. If we take it into consideration that his political career had been built up through adverse circumstances such as dismissal from the government job and conviction, it can be said that arrest on this occasion offered him almost the last opportunity for political standplay. After the break-up of the Conference, Fuller wrote to Minto: "All that we stipulated for was that the delegates, having come to this province, should come to the orders which prohibit noisy demonstration in the streets."(114) In the same letter, Fuller added: "I am glad to say that the people of Barisal generally kept aloof from the procession." So, his object of attack was set mainly on the Calcutta leaders from the very beginning. Fuller's territory-consciousness can be said to have walked unknowingly into a trap set by Surendranath Banerjea.

Krishnakumar Mitra was another 'moderate' who took the most defiant attitude towards the threat of force displayed by the local authorities.

114. Fuller to Minto, 22 April 1906. Minto Papers: (op.cit.)
When the "delegates left their seat", wrote Surendranath Banerjea, "he remained in his seat and would not move. Determination was painted upon his features; his face was red with indignation. He was prepared to face the consequences of the disobedience of authority. We have argued, prayed and protested; and it was with the utmost difficulty that we persuaded him at last to leave the pandal."(115) Because of his hot blood, Krishnakumar Mitra was always a suspect in the eyes of the police, in whose lens, "Krishnakumar Mitra, though outwardly a moderate, knew of the Muraripooker (Bomb) affair from start to end."(116) It is beyond doubt that behind his deportation at the end of 1908 there was an image of a defiant figure in the field of political activities.

There are a few more things to be referred to regarding this Conference. At the beginning of the second day's proceedings, Aswinikumar Datta proposed to build a memorial pillar at the site where Surendranath Banerjea was arrested. The proposal was passed with enthusiasm. When the fund began to be collected, a housewife named Sarojini Basu (resident of Narottampur village) offered a golden bangle of her right hand with the message to the effect that she would no longer wear a golden bangle until the Bande Mataram Circular was cancelled. (117) Women's participation in modern politics had been noticed since the end of the 19th century. Kadambihini Ganguly attended the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress (1889) and was the first woman to speak from its platform.

116. Memo on history of the Bomb affairs by the editor of the Telegraph (op.cit.)
117. The message of Sarojini Basu is reproduced in the following books. Priyanath Guha, op.cit., p.104; Jogendranath Bandyopadhyay, op.cit.p.88. Later, Sarojini Basu was presented a pair of gold bangles by Aswinikumar Datta and was simultaneously awarded the courtesy title of 'Banga Lakshmi' at the time of the Barisal District Conference held in August 1908.
Sarala Devi (Ghosal, later Chaudhrani) contributed much to the samiti movement. But it is only in the period of the anti-partition movement that the ordinary women took interest in politics. A contemporary Japanese historian regarded women's earnest concern in the national movement to be a great menace to the British Raj. He wrote: "Generally, any movement first obtains sound foundation when it moves womenfolk. As time has come when politics is discussed in the zenana, it can be safely said that no longer British can sleep without anxiety."(118)

Abdul Rasul, a Barrister-at-law of the Calcutta High Court, took the presidential chair and this was the first time in the history of Bengal Provincial Conference that a Muslim gentleman occupied the position. The Hindu-Muslim relations will be discussed in Chapter V in connection with the tension between the two communities that occurred during March and May in 1907. Here a mention of two relevant matters will suffice. Since the inception of the anti-partition movement, Hindu leaders had tried to put the influential Muslims in the chairs at swadeshi meetings. Rasul was selected in this context, but he was far from a puppet in the hands of the Hindu leaders. Aswinikumar referred to Rasul and the prospect of Muslim participation in the movement in course of his speech in the capacity of the Chairman of the Reception Committee as follows: 

"... their (delegates') deliberations will be presided over by a distinguished gentleman whose name is held in

118. Shumei Okkawa, Indo ni okuru Kokuminteki-endo no Genjo oyobi sono Yurai (The origin and Present Situation of the National Movement in India) first published in 1916. See Bunzo Hashikawa (ed.), Okkawa Shumei shu (Collection of works of Shumei Okkawa) (Tokyo, 1975), p.28. It may be said in this connection that the above-mentioned work is most probably the first Japanese book in which Barisal was mentioned in relation to the national movement in India.
high regard by men of all classes and creeds. I doubt not this noble example will be followed by all our Mahomedan brethren. It seems a few of them have been captivated by waves of siren songs coming from certain quarters. I am still confident they will be disenchanted and brought back to their bark of hope by the exhortations of one whom, I should think, it would be a pride to follow."(119)

In the same speech, he exhorted the audience to undertake three practical programmes: (1) national education, (2) swadeshi, or creation and development of indigenous industries and (3) foundation of arbitration committees. Aswinikumar, as usual, did not propound it as a mere theory but gave practical examples from what he had actually done on these lines.

Last but not the least, a remarkable change was wrought in the minds of the people by the shock of what happened in Farisal in April, 1906. "A deep current of ill-feeling towards the English has been created by the incidents at Barisal."(120) And "Indignation, resentment and a sense of humiliation were rankling in their breast." (121) Under such circumstances, the Barisal Hitaishi traced the evolution of a new trend of thought in the town. After describing their sincere efforts to carry out the government orders, despite their unjust character during the Conference, the paper touched upon their futility: "their forbearance, patience and obedience to law

119. Aswinikumar Datta, Speech delivered in the capacity of the Reception Committee on 14th April, 1906 at the Bengal Provincial Conference. See Aswinikumar Rachnessambhar (Calcutta, 1374 B.S.), 'Baktritabali', pp. 2-3.

120. Daily Hitavadi, 17 April 1906. RNP(B) for the week ending 28 April 1906.

121. Sanjivani, 19 April 1906. RNP(B) for the week ending 28 April 1906.
were only set down (as) their cowardice and the police went on making preparations to bring to nothing all the arrangements to hold the conference. The submissive spirit of the people failed to satisfy the officials, puffed up as they were with the pride of power.

The more we have prostrated ourselves at the feet of the humble representative of the Sovereign, the more ignominiously have we been treated...

The late incidents have, in fact, taught us that 'Might is right', and that unless we can gather strength, and standing against the officials curb their despotism, we shall be trampled upon like so many little insects."(122) As Kaliprasanna Kavyavisharad, editor of the Hitabadi and a prominent delegate to the Conference, chanted in his songs:

"Barisal is hallowed today, by strokes of the lathi,"(123) official "challenge to the nationalism of Bengal . . . was accepted by the people."(124) Many boys and youths in Bakarganj received the first inspiration to future revolutionary activities.(125)

Aswinikumar Datta and Rajanikanta Das contradicted in the Bengalee of 12 May, the official version of the 'Barisal Affair' published in the same paper on 8 May.(126) The 'Bande Mataram' Circular was annulled on 8 May. On 23 May, the Bande Mataram procession of the Hindus and Muslims,

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122. Barisal Hitaishi, 29 April 1906. RNP(B) for the week ending 12 May 1906.

123. Quoted in Arunchandra Guha, op. cit., p.53.


numbering over ten thousand men, passed through all the principal streets of the town of Barisal. The Hindus shouted 'Allah-ho-Akbar' with the Muslims, while the Muslims shouted 'Bande Mataram' with the Hindus. The procession, headed by Aswinikumar Datta, Barrister Syed Mitahar Hosein, M. Mahommed Shriuff, zaminder of Charamudd and others was hailed throughout the route by Ulu from ladies behind the purdah, Aswinikumar spoke on the occasion: "... the withdrawal of the (Bande Mataram) Circular was not due to any favour granted either by Sir B. Fuller or anybody else, but was due to the spirit of self-help and manliness, shown by our people. ... The agitation must be continued with redoubled vigour and cries of Bande Mataram, and the Swadeshi must not be relaxed till Home Rule was given to India like that given to the Colonies."(127) The goal of agitation had now widened beyond the annulment of the partition into a demand for Home Rule.

On 5 June 1906, the Shivaji festival was celebrated in Calcutta. Tilak, Khoparde and Munje attended it and Aswinikumar Datta presided over it.(128) There were three factors which worked behind Aswinikumar's Chairmanship. First, his initiative in holding the Shivaji festival since 1904 in the mofussil town of Barisal was appreciated by the leaders of Calcutta. Secondly, his fame as one of the most respected and efficient leaders was undoubtedly established as a result of the Barisal Conference which was organised under his guidance. Thirdly, the radical trend of politics gained much strength

127. 'Grand Banda Mataram Procession', Bengalee, 23 May 1906.
128. 'The Shivaji Festival', Bengalee, 7 June 1906.
• 'Shivaji Festival in Calcutta', Amrita Bazar Patrika, 7 June 1906.
after the Barisal Conference. Many radical leaders in Bengal, like Pal, Guha Thakurta, Samsundar Chakravarti, P. Mitter and C. R. Das took part in it and they joined hands with Tilak and Kheperde who came from Maharashtra. Aswinikumar had been attracted by Tilak, most probably since the end of the last century. Actually, there was much similarity between the modes of activities of Tilak and Aswinikumar, though their dispositions were much different. The Shivaji festival, held at Barisal, was an apparent indication of Aswinikumar's inclination towards Tilak. The Shivaji festival of 1906 was celebrated in close collaboration between the extremist leaders of Bengal and Maharashtra. It is quite natural that they could form a strong political bloc in the national movement. The impact of this fact appeared, as early as in July, in the form of extremists' challenge to Surendranath Banerjea's leadership in connection with the setting up of the reception committee for the coming Congress. (129)

On the other hand, the Shivaji festival, which introduced the worship of the image of goddess of Bhabani, aroused much criticism as it held considerable possibilities of producing ill-feelings among the Muslims, despite the speakers' denial that it would alienate the Muslims from the national movement and the fact that it was attended by many Muslims. (130)

For this reason, the Anti-Circular Society, guided by Krishnakumar Mitra,  

129. Samit Sarkar, op.cit., p.68.

130. Dr. Gaffar and Moulvi Dedar Bux attended the celebration as eminent Muslims. It was reported that the gathering was a representative one, as Hindus, Muslims, Marwaris and others were all present. See Bengalee, 7 June 1906. (op.cit)
kept aloof. (131) In fact, Tilak observed in course of his speech:
"We are all Hindus and idolaters and I am not ashamed of the fact. And I must declare from here my conviction. We cannot conceive of Shivaji without Bhabani." (132) Judging from what Aswinikumar said on the occasion of the Shivaji festival of 1904 at Barisal and what was seen in the above-mentioned Bande Mataram procession at Barisal in May, he must have made a more cautious approach towards the problem. Yet the fact remains that the Shivaji festival was a kind of ropewalking as far as the Hindu-Muslim relations were concerned. Even in the midst of Aswinikumar's own citadel at Barisal, there was at least a man critical of the celebration of the Shivaji festival. Dhirendranath Chaudhuri, professor of the Brajamohan Institution and a Brahmo, maintained, in the early days of the anti-partition movement (1905), that "Hindus should be prepared to stop the Shivaji and Pratapaditya festivals if that was found necessary for unity." (133) In conclusion, the Shivaji festival of 1906 created unity between the two provinces, but it contributed to widen a gulf between the two communities. (134)

In the middle of 1906, the delta-lands of East Bengal fell

131. Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., pp.61, 304.
132. Bengalee, 7 June 1906 (op. cit.).
134. While admitting the good intention of the Hindus celebrating the Shivaji festival, a Muslim paper, the Soltan (6 June 1906) criticized it in the following words: "In order to give high praise to Shivaji, one cannot but censure Musalman rule. . How can our Hindu brethren wipe away from the page of the history the record of Shivaji's inhuman conduct towards Afzal Khan and his army?" See RNF(B) for the week ending 16 June 1906.
in the grip of a famine. As early as 1 October 1905, the Bikash expressed apprehensions about "the possibility of scarcity of food in 'the house full of rice' (i.e. Bakarganj)." (155) On 6 January, the Daily Hitavadi reported the scarcity in Bakarganj for the first time. (156) This was followed in February by the Sanjivani which referred to the case of a villager committing suicide in despair, having failed to procure food for his family. (157)

Aswinikumar Datta touched upon this problem in course of his welcome speech at the Provincial Conference in April: --- "Bakargunge, reputed to be the granary of Bengal, has been reduced to such straits that she has not the means of tiding over only one season of scarcity and distress." (158)

At the end of May, the Amrita Bazar Patrika reported that the distress in Bakarganj had assumed the proportions of a famine. "The officials", complains the same article, "refuse even to recognize the existence of famine!" (159) The Indian Nation in its issue of 11 June exhorted the leaders of the swadeshi movement: --- "There is a famine in the land, and the leaders have now a splendid opportunity of showing that they can 'stand on their legs', by helping their distressed fellow-countrymen." (160)

155. 'Annapurna grihe annakaster sahshashana', Bikash, 1 October 1905.
156. Daily Hitavadi, 6 January 1906. RNF(B) for the week ending 13 January 1906.
157. Sanjivani, 15 February 1906. RNF(B) for the week ending 24 February 1906.
158. Aswinikumar Datta, Speech at the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1906. (op.cit.) p.10.
159. Amrita Bazar Patrika, 31 May 1906, RNF(B) for the week ending 16 June 1906.
160. Indian Nation, 11 June 1906. RNF(B) for the week ending 23 June 1906. Decca Prakash, 17 June 1906, wrote to the same effect. "Children of Bengal, give up all political agitation for the time being, put your whole energy in the work of saving the lives of your brethren, and be true followers of the swadeshi." See RNF(B) for the week ending 23 June 1906.
Out of a more genuine concern for his own people, Aswinikumar set about organizing relief-work as soon as he came back from the Shivaji festival. A relief-organization was opened at Barisal on 18 June under his leadership. (141)

The 1906 famine was caused in East Bengal by several factors. Firstly, the aus crop of 1905 was poor, the outturn was estimated to be only 50%. Secondly, the crops of cocoanut and betelnut were also not very satisfactory. Thirdly, these were followed by the failure of the aman crop which was the main staple of the district and grown everywhere. High floods damaged the seedlings almost everywhere either by drowning them or by infusion of salinity. Fourthly, insects and pests, known as 'Pamari' and 'Leda' pokas, ravaged nearly half of the area. The general result was a crop amounting only to half the normal outturn. (142) The shortage of rice affected prices greatly. The normal price of common rice (mota chaul) at Barisal was 15 seers 6 chittacks per rupee. (143) The monthly fluctuation of prices of rice during October 1905 and December 1906 at Barisal is shown in the Table-I.


142. T. Emerson, Collector of Bakarganj, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907. Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue), A.103, October 1907.

143. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of Dacca Division, 17 June 1906. Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue), A.143-204, August 1906. This was the average rate of the preceding 15 years. See T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 14 February 1906. Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue) B.418, April, 1906.
It was widely believed that the rise in prices of rice was "due to the unholy combination among the Mahajans to corner the rice market." *(144)* It is not evident whether there was actual cornering of the rice market by the mahajans, but there was a fact that "the high price of rice was undoubtedly maintained by the export of rice in considerable quantities when the distress began and prices began to rise in the surrounding districts." *(145)* In these districts, the considerable portion of rice fields had been converted into jute plantation for the last 20 years. *(146)*

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*(144)* Petition, signed 1,549 inhabitants of Bakarganj and submitted to the District Magistrate (undated but apparently the latter half of August 1906). *Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue) B.417-490, March 1907.* T. Emerson commented upon this point. "The combination referred to is the regulation of price of merchants in the bazar on receiving telegraphic (sic) in fore time from other marts. It is not illegal and is outside my control." See No.648G, T. Emerson, 28 August 1906. *Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue), B.417-490, March 1907.*

*(145)* T. Emerson, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907 (Op.cit.)


The result of poor harvest of rice, therefore, was first felt in these districts. The people of these districts, who were prosperous due to the high price of jute (147) were able to import rice from other regions — either Bakarganj, Calcutta or Rangoon. Bakarganj rice was so highly appreciated that it was believed rice imported from Calcutta was all re-shipped to Dacca as what was produced in Bakarganj. (148)

In these circumstances, the cultivators of Bakarganj, where jute had been scarcely substituted for rice, sold part of their house-stocks, which were exported to the jute growing districts of the north, in the hope of buying cheaper when a fall in price should happen. But the expected fall did not come. (149) This must have aggravated the condition in Bakarganj.

In this famine, the most affected area was the hill tracts of Bakarganj and Faridpur, and some other portions of Bakarganj as will be mentioned below. According to official views, the hardships of the poorer classes were "aggravated very considerably by the rise in the prices of other commodities which had resulted from the efforts of those interested in the swadeshi agitation to direct consumption into unaccustomed channels." (150) This official version, as a matter of

147. The price of jute was highest in 1905-1907 during the period of 1890-1912. It rose 27% in 1905, 57% in 1906 and 54% in 1907 as against the average price of 1890-1894. See K.L. Datta, op. cit., para 86.


149. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907. (op. cit.)

150. P.C. Lyon, Chief Secretary to the Govt. of E.B. & A., to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, Revenue and Agricultural Dept., 16 June 1906. Eastern Bengal and Assam Gazette, 14 July 1906, No. 23 of 1906, p. 458.
course, was challenged by Bengali papers as a baseless statement. The Sanjivani tried to verify that the swadeshi goods were cheaper than the belati ones and that the boycott of the latter brought food to the weaver's home in East Bengal. (151)

The failure of rice crops was observed all over the district. The Bhola subdivision was less affected in comparison with the rest of the district. Even there, however, the failure of betelnut crops was a blow to the people to a great extent. The most distressed areas were the bil tracts of Gaurnadi (Sadar subdivision), the thanas of Patuakhali, Mirmaganj and Betagi, and the Sundarbans (Patuakhali subdivision). The distress was especially acute in the bil tract of Gaurnadi (the poorest area of the district) as a result of the failure of crops for the preceding two years. (152)

The people affected were the labouring class, the poorer class of peasants, i.e., those who had no lands or ploughs of their own, and the poorer 'bhadralok' who depended for their livelihood entirely upon a small patrimony. As was usual in such distress, widows, orphans and beggars suffered most. (153) The period of the swadeshi movement

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151. Sanjivani, 21 June 1906; RPF(B) for the week ending 30 June 1906.
152. LeMesurier to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, E.B. & A., 9 June 1906; Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue) A.148-204, J.T. Rankin, Offg. Secretary to the Board of Revenue, to the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of E.B. & A., 18 June 1906. Ibid. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 17 June 1906. Ibid. Same to same; 7 March 1907. (op. cit.)
153. Same to same. Ibid. J.T. Rankin to the Chief Secretary to the Govt. of E.B. & A., op. cit.
corresponded to an era of high prices which commenced in 1905. Price of almost all classes of commodities had been rising since that year.\(^{(154)}\)

This was the primal cause of the distress among the lower middle class, i.e., the smaller non-cultivating tenure-holders or low-salaried clerks, school-masters etc. Besides this, high prices of rice ruled over the district (East Bengal as well) even after the normal quantities of aman crops were harvested in early 1907.\(^{(155)}\) Dr. Amales Tripathi pointed out that "areas most affected Extremism had been the greatest sufferers from the rise of food prices" by showing the statistical tables.\(^{(156)}\)

The prices of rice rose rapidly in April and May and home stocks ran out quickly in June. The state of affairs became worse by the middle of June. The distress was declared by the government on 13 July 1906. The famine relief operations were carried out through the three different channels, i.e., (1) the Government of Eastern Bengal & Assam, (2) the District Board of Bakarganj, and (3) the Barisal People's Association. The relief work of the Government assumed the form of (1) the distribution of agricultural loans (Rs. 210,040 were loaned to about 3,000 persons), (2) test works such as clearing of tanks, construction of the roads, etc. (given to 15,483 persons), and (3) gratuitous relief to 32,059 persons. The Government spent Rs.15,468 for test works and gratuitous relief, a woeful drop in the ocean of distress. The relief centres of the Government were declared to be

\(^{154}\) X.L. Datta, \textit{op.cit.}, para 84.

\(^{155}\) Sri Sri Vishnu Priya-o-Andana Bazar Patrika, 7 March 1907. RNP(B) for the week ending 16 March 1907.

\(^{156}\) Amales Tripathi, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.144, 220.
on 15 August, while distribution of loan was continued till September. (157)

The District Board opened relief works on 19 June. (158) It gave gratuitous relief to 64,321 persons and helped 10,340 persons with test works. With the declaration of distress (13 July 1906), however, the distribution of gratuitous relief, hitherto carried out by the District Board, was undertaken by the Government. (159) This measure as well as other steps taken by the Government were criticized by Aswinikumar Datta with the following words: "The District Board were lightening our labour to a certain extent by gratuitous relief to those who needed except respectable persons who blush to see their names on their roll, Sir Bampfylde Fuller has ordered the District Board not to spend its funds over gratuitous relief; such relief will now be supplied by Government itself. Charge Superintendents have been appointed and Panchayats have been furnished at the outset with Rs. 25 for a fortnight. You will surely agree with me in thinking that it is hopelessly inadequate. The needy of respectable families and most of those who cannot move out of their houses would very probably be altogether left out in the cold. Moreover, our people, as a rule, have not much faith in the Panchayats. I do not understand why Government have not formed 'Local Relief Committee' or 'Panchayet of Respectable Persons' in the village under the section 182 of the Famine Code." (160) The Vice-Chairman of the District Board was

157. T. Emerson, to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907. op. cit. Sister Nivedita, op. cit., p.431.
158. Ibid. p.429.
159. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907 (op.cit.)
Rajanikanta Das, a co-worker of Aswinikumar for a long time and the Secretary to the Reception Committee of the 1906 Provincial Conference at Barisal, who toured the interior of the district and inquired about the distress by making house-to-house visitations. Thus, the District Board and the People's Association undoubtedly maintained liaison with each other in course of their relief operations.

Aswinikumar Datta carried out famine relief works as the Secretary of the Barisal People's Association from 18 June 1906 to 22 December 1906. He opened relief centres in 161 different places. The relief centres nearly coincided in number with the branches of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (159 branches). As we have already pointed out, the actual workers engaged in relief works were the volunteers of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti. Aswinikumar worked very hard during this period. He laboured continuously from 6 to noon and from 2 to 6 in the afternoon. After taking a walk, he again started working at 7 till 11 at night. This overwork told much upon his health. Henceforth he had to struggle with diabetes. And it was in this period of heavy labour that Aswinikumar had to give up his favourite work of teaching English in the Brajamohan Institution.

Aswinikumar Datta appealed to the public through newspapers to extend their help for the famine relief works conducted by the People's Association. Due to his reputation as the most sincere patriot, response

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161. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907 (op. cit.)
came not only from Bengal but also from different provinces of India.(164) He succeeded in collecting about Rs. 80,000. The number of persons relieved by the People's Association reached 4,80,301, out of which 80% were Muslims. The Association distributed Rs. 31,162 in cash, 5,766 maunds of rice and 3,510 pieces of cloth.(165) Comparing the amount of money and the length of time spent by the three relief organizations, it is obvious that the People's Association contributed much more than the Government or the District Board to allay the distress of the famine-stricken people. Aswinikumar reported the activities, income and expenditure to the public through the press.

T. Emerson's views on Aswinikumar's relief works were much distorted by official bias. He wrote thus: — "A fund was started in Barisal for the relief of the distressed and a large amount of money is said to have been subscribed from outside districts. I have no information of how the money was expended. I understand accounts have yet been published. I have, however, in the course of my tours come across one or two depots from which rice was distributed free in doles. I understand that fund was largely used for the benefit of the 'bhadralok' classes, and as they were badly affected by the distress and the Government help could not reach them, the fund has probably done some excellent work."(166)

165. Sureshchandra Gupta, op.cit., pp.484, 487.
166. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 7 March 1907, op.cit. T. Emerson's views were reiterated by his successor, Hughes-Buller. "He (Aswinikumar) has and has had high ideals for the betterment of his countrymen, and last year in the scarcity he and his 'volunteers' were undoubtedly instrumental in furnishing relief to many of those of the bhadralok class who were suffering from destitution." R. Hughes-Buller's Memorandum on Sabu Aswini Kumar Datta, dated 20 June 1907. Home (Pol) A.106, August 1907.
It was a fact that Aswinikumar's relief workers were sensitive to the distress of the middle class. In a portion of his report, Aswinikumar referred to their works: "They (volunteers) carry bags of the rice on their shoulders in the night to the houses of respectable ladies and gentlemen who would rather die of starvation than let others know of their want. Names of such persons are not entered in the register or the returns." (167)

It was a common understanding of the relief workers in those days that the middle class people had to be relieved secretly. (168) The fact that Aswinikumar's relief works were appreciated by the common people will be clearly understood from the following episode. Nishikanta Basu, a preacher of the Swadesh Sambar Samiti, went to a village in the south of the district with a boat of relief rice. He came across a band of pirates at nightfall near the village. When he told them that the rice in the boat was sent to famine stricken people by Babu (i.e. Aswinikumar), they themselves helped him carry the rice to the village. (169)

Zamindars who supported the swadeshi movement tried to allay distress in their own way. Upendranath Sen of Basanda and Binodkumar Raychaudhuri of Kirtipasa wrote to T. Emerson stating that their tenants were in great distress, although they themselves had stopped collections and distributed some loans. (170)

167. Aswinikumar Datta's letter, 17 July 1906. (op.cit.)
170. T. Emerson to the Commissioner of the Dacca Division, 1 July 1906.
Govt. of E.B. & A., (Revenue) A.148-204, August 1906.
the zamindars put up a schedule of moderate price for sale of rice, but no heed was paid by the sellers to this notification. (171)

In the hill tracts of Gaurnadi, Christian missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, who were working among the Namasudras, were active in dealing with distress in co-operation with the government officials. (172)

The description of Aswinikumar's famine relief works can be best concluded by Sister Nivedita's following assessment. "The energetic effort of political vigour on all civic and corporate action was never better seen than in Barisal during the last months of the year 1906, . . few probably have realised that had it not been for this agitation, and for the determined spirit of co-operation evoked by it, thousands of helpless people who have now been aided and relieved, must have been swept out of ranks of the living by the ruthless hand of famine during the past year. . . Among voluntary organizations, unrecognized by State or Government, and taking place spontaneously in face of the need with which they were to deal, this, for rapidity of formation, loyalty to its leaders, cohesion, and efficiency, might well, I think, claim to be unprecedented in any country." (173)

Throughout the period of famine, political activities were not suspended. Famine relief works and political movement invigorated each other. During the first half of August, there were several big meetings

171. Ibid.
Same to same, 7 March 1907 (op. cit.)

172. Ibid.
H. LeMesurier to the Secretary to the Board of Revenue, Ibid.

held at Barisal — the first anniversary of the swadeshi movement on the 7th; another meeting on the 8th; reception of Surendranath Banerjee at the steamer ghat by about five thousand people on the 11th; and the District Conference on the 12th. The agitation was very active.(174) The District Conference was held in connection with the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti and attended by about 300 persons with Syed Motahar Hossein, pleader and younger son of Nawab of Shaistabed, in the chair. There were, altogether 7 resolutions passed in the Conference — resolutions (1), (2) and (3) were connected with the boycott and swadeshi; to promote physical strength of the inhabitants of Bakarganj and to start a national school were resolved in (5) and (6) respectively; resolution (7) was passed to offer thanks to all for the help extended to the famine relief works. Aswinikumar Datta moved resolution (4) in which it was proposed that all cases should be settled by arbitration without going to law courts.(175)

Within a year (August 1905 - August 1906), 523 disputes were settled by arbitration. According to the second and third annual proceedings of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti (August 1906 - August 1908), 500 cases were amicably settled through the attempt of the samitis. The Rahamatpur suit in respect of a property of the value of about Rs. 90,000 and Bhandaria case involving Rs. 65,000 were the two biggest cases among those settled by arbitration.(176) Arbitration was one of the three works undertaken by village samitis. First, the village samiti made efforts to settle disputes in the village by themselves by means

175. 'Barisal District Conference', Bengalee, 18 September 1906.
of arbitration. Arbitrators were, as a rule selected from the local society. If the contending parties did not consent to this, the selection was made from another society in the vicinity. If they did not agree to this even, the selection was made from among the people of an adjoining subdivision. A quarterly return was submitted to the Secretary of the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti at Barisal. (177)

A few boys of the Anti-Circular Society came from Calcutta and displayed their skill in lathi-paly, fencing and dagger-play on the occasion of this district conference. One of the volunteers of the Conference wrote in his reminiscences: "... the seed of lathi and dagger play was sown in Barisal by this contingent of athletes from Calcutta; for in a few days I saw Akharas being opened and boys and even girls being taught the many exercises in various places of the district." (178)

In the meantime, Fuller was forced to resign his office in August. For Fuller Barisal was the place where "the most serious antagonism was organised." (179) Before leaving India, Fuller wrote a private letter to Aswinikumar Datta to request the latter to abandon hostility to the British Government at the opportunity of his resignation. In a portion of this letter, Fuller wrote: "I have been hoping all along that you are, I am sure, not one of those who

177. 'Objects of Village Association and its Method of Working', signed by Aswinikumar Datta and Satishchandra Chattopadhyaya, President and Secretary to the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti respectively. Home (Pol) Depo. 2, April 1909.
render to their country lip-service only, to the cause of education you have devoted practical and successful efforts; remembering that philanthropy is shown by deeds, I beg that you will reflect upon the situation and upon the harm, ... "(180) Aswinikumar wrote back to Fuller and informed him that he felt no hostility to the Government but he could not stop protesting against the unjust measures pursued by the Government. (181) Fuller's letter to Aswinikumar and Rajanikanta Das first appeared in the Indian Nation and the same was reproduced later in most of the newspapers. (182) Aswinikumar regarded it as a matter of regret that the private letter had been thrown open to the public through press. During the second half of August, Anandachandra Ray of Dacca issued circular regarding a sort of reception which was intended to be given to L. Hare, successor of Fuller. Aswinikumar Datta resented this proposal and "after consulting other agitators, said that Mr. Hare should receive the same treatment as Sir B. Fuller, or else the cause of swadeshism will suffer." (183)

Throughout the latter half of 1906, boycott was continued but the leaders watched and analysed the movement with a clear focus upon Hindu-Muslim relations. (184).

180. The whole letter (14 August 1906) is quoted in Sureshchandra Gupta, op. cit., pp. 490-491.
181. Ibid., p.492.
183. Ibid. 'Summary of speeches delivered by Babu Aswini Kumar Datta'. Home (Pol) A.109, August 1907.
184. See, for example, F.R. during the first half of October, 1906 (para 5), Home (Pub) A.310-311, December 1906; F.R. during the first half of November 1906 (para 4), Home (Pub) A.262-265, January 1907; F.R. during the second half of November, 1906 (para 5), Home (Pub) A.152-154.
In the evening on 6 November 1906, a meeting took place at the Raja Bahadur's Haveli in Barisal. Aswinikumar's speech delivered at this meeting expressed the goal and limitation of the movement which he led. "He (Aswinikumar) hoped before long the Indians would be given self-Government as other nations have been given under the British rule, and if the Government did not give them their rights and privileges a time would come when they would assert themselves, . . ."(185) The first portion exactly corresponds to Dadabhai Naoroji's remark in his presidential address at the Calcutta Congress of 1906 --- "Self-Government" or Swaraj like that of the United Kingdom or the Colonies. It was different from the proposition of 'absolute freedom from all foreign control' as preached by Bipinchandra Pal one and a half months before.(186)

In November and December 1906, there was a tendency of general increase in the import and sale of foreign cloth, sugar and salt. On 18 November, Aswinikumar Datta made a speech on the benefit of boycotting foreign goods at a meeting held at Dhamura. The meeting was first proposed to be held at the Batajore market, of which Aswinikumar was a part-owner, and he wished the sale of foreign goods to be stopped during the two days of his stay. These proposals were refused. Besides, having failed to obtain the use of the Dhamura market belonging to the Court of Wards, he had to hold the meeting in a private garden. Consequently people taunted Aswinikumar in the following words: "You have failed in your native market, how can you influence us?"(187) The situation was

185. Enclosure A to F.R. during the second half of November, Ibid.
seriops. Social "boycott was frequently applied to those who swerved from swadeshism. This tendency was observed clearly from the end of 1906 to the early 1907.

In December, the focus was set upon the coming Calcutta Congress. One day in early December, Nibaran Chandra Das (Gupta) delivered a lecture on "The National Congress and the present agitation" before about 1,300 people. He admitted that "the agitation not being as keen as formerly, Mr. Emerson (District Magistrate) was sleeping peacefully in his bungalow." The most noteworthy point of the speech, however, was that the moderate policy of Surendranath Banerjea was condemned and extremist line of Bipinchandra Pal was agreed to. (188)

The Calcutta session of the Congress in 1906 was a noteworthy landmark. It was in this session that "the first open rupture (between the moderates and the extremists) manifested itself." (189) The contention was observed clearly at the meeting of the Subjects Committee held on 27 December. (190) Surendranath Banerjea proposed the boycott resolution, which ran to the effect that the boycott of British goods in Bengal was legitimate and calculated to further the industrial and political regeneration of the people. Krishnaswamy Aiyar of Madras, Madanmohan Malavya of U.P. and a Muslim delegate objected to it on the ground that boycott was legitimate only in Bengal and it should not be extended to

190. As for the position of each principal figure in the extremists camp, see Amales Tripathi, op.cit., p.129.
other provinces. Seeing that the Panjabis did not want boycott, Lajpat Rai proposed an amendment. (191) According to it, the latter portion of the resolution should form a separate resolution which ran as follows:

"This Congress accords to most cordial support to the Swadeshi movement and calls upon the people of the country to labour for its success by making earnest and sustained efforts to promote the growth of indigenous industries and encourage the consumption of indigenous articles by giving them preference over imported commodities." (192)

Lajpat Rai's amendment was supported by the moderates.

The extremist leaders, represented Bengal and Maharashtra, considered the wordings of the resolution to be "not precise enough and too liable to be twisted into an approval of Lord Minto and Sir Pheroje Shah Mehta's honest Swadeshism." (193) Accordingly, Bipinchandra Pal put forward an amendment, first part of which was couched in the actual language of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji's Presidential address (194). This amendment of Pal, however, was declared lost on a show of hands. The demand for a division was neglected. Then, Lajpat Rai's amendment was called for a show of hands and declared carried. The refusal to divide resulted in the walking out of many extremists. Bipinchandra Pal, Khaparde, Motilal Ghose (of the Amrita Bazar Patrika), Anathbandhu Guha (of Mymensingh)

192. 'Boycott of British goods in Bengal', Bengalee, 9 January 1907. (quotation from the Sanijvanii)
193. 'The Subject Committee Incident', Bande Mataram, 3 January 1907.
194. Ibid.
and Aswinikumar Datta were principal figures among those who walked out. In this connection the Saniivaji wrote: "This decision upset the mental equilibrium of certain Bengal members. Some of them even went to the length of inducing the volunteers to give up work. Babu Priyanath Guha of Barisal, Babu Surendranath Sen of Kishoregunge and Babu Taranath Bal of Mymensingh were the persons who induce the members to leave the pandal, crying that Bipin Babu had already left, Aswini Babu and Anath Babu should follow him."(195) Priyanath Guha and Surendranath Sen were Aswinikumar's men belonging to younger generation. According to the Saniivaji, Aswinikumar Datta and Anathbandhu Guha declared later that it was not right for them to have left the Pandal.(196) This explanation was as a matter of course challenged by the Bande Mataram. "Aswini Babu", wrote a reporter of the Bande Mataram who was sitting next to him, "expressed himself very strongly both then and afterwards on the inconclusive and unsatisfactory wording of Lala Lajpat Rai's suggestion and was in entire sympathy with the view and action we had taken."(197)

The ambiguous manner of Aswinikumar made him the object of scramble between both moderates and extremists. At that time Barisal was a focus of the swadeshi movement and it was invaluable for either

195. Bengalee, 9 January 1907. (op. cit.)
Young delegates from East Bengal created hot circumstances in the pandal of the Congress. They were ardent supporters of extremist views advocated eloquently by Pal. See Enclosure I to F. R. during the second half of December, 1906. Home (Pub) A, 265, February 1907.

196. Bengalee, 9 January 1907. (op. cit.)

197. 'The Subject Committee Again', Bande Mataram, 9 January 1907.
party to win over the indisputable leader of Barisal to its own camp. Aswinikumar's position was prescribed not to a small extent by the views of younger workers of Barisal, which naturally leaned towards radical ideas. It is beyond doubt that Aswinikumar was tired of the mendicant policy of the moderates. (198) After returning to Barisal, he observed in course of his speech that "the discussions and diversities of opinion among the delegates were good signs, as it showed that no one's word would be taken blindly. Even Babu Surendranath Banerjea's speech had been interrupted, and this was a very good sign." (199) His ambiguity seems to have arisen not from the uncertainty of his political views, but mainly from his inner motive to be a mediator between the two groups for larger benefits of the united Congress. Actually the difference between the two groups was not so fundamental. (200) Under these circumstances, the long Congress career of Aswinikumar Datta provided him with the status of conciliator. The role of

198. "He (Aswinikumar Datta) said he was not at all satisfied with that part of Narorozji's speech in which he said that the people should continue to petition Government. Otherwise the speech was a masterly one." Aswinikumar Datta's speech on 6 January 1907 at Barisal. 'Summary of Speeches delivered by Babu Aswini Kumar Dutta', Home(Pol) A.106, August 1907.

199. Ibid.

mediator was also played by him in the Surat Congress of 1907.

As early as on 6 December 1906, the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti vehemently protested against the displaying of the advertisements of foreign goods on the walls of the Industrial Exhibition which was held during the session of the National Congress. (201) The scenery encouraged the Barisal Saha merchants, who attended the session of the Congress, to ask Aswinikumar to allow them to sell foreign goods. Aswinikumar did not consent and delivered a speech at Kalighat in Calcutta expressing his objection to the putting up the advertisements of foreign goods in the Congress pandal. (202)

Four of the Sahas were present at the Kalighat meeting and appealed that their business was being ruined. Their appeal went in vain. It had been recognized since the beginning of the swadeshi movement that it was an indispensable step for the success of the swadeshi movement to organise the mahajans. The mahajans, as a rule, were sympathetic towards the swadeshi movement in its early phase (1905), especially so were they at Jhalakati. (203)

In the Bakarganj district, trade in foreign goods was carried on mainly by the Saha merchants. The Sahas, originally a sub-caste of Sundis whose occupation was distilling and selling of spirituous liquor, began to detach themselves by taking up trade in foodgrains, salt, timber and jute from the middle of the eighteenth century. (204)

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201. 'Barisal Meeting', Bande Mataram, 7 December 1906.
203. 'emani chai,' Bikash, 1 October 1905.
of them again switched over them to more lucrative business of dealing
in foreign goods in the 1330's. (205) In Bakarganj the Sahas, who
hailed from the Dacca district and kept their pedis (home) there still
in the swadeshi period, started selling Manchester cloths from the
middle of the nineteenth century. (206) They sent their boats loaded
with foreign goods to all the bazars in the district. (207) They
were also important as money-lenders in the interior of the district. (208)
So far the Sahas had succeeded in establishing themselves as a distinct
caste which was generally regarded as superior to the ordinary Sundis.
But their status in the ritual context remained as low as the parent
stock. (209) High caste Hindus did not take water from their hands.
In short the Sahas, with all their wealth, influence and the strict
observance of the orthodox Hindu way of life, had to stand to a back
row in the caste hierarchy. Consequently they were very eager to raise
their ritual status in the Hindu society. The swadeshi movement provided
them with such an opportunity.

In Barisal, a Mahajan Samiti was organized at the suggestion of
Aswinikumar Datta after the Barisal Conference, with Dinabandhu Saha
(pleader) as President, Rajkumar Sen as Secretary and an Executive
Committee of seven members. At this stage, it was necessary for their
social uplift to place the swadeshi agitators (mostly high caste Hindus)

205. We owe this fact to Dr. Hitesranjan Sanyal.
206. "The undersigned have been selling Manchester cloths at Barisal and
throughout the district of Bakarganj for over 80 years." Brindaban-
chandra Krishnachandra Shaha and three other Shahas to the Superinten-
tendent of the Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta, 18 February 1907.
207. Ibid.
208. "Srish Chandra Bai had been sent by Aswini Kumar Datta to Kalashkati
to instruct the people there, who owed to the Shahas money, not to
pay them. The Shahas said that Rs. 40,000 were due to them." Intelligence Abstract No.12 of 1907, para 78(b). Home (Pol). Depo 15,
May 1909.
209. Hitesranjan Sanyal, op.cit., p.78.
under obligation even at the cost of short-term sacrifice in trade. But some of them imported foreign cloths in the Puja season and were reproached by their fellow caste men. In November, the violators were fined and when they refused to pay it, they were socially boycotted. (210) After that a compromise was attempted and the Saha merchants executed the agreement to the effect that they would be made outcasts and forced to pay a fine of Rs. 25 if they dealt in foreign goods. (211) Then came the scene of the Calcutta Congress as referred to above. Realizing that the boycott was on the wane, some of the Saha merchants resolved to sell foreign goods again. They were fined Rs. 500 by the Mahajan Samiti but they refused to pay it. Strict social boycott was applied to them. In January 1907, all efforts were made to attain this object — meetings of barbers and washermen took a vow not to render their services to the four anti-swadeshi Sahas. Then their Saraswati Puja was also boycotted. (212) Besides they were deserted by the Hindu manthis (boatmen) and all through the district zamindars did not allow the boats of those Sahas to be moored to their ghats. Their shops were picketed and their families were jeered in the streets. In February, Madhusudhan Saha, one of the four swadeshi-violators, went to his native village, Samsudhi in Dacca, to perform the Mahotsav. Shrishandra Ray was sent there from the Swadesh Bandhab Samiti and succeeded in hampering it with the help of the volunteers of Dacca working under the direction of Anandachandra Ray. (213)

211. Intelligence Abstract No. 45 of 1907 (para 342(b)). Home (Pol) Depo. 15, May 1909.
212. F.R. during the second half of January 1907. Home (Pol) A.207-210, April 1907.
It was reported in the latter half of January 1907, that nine-tenths of the shop-keepers were dealing openly in foreign goods. Generally speaking, the most of the Sahas did not oppose to the swadeshi movement, although they might have been 'nominally for swadeshi'.

In conclusion, the four anti-swadeshi Sahas frankly represented the economic interests of their caste. Most of the Sahas wobbled between economic interests and an inner urge to raise their ritual caste status. On 26 July 1908, there was a meeting of the Sahas at Jhalakati. The meeting was presided over by Banamali Ray and attended by about 70 persons. They arranged that if Brahmans and Kayasthas would take water from them, they in return would participate in the agitation, otherwise they would keep aloof.

214. Intelligence Abstract No.17 of 1908, para 180(b), Home(pol)Depo.15 May 1909.
215. Intelligence Abstract No.33 of 1908, para 367(b), Ibid.