Bengal occupied a unique place in the social and political history of India. First, she had the unequalled distinction of being the matrix from which emerged the Indian enlightenment. Secondly, the indigo upheaval of Bengal provided a fiery mould upon which the image of Indian nationalism was forged. Under its impact, the national sentiment found an outward expression as a definite entity.

Long before the indigo crisis, the spread of English education in Bengal stimulated the interest of the Bengalis in Western political thought. But until this great event, the categories of Western political thought such as liberty, justice and equality were, to them, merely so many distant echoes of conceptual ideas developed by an exotic civilization. But the indigo struggle presented an occasion to test these ideas in actual practice. These concepts acquired, thereafter, a dynamic and concrete meaning for the first time in India.

The policy of acquiescence of the British India Government towards the indigo planters, before the advent of John Peter Grant, was mainly responsible for the reckless abuse of the industry by the latter. Nevertheless, the popular
resentment was directed against the tyrannical planters who, by their depredations, inflamed the hostility of the generally inoffensive ryots. However, Grant vindicated the popular cry for justice. He thus closed temporarily the gap between the profession and practice of a Government which, although supposed to represent the political tradition of the British liberalism, was initially indifferent to the call of justice.

But it did not take long for the Government itself to wound the susceptibilities of a section of the Bengali intelligentsia, including Sisirkumar, by its ill-conceived and motivated policies. As a result, they became deeply suspicious of the ultimate intention of the British policy-makers as regards India.

Gradually, the very rationale of the British rule came to be called into question. The entire relationship between the rulers and the ruled became generally strained and embittered.

The indigo struggle gave the Bengalis a rare sense of self-respect and self-confidence, and they were hardly expected to rest content with a Government which was in no mood to show respect to the popular wishes. Indeed, all the social and political problems of the time might be reduced to a fundamental contradiction — a contradiction which could hardly be resolved within the existing state of things. This contradiction became evident in the natural tensions between
the high degree of democratic consciousness with which the Bengali intelligentsia emerged victorious in the indigo struggle and, the arbitrary practice of a colonial Government. Needless to say that the members of the Bengali intelligentsia could not reconcile themselves to the status quo and, therefore, this time, they came into direct conflict with the Government itself. This conflict centered round the demand for a minimum of democratic rights hitherto denied to the Indian people. Thus began a political process which culminated ultimately in the great upsurge of 1905, the anti-partition movement in Bengal.

Sisirkumar was not directly connected with the active politics during anti-partition days, having retired for ill-health from the editorship of the Amrita Bazar Patrika long before 1905. But he had an important part to play in the preceding political events which prepared the ground for that historic phenomenon. He was one of the pioneers "whose thought and activities", as Prof. Nirmal Sinha observed, "created and spread among their countrymen a growing urge for more and more freedom in every sphere of life, intellectual, social, religious, political and economic. As pioneers in the field of political thought and activity, they can be credited with having created the much needed political consciousness and national feeling, which mentally prepared their countrymen to meet the challenge of 1905 ..."
What strikes one as extraordinary about Sisirkumar is that, while many of his contemporaries were fully reconciled to the fact of British subjection as not only fait accompli but well-merited and beneficial to India, he was acutely sensitive to the degrading depth to which India had fallen under the foreign domination. This induced in him a sense of humiliation and melancholy. He could never free himself from this feeling which constantly troubled his conscience. He was so much identified with the wretched condition of his motherland that the good of the country and the eradication of its evils were his supreme concern. Here is to be found the mainspring of his national sentiment which he wanted to infuse into the minds of his countrymen through the columns of Amrita Bazar Patrika.

This sentiment was like a passion which blazed within him constantly like a sacred fire and whoever came in close contact with him was sure to be infected with its sparks. That it is not an overstatement in the least is borne out by the evidence given by the famous Poet Nabindra Chandra Sen. The poet came to be acquainted with Sisirkumar at Jessore where he was a Deputy Magistrate in his early twenties. Sisirkumar was about thirty and had already made some name as the editor of Amrita Bazar Patrika. The poet observed:

"In speaking of the distress of the motherland, Sisir would move to tears and used to become transported by an excess of emotion.... The urge for freedom and the tears shed for
the motherland in my poems written at Jessore were to some extent the outcome of my association with him, and of his teachings. It was he and his paper which first panted the way for patriotism in this country.  

All the fear and suspicion, which Sisirkumar provoked in his adversaries, whether of the ruling class, or of his own countrymen who differed from his somewhat radical outlook, were due to the fact that he loved his motherland with all the purity and simplicity of his soul, and would make no secret of his real feeling. That was precisely the reason why he would react violently to any wrong or injustice meted out to his motherland by the rulers.

Sisirkumar was often charged with spreading of sedition. But that was a deliberate misinterpretation of his real object behind the outspoken and uncompromising criticism of the Government policies. His real object was to put forward the Indian point of view and, if possible, to pressurize the Government to correct its policies. In a word, his criticisms were always marked by a constructive overtone. However, he was practical enough to realize that India might not be able to recover her freedom in view of the formidable British power deeply entrenched in India. The political development of India did not hold out any hopeful prospect either. Yet he dreamt of freedom from time to time which, alas, he knew, was never to materialize during his life time.
It was this dream which made him interested in the spectacle of the Sepoy Mutiny which he called a war of independence. He dwelt on the circumstances leading to the defeat of India in that war, and also on the present condition of his country—its reduction to a state of impotence under the British rule. He spoke of the advantages which the British power enjoyed during his lifetime—such as railways and telegraphs providing for speedy transport and communication between distant parts of India in case of emergency. Some of these advantages, of course, he admitted, had more or less existed during the war of 1857. But of all the advantages of the British power in that war, the most vital had been, on his view, the want of unity among the Indian people. Had there been a unity and solidarity among the different sections of the Indian people, the rebels of 1857 would have won against the English. He remarked:

"We have shown ... that one Englishman has been ruling over 1284 Indians. A war will mean a greater loss to the English than to the inhabitants of this land. Specially, mere victory can not ensure the defence of the country. If the English become involved in a war in this country, they will have to incur heavy expenditure, whereas a war in Europe

*Sisirkumar observed: "It is now admitted by all that the war waged by the Sepoys was not merely a mutiny by a group of soldiers. The state of subjection being unhealthy, the Indians once embarked upon a life and death struggle for freedom. It was because they were defeated in the war that the British and the men of this country called it Sepoy Mutiny. It would have not been so called had the Indians come out victorious." ("The Permanence of the British Rule", Amrita Bazar Patrika, March 3, 1870. Translated from Bengali.)
will not cost them so much. If by some accident, a war is protracted for too long a period, the English will have to leave this country for sheer poverty. But all these considerations need not frighten them. The main question is unity. The day when the Indians will rise like one man, the English will have to quit this land. God only knows when there will be such a unity or whether there is any prospect at all for such a unity, but this much we can tell that it all depends on the English themselves whether they, by their deeds, will force such a unity among the Indians. It is oppression which makes a country united. 3

What is remarkable is that at such an early stage, when the fate of India was interlinked with that of England, the prospect of India's freedom should at all form a theme of Sisirkumar's article. This shows that he carried within his innermost soul a solitary sorrow for subjection, which he could not share with others, and which found expression in his writings. It also pointed to his sense of disenchantment with the actual practice of the British India Government.

In another interesting article, Sisirkumar speculated on the future of India. He began with the following words:

"The sober Englishmen, who are well versed in politics, now think over the question as to what will be their policy in regard to India. The Englishmen who come to India and see her natural beauty, her fertility, her vastness, and enjoy the bliss of power, profess publicly that they are not
going to leave India in life. But the sober Englishmen cannot say that. They can see that India has been progressing like other civilized countries. When, after some time, there will be no difference between them and the Indians, what would be the justification for the further continuance of their rule over India? They never expect to remove the discontent of the Indians over their state of subjection by mere good administration. Moreover, how can the British ensure a good administration when they are keen to dominate India? ..." 4

Animated by an intense patriotic fervour, Sisirkumar realized that the human desire for freedom is unquenchable. Naturally, he was very much confident of India's future prospect. He concluded:

"... When all the people will demand independence in one voice, the British shall have to quit the country willingly or unwillingly. The sober Englishmen have not a semblance of doubt that one day India will become free; now, it is only a question of time — whether to-day or tomorrow, whether in this century or the next." 5

Sisirkumar's description of the Mutiny as a war of independence offers a judgment which can not be said to be peculiar to his point of view only. It is a judgment which has subsequently been shared by all modern scholars of Indian political history in so far as they have traced the origin of India's struggle for freedom to that great event.
But there is another, altogether different point of view which questions the wisdom of this evaluation of the rising of 1857. Karl Marx may be said to represent this point of view. He was not concerned with any moral consideration. He was concerned only with practical questions which had a bearing on the future history of India. It seems that he saw in the Mutiny an attempt of the reactionary forces of India to regain their lost power. The success of the revolt, on his view, would have stopped the modernizing impact of the British rule in India.

Apart from the consideration of the circumstances leading to the rise of the British power in this subcontinent,* it may be said that the British rule substituted in India order and unity in place of chaos and confusion. England with a culture far superior to that of decadent **

* Karl Marx has given a graphic description of the most fluid state of Indian politics of the time. His opinion was that, under the circumstances, India could not escape the fate of being conquered. And England, the most progressive of all the nations of the world, had a historic mission to fulfil in India. (Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization, ed. by Shlomo Avineri, New York, 1968, P.125).

** According to M.A. Buch: "Neither the Hindus nor the Muhammedans were able to build up a stable social and political system on the basis of the principle of nationality. Autocracy, personal rule prevailed everywhere ... This was the root cause of all medieval oriental despoticisms... Great Britain is in a way unique in the world; and in virtue of her tradition embodied in a permanent, stable political system, organized on the basis of the principle of nationality, she established her superiority over the rival warring powers. ... The conquest of India by Britain
India had not only revolutionized the material basis of Indian society but made a profound impact on the world of her ideas. Therefore; those who are reluctant to ascribe the status of freedom struggle to the rising of 1857 may point out: Compared with the Western ideas (i.e., democracy, nationalism etc.), did the rebels of 1857 have any alternative to offer in their place? They wanted to overthrow the foreign yoke, no doubt. But what was the political ideal which could be said to have inspired them? They had, of course, their genuine grievances. But would it not be an anachronism to maintain that they were inspired by a sense of Indian nationalism?

But whatever may be the value of these arguments otherwise, they completely miss an important point in so far as Sisirkumar's evaluation of the history of the great uprising is concerned. Apart from all other considerations, there is no denying the fact that the sepoys waged a war against the foreign rulers. In particular, it was the heroic action of the sepoys that drew his admiration. In this sense, they deserve respect as patriots.

Sisirkumar's outlook on the rising of 1857 was less a question of logic than a sentiment. To do justice to his point of view, one must try to appreciate with sympathy and

is not the conquest of mere brute force; it is not the conquest of mere duplicity and cunning; it is the conquest of a socially superior system over a decaying and disintegrating culture; the conquest of the principles of order and unity as a very basis of social life over the rival principles of disunity and chaos." (Buch, M.A., Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism, Baroda, 1938, PP. 37-38).
understanding the sentiment which made him ascribe the status of freedom-fighters to the sepoys. Indeed, his evaluation of the episode was a sort of wishfulfilment. The greater the disillusionment he suffered with the British rule, the greater became the magic spell of this episode. In fact, Sisirkumar began speculating on freedom as early as 1870 inspite of all the values the British rule stood for. Whatever may be one's outlook on the Sepoy Mutiny, it had at least a symbolic value for those who were inspired with nationalistic aspirations.

However, in describing the Sepoy Mutiny as war of independence, Sisirkumar unconsciously projected his own image of nation upon India of 1857 which was practically divided and subdivided into so many self-contained units. This shows that the English educated sections in Bengal were becoming increasingly aware of the emergence of India as a nation. Sisirkumar at once discovered the root of this newly emerging nation in the glorious past of India. It is a lesson of history that when a subject people develops its early impulses of nationalism, it is filled with a romantic urge to link the present to the past with nostalgic reminiscences. It is virtually a spiritual voyage into the past in search of an identity. In the background of the existing state of subjection, the past acquires a greater meaning than the present. At times, the past becomes so much vivid and enchanting in its
memory that the demarcation between fact and myth is often completely obliterated. The same urge seemed to have led Sisirkumar to seek his country's identity in the Aryan past of India.

This faith in India's great past was exceedingly helpful in restoring the self-confidence of the people. They found it easy to confront the foreign power with greater amount of self-reliance and control. It was not surprising that Sisirkumar would invoke now and then his Aryan past in his fight against the Government or when he was involved in a verbal dual against the English press.*

This pointed to the growing racial consciousness in the minds of the English educated sections. This racial consciousness was a significant factor to mould India,

* For instance, in 1870 the Government proposed to amend the Indian Penal Code with a view to punishing seditious publications. Criticizing the proposal, Sisirkumar wrote an article in the Amrita Bazar Patrika on September, 1, 1870. He concluded the article thus : "... If such a law is passed that if the subjects who show a dark face will be thought seditiously disposed, the only three courses left for them are to rise in arms against the Government, or leave India, or be exterminated as a race. It is impossible that loyal subjects like the Indians should rebel, the Aryan race is not to be destroyed, so it is very likely that they shall be compelled to leave the country." Emphasis added.
emotionally and intellectually, into one political entity. With Sisirkumar, of course, race was not a purely biological conception, divested of political attributes. There can be no doubt that his imagery of Aryan race was coloured by a sentiment which was essentially nationalistic. While the European or English race formed a dominant political group, the Indians were just emerging with their in-group consciousness as politically most oppressed race. Thus the word "race" came to acquire a political content in the nineteenth century, whether applied to the British or the Indians.

At any rate, the in-group consciousness of the educated sections of India was strengthened as a basic pattern of Indian nationalism. This was reflected in the religious movement which began in Bengal in the nineteenth century. A national sentiment is never static; it is a dynamic emotional experience which embraced everything that comes its ways. This is particularly true of a people confronted by an alien group. It extends its sense of self-identity, arrived at by the mechanism of in-group consciousness, to everything with which it can establish an emotional association.

Christianity as the religion of the conquering race had at the beginning cast a bewitching spell on the minds of the conquered. But under the impact of the growing self-consciousness of the English educated people, a reaction followed. Brahmoism developed and it effectually countered the spread of Christianity. It helped, more importantly, to
promote an all India consciousness of a people stagnated in all sorts of local and chaotic mass of beliefs and practices. Although Brahmoism was the first serious attempt to place Hinduism on the basis of reason without separating the Hindus from their past, yet it could not be very effective because of the upsurge of Hindu revivalism. This spirit of Hindu revivalism ultimately gave a characteristic temper to Indian nationalism. As Prof. Nirmal Sinha observed:

"The widespread hostility towards proselytization and Anglicization, combined with the orthodox group's opposition to the British Government's policy of interference with the religious customs of the Hindus, succeeded in creating not only an anti-British feeling but also a sense of nationality, without which the urge for freedom would have remained confined to the hearts of a few individuals only."

In his youth, Sisirkumar was a progressive Brahmo. Animated by a renaissance spirit, he advocated all kinds of social reforms. But his national sentiment would not allow a foreign Government to interfere, by means of legislative measures, in the internal affairs of the society. On his view, a society could truly reform itself by developing its own inner moral force. It was for this reason that he opposed the move of some of his countrymen to abolish polygamy by legislation. He remarked:
We believe that the interference of Government, especially, a foreign Government, in social and religious matters is against the genuine political principle. It may be beneficial for the time being, but it will be ruinous to the country in its ultimate result. We have lost everything, and the only things we have been left with to call our own are religion and society! Why should we leave them to the care of the Government so that it can do anything it likes with them... At any rate, no attempt seems necessary at present to abolish polygamy. One can feel the stirrings of a new force within society which will do away with this practice.

The spirit of enlightenment of the nineteenth century was so much ingrained in his mind that he was not to sacrifice his freedom of thought to religious sentiment. That was why he was against the cult of personality even in religious sphere. Nobody could doubt his sincerity when he left the Brahmo Samaj in 1869 as a mark of protest against the irrational behaviour of its members who almost worshipped Keshab Chandra Sen like a god.

Sisirkumar renounced Brahmoism only to make a later choice in favour of Vaishnavism. This event was perhaps not without significance. It was the humane appeal inherent in Vaishnavism, a religion of true love, which won his heart. Moreover, the Vaishnava faith, as a religion of the very soil in which he was born, stirred up his patriotic soul.
If the religious movement against the serious inroad of Christianity on the minds of the Indians gave a somewhat revivalist overtone to Indian nationalism, an opposite movement towards the secularization of politics was also at work from the very outset. It was perhaps Sisirkumar who paved the way for this movement. He was convinced that religion and nationalism should not interfere with each other. Despite his profound religious conviction, he was fully alive to the need of keeping religion to its proper sphere. From this point of view, he was a true child of the enlightenment. When it came to the consideration of the politics of the country, he would not allow religion to encroach upon it.

As a politically conscious being, he was not a man to stop short of a rational judgment as regards the line of demarcation that exists, or should at least exist, between religion and politics. Astonishing as this secular outlook might seem in a devout Vaishnava like him, it definitely points to the progress the Western ideas had made in India. What is more, he clearly perceived that too much emphasis on spirituality, forgetful of this world, undermined the vitality of the nation.

The nationalist in Sisirkumar did not make him blind to one fatal weakness in the character of the Indians to which he attributed the present state of their misery. With a
spirit of self-criticism, he tried to make them conscious of this weakness which had crippled the minds of their forefathers. He maintained that in order to survive and make progress as a nation, they must get rid of an irrational belief in the order of the universe as something predestined by a supernatural power. They must refrain from following the age-old precept: "If the order of things in the universe is unchangeable, and the fate of man within it is predestined by God, what is the use of taking interest in, and of changing or controlling, the worldly affairs? Rather, accept everything, good or evil, as divinely ordained." This self-denying attitude had also induced in the Indian people an asceticism which looked upon earthly happiness as sinful. The human initiative, enterprise, spirit of enquiry into the worldly phenomena, were depreciated as a manifestation of human vanity. Against this fatalistic philosophy, Sisirkumar maintained a positive philosophy which emphasized human endeavour and the spirit of enquiry. He said that inquisitiveness was the first condition for the origin and development of science which gave man power over nature.

But there flourished in India, instead, a spirit of acquiescence which was the main cause for India's downfall. In this regard, according to Sisirkumar, no other country presented a more deplorable example than India. As he pointed out:

"Science is the power of the weak, the abode of truth, the herald of civilization, the prime source of
Social forces, and the only condition of all kinds of modern progress. The cult of Vakti has penetrated the innermost core of India and has deprived her of the power which science gives, and as an atonement for the sin of disparaging nature, she has suffered humiliation at the hand of all races...

"Another outcome of the cult of Vakti of the Aryans... is fatalism. This "fatalism" is the root-cause of all misfortunes of the country. Those who were greatly devout among philosophers, were so much eager to establish the divine glory that they were at pains to lower too much the power of man, and in the end, they completely lost sight of man's intelligence, conscience, his achievement and freedom of will. All the events that had occurred in the human and non-human world appeared to their imagination as caused by a divine will...

"India, the fatalist and the blind follower of a divine power, turning her back to the struggle for life, and avoiding the thorny path of manliness and the law of nature, has been yearning for long for absolute emancipation (Nirvana). If all the people of this country, in pursuance of the true intention of God in regard to human beings, do not rise as a man to make concerted efforts to cure themselves of this grave perversity of mind, all hope of India will be gone, and the whole of the Indian subcontinent from the Himalayas to
Cape Comorin will face universal extinction in this very earthly life. — Sisir Kumār

As indicated already, the main problem with Sisir Kumār was to separate religion from politics so that the Indians might stand united in their claim for political rights against the Government. He perceived that religion was the main obstacle to achieving national unity in India. What was needed was the separation of religion from politics. He was fully aware of the historical reality of the day — the existence in India of various religious denominations. So religion could not act as a cementing force among them. He was convinced that if there could be any unity among the Indians in spite of their religious differences, it would be a political unity, especially when they were confronted by the same political authority. The same political condition would make them conscious of their political rights as inseparable and thus would enable them to transcend religious differences. He believed that the same state of political subjection — the universal condition of the different sections of Indian people — was sure to give them a mutuality of feeling — a sense of belonging to one another. Sisirkumar observed:

"... There is no religious tie in India. There are Hindus and Mahomeds who hate each other. There are sects amongst the Hindus and Mahomeds who bear ill-feeling towards each other, and there are so many religious divided and
subdivided into so many sects that it is impossible to unite the nation by the cohesive power of religion... No prophet in India could unite the nation under one banner ...

In our own day Babu Keshab Chandra Sen made the attempt. His idea no doubt was to bring all denominations and sects in India under one universal banner. But somehow or other the Brahmo religion wanted that cohesiveness which is indispensable in forming a band of enthusiasts. No sooner the Brahmos shewed signs of some growth than they were split into two parties.  

Sisirkumar was perhaps the first to propagate the ideal of secularism in India. He traced the role of religion in Indian history from an objective point of view. He showed that religion failed miserably to achieve the much-needed unity among the Indians. He again observed:

"... Considering all circumstances, religious union in India at present seems to us to be utterly impossible. But another sort of unity is just becoming possible, and that is a national or political union. Since the nation is under one Government, the people of all sects and denominations have the same blessings to enjoy and wrongs to suffer — the Mahomedans and Hindus, Maharattas and Bengallees, are just learning to sympathise with each other."

Long before the birth of Indian National Congress in 1885, Sisirkumar expounded such a broad and progressive
idea of Indian nationalism. It was for this reason that he advocated Hindu-Muslim unity in the larger interest of the country. It is sometimes maintained by some scholars* that the leaders of Bengal in the nineteenth century including Sisirkumar Ghosh showed a greater sense of history and a deeper political insight than those of the twentieth century by acknowledging the truth that the Hindus and Muslims formed separate communities. The Indian leaders of the twentieth century ignored this truth for political expediency. They would have done better had they admitted this truth and made an amicable settlement in a peaceful atmosphere so that the Hindus and Muslims might live not as brothers but as friendly neighbours.

Sisirkumar, like all other thinkers of the nineteenth century, agreed that the Hindus and Muslims formed two separate communities in so far as religion was taken as a criterion. But Sisirkumar still believed that religious differences should not be considered insuperable so as to preclude forever a political union between them. He was well-conversant in the modern political development of the West. He was not unaware of the political trend of the world history which was definitely towards the depolitization of religion. Anybody with some knowledge of the European political history knew

* The most notable among these scholars is R. C. Majumdar, the renowned historian. See his article "Thoughts on the Freedom Movement in Bengal", The Amrita Bazar Patrika Centenary Supplement (March 8, 1968), Part Nine, P. 69.
that the medieval structure of Christendom had broken down under the impact of nationalistic aspirations of the European peoples. The principle of national self-determination had completely changed the political map of Europe. Therefore, Sisirkumar stood for secularization of politics. His rational outlook regarded the communal principle as a symbol of the medieval age, and, consequently, as an evil. Of course, secularism was an ideal very much difficult to achieve in a country like India composed of multi-religious groups. But every age is marked by a clash between the ideal and the actual. The ideal of secularism was, therefore, a challenge to the progressive minded political thinkers of India in the nineteenth century when religious dissension was an actuality. For them, not to accept that challenge was to fall short of a rational judgment required of them as human beings. True, the secular principle suffered a set-back in 1947 with the partition of the Indian subcontinent. But this triumph of a medieval spirit over the modern in the Indian politics can not be said to have validated this regressive spirit for all times to come.

However, Sisirkumar was foresighted enough to realize that it was ultimately the Government who was to reap the dividend from the internal dissensions between Hindus and Muslims. Division among them would keep the country weak for ever, thus rendering the Government stronger. It was the policy of the Government to drive a wedge between the two communities and foment communal feelings in them. So he
propagated through the columns of the Amrita Bazar Patrika the idea of Hindu-Muslim amity. He tried to impress upon members of the two communities the need for working together for the common good of the country. For this, they must forget the ill-feeling and enmity which had kept them apart in the past. Particularly, he called upon the Muslim inhabitants of the country to eschew their sense of exclusiveness preventing them from participating in the political movements initiated by the Hindus against the Government. Indeed, a joint political action was necessary not only to strengthen the cause of the country but to secure those rights which concerned exclusively the Muslims. He observed:

"... The English did not conquer this country solely by force. The main strategy in their conquest of the country was to foment internal quarrels ... By adopting the same device, they have been carrying on administration for a very long time, leading by nose millions of men like so many puppets. There was never a sincere good feeling between Hindus and Muslims. The English perceived this the very moment they had set their foot in this country, and became assured of keeping India under their subjection . . . . However that may be, we have reaped the peculiar fruits of our internal dissensions. We have lost our country, our money and honour, and our country has sunk to the lowest depth of misery. Then, what is the
use of going on quarreling? Neither the Hindus alone nor the Mohammedans alone may be able to rule in India but the various wants from which both suffer will be removed in case the two races become united in a bond of brotherhood. While the Hindus are intelligent and tactful, the Mohammedans are men of determination and full of hatred for the enemy; while the Mohammedans are zealous, vigorous and energetic, the Hindus are sober, calm and conscientious. India has all the ingredients necessary for the formation of a nation. ... It is knowledge, intelligence and physical force which now hold sway over the world and, as such, England stops at nothing. Our country suffers from the lack of all these things. The Hindus by nature are wanting in some of these, just as the Mohammedans by nature are lacking in others. The unity between the Hindus and Mohammedans will do away with many of these wants.  

Sisirkumar regretted that, although the Muslims were definitely Indian, living side by side in the same country, in the same village with the Hindus, the two communities could not so long share the joys and sorrows of each other. But there was indication, he noted hopefully, that many among the Mohammedans were gradually coming to realize that the Hindu-Muslim unity would make for much happiness and progress for India. Sisirkumar was not an idle dreamer. He did not minimize the factors which stood in the way of that unity. But he thought that the educated sections of both the
communities would do a great service to the cause of the country if they had taken pains to increase mutual good feeling.¹⁶

Thus long before the political leaders of the twentieth century, Sisirkumar tried to base Indian nationalism on a secular ideal. With an unerring political intuition, he perceived the fundamental weakness of India's position with regard to the foreign rulers — division of her population into two major dissenting groups. He knew that the rulers would do everything in their power to exploit it to their own advantage at the cost of the country's growth and progress. So he was untiring to emphasize the same point again and again — the urgent need for political unity between the two major communities of India. As he pointed out:

"... We have said again and again that the Hindus alone do not possess all the qualities required for their elevation and progress nor these can be found in the Muslims alone. But if, by any chance, these two races become united in a common bond, none will be able to prevent their progress. And if the Muslims begin to take part in political deliberations, we will gradually become united by a common bond. Both of us can not be united by religious tie as because our religions are completely different. Neither can we be united by social tie because, unfortunately, the social disciplines of both Hindus and Muslims are very severe. There is only one place where we can stand with brotherly feeling..."
and that place is the political condition of both of us ... 17

Nowhere was Sisirkumar so much explicit as in the following passage in which he asserted that the Hindus and Muslims form one nation. He observed:

"... We are brothers, Hindus and Mahomedans. We are the children of the same soil, and we have lived in the same society for centuries together. The Indian population no longer means Hindus alone, but it is composed of Hindus as well as of Mussulmans. We are thus one nation and let us act as such. Let Hindus join their Mahomedan brothers, and let their interests be common ..." 18 *

II

The year of 1868 may be regarded as a milestone in the history of Indian journalism. In that year the Amrita Bazar Patrika came into existence. From its very inception, the Patrika took the cause of India with a singularity of purpose and a rare sense of dedication. This brought it into a conflict with the ruling authorities. The nature and content of this conflict is vividly portrayed in the files of the Patrika.

* Emphasis added.
The Patrika took a radical tone in criticizing the retrograde and ill-conceived policies of Government. Consequently, the Government came to regard it as one of its chief adversaries. No other paper of the time represented the views and sentiment of the Indian people so faithfully and in such a poignant manner. It pictured like a Kaleidoscope the sense of pain and sorrow, of wounded pride, and the hopes and aspirations of India which were either belied or deferred indefinitely. Only the Patrika could take such a high moral tone consonant with the high degree of political awareness as represented by the intelligentsia in Bengal. There was hardly any paper which could come anywhere near it in its bold spirit and outspoken frankness. At one time, it exhorted the British to live up to their liberal tradition with a dignified appeal to the English sense of justice; at another time, it would remind them of their moral duty to compensate the "natives" for what they had taken from India — her freedom.19

At any rate, the perusal of the files of the Amrita Bazar Patrika makes one acknowledge the truth that, of all the political means employed by the intelligentsia for agitations, the Press was the most effective one. As Prof. Nirmal Sinha rightly remarked: "The Bengalee-owned Press — both English and Vernacular, occupies an important place in the history of the political awakening and progress of the country. Newspapers in Bengalee hands became the most effective means of focussing public attention on problems which agitated the
mind of the intelligentsia, on administrative wrongs, on the basic political rights denied to Indians, on the system of exploitation associated with the British, on ill-conceived Government policies ...

For Sisirkumar, the Press became a formidable weapon. As the Jessore correspondent of the Hindoo-Patriot during the indigo agitations, Sisirkumar literally created a consternation among the official and non-official Europeans by his shockingly realistic reports. This early experience as a reporter must have impelled him later to found and edit the Patrika. Endowed with a lively and sensitive mind, he was agitated with all sorts of questions which concerned vitally his countrymen — social, political, and economic. The sense of devotion with which he took up his journalistic profession* marked him out as a model in this field. Even judged by the modern standard, he is hardly to be equalled in courage and truthfulness. His virility of mind and intellectual honesty had always disquieting effects not only on the rulers, but also on his own countrymen who were particularly faint-hearted to express their views freely and boldly. He had a great abhorrence for falsehood and, as such, was not afraid of speaking out unpalatable truths even at the risk of incurring the displeasure of the authorities. In this he was not a respecter of persons or "the powers that be".

So it is not at all surprising that the writings of Sisirkumar were often misconstrued by the authorities as

* The word "profession" is too mundane to be associated with his name; the word "vocation" would perhaps be more appropriate.
seditious and maliciously disposed to the Government. But nothing could be far from the truth. In 1873 Sir George Campbell, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, * charged some newspapers like the Amrita Bazar Patrika with bearing deliberate ill-will to the Government. According to him, such papers were examples of "greater pretensions". But Sisirkumar was not a man to take such a remark lying down. He took exception to the expression "greater pretensions" and replied that it was unbecoming of a man in such a position to give vent to his feelings in such a cheap and irresponsible manner. He denied the charge that the Patrika showed any ill-feeling to the Government. If his paper criticised Government policies which were detrimental to the interest of the country, it was never inspired by any malice or ill-will. It is true, the Patrika was sometimes loud and was not always respectful but the reason was that it spoke from the depth of its heart on behalf of the country, a victim of injustice of a foreign Government. He pointedly mentioned some of the Government policies as cruel and unjust to the people. He wrote:

"... We did not like these and told so plainly, and we intend to persist in our opinion and assertion... When we complain, sometimes loudly, sometimes perhaps disrespectfully, it is the pangs of the lashes which the Government

* Resolution on the Administrative Reports of the Presidency and Burdwan Divisions.
sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously applies to our backs... We cannot follow the Mirror * and are incapable of ruseome flattery, because we are honest. Let Sir George do justice to himself and he will find that those who criticized him most did him the greatest service, for it is impossible to govern without an honest public opinion...... If we had borne his Government any malice, we would have distorted facts and found no merit in or attributed motives other than real to his measures. Now-a-days it has been the fashion to talk of the Native Press as seditious, disloyal and so forth, because the Natives have learnt to speak their minds. If Government does not like it, let it suppress the Native Press, for it is far better to have no Press at all than to have one which is tied hand and foot and which cannot perform its legitimate functions. What is the use of a press at all which will subserviently extol or condemn everything which the Government wishes it to extol or condemn? The Government may rest assured that so long as we do not mean to form a conspiracy amongst ourselves to expel the English and subvert the English Government we shall speak without reserve, fearlessly, and sometimes warmly; but no sooner we harbour such thoughts in our minds, we shall then adopt... Mirror-like subserviency and smiling exterior."**

This passage brings out clearly the journalistic aim of Sisirkumar. He kept this ideal high all through his

* Sisirkumar here refers to the Indian Mirror, an Indian-owned newspaper, which was, according to him, pro-Government.
** Emphasis added.
life. He was always outspoken because he was honest and straightforward. But he was never irrational like a man with an untrained intellect. However paradoxical it may seem, passion and reason seemed to have coincided in him which is characteristic of a great thinker. All of his writings were stamped with his live personality which gave them an unusual warmth and richness of tone.

Perhaps one of the reasons why he was often so loud was that he was not sure whether he would be able to make himself heard by those for whom his words were chiefly designed. He was fully conscious of the great responsibility of the Press and of the sacred duty it owed particularly to the people. It will be worthwhile to refer here to an episode as reported by one of his biographers. The biographer observed:

"The Patrika came to be unpopular with a certain section of the people in consequence of its support to the Income Tax Bill and its circulation fell off. It was, therefore, necessary to enlist new subscribers. At the request of Sisirkumar, Raja Digambar Mitra wrote private letters to about fifty of his friends in Calcutta to subscribe to it... Dwarkanath Mitra, one of the first Indian judges of the Calcutta High Court, said to Sisirkumar: "I have subscribed to your paper. But I am afraid your writings are characterised by a virulence which may afterwards come to influence the masses and spread discontent and disaffection in the
country." To this the reply was: "The Patrika was started with a view to cause an awakening amongst the people of their abject condition and to infuse into them a life and a sense of patriotism. They are now more dead than alive. They need being roused from their slumber. Our language has therefore to be loud and penetrating." 22

Sisirkumar was an unrelenting and uncompromising critic of the British India Government. His sharp and penetrating criticism of Government policies and actions irritated the authorities, no doubt, causing them much discomfort and annoyance. He also roused a feeling of uneasy fear among a section of his own countrymen.

It was precisely for his progressive political outlook that he was often described as an extremist. Even the writers on the Indian political thought are accustomed to associate the term "extremist" with his name.* But, as a matter of fact, the term becomes at once questionable when applied to the political ideas of Sisirkumar Ghosh. Whatever may be the meaning of the term "extremist", a true champion of democratic ideal can not be possibly regarded as such.

Like all colonial Governments, the British India Government, for all practical purposes, was not only absolute but despotic. Therefore, to cherish democratic aspirations against it could be interpreted as a form of extremism. But surely Sisirkumar had no violent or revolutionary programme to realise those aspirations. As he said, he did not want to overthrow the

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* This seems to be a widely accepted idea. For example, see Majumdar, B.B., History of Indian Social and Political Ideas (Calcutta, 1967), P. 126.
British regime, but sought to democratize the institutions of the Government.

As a matter of fact, Sisirkumar represented the views and ideas of the English-educated youths who were well-conversant in the history of Greece, Rome, England and France. They imbibed the spirit of democracy which made them aspire and agitate for basic democratic rights. They were rather impatient at the extremely slow pace of political progress of the country. Besides, with the spread of education, unemployment grew rapidly among them. They had no avenue of employment in trade and industry, while all the lucrative posts under the Government were reserved for Englishmen. Moreover, there was another cause for general dissatisfaction. The cost of administration went on mounting, entailing extra-burden of taxes on the poor people.23

This was the immediate historical background in which Sisirkumar formulated his political ideas. It explains to some extent the radical orientation of his political thought. But it seems to be quite inadequate for a proper evaluation of Sisirkumar as a political thinker. He was not a man to rest content merely with few economic or political concessions. He was much ahead of his time in thinking and saw things in a perspective not even dreamt of by his contemporaries, who were confined within the walls of the time. He knew that the emergence of a politically conscious and progressive middle class in India totally changed her
political scene. The old relationship of ruler and subject
between England and India became not only incongruous to,
but incompatible with, the level of consciousness of this
rising middle class. His contention was that the middle
class must have a share in the Government of their own
country, otherwise a struggle for power would follow in
near future. He was always trying to impress the British
with their moral obligation towards India. This led him
to raise questions about the rationale of the British rule
in India. And it was from an ethical point of view that he
once demanded equal status of India with England: As he
remarked:

"It is indeed true that as England and India are
now circumstanced... the political aspirations — qualifi-
cations of the two countries different as they are — must
soon come to the same level. This result might follow in
two ways, either by the degradation of England or by the
promotion of India. Now England can easily obviate the
former alternative by heartily applying herself to the
latter. Let her fundamental policy of action be really, as
it is vaunted in words, to raise the condition of India to
an equality with her... In fact, in attempting to raise
her old sister to an equality with herself, she will even
find herself also unconsciously higher than she was..." 24

Sisirkumar was decidedly more progressive than his
contemporaries in presenting such an argument. He pointed
Out that it was the selfish desire of England to possess and dominate India for ever that drove a permanent wedge between the two countries. As a devotee of truth Sisirkumar was uncompromising in his views on life in general and on politics in particular. This was evident in his espousal of the indigo cause in defiance of the European planters. He was not to surrender this indomitable spirit of truthfulness even if this time his adversary was the formidable British power. He might have said, as it were, that this love of truth was the only privilege he could boast of, having lost everything he could call his own — the country, money and the honour, the very words he had uttered as a plea for Hindu-Muslim unity.* The fearless spirit which he exhibited in his ruthless criticism of some of the British policies in regard to India must be traced to this spirit of truthfulness which, again, gave him a high moral outlook. He once observed in the way of proclaiming the aim and object of the Amrita Bazar Patrika:

* Some of the authorities have expressed their annoyance with our paper. We can do no harm to anybody if we indulge in falsehood in our paper. There is no use bringing pressure by the authorities to restrain us. Suppression of truth by force is the same as wrapping fire with a piece of cloth. We often call a spade a spade. We make true representation of a fact as it is to the people. We do not

soften what we write at the request of others, and for fear of incurring displeasure of anybody. In short, as we have said before, we have no such aim as approaching the authorities with begging bowl; our main object is to make our countrymen aware of the depth of their social and political degradation. We are photographers only. We take social and political photographs, and show these to the countrymen. If the photographs taken by us picture that some are snatching the bread of another, the powerful are throttling the week, heaping up wanton insults upon their heads; the legitimate dues of one are being given away to another; and that the judge is carrying on miscarriage of justice, we are helpless...

"We confess that we love our countrymen more than the Englishmen. But justice seems to be the dearest of all to us. Those who speak out their minds freely do better than those who do not express what they actually feel. Therefore, we do not think even for a moment of the consequences that might follow from speaking the truth". 25

It is amply evident from the columns of the Patrika that at one time he sincerely believed in the British sense of justice. The British democratic liberalism had raised high hopes in his mind about the future destiny of India. But it was not long before all his hopes were dashed to the ground. He realized that the policy of the British India Government was out and out anti-Indian both in letter and
spirit. He perceived that the British were determined to debar the Indians from the benefits of democracy, as if from some "forbidden fruits." His disenchantment with the British rule was complete when in 1870 the British India Government under Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy of India, sought to abolish higher education in Bengal. The following passage written by Sisirkumar on this occasion reveals the depth of his disappointment with the British rule and also the great expectations it had inspired in him. He remarked:

".... Why did you not tell us before that the more we learn, the less shall we be liked by you? It was only that day, the Viceroy cheered us with soothing words. Was that a hoax? Must we for ever remain enchained, crushed, trodden, ignorant, superstitious, to satisfy your love of power? ..."

"..." We write from the bottom of our soul and if every native were to unbosom his heart, you would see their distrust and desperation, stamped with indelible character. There was a time when we felt positive pleasure in contemplating the future prospects of our country, when we pictured to ourselves a country thoroughly civilized, educated and enriched, with numerous literary and scientific Associations, with newspapers, Railways, canals and roads, with a parliament of its own with a population black and white, nevertheless
united by an undying brotherly feeling; but the delusion
no longer enchants us. The question again recurs with
agonizing feeling, what will become of India? 26

The uncompromising attitude of Sisirkumar towards
the British India Government and his scathing attacks on
its policies may be considered by some as something idiosyn­
cratic or a morbid expression of a neurotic mind. This would
be to deny completely any ethical import to his point of view
from which he criticized the policies of Government. But it
was the very ethical question which always formed the essence
of his criticism of any particular issue. What was involved
in the conflict between him and the Government, was, indeed,
not merely the issue itself but the principle which lay behind
it. It was this fight for the principle which gave his
writings a dignified tone. On June 9, 1870, Sisirkumar wrote
an article accusing the Government of squandering Indian
money whereas it proposed to abolish high education in Bengal
on the plea of shortage of fund. This article brings out
also his deep sense of national pride. The following passage
is perhaps a model in this regard:

"We do not fight for high education but a principle.
The English people have been declaring since their advent
that they govern India for India's good. This is their
"patta" which empowers them to be here at all. Let them fulfil their part of the contract. We do not seek any favour. *We do not extend our arms for alms, we only lay claim to a part of the just dues of England in this country.* The 52 millions of our money are annually squandered away without our sanction but we do not murmur at that tho' no nation upon earth is so trifled with ... The Carolina slave has a voice, the Liberians have their own Government but we with Aryan blood flowing in our veins must from our birth bear to obey." *

Indeed, Sisirkumar did never represent any "extreme" point of view in politics. His political ideas were the exact measurement of the degree of political consciousness as represented by the intelligentsia during the seventies of the nineteenth century. They arose as a response to the political exigencies of the time. To say that he was an exponent of an extremist school of thought was to imply wrongly that his ideas were peculiar to himself, having no causal or logical connection with the political condition of the day. In fact, during the period from 1870 until the birth of Indian National Congress, Sisirkumar was one of the pioneers who could be credited with representing the hopes and aspirations of new India.

* Emphasis added.
What were at stake with Sisirkumar were the basic political rights of the Indians without which they were hardly to be distinguished from mere slaves. The spirit of democracy which he had imbibed from the Western Liberalism taught him that all political rights were ultimately reducible to the right to self-government. It was this conviction which led him to voice a demand, perhaps for the first time in India, for an Indian parliament as early as 1870. It is easily imaginable that such a demand on the part of an Indian must have sounded not only strange but extremely ridiculous to the authorities. Sisirkumar made it plain that his demand for an Indian parliament should not be taken to mean independence from England. What he envisaged was a local parliament within the British dominion. Only such a representative body composed of Indians, could adequately reflect the Indian point of view, and safeguard Indian interests. It is very much interesting to read the arguments of Sisirkumar for an Indian Parliament. He stated:

"... It is high time that we should stir ourselves and demand for a Parliament of our own. We as human beings have all the aspirations and privileges of human beings, and we do not know how England can reasonably refuse our demand. Britain which is governed by 658 of her own people ought to admit that India which is a much larger country, inhabited by as many races as there are nations in Europe, can not be well governed by a single foreigner ...."
It may seem quite strange to demand for a privilege which, if granted, would be tantamount to the independence of the nation, when the Government is screwing tighter and tighter to keep them down, but the thing is, we are convinced that we must either disappear as a nation from the face of the earth, or live with our political condition improved...

"... Let the people unite and demand and Government will be bound to treat them with respect".  

It was an impossible demand, no doubt, from the point of view of the rulers who had their own reasons not to take it at all seriously. But Sisirkumar was convinced of the justice and reasonableness of the demand. Apart from all other questions, the mere fact that he had voiced the demand at all was something creditable in itself. By his demand, he not only displayed his bold spirit and patriotic fervour but did something to the cause of India. At any rate, Sisirkumar had, in a way, anticipated the Home Rule Movement of the Indian National Congress in the twentieth century.

However, Sisirkumar forestalled his opponents by pointing out their two possible objections to the demand. He met these objections in the following words:

"There may be two objections to such a demand, one is that Government will never encourage us to act independently and another that we do not know how to govern. The latter objection is simply a plea, for one to learn to govern must
first of all govern to learn. As to the other objection, we do not aim at independence, we simply object to be governed by a single irresponsible individual. If we had been properly represented in the Parliament or if the honourable members of Parliament had paid some attention to the 150 millions entrusted to their care, we could have waited a century more for a Local Parliament. But whenever colonial subjects are introduced, the members evacuate their seats or go to slumber. Lately not more than ten members could be induced to give a hearing to a case of New Zealand. India, the brightest diadem in her Majesty's Crown, is not more respectfully treated...."  

"If we demand a Parliament of our own from the English people it is to lighten their trouble. We are willing to admit that many of the oppressive measures which give us dissatisfaction are framed from sheer want of knowledge of the wants and necessities of the people. ...." 29

This advocacy of Sisirkumar for a local Parliament in India was based on the supposition that the spirit of justice was deep-lying and all-pervasive in the national character of the British. As such, they could rise above their selfish interests so as to oblige India by giving her something resembling a self-government. His arguments for a local parliament were not aimed at an England which believed in the principle that "might is right". However, he offered
his arguments from a very reasonable and practical point of view. And he made it clear again and again that his demand was not actuated by any ulterior motive to impair the existing relations between England and India.

At any rate, Sisirkumar had a natural detestation for a government which was not based on popular will. According to him, the British India Government was a model of despotism, because it did not evolve from the "feelings and wishes" of the people. The following extract will throw light on his attitude towards the British India Government. It also exemplifies his spirit of democratic constitution:

"By Government we mean a power exercised by a person or a body of persons over a society invested by it and revocable by it when used prejudicial to its interest... The existence of a Society supposes a Government, and the extinction of the one is incompatible with the preservation of the other... The Government of India is neither evolved from the feelings and wishes of the people nor is it preserved by the will of the people. It is foreign power exercised among an unwilling people first established by physical force and must be upheld by physical force too... The Government of India, therefore, is a misnomer or it is Her Majesty's Government in India. If the intention of the English conquerors of India is to establish a harmony between the people and the Government, without which no society can advance in
the scale of civilization, the present Government should undergo a radical change. We are fully aware that without England India is a chaotic mass but we at the same time know that Government without India is a capricious despotism. ... Much of the mal-administration of justice, much of the mutual distrust and of the ingratitude and disaffection and discontent of the people have sprung from the fact that there is no Government of India..." 30

Sisirkumar knew that a mere appeal to the British sense of justice was not enough to secure a minimum of democratic rights under the British regime, neither did he set a great store on verbal criticism of Government policies. Indeed, nobody knew better than Sisirkumar that merely pressing forward a political demand would not help the cause of India in any way. What was needed was a continuous political action through political associations. In the existing state of things, the only means by which the Government could be made to defer to the popular demands was democratic or constitutional movement. Political associations, if established throughout the country, would be the most effective means to this end. They would give not only political training to the countrymen but would go a long way to form an enlightened public opinion in order to bring moral pressure upon the Government. Again, he emphasized the point that he had no particular "extremist" or revolutionary programme to secure political rights. He observed:
"The British India Government was always strong and self-willed, but never did we feel its despotism so much as now. ... We believe the birth of such associations may be safely attributed to the despotism of our Government. The growth of these institutions will not so much depend upon the exertion, zeal, and patriotism of the people as upon the attitude which the Government may hereafter assume towards the people. If the Government continues to rule despotically, the people will oppose it energetically, and feel more strongly the necessity of helping and encouraging and sympathising with each other. It is not merely our apathy, selfishness, and poverty that has made us so weak, Government so strong, our ignorance has great deal to do with it. Political training is necessary to cope with trained politicians, and unfortunately none of us ever has had any training of that sort. The English nation is eminently a political nation, and to grapple with them we must needs know something of politics ourselves. The struggle has already commenced, the Suez Canal has already brought the two countries nearer and facilitated the influx of emigrants, and the contest of the two races for the mastery of India is becoming hotter and hotter; since we should not fight with gun-powder and shot, we must try all legitimate means in our power to maintain our privileges. A political training and a unity of interests are all that is necessary to give an impassable front to the ever-encroaching Government of ours".
As a colonial Government, the British India Government was, in its very nature, a power without any moral force. A government is always and everywhere an organized power. But it nevertheless has its root in the social instinct of man who abhors chaos and disorder. The English had come to India when the politics of this subcontinent was in a fluid state. They earned the gratitude of the people by imposing law and stability in place of political chaos and confusion. It was for this very reason that the intelligentsia of Bengal in the early nineteenth century looked upon the British rule as a blessing conferred by Providence.

But the point in Sisirkumar's criticism of the British rule was that mere physical force as an organized power was only one aspect and, for that matter, only an outward aspect, of a Government. The political stability, imposed in India by this physical force, was, no doubt, one of the main benefits of the British rule. Like all educated men of the nineteenth century, Sisirkumar was not averse to acknowledge this. But what he wanted to emphasize was that political stability could not be an end in itself; it was only a means to an end, that is, the good of the country. Sisirkumar was convinced that mere preservation of law and order was not enough. Nor could this exclusive function mobilise natural love and affection of the people. This conviction seemed to have been the main
The premise implied behind his criticism of the Government: The Government, although it had consolidated the political stability of the country, would not find it easy to mobilise the love and affection of the people without a moral purpose. So he wanted to infuse this purpose into it. He said explicitly again and again that the Government ought to base its power upon the natural allegiance of the people. As he declared, all power which was not based on the will of the people was without their moral sanction, and, as such, was a brute force. The British India Government lacked altogether that moral force which could transform it into a creative channel, a kind of give and take, between the rulers and the ruled. Therefore, he exhorted the Government to formulate policies in such a way that these should be transparent enough to reflect its goodwill and its real concern for the common interest of India.

Sisirkumar knew that the Government, if its own initiative, would do nothing to revise its retrograde and ill-advised policies, unless the Indian people organized themselves into an effective political force to oppose them. Indeed, the significance of his statement that the contest between the British and the Indians for the mastery of India had already begun and that it was gaining momentum day by day would be evident from the fact that the British India Government itself was a stumbling-block to India's progress.
This has been beautifully expressed by Hans Kohn in the following words:

".... Like every bureaucracy, the Anglo-Indian rulers were filled with a sense of their consummate patriarchal merits and their unchanging vocation to direct a politically immature and incompetent people for their own good. For this reason the English Civil servants in India were opposed on principle to any form of parliamentary government or democracy. For parliamentary government means discussion; but to discuss with the Indians what was required for their well-being was a step to which the bureaucracy could not make up its mind, for it believed exclusively in government by command. ... It was not through the English bureaucracy that the British political ideas made progress in India, but in its teeth ..."  

As a matter of fact, the achievement for some of the progressive measures initiated under the British rule must be attributed to the enterprise of private persons, and not to the magnanimity of the Government. The driving force behind all these were some benevolent Englishmen, English missionaries and, last but not the least, eminent Indians like Raja Rammohan Roy. The same was true of English education in India and particularly in Bengal.
That the Government was never conscience-free about the introduction of English education in India was evident from its later policy of undermining the very foundation of higher education under one pretext or another. It withdrew the State Scholarships during the Viceroyalty of Lord Mayo.34 These were founded as an incentive to native students who wanted to go abroad for higher studies. Finally, it intended to abolish English education altogether on the plea of promoting mass education. But its real motive lay elsewhere. It became apprehensive of the unforeseen political awakening among the English educated middle class which displayed a fearless spirit of criticism. This policy evoked fierce opposition of Sisirkumar. Indeed, he saw in the policy a diabolical plot to murder the whole Indian nation. As he remarked:

"We have no adequate word at our command to express our abhorrence of the barbarous policy of Government. To seek to increase Revenue by fair or foul means is not a thing uncommon in the annals of a nation, tho' the motive may be as much to increase the Revenue or to keep a nation politically prostrate, but to murder a whole nation that the English can rule without disturbance, is a policy of which we know of no parallel." 35

The day-to-day policy of the British India Government was nothing but a shameless repudiation of all of its liberal principles. In this connection, Sisirkumar particularly remembered the vision of Sir Metcalfe who wanted to invest
the English colonial rule with some enlightened purpose and moral justification. Metcalfe was a staunch advocate of English education in India. Sisirkumar reminded the English rulers of the sincere and soul-stirring words written by Metcalfe in his apologia for the introduction of English education in India:

"All that rulers can do is to merit dominion by promoting the happiness of those under them. If we perform our duty in this respect, the gratitude of India, and the admiration of the world, will accompany our name through all ages, whatever may be the revolutions of the futurity; but if we withhold blessings from our subjects, from a selfish apprehension of possible danger at a remote period, we shall not deserve to keep our dominion, we shall merit that reverse which time has possibly in store for us... My own opinion is that the more blessings we confer on them, the better hold we shall have on their affections, and in consequence the greater strength and duration to our Empire."

The object of all these discussions is to establish the fact that the ideas of Sisirkumar were no more radical than those of the English liberal thinkers like Metcalfe who desired to win the hearts of their Indian subjects. Both Sisirkumar and Metcalfe were inspired by the same vision, that of seeing India progress and develop under the aegis of the British Government. In this sense, Sisirkumar might
also claim his political ancestry to Rammohan.* The difference is that while the latter had died with his belief in the historic mission of England still unshaken, the former, standing at a different point of time, suffered disillusionment and grew suspicious about the real intention of the British rule in India. With a sense of alienation in his mind, he wielded a powerful pen with a view to impress the British rulers with their moral responsibility to lead India to the goal of national self-determination, a commitment which was made in the Queen's Proclamation of 1858. The main strain of all his writings was that the British rulers, as the true representatives of a civilized nation, rooted into the great liberal tradition, must fulfil the democratic aspirations of the Indian people, a task which was also envisaged by great liberal thinkers like Metcalfe.

The event of India's coming under the direct administration of English Parliament, consequent upon the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, raised high hopes among the Indian

* Rammohan desired to see India and England united in a bond of friendship. (See Majumdar, B.B., A history of India's Social & Political Ideas, Calcutta, 1967, P.49). Of course, his dream did not come true. But there is a sense in which his dream may be said have been fulfilled, although not in the same manner as he had expected it would. His dream may be said to have come true to the degree that the English educated middle class succeeded in making western ideas its own. For, if England was worth anything to him, it was that spirit of liberty, freedom and justice which distinguished her among the nations of Europe. It was as the land of democratic ideas, wedded to freedom, justice and equality that Rammohan sought union of hearts with England, and not as the land of "shopkeepers".
intelligentsia, because of the fact that it found in this an increasing awareness of England in the problems of India. Whatever might have been the value of the Queen's Proclamation in terms of reality in the subsequent history of India, it gave a true expression to India's political ambition in the sense that it reiterated officially the faith of England in the principles of British liberalism in relation to India. Through it England acknowledged her duty of leading the Indian people in the direction of national autonomy under the English surveillance. The following episode illustrated how much value the "native" intelligentsia had put on the liberal principles pledged in the Proclamation. Sir George Campbell was once ill-advised to subsidize from public fund the Christian missionaries in Bengal for evangelical purposes. Sisirkumar saw in this a disgraceful violation of the secular principle professed in the Proclamation. On this occasion the Proclamation became an effective weapon in the hands of Sisirkumar to fight the Government. 37

As a political creed, the British Liberalism arose in the seventeenth century England. It was a kind of philosophical justification of the bourgeoisie which was emerging as a dominant political force. But did the British power in India need any justification from the conquered, keeping in view the fact that it was enforced upon them from outside? So in a fundamental sense it made little difference to the political reality of a colonial country whether the current
trends of politics of the conquering nation were determined by Liberalism or not. But the picture was completely changed when the rationale of the colonial rule was challenged from within. The political awareness of the Indian intelligentsia did make a great difference to the Indian political situation under the British rule. At least it was not ready to put up with a despotic power without any moral responsibility to the people. To it, a colonial government exercising an arbitrary power must have appeared as totally anachronistic.

It is interesting to note that Sisirkumar tried to enlist the support of the European residents in India in his demand for a system of direct representation. He remarked:

"... It matters very little to what a nation a man belonged, or in what country he was born, that is his country where the best portion of his life is spent. In a despotic country no body is free, no, not even the highest official. It is no consolation to the stronger that if he is oppressed by the strongest he can wreak his vengeance upon the weak; yet to this consolation alone the European residents cling when invited by their native fellow subjects to unite and work for their mutual benefit..." 38 *

Although Sisirkumar's plea for a representative system in India met only derision and scorn of the Europeans, both official and non-official, his object behind this demand was to have some "say" in the formulation of financial policy

* Emphasis added.
of the Government. In the seventies of the nineteenth century
the Government began to make exacting demand on the people
on the ground of meeting its mounting expenditure. Sisirkumar
opposed this extravagance of the Government with the principle
of what may be called "no taxation without representation". 39
He knew that the sole end of the Government was to extort
money from the defenceless people as much as possible, quite
oblivious of their welfare. He accused the Government of
using India as a milch cow. His aim was to place its financial policy on a rational basis. As he pointed out:

"A healthy financial system is the best soil on
which a good government grows. A bankrupt government with
one hundred and fifty thousand efficient soldiers is weaker
than a Herculean Frame minus a soul. Tax heavily a conquered
people, it will assuredly redound on the conquerors. Heavy
taxation, next to religious persecution, causes the greatest
discontent and a universal discontent never goes for nothing.
If the object of Government were to, like Nadir Shah, drain
India of her last pice and then to leave her to her fate, the
present policy would be appropriate, but, as we believe,
Government intends to retain India, and as England and India
have become necessary to each other, the present suicidal
policy must cease!" 40

Sisirkumar did never question the right of the
Government to tax. He knew that taxation is a universally
accepted means by which a government raises money to meet
its legitimate expenses. But he decried the tendency of the British India Government to create "artificial" deficit as a plea for new taxes. According to him, there was a limit to taxation beyond which it would become a most fearful weapon to oppress the people.

None of his criticisms, sometimes bitter, sometimes satirical, were maliciously motivated. They were entirely constructive in purpose. He pointed out that if the object of the British India Government were public good, it would have spent the revenue it collected on the reconstruction and development of the country entrusted to its care. Indeed, the practice of the Government was an outright disregard of this fundamental principle. Sisirkumar was merciless to expose the dubious motive which went to the making of the taxation policy of the Government. The anomaly of the whole system, as he sarcastically remarked, lay in the fact that the machinery which it created for the collection of the revenue swallowed up its major portions! As he observed:

"... What goes to uphold and justify taxation by Government, why it is the theory of public good? And from what does the true strength of such a theory proceed — simply from an uncompromising practice of it? But how does our Government practise it? Why, it says, Government revenue is not for your education, for your sanitation and like. These are things for which you must make your own shift."
Properly, the purpose of Government taxation and revenue is the defraying of the expenses of its collection; so it is clear that the ultimate reason why people should pay revenue and taxes amounts, according to the practical language of our rulers, to this, that the tax might be effectually gathered.

"And this is no false thesis. Consider, on the one hand, the grudging of Government to contribute to the cause of our education, to the establishment of charitable dispensaries... to the extension of useful public works and the like; and look, on the other hand, to the amount of revenue consumed by those who are directly or indirectly intended to secure its safe collection..." 43

Sisirkumar showed with facts and figures that the sum spent by the Government for the cause of education in India was merely a pittance in comparison with that being spent in one of the most backward of European countries. According to him, the Italians spent one-tenth of their whole revenue for education while the British India Government grumbled to pay only the hundredth part of its revenue. 44

Then he said point-blank to the Government:

"One simple fact, it seems, the Government often forgets is that the money it annually receives does not come from England but is created, with what toils Heaven knows, and is paid by us. With this simple fact in mind the
Government ought to spare that small part of the sum which is employed for the good of the people and not to be savage with it, if it encounters deficit created by its own extravagance. 45

As an illustration of the extravagance of the Government, Sisirkumar made an estimate of the heavy expenditure incurred yearly by it to maintain highly paid English officers. These officers came from England to perform jobs which would have been done by the moderately paid Indians with equal, if not more, efficiency, thus economising the expenditure. He was commenting on the system of income tax introduced by Mr. Temple, the then member of Finance in the Viceregal Council. Initially, he had some reservation about the measure but later whole-heartedly supported it as he came to recognise fully its equity in that it touched only the rich, leaving the poor quite unaffected. According to him, the income tax was a two-edged sword, because it affected both the rulers and the subjects. However, he remarked:

"We have in Bengal, 11 Commissioners, the aggregate amount of their pay is 366,500. We have 23 First Grade, and 13 Second Grade Collectors and 18 Deputy Commissioners, the whole amount of their pay being 3,992,200. Then there are, besides the Assistant Magistrates and Commissioners, 33 Joints, whose annual pay amounts to 3,230,000. There are 26 Judges, 4 Additional Judges, and 2 Judicial Commissioners..."
who draw no less a sum than 948,000 annually. Thus only 130 officers draw the sum of Rs.2,537,800 from the State. Need we mention here that 130 natives of equal, if not better merit, would perform the same duties for a tenth part of the above sum? How is it possible for a very poor country to keep its finance healthy, if she is made to import richly paid officers from a foreign country to perform the commonest duties of the State?" 46

Sisirkumar went at once into the very heart of the matter when he asked a basic question: "why do we pay any Revenue at all if it be not for our advantage?" 47

This was indeed a bold question, but it was annoying to the authorities. At any rate, the importance of the query could not be over-emphasized. Such a question was altogether unwarranted from a man belonging to the subject people, because it was symptomatic of a spirit which, if allowed to take root and grow in their minds, was sure to prove dangerous in the long run.

According to Sisirkumar, the Government's complaint of shortage of fund was nothing but an excuse for imposing new taxes which would mean increased burden on the poor people. He contended that the Government had itself to blame if there was any real shortage of fund. The way it was acting confirmed him in his belief that its interest was not only distinct from, but actually antagonistic to, that of the people. The result was a mutual distrust so much so that,
speaking from the point of view of the governed, one could not find any justification for, and must be envious of, the large portions of the revenue being engulfed by the Military Department, considering also the Government's gross negligence of the works pertaining to the general good. He went on to observe:

"We dare not meddle with the sacred subject, the Military Department. We shall only remark that, constituted as it is, if it does anybody good, it is the British Government. England surrounded by war-like rivals is satisfied with something above one-sixth of the whole Revenue; but our Government, entrusted as it is with money belonging to a nation politically dumb, does not scruple to set apart about one-third for the maintenance of the army ..." 48

Sisirkumar's criticism of the British India Government reveals not only his rational outlook but his profound sympathy for the poorer and weaker sections of the people. A reference has already been made to his defence of the income tax system. A section of the "natives" (evidently, the wealthy) protested against the system along with the Europeans. Sisirkumar condemned this folly of his own countrymen in the following words:

"... The English Press raised an indignant cry, and the Natives cried by the law of sympathy. The result has been that Mr. Temple seems to be more unpopular with the
Natives than even with Europeans ... A silly writer ... proposed a tobacco tax in lieu of the Income tax but the present fashion is to propose an additional duty upon salt! It is said that a small increase will not press heavily on the poor, and that it may develop indigenous manufactures. A salt is a Government monopoly and the duty upon salt shall be exactly levied whether manufactured here or at Cheshire, we do not see how an increase of duty will have the effect of putting a stop to the exportation of salt ... Then again if an increase does not press heavily upon the poor, the income tax does not touch them at all. The people already pay an enormous duty upon such a necessary as salt, and for this fact alone we would never recommend an increase. A salt tax is a poll tax, an income tax is a levy upon the rich ... 49.

During the seventies of the last century, the politically conscious sections of India had not yet been able to form themselves into an organization on an all-India basis for defending the interests of the country. The rulers found it obviously easy to have their ways in everything without a semblance of opposition. Indeed, the relations between the Government and the people were hardly better than that which obtained between the master and the slave. In this critical situation, it was Sisirkumar who all by himself raised a fearless voice to defend the cause of India. It
devolved upon him to lay bare the fact that the British rule was but a form of relentless and unmitigated exploitation on India. One can not simply imagine to-day what a stupendous and formidable task it was to put forward such a point of view. In those days of imperial glory, when the sun of the British Empire was at its zenith, to speak out one's mind was to become a suspect in the eye of the Government, and to espouse a cause against it, however just and righteous, was to draw upon one's head its fearful wrath.

But Sisirkumar was really alarmed at the rate at which money was drained out of India day after day. So he could not remain silent. He wrote:

"Why is India so poor? Her land is fertile, the people are industrious, simple and temperate, they enjoy a profound peace, Railways, canals, road and foreign war have increased her commerce, European capitals have entered into all the meandering veins of the land, yet India fasts 3 months every year, and is starved to death every six years. A canker feeds upon her heart, and no amount of external treatment will add a pound of flesh to her emaciated form ...".

"A poor people makes a poor government, and an exacting government makes a people seditious. If Government wishes to increase her resources and income, if it wishes the people to make their roads and schools and, at the same time, remain loyal and contented... let their wretchedness be removed. The annual drain upon India, especially of late, has become so
great that we entertain a constant dread of the recurrence of that bankruptcy of the whole nation which occurred three quarters of a century ago ... To tax a people heavily is impolitic, but to tax them heavily under circumstances* ... is simply suicidal."

Sisirkumar then showed in details the "channels" through which money kept flowing out of India. It required great courage to disclose how the British cupidity was preying upon the vitality of India in a most ruthless manner. His expose of this ugly and vile aspect of the British rule was based on authentic facts and figures. In this way he brought a profound indictment upon England for pursuing an economic policy calculated to impoverish a country which was completely at her mercy. He observed:

"The Europeans, official and non-official, come to this country to make money and retire with large fortunes to spend their earnings in their own country; large sums of money are annually sent to England by Anglo-Indians who have families or relatives to maintain there; even those who reside in this country and spend a portion of their money here consume mostly articles imported from Europe. Then, again, the scandalous Home charges, the interest upon Indian Securities etc., are paid from the taxes of this country ....."

".... We pay England annually the sum of 16 millions, though the poorest nation on earth. It was once triumphantly pointed to our nation by an English editor that while Russia

* By "circumstances", Sisirkumar meant various forms of annual drain on India.
pays upwards of 9, England 23, France 20, Turkey 4, Switzerland 3 Rs per head as taxation, India has to pay only 3 Rs, that the writer forgot that India was poorer than any of these countries. Others congratulate us on the cheapness of our Government, alleging that while Russia pays almost 2 millions to her Sovereign, no such charge is ever made in India. These politicians seem to ignore the fact that it matters very little to the country whether she is heavily or lightly taxed if the tax raised is spent in the country. As to the second point, we must beg to leave to say that if the Russians pay one crore and seventy lacs, we pay more than 8 times the amount to our Sovereign country....

Another economic drain upon India, as detailed by Sisirkumar, was "Home Charges". Indeed, if one goes through minutely all the items coming under the "Home Charges" one is sure to be struck by the brazen injustice which they entailed upon India. They include not only the salary of the officials of the Council of India, and the Officers of State for India in Council (Rs 13 lacs a year), the cost of the stamp and stationery (Rs. 20 lakhs), and even the expenses incurred by the British Government in other Asian Countries (over 6 lakhs of Rupees). India did not derive any benefit from these expenses, though she had to bear the financial burden.

The story of this rank selfishness of England did not end here. Indeed, the history of British rule in India
was a story of continuous exploitation. A fabulously rich country was reduced to abject poverty by this process. Sisirkumar, with all his admiration for the British rule, could not remain a silent spectator to the deliberate ruin of his country. He was courageous enough to tear away the painted veil of the British rule in order to show its ugly face. One may be powerless to resist an evil but one can at least raise a voice of protest against a wrong, thus breaking the silence, as the demarcation between silence and consent sometimes becomes indistinguishable in certain circumstances. At any rate, Sisirkumar did never in his life let pass a wrong, whether individual or national, without a note of condemnation.

In this connection another instance of ruthless British exploitation may be mentioned. Sisirkumar exposed this brand of glaring injustice in the form of a story entitled "A Strange Story". Prior to 1834 the East India Company had enjoyed the monopoly of Indian trade. But the English public began to clamour against this privilege on the ground that it was a grievous injustice both to India and England! The Company, however, agreed to give up the monopoly but demanded adequate compensation for the loss of monopoly. But who was to pay the compensation? An agreement between Parliament and the Company threw the entire burden of compensation upon India. This injustice was roundly condemned by Sisirkumar. 53

Sisirkumar accused England of pursuing a deliberate policy of enriching England at the expense of India. Things
had come to such a pass that any appeal for justice by the Indian people would be of no avail as if no rules of morality and no norms of the civilized world were applicable to them. The injustice underlying this vile and inhuman policy would appear all the more striking by a comparative study of India and England with respect to their economies. *

The British India Government with all its benefits otherwise, remained for ever a stranger to the Indian people. It was because a vile and selfish interest lay at the basis of the British rule in India as was manifest in its predatory economic policy. By contrast, the Mohammedan conquerors, Sisirkumar ventured to say, came closer to the hearts of the Indian people, at least, in certain respects. It was not only because they adopted this country as their own, as such there was no question of the flight of Indian money outside, but also because they Indianised, to a certain extent, the general administration. By this, Sisirkumar did not mean that the conquests of India by the Mohammedans and the British were of the same historical import. While the former were in no

* According to an estimate based on the statistics of one Mr. Torrens, a British M.P., the total production of the Indian Empire was under £ 300,000,000 a year and that of the United Kingdom, £ 9000,000,000 sterling. It may be mentioned that the population of India and England was then 225 and 25 millions respectively. Thus an Englishman's labour produced good worth Rs. 360/- a year, while the value of an Indian's labour worked out to Rs. 13-8 As. Therefore England was 30 times richer than India. Nevertheless, as Mr. Torrens showed, India was three times more heavily taxed than England which, it was said, was the most heavily taxed country in the world except perhaps the United States. ("The Wealth of England", Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 19, 1872).
way superior in culture to the Indians and as such failed to make any impact on their society, the latter, by virtue of their superior culture, revolutionized the Indian society. Sisirkumar also knew that with their superior civilization, the British had also brought in India their morbid pride and a contempt for the conquered. Sisirkumar was forced to admit that the Islamic rule was more beneficial in certain respects than the British rule, particularly because the Mohammedans settled in this country * and left the burden of administration on local people which the British never did.

* In an article Sisirkumar wrote:

"The Mahomedans in India were more successful than either the English or Romans in securing the good feelings of those they conquered. If the wise policy inaugurated by Akbar were followed by his successors and if such bigots as Aurungzebe were not born, there would have been perhaps very little difference between a Hindoo and Mahomedan in his feelings and views... The Mahomedans did not come to India with a higher civilization, and therefore a morbid pride of their own superiority and contempt for the conquered ..." (The Amrita Bazar Patrika, December 18, 1873) Emphasis added.

Also, in commenting upon the annual drain upon India, he remarked: "The most oppressive and exacting Mahomedan Emperors resided in the country, and if they impoverished one Province, they enriched another or, in other words, they did less injury to the country than the British are doing now." ("The Annual Drain upon India," Ibid., July 28, 1870).
Thus Sisirkumar earned the gratitude of his countrymen by focussing their attention upon some of the patent cases of permanent injustice which these economic drains stood for. But these were only symptoms of a malady which went deeper into the economy of India. The economic basis of the Indian society had been, from the remotest antiquity, a union between agriculture and indigenous industry. But the British selfishness backed by steam and science destroyed India's indigenous-manufacturing industry and made her solely dependent on England even for her barest necessaries. As Marx observed:

"... The hand-loom and the spinning-wheel, producing their regular myriads of spinners and weavers, were the pivots of the structure of the society (Indian). From immemorial times, Europe received the admirable textures of Indian labour, sending in return for them her precious metals.... It was the British intruder who broke up the Indian hand-loom and destroyed the spinning-wheel. England began with driving the Indian cottons from the European market; it then introduced twist into Hindostan and in the end inundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons. From 1818 to 1836 the export of twist from Great Britain to India rose in the proportion of 1 to 5,200. In 1824 the export of British muslins to India hardly amounted to 1,000,000 yards, while in 1837 it surpassed 64,000,000 yards. But at the same
time the population of Dacca decreased from 150,000 inhabitants to 20,000. This decline of Indian towns celebrated for their fabrics was by no means the worst consequence. British steam and science uprooted, over the whole surface of Hindostan, the union between agriculture and manufacturing industry. 55

It will be wrong to suppose that Sisirkumar considered hand-loom and spinning-wheel to be of much consequence for India's economic progress. Indeed, he blamed the British not so much for the act of destruction as for the motive behind it, which was to incapacitate her to stand on her own feet: for all times to come. Sisirkumar was quick to apprehend the spirit of the new civilization which the British steam and science heralded in India. He perceived that the future destiny of India lay not with the Indian hand-loom and spinning-wheel but with the science and technology which the British had brought to India. Sisirkumar, like a true visionary, tried to infuse this scientific spirit into the minds of his countrymen. He admired the superiority of the industrial capitalism and its technical excellence in different sectors of life. As he remarked:

"Only the other day ran fast a long line of carriages over the largest and most headstrong branch of the Padma, Gorie; could the folk of Bengal believe that, if they had seen it or the like of it? What an astonishing work
it is which carries a broad road over such a mighty stream! 
... Indeed, the Gorie bridge is a stupendous monument of 
the mechanical art. The circumference and height of the 
huge iron pillars would indeed deserve an Herculean age but 
they are not the monument of engineering art only. They 
signally demonstrate the economical genius of England... 56

Sisirkumar fully realized that India could not 
survive the destruction of her old economic basis by British 
selfishness unless and until she herself imbied the know-
ledge of science and technology. But science and techno-
logy alone would not do. She needed also large capital and 
the enterprise of her people. Therefore, Sisirkumar called 
on his countrymen to "save and economize" : He observed :

"... There was no permanent influence at work to 
make us constantly stir about our livelihood, to make us 
vigilant, designing and parsimonious. Thus our good fortune 
formed our ruin. But our eyes are opened now. To see a 
foible is to mend it. Times are changed and we ought to be 
changed also. We cannot any longer afford to be a nation 
of spendthrift. We must now learn to save and economize." 57 *

* Emphasis added.
Can one miss the voice of a new India speaking through Sisirkumar? Indeed, he saw a vision of India pulsating with the spirit of creative activity leading to her economic regeneration. Sisirkumar pointed out that India had no dearth of commercial commodities. Indeed, she was abundantly rich in raw materials. But what she lacked was the requisite knowledge to transform these into finished goods. As a result, cotton, jute, leather etc., produced in India were taken to England to be processed and returned to India for sale in different shapes. For example, twist and clothes made of Indian cotton provided for India's wearing material. Even Indian sugar was purified in other country and then imported to India. In this way India was losing huge amount of money. But the introduction of science in this country would have saved this loss of money. He stated:

"India has fallen into such an abject condition, and money has become so much scarce that one cannot collect even a hundred rupees if one goes searching through many villages together. In many cases the interest of money has gone up by 50 per cent per annum. Many signs of such a distressing condition of the people can be noticed..." 58

But Sisirkumar was not to be disheartened by the present degradation of India. He was very much optimistic of India's future, inspired as he was by a new destiny. So he went on to depict a brilliant picture of India in the following lines:
... It is of utmost necessity to increase the wealth of the country ... If the people become well-versed in scientific knowledge, if there is agricultural development in some part of the country, if industries like paper-mills and cloth-mills grow up in other part, and if new machineries are invented by men, the society will be quickened to a new life, and the people will be charged with energy and vigour. In the same manner that the commercial goods of highly civilized countries like England and others adorn the ports of our country and make our towns and cities wear incomparably beautiful look, the varieties of Indian goods will adorn the ports of other countries and will add to the beauty of their towns and cities. Then the English will not feel ashamed to shake their hands with us and will not hate to share the same seat with us. India will hoist her flag of victory and will flow with milk and honey."

What an inspiring vision of future India! It is remarkable that he saw this vision about a hundred years ago. He knew that he was not to live to see his dream realized in a near future. But what he wanted was to leave behind this magnificent image of his motherland to inspire his countrymen for times to come. And to think that he depicted this beautiful picture of the country just when all around him its economic structure lay in ruins. Indeed, the profound indictment he brought upon England was that while the ideas of the Western mind had generated in the Indian
intelligentsia an irresistible creative urge seeking outlet for expression in different directions - social, political and economic — the "English enterprise, machinery, money and selfishness" * conspired to undermine these processes of regeneration by reducing India to a supplier of raw materials to satisfy the ever growing hunger of the industries of England. 60

Thus Sisirkumar may be regarded as one of the pioneers among the Indians who waged a constant and uncompromising war against the British imperialism in its early days in India. Like a true sentinel, he kept a close watch on its ulterior designs. As a result, the efforts of the British Government to hide its policy of exploitation through periodic proclamation of liberal principles were systematically exposed. In this way the British duplicity became clear to the public. One who had always an axe to grind could not naturally be true to one's word, and it was precisely the case with the British India Government. Sisirkumar vehemently criticized the double-policy of the English rulers. The following passage is remarkable for his bitter irony and sarcasm:

"A man of double heart is despicable. A man of double policy is dangerous ... Most unfortunately, this vice is seen at play in the general conduct of our principal rulers.

* Sisirkumar wrote:

"... How English enterprise, machinery, money and selfishness have destroyed all indigenous manufactures! India which
"When that assures in favour of the purse and pride, our rulers are unhesitatingly followers of the policy of governing India in an Indian way. You should not ask for a voice in state expenditure, for that would be an Western innovation ... You must not murmur for the extinction of the jury system, for that forms no part of the Eastern despotic Governments. You must not set up any exclusive proprietary right to land, for by the traditions of the East land belongs in part to the State.

"But take an instance in which policy of Orientalism does not suit the purposes of the Government and favours the right of the people, no, the Government must at once honestly call your attention to the civilized ideas and practices of the West rather than the barbarous prejudices of the East. There must be municipal taxes for they obtain in England. High education must be supported by private funds, look to Cambridge and Oxford. ... You must bear the road cess and this cess and that duty, because although they are pinching to half-starved natives, they are the concomitants of Western enlightenment ..." 61

The Government itself always tried at least to gloss over its policies and actions by some high-sounding rhetorics. But some of the Anglo-Indians were more frank.

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"... the grower of raw materials only ..." (Annual Drain upon India, "Amrita Bazar Patrika, July 28, 1870).
in this respect. Particularly, a section of the English-owned papers represented openly the principle that "might is might." They were conscious of the difference which should obtain between the conquered and the conquerors. It was more than they could tolerate that the Indians who were fit to be trampled underfoot should clamour for rights and privileges which rightfully belonged solely to the conquerors. They were the sworn enemy of any individual or newspaper which championed the cause of India. To them, the advocacy of an Indian cause was tantamount to treason. This kind of irrational reaction on the part of the English papers was explicable by the fact that they were not here to uphold any cause of justice or to fight for any principle. Their sole object was to safeguard the English vested interest in India in its most primitive form. So they often outdid the authorities themselves in their zeal to support blindly those policies of the Government which were specially designed to further the interest of the ruling class at the expense of India. It goes without saying that Sisirkumar who was indefatigable to champion the Indian cause should come in bitter conflict with them. According to them, Indians were very much ungrateful not to acknowledge the manifold benefits of the British rule; instead, they were given to seditious thoughts. Such a high-browed sentiment was once glibly expressed in an English newspaper. To this, Sisirkumar retorted with a story entitled, "The
Brahmin and the Plebeian. In this interesting story, he described how a Brahmin managed to accumulate a large fortune by manipulating a low caste Hindu. The irony of the whole thing was that the Brahmin did not forget every now and then to remind this simple folk of the privilege of serving the Brahmin, a proud privilege indeed, for which he should be grateful for ever. The implication of this allegorical story was unmistakeable. This was the characteristic way of Sisirkumar to reveal the ruthless exploitation of India by the imperialist England.

Sisirkumar was perhaps the first among the Indian thinkers to expose the systematic process of economic ruin of India by England. But his concern was not confined merely to showing the devastating effects of this imperialistic exploitation on the Indian economy; he was also concerned with devising means to counteract this process. He wanted the rising generation of the middle class to take upon itself the task of economic regeneration of India with the aid of European science and technology. It was for this reason that he was very much keen on founding an industrial school in Bengal. He had enough insight to perceive that the economic well-being of a people entirely depended on its knowledge and enterprise to exploit the natural resources of the country. He was aware of the importance of trade and commerce to increase the wealth of a nation. He also vigorously campaigned for the industrialization of India.
He knew that it was the middle class which must take a leading part not only in the process of industrialization but also in trade and commerce in order to make India economically self-sufficient.

In an article written on September 4, 1873, he emphasized the advantage of India over England in the prospect of industrial development. While the latter was entirely dependent on the former for raw materials, the former possessed them in plenty. But India lacked the required scientific technique to process her raw materials into manufactured goods. What India needed was factory-based mass production. The English were no doubt more skilled and enterprising than the Indians and, as such, while England was an affluent country, India found it difficult to make her both ends meet. England had to import raw materials like cotton, jute, and leather from India. Moreover, the rate of wage of the English labour was much higher than that of the Indian counterpart, apart from the fact that she had to make extra payment towards freight, tariffs and insurance, both when she imported raw materials from India and when she exported the manufactured goods to India, Sisirkumar wrote:

"... We produce cotton, jute on our own fields, we need not import sugar, potassium etc., from other countries, nor we lack the material required to manufacture
paper. The only thing we need to import from a foreign
country is the machineries for factories ...

"England has become immensely wealthy solely by
trade and commerce in our country. If we have the requi-
site will and enterprise, we can stop this flow of Indian
wealth to England by trade and commerce. We can retain
much money if sugar, potassium etc., are purified and
machineries manufactured in our own country. Moreover,
we can earn profit by exporting cotton, jute etc. The
middle class can make money by trade and commerce in the
same way that the agriculturists can earn money by working
in the fields. In this way we will no longer have to
be dependent on England for our bare necessaries, nor will
we have to curse our fate for serving in the English Commercial
houses.... They (English) have taken away a good deal of
money by plunder and oppression, and all our misery will
come to an end if we can bring back a thousandth part of
that money. If the Bengalees come forward to set up
factories, the English will also perhaps feel tempted to
do the same. That will do much good to the country —
-attracting money from England..." 64

It is interesting to note that Sisirkumar advocated
trade and commerce by the Indian middle class for another
very different and remarkable reason. The closer contact
with other civilized nations through trade and commerce
might help and facilitate India's passage to freedom. He
observed in the concluding lines of the article thus:
Another good will perhaps accrue to our country.
If trade and commerce bring us in closer contact with many
civilized nations of Europe and America, we might be able
one day to free ourselves with the help of advanced
countries like England and other states."

Sisirkumar was very much pained to see that India
was fast becoming an agricultural country under the British
rule. He knew that a country with a majority of agrarian
population and with an economy mainly dependent on
agricultural products can not rise in the scale of civiliza-
tion, and is incapable of progress in the modern world.
So he saw the increase of agrarian population in India as a
definite proof of her backwardness. It was a sign of
"national degeneration". What was needed to arrest this
process was a "national movement" for "national industry".

Therefore, Sisirkumar saw in the emergence of the
middle class the only hope for progress and advancement of
India. For him, the rising middle class personified the
regenerative spirit of India. It was the pivot round which
the progress of India would revolve.

Thus the writings of Sisirkumar provided a great
insight into the historic role the Indian middle class was
to play in the economic regeneration of India. By "middle
class", he did not mean "Babus" or "bhadralogs", poring
over office files, without incentive, and enterprise, and
averse to all kinds of hard labour. It was the image of
a vigorous economic class entrusted with the historic task of national reconstruction. There were, broadly three classes in Bengal at the time: the landed aristocracy, the child of the Permanent Settlement of 1793; the peasantry or the ryots, forming the majority; and, at the fringe of these two classes, the English-educated who were just coming to prominence by virtue of their free-thinking and progressive outlook. This educated middle class, which first emerged in Bengal and, afterwards, in other parts of India, under the British rule, was in no way analogous to the European bourgeoisie, also called middle class, which controlled the economy of European countries by owning all the means of production. Nevertheless, it was this rising middle class of India which, by a historical process of elimination and inclusion, would rise to be a capitalist class, and would control the economy of India.

In his life time Sisirkumar saw the beginnings of this process. Forces were already at work to create the nucleus of this class which was to become rival to the English capitalists in India. Sisirkumar anticipated the rise of this class in some of his writings. In a way, he may be looked upon as an exponent of the political philosophy of the Indian bourgeoisie in the making. But this judgment on Sisirkumar may give rise to some misunderstanding as regards his outstanding contribution to the democratic and national movement of India. Therefore,
to preclude any such misunderstanding, his ideas must be judged after placing them in their proper historical context.

India was then passing from the feudal to the capitalist economy under the leadership of the British. Of the three Indian classes, the landed aristocracy, the middle class and the peasantry, it was the middle class which was more vigorous, progressive and enterprising. It devolved upon this class to lead the democratic movement of India and to challenge the British monopoly in Indian economy and politics. This was the starting-point for India's democratic movement in which, however, the Indian middle class provided the required leadership. Indeed, as India's subsequent political history showed, the people from all walks of life, including the oppressed and the down-trodden, rallied behind the middle class in India's national liberation struggle against their common enemy, the British.

During the period in which Sisirkumar played an active part in his country's affairs, the real confrontation was between two antagonistic classes, British and Indians, the rulers and the ruled, the exploiter and the exploited. As a champion of India's cause, Sisirkumar may be said to have worked not only for the middle class, but for all the progressive forces which had a stake in the rise of India as a democratic country, free from all sorts of
restraints on her economy and politics. The Amrita Bazar Patrika became a rallying-point not only of a particular class but of the Indian people as a whole, irrespective of classes and creeds.

As a representative of the middle class, Sisirkumar adored the principles of democratic liberalism. These were for him absolute values for which he fought all through his life against the despotism of the British India Government. These principles should, according to him, measure the standard of the British rule in India.

For all his denunciations of the British colonial rule, Sisirkumar made no secret of his unreserved admiration for the British sense of justice and freedom. For him, there was another England, quite different from the imperialist one, representing all the democratic values. And he made these his main points of attack on the British imperialism. Evidently, he made a clear distinction between the British liberal tradition and the British colonial rule. At any rate, as will be evident from the following quotation, the contradiction in the role of British rule in India came into a sharper relief in his consciousness. His ultimate appeal lay with the great liberal tradition of England, and he was always calling on her to live up to that tradition. Indeed, he thought that the British were still capable of great action, true to their spirit of freedom. He told the British to take lessons from history and warned them
against the danger of ruling over men despotically, keeping
them deprived of all sorts of democratic rights. For what
were men without a minimum of democratic rights? They were
no better than slaves. A people, deprived and enslaved,
might also degrade its rulers. A process of degeneration
might set in and pervade the whole British national character.
It might even bring about the fall of England from her great
political tradition at home in case she, from imperialistic
motivations, tried to deny India a minimum of democratic
rights. As he pointed out:

"For a conquering nation to be degraded and en­
slaved, there are always strong and abundant causes and
temptations; and in the case of the conquest of India by
England, they are stronger and more abundant by far. And
is England taking any care to keep herself clear of them?
Liberty is her most valued ornament, she has attained to it
through an unheard of amount of trouble, struggle, anxiety
and heart-burning. Is she taking due precaution to preserve
it?

"The fact strikes every one that the Englishmen
of India are altogether a different race of being from their
brethren at home. None of that nobleness, candour, and
gentleness which mark the character of Englishmen in England
can be discovered in the Englishmen as a class here. On the
contrary, superciliousness, conceit, meanness and duplicity
we witness in abundance here ... Here they busy themselves as tools of despotism, in capitalizing themselves on their superior intellect and power and in bringing the people to a most consummate state of submission and humiliation. The result is, the noble maxims and principles of the free government of England fall farthest from their mind..."  

There were certain things on which Sisirkumar would not make any compromise with the British India Government under any circumstances. But inspite of this uncompromising attitude, he knew that it was too early at this stage to start a total war on it. He also knew that India could hope to make England defer to her political aspirations only by constitutional methods. The appointment of a permanent agent in England would be one of these methods. He would take up the cause of India and act as a channel between her and the progressive and pro-Indian elements there. Through him, India would be able to draw moral support from the Foxes and Burkes of England in her constitutional struggle, and her grievances would find their way to the British public in general. As he observed:

"It is a permanent agent that we want, a permanent and paid agent. He will be our representative. We know Government will not accept him as such but what is in a name? It will be his business to create a strong pro-native party
in England to interest public men, influence members of Council, and members of Parliament, to secure the good services of the influential Journals and so forth. We have no Representative in Parliament, but with an energetic and earnest man in England we can exercise an indirect influence over both the Houses... It will no doubt be a glorious day for India when we shall have such a worker in England, always neutralizing the evil effects of misgovernment and despotism and taking advantage of every incident in the Sovereign country to further the interests of unrepresented, un cared for and neglected."

IV

It is quite natural that Sisirkumar as an exponent of progressive middle class philosophy, would clash with the landed aristocracy which dominated the politics of the day. However, this domination was challenged by the formation of the Indian League of Sisirkumar in 1875, and of the Indian Association in 1876.

The members of the landed aristocracy were progressive in their own way and to a certain extent, because of their contact with the Western culture. The British Indian Association, organized by them to agitate constitutionally for "native" rights, did some good works to the cause of the
country. But they were essentially conservative, having a stake in the established system if only for the fact that they owed their very existence to the new land system introduced by the British in Bengal.

At any rate, the clash between Sisirkumar and the landed aristocracy was inevitable, because, apart from his progressive outlook, he had always a bias for the poor and meek peasants. Indeed, what had set him apart from his contemporaries was his deep love and sympathy for them. In a way, the difference of outlook and opinion on the social and political problems between him and his contemporaries may be traced to the "rustic" background in which he spent his formative period of life. This background had not only left its enduring impress upon his personality but gave that stamp of individuality which marked his ideas and thought. He was a "man of the soil in the true sense of the term. The bond of sympathy which grew up between him and the rustics was never to be severed as was evident from the fact that, after migration from his native village to Calcutta in 1871, he continued to wield his powerful pen for the cause of the peasants. Thus the invaluable services which he rendered to their cause as Jessore correspondent of the Hindoo Patriot during 1859-60 did not end with the success of Indigo Revolt but were pressed forward to a new sphere. This time he campaigned for the betterment of the lot of the peasants in general.
Sisirkumar regularly contributed to the columns of his paper about the agrarian problems and the men connected with them. The peasant who, like a dumb animal, worked wearily in the field from dawn to dusk and received, in return, only contempt and maltreatment from those who lived on his toil, found in Sisirkumar a great friend and sympathizer. He was one of the earliest champions of rights of peasants in India and, focussed the attention of his countrymen as well as the Government on the abject condition of the peasantry. Indeed, India meant for him more than what she meant to those who were born and brought up in the city and knew not the ugly face of poverty. So he started a vigorous campaign to change and improve the lot of the peasantry. In thinking of India, the worn and weary faces of uncounted millions, bent down under the heavy burden of hard labour and misery, came floating before his mind's eye. His deep concern for the plight of the peasantry will be evident from the following passage:

"Fourteen months ago we saw a most extraordinary paragraph in the Englishman regarding the condition of the ryots of Bengal. The para (based on the report of one Dr. Bedford) appeared to us so extraordinary that we preserved it. Here it is: "In Bengal the condition of the Peasantry has improved of late years to an almost incredible extent inspite of the little that is done for them by their own native landlords. The man who formerly deemed himself fortunate if assured of one scanty meal in the twenty four
hours now rails against fortune and the Feringhee if he cannot gorge himself at least twice in the day". Here is the picture of the prosperous Bengallee Ryot, he gets two meals a day! The duty of Government towards them has been bravely done, they generally get two meals a day in the twenty-four hours. This is the incredible prosperity of the Bengallee Ryot. He does not drink, he gets no milk, no meat, he has no festivals, he is not idle but toils on from dawn to sunset, not on arid and unproductive soil, but on a "black mould which is in many places 8 feet deep". In a hot climate clothing costs him little, he needs no shoes or stockings to warm him, a toka worth a pice defends him from the sun, and after all these, he manages to produce two meals a day. A dog or cat is far better off in as much as it has not to labour so hard for its existence or to go to jail for its poverty." 70

Sisirkumar was very much critical of the Act of Permanent Settlement of 1793 because it gave the stronger an unlimited power over the weak. It virtually resulted in the enslavement of the peasants of Bengal who became a helpless prey to the endless exacting demands of the zemindars. According to him, nothing could be more unjust than the Act of 1793 so far as the Ryots were concerned. They were virtually sacrificed to the interest of the zemindars.
by this Act.*

The Permanent Settlement was only one aspect of the process of ruthless exploitation to which the mute and unresisting ryots were subjected. The Government itself did not feel any qualm of conscience to make exacting demands upon them in the form of various taxes. Sisirkumar observed:

"The sacrifice of 1793 was to save the British Empire in India but the sacrifice No.2 (here he referred to the cess imposed on the ryots) is a purposeless cruelty. A cess upon the zemindars was long thought of, but Government dared not tax the zemindars alone but the blood of the Ryots was again felt necessary to help them out of the difficulty... The Ryot pays the salt tax, he pays the land tax, and it has now been ruled that he must pay the cess also. Hitherto it was the Zemindars who had the absolute right of pumping the Ryot, here is another competitor in the field in the person of the paternal Government itself... Then again Government is well aware that tho' the Ryots are to pay legally one half of the

* Sisirkumar commented: "It was in 1793 that the Ryots were made over to the tender mercies of the hungry zemindars with these injunctions "Don't oppress the Ryots but you must pay any demand any how, on your property shall be sold." Government was well aware that these injunctions could not be obeyed and that it was the interest of the zemindars to disobey the first, but it consoled itself with the thought that the Ryots must be sacrificed to save the British Empire in India. This was sacrifice No.1." ("The Poor wretches, the Ryots of Bengal, Amrita Bazar Patrika, July 6, 1871)."
cess, practically they will have to pay the other half of it. Government very well knows that the stronger will take advantage of this law to oppress the weak, but it shuts its ears and eyes against the lamentations of the Ryots ... Need we tell the truth, the British Government is a friend to the stronger ... The Zemindars must be heard... but the Ryots, let them cry. This may be a safe policy but not generous." 71

The zemindars did not naturally take too kindly to the scathing criticism of Sisirkumar against them. They looked upon him not only as their political adversary but as their arch-enemy. The outspoken frankness with which he expressed his views and opinions made him unpopular with the dominant section of the society. But he was never afraid of subjecting every social and political question to critical analysis and did not avoid conclusions even when these were unpalatable to others. So it was not at all surprising that the landed gentry disliked Sisirkumar and did everything to snub him down. It never recognized his importance as a political thinker. 72 There was, of course, another reason behind its attempt to belittle him. Coming as he did of an obscure middle class family of a more obscure village far away from Calcutta, his ideas and views did not find favour in a fashionable and high-browed urban society.
But his national feeling was so much deep-rooted into the soil of India that it transcended every sectional consideration. It was never commensurate with the hopes and aspirations of men belonging to the upper strata of society only. His object was to build the foundations of Indian nationalism into the hopes and aspirations of the toiling masses also. He perceived that India would fail in her historic task of national reconstruction if the peasantry was not pulled out of the sub-human level of existence due to centuries of poverty and deprivation.

When the issue lay between the nobility and peasantry, he always took the side of the latter. With him, it was not only a question of compassion for the distressed class but a question of justice to the weaker section of society. At any rate, his criticism of the zemindars was animated by the ideal of social reform. His object was not an outright condemnation but a correction of their ways so that they could contribute to the good of the whole society. In a word, he wanted to infuse in them a love of the country and a sense of responsibility to those under their care. The typical example of this was an article written by him in his paper dated February, 31, 1870. It was customary with the zemindars to transfer any tax imposed by the Government to the shoulders of the unfortunate ryots. The poor and helpless ryots could never think of bringing action against the zemindars in the law courts. The reason was that they were inferior and
penniless. Moreover, there was also the fear that their children and grand-children might be victimized by the zemindars. So his suggestion was that the Government should arrange some sort of a safeguard against such kind of oppression on the ryots. Then he went on to observe:

"Alas! when the zemindars will come to love their own country ... Why they are so much apathetic, possessing so much wealth? If they come forward, on their own initiative and at their own will, to devote themselves to the good of the country, the Government is not required to impose taxes at all ... "

So the main point of Sisirkumar's criticism, against the zemindars was their lack of patriotism. He wanted to kindle in their innermost soul a sacred fire of patriotism. Only then they would be enabled to look upon the ryots as their brothers and would cease to oppress them to further their selfish interests.* He knew that this community of feeling between the two sections of the country would fortify its political cause. In principle, he could not reconcile himself to the idea of Permanent Settlement - a boon which

* In an article entitled "Three advices to the Zemindars", Sisirkumar observed:

"They (zemindars) should look upon the ryots as brothers. They should give up the attitude of considering themselves masters and the ryots, servants. The more they will adopt this attitude, the more will they incur the hatred of the ryots. They should endeavour to do good to the ryots but if they do one or two petty works only to deceive the Government, no real good will accrue to the ryots. Their aim should not be to acquire some "name". It is the good of the ryots which ought to be their object..." (Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 13, 1871. Translated from Bengali).
the zemindars did not deserve, indifferent as they were to
the duties and responsibility entailed by it. As a class
they were tyrannical and given to sinful luxuries. But his
indictment of the landed aristocracy should not be taken to
mean that he considered the existence of this class entirely
useless for the country. Seen in the broad perspective
of the country's future destiny, he definitely regarded their
existence as a clog on the wheel of its progress. But judged
within the existing state of politics in which India was
pitted against a foreign Government, he thought the class
still capable of delivering some good to the country's
political struggle. Indeed, he judged everything from a
national point of view, and he also wanted the landed
aristocracy to see things from the same perspective. He had
no natural antipathy against them; his moral condemnation
was aimed at their abuse of a great trust placed upon them
by the Government. This will be evident from the fact that
whenever the Government intended to intrude upon their rights
legally conferred by it, he at once came to their defence
again and again. Here he judged things by the same crite-
ron, that of national interest. The first and foremost
concern of Sisirkumar was the well-being of the country.
This led him, despite his criticism of the Permanent
Settlement, to examine it from a different light. He
observed:
The benevolent people, not zemindars, are opposed to the Permanent Settlement. They honestly believe that the zemindars fatten at the expense of the Ryot. Now every individual, every class has a different standpoint of view. There are three different interests, viz., the welfare of India, the welfare of British India Government and the welfare of the English Nation, which moves the political schools of India. To a Native, the welfare of India must transcend every other consideration ... In our own case the interests of the governed and the governing oftentimes stand in opposition. The Government prospers at the expense of the people and vice-versa.

"If the zemindars are destroyed, it will benefit the British India Government, but it is to be proved that Government will then enter in Permanent Settlement with ryots, and Natives who are in opposition to the zemindaree system simply on this ground, must first obtain assurance from Government to this effect.

"... The idea of a Spartan partition of landed property in Bengal is utopian, so it would come to this: The revenue of the Government shall increase, the zemindars shall remain exactly as they were, only a little short of means, and the ryots will have to pay for the both ...

"We want some rich folks of this country to fight for our privileges ... A bad zemindar even is then of some use ..."
In the early seventies of the last century, the Government was in a desperate need of money. It thought that the Permanent Settlement of 1793 stood in its way to augment the revenue from the land. So it was looking for some plea to revoke the Act of 1793. Sisirkumar took it to be a betrayal of the Zemindars by the Government. But he was not a man to allow such an injustice without condemnation. Any wrong, no matter whether to the zeminders or to the ryots, was considered by him to be a national wrong and, as such, he would at once take up their cause. So when the Government contemplated to repeal the Act of 1793, Sisirkumar made the following observations:

"... We shall do only harm instead of good to ourselves by opposing the Permanent Settlement. However magnanimous foreign rulers may be, they can not rule a conquered country disinterestedly. Never there was such a case in the history of the world and never shall be in future.

"... If the authorities tried to take back the right of property given to us by the Permanent Settlement we shall not blame them ... But we should not do anything to harm the cause of the country because of our ill-feeling to the Zemindars. Everything of ours has been taken away by the foreign power. The only thing left is this small property... Therefore we should try to preserve whatever little we have.
"... It was not from any feeling of kindness that the English were led to introduce the system; rather, they were forced to do this. In the process of effecting it, they reduced mercilessly many zemindars to complete destitution. Such was the Permanent Settlement, and the authorities are wrong if they think that they can undo it at their own sweet will. They should get rid of such an idea. Those days are gone when they could perpetrate such an injustice; The Bengalees are far advanced to-day. Therefore, they should find out some other means." 75

Sisirkumar had no doubt that the Permanent Settlement in Bengal did more good to a handful of people than to the majority, that is, the ryots. But it seems that he was ready to tolerate the landed aristocracy as a "necessary evil". To him, the existence of the native zemindars was of a lesser evil than that of the Europeans, had the latter been in the former's position. As a nationalist, he would prefer the enjoyment of the fruits of ryots' labour by the Indian zemindars than by the Europeans who monopolised all other privileges here.

However, at another time and in a different situation, Sisirkumar would have welcomed the abolition of the existing form of private property in land, thus doing away with a class which thrived on the exploitation of toiling millions, because that would have set free the ryots from the state of
semi-serfdom. But the political necessity of his time led
him to support the zemindars against the Government. In
the context of the political relations obtaining between
the rulers and the ruled, the interest of the zemindars
formed part of the country's general interest. As he wrote:

"... It is known and universally admitted ...
the greater number of them (Zemindars) ... unenterprising,
idle, weak, and ignorant, oppressive and selfish. We know
too that they squander away annually vast sums of money
after frivolous and mischievous pursuits which morally
belong to the Ryots, and that the ruin of some of them would
liberate millions of Ryots from a semi-bondage. We know all
this and we respect and love the Ryots more than we can do
the zemindars; yet we must support them. It is a cruel
necessity ... we shall simply state the reasons which
convinced us that a body of aristocracy is absolutely necessary
for the welfare of such a country as India.

"Our English Rulers on the whole however good and
enlightened, can not help being unjust to India. As many
honest Indigo Planters were forced to commit oppressions on
account of a bad system, our Rulers to retain their super-
macy in India, must do things which are not strictly just ...
We have been excluded from the service and trade of the
country and the only thing which we can call our own is the land. If once taken from the zemindars, it will be never returned to us; and it is for this that so many attempts have been made of late to undermine the Permanent Settlement. It is, we hope, no treason to say that we love our countrymen better than we love the Europeans, we shall like to see them, bad as they are, enjoy the fruits of the Ryot's labour than the Europeans, especially as the former spend their money here which benefits the country and the latter carry theirs to England ... All political agitations to be of use must be supported by money, and if we ever do anything, we must do it with the money of the zemindars. Ryots enriched at the expense of the zemindars must always be a desirable sight, as Europeans enriched at the expense of both the zemindars and Ryots must always be undesirable ... On the contrary we have every reason to fear that the revenues thus increased from land shall be squandered away not for our benefit but for the benefit of the favoured race ... Let the people have first some control over the Finances of the country and then we shall oppose with all our heart and soul a settlement which we are at present constrained to support..." 76 *

Indeed, Sisirkumar as a political thinker had an utmost intellectual honesty. He was not a political charlatan, nor was there anything spurious in his national

* Emphasis added.
sentiment. So nothing could induce him to pamper the whims of the privileged class by playing the role of a sycophant.

He emphasized the fact that there could be no good of the country apart from the good of the people in general. Rather, only the good of the people as a whole could contribute to the general welfare of the country. Sisirkumar may be said to have broadened the basis of India's political movement by giving it a mass orientation. In this connection it is worthwhile to recall a mass demonstration organized by Sisirkumar at Jhikargacha in 1885. According to Prof. Nirmal Sinha:

"The Jhikargacha (a village in the Jessore district, now in Bangladesh) conference of 1885 was an eloquent testimony to the political consciousness created among the people of Jessore by the efforts of Shishirkumar and his brothers, Hemantakumar and Motilal. The conference was preceded by hundreds of village meetings at which the humble folks were urged to discard their apathy and take an active interest in the political, economic and social problems of the country." 77

Thus it is clear that Sisirkumar tried to have the two forces, one at the bottom and the other at the top in the scale of society, geared to the political movement of the country. On the one hand, he started a campaign to
remedy the misery and deprivation of the peasants, to which, of course, the zemindars had not a little contribution, and fought for their rights; on the other, he defended the rights of the zemindars against the encroachment of the Government. And he wanted the zemindars to shed their egotism so that they could make a common cause with other sections of society. In this respect, Sisirkumar was an idealist. But he can not be said to have been a utopian. Definitely, he did not think that the zemindars would turn "altruistic" overnight or could be made at all to rise above their self-interest. What he desired was perhaps that they should be inspired with what may be called an enlightened self interest, fully amenable to the greater interest of the country. That greater interest was, under the specific circumstances prevailing at the time, the achievement of a minimum standard of rights and privileges below which no man should be allowed to fall. At any rate, his ultimate object was to align the landed aristocracy with the rest of his countrymen in order to forge unity and solidarity of the Indian people without which they could not secure even a minimum of their just and legitimate demands.

From the above discussion it is also evident that Sisirkumar attributed to the middle class a pioneering role not only in politics but in every sphere of life. He was prophetic enough to apprehend the historical importance of the middle class who personified the progressive spirit of
the age. As has been shown before, by the term "middle Class" he certainly did not mean only the professional men only. He attributed to the middle class the same economic role which the bourgeoisie played in Europe from the seventeenth century.

In this connection it will be in order here to refer to an interesting controversy centering round the question as to who was competent enough to represent the ryots in Bengal. Sisirkumar contended that it was the middle class who could only speak on behalf of the ryots. He argued to show that neither a member of the nobility nor the ryot himself could have a legitimate claim to that right.

Thus, according to Sisirkumar, the advent of the middle class was historic in importance. Yet Sisirkumar, in the greater interest of the country, was not averse to recognize the appointed place due to the landed aristocracy in the politics of the country. So he was ready to co-operate with the British Indian Association, a political body dominated by that class. He was even willing to work under its banner because he knew that unity, not dissension, was the supreme need of the hour. The only thing he wanted was that the Association should be broad-based according

*Sisirkumar wrote in the Amrita Bazar Patrika on January 20, 1871: "... Not agreeing with all its views we shall yet consider the collapse of such an Association as a national calamity. It is the only Native political association and in spite of its objectionable tendencies deserves the support of all Natives. If it has shortcomings we will have not to go to the Duke of Argyll for a remedy, it is in our power to mould it to any shape we choose ..." ("Why we support the Zemindars"). Emphasis added.
to the true principle of democracy. As he argued, its membership should be thrown open to all sections of the middle class by reducing the rate of subscription from Rs. 50/- to Rs. 5/-. But this suggestion of Sisirkumar was rejected by the influential members of the Association on a ground which was most undemocratic in principle. They feared that the extension of membership might not be safe for the very existence of the body. Afterwards, Sisirkumar became convinced that it was actually a tool in the hand of a clique. According to him, the "bigger folks" whose aim was to have a title of honour, subscribed to the Association in the belief that the royal titles were "in the keeping of it". Sisirkumar noted down all these in an article published in the Amrita Bazar Patrika on September 30, 1875. The ideological conflict between him and that body became irreconcilable and, after severing his connections with it, he founded the Indian League on September, 25, 1875. In one place of the article he observed:

"This is the first instance of a political body formed by public announcement, and a call upon the nation to attend it and mould it to their liking. So little of cliquism was in the whole affair that Resolutions were framed and omitted and movers chosen after the meeting had assembled. The organisation was formed by a coup-d'état as that was the only possible way of carrying it
successfully... The value of the membership is only Rs. 5/- per year; it is open to if not all, but to all who can appreciate the advantages of such unions. Here is then an opportunity for the Government to learn the genuine wishes of the nation, and here is an opportunity for the nation to let know their wishes to the Government. Here is also an opportunity for men of talent to develop their powers. So long there was no avenue; here is one they can take the advantage." 79

It was not from any partisan spirit that Sisirkumar was led to form the Indian League. He never thought that it should function as a rival organization of the Association. He placed above everything the good of the country and he knew that internal dissensions would only weaken the cause of the country. So he always tried to avoid conflicts between the two organizations. He wanted them to work together in the country's democratic movement for political rights. He concluded the article with the following words:

"Let us work together. Why should we quarrel? Our aim and object tend to the same direction. Why should we weaken each other by suicidal dissensions? We need help of each other, we shall supplement the wants of each other. Let those who seek to injure the common cause for private ends beware! It is no longer possible to lead the
country by the nose. We have grown sufficiently to select the chaff from the wheat. If any body deserves to lead, it is he who is the most unselfish, the most devoted, and the most determined. The selfish time-server has now very little opportunity to thrive....

That the two organizations actually represented two entirely different classes of interest was evident from the fact that they clashed several times on issues vitally affecting the country's general interest. One such issue was the proposal for introducing elective system in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation at the time of the Lieutenant Governorship of Sir Richard Temple. Sisirkumar had been campaigning through the Amrita Bazar Patrika for long to have the elective system introduced in the Corporation so that the ordinary rate-payers might have some control over the municipal affairs. This would also provide for some training to the people in the art of self-government. The Bengal Government, in deference to the popular demand, expressed its willingness to introduce the system, although partially. But the British Indian Association reacted adversely to the idea of partial elective system. It communicated its objection against the partial elective system to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal through a letter. It demanded that the Government should either introduce a full elective system or nothing at all. But the real intention of the members of the Association behind their objection

* Emphasis added.
to the partial elective system (the ordinary rate-payers were to elect only two thirds of the Councillors or Commissioners) was that majority of them were already nominated justices of peace * and as such, the introduction of elective system would do away with the influence and privileges enjoyed by them as justices of peace. Sisirkumar saw in their objection a shrewd attempt to sabotage the interest of the ordinary rate-payers under the smoke-screen of a full-fledged elective system which was, on his view, not consistent with the political reality of the day. Considering the attitude of the Government, he came to the conclusion that the people could hardly expect of it such radical step as the full elective system. According to him, the political progress of the country could be achieved only by stages. He wrote on this occasion:

..."We have read the letter of the British Indian Association to the Bengal Government regarding the municipal bill with pain, sorrow and despair. It is for the first time they (members of the British Indian Association) have taken upon themselves to stand in opposition to the wishes of their countrymen. India has all along suffered from internal dissensions: is our country again to pass through that suicidal ordeal? It is well-known that the rate-payers of Calcutta want a thorough change in the constitution of their Corporation, and distinctly demand an elective system. But the British

* In those days the Councillors of the Calcutta Corporation were called justices of peace. (Majumdar, B.B., History of Indian Social and Political Ideas, Calcutta, 1967, P.136).
Indian Association adopt a suicidal course. It occurred never to them that they are rich folks, enjoying a great deal of influence and are not subjected to the municipal oppressions, so crushing to ordinary rate-payers. They are themselves Justices and are regarded with respect by the municipal authorities, and enjoy immunities from the troubles which harass ordinary people... Did it never occur to them that people might be disposed to attribute to them motives if they stood against the prayers of the general body of rate-payers, for change in the constitution... They say that since the system can not be introduced in its entirety, some other means must be sought to allow the rate-payers a fair and healthy representation.

"... No Government in the annals of universe gave at once a sixteen annas blessing to its people. But the members of that body admit that a fair and healthy representation is necessary and that they mean to give by empowering Justices to elect members and add to their own body! This is called the "healthy and fair representation" by that body; perhaps they represent the public in the same way."82

But Sisirkumar was a man of different mettle. He was determined to fulfil the democratic aspiration of the people of Calcutta, although in a limited way, and, thus, to defeat the attempt of the Association to subvert the majority interest. For this purpose he made an all-out effort to rally the public behind the demand of partial
elective system as agreed to by the Government in order to demonstrate to the Government that it was the Indian League, and not the Association, which truly represented the people. A mammoth gathering was held in October, 1875 at the National Theatre on the Beadon Street under the auspices of the League. It showed the tremendous power and influence that Sisirkumar and his Indian League exerted upon the general public. This will be evident from the coverage of the meeting made by the Englishman:

"The monster gathering of the middle classes of the Native Community at the Beadon Street Pavilion on Saturday last is a sign of the times, the significance of which it would be difficult to overrate. The meeting shows two things at least. It shows that a strong desire to be heard arising more or less out of dissatisfaction with the existing order of things in this city, animates what in all civilized communities is the most important section of the public; and it shows that the section of the public in question are not contented to have the care of their interests in the hands of a self-seeking plutocracy. The meeting of Saturday is, in fact, the first marked sign of the awakening of the people on this side of India to political life. We have received several letters from natives, calling in question both the representative character of the meeting and the motives of those called it. To our thinking, the manner and character of the attendance afford a significant answer to these insinuations." 83
But Sisirkumar's contribution to the democratic movement of India was not limited to his campaign for the introduction of elective system in the Calcutta Corporation only. He demanded the extension of the elective system immediately to all district municipalities also. As Prof. Nirmal Sinha remarked:

"As a matter of fact, long before Temple proposed the system of election, Shishirkumar advocated its introduction in the district Municipalities. If these Municipalities were allowed to have elected Chairmen (not the Magistrates as Chairmen), then the people would not grudge the imposition of fresh taxes. These municipalities, with wide powers over local education and sanitation, constituted the best form of local self-government for the people. They could teach the people not only to manage their own affairs within their limited resources, but also to resist oppression of all kinds, social, political and economic, without looking up to the British for help and guidance." S4

As a nationalist, Sisirkumar had one thought, one desire, and one goal, that of uniting his countrymen against the all-powerful British Indian Government. Indeed, long before the emergence of Indian National Congress in 1885 as a political platform symbolising the unity of the Indian people, Sisirkumar's writings reflected an all-India outlook, even when he was coping with problems peculiar to Bengal. His political outlook was so broad that he did never regard the problems of Bengal as completely separate from, and independent
of, the problems of India. In fact, he knew that, in the context of the same political condition facing the country, the fate of Bengal was inextricably linked to that of India. He once observed that the same political condition was moulding the Hindus and Muslims, the Bengalis and Mahrathas into one political unit.* Furthermore, he also knew that culturally the different races of India formed parts of an integrated whole.

As a matter of fact, Sisirkumar always identified himself with the victim of oppression and injustice. He defended the weak and the wronged all through his life, be it the ryot in opposition to the zemindar, or the zemindar in relation to the Government, or, for that matter, any Indian vis-a-vis his ruling authorities. His pen flashed with indignation against the persecutor. This sentiment was deep-seated in the psychology of Sisirkumar, forming the nucleus of his national sentiment. To his consciousness, India was a most helpless victim in the hands of the British India Government which was more interested in her exploitation than in her well-being. The first and foremost concern of Sisirkumar was the welfare and progress of India. This formed the real context of all his writings.

* Opp. Cit., P.63.
V

Sisirkumar's services to the cause of India have been generally recognized. Lokmanya Tilak, one of the greatest nationalist leaders of India, paid a high tribute to Sisirkumar. He acknowledged Sisirkumar as his political 
Guru in whose feet he learnt many lessons (The Presidential Address on the occasion of the sixth death anniversary of Sisirkumar on December 29, 1917). The Lokmanya observed:

"To me Shishir Babu figures as the pioneer of journalists in this country. After the Mutiny when he was only 15 years of age, came the establishment of the British Bureaucracy in this country - it was a despotic rule and the country wanted a man who would cope with their devices, - who would see the inner meaning of their devices, - who was courageous enough to meet them, bold and honest enough to expose them, and take defeat calmly and coolly in order to resuscitate for future strength. Such was Shishirkumar Ghosh. The Patrika is the manifestation of the spirit of which he was full - nobody may talk of the "Patrika" without being reminded of Shishir Kumar Ghosh. At this time a man was required with a feeling heart to realise the position of the masses who were then governed by a despotic rule - one who must have sympathy with the people who were unjustly treated and did not know what to do but only looked up to heaven for help. The people were dumb, bureaucracy had full power ... At such a time a man was required to steer the national ship
to a safe harbour constitutionally and legally - a man of courage, a man who could see through the actions of the bureaucracy ...

"Babu Shishirkumar was a true political saint and I regret as much as you do that that kind of character is getting rare in these days... We thank God that we had such a man in the early years of journalism in India. He was a hero in the true sense of the word. He did not see his aspirations fulfilled. It might be fulfilled in a generation or two or more but we can not forget that it was he who laid the foundation ..." 85

One interesting fact which emerges from the study of Sisirkumar is that the two main trends of political ideology which dominated Indian politics towards the close of the nineteenth century and onwards appeared to have been interlinked in him. His thought was characterized by a kind of ambivalence between two extreme poles. On the one hand, he was outspoken and uncompromising in his criticism of the British India Government. On the other, he had a great faith in the tradition of British liberalism. These two opposite tendencies existed in his thought-processes in quite an undefined and undifferentiated form. In subsequent years these two trends became well-defined and separated in the thoughts of other political thinkers and, in general, took two distinct forms so as to give rise to two schools of political thought - the one, moderate and the other, radical
or extremist. The former was typified by Surendra Nath Banerji, a brilliant exponent of Indian liberalism, and the latter, by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who represented the militant nationalism of India.

It has been argued above that it would be a misunderstanding of Sisirkumar's political ideas if he is placed in the same category with the extremists because whatever radicalist tendency was discernible in his thought, it was justly balanced by an opposite tendency towards liberalism. The moderate school believed in the politics of persuasion as its adherents relied heavily on the British sense of justice and freedom. As for the extremists, they aspired for complete independence, severing all connections with the British Empire. Are not these two trends interwoven in the political thought of Sisirkumar? On the one hand, he suffered from a sense of disenchantment with the British rule as evidenced by some of his writings which, both in letter and spirit, embodied the dictum, "we are we, they are they." *

On the other, in a different mood, when he sought some remedy for political wrong, his moral appeal was ultimately from the British India Government to the British liberalist political leaders like Fox and Burke, that is, to their sense of justice.

* In describing the story how the Amrita Bazar Patrika was first started in an article entitled "Romance of an Indian Newspaper", Sisirkumar observed long after his retirement from the editorship of the Patrika: "The paper they (Sisirkumar and his brothers) started was a weekly, in the Bengali language, and called it the "Amrita Bazar Patrika." It began by teaching that "we are we", and "they are they". (Amrita Bazar Patrika, January 4, 1904.)
and equality. Considering the Indian political condition and the degree of political consciousness attained by her people, that is, considering both the objective and subjective condition of India, he knew that the overthrow of British yoke was only an idle dream. For the moment, England and India were necessary to each other.*

It is evident that Sisirkumar was convinced of the evils of the British rule in India. However, he found the remedy not in any demand for political liberation but in democratizing the administration partly by appeal to British sense of justice and liberalism, and partly by organizing the people concerned. His object was to exercise a moral pressure upon the Government so that it responded adequately to the basic needs of the people.

He had a deep love and respect for the common people. He never left any injustice without exposure and condemnation. He was always for the downtrodden. He was confident of the historic leadership of the middle class. He was convinced that the future would be determined by this class for which he even demanded a special recognition from the government. In particular, he emphasized the role of this class in the industrialization and national reconstruction of the country.

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* Opp. cit., P. 97.
He utilized mainly the press to articulate his criticism of the Government and even to formulate constructive proposals. For him, the press was the best instrument to fight for the rights of the people. It could also enlighten the government about basic realities of the time. In a number of ways, he envisaged the future growth of nationalism and anticipated its trend and direction in India.
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