

Charting the Terrain of Early Nationalism: Maldah 1905-1916

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Abstract : *The paper discusses the genesis of nationalism in Maldah in the late nineteenth and the first two decades of the twentieth century. The focal points of discussion are the emergence of a new intelligentsia as the opinion makers of society who became the chief vehicle for spreading nationalist consciousness in the district. It was due to their efforts the stage was set for further and steady growth of national consciousness in a mufassil district. The paper also discusses how this incipient growth of national awakening was given a flip by the Swadeshi Movement that followed Curzon's infamous decision of partition of Bengal in 1905. The paper analyses the pivotal role played by the Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti in spreading 'national' education and national consciousness among a large number of student of Maldah, many of whom in later years turned out as prominent persons in political, social and cultural arena of the district. Further, it also indicates the limitations of the first phase of nationalist activities in Maldah. The paper also discusses the terrorist activities in Maldah under the banner of the Anushilan Samiti and Brati Samiti. It has been argued that in spite of its failure, the terrorist activities contributed to raise the level of political consciousness in Maldah.*

Key words: *Maldah, Sannyasi and Fakir Rebellion, Wahabi Movement, Nationalism, Intelligentsia, Swadeshi, Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti, Revolutionary Terrorism.*

The aim of the present paper is to study the emergence and growth of 'national' consciousness and nationalist movement in Maldah for the period from 1905 to 1916. A major focus here is on the emergence of a new class

of English educated intelligentsia who became the chief vehicle for spreading nationalist consciousness in the district. In fact, the intelligentsia of Maldah emerged as a distinct entity in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This paper seeks to discuss the role of the intelligentsia and students in two important movements in which they were actively involved--- one anti-partition and the other revolutionary terrorism. The period saw the sprouting of nationalism in Maldah upon which was built the edifice of future nationalist movement. This could be seen as the beginning of a new phase of modern politics in Maldah.

It has sometimes been argued that Maldah had been all through a politically backward district.¹ As it was the land of big zamindars in comparison to other districts of Northern Bengal, the progress of the nationalist movement was thwarted. However, our in-depth study would reveal that the district of Maldah both sustained the anti-British sentiments and translated them into movements against the colonial state.

Tradition of Protest

In fact, the district of Maldah had a rich heritage of protest against the colonial rulers and their Indian compatriots. The district witnessed from the very beginning of the colonial rule the primary resistance movement. The earliest of these was the Sannyasi and Fakir rebellion, which rocked northern Bengal and adjacent areas of Bihar between 1763 and 1800. The Dasnami Sannyasis, known for their martial tradition, were involved in landholding, money lending and trade in raw silk, piece goods, copper and spices. These sannyasi traders used to purchase a large quantity of cloth made of mixed cotton and silk. The Gosaintuli area of Maldah owes its name to them.² The sannyasis and gosains were the chief merchants of Maldah area for the export of silk piece goods to the Western Provinces and Deccan.³ They partly sold these goods at Patna and Benares. However, the major portion was sold in the mart of Mirzapore, the prominent trade centre of the entire North India. It was from Mirzapore they distributed these goods all over the Western and North Western Continent of Asia.⁴

In 1794, the prominent gosain merchants of Maldah were Mahant Majgir, Gosain Sannalgir, Gosain Dasagir, Gosain Bhairovgiri and Mohant

Kesargiri.⁵ A fresh tax was levied on them at Maldah even while they were paying sair duties at Kata Manzhi and Gazipur for their carrying trade to Benares and Shahjahanabad, and this was a cause of much resentment among them.⁶ Some of the sannyasis of the Giri sect acquired landed properties in the district of Maldah.⁷ The madari fakirs, who traced their origin from the sufi order initiated by Shah-i-Madar, enjoyed rent-free tenures and retained armed followers during the Mughal days. At Pandua of Maldah district, the fakirs came to possess the Baishazari Estate granted to them by the Mughal Emperor. The noted Adina mosque and Bari Dargah were under the supervision of this estate. The fakirs belonging to madari and burhan sect had resided in Maldah. Both these groups of armed wandering monks, namely the sanyasis and fakirs, were affected by the company's high revenue demands, resumption of rent-free tenures, and commercial monopoly. The sufferers from the famine of 1769-70, a large number of aggrieved small zamindars, disbanded soldiers and the rural poor, inflated their ranks. The sanyasis and fakirs selected the factories and revenue offices of the company, the kachharis of rich landlords and the granaries of the merchants as the main targets of their attack.⁸

On 8 March 1783, Grant, the agent of Maldah factory, reported to the Collector of Bhagalpur, "The country in the neighbourhood of Maldah was being infested by several large body of Fakeers (headed by Shaw Burhan) who have committed many depredations".⁹ These fakirs probably belonged to Majnu Shah who himself had been staying with a greater force at Buddel, on the border of Purnia. It is also reported that a party consisting of 600 or 700 persons robbed the public catchery, which was six cross away from Maldah. After that, they appeared very near to the Company's aurang at Nirschindipur. Another party of 500 was near Colligang (Kaligram, near Chanchal), a principal aurang of the Company. They beat the weavers and threatened to burn their villages if they refused to pay a contribution.¹⁰

We can easily realize the gravity of the situation from the above-mentioned report. His own armed men, Grant felt, were inadequate to defend his factories. Therefore, he appealed to the Colonel-in-charge of the Company's closest military station for a detachment of troops to protect the countryside

from "wandering and robbing fakeers". Accordingly, the Collector of Bhagalpur intimated the Resident that six companies of sepoy under Major Bhchan was proceeding to Maldah to prevent the incursions of the sanyasi raiders.¹¹

In February, 1793, George Udny, the Resident of Maldah, informed the Board that a large body of armed fakirs numbering two or three hundred had appeared very near the factory and had visited Pundoos (Pandua) which was a revenue collection centre subordinate to Maldah.¹² On 1 July 1794, he again reported that the coolies at Ramgunj which was the seat of business of the Malduar aurung had been attacked and plundered by a body of three or four hundred armed fakirs who carried off cash and clothes worth 3700 rupees.¹³ The leader of the bandits was supposed to be Sobhan Shah, the "chelah" or adopted son of Majnu Shah. Sobhan Shah came with a numerous body of fakeers to the town of Maldah in Feb 1793, created disturbance and maltreated several merchants there. Shortly after, he plundered the public cutchery at Kanchan as well as several wealthy people thereabout. They also levied contribution on local people "under the name of charity".¹⁴ In fact, a distinctive characteristic of the peasant war in the 1790s was the assault on gomastas and other employees of English factories.

These frequent attacks caused alarm to the Company's Maldah establishment. During the year, 1760-1800 recurrent confrontations between the sanyasi-fakirs and the armed forces of the Company took place in a wide region of northern Bengal, including Maldah. Johuri shah, an important leader of the rebels, was arrested in Maldah.¹⁵ Considerable quantities of arms were seized from the jungle of Pichchli in Maldah. Majnu Shah, the noted leader of the Sanyasi-Fakir rebellion, was injured while fighting with the company's army at the village of Manjura of Bogra district. His followers carried their injured leader to Maldah and took shelter at Pandua, which was a stronghold of the madari fakirs. Later Majnu Shah preferred to go to Bihar and breathed his last at Makhanpur village. The British administration considered the uprising as problem of law and order; the rebels were portrayed as primitive savages resisting civilization.¹⁶ Whatever might be the opinion of the colonial administrators, the fact remains that the Sanyasi

and Fakir rebellion bears ample testimony to the anti-British attitude of the people of Maldah.

The Wahabi¹⁷ movement, another formidable peasant uprising, had deep impact on the district of Maldah also. Writing in 1876 W.W. Hunter informs, 'a great many of the Muhammadanas belong to the Faraizi and Wahabi sects; and in 1869 several prosecutions for abetment of waging war against the Queen were instituted in this district.¹⁸ The movement appeared so strong and organized in Maldah that in 1868 that the District Magistrate thought it advisable to suggest the use of orthodox mullahs against the reformist preachers as a counter-measure to contain their influence. "There can be no doubt", he wrote, " that the Wahabee movement in Maldah is at present very vigorous, and will so continue until we meet the moulvies with their own weapons."¹⁹ In Maldah, the organizers of jihad set up compact organizations in rural areas, which systematically levied men and money and forwarded them by regular stages to the jihad camps in the Frontier. The Officiating Magistrate of Maldah, J.O. "Kinealy, in his report to the Government, dated 20 October 1868, stated: "the depositions show that during many years past the Wahabees have pursued a system of raising supplies for the support of the fanatics... who are waging war against the Government".²⁰

In Maldah, the chief leader of the Wahabi movement was Rafik Mandal, a poor peasant himself.²¹ Due to his efforts, Wahabi organizations were set up in different parts of Maldah. The main centers were Sibganj, Kansat, Nababganj, Kaliachak, Harishchandrapur, Ratua and old Maldah.²² Maulana Inayet Ali, a well-known Patna caliph, did extensive missionary work in Maldah and Rajshahi, and his efforts were largely responsible for the great enthusiasm created in that area for the jihad campaigns in the north-west.²³ In order to carry on their jihad or war against the British, the Wahabi Sardars (leaders) collected money from the villages. Those who refused to join them were excommunicated from the society.²⁴ At the instruction of Rafik Mandal, the Wahabis of Maldah had maintained contact with the Wahabi centres of Patna, Sittana, Nadia and Murshidabad. Some Madrasas in Maldah and Murshidabad played an instrumental role to train the Wahabis.²⁵ In this way a large band of Wahabis, numbering not less than eighty thousand, was

organized by Rafik Mandal and his son Maulavi Amiruddin in the district of Maldah.²⁶ The colonial administration became apprehensive of the activities of the Wahabis. W.W.Dampier, the Superintendent of Police for the Lower Provinces of Bengal, had mentioned in his report, that the Wahabis had been succeeded in creating 'religious fanaticism' among a large section of the Muslims in Maldah and Murshidabad.²⁷ The administration decided to take action against the Wahabis and Rafik Mandal was imprisoned in 1853. In spite of this, Maulavi Amiruddin, son of Rafik Mandal, continued to organize the Wahabis. It is stated in an official document, "the man who has most influence among the Wahabees in Maldah is Moulvie Ameerooddin of Sandipa Narrainpore. Several of the men who had returned from Malka and Sittana stated that they had been influenced to go there by the preaching of the Moulvie....So long as this man remained at liberty, the collections on account of jihad, and for the support of the fanatics across the frontier, would not cease in Rajshahye and Maldah.... He is a fanatic, and preaches sedition against the Government, because, in his opinion, it is a Kaffir government....For years Ameerooddin has been engaged in collecting money, preaching sedition, and sending recruits to join band of fanatics across the frontier."²⁸ There were many sub-collectors in the district who collected small sums of money in their villages and send it to Maulvi Amiruddin. The name of such sub-collectors were Sardar Masoom, Enayetullah, Amanat Mondal, Saifulla, and others.²⁹ In 1869, Maulavi Amiruddin and a number of his followers were arrested and prosecuted on the charge of waging war against the government.³⁰ Property of Maulavi Amiruddin was confiscated and he was sent to Andaman in exile.³¹

However, even after his arrest, collections for jihad continued in the district, especially at Narainpur, Hanspookur, Shahaban Chuck and Mojampur. The Sardars who took a leading role in it was Habelash Mondal of Shahaban Chuck and Amanat Mondal of Hanspookur. They recruited a large number of men from the villages of Hanspookur and Adatola and sent them for jihad in NWFP. At Hanspookur, there were nearly five hundred fanatical Muslims of the Wahabi sect who sympathized with the jehadis.³² However, after their arrest in 1872, the Wahabi activities in Maldah were

subdued.

The peasant uprising that took place on the indigo plantations in Bengal in 1859-1862 had its impact in the district as well. Indigo trade became a rich source of high profits for the East India Company in India. The planter acquired lands from native zamindars in Bengal and Bihar and extended the cultivation of this crop on a large-scale as a plantation industry. Tenants were forced to grow indigo under a system of great oppression.³³ Indignation was spread all-over the indigo-growing districts. Peasants' resistance first began in Pabna and Nadia 19 1859 which soon spread to Jessore, Khulna, Rajshahi, Dacca, Murshidabad, Maldah and Dinajpur. The planters and their kuthis (indigo factories) were attacked and arsoned. In Maldah, the riots were organized under the leadership of Morad Biswas, Suhas Biswas and Lal Chand Saha of adjacent Murshidabad.³⁴ On 20 March 1860, some three hundred ryots attacked the Bakrabad factory of Kaliachak p.s. owned by David Andrews. The rebels entered the office and destroyed the ledgers. They next attacked the residence of the manager and carried off several guns and a sword. Next day a large number of ryots, armed with spears and swords, attacked a neighboring factory managed by Mr. Lyons. In panic, Lyons opened fire on the mob, killing two and injuring five. Fortunately, for the planter a Government steamer arrived at a point opposite the factory and rescued Lyons. The ryots were dispersed. Morad Biswas and Lal Chand Biswas, together with twenty-four rebels, were arrested. Peace was restored in the district at the end of March 1860.³⁵

Emergence of a New Educated Class: A New Phase of Modern Politics

This rich heritage of protest eventually led to the emergence of nationalist stirrings in Maldah district in the last decade of the twentieth century. The rise of nationalist consciousness was, no doubt, favoured by the spread of western education, development of communications, introduction of local self-government as well as formation of Englishbazar (1869), Old Maldah (1869) and some year's later Nababganj (1903) municipalities. The Maldah Zilla School, established in 1858, was the first government school in North Bengal.³⁶ A few more English schools were established in the district by 1870.³⁷ There was no college in Maldah until 1944. However, a good number

of students used to go to Rajshahi College and Berhampur K.N.College for higher studies. Many of the early nationalists of Maldah received education from these colleges.³⁸

Thus, a new class of English educated gentry emerged in the socio-political canvas of the district in the last quarter of the 19th century. These English educated gentry became the chief vehicle for spreading nationalist consciousness in the district. Though a microscopic minority, this class showed interest in common political and societal issues concerning the general welfare of people. By using modern idioms and vocabulary, it started to set priorities for the ruling class as well as for the people. Following this, a marked departure in the political life of Maldah was apparent. From then on, politics was no longer the sole prerogative of the feudal and dominant classes. Through its active intervention, the new educated class broadened the scope and extended the radius of politics in the district. The late nineteenth century, thus, could be seen as the beginning of a new phase in modern politics in Maldah.

The career of Radhesh Chandra Seth symbolizes the aspirations and activities of this genre of early nationalists of Maldah. Radhesh Chandra Seth was born in 1854 in a rich merchant family of Old Maldah. He passed the Entrance Examination from Maldah Zilla School in 1870. While studying in Zilla School, he had formed an organization named Maldah Association. Its chief objective was social service.³⁹

Like many of his contemporaries, Radhesh Chandra got himself admitted in Rajshahi College from where he passed the B.A. Examination. At that time, a problem arose over the issue of the continuation of Old Maldah Municipality. A section of the local gentry opposed the working of the civic body and demanded its abolition. However, another group, led by Radhesh Chandra, argued in favor of its existence for the benefit of the people. Radhesh Chandra himself wrote a booklet to propagate the necessity of smooth functioning of the civic body. It was due to his efforts that a strong public opinion was built up and the municipality was allowed to continue.⁴⁰

Radhesh Chandra was fully aware of the usefulness of newspaper as a

medium of disseminating political consciousness in a district far away from the metropolis. While studying in the Rajshahi College, Radhesh Chandra had attended the third session of the Indian National Congress held in Madras as delegate from Maldah.⁴¹ In Madras, he came into touch with the nationalists coming from different corners of the country. He clearly understood that this new political consciousness cutting across the regional barriers had no reverberations in his own district. Returning in Maldah, he decided to publish a newspaper to make the people aware of the newly emerging nationalist consciousness.⁴² In 1894 he started to publish *Gourbarta*, a fortnightly newspaper. Radhesh Chandra also founded Krishnakali Press with the help of some lawyers and teachers of the town. However, the people of Maldah were yet unprepared to appreciate this pioneering venture. The *Gourbarta* did not continue for a long time due to lack of response from the people and paucity of funds.⁴³ This initial failure did not divert Radhesh Chandra from his mission. Soon after, he began to publish another newspaper, the *Gourdoot*. In *Gourdoot* he wrote several articles relating to issues like landlord-peasant disputes, maladministration of the municipalities, the district board and the local boards, police inaction in respect of law and order, the necessity of extension of railways to the district etc.⁴⁴ However, the publication of the *Gourdoot* also came to an abrupt end when in 1897 a violent earthquake destroyed the Krishnakali Press. Thereafter Radhesh Chandra joined the *Maldaha Samachar* as a regular columnist. During the time of the Swadeshi Movement, he wrote a number of articles in *Maldaha Samachar* to propagate the Swadeshi cause.⁴⁵

Thus, it was due to the efforts of some local middle class intelligentsia like Radhesh Chandra the stage was set for further and steady growth of national consciousness in a district far away from Calcutta, the nerve centre of provincial political activities. The incipient growth of national awakening was given a fillip by the Swadeshi Movement that followed Curzon's infamous decision of Partition of Bengal in 1905.

Maldah and the 1905 Bengal Partition

Curzon's partition of Bengal provoked what is famous as the Swadeshi Movement which upset the 'settled fact' of partition and during which various

new techniques of political mobilization were successfully attempted.⁴⁶ Bengalis, both Hindus and Muslims in Western Bengal and mainly Hindus in East Bengal came out against the imperial policy and developed the ideology of Swadeshi nationalism. It permeated large areas of Bengal and introduced hitherto unknown devices of political mobilization to India's freedom struggle by directly confronting the British raj.

The mufassil districts of Bengal played their due role in the Swadeshi Movement. The district of Maldah did not lag behind in this phase of nationalist movement. The district itself was included in the newly created Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In Maldah, the anti-Partition movement began as an urban middle class movement in which leadership and inspiration were provided by Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Radhesh Chandra Seth. Benoy Kumar Sarkar stood first in the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University in 1901 as a student of Maldah Zilla School. While studying in the Presidency College of Calcutta, he came under the direct influence of Satis Chandra Mukherjee, the founder of the Dawn Society and a prominent leader of the Swadeshi Movement. Benoy Sarkar became a member of the Dawn Society. He had also developed a close relation with Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya, the editor of the nationalist periodical, the Sandhya.⁴⁷ Benoy Sarkar thus imbued with zeal for the Swadeshi.

Meanwhile the people of Maldah had begun to express their objection through numerous meetings against the partition of Bengal and inclusion of the district in the proposed province of Eastern Bengal and Assam.⁴⁸ Radhesh Chandra Seth took a leading role in arranging such meetings in which leaders from various places including Calcutta spoke on nationalistic subjects.⁴⁹ Sir Andrew Fraser, then the Lt. Governor of Bengal, thought it necessary to enlist the support of the people to the proposed measure and decided to come to Maldah.⁵⁰ Andrew Fraser delivered a speech in Maldah in which he tried to convince the people of various advantages of the proposed transfer of the district to the new province and of the necessity of the creation of the new province. However, his speech did not have any impact on the people.⁵¹ The people of Maldah did not lag behind the other parts of Bengal in registering their protest against the Partition of Bengal.

Legal practitioners, teachers, students were active participants of the movement.⁵² The day, on which partition took effect, 16 October 1905, rakhi-bandhan was observed by all Bengalis as a symbol of brotherhood and vanity of the people of Bengal. In Maldah town too, the day was observed.⁵³

An important aspect of the movement was the disrespect shown on the part of the people towards the machinery of the British raj. When Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the Lt. Governor of the newly formed Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, arrived in Maldah, the people showed a visible apathy to him. Only a few people assembled at the landing ghat to receive him, which annoyed the Lt. Governor, and he did not attempt to suppress it.⁵⁴ The Swadeshi activists also resented the elaborate preparations made by the authorities of Maldah Zilla School to receive Sir Bamfylde Fuller.⁵⁵

While this incident dramatically revealed the mood of the period, much more significant were various other expressions of nationalist feeling. A revulsion against western education became a major strand in the Swadeshi movement, taking the two forms of calls for boycott of official schools and colleges, and attempts to build up a parallel and independent system of 'national education'.⁵⁶ Meanwhile in Calcutta a group of bright young students associated with Satis Chandra Mukherjee's Dawn Society had issued a manifesto in September 1905 calling for a boycott of the coming M.A. and P.R.S. examinations. Benoy Kumar Sarkar of Maldah, holder of the Ishan scholarship was among these Swadeshi activists.⁵⁷ He also made efforts to organize several meetings in Maldah advocating educational boycott. In his endeavor, Benoy Kumar Sarkar got the support of Radhesh Chandra Seth and Bepinbehari Ghose, the two pioneer nationalists of Maldah.⁵⁸ It is to be noted that the agitators against the Partition were drawn from Hindus and Muslims alike, and Moulvi Mohammed Nur Bux, a distinguished nationalist leader of Maldah presided at a few anti-partition meetings.⁵⁹

The spontaneous participation of a large number of students in the Swadeshi movement forced the government to issue Carlyle Circular on 10 October 1905 threatening withdrawal of grants and scholarships and disaffiliation of institutions which failed to prevent student participation in

politics and the Lyon circular on 16 October 1905 in East Bengal banning the *bande mataram* slogan and adding that students of recalcitrant schools and colleges could be debarred from government service.⁶⁰ The administration in Maldah also did not lag behind. That the participation of students of Maldah in anti-partition agitation caused alarm in the official circle was verified by the fact that the District Magistrate issued a circular in 1905 directing the students not to take part in political agitations. However, the circular seemed to have little impact on the student agitators.⁶¹

National Education and Maldah Jatiya Siksha Samiti

The Swadeshi movement was not confined to only boycott of foreign goods and to the observance of Partition day. It rapidly spread in the fields of education also. Sincere and comprehensive efforts were made for the growth of national education. The National Council of Education was constituted on 11 March 1906. The National Council of Education drew up in 1906 a curriculum for a three-year primary, seven-year secondary and four-year collegiate course. Literary and scientific studies were proposed to be combined with some amount of technical training up to the fifth year of the secondary course, after which the three streams would be divided.⁶² Provision was made for a system of affiliation and grants-in-aid. Eventually the Bengal National College and School started on 15 August 1906 in Calcutta, with Aurobindo Ghosh as its first principal and Satischandra Mukherjee as superintendent. The young men trained by Satischandra Mukherjee through the Dawn Society - Benoykumar Sarkar of Maldah, Radhakumud Mukherjee and others formed the core of the teaching staff.⁶³

National schools were sprung up in a number of Bengal districts. Benoykumar Sarkar took a leading role in establishing in June 1907 the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti. The president and the secretary of the organization were Prankrishna Bhaduri and Bepinbehari Ghosh. Radhesh Chandra Seth and Moulvi Mohammed Nur Bux served as its vice-presidents.⁶⁴ All these men were leading lawyers well known for their social work. The Maldah organization had a committee of 45 members with many of them coming from the rural areas. It had an examination system of its own, and unlike the Calcutta prototype tried to concentrate its efforts on

mass education. The Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti had set up eight schools with 748 students by June 1908, three of them primary.⁶⁵ These schools were located at Maldah, Kutubpur, Kaligram, Dharampur, Parampur, Jadupur and Malatipur.⁶⁶ In order to spread mass education, the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti had established night schools at Kutubpur, Kaligram and Dharampur.⁶⁷ The Samiti also endeavoured to spread female education. Girls' schools were opened at Kaligram and Dharampur.⁶⁸

The Maldah Samiti since its inception had emphasized the need of well-written textbooks in vernacular. Radhesh Chandra Seth and Haridas Palit engaged themselves in writing textbooks in history and geography.⁶⁹ Benoykumar Sarkar, however, took the leading role in this respect. During this period, he wrote *Prachin Greeceer Jatiya Siksha* (1910), *Bhasa Siksha* (1910), *Siksha Sopan* (1912), *Aitihāsik Prabandha* (1912) and several other books in vernacular to solve the problem of scarcity of text books.⁷⁰ Prominent scholars like Radhakumud Mukherjee, Radhakamal Mukherjee, Bidhusekhar Shastri, Kumudnath Lahiri were invited to deliver lectures and to encourage higher research in Bengali.⁷¹ The Maldah Samiti founded a Literary Research Department in 1911, which greatly patronized the folk culture of the region. Haridas Palit was encouraged by the Literary Research Department to compose his *Addyer Gambhira*, which was published in the journal of *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad*.⁷²

The Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti laid stress on technical education and vocational training as well. Many National Schools had their own laboratories. A number of craftsmen were appointed as teachers. The Kaligram National School had a small workshop.⁷³ It was mainly through the initiative of Benoykumar Sarkar that a number of students associated with Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti were sent to various universities of the U.S.A. for receiving higher education in the field of technology.⁷⁴

Thus the Maldah Jatiya Shiksha Samiti under the leadership of Benoykumar Sarkar and Radhesh Chandra Seth played a pivotal role in spreading 'national' education and national consciousness among a large number of student of Maldah, many of whom in later years turned out as prominent persons in political, social and cultural arena of the district. To

sum up, the period of Swadeshi movement saw the sprouting of nationalism in Maldah and the nationalist activities had several dimensions. Although the Swadeshi movement initiated a novel process in the district that yielded results in a later period, it nonetheless failed to expand the arena of nationalist politics beyond students, nationalist lawyers and some zamindars. In Maldah where the overwhelming majority of the population was rural with little or no contact with Calcutta, Swadeshi as a political ideology was too distant to attract support among the masses. All these indicate the limitations of the first phase of nationalist activities in Maldah.

Rise of Revolutionary Terrorism in Maldah

By 1908, political swadeshi was certainly on the decline and was taken over by another trend, i.e., individual terrorism against British officials and Indian collaborators. This signified, as Sumit Sarkar points out, a shift from non-violence to violence and from mass action to elite action, necessitated primarily by the failure of the mass mobilization efforts.⁷⁵ The real story of terrorism in Bengal begins from 1902 with the formation of four groups, three in Calcutta and one in Midnapur. The first was the Midnapur Society founded in 1902 and this was followed by the founding of a gymnasium by Sarala Ghosh in Calcutta, the Atmoroti Samiti by some central Calcutta youths and the Anushilan Samiti by Satischandra Basu in March 1902. The beginning of the Swadeshi Movement in 1905 brought an upsurge in secret society activities. The Dacca Anushilan Samiti was born in October 1906. A revolutionary weekly called Yugantar started in the same year. A district group within the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti headed by Barindrakumar Ghosh, Hemchandra Kanungo and Prafulla Chaki soon started action. Several swadeshi dacoities to raise funds were organized and a bomb-manufacturing unit was set up at Maniktala in Calcutta.

Both the Anushilan Samiti and the Brati Samiti had their branches in Maldah.⁷⁶ The Brati Samiti was formed under the leadership of Manoranjan Guha Thakurata who was closely associated with the Dacca Branch of the Anushilan Samiti. It had branches in Khulna, Faridpur, Maldah and other places.⁷⁷ Satish Pakrashi in his book 'Agniyuger Katha' mentioned that he evaded the police in connection with the Rajabazar Bomb Case and after

changing his name shifted his field of activity to Maldah. Here, he recruited some of the students of the local National School for the terrorist movement.⁷⁸ Trailokyanath Chakrabarti, the noted revolutionary, has mentioned the names of Hangshagopal Agarwala, Krishnajiban Sanyal, Mahendra De, Dakshina Lahiri and others as the representatives of the Anushilan Samiti in Maldah.⁷⁹

Meanwhile Kshudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, the two members of Maniktala group of the Calcutta Anushilan Samiti made an abortive attempt at Muzaffarpur on the life of the Presidency Magistrate Kingsford. However, they mistakenly killed two European women. This incident led to the arrest of the entire Maniktala group, including Aurobindo and Barindra Kumar Ghosh. At Maniktala, the police seized several bombs, dynamite, revolvers and other weapons along with numerous letters and various other documents indicating the existence of a secret society.⁸⁰ The activists were tried in the Alipur Bomb Case and awarded in February 1910 various terms of imprisonment, including transportation for life. Aurobindo was ably defended by C.R.Das, and as the charges against him could not be proved, he was released.

The youngest person tried in the Alipur Bomb Case was Krishnsjiban Sanyal of Maldah, aged about 16 years.⁸¹ He was ousted from Maldah Zilla School for raising the slogan 'Bandemataram' in the class. Later his guardian sent him to Bihar where he was admitted in the Giridi High School.⁸² At Giridi, Krishnajiban came into connection with Barindra Kumar Ghosh and decided to join the Maniktala Secret Society.⁸³ The members of the Maniktala Society were, with few exceptions, young Bengali Hindus. Most of them were from the 'respectable' (Bhadralok) castes and most of them fairly well educated.⁸⁴ During the preparatory period of the Maniktala Society, its members were concerned chiefly with the collection of men, arms and money.⁸⁵ All the recruits did in fact spend much of their time in study. There was a special emphasis on religious texts, in particular the Gita and Upanishads. Bomb making formed part of the general curriculum. In his statement before the police, Krishnajiban Sanyal said that 'in the garden Upen Babu used to teach us Upanishads and politics and Barindra Babu

[taught] Gita and History of Russo-Japanese War and Ullas Babu delivered lectures on explosives'.⁸⁶ In the Alipur Bomb Case Krishnajiban was sentenced to rigorous imprisonment for one year.⁸⁷

As it became clear after the Alipur episode, a section of students of Maldah had a direct involvement in the revolutionary activities, the district administration let loose various repressive measures to scare the people away from swadeshi campaign.⁸⁸ The situation in Maldah was so panic-stricken that the editor of a local newspaper wrote, 'There is a general sense of insecurity throughout the district. People feel that any moment their houses may be searched and they may be arrested if only they have incurred the displeasure of the police'.⁸⁹ Indiscriminate police repression helped to contain revolutionary activities for the time being.

However, the revolutionary activities again came into operation around 1915. During this time, the students and youth who were associated with revolutionary activities were Harimohan Jha, Mahendra Das, Pashupati Jha, Gopal Majhi, Hanshagopal Agarwala, Narayan Saha and others. On January 28, 1916 Nabinchandra Bose, the Headmaster of Maldah Zilla School, was stabbed to death.⁹⁰ The revolutionaries suspected that Nabinchandra Bose had been supplying information to the police about the political activities of his students.⁹¹ As soon as the news of assassination spread, the police swung into action. Mahendranath Das, a student of Maldah Zilla School who was suspected to have a revolutionary linking and was seen on the spot of murder, was arrested immediately. The police raided and ransacked his house, seizing some books, letters and other documents. A few days later some other students namely Harimohan Jha, Pashupati Jha, Kalipada Ghosh, Narayan Saha were taken into custody. The trial of Mahendranath Das and others created a sensation throughout the district. It had the effect of raising the level of political consciousness in Maldah.⁹² After the trial was over Mahendranath Das was sentenced to transportation for life. Four others - Harimohan Jha, Pashupati Jha, Kalipada Ghosh, Narayan Saha were sentenced to five years to one year of imprisonment.⁹³

The district administration was keen to wrap up the so-called troublemakers. It let loose various repressive measures to scare the people.

Indiscriminate police repression was effective for the time being in containing terrorist activities in Maldah. It, however, contributed to raise the level of political consciousness in Maldah. Previously, majority of Maldah inhabitants were largely indifferent to the activities of the nationalists, repression brought to them the realities of the Swadeshi Movement, which provoked the local administration to undertake measures to combat the participants.⁹⁴

Although the Swadeshi Movement declined in the second decade of the century it had provided a solid foundation upon which was built the edifice of future nationalist movement. Meanwhile a void was created in the rank of nationalist leadership in Maldah. His contemporaries considered Radhesh Chandra Seth's demise in 1911 as a great blow to the nationalist movement in Northern Bengal.⁹⁵ In the same year Baneswar Das, a young and energetic nationalist leader in Maldah, had left for the USA to receive higher education.⁹⁶ In 1914, Benoy Kumar Sarkar himself had left for the USA and thus was created a void, which could never be filled.⁹⁷

Notes & References:

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2. B. P. Misra, The Sanyasi Rebellion ,Center for Himalayan Studie , University of North Bengal, 1985, p. 31.
3. Board of Trade (Commercial) Proceedings, vol.13, 7 November 1794, WBSA, cited in A. G. Ghosh , The Factory of the English East India Company at Maldah , 1757-1833 (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis , North Bengal University, 1978) .
4. Ibid., Vo. 171, 6 March 1804, WBSA, cited in Ibid, p.42.
5. C.P.C. vol. XI, 8 September 1794, WBSA, cited in Ibid, p.45.
6. Ibid.
7. J.C Sengupta, Maldah District Gazetteers, op.cit, p. 57.
8. Letter from the Magistrate of Dinajpur to Governor General in Council,

- Judicial Department (Criminal), Original Consultation, No. 4. dated 20 December 1793, WBSA, cited in *Ibid.*, p.46.
9. Board of Trade (Commercial) Proceedings, vol.35, 17 March 1783, cited in *Ibid.*, p.47.
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. Prest. List of Ancient Documents, Revenue Department, vo. XI, Letter from the Collector of Bhagalpur to Charles Grant, 13 march, 1783 , cited in *Ibid.*, p.56 .
 12. Board of Trade (Commercial) Proceedings, vol. 102, 18 February 1793, cited in *Ibid.* ,p.61.
 13. *Ibid.*, vol.111, 1 July 1794.
 14. *Ibid.*
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 20. *Ibid.*
 21. W.W.Hunter, *The Indian Mussalmans*, London : Trubner, 1871, p.66.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. Qeyamuddin Ahmed, *The Wahabi Movement in India*, Calcutta, 1966, p.103.

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30. Ibid., testimony of Ibrahim, p.41.
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41. Ibid.
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