



Revolutionary Activities in Midnapore in the Early Nineteenth Century: An Overview

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Abstract: The present study has been carried out to discuss the revolutionary activities taken place in the district of Midnapore in the late eighteenth century. It also discusses the different activities that had greater influence in the freedom struggle of India against the British Raj. In this study, the traditional methodology of collecting data from the government official sources, from the contemporary newspapers and from the eulogistic narration of the role of nationalist leaders by popular writers have been taken into consideration. But emphasis has been laid on the unutilized literary sources. It has been indicated that in the freedom struggle the contributions of the different districts of Bengal were of varying nature and degrees, but it must be conceded that the district of Midnapur deserves the honour of the first place.

Keywords: *Freedom Struggle, Greatest Contribution, Revolutionary Activities.*

Introduction: In the freedom struggle the contributions of the different districts of Bengal were of varying nature and degrees, but it must be conceded that the district of Midnapur deserves the honour of the first place. True, the spirit of nationalism had been the greatest contribution of the English education mid culture in India and the people who first took advantage and reaped the benefits of the English education were the Bengalese. The freedom struggle in Bengal in particular and for that matter in India, therefore, began as a movement of the educated middle class and it was not until after the second decade of the present century that the common people had taken any part in it. In case of Midnapur, however, the story is somewhat different, for here the Mahishyas who occupied a low status in the social and caste-hierarchy, but were economically well to-do, played the leading part. (Bhattacharyya ,1979)

The anti-British stance of the Midnapur people in general may be traced to their inherent turbulence, born of their incessant fight against the in clemencies of Nature, armed opposition to the Marathas as also to their grievances due to their loss of independence to the East India Company.

There are, in fact, two different tracts in the district with two different types of rebellious spirit. One is comparatively recent and dates from the end of the nineteenth century and much publicised because of its bourgeois national character. This type is represented by the predominantly Mahishya population of Ghatal, Daspur, and the sea board of Tamluk and Contai subdivisions. The spirit of rebellion in this part was by and large the result of the decay of commerce and industry which were, even in the late nineteenth century, so prosperous. Cotton textiles, silk-tusser, salt-production and many other handicrafts decayed and were completely ruined due to competition of English manufactures Introduced by the British, The economic instability and a sense of injury resulting from the unequal competition of foreign goods generated a spirit of frustration and unrest which gradually took the shape of national spirit. It was this

part of Midnapur - Ghatal, Daspur, and the Tamiuk-Contai Sea board that left into prominence in the national struggle of 1905, 1921, 1931, 1942.

Statement of the Problem: Midnapur had always been a home of revolt, whether in restless days of early British administration or in the comparatively tranquil days of the nineteenth and twentieth century's. During the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 Midnapur was the only district in Bengal which matched a civilian revolt with the sepoy rising and at one stage the British-residents of the district all thought to trek down to the Bupnarayan to escape the civilian rising. What distinguished the people of Midnapur from the people of the rest of Bengal, was their spirit of rebellion. In this connection it is worthwhile to mention Judicial Magistrate Mr. H. Strachey's observation "And can it be possible for a moment be supposed the people of Bengal dream of subverting the Government. They are in this respect ignorant of all people, and the most helpless having no power to combine". Mr. Baley, another civilian likewise observed our own subjects (Bengalese) have lost their military character, they now follow commercial and agricultural pursuits in preference" (Feb. 1832). Midnapur people were an exception in this regard. Hence the problem stated is "Revolutionary activities in Midnapore in the Early Nineteenth Century: An Overview".

Objectives: The present study has been carried out to discuss the revolutionary activities taken place in the district of Midnapore in the late eighteenth century. It also discusses the different activities that had greater influence in the freedom struggle of India against the British Raj.

Method: In this study, the traditional methodology of collecting data from the government official sources, from the contemporary newspapers and from the eulogistic narration of the role of nationalist leaders by popular writers have been taken into consideration. But emphasis has been laid on the unutilized literary sources.

Organisation of B.V in Midnapore: The schools and colleges were freely utilized by the B.V branch of Midnapore to pick up new recruits# The prospective recruit was marked for some time and was approached by a member of the organization to read books and to Improve his health and moral character# His attention was drawn to the poverty and misery of the country and he was told that it was his duty to take his part in ameliorating the condition of the people. After his mind had been sufficiently impregnated with the motion of service to the poor he was told that a service to the poor could be done more effectively by fighting for freedom. Moreover, in order to draw young men into the secret societies, arrangements were made for holding religious festivals, establishing gymnasia, night schools and delivering lectures to the young men.

There were four categories of recruits In the B.V group of Midnapore. In the first category, boys of schools and colleges were picked up for intensive training and imbuing them with revolutionary ideas# The second category of recruits was young men who were not married and could venture anything even at the risk of their lives. The third category comprised of moneyed men, although married, for the purpose of getting financial help from them. In the fourth category aged and worldly men who were thought to be capable of helping the organization with advice, sympathy and money were enlisted in the volunteer organization. It was only after the recruit's allegiance had been tested, that they were told of object of the party, namely, to bring about the independence and welfare of India by violent activities. (Dhara, Sushil Kumar,1973)

The initial stage of revolution was marked by the policy of individual (shutting) assassination. The group decided to spot out oppressive personnel of government and to commit murders. Hatred between individuals or private disputes were not the cause of murders. The group knew that the military strength of the government could not be destroyed by bombs and fire arms but they believed that by frequent resort to these deadly weapons the attention of the government could be attracted towards the prevailing disorders in the countryside and the attention of the people could be drawn to the self sacrifice of the youth who committed such murders.

Doglus Murder: On the 16 September 1931 the Guard of Hijli detention camp fired upon the detenues at about 9-30 P.M. and killed two of their members. Tremendous indignation had been worked up especially at Calcutta and Midnapore where meetings were held and very violent speeches made over the shooting at Hijli detention camp. The incident had given a fillip to revolutionary activities at Midnapore. The members of B.V.Group in Midnapore heard speeches delivered in the Chandrakar Maidan at Midnapore and carefully noted the speech of Birendra Nath Sasmal who said "youths of Midnapore take lessons and accept martyrdom for the cause of the country like Santosh and Tarakeswar. Avenge their death by your sacrifice". The government did not accept the report of Hijli enquiry committee and viewed, "the report shows most of the blame on to the sepoys more indeed than the fact found in the report seems to justify". No action was taken excepting some officers and sepoys were transferred. Members of B#V.Group in Midnapore thought that Doglus, the District Magistrate, was privy to the formulation of the enquiry report and became unpopular to them.

On 30 April, 1932 there was a meeting of the District Board held in the afternoon. R Doglus, the District Magistrate, was presiding over the meeting and was engaged in discussing the items when two young men (Prodyot Kumar Bhattacharya and Prabhansu Sekhar Pal) appeared behind his chair each with a revolver in hand and both of them aimed at Doglus with their revolvers and that 3 or 4 shots rang out in quick succession and that Doglus was found shot immediately afterwards with bleeding injuries all over his body. Doglus was immediately removed to hospital where he expired that very night within four hours of having received the injuries. Immediately after Doglus had been shot at, both the young men ran a short distance along the public road. Basir Ali caught hold of Prodyot and Mr. George snatched off revolver from the hands of Prodyot. Other young men then ran out of sight along the track. Prodyot's person was searched by S.D.O. of Central who recovered from the fight pocket of shirt an envelope containing a piece of paper with the following writings in red ink "Mild protest against the oppression at Hijli. Let their deaths be proclaimed to Britain. Let India wake up by our sacrifice, Hail to the Motherland". The police announced a reward of Rs.6, 000.00 for any information leading to arrest of Prabhansu Sekhar Pal. Twenty two persons were arrested. But in the end charge sheet was submitted against Prodyot only. The remaining accused were discharged.

Burge Murder: The policy of repression that followed the Doglus murder only hardened the attitude of B.Y.Group in Midnapore and had taken a fancy for the European officers of the district. The assurances given by the governor of Bengal of the time were expected to put a stop to the revolutionary terrorist activities. However, it was rumoured on November 6, 1932 that it was Burge who ordered severe measures to be taken against a no-tax campaign under which the people groaned. In view of the murder of his two predecessors in the month of April 1931 and 1932, Burge the new District Magistrate was taking stringent precautions and was transacting almost all public business in his own house surrounded by armed guards. The B.V. Group therefore, could not get any opportunity to approach him for several months.

However, in the month of April, 1933 as Burge was not found, attempts were made on the life of Evans, the Superintendent of Police but failed. Subsequently the B.V. Group got the opportunity to attempt on the life of Burge when he began to come out of his bungalow. Anath Panja and Mrigen Datta were selected to murder Burge. Three unsuccessful attempts were made on his life. On two previous occasions, once when Burge presided over a meeting in connection with flood relief and another when he attended a football match in August 31, strong police guard frustrated all attacks on him. On 2 September 1933 there was a match between the Town club and the Mohamedan Sporting Club and Burge was to play in the match. At about 5.15 P.M. Burge had just stepped out of his car and was walking on to the field when two young men, who with others had been kicking ball about near one of the goals, closed in on him and opened fire with revolvers. Burge fell and died almost immediately. P Norton Jones, ASP and Inspector C O Smith, who were present on the field, at once grappled with the murderers, who were shot by Burge's guards, one of the assessors died on the spot, and the other expired in Hospital. Subsequent police

investigation revealed the existence of deep laid plot to kill District Magistrate and disclosed the fact that two previous attempts had been frustrated 26 nearly by chance.

Kharagpur Railway Strikes: With the end of the first World War organized labour movement started in Bengal. Industrial modernization generally is followed by labour movement. In India industrial growth was noticed in the first quarter of the 20th century and it was confined only in a few regions along with slow progress. The ownership of principal industrial sectors, in the initial stage, were never exclusively under Indian Control, was predominantly European, a fact which accentuated the feeling of frustration. Over India's industrial backwardness and in Bengal majority of industrial labourers migrated from outside. Labour movement in Bengal had to face many hurdles. However, organised labour movement in Bengal was directed against the British capitalists.

Two successive strikes of railway workers at Kharagpur in 1927 added a new Chapter in the history of labour movement in Bengal. Majority of railway workers at Kharagpur migrated from Orissa, Andhra and Madras. Though the ownership of Bengal Nagpur Railway was predominantly government of India yet it was conducted by the British capitalists. Till about 1918, there was hardly any upward trend in wages, though the price level rose sharply during the World War I, During the economic depression of 1929-33 the wage cuts assumed even more serious proportions and there was no mentionable improvement till the outbreak of World War II. Strong inflationary tendency and sharp rise in process continued to keep the workers' real income at a low level. Low wages, exhausting work, poor housing, Insanitary conditions of urban life and post-war sharp rise in prices made the railway workers at Kharagpur to drift towards movement.

Struggle With Arms in Medinipur (1930 -1933) both the general populace and students in Medinipur continue to actively participate in every campaign launched throughout the nation to overthrow the British Raj. not only during the war for independence, but in every facet that follows. Debra and Gopiballavpur from the Medinipur district continued to be involved in the Nakshal Movement far into their seventieth year. When the Salt Satyagraha was in full swing in Bengal Province between 1930 and 1931, armed liberation fighters made every effort to startle the colonial administration. Masterda Suryya Sen led the looting of Chattagram Armoury on April 18, 1930; Binoy-Badal-Dinesh led the Writers' Buildings raid on December 8, 1930; and Masterda Suryya Sen led the Paharitala expedition on September 28, 1932.

Second Civil Disobedience Movement (1932-1934): More people participated in the second phase of the civil disobedience action than in the Medinipur Salt Satyagraha movement. Although the Salt Satyagraha was concentrated near a river, there were protests against various tariffs being imposed all across the place. It was intolerable to see police abuse throughout this struggle. Tortures included looting, rape, mass arrests, and incarceration, among other things.

Tamluk Sub-Division: Public meetings: 291 in the open, 1836 in secret, 15 in procession, 33 in Hartal, 147 in picketing, 7 in flag Satyagraha, and 3 in death. However, 912 people were assessed a penalty for failing to pay the Chowkidary Tax. The tax liability was Rs. 1,050, but the penalty amounted to Rs. 10,780. There were 198 homes that were plundered and 61 homes that were searched. The whole loss came to Rs. 23,878. There were 720 men and women detained. There were 512 men and 103 women who were seriously hurt.

Contai Sub-Division: In Medinipur, the movement primarily aimed at eliminating various taxes took place during the second stage of civil disobedience. During same period, there were also limited-scale Salt Satyagraha events in Tamluk and Contai Subdivisions. There were twenty martyrs during this time. Thirteen of them went on to become martyrs for the nonviolent cause. There was a female martyr among them. She was Kharagpur's Kokila Datta. Salt Satyagraha was inferior to the magnificent contribution made by women in the second phase of the Civil Disobedience campaign. A few of the many instances include: On April 4, 1932, during the Balya Gobindapur gathering, Smt. Sukhadayini Roychowdhury, the

wife of Ashutosh Roychowdhury of Patashpur, Contai Sub-division, was arrested for breaching Section 144. Congressman Smt. Kusumkumari Mondal regained the office of Manglamaroh, which the police had forbidden. On July 4, 1932, five people were slain at Mashuria hamlet in Bhagwanpur Thana during a public assembly that was taking place under the direction of Smt. Dhira Das in violation of Section 144 on the occasion known as "Rajbandi Day." The ladies of Tamluk Sub-division, namely Smt. Suhasini Devi, Indumati Bhattacharya, Smt. Lakshmimani Mukhopadhyay, Smt. Nityabala Gol, and Smt. Subodhbala Kuiti, served as the board's directors. Even at the Thana level, female directors were selected. Smt. Prabhavati Maiti, the wife of Rakhil Chandra Maiti, entered the Thana and raised the national flag from Deuli hamlet in Moyna Thana. She spent six months behind bars.

Conclusion: The young revolutionaries of Midnapur were determined to march forward with a definite philosophy of their own. It was their motto to help the national movement according to their philosophy for the ultimate objective of ending British rule in India, It may be mentioned here that the young revolutionaries of Midnapur had never fallen in the grip of any earthly temptation. In order to frustrate the revolutionary activities, the Government tried utmost to create disunity among the members of the party in various ways. The history of the revolutionary movement in Midnapur during the thirties proves beyond doubt that no revolutionary belonging to the Bengal Volunteers Group had turned into an approver or helped the Government directly or indirectly.

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